

PASSAGES PROJECT

Theory of Change Report

Responsible, Engaged and Loving
(REAL) Fathers Initiative



real fathers.

a journey from innovation to intergration.

JULY 2021

PREPARED BY
THE INSTITUTE FOR REPRODUCTIVE
HEALTH AT THE GEORGETOWN
UNIVERSITY CENTER FOR CHILD AND
HUMAN DEVELOPMENT



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Recommended Citation:

Theory of Change: The REAL Father Initiative in Karamoja and Acholi. March 2021. Washington, D.C.: Institute for Reproductive Health, Georgetown University for the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).

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This report was prepared by IRH under the Passages Project. This report and the Passages Project are made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) under the terms of the under Cooperative Agreement No. AID-OAA-A-15-00042. The contents are the responsibility of IRH and do not necessarily reflect the views of Georgetown University, USAID, or the United States Government.

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Introduction

The Responsible, Engaged and Loving (REAL) Fathers Initiative is an evidence-based, community mentoring program that works with young fathers (aged 16-25 years) to prevent intimate partner violence (IPV) and violent discipline of young children (aged 1-3 years) and to increase acceptability and use of family planning. REAL Fathers engages young men at a key transition period in their lives: when they become parents and partners and are considered adults in their community. The initiative was developed as an integrated violence prevention project in northern Uganda in response to community members raising concerns that young men lacked role models and elder mentors to guide them during this transition period.

With funding from USAID, REAL Fathers was developed, piloted, and evaluated in northern Uganda between 2013-2015. The initiative was adapted, scaled, and evaluated in northern Uganda and Karamoja, between 2016-2018. In both sites and for both the intervention and control groups, the men who participated in REAL Fathers were on average 22-23 years old, their children were an average of 2 years old at the time of the intervention, and the vast majority of fathers (between 89-96%) had their primary livelihood in farming or agriculture. The impact evaluation of the scale-up project demonstrated consistent results on prevention of IPV and violent discipline, with findings sustained one-year post intervention in both sites. Fathers in both northern Uganda and Karamoja reported an increase in their interactions with their children, use of positive parenting practices and improved communication with their spouse, with findings sustained one-year post intervention. In Acholi, fathers reported increased voluntary use of modern contraceptives (1,2).

Few projects take an integrated approach to preventing violence in the home or addressing both IPV and family planning; even fewer have evidence of effectiveness. Using a theory of change framework to develop a better understanding of how programs achieve change can guide intervention development, adaptation, and scale. Frequently, theories of change are developed by program designers and managers, not with community members and program participants. **This participatory consultation with young fathers, their wives, REAL Fathers mentors, and community members who were involved in the scale-up of REAL Fathers between 2016-2018 used reflection and dialogue to understand how fathers internalized, enacted, and sustained new behaviors in their relationships, using a theory of change framework to understand the sequence of identified changes.** In addition, the consultation sought to understand from the participants' perspective what made the project meaningful to fathers and their families, and what supported or limited fathers' changes in behavior. Learnings from this consultation will support future scaling of the REAL Fathers in Uganda, adaptations to new settings, and advance the global understanding of how to work on integrated violence prevention with young men.

REAL Fathers Initiative: Brief Project Description

As a community-based mentorship program, REAL Fathers seeks to build young fathers' knowledge and skills for new behaviors, enlisting the support of families and communities in fostering and encouraging fathers' new behaviors. REAL Fathers starts with community leaders selecting young fathers co-habiting with their spouse and parenting a child under five to participate in the initiative. These young fathers then select trusted and respected older men in the community to be their mentor. Young fathers' wives and community leaders validate the selection of the mentors, confirming their capacity to guide young fathers and their demonstration of behaviors aligned with the project. Each mentor is responsible for four to five young fathers.

¹ In this report, the term 'wives' means young fathers' cohabiting partners, regardless of whether or not this relationship was formalized.

Mentors participate in a transformative training on gender equity, gender roles and responsibilities, family planning, power, and violence. During this training, they learn to implement REAL Fathers. Each month for seven months, mentors conduct one individual or couple mentoring session with each father they mentor.

Individual and couple mentoring sessions allow mentors to provide information and homework, build fathers' skills, observe fathers enacting the behavior, and provide tailored guidance to fathers. Mentors hold one group mentoring session each month with four to five other mentors and their mentees; themes covered in group sessions complement and build on themes covered in individual sessions. The seven-month implementation period includes one women's session to discuss wives' experience with the project, any challenges they are facing, and how women can support men in their behavior change .

A concurrent, emotion-based public poster campaign (one poster per month for seven months) reinforces learning from the monthly mentoring sessions and messages of community support for fathers' new behaviors. After the final session, a community celebration brings together young fathers, their wives, mentors and community members to recognize fathers' accomplishments and encourage sustained changes.

Methodology

Participatory theory of change consultations were held in sub-counties purposively selected for feasibility in both Karamoja and the Acholi sub-region of northern Uganda where REAL Fathers was implemented between 2016-2018. In Karamoja sub-region, consultations were held in one village each of the Lorengedwat and Lolachat sub-counties in Nabilatuk District (formerly part of Nakapiririt District). In the Acholi sub-region in northern Uganda, two villages each of the Pabbo and Atiak sub-counties in Amuru district were included.

Group consultations were held separately with mentors, REAL Fathers, wives of REAL fathers, and community leaders. Additional group and individual consultations were held with stakeholders that guided the adaptation and implementation of REAL Fathers, including Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) program coordinators in Karamoja, local government community development staff, and staff with Save the Children and the Institute of Reproductive Health who previously coordinated REAL Fathers in the sub-region (Table 1). Government district coordinators were not available in the Acholi sub-region at the time of this consultation. The selection of participants in both Acholi and Karamoja captured perspectives and experiences from the individual, family and community level and helped to triangulate findings.

Theory of Change Consultation Process

The consultation followed a three-step process to engage participants in reflection and dialogue: listing, pile sorting with discussion, and ordering with additional reflection questions. Consultation participants (Table 1) listed and the facilitator recorded all the changes that they had experienced and/or observed in REAL Fathers families. Once finished, the group undertook a pile sorting activity where each of the changes were categorized as related to REAL Fathers or due to other factors (e.g., education, employment, participation in other projects), even if they were seen as indirectly influenced by the project. During the pile sort, consultation participants discussed their categorization and came to agreement. After the pile sort, participants ordered the changes related to REAL Fathers according to when they were observed. At times, consultation participants disagreed on the order of changes; disagreements were discussed until an agreement was reached.

² For more information about REAL Fathers implementation, you can read the

	KARAMOJA SUB-REGION		ACHOLI SUB-REGION	
Individual and Group Consultations	No. of Consultations	Total No. of Participants (men/women)	No. of Consultations	Total No. of Participants (men/women)
Young Fathers	2	16	4	27
Young Mothers	2	15	4	27
Mentors	2	18	4	20
Community Leaders	2	15 (13/2)	3	6 (4/2)
ECCD Coordinators	2	3 (0/3)	N/A	N/A
Sub-County Officials	2	7 (5/2)	1	4 (4/0)
District Officials	1	4 (1/3)	0	0

Discussions were conducted in the local language of the consultation participants, except with sub-county and district officials, which took place in English. In Karamoja, the facilitator worked with local translators to conduct consultations in Nga’Karamojong. In Acholi, all the discussions were held in Luo, the facilitator’s native language, allowing for direct in-depth discussions with consultation participants. Consultations in Karamoja took place in March 2020; in Acholi, consultations were held in September 2020. Acholi consultations were delayed due to COVID-19 related travel restrictions. These consultations abided by COVID guidance, including wearing a mask, washing hands, keeping six feet of distance between participants, and holding consultations outside. The facilitator distributed masks and set up a handwashing station.

Analysis of field data was inductive; all codes and themes emerged directly from the transcripts based on patterns across FGDs and interviews. The field notes were read and re-read by the consultant and a research assistant who each developed and applied codes, identified themes, and compared findings for consistency. Analysis accounted for how the different groups described changes resulting from REAL Fathers. Data from Karamoja and Acholi were analyzed separately, then compared and combined into the theory of change figure and narrative.

REAL Theory of Change

Across consultation participants and settings, it was clear the changes observed did not take place in a linear way. Instead, changes were often grouped together (i.e., a phase) with changes within a phase influencing and supporting other changes within the same phase. Some fathers adopted changes earlier and others later in the project cycle. Some fathers may have spent more or less time within a phase before advancing to the next phase, if at all (Figure 1). This section describes changes observed in REAL Fathers as taking place in five thematic phases and concluding with an ultimate change. We did not try to identify nor was it clear from discussion whether certain REAL Fathers mentoring sessions or fathers’ level of engagement in the project were linked to specific phases of change. In general, some fathers experienced these changes earlier in the program and others later in the program; nevertheless, the sequence and thematic domains of change for fathers were well-accepted.

REAL Fathers PARTICIPATORY THEORY OF CHANGE

ACTIVITIES (ALL PHASES)



Community-based mentor selection



Individual, couple and group mentoring, critical reflection and discussion



Community celebration with public testimony and commitments



Mentor training and transformation



Thematic media campaign via public posters

PHASE 1

Opening of hearts and minds

PHASE 2

Improving communication and understanding
Sharing household planning and decision making
Sharing household responsibilities
Reducing or stopping alcohol consumption

PHASE 3

Behaving respectfully towards wives, parents, and elders
Fulfilling community expectations and norms
Reducing and preventing intimate partner violence

PHASE 4

Advising other households
Improving livelihoods and increasing income
Strengthening the relationship between young fathers and mothers
Engaging fathers in parenting
Improving parenting practices

PHASE 5

Building positive parenting and preventing violent discipline
Improving couple's sexual relationship
Improving child spacing and family planning

ULTIMATE CHANGE

Increasing peace and harmony in the home

Phase I

Opening of hearts and minds

The most notable and important starting point of change in Acholi and Karamoja for young fathers was described as fathers “opening their hearts and minds” or being “awakened.” The expression described a shift in mindset that young fathers experienced. In this phase, young fathers internalized concepts advocated by the project and started to imagine a new way of being and behaving in their relationships with their wives, children, parents and peers as a result of the messaging and discussions from their mentorship. For example, during a mentoring session on fatherhood and family dreams, fathers were asked to imagine different ways of being a father and husband. An Acholi young father explained, “the mentors asked what kind of father I wanted to be and what I thought of my children’s future.” All types of consultation participants noted fathers’ more open minds and hearts as foundational for all future changes to take place. For the first time, fathers could identify some of their own behaviors that harmed their families, especially behaviors related to their relationships with their wives and children.

Phase 2

Improving communication and understanding

Prior to REAL Fathers, consultation participants described how fathers were socialized to believe that developing a close relationship with their wives and children - characterized by speaking frequently, openly, and kindly - was seen as weakness and demonstrated a lack of authority as head of household. Fathers who deviated

from these social expectations faced sanctions, such as being mocked or judged by their peers and male elders. Thus, most young fathers did not speak or consult with their wives; women were not seen as equal partners in an intimate relationship. Consultation participants described young fathers who followed these norms as being harsh, rude, loud, and violent, shouting at their wives and children and creating fear in the home. For example, when men came home late or did not return home at night, their wives were not permitted to inquire as to their whereabouts. Women who did ask these questions or responded in other ways to their husband's behavior were judged to be disrespectful. Such women were seen as undisciplined and disrespectful, and sometimes sent temporarily to their maternal families for this behavior. In addition - though polygamy is typical in the region - men sometimes used these interactions as an opportunity to justify taking a new wife.

Through participation in REAL Fathers, young men were described as changing the way they communicated with their wives and children, resulting in early improvements in couples' relationship. Young fathers were motivated and able to change their attitudes, style, and approach to communication when they understood the negative impact it had on their relationships. Consultation participants described young fathers engaging in discussion to resolve problems rather than shouting, behaving harshly, or using violence. Fathers and mothers started to discuss how to create a good home and family, including how to care for their children. Through these changes, couples became closer, with some beginning to use expressions of affection when referring to their spouse like "Min Ababa" (Mother of Ababa) and "Won Ababa" (father of Ababa) or "mummy" and "daddy". These communication and relationship-related changes were also reflected in how fathers interacted with their children, becoming friendlier and more approachable in these paternal relationships as well.

Sharing household planning and decision making

Prior to REAL Fathers, young fathers enacted their role as head of the household by making decisions for the family alone. Over time, and with improved communication between the couple, young mothers were able to express their opinions and thoughts to their partner. As they participated in REAL Fathers, young fathers shared ideas, discussed and involved their wives in planning and decision-making. Families described improvements in their homes as a result. An Acholi mother elaborated, "We decide together what to do and how to use the money that we have. [For example,] we can buy goats that will go towards the schooling of our children." Some mothers described their husbands telling them about the money they had earned as a "miracle". The joint household planning and decision-making enhanced family unity and harmony, and young mothers described feeling increased ease and self-esteem. Finally, consultation participants indicated that the changes signified young men's respect for their wife and equal treatment.

Sharing household responsibilities

Prior to REAL Fathers, young men were not expected to and mostly did not take part in household chores, including cooking or cleaning. Consultation participants described young men using their time to meet with friends; in Acholi some young men visited trading centers or towns where they could go to discos, drink, gamble, or meet other women. Some men stayed away from their home for multiple days or weeks. Young mothers were required to fill this gap in household work. An Acholi woman described, "My husband did not go to the garden...I did all the cultivation alone. Even when our hut was spoilt, he would not repair it. I did everything on my own." Women described themselves as stretched or overburdened, as they carried the household responsibility, resulting in tension in the home.

Through REAL Fathers, young fathers started to realize and acknowledge the disproportionate burden of

work shouldered by young mothers and its strain on their relationships and in their home. Sharing domestic responsibilities did not stop at men reclaiming their traditional household roles (e.g., repairing the home). Young fathers started to participate in other domestic work such as bathing children, collecting water, washing clothes and dishes, cooking, collecting firewood, and cleaning. A young father explained, “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.” Through working together in the home and sharing responsibilities, couples became closer and tensions that were created from father’s lack of involvement in the home reduced or altogether resolved.

Reducing or stopping alcohol consumption

In both Karamoja and Acholi, consultation participants described decreased alcohol consumption as a key change. Drinking had been a main reason that fathers spent extended periods of time away from their home, and it affected young fathers’ ability to provide financially for their families, as they spent money earned on alcohol. Drinking also affected the quality of the couple’s relationship, as it was associated with arguments and violence and in some cases resulted in separation or divorce. Through REAL Fathers, young fathers realized high alcohol consumption had a negative impact on their families. Mentors facilitated discussions on the effects of drinking on REAL Fathers households and offered ways in which couples could support each other to reduce their consumption. Gradually, many REAL Father participants reduced or stopped drinking alcohol. A few young fathers were described as having stopped drinking completely, though most men managed their drinking better, most through reducing the quantity and frequency of drinking, for example, only consuming alcohol while socializing with their peers. This change affected other behaviors, with fathers spending more time at home with their families and using their money on household projects with their wives. Reduced alcohol consumption improved understanding between the couple and contributed to the reduction or end of intimate partner violence. Overall, young fathers were considered more accountable to their partner and children. A Karamajong young mother explained, “My husband changed. He comes home early and the children are able to see him more.”

Phase 3

Behaving respectfully towards wives, parents, and elders

Prior to REAL Fathers, consultation participants described young men as behaving disrespectfully and violently in their families and community. Some young fathers’ marital relationships were characterized as in distress and close to or already broken, with couples separated. REAL Fathers encouraged young men to explore ways to improve their relationships with their wives by changing their own attitudes and actions. Young fathers started to shift their perspective, focused on the positive attributes of their wives. Fathers recognized and voiced appreciation for their wives’ contributions to the home. An Acholi father explained, “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.”

Moreover, as the relationships between young fathers and mothers improved, so did their relationships with their parents and elders. Prior to REAL Fathers, young men and women were often described as behaving harshly and violently with their parents and elders; some were unwilling or unable to fulfill their responsibilities towards their parents and elders. Through mentorship and its associated changes, fathers and mothers changed how

they related to and interacted with their parents and elders. They became more respectful and responsible, communicated with kindness, and stopped being harsh and abusive - changes linked to lessons and skills learned from REAL Fathers. For example, mothers in Karamoja who were previously estranged from their mothers-in-law started to share food with them when they were able, or to collect water for them.

Fulfilling community expectations and norms

The use of violence and heavy alcohol consumption among young fathers prior to REAL Fathers were considered problematic in their communities. Elders and community leaders were not able to guide fathers or discipline them to improve their behaviors. As a result, many young fathers were not well-regarded and were unable to hold respected social positions or fulfill their expected social roles, including being responsible for their families and being an active member of the community. As fathers changed their behaviors and improved their relationships, community members began to view them differently. These young men and their wives were now able to fulfill community expectations and norms. Further, as the relationship between young women and their partners improved, community members witnessed the respect their husbands afforded them and began to treat women with more respect and trust, boosting their social status. For example, some women were appointed to leadership roles in their clan and their community, with one Acholi woman who participated tasked with training other young women of their clan on the principles shared in REAL Fathers.

Reducing and preventing intimate partner violence

In most young fathers' homes, consultation participants connected the perpetration of IPV with alcohol consumption, described under Phase 2. They observed that IPV increased and decreased in parallel with alcohol consumption. Women also described feeling vulnerable in their relationships and particularly at risk for abuse by their partner when payment of bride price was incomplete. In addition, consultation participants described gender norms in their communities that guided couples' relationships. These norms held that women should be submissive to their husband, responsible for performing household duties and providing for the husband and his family's needs; men were expected to be heads of their homes and take care of the family, including financially. Consultation participants described deviations from these gender norms as being a source of tension in the home and sometimes resulting in arguments that included violence. A Karamajong woman explained, "Once a man pays bride price...you become their property. They use, torture and abuse you...sometimes I want to remove the marriage necklace [which symbolizes their marriage] ... it is a hard situation for women".

With this backdrop, consultation participants described REAL Fathers as leading to improvements in communication. This included the use of REAL Fathers cards - distributed to program participants and designed to signal discomfort in conversation and a need to pause and continue discussion calmly at a later point - as particularly important to preventing IPV. After the REAL Fathers finished, women who had participated described continued use of the card to disrupt situations where their husband was being verbally abusive or violent. A Karamajong mother described, "Whenever one of us goes wrong, we raise up the card of the broken spear to signal that something is not good at home. Once the card is raised, the young father realizes his mistake and we talk about it, ask for forgiveness and move on." An Acholi young father described the card as "magic," reminding him to pause and reflect on his behaviors and choices and to discuss problems calmly without being confrontational. Young mothers felt safer, more assured of their place in their homes, and had decreased concerns about needing to return to their maternal home due to violence in their marital home..

Phase 4

Advising other households

After young fathers completed their mentorship, changed their attitudes and behaviors, improved their relationships, and started to share work and planning with their wives, fathers were considered exemplary members of their community. Fathers were described as peaceful and settled: they communicated better, worked together with their wives, planned and made decisions as a couple, and families experienced less violence. Changes that took place in REAL Fathers households inspired those who were not part of the initiative, including relatives, friends, and community members, to want to adopt the same changes. Young fathers and mothers both offered and were approached by other families and community members for advice and counseling. An Acholi mother explained, “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.”

Improving livelihoods and increasing income

Prior to REAL Fathers, most young fathers struggled to save money and invest in their households; their decisions focused on short-term planning rather than long-term goals. In addition, young fathers reported that their behaviors prior to the initiative, including frequent and heavy alcohol consumption and their inability to work together as a couple, contributed to keeping the family impoverished. Program participants, including those in Karamoja who did not participate in the initiative through a livelihood program, felt that REAL Fathers helped young fathers prioritize their families’ development and long-term goals, improving livelihoods and income.

In Acholi, where fathers were enrolled in REAL Fathers because of their participation in a livelihood project, REAL Fathers contributed to livelihood outcomes. With their relationships strengthened through REAL Fathers, couples started to engage in productive activities, such as cultivating their farms, rearing livestock, and running small businesses. Some families were able to send their children to better schools in hopes of improving their opportunities. In general, fathers were able to improve their families’ standard of living and guarantee basic needs such as healthcare, clothing, housing and food security. These changes improved couples’ relationships, reducing the tension caused by the inability to afford basic household needs, which contributed in turn to reduced IPV.

Strengthening the relationship between young fathers and mothers

In both sites, consultation participants felt that REAL Fathers strengthened relationships between young fathers and their wives. A Karamajong mother explained, “The reason I am here until now is because of the project, otherwise, he (husband) would have got another wife. We see the examples from those who were not part of the REAL Fathers project, they have so far married three wives now.”

One specific area where REAL Fathers impacted relationships, according to consultation participants, was bride price. Typically, a marriage is considered official when a man completes the payment of bride price of cattle or other gifts to the maternal in-laws. Bride price solidifies the relationship between the couple and their families, giving social legitimacy and respect to the woman, offering her membership in her husband’s clan and ensuring that her children are members of his clan. Prior to REAL Fathers, most young fathers acknowledged that they had not completed and in some cases not started payment due to lack of money and cattle. However, as fathers participated in REAL Fathers, household income and livelihood improved in parallel with couples’ communication and their ability to plan for the future. Some REAL Fathers participants saved some income and planned to

formalize their marriage through payment of bride price. Where the bride price was complete, young mothers felt more secure about their place in the family. REAL Fathers did not directly address bride price or seek to prevent polygamy, but the improved relationship between couples allowed couples to discuss these topics. It's of note that while bride price completion can stabilize and improve relationships, some young mothers considered bride price as compromising women's rights, constraining her choices, and making it difficult to leave the relationship later.

Engaging fathers in parenting

Prior to REAL Fathers, mothers were typically largely or solely responsible for daily childcare and parenting. With the initiative, fathers learned how to engage with their young children and take more responsibility for childcare. Fathers described returning home from socializing earlier and spending more time overall at home with their family, including playing with and caring for their children. Consultation participants described fathers bringing treats home for their children. In addition, some started to participate in daily childcare activities such as bathing, changing children's clothes and diapers, preparing and serving food, taking children to school, and bringing them to the clinic when sick. All of these activities were new for fathers, as the community and family members typically expect mothers to perform these duties.

Improving parenting practices

REAL Fathers engaged men in different activities to help them build closer relationships with their young children. These activities taught fathers how to spend time with their children and to use positive parenting skills to redirect and discipline their children. Some consultation participants described fathers caring for their children and spending time with them sitting, talking, and listening. In Acholi, consultation participants described REAL Fathers participants as sitting with their children in the evening in front of the traditional fireplace, called the Wang Oo, to share folklore stories called Ododo-wa. Traditionally, the Wang Oo is a gathering place between elders and children, where children receive guidance from and strengthen their relationships with elders. This traditional activity had elapsed as communities recovered from two decades of war. Children enjoyed the Ododo-wa storytelling sessions, and this time together strengthened the bond between children and their fathers. Fathers mentioned that they found it challenging to interact with and play with their daughters as they would with their sons; they may need additional support and guidance in how to do this.

Phase 5

Building positive parenting and preventing violent discipline

With mentoring, fathers and mothers were able to improve their communication with each other and start to discuss, plan, and work together towards their parenting goals. These goals include reinforcing children's positive behaviors and using nonviolent approaches to correct misbehavior and guide children. Consultation participants described fathers as reducing or no longer using abusive language or physical force with their children as they learned other ways of disciplining and encouraging desired behaviors. A mother in Acholi stated, "We don't beat children when they make a mistake. We call and talk to them, and they listen to our advice. That is a good way to discipline them. Our home is known as a good home. Children can change... when there is no violence in the home." Mothers and fathers started to sit with and speak to their children to correct children's behavior. These positive and nonviolent approaches to parenting led parents to observe that their children were more likely to listen to them and be obedient and respectful. Fathers realized using violence to discipline their children harmed their physical health and wellbeing; they observed their children's improved physical appearance and behavior.

The Karamoja ECCD coordinator observed children from REAL Fathers homes being more confident, actively participating in activities, and having improved concentration.

Community and sub-county leaders identified gaps in achieving nonviolent discipline and positive parenting practices. They explained that some fathers who participated in REAL Fathers did not believe that positive parenting practices worked as a means to correct children's misbehavior. Those fathers believe that these positive disciplinary approaches promote an type of individualism, where children are taught to be independent and not feel responsibility to their family and community. Local leaders described a common belief in parent's duty to their children including the use of discipline, sometimes violent, when necessary. A few consultation participants described REAL Fathers as emphasizing child rights, a concept perceived to be Western and to conflict with local traditions and practices of child rearing and discipline, fearing that it would cause children to be irresponsible adults and disrespectful to their elders.

Improving couple's sexual relationship

Typically, in Acholi and Karamoja, men decide when to have sex and women are not supposed to refuse. In reflecting on their relationship before participating in REAL Fathers, consultation participants described sex between partners as forceful, with men having control over a woman. As a couple's communication improved and alcohol consumption and IPV decreased with participation in REAL Fathers, some couples started to discuss their sexual relationship. They discovered an appreciation for and increased pleasure associated with discussing and agreeing to sexual intimacy. Over time, couples started to discuss their sexual feelings, interests, and intimacy and were able to agree to their sexual encounters. A Karamajong mother explained, "Before sex was on-demand, but, now, it is no for no and husbands respect it until they get a go-ahead (from their partner)."

Improving child spacing and family planning

A couple's social status improves when they start having children, and having children is an important demonstration of a woman's fertility and femininity. Consultation participants described the value placed on childbearing; women who are not able to have children are at risk of losing their marriage. Finally, prior to REAL Fathers, men and women described their lack of knowledge about ways to plan and space pregnancies. Through REAL Fathers, both mothers and fathers learned about family planning and family planning methods. REAL Fathers participants recalled being asked to reflect on their dreams for their family, an approach that encouraged reflection family size and child spacing, allowing parents to consider how many children they would like and how they wanted to space them.

In addition, consultation participants noted that as REAL Fathers' relationships and communication improved, they were able to discuss and make decisions about whether to use family planning. In fact, men and women that were speaking with their partner about their sexual relationship and intimacy, including when to have sex, realized that both partners valued the sexual relationship. These couples were better able to discuss, plan, and space their children as they had learned how to have sex without worrying about pregnancy. A young father from Karamoja explained, "Now we can have sex on credit, meaning, for enjoyment without any pregnancy".

Family planning services are more readily available in Acholi and less so in Karamoja. This was evident from consultation discussions - fathers in Acholi were able to support and encourage their wives to seek and use a family planning method. In Karamoja, some men and women used fertility awareness methods for family planning. Yet,

even with mentorship that included a family planning focus, some REAL Fathers participants expressed concern about family planning, repeated common family planning myths, and explained that their in-laws' resistance to family planning inhibited couples' use of family planning.

Ultimate Change

Increasing peace and harmony in the home

The overwhelmingly consistent response as to the most important ultimate change that REAL Fathers introduced in families was peace and harmony in relationships and in the home. REAL Fathers participants described their relationship as more respectful and committed, without violence or tense confrontation between partners. They described engaging in discussions and finding solutions together to their disagreements. Women, in particular, felt more secure and stable in their marital homes. Fathers and mothers reported that they felt happier and more peaceful. The use of the phrase 'peace and harmony' by consultation participants captured the holistic way that REAL Fathers contributed to improving couples' relationships and men's behavior with their wives and children. These significant household improvements were reflected in men and their family's strengthened relationship with their community.

Key learnings for scale up of REAL

Consultation participants were asked to reflect on factors that supported and limited fathers' engagement with REAL Fathers curriculum, resulting behavior change, and how future iterations of the program can support fathers' sustained improvement in their relationship with their families. Below, these reflections are captured in

Box 1. Participant suggestions to improve REAL in future adaptation and scale



- Consider adding female mentors to provide guidance to wives' behavior change throughout the project period



- Include or link to structural (e.g., economic initiatives) and behavioral (e.g., services to prevent heavy and frequent alcohol consumption) programs to support fathers' engagement, motivation and commitment.



- Include or link to reproductive health services to ensure access to family planning methods



- Monitor for and consider how to respond when extended families promote harmful behaviors and prevent fathers' adoption of new behaviors



- Engage mentors in reflection and training to create a plan for how mentors can provide continued guidance to young fathers and their families post project



- Work with fathers and their wives to identify strategies to support men in maintaining their behaviors over time

Key Message 1. Trusted, well-trained and -supported local mentors are important to young fathers' engagement with REAL Fathers and efforts to change behaviors.

REAL Fathers mentors are selected through a consultation process with young fathers and their wives and community leaders. Mentors are trusted and respected individuals from the community whose own behaviors and relationships are meant to model behaviors the project seeks to uplift. As fathers selected their own mentors, the relationship between fathers and mentors started from a place of trust and confidence, where many fathers felt comfortable seeking advice. Key to being a good mentor was having undergone a personal transformation during the REAL training. This allowed mentors to both guide fathers and enact the desired behaviors in their own relationships, serving as role models for young fathers.

During the project, mentors' regular visits to fathers created a sense of obligation and commitment in young fathers to enact the actions they discussed. This supported behavior change, as the fathers did not want to disappoint their mentors. Even after REAL Fathers finished, mentors and young fathers described a lasting relationship with mentors continuing to provide support and advice. However, some mentors were appointed into REAL Fathers (rather than being selected by young fathers, their family and community) or did not experience personal transformation during the training. These mentors were often described as lacking the knowledge and skills to guide fathers and inconsistent in their follow up with fathers. Finally, mentors were paid small stipends, if anything. This economic constraint was visible when mentors had to make decisions on how to spend their time: earning money to support their family or mentoring.

Key Message 2: Creating an emotional connection with fathers, opening their hearts and minds early in the project, allowed men to internalize concepts and imagine new ways of being in relationship

The theory of change describes how consultation participants identified the opening fathers' hearts and minds as an essential entry point to gaining their interest in and commitment to REAL Fathers. This important shift in fathers' understanding of their relationships and themselves helped them to be receptive to further mentorship, messaging, and assignments to build skills and practice behaviors. Men whose hearts and minds opened - in other words, who internalized the project messaging and connected emotionally with it - were internally motivated to understand and apply new practices in their relationships. This phase in the project was considered foundational to achieving the later goals of family violence prevention and improved relationships, including whether behaviors are sustained over time. The project strategies of having fathers identify their mentors, transformational training for mentors, activities in the initial sessions, and reinforcement and support for the project from the community likely contributed to fathers experimenting with, and in many cases adopting, new ideas and behaviors.

Key Message 3: Readiness and commitment to REAL Fathers is influenced by fathers' individual behavior, relationships, and socio-structural factors

While many fathers experienced an opening of their hearts and minds early in the REAL Fathers process, others were less committed to the initiative's principles or had more difficulty understanding and applying learnings in their own lives. Those fathers who drank alcohol more frequently and in larger quantities were described as resistant to REAL Fathers messages, or as progressing more slowly and with greater difficulty through the program and phases of change. These fathers found it harder to try the agreed-to actions from the mentoring sessions, even with support from their mentor.

Peer influence affected fathers' efforts to try new behaviors, with some fathers internalizing messaging and acting on new skills despite resistant peers and other community members. Peers sometimes ridiculed REAL Fathers participants as weak, not 'man enough,' or under the control of their wife. This reflects common conceptions of what a father and husband should be, including asserting authority in the home, using harsh discipline with their children and/or violence with their partner, and not being responsible for caregiving- or household-related tasks. Some peers expected and encouraged their friends to drink alcohol when together, and some fathers who avoided or limited meeting their friends to reduce or stop their alcohol consumption were sanctioned by being mocked by their friends. In Acholi, consultation participants described peer influence as harmful, encouraging gambling, sex and heavy alcohol consumption. In contrast, in Karamoja, peer influence was considered helpful and reinforced fathers' new behaviors and improved family relationships. Finally, structural and social factors such as economic insecurity or illnesses in the family impacted consistent participation of fathers in the initiative. At times, fathers, like mentors, were obligated to miss mentoring sessions for income generating activities.

Key Message 4: Engaging multiple family- and community-level relationship supports throughout the project is important to fathers' motivation, retention, transformation, and sustained change.

Wives were engaged in REAL Fathers in a number of ways, including: 1) to gain their acceptance and commitment for the approach, 2) to validate mentor selection, 3) in selected mentoring sessions. A supportive partner helped ensure that fathers continued their participation in REAL and strengthened their commitment to change their behavior. For example, some wives reminded fathers to attend sessions or hired a *boda boda* (motorcycle taxi) to take their husbands to mentoring sessions. Women reminded and helped their husbands practice the skills and complete homework from the mentoring session. Engaging wives was considered important to build trust and gather feedback on fathers' practices. In fact, in previous learning efforts, women and men suggested that women needed to be more fully engaged in REAL Fathers to support their parenting skills and their relationship with their partner. One community member in Karamoja described REAL Fathers' approach of focusing on family wellbeing and development by mentoring fathers to improve communication, responsibility sharing, and other behaviors as important to its success. However, consultation participants noted a lack of attention to the specific dynamics of polygamous families despite this being common practice in both sub-regions. Some co-wives who were not actively engaged in REAL Fathers were unwilling to support the changes advocated by the project, which went against their personal and social expectations of how a good husband and father should behave. Other co-wives resisted the changes promoted by REAL Fathers because they thought their husband favored the participating wife. This could result in mistrust, competition, and anger in the relationship between co-wives.

When family members, including parents and in-laws, demonstrated support for fathers' involvement in REAL Fathers, fathers felt respected and encouraged to be a better parent and partner. When community members

recognized young fathers and their wives for their changed relationships and demonstrated renewed trust, fathers became more engaged in their communities and their self-esteem and confidence improved. Due to improvements in their family life, some REAL Fathers participants and their wives were elevated as role models and leaders in the community and others asked them for advice and guidance. However, when parents, elders or other family and community members ridiculed fathers for their changed behavior, including when the behavior was different from expected gender roles and responsibilities, fathers were discouraged and risked abandoning the project or efforts to change.

Key Message 5: Family and community pushback to changing gender roles and responsibilities in the family challenged fathers' willingness to change

As REAL Fathers sought to redefine the roles, responsibilities, and behavior of a good father and husband, it confronted strict gender norms on caregiving expectations, decision-making, and communication. When family and community members observed or heard about men's increased engagement in childcare, cooking, cleaning, or other household chores, some ridiculed and reprimanded young fathers and mothers. They described fathers as performing what is considered women's work: washing clothes and dishes, cooking, cleaning, splitting firewood, and working the family farm. Their wives were reprimanded for "mistreating, controlling, or having bewitched" their husband. As a result, some fathers did not take on these responsibilities fully and instead defined boundaries around their new engagement in these duties, for example, when mothers were not home or were sick. Finally, during this consultation, some women described the expectation for husbands to pay bride price for their wife as countering the expectations of gender roles change that the initiative promoted. They described the practice as limiting women's respect and security in their relationship when not paid in full, as well as being a cause of violence in relationship and reinforcing unequal power and relationship dynamics when paid.

Key message 6: Applying a tightly focused, contextually-appropriate approach to programming influenced the acceptability of REAL Fathers

REAL Fathers maintained a targeted focus, working with a specific population of fathers in a defined community. Mentors were responsible for a small number (3-5) of fathers, allowing them to provide more regular guidance and to observe fathers' behaviors more consistently. As mentors were known to the family and community, they were more easily accepted and trusted to provide guidance. In addition, fathers meeting in group sessions were known to each other, which helped create a support and accountability network for them, especially when others in the community resisted or opposed changes. For example, because of these connections, fathers and mentors were willing and able to follow up with men who missed a mentoring session. In addition, the curriculum was developed for and adapted to the local context, ensuring that messages reflected local language, perceptions, and desires. The examples, roleplaying exercises, and poster messaging used in the curriculum were familiar and relatable to the young fathers and mothers, and accessible to illiterate as well as literate young couples.

Appendix I. Elaborating a theory of change for REAL Fathers: Final Tools

Facilitator Guide

Location: Karamoja and Acholi Sub-region, Uganda

- Lolachat and Lorengedwat Sub-counties in Karamoja Sub-region. Eight (8) FGDS of male and female participants, 4 in each site.
- Atiak and Pabbo Sub-counties in Acholi Sub-region. Eight (8) FGDS of male and female participants, 4 in each site.
- Two FGDS with mentors in each sub-region.
- Adjusted group numbers and participation to reflect COVID SOPs. Had fewer participants per group in Acholi Sub-region.

Group consultations should take 60-90 minutes and include 6-10 people depending on availability and the size that is manageable for the facilitator.

The facilitator will need to facilitate discussion and encourage all participants to speak and reflect on their ideas. The note taker should try to capture the ideas as much as possible to support later analysis.

Group and key informant consultations:

1. Group consultation with mentors
2. Group consultation with young fathers that participated in the intervention
3. Group consultation with young mothers whose partners participated in the intervention
4. Group consultation with community development officers (CDO) and government staff: Education officer, Sub-county Chief, Local leaders at the Sub-county - LC III Chairperson and representatives, trainers of mentors.
5. Group consultation with community leadership (may be combined with CDO/government staff), included: Local Council I, youth leaders, women leaders, religious and traditional leaders.
6. Key informant interview with Save the Children staff that were involved in REAL (if available)* (there was one full time PO per area)
7. Group consultation with YIELD and ECD staff (if available) YIELD in Acholi and ECD in Karamoja.

Materials Needed

- Discussion guide
- Notebook
- Pens
- Flip chart paper
- Markers
- Large index cards [or other visual that can symbolize changes along the pathway]

*consider how to adapt this for lower literate populations as in Karamoja where people may not feel comfortable writing if literate or may discuss less if they are dealing with a written document.

Final Tool: Elaborating a theory of change with community development officers, community leadership, young fathers, young mothers, and mentors

Population Groups:

- Group consultation with community development officers (CDO) and government staff
- Group consultation with community leadership (may be combined with CDO/government staff)
- Group consultation with young fathers that participated in the intervention
- Group consultation with young mothers whose partners participated in the intervention
- Group consultation with mentors

Facilitator Guidance

During this activity, we seek to understand in discussion how the program facilitated changes in the partnership and parenting relationship, explore challenges to changing behavior and sustaining behavior change. We are not interested in understanding any individual's specific relationship with their partner or child, including how their behavior changed. Instead, we want to explore the groups experience with the program to inform and elaborate the theory of change. We think this discussion will take 60-90 minutes.

Introduction

Thank you for coming to this meeting. Today we would like to talk about a program, REAL Fathers, that was implemented in this region. As you know, REAL Fathers is a community mentorship program that works with young fathers to improve communication between partners and to develop parenting skills. We want to understand your experience with this program when it was implemented here. This is a conversation that will help us understand how the program worked and what could be improved. There are no right or wrong answers. We are holding similar discussions with other people in this community that know of REAL.

You have been asked to participate in this conversation because of your involvement as a [REAL Mentor, REAL Father, the partner of a REAL Father]. We will be taking notes throughout this activity to help us remember what you say; we will not include your name or link your comments to you. We are conducting a series of discussions in this area to better understand how the program influenced relationships in this area. At this point, we do not have funding to continue implementing REAL. But we wish to better understand the program to inform future efforts should funding become available. Your answers on how the program worked or what was difficult will not influence whether funding becomes available.

Does anyone have any questions before we start?

Activity

1. I would like to start by reminding you about REAL Fathers. This program was implemented in this area a few years ago. Fathers of young children participated in the mentoring program. Men from the community were identified to be their mentors. Mentors were trained and they met with fathers in their homes, in groups and with their wives. Each month a poster was revealed in the community like this one [show poster]. At the end of the program, there was a community celebration. Do you remember this program?
2. We want to understand how the mentoring program led to healthier and better relationship between fathers and their children. There are many different ways to get where we want to go, meaning, this may have happened differently in different families and for different people. This is like going from your home/manyatta to the kraal or market/trading centre may take many steps to get there. Some people might walk slowly and other people might walk faster to get to their destination or where they are going. We don't all

take the same road or means to get there. Some people might go straight without making any turns or stops and other people might take different roads to get to their destination. To illustrate, some people might walk and others might take a boda-boda or go by taxi/bus to get to their destination faster. We want to understand what are the different steps a father took to have a relationship with his young child or children.

[notes for facilitator: We want to start with a general examination of the relationship between REAL Fathers, their children, and their wives. Then we will ask specific questions about the relationship between father-child relationships.]

Let's start by discussing mentoring. Fathers were visited by mentors in their home/manyatta and in a group. Sometimes these meetings were one-on-one, sometimes in a group with other young fathers, and sometimes with their wives.

Think about men in this community that participated in mentoring. Think about the young fathers whose relationships with their children improved while they participated in REAL Fathers.

- When you think about REAL in this community, can you tell me what you think were 1 or 2 changes that you saw among the families who participated in the programme?
- **[LISTING]** As we discuss, I am going to write on these cards so I can keep track of what you're saying. Tell me how did mentors visiting fathers in their home and in group meetings lead to changes in father's relationships with their children? Are there any others? Facilitator to list all the changes.
- **[PILE SORTING]** Ok let's look at these. We know that one project can't lead to all changes that fathers experience with their children. Let's look at each of these and put them in two piles. One pile will be for changes that we think are related to fathers participating in REAL and the other pile is for changes that happen for any other reason. Other reasons could be anything such as being employed, education level, participating in a different project, growing older or any other reason.

Facilitator to pile sort each of the reasons identified.

- **[DRAWING A ROADMAP]** Thanks. Now let's look at the list we have for things that changed because fathers participated in REAL. Let's try to put them in order so we can understand how mentoring led to healthier relationships for fathers with their children. I am going to use this large piece of paper to help us keep track of our discussion. On this side (left), I am writing/drawing mentoring. This shows fathers participating in home/manyatta and group mentoring. On this side (right), I will write healthier family relationships. Now I'll read each of the changes we discussed. These are the changes we said are related to fathers participating in REAL. As we discuss, I am going to use our cards to start showing the road from mentoring to changed relationships. Sometimes we might put one card in one place, and as we discuss it, decide that it's the wrong location or remove the card altogether. This is normal. Let's start to put them in order. When fathers participate in mentoring, what changed first? And then what?
- If father's disciplinary practices (violent discipline, positive parenting, hands on parenting, etc.,) is not already mentioned (even if worded differently), then ask, did the program change anything in the way fathers discipline their children? What did it change? Where would you put that on this road?
- Great we have a useful picture here of how change happens. Do you think we missed anything?
- Can you tell me which steps/changes are the hardest to make? Are there any points where fathers might give up or feel discouraged? Can you describe what makes this difficult? difficult [e.g., something in the household? Challenges around sustaining behavior? Alcohol use? Economic stress, relationship with wife or others in the community?]

3. [REPEAT STEP 4 FOR THE OUTCOME FATHERS RELATIONSHIP WITH THEIR WIFE IF IT DOES NOT COME OUT IN THE EARLIER SECTION.]

[notes for facilitator: We want to start with a general examination of the relationship between fathers and wives. Then we will ask specific questions about the relationship between use of violence and family planning/child spacing. Use a separate flip chart paper though some of the same factors may come up.]

- If fathers use of physical violence (e.g., hitting, beating) or psychological violence (e.g., using harsh words) is not mentioned, you can ask, did the program change anything in how couples fight, for example whether fathers hit, punch or insult their wives? Tell me about what changed
 - If family planning/contraception/child spacing is not mentioned (even if worded differently), then ask, did the program change anything in the way fathers and mothers decide to use or not use family planning? What did it change? Where would you put that on this road?
 - Can you tell me which steps/changes are the hardest to make? Are there any points where fathers might give up? What makes this difficult [e.g., something in the household – men helping with household chores and child care? Sustaining behavior? Shared decision making? Working together with their wives in the garden? Equality over family/household resources between husbands and wives? Alcohol use? Economic factors]?
4. The program also had posters like this one (show the poster) that were set up in the community. Can you describe how these posters led to fathers improved relationship with their children? And their wives?
5. The program also had a community celebration at the end of the project where fathers, their wives and community members attended and shared their experience with the program. Can you describe how these celebrations led to fathers improved relationship with their children? And their wives? And maybe with the larger community? Image and social status – elected to leadership position because people trust and respect them due to the changes they experienced as part of REAL etc?
6. We have learned a lot about how this program worked in this community. It's very interesting for me. I just have a couple more questions.
7. [**> SKIP TO QUESTION 11 IF FATHER OR WIFE. > SKIP TO QUESTION 10 IF CDO, GOVERNMENT. ASK QUESTION 8 ONLY TO MENTORS**] Thank you for all of this discussion. I have a couple more question. Mentors participated in a training program. Can you describe how that training program prepared mentors to work with fathers? E.g., communication skills etc
- While working as a mentor, did anything happen in your work with fathers and wives that you didn't expect?

8.[> SKIP TO QUESTION 11 IF MENTOR. ASK QUESTION 10 ONLY TO CDO OR GOVERNMENT]
Thank you for all of this discussion. I have one more question.

- How would you describe the involvement of CDO's and local government in the REAL Fathers program? What responsibilities did CDO and local government have in the program?
- If this program was to be implemented again in a different setting, what do you think is important to consider?

9. [END OF SESSION]

- Before we close, do you have anything else you want to share?
- Thank you for your participation.

Final Tool: : Elaborating a theory of change with Save the Children staff

Population Groups:

- Key informant interview with Save the Children staff that were involved in REAL (if available)* Group consultation with community leadership (may be combined with CDO/government staff)

Facilitator Guidance

During this activity, we want to explore Save the Children's experience in facilitating and supporting REAL Fathers. This is an opportunity to explore your current thinking on the theory of change, after conducting the above consultations/discussions. Consider this a chance to vet your ideas, discuss any contradictions in the data, and understand more about the level of support Save the Children program officers provided for adaptation and implementation. If time permits, exploring the participants understanding of whether changes were sustained is helpful.



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