

L'ENGAGÉ

A NEWSLETTER ON HEALTHY MASCULINITY PROMOTION EFFORTS IN NIGER AND MALI

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Personal Transformation Story

Patoma Arama: A Man Engaged

Patoma Arama is 48 years old and a polygamist from the village of Ama, located 4 kilometers from Ouou, in the region of Mopti. In 2009, Patoma was identified by CARE Mali as a Community Relay for the promotion of maternal and child health. Later, he was identified as a Change Agent for CARE Mali's Men Engage initiative. Patoma is from a community in which men are resistant to supporting women in their development activities. In spite of this resistance, he quickly understood that women are at the center of sustainable development.

"The capacity building I received helped me a lot. I received training on the VSLA approach, social norms, gender, the prevention of female genital cutting, nutrition, essential family practices, civic education, rights and responsibilities, female leadership, advocacy, and social negotiation. Thanks to all of this capacity building, I became a Change Agent committed to women's cause: I support women in the coordination of their VSLA activities, I support them in developing and submitting their files, and I help facilitate their access to elective posts.

I have never backed down to my detractors. I have objectives I am aiming for. So I decided to contribute to the objective sought by the Men Engage initiative. Currently, my efforts to support women are well known in the commune. Today I am at the head of the network of change agents in my commune.

The biggest change in my family life is the fact that I listen to my wives with more attention, and I pay more attention to my children. I have stopped believing that children's education only concerns women. I understood that I am the first responsible. I was able to adopt such an attitude thanks to an awareness I acquired through sessions and discussions with men and women.

I realized that, contrary to what our parents and some men from our generation say, women **have very good ideas that can help to improve life conditions through good management, household cohesion, and paying attention to each family member.**

During the whole process of my personal change, I faced pressure from the community, especially when I began regularly accompanying my wives to health centers, when I would pound millet to lighten the workload of my wives, and during my leadership of family meetings. **In my village, I have long been perceived as an 'abnormal person'.** Today, I am very proud of myself because the members of my household trust me very much and see me as being transparent; we don't hide anything from each other and I do not feel like the sole master of my household.

For those who believe that women must always accept or submit themselves to everything a man suggests or decides, I would advise them to rethink their position and to try, just once, to be willing to discuss a problem with their wives; then they will realize the time they wasted by not including their wives in decision-making.

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"My willingness to pursue change actions is inspired by my perception of a sustainable development in our commune that places women at the center and that results in the wellbeing of our households." (Patoma Arama)

As far as the other men in my family are concerned, I make sure that they see me supporting my wives and my children. During family meetings, I make sure that women participate, and I encourage them to offer their points of view. Every time my brothers approach me about a subject related to their household, I do not hesitate to ask them if they shared it with their wives first. I very much encourage the women in the family to express themselves and to encourage their husbands to consult them on family decisions.

I think that by continuing on this road, my household will be happier: the members of my household will trust me more, I will provide more information on what is happening in my home, and no one will hesitate to approach me to identify solutions to problems. This will ensure cohesion, peace and happiness."



Patoma talking with a group of men in the community

Institutional & Programmatic News

Results from the Mid-Term Evaluation of the Male Engagement Initiatives in Mali and Niger

In February 2013, CARE Niger and CARE Mali completed a mid-term review of their respective male engagement initiatives.

CARE Mali

Men demonstrate a greater acceptance of Family Planning: Husbands accompany their wives to pre and post natal consultations, and cover related expenses; the men have set up a donation system at the community level to enable the rapid evacuation of women with medical problems.

Men are more involved in domestic tasks including: collecting firewood, caring for children, collecting water. This has resulted in a lightening of women's workload.

Improved couple dialogue: Some men have created spaces for communication in their households. This has made the home environment more prone to dialogue; it has strengthened trust between men and women, and reduced men's use of violence against women. More and more men are ending their use of physical and verbal violence against women.

Men have supported women in their access to land: In the village of Parou, the men made 3 hectares of land available to women following a complaint the women issued to the village chief. Their complaint was deemed legitimate. Afterwards, all of the men in the village committed to their cause. At least 50 women benefited from arable land plots as a result of efforts made by the men.

"In terms of my relationship with my wife, before I didn't used to give her much listening time until the day I understood the advantages of mutual listening in a couple. Since that day, I have become my wife's main confidant and vice versa. Now she is no longer uncomfortable calling me, even when I am not around, to confide in me; and I do the same." (CARE Mali staff member)

CARE Mali's Men Engage initiative also has as an objective the personal transformation of the implementing team. The following changes were identified at the level of the staff:

Most of the staff stated that there was a **strengthening of dialogue in their couple, and a greater involvement of men and boys in household tasks.**

Male staff report **a greater awareness of gender inequality.** As a result of this awareness, they reported completing tasks previously reserved for women (bathing children, making the bed etc), abandoning harmful practices such as FGC, and talking about sexuality with their children.



CARE Mali Program staff sharing under the talking tree

CARE Niger

Men are more and more sensitive to the need to engage in dialogue with women on taboo topics such as reproductive health, decision-making, sharing land heritage, actively supporting girls' education, and ending early marriage.

Mass communication campaigns have resulted in a **reduction of violence against women,** and improvements in household dialogue.

Men are active in the behavior change groups, the gender equity and equality platforms, and the communal councils. **Other men in the community are motivated by the transformation of those men who are members of the various structures created by the program.**

More and more men are open to the use of contraceptive methods, resulting in a significant increase in contraceptive prevalence in the intervention area between 2011 and 2012 (from 28% in 2011 to 82% in 2012). The topic of sexuality is now less taboo at the community level.

More and more men deliberately plan for transportation strategies, and/or resources to reduce risks related to pregnancy and childbirth. Some men have initiated risk-management actions such as: purchasing an ambulance for medical evacuations; **penalizing heads of household when their wives give birth at home**; building a physical structure to allow women to discretely receive medical consultations; and **initiating dialogue between communities and health agents to improve the quality of services.**

Men are contributing to reducing women's domestic tasks either by contributing to household expenditures or by completing the tasks themselves: **in one village, the men started collecting and transporting water, an activity traditionally reserved for women; in another village, the men now pound millet.**

There is a greater social awareness of men's responsibility in the health of families, girls' education, and child nutrition. Some men have changed their perception of their role and the role of women, especially in terms of enabling girls' school enrolment and their continued education, and accepting women's equal right to inherit land.



Ambulance purchased by the men in Maikalgo (Niger)



Sign for a maternity clinic rehabilitated by CARE Niger's Men Engage initiative

SPECIAL STORY:

Understanding Men's Experiences with Violence

In an effort to increase staff understanding of masculinity and gender issues, and staff capacity to develop and carry out male engagement strategies, 2 reflection workshops were hosted by CARE Niger. One important aspect of masculinity that was explored during both workshops was men's experience of violence.

When developing programs or projects aimed at women's empowerment or gender equality, the tendency is to position men simply as perpetrators of violence without also acknowledging their relationship to violence as victims and as witnesses. The general tendency is also one in which *how* men experience violence as perpetrators, victims or witnesses is not explored or acknowledged. Focusing on only one aspect of men's relationship to violence negates the importance of the other two, and the ways in which men's various relationships to violence have influenced—and continue to influence—how an individual man has chosen to express his masculinity. Failure to create spaces for men to reflect on how they have experienced violence during their lifetime prevents us from connecting with men; it also prevents us from seeing men as other than powerful, invulnerable, impervious, and unemotional beings—the very social constructs we are seeking to *deconstruct* in our work with men and boys.

For several of the male workshop participants, reflecting on their experiences of violence from various perspectives was eye opening; it was also eye opening for the women. The reflection seemed to help men connect with their feelings on violence. These feelings were sometimes expressed as anger, powerlessness, embarrassment, and disbelief. Working with men to explore and understand how and why they use violence, and how they have experienced violence, is important for bridging the gap between the experiences of women and men, and for helping men and women to realize that there are other ways for men to be men.

For this issue of the Engagé, 3 male staff from CARE Niger and CARE Mali were willing to share their personal experiences with violence. The staff in question are Tamba Simpara and Boukary Sanogo from CARE Mali, and Amadou Dan-Kouré from CARE Niger.

Witnesses of Violence

"The first thing I felt was compassion for this girl because, I told myself: what if she was my daughter, my niece or a little sister? My heart began to swell; I was overcome with frustration. Thankfully, I was able to control myself and actively listen to the young boys; and then I went with them and the young woman to the village. Once both families met, I was very frustrated and felt powerless because the incident was handled as something normal and commonplace."

"Suddenly, before I could subdue him, my landlord was punching and kicking his wife. The poor woman had a swollen face and scratches, and she was bleeding from the mouth. Without needing to understand the reasons why this was happening, I felt very sorry for the woman. My eyes were full of tears and I was very angry with my landlord because the children were also crying, powerless; and they were seeing their mother in such a state. The incident affected me and each time I visit with the family I remember that incident."

"I witnessed an incident of violence in a young couple; the young man was violently beating his young companion. Faced with such extreme violence, I wasn't able to restrain myself. So I decided to physically intervene in order to put an end to this brutality."

Perpetrators of Violence

"I was proud of this responsibility that was entrusted to me, and I thought that I was a man because I was honored, and I had to watch and be the guardian of the women who surrounded me. For a start, I felt guilty about the dishonor I caused my family by my failure, and then I was embarrassed when my uncle, who had placed his trust in me, looked at me with eyes full of doubt. Then I felt rage towards my cousin and her boyfriend. In sum, the first act of violence against my cousin led to more violence."

"Each day, I made my young brothers work from 5:30 in the morning until 5 or 6 in the evening. I used to repeatedly hit my two brothers when they were being lazy. For me, it was normal; on the one hand, I had to meet the challenge given, and on the other, I had to train my brothers to not become lazy in life. Today, I recognize that I was a perpetrator of violence because I used to whip them."

"When I managed to subdue the young man [who had been violent towards his female companion], his young companion began to cry and she looked at me with anger. I quickly understood that I hadn't acted wisely because her elation turned to contempt. I felt regret at having behaved in such a way."

Victims of Violence

"Having been the victim of a slap because of my refusal to fight, I carried around an extreme desire for retaliation for more than 12 years; I searched for this person who had hit me, and whom I never found."

"This experience was one of the hardest of my life. My name was at the top of all of the files sent by the French institute and would enable me to go to France for an internship. After all of the preparations had been made, I found out 3 days before my departure that my name had been replaced by the name of the brother of the director of the institute where I was studying. I lost that opportunity. Given that there was no other alternative, I was overcome with terrible remorse, and this was followed by a bit of trauma. For more than three months I stopped living (I locked myself in the house the whole day, I had difficulty eating, I spoke to almost no one). I saw myself in an unjust world where the weakest have no privilege."

"It was 1979. My friends and I had to participate in the circumcision ceremony. Aunts and uncles came for the evening gathering. They encouraged us and said: 'Tomorrow you will be part of the men so be real men; do not cry. Honor us. We are counting on you.' It was during the month of January and it was very cold when the military officer and his colleagues circumcised the 17 young boys without anesthesia. For three hours each of us began to bleed, moan, and writhe with pain. Every time I felt like crying or screaming I remembered 'Tomorrow you must not cry, be a man' and I immediately repressed all of my feelings. I was among the 3 boys who were younger than 17. During the whole morning I fought to withstand the pain in order to honor my family and relatives."



Men as Agents of Change

It is important to believe in men's potential for transformation; this potential should be at the foundation of all of our work with men. In their personal reflections on their individual experiences with violence, Tamba, Sanogo, and Amadou wanted to communicate the following messages to other men:

"Other men must know that they are naturally loving and good but that they are in an environment that has transformed them. They must therefore take risks if they want to have a clear conscience and if they want their behaviors to be irreversible." (**Boukary Sanogo**)

"Men are naturally loving, kind and sensitive towards other men, and towards women and children. This positive side must be strengthened through trainings on masculinity. The ideal situation would be setting up support groups in the community. Men are educated to be masculine; this education leads to confusion, disconnection and domination. During the trainings and discussions important information will be shared on the Man Box and the advantages and disadvantages of being in or out of the box." (**Tamba Simpara**)

"In my opinion, other men should know that violence, whatever its form, is not the right solution for solving a problem. Men can break the cycle of violence by recognizing the freedom and the added value of other men and women in society, such that they become real agents of change." (**Amadou Dan-Kouré**)



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