

Case Study: Men as Champions of Women's Empowerment in Ghana and Nigeria

Executive Summary

The **\$10 Spark Igniting Transformation Initiative** successfully mobilized nearly **25,000 men, reaching 100,000 people** across Ghana and Nigeria to become champions of women's empowerment through innovative intra-household dialogues. By creating safe spaces for men to challenge patriarchal norms, the project transformed household dynamics, improved financial planning, and strengthened women's economic agency in deeply traditional communities.

The Challenge

In Northern Ghana, Upper East Ghana, and Kano State Nigeria, deeply rooted patriarchal norms and religious traditions severely limited women's economic participation and household decision-making power. Women faced a "triple shift" of business activities, household chores, and childcare with minimal spousal support.

Key Achievements:

- **24,906** male champions mobilized across 125 communities
- **1,007** community dialogues completed with 205 Community-Based Facilitators
- **28,109** women engaged in second dialogues with their spouses
- **12,400** gender action plans voluntarily created by couples
- **36%** of participants were in polygamous marriages, requiring specialized approaches

The Reality Before:

Issues before the intervention included poor communication and unilateral decision-making by men, frequent quarrels about money with limited joint planning, women being viewed primarily as homemakers, not economic contributors, men fearing community mockery for supporting wives in household duties, and lack of financial transparency and trust between spouses.

As one participant shared: "*There are some men who already do something like this or want to do something like this but do not know where to start. Some men want to support their wives in household duties but for fear of mockery, or resistance from their male colleagues they fail to do it.*"

The Approach

Community-Based Facilitation

The project deployed 205 Community-Based Facilitators (183 male, 22 female) who were selected for their proficiency in dialoguing, digital skills, and appreciation of gender issues. Male facilitators were preferred by the partners given the patriarchal contexts and facilitated the majority of the dialogues.

A few women, who were already respected by the communities, facilitated dialogues alone and a few participated on a male-female facilitation team. When the male-female facilitation team was possible, they balance authority with empathy. For example, when some men wanted to put blame on women, the female facilitator was able to be the voice for the other women in the room.

Two-Stage Dialogue Process

First Dialogue (Men Only): Created safe spaces for an average of 25 men per session to discuss authority, finances, and decision-making. Male facilitators leveraged peer influence, often meeting men in their farming groups.

Second Dialogue (Couples): Brought spouses together to establish joint goals, create emergency funds, and develop action plans for shared household responsibilities.

Culturally Adapted Curriculum

Grameen Foundation's dialogue guides were adapted to cover practical topics including managing financial shocks, opening savings accounts, creating household emergency funds, and sharing household responsibilities equitably.

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Navigating Complex Realities

Polygamous vs. Monogamous Households

Polygamous households (36% of participants): Required careful mediation as co-wives competed for recognition with different expectations. Facilitators dedicated significant time to planning logistics, scheduling with all wives, and ensuring equity. Confusion arose about joint accounts and who would control them.

Monogamous couples: Engagement was more straightforward with quicker improvements in joint decision-making and financial planning. Private dialogues strengthened intimacy and deepened trust.

Gender Dynamics in Facilitation

Male facilitators were widely preferred by men who felt comfortable discussing sensitive issues. Had greater acceptance from community leaders and could easily access men in farming groups. **Female facilitators** were highly effective in creating trust with women participants who opened up more about personal challenges and household power dynamics. This worked exceptionally well in the couple sessions.

Transformative Outcomes

Household Dynamics: Couples moved from poor communication to improved trust and joint decision-making. Conflicts over money decreased significantly as financial transparency increased.

Economic Empowerment: Men helped wives open mobile money and bank accounts, provided monetary support for micro-enterprises, and couples began jointly saving for emergencies. Some men also reported supporting their wives' businesses financially or working in the business while she was away or indirectly supporting by helping with household responsibilities.

Behavioral Changes: Men committed to sharing chores and parenting responsibilities. Male champions began publicly supporting women's economic empowerment in their communities.

Real Impact: A couple from Nwogu transformed from constant disputes over food money to jointly budgeting and saving. The husband now cooks while his wife breastfeeds their baby—a practice once considered taboo.

Community Impact: Over 100,000 community members impacted and equipped with new tools to escape poverty sustainably while fostering entrepreneurial opportunities that enhance household income and resilience over time.

Implementation and Results

By the Numbers

Ghana:

105 agents trained (83 male, 22 female)
507 dialogues completed
11,781 men and 12,695 women participated

Nigeria:

100 agents trained (89 male, 11 female)
500 dialogues completed
13,125 men and 15,414 women engaged

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Overcoming Resistance

Initial Barriers

Men's Reservations:

Men had fears of their authority being undermined and "foreign" gender equality agendas, concern that wives gaining financial power would lead to disrespect or divorce, worry about mockery from other men for being "controlled" by wives, and skepticism about practical benefits.

Community Skepticism:

This included rumors about "changing culture" or political undertones, perception of government cash handouts, and suspicion that dialogues were academic exercises with no real value.

What Worked

Evidence and Visibility: As households showed improved harmony, productivity, and financial planning, resistance softened. Relatable case studies demonstrated practical value.

Strategic Leadership Engagement: Traditional and religious leaders, once engaged, became supportive, framing dialogues as tools for peaceful households rather than threats to tradition.

Respect and Reassurance: Men were respectfully shown that the program strengthened families rather than usurped authority, positioning them for long-term prosperity.

Key Lessons for Replication

Critical Success Factors

- 1. Adapt to Household Structures:** Different approaches were needed for polygamous versus monogamous households.
- 2. Balance Facilitator Gender:** Combining male and female facilitators enhanced inclusivity and effectiveness.
- 3. Link Social and Economic Benefits Leveraging on Existing Practices:** Connect dialogues with livelihood opportunities so households see tangible results, building on traditional savings methods like susu groups and livestock keeping.
- 4. Engage Leaders Early:** Securing buy-in from community, religious, and traditional leaders is critical.



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Conclusion

The \$10 Spark Initiative demonstrates that transforming patriarchal norms is achievable when men are engaged as champions rather than adversaries. By creating culturally sensitive safe spaces, leveraging peer influence, and connecting social change with economic benefits, the project mobilized nearly 25,000 men to support women's empowerment in deeply traditional communities.

The transformation was profound: **couples moved from "not even being in talking terms" to "planning and saving together for emergencies."** Men who once feared mockery now publicly champion women's economic participation. Women who were seen as "house helps" are now recognized as economic partners.

The model's replicability depends on: cultural sensitivity, early stakeholder engagement, balanced facilitation teams, integration with livelihood opportunities, and linking social transformation with practical economic outcomes. The male champions created through this initiative are now positioned to drive broader community change and participate in government programs advancing women's economic empowerment across Ghana and Nigeria.

Important Considerations

Financial Constraints: Many couples were motivated to plan jointly but lacked income to set aside emergency funds. Several men complained about inadequate means to provide needed support.

Broader Needs: High numbers of widows and widowers suggest need for non-couple-focused programming. Youth couples face similar challenges with fewer resources.

Cultural Timing: Factor in religious observances like fasting periods to avoid delays and ensure stakeholder participation.

Recommendations for Future Programs

Add Third Dialogue Session: Women-only sessions facilitated by female CBFs would enable deeper insights in patriarchal contexts. While this was a desired aspect of the program, it was not possible during the implementation period.

Government Partnerships: Engage relevant ministries early and present male champions as a ready pool for economic empowerment programs.

Financial Service Providers: Partner with FSPs to provide financial literacy and business development skills for sustainability.

Youth Integration: Develop specific programming for young couples with limited resources.



Coverage: Northern Region Ghana, Upper East Ghana, Kano State Nigeria

Implementation: 2024-2025