



PROGRAM EXPERIENCE AND EVIDENCE: MALE ENGAGEMENT THROUGH GENDER DIALOGUES

INTRODUCTION

Grameen Foundation USA (Grameen) is a global non-profit that uses technology and innovation to transform ecosystems so that women and girls can realize their full power, thereby breaking the cycle of poverty and hunger. Grameen has conducted male engagement activities, including community-level and intra-household dialogues (IHDs), in the context of financial inclusion and other programming focused on reducing poverty and enhancing income generation of women in a range of settings across West Africa, Central America and Asia since 2014. Typically, they are introduced in a phased approach following capacity-building in gender and inclusion with financial service providers (FSPs) or other local partners.

In our own assessments (some of them peer reviewed), we find that IHDs (introduced as a complement to other program activities) lead to improved agency of women to access and use financial services for enterprise growth, without fear of negative male backlash. Households become more harmonious and cooperative.

This is likely because men become more comfortable with women accessing and using financial and other services as they come to appreciate the benefits that accrue to him and the rest of the family as household incomes are diversified or double. In addition, by engaging men in groups with other couples, they are able to observe their peers' willingness to change their attitudes and behaviors, which creates a ripple effect.

This brief will outline the global evidence base and share experiences of various Grameen projects deploying IHDs.



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GLOBAL EVIDENCE BASE

Supported by students from Brigham Young University, Grameen compiled the “[Evidence review on the role of male engagement in women’s economic empowerment \(WEE\) programs](#)”. This document is cited as a key resource for a World Bank publication, “[Engaging Men for Women’s Economic Empowerment: Overview of the Evidence](#)”. These resources show male engagement is critical to the success of initiatives that seek to invest in women’s economic power.

Key Findings:

- **Access and use of financial services is core to poverty alleviation** ([Odell/Grameen Foundation](#)). When women contribute more cash income to their household they will ideally receive greater intra-household decision-making power. By enabling women to earn cash income for the family, microcredit interventions can impact a women’s empowerment by increasing their respect for self, and respect they receive from their partner ([Osmani 2007](#)).
- Overall familial and community well-being have also improved in areas where **women have increased bargaining power in their homes**. In areas of Bangladesh where Muslim women went against tradition by holding stronger roles in their household decision-making process, they saw greater fulfillment of basic family needs compared to areas where the households were strongly patriarchal. Economic trends suggest that when a woman’s intra-household bargaining power increases, household product consumption favors needs that promote child welfare. ([Schmidt 2012](#))
- **Dialogue-based approaches, such as IHDs, are effective** at challenging inequitable social and gender norms, promoting positive masculinities, improving health outcomes, reducing conflict and GBV. ([Wegs et al 2016](#); [Abramsky et al 2016](#))

GRAMEEN'S PROGRAMMING EVIDENCE WITH IHDS AND COMMUNITY DIALOGUES

ESCÚCHAME HONDURAS 2022-2024

Under the Escúchame Honduras program, Grameen worked with an FSP partner to conduct three IHDS with women participants of RLRB education and microcredit programs, and their male partners, with the goal of enabling men to be champions of women's entrepreneurship. A [learning brief](#) outlines lessons from implementing the IHDS with 50 couples reporting improved communication and improved attitudes towards gender equality. Moreover, the IHD facilitators (who are also credit officers and primarily men) have experienced changes in their own attitudes and behaviors, at home and in the workplace. See the [final report](#) for more results as well as the [IHD modules](#).

WAGE GHANA 2021-2023

Under WAGE Ghana, Grameen conducted positive male engagement with the partners of the 90 female mobile money agents mobilized to deliver digital financial services (DFS) and other support to women entrepreneurs. This was important to ensure the male partners would support the female agents to start up and grow their agency businesses.

Engagement activities included:

- Community entry meetings held by Grameen's partners with 1,280 local traditional and religious leaders and community members in every project community. The purpose of the community entry meetings was to educate local stakeholders on the goals and potential benefits of the project, and to engage them as champions supporting women DFS+ Agents in their work.
- Agent/Spouse Orientations with all 90 DFS+ Agents and their male partners or family members to introduce the project, explain the benefits of women acting as DFS+ Agents, and to obtain commitments from the men to be active supporters of their spouse/relative's work.
- IHDS held with VSLA members and their spouses (40 participants per dialogue; 400 participants total; 50% men, 50% women).

The [endline report](#) indicated an eight percentage-point increase in agents who feel very supported by their spouses and male family members (growing from 70% at baseline to 78% at endline). At the same time, 90% of agents reported that the amount of support provided by their spouses had increased by a lot, or somewhat. The endline also found that couples reported improved household harmony ('there is more peace in our home'), an indicator of increased male comfort and reduced female hesitation to using financial services for income generation. Additionally, local partners appreciated the male and community engagement aspects of the project.

WAGE TIMOR LESTE 2020-2023

Under WAGE Timor Leste, Grameen piloted IHDs with 40 couples on the topics of household power dynamics, equitable decision-making, and mitigating the risk of GBV at home. The women participants were benefiting from Resilient Life, Resilient Business education which was offered through an audio drama format, which lent itself to a discussion format with male partners. Noting the IHDs were not a planned activity, the [evaluation](#) recommended that male engagement be increased in future initiatives of this kind. The module used in Timor Leste is available [online](#).

WAGE ESWATINI 2020-2022

Community dialogues were a key strategy for male engagement in the Eswatini initiative. By reaching out to men and boys through community dialogues, the WAGE project supported gender sensitization and women's economic participation but also addressed gender-based violence (GBV) along with the support of local partners with the expertise on best practices in GBV prevention and response. At the project's close, [evaluation results](#) demonstrated a 74% increase among men and a 152% increase among youth in GBV awareness. Around 85% of men surveyed attributed their increased understanding of GBV and gender equality to the community dialogues and other gender awareness-raising interventions and youth reported more positive and informed attitudes around gender equality. These changes did not go unnoticed, and, as one CSO employee noted, "the communities where the dialogues were done have approached the office to request more dialogues for more discussions in the larger communities to benefit more people."

WAGE SRI LANKA 2020-2022

Under WAGE Sri Lanka, 62 local women and men, including community leaders, were brought together in community dialogues to discuss gender-related barriers to starting and running businesses such as GBV, harmful gender norms, and inequitable household workloads. Participants made action plans to address and overcome the barriers identified. After the community dialogues, the trained facilitators cascaded the workshop to 737 individuals and the ensuing post-test assessment noted that awareness of and confidence to champion women's economic empowerment topics increased among participants. In the project's [final evaluation](#), it became clear that the community dialogues were well-received by participants and led to more open communication and improved task-sharing within the household. As one male participant shared, "we now sit down to discuss as a couple... This has taught us that our actions in the past—particularly mine as a husband—were improper and should be changed in order to prevent future occurrences. I can already sense the changes taking place in my family and in me."

RICHEs EL SALVADOR, THE PHILIPPINES 2017-2022

Under RICHES El Salvador and the Philippines, Grameen developed and pilot tested an IHD module that integrates child labor with WEE whereby women and their spouses discuss equitable household chores and caretaking responsibilities, investments in children's education, and means for keeping children safe while working in a woman's business. This module is [available online](#) for any organization interested in addressing child labor as a potential unintended negative consequence of investing in women's entrepreneurship.

BUILDING THE RESILIENCE OF VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES IN BURKINA FASO (BRB) 2014-2019

Grameen's BRB project leveraged community-based gender dialogues to complement and integrate with financial inclusion, agricultural livelihoods and household nutrition-focused activities. Community dialogues with male spouses of women's savings groups were well-received and engaged entire communities about the ways they could support women to pursue their income-generating activities. For example, one community identified a parcel of land that the women's group could farm on that would be more productive. [Program evaluations](#) showed improvements in dietary diversity, savings, and household resilience but also shared lessons regarding the need to be more intentional about male engagement. In addition, Grameen used the Project-level Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index to measure changes to women's empowerment across multiple dimensions, including access to and use of financial services. A [peer-reviewed finding](#) was that men's access to financial services was equally or more limited than women's in this context; Grameen takes this finding forward as an insight that household tensions may arise from FSPs only targeting women for credit.

BENIN FAMILY PLANNING (2017-2018)

Under Family Planning Benin, Grameen developed and tested IHDs on the topic of family planning with women's savings groups. The dialogues revolved around stories/skits, based on the Benin context with non-personal and non-threatening topics, along with facilitated discussion questions. Women from the savings groups who had been saving for health and family planning goals (alongside other savings objectives) invited their husbands, community leaders, religious leaders, and others to participate. The dialogues were found to result in improved decision-making on family planning among rural households. The [final report](#) further explains impacts on saving for health, attitudes about seeking health services, contraception use, and more.

RAJASTHAN NUTRITION PROGRAM (2015-2017)

In India across multiple initiatives, Grameen is mainstreaming the use of IHDs facilitated by community agents with digital financial service agents and their spouses, and with female and male members of farmer producer organizations, as a strategy to ensure that women are able to take advantage of the improved access to finance, agricultural inputs and market linkages. Previously under the Rajasthan Nutrition Program, Grameen's Community Nutrition Advocates facilitated IHDs with women's self-help groups and male family members in order to engage men around the causes for poor nutrition among women and children. A [peer-reviewed study](#) found that the program (which integrated nutrition education with self-help groups and gender dialogues) enabled significant improvements in food security, poverty reduction, as well as confidence and reduced fear of a male partner/husband. IHDs led to improved food consumption.

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