



Takunda

CARE

Technical Brief: Men, Fathers and Husbands Committed to Improved Nutrition in their Homes and Community-Zimbabwe

OVERVIEW

Takunda's work with men and boys to re-envision norms has made great strides in exploring and expanding ideas around what it means "to be a man;" definitions of masculinity within households and communities; and how this impacts food and nutrition. Takunda views its work as a "journey" of engaging men and boys in food security and nutrition programming. It is a work in progress, building on lessons learned, experimenting, and learning from others. Takunda believes that engaging men does not take away from a focus on women or women's empowerment. It is not a zero sum game; men and boys are part of the solution, especially when we work with them as equal partners with women and girls to change social structures and power imbalances. By understanding the complexities of men's' and boys' experiences — how they are shaped and the pressures they face — we can build sustainable approaches that benefit everyone.

ABOUT TAKUNDA

CARE Zimbabwe, along with partners FHI360, International Youth Foundation (IYF), Nutrition Action Zimbabwe (NAZ), Bulawayo Projects Centre (BPC), and Environment Africa (EA), and ICRISAT, implements Takunda '**We Have Overcome**', a five-year, USD \$55 million USAID Resilience Food Security Activity (RFSA). The project is implemented in two provinces: Masvingo (Chivi and Zaka Districts) and Manicaland (Mutare and Buhera Districts). Takunda seeks to promote sustainable, equitable, and resilient food, nutrition, and income, directly impacting 301,636 people. Targeted populations include vulnerable adult women and men, adolescent mothers, male and female youth (aged 18-35), women of reproductive age, and children under five years, who are made vulnerable by socio-economic challenges, the impacts of climate change, and the COVID-19 pandemic. Gendered behaviors and social norms continue to shape power dynamics in decision-making between women and men in the target communities, which has significantly impacted household food security and nutrition, leading to deeply entrenched poverty. The Takunda Theory of Change directly responds to the underlying causes of food insecurity and malnutrition. These include poverty, limited financial resources, gender inequality, persistent negative social norms, cultural beliefs and behaviors, limited youth empowerment, and weak institutional/organizational governance and accountability. Activities addressing these causes fall under the following three purpose areas:

- **Purpose 1** – Increase incomes from on-farm, off-farm, and non-farm livelihoods activities.
- **Purpose 2** – Improve the nutritional status of children under five years of age, adolescent girls, and women of reproductive age.
- **Purpose 3**– Build capacities among vulnerable households and communities to cope with shocks and stressors and reduce risk.

Gender equality and youth empowerment are cross-cutting themes aimed at reducing disparities regarding access, control over, and benefits obtained from resources, assets, and opportunities; reducing gender-based violence (GBV); and increasing the ability of women and girls to realize their rights, determine their life outcomes, and influence decision-making at the household, community, and institutional levels.

IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS



CONTEXT

Most Zimbabwean women (about 86%) depend on land for their livelihood and food production for their families¹. However, they face a myriad of challenges, including poor access to and control and ownership of means of production (capital, labor, land, and mechanization, and irrigation infrastructure). They also have little or no control over resources and decision-making, severely constraining access to nutritional foods. The Takunda Social Behavior Change (SBC) Study, conducted in 2020, revealed limited access to nutritious foods and barriers to accessing resources. While women expressed the desire to improve their diets and the diets of their children, the daily quest for money to feed the family was relentless. In Apostolic households, religious beliefs against utilizing health services were a major inhibitor of identifying and treating malnourishment. Beyond the health impact of receiving no medical care, the church doctrine deterred women from speaking with Volunteer Health Workers about nutrition education for fear of being reprimanded by husbands or pastors.² During the COVID-19 lockdown, women and girls were increasingly vulnerable to sexual exploitation and abuse from men in exchange for food.³ Discriminatory norms continue to impact women who are prohibited from taking leadership roles and from participating in community and productive activities. Men feel threatened when women are successful in income-earning activities.⁴ Men partaking in family care was conditional, as they perform chores either when the wife is sick or when she is absent from home. . *“I can only cook and sweep the yard when my wife is not around or when she is feeling sick, I can’t starve because she is ill or absent.”*⁵ Other factors that contributed to men’s resistance to assist with household chores were tied to the labelling and the embarrassment that followed. This was common for the apostolic men, who rarely contribute to household chores due to religious beliefs and norms that culturally classified household chores as only women’s work.⁶

WHY ENGAGE MEN AND BOYS?

Takunda began with a gender analysis that identified gender norms, roles, and dynamics in the context of food security and nutrition goals. The prevailing norms characterize women as caregivers who are involved primarily in subsistence agriculture, petty income-generating activities. Women are also seen as being responsible for household nutrition and food security. Men, on the other hand, are seen as providers for the family and are the household decision-makers. While Takunda has a huge focus on empowering women and girls – through the design of a range of topics including improving agricultural production, increasing breastfeeding and healthy diets, earning business and financial skills – involving men is critical to re-envisioning harmful norms and expectations. Lack of male engagement results in limitations in women’s nutrient-rich food production because men control the land while women have limited control of assets and lack authority to purchase inputs. Food allocation and food distribution at the household level often favors men, with women eating least and last. Due to disproportionate caregiving and household tasks, women are limited in adopting exclusive breastfeeding and infant and young child feeding practices. Not involving men and boys could also lead to backlash or GBV as this involves potential changes in power dynamics. Consequently, one cannot work with women alone, as they are only half the equation.

KEY APPROACHES AND TOOLS

Takunda uses a five-staged synchronization approach (Male Engagement Synchronisation Model) of engaging men for advancing gender equality. **Synchronization** means a program intentionally reaches out to both genders to promote mutual understanding. The program promotes flexible gender roles, a balance of power, and the pursuit of gender justice. This is meant to ensure Takunda does not focus only on empowering women without addressing husbands and influential men at community levels. Through the establishment of men’s groups, the project seeks to create safe spaces for men to dialogue, reflect and change unequal power relationships for improved food security and nutrition.

¹ USAID Takunda Gender Analysis 2020

² USAID Takunda Gender Analysis 2020

³ Ibid

⁴ Ibid

⁵ USAID Takunda Outcome Mapping Baseline 2023

⁶ Ibid

Stage 1. Conscientisation: Conscientization starts with the individual to build personal awareness and encourage critical reflection on gender. When engaging with men and boys, it's about reflecting on masculinities and the consequences different forms of masculinity have on men and those around them. This requires a safe space for critical reflection. Takunda facilitated a community-led process of identifying male champions to lead men's fora dialogues and work as agents of change, to foster equitable power sharing in childcare and related reproductive roles. Facilitated by a trained male champion, men gather at village level in groups of 10 and use the participatory Social Analysis and Action (SAA) methodology to engage 90-to-120-minute conversations around barriers to achieving nutrition. One unique feature is that at CARE, this personal reflection is done first with CARE staff. This goes back to the recognition that gender socialization affects all individuals.



- 1. CONSCIENTIZATION**
Structured spaces for men and boys to reflect on masculinities, gender, power and privilege in their lives.
- 2. INTIMATE DIALOGUES**
Conversations with intimate partners, and within families to promote more open communication, equitable relationships, non-violence, support and trust;
- 3. BUILDING THE BASE**
A mix of individual outreach and regular meetings to share testimonies and strengthen relationships among male allies to build and expand social support and solidarity;
- 4. STEPPING OUT, STEPPING UP**
Capacity building and support to men to facilitate discussions and campaign around gender and masculinities to transform social norms; and
- 5. ALLIANCES FOR ADVOCACY**
This element focuses on linking with advocacy efforts led by women's and feminist movements for social and policy change at local, regional and national levels

Male Engagement Synchronisation model



*Men getting ready for a soccer match after a dialogue.
Photo credit: Alexander Sakara*

Stage 2. Intimate dialogues: The focus here is on dialogue across key relationships, particularly between couples and among male peers. Takunda utilizes a series of dialogues among men only, women only, and in mixed groups. The project leverages Village Savings Loans Association groups (VSLA), producer groups, and Care Groups to meet with men and women as single sex groups or as couples. They discuss issues such as traditional gender roles in the household and nutrition, including exclusive breastfeeding and infant and young child feeding.

Stage 3. Building the base: Using various platforms and entry points like soccer activities, Takunda supports men's groups to gather and share testimonials as to encourage learning from each other. Male community leaders and male champions leveraged

international commemoration days like 16 Days of Activism against GBV to share key messages on nutrition and sharing testimonial on behavior change.

Stage 4. Stepping out and stepping up: Takunda supported men's peer exchange sessions among groups from different villages so that they learn from each other. Testimonials and dialogues center on joint asset control, use of household income, consumption of nutritious foods, and access to means of production. Takunda is working with male champions to go beyond awareness and dialogue, to facilitate collective action. By publicly celebrating positive role models for gender equality, they raise community-level awareness.

Stage 5. Alliances for Advocacy: This stage entails mobilizing and advocating on behalf of men's fora work to influence policies on gender equality and nutrition. This includes linking groups of male champions from local to national levels to advocate for gender equality – often in alliance with diverse gender equality groups and activists. Takunda has managed to link men's groups to several provincial and national level advocacy activities led by the Ministry of Women Affairs Community Small and Medium Enterprises Development (MOWACSMED), pushing for the role of men in nutrition policies. Takunda men's group participated in a national Male Engagement Symposium where Takunda was awarded a certificate by the Zimbabwe Gender Commission for its outstanding work in male engagement in food and nutrition security.



Honorary certificate awarded to CARE, July 2024.
Photo credit: Tanaka Chitsa

IMPACT OF ENGAGING MEN

Takunda progressed food and security outcomes due to contributions made through the male engagement approach:

“I was socialized to think that pregnant women should not eat liver and eggs because they will give birth to a bald-headed child. I am a transformed husband because I now understand the nutritious benefits of those foods to pregnant women and children under 5 years. That harmful act is now a thing of the past.” **Male Traditional Leader Chivi District (Key Informant Interview)**

“It was never common to have the Apostolic Sect members participate in health and nutrition activities. Thanks to Takunda male engagement sessions; they opened our eyes and a significant number of apostolic sect members are now enrolled in the project. We are also thankful to the supplementary feeding program which helped to bring these people even closer.” **Male Religious Leader, Mutare District (Key Informant Interview)**

“Due to male engagement sessions in our community, husbands are now actively participating in household chores, such as fetching water and firewood, and are even accompanying their spouses to the hospital for antenatal care (ANC). This newfound support has contributed to a decrease in gender-based violence” **Patience Machiri, Mutare District Ward 10**

Key Results

- Improved household dietary diversity at 74%, against a target of 65% (PaBS 2024).
- Improved minimum meal frequency among children aged 6 to 23 months at 60%, against a target of 38% (PaBS-2024).
- Increased access and control over productive assets, including land from 56% and 43% by women and youth in FY23 to 96% by women and 89% by youth in FY24 (PaBs 2024).
- Increased investment in income generating activities as a result of VSLA. Total capital loaned in FY23 is USD\$ 270,321.00 with women accessing USD \$231,835.00 and men accessing USD \$38,486.00.
- Men taking up family care roles like cooking, childcare, and fetching water and firewood (Routine monitoring).
- Norms around consumption of nutritious food by women of the reproductive age and children under 2 addressed. For example, shifting from herbal remedies for babies under six months towards food therapies. The majority no longer withhold eggs and meat from children, pregnant and lactating mothers (Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices 2023).
- Increased joint planning and decision making on household food security and nutrition. 65% of women made decisions on livestock to keep (Outcome Mapping 2023).

Source: Participants' Based Survey FY23/FY24; Takunda Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices Study 2023; Takunda Outcome Mapping Study; Qualitative Planning Sheets reports 2022.

Agripa: A Male Gender Champion in Action

In 2022, Takunda trained gender champions on SAA in Chivi District. Among those trained is Agripa Ruvengo, a 37-year-old father of five from Chipeta Village Ward 28. During the training, the community selected him to become a male gender champion. Armed with knowledge and determination, Agripa embarked on a mission to transform lives in his community. To ensure maximum attendance by community members, Agripa took advantage of community gatherings and garden work activities to engage in gender discussions. *"I realize if I mobilize men for sessions without other activities their attendance is normally poor. As such I leverage garden activities and other community meetings to facilitate gender dialogues,"* he explains. Agripa uses participatory tools produced in vernacular for ease of navigation and understanding. Agripa's work has impacted men beyond his geographical location. Most men he works with appreciate and support the role he plays in bringing social behavior change and transformation among community members especially men. They also testified to a reduction in GBV and child marriages. Apart from helping communities, he is a gender champion who leads by example, supporting his wife with household chores and engaging in joint planning on income and family welfare. His work has contributed immensely to food, nutrition, and income security at household and community levels. Agripa looks forward to continuing with the gender sessions beyond the project close out, saying, *"I am prepared to conduct gender sessions beyond Takunda. Nothing*



Agripa Ruvengo, showcasing the gender reference materials developed by Takunda. Photo credit: Siphwe Maphosa



Agripa showing off the bean crop they grew in their nutrition garden: Photo credit: Siphwe Maphosa

can hinder me from facilitating these sessions, especially with the aid of these reference materials.”

LESSONS LEARNED

- **Identify and collaborate with community influencers.** Takunda engaged influential leaders including religious leaders (who are predominantly men) of the “mapostori” white garment sect. These religious leaders have a responsibility to ensure church members adhere to doctrine, despite some harmful norms being promoted including early child marriage and prohibiting women from taking community leadership roles or engaging in economic empowerment and health and nutrition activities. Through their continuous engagement with Takunda, religious leaders now support young mothers from the sect to attend Takunda-organized meetings and activities, including nutrition Care Group activities, a situation which did not happen before.
- **Use male role models and advocates.** Recruiting male role models in programme communities is an effective way to re-visit harmful norms. However, it is important to unpack gender norms that the men’s group would like to tackle and clarify how these promote food security and nutrition. This includes men supporting women with household chores so that women have more time for exclusive breastfeeding and infant and young child feeding.
- **Changes in norms happen in diverse ways,** with many drivers at individual, community, and institutional levels. Change may be rapid or slow. It may be easier to change norms on a smaller scale, within the home or community, than changing the same norm at structural level or culture. Such small-scale change can be achieved through targeted peer to peer programming, while norm change at a larger scale requires policy changes through mobilization and advocacy work that men’s groups can contribute.
- **Engage men in areas and activities that interest them.** Throughout Takunda areas of operation, men’s participation was low, until the program devised a strategy to leverage community soccer platforms where most young men participate. In this way, young men were introduced to reflections and dialogues to challenge norms on nutrition, participated in cooking demonstrations, and were introduced to other Takunda activities, including Technical and Vocational Education and Training and life skills.

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