



lessons from REAL Fathers advocacy

Government-led influence on public and private stakeholders to advance intervention scale-up in Uganda.

BACKGROUND

Uganda's Ministry of Gender Labour and Social Development (MGLSD) and Impact and Innovations Development Centre (IIDC), in collaboration with the Center on Gender Equity and Health, University of California, San Diego are leading a process to guide the scale up of Responsible, Engaged, and Loving (REAL) Fathers, a proven violence prevention approach.¹ The initial process required advocacy led by government to interest district governments and local user organizations.

ADVOCACY OBJECTIVES

The main objective of the advocacy was to build a constituency of public and private stakeholders to support REAL Fathers scale up, from the pilot intervention to National scale-up efforts. We also sought to identify potential entry points and mechanisms for integrating REAL into ECD programs in Northern Uganda and Karamoja.

APPROACH

The core team (UCSD, IIDC and MGLSD) intentionally identified and engaged relevant stakeholders at the National and District levels, keenly assessing level of commitment among potential stakeholders. Our advocacy approach was based on four guiding principles.

First, we used blended organizational intelligence which was vital in understanding formal and informal structures within government and non-government organizations. This was vital in helping to understand how government operates and to target MGLSD which was organizationally well placed to lead the process. Second, we used a team building approach focusing on influential organizations and government departments with the capacity to promote REAL widely in their spheres of influence. This led to the creation of a resource team to lead advocacy efforts. Third, we applied trust building to ensure solid advocacy efforts. It was important to not only build, but also maintain trust in guiding scale-up stakeholders with confidence. It was clear that we needed trusted partners with working experience in the child welfare sectors, and a mandate to implement child focused and male engagement programs. Fourth, we leveraged strong existing networks to cultivate advocacy power. Before launching structured advocacy efforts, we conducted an

initial mapping exercise across the six pilot districts to identify organizations known by district leadership as collaborators within the male engagement and early childhood development field. This informed the decision to have District-NGO workplans to pilot test REAL-ECD integration.

PROCESS

Once we obtained buy-in at the central government level to lead the core team in all subsequent processes, we held a series of four structured workshops, sub-dividing participants by category based on the different advocacy requests and roles for each stakeholder category.

- The first meeting targeted the USAID Mission and USAID implementing partners for two reasons. First, they funded the initial phase of REAL in northern Uganda and wanted to build on their interest in leveraging their initial investment. With horizontal scale up in mind, we involved USAID implementing partners because of their breadth of geographic coverage, and because some (John Snow, Inc, University Research Co and Bantwana World Education) had ongoing programs in the proposed pilot districts in Northern Uganda and Karamoja.
- The second advocacy workshop targeted the Intra-ministerial Violence against Children (VAC) and Early Childhood Development (ECD) working groups. These were selected due to their mandate and influence on child focused and male involvement networks and programs. Their mandate makes them accountable to the central government on how VAC programs are implemented. Through these groups and networks, REAL Fathers became increasingly known and appreciated by key government departments and therefore easy to advocate for in the wider network of implementing agencies and organizations.
- The third meeting was conducted with other central government ministries and VAC implementing partners in Kampala. This was because most NGOs are headquartered in Uganda's capital Kampala, and adaptation decisions are generally made by executives rather than field level project teams. Additionally, we envisioned REAL Fathers scale up beyond the northern and Karamoja regions, hence it was strategic to engage partners in Kampala.

- The fourth and last meeting was conducted with VAC and male involvement partners in Karamoja and Northern Uganda, specifically because these were the organizations which would implement the pilot. These included local organizations and district governments in the two regions identified during the mapping exercise. It should be noted however that because the process was government-led, the core team had to follow government timelines and schedules which delayed the pilot roll out, and some scale-up activities.

KEY LESSONS FROM THE ADVOCACY PROCESS

- Government led scale up is quick to galvanise expansion of proven models. Civil society organizations are expected to supplement government programs, thus there is a greater likelihood of horizontal scale up with the government at the forefront.
- For behaviour change programs, advocacy requires audience segmentation which provides only relevant information to targeted stakeholders. We segmented the advocacy workshops into donor; central government/intra-ministerial working groups; Kampala partners; and finally user organizations and district local governments. Advocacy requests must be tailored for different stakeholders.
- For successful inroads into government systems and structures, it is easier if one government department/ministry buys-in and assumes the responsibility of coordinating other government ministries in promoting an approach or intervention with multi-sectoral outcomes. In this case, the MGLSD made the initial

linkages with the MOES and MOH with less resistance than an outside organization might meet. Therefore, it is strategic to identify a department that understands overall government policy frameworks to support the advocacy process.

- It is vital to systematically apply organizational intelligence, establish trust, build teams and leverage networks to successfully advocate for scale up of an implementation model. When used deliberately, these tools foster a coalition with all needed ingredients of advocacy, increasing the chances of success.
- A collaborative public-private approach to advocacy is vital to achieve both vertical and horizontal scale up. This is especially the case in resource constrained settings like Uganda, where government relies heavily on development assistance to deliver services to hard-to-reach communities. This approach helps the private sector (CSOs, NGOs, CBOs) use their resources optimally while leveraging limited government resources. It also facilitates acceptability of the intervention by the local community and local governments.
- A government-led, but private-sector engaged, advocacy process is a good starting point to facilitate a transition from co-ownership to full ownership of the intervention by government. However, this must be done intentionally, including benchmarks for government leadership of program implementation as CSOs, CBOs and NGOs have limited hope of sustainable financial independence. Therefore, co-ownership builds a relationship of mutual accountability between government and private sector players.

KEY ADVOCACY OUTCOMES

This government-led advocacy process was successful as evidenced by the key outcomes that guide our learning.

