

# REAL Fathers

## Pretest Findings

*Save the Children in Uganda*  
*March 2013*

## Executive Summary

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The Institute for Reproductive Health at Georgetown University and Save the Children are starting the **Responsible, Engaged and Loving (REAL) Fathers Project** with USAID support. The project aims to teach young fathers in Atiak Sub-county of Amuru District in Northern Uganda between the ages 16 and 25 parenting and relationship skills that can help improve the health of their families.

The project will test the effectiveness and feasibility of a mentoring program for young fathers to build positive partnerships and parenting practices and a series of emotion-based messages conveyed through community message boards to catalyze diffusion of reflection on inequitable gender norms and gender-based violence. The project will also develop standardized, reliable measurement methods which incorporate perspectives of the fathers' partners and utilize a rigorous pretest-posttest control experimental design to measure the attribution of changes over time.

To gather inputs in the design of the mentor program and craft tailored, context-specific community message boards, Save the Children conducted a pretest exercise in March 2013. The pretest team facilitated group discussions with 20 young fathers in two parishes of Atiak Sub-county. Additionally, 9 wives of young fathers participated in discussions about couples and parenting.

### *Fatherhood:*

The young fathers see numerous differences between fatherhood in the past and today. Compared to past generations, young fathers believe that they need to have a more involved role in their family to send children to school: "to struggle for school fees for each child". In the past, they said that fathers were able to give all of their sons land and cattle and education was not a priority. Now the young fathers need to find their own way and provide for themselves.

Traditionally in Acholi culture, elders provided guidance to people when they get married and have children. Most of the young fathers said that today they do not get this guidance and support, since many of their parents perished during the war time and other elders have their own growing families to support.

The young fathers want more respect from elders, and feel frustrated that they are still seen as youth, not adults, in the community. As youth, they are still experiencing emotional growth. Some may also be affected from lingering trauma from the war.

Nevertheless, the young fathers take being a father very seriously and want the best for their children. They want their children to admire and appreciate them for working hard and helping them grow up well. Currently few fathers engage in child care, including children's discipline, but most are willing to get more involved. They were able to envision the benefits of this to themselves and their children. The methods of correcting or disciplining children are also changing. Most can identify negative consequences of beating children and instilling fear in the children, but do not have any ideas about positive, non-violent methods that would be effective. They are very open to learning.

### *Relationships:*

Most love their wives and want their relationships to continue, but do not have exposure, knowledge or skills to have a relationship. They are generally happy but may experience instances where he feels he has to show his authority. The young fathers feel that as men they must walk a fine line between showing power and authority in the home so his wife does not overpower him, and keeping his wife happy so she does not leave. Many are not sure how to do this, but want to learn.

For most of the young fathers, this is the right time and age to improve their skills and prevent future violence in the home. They do not have positive attitudes towards violence in the home but may resort to violence over time as issues build up. Nevertheless, there may be trigger events that can provoke words or fighting among the couple. Several gave examples of having made 'home rules' that the couple agreed to live by, and exchanging words when the men did not follow the rules (such as coming home late).

But there is a small number unhappy with their relationships and there may be physical violence in the home already.

### *Inputs on Mentor Selection and Work:*

Young fathers expressed high interest in participating in mentor sessions. Young fathers recommended meeting mentors twice a month: once at home for an individual session and once at the sub-parish meeting place for the group session.

The young fathers identified preferred characteristics of mentors. Foremost is the person's ability to work well with young men, gain and keep their trust and confidence. They also said that the mentors should be able to learn from the training and apply what they learn well.

They recommended that the wives be involved from the start. First, they said that couples should discuss and agree as a couple for the man to participate from the very start, even before he completes the survey. Second, they suggested that the mentors spend time introducing the project and the discussion topics to the couple prior to the first session so that their wives would know what is happening, be comfortable with the mentor coming to the home, and understand when in the process the wives would be included.

### *Feedback on Community Message Board Concepts:*

Young fathers welcomed the idea of community message boards, which they think will give them more credibility in their communities as fathers and adults. They can be placed in the sub-parish community meeting place (usually a primary school) for visibility to the entire community.

### *Feedback on Mentor Sessions Concepts:*

The sessions were generally understood, liked, and deemed relevant to them as young fathers. They also clearly identified the calls to action within each session. In the week following the first discussions,

fathers reported trying new actions at home. Many reported differences with their wives, including helping with household tasks like washing dishes, as well as talking and listening to her. Most also said that they spent more time with their children playing. Although they did not find everything easy, they believed it is useful to continue trying and taking steps to have healthy and happy relationships and homes.

As they had anticipated, some young fathers were concerned about what their friends would say if they found them caring for the children or helping their wives. They knew that the friends would be thinking or judging because they do not know the benefits of such actions, but still felt concerned. Some wanted to engage in peer education to avoid expected situations.

Verbal communication between couples was the most challenging. This may warrant more time and attention by mentors, as well as greater emphasis on non-verbal communication signals.

The wives reported some differences and generally felt pleased with the changes. However, some of the women wanted their husbands to change more, and faster, than the men were willing or able to do leaving them disappointed.

#### *Conclusions:*

Young fathers who participated in the pretest expressed high motivation to learn how to become better fathers and husbands. They want to be equipped to raise their children to grow up healthy, well fed and educated. Traditionally as new husbands and fathers they would get such guidance from elders, but this practice no longer exists due to changes remaining from the war. They also recognize that fatherhood today is different than the past. They said that today fathers must struggle for school fees to send each child to school and provide material things like clothes. Also, unlike the past, many are not supported by or living with extended families, and must make it on their own.

Nearly all of the young fathers in Atiak who participated in the pretest care a great deal about their relationships and want to stay married. Some have started to pay the bride price. However, their stories suggest that the relationships are not yet stable. These relationships may break up during the course of the project and research. Their experiences suggest that the couple is still getting to know each other, finding out how to support themselves, and under numerous pressures as they grow into adults.

The topics proposed through the review of global best practice were understood, relevant and interesting to them. The young fathers also demonstrated willingness and ability to make changes in how they interact with their children and their wives. Their input is being used to tailor global recommendations to the local context in Atiak to improve parenting and relationship practices among young men, and thus reduction in violence within families.

## Table of Contents

Executive Summary .....	ii
Project Introduction .....	1
Methods .....	1
Context .....	4
Fatherhood Today.....	4
Relationships.....	8
Feedback on Plans for Mentor Sessions and Message Boards .....	12
Input on Mentors .....	12
Input on Community Message Boards .....	12
Overall Feedback on Session Plans .....	14
Feedback by Session.....	15
Conclusion and Recommendations .....	27

## Project Introduction

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The Institute for Reproductive Health at Georgetown University and Save the Children are conducting a project called Responsible, Engaged and Loving (REAL) Fathers Project with USAID support.

The project aims to teach young fathers in Atiak Sub-county of Amuru District in Northern Uganda between the ages 16 and 25 parenting and relationship skills that can help improve the health of their families. The project aims to:

1. Test the effectiveness and feasibility of:
  - A mentoring program for young fathers to build positive partnerships and parenting practices;
  - A series of emotion-based messages conveyed through community message boards to catalyze diffusion of reflection on inequitable gender norms and gender-based violence.
2. Develop standardized, reliable measurement methods which incorporate perspectives of the fathers' partners.
  - This research will utilize a rigorous pretest-posttest control experimental design, including randomization and control groups to measure the attribution of changes over time, reliable and standardized measurement methods which safely collect information.

## Methods

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### Pretest Participants from Save the Children

Dickens Ojamuge, REAL Fathers Project Specialist  
Denis Eluk, REAL Fathers Project Officer  
David Onenchan, GREAT Project Officer  
Lisa Sherburne, GREAT Consultant  
Joel Odokonyero, Interpreter and Researcher  
Brad Kerner, remotely reviewed and commented

### Participants from Atiak Sub-county

- 19 young fathers between 16-25 years-of-age who have children 1 to 3 years old (and younger)
- 10 young mothers 16-25 years-of-age who have children 1-3 years old (and younger)

### Location

Pretests were conducted in two parishes of Amuru District, Atiak Sub-county: Parwacha Parish and Pupwona Parish.

There are 8 parishes in Atiak sub-county. Each parish has two sub-parishes (for a total of 16). Each sub-parish has approximately 5 villages, spread apart between 1 to 6 km. Each sub-parish has a common meeting ground, and each village has a meeting group. The meeting grounds are usually at a primary

school. The sub-parish has an LC1, the lowest level political official, and villages have a Rwot Kweri, a traditional leader. The project team will prepare a diagram of the administrative structure of Atiak Sub-county.

Amuru is a relatively new district, carved out from Gulu. Atiak sub-county is in the north along the border with South Sudan. A parish at the northern border has trade with Sudan, while others are focused on subsistence farming.

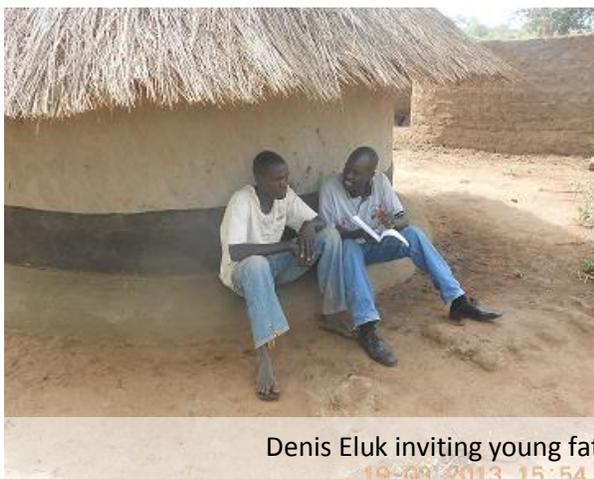
Acholi people in Amuru are Lamogi. Lamogi were the only ones who were not colonized during the British occupation, due to the Lamogi Rebellion, an important event in their cultural heritage and pride.

Amuru District has made news recently. Lamogi elders officially declared war with the Government of Uganda in July 2012 because the Government sold communal lands for sugar cane farms and other agribusiness. Although the disputed land is not in Atiak Sub-county, it bolsters the area's desire for independence and reflects their willingness to fight.

Denis Eluk, Sr Project Officer, worked with sub-county officials to select two parishes for the pretest. In each of the parishes, he discussed the needs with Community Development Officers (CDOs) and Local Council I (LC1) leaders, and visited homes. Home visits were required because the CDOs and leaders had other ideas about who could participate. They expressed great interest in the project and helping young parents. There is recognition and concern about the high level of break-up of young couples.

Also, the leaders did not know the ages of young fathers or the ages of children in the homes. The leaders also did not know whether children in the homes are biological children or children of the mothers with another man, or relatives' children being cared for by the couple.

The young fathers who met project criteria were invited to participate. Half were asked to bring their wives.



Denis Eluk inviting young fathers to the pretest at their homes



Focus group discussions were utilized to test concepts for community message boards and mentor curriculum sessions with young fathers, elicit their feedback and gather additional inputs from young fathers and their wives.

The discussions lasted approximately 2 hours with each group of 5 young fathers on the first day, and 2 hours with each group of 8 to 9 young fathers and their wives on the second day. The following week, the team returned to talk with the same groups of young fathers and couples. Discussions were conducted in the Acholi language.

Interviewers used semi-structured discussion guides to ask questions, test ideas for activities and community message boards, and gather input from participants. The discussion guides were developed from a review of literature and international curricula and materials on parenting and fatherhood, as well as a review of the GREAT formative research findings on violence, by the Institute for Reproductive Health (IRH) of Georgetown University and Brad Kerner, Adolescent Reproductive Health Advisor, Save the Children, and Brad Kerner's concept development for young fathers.

As group discussions were used, rather than individual interviews, personal behaviors were not discussed in the groups. The discussions aimed to understand young father's perceptions of general practices among people like them in their communities, as well as elicit their ideas for the project and the community message boards.



Dickens Ojamuge, far left, and David Onenchan, far right, with young couples

## Context

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### Fatherhood Today

***Young fathers are highly motivated to participate in REAL fathers.***

Young fathers welcomed this project for several reasons.

- 1) No one teaches them about being a father or husband. They have to learn on their own.
- 2) They see that children these days need more involved fathers (to ensure that the children get educated), and they want to help their children succeed.
- 3) They do not get the respect from community members and relatives that they would like. They are youth, between childhood and adulthood, and think learning about being a real father will help them be seen as adults, and more respected.

***“It’s entirely upon me. Things have totally changed.”***

The young fathers believed that they are living in a very different time from the past – from their parents and grandparents. They said that in the past, people lived for the sake of living. Resources were plentiful, including land and cattle. Every child received a share of the resources from the head, and could easily set up their own family. (They all talked about the past as pre-war; they preferred not to mention that time).

They see that times are now different. Today, young fathers described a shortage of resources to give children, many people in their parents’ generation perished (including many of their own parents), and the others have many young children of their own. These changes affect family and community dynamics. No longer do children get land and cattle; they have to make their own way. *“It’s entirely upon me. Things have totally changed. Now our parents are not there... young men used to be supported in the past.”*

As a result, young fathers were generally focused on the present and future. They said this is the start of their life and journey.

Nevertheless, many of the young fathers expressed disappointment with the destruction of the social fabric that connects the generations. Young fathers recognized the central importance of community relationships, particularly with elders who traditionally provided guidance to young people, and that it is now missing. They repeatedly noted a desire to be respected and supported; without this they have some insecurity (for example, in case of a wife returning to her family they would not be able to get her without an elder’s support).

Some described feeling actively rejected; one said, “elders abuse us and rebuke us for try to attend community meetings.”

Young fathers said that no one teaches them about being a husband or a father. Although traditionally couples would get guidance from elders when they married, this no longer happens. They lamented that

they no longer live at home to get advice from family members. When asked about who they admire, or want to emulate as fathers, they recalled their grandparents' styles (related to teachings, not discipline styles.)

A couple of the young women said that they get guidance from their mother-in-law or an old lady who lives nearby. In the case of the older lady, she intervenes when she is concerned about how the young mother is caring for the infant.

Young fathers felt that fathers have an even more important role to play in their children's lives than before. *"Things are different now. Fathers must be involved to struggle for school fees."* In the past, not all children had to attend school. Now, people believe that without education a person cannot get anywhere. All children need to be educated. The role of the parents, especially the father, to pay the fees related to school is vital to the child's future (both girls and boys).

They also cited the increasing use of alcohol in communities as a change from the past. They shared examples of their peers whose marriages have broken due to the men's drinking.

### ***Fatherhood is their purpose in life***

Many of the couples have more than one child, and/or their wife is pregnant again. The children are generally the reason for being in a relationship as they got married because of pregnancy or in order to have children. There are often more children in household than the man's biological children. Some of their wives may have come to the relationships with children from previous relationships. The discussions focused on his biological children, due to the project aims.

Young fathers believed that gaining knowledge, respect and power would make them the type of husbands and fathers that they want to become. They also want to be people who are known to tell the truth.

They said that children are their legacy for the future, and their purpose in life. Everything they do and will do from now on is for the sake of their children.

They described the type of fathers they want to be. They talked about being a role model for children, by struggling, working hard, providing for the family and paying their school fees. They should say, *"My father struggle a lot to pay for my education."*

They talked about having a good reputation and being recognized positively. *"My children should be proud to say, this is my father."*

Other young fathers echoed this sentiment. One described his wish as *"I want my child to appreciate me for what I will have done. I can't say what that is now, but I am trying to build it. I want to be 'lapit', the one who feeds my children and makes them grow up."* Another shared, *"My children should say that I brought them up in a good way, I am hardworking, and that I was able to give them an education."*

One said that he wants his child in the future to say, *“Baba is the one who made me the way I am. Baba showed me the right way.”*

A father wants his child to get something tangible from him. He wants his child to be able to say in the future, *“Muzee bought for me a goat.”*

Another wants his child to recognize him for being peaceful and be able to say, *“Baba never liked beating people.”*

When asked what they want for their children, young fathers said that they want children to be healthy, well fed and good-mannered. Some said that they want children to listen to teaching (of parents) and do well and be educated.

Young mothers said that they want children to listen well, have a better future, and get educated.

### ***Motivations and challenges to becoming a caring father***

Young fathers were excited about the possibility of learning how to be better and more caring fathers. They believed that there would be numerous benefits that they would gain from more knowledge and skills related to fatherhood. They realized that it would strengthen bonds with the child, increase their understanding of the child’s life, and strengthen their child’s trust in them.

Some also thought that being more caring would keep their children aligned toward them, rather than moving closer to the maternal side of the family. This would ensure that they could teach the child their own values and beliefs, rather than let the child learn others’.

While fathers do not get involved with the children now, they would like to do so. They would welcome praise from their wife and others about how they are taking care of their child.

However, some were concerned about what other people would think and say about them for showing care to children. They anticipated that people will think that he is spoiling the child, and making the child ‘hopeless’. They especially worry about what their friends will think and say, and if their masculinity will be called into question.

One group engaged in a values clarification exercise. When asked if fathers can bathe a young child, over half felt that it would be fine, especially if it is a boy or a girl under 3 years, while the others were not sure. When asked if men can cook supper while a mother plays with the child, half said that would be fine as long as there is agreement among the couple. The others worried what their friends would say if someone saw them do this.

### ***Children’s discipline methods are also in transition***

Currently, most of the young fathers said that they leave family matters to their wives, including the discipline of children. (It is important to note that they have very young children and it is possible this would change when the children are older).

The young fathers reflected on changes in how children are disciplined. In the past, they believed that families did not think much about the children's future, and the emphasis was on instilling respect (ie fear) in children of elders. Another big difference was the discipline was a collective responsibility. One recall being beaten by an elder brother for not going to the borehole, and he said that the pain taught him about hard work. Another recalled refusing to go to school and was caned by a relative, but then given a biscuit. He remembers liking the biscuit and then going to school.

Some said that they learned proper ways of acting through actions embedded in traditional dances, such as courtship.

Today, they said, children's futures and rights are considered. Now children get clothes, health care and are not disciplined by just anyone; nobody tries to interfere with children. It is all the parents' responsibility.

They recognized advantages of each style. Now children are healthier, but they have become unruly and 'big-headed' and individualistic. The dances today are immoral and do not teach children how to act.

Fathers are not sure how to best discipline children as they grow up. Young men who were disciplined through beating when young said that it is natural that they would expect the same for their children. One talked about what he sees in a brother's home. When children refuse to go to school, the father threatens their mother. The mother cries, and then children do whatever the man wants without actual hitting.

They all know some negative consequences of shouting at or beating children. They said that if children fear their parents, they would not listen or work well. They would play until they see you, and then run and do whatever it is they were supposed to do. But if they are not fearful, they will listen and work carefully. They also said that it is not uncommon for a child to be taken away if a parent beats a child too much.

### ***Young fathers feel pressure to maintain their family.***

Young fathers described a number of issues that that the face. Many, if not most, are making their own way in life. They are starting and providing for a family without support from family members. Traditionally they are used to being able to go to elders, such as uncles, for guidance and (financial) support. Many said that they do not have such relatives anymore, or these elders have young children of their own to support.

Yet they see the increasing need to earn money to provide for their families, especially school fees to educate children who are quickly growing up.

Underlying this pressure, and all of their goals in life, is their desire to keep their family together and in harmony.

## Relationships

### ***Relationships are very important to most of the young fathers.***

The young fathers who participated in the pretest are generally in new relationships, in the early phases, and very much in love, with several notable exceptions. Among the participants, they had been together on average 2 years, ranging from 1 to 4 years.

These relationships were based on attraction between the couple. When asked to describe their wives, most of the young fathers said that they appreciate that their wives are hard-working, caring and loving to them and the children, and listen well. Some said that their wives are likable people, work well with him as a team, and help earn money for their household. One mentioned his wife's beauty. Another said that his wife was made for him because she is tall like him and just makes him happy whenever he sees her. One shared his wife is like his mother; she takes care of him just like his mother who passed away a few years ago.

The challenges that they face with their wives primarily revolve around control of household resources. Some wives give things to other people without asking him for permission. Others said that their wives do not agree with him when he wants to sell something (such as grain). The men want to be the authority over household resources, while traditionally women are the custodian of these resources.

A few also talked about health and social challenges. One complained that his wife often falls sick, while another worries that his wife overworks. One said that his wife is too submissive in the community. When probed, he explained that she does not tell him about abuses she suffers at the hands of others.

A couple of the young fathers were unhappy with their relationships. They could not express much about the relationships, but essentially felt that they are useless.

### ***Relationships are new, and often unstable.***

In Acholi culture, the traditional marriage process can be completed over time. Often not all of the requirements are fulfilled. Many of the young fathers said that they have received a letter from their wife's family to initiate the traditional marriage process and pay the bride price, a sign of respect for his wife and mother of his children. A few of the young men had already made a first payment, 'ayenga', to initiate this process.

In general, the longer a couple stays together the farther along in the marriage process they may be. However, participants in the discussions who had made an initial payment had been with their wives the shortest amount of time, approximately a year.

Regardless, the young fathers repeatedly made reference to the fact that the relationships are not solidified or stable. The women can easily leave if they are not satisfied or not well treated. A fear is

that if the wife leaves, she will take the child(ren). (The research team clarified that a man can bring the children back to his house when the children are older.)

It is not difficult for wives to leave if not happy, and have multiple options. Women could go to one of their relatives' homes or another man's. If she returns to her home, he would need an elder to go and negotiate getting her back. Many of these young fathers do not have elders who would support them in this, leaving them feeling insecure about the future. If a woman leaves, she would take the children. (Some young fathers have wives who brought a child from a previous relationship).

A woman could also go to his family and he would get rebuked and fined Uganda Shillings 5,000 to 10,000. In case others do not think that he cares for his family well, the child could be taken away.

They described a delicate balance to reach with their wives. While being concerned about being too strong, and chasing a wife away, they also worry about being too soft in the relationship which 'allows the woman to become more powerful and makes him uncomfortable'. They said that this situation leads to the man drinking, and feeling high emotions (ie potential violence).

However, acceptance of beating a wife was very low. During a values clarification exercise, when asked about if it is ok to beat a wife when coming home drunk, one young man said that it is acceptable if she greets him rudely. The others disagreed.

Wives' participation in the project was a source of concern for the young fathers. They asked for group discussions with the wives' of young fathers first, prior to any mentoring visits. This is because the wives may feel uneasy about the mentor coming to the home and only talking with the man. One said, *"Sometimes women think differently than we do, and may misunderstand what is happening."*

Some also felt that it would be difficult to try anything new if their wives were not already on board. As one explained, *"My wife would either leave me, or tease me back to the old ways."*

### ***Motivations and challenges to becoming a caring husband***

Most of the participants were interested in learning skills to become a more caring husband. They felt that this would enhance togetherness and respect, and create a strong relationship. Most want to stay in their marriages and truly love one another. Yet they know that they have differences and challenges.

They realized that *"little things can make a relationship go crooked,"* and they want to learn how to avoid that.

While they do not express love to their wives verbally, they described how they show love to their wives on a daily basis. Most mentioned that they buy things for the house, such as soap, and provide food. Some said that they show love by chatting with her, coming home in a good mood, having sex, and speaking the truth. One young father said that he accompanies her to the health center to be able to ask questions and explain things to the health workers since she is too shy.

Some of the young fathers cautioned that if they are too caring, their wives may get too proud or overpower them. They would then feel uncomfortable in the relationship, and may get too emotional (ie violent).

A few said that this may not work in their relationships because women love men who demonstrate masculinity. And they felt that being caring would not make their wives respect or like them more.

Some worried what their friends would say, who may misunderstand the mentoring program, and say, *“So, you didn’t know what you were doing all this time.”*

They currently show care to their wife by providing things (ie soap) for the home. A few help with housework, and garden work. Some help with children. When asked about other possible ways that they could show care, they said that they generally do not: greet her in the morning, keep her informed about where he goes, or spend time with her. Regarding spending time together, they explained that it just depends upon the man’s mood. But they seemed open to this recommendation, and to talking more.



### **SRH Service Needs**

When asked about how many children they want to have, couples had different ideas. The husband wanted one more child than the wife (for example, one father said that he wants four children while his wife wants three). They agreed to talk about this and come to agreement. They may benefit from linkages to services.

### **Violence**

In general, young fathers did not hold positive attitudes toward physical violence against their wives and few talked about violence in the home. (This is consistent with the GREAT baseline findings.) They were concerned about having the power and authority in relationships, but most also wanted to avoid conflict and maintain harmony and the relationship. They described exchanging heated words sometimes.

Even in these couples, there may be instances that trigger some type of reaction. It may be physical violence against the wife, a threat of violence, or a scuffle (when both parties react and hit each other, but not seriously). Situations that were mentioned as triggers included when a wife greets her husband 'rudely' when he returns home and/or when a wife questions where her husband has been when he returns home. For some couples, these may happen but not recently (ie in the past 3 months), but could be documented within longer time frames.

It is possible that over time when relationships are more solidified and more stress comes up, things may change. If that is true, the couples together longer may experience more physical and verbal violence.

Among a small proportion of couples, however, it is likely that there is regular verbal, physical and/or emotional violence. Two of the young fathers who were in unhappy relationships did not hold negative attitudes toward violence, and alluded to reacting with high emotions to certain situations. These relationships may not last the duration of the project. There were also two young fathers who said that it would not be acceptable for their wives to call a foul (in the context of yellow cards), suggesting that if their wife tried to equalize the power imbalance in the home, they would address it.

***Alcohol abuse is widely known to be harmful, but influenced by peers and stress***

The harmful effects of alcohol are widely known in these communities. The young fathers listed some consequences of getting drunk, including spending family money, violence and conflict in the home, and not having a clear mind. Drinking responsibly gives them a better handle on their money, their home and their minds. It also helps them achieve their life goals.

They want to have a proper home, with respect, and realize that drinking too much would take this away.

Some said that the exercise on alcohol in a mentor session is welcome, even if they do not drink. They said that it is good to "start from me as a person" to help others stop drinking.

There will be some young fathers who drink too much. They said that this is not because they lack awareness, but because of the influence of friends, and/or because of too much stress and pressure.



## Feedback on Plans for Mentor Sessions and Message Boards

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### Input on Mentors

The young fathers suggested mentors with the following characteristics:

- Can translate learning into practice
- Talks without fear
- Strong-hearted, not easily swayed
- Does not judge them or discriminate against them
- Loving
- Works with a passion
- Good listener
- Good timekeeper

As long as mentors are endorsed by the young fathers, the mentors will be accepted. The young fathers were not concerned about the person's age or level of education. But, if someone educated could be non-judgmental and work well with them as youth, then they would be welcome.

In general, the young fathers recommended meeting with mentors twice a month. Although some said that they would participate as often as sessions are available, even every day, they agreed that twice a month would be ideal, including an individual session and a group discussion. Most said that the day and time could be scheduled with the mentor, but suggested mid-day after garden work or other work in the morning.

They said that individual sessions could be at their home, to ensure privacy, and group discussions at the sub-parish meeting areas.

During the pretest sessions, they received lunch. When told that they would not receive any monetary or in-kind gifts or reimbursement for participation, they wholeheartedly agreed. As one young father said, *"we cannot put a price on our children's future."*

### Input on Community Message Boards

The young fathers who participated in the pretest felt that community message boards would be interesting and useful.



Their initial reactions focused on the opportunity for message boards to improve their reputations and credibility with community elders. They said that community elders currently perceive them to be youth (traditionally regarded as children), and do not give them the respect they feel that they deserve.

They also realized that message boards would help their friends understand their new, more caring actions at home and convince their friends to also try these new actions. After the couple communication session, some of the young fathers thought that a message board could help them express love to their wives, which they cannot say with words.

The young fathers preferred photos over illustrations because they think photos would be more believable and illustrations would look like cartoons for children.

All of the participants believed that the best place for a message board would be at the sub-parish communal meeting place. The meeting place is usually a primary school. In one case it is a non-formal education center because the primary school is still under construction across the road. The primary schools are also a source of a borehole, so women often spend time in this location.



Teachers' homes adjacent to primary school (shown in background on right)

A board with a slight roof and an acrylic cover over the place where the poster would be affixed would work well. This would allow posters to be protected from rain, be rotated, and serve as a place for other community messages and announcements.

Given that many of the primary school children live with relatives or single mothers, but would really want a caring father, the project team may want to discuss the implications on these children of having message boards promoting fathers. It may still be fine to continue with the plans, but perhaps some orientation could be given to the primary school about finding and establishing connections with a caring adult, not necessarily a father.

## Overall Feedback on Session Plans

Young fathers were eager to learn and participate in the sessions. They expressed interest in all of the session themes. They felt that the topics were relevant to them as young fathers, and identified the new actions the activities were asking them to try at home.

The sessions were generally appreciated. They preferred the interactive or challenging activities that made them move or think critically, compared to reading letters or stories. For example, they enjoyed values clarification and blindfolding exercises that made them move. If stories are included, allowing them to add elements to the ending, or including riddles (or something to make them think) would increase their interest. They would also like role-plays, but only if they could find a private space to perform.

Nearly all of the young fathers who participated in the first round of group discussions returned the next week for follow-up meetings. They reported trying a number of actions in the week after the first discussions, including getting more involved in child care and household chores, reducing alcohol consumption, and sharing money that they earned. They said that all of these actions felt fine, except sharing their earnings. This felt 'painful', but they said that they would continue because they know it helps with the welfare of their children.

Discussions with the wives after one week generally confirmed the changes. Most of the wives reported feeling closer to their husbands.

However, after the first discussion, two of the wives felt that they should no longer accept their husbands returning home late without explanation. They decided to withhold supper, and the men did not agree with this. In one case, the man asked neighbors to talk to his wife and she eventually agreed to give him supper. In the other case, the couple scuffled. While mentors will not be meeting with couples as a group, so this exact situation may not reoccur, it does raise an issue that mentors will need to address – women will expect faster change than men may be willing to make.

## Feedback by Session

### SESSION 1: Fatherhood & Masculinity

#### Individual Mentoring Session

- *Purpose:* Reflect on differences between how fathers were in the past and what kind of father he wants to be. Relate this to his ideas of masculinity.
- *Activities:* Visioning exercise about how he wants to be as a father, discuss benefits of his vision/ being a new type of father; Read letter.
- *Homework:* Talk to your wife about your vision. Ask her to talk about her vision.

#### Group Mentoring Session

- *Community message board:* "My son is a REAL<sup>1</sup> father!" Elders admiring a young father with his child. "He works hard", "He cares for his children financially and emotionally" "He disciplines without violence to have a peaceful home"
- *Activities:* Discuss what it means to be a REAL father and share personal visions, related to masculinity.

#### Individual Mentoring Session

*Theme:* The young fathers liked the idea of talking about fatherhood and masculinity. They enjoyed thinking about how they want to be as a father, and how they will be able to do this.

However, they did not feel that comparing themselves with fathers in the past was not meaningful to them because the context of raising children today is so different. When thinking about fathers in the past they imagined pre-war/ pre-camp time. (The young fathers were not open to talking about the time in the camps, during which time many of their parents and that generation perished or left). In the past (their grandparents generation or earlier), they explained that families had land and cattle resources, and fathers did not get very involved in their children's lives, and did not have to struggle to pay school fees, unlike today. Also in the past, the fathers usually left the responsibility for caring for and disciplining children to mothers. Therefore their focus is on today, looking toward the future.

*Activities:* The visioning exercise worked well, and they agreed to share their vision with their wives. Some said that they would share with their wife that afternoon.

The story/letter from the activity card did not engage the participants' interest or feel relevant to them. They explained that people do not write letters these days (except to ask for the traditional marriage bride price, which may not be a welcome letter to them). Also, most of them do not have uncles who provide guidance or support, and they would not question a father like that.

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<sup>1</sup> 'Real fathers' can be translated into the Acholi language as '*wege ki kome*'. This invokes the issue of responsible, whereas Great or '*oketa*' invokes achievement.

## Group Mentoring Session

*Community message board:* perfect as proposed. A poster with elders admiring a young father was very welcomed. They felt that this image would help them get the validation and support from elders that they want. It would also help their friends understand why they were making changes.

- *Main caption:* "My son is a REAL father!"
- *Image:* Elders admiring a young father with his child.
- *Text:* "He works hard", "He cares for his children financially and emotionally", "He has a vision for his children's future and works hard to achieve the plan," "He disciplines without violence to have a peaceful home."

*Activities:* A wang-oo (fire) would be an interesting way to bring the mentor's groups of young fathers together, share their visions of fatherhood, and experiences about changes they made since individual sessions.

*Group commitment:* The young fathers would be open to making commitments to:

- Take steps to achieve their vision
- Care for his children
- Have a peaceful home
- Support each other to raise children

### **Follow-up Discussion**

One week after the first discussion about this session, five young fathers shared their reflections. They said that they told their wives about the discussions and their vision for fatherhood. This helped their wives to understand the changes they saw in them. They reported helping more with household tasks, such as washing dishes, and caring for children, and talking more to their wives.

## **SESSION 2: Tips and Tricks to Being a REAL Father**

### Individual Mentoring Session

- *Purpose:* Practice nonviolent parenting skills and discuss how they feel about these new ways of parenting.
- *Activities:* NMPA card: Disciplining children story: "Advice for my children" - (letters from wives) Advice about loving our children: Letters from uncles to new fathers about how to be better fathers. Discuss tips for nonviolent reactions
- *Homework:* Practice good labels when disciplining children

### Group Mentoring Session

- *Community message board:* "My son is a REAL father!" Elders admiring a young father with his child. "He works hard", "He cares for his children financially and emotionally" "He disciplines without violence to have a peaceful home"
- *Activities:* Role play of father helping with child care

### Individual Mentoring Session

*Theme:* The young fathers showed great interest in this theme. They wanted to learn as much as possible to be a good father.

*Activities:* Letters were not engaging for young fathers. They would like a values clarification exercise with the same content, or a bucket exercise like Brad created for the mentor training. Also, a handout would be very appreciated.

While fathers do not usually get involved in disciplining or teaching young children, it is something they could discuss with their wives to be able to work as a team. They identified ways that they could get more involved with child care, including holding the child, playing with the child and talking with/teaching the child. Some felt that they could also bathe the child.

Their children are too young for them to be able to apply the recommendations of using positive labels. But they agreed to try showing more care for their children. They did not have many ideas about how to do this (initially interpreting it to mean providing gifts such as candy), but are open to learning.

### Group Mentoring Session

*Community message board:* The concept of children talking about their fathers in the poster was very liked by the young fathers. They said that this would help to reinforce new ways of showing care for their children, and learning how to be better fathers.

- *Main caption:* “My father is a REAL father!”
- *Image:* Children (3 -10 years?) admiring their father and/or split screen
- *Text:* ‘My father teaches me’, ‘My father knows me,’ ‘My father comforts me’, and ‘My father plays with me’, ‘My father loves (or works hard?) for me.’

*Activities:* The proposed activity of a role play of men helping women with child care would be interesting for the group, but they expressed concern that a lack of privacy could make them reserved. If the role play is not possible, a group values clarification with discussion would be interesting for them.

*Group commitment:* The young fathers would be open to making commitments to:

- Be more involved in child care
- Teach child values
- Communicate regularly with child
- Have a firm but peaceful reaction if the child does something wrong

### **Follow-up Discussion**

One week after the first discussion about this session, five young fathers shared their reflections. All of them reported spending more time with their children, playing and ‘sharing teachings’ their children sometimes. They found that playing makes the children happy, and they receive bigger welcomes from the children when they come home now. One said that playing with his child makes the child happy, and so it makes him feel happy as well.

Other changes included sitting down to talk with children and carrying /holding children more. One said that he did whatever the child wanted. Another said that he came home every day with something (like candy) for the child.

Some expressed (continued) concern about what other people would think about this greater involvement in child care.



photo credit: Dickens Ojamuge

### SESSION 3: Future dreams for my family

#### Individual Mentoring Session

- *Purpose:* Form a vision for the future and then do an activity to show the effect on alcohol in reaching this vision
- *Activities:* Spin and walk: Compare how alcohol affects visions of the future.
- *Homework:* Stop after three drinks and practice what you will say to your friends to get out of drinking more

#### Group Mentoring Session

- *Community message board:* "My Neighbor/Friend is GREAT!" [Concept--"You are not being judged, you are being admired" ] "I wish I could talk to my children the way he does" "He loves his kids, and they respect him for it" "I admire the way he disciplines his kids without hitting" "He does not drink to the point where he cannot control himself"
- *Activity:* Review homework, or spin and walk again as a group

#### Individual Mentoring Session

*Theme:* Participants enjoyed the spin and walk exercise and discussing the effects of alcohol. They said that even if they do not drink alcohol themselves, it is good to know about its effects. Attitudes were overwhelmingly negative toward getting drunk, and they identified impacts on the family budget, peace in the home, and having a clear head.

*Activity:* The main barriers to reducing alcohol intake are related to stress (they said that drinking is an escape/ coping mechanism) and peer influence. A values clarification exercise or a discussion on these topics would be welcome.

*Homework:* Practice what to say to friends to reduce alcohol intake, and stress management techniques.



'Spin and walk' exercise during group discussion with young fathers

#### Group Mentoring Session

*Community message board:* A message board illustrating friends and neighbors admiring the young fathers was interesting to them. The concept of friends admiring them rather than judging them was very appealing. However, they are not sure how they would know if this is true unless a friend says something. They were confident that the judgment was coming from a place of jealousy and lack of understanding.

- *Main caption:* "My friend is a REAL father!"
  - *Image:* Friends admiring a young father playing with his child.
  - *Text:* 'He drinks responsibly,' 'He does not drink to the point where he cannot control himself' 'He loves his children, and his children love and respect him.'
- or*
- 'My friends admire how I treat my family,' 'My friends and neighbors learn from me', 'My friends admire the type of father I am'
- or*
- 'I wish I could have a relationship with my children like my friend' 'I learn about being a REAL father from my friend,'

*Activities:* Values clarification on stress management and making personal decisions (resisting peer pressure). Discuss the concept, "You are not being judged, you are admired."

*Group commitment:* young fathers would be open to making commitments to:

- Release stress in active and healthy ways
- Support each other to achieve their plans and goals, including drinking responsibly
- Support each other to continue making changes to be REAL fathers, even if they do not get immediate support from friends and neighbors

### **Follow-up Discussion**

Five of the young fathers reflected on the session one week later. Most said that they tried new things to improve their relationships since the discussion. Several said that they started greeting their wives in the morning. Most reported less tension and conflict between the couple, but said that sometimes they still exchanged words occasionally.

Most of them also reported changing how they shared money that they earned. One young father said that he was saving more money. A couple of the young fathers said that they saved money by reducing the amount of alcohol they drank.

One of the young fathers appreciated the changes he has made. He said that even the neighbors see him drinking less and feel that it is a call to them to also 'live well.' He is now striving to be a model for others.

Several of the young fathers shared more of their earnings with their wives. One said that he earned Ush 10,000 (\$3.85) and gave Ush 8,000 of it to his wife. Another got Ush 5,000 (\$1.92) and gave Ush 1,000 to his wife. They said that this was 'painful and challenging' because parting with money is not something they are used to. However, they realized that being more responsible with money is good for their children and families.

## SESSION 4: *Loving my wife, loving my children, loving myself*

### Individual Mentoring Session

- *Purpose:* Understanding their feelings, learn to express /talk about feelings, react in a constructive (non-violent way).
- *Activities:* GREAT activity cards for NMPA- Advice on solving problems card: two short stories, both in which the man is violent. Communication postures (body language)
- *Homework:* Practice communication with wives

### Group Mentoring Session

- *Community message board:* "My husband is GREAT!" He asks my opinion", " He uses loving words instead of violence with me and the children"
- *Activity:* Review homework

### Individual Mentoring Session

*Theme:* The topic of this session was well-received. They would like to learn more about communication and develop skills.

*Activity:* Advice on the cards was fine for young fathers, but more active activities would be more interesting for them. They would like activities to help them understand and develop skills in communication, conflict resolution and showing love.

The focus of this session could be a reflection on power dynamics, and how more balanced power and relationships benefit the man and the family. Then basic concepts of communication could be practiced to prepare for the coming couple session. Additionally, here the specific situations that cause tension in the relationship could be addressed (ie how a man is greeted when returning home, managing household resources) so that they could prepare responses.

*Homework:* Practice communication and showing love, and responding calmly to certain situations.

### Group Mentoring Session

*Community message board:* This board was fine for the young fathers.

- *Main caption:* "My husband is a REAL father!"
- *Image:* A wife admiring a young father holding their child.
- *Text:* 'We parent as a team.' 'We work together.' 'He discusses important issues with me.' 'He spends time with me and the children.' 'He shows care for me and the children.' 'He uses soft words instead of violence with me.'

*Activities:* A values clarification exercise and/or role play would work well (especially if they can find privacy for the role play). They could discuss conflict resolution and non-violent options for how to respond to certain situations.

*Group commitment:*

- Get more involved in household activities
- Spend free time with wives, chatting and listening
- Prepare to respond calmly to situations that may arise

### **Follow-up Discussion**

Five of the young fathers reflected on the session one week later. Most said that they tried new things to improve their relationships since the discussion. Several said that they started greeting their wives in the morning. Most reported less tension and conflict between the couple, but said that sometimes they still exchanged words occasionally.

Some said that they shared these changes with friends and were received positively.

One young father said that he helped his wife with peeling potatoes. He said it was hard, but it made his wife happy. He agreed to continue making changes gradually.

Another said that he brought his wife water for her bath after they returned from the garden and she said that she was very tired. He further recounted that he warned her that she should not be pretending to be tired, which would not be all right.

## SESSION 5: Couple Communication

### Individual Mentoring Session

- *Purpose:* reflect on and practice couple communication
- *Activities:* Blindfold husband. Place object in the distance and a few obstacles. Wife communicates to direct him to get it. Repeat with wife blindfolded and husband directing. Debrief on their communication patterns and how they felt about the way they were directed. Additionally, introduce the "Red CARD" for men to give to their wives as a way to remind them when they are not using non-violent behaviors so they can both stop and talk.
- *Homework:* Practice communication

### Group Mentoring Session

- *Community message board:* "My husband is a REAL husband!" He asks my opinion", " He uses loving words instead of violence with me and the children"
- *Activity:* Small reminder gift

### Individual Mentoring Session

*Theme:* This was probably most interesting session of all for the young fathers. They liked talking about men and women, communication and how to increase understanding.

The blindfold exercise was meaningful to both the men and women. Although they did not work as a couple in the group (two fathers demonstrated the exercise) they all liked it and identified parallels to desired couple communication. Most of the participants (men and women) liked that the person guiding the one blindfolded used 'soft words'. Both men and woman want more of this at home.

A prediction game was also tried with the couples. It took them some time to understand how it worked, but once started they did not want to end it. They were asked questions about how they thought their spouse would answer- their prediction. Then the spouse would answer to show how close they were – and the gaps in understanding each other.

Finally, couples discussed options for stopping a heated moment or argument and improving communication using a 'red card' or a 'yellow card'. Red cards are well-known in football for removing someone from the game. Yellow cards are linked to a foul. Couples described both red card worthy events and yellow card type fouls in relationships. The red card events signified the end of a relationship – such as woman's infidelity or violence.



Yellow cards, on the other hand, were about warnings and continued commitment to work on the relationship. Several wives recounted instances when they gave their husbands 'yellow cards' by withholding sex or supper after he did something they had agreed he would not do. In one case, the man explained that he had agreed to not come home after 10pm but did this several times. After the third time being late, and not getting supper, he has stopped coming home late.

Nearly all of the couples said that yellow cards could be used to express a foul instead of another action (like withholding something). They saw the cards as practical and tangible ways to highlight a problem. However, a yellow card does not automatically result in dialogue. Dialogue cues could be included on the cards to facilitate discussion and resolution, such as:

- (1) What have I done to get this card?
- (2) How did it make you feel?
- (3) What can we do in the future to avoid this frustration?

Two of the young fathers said that it would not be acceptable for their wives to give them a yellow card. Whether or not they would agree after multiple mentoring sessions would need to be assessed carefully by the mentor before trying this in their households.

### Group Mentoring Session

*Community message board:* They really liked this concept because they think it would visually show a loving couple. They thought that they could ask their wife to go to the message board and just see the message since they have a hard time expressing their love in words.

- *Main caption:* "My husband is a GREAT husband!"
- *Image:* A wife admiring a young father holding their child.
- *Text:* 'We parent as a team.' 'We work together.' 'He discusses important issues with me.' 'He spends time with me and the children.' 'He shows care for me and the children.' 'He uses soft words instead of violence with me.'

*Activities:* Values clarification and group discussion at the wang-oo. Distribution of reminder gifts.

The reminder gifts that the young fathers felt would be most attractive for them included: necklaces, wristbands, key chains, t-shirts, caps, or wallets. They would also not mind a card to put in their wallet or a home rules banner for their home. If a home rules banner, the mentors could compile rules that they make from session 1 with their wives, and then give out during this session.

*Group commitment:*

- Practice regular communication, both positive (appreciating the good things) and constructive (resolving issues before they become big)
- Stop in the heat of the moment to recall commitments to be peaceful

## SESSION 6: *Parenting commitments*

### Individual Mentoring Session

- *Purpose:* Discuss and agree on how they want to be parents
- *Activities:* GREAT activity cards: getting to know you: Interview each other with a few set questions. Advice for our children: Dear auntie stories about discussing joint parenting practices
- *Homework:* Make a commitment to parent together and practice

### Group Mentoring Session

- *Community message board:* “REAL fathers are a great community resource!”
- *Activity:* Community celebration - wives and children invited. Pledge Board- individuals make a pledge and sign the board inform of others

### Individual Mentoring Session

*Theme:* The topic of being a better parent was very interesting to both young fathers and mothers. They shared a number of benefits to the fathers to spend more time caring for children such as it makes the child get used to the father, including his smell. They explained that children usually just get used to the mother’s smell. Also, it lets the father get to know the individual child well and understand the child’s life.

The young fathers felt that their involvement is especially important for sons.

*Activity:* Couples enjoyed the pair interviews exercise from the GREAT activity card (although they did not pair up with their spouse because it was a group setting).

The stories were fine, but mini role-plays or half of a scenario (where the couple can complete the ending) could increase their level of interest.

The issue of a joint parenting commitment did not come out clearly. This could be included in the session as one activity, even with a paper to sign.



‘Pair interviews’ during group discussion with young couples

photo credit: Dickens Ojamuge

*Homework:* Make a joint commitment about how they will parent as a team.

### Group Mentoring Session

*Community message board:* Like the other concepts for message boards, the young fathers felt that this would increase their reputations and image in the eyes of the community.

- *Main caption:* “REAL fathers are a valuable resource of our community.”
- *Image:* Many fathers with their children, or a couple with their child.
- *Text:*
  - ‘A REAL father spends time with his wife and children’
  - ‘A REAL father shares and listens to his wife and children’
  - ‘A REAL father teaches his children.’
  - ‘A REAL father helps to care for his children.’
  - ‘A REAL father disciplines with love’
  - ‘A REAL father continues to learn and get better’
  - ‘A REAL father is loved and admired’

*Activity:* The final group session will be a community celebration with wives and children invited. The young fathers will sign a Pledge Board and inform others what they have learned, tried and what they commit to continue.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

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Young fathers and their wives in two parishes of Atiak Sub-county in Amuru District participated in group discussions in March 2013 to test and gather input on proposed concepts for the mentor protocol and community message boards.

Mentoring on parenting and relationships was enthusiastically welcomed by young fathers as timely and useful. Young fathers who participated in the pretest expressed high motivation to learn how to become better fathers and husbands.

Young fathers said that they typically do not spend much time with their young children and leave nearly all aspects of household work and child care to their wives. However, they recognized numerous benefits of becoming more involved fathers, teaching and guiding the children, and sharing child care tasks due to the changes in society and new demands on fathers. They described some confusion over the best way to discipline. Although they knew many negative consequences of physical punishment, including children fearing the father and becoming closer to his wife's family than to him, they feared that not using physical punishment would cause the children to become 'hopeless' and spoiled. Most wanted to learn new ways of parenting, including discipline, but some expressed concern about friends' reactions to them getting involved in child care.

Most of the young fathers were in new, loving relationships and appreciated their wives for being caring and hardworking. They described a challenge in maintaining the relationship and their status as head of the family. They worry that if they are too nice their wife will overpower them, but if they are violent their wife may leave. This leads to strong reactions when they think their wives are trying to gain power or question their authority. However, most said that they are willing to learn new communication styles and want to be good husbands.

During discussions with couples, both men and women enjoyed exercises that elicited sharing, listening and 'soft words'. Both men and women said that they want more of this in their relationships, and coaching from Mentors to keep this going. The women suggested some type of orientation for wives to learn how to speak up prior to the Mentor sessions for couples.

Regarding Mentor selection, they were mostly concerned about a Mentor being willing to listen to and work with them well, without judgment. As youth (traditionally they are still perceived to be children), they do not get the respect that they want from community members; there is tension between them as youth and many of the elders due to this.

For community message boards, they discussed and provided input into each of the six proposed themes. The young fathers believed that these boards will improve their reputation in the community so that elders appreciate them as young fathers. They felt that the boards would also help their friends accept the changes they will make.

The topics proposed were understood, relevant and interesting to them. The young fathers demonstrated willingness and ability to make changes in how they interact with their wife and children. Even without specific requests to the young fathers to try new things, on their own they adopted new practices immediately after the first discussion. Most got more involved with their children, including playing with the child, teaching the child and holding the child. Some helped with household tasks like washing dishes and preparing food. Some also tried communicating more with their wives. They saw immediate benefits including feeling closer to their wife and child, feeling happy to make their child happy, and getting a bigger greeting from their child when returning home. Although those who helped with household chores felt it to be challenging they all said that they would continue the new practices.

Selection of participants in the project and research will require careful screening. There are no lists of young fathers, even though local leaders know in general where young fathers live. Due to the concerns of leaders about the lack of guidance for these young couples, and the high demand of young fathers to participate, they may give their age according to project criteria; ages will need to be verified through birth certificates, identification cards and/or checking with friends and relatives. Additionally, the ages and biological parents of children in the household will also need to be verified. Some children in the households of young fathers will not be their biological children as it is not uncommon for the young women to bring children from another relationship when they move, and/or care for relatives' children.

Additionally, they recommended that before any young father is recruited to complete the baseline survey, he should be given time to discuss participation in the project with his wife. They felt that couple agreement about his participation will be important to ensure that he can continue. They also wanted Mentors to discuss the project with the couple at home, prior to starting the first session with the man so that the wife would not be suspicious of the mentor or the changes the man will make.