



Save the Children

Sweden

Becoming Part of the Solution:
***Overview of two boys' groups programmes working in
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia to promote gender equality***

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A. Introduction

Save the Children Sweden (SCS) is a politically and religiously unaffiliated non-governmental organization founded on the principle of voluntary, individual membership. SCS fights for the fulfilment of the goals expressed in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) – in Sweden and abroad. We believe in a child-friendly society and focus mainly on lasting improvement for children to achieve change. In Ethiopia, SCS works to promote children's rights through advocacy, direct support, capacity building, research and awareness-raising.

In 2005, SCS established two boys' groups in Addis Ababa. These groups were formed working in collaboration with two local partner organisations¹ in order to provide a forum for boys and young men to discuss issues surrounding gender inequality, gender violence and the transmission of HIV/AIDS and to promote the idea of positive change within their communities. They are part of SCS' child participation, HIV prevention and non-discrimination programmes.

There is growing evidence of a strong causal link between gender inequalities and the risks of contracting HIV/AIDS and of experiencing gender based violence.² Both risks are closely connected with early socialisation that promotes certain gender roles as the norm. These norms might include support for men to have multiple partners, or to maintain control over the behaviour of their female partners. Therefore addressing gender norms – the cultural messages that dictate and circumscribe what is appropriate or acceptable behaviour for males and females – is increasingly being recognised as an important strategy to prevent both gender violence and the spread of HIV infection³.

The boys' groups in Addis Ababa have the specific objective of promoting gender equality as a means of tackling the growing threat of HIV/AIDS and of gender violence. They aim to work in partnership with boys and young men in an inclusive manner, supporting those who do not wish to 'act out' damaging behaviours in terms of their sexuality and violence and encouraging them to be committed agents of change within their communities.

During January and February 2007, two consultants documented these boys' groups. The objectives of this documentation were:

- to gather sufficient qualitative data by way of in-depth interview, observation and focus group discussion to be able to describe and analyse the boys' groups so that their experiences and knowledge can be shared;

¹ The two collaborating partner organisations are Hiwot Ethiopia and Integrated Family Service Organization/ Eshet Children and Youth Association (IFSO/Eshet).

² Research conducted by the Promundo Instituto found that support expressed by young men for inequitable gender norms and gender roles was significantly associated with HIV risk, reported STI symptoms, lack of contraceptive use and both physical and sexual violence against a partner (*Promoting More Gender-equitable Norms and Behaviors Among Young Men as an HIV/AIDS Prevention Strategy* Julie Pulerwitz, Horizons/PATH Gary Barker, Márcio Segundo, and Marcos Nascimento, Instituto Promundo (2006))

³ Gary Barker (2006) *Engaging Boys and Young Men in Promoting Gender Equality: Reflections on Masculinities in Sub-Saharan Africa and Program Responses* Background Paper for the First Pan African Seminar on Working with Boys and Young Men to Address Gender-Based Violence and HIV/AIDS Instituto Promundo, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

- to examine how the boys' groups address rights' violations in relation to gender inequality, transmission of HIV/AIDS and gender violence;
- to look at the sustainability of the boys' groups; and
- to identify improvements so that lessons can be learnt from their experiences.

The following is a shortened version of this documentation describing why SCS took this initiative, how the programme was implemented, the challenges the programme faces and the lessons we can learn from such an innovative experience.

B. Why do we need boys' groups?

i. To promote gender equality

An inclusive approach

The term gender refers to socially constructed roles given to boys and girls. These roles influence the way children and young people think, behave and relate to each other in a crucial way. The response to gender inequality has often focussed exclusively upon empowering women to demand their rights and little, if at all, upon the role boys and young men can and do play in maintaining or challenging gender inequalities. While understanding the deep-rooted discrimination that girls and women often face, it is important to move away from the perception of girls or women as victims or members of a 'vulnerable group' towards a more positive view of girls and boys as constructive and active members of a society where their rights are recognised.

Strengthening positive role models

It is clear that many boys are socialised in ways that promote gender inequality and violence but that not all boys adopt these gendered behaviour patterns and most do not act out these roles all the time. It is essential that when addressing gender norms boys and young men are involved as partners in dealing with gender inequality rather than viewing them solely as a source of problems and that positive examples of boys not conforming to their allocated roles are encouraged and built upon.

Gaining boys and young men's commitment

The recent involvement of men and boys in policies and programmes designed to address HIV/AIDS and gender violence helps to challenge constructions of masculinity and prompt changes in many commonly-held attitudes and behaviours. This includes the way boys are socialised to become men and how boys and young men approach sexuality and violence.⁴ Such an approach helps to gain the support

⁴ In recent years, there has been increasing attention to how boys are socialized and to the specific needs and risks to health and development that boys and young men face, as well as to the need to engage boys and men in promoting gender equality. The 1994 International Conference on Population and Development and the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing provided a foundation for engaging men—including young men—in efforts to improve the status of women. Similarly, UNAIDS focused its 2000-01 World AIDS Campaign on men and boys, recognizing that their behavior puts themselves and their partners at risk of HIV infection. In addition, in 1998, the WHO's Adolescent and Child Health and Development division began a multi-year research and training initiative on the health and psychosocial needs of adolescent boys, carrying out a survey of programs and a literature review on health and development of adolescent boys. UNFPA has also examined the connection between masculinities and sexual and reproductive health outcomes, and UNESCO has looked at the

and commitment of boys and young men in promoting gender equitable behaviour and encourages the community to accept and recognise the potential that boys and young men have to make a positive contribution. While relatively small in number, there are a handful of important programme examples that explicitly include discussions of gender socialization in their work with young men and boys.⁵

ii. To combat HIV/AIDS

Combating Secrecy

HIV/AIDS is generally regarded as the most serious public health problem in Sub-Saharan Africa and Ethiopia has the second largest number of HIV-infected people in Africa (after South Africa). According to the fifth edition of 'AIDS in Ethiopia', the prevalence of HIV infection was estimated to be 4.4% in 2003 and 4.6% in 2004. In urban areas such as Addis Ababa, where the boys' groups meet, the prevalence is far higher and was estimated to be 12.6% in 2003 and 12.5% in 2004. Overall the prevalence is higher for women than for men (5% to 3.8% in 2003)⁶.

The expanding epidemic in Ethiopia is transmitted principally by heterosexual sex and young people have been identified as the highest risk age group and therefore have become a target of prevention efforts. Although Ethiopia has introduced a Strategic Plan for Intensifying Multi-Sectoral HIV/AIDS Responses for the period 2004-2008, which targets students and out of school youth, few of the strategies outlined have, as yet, been fully implemented. On the other hand, efforts to present young people with information about HIV/AIDS transmission and prevention have often been limited to scaring them with selective information about the dangers of sex and equating sex with AIDS⁷.

There is a prevalent view, particularly amongst parents and schools, that children should not be informed about sexuality since keeping them ignorant will help to retain their innocence. This perception of sex as something dangerous means that there is very little sex education in schools and what there is, is of uncertain quality. One focus group discussant from a boys' group described how '*our civic teacher was insulting girls while he was teaching us about gender.*' Such a culture of secrecy surrounding sexual matters means that children glean inadequate information from peers or pornography. Instead of acknowledging young people's sexuality and providing them with access to information and technology to enable them to enjoy a healthy, safe sex life, these messages serve to alarm and stigmatize.

association between masculinities and violence. Cited in Barker, G. & Ricardo, C. (2005). *Young Men and the Construction of Masculinity in sub-Saharan Africa: Implications for HIV/AIDS, Conflict and Violence*. Social Development Papers, Conflict Prevention and Reconstruction, Paper No. 26, June 2005. Washington: World Bank.

⁵ Promising examples of programmes taking an approach of gender and masculinities include the Men As Partners Program in South Africa, Stepping Stones in Uganda and South Africa, and Conscientizing Male Adolescents in Nigeria, and Young Men as Equal Partners in Tanzania, Uganda and Kenya.

⁶ Ethiopia Ministry of Health, et al., 2004, AIDS in Ethiopia 5th Report, Federal Ministry of Health, Disease Prevention and Control Department, Ethiopia, Fifth Edition.

⁷ Poster printed by ISAPSO with financial assistance from UNAIDS distributed widely in Ethiopia (cited in Tadele, G (2006) *Bleak Prospects: Young men, sexuality and HIV/AIDS in an Ethiopian town*. African Studies Centre Research Report 80/2006 pp 3) 'Boys/Girls: Avoid sex and drugs, Be smart – AIDS is a reality, Smart boys/girls say 'No' to sex, Tell girls/boys 'They can't just use you', Giving in to sex ain't smart – beware!, Who said sex guarantees marriage?, Give in to sex and get dumped, Rush into sex, rush into AIDS, your body is your right, protect it, Think, refuse, be firm, you are smart, secure your future.'

Article 6 of the CRC makes it clear that every child and young person has an inherent right to life and that governments must ensure their survival and development to the maximum extent possible⁸. This obligation extends to ensuring that children have access to basic health and education including the knowledge and skills needed to protect them and others from HIV, as well as appropriate treatment, counselling, and care. The lack of readily available information about SRH represents a significant rights violation for Ethiopian children.

Furthermore, the potential in Ethiopia for children and young people to be a vital force in engaging in the prevention of HIV/AIDS and gender violence is not realised and their ideas, experiences and concerns about gender inequality, violence and sexuality are largely neglected and ignored. This is contrary to Article 12 of the CRC which affirms the right of children and young people to have their views listened to in matters which affect them⁹.

A central objective for SCS in establishing the boys' groups is to play a vital role in combating this culture of secrecy and in ensuring that children's and young people's voices are heard and that they are given the information they need.

Tackling Gender and HIV/AIDS

It is clear that HIV/AIDS prevention is a complex minefield 'which requires dialogue on emotionally charged and culturally laden issues of sex and gender, and change in the wider societal contexts that shape these relations.'¹⁰ The engine that drives the epidemic in many parts of the world is sexual violence and the subordination of women and girls. The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women concluded in 2001 that 'Women's and girls' relative lack of power over their bodies and their sexual lives, which is supported and reinforced by their social and economic inequality, makes them more vulnerable to contracting and living with HIV/AIDS.'

Norms related to masculinity and sexuality, such as those which espouse male sexual needs as uncontrollable, multiple partners as evidence of sexual prowess, and dominance over women (both physical and sexual), can place young men and young women at high risk of HIV infection. A gender power imbalance means that girls and women are often in no position to negotiate safe sex and therefore can expose themselves to STIs and to unwanted pregnancy. The risks of unwanted pregnancy to unmarried girls and young women is significant in a country where there is a great stigma attached to having a child out of wedlock. Furthermore, since abortion is illegal in Ethiopia, girls and women have to terminate unwanted pregnancies by illicit means therefore putting their lives at risk. Complications from unsafe abortions account for almost 55% of all recorded maternal deaths in Ethiopia, 13% of which

⁸ Article 6 CRC '1. States Parties shall ensure that every child has the inherent right to life. 2. States Parties shall ensure to the maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child.' The government of Ethiopia acceded to the CRC in 1991.

⁹ Article 12 CRC '1. States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views, freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child....'

¹⁰ Schoepf (1995) 'Culture, sex research and AIDS prevention in Africa' in *Culture and Sexual Risk: Anthropological perspectives on AIDS*. Amsterdam: Gordon and Breach pp 29-51

occur in the under 20 year age group.¹¹ This power imbalance is heightened when girls and women are economically insecure. 'Gender inequality and poverty are far more important contributors to HIV risk than is ignorance of modes of transmission or 'cultural beliefs' about HIV.'¹²

Challenging norms

By working with boys and young men, SCS aims to provide a safe and secure environment to discuss, analyse and ultimately to challenge these norms. The strength and self-awareness that the members gain as a result of their involvement in the groups means they have the confidence and knowledge to negotiate safe sex practices for themselves and can be role models and agents of change within their communities.

iii. To combat gender violence

Gender violence in Ethiopia

Gender violence represents a serious violation of the rights of girls and women. Article 6 of the CRC recognises that children and young people are vulnerable and need special protection and support and that protection from violence and exploitation is vital for their maximum survival and development. The facts globally are bleak and warrant rehearsing: nearly one in four women experiences sexual violence by an intimate partner during their lives, and as many as one-third of all girls are forced into their first sexual experience.¹³ The World Bank tells us that the 'health burden from gender-based victimization among women age 15 to 44 is comparable to that posed by other risk factors and diseases high on the world agenda, including HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, sepsis during childbirth, cancer and cardiovascular disease'¹⁴.

Violence is not only a problem in itself. It is a major factor limiting women's and girl's health, education and empowerment, limiting women's participation in the work force and social life, causing a massive drain on social resources, acting as a template for many forms of socially-destructive attitudes and behaviours, and thwarting the realization of development goals, including the fulfilment of rights.

It is also commonplace in many guises in Ethiopia: seven out of ten women who have ever had a partner have suffered either physical or sexual abuse at home.¹⁵ A retrospective survey conducted in 2006 concerning violence against girls in Ethiopia unearthed some alarming findings.¹⁶ According to the survey results, 3 out of 10 girls in Ethiopia have been raped at least once before they are 18 years old. Other forms of violence experienced include being punched and kicked. One of the main reasons

¹¹ Korra A and Hail, M (1999) *Sexual behaviour and level of awareness on reproductive health among youths: Evidence from Harar, Eastern Ethiopia*, Ethiopian Journal of Health Development 13 (2) 107-114

¹² Borne, F van den (2005) *Trying to survive in times of poverty and AIDS. Women and multiple partners in Malawi*, Amsterdam Het Spinhuis

¹³ WHO World Report on Violence and Health, 2002

¹⁴ Lorie L. Heise, Jacqueline Pitanguy and Adrienne Germain, *Violence Against Women: The Hidden Health Burden*, World Bank Discussion Papers, No. 255, 1994, p. 17.

¹⁵ WHO, Multi-Country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence Against Women – Ethiopia Case Study

¹⁶ Stavropoulos, J. (2006) *Violence Against Girls in Africa: A Retrospective Survey in Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda. Survey findings on experiences of physical, sexual and psychological abuse*. African Child Policy Forum.

given for being assaulted is not accepting a man's request for sexual partnership, a request that girls face usually between the ages of 14 and 17. Being insulted, shouted or glared at, and embarrassed in front of others are the most frequently repeated forms of violence experienced by Ethiopian girls. Violence surrounds Ethiopian girls in the very places they should feel safe. They are psychologically abused primarily in their own homes by their families and then in their neighbourhoods by their communities. The women questioned indicated that male friends were their prime sexual abusers during their childhoods. In addition to male friends and child neighbours, other perpetrators reported by a great number of young women in all types of sexual abuse are adult male neighbours and strangers.

Amongst the members of the boys' groups we talked to it seemed that harassment and violence against girls and women was relatively commonplace and casually referred to. One 19 year old youth from the Hiwot group describes the following: *'I have seen young men forcing young girls to talk to them. If I see such acts I would usually interfere whether the boy is stronger than me or not. I will talk to the boys and tell them that they should not use force and should not hit the girl/young woman. This is a very frequent event in my neighbourhood.'* Another youth from the Hiwot group described how *'When a girl shouted at me or started talking too loud I would prefer to kick her not discussing it. But now I believe in discussion. I try to discuss everything calmly and look for the solution. Q Why did you attack the girl? Because I think she is disrespectful to me and I took it as an insult.'*

In theory, girls and women in Ethiopia do have recourse to the justice system: the penal code criminalizes rape and forced marriage and the family code sets 18 as the earliest age a boy and girl can marry. However, societal norms and limited infrastructure prevents many from seeking legal redress and offenders are prosecuted on a limited scale. Other forms of gender violence visited upon Ethiopian women and girls include forced marriage by abduction and early marriage which continues to be a widespread practice in several regions including Amhara, Oromiya and Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region¹⁷. In such a climate, acceptance of gender violence can quickly become the norm. A July 2005 World Bank study concluded that 88% of rural women and 69% of urban women believed their husbands had the right to beat them.

A space for respect

The causes of gender violence are manifold but rooted in gender inequalities. From a developmental perspective, there is evidence that styles of interaction in intimate relationships are 'rehearsed' during adolescence. Viewing girls and women as sexual objects, using violence against girls and women, delegating reproductive health and parenting to women, use of coercion to obtain sex and viewing sex as performance generally begin in adolescence (and even before) and may continue into adulthood. While ways of interacting with intimate partners change over time, context and relationship, there is strong reason to believe that reaching boys is a way to change how they interact with girls and women. If boys can be given space to learn to be

¹⁷ US State Department Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for Ethiopia (March 2007) <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2006/78734.htm>

respectful of women and to practice safer sexual activity, they often continue this behaviour into adulthood.

The objective of the boys' groups is to provide such a space for boys and young men to learn different, more respectful, ways of communicating with and behaving towards girls and young women which, it is hoped, will stay with them into adulthood.

C. How did the boys' groups develop?

The group run by IFSO/Eshet began in 2005 with the selection of 100 children and young people both in and out of school with an age range of between 10-24 years. They received 4 days of training on issues of SRH, HIV/AIDS and concepts of gender. A peer discussion group was then formed which meets every week in the Eshet compound in a suburb of Addis Ababa. The meeting lasts about two hours and they cover topics such as: Should you have sex before marriage?; Do you have to love a girl to have sex with her?; What are the different roles allotted to boys and girls? What would the world be like if there were no girls? And if no boys? About 40-50 children and young people attend most of whom are in school and most within the age bracket of 14-19. The groups are about two thirds male and a third female. There is a core group from the original cohort who received training and they also invite friends to attend. In addition they invite their parents to attend for a discussion once a month.

At Hiwot, 40 children and young people were given training similar to that described above and seven peer discussion groups were established. They meet weekly in different venues and are mostly between 14-19 years old and in school. The groups are about two thirds male and a third female. New people attend for three months and then are replaced. They discuss issues such as: Does a girl or woman enjoy sex in the same way a boy does?; Why can't a boy do domestic work?; What happens to girls and boys when they don't conform to gender stereotypes?; Is it only boys who abuse drugs?; Why should a boy always have to pay for a girl to go out on a date?; Who has the right to agree to an abortion – the woman or the man?

D. Challenges

- Lack of support from families and from the community in general owing to the traditional and conservative nature of Ethiopian society.¹⁸
- Resistance to change from boys themselves as evidenced for example by the number of drop outs from the training courses.
- Members fear rejection and stigma from their peers.

¹⁸ See Poluha, E (2004) 'The Power of Continuity *Ethiopia Through the Eyes of Its Children*' Nordic Africa Institute for more on a tradition of conformity within Ethiopian society.

- Parents fear that open discussion of SRH could encourage early sexual practice, reduce respect for parents, encourage children to confront social norms and expose them to risk.
- Slippage in structured discussion so that issues are not developed upon week on week.
- Lack of monitoring enabling misconceptions about the concept of gender inequality to take root.
- There is a lack of time for working parents to talk to their children.
- Lack of security in finding meeting spaces.
- Lack of structured monitoring and evaluation.
- Lack of incentives for boys to be part of the groups and to continue with the groups as young men.
- The group is not homogenous and there is a failure to tailor messages for age groups which means younger children (under 14) are not really involved as the subject matter is perceived to be too 'adult' for them.
- There is a lack of support and involvement of other stake-holders such as the kebele, schools and other organisations.
- Lack of sustainability of the programmes in the long-term owing in part to the lack of involvement of other stake-holders.
- Misconceptions arising within the groups are not always addressed.

E. Successes

'..being a member of the Boys Group is above all entertaining, educative, a place where one makes a difference. I am very happy that I am part of such a group.'

18 year old boy

Empowerment

In the year, to year and a half that these two boys' group programmes have been running, they have achieved a great deal in terms of empowering their members. They have enhanced their members' knowledge of SRH and promoted positive attitudes towards risk free practices. An 18 year old youth from one group stated that *'I used to follow what the ignorant people say - 'there is no AIDS after 10:00 pm'. Now, I know that this is a wrong attitude that will not take me far.'*

Participation in the groups has encouraged them to speak out about how they feel about gender inequality, about gender violence and about HIV/AIDS. It has given them self-confidence in expressing themselves, the knowledge and skills needed to act as agents of change within their community and fostered tolerance and respect towards other members of the group even though they may at times disagree with them. An 18 year old girl from one group describe the change in herself: *'I have seen so many changes in myself since joining the Boys Group... 1. I am able to respect men as they deserve my respect; 2. I have won attention at home; 3. I have avoided shyness and become self confident; 4. I am able to communicate my ideas clearly; 5. I have got so much knowledge and awareness'*

Many of the members described how they have acquired the ability to resist peer pressure, resolve conflicts in a peaceful manner, think critically, make decisions and communicate well because of their involvement in the groups. Many perceive

themselves to be agents of change within their communities: a young man from one group describes how he was given the nickname 'Anti-Aids' because he talked so much about it in his community. When asked what the purpose of the boys' group was, a boy said that it was *'to create a boy that respects his mother, sister, girl friends, lover, and woman teacher. It is also to become role models of change.'*

Promoting Equality

Some of the boys and young men described how they had developed a strong sense of responsibility to their family and future family and described how they would ensure that their future relationships with girls and women would be equal. A boy from one group said: *'Whenever I think of my future and married life it will be based on equality. My children will have also a better view than myself and that is a lot dependent on me. It is up to me to shape children who strongly believe in gender equality.'* Another 18 year old male stated *'I hope I will be an advocate of women rights in my future career and married life and also be a good husband and good father.'*

There are many examples of members explaining how their attitudes towards girls and women have changed positively because of their involvement in the group: *Some do not know that women are capable of doing anything that a man does. I used to be with that group of people who thinks that way. Now I am changed because I am well informed about gender equality. It is the knowledge that makes the change.'* 19 year old male. *'Joining the Boys group makes me faithful to my girl friend, a strong believer in discussion, respectful of girls and women teachers in school and very supportive to my sisters and mother at home'* 17 year old male.

Many of the members reported a change in their attitude towards domestic work and admitted proudly to doing it. One 17 year old from IFSO/Eshet said that *'I feel happy when I can decrease the domestic work load of my mother and my sisters whenever I do domestic work. This has also given me the skills I need and the love and respect from my family and neighbours.'* During the parent's meeting at Eshet, one of the boys from the group took the lead in making the coffee during the coffee ceremony which is traditionally very much a female role.

The Future

The groups have been a source of inspiration amongst the NGO community both within Ethiopia and abroad. In May 2006, SCS organised a Pan-African conference on the theme 'Partnering with boys and young men to address gender based violence and HIV/AIDS.' This included field visits to the boys' groups in order to show participants a practical example of engaging with boys to challenge gender stereotypes and discriminations. Following this conference, many of SCS' partner organisations in Ethiopia became interested in establishing similar projects: one in particular, Forum on Street Children, has institutionalised the concept into an existing sexual exploitation and violence programme. In addition, Save the Children Norway has now started up a similar programme in Northern Ethiopia having consulted with the boys' groups in Addis Ababa. It is hoped that in the future, the experience gained from these boys' groups will assist in targeting advocacy with both the government and within civil society in Ethiopia. It is also hoped that the programmes can be scaled up and funding to enable this has been applied for.

F. Lessons to be Learned

i. Misconceptions

Clarifying concepts: what is gender equality?

Some fundamental concepts are missing from the members' thinking and discourse and this needs to be addressed by renewed training of both members and facilitators. When asked 'what is gender equity?' without exception all of the members defined it in terms of the division of domestic work. They pointed out the inherent unfairness that girls were expected to perform domestic duties rather than study and that they were not allowed to play outside from a young age (four years was given as the age at which gender differences really become pronounced). They demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of gender equity in terms of social expectations. A 14 year old boy describes how *'There was a lot of pressure on my sister. She immediately starts working at home just right after she returned from school. But not me, I will go to play right after school, then do my studies and sleep. My sister always sleeps after we all are slept. She is the last one to go to sleep. I used to side with my Mom whenever she orders my sister. But after I joined the Boys Group I now side with my sister. I have changed so much since I joined Boys Group. Now my mother has also changed after my advice. I also do domestic work equally with my sister. Now, me and my sister support each other with domestic work.'*

To a certain extent this focus on gender equality in terms of domestic roles at home is to be expected. It is in the domestic arena where boys begin to understand what it is to be masculine by observing the ways in which men take precedence in the home and exercise power over women and children so that less involvement in domestic roles becomes identified as part of being masculine.¹⁹ However, even amongst older interviewees, no-one was able to give an explanation of the causal link between gender inequalities and risky sex practices and violence against girls and women. When pushed, they would talk about how rape can increase the likelihood of transmission of HIV but no-one, even after leading questions, could proffer an explanation as to why girls or women might agree or submit to unsafe sex in the context of a relationship.

There did not seem to be much awareness amongst members of how negotiation of safe sex practices such as using a condom could be problematic in a context of gender inequality. In Ethiopia, girls and women are expected to be sexually naïve and passive. 'Women who assert condom use may be perceived as sexually knowledgeable or promiscuous and therefore may be looked down upon by their partners.'²⁰ When describing what attributes a girl should have to be accepted in society, the boys talked about qualities such as being 'circumcised', 'not promiscuous and easy going' and 'shy when approached by a man asking for love'. She will not get acceptance if she is 'too sexy'. Girls and women are socially restricted from making demands upon boys and men and the very act of proposing condom use in order to

¹⁹ Julie Pulerwitz, Horizons/PATH Gary Barker, Márcio Segundo, and Marcos Nascimento, Instituto Promundo (2006) *Promoting More Gender-equitable Norms and Behaviors Among Young Men as an HIV/AIDS Prevention Strategy*

²⁰ Lucas R (2001) Sex, sexuality and the meaning of AIDS in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, PhD dissertation University of Michigan

protect themselves might suggest a promiscuity and an assertiveness and confidence which boys and men would not welcome.

The connection between gender inequality and gender violence is also unclear in the members' thinking. Most of the boys and young men defined gender violence in terms of rape and some implied that this was a diminishing problem in Addis Ababa (as opposed to rural areas). There did not seem to be a clear understanding of the spectrum of behaviour that can be gender violence, ranging from harassment and intimidation of girls walking to and from school, to gang rape, nor that the root cause of much gender violence is gender inequality.

It is very significant that members are beginning to challenge normative roles by undertaking domestic work and this demonstrates a commitment to the idea of equality. However, it is central to the objectives of the boys' groups that the inter-relationship between sexuality and violence and the norms of gender roles be explored and challenged. The concept of gender equality needs to move out of the domestic arena and into the wider world of sexual relationships and gender violence so that the boys' group can have more of an impact. It seems likely that this concept was not fully addressed as part of the training and so has not been incorporated into the boys' groups' discourses.

One way of improving this might be to explicitly include this in terms of training and another might be to have small rolling programmes of refresher training to ensure the concept of gender equality is broadened outwards. In any event, facilitators must be clear that when difficult themes emerge then they can seek guidance and assistance from the organisers.

Clarifying concepts: rural v urban problems

Many members talked about problems of gender violence (including harmful traditional practices such as female genital mutilation) and HIV/AIDS as something which only happened in rural areas away from their own experiences. The way in which gender inequality manifests itself in both rural and urban contexts should be explored to ensure that the risks of HIV/AIDS transmission and of gender violence in urban areas are very real to the members and not perceived as something which happen elsewhere in Ethiopia, somewhere outside of their own communities.

But boys are discriminated against too!

At one group in particular, the members appeared to view the groups as a forum for discussion of how boys and young men are discriminated against in society. One boy explained: *'I always say men and women are equal. That hasn't changed. I never agree with the idea that states women are oppressed. I do not agree with that.'* It was suggested that in the West, women had been so empowered by legislation that men were fearful of them and that the balance between them had tilted too far: *'in the west the men are oppressed not in power but especially in sexuality. We heard it from people who have been abroad...that there are such problems in England and America. Especially, women try to get the money of rich men by accusing them of rape and other charges. I think men and women hate each other and this comes from our difference. I think the women are too much empowered. Like the rules we have in our country. I think the same is happening in our country. I think the law is not good. The most important focus should be*

the education. **Q. Which laws are you referring to?** I mean the laws that support women.

It is of course important to understand the nature of discrimination operating against boys and young men, not in order to excuse violence, unsafe sexual practices and the sexual coercion of women but to put these behaviours into context. One girl described how *'Previously, I used to generalize that all men/boys are bad. But now I understood that boys/young men behave like this due to the social pressure from the family and the society.'* However, the impression given was that the members saw the boys' group foremost as a means of analysing and coping with discrimination against boys and young men rather than as a means of addressing gender inequality amongst both girls and boys. There needs, of course, to be space to discuss how boys experience discrimination but at the same time to demonstrate how patriarchal power structures function and how both boys and girls are victims in this structure.

There is a danger that highlighting society's discriminatory attitudes and marginalisation of low-income, urban boys and young men may embitter and create division amongst the members. This focus on discrimination against boys and young men needs to be complemented with a clear explanation of how the cultural expectations of boys and young men contribute to the transmission of HIV and to gender violence. The boys' groups' members must also be encouraged not to adopt or act out such damaging cultural norms. Both groups could benefit from more clarity about how discrimination against boys and girls impacts on the transmission of HIV/AIDS and gender violence.

ii. Programme development

Future development

There was no real sense that the members themselves could lead the programmes further - they had ideas but did not feel they could do it themselves but were restricted by the given framework. One female member of the group describes the relationship with the organisers in these terms: *'They provide us financial and materials support to facilitate the boy's group discussion. That is the contact we have as far as I know. They give us the topic and give us stationary support for the discussion.'* At present the facilitators meet on a monthly basis with the organisers to discuss progress but before developing the programme further, members' views must be sought.

Whilst the members' involvement in terms of the actual implementation of the programme is excellent they could also be more involved in monitoring and evaluation. At present two or three of the group members complete a monitoring form each week but they have not received any training specifically on how to do this or why it is so important.

Structuring discussions

It seems that there has been a degree of drift in terms of over-sight from the organisers so that, over time, the discussions have become lacking in structure and a sense of progress. The discussions need to develop ideas week on week to build on the members' learning and understanding. Since the facilitators are on the whole

excellent they should be trained specifically on new guidelines which ensure that core ideas are discussed and conclusions reached.

Reference materials

Having a fixed reference library with age-appropriate materials in English and Amharic would be very helpful for members to consult in their spare time to widen their information base.

Referral Services

There should be a more structured relationship with the members to ensure that they know how to access further advice, information and if necessary counselling. Both organisations could improve the availability of referral services available to members.

Security of meeting space

The venues for meeting are insecure. At one group, the compound is large and spacious but the rent expensive and it is a struggle to find it year on year. At the other the members meet where they can. The group we observed had access to a local government building but others meet in public at cafes.

iii. Diversifying membership

In terms of the organisation of the groups, it would be beneficial, and challenging, to broaden membership to make it a more diverse group involving out of school children and young people. In both groups there is a significant bias towards children who are in school and also a bias towards young people in the 16-20 age bracket. Many of the children are also involved in other initiatives such Anti-Aids Clubs so already have a base of knowledge. They do bring their friends to the groups to participate, however, it would be good to widen the constituency of members to include children who are out of school. Given that in Ethiopia, the proportion of school-age youth actually enrolled in school is less than about one-third of the total eligible population, out of school youth do demand attention.²¹ In addition they are an important target for the boys' groups because they are likely to have inadequate information about sexuality and condoms perhaps because of illiteracy and their non-attendance at school.

We can only speculate why younger children do not become involved but they could be encouraged with more tailored age specific materials. The youngest member of the group we observed was 11. All members agreed that it is good to have younger children involved since they are easier to change and influence. However, in line with their evolving capacities, members in the age range of 11-14 or 15 should have tailored and age appropriate information. The lack of attendance of young men over 20 is explained by one employee at Hiwot because of a lack of incentives and other more pressing calls on their time.

²¹ Tadele, G (2006) 'Bleak Prospects: Young men, sexuality and HIV/AIDS in an Ethiopian town.' African Studies Centre Research Report 80/2006

iv. Reaching outwards

At present the boys' groups, at best, have a powerful impact on the members involved. In the absence of any evaluation work to date, it is hard to get a sense of the actual numbers of children and young people who have been involved with these groups however, it is likely to be in the low hundreds. Based on the qualitative information we obtained during this documentation, we can say that the wider impact is sporadic, random and unrecorded. An 18 year old youth explains it rather optimistically in this way: *'The main impact we have had is in the changes of the boys in the group. The attitude of most boys has changed. My old view and current view are quite different. I used to down-grade women but now I have realized that there are so many girls that are better than me, including girls who are involved in the group. In addition, there are so many young people reached by members of the boys group. These young people have changed their attitude towards women.'*

Much more work could be done to ensure structured dialogue with the community in order to widen the impact of the groups. As one 17 year old youth explains: *'I know we are doing a wonderful job. We have become so popular in the community due to what we do but we need to do more.'*

v. Monitoring and Evaluation

Both monitoring and evaluation are crucial to ensuring that the programmes develop and remain vital without losing their momentum. Both organisations could improve their monitoring processes and tie them in more closely with their base-line studies to ensure that when the times come for a full evaluation, the monitoring documents are accurate and useful and enable a full picture of the impact of the boys' groups to be made. At the very minimum the monitoring should consist of the following: both organisations should ensure that the facilitators of each discussion session keep records on the group dynamics, challenges and successes, and attendance of the group education. The format of this report should provide a qualitative assessment of what was discussed and what they thought of the discussion (challenges, interesting reflections, issues that had not been anticipated, etc.). The report should also include central themes discussed; difficulties encountered in the facilitation of the activities; topics that particularly interested the group; topics that were particularly difficult to discuss (including possible reasons for this); perceived changes among the youth; how the youth correlated the issues discussed to their daily lives, communities, and families; the dynamic between the facilitators and groups; and other points that the facilitator deemed relevant for inclusion. The organisers should then hold weekly meetings with the facilitators to monitor the process and to provide advice and support.

One tool that is pertinent in terms of eventual evaluation is the Gender-Equitable Men Scale (GEM) which was devised in Brazil. It measures attitudes toward gender norms related to topics such as HIV/AIDS prevention, partner violence, and sexual relationships and, with contextual adjustment, could be very useful in ensuring that meaningful evaluation takes place.²² This scale includes seventeen items which

²²Julie Pulerwitz, Horizons/PATH Gary Barker, Márcio Segundo, and Marcos Nascimento, Instituto Promundo (2006) *Promoting More Gender-equitable Norms and Behaviors Among Young Men as an HIV/AIDS Prevention Strategy*

measure what are commonly understood as “traditional” attitudes toward gender norms related to HIV/AIDS and pregnancy prevention, violence, sexual relationships, domestic chores and care-giving, and homosexuality.

At present the relationship between the existing monitoring procedures and the base-line studies done is not clear which means that any evaluation cannot be effective. One option is to conduct a new base-line study mid-programme founded upon the GEM scale adjusted for the Ethiopian context and to carefully tailor the monitoring processes to fit with this base-line.

vi. Sustainability

In order for children to enjoy their rights, a ‘system’ of rights and responsibilities has to be made to function. Those who hold the rights need to be empowered and assisted to claim them and those who have duties and responsibilities have to be able to meet their obligations and be held accountable for doing so. We have seen that the members of the boys’ groups have become empowered and confident about claiming their rights as a result of their participation. However, the duty bearers responsible for fulfilling their rights have not yet been held accountable within the programme. Although governments are often seen as the primary duty-bearers, and indeed have the responsibility to ensure that rights are secured, other elements of society are also involved from the level of international institutions, through to individuals in the family and community.

In this instance, duty bearers responsible for ensuring that the rights of children are fulfilled in relation to gender equality, gender violence and the transmission of HIV/AIDS might include: the kebele (local administration), schools, religious institutions, Idirs (local community groups), health departments, other youth clubs and family members. At present there is very little engagement of the boys’ groups with duty bearers within the Hiwot programme aside from informally through family members. The IFSO/Eshet programme runs a project support group which meets quarterly to discuss the project. This consists of people from IFSO/Eshet, the kebele, schools, church, HAPCO, the Health department of the local sub-city and health centres. This should be supported further as a crucial component of sustainability.

In order for the boys’ group programme to be sustainable, a broad range of relevant duty bearers need to be involved and their commitment strengthened so that they can properly fulfil their responsibilities. Furthermore, alternative sources of income for the groups should be generated. At present, they would cease to function without further donor funding. Indeed, the boys’ groups did not meet at all during the early part of January 2007 because the partner organisations were awaiting funding from SCS for the year to begin. This emphasises their vulnerability. The programme is innovative and at a very early stage of its development, however, it is vital that both organisations start to involve other duty-bearers as soon as possible.

G. Conclusions

The intention in setting up these boys' groups was to contribute to the long term process of combating gender inequality, gender violence and the transmission of HIV/AIDS by way of discussion and peer education amongst boys and young men in Addis Ababa. These programmes are unique and ground-breaking in Ethiopia and are already acting as a source of inspiration to other organisations.

A great deal of work remains to be done to improve these programmes in terms of re-training, provision of resources, restructuring of monitoring and evaluation processes and in particular of working towards future sustainability. However, the work the boys' groups do week after week in their meetings and outside in their communities and the energy, commitment and enthusiasm they have for their groups is very inspiring. They are dynamic and vibrant and it is clear that the members flourish as a result of their participation. Even though tangible progress is painfully slow and incremental, they are an important and valuable tool in achieving the long-term goal of gender equality in Ethiopia.

End.

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