

# Examining the effectiveness of a gender transformative approach in economic empowerment programs to reduce Intimate Partner Violence



The Global Women's Institute

THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY



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# Foreword

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is a barrier to well-being and development. Whilst VAWG is preventable, there is no one solution for addressing such a complex issue. Driven by gender inequality, tackling VAWG demands many people, from diverse sectors and disciplines, coming together to find solutions. Ending VAWG requires partnership and sustained investment. Innovative solutions require multiple voices and different ways of looking at an issue, extending beyond specialist VAWG programs and interventions.

To extend our menu of VAWG interventions, more research is needed on the impact of a broad range of development programs not specifically designed to address gender-based violence on levels of VAWG in our communities. At a minimum, our efforts to increase gender equality and empower women should also understand the impacts on violence related outcomes.

Moreover, the mainstreaming of VAWG measures into non-specialist development programs, if done well, can uncover violence experienced by women in our programs and shed light on whether the programs are impacting on this violence. Measuring VAWG, however, is a complex undertaking. Specialist skills and knowledge are needed to ensure that the

data gathered is reliable, valid and does no harm to the people in our studies. Ethical measurement of VAWG strongly includes practitioner voices. When research is conducted without the expertise of those working for decades to address VAWG, we may incorrectly measure program impacts and unfairly bias the effectiveness of the program. A collaborative approach to research, with researchers and practitioners working together, is the solution because partnership brings together research expertise and practice-based knowledge, reassuring us that the research findings are both useful to the field and most importantly remain true to the lived experiences of the women we are working with and for.

By bringing practice and research together to explore the impact of an economic empowerment program on intimate partner violence, Send a Cow's study is a model of best practice, providing lessons that extend far beyond what has been learned at a project level. By measuring VAWG, the study has shown that the practical tools and methodologies in Send a Cow programming, which were not specifically designed to reduce violence, still did so. It also showed that there is a level of violence happening within some households that may have escalated and

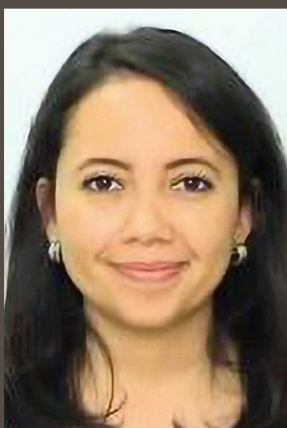
should be addressed. Without this partnership, the global community would not have known of these impacts and Send a Cow would not have understood the full transformative potential of its work.

Given the high levels of violence in our communities, the importance of measuring VAWG should be a priority. We need to know how programs are impacting the women and men with whom we are working and impact on levels of VAWG must be a standard program evaluation measure.

It is a brave undertaking for researchers and programmers to partner on evaluation of a beloved program. Such partnerships, whilst essential for strengthening efforts to prevent violence against women, can be challenging, especially if issues of power and experience are not addressed up front. This project is an example for the field on how this can be done successfully and how research and practice together has been used to strengthen a program affecting the lives of women and girls and their community.



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# Abbreviations

<b>DHS</b>	Government of Kenya Demographic Health Survey
<b>EASE</b>	Send a Cow's Economic and Social Empowerment approach
<b>FAO</b>	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
<b>GBV</b>	Gender-Based Violence
<b>GSI</b>	Gender & Social Inclusion
<b>GW</b>	Global Women's Institute
<b>GWU</b>	George Washington University
<b>HIV</b>	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
<b>IPV</b>	Intimate Partner Violence
<b>MEL</b>	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
<b>SAC</b>	Send a Cow
<b>SACK</b>	Send a Cow Kenya
<b>SVRI</b>	Sexual Violence Research Initiative
<b>THM</b>	Transformative Household Methodology
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNFPA</b>	United Nations Population Fund
<b>VAWG</b>	Violence Against Women & Girls
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organization



# Executive Summary

## **Context: Violence Against Women and Girls in Kenya**

Globally, more than a third of women have experienced sexual and/or physical violence at some point in their lives (World Health Organization, 2021). There is widespread evidence of the harmful effects of violence on women's physical, mental, sexual and reproductive health, as well as on their productivity (Maman, S. et al. 2000; Swanberg, et al. 2005; World Health Organization, 2013). Women in Kenya suffer even higher rates of violence with 38% experiencing violence in their lifetime, rising to 60% in western Kenya, where the risk factors of poverty and low education are prevalent (World Health Organization, 2021; Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2015). Violence against women has significant economic costs in terms of expenditure on services, decreased productivity and lost income for women and their families (Duvvury, et al., 2013; McLean & Gonzalez Bocinski, 2017). The ongoing COVID-19 crisis is compounding risk factors for VAWG and is likely to be increasing intimate partner violence (IPV) at household level (Santagostino Recavarren & Elefante, 2020; Peterman et al., 2020).

## **Purpose of the research: To examine the effectiveness of gender transformation in economic empowerment programs to reduce IPV**

Gender equality and economic empowerment are intrinsically linked. This research project, led by the Global Women's Institute at The George Washington University, set out to examine the effectiveness of Send a Cow's gender transformative approach in economic empowerment programs on reducing IPV levels in rural communities of western Kenya. Send a Cow (SAC) is a non-governmental organization that works alongside rural women and their families to empower them socially and economically through agricultural development. SAC utilizes an Economic and Social Empowerment (EASE) approach, that includes a strong gender component, together with its Transformative Household Methodology (THM). Though not designed to tackle violence directly, SAC staff saw the potential for EASE to address it. Even though VAWG was not openly discussed in communities, due to secrecy, fear and stigmatization, SAC staff were aware of its presence. The aim of the research was to 1. Develop specific, appropriate and safe tools and approaches for measuring rates of violence; 2. Increase the capacity of SAC staff to ethically collect data on violence; 3. Identify best practices from SAC's EASE approach to change attitudes to, and experience of, violence for women.

## The impact of Send a Cow's EASE approach on levels of violence and controlling behaviors

Formative research into the situation of women before and after their participation in SAC's programs found that prior to intervention, women were financially dependent on men, unable to provide food or meet the basic needs of their families and experiencing severe poverty and food insecurity. Men dominated decision-making, whilst women were over-burdened with work. Through SAC's EASE approach, women and men reported a reduction in women's workloads and an increase in their confidence and involvement in decision-making. Women were earning income from agricultural activities, becoming economically empowered and food secure. Relationships were better, with men and women respecting each other more, whilst women were able to take up positions of leadership within the community. Prior to delivering their programs, Send a Cow Kenya (SACK) found high levels of violence within the target communities, with 71% of women participants having experienced violence from a partner within their lifetime. After following the EASE approach, women reported considerable reductions in levels of physical, sexual, emotional and economic IPV. For example, over 60% of women reported that physical or sexual violence had stopped or decreased in the previous year. The reduction in IPV levels was sustained, or enhanced, for some women. However, for a small proportion of women, IPV increased during the period of intervention, particularly for those in unequal relationships, influenced by patriarchal attitudes and controlling behaviors. Exploration of traditional beliefs found that negative attitudes that foster and normalize violence were still held by some men and women. Most women participants continued to maintain gender inequitable views, however, only half thought that the use of violence by a partner was acceptable. Overall, the research showed that SAC's EASE approach had a considerable impact on levels of and attitudes towards violence. Comparison of this approach with documented interventions shows that EASE includes many of the factors identified as being essential for tackling violence against women. The study identified gaps and areas for further investigation, particularly around how to improve the efficacy of SAC's EASE approach to address violence, overcoming gaps and challenges, sharing the learning and developing THM.





# Introduction

## Violence Against Women and Girls

Gender equality is a fundamental human right and a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world. Global commitments and declarations include: the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action at the Fourth World Conference on Women; the United Nations (UN) Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security; and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. More recently the UN Sustainable Development Goals were established, with Goal 5 aiming to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls to ensure their equal rights (United Nations, 2015).

One of the most severe consequences of gender inequality is violence against women and girls (VAWG). In the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, the UN defines VAWG as “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life” (United Nations, 1993). Despite progress made in addressing VAWG since the landmark Fourth World Conference on Women was held in Beijing in 1995, it remains a pandemic issue. WHO estimates that one third of women worldwide have experienced sexual or physical violence at some point in their lives (World Health Organization, 2021).

While there are many forms of VAWG, one of the most common types of violence experienced by women is intimate partner violence (IPV) (World Health Organization, 2021). IPV is far more commonly reported than non-partner violence globally, though both are likely to be under-reported due to issues such as stigma or fear of disclosure during surveys. While IPV is commonly experienced by women and girls throughout the globe, some contexts – such as armed conflict, natural disasters or other acute shocks - may exacerbate the risk of experiencing this violence. In particular, the ongoing COVID-19 crisis is compounding risk factors for VAWG and may be increasing intimate partner and other types of household violence (Santagostino Recavarren & Elefante, 2020; Peterman et al., 2020). The UN Population Fund estimated that for every three months that countries are in COVID-19-related lockdown, there will be an additional 15 million gender-based violence (GBV) incidents (UNFPA, 2020). Prevention measures against Coronavirus, such as lock-down and closure of businesses, are keeping people at home and aggravating the stresses that foster violence such as food insecurity, economic hardship, health issues and gender inequity. Tensions within the home and community are higher, driving more violence, whilst restrictions on movement are making it difficult for survivors to access services and support. It has been proposed, amid the COVID-19 crisis, that all sectors need to prioritize three key components of gender equality in their work: learning and listening to local people about the situation; integrating and adapting solutions into a project; and finding avenues to distribute information about the challenges, learnings and successes.

## Box 1 Forms of violence against women and girls

### Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)

includes any of the following perpetrated within an intimate relationship, whether by a current, or former, partner; and any behavior that causes physical, sexual or psychological harm

- Violent and/or controlling behaviors
- Physical aggression
- Sexual coercion
- Psychological abuse
- Economic coercion

### Physical violence

Intentional use of physical force with the potential to cause death, injury or harm

### Sexual violence

- Any sexual act or attempt to obtain a sexual act
- Unwanted sexual comments or acts directed against a person's sexuality

### Psychological, or emotional, violence

- Any act, or omission, that damages the self-esteem, identity, or development of the individual
- Humiliation
- Forced isolation
- Threats of harm to the individual or someone they care about
- Repeated yelling, denigration or degradation and inducing fear through intimidation
- Controlling behavior
- Destruction of possessions

### Economic violence

Denying a woman access to, or control over, resources  
Causing, or attempting to cause an individual to become financially dependent  
Obstructing independent economic activity or access to employment  
Denial of funds, food or basic needs or access to healthcare

(Jansen, 2016; SVRI, 2021)



## Risk Factors and Consequences of VAWG

Documented risk factors for experiencing GBV are wide-ranging and include: poverty; low education levels; exposure to and experience of abuse in childhood; and partners' alcohol or drug use (World Health Organization, 2019). However, the underlying root causes of violence are considered to be: unequal gender dynamics and patriarchal norms, including attitudes of acceptance of subordinate status of women and girls; male privilege; and violence itself. Factors specifically associated with IPV include: a past history of violence; marital discord; and learned behaviors such as male control of their partner (Heise, 1998). There is a growing evidence base on the harmful effects of VAWG on women's physical, mental, sexual and reproductive health. Studies demonstrate that women who experience violence have an increased risk of contracting HIV and other sexually transmitted infections due to forced or unprotected sexual intercourse (Maman, S. et al. 2000). They are more likely to experience adverse reproductive health outcomes such as unintended or adolescent pregnancy, miscarriage and stillbirth (World Health Organization, 2013). Moreover, IPV results in high levels of traumatic stress which may lead to depression, anxiety disorders or even suicide (Swanberg et al., 2005; World Health Organization, 2013). Direct effects of VAWG also include fatal and non-fatal physical injuries, which commonly go unreported due to fear or lack of access to health services (World Health Organization, 2013). Violence against women is one of the major barriers to their participation in economic, social and political spheres, and carries a huge economic cost (Duvvury et al., 2013). It is a widely held view that gender equality and economic empowerment are intrinsically linked and should be jointly considered when addressing gender disparities. Poverty is known to be a key driver of violence against women and girls, though the relationship is bi-directional: poverty increases the risk of experiencing violence, whilst violence reduces productivity and therefore exacerbates poverty (Gibbs and Bishop, 2019). Poorer women and girls have less decision-making power in households than men and boys and therefore often become dependent, which makes it harder for them to leave abusive relationships (Murphy et al. 2020; Robinson et al., 2020). Poverty also increases other risk factors such as low educational attainment, ill-health and stress (Brisson et al., 2020; Engle & Black, 2008; Wagstaff, 2002). Women and girls experiencing IPV are likely to be poorer as a result of reduced productivity and any additional costs of medical and healthcare (McLean & Gonzalez Bocinski, 2017).



## Context and background



# Context and background

## Violence against women and girls in Kenya

Globally, Africa has one of the highest rates of VAWG, with 36% of women reporting experiences of IPV at some point in their lives (World Health Organization, 2021). In Kenya, the rates are similar, with an estimated 38% of ever-partnered women aged 15-49 having suffered physical and/or sexual violence during their lifetime, and 23% experiencing violence in the last 12 months (World Health Organization, 2021). However, all Kenyan women do not suffer equally and IPV rates throughout the country vary by age, background and poverty levels. Documented risk factors that contribute to VAWG in Kenya include poverty, gender inequality, low educational attainment, occupational status, unemployment, marital status and substance abuse, as well as inequitable social and legal structures (Lawoko et al., 2007; Kimuna & Djamba, 2008; Jaoko, 2010; Gust et al., 2017; Shafer & Koyiet, 2018; Odero et al., 2014). These findings are supported by data that suggests that less-educated women are more likely to experience violence than those who are more highly educated, although data from the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics shows that the highest levels of violence are experienced by women who did not complete primary, rather than those with no education at all (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2015). The risk of violence for women in the highest wealth quintile is also much less than that of women in other wealth categories (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2015). Ever-partnered women who are employed (not for cash) have the highest rate of physical, sexual or emotional violence (52%) followed by women employed for cash (51%) and those who are not in paid work (32%) (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2015).

Traditional norms, negative attitudes about gender and acceptance of violence are key factors that underpin VAWG in Kenya and intersect with issues of poverty and economic insecurity (Lawoko, 2008). Traditional beliefs about the roles of men as head of the household and provider for the family, and the roles of women as child minder in charge of cooking, cleaning and fetching wood and water, are often used to justify violence, particularly when a woman is considered to be failing to fulfil her allotted duties as wife and mother (Lawoko, 2008). Similarly, when men are not meeting perceived obligations to provide for their families, marital conflict is likely to emerge. Stresses such as poverty and substance abuse compound the issues, triggering violent incidents (Shafer & Koyiet, 2018). Poverty may also be a barrier for women seeking to escape violent relationships. Institutions that should provide support to women experiencing violence, such as police, health services, community leaders and lawyers, may themselves espouse inequitable attitudes and accept the use of violence against women as 'the norm' and therefore contribute to the barriers facing women who seek help (Odero et al., 2014).

Women from western Kenya suffer even higher rates of violence than those from other parts of the country, with 60% of ever-partnered women aged 15-49 having experienced at least one form of IPV – emotional, physical or sexual (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2015). The elevated rate may be linked to the high prevalence of control exercised by male partners as 30% of partnered women from western Kenya reported having been subjected to three or more controlling behaviors, including accusations of being unfaithful, not being permitted to meet with friends, having limited contact with their own family, or men insisting on knowing where women are at all times (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2015).

The Government of Kenya and Kenyan civil society have responded to, and are working to address, these high rates of violence experienced by women and girls. The government has enacted laws, policies and regulations including the Sexual Offences Act (2006), the Penal Code (2009), Constitution of Kenya (2010), the Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation Act (2011) and National Gender & Equality Commission Act (2011), as well as the Protection Against Domestic Violence Act (Government of Kenya, 2015). The latter took an expansive view of VAWG, acknowledging and including potentially sensitive subjects such as sexual violence within marriage, economic abuse, early and forced marriage, and wife inheritance. It also details the duties of law enforcement in cases of VAWG and institutes key legal mechanisms such as protection orders for women who report violence (Government of Kenya, 2015). Other efforts to mitigate against the impact of VAWG in Kenya include the establishment of the first Gender Violence Recovery Centre by Nairobi Women's Hospital in 2001, which offers free and comprehensive medical treatment and psychosocial support to survivors of violence (Gesora Ondicho, 2018). Since then, several other centers have been established at government health facilities with the remit to provide support services, carry out prevention activities that promote behavioral change and train medical personnel, the police and judicial officers. Although a positive step forward, these centers are difficult for women and girls living in rural areas to access and, like many other public sector services in Kenya, are hindered by budgetary constraints (Gesora Ondicho, 2018). Despite these legal and social measures to tackle VAWG, violence continues to be a pervasive problem in Kenya that needs to be addressed.

## Economic status of women in Kenya

Across the world, women face greater barriers to accessing productive resources and economic opportunities than men (FAO, 2017). In line with women from other African countries, Kenyan women living in poorer households are limited in their ability to participate in the formal labor force, earn lower wages and are less likely to own property than men (World Bank, 2018). Opportunities to engage in the labor force are constrained by a range of socio-demographic variables including religious norms, education, marital status, and the presence of young children in the household (World Bank, 2018). In terms of marital status, women who



are widowed, separated, divorced or in polygamous marriages are more likely to participate in the labor force than women in monogamous relationships. Similarly, the probability of a woman participating in the labor force is reduced by 2% for every child she has between the age of 0-5 (World Bank, 2018). These numbers may be a reflection of how partnered women are more likely to fulfil traditional roles within the household, which can create both tangible and intangible barriers that prevent them from seeking outside employment.

Employment opportunities and participation in the formal labor market also changes in relation to location. For example, a woman living in an urban area of Kenya is 7% less likely to enter the labor force than a woman living in rural areas of the country. This difference is attributed to challenges associated with childcare and labor market opportunities, however education increases a woman's likelihood of being able to find employment, even if the level attained is only primary education (World Bank, 2018). Nevertheless, even when employed, Kenyan women earn 30% less than men on average, which is attributable to factors such as age, education, working hours, industry, occupation, and urban-rural location (World Bank, 2018).

Traditional patterns of sectoral segregation have been found to impact male and female employment in Kenya, such that the majority of women work in agriculture and services, while men engage more in the industrial sector. At the same time, although women represent more than half of the agricultural sector's workforce, they are the primary decision maker for only 39% of agricultural plots (World Bank, 2018). Analysts have proposed that if women had the same access to productive resources that men do, they could enhance yields on their farms by at least 20-30%, increasing food production and reducing hunger (FAO, 2010-11).

VAWG is recognized as a significant threat to food security as it undermines the physical and psychosocial well-being of women, whilst injuries, illness or low self-esteem affect their capacity to work and their ability to produce or secure food for themselves and their families. Studies among subsets of Kenyan women have demonstrated that food insecurity is associated with higher rates of IPV (Hatcher et al., 2021). COVID-19 has brought increasing awareness to these issues and demonstrates that VAWG is a systemic issue that can be exacerbated by situational conditions and also a key issue for agriculture programming. Gender equality is essential to economic development and, when men and women of all ages and ethnicities equally take part in a society, it strengthens the whole.

## Poverty Alleviation and Economic Empowerment Interventions tackling VAWG

Many different interventions that seek to reduce VAWG have been developed but the evidence Economic empowerment targeting women and girls in low-income settings has been one promising avenue for programming due to the correlation between IPV and economic dependence of women on their male partners (Heise & Kotsadam, 2015). Researchers have proposed that financial autonomy can increase a woman's value to the household and her power in a relationship, as well as facilitating women to leave a violent situation should they wish to (Ellsberg et al., 2014). As a result, many programmatic approaches have focused on improving access to productive resources for women and girls. Through this mechanism, gender equality is measured by the accumulation, use and application of endowments such as education, health, and physical assets (World Bank, 2012).

Interventions that exclusively focus on poverty alleviation, such as cash transfer programs, have shown variable, context-specific impacts on IPV. In some studies, women's involvement in income generating activities has been found to be protective against VAWG, whereas in others it increases a woman's risk of experiencing violence (Vyas & Watts, 2009; Hidrobo et al., 2016; Bhattacharya, et al., 2009; Heath, 2013). The most disadvantaged women are often those who are most at risk of experiencing IPV, while those who have household assets and higher levels of education are less at risk, according to the current evidence (Hidrobo, et al., 2016; Bhattacharya, et al., 2009; Heath, 2013; Vyas & Watts, 2009). Recent summaries of cash transfer programs have found that 3 in 4 interventions have documented decreases in physical violence perpetrated by an intimate partner (Buller et al., 2018). There are wide variations in the results from microfinance programming. In some studies, women's participation in microfinance had no impact on IPV, others documented an increase in IPV, whilst yet others found an initial increase followed by reduced risk in the long run (Gibbs et al., 2017).

Conversely, multi-faceted interventions that combine livelihood and gender components have generally demonstrated positive results. For instance, a model in Nairobi, Kenya that combined micro-loans, business management training and psycho-social support to groups of female survivors of IPV demonstrated an increase in daily profit margin, higher self-efficacy and a decrease in the incidence of IPV among women in the intervention group (Sarnquist et al., 2021). In addition, evidence from the UK Department for International Development (now Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office) flagship What Works to Prevent Violence against Women & Girls program revealed that participants in combined economic empowerment and gender-transformative programs gained more equitable gender attitudes, had a greater say in decision making and experienced improved mental health and up to 50% reduction in IPV (Gibbs & Bishop, 2019; Crawford et al., 2020). The authors identified limitations and gaps in the evidence-base for combined programming, including less success in reducing the experiences of IPV for young women or those in

challenging contexts. The results were also inconclusive as to whether economic empowerment interventions alone achieve reductions in violence or if gender-transformative components are crucial. It was noted that men are rarely included in combined economic empowerment and gender-transformative interventions and when they are, it is only in limited ways. However, this and other studies have shown that combining economic empowerment and gender-transformative interventions for women and families can reduce intimate partner violence and strengthen the economic position of individuals and families.

### **Send a Cow's Economic & Social Empowerment (EASE) approach**

SAC supports farming families to improve their economic situation using an integrated approach that combines agricultural and gender & social inclusion interventions to bring long-term positive changes to food security, nutrition, income generation, savings, women's participation, relationships and gender equality. The approach combines training, inputs, supportive supervision and mentoring, delivered by SAC and government extension staff to self-help groups where the majority of members are women. The training, centered around SAC cornerstone values, is a key aspect of the program and delivery is both practical and participatory in nature. The cornerstones are 12 foundational values, which include genuine need & justice, sharing & caring and passing on the gift.

To encourage economic empowerment in rural communities, SAC promotes agro-ecological, climate positive agriculture that utilizes natural and locally available inputs to boost productivity. Training is focused on farm systems and helping women to plan and manage their farms as an integrated whole, whilst building their skills in natural resource management, animal husbandry, soil and water conservation, crop management (rotation and inter-cropping), integrated pest management, tree planting and vegetable growing. The gender & social inclusion (GSI) component is initiated by a process called 'envisioning' in which individuals, groups and families identify their goals and aspirations and set out plans for achieving those. Capacity building in group dynamics and conflict resolution is complemented by training on gender equity, nutrition and hygiene & sanitation so that women have social skills and the confidence to be able to speak out and contribute to decision making and leadership, as well as to manage the home and health of themselves and their families. Training is complemented by the use of SAC's Transformative Household Methodology (THM) which opens up dialogue around gender inequalities within the home and community, and empowers families to make changes towards greater equality (see Box 2). While training is primarily delivered for self-help group members, they are encouraged to bring along spouses or other relatives to sessions, and to take lessons they have learned back home to share with their family. Excelling members of self-help groups are selected for additional training to become Peer Farmer Trainers and Community Resource Volunteers, who mentor and train their own group members, as well as other people within the community.



## Box 2 Transformative Household Methodology (THM)



THM is a gender tool, developed by SAC by combining the Harvard Gender Analytical Tool (focused on activity profiles and access to, and control over, resources) with Participatory Rural Appraisal exercises. It was designed to challenge unequal gender attitudes, roles and norms through facilitated dialogue at household level involving women, men, girls and boys. The tool can also be used at community level and is just one part of SAC's integrated approach to social inclusion alongside training and workshops.

### The impact of THM

- Opens up conversation about gender, workloads, resources – giving all family members a voice
- Highlights areas of inequality in a non-threatening manner
- Reduced workloads for women and girls, who tend to bear the burden of household chores
- More equal sharing of economic rewards so they benefit each member of the family
- Greater involvement of women in decision-making over resources and use of income
- More investment in girls' education
- Improved relationships within the home bringing harmony, respect and love.

### How THM works

- 1** A trained facilitator explains to the family how THM works and what it is intended to do.
- 2** All the members of a household create a grid on the ground in which each column represents an activity (e.g., fetching water, hoeing, cooking, childcare) or a resource (e.g., food, livestock, income). Each row is allocated to one member of the family, including children.
- 3** Every member places stones, or beans, in the grid to represent their level of engagement in activities or influence over resources.
- 4** Scores are counted, exposing areas of disparity which are then discussed in relation to gender stereotypes and assumptions around roles and responsibilities.
- 5** The family is assisted to develop an action plan for bringing greater equality and participation for all members.

The potential for scale up to use the tool is huge as it can so easily be adapted to different situations and contexts. SAC is in the process of developing the THM tool to explore areas of gender inequality around food and nutrition, as well as disability inclusion.

## Send a Cow Kenya project context

In 2016, SAC completed the Wealth Creation project – a four-year agricultural economic and gender-mainstreaming program in western Kenya that aimed (indirectly) to address some of the underlying drivers of VAWG, including economic insecurity and unequal power dynamics. The lessons learned during Wealth Creation influenced the design of the Improving Nutrition project, also based in western Kenya, which started in 2018. The aim of this second project was to reduce economic stress and promote more equal household dynamics among farm families using the EASE approach with enhanced gender components. Focusing on nutrition, food security, better health and sustainable livelihoods, the Improving Nutrition program also aimed to address household inequality in gender dynamics. Food security and good nutrition are vital to reducing stress for agriculturally dependent families and lifting this economic burden is likely to contribute to a general decrease in household stress. This, together with gender programming, was therefore expected to contribute to more equal and harmonious relationships and family dynamics.

Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) surveys and impact data demonstrate that the gender component of SAC's EASE approach is having a considerable positive effect on participating families. It shows particular promise for women, as their participation has resulted in improved relationships in the home as well as an increase in their engagement and leadership in the community. SAC also has a wealth of evidence from previous projects in Kenya and other country programs, of the efficacy of their gender transformative approach to improve economic outcomes and change gender dynamics. Quantitative and qualitative data show that women's confidence, self-esteem, leadership, decision-making ability, workloads, position in the household and personal relationships are all improved (Send a Cow 2013-20). However, what is lacking is any information on the levels of violence experienced by women. SAC staff have heard anecdotal reports from women participants of incidents of violence, and of transformed relationships as a result of their programming, that imply that violence is present in supported communities and that SAC's EASE approach could potentially be having an impact on the levels of VAWG. However, until this research project, they lacked any documented evidence to support this.

The lack of clarity on the impact of economic empowerment and poverty alleviation interventions on VAWG, combined with the potential for SAC's EASE approach to address violence, provided the impetus for SAC, with the Global Women's Institute (GWI) as partner, to apply for an award from the World Bank and Sexual Violence Research Initiative (SVRI) Development Marketplace: Innovations to Address Gender-Based Violence, in order to examine whether EASE is a promising mechanism for reducing intimate partner violence for poor and vulnerable women living in rural communities of western Kenya.





# Methodology

Send a Cow (SAC), and its research partner, the Global Women's Institute (GWI) at George Washington University (GWU), together with SAC Kenya (SACK) undertook a two-year research study from June 2018 to examine the effectiveness of SAC's economic interventions on reducing rates of IPV in target communities in western Kenya. Funded by SVRI and The World Bank, the primary aim of the research was to understand the effectiveness of SAC's EASE approach on the acceptance and rates of VAWG among families in two counties of western Kenya.

## Specific Objectives:

- 1** To develop approaches and tools to measure changes in acceptance and rates of IPV in SAC's economic empowerment programs in western Kenya
- 2** To increase the capacity of SAC program staff to deliver quality VAWG prevention programs and ethically collect data on the subject of violence in their programs
- 3** To identify best practices and lessons learned from SAC's gender-transformative economic empowerment programming model to change attitudes and experiences of violence for residents in their target communities

## Literature Review

GWU conducted a preliminary desk review of available evidence and best practices surrounding economic empowerment and VAWG. This literature review, including published research articles and reports, provided essential background information on the country context and economic status of women, particularly in relation to gender and approaches taken to measure GBV. In addition, GWI and SACK mapped available support services for VAWG survivors in the locations where the research was to take place.

## Formative research in the Wealth Creation project

The formative research was undertaken to provide a better understanding of how SAC's Wealth Creation project in western Kenya affected the lives of women & girls and family dynamics in targeted communities. In August 2018, GWI and SAC collected qualitative data from beneficiaries and stakeholders through focus group discussions and key informant interviews to assess the impact of the project and to guide the remaining research activities.



## Focus Group Discussions

GWl and SACK staff randomly selected participants from the Wealth Creation project to take part in focus group discussions. A total of 9 groups, five women-only and four men-only, each including 6-8 participants, took part in the discussions. During focus group discussions:

- **Free listing** was used to gather information regarding the type of violence participants consider to be most common and the context in which the different types of violence occur (where, when, by whom and how)
- **Timelines** were developed by participants to explore how SAC's programming impacted people over time, what changes took place and at what point in the program lifecycle
- **Open-ended stories** were used as an indirect way of revealing changes in gender dynamics between couples and within families without the need for sharing personal information. The beginning of a hypothetical story about a project participant was presented, but the end was purposely left out, offering focus group members the opportunity to complete the story based on what they thought would have happened before and after the Wealth Creation project.

## Semi-structured interviews

To gather more in-depth information, 16 interviews were conducted with key informants including community leaders, local government representatives, SAC staff, project participants and other community stakeholders. The research followed the WHO's Ethical and Safety Recommendations for Researching VAWG. All participants in qualitative data collection exercises were 18 years or older. All groups and facilitators were sex and age matched to promote open dialogue amongst participants. To reduce the risk of breach of confidentiality, no identifiable information was collected about respondents. In addition, a list of local VAWG response services was made available to any participant requesting support.

## Development of a tool to measure changes to rates of IPV in SAC's EASE programs in western Kenya

The findings of the formative research were used to inform the development of a data collection tool to monitor IPV in the households and communities where SAC works. The IPV data collection tool was based on the WHO Multi-Country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence Against Women model (World Health Organization, 2001; World Health Organization, 2005), as it is considered internationally to be the best practice for VAWG data collection. The questions were revised by SAC and GWl staff and adapted and translated to be appropriate in the specific context of western Kenya. The tool included assessment of attitudes to and experiences of IPV and its association to SAC programming. The tool was piloted and tested in SACK's Improving Nutrition project and then added to SAC's MEL toolkit to enable measurement of improvements in reducing IPV in future programs.

## **Increasing the capacity of SAC program staff to deliver quality VAWG prevention programs and ethically collect data**

GWI staff conducted capacity building training for SAC program staff on how to carry out GBV research whilst applying ethical data collection methods. The purpose of the training was to enhance the ability of SAC staff to supervise monitoring and evaluation surveys that include a GBV component. The training curriculum, referring to documented GBV best practice, focused primarily on the collection of quantitative data using the jointly developed monitoring tool, but also included participatory qualitative research and possible improvements to SAC's gender transformative economic empowerment programming, whilst utilizing safe and ethical data collection approaches. At the same time the project team conducted training sessions for 30 enumerators on how to sensitively collect data on gender-based violence. Participants were encouraged to share their own experiences and ask questions. The training sessions also addressed potential challenges, both physical and emotional, that enumerators might experience while conducting interviews on GBV. Training topics included: gender definitions, overview of VAWG, causes and consequences of VAWG, safety and ethical considerations. The enumerators were given the opportunity to practice conducting the questionnaire, including translating the English questionnaire to and from the respondents' local languages to ensure accuracy and consistency of translation.

## **Quantitative Analysis of IPV in Improving Nutrition project in western Kenya**

The study utilized descriptive statistics to assess the impact of SAC's EASE approach on IPV among women participants of the Improving Nutrition project. Specifically, analysis focused on prevalence and characteristics of IPV among the target population, their responses to violence and social norms and the effect of EASE on levels of IPV.

The IPV data collection tool was incorporated into SAC's ongoing knowledge, attitude and practice (KAP) survey for monitoring impact within their programs. Trained SACK staff and enumerators used the survey to collect quantitative data on IPV to understand the experiences of and attitudes towards violence and gender equality in general, as well as how the situation has changed for women following participation in Improving Nutrition. A random selection process was used to identify households for inclusion in the survey, whilst a systematic sampling strategy was used for selecting participants from each household; a total of 96 men and 274 women were sampled. Interviews with men and women were conducted separately to ensure confidentiality and security of respondents. Questions about experiences of violence were only asked of women participants. The survey captured changes in IPV for women during two periods, each representing one year of the woman's life as follows:



- 1** before participation in the program until initial participation
- 2** from initial participation in the program until 1 year into the project.

The questionnaire focused primarily on experiences of physical, sexual, emotional and economic IPV and the change in IPV experienced by women since joining Improving Nutrition. The survey also included questions related to gender attitudes, relationship dynamics between couples, controlling behaviors, and the occurrence of early marriage and polygamy. The research team took every precaution to ensure confidentiality. Interviews were held in a private place and data and transcripts were stored on password-protected computers, with secure procedures for storing and sending electronic data being followed at all times. No personal identifiable information was used in reports, and all data and direct quotes have been de-identified. Significant efforts were made to minimize re-traumatization and other risks to participants, whilst a list of health, psychosocial and legal services for survivors of violence was made available to all respondents regardless of whether they reported experiencing violence or not.

## Review Workshop

The findings of the survey and research were shared with SAC and SACK staff at a review workshop, at which they examined the results and the implications for future programming, particularly how SAC can improve EASE to have the greatest impact on vulnerable women and girls.

For physical IPV, respondents were asked if their current, or any previous, husband, partner or boyfriend had: 1) slapped her or had something thrown at her; 2) pushed, cornered, pulled her hair; 3) hit with something that caused injury; 4) kicked, or dragged; 5) attempted strangle, intentional burning; or 6) threatened by or assaulted using a gun, knife or any other weapon against her. For economic violence, respondents were asked if they were: 1) prohibited from getting a job, working, trading, earning money, or participating in income generating projects; 2) taken money (earnings) against her will; or 3) refused money for household expenses even

when the partner has money for other things (such as alcohol and cigarettes). For sexual violence, respondents were asked if they were: 1) forced to have sex when she did not want to; 2) had sex when she didn't want to because she was afraid of what the husband/partner might do if she refuses; or 3) forced her to do anything else sexual that she did not want or that she found humiliating or degrading. For emotional violence respondents were asked if they were: 1) insulted or made to feel bad about oneself; 2) humiliated in front of others; 3) intentionally scared or intimidated; or 4) verbally threatened to be hurt or someone important to her.



## Key Findings





# Key Findings

## 4.1 Formative research in the Wealth Creation project

### Challenges facing participants prior to SAC intervention

When describing their situation before the Wealth Creation project, women portrayed themselves as being completely dependent on their husbands for financial support and unable to provide food or meet the basic needs of their families. The challenges they faced included poverty and associated concerns such as lack of food, no money for school fees, poor quality clothing and housing, as well as social issues of alcohol consumption, lack of communication or trust between spouses, and men acting as dominant decision-makers. These stressors were commonly noted as drivers of household conflict and marital strife.

*“Lack of communication between the husband and wife – on things such as school fees. The husband isn’t providing. The lady stays home while the man is in town.”*

female participant.

Prior to Wealth Creation, men were typically not contributing to the household economy or success of the farm. Whilst women were overworked due to their obligations to care for the family, work the farm and engage in small enterprises for income generation, their husbands would often spend their days idle or drinking.

*“There is a lack of money and the husband isn’t willing to support – maybe he doesn’t have the money. It is a woman’s responsibility to support the children and if they don’t, it brings big problems.”*

female participant.

*“There are occurrences when the husband doesn’t want to work. The lady goes to the garden, looks after the livestock and the children, but the husband wants food even though he doesn’t work. This brings problems.”*

female participant.

Financial issues compounded these unequal gender dynamics. Before attending training, most women played no part in financial management and were suspicious of their husbands, thinking they were withholding money from them. This increased household tensions and sometimes led to violence. When women were given money by their husbands, they in turn were suspected of misusing it, also exacerbating conflict.

*“Maybe the husband has money but does not put it on the table, which maybe leads to violence because they don’t trust each other.”*

female participant.

*“If a woman is taking care of the cow and she sells some milk, even if she tries to give her husband a little something, he demands all the money because he says he is the head of the household.”*

female participant.

*“If he gives the wife some money to go and purchase things, he will question the budget. He will give her money to go and buy this and that. When she comes back, he will look at the budget and if there is a balance of even 5 Kenyan shillings (4 cents USA) this brings problems. He will think she used it to buy sweets or something.”*

female participant.

Prior to SAC’s intervention, women complained of being left out of decision-making about the household, farm, income generation or use of money. They explained how this lack of involvement in decision-making posed a real challenge for them, particularly at the start of the project when they needed to buy seeds and have a say in what crops were to be planted on the farm and where, in order to implement the agriculture training. These requests were sometimes met with initial resistance.

*“At times women are not given a chance to make decisions.  
Men are dictators and this can lead to conflict.”*

female participant.

*“Women work on the farm alone – but after harvesting, the man takes what has been harvested and sells alone without the input of his wife. This brings misunderstanding.”*

female participant.

## Changes as a result of SAC’s Wealth Creation program

Wealth Creation participants described how their situation was affected by SAC’s EASE approach and any gender-related benefits attributable to the project. Overall, EASE has had a considerable impact, resulting in important gains in terms of attitude change and gender transformation at household and community levels, which have been crucial in improving the quality of the lives of women and girls.

### Workloads:

It became clear that the burden of work for women was considerably higher than that for men before the project. Through a combination of training, cornerstone values and THM-facilitated dialogue, Wealth Creation helped to reveal underlying assumptions around gender roles, stereotypes and workload allocation that resulted in women and girls being over-burdened with chores compared with men and boys. THM discussions at group and family level led to participants developing their own action plans to address inequalities. With greater transparency around roles and responsibilities, men and women began to collaborate and share the workload more equally to contribute to the success of their farms and household. Men started working much harder and became more involved with the farm and home, taking on activities that were previously seen as women’s work such as cooking, fetching water and caring for children, whilst women were able to take on tasks that would traditionally have been done solely by men. As a result, the dynamics between men and women began to change. Women explained that they felt

more respected by their husbands and there was more harmony in the home. They attributed the transformation primarily to training and THM, which they said had opened their eyes to the situation and given them impetus to change it. A secondary factor to reducing workloads for women was the introduction of labor-saving devices, which were introduced by the project to help reduce the burden on women. Energy efficient cookstoves were particularly valued by participants as they reduced the amount of fuel required for cooking and therefore the time and effort involved in collecting firewood, a role that was primarily considered to be the responsibility of women. As a result of more equal distribution of labor within households and the introduction of labor-saving devices, women's workload and tensions around chores and responsibilities reduced.

*"Before training, women had to take on many roles, she would rise early and work all day. This exercise [THM] helps the man to realize that he is over-working her."*

key informant.

*"Before the training, ladies did everything. But now they share roles and responsibilities. At times husbands even cook for their wives."*

female participant.

*"Because of the training we are sharing roles and responsibilities both in the home and in the group. This gives ladies time to rest – before we were really overworked."*

female participant.

## Decision-making:

Women reported having a greater say in household decision-making after Wealth Creation. Having attended training workshops and taken part in THM exercises, women gained knowledge, confidence and the support of the family to be more empowered and speak out. They were able to make some decisions of their own whilst also contributing to discussions and joint decision-making with their partners. Husbands and wives reported being able to plan the farm and household cooperatively, deciding together what to plant, what to sell and what to spend their money on. As a result, power dynamics shifted so that relationships became more balanced and collaborative.

*"We started working together as a family – husband, wife and children – to make decisions."*

female participant.

*"More joint decision making and joint planning – now able to discuss and plan as a family because the husband is now committed and no longer goes for alcohol."*

female participant.

## Economic empowerment:

Wealth Creation was also found to have greatly improved agricultural output resulting in increased food, income and economic security, thus reducing poverty for participating families. Women were empowered economically and gained financial independence as they were able to earn their own income, mostly by selling farm produce. They also noted that increased access to their own money and capital allowed them to pay for food and basic needs, as well as oversee issues related to the farm and household, so they no longer needed to ask their husbands for money.

*"I plant further crops and am able to sell and get some income. I now don't have to ask for money every day – able to buy the basics."*

female participant.

*"After the training, we planted vegetables and started increasing our income. We don't need to go to our husbands for money to buy salt and other things. This has reduced the conflict between husband and wives."*

female participant.

At the same time, women also learned how to manage money more effectively and started making their own decisions about how they wanted to spend it. The status of women in the household and community was enhanced through ownership of valuable assets, such as livestock, as well as by their contribution to household income. Income levels rose from an average of \$271/annum to \$1,456/annum, an increase of 430%, whilst the proportion of households earning more than \$1.25 per day grew from 10% to 68%. Participants highlighted Push-Pull - a biological pest management technology developed by the International Centre of Insect Physiology & Ecology - as making an important contribution to productivity because it reduces the impact of pests on cereal production, thus increasing yields of staple crops such as maize. The importance of being given a dairy cow was also highlighted by many people since cows are valued for the milk they provide, for being a source of organic manure, and for the enhanced social status they confer. Dairy cows were noted as one of the avenues for men to become more fully engaged in the project. One of SAC's cornerstone values, "Passing on the Gift", was also commended for improving livelihoods and enhancing status as beneficiaries become donors by passing offspring from their animals to another family in the area.

*"For farmers the milk is a major thing for the family. Milk is very expensive and if you don't have milk, you have problems. Milk helps you in everything you do - even in school fees and sending the children for an education. Families are able to drink their own milk and not have to buy it."*

key informant.

*"Dairy cows changed things completely. In our society, it is the man who takes care of the animals, so the man is automatically involved when the family gets a cow."*

key informant.

*"There are no problems. They [the cows] have brought everyone closer and improved the relationships in the household. This is an asset that, if not for the lady, the family wouldn't have. The dairy cow is something they couldn't even have imagined owning."*

key informant.



Men saw women's greater economic independence and ability to control their own finances as a positive change, whilst husbands and wives reported that the economic benefits reduced conflict, and therefore the likelihood of violence, between them.

*"In joint discussions in the households – we were able to share ideas and started planning together (what to plant, where to plant). This increased respect and love between husbands and wives."*

female participant.

## Gender attitudes:

The research endeavored to uncover underlying attitudes that contribute to the perpetration and acceptance of violence and found that, although there had been positive changes in gender equality, some men and women still held very traditional views that resulted in persistent patriarchal attitudes and practices. It is a widely held belief that men should be the head of the household and women should obey their husbands. Men have more freedom in relationships with acceptance of their "right" to take additional wives or partners, whereas women are expected to be a virgin at the time of marriage and remain faithful. Women are often blamed for rape.

*"Some men didn't want their wives to be part of the project – especially the cell groups – and would question why women couldn't stay at home and keep the house and take care of the children."*

female participant.

*"Rape is women's fault because of the way they dress or because they drink. This is an invitation to be raped."*

male participant.

Discussions with participants revealed that, even though some positive changes had happened, many men and women still held underlying negative attitudes and conservative beliefs. Even though men were more open to input and ideas from their wives, they still did not see women as their equals despite their substantial contribution to farm and household. Female participants claimed that one of the reasons for reduced quarrels and violence was that women were less likely to "bother" men. Similarly, focus group members attributed improved relationships to the altered behavior of women, citing a reduced need for them to travel far from home, being too busy to gossip, working hard, focusing on the farm and respecting their husbands as the underlying drivers for greater harmony and respect.

*"Because now we are busy with daily duties, we are committed and there is no time to rumor monger which has reduced conflict."*

female participant.

When women were presented with hypothetical scenarios during the open-ended story session and asked what, if any, potential negative consequences might arise from participation in the project, the most common response was that a woman who was experiencing violence might now be so empowered that she would leave her husband or have him arrested.

*“Because she now has the knowledge and money, she will have the husband come and be arrested.”*

female participant.

A consistent theme was that men were initially resistant to women participating in the project, believing that groups were a place for women to go and gossip, instead of a source of training that could offer social and economic benefits to the whole family. This resistance sometimes took the form of increased IPV and controlling behavior.

*“At the beginning of the project, we were not allowed by our husbands to go to group activities.”*

female participant.

*“During the initial steps, when we were just starting out with the training, there were negative effects. Some men didn’t want their wives to be part of the project - they would ask us why we couldn’t stay at home to keep the house and take care of the children.”*

female participant.

*“At the beginning, we had several technologies and planting techniques for the vegetables that we needed to see. We used to rove to one cell then another to see them. When we came back there would be problems with the husband because he couldn’t understand why we were moving around. But when the returns started coming then the problems reduced.”*

female participant.

## Violence against women and girls:

Women noted that the reduced poverty and greater equality resulted in more harmonious relationships and a decrease in the violence they experienced. They considered that more equal sharing of workloads specifically contributed to reducing violence because men were working much harder and so were too tired to demand sex from them. The concomitant perception of men was that women were not as tired as they were previously because they were working less hard, and they were therefore more interested in sex.

*“After training we sit down together as a family, share what we learned with the family – that one really reduced the issue of quarrelling and other violence.”*

female participant.

*“We used to be overworked and get tired. The men were just sitting and not doing anything. When they came to marital bed, they had a lot of energy and wanted sex, but we were too tired, and this caused conflict. Now we are both tired.”*

female participant.

*“Men have less desire for sex because they are so tired, so they don’t force women.”*

male participant.

## Influence in the wider community:

The impact of the project was not only felt at household level but also reached into the wider community because participants shared their knowledge and training with neighbors, friends and relatives setting off a ripple effect. People from the community who implemented the SACK-promoted agriculture techniques were able to enhance the productivity of their land, generating food and income. This helped to reduce poverty around the project area. Families also adopted many of the social changes as they saw the positive changes in project participants. Women's confidence grew enormously through their involvement in Wealth Creation such that they were able to speak out in public and take up positions of leadership, for example as local or religious leaders or peer educators. Participants reported reduced tension and conflict within the wider community and attributed this change to the influence of women from Wealth Creation.

*"We trained others in the community and they are now able to sell, which has improved our relationship. The main challenge for everyone in the community had been poverty but now finances and nutrition have improved."*

female focus group participant.

*"We are respected in the community – after the trainings we started to implement the new cultivation strategies – we became respected because we had money and we were able to advise other people about what to do in the community."*

female participant.

*"We are also able to get leadership roles in the community – we are now leaders in our churches."*

female focus group participant.

*"Women are more empowered, more economically independent, some of them have even become leaders in the community!"*

male focus group participant.

## 4.2 Quantitative Analysis of IPV in the Improving Nutrition in Western Kenya Program

Interviews were undertaken with women participants in the Improving Nutrition project approximately one year after they began working with SAC. Respondents reported on their overall life experiences as well as the changes they experienced as a result of their participation in the project.

### Status of women in the project

The Improving Nutrition project targeted rural farming families from western Kenya, which meant that the majority of participating women (99%) had been partnered at some point in their lifetime. At the time of the research, 75% of women were married and living with their

partner, while 11% were previously married but living apart. The age of first marriage was evenly split; 49% of women were 18 or younger when they first married, whilst 51% were 19 or older. Polygamy was a common practice, with 30% of women confirming that their husband had other wives while they had been together. Of the women in polygamous relationships, 51% said their partner had two additional wives and 24% had a partner with three additional wives.

After one year of working with SAC, most women noted that their primary source of income was from their own work (73%), with 21% relying on their partner for money. While comparison data from prior to the project is not available, this high rate of women earning income suggests that EASE is driving women's financial power within the household.

## Gender attitudes and acceptance of VAWG

After one year, many women participating in the Improving Nutrition program continued to hold attitudes that reinforced a patriarchal structure. The vast majority (85%) of respondents considered it natural for men to be the head of the household and 82% believed a wife should obey her husband, even if she disagreed with him. Furthermore, more than half held the view that a woman's primary role was to take care of the household and just under 50% that it was obligatory for a wife to have sex with her husband. The average score on a 1-5 scale (higher scores representing agreement with more inequitable gender attitudes) was 3.1 points, demonstrating these patriarchal attitudes were the norm. In fact, 22% of all respondents held gender inequitable attitudes on all 5 gender attitude questions asked during the survey, while only 4% agreed with no inequitable views.

Figure 1.

Gender inequitable attitudes  
among women in SAC  
Improving Nutrition program



96%

Of respondents agreed  
with at least 1 gender  
inequitable attitude

22%

Of respondents held gender  
inequitable attitudes on all  
5 questions assessed



These inequitable gender attitudes also influenced respondents' views on whether or not the use of violence against women was acceptable. Many Improving Nutrition participants considered violence to be acceptable under certain specific circumstances. The most accepted reason for violence documented was when a woman neglected her children (42%), which aligned with the assumption that it was solely, or primarily, a woman's role to care for the family. About 1 in 5 thought violence was acceptable if a woman refused to have sex, argued with her husband or was suspected of having an affair. However, almost half of all respondents (47%) thought there was no reason that violence against a woman was acceptable (Figure 2).

**Figure 2.**

**Acceptance of IPV among women in  
SAC Improving Nutrition program**



Women who are experiencing violence may also face cultural pressures to not disclose that it is happening. These attitudes were seen among Improving Nutrition project participants with 53% of respondents agreeing that a woman should tolerate violence to keep her family together and 37% agreeing that when a woman experiences violence from her husband, she should keep silent about it.

## Levels of Intimate Partner Violence

Prior to working with SAC, the most prevalent form of IPV experienced over a woman's lifetime was physical violence, with 51% of participants affected. Almost 50% of surveyed women had suffered emotional violence and 35% sexual violence. In total, 59% of women reported experiencing physical and/or sexual violence and 71% of women had experienced any form of violence during their lifetime (Figure 3).

Similar patterns were seen with current IPV prevalence, with approximately 40% of women having experienced violence at the time of the survey. 39% of women said they had experienced physical violence, 29% sexual violence and 21% economic violence within the last 12 months. These results confirmed that SAC was targeting a population that was highly affected by IPV.

**Figure 3.**

**Prevalence of lifetime IPV reported by women in SAC program**



**71%**

**Of women in SAC's program reported experiencing some form of IPV in their lifetime**

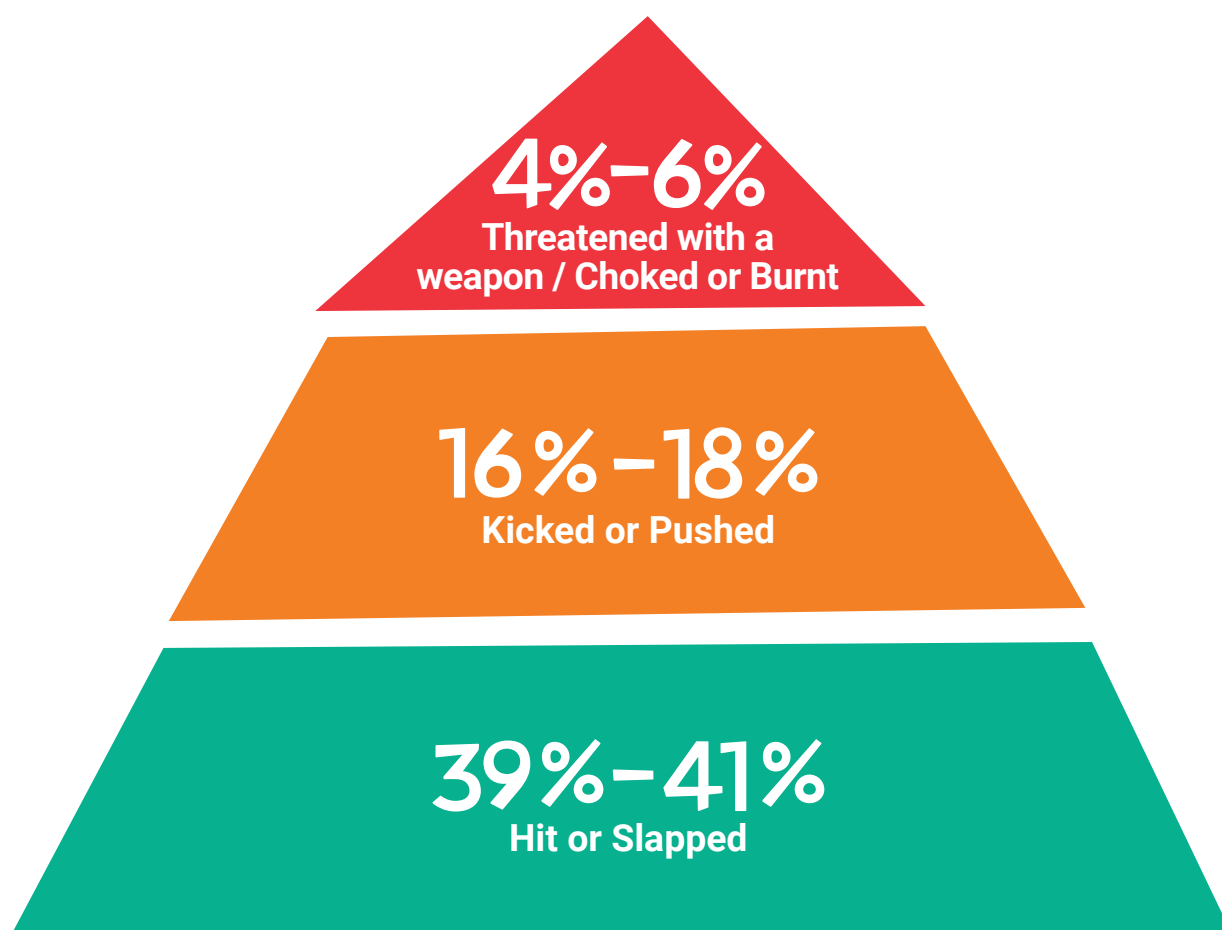
**59%**

**Of women had experienced sexual or physical violence**

The survey also asked women about the type of physical violence they had experienced. The most common acts of violence were being hit or slapped. Forms of violence considered to be most severe, such as being deliberately burned or threatened with a weapon, were the least prevalent (Figure 4).

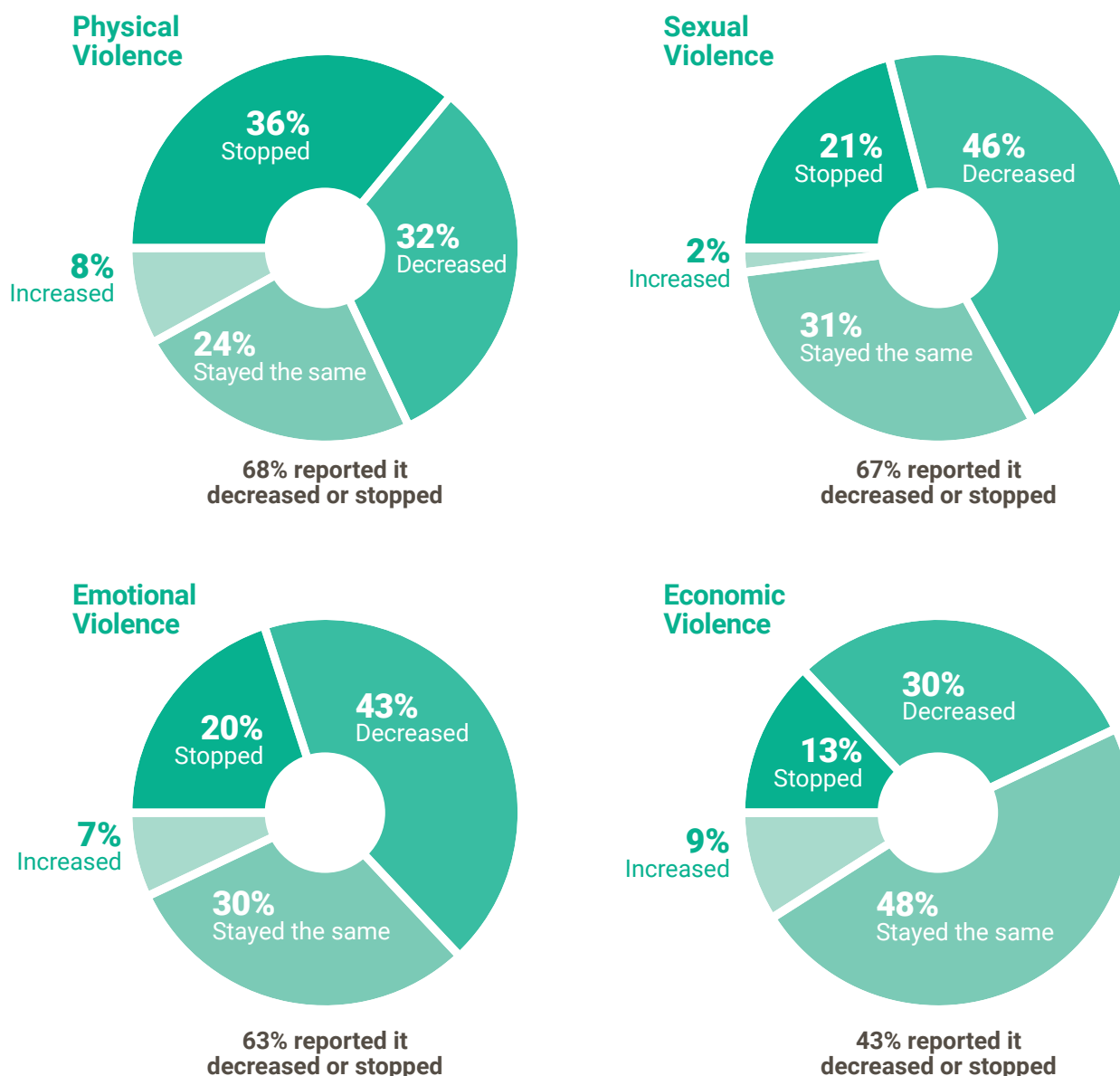
**Figure 4.**

**Prevalence of different acts of physical IPV reported by women**



**Change in levels of Intimate Partner Violence**

Women from the Improving Nutrition project were asked if their experience of IPV changed positively, negatively or remained the same one year after they started participating in the program. While this data is retrospective and thus subject to potential recall bias, more than 60% of project participants reported that IPV had lessened or stopped since the start of the program. The biggest change was in physical violence where 32% of participants said that physical IPV had decreased and a further 36% that it had ceased entirely. Similarly, more than 60% of participants said that emotional and sexual violence had either decreased or stopped (Figure 5).

**Figure 5.****Reported reductions in IPV from start of SAC program to follow up survey**

These data show that most women experienced a positive change in their lives over the first year of Improving Nutrition. It is also important to note that this change was lasting; women reported positive changes shortly after the start and for most women the changes were sustained or improved after one year of EASE interventions. Interestingly, although SAC's programming places a strong emphasis on economic empowerment, just 43% of women experienced a decrease or cessation in economic violence (Figure 5). We would need to explore this area in more depth to understand why but it could be that when women have access to their own income and assets, and greater power over them, that it causes more tension and economic violence, at least in the short term. A small proportion of women experienced increases in different forms of violence after joining the project. This was especially the case for economic violence, where 9% of women reported an increase, followed by 8% for physical violence, 7% for emotional violence, and 2% for sexual violence.



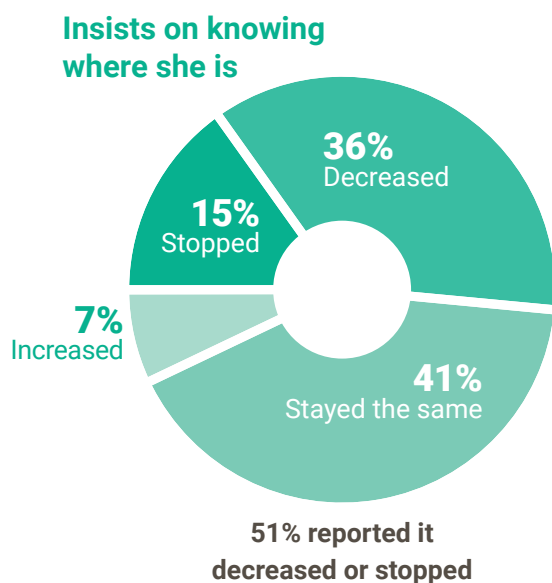
## Controlling behaviors

Improving Nutrition participants reported experiencing controlling behaviors perpetrated by their partners during their lifetimes. Frequently, these related to a woman's right to travel and movement, with 42% of women reporting that their partner had insisted on knowing where they were at all times and 40% reporting that their partner had expected them to ask permission to leave home. Furthermore, jealousy or anger when they spoke to another man was reported by 30% of respondents. Overall, only 35% of respondents had experienced no controlling behaviors ever during their lifetimes. Controlling behaviors were highly associated with IPV, demonstrating how male control over women is often accompanied by physical, sexual or other forms of violence.

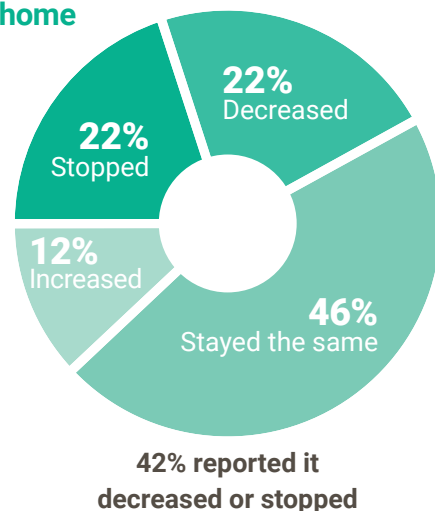
However, after one year, women testified that these behaviors had decreased as a result of EASE. After a year of participation in Improving Nutrition, 46% of participants said that some controlling behaviors by their partners had stopped or decreased. While these numbers are very promising, it is important to note that almost 10% of women reported an increase in controlling behavior.

**Figure 6.**

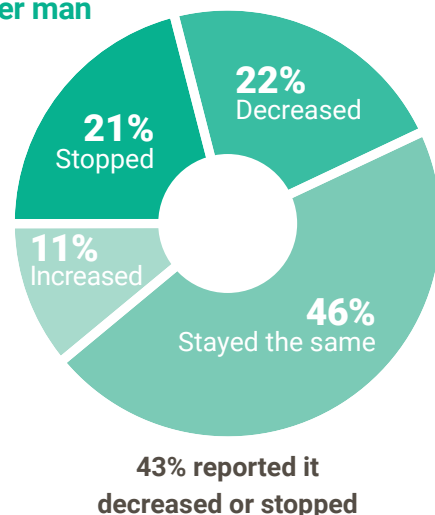
**Reported reductions in selected controlling behaviors from start of Improving Nutrition to follow up survey**



**Expects she asks permission to leave home**



**Gets jealous if she talks to another man**









# Discussion

As detailed above, SAC's EASE approach is based on values and fully integrates gender transformation with farm-based economic empowerment. By utilizing EASE, SAC has consistently helped people living in the communities where it has implemented programs to effect positive changes in all areas of their lives including food security, dietary diversity, income generation, savings, decision making, confidence, relationships and leadership, as well as housing, sanitation, health and education (Send a Cow, 2013-20). SACK project staff, who delivered the Wealth Creation and Improving Nutrition programs, were aware from private conversations with women participants that they were experiencing violence. From testimonies by men and women, SACK had also gleaned anecdotal evidence of the potential for EASE to reduce violence. However, they did not know the true prevalence of VAWG among participants because it was not openly discussed for fear of stigmatization and the risk of facing further violence. Neither had SAC, until this research study, been able to systematically measure and assess the levels of VAWG or the impact of their programs on it.

## Gender attitudes

The research showed that, for the majority of men and women, EASE brought about greater gender equality, changing lives and relationships for the better. However, the research also uncovered deeply held traditional views and persistent, underlying patriarchal attitudes and practices that contributed to the perpetration and acceptance of violence. A high proportion of women (82-85%) still held the principle that men should be the head of the household and that a woman should obey her husband even if she disagreed with him. Men considered it their right to have sex, whilst expecting women to be a virgin at the time of marriage and faithful throughout. It was socially acceptable for men to have more than one partner or to take additional wives, but not for women. Although in practice men and women were sharing workloads more equally, still almost half of women participants considered it to be their responsibility to care for the home, family and children. Many men were initially resistant to women participating in the program, believing the community groups to be a place where women would go to gossip, rather than to attend training and learn something valuable that would contribute to whole family. This resistance sometimes took the form of controlling behaviors or IPV before men fully began to realize the social and economic benefits that would accrue as a result of their wives' engagement in the program.

A considerable proportion of women considered violence to be justified in certain circumstances; the highest acceptance rate was in relation to neglecting the children (42%) which, as mentioned above, was a reflection on how women still perceived the children and household to be their responsibility. Women also considered violence to be justified when a

man suspected a woman of having an affair, when a wife argued with her husband, or when she went out without telling him where she was going. Men continued to blame women for rape, citing her choice of dress or behavior as the cause. It is known that controlling behaviors such as jealousy and anger can lead to violence, yet research on why men perpetrate IPV indicates that women's actions are commonly cited as the reason along with cultural beliefs (Shafer & Koyiet, 2018). These assumptions are in line with other research conducted in Kenya that found community structures often blame women for provoking violence or encourage violence as a form of discipline by the husband (Odero et al., 2014). These underlying gender attitudes have the power to continue reinforcing a patriarchal social structure, one in which violence against women is normalized and justified. At the same time, service providers may also possess unequal gender attitudes, making it more challenging for women to seek formal support or redress for IPV (Odero et al., 2014).

The underlying assumption that women were to blame was also reflected in participants' understanding of how and why change happened. Focus group participants from Wealth Creation often attributed improved relationships to changes in the behavior of women, citing women now being too busy to gossip, working hard and focusing on the farm, not travelling far from home and respecting their husbands as factors contributing to harmony in the home. Another contributing factor considered in the reduction of conflict between men and women was the ability of women to generate their own income so they no longer had to ask men for money. Women said that the reason quarrels and violence were decreasing was because women were less likely to "bother" men. Men were very appreciative of the economic benefits gained from the program and more open to input from their wives but did not necessarily see women as their equals even when they were contributing to household finances. This area of men's experience and attitudes is one that would justify further investigation to understand in greater depth what is driving the reduction in violence and how sustainable it may be. In particular, whether men are less jealous or controlling as a result of greater understanding of gender issues and improved perception of their wives, or whether they are more tolerant because their wives are bringing in income; in which case would a reduction in income cause them to revert to violence? From SAC's experience in other country programs, men's attitudes and behavior do change and they are often willing to speak out about their personal experience of positive gender transformation. It may be that men participating in this study were not so willing to do this in a focus group with other men, but in private could be more open.

Another indicator that full gender transformation may not have been achieved revealed itself when women were presented with hypothetical scenarios and asked what potential negative consequences might arise from participation in the program. The most common response was that a woman who was experiencing violence might now be so empowered that she would leave her husband. Given the importance of the family unit in local culture and the risks women face in terms of loss of access to children or land, stigmatization and negative impacts of returning to the maternal home and loss of income, it is unsurprising that women felt that divorce might be



the most negative outcome that could possibly occur. There are many issues, including dowry payments, that make it a complex and fearful proposition for women to leave and this may explain why many women tolerate the violence.

Some important drivers of IPV, such as early marriage, bride price or polygamy, were not directly addressed through EASE, which may limit the long-term impact of the program on VAWG. The incidence of polygamy within the project communities is of particular concern because when men become more financially secure, they may decide to take another wife. Another issue that is highly relevant to SAC programming, given the focus on agricultural development, is the issue of land. Traditionally women do not own land or livestock; the land typically belongs to the husband or his family, which can be a challenge when women want to implement any new agricultural practices that SAC promotes. Wider changes in social norms are needed, as well as legal support structures to ensure that women are able to gain access to land in order to reduce these barriers and promote gender equality. Although it is clear from the wider benefits achieved that the majority of women participants are able to put agricultural training into practice and work together with their husbands to decide what and where to plant. It was noted that as the benefits of the new technologies accrue, men become more willing to share.

The fact that women still hold onto attitudes that reinforce patriarchal structures, including the acceptance of controlling behavior and justification of violence, whereas men do not accept certain behavior from women, emphasizes how embedded these social norms are and highlights the gulf that still needs to be overcome before women can be said to be truly equal. It is important to consider that women who justify violence and have a controlling partner may be at an increased risk for IPV. It has been recommended that in highly patriarchal settings, combined economic empowerment and gender transformative interventions may best be targeted at families to strengthen outcomes, ensure women can fully participate in interventions and help reduce the risk of backlash against women (Gibbs and Bishop, 2019). That is exactly what SAC does through EASE, working with women's groups but involving spouses and all the family in the training and interventions, promoting sharing of labor, benefits and decision-making. It is important for children, both girls and boys, to see and experience positive gender role models in order to break the cycle of entrenched gender norms and inequality.

## Levels of IPV experienced by women

The study results demonstrate that almost three quarters of the women participating in the Improving Nutrition project experienced violence. It is important to note that the prevalence of violence in this study was higher than in previous studies carried out in Kenya, for example, a countrywide study by Government of Kenya Democratic Health Survey (DHS) found a lifetime prevalence of 60% for any form of IPV in western Kenya (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2015) compared with the 71% in this study. The situation is similar when focusing on physical and sexual violence. National studies report 47% of ever-partnered women experienced physical

and/or sexual violence, whereas in the Improving Nutrition cohort we found 59% of women had been impacted by physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2015). This increased reporting could be attributed to how the study was administered. Women who are engaged in SAC programming might have been more comfortable disclosing experiences of violence because they knew and trusted the program, compared to a larger DHS survey implemented by unknown parties. Furthermore, as SAC targets particularly poor and vulnerable families in the community, the program's beneficiaries might have been more at risk of violence than the wider Kenyan population at large.

### Changes in levels of IPV experienced by women

What is encouraging from this study is that SAC's EASE approach was found to have a very considerable impact on the lives of women and the levels of violence they experienced. Approximately 60% of women who had suffered violence reported that it had stopped or decreased, although the reduction in economic violence was less than for the other types, an observation that could be unpacked with further investigation. In particular, the majority of women who suffered physical IPV before entering the program reported that they experienced less violence, or none at all, after just one year of involvement in Improving Nutrition. These are important and substantive findings demonstrating a considerable reduction in violence, all the more significant since EASE was not designed to intentionally address violence.

However, the data also shows that for a small proportion of women (2-9%), IPV increased after participating in the program for a year. The research team posited that women who experienced an increase in violence were in very unequal relationships, with partners who possessed strong patriarchal attitudes and controlling behaviors. The increased aggression of these men may have been a form of resistance against the changing attitudes, household practices or economic benefits accruing for women, that could potentially have led men to feel that their control over their household and relationships was threatened, resulting in violence as a response.

### Broader impact on women's lives

Findings from the qualitative analysis of Wealth Creation and quantitative data from the Improving Nutrition program show positive change in the lives of women participants beyond a reduction in IPV. Both women and men reported that women's workloads were much higher before the project and that these had reduced considerably due to a combination of more equal distribution of chores within the family and the introduction of labor-saving devices. One of the major effects of SAC programming was increased household economic security. Women were able to earn their own income by selling farm produce so they had access to money for food and necessities and no longer needed to ask men for money. They were also able to manage their

finances more effectively and their status in the household increased as a result of their contribution to household income and through ownership of valuable assets such as livestock. From a gender perspective, these changes are important because they reduce stressors on the household that can trigger incidents of VAWG. Participants described how increased income and financial security led to fewer disagreements between husbands and wives and subsequently reduced levels of violence. Although economic security can alleviate some of the stressors that contribute to VAWG, it is not necessarily a direct path to long lasting change. As described above, some women suffered an increase in IPV, which is aligned with recent research that demonstrates that economic independence can increase a woman's vulnerability to violence due to the fact that she may be in a position to be more outspoken and defy societal norms of male superiority, which can result in violent consequences (Lawoko, et al., 2007).

SAC's programming also opened the way for women to play a larger role in decision-making and to take responsibility for some household decisions. Before the program, men tended to dominate and make all decisions in such a way that women were afraid to speak out. Disagreement could, and did, lead to violence in some instances. However, after engaging in the program women reported being able to contribute to discussions, to voice their opinions and to take part in decision-making, particularly around household matters, land use, what to plant on the farm, produce sales and how to spend money. Women often prioritized investment in children's education as a result of enhanced involvement in economic decision-making. Joint decision-making had a positive impact on family dynamics. Women and men both reported that relationships between them were better and that their partners had greater respect for them. As a result, there was more harmony, unity and peace in the home and quarrels had reduced. This reduction in conflict is likely to have contributed to the reduction in levels of violence as presented above.

In addition to changing women's lives within the home, the program also widened the scope for women to engage more in their communities. EASE boosted women's self-esteem and empowered them to become more independent. Female respondents noted that, as the confidence of women participants increased and they became more comfortable to speak out in public, they were able to take on leadership positions within the community. These included taking on the role of Peer Farmer Trainer, or becoming respected providers of agricultural knowledge, whilst others became religious leaders or local councilors. Overall, through the EASE program women have become better equipped, empowered and confident leaders and mentors within their homes and communities. As role models to their daughters and sons, as well as other young people from the community, they will open the way to positive and sustainable generational change.

## Factors influencing IPV and the success of SAC's approach in tackling VAWG

It is interesting to consider how and why EASE has such a considerable impact on levels of violence when it was not intentionally designed to do this. This study suggests that it is the combination of gender transformation with real economic benefits for women that resulted in a reduction in IPV levels among participants of the Improving Nutrition program.

This suggestion is upheld by evaluations of other interventions that combine economic empowerment and gender transformative methods. These were found to have the potential to reduce IPV and strengthen the economic position of individuals and families, whether or not the intervention was intentionally addressing VAWG (Gibbs & Bishop, 2019). The elements considered to have contributed to the success of these interventions were outlined in a comprehensive paper (Jewkes, et al., 2020). Lessons learned included the following:

- Interventions must be carefully planned and rooted in knowledge of the context with a robust theory of change
- They must address multiple drivers of VAWG such as gender inequity, poverty, poor communication, and marital conflict
- They should work with both men and women and, where relevant, families
- They should be based on theories of gender and social empowerment that view behavior change as a collective process rather than an individual one and foster positive relations and gender equity
- They should use group-based participatory learning methods that build capacity in communication, critical reflection and conflict resolution
- They should employ carefully designed, user friendly manuals and materials
- Optimal intensity, duration and frequency of sessions and overall program length enables time for reflection and experiential learning
- Staff and volunteers must be selected for gender equitable attitudes and non-violent behavior – and be thoroughly trained, supervised and supported.

It is important to note that SAC's EASE approach includes many of these elements. For example, SAC programs are based on 12 cornerstone values that underpin all engagement with people and lay the foundation for transformation. All staff are local, recruited in line with these values and trained and mentored to follow the principles as well as offering in-depth knowledge of the local context and situation. Program design is based on participatory community assessments brought together in a Theory of Change with clearly defined goals, outcomes and mechanisms of change. The integration of gender and social inclusion with economic empowerment in EASE was conceived to tackle a number of drivers of VAWG including food insecurity, poverty, gender inequality, conflict in relationships and women's lack of power. SAC works with community



groups (mostly women – 70%), who select one of their members for further training to become a Peer Farmer Trainer to deliver mentoring and support in farm techniques. The groups and peer support reduce the sense of isolation women experience. A synthesis of economic empowerment interventions concluded that involving women's male partners increased intervention success as well as pointing to the potential effectiveness of family-centered models (Jewkes, et al., 2020). In SAC programming, spouses and other male relatives are encouraged to attend training with women and be fully involved in project activities. Men who embrace behavior change have been found to influence others to do the same, contributing to changing norms. If in a community all men are violent, there is impunity and expectation of violence. But if the balance can be tipped, so the majority are not violent, then the behavior of those who are perpetrating violence is questioned.

THM was specifically developed by SAC to address inequalities at family level by involving all members in discussions around chores, assets and decision making. SAC's training for community groups is practical in nature and encourages participation. It builds women's confidence so they are able to speak out and their voices are heard, as well as encouraging self-appraisal and assessment of achievements against individual, family and group level vision statements. SAC staff are fully engaged with the people they serve, building close relationships over time to support them in their journey.

Another area of SAC's programming that contributes to its impact includes engagement with local government and social structures. SAC aims to engage the whole community in social and economic transformation through community-based activities with the intention to spread and sustain impact. This appears to be an appropriate approach given that evaluators of other VAWG programs indicated that community engagement has been found to support sustainable change (Crawford et al., 2020). Until this study, SAC interventions had not previously included any specific support for survivors of violence but, as a result of delivering this research, staff have now mapped support services available in the project communities and raised awareness of these for participants. In addition, SAC has also introduced additional elements to its gender and social inclusion curriculum, including community conversations about VAWG, which tackle issues such as what constitutes violence & violation of people's rights and how to address violence.



## Conclusion and recommendations





# Conclusion and recommendations

Overall, the changes in attitudes and behaviors that have been engendered by SAC's EASE approach are very positive. The project has clearly had a considerable impact on the lives of women, empowering them socially and economically, and at the same time has reduced violence. Household dynamics between men and women have improved. Women and men are working and planning collaboratively to make decisions and both report that communication is clearer and more constructive. Women's economic empowerment has been considerably enhanced as they have gained access to and control over assets and financial resources. As a result, poverty (a key driver for violence) has been reduced. Relationships between men and women have improved such that they report greater respect and harmony in the home. The research has shown that the impact has not just been felt at family or household level but also changed the situation for people from the wider community. The confidence of women to speak out, participate in decision-making and lead has also been built such that they have a higher profile and are taking a more active role in the community, for mutual benefit. These factors are reducing conflict and lessening the trigger points for violence. Subsequently, rates of physical, sexual, emotional and economic IPV have reduced considerably for a high proportion of women.

It is recommended that further research be undertaken and additional elements incorporated into SAC's programming so that the EASE approach can fulfil its potential to contribute to a reduction in VAWG within the communities where SAC works. A key question to consider for further study would be whether SAC's programming could address IPV even more effectively if it was more intentional in addressing violence from the start. The researchers consider that the EASE approach could be even more successful should SAC address some additional areas in their future programming, in particular the underlying drivers of violence.

## 1. A promising approach:

SAC's EASE approach shows huge promise in reducing VAWG and should be applied and assessed in different contexts and situations. SAC should seek additional funding for its work on IPV to test and evaluate its approach yet further.

## 2. Dynamics of change:

SAC should explore which of the different elements of EASE contributes most to the positive changes and reductions in IPV and investigate further the interplay between economic and social impacts with IPV. In particular, develop greater understanding of the underlying beliefs and behaviors that drive patriarchal norms and negative preconceptions.

### **3. How to improve IPV outcomes:**

Contextually relevant research is needed to understand whether there are important barriers limiting potential reductions in IPV in any given situation, and what adaptations may be required if these barriers are to be overcome. Further research could also unpack why violence increased for a small percentage of women and how this could be prevented in future programming.

### **4. Widen the scope of the Transformative Household Methodology:**

THM has been shown to be a very effective tool for exploring inequalities within a household or community, opening up discussions around this and driving pro-active change. SAC is in the process of exploring how THM can be adapted for nutrition-related gender inequalities and aspects of disability inclusion. The researchers suggest SAC also consider how THM could be used to look at the areas of gender inequality that impact on VAWG, as well as how to share this innovative and effective tool more widely.

### **5. Address other forms of violence:**

The capacity of SAC staff could be built, and the gender component of EASE developed further, to emphasize gender attitudes, social norms and the root causes of violence. At the same time SAC could explore how EASE and THM may impact other forms of VAWG and patriarchal practices such as polygamy, female genital mutilation, early and forced marriage, nyumba mboke, bride price and land rights for women.

### **6. Develop gender champions and mentors:**

SAC could consider building the capacity of men and women who have embraced more equal gender dynamics and experienced positive changes to become gender champions within their communities and mentors to support households where gender attitudes are more traditional. Emphasis on how gender equity and reduced violence is, in and of itself, a positive benefit to men and women could enhance and accelerate the uptake of gender changes in future SAC programming.

### **7. Incorporate the IPV tool into SAC's MEL systems:**

Continue monitoring gender attitudes and IPV in the areas where SAC works, as well as incorporating IPV into SAC program outcomes. Key areas to focus on initially would be the level and characteristics of violence experienced and how these change over time.



#### **8. Disseminate the research findings:**

The results of this research are exciting and should be disseminated more widely through academic press and VAWG fora/ events. It would also be interesting to collect and analyze quantitative data from the Improving Nutrition program participants at the end of the program to assess the longer-term impacts of EASE on IPV.

#### **9. Assimilate learning from other IPV approaches:**

EASE appears to be a very successful approach to addressing IPV, but if SAC is interested in furthering its efforts to address VAWG then it would be worthwhile to learn from complementary approaches, such as SASA! Raising Voices in Uganda and UK Aid What Works, to further strengthen its IPV programming.

#### **10. Integrate VAWG into community safeguarding:**

As SAC develops its community-led safeguarding to empower communities to keep themselves safe, it could integrate education on violence and its prevention into the process to ensure communities continue to work towards protecting, preventing and mitigating against violence so women and girls can be safe in the long term.

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