



Men Care+

MenCare+  
engaging men  
in a 4-country  
initiative.  
Rwanda



The MenCare+ programme in Rwanda encourages women and men to work together towards gender equality. The programme challenges social and gender norms that perpetuate inequality, violence against women and girls, and hinder the full attainment of women's and men's sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). The holistic programme uses a comprehensive set of strategies, adapted for the Rwandan context, to engage boys and men in social change and as caregiving partners in order to improve the health of women, men and children, to prevent violence, and to build respectful relationships.

Rwanda population (1)  
11,533,446

GDP per capita (2)  
\$1,535

Life expectancy (3)  
66.7

Maternal mortality (4)  
(per 100k)  
210

UN Human Development  
Index (5)  
163

UN Gender Inequality  
Index (6)  
0.4

The programme is implemented by the Rwanda Men's Resource Center (RWAM-REC), which works in collaboration with the Rwandan government, to support the attainment of the country's development goals. In Rwanda, there is great political will and a strong legal framework to promote gender equality and women's empowerment. National policies and strategies acknowledge the important role that men can play in preventing violence, promoting maternal, newborn and child health and family planning. The MenCare+ programme, known locally as Bandedereho, works together with the government to promote positive gender and social norms among the community and to support the implementation of these policies.

## INTERVENTIONS

### GROUP EDUCATION

#### YOUNG MEN'S AND WOMEN'S GROUP EDUCATION

More than 3,000 young men and women have participated in Bandedereho youth groups. The Bandedereho youth group education aims to promote gender equality and the sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) of young men and women ages 18-24 in Rwanda. The curriculum has 15 interactive sessions that engage young men and women in critical reflection and dialogue. The weekly, single-sex small group meetings are facilitated by 64 trained male and female peer educators.

The sessions are designed to foster greater support for gender equality, to increase awareness of SRH rights, and to promote healthy behaviours and relationships. Bandedereho groups work in conjunction with local health providers to equip young people with the skills and knowledge necessary to protect their own sexual and reproductive health and to enhance their ability to practice safer sex. The sessions also help prepare young men and women for their future relationships and roles as parents, emphasizing the importance of caregiving for both men and women.

An evaluation of the Bandedereho youth SRHR groups was conducted by RWAMREC and Promundo-US, using pre- and post-surveys. After 15 weeks in the programme, young men and women reported: increased use of health services; increased support for gender-equitable attitudes; friendlier attitudes towards contraceptives and condom use; greater sense of shared responsibility between men and women for SRHR; greater participation in household tasks among young men; and Reduced acceptance of intimate partner violence.

(1, 2, 3) National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda (NISR), May 2016  
(4) National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda (NISR) [Rwanda], Ministry of Health (MOH) [Rwanda], and ICF International. 2015. Rwanda Demographic and Health Survey 2014-15. Rockville, Maryland, USA: NISR, MOH, and ICF International  
(5, 6) UN Human Development Reports 2015



*"This [programme] changed my life.  
This special programme empowers youth to increase awareness of  
gender-based violence, gender equality, and fighting unwanted pregnancy,  
so that they can be allowed to prepare for their future...  
I am transformed into a worthy young man."*

*Young man, aged 21*

#### COUPLES' GROUP EDUCATION

More than 3,400 men and women have participated in the Bandedereho parents' groups. The Bandedereho parents' program works to promote men's involvement as equitable and non-violent fathers and partners. The program targets new and expectant fathers and their female partners ages 21-35. The Bandedereho parents' curriculum has 15 interactive sessions that engage young fathers in critical reflection and dialogue. Men's partners attend 8 of the 15 sessions in order to promote shared understanding and improved couple relations. Weekly small group meetings are facilitated by 48 trained father peer educators. Local health providers co-facilitate two sessions on pregnancy and family planning, and police co-lead one session on the law on gender-based violence.

The sessions are designed to foster greater support for gender equality; to educate couples on maternal health and foster support for men's involvement in the antenatal period and beyond; to provide accurate information on family planning; and to promote healthy non-violent relationships within the home. Interactive activities support young parents to communicate about household decision-making, and to learn skills for resolving conflict and discuss raising children without violence. Promundo-US and RWAMREC have conducted a randomized controlled trial (RCT) of the couples' groups to evaluate impact. Preliminary outcomes suggest positive changes across several key outcome areas, including sexual and reproductive health, men's participation in maternal, newborn and child health, and reductions in intimate partner violence. The RCT findings will be available in mid-2016.

*"This group education was an answer for me and my family.  
After participating, I take care of my child. I take care of his cleanliness,  
feed him. I do any household work. I am now aware that all those activities are  
my own responsibility, and that they are not only the tasks of my wife."*

*Father, age 29*

#### CAMPAIGNS

In Rwanda, the Bandedereho community campaigns complement the work being done with individuals and families through group education. The campaign was designed to transform gender and social norms by promoting men's involvement in maternal, newborn and child health and in family planning, and positive family relations. RWAMREC implemented the campaign, which included a variety of tools to raise awareness at the national, district and local levels. Print media and radio were used to engage listeners in discussions about gender equality, fatherhood, violence prevention, and maternal, newborn and child health. Community events, including sports activities and awareness-raising at Rwanda's monthly community service called umuganda, were also conducted. Posters were also

displayed at health facilities in each district and flyers, t-shirts and other communication materials distributed to community members. Millions of people across Rwanda were reached by the campaign.

## WORK WITH SERVICE PROVIDERS

### TRAINING HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS

The Bandebereho program works in close partnership with health providers in its efforts to improve the lives of young men and women, and new and expectant parents. The program has trained nearly 300 health providers in Karongi, Musanze, Nyaruguru and Rwamagana districts on how to engage fathers in maternal, newborn, and child Health (MNCH) and in how to provide youth-friendly SRHR services to young men and women. RWAMREC and the Rwanda Ministry of Health co-led trainings for health providers from health centers and hospitals in all four districts. The trainings explored topics of gender equality, family planning, adolescent SRHR, and engaging fathers in MNCH. The trainings aimed to provide skills and lessons that health providers can apply in their daily work to provide quality and rights-based SRHR and MNCH services. Promundo and RWAMREC conducted a pre- and post-evaluation of these trainings with 184 participating health providers to assess impact. After attending the training, health providers reported: friendlier attitudes towards the SRHR of both young women and young men; greater confidence in providing SRHR services to adolescent girls; and increased support for engaging men in MNCH.

The Bandebereho program also linked health providers directly to participants attending RWAMREC's group education sessions at the community level. Trained health providers co-facilitated 2 of the 15 group education sessions run by RWAMREC for young men, young women, and fathers. The group sessions provide an opportunity for the health workers to demonstrate various family planning and contraceptive methods, provide accurate information on HIV/STIs and pregnancy, and respond to participants' questions and promote SRH service use.

### COUNSELLING MEN ON INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

The Bandebereho Pillars of Peace program provides group counselling for Rwandan men ages 30-45 in order to promote safe and peaceful homes and communities for women, children, and men. Self-reflective group counselling processes are used to transform gender norms and promote more equitable gender relations; encourage healthy and respectful relationships; and equip men with useful anger management strategies to prevent intimate partner violence. The Pillars of Peace curriculum has 14 interactive sessions that engage men with similar backgrounds in self-reflection and dialogue. Sessions promote critical thinking about gender and rights, and strategies for promoting more equitable relationships between women and men. More than 2,100 men and their partners participated in the Bandebereho Pillars of Peace groups since 2015.

Men reflect on how past experiences with violence both inform and impact their present lives and relationships. Within a supportive peer environment, men learn anger management strategies and communication skills to foster positive, healthy changes in their lives, and in the lives of their partners and

The MenCare+ programme is a 3-year, 4-country collaboration between Rutgers and Promundo-US, created to engage men aged 15–35 as caregiving partners in maternal and child health and sexual and reproductive health rights. The programme is supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands and is implemented in Brazil, Indonesia, Rwanda and South Africa (2013-2015).

MenCare+ Rwanda is a partnership between Promundo-US and the Rwanda Men's Resource Center. The Rwanda Men's Resource Center is a Rwandan NGO with a mission to mobilize men to support women's leadership; to contribute to the eradication of men's violence against women; and to serve as role models for the promotion of positive masculine behaviours. The MenCare+ programme was implemented in four out of Rwanda's 30 districts: Karonji; Musanze; Nyaruguru; and Rwamagana. The programme was implemented in collaboration with the Maternal and Child Health Department of the Rwanda Biomedical Center.

children. Women join their partners at 2 of the sessions to exchange ideas and to brainstorm ways to sustain the positive changes taking place in their homes. The weekly small group meetings are facilitated by 72 trained facilitators, under the supervision of mental health professionals from the district health centers. Preliminary findings from a qualitative evaluation indicate the group counselling is supporting men to adopt more positive behaviours – including reduced alcohol use, increased family communication, and participation in household activities – and is contributing to better relations with their partners and their children.

*"I used to insult my wife and I didn't value what she had done. When [Bandeberaho] taught us about violent and disrespectful language, I felt pain in my heart and I was touched. After that lesson, I asked her to forgive me. Things changed from that time. Now people tell me that Pillars of Peace really changed me and that I am a real Pillar of Peace."*

*Group participant*

#### PARTNERSHIP WITH GOVERNMENT

The Rwanda Men's Resource Center (RWAMREC) launched the Bandeberaho program in 2013 in collaboration with the Rwandan Ministry of Health and Promundo-US. The program supports the achievement of the Government of Rwanda's maternal, newborn, and child Health and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) goals by working simultaneously at the community and health facility levels. The partnership with the government at national and district levels has been critical to the success of the multi-component program. More than 1,500 stakeholders – including local authorities, police, NGOs and other service providers – have participated in training and awareness raising sessions on the importance of engaging men in promoting gender equality, SRHR and violence prevention. Through these meetings, RWAMREC works with decision- and policy-makers to create an enabling environment for men's involvement and to support the implementation of the Bandeberaho programme. Local authorities in each district work hand-in-hand with the Bandeberaho programme by helping to identify eligible group education participants, visit groups, and promote the Bandeberaho programme. District mayors and local authorities have also been strong champions of the programme, calling for scaling-up of the model in other sites.

