

Empowering Men to Engage and Redefine Gender Equality (EMERGE)

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INTRODUCTION

Background and Context

CARE International Sri Lanka's 'Empowering Men to Engage and Redefine Gender Equality' (EMERGE) project was implemented across 30 villages and 5 plantations in the districts of Batticaloa, Polonnaruwa, Nuwara Eliya (2010-2014) and Hambantota and Moneragala (2010-2013). The project attempted to address persistent issues of gender inequality and GBV through the engagement of men and from a perspective that challenged hegemonic masculinities. The emphasis of this project was on transforming attitudes, perceptions and practice of gender inequality in various forms, working with men, boys and women to this end. The project worked at multiple levels - household, community, divisional, district and at national level where it engaged in advocacy efforts around the issues of gender equality and GBV.

For CARE Sri Lanka, engaging men has been acknowledged as an important component of gender programming, as it is seen as widening the scope of its work to address GBV, by working with both men and women to challenge dominant masculinities.

The goals of the project were as follows:

Overall Goal:

Men and youth act as allies to promote respect and diversity, to improve women's status in society (by 2014).

Intermediate Goals

- Men and Youth demonstrate leadership and actively participate in promoting gender equality within CARE and in areas where CARE operates.
- The wider public (state and non-state) understands and appreciates the roles men and youth play in promoting gender equality.
- Selected households within CARE EMERGE operating areas exhibit equitable decision making and access to resources.
- CARE acts as the lead facilitator in engaging men to advocate for women's empowerment in Sri Lanka.

Given below is a broad description of the type of activities conducted under the EMERGE project:

Household level: The project worked at household level through a program with married couples. Initial assessments were conducted among selected families in the Nuwara Eliya District, followed by a training/awareness building on some main themes that included: perceptions and attitudes that lead to conflict in the family unit, understanding of Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH), Gender Based Violence, shared decision making, family counselling and positive parenting

within families for the well-being of all. The program also partnered with the Family Planning Association of Sri Lanka to train midwives, and other health professionals and provide SRH awareness for participating couples. Following the popularity of the program and positive feedback from estate worker communities this was expanded to Batticaloa in the East and in Polonnaruwa in the North-Central province in 2013 to include a further 192 couples, in addition to the 160 couples in the Nuwara Eliya District.

Community level: EMERGE worked with community level structures - Village Level Action Groups (VLAG) and Community Development Forums (CDF) that provided a forum for villagers to come together to discuss issues related to gender and GBV facing their communities, and take action as required. There are currently 28 VLAGs and 5 CDFs established. EMERGE also continued to work with youth groups in each village, which it saw as an important way to mobilise youth to talk about, and take action where possible on issues of gender inequality in the village/communities they live in. It also envisioned that this would provide them a space and platform to reflect and share experiences.

In 2013 EMERGE formed and began working with groups of male change agents at village level, who were meant to act as peer educators on the subject of gender, men and masculinities, and the prevention of gender based violence. At the close of the project, there were 220 male change agents working across the three districts of Batticaloa, Polonnaruwa, and Nuwara Eliya.

District and Divisional levels: EMERGE worked with Divisional Level Task Forces (DLTFs) at local government level, which brought together local government officials and decision makers such as the Divisional Secretary, Medical Officers of Health, Zonal Directors of Education, and community representatives. The purpose of this structure was to involve local government officials in addressing gender based issues. A District Level Task Force (DTF) continues to function in Batticaloa, with representation from stakeholders that the EMERGE project worked with, as well as with DLTF members from the Batticaloa district.

National level: In 2013, EMERGE launched the study 'Broadening Gender: Why Masculinities Matter', with the support of Partners for Prevention. The study undertook research on the knowledge, practices and social attitudes towards gender and gender based violence in 4 districts of Sri Lanka - Colombo, Hambantota, Nuwara Eliya and Batticaloa - with a total sample of 1,600 men and 600 women. The study continues to be drawn on as a resource by other organisations as well, providing information that could potentially support interventions that

address GBV. The study was also used as a springboard to initiate national level advocacy interventions which included a focus on engaging men and boys to address gender based violence.

One such initiative is the policy document on “Preventing Sexual and Gender Based Violence - Strategies for Universities” which was spearheaded by senior academics from the Universities of Kelaniya, Colombo and the Open University, and developed in collaboration with senior academics of 14 universities across the island. The policy, launched in March 2015, was endorsed by the University Grants Commission (UGC)¹ and the Federation of University Teachers’ Associations (FUTA). The UGC has undertaken to play a lead role in disseminating the strategy document within the universities under its purview. Additional interventions included training on “Masculinities and Gender” for District level Women Development Officers through the Ministry of Child Development and Women’s Affairs; similar training for staff of Watawala Plantations, including field staff and human resource management staff at its head office; and advocacy efforts with male parliamentarians, in an attempt to request parliamentarians to raise issues relating to GBV during parliamentary debates.

Purpose and Framework of this Evaluation

The purpose of this evaluation was to capture lessons learned and experiences of the EMERGE project over the past four years, especially given that it was a pilot project for CARE Sri Lanka. As such, the project also evolved over time, reflecting the learning curve of the implementing team as well as responses to specific contexts and circumstances within CARE itself. This approach has been described in hindsight as one of ‘emergent practice.’²

A decision was made therefore to move away from a standard evaluation that focused strictly on achievement (or not) of outlined goals, outcomes and outputs as specified in the logframe, to one that reflected on and interrogated the overall approach including the project’s guiding politics and the tools adopted at multiple levels. The chapters do however link to overall objectives of the project as well.

Four thematic areas were identified for the evaluation:

- 1. National level initiatives:** To evaluate to what extent the EMERGE Project fell in line with the broader objectives of CARE’s national level work, and how it contributed (or not) to the ongoing work of key actors and organisations in the women’s rights, gender equality and GBV field in Sri Lanka.
- 2. Community level initiatives:** To evaluate how appropriate and useful were the approaches to a) working with married couples and b) male change agents / peer educators in efforts to address gender equality, and to what extent these programmes had an impact on the reduction of GBV.³

- 3. Local government structures:** To evaluate the usefulness of local government structures (DLTF and DTFs) in addressing gender related issues raised by the VLAG and CDFs.
- 4. Youth programmes:** To evaluate how useful EMERGE’s youth work has been in addressing gender equality through the engagement of young men and boys.

Methodology

Independent researchers were commissioned for each of the four thematic areas (which make up the four chapters of this report). The researchers worked in teams on chapters one to three.

	Title	Authors
1	National level initiatives	Sarala Emmanuel & Vijay Nagaraj
2	Community-state partnerships: The VLAGs, CDFs, DLTFs and DTFs	Professor Neloufer de Mel & Dr. Pradeep Peiris
3	The private and the public: Transforming gender relations through the Happy Families and Male Change Agents programmes of EMERGE	Professor Neloufer de Mel & Dr. Gameela Samarasinghe
4	Working with Youth	Iromi Perera

The researchers conducted interviews both in Colombo and at district level with stakeholders and project partners where relevant, as well as focus group discussions where needed. These were conducted over December 2014 and January 2015. Efforts by the researcher to follow up on work that was done in the Hambantota and Moneragala districts (where only youth work was conducted until August 2013) were not successful. This has been noted in the relevant chapter.

A limitation of the evaluation was a reliance on CARE’s partner organisations to coordinate and select the interviewees and participants in the discussions. Another limitation identified was that the methodology was dependent on self-reporting and could not be corroborated, which led to the recommendation that better tools of measurement were needed, especially in measuring gender equality within the home.

Summary of Findings: Cross-cutting Themes

All of the chapters identified that the project had made some gains, but they interrogate the framing of the work and the depth of its achievements in light of a broader context of work carried out on women’s rights in Sri Lanka.

For instance the ‘civic engagement approach’ adopted by the youth programming was applauded as a useful entry point in mobilising youth to talk about issues of gender equality, while at the same time enhancing recognition for their work in the community. The critique however was that sometimes the entry strategy did not necessarily translate into substantive engagement on these issues with young people. So for

¹ Soft copies of this policy are available at the website of the University Grants Commission: <http://www.ugc.ac.lk/en/news-and-events/1494-preventing-sexual-and-gender-based-violence-strategies-for-universities.html>

² Victor Robinson (2014) Emergent Practice: Care International Sri Lanka’s Gender Based Violence Work: 2011-2014

³ The aspect of the project’s contribution in terms of reduction of GBV could not be assessed due to limitations of time and gaps in information available.

instance, the evaluation reported that young people now had a better understanding of gender and gender roles even if incomplete, but this did not necessarily translate into a clear articulation of its importance, or into action.

In the programme with married couples, the entry strategy was to discuss issues of ‘money management’ in order to encourage shared decision making around incomes at the household level. This may have led to upward economic and social mobility through household budgeting. However, participants tended to equate the benefits of the programme to social mobility with a diluted focus on gender equality which became a by-product. Gender issues had, therefore, to compete with people’s competing priorities, whether it was savings, upward mobility or even migration for employment in the case of youth.

The evaluation also emphasised the need to recognise that EMERGE followed a long history of prevention of GBV work in areas such as Batticaloa, which also saw periods of conflict, displacement and related violence, in addition to the tsunami in 2004. Given this context, the chapters also looked at how the work of EMERGE was framed - for instance, did EMERGE approach GBV from the point of view of an ‘injustice’ or was emphasis placed on win-win solutions between men and women in other words did it reduce violence to a consequence of poorly managed intimate relationships? Was there insufficient emphasis on the distribution of power not only within patriarchal households but also in the broader context of the plantation sector for instance? To what extent was the project implementation marked by a conscious of a feminist politics? Was an approach to challenging masculinities contextualised taking into consideration for instance a history of conflict in Batticaloa, or a history of patriarchal structures in the political economy of plantations, or the relationalities within masculinities themselves?

In relation to local government structures, the evaluation acknowledges the benefits gained, particularly in ensuring the engagement of government officials with issues relating to gender based violence. The fact that community members were part of village level structures also ensured that local communities could more easily access state mechanisms. The critique of these structures however, was that it posed the risk of reinstating ‘power’ in the hands of a select few who mediated between the community and the state. For instance, some of the Male Change Agents, as well as community leaders who were part of the CDFs or VLAGs, would sometimes play the role of local vigilantes, often times “subordinating gender interests in thought and practice”, leading to the further discrimination of women.

A key point raised in the chapter on the ‘Happy Families’ and ‘Male Change Agents’ Programmes was that both programmes emphasized behavioural change at the expense of the cognitive. The chapter argues for the need for both a cognitive and behavioral approach that is complementary so that attitudinal change can be sustained beyond the life of the project itself. In order to achieve this, consistent ideological

support and systematic, frequent training programmes targeting not only the communities in question, but also the project staff, resource persons and all others involved at a programmatic level, is necessary.

The evaluators also point out that EMERGE may have suffered as a result of the initial strategy of mainstreaming its work through other existing projects at CARE Sri Lanka, given that it was a pilot project. As the evaluators argue, having a tried and tested programme would have stood a better chance at being mainstreamed and implemented by, and through other projects.

In a broader sense, the evaluation also raises important questions as to the developmental discourse and the political consciousness that guides CARE Sri Lanka’s work in the area of preventing GBV, and the importance of introspection around the same. In addition, there are important practical considerations around implementation such as the ways in which knowledge is transferred between CARE Sri Lanka in Colombo where programmes are conceptualised, and partners who implement the work on the ground. Another consideration is to what extent there was/is an asymmetry built into the relationship with district or divisional level partners, and how this impacted on the project.

In sum, the purpose of the evaluation was to reflect on the gains that the EMEGE project made, as well as its lessons, so that it guides the work not only for CARE Sri Lanka, but also other actors working to prevent GBV by ‘engaging men and boys’ towards this end.

CHAPTER 1

National Level Initiatives

Sarala Emmanuel and Vijay Nagaraj

Introduction

We were invited by CARE Sri Lanka to be part of a team to conduct a final evaluation of the EMERGE (Empowering Men to Engage and Redefine Gender Equality) project. While three specific components of the project—‘Happy Families’, youth work, and work on building local structures of engagement at the village and district levels—were allocated to three separate teams, we were invited to focus on ‘broader issues’. These issues were variously described as including the ‘conceptual’ framing, looking at the national level work done under EMERGE such as the masculinities research and the policy work, the translation of key ideas and approaches and its trajectories within CARE Sri Lanka, and the broader relevance of the ‘engaging men’ strategy at the core of EMERGE in relation to on-going work on gender and women’s rights work in the country.

Eventually we agreed with CARE Sri Lanka to focus on the following key questions:

1. To what extent were the EMERGE objectives and goals in alignment with, related to and refracted the broader objectives of CARE’s national level work?
2. Flowing from the above, how does the EMERGE approach/project link to the on-going work on women’s rights and gender equality at the district level and national level within or supported by CARE?
3. How do key actors in the women’s rights, gender equality and GBV field in Sri Lanka see the contributions of the EMERGE project and work on masculinities in relation to the priorities and issues of the broader women’s rights work at the district and national levels?
4. What are the prospects of the EMERGE policy influencing processes in promoting the objectives of project? What have been the achievements and challenges?

We would like to stress that our contribution needs to be read alongside all the other component parts of the evaluation and not in isolation. This is especially important given the nature of EMERGE, which a 2014 review (Emergent Practice) described

as “disparate activities ranged across a broad spectrum of social development” (p. 15) while quoting a CARE annual report that admits to concerns amongst staff that “activities carried out are not clearly linked to a broader programme logic on male engagement.” We however also emphasize, much like Emergent Practice does, that such concerns about coherence and looseness or the lack of log-frame-like consistency by themselves do not provide sufficient grounds to understate let alone reject the value of the underlying ideas, the contributions made by the different activities of project, and the positive impacts that may have accrued. Indeed, the May 2014 review as well the mid-term evaluation of April 2013 identify several positive aspects of the project as do the other contributions to this final evaluation report.

Given the challenges of considering issues pertaining to a wide spectrum of activities and aspects of the large project that is EMERGE within a limited time we began engaging in conversations with a set of key individuals. These individuals included staff from CARE and its concerned partners, as well as others selected from a list given to us by CARE of those involved in or engaged with EMERGE in different ways. In addition, we also interviewed other individuals with a history of engagement on gender and women’s rights issues. It is important for us to stress that our ‘sample’ while purposive is by no means representative but the viewpoints and issues raised are most definitely pertinent. Out of respect for confidentiality all respondents are anonymised when quoted or referred to in this document.

As we sought to collate insights from our interviews, we realized that perhaps the most useful and pertinent set of points could be grouped under the following three areas of concern with a view to addressing the key questions outlined above:

1. Considering how the priorities and approaches of EMERGE actually shaped and constructed GBV within the context of

CARE Sri Lanka's work.

2. The politics of the 'engaging men' strategy and the masculinities discourse in the context of the wider women's rights movement and gender justice activism in Sri Lanka
3. Considering the policy influencing initiatives and processes connected to EMERGE

These concerns are especially pertinent if we accept the suggestion, in Emergent Practice that EMERGE be viewed as an "incubator for innovation" rather than a model, a suggestion we are inclined to being broadly sympathetic too. The first of three concerns listed above speaks to the idea that projects like EMERGE not only respond to pressing problems and challenges but in doing so in fact give shape and construct them in particular ways. Drawing on our interviews, previous reviews and evaluations as well as the training material and the literature generated by EMERGE we attempt a brief critical exploration of the ideas and approaches of EMERGE.

While the first and third concerns emerge directly from within EMERGE's work itself, the second of the three concerns listed above emerges from our conversations with those engaged in women's rights and gender justice activism in Sri Lanka regarding the politics of 'engaging men' in the context of GBV and VAW. In this context, it is important to stress that this section does not canvass the views of those interviewed regarding the EMERGE project as such but the broader question of addressing the politics of how masculinities is deployed and 'engaging men' positioned as a priority in relation to work on GBV in the context of Sri Lanka.

Finally, it is also important to state at the very outset that this report draws on our experience of being involved in work around violence against women, especially Sarala Emmanuel's familiarity with GBV work and CARE Sri Lanka's interventions in Batticaloa. This report is therefore, at least in part, also a look at EMERGE from an insider-outsider position with respect to the women's rights work in Sri Lanka.

EMERGE: Priorities, Approaches and how they shape the agenda on GBV

EMERGE was conceptualised in the context of an emerging global discourse backed by increasing investment on engaging men to counter Gender-Based Violence (GBV) as well as Violence against Women (VAW).⁴ While CARE's own work in Bosnia on engaging men had started in 2007,⁵ in Sri Lanka EMERGE came on the heels of a 8-year long intensive GBV programme which was implemented in Batticaloa during a period characterised by war, displacement and generalised violence, as well as the 2004 tsunami. The fact that there was a project that worked with women on the ground who were grappling with GBV in

a very complex and risky context and attempted to support women who had experienced violence, including sexual violence, should be recognised at the very outset.

Speaking of the years preceding the EMERGE project when CARE initiated a systematic attempt to engage men as part of the Preventing Gender Based Violence (PGBV) programme through a 'men against violence against women' component,⁶ R6, who was involved in the project, recalled that "women who were worst affected by violence said 'we can't change the men.' Women said 'men were like animals.' I had never seen such anger within women against men. I couldn't understand how they lived in families having so much anger and hatred. Women even said 'we should keep a grenade in the male organ and blast it.' They were so angry."

The pressing need to work with men therefore also came from these ground experiences of the incomprehensibility of brutal violence and the anger and sense of injustice amongst women. R6 further reflected, "then I realized we should work with men and men can influence other men in the community. I strongly believe that males who are going as 'change agents', they have to have strong women who engage with them and criticize them regularly so they don't go back to patriarchal practices".

Confronting GBV as injustice elicits some of the strongest challenges from socio-political structures. It is not clear to us if EMERGE actually grappled with this idea of GBV, especially VAW as a fundamental injustice or if this slipped away from the EMERGE project, which placed more emphasis on a 'win-win' mediated frame—for example, the absence of violence making for happy families. This is a very pertinent question in the light of R15, a key CARE staff, noting, firstly, the preference to use 'gender equity' rather than or along with 'gender equality' in project documents, such as in the log frame (this was subsequently changed, according to R15), and secondly, the lack of a feminist politics.

The way we read this last observation, for the purposes of this report, is that there was more of an emphasis on outcomes (a key element of the equity discourse) and not enough of an understanding of the dynamics of gendered misdistribution of power (a key element of equality discourse). The key issue to be considered by CARE is whether such choices of frames were made consciously and what were their political implications and effects. While it is important to note that not everyone working within women's organisations may necessarily answer to the description 'feminist', which itself is better thought of in the plural (i.e. feminisms), what is at issue is the extent to which there was a consciousness of the extent to which the approach engaged or not with feminist politics.

A key question here, in our view, is whether the idea of GBV itself was somewhat levelled out and flattened in the EMERGE project by a discourse that uses 'gender equity', 'gender equality' and 'gender-based violence' more loosely, and somewhat inter-changeably, leached of their political and social

4 For more on this see, for example, Emily Esplen (2006) *Engaging Men in Gender Equality: Positive Strategies and Approaches- Overview and Annotated Bibliography*, BRIDGE, IDS Sussex, available at <https://www.amherst.edu/media/view/186275/original/BB15Masculinities.pdf>; see also the work of UNFPA work on changing gender roles with respect to care and fatherhood and <http://www.engagingmen.net>.

5 See CARE International (2012) *The Young Men Initiative: Engaging young men in the Western Balkans in gender equality and violence prevention-A Case Study*, available at http://www.care.org/sites/default/files/documents/YE-2012-Balkans_Young_Mens_Initiative.pdf

6 According to R6 this programme was implemented between 2005 and 2007 in villages such as Mailankarachchi and Thiyavattavan in Valachenai DS Division, Batticaloa district.

import. To us it appears significant that CARE International's facilitator manual,⁷ published in 2013, on 'engaging men and boys on gender equality' is titled Gender Equity And Diversity (emphasis added) and does not carry a single reference in its 122 pages to patriarchy.

The treatment of gender and masculinities in the EMERGE Gender Trainers' Manual (2012) also reflects some of these concerns above. The issue of violence (GBV) is clubbed together with a discussion on fatherhood and parenting while sexual violence is discussed separately with reproductive health. While a more critical reading of the manual and its approach is beyond the scope of our immediate task, given its importance in setting the theoretical frame and shaping the perspectives of key agents of change it is vital to review it comprehensively. It also raises the question of how concepts and ideas are in fact translated, for instance, the manual does not engage substantively with masculinities in the plural, and appears to rely instead on a rather narrow explication of masculinity in Module 1. Notwithstanding the fact that trainers using this manual are assumed to have gone through a Training of Trainers (ToT), that its framing of masculinity appears so narrowly fixed is a matter of concern.

Another key question that arises for us is whether EMERGE signalled a move away from putting in place human resources, services and structures oriented to responding to GBV from within a women's rights, gender justice and collective feminist politics frame to one centred on 'engaging men' that focuses on developing life-skills to shift gender roles and behavioural change at the individual and family level? We agree with Victor Robinson in Emergent Practice⁸ that while the latter may indeed enable a move "in the direction of greater gender equality" (emphasis retained) and that any changes brought about by EMERGE on this front "should not be understated". (p. 11) But as he also underlines "What was unclear, however, was whether participants would be able to articulate the reasons for that change – why greater gender equality would be good for themselves and for their community – and what that change would look like in the wider society." (p.11)

We see many of the questions and issues raised above as connected to the key overall challenge for EMERGE and CARE outlined in the 2013 mid-term review,⁹ namely to "identify and develop a theory of structural change for women's empowerment and agency", one that engages "political and economic structures" and goes "beyond the current micro-level focus on individual or personal change interventions (happy families, youth trainings, SRH etc.)..." (p 5-6; also reinforced on p. 8).

Concerns over the extent to which structural elements of inequality and oppression are retained or lost are in fact central to critiques of EMERGE's approach by several women's rights

activists in Sri Lanka (see discussion further below). The risk is not only one of instrumentalisation but of pragmatic concerns and tactical choices circumscribing what we felt should be conscious political choices. For instance, 'happy families' on tea estates may mean higher productivity but this managerial logic operates in the context of a fundamentally inequitable and disempowering political economic context that is the broader plantation economy itself. Similarly, as underlined in Emergent Practice (2014) while participants in the Happy Families programme were clear that greater gender equality—seen as "men taking more responsibility for household chores and child care and women having more input into household decision-making"—would lead to happier families, CARE's Broadening Gender study (2013) cautions that even "masculinities that permit agreement on equal decision-making and greater participation of women in public life are not necessarily in direct competition with overtly patriarchal masculinities, which call for women's obedience, the feminization of household duties and the control of women's sexual relations." (p. 32).

Finally, following on from CARE's own history of engagement with GBV and VAW work as well as experiences of others, CARE's internal documentation identifies the complexities of designing programmes to respond to GBV, particularly in the context of war and post-war realities, and the risks involved. For instance, Putting the Jigsaw Together (2011), which documented the country office's gender-based violence work in Batticaloa District from 2003 to 2011, identifies a number of such challenges and risks, including but not limited to:

- GBV has "deeply embedded" cultural and social roots
- The need for a "multi-level multi-faceted intervention approach" that affects "multiple aspects of individual and social lives",
- Strong "social stigma attached to physical and sexual violence and cultural prohibitions against revealing "family secrets" which present particular challenges in problem identification, information-gathering and direct intervention. (intervention depends significantly on strong relationships at the community level)"
- "There are unusual risks involved in GBV intervention (to beneficiaries, families, organization)"

It was interesting that these concerns—how they arose and how they were addressed—in the course of EMERGE did not really figure substantially in any of the discussions with CARE project and partner staff during this brief enquiry. The only time there was any significant reference to them was when a staff member from a partner organisation mentioned that they were selected midway through the project because the previous partner had experienced difficulties in implementing the project in the context of Muslim communities.

Virtually all references made to the challenges, by CARE staff as well as partners, centred on the question of 'engaging men' as an approach, there was no mention of the complex challenges and risks (highlighted above) that working with women facing or at risk of GBV generates in a patriarchal

7 CARE International (2013) Gender Equity And Diversity-Module 501: Engaging Men And Boys For Gender Equality, Facilitator Manual 2013, Available at <http://www.care.org/sites/default/files/documents/Engaging%20Men%20and%20Boys%20GED%20501%20Manual.pdf>

8 Victor Robinson (2014) Emergent Practice: Care International Sri Lanka's Gender Based Violence Work: 2011-2014.

9 Darini Rajasingham Senanayake (2013) Mid Term review of EMERGE, April 2013.

context characterised by further stratification along lines of class, caste, and ethnicity. This, in our view, begs the question as to what extent EMERGE actually challenged the patriarchal structures that generate and perpetuate GBV. In other words, to what extent was there a transformative thrust to EMERGE or, put differently was the stress on readjusting gender role expectations and getting men to treat women better but within predetermined programmatic frames such as ‘happy families’ or ‘male change agents’?

Finally, an important question arises as to how and in which way EMERGE linked masculinities and GBV to war and militarisation in Sri Lanka. For instance, even though the Broadening Gender study carries multiple references to the significance of war and militarisation on the construction of masculinities and GBV in the text, the questionnaire employed appears not to have been adapted to the Sri Lankan context in this respect. The Gender Trainers’ Manual produced by EMERGE makes no substantial reference to war and militarisation, despite the brutal thirty year period of armed conflict (in the north and south of the country) whose legacy in terms of GBV and gender relations are profound and well discussed in literature.

Moreover, conversations with CARE staff and partners in the field also did not elicit any significance references to the impacts or significance of war and militarisation and how they have been accounted for or confronted in the course of the project. This is especially significant because the project was implemented in the districts of Polonnaruwa and Batticaloa and significant parts of the former and virtually the whole of the latter saw very high levels of militarisation, SGBV, and other war-related social impacts. Indeed, even issues such as early marriage in these areas are related to the war. All of this invites reflection on whether there was a degree of disembeddedness and decontextualisation of the discourse on masculinities.

On the Politics of ‘Engaging men’

According to R8, senior CARE Sri Lanka staff, the approach of working with men and boys “gave a lot of credibility to the work we [CARE] did” because otherwise “when we talked about gender it was one-sided”. She said that EMERGE allowed for a more “holistic understanding of gender transformative approaches.” R7, a former CARE Sri Lanka staff involved in EMERGE, noted, the “understanding of gender in CARE was theoretical” and according to her the project helped speak about gender in a way that people could relate to, what “gender equality meant” in “everyday life”. The project was about “getting gender to make sense in people’s lives”, “making it real”. In the Happy Families approach we saw “gender transformation at work” (R7) as there was, according to her, a stress on personalising gender transformation.

This view of the ‘engaging men’ approach as somehow grounding, completing, and giving a more rounded approach to CARE’s work on a gender transformative agenda needs however to be read in the light of the issues raised further below with respect to the politics of the ‘engaging men’ strategy as also the evaluation of specific components of the

project elsewhere in this report.

We now highlight some of the key questions, concerns, and critiques that emerged from our interviews with those engaged in women’s rights and gender justice work in relation to ‘engaging men’ to address GBV. It is important to note that while all the points outlined below emerged in conversations regarding CARE Sri Lanka’s approach in EMERGE, the emphasis of different individuals was different. Nevertheless we maintain that these questions, concerns and critiques are very salient in terms of any future work on GBV centred on working with men and boys within and beyond CARE.

A first important finding from our interviews with women’s rights activists and scholars is that there is a need to recover the political history of feminist engagement with men in a broader sense. As R9 noted there is a long history of feminist engagement with “male authority figures” in Sri Lanka. As several activists we interviewed underlined such an engagement has occurred not only in the context of violence within families or intimate relationships but also in contexts as varied as male-dominated farmer’s movements and labour unions in free trade zones to work with male judges and Quazis to male medical professionals.

A second closely related key finding is that there is a need to reflect on the history of engaging with “brothers” in other political struggles over women’s issues and concerns, including and women’s leadership and representation. Such reflections and the recovery of this knowledge can potentially offer new insights into ‘engaging men’ but also the politics of doing gender and shifting the patriarchal and heteronormative basis of power within the context of social action for social change. As R12 suggested progressive women’s groups have long engaged with men not only as co-travellers in common struggles but also making specific demands on men, for instance that labour unions should take on issues of sexual violence. As R18 underlined looking into and understanding the gender relations dynamics within movements for peace or workers rights and other campaigns could be very productive in understanding the negotiations and dynamics entailed. At the same time her caveat that such engagements did not entail a reference to masculinities, a more recent framework, is also important to note.

As R9, R6, R12 and R11 underlined a depoliticised approach to masculinities, disconnected from class, caste, ethnicity and other vectors of power and struggle, would in fact be counter-productive. This has to be seen in the light of increasingly professionalised and depoliticised approaches to work on gender in Sri Lanka.¹⁰ As R6 observed “I can see now, even those men who had the politics earlier and were working on gender rights before, now how gender has been taken out of those politics and have become interpreted in the patriarchal framework.”

¹⁰ See, for instance, Malathi de Alwis (2009) *Interrogating the ‘political’: feminist peace activism in Sri Lanka*, Vol. 91.

R11 raised the question of whether CARE's approach to engaging men within a framework of masculinities raises the risk of "attaching masculinities to male bodies" and in fact side-lining "non-conformist gender expressions." In her view CARE's approach to employing masculinities was not politically grounded in a feminist politics but appeared like an uncritical deployment of a 'novel' frame that in fact did not challenge heteronormative and patriarchal binaries.

As R14 said working with masculinities and constructing the 'good man'—who would not commit violence against women—far from necessarily challenging could even reinforce certain dominant cultural concepts of the 'good woman'. Similarly the construction of 'happy families' is itself problematic given the dominance of the heteronormative trope, which is deeply gendered. At the same time, it is true that such easily accessible frames like 'happy families' have a strong appeal in terms of opening up non-threatening ways of engaging men and women. As an entry strategy it can engage less resistance and secure buy-in from men and powerful structures, and the project idea is also not seen as alien to local cultural contexts. For example, the idea that happy families would build stronger communities or increase productivity in the plantations is appealing. However, the question that arises is how these tactical choices redefine the problem itself and therefore dictate the strategy.

A third crucial concern that emerged is whether the approach of EMERGE to masculinities is limited to shifting behaviours. As R14 underlined, it is possible to effect shift in behaviour, such as stopping violent behaviour, because of public shame or threat of police intervention but without a fundamental shift in attitude. Indeed the focus on changing gender roles within the home, key to the 'happy families' component does not necessarily imply a challenge to patriarchy. Reflecting on his years of working with men and his own struggle, R10 underlined that the key is "internal transformation" not merely behavioural change that can in fact be reversed.

For instance, R9 noted that while she did use the material generated by EMERGE in her work on gender justice and women's rights, it did not deal with issues such as equal pay for equal work or dowry. In her view, "the foundational concepts behind the behaviours" such as patriarchy combined with class, caste and other forms of exploitation, need to be addressed, for a masculinities frame to lead to awareness of male privilege and how it links with other vectors of social, political, economic and cultural power exercised within society. This was a view echoed, albeit in different terms, by R6, R10, R14 and R12.

A fourth critical concern that emerged is whether 'engaging men' and masculinities is "piggy-backing on the vulnerabilities of feminist approaches" (R11) and emergence of "men as players" competing for already scarce resources and space. By vulnerabilities of feminist approaches she was referring to the self-critique within the feminist movement regarding their strategies over the decades and the 'failures' to address GBV or even attain justice. R14 noted that it is no longer only women's

organisations who are working on questions of VAW or gender and this expansion brings opportunities as well as dangers, especially because they do not always come from a feminist or even a woman-centred perspective.¹¹

R6 for instance spoke about the repeated attempts by an organisation that does not identify itself as a women's organisation to join a network of women's organisations. According to her it is crucial to consider the challenges of access to resources for women's rights work and in this context look at how an 'engaging men' agenda can in fact throw up further challenges to women's rights work.

R14 suggested that the 'engaging men' strategy need to be situated in a political and cultural context in which "when women do take a stand against violence they do not have the support services necessary" and moreover "they become the witches and the whores and the sluts of our society. How do we support the women who want to go against the grain?"

A fifth concern is how accountability for violence plays out in the context of 'engaging men' to stop VAW (R6, R12). This is especially pertinent in the light of the fact that over the years human rights organisations, trade unions, and community organisations have been unwilling to frontally address the question of responsibility and accountability for violence against women. In the context of a broader dominant discourse that naturalises and trivialises violence, R11 underlined the dangers of CARE adopting a masculinities frame that constructs men as 'wounded subjects'. Nevertheless, we also note R18's contention that an engagement with masculinities that "disturbs the stereotype" and highlights how the generalised violence that men are exposed to constitutes masculinities. Her contention was that those engaged in women's rights work have to find ways to engage with the significant challenges this throws up. At the same time, R9 argued that the approach of engaging men that focuses mainly on altering harmful behaviours—to oneself and to women—individuates and depoliticises or dilutes the structural element of gender power relations. The challenge as outlined by her, is ensuring that gender continues to be a political struggle and concept and is not reduced to reconfiguring roles within patriarchal institutions or disconnected from other political issues.

¹¹ See Chulani Kodikara (2014) *Balancing Acts: Counseling for Intimate Partner Violence Against Women in the two Districts of Anuradhapura and Batticaloa*, International Centre for Ethnic Studies.

On the ‘Broadening Gender’ Study and Selected National Level Policy Work

The Study

The Broadening Gender study on masculinities and SGBV undertaken in four districts across Sri Lanka gave CARE and EMERGE significant recognition internally and externally. Internally, according to a senior staff member R8, the baseline study enabled greater internal collaboration as it made the work of EMERGE “more grounded, the work became more realistic, approachable”. In her view, the study led to not only EMERGE staff but also others within CARE championing its ideas.

Externally the study generated very high levels of interest from different sectors and actors. The data from the study has been widely quoted by national and international actors and all of the people interviewed for this evaluation who made a reference to the study noted its value and the insights it has provided into masculinities and SGBV in Sri Lanka. The manner in which the study was leveraged also appears to have been crucial. R 16, a senior academic and activist, noted that Engaging Men was a “ground breaking study” and CARE Sri Lanka acted very strategically in identifying key sectors—universities, private sector, medical fraternity—to actually attempt to anchor its relevance within “specific institutional contexts.” In her view, such anchoring helped direct the information and insights as well as actions informed by the study and increased its “potential to become institutionalised practice and culture”.

Apart from the data and insights from the study, it was also CARE’s decision to initiate a range of policy influencing engagements. Five working groups were established and policy briefs developed in areas pertaining to: child protection, youth engagement, women’s attitudes and impact of GBV on health, addressing men’s health to prevent SGBV, and the role of the private sector.

This in turn led to significant policy engagements related to addressing SGBV issues within universities, Watawala plantations, (both discussed further below) as well as male parliamentarians (a process still in the early stages and not considered by us). Moreover, the study also bolstered the EMERGE strategy of opening up new avenues of engagement with the state gender machinery. The Ministry of Women’s Affairs had already initiated a programme called “pirimintath venasak kala haka” [Men Too Can Make A Difference] and there was thus an interest in the Ministry to work with men. The opening enabled the training of district level Women’s Development Officers (WDOs) from across the country, Gender Focal Points in other ministries/departments and other officials on gender equality, women’s rights frameworks, men, and masculinities.

The study itself, it is important to note, was part of a larger 5 country study initiated by Partners for Prevention (P4P) and the questionnaire/interview schedule and much of the framing was determined by P4P. Hence the space to adapt it to the

local context was minimal. Therefore, notwithstanding the significant attempt to contextualise the data and analysis to Sri Lanka, in the main through secondary literature, there is merit in the argument that it is not necessarily fully reflective of the spectrum of Sri Lankan realities. As the lead researcher explained, while its publication as a stand-alone study raised expectations of greater contextualisation, in reality it was heavily shaped by the larger five-country study that it was a part of. While this certainly does not negate the overall relevance or value of the study’s findings, it does contain important gaps, especially in terms of its data collection tool not being fully tailored to exploring the impact of over three decades of war and militarisation.

On the one hand, the Broadening Gender study certainly offers an interesting approach for future collaboration between academics and researchers and CARE. The perspectives and analytical skills of the former played a crucial role in ensuring that the study was not reduced to a report that did little else but present data collected through interview schedules designed elsewhere. The lead researcher noted with appreciation the space and analytical freedom CARE gave the research team during writing and suggested that the engagement with key CARE staff on the report was always productive. At the same time, the lead researcher also welcomed as “very strategic” CARE’s carefully calibrated approach to leveraging the study and using the data, including a considered and cautious approach to media coverage, as well as the follow-up measures initiated through the working groups and policy interventions with universities, the private sector, youth, etc.

On the other hand, it is also a matter of concern that other than the on-going engagement with core EMERGE staff in Colombo, CARE did not facilitate a systematic exchange between the researchers and the rest of the EMERGE staff and partners. Notwithstanding its limitations and the fact that it came out late in the project cycle, the question remains as to what extent the analyses and problematisations in Broadening Gender have actually been digested within CARE itself and EMERGE partners. Or, as has been suggested, the greater emphasis was on “mining the data” that served certain specific project objectives.

The crucial issue here, as the lead researcher also underlined, is the gap between the construction of gender and masculinities, even if it is by no means beyond being contested, in Broadening Gender and that in other project-related discourses. Even after making allowance for the fact that the study was lead and written by academics and social scientists and that seeking a consistently high level of analytical capacities across all those engaged in such a large project is somewhat unrealistic, the evidence suggests that the gap is very significant. The research appears to occupy a very different space within or in relation to EMERGE, useful largely in terms of data and providing a credible basis for certain policy level interventions but there appears to be cause for concern as to whether the study’s analysis and approach is sufficiently internalised across the organisation/project and its partners. This concern is in fact

underlined by the observation made by R13, a senior CARE staff member, who noted that the research “somehow became the prime focus of the whole project” and community engagement took a backseat.

University Work

Building on the Engaging Men study, CARE worked closely with the Centre for Gender Studies - University of Kelaniya (CGSUK) and initiated a programme to develop measures to preventing and responding to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) within universities.

The CGSUK had already initiated some work in this regard in association with the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU) including convening a Gender Equity and Equality network with members from all universities in Sri Lanka (R16). With support from CARE, the CGSUK, along with the lead researchers of the study, initiated a process that envisioned developing a comprehensive policy and guidelines to prevent and respond to SGBV in universities across Sri Lanka.

The initial proposal included conducting 6 national workshops across the country to bring together all key universities in a process that would involve a) sharing information on SGBV within universities, b) using findings from Engaging Men to raise awareness and generate debate on SGBV and masculinities and c) initiate discussion on measures that can be taken at various levels.

However due to funding issues only two workshops could be held, a national workshop in Jan 2014 in Colombo and a workshop at the Eastern University in Batticaloa in March 2014. In all nearly 100 academic and administrative staff from various faculties and departments of 14 major universities from across the country participated in these workshops. Drawing on discussions from these workshops a set of guidelines to prevent and address SGBV in universities were drawn up. However, the sudden closure of the CGSUK as well as additional hurdles created by a change of leadership at the University of Kelaniya coupled with the unwillingness of the University Grants Commission (UGC) to officially back the guidelines owing to political considerations and the sudden declaration of Presidential elections, has stalled the formal adoption of the Guidelines.

While the change in the political context may enable forward movement on this front, it is important to note that the process had important positive effects:

- They provided a valuable space that not only “surfaced many issues” (R16) pertaining to SGBV within universities but also enabled discussion of challenges involved in responding to SGBV. Both R10 and R16 underlined that the levels of participation and engagement was very high.
- The workshops also provided a space for sharing of on-going research within universities across different faculties that was relevant to understanding SGBV.
- The workshops enabled the development of countrywide

links across universities of those with a shared interest in addressing SGBV within universities. R10, who facilitated the workshop at Eastern University, underlined that these workshops were well planned and participants from the universities were carefully selected.

- R10 noted that the workshop “strengthened us conceptually” and also spurred further discussions within the University on questions of gender and violence as well as gender sensitivity, and the under-representation of women in key positions and other issues. In other words, it opened up wider conversations.

The changed political context will likely generate new opportunities to take this forward, especially the possible official adoption of the guidelines to prevent and address SGBV within universities. At the same time, it is clear that well-directed and strategic advocacy with clear goals, based on evidence generated by sound research, and backed by a consultative and participatory process can generate significant value at various levels within universities: surfacing issues of SGBV, raising awareness and initiating debate and dialogue regarding masculinities, enhancing collaborative action, and generating practical policy measures to address SGBV in universities.

Whether all of this has translated into building a strong critical mass of opinion-makers working in a sustained manner on SGBV within universities is not a question this evaluation has addressed. Nevertheless it is clear it has “created spaces” for such a possibility (R10). The issues raised and the links established are also being leveraged in other ways, for instance the 2015 South Asia gender conference of the Association for Commonwealth Universities is due to be held in Batticaloa, hosted by the Eastern University. Both R10 and R16 noted that this would be used to consolidate the links established and take forward discussion on SGBV issues within universities.

Work with Watawala Plantations

As part of its engagement with the private sector, EMERGE signed a MoU with Watawala Plantations PLC to engage with the staff and the community. In the absence of fieldwork our assessment of this intervention is necessarily limited. We restrict ourselves to raising the following issues based on discussions with key staff from EMERGE and the company.

The first and perhaps foremost issue concerns the effects of locating interventions aimed at addressing SGBV and transforming gender relations within the framework of enhancing productivity. As R17, a senior executive with Watawala Plantations told us, for such interventions to have any legitimacy they “should have a company perspective” i.e., their legitimacy is connected to the extent to which they contribute to enhancing productivity. There is a long history of welfare interventions prompted by the understanding that a range of negative social behaviours have adverse implications for the workplace. In recent times employers are being increasingly called on to recognise domestic violence as a workplace issue because it leads to low productivity owing to poor health, low

morale, absenteeism, loss of work time, etc.¹² R17 listed many of the same concerns as having motivated the company to committing to working with EMERGE.

While these concerns are most certainly valid from the point of view of the company or an employer and perhaps serves as a good point of entry, there is the question of whether this can lead to an instrumentalisation of the goal of transforming gender relations. A larger question is how such approaches grapple or account for the adjustment of potentially transformative social agendas to a market logic, one that already commodifies both production and reproduction. It is not clear to us if there was sufficient attention to or discussions within CARE let alone between CARE and Watawala Plantations concerning these issues.

A second issue that arises is how such interventions play into the relations of power characteristic of the political economy of plantations, which locks communities into a distinct relationship of domination and dependence vis-à-vis the companies. What meanings do such interventions assume when routed through company structures and mechanisms? The reality of plantation communities is that they are already susceptible to far higher levels of surveillance and measures of control and the question is whether such interventions, which target personal behaviour and intimate relationships, actually enhance these tendencies of surveillance and control? We do recognise that access to communities on plantations is almost always heavily mediated by companies but the question is the extent to which there was an awareness of these dynamics and issues and what efforts were made to deal with them.

A third and final concern, also flagged by R17, is the exit strategy. The EMERGE facilitated intervention essentially took the form of training a section of the company staff as well as the community, workers as well as youth not employed directly on the plantations, on gender relations. It appears that there lacked a clear phasing out and transition strategy; the end of the project marked an abrupt termination of the engagement. As R17 noted there did not appear to be enough resources dedicated to transition and phasing out thus raising concerns about longer-term sustainability of these interventions.

Conclusion and Recommendations

We recognise that the task set for us was somewhat different and our approach has its limitations, several more interviews would have been especially useful. However, the relatively short time available, the overall timing of the evaluation as well as the professional and personal circumstances combined to restrict us somewhat. Our intention was to critically explore ideas and approaches that underpin EMERGE rather than highlight what worked and what did not. We have highlighted questions and concerns in the spirit of concerned and constructive critique and we hope they will prove to be points of departure for further reflection within CARE for future programming.

We would like to conclude by making one final point. In our view, working with or engaging men to end GBV, as relevant as it is, is not the same as doing so from a critical framework of masculinities, such as the one outlined in *Broadening Gender* for instance. ‘Engaging men’ may occur and even be ‘successful’ within a narrowly conceived or politically decontextualized understanding of gender relations or masculinities. In initiatives such as EMERGE, there are often slippages at every stage, from conceptual framings to translation into programmatic priorities and logics, and then to how they are actually translated into concrete actions within the frame of projects. However the crucial question is the extent to which organisations are alert to this and are aware of when these slippages occur, what their effects are, and how they impact on the full spectrum of issues from shaping the problems to designing interventions and assessing effectiveness. We hope that notwithstanding its limitations our contribution to the EMERGE final evaluation, taken together with those of others, will enable CARE and its partners to reflect critically on EMERGE with a view to designing more politically grounded interventions centred on engaging men on SGBV.

¹² Domestic abuse is your business: Guidance for developing a workplace policy, Equality and Human Rights Commission, UK and EM Ajala (2013) Domestic Violence and the Workplace: Improving Workers’ Productivity, *Lwati: A Journal of Contemporary Research*, Vol 10, No 1. See also the following websites <http://www.workplacesrespond.org/learn/the-facts/the-facts-on-the-workplace-and-domestic-violence>; <http://employersagainstdomesticviolence.org/effects-on-workplace/workplace-dv-stats/>.

CHAPTER 2

Community - State Partnerships: The VLAGSs, CDF's. DLTFs and DLFs

Neloufer de Mel and Pradeep Pieris

Introduction

This chapter of the final evaluation of the Empowering Men to Engage and Redefine Gender Equality (EMERGE) project inquires into the design and role of the local community and government structures such as the District Tasks Forces (DTF), Divisional Level Task Force (DLTF), Village Level Action Group (VLAG) and Community Development Forums (CDFs) established by CARE in relation to the objectives of the project. The local government structures (DTFs and DLTFs) which are linked to the community through the VLAGs and CDFs existed prior to the EMERGE project. This evaluation, however, is limited to the period of the project itself (2011- 2014).

As its contribution to the overall evaluation this chapter focuses on the following questions.

1. How useful was EMERGE's work with the DLTFs and DTFs in addressing the core concern of GBV and prevention of GBV, and other areas of work to challenge gender inequalities at community level through the engagement of men?
2. Was the effectiveness of these structures compromised or strengthened by EMERGE's involvement in achieving its stated goals and intentions?
3. How sustainable are these structures?
4. How can these structures be strengthened in line with EMERGE goals?

Methodology

The evaluation team conducted a series of interviews with individuals who worked on the implementation of EMERGE at national, regional and village levels. At the CARE International Sri Lanka head office, interviews were conducted with the Deputy Country Representative, the EMERGE Project Director, Project Managers and a few former EMERGE staff members who were instrumental in designing and launching the project. In addition, interviews were held with district level Project Coordinators of the EMERGE project to understand how they negotiated project implementation with the national coordinators as well as village level partner organizations. Finally, the evaluation team travelled to the Batticaloa and Nuwara Eliya districts and conducted a series of group discussions as well as individual interviews with field coordinators in partner organizations and participants of the Happy Families and Male Change Agent programs of EMERGE to assess the experience of the local partner organizations, project participants and local government officials. The evaluation team was thereby able to pull together and assess the information and evidence it collected on the project activities, achievements and challenges the project encountered since inception. However, due to time constraints the interviews were limited to the individuals who participated and contributed to the EMERGE activities, and the views of those who dropped out of the project activities have not been captured in this evaluation.

This chapter is organized under four sections; i) Design of the EMERGE project at the village level, ii) How it connects with local government structures, iii) The role of the local government structures in the operationalization of the EMERGE project, iv) our attempt to address the broader questions defined above in order to assess the usefulness and sustainability of the local government structures such as DTF, DLTF and VLAG in addressing the core work of the EMERGE project.

Design of the EMERGE Project at community level

The idea of the EMERGE project evolved over time in response to experiences from the field and requests by participants in CARE Sri Lanka's previous programs. As Robinson notes, the strategy, at first, was that EMERGE should be implemented through other CARE projects¹³. Although this strategy was expected to deliver advantages such as broader geographic accessibility, it weakened the coherence of the project as activities were often initiated without much thought on how they could be linked to overall project objectives¹⁴. For example, the research study on masculinities that was implemented in partnership with Partners for Prevention (P4P) and Social Indicator (SI) captured the extensive attention of the senior project team management of EMERGE located at the CARE head office to the detriment of community level activities of the project.¹⁵ Nor was the study itself significantly mainstreamed into community level activity (see Chapter on Happy Families and Male Change Agents).

Although EMERGE had its district field officers, the partner organizations were responsible for the implementation of 'core activities' within the villages it worked¹⁶. These core activities focused on three different groups: a) married couples, b) men and c) youth. Partner organizations selected the married couples based on criteria designed at the CARE International Sri Lanka head office. They also facilitated trainings on gender, sexual and reproductive health, household financial management, and prevention of GBV. In addition, the couples were provided with basic conflict management methods.

Youth groups were formed at village level in order to engage them on gender inequality and address their concerns as youth. EMERGE organized a series of youth camps to encourage participants to identify their community development needs. It also conducted sessions on sensitizing them to gender dynamics prevalent within their own communities¹⁷. In addition to youth groups, in the third year of the EMERGE project, 3-5 men from each village were selected and trained to be Male Change Agents or peer educators on the subject of 'gender equality, GBV, gender roles within the household and positive parenting.

EMERGE Local Support Structures:

Community Mechanisms

The interventions of EMERGE at village level were supported by two mechanisms CARE established amongst government and other service providers at divisional and districts levels¹⁸. These mechanisms were the DLTFs and DTFs aimed at supporting CARE's GBV and women's empowerment programs under its BRIDGE project¹⁹. After the BRIDGE project came to an end, the EMERGE project acquired these infrastructures either as they already functioned, or following revitalization in some areas.²⁰ The design of the local government support structures, as perceived by CARE district coordinators, partner organizations and members of the VLAGs, are presented in the following figure (Figure 1).

As depicted in figure 1, village level EMERGE project activities such as the Happy Family, Youth Group and Male Change Agent programs were supported by the VLAGs that held monthly meetings in order to discuss relevant matters. These meetings were convened and coordinated by a voluntary core group that comprised of a few individuals (4-5) drawn from the Happy Family, Youth and MCA programs. According to the partner organizations we spoke to, approximately 20-25 people participated at the routine monthly meetings. Depending on the matters discussed, relevant government officers such as the Grama Niladari, Women Development officer and/or Child

16 Interviews with CARE EMERGE Head office team and EMERGE district coordinators

17 Robinson V.C (2014). Emergent Practice: CARE International Sri Lanka's Gender Based Violence Work: 2011-2014. p.7

18 Robinson V. C (2012). Building Relationships in Development and Gender Equity: The Bridge Project – January 2008 to December 2011: A Synthesis Report Compiled from Existing Documents. p.4

19 Ibid

20 Robinson V.C (2014). Emergent Practice: CARE International Sri Lanka's Gender Based Violence Work : 2011-2014. p.8

13 Robinson V.C (2014). Emergent Practice: CARE International Sri Lanka's Gender Based Violence Work : 2011-2014. p.2

14 Discussion with senior project officer at the head office, CARE International Sri Lanka

15 Discussion with senior project officer at the head office, CARE International Sri Lanka

Care officers were also invited. At the meetings participants discussed issues that require urgent attention in the village and their neighbourhoods. Some VLAG members were appointed to intervene, either by engaging in conflict resolution within the village and/or accessing local government services. According to the VLAG members we interviewed, the most common issues discussed at the meetings related to domestic violence, child abuse, drug addiction of men, alcoholism of husbands and migration of mothers with infants. Where the matters were beyond the scope and capacity of the VLAGs, they were referred to higher officials and the DLTF.

Figure 1: EMERGE Local Support Structures

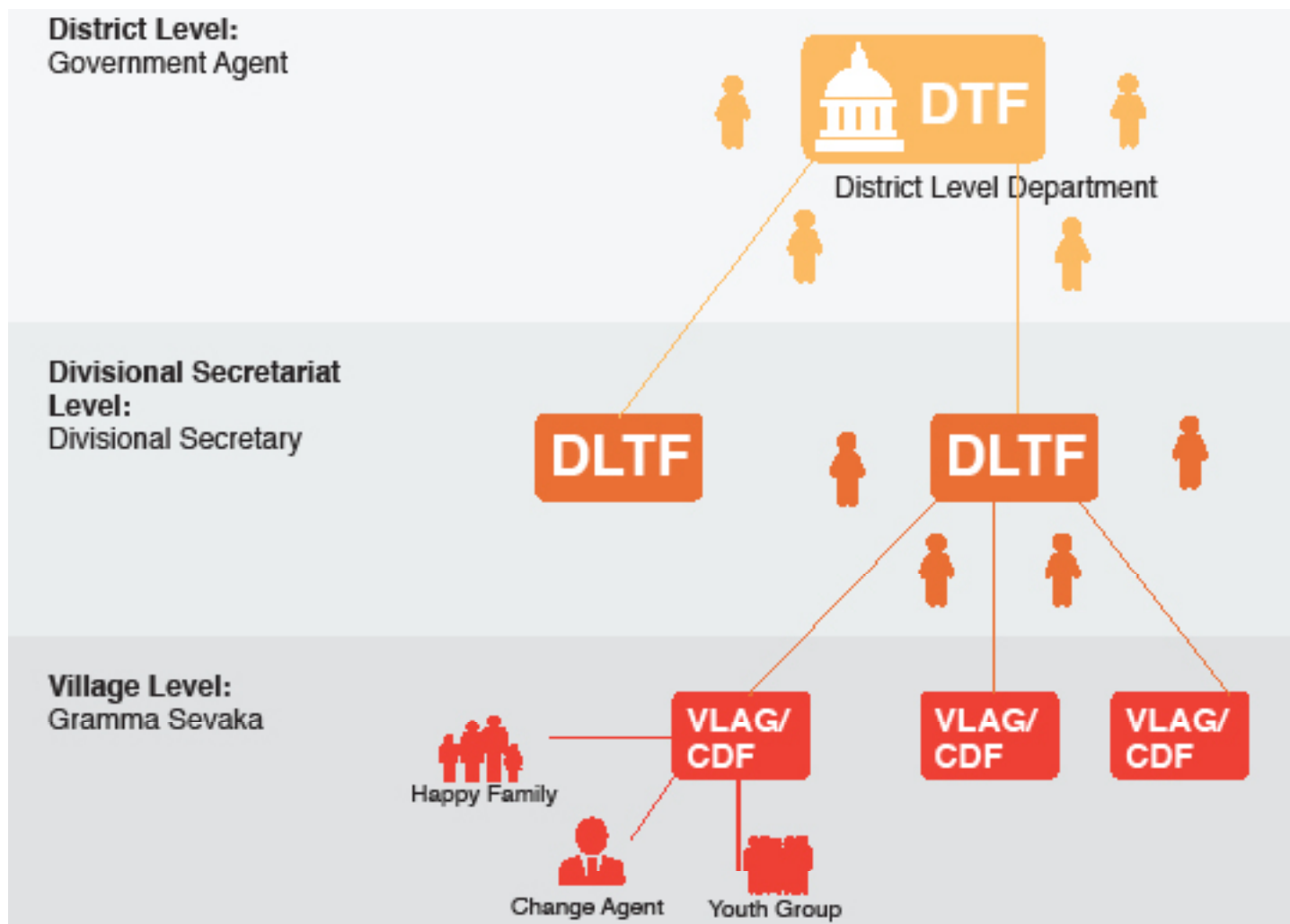
As depicted in Figure 1, village level EMERGE project activities such as the Happy Family, Youth Group and Male Change Agent programs were underpinned by the VLAGs that held monthly meetings in order to discuss relevant matters.

The Community Development Forums (CDFs) were similar to the VLAGs but located in the plantations. An outcome of the CARE Plantation Community Empowerment Project (PCEP), the CDF's initially concentrated on livelihoods skills, household money management and training in IT. When EMERGE began in the plantations in 2011, it used the existing CDFs for its work on engaging men towards gender equality. Many participants of the Happy Families and Male Change Agents Programs

were members of their local CDFs. The CDFs also held monthly meetings and consulted local government officials through the Ambagamuwa DLTF. It was clear from our interviews with officials at the Ambagamuwa Divisional Secretariat that there was a good rapport between the DS office and CARE, as well as its partner, the Navayugam Social Development Forum based in Hatton.

Local Support Mechanisms

The DLTF functions as the next highest level to the VLAGs and CDFs, and is the forum at which EMERGE project participants can bring their issues and seek remedies. The DLTF acts as the hub that connects all the institutes and stakeholders in the administrative unit (divisional secretariat) who work on GBV. The DLTFs were setup by CARE but function quite autonomously and act as independent units. They are expected to meet bi-monthly and the Women Development Officer at the respective DS office is responsible for coordinating the meeting. Police officers of the Women and Childrens' Desk, the MOH, the Probation officer, and, in Batticaloa, representatives of various religious and social organizations such as those in Quadi courts, NGOs, mediation boards, and the VLAGs are invited for the bi-monthly DLTF discussions. The current issues of the area and community concerns are discussed at these meetings and relevant stakeholders take responsibility for follow up on action. As a one-stop shop these DLTFs provide an efficient mechanism for intervention on community concerns.



The issues that need intervention at a higher level are referred to the DTF under the leadership of the Government Agent at district level. CARE assists in facilitating the DTF meetings that are held quarterly (although often irregular) with the participation of all the heads of departments in the districts. Apart from assisting the DTF meetings, CARE also provides refreshments etc. for the DLTF meetings. It also facilitated a field visit by the Ambagamuwa DLTF to the DLTF in Chenkalady, Batticaloa. This was spoken of by the Ambagamuwa divisional secretariat officials, including the divisional secretary, as a significant opportunity to observe other DLTFs at work and exchange experiences.²¹ Likewise, officials of the Batticaloa kachcheri told us that they found the symposium CARE organized in Batticaloa in October 2014 where there were over 200 participants, extremely useful and informative.

These supportive local structures provide a very important mechanism because they enable community level EMERGE interventions to link up with local government departments and authorities. The next section of this chapter evaluates their operationalization.

The discussion thus far presented the local government support structures of the EMERGE project from the point of view of how they were meant to function. They were the outcome of innovative strategic interventions to ensure the engagement of government officials in community development and gender initiatives, which also enabled village communities to address the state. Furthermore, the design of these structures envisaged the collaboration of government and non-government actors in providing mutual support and infrastructure to address the prevention of GBV and gender inequality. They were also expected to be efficient even after the change of focus to masculinities with the EMERGE project. It is important to note, therefore, that these local government structures had to function in collaboration, and in relation to other existing government structures and programs in the divisions and districts.

Therefore all these novelties and complexities contributed to numerous variations and challenges in implementing BRIDGE and EMERGE. They also had to shift to EMERGE's work on masculinities from the focus on GBV of the BRIDGE project. As a result, the VLAGs, CDFs, DLTFs and DTFs reproduced some of the conditions that EMERGE attempted to counter. It is important to be aware that achievements as well as challenges and drawbacks are relational, and can only be assessed once a reference point is decided upon. In this analysis, the objectives of the EMERGE project provide the reference and basis of evaluation.

The VLAGs and CDFs: How well did they understand EMERGE?

As the interviews with the members of the CDFs and VLAGs indicate, they were very useful structures for the activities of EMERGE. They provided the forum for participants to share experiences and the EMERGE project itself derived legitimacy for their good work. They provided a platform for fellowship to the participants of the various EMERGE programs in the village

where they could discuss their achievements, challenges and future plans. Being a part of this fellowship, VLAG and CDF members took the trouble to nurture their memberships in these structures that thereby function as a centripetal force. As the Coordinator of the Eastern Social Development Foundation, a partner of CARE in Batticaloa noted:

“ One of our happy family members who are present today at this discussion used to be a very bad alcoholic and had frequent quarrels with his wife before joining us. His name was suggested at one of the VLAG meetings and we approached him and spoke to him. Now he has quit drinks and has become a regular participant of our work. ”²²

The members of the VLAG of Eravur Pattu DS also shared a number of experiences with us on their interventions in neighbourhood problems. Volunteers from this VLAG assist victims of GBV in their community. One female member shared her recent encounter as follows:

“ I met this young woman with small kids who has been deserted by her husband. We helped her trace him and found that he is living in the Ampara district and married with children. We advised her to get divorced and she agreed. I have personally helped her and accompanied her to courts and various places as she could not do that alone, and she did not have anyone to help her. ”²³

The VLAGs and CDFs not only provided a mechanism of intervention as evinced above, but also encouraged fellowship among members similar to a 'church parish'. The training provided by EMERGE and BRIDGE earlier, provided knowledge and skills they used as social and cultural capital in their everyday negotiations in the village. The practice of GBV intervention also allowed VLAG and CDF members to build networks with various important officials and community leaders who could be useful not only in their GBV work but also in other fields. When asked what motivated them to participate in the EMERGE programs and VLAG activities, participants in Poratheevu Pattu mainly indicated that they enjoyed the subtle status gained by being part of such groups in addition to their love of doing good in society. Elaborating on this one participant said:

“ People in the village think that I am knowledgeable with regard to accessing government authorities. Therefore, often they come to see me to get my help for various things. I help them whenever I can. Since I know some of the government officials it is not that difficult for me to get little things done from government offices. ”²⁴

²² Interview with Buhari, 17 January 2015

²³ Interview with Kavitha, Community Development Foundation, Eravur Pattu, 18th January 2015.

²⁴ Interview with Parameshvari, Poratheevu pattu, 18th January 2015.

²¹ Interview with Divisional Secretary, Ambagamuwa, February 2015

Therefore, VLAGs also provide access to alternative power structures within the village and is a source of power for those who are socially and politically marginalised. The danger here, however, is that VLAG and CDF members who access the state via the DLTFs can become ‘brokers’ mediating between political patrons and village level clients. As Javier Auyero notes, ‘enjoying the power that comes with their mediating function, brokers are expert manipulators of information and of people, channelling their resources from their patron to their clients and votes and support from their clients to the persons in control’. Thereby they participate in and reproduce (for the most part unknowingly) a powerful web of political domination.²⁵ Auyero may present a worst case scenario here (brokers as conscious manipulators of resources and information) but he also draws attention to how power can be often subtly and sub-consciously exercised from within/amongst the community itself. This was evident from a response by one of the female VLAG participants in Porutheevu Pattu who noted when we interviewed its group members in January 2015:

“ At a meeting in October 2014, we came to know that one mother, because of poverty, was trying to migrate out. But she had a small baby of one month. We informed the GS and DS and put a stop to that. ”

Evident here is the power and possibility of VLAGs to act as vigilante groups. The assumptions these members acted upon were premised not only on legality and the welfare of the child but also of the sanctity of the nuclear family that would be threatened if the mother were to leave. Another example of the importance of family as a social and cultural structure came to light when a participant at this same meeting noted:

“ During the last three years a man who was quite strong was violent towards the wife. He hit her with a mamoty. She was wounded and bleeding. Nobody intervened. As VLAG members we took the initiative and went to police and GS. But police did not come to the scene. Then we took the case to the civil security committee which brought GS and police and arrested the husband. A VLAG member took the wife to Batticoloa hospital and took care of her. They have not separated as a family. Husband and wife are still together. No violence after that. They have six kids. So if there is violence against children also the VLAG will be notified. ”

The above indicates the good citizenry and victim support that VLAGs can offer. However, it also points to how the VLAGs function as watchdogs. Was this a stated objective of EMERGE? The Coordinator of one of EMERGE’s partner organizations we spoke to noted:

“ Our role here is to assist the victim. We won’t be able to provide solutions but we help them find solutions. We would not suggest what they can, or cannot do. ”

However, there were other experiences reported from the field that recorded the overt interventions of VLAGs in shaping outcomes. In a Muslim village in the Batticoloa district a man was beaten up by male VLAG members for allegedly committing adultery and taken to the Quadi court.²⁶ In this instance neither the ethos CARE sought to foster amongst VLAGs nor zero tolerance on violence – whether male on female or male on male – had traction. This incident point to both the moral power wielded by VLAGs as well as the shortfall in attitudinal change amongst its members.

In fact, the discussions with VLAG members for this evaluation indicate that many of them did not possess a clear understanding of EMERGE objectives. They noted the importance of curbing violence against women and the importance of involving men in such interventions. But there was very little understanding of the complexities and diversity of masculinities. All anecdotes provided were of violent or alcoholic men who had reformed through CARE and VLAG interventions. This in and of itself is a good result. However, more systematic work is required if VLAG and CDF members are to understand what is meant by bringing men into gender awareness and working towards gender equality. Such an understanding was also not evident amongst the DS officials we spoke to. Nor could they act or intervene in a program on masculinities because gender was officially defined solely in terms of women, and official approvals, under the Ministry of Women and Children’s Affairs of which the Women’s Development Officer, for instance, was a part of, was solely for work with women.²⁷

Moreover, the claim made by many VLAGs and CDFs that at their meetings a wide range of issues were discussed meant that the gender component was marginalized. This also occurred because the active members of the VLAGs were also involved in other NGO and government activities. This raises questions about how the VLAGs were constituted in the first place because in most cases, this structure seems to have been formed with already agentive and empowered individuals. When we asked partner organizations how they recruited members for the EMERGE programs and the VLAGs or CDFs, we were told that they had approached people with ‘good reputation,’ as well as women headed households and youth. Similarly CDF members in the plantations told us they had been recruited for their leadership qualities and/or prior work with CARE. Therefore, it is the case that the VLAGs were both empowered and empowering for they permitted community leaders/ men and women who already possessed social capital

²⁶ Interview with Thivya Radhakrishnan, Former EMERGE Project Manager, Colombo, December 2014

²⁷ Interview with Women Development Office, Ambagamuwa Divisional Secretariat, February 2015

to continue and enhance their worth. Therefore the VLAGs were already empowered at their inception. On the other hand, by opening up an inclusive space they were empowering particularly to the average or marginalized villager who was able to enter, through them, and belong to associational life.

A strong VLAG is certainly an asset to EMERGE interventions as they allow the programmes to engage proactively within and outside of the village. As Kavitha from Eravur Pattu told us, contacts she already had with officials helped her to assist needy young mothers. However, the negative effect of constituting VLAGs with those who are already empowered, or who accrue power through the structure as brokers is that EMERGE objectives can become diffused. There is also the danger that empowered individuals who join the VLAGs impose their values and prejudices on the community and act as a 'moral police'. Especially in pilot projects such as EMERGE that last only a few years, structures such as the VLAGs can be hijacked by those who do not completely buy into, or understand the key concepts, values and objectives of the project.

Without the VLAGs and CDFs, however, EMERGE community based interventions would not have survived because these structures bind all the community based programs such as 'Happy Families', 'Youth Groups' and 'Male Change Agent' together. The absence of CARE official involvement at field level provided space for the VLAGs to function more like organic institutions. Nevertheless, this also had its dangers as will be discussed in the next section of this chapter. Moreover, EMERGE objectives and values could have been communicated to the VLAG members more strongly and reinforced through continuous training and feedback via a stronger connectivity between the EMERGE core team and the VLAGs and CDFs.

The DLTF and DTFs: how useful have they been to EMERGE?

The DLTFs and the DTFs were setup to enable community organizations to access the bureaucracy and vice versa in addressing GBV at the divisional secretariat and district levels. Established under the BRIDGE project these structures continued to be used by EMERGE.

The strategy behind the DLTFs and DTFs was to connect village level interventions with officers in the government bureaucracy and other stakeholders, including other gender based service providers in the area to enhance the impact of the village level interventions. Ideally this design was meant to be a win-win situation where the interests of all stakeholders, whether government, NGOs or community organizations, were met. The government officials we spoke to in both Batticaloa and Ambagamuwa reported that they benefited from the horizontal and vertical networks that the DLTFs and DTFs offered. The horizontal networks with officers of different departments (health, police, social service etc.) allowed them to bypass some bureaucratic barriers when intervening at the division or district levels. As Robinson reported, the DTLF is a place 'where all the jigsaw pieces fit'²⁸.

Similarly the vertical networks with the community groups such as the VLAGs and CDFs made the DLTFs' work easier. Speaking to the evaluation team, an officer at the Valachchanai DS office said:

“ We visit villages but with the resources available to us we can visit only to an extent. We have to spend for transport when we visit the field and we have to travel very far to reach some villages. Therefore, it is good to have groups like VLAGs as they can inform us of their village problems and we can act much faster on those issues.²⁹ ”

The vertical network that this structure provided brought, therefore, the village level issues and problems to government attention, while the horizontal networks allowed the government bureaucracy to seek solutions and to determine which department should take responsibility in each of these cases. Elaborating on this process, a senior administrative officer at the Batticaloa district Kachcheri said:

“ For example, we come across instances where mothers with infants attempt to go abroad as migrant workers. Obviously once such cases are informed to us our officials intervene to stop that person migrating. Our intervention should not stop there and we have to look into her financial issues. We discuss with the representatives of social services and other departments whether we could assist her.³⁰ ”

Yet it is also the case that the DLTFs and DTFs have not functioned as efficiently as they could have. The success of these structures have been contingent upon the district and divisional level leadership of government administration. According to the EMERGE district coordinators, while they received valuable support and assistance from the Government Agents of Batticaloa and Nuwara Eliya and their division secretariats, they found support not as forthcoming in Polonnaruwa. They also noted that while some middle level management officials were extremely helpful others were reluctant to cooperate with EMERGE programs.

The political climate within which EMERGE attempted to engage with government officials is pertinent here and requires highlighting. During the war as well as its aftermath government bureaucracy had instructions, implicitly or explicitly, to distance itself from civil society organizations. Especially in the Eastern province after the war ended with the Thoppigala victory in June 2007, NGOs were asked to work on infrastructure projects such as road construction and livelihoods and not on 'soft subjects' such as gender and human rights.³¹ This shaped the reactions, including the resistance, of some government officials to the EMERGE initiatives. On the other hand when the Government

²⁹ Officer from Valachchanai DS office, 18th January 2015.

³⁰ Interview with Senior Administrative Officer, Batticaloa Kachcheri, Batticaloa, January 2015

³¹ Discussion with Thivya Radhakrishnan, former Team Leader of the BRIDGE Project, Batticaloa and former Project Manager of the EMERGE Project, 2 December 2014

Agents were sensitive and supportive of gender work, as in Batticaloa and Ambagamuwa, good relations between the CARE district coordinators, the programs and the government ensued. Though not the only condition, this showed that for local level government structures to work at their optimum, the individual goodwill and support of high-level bureaucrats were necessary.

Other necessary conditions included the carefully nurtured and sustainable interaction between the CARE head office and district level officials. A senior member of the CARE head office reflecting on this issue noted that the head office had paid inadequate attention to field activities and the maintenance of local supporting structures. She noted this was the case particularly when their attention was drawn to the masculinities study then underway. This senior officer noted that CARE should have stationed some of its core EMERGE staff in the field districts to ensure the optimization of the work at the local level.³² This is borne out by some of our interviews with government officials who participated in the DLTFs and DTFs which indicate that they were not very conversant with the specificities of the EMERGE project and why masculinity had been brought into community interventions. The majority of officers we spoke to during the evaluation felt they were intervening on activities to curb GBV and issues related to women. They were aware that, under EMERGE, attention was paid to men. However for many of them the EMERGE project was about gender – i.e. women. Moreover, their use of the DLTFs and DTFs as mechanisms to address their operational issues meant a subordination of gender in their thought and practice. When asked what they discussed at the most recently held DLTF, one Women's Development Officer could not recall a specific issue but said they discussed whatever issues were brought to their attention at the meeting. The distribution of funds, social welfare distributions and security issues were amongst the themes discussed at these meetings. It is evident therefore that while gender was the strategic entry point to bringing both these horizontal and vertical local support structure face to face, their outcomes were not limited to gender. Gender work, therefore, had to be packaged with other goods and services that mattered (more) to the community as well as the state.

Operationally too there were shortfalls. Although the DLTFs were expected to meet bi-monthly and the DTFs quarterly, these meetings did not keep to schedule at least in the Batticaloa district.³³ This was despite the CARE Batticaloa district coordinator's assessment that Batticaloa was the district in which the DLTFs and DTFs function the best.

It should also be noted that the capacity and contacts of the partner organization were vital to whether and how local support structures delivered on EMERGE objectives. During the project period EMERGE terminated contracts with some partners while continuing to work with others.

Therefore, there was confusion in the message and the process of the project in the field. This could have been averted if EMERGE had conceptualized a well-defined project design at the beginning, independent of other CARE projects. However, given the limited time, EMERGE would have anyway faced many challenges in establishing a network and providing orientation and training on the project objectives to all its stakeholders. Therefore, to conduct a fair but candid assessment of the EMERGE project in relation to its local support structures, the evaluation team considered all the conditions within which the project was designed and evolved.

³² Discussion with Ashika Gunasena, 10th February 2015

³³ Field work is only conducted in Batticaloa district due to the limitation of resources.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The use of local support structures to facilitate and enhance local level EMERGE initiatives was a worthy and pragmatic decision because these structures had the capacity to offer all the stakeholders – VLAG and CDF members, and officials of the DLTFs and DTFs – something of value. They were, therefore mutually beneficial. They also proved that they were worthy long term investments given that they began life with the BRIDGE program and lasted throughout EMERGE. All members of the VLAGs, CDFs, DLTFs and DTFs we spoke to were keen, moreover, to extend these mechanisms beyond EMERGE, indicative of the value they placed on these structures.

They provided affirmation to EMERGE beneficiaries as well as alternative networks to government officials seeking to work both horizontally and vertically on community issues in the absence of funding and political will.

The weaknesses of the mechanisms and the shortfall in their effectiveness yield lessons that can be beneficial for future CARE work. In constituting the VLAGs and the CDFs, CARE paid insufficient attention to the dynamics of recruitment, and how already empowered individuals who were invited to become members could, at times, act as a moral police and contradict EMERGE's core values. The failure of the CARE head office/core team to pay adequate attention to nurturing the DLTFs and DTFs also had a negative impact, particularly given the power imbalance between elite officials such as the Government Agents and more inexperienced partners or program officers in the field. Moreover, a mechanism was needed whereby gender, rather than being instrumentalized as a strategic entry point or a good that had to be packaged with other, more 'important' community concerns, was made a top priority at all the discussions and interventions of each of the structures.

It is recommended, therefore, that these local support structures are nurtured more effectively for their numerous benefits, and that when scaling down CARE negotiate with other organizations to maintain them (particularly the government level ones). Alternatively they should be included in future CARE programming but in a way that takes best practices from the past with commensurate breaks from their negative tendencies so that old legacies do not haunt the new programs. It is also recommended that CARE provides training on masculinities as a continuous, on-going process to its grassroots and community organizations, and complementarily organizes a high-level symposium on masculinities to provide information and concepts to bureaucrats at all levels. Finally, given that work on women and prevention of GBV dominates the field of gender, and that the Ministry of Women's Affairs, for instance, specifically authorizes interventions and programming only on women, CARE needs to work towards mainstreaming its focus on masculinities at the highest levels of policy making in Sri Lanka.

CHAPTER 3

The Private and the Public: Transforming Gender Relations through the Happy Families and Male Change Agent Programmes of EMERGE

Neloufer de Mel and Gameela Samarasinghe

Introduction

The Happy Families (HF) and Male Change Agents (MCA) programmes were implemented under the Empowering Men to Engage and Redefine Gender Equality (EMERGE) project of CARE International Sri Lanka. Both programmes were conceptualized as household and community level initiatives and had strong linkages to each other as well as local support structures that CARE had already established under its previous projects in the districts where it worked. Initially, they were conceptualized as two programmes to be mainstreamed into CARE's existing projects such as LEAD, PCEP and BRIDGE.³⁴ This had the advantage of scaling up these latter projects towards a larger platform and group of participants.³⁵ However, in 2011 and 2013 respectively CARE Sri Lanka decided to implement the HF and MCA programmes as independent though interlinked programs.

The HF and MCA programs were implemented through CARE's local partners in the districts. In the Nuwara Eliya district the partner was the Navayugam Social Development Forum (2013-2014), and in the Batticaloa district it partnered with the Poratheevu Pattu Development Rehabilitation Organization (2012-2014), the Eastern Social Development Foundation in Ottamavaddy (2013-2014) and the Community Development Foundation in Chenkalady. In the Polonnaruwa district it partnered with the Pulathisi Prajavurthika Eganum ha Puhunu Madyastanaya and the Arunodaya Maha Sangamaya. Many of these organizations had worked with CARE Sri Lanka for a number of years. However, both the Community Development Foundation in Chenkalady and the Arunodaya Maha Sangamaya in Polonnaruwa were discontinued as a partner organization after one year following a negative evaluation.

Many of the couples who participated in the HF programme and male participants of the MCA programme were also members of the Community Development Forums (CDFs) and the Village Level Action Groups (VLAGs) established by CARE in the plantation sector and the Polonnaruwa and Batticaloa districts respectively under its previous PCEP and BRIDGE projects. The CDFs and VLAGs were, in turn, linked to the District Level Task Forces (DLTF) and the Divisional Task Forces (DTF) comprising government officials such as Divisional Secretaries, Women's Development Officers, Social Service Officers, Medical Officers, Counsellors and through the DTFs, the Government Agent.

This interlinked structure enabled HF and MCA program participants to meet as peers within the CDFs and VLAGs and thereafter with local government officials once a month at the DLTF meetings to discuss community issues. At the same time, it enabled local government officials to travel to participating villages and meet the local residents in their own locality. These 'town hall' or community hall meetings constituted one of the strengths of the HF and MCA programmes. They provided access to local government and in turn, strengthened participatory democracy when officials visited the village for meetings. As discussed in the chapter on local support structures, access to local government officials was a tangible benefit to HF and MCA participants because it provided a direct means of addressing the state. Familiarity and friendship with officials, including the police, as well as membership in multiple voluntary organizations at the community level conferred on participants' power and social capital. However, such resources also conferred on the CDFs and VLAGs the opportunity to influence outcomes that were contrary to EMERGE's core values. While examples of such incidents were available in Batticaloa, we did not encounter them in the plantations.

³⁴ The LEAD (Local Efforts for Empowerment and Development) project was implemented by CARE in the Moneragala and Hambantota districts, while the PCEP (Plantation Community Empowerment Project) was operational on 13 districts in the Nuwara Eliya district. The BRIDGE (Building Relationships in Development and Gender Equity) project was established in the Batticaloa and Polonnaruwa districts and focused on work with women headed households and prevention of gender based violence.

³⁵ Robinson, Victor (2014) *Emergent Practice: Care International Sri Lanka's Gender Based Violence Work*, p.2

Methodology

This evaluation was conducted from December 2014 to February 2015 and encompassed a literature review of documents related to the HF and MCA programs as well as the overall EMERGE project and its training materials. Field trips were conducted in January and February 2015 to Batticaloa and Nuwara Eliya districts respectively and qualitative interviews were conducted with the Coordinators of CARE Sri Lanka's partner organizations in the districts, beneficiaries of the HF and MCA programmes, Divisional Secretariat officials, members of the CDFs and VLAGs, and a trainer-counsellor based in Hatton. Interviews were also conducted with CARE officers at its head office. The interviews incorporated both focus group discussions and individual face-to-face conversations. In the field the interviews took place in Tamil with the aid of an outside translator. A limitation in the methodology was that we were reliant on the partner organizations to coordinate and select the interviewees while the partner organizations themselves were chosen for us by CARE. Therefore a bias in their responses was a possibility.

Overall, an objective of the evaluation as provided by CARE Sri Lanka was an assessment of whether EMERGE had contributed to knowledge generation and dissemination on work in engaging men towards gender equality, and whether this work could be used for future gender programming in Sri Lanka.³⁶ Keeping this objective in mind we decided to leave the Polonnaruwa district out of this evaluation as several reasons were provided as to why the HF and MCA programs administered in the Dimbulagala and Welikanda divisions had not achieved their targets. These reasons ranged from lack of local government support to the gap of 2-3 years which marked the end of the BRIDGE project and the beginning of EMERGE and therefore the inability of the latter project to make use of the structures set up by BRIDGE. A hostile political climate that affected the NGOs and their paucity in the region were also mentioned.³⁷ It was decided therefore, that focusing on the HF and MCA activities in the Nuwara Eliya and Batticaloa districts would yield more useful information to the evaluation as a whole.

The research questions that informed this component of the evaluation were:

1. How successful was the initial framing of the HF and MCA programmes in relation to working with men and masculinities towards gender equality?
2. How appropriate and useful were the approaches to a) working with married couples and b) male peer educators in efforts to address gender equality?
3. How useful were the training and counselling components of the programmes?
4. What has been the impact of the two programmes on reduction of GBV, and increase in positive parenting, non-violent communication and attitudinal change?

36 CARE EMERGE Final Evaluation Guidelines 2014

37 Ashika Gunasena, Assistant Country Director, CARE Sri Lanka; Thivya Radhakrishnan, former BRIDGE Project Manager (interviewed in November 2014); M. Kabeel, EMERGE Project Coordinator for Polonnaruwa, (interviewed at CARE Sri Lanka Head Office, Colombo, December 2014).

The Happy Family Program

The HF programme (also referred to in CARE documentation as the 'Married Couples' programme) began in the Nuwara Eliya district in 2011 and was extended in 2013 to the Batticaloa and Polonnaruwa districts. It targeted married couples as beneficiaries and criteria for selection to the programme included a) couples who were between 16 -50 years of age, b) were legally married, c) permanent residents of a particular village or estate division and d) were willing to participate in the programme for at least one year. A cap was placed at a maximum of 10 participating couples per village. By the end of the EMERGE project in December 2014, a total of 347 couples had enrolled in the HF program in the three districts.³⁸

While the above criteria for selection only related to technical issues such as age, residency and legality, many of the couples we spoke to referred to other criteria as the basis of their selection, primarily a prior relationship with CARE through its previous programs. A HF couple on the Carolina division noted that while the husband had worked on CARE programmes since 2010, the wife had been a volunteer on CARE's Savings Project. After some probing some couples admitted they had been selected because they had faced domestic problems. Recruitment also followed a snowballing pattern where couples already in the programme recommended others who faced domestic problems/alcoholism/ domestic violence. Estate management was also consulted before couples were recruited to the programme. Therefore a mix of prior association with CARE, recommendations/approval, as well as domestic situations shaped enrolment in the programme.

The goals of the HF programme were: a) reducing family conflict, b) enhancing gender equality within the household, c) household budgeting and money management, d) reduction of male alcohol consumption, e) equality in decision making and f) making selected households models of equitable decision making and access to resources. Of these goals, household money management, alcohol reduction and shared decision making had been part of PCEP work. Many HF and MCA members we spoke to on the Campion and Loinorn estate divisions noted that they had participated in CARE's 'money savings training.' PCEP was well received by its beneficiaries and given its popularity, CARE used it as an entry point for EMERGE. It had also worked in partnership with PCEP when the latter was operational – sponsoring, for instance, a counselling program for 61 married couples from 12 estates in 2011 following requests at a PCEP focus group discussion.³⁹ By 2012 these activities had morphed into the HF component of EMERGE in the plantations.

The HF program also drew on CARE's BRIDGE programme (2007-2011) which was operational in the Polonnaruwa and Batticaloa districts. As Robinson notes (p.2) building on BRIDGE provided EMERGE the advantage of a shorter lead time required to build trust amongst local partner organizations and

38 CARE EMERGE Briefing Note #2, 2014

39 Robinson, Victor (2014) *Emergent Practice: Care International Sri Lanka's Gender Based Violence Work*, p.4

enabled it to work through the local support structures such as the VLAGs and DLTFs already established by BRIDGE.

The Male Change Agents program

The MCA programme, sometimes also referred to as the Peer Educators' Programme, arose from the core belief of EMERGE that men and youth are allies in the promotion of gender equality. The programme was begun in May-June 2013, following a mid-term evaluation of EMERGE that recommended an added initiative to target men and boys more effectively. As of November 2014, the MCA programme had 220 enrolled male participants across the Nuwara Eliya, Polonnaruwa and Batticaloa districts. Its objectives drew on EMERGE's immediate goals of a) enabling men to demonstrate leadership in the promotion of gender equality, b) creating understanding amongst a wider public of the roles men and youth can play in the promotion of gender equality, d) engaging men in advocacy related to women's empowerment and e) enabling men to challenge dominant and aggressive forms of masculinities. Combined, these goals aimed at tackling attitudes, perceptions and practices of gender inequality primarily through the engagement of men and boys.⁴⁰

The MCA programme was also a response to an overall lack, noticed by CARE in its previous work, of respected male role models who stood up for gender equitable relations. Through the EMERGE project CARE sought, therefore, to bridge this gap by developing a network of men and boys actively engaged in promoting and protecting women's rights.⁴¹ The MCA programme targeted only male participants rather than a male-female mix so that the men could talk freely and develop uninhibited peer interaction. Participants were selected on the basis of a) the respect they mustered in their communities and workplaces and therefore 'good repute' b) recommendations by village Grama Seva Niladharis or the plantation management, c) permanent residency in the village or estate division, d) willingness to continuously participate in MCA initiatives, e) ability to be a good team player, f) between 18-55 years of age and g) positive attitudes towards women and men. Many of them had participated in previous CARE programmes. One MCA participant on Carolina estate, for instance, had worked with CARE for the past seven years as a beneficiary of its PCEP livelihood/self-employment scheme undergoing training in cattle farming. He was also a member of its CDF on the estate.

A process of guided self-reflection that required participants to assess their roles in relation to gender inequality, power relations, dominant masculinities as well as their counterparts was central to EMERGE's approach to the HF and MCA programmes, and training was its primary methodology in facilitating this process. The importance of equitable roles of both spouses within a family unit, the appreciation and support of such by all stakeholders, making selected families role models with supporting linkages within their communities, capacity building in relation to making both spouses able to

make decisions and access resources both within the household and outside of it, and enabling men to demonstrate leadership in relation to ensuring women's equal access to services and enhanced participation for community development were desired core outcomes of this training. Given that these goals incorporated the active understanding and support not only of participants but also partner organizations, counsellors, community leaders and government officials, the training given to each of these groups is important to evaluate.

Preparing stakeholders for change: EMERGE's Training Program

Staff from CARE's partner organizations and participants in the HF and MCA programmes received training under EMERGE. Of the trainers the most frequently named person by participants we met was Mr. Weerasingham. Other resource people were also brought in when needed. For instance when training was provided to officials of the DLTFs and DTFs, external resource people were enlisted. At some community level programmes, the CARE programme coordinators themselves provided training.

However, it was often reported that a shift to masculinities from GBV was difficult even for the trainer-coordinators as well as the MCA participants. Mr. Kabeel, Project Coordinator in the Polonnaruwa district noted 'It was difficult to understand masculinities. Training didn't take place over a sufficient period of time.'⁴² Nor was training conducted systematically with EMERGE's own partner organizations in the field. One partner organization declared that it had not received specific training on masculinities and engaging men towards gender equality. Conversely, one of the EMERGE Project Coordinators we spoke to noted that initially some partner organizations were not sure of the MCA program and not committed to training.⁴³ This indicates a lack of agreement on the part of EMERGE and its partners on the overall importance, role and frequency of training in relation to the HF and MCA programmes and their core objectives.

The training also did not target all participants of the HF and MCA programmes equally and it is likely that participants who joined the programme mid-way missed out on the initial trainings. Similarly a counsellor who worked for EMERGE based in Hatton stated that she had not received training from CARE on masculinities, and had to learn on the job from various inputs provided by CARE over time.⁴⁴ This indicates that CARE relied on the experience and professional qualifications of its counsellors,⁴⁵ and left it to them to pick up on evolving concepts especially in masculinities and engaging men in gender work.

That CARE did not provide such training also points to how it defined masculinities under the EMERGE project as applicable to both HF and MCA programs. The outcomes of both programmes were tied to a behaviourist approach that

40 CARE Guide to the Final Evaluation 2014, p. 4.

41 CARE Guide to the Final Evaluation 2014, p. 4.

42 Mr. Kabeel, EMERGE Project Coordinator for Polonnaruwa, CARE head office, December 2014

43 Focus group discussion with EMERGE Program Coordinators, CARE head office, Colombo, December 2014

44 Interview with Mrs. Shakuntala at the NSDF, Hatton, February 2015

45 This counselor had a professional diploma in counseling from the Eastern University.

would result in non-violent men who shared household and childcare responsibilities, respected shared decision making within the household, and acted as role models within their communities. While these working definitions may have been reasonable for EMERGE as a pilot project, they were by no means sufficient for a deeper engagement with masculinities, nor a sustained attitudinal change on gender equity by both participants and communities. This was borne out by the statement of one trainer we spoke to who noted ‘we have tools for how to change behaviour. But we haven’t got the tools for how to change society. We need to take the training to the next level.’⁴⁶

Furthermore, there were operational weaknesses in the frequency of training. There was uncertainty with regards to whether or when training would take place. At times training for VLAG and HF participants was provided every month, at times once in three months, and at other times once in six months.⁴⁷ The frequency of the training was not transparent to participants. Yet, that CARE provided funding to estate management so that participants from the plantations could come for training without missing out on their daily wage points to the fact that it was not indifferent to its training programme. We were also told that CARE was negotiating with estate managements to pay 50% of the wages of workers on training, with the added goal of making these managements stakeholders in EMERGE.⁴⁸ There was significant variability, therefore, in the approaches to, and operationalization of the training. While EMERGE Project Coordinators did respond to local conditions by either scheduling training during the agricultural off-season so that more men could participate as in Batticaloa, or working with estate managements to ensure worker wages as in Nuwara Eliya, the lack of participant awareness as to frequency of training and the ad hoc nature of the training was a cause for concern.

The training curriculum comprised of the following aspects: a) gender equality, b) masculinities, c) family planning, d) sexual and reproductive health, e) domestic violence, f) positive thinking, g) joint child care, h) managing family income, i) household responsibilities, j) problem solving, k) leadership and l) joint decision making. Of these topics, gender equity was considered the most useful according to one MCA participants who told us that, in a cultural context where wives are usually blamed, equality was a novel concept and that he applied what he had learnt to his marriage. All participants we met informed us that after training and participation in the HF and MCA programmes they shared household and childcare work with their wives. They also reported that they engaged in equitable decision making regarding how household money was spent.

The bias of the participants we referred to in our section on methodology aside, these favourable responses could indicate that participants did learn something and were exposed to some basic ideas on gender equity. They also requested more training although when probed, it was unclear what areas and what kind of training was being requested.

Counselling: Notes towards an integrated approach

Counselling involves providing assistance or guidance in resolving personal or psychological problems. Therefore it seemed necessary in this evaluation to find out how counselling contributed to the HF programme as some of the families who were its members had experienced violence in their homes. We also attempted to understand whether counselling skills helped to develop positive parenting, non-violent communication and attitudinal change. For these reasons we decided to look at the counselling component of the EMERGE project, in particular, training in counselling skills, and counselling as a way of supporting individuals and families in the project. Both these components were mentioned by the participants who were interviewed for the evaluation.

We found out that training in counselling skills did not take place. However, resource persons with counselling skills counselled members of the HF programme who had experienced family problems after they had been selected into the programme by the GN, CBOs or Medical Officers.

Although some counselling was introduced this was done in an ad hoc manner and varied from one location to another and from partner organization to another.

It was sometimes an advantage to have received training in counselling to be selected to the EMERGE Project as a resource person. Before getting involved with EMERGE, one informant in Batticaloa said he had done family counselling with families who experienced domestic violence. He believed that his experience as a counsellor helped in his selection to the programme. At a focus group discussion organized by the ESDF in Ottamavaddy, Batticaloa too some participants said that they first had to ‘sort out their issues’ before joining the programme. This indicates that some participants received counselling prior to joining the HF programme while others did not. It must be noted that some participants who did not receive counselling before joining the programme, did have access to counselling after. The underlying assumption as to why some couples or men were selected for counselling while others were not was that only those who were reported to have experienced domestic violence or alcoholism were considered needy of counselling. If counselling skills had been included as a module into the training programme, men/couples might have engaged with potential MCAs and Happy Families in a less forceful and more sensitive way. Importantly this would have prevented a hierarchy being formed within the group itself signalling that some couples/men were already models while others were not, or that some were ‘better’ than others. Ideally, counselling skills should be used to help others assess their situation and take decisions on their own so that they don’t say – “it is because of you that I changed.”

⁴⁶ Interview with Mr. Irfan, trainer at the Positive Parenthood training program, Kotagala, 15 February 2015

⁴⁷ Reported at a VLAG focus group discussion organized by the Paratheevu Pattu Development Rehabilitation Organization, Batticaloa, January 2015

⁴⁸ Interview with Mr. Sasikumar, EMERGE Project Coordinator, Hatton, February 2015

After interviews with MCAs, HF members and resource people of the EMERGE Project it became clear to us that counselling/problem solving constituted a weak point in the programmes despite anecdotes of how domestic violence or alcoholism had reduced because of what participants generally called ‘training.’⁴⁹ The challenge lay in how MCA, VLAG or CDF participants tended to solve problems within homes sometimes without much sensitivity. We were told of situations where a MCA would barge into a home to warn an abuser, explaining to ‘the culprit’ not to behave in such a manner and suggesting ways of changing. One MCA participant shared with us the route he took. He first spoke to the couple in question separately and after that he got them to talk to each other. While this intervention was ‘more sensitive’ than barging in, his narrative reflected this change agent’s confidence that he could manage the case and that he knew what was best for the family. Counselling skills would help in less judgmental interventions and make MCA or HF participants aware that decisions must be taken by the clients/parties concerned for only clients know what the exact dynamics are within the home. It was also reported that while most cases of domestic violence or family disputes, for instance, were resolved at peer level, they were reported to the ‘estate Dorai’ (estate leader) or the DLTFs and then the police only if complicated. One has to question who decides when a case becomes too complicated.

In comprehensive counselling and its training, one has always to question one’s capabilities, values and beliefs. We were also told that apart from domestic violence, alcoholism was a common problem. These are not issues that can be easily dealt with whether one is an experienced counsellor or not. Therefore integrating both DV and alcoholism into a counselling module of the training curriculum is recommended.

Ideally, a supervision system should be set up that would give MCA and HF participants the opportunity to discuss cases and how they should be handled. Some systems are, to some extent, already in place. For example, there is an office room for a Counselling Assistant (CA) in the Divisional Secretariat, Valachchennai where technically the MCA and HF participants could refer clients, but the CA has not yet been appointed. On the other hand, in Ambagamuwa there is a CA who is very active and had gone to the field to provide counselling to families rather than waiting for them to come to his office, alert to the difficulties in distance and transportation these families face. The Divisional Secretariat officials also spoke to us about transport difficulties given the large area they cover, but they reported that they attempt to respond to the needs of people as best as they can. A large DS team visits homes when they hear about violence or otherwise does spot visits.

Yet, according to the Additional Divisional Secretary in Ambagamuwa, people in his division do not understand the concept of counselling although they have problems. This is not

49 For example a discussion with VLAG participants in Eravur in Batticaloa yielded an anecdote of a couple who underwent counselling at Vandaramullai which resulted in the husband’s alcoholism being brought under control. FGD, Eravur, January 2015

surprising considering that counselling is very much a western concept and Sri Lankans do not like to talk about their feelings. They often solve their problems by identifying external factors that may contribute and affect their wellbeing. A debate exists on whether counselling is appropriate for Sri Lankan people. Many participants we met told us that they had joined the HF and MCA programmes because they had domestic problems and that they had been selected precisely for this reason, although this was not a criteria for selection according to the former EMERGE Project Manager.⁵⁰ The counsellors had helped them initially with their issues before they actively got engaged in the programs. Our argument has been that all stakeholders would have benefitted from counselling skills and that counsellors themselves required deeper training on engaging men and masculinities. It is strongly recommended, therefore, that in future CARE programming counselling is integrated in a consistent and sustained manner within the training itself.

Masculinities: Conceptualizing and operationalizing the shift

‘It has been difficult to manage men’s attitudes. The shift from GBV to masculinities has been difficult to explain. Men will not give up their rights all at once. Sometimes men feel they don’t have a problem’

EMERGE
Project Coordinator,
Nuwara Eliya district

Holmgren and Hern (p. 404) noted in an essay entitled ‘Framing “men in feminism”’ that most often, male practices in both the public and private domains are not seen as gendered.⁵¹ Rather, they are assumed to be gender-neutral and a-political. This is borne out in the comment of the EMERGE Project Coordinator in Nuwara Eliya that ‘Sometimes men feel they don’t have a problem.’

EMERGE faced many challenges in bringing men into gender consciousness and affirmative action towards gender equality. To begin with, intense NGO activity over the last several decades in Sri Lanka on gender and development, gender equality, and violence against women (VAW) has defined gender as women, and this understanding has saturated the field. Even though, within CARE’s BRIDGE programme itself there were shifts from victim support to prevention of GBV by 2002, and the Prevention of GBV program itself changed its name to Gender Power Relations by 2004-2005 signalling CARE’s attention to gender relations between men and women, its work primarily targeted women.⁵² As an outcome of these shifts BRIDGE had introduced the concept of engaging men into the VLAGs it facilitated in the Batticaloa district.⁵³ Nevertheless, as the former BRIDGE Team Leader herself noted:

50 Email interview with Thivia Radhakrishnan, March 2015

51 Holmgren, Linn Egeberg and Jeff Hearn, (2009), Framing ‘men in feminism’: theoretical locations, local contexts and practical passings in men’s gender-conscious positionings on gender equality and feminism,’ *Journal of Gender Studies*, 18: 4, 403 — 418

52 Interview with Thivia Radhakrishnan, former BRIDGE Team Leader, LIFT Project Coordinator and EMERGE Project Manager, based in Batticaloa and thereafter in Colombo at the CARE Head Office. November 2014

53 Robinson, Victor (2014) *Emergent Practice: Care International Sri Lanka’s Gender Based Violence Work*, p.4

“EMERGE is about masculinity and male partners, but our old partner organizations were used to GBV. Training them in masculinities and male change agents was very different. Male change agents are meant to work with their peers. But if you talk to them, these male change agents work (only) with women. The discussion/training has to start with men and masculinities, not GBV.”

This comment points to an understanding that engaging men towards gender equality was not simply about men being nice to women or helping them in house work but a complex attitudinal and behavioural change on the part of all men, as well as women, towards the acceptance of gender equality. This understanding, however, was not always grasped in the field. Nor was the distinction, while noting their linkages, between GBV and masculinities made clear in the initial conceptualization of EMERGE. ‘Masculinities’ was deployed in the EMERGE proposal as a means to an end: its overall goal was of making ‘men allies in promoting respect and diversity to improve women’s status in society.’ Women remained, therefore, the ultimate beneficiaries, and while this goal is not in question, the project may have missed the important distinctions of male-male relations, the diversity amongst males themselves, and how masculinities are constructed and constituted by specific histories and locations over time including plantation economies, Sri Lanka’s civil war, the tsunami and the developmental field.

The necessity for working with men in relation to other men was highlighted when all MCA participants we met in the plantations noted that they were teased by other men and sometimes by women for being pro-gender equality. When we asked a younger male MCA beneficiary as to whether he felt isolated as a role model of positive masculinity he replied,

“Yes, I feel isolated. It is very hard. I almost gave up the program. It is frustrating when the community does not accept what you say...I also get teased at the CDF meetings. But I thought I should help my family so I began at home.”⁵⁴

What is clear from this is that the training and focus group discussions at MCA and CDF meetings did not adequately address patriarchies and how they accommodate themselves to change. Nor were the complex reasons for the disconnect between, on the one hand the ideological alignment of both males and females to gender norms and, on the other, male practices that change towards gender equity adequately explained. It would have been helpful to draw on feminist theoretical resources, as well as the EMERGE study on masculinities which discusses how, even as forms of masculinity change, its investment in the distribution, control

⁵⁴ This MCA participant who lived on the Loinorn division acknowledged that he had ‘changed from being a playboy to a responsible person through the program.’

and management of power patriarchies often do not.⁵⁵

Moreover, the small cohort of MCA participants compounded their sense of isolation. In the Loinorn estate there were only seven MCA members. Participation rates of males in the HF and MCA programmes were a constant challenge. Estate managements were reluctant to release men from work in the plantations. In Batticaloa male attendance at meetings and training were compromised by their migration out of the region for seasonal migration as laborers. Although HF meetings were conducted during breaks in the agricultural seasons in Batticaloa, male participation rates remained low in comparison to the women’s and male drop out rates were high. While this numerical short fall was explained to us in practical terms (seasonal work or daily wage labour) by the EMERGE Project Coordinators, it is possible that it also reflects the skepticism of some male participants regarding the goals of gender equality and the benefits of the program to them as men – which points to the continuing influence of patriarchy, the feminization of the private sphere and the masculinization of the public.⁵⁶ We were also told that men joined the programme to police ‘their’ women. The Coordinator of ESDF in Batticaloa explained that initially training on the HF programme was provided only to women, and that men were invited to join when they expressed anxiety and suspicion as to why the women were being targeted and thereby empowered.⁵⁷ This points to the complicated reasons that mediate male participation in the programs that, in turn, arise from both pragmatic and ideological roots.

The upshot of the numerical shortfall of males, however, was that MCA participants in particular lacked an effective cohort within their communities. Numbers do not necessarily translate into more equitable men who are able to stand up on their own. Nor do they ensure that ‘might is right’ because strong numbers are often linked to majoritarian tendencies that are inimical to women as well non-abiding men. However, the isolation felt by the MCA’s points to a deeper problem: that a behaviourist approach alone without due consideration to the cognitive understanding of the complexities that constitute masculinities, patriarchies and gender relations is inadequate for deeper attitudinal change within communities in which these men live.

In the absence of such a transformation, MCA and HF couples negotiated their participation in the programmes by other means. An aspect that struck us on visiting the beneficiaries’ homes in the plantations was that all their houses had been upgraded, with plastered walls, tiled roofs, TV and electrical appliances. They constituted, therefore, a middle class that stood out from the rest of the plantation ‘line rooms.’ The Field Coordinator of the NSDF explained this upward social

⁵⁵ Vijayan in de Mel, Peiris and Gomez, (2013) Broadening Gender: Why Masculinities Matter, Colombo: CARE International Sri Lanka, p.32

⁵⁶ This was borne out in the reply of a HF husband on Campion division who replied, when asked what his mother thinks of his changed behaviour, that she does not mind because ‘most often [he] is away at work.’ His wife corroborated this adding ‘She (the mother-in-law) doesn’t mind because it (shared housework) happens once in a while, and because he is a trade union leader.’ This points to how male change can be both within tokenism and negotiated by the man through his masculinized work and political status.

⁵⁷ Interview with Mr. Buhari, Coordinator, ESDF, Vaharai, January 2015

mobility as a consequence of participation in CARE's money management training. A MCA participant we spoke to on the Campion estate corroborated this saying 'I was able to renovate my house because of this programme.' Many husbands of the HF programme noted that, despite conservative gender attitudes on the plantations, other people take notice of them because they 'live nicely.' Evident here is that other 'properties' such as a nice house and a middle class life style become a metaphor for domestic harmony and gender equality. Similarly, membership in voluntary associations and trade unions, as well as links to local government through the CDFs and VLAGs become 'goods' that are leveraged by the more active male HF and MCA participants towards retaining their masculine credibility.

There are both advantage and disadvantages to this. In the short term, life styles and credibility entice people to pay attention to the HF and MCA programmes and prevents their outright rejection. In the long term, however, they risk becoming the goals themselves thereby de-prioritizing gender work. When this happens gender equity becomes instrumentalized, the vehicle through which other public 'goods' that already enjoy community credence/value can be attained.

The above points to an important challenge related to the theoretical approach EMERGE adopted for its HF and MCA programs. It predominantly deployed a behavioural perspective that accounts for external factors that trigger particular, observable behaviours. In this model a stimulus causes a response and this response can be increased in frequency or intensity through reinforcement. This perspective considers individuals as passive receptors of stimuli. Accordingly, the behavioural perspective stresses that a man would resort to alcoholism or beat his wife when usual reinforcements such as satisfying jobs or financial success are suddenly withdrawn. On the other hand he would work hard, help with household chores and spend time with his children if his family members show happiness and appreciate his change in behaviour. He would receive gratification and therefore would repeat this behaviour.

A cognitive approach, on the other hand, stresses the dynamic role of cognitive processes. An emphasis is on 'knowing' and 'perceiving.' This perspective focuses on the fact that individuals are not passive receptors of stimuli. According to the cognitive perspective, the mind processes the information it receives and transforms it into new forms and categories. Cognition refers to the mental processes of perception, memory and information processing by which the individual acquires knowledge, solves problems and plans for the future. The cognitive perspective focuses on how people view themselves and the world.

It could be said that the HF and MCA programmes of EMERGE did not focus adequately on the cognitive processes that could have helped participants and other stakeholders understand why it is important to change one's behaviour. This is proved by the requests of trainers that the training 'needs to go to the next level'; that one and a half years is insufficient time

to change attitudes; and that tools are required with which to understand social norms and the processes of norming. This points to the need from participants within the field for a stronger combination of behavioural and cognitive approaches towards engaging men on gender equality.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The HF and MCA programmes were flagship activities of CARE's EMERGE project. However, the GBV legacy of the developmental field as well as EMERGE's own genealogy in CARE's previous PCEP, LEAD and BRIDGE programmes had two significant effects on the HF and MCA programs. First, their legacy which were predominantly on women's livelihoods and domestic violence, positioned men only in relation to women, alcoholism and violence. This shaped assumptions on the 'mentality of men' as one participant told us, which risked stereotyping men and marginalized the need to pay attention to the distinctions of male-male relations and diversity amongst men. Concomitantly, gender equitable men were defined by all stakeholders we spoke to only in relation to non-violence, household participation and equitable decision making. This in and of itself did not adequately expect or explain why male behavioural change does not necessarily translate into ideological change. A more sustained application of feminist theoretical tools and resources including CARE's own study on masculinities is recommended in future programming.

Secondly, in selecting recruits to the HF and MCA programs who had already worked on previous CARE programmes on household money management, sexual and reproductive health and leadership, CARE, perhaps unintentionally, deployed these prior services/tools as strategic entry points to the MCA and HF programmes. Strategic entry points, while necessary, run the risk of becoming the main goals themselves, particularly when savings, livelihoods and budgeting are more valued by communities than gender work. CARE needs to take this into account when designing the entry points and selection criteria in future programming.

CARE also needs to design tools to measure behavioural change amongst males within the private domain of households. The bias in self-reporting, as well as characteristics, frequency and consistency of male change need to be developed into a tool of measurement that would provide CARE an evidence based assessment of the outcomes of its change agent programmes.

Moreover, CARE needs to revise and re-visit training and counselling programmes for the reasons outlined in the main body of this chapter. Importantly, it needs to work out a stronger balance between behavioural and cognitive approaches towards achieving EMERGE goals.

CHAPTER 4

Working with Youth

Iromi Perera

Introduction

The objective of this evaluation was to conduct a final evaluation of the youth initiatives conducted under the CARE EMERGE project, conceptually framing it within a feminist perspective. This evaluation covered the work the project has done over the past four years in the three districts of Nuwara Eliya, Batticaloa and Polonnaruwa.

The youth activities component in the EMERGE programme shared the main objectives of the overall programme of ‘Men and youth act as allies to promote respect and diversity to improve women’s status in society’ and an intermediate goal of ‘men and youth demonstrate leadership and are actively participating to promote gender equality within CARE and in areas where CARE operates.’

In 2010 when CARE Sri Lanka was discussing the relevance of their work in a post war context, the three key strategic areas identified for youth work were economic, empowering decision making and safety and security. The EMERGE project straddles the last two strategic areas.

Methodology

The information and observations made in this chapter are derived from:

- Project documents shared with evaluation consultants by CARE
- Focus group discussions with youth groups in Hatton district (Carolina estate in Watawala, Campion estate in Bogawantalawa and Drayton estate in Kotagala), Batticaloa district (Vellavaly, Chenkalady and Oddamavady) and Polonnaruwa district (Welikanda and Dimbulagala)
- Interviews with partner organisations in the three districts
- Interview with D1 - the first coordinator of the EMERGE youth activities and responsible for putting together the youth strategy
- Interview with D2 - senior staff member at CARE Sri Lanka
- Interview with D4 and D5 - youth leaders engaged at a national and district level and not connected to CARE projects.

Hambantota and Monaragala

While the EMERGE project initially included Hambantota and Monaragala, where they worked alongside CARE's Local Efforts for Empowerment and Development (LEAD) programme, EMERGE activities were discontinued at the end of LEAD. However, according to interviews with D1 and D2 the youth activities were not very successful even when LEAD was active in the area. According to D2, EMERGE lost the youth groups even before LEAD ended because they could not provide them with better employability options. Providing employment or increasing the employability of youth was not a strategic area for EMERGE but it was the key issue for the youth in Hambantota and Monaragala and therefore CARE could not keep them motivated in EMERGE activities. D2 also stated that at that time, the focus of the EMERGE team had been on the four district study and that more attention could have been paid to Hambantota and Monaragala with regard to keeping the youth enthusiastic about the work. While CARE staff provided details for youth that had been part of the EMERGE project in Hambantota, all efforts to contact them were unsuccessful.

Findings from Focus Group Discussions with Youth Groups

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted in the communities where the EMERGE project took place and had a youth activities component. FGDs were conducted with the youth groups in each identified DS division/ estate and were conducted in a community centre or other community location organised by the partner organisations of CARE.

From the FGDs conducted across the three districts, the groups from Hatton are the most engaged at present in line with CARE immediate goal of - 'youth demonstrate leadership and are actively participating to promote gender equality'. Explained in detail below, what this means is at the end of the EMERGE project in 2014, it is mainly the youth groups from Hatton that are carrying forward activities into the future that are on the themes of gender equality and violence against women, whereas groups from other districts are more focussed on community service activities. It was also only in Hatton (in

all three FGDs) that youth - both boys and girls - actively participated in the discussions and had been actively involved in EMERGE activities, compared to interviews in the other two districts. Youth groups in the other districts did not have many members who had originally been a part of the EMERGE activities.

A high level of transition among male youth due to unemployment is the primary reason youth clubs in the Batticaloa and Polonnaruwa districts are the least engaged in the vision of the EMERGE project. Not too many of those who were part of the initial trainings and activities are in the communities any more to organise or recruit younger members, nor had it been a strategy⁵⁸. While unemployment is also an issue among youth in Hatton, most expressed that they prefer to stay in the estate or close to the estate, indicating that many were at home unemployed or found work closer to the estate. In all three FGDs conducted in Hatton, there were several active members, both male and female, who had been involved in EMERGE activities from the start and spoke of their active interest in keeping the clubs going, which was not the case in the other groups.

When speaking of activities conducted in the past and of activities they hoped to carry out in the future, youth groups in the Hatton district discussed activities related to gender equality⁵⁹, domestic violence and alcohol and drug abuse - all issues identified at the beginning of the EMERGE project as problems existing in their communities. Youth members reported that they can see a visible reduction in alcohol and drug abuse, as well as a reduction in men as perpetrators of violence or sexual harassment in their own communities. Young men also mentioned that they now play a more active role in the household as well and help their mothers and sisters with house work and that those were not activities they would have otherwise participated in prior to the EMERGE project. A majority of the participants in the FGDs had actively played a role in the project activities - such as developing and distributing hand bills alcohol and drug abuse, and violence against women, forum theatre and a campaign that went from door to door in the Campion estate where they spoke to adults about gender equality and violence against women. The motivation to continue their activities beyond the CARE project arises most likely from the fact that they identify visible changes in their community that they attribute to their youth group activities. Both girls and boys actively participated in the FGDs, sharing their views. The fact that they varied in age also indicated a system of transfer of knowledge from the initial trainings received from the EMERGE project.

⁵⁸ See section below on 'Assessing EMERGE youth work and observations' for more details on lack of transfer of knowledge.

⁵⁹ Gender equality meant equal gender roles in the household and in the community - that there were no prescribed roles for men and women. However, youth mainly spoke of roles within the household - specifically in terms of labour - and not in terms of shared responsibility.

The civic engagement approach⁶⁰ had been a successful one in the Hatton district as CARE staff and partner organisation staff reported that at the beginning of the project, the youth in the selected estates did not have much credibility in their community, or in the eyes of the estate management. Lack of employment opportunities in the estates or nearby areas, and inability to enroll in some form of skills training or formal qualification due to poverty meant that most youth, especially male, were at home idle and unemployed. Therefore if not for prioritising empowering and building the capacity of the individuals and thereby changing the perspectives of the community towards the young people, the EMERGE project would not have been able to be fulfilled in the manner that it was envisioned. While the EMERGE project has developed leadership and personality skills of the youth in the estates, the significant issues of unemployment and lack of opportunities remain for a majority of youth. They are able to be actively involved in the youth groups mainly for the reason that they are either still in school and for those who are not, are living in the estates without a job. It was mentioned however that in order to keep the clubs active they need a lot of members who are willing to actively participate as they have a lot of older members frequently leaving the estates in search of employment.

In the Batticaloa district, the high level of transition among young men has had an impact on the youth activities. Except for one male in Oddamavady (aged 33) and two males in Chenkalady none of the other male youth club members had been involved in the project from the start; they had only been members for one year or less. When asked about the activities conducted by their youth clubs, in Chenkalady they mentioned mostly community service activities and it was only with repeated questioning that they recalled some of the workshops they had attended which related to gender equality and activities they had conducted. In Vellavaly it was mentioned that there has been a reduction in eve teasing in their village and that they can see a change in mentality among adults regarding the notion that men and women have assigned roles and jobs. There had been resistance from the community at first to listen to youth talking about such topics, so instead they concentrated on working with their families first and eventually, the community accepted their interventions. In all three districts there have been some activities that were conducted along the themes of gender roles and equality, drug abuse and domestic violence but there has been little or no transfer of knowledge from the camps and workshops organised at the beginning of the project and the youth groups remain mostly as community service groups. In Chenkalady and Oddamavady, the young men stated that they think it is important that programmes such as these engage with men directly as men are the key perpetrators of violence and gender discrimination, and that having the training on masculinities and gender was useful for them as they had information to use in their discussions with men in the village.

In Polonnaruwa, the issue of high level of transition arose as well. Except for one male youth in Dimbulagala, all other participants in both FGDs were very young and had not had any direct exposure to EMERGE organised activities.

In Welikanda, the participants at the FGD were all below the age of 16 and had a charismatic male elder from their village in charge of the group. Their activities even during the project period had been mostly community service focused and not aligned with EMERGE objectives. It could also be that they never shifted from the civic engagement stage as they lacked the participation and leadership to take it beyond to EMERGE related activities. This group had clearly only engaged in community service work and the gender related awareness sessions a few had been exposed to at the school level seemed a distant memory and only mentioned by the male elder. Due to the involvement of this male elder, there was clearly no leadership or incentive to organise activities amongst the youth and instead they looked to him for direction and guidance.

In Dimbulagala, the youth leader who had participated in the initial national camp and continued working with the youth group in his village spoke enthusiastically of his personal change and attributed it to the leadership training and exposure that CARE activities gave him. They had organised a successful poster campaign on gender roles and gender based violence and said that they designed the posters themselves using the knowledge they received from the five day training. Unfortunately the early enthusiasm does not seem to have continued and the group has engaged in mainly community service oriented activities since then. The main reason appears to be that most young men and women who were involved from the start had serious issues to tackle - such as finding gainful employment. Those left in the village, such as the youth leader didn't seem motivated to revive the group without support from CARE. He was also unaware that the EMERGE project had come to an end and was under the impression that the new recruits who were at the FGD would learn more about CARE and be exposed to the same kind of trainings he was exposed to in order to be motivated to join in on the activities.

When asked from the youth about what advice they would give others who might like to set up a similar youth club in their area, it was interesting that most of the answers were common across the board. One was that in order to get parent's to allow them to participate (especially girls), it was important to make them aware of what the programme is all about. That EMERGE activities included an orientation for the parents helped immensely, especially when it came to girls participating in trainings away from their homes. Second was that it would be helpful if they had an organised place to meet - such as a community centre so that it made discussions more formal as opposed to meeting in someone's house. Third was that talking about issues related to gender was not easy, and that winning the trust of their families first and then community members was the best way to be able to have those conversations.

⁶⁰ In the civic engagement approach, initial activities organised by youth were community service activities in order to gain acceptance from their community and for the youth to be seen in a positive light. This enabled them to tackle serious issues (such as gender roles for example) through their activities in the future. This approach is discussed in detail below.

Civic engagement approach

Focus group discussions were conducted with youth in the EMERGE programme areas prior to designing project activities in order to identify issues facing youth. According to project documents and the interview with D1, key issues facing youth at that time were unemployment, lack of opportunities, poverty and a low level of acceptance of youth by the community and for some, even their families. The youth activities were designed with an approach that would enhance the acceptance of the youth in the community - by developing life skills of the youth themselves, but also by enabling them to organise activities that would benefit the community. It was necessary to use this approach as an entry point if youth were to engage and organise activities in line with EMERGE project goals that were accepted by the community.

This civic engagement approach worked well for the EMERGE project in terms of developing life skills of youth, gaining acceptance from the community towards youth and more importantly, buy in from the youth themselves into the EMERGE programme. The main activities at the start of the programme such as the five day training was where CARE staff identified motivated and promising youth to be appointed as change agents in their respective communities and this was a good approach as activities conducted in these five days would have given some insight as to which young men would be interested and motivated to take the lead in carrying forward this work.

Unfortunately, in districts of Batticaloa and Polonnaruwa, most groups haven't completely transitioned from community service oriented activities to activities more aligned in achieving EMERGE objectives, whereas in Hatton, the youth groups had found a harmony between the two. This shows that the entry approach ended up becoming the strategy itself, and interviews with partner organisations indicated a necessity to keep the clubs running due to the high transition among male youth and this need was perhaps what contributed to entry becoming strategy, with the objective of keeping the clubs active as opposed to ensuring that the clubs functioned to achieve the objectives of the EMERGE project. In addition, given the high level of transition among youth, continuous engagement with the youth groups and transfer of knowledge is also key for this strategy to work - for it to move beyond civic engagement alone.

In the Mid Term Review of the EMERGE programme, it was recommended that the youth strategy be conceptualised better and the revised strategy that came out of it - the 2013 Revised Youth Engagement Strategy does away with the civic engagement approach and instead focuses on achieving an aspired status of youth by concentrating on employability and life skills.

A combination of the two would have worked better instead of introducing two different approaches in such a short period of time. While formalising the youth groups through registering them with the National Youth Council and thereby opening a range of services for them, the need for youth to address

gender equality and go beyond just having an awareness appears to have got lost in the transition process. Perhaps if the programme was to continue beyond 2014, there may have been a positive outcome but the time period for so many changes in strategy was indeed too short.

Assessing EMERGE youth work and observations

Given that the main objective of the EMERGE youth programme is that youth become allies to promote respect and diversity to improve women's status in society, the youth groups and the work that they have been empowered to organise and do in their respective communities in order to achieve this overarching objective has to exist beyond the time period of the EMERGE project and independently of it for it to be sustainable. Youth must accept the knowledge they gain about gender equality and violence against women and be self motivated to do their part to become change agents in their communities, and more importantly, ensure that this role they play as catalysts for gender equality continues after them.

This does not appear to be something that CARE Sri Lanka had factored in their strategy or programming. For one, the level of transition / migration among youth was not something that CARE had anticipated when they launched the youth strategy and began youth activities. To tackle this issue and ensure that knowledge and the continuation of the youth groups is not concentrated on one or two individuals, there had to be more involvement of CARE regional and partner organisation staff which had not been the case. D2, senior staff member at CARE said that they had only one CARE field coordinator in each district and their main tasks involved managing the partner organisations, reporting and handling the administrative side of the project, which left little time for them to actively monitor the actual work being done in the communities. EMERGE annual reports from every year notes the high youth turnover as an issue, but does not seem to have tackled it well and as a consequence, it is difficult to acknowledge that EMERGE objectives have been met by most youth groups. The approach that this programme took with youth was a unique one - it had direct benefits for both youth and CARE, as well as the community and it was not work that existed in isolation in the communities. The fact that other programmes like Happy Families was also taking place alongside the youth groups meant that the community was also familiar with why youth were engaging in activities that dealt with topics such as gender equality and drug abuse. It is therefore unfortunate that there was no better strategy to ensure the longevity of the youth group activities in addition to ensuring that the the groups transitioned well beyond just community service activities. This is precisely why it can be determined that at least in the case of Batticaloa and Polonnaruwa districts, the entry strategy for youth became the strategy itself.

A key reason for this was the fact that youth component did not have a project coordinator right throughout the EMERGE programme. The departure of the first youth coordinator in 2013, immediately after the youth strategy had been formalised after a long period of planning and deliberations, left a gap that

wasn't filled by subsequent staff members. D2 stated that the momentum was lost with D1's departure and when the next youth coordinator took over, the EMERGE project went back to the drawing board and the Revised Youth Strategy 2013 was born after another lengthy period of fieldwork and discussions. The two coordinators had two different perspectives and approaches. Given the short amount of time left in the project period, the youth component was affected by these changes.

Another reason as to why the youth communities never fully evolved from the civic engagement model (and was evident from the interviews with partner organisations as well) was that focus by the partner staff and CARE field staff was to keep the groups together in whatever form, as opposed to ensuring transfer of knowledge or ensuring activities were in line with EMERGE objectives. It is also clear that knowledge regarding EMERGE's own key topics were somewhat diluted at the partner and field staff level as not everyone had attended the knowledge trainings and the level of knowledge and understanding varied. As the youth groups had most interaction with them, the knowledge at the field level with partner organisations and CARE staff played a role in how the activities were shaped. EMERGE would have benefited by having people with a better understanding of the project conceptually being located in the different districts and focussing only on the activities to ensure that the work at the ground level was aligned with what EMERGE was actually about.

The 2013 Revised Youth Engagement Strategy document outlines the need to revise the strategy, details issues faced by youth and what their needs are and how the strategy needs to be revised in order to achieve youth as well as CARE objectives. The issues and needs of youth are the same as what is outlined above in the FGD findings and from the only item out of the 'aspired status of youth' list that has been realised at the time of the end line evaluation is that youth are more aware about gender equality, drug and alcohol abuse and its effect on GBV. The other key items such as youth being gainfully employed and youth addressing gender equality and preventing GBV have mostly not been met.

An excerpt from the conceptual framework for the revised strategy is as follows:

“ The key lesson learnt is that all these trainings and exposure was received only by a few youth representing each village and the dissemination of the ideas and the learnt behavior had not been successfully acquired by the rest of the youth in the village. Thus, a collective means of addressing gender issues prevalent in the society by the youth themselves (rather than the village level action group members) is less organized and even less comprehended.

The other fact is the rapid turnover of youth members in youth groups to continue certain training programs in a sequence; the main reason

being for employment purposes. Hence, the interest towards gender and youth engagement over the need for employment is less and also it is less valued. Thus, combining the gender and men engagement programs along with programs on career development and employability enhancing skills, is suggested to sustain youth in the gender sensitization process. ”

There are several weaknesses in this revised strategy. One is that it does away with the civic engagement approach that worked well - when asked from youth about how they were able to talk about issues related to gender, drug abuse and GBV with their parents and their community members, every FGD revealed that the fact that they had gained merit in the eyes of the community leaders by organising activities that benefited the community and showed demonstrable change in the youth themselves. That created an entry point to organising serious awareness campaigns and activities that dealt with sensitive issues.

Second, the revised strategy assumes that exposure visits and career development orientations alone would enable youth to be more employable. While this is true to an extent, the root causes of their unemployability is not addressed - most youth in these areas are unable to find employment because they do not have the skills or qualifications for the jobs they desire and they do not have the financial means to acquire them. There is also little desire to work in Colombo or cities far from their villages. These are two elements that should have been taken into consideration when organising the career development activities for the youth. It also shifted the focus mainly to the economic aspects and perhaps confused the intent of the work as well, and became something that the EMERGE project wasn't about.

Third and most importantly, the revised strategy yet again does not address the gap in transfer of knowledge and learnt behaviour to the rest of the youth in the community. Even if an ideal scenario did occur where youth were all gainfully employed - it would mean that they would either leave the village or not have time to be very involved in activities. That solutions to address the transfer of knowledge in a more organised process was not mapped out in the revised strategy and even through interviews conducted showed that this crucial aspect was not something that was addressed adequately.

In every FGD conducted and interviews with CARE staff and partner organisation staff, it was mentioned that there was a change in the youth as individuals through the trainings and the exposure they received through EMERGE activities. Youth reported being more confident, better able to work as a team, more motivated and with purpose to do something, improved leadership skills and so on. Exposure to voluntary groups like STITCH had proved particularly useful as participants received wide exposure by participating in trainings in different parts of the country together with other youth from all over the island.

A wide range of topics had been covered (from social media training to leadership training to team building activities) and in addition, participants could see how youth groups can be run successfully without any backing - financial or otherwise - and function with volunteers giving whatever time they could. It is also necessary to note that when asked about what trainings they had received by being a part of the EMERGE programme or about what they have learnt, the youth associated trainings and activities such as leadership training or confidence building activities more with the EMERGE project, rather than the gender and masculinities trainings, or they only came up when questioned further.

An observation that was contrary to what was reported was that while awareness and exposure have apparently had a positive impact on these youth lives as reported by them and also mentions change in behaviour towards gender roles during interviews, it was interesting to note in every single location that an FGD was conducted (except in Oddamavady where there were only men), the sweeping of the premises and in one FGD in Hatton, the preparation of tea was carried out by a female youth group member and never a male. So while stating that they help out at home, that it did not occur to them to them to sweep the premises or make the tea indicates that that prescribed gender roles still do exist in the minds of these young people and that taking on roles that are not conventionally 'male' is still very much a conscious decision and not one that comes automatically yet.

This is where the trainings given to the youth must be of the highest standard and should ensure that youth understand and absorb the knowledge well, and not their own interpretation of it. According to D1, at the start CARE was conscious of the language and the approach, especially the way the concepts and knowledge were conveyed in the local languages during the trainings. For example, in the trainings youth were told about 'shared responsibilities' as opposed to 'helping' in the household, and the goal was personal transformation and not a role of 'protecting' the women. However, in the focus group discussions, when male youth said that through the EMERGE project they learnt about gender equality, they all said that they "help" their mothers and sisters with the house work and the idea of shared responsibility didn't come across. Even in partner organisation and CARE field staff interviews, it was the word 'help' that was used which indicates that the conscious efforts taken by CARE at the beginning regarding concept and language had not transferred over the years. Importance was placed on change in behavior of the youth and not necessarily the theoretical foundation of that changed behaviour. Therefore this ties in with a point made earlier in this chapter, about how the youth component of EMERGE would have benefitted greatly by having a dedicated individual with a strong conceptual background to work with the groups in the different districts.

Interviews with youth leaders engaging in youth issues and activities at a policy level and at national/ district levels acknowledged that CARE's approach towards engaging with

youth - making them stakeholders in a project as opposed to youth being mere recipients, was a more appropriate and holistic approach compared to other organisations. Work with youth in Sri Lanka usually takes the form of charity or as awareness-raising sessions where the youth are recipients of knowledge only⁶¹. By developing life skills of the youth and raising their level of acceptance and recognition in their communities, and then motivating them to carry out this message about men and boys working together to prevent gender based violence, CARE ensured that the youth had as much of a stake in the activities as CARE did.

⁶¹ Interview with D3, member of Youth Parliament

Conclusion and Recommendation

Overall, there are several important lessons learnt from CARE's work with youth under the EMERGE project which should be carried on to other work of the organisation that involves youth. In sum, ensuring that the realities of youth and their environment are included into any strategy is key, and the actual work and implementation should be driven by the youth themselves in order for there to be ownership and ability to identify their part in whatever change that may take place. That youth are recognised among peers, family and community in a positive light - as leaders and change agents - is crucial for there to be self motivation to carry on the work. Furthermore, this aspect of recognition is important because the messages they carry as part of this project - on gender, masculinities, GBV etc - are not conventional or easy ones to talk about with elders and one cannot expect them to be very receptive to such discussions with young people at the start.

Despite the EMERGE programme not reaching its key objectives in full for their youth activities, there have been positive outcomes through the work of CARE that must be acknowledged. Youth reported having a better understanding and awareness about gender and gender roles and the need to work together to combat violence against women. Male youth in most FGDs mentioned changing their behaviour at home and helping with the housework and other activities that they normally would not have done so and an acceptance of their roles as men in affecting the lives of women. While the language used is problematic, the fact that there is a reporting of changed behaviour is something CARE can consider to be a positive result, admittedly at a basic level. Both boys and girls stated that before the EMERGE programme they viewed gender roles very differently and that they see things in a different light now. Even if most youth groups concentrated on more community service based activities such as shramadana (direct translation – a donation of labour, where people give their time and labour towards an activity organized for the betterment of their community, for example cleaning up of public areas or painting the local school), the understanding of the young people about what brought them together as a group was an awareness that they were all equal and that gender, ethnicity or geographical location was not a reason to discriminate.

The approach that CARE took with the EMERGE programme period with the youth activities is an interesting one in the wider Sri Lankan context, and had it been better planned and planned in a way that youth groups could eventually exist and function on their own it could be a successful approach that can be used when engaging with youth. The longevity and sustainability of the groups depend on how well the issues of transfer of knowledge and youth migration are tackled. Personal change that they themselves can identify is as important as change they can identify in the community. For this, while exposure to other youth groups and youth realities in different parts of the country is critical, so is developing life skills. The civic engagement approach, while a successful strategy as an entry unfortunately became the strategy itself and the danger of this was not realised until the very end and

therefore the transition is something that should be factored in future work. The time period of a programme must be taken into careful consideration when key objectives include attitudinal change and the conceptual framing of the work should remain consistent throughout the life span of the programme.

Attitudinal change is difficult, especially more so with older people and therefore the task given to youth – to bring about change in their community on sensitive issues was not an easy one. There are some things the EMERGE project could have done differently to have better supported this task. For one, continuous and more in-depth training would have helped in creating a more solid understanding of the concepts and information that EMERGE brought together through this project and also ensured a better continuity of activities that were more aligned with the project objectives. Furthermore, instead of introducing an emphasis on the employability of youth half way through the project, CARE could have worked on other ways to keep the youth motivated on EMERGE issues while linking them to other organisations or services that could have helped their employability.

While the youth work in the EMERGE programme had several critical set backs which meant that the broader objectives were not fulfilled completely, some key impacts have been made through the youth programme interventions - both among youth and their communities. Certain approaches implemented and strategies employed demonstrated ways an organisation, while taking into consideration the realities of diverse youth groups such as these, can maximise the the participation of youth as stakeholders of a broader objective while also ensuring their active participation. The lessons learnt in the EMERGE youth component on how to engage with youth on critical issues such as gender equality and GBV and make them allies in creating change are lessons that are valuable for any organisation and that probably is the one of the key outcomes of this component in the overall EMERGE project.

