



Empowering Communities to Lead: *Strengthening Community Capacity to Challenge Gender Norms, Reduce HIV Risk, and Improve Reproductive Health in Tanzania*

KEY POINTS

Community activists and local leaders equipped with the knowledge, skills, and resources needed to take action play a key role in reducing HIV risk, improving sexual and reproductive health, (SRH), eliminating gender-based violence, and transforming inequitable gender norms within their communities.

In 14 urban districts in Tanzania, the CHAMPION Project's community engagement approaches empowered communities to act on their own behalf by strengthening their capacity to develop, implement, lead, and monitor locally tailored gender-transformative solutions to HIV and poor SRH.



BACKGROUND

Gender Matters

Inequitable gender norms are among the most influential factors fueling HIV transmission in Sub-Saharan Africa, including Tanzania (Barker & Ricardo, 2006). Harmful and entrenched concepts of masculinity encourage men to equate high-risk sexual behavior, violence, and dominance over women with “manhood.” Transforming the inequitable gender norms that increase HIV risk, raise the incidence of gender-based violence (GBV), and lead to other poor sexual and reproductive health (SRH) outcomes requires a comprehensive approach that addresses factors at all levels—individual, community, service delivery, and policy.

Holistic Community Driven Approach

Using an approach designed around an ecological programming model, the CHAMPION Project worked to holistically address the context in which decisions about sexual relationships, behaviors, and related health care-seeking are made in Tanzania. An ecological model asserts that a set of interconnected interventions applied at the individual, community, health services, workplace, and policy/advocacy levels will affect the multiple forces perpetuating inequitable gender norms, thereby having a positive effect on gender-equitable attitudes and behaviors and, consequently, on HIV and SRH outcomes (CHAMPION Project, 2014). Through community-level interventions, the project worked to eliminate barriers to preventive and curative sexual health care services for men by improving the male-friendliness of health facilities and ensuring a supportive policy environment. In addition, CHAMPION worked with local “lead” nongovernmental organizations (LNGOs), government and private-sector partners, and local champions to foster supportive workplace and community environments where equitable gender norms could be actively discussed, promoted, and practiced.

While individuals' knowledge influences their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors, information campaigns alone are not sufficient to change deeply held norms and beliefs about gender, sexuality, sexual relationships, and behaviors. Such changes also require peer role models and leaders of change within communities to catalyze collective transformation—change agents and compelling voices positioned to challenge entrenched norms and practices.

COMMUNITY
INTERVENTION





Community health talk in Mbeya Region, 2010

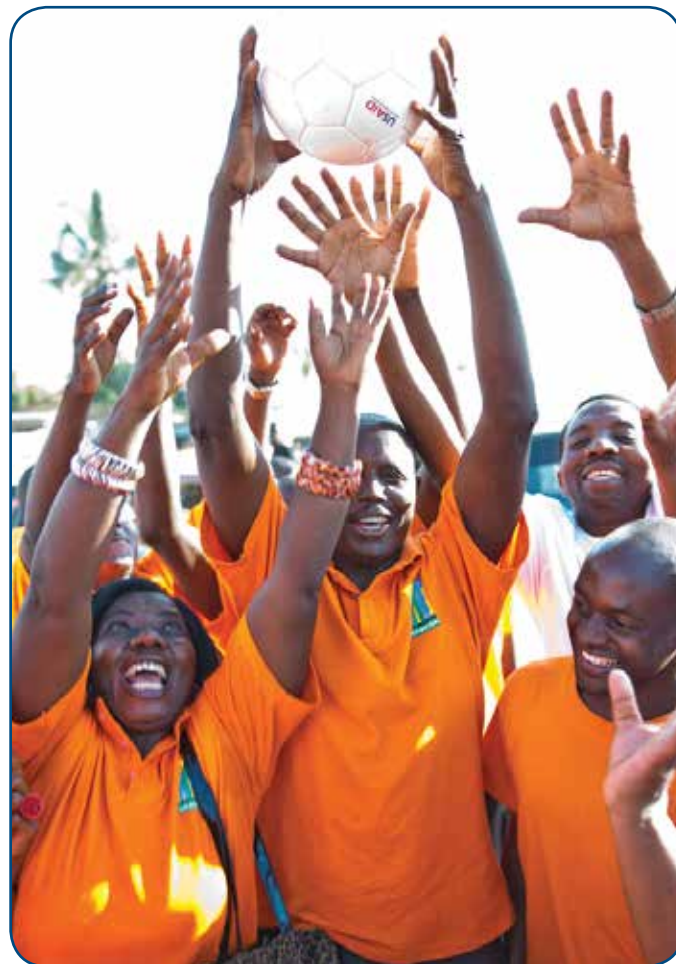
COMMUNITY APPROACHES

CHAMPION's work to foster supportive community environments for change was guided by EngenderHealth's definition of community engagement as a capacity-building process that supports community partners in planning, implementing, and evaluating actions to address priority issues affecting their health and well-being. Through training and ongoing support, CHAMPION worked to strengthen the capacity of local-level champions and activists. This training and support was focused on strengthening knowledge about HIV and gender within communities and supporting grassroots activists and leaders in exploring challenges, setting priorities, and planning, implementing, and evaluating interventions to address these priorities (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Essential elements of community engagement processes



In focus districts, CHAMPION worked with local government authorities and stakeholders to identify a diverse range of influential community partners and potential champions for transforming gender norms. These partners ranged from LNGOs and community-based organizations to community officials and leaders to local activists interested in working together to champion equitable gender norms to address HIV and GBV in their communities.



Community Action Team (CAT) members celebrate the launch of CHAMPION's *Vunja Ukimya, Zumgumza na Mwenzi* World Cup-themed event.

Training for community partners focused on sensitizing them to key concepts related to gender and supporting them in critical reflection about the influence of inequitable gender norms on HIV and GBV. Training sessions explored participants' perspectives on and visions for gender equality, healthy relationships, and positive health-seeking behaviors and built their skills in various areas, such as participatory appraisal methods, critical thinking and problem prioritization skills, community action planning, and monitoring and evaluation.

During and after training sessions, community partners were supported in identifying root causes of inequitable gender norms and risky behaviors, using participatory appraisal methods, such as community mapping, problem trees, and "gender fishbowl"¹ exercises. In addition, partners were supported in developing action plans to address identified concerns and priorities.

Actions planned by community partners included heightening awareness about gender and HIV through street dialogues (*boda boda*), radio shows, and health fairs, as well as engaging local opinion leaders (e.g., religious leaders and influential social leaders) in challenging harmful gender norms through community dialogues. CHAMPION provided social and behavior change communication (SBCC) materials to community partners to support them in planning and implementing these activities.

“After attending a CHAMPION talk on unequal gender norms, I came to realize women do a lot more than men. I talked to my wife about gender norms and started to help her with small activities like fetching water and washing our babies’ clothes.”

—T. Ernest Achimpota, Morogoro Urban

CHAMPION also supported community partners in reviewing their progress monthly and identifying achievements and lessons learned through their community activism, as well as developing strategies for improving effectiveness and addressing gaps.

ACHIEVEMENTS AND OUTCOMES

As a result of training and capacity building supported by CHAMPION, community partners reached more than 420,000 individuals in their communities through small-group dialogues with influential local leaders, door-to-door home visits, health fairs, and street dialogues. Other important results of CHAMPION’S community efforts include:

- **Strengthened capacity to raise awareness and stimulate reflective discussion about gender norms.** More than 2,700 men and women completed a Men As Partners® group education workshop, a gender-transformative intervention promoting critical reflection and identification of common gender and social norms that increase HIV risk and other adverse RH outcomes.
- **Increased involvement of community partners in addressing gender and HIV.** A number of CHAMPION’S community partners have been recognized as important grassroots partners for ongoing efforts to address HIV and AIDS. In Mwanza, one of CHAMPION’S Community Action Teams (CATs) was awarded funding from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) to implement a gender project, and a CAT member from Morogoro was invited to serve on his District HIV/AIDS Committee.
- **Increased uptake of RH services.** Nearly 25,000 people were tested for HIV during events organized by community partners working with local health care providers to offer HIV testing and counseling (HTC) and RH outreach services at community events and through referral linkages.

MOVING FORWARD

CHAMPION’S experience has shown that community partners and grassroots activists are well-positioned to identify and challenge social, cultural, and gender norms that negatively influence SRH behaviors and outcomes. Communities are key partners in identifying priorities for change and in leading such change. Investments in building the capacity of local partners and supporting them in planning, implementing, and evaluating actions to challenge and address gender-inequitable norms in their communities are critical for achieving and sustaining social and behavioral change.



Graduate of a community-based Men As Partners® (MAP®) group education workshop



A CAT member participating in a health facility dialogue about the importance of men’s seeking health care and accompanying their partners for reproductive and maternal health services



A CAT member engages a crowd at a community health fair.

Success Story: Religious Leader Is Key to Growing Healthy Relationships



A local pastor in Shinyanga Urban district, Reverend Daniel Nelson Kikoma, has always been concerned with the social and economic issues that face his congregation, including high rates of HIV and GBV. Through CHAMPION, Reverend Kikoma attended a gender transformation workshop for community leaders in Shinyanga, which provided an opportunity to reflect on inequitable gender norms and their impact on relationships and health. This workshop made Reverend Kikoma question his attitudes about gender norms and his sermons about the importance of women obeying their husbands in all matters: "The reflective process I went through with CHAMPION showed me that a healthy household is an equal household."

With newfound courage and eagerness to demonstrate his knowledge and skills, Reverend Kikoma now focuses his efforts on helping young adults and couples resolve conflict and address important health issues. With support from CHAMPION, Reverend Kikoma organized a gender transformation workshop for his church and surrounding community. Due to its success, he is now planning another workshop outside of his church so that people of all faiths can participate. Reverend Kikoma is now a strong and passionate advocate for creating and maintaining gender-equitable relationships. Using his position as a pastor to influence, inform, and support his community, Reverend Kikoma now takes every opportunity to engage others in challenging the harmful attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that perpetuate unequal relationships, GBV, high HIV risk, and poor SRH.

REFERENCES

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Suggested citation: The CHAMPION Project. 2014. Empowering Communities to Lead: Strengthening Community Capacity to Challenge Gender Norms, Reduce HIV Risk, and Improve Reproductive Health in Tanzania *CHAMPION Brief No. 4*. Dar es Salaam: EngenderHealth/CHAMPION Project.

¹ The fishbowl activity aims to create a better understanding of the gender-related experiences of the other sex. Participants are first divided into same-sex groups. One group sits in a circle in the middle of the room as the other sits around the outside of the circle, facing inward. Those in the middle of the circle are asked a series of questions about their gender-related experiences, while the outside group listens. The process is then repeated for the other sex.

This brief is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The contents are the responsibility of the CHAMPION Project led by EngenderHealth, and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.

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Writers: Holly Connor and Jaughna Nielsen-Bobbit; Contributing reviewers: Ellen Brazier, Jane Schueller, and Monica Mhoja; Editor: Michael Klitsch; Design/Layout: Carolin Beine; Photo credits: D. Zalucky/EngenderHealth (Page 1, upper left); S. Lewis/EngenderHealth (Page 1, upper right; Page 2 and Page 3); Staff/EngenderHealth (Page 4).

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