Impact Assessment

Mobilising Communities to Prevent Domestic Violence
Kawempe Division, Uganda

July 2003
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Executive Summary
In 2000 Raising Voices initiated a pilot project to field-test a new program tool, *Mobilising Communities to Prevent Domestic Violence: A Resource Guide for Organisations in East and Southern Africa*. The project began as a partnership between Raising Voices, the National Association of Women’s Organizations in Uganda (NAWOU) and Action Aid, and is now sustained by the Center for Domestic Violence Prevention (CEDOVIP). The project works in Kawempe Division, a low income, densely populated community of approximately 300,000. This impact assessment examines the implications of rights-based programming on levels of domestic violence through interviews, focus group discussions and questionnaires with 180 married women and men ages 20 – 66 living in the community. It was found that human rights discourse significantly contributed to individual, relationship and community change which resulted in a decrease in levels physical, emotional, sexual and economic violence against women in the home. While some men’s reluctance to change and backlash to the discourse did emerge, study participants reported a general trend toward more acceptance of women’s right to live free of violence. The findings will be used to strengthen programs at CEDOVIP and other violence prevention efforts within the region, and contribute to the body of knowledge about social change programs.

Summary of Key Findings
The paths toward change as individuals, within a relationship, or within the larger society are a long and varied. The communities where Raising Voices and CEDOVIP have been undertaking intense human rights education on the issue of domestic violence for two years does show a significant change in the experiences of domestic violence as reported by community members.

Individual Change
- 96 percent of women and 84 percent of men had knowledge about human rights.
- 70 percent of women said that knowing about human rights increased their self-esteem while 58 percent of men said the same.

Relationship Change
- 78 percent of men said they felt more accountable in their relationships after hearing about human rights and 76 percent of women said they were more assertive.
- Men’s accountability stemmed more from external than internal sources in that they more often discussed formal systems or community structures to which they felt accountable more than their partners or to their own integrity or values.
- 46 percent of women said they feel better about their partner after learning about rights and 58 percent of men said the same as women. Positive feelings about partners stemmed primarily from their partner’s recognition and respect of their rights.
- A further indicator of positive change within a relationship was the degree of communication between partners about human rights and domestic violence. Where there was increased communication, both partners were likely to report increased positive regard for their partner. 54 percent of women and 70 percent of men reported having talked to their partner about human rights.
- External events such as radio programs, newspaper articles, posters and community activities increased opportunities and facilitated discussions between partners.
- Common barriers to communication were men's fear of rights, insecurity, a feeling of powerlessness and women’s fear of increased violence.
- Surprisingly, women thought more of the rights of men than vice versa. Contrary to popular beliefs that suggest that women will become unruly, rebellious ‘man-haters’, the talk of rights seemed to make women more aware of their husband’s rights and humanity and thus they felt more obligation to respect these rights, even in cases where their partner was violating their own human rights.
- Some men reported more violence toward their wives, the desire to leave, or to get another wife – one who ‘behaved’. In Kawempe, men were much more likely to express a desire to leave relationships than women.

Community Change
- Both women and men said that their extended families, friends and neighbors influenced their beliefs and behaviors about violence and rights. Women sought support and mediation from...
extended family members and depended on the intervention of neighbors during violent episodes in their homes.

- Men also sought advice from friends and family and were more likely to feel accountable to them than their wives. Men feared being publicly shamed by having their problems exposed to local councils or other community leaders and this played an important role in reducing violence in relationships.
- Women and men also remarked that they noticed a change in the levels of violence within the community. Many said they heard less screaming in the night and they saw less quarreling between couples.
- Men felt decreased tolerance of violence and this affected their behavior as they felt they had to be more careful within their relationships. This is linked to a shift in institutions or community structures that are perceived to be more woman-friendly. The local councils, secretaries for women, NGOs, and police were cited as advocates for women's rights and violence prevention. This bolstered women's resolve and made them feel more powerful in their relationships and, for men, it made them feel more accountable.
- Both women and men discussed the importance of having regular human rights messages and activities in the community. They said that the reinforcement from many different sources provided ample opportunity to think about and discuss human rights. They believed this contributed to changing community norms.

Physical Violence

- 48 percent of both women and men reported a decreased level of physical violence in their relationships.
- 8 percent of women reported an increase in violence against them and a further 16 percent experienced no change in the levels of violence.
- Some men explained how they were using physical violence as a deliberate technique to maintain power over their wives while other men reported additional tactics to avoid physical violence such as marrying another woman or punishment to their wives through increased economic violence.

Emotional Violence

- 54 percent of women and 52 percent of men said that the talk of human rights decreased emotional violence in their relationship. This primarily signified a reduction in verbal abuse and isolation.
- 10 percent of women said that emotional violence had increased and double that number of men said they increased emotional violence in their relationship. Some men commented that while they may fear being physically violent to their partner, this less tangible and more subtle form of emotional violence was used as an alternative.

Sexual Violence

- Levels of sexual violence decreased with 52 percent of women reporting less sexual violence and 42 percent of men also stating a reduction in their relationship. The disparity in numbers reflects a general trend of male under reporting sexual violence due to the differences in perception about the validity of women's right to deny sexual advances of their husbands.
- 12 percent of women said that sexual violence increased as opposed to only 6 percent of men reporting an increase.
- Men reported that they were less afraid to perpetrate this type of violence because it was still seen as a private matter and they didn’t feel there would be public consequences.
- Within some men there did seem to be genuine confusion and uncertainty as to how to negotiate sex with their partners without using force or coercion.

Economic Violence

- 48 percent of women and men reported a decrease in economic violence in their relationship.
- The most discussed area of change was in men ‘allowing’ their partner to work outside the home. Interestingly, while this meant increased freedom and independence for women, they came to find it also brought a different form of economic violence. Once women were working, many men then chose to stop sharing in the financial upkeep of the family all together so women were left more burdened. Many men described this behavior as ‘paying back’ the woman as she had wanted to be the ‘man’ in the family so he let her.
Resistance to Change

- Many men were genuinely struggling with what they perceived to be a loss of power within their homes and intimate relationships. They resented the introduction of women’s rights and some felt that in Uganda, human rights had to be ‘redesigned’ to fit the traditional beliefs about male superiority and female inferiority.

- Other men spoke about the need to learn practical alternatives to violent behavior as it was such a common way of dealing with problems that they felt uncertain as to how to move forward in their relationships without violence.

- Women were surprisingly patient and understanding toward their partner’s fears and resistance toward change. They appreciated the small changes and efforts that their partners made and remained hopeful that further change would occur.

Reasons for Change

- Women and men discussed the key factors that facilitated positive change in their relationships:
  a) knowledge of women’s human rights and the negative consequences of domestic violence;
  b) desire for happiness in the relationships and seeing rights (i.e., mutual respect) as an avenue toward that goal;
  c) fear of consequences both formal (i.e., police and local council) and informal (i.e., public shame from neighbors or family);
  d) supportive environment within the community that no longer tolerated domestic violence as a natural part of relationships;
  e) maturity and age in that older participants felt they needed to be role models for their children and other community members and they perceived domestic violence as damaging their credibility and dignity within the eyes of others; 
  f) an experience of extreme violence and serious injury strengthened women’s resolve not to be violated and frightened men; and,
  g) women’s economic independence, which increased women’s self worth and increased their options.

The following report provides further information about the project design, process of the impact assessment, extensive detail about the above findings and recommendations for future domestic violence prevention efforts.
Section 1: Introduction

1.1 Background
Raising Voices and the Center for Domestic Violence Prevention (CEDOVIP), formerly known as the Domestic Violence Prevention Project (DVPP) have been undertaking a rights-based domestic violence prevention program in Kawempe Division since 2000. The work began as a partnership between Raising Voices, the National Association of Women’s Organizations in Uganda (NAWOU) and ActionAid-Uganda.

1.2 Project Overview
The project is based on Mobilising Communities to Prevent Domestic Violence: A Resource Guide for Organisations in East and Southern Africa, a programmatic tool developed by Raising Voices. CEDOVIP has been pioneering the field test and pilot of this new approach to violence prevention. The project is rooted in a human rights approach, attempts to reach a large cross-section of community members and works to address the root causes of domestic violence. The project is holistic in design and requires extensive community participation and leadership. As a behavior change program, the project, as suggested in the Resource Guide, is structured in five phases that mirror Prochaska’s (1992) theory of individual behavior change scaled up for the community level. They are:

Phase One: Community assessment to gather information on attitudes and beliefs about domestic violence.

Phase Two: Raising Awareness within the general community and various professional sectors (i.e. social and health services, law enforcement, teachers, religious communities, etc.) of domestic violence and its negative consequences on family and community life.

Phase Three: Building Networks of support, action and strength within general community members and various professional sectors that empower and enable individuals to take action and make change.

Phase Four: Integrating Action against domestic violence into everyday life and systematically within institutions.

Phase Five: Consolidating Efforts of programs and activities working against domestic violence to ensure their sustainability, continued growth and progress.

In each phase, five strategies and a variety of activities are used to influence attitudinal and behavioral change at the individual and community level. The strategies and sample activities are as follows:

- **Learning Materials**: development of colorful and engaging rights-based messages about women’s rights, domestic violence and individual and communal responsibility.

- **Building Capacity**: training and extensive follow-up support with police officers within the Family Protection Unit, health care workers, religious leaders and local council members.

- **Local Activism**: working with women and men at the grassroots (including 85 volunteers) to conduct activities such as community theatre, dialogues, booklet clubs, impromptu discussions and door-to-door visits.

- **Media and Events**: using radio, television and newspaper to promote women’s rights, further the dialogue on domestic violence and bring these issues into the public domain.

- **Advocacy**: local level advocacy working with teachers, local courts and other NGOs to promote understanding of the right to safety and the negative consequences of domestic violence.

The approach is predicated on the belief that social change can be facilitated by organizations if it is carefully introduced, many different strategies are used, a cross section of the community is reached...
and that activities are conducted over a sustained period of time (Michau and Naker, 2003). The philosophical underpinnings of the project are based on human rights. The core intent is to work at the root causes of domestic violence (gender inequity and women’s low status) and promote both the right of women to live free of violence and the collective responsibility -- of individuals and the community -- to uphold and respect that right. The first two phases of the project, community assessment and raising awareness had been completed by the time this assessment was conducted.

Key concepts explored with community members through CEDOVIP’s activities include: a) everyone has a right to live free of violence; b) women have the same human rights as men; c) domestic violence is a violation of women’s rights; d) women are the primary ‘victims’ of domestic violence; e) domestic violence includes physical, emotional, sexual and economic violence; f) domestic violence hurts women, children, men, families and the community; g) relationships and families that are free of domestic violence are happier and healthier; and, h) everyone has a responsibility to prevent domestic violence.

1.3 Assessment Objectives
The overall aim of this assessment was to examine how the community-based violence prevention project outlined in the Resource Guide and implemented by the Center for Domestic Violence Prevention, impacted women and men as individuals, in relationship and the broader community. In particular, the personal and relational implications of the project are examined within the framework of physical, emotional, sexual, and economic abuse in relationships. The specific objectives of this assessment are:

a) to understand the individual, relational and social (community) impact of the project.
b) to examine if the project has affected experience of domestic violence within intimate relationships; and,
c) to explore and analyze the process of change and resultant programmatic implications for preventative, rights-based anti-violence work.

The assessment is an attempt to better understand how the introduction and promotion of women’s rights, particularly the right to safety in an intense community-based program impacts intimate relationships such that women and men can enjoy more equitable and safe relationships. Due to the nature of social change efforts, the assessment was not expecting to find a cessation of domestic violence but rather explore with community members what impact, if any, on a personal and community level, the domestic violence prevention project is having.

1.4 Scope of the Assessment
The assessment was carried out within four parishes in Kawempe Division, north of Kampala: Mulago II, Mulago III, Bwaise II, and Makerere III. Kawempe Division is a peri-urban community on the outskirts of Kampala City. It is 32.5 square kilometers and extremely densely populated with an estimated population of 300,000 (KCC cited in DVPP, 2000). The residents of this area typically live on under one US dollar per day (Ibid). The communities are commonly referred to as ‘slum’ areas because they lack basic infrastructure and services such as water, sanitation, electricity and permanent housing structures. Unemployment is high in the parishes and the majority of women and men work temporary jobs or as petty traders. The majority of residents live in one or two room mud brick houses with shared courtyards.

1.5 Assessment Overview and Research Team
The community-based assessment involved 180 community members: 90 women and 90 men ages 20 – 66. An eight-member research team was assembled and trained in qualitative research methodology. Each research team (consisting of two members) conducted 10 interviews, 1 focus group discussion and 25 questionnaires within each of the four parishes making a total of 40 interviews, 5 focus group discussions and 100 questionnaires (one team conducted two focus groups).

1 Note: Parishes are geographical areas within a Division, each consisting of their own local government structure.
The team consisted of four women and four men, with lead and assistant researchers working in pairs for each interview, questionnaire and focus group discussion conducted. The lead researchers had extensive training and experience in human rights and domestic violence and had been working on the issue for several years.

The four research assistants were designated as notetakers, who were used because participants did not feel comfortable with the use of tape recorders. It inhibited their sharing and some refused recording all together. Notetakers were also used because the lead researchers found it difficult to record the detail and depth of the conversation while conducting the interviews or focus groups themselves. Therefore, in order to maintain quality, it was decided that the assistant researchers would be dedicated solely to writing out the text of the discussions. This was considered less obtrusive to participants and the extra person in the room did not seem to negatively influence the data. Both the lead and assistant researchers were fluent in Luganda and English.

The assessment team participated in a half-day training on participatory research methodology although six out of the eight had extensive experience in qualitative research prior to this study. The training included necessary personal qualities of a researcher, techniques such as probing, asking open-ended questions, focusing the discussion, and debriefing. Role plays were done to practice the techniques and feedback given to help build skills. Handouts were given to each member of the team from *Qualitative Methods: A Field Guide for Applied Research in Sexual and Reproductive Health* on moderating focus group discussions, conducting interviews and common errors in moderating focus group discussions (Ulin et al., 2002). Also covered were the ethical considerations for conducting research on domestic violence and importance of receiving oral consent from participants. Each member was also given the *WHO Guidelines on the Ethical and Safety Recommendations for Conducting Research on Domestic Violence Against Women* (WHO, 2001) and the special issues that arise when researching violence. After each session, the assessment participants were given the contact information of the Center for Domestic Violence Prevention so they could obtain counseling or assistance if needed.

### Methodology

A total of 180 community members participated in the assessment. The participants were selected based on snowball sampling with the help of community members who were known to the Center for Domestic Violence Prevention. Participants included those regularly involved in the project at the grassroots, professionals (such as police, teachers, health care providers, local council leaders, etc.) as well as those who are not directly involved in the project. The participants were chosen from a variety of ethnic, socio-economic and religious backgrounds. Informed consent was obtained from each participant. The number of participants directly involved with CEDOVIP (i.e., as community volunteers, counselors, resource persons, etc.) was 19.

This assessment used primarily qualitative research methods of in-depth interviews and focus group discussions to gather information from community members. A questionnaire was also used in an

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<th>Number of Female Participants by Age and Methodology</th>
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**Figure 1**

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<th>Number of Male Participants by Age and Methodology</th>
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**Figure 2**
effort to sample larger numbers of individuals. Triangulation of the three methods of inquiry allowed corroboration of findings.

1.6a In-depth Interviews
The research involved a total of 40 semi-structured in-depth interviews with 20 women and 20 men, ages 20 to 66 who were currently married or cohabiting. Interviews lasted from 45 minutes to 1 hour 30 minutes and were conducted in homes and various places in the community based on the participant's preference. A quiet, private space was the only requirement. Each interview was debriefed for clarification of main points, feedback, and reviewing notes.

1.6b Facilitated Community Questionnaires
A questionnaire was administered to 100 community members in the four parishes. This questionnaire was designed for low literate participants, as only a tick (✔) was required for each response. To further ensure understanding and accurate responses, the questionnaires were administered in groups of approximately 25 participants. Single sex groups met in quiet spaces (i.e., church, Local Council office, community hall, and school) and the assessment teams explained the topic. The oral consent statement was read to all participants and community members were asked if they felt comfortable in participating in the assessment and given the opportunity to leave if they did not want to participate. In the four questionnaire sessions that were administered, all community members mobilized chose to participate. Participants were assured that they would not be asked to share their names and that all questionnaires would be kept strictly confidential.

After consent was obtained, an assessment team member proceeded to read out each question to the participants. There was no discussion between participants but clarifying questions were allowed. The assessment assistant was available to help participants who needed individual assistance or clarification. The questionnaires took approximately 30 minutes to administer. All participants were thanked for their participation and given the contact information for the Center for Domestic Violence Prevention in case they needed any further assistance.

1.6c Focus Group Discussions
A total of five focus group discussions were held with community members in the four parishes. Each group consisted of 8 participants with two groups being all women ages 20 and above and two groups being all men with participants from 20 and above. The fifth focus group was a mixed group of women and men. In this group, the questions on violence were omitted and participants were only asked about the women's rights discourse in the community and how it affected them as individuals and in relationships. This was done to ensure the safety of female participants and to avoid putting any participant at risk. However, during the discussion, participants raised the issue of violence independently and the lead researcher probed for further information.

Section 2: Individual Behavior Change
Every individual's internal processes and perceptions deeply influence the behaviors and choices she or he will make. The key components that were examined as indicators of change within individuals in this assessment are:

- a) knowledge of human rights;
- b) self-esteem or how one feels about oneself;
- c) assertiveness or accountability; and,
- d) economic independence.

2.1 Women's Perceptions
2.1a Women's Knowledge of Human Rights
96 percent of women in the community who responded to the questionnaire said they had heard of human rights and were familiar with the discourse. In the interviews and discussions when asked to describe the rights women possessed, the most commonly mentioned were the right to work, to safety, to peace, to make decisions and interestingly, to refuse sex. Many women remarked at how surprised they were to learn of the right to choose when to have sex. The right to work seemed the most tangible and sought after right among women interviewed. Many women saw this as precursor to the enjoyment of other rights, and felt it would have far reaching implications on empowerment and quality of life issues.
Many women also linked the concept of domestic violence and human rights. “I believe that if both men and women respected each other’s rights, then domestic violence could be no where to be seen” (Woman, 48 years, teacher). Even more subtle types of violence were identified as a violation of women’s rights. “If your husband treats you poorly then he is abusing your rights” (Woman, 40 years, unemployed).

Four percent of the women responding to the questionnaire however, had not heard of human rights or found it irrelevant to their lives.

I don’t take trouble because I think it’s [human rights] none of my business. I don’t think it can help me in any way and maybe I don’t have interest in knowing (Woman, 23 years, hairdresser).

Other women had heard of women’s rights but did not have a clear understanding of what they meant for their own lives or in the lives of other women. This made them fear women’s rights, the potential that they hold and it increased their apprehension about the domestic violence prevention efforts in general. “I have heard of women’s rights. I heard that men should follow what women want” (Woman, 38 years, cattle dealer).

Yet many women recognized that while there were some conflicting messages about rights, many times, these were used as distortions by those who wanted to maintain the status quo.

I think both men and children and also women have the same rights, but as you know our culture doesn’t recognize women and children, that is why they are seriously oppressed. And when organizations start to talk about the rights of women and children say to work, eat well, etc. men think they want to spoil their families, but I think this is not true (Woman, 28 years, manages food kiosk).

Finally, a key component within women’s knowledge of rights was their practical applicability in their own lives. For the majority of the women interviewed, women’s rights did not remain abstract or theoretical but were a type of tool to use very directly in leveraging power to improve their quality of life. “Before we heard about women’s rights we were there not knowing what to do” (Woman, 29 years, petty trader). Many women who participated in the assessment talked about how they harnessed the power of rights to make positive change in their lives.

I heard…to run for help when we get any problem of violence in our relationships and we shouldn’t keep quiet when such things happen to us, to never pretend we are alright when actually deep inside we are dying (Woman, 28 years, water vendor).

2.1b Women’s Self Esteem

Increased knowledge of women’s human rights seems closely linked to increased self-esteem in women. When asked how the talk about women’s rights made them about themselves, 70 percent of the women said they felt better about themselves. While only 4 percent of the women participating in the questionnaire said they felt worse, and 26 percent said they were unsure or that there was no change. This demonstrates that at a conceptual level, women’s rights discourse provides many women legitimacy to think about themselves in a more positive light.

I feel better, because of knowing my right to safety, I am now confident (Woman, 40 years, rears poultry).

I know I have a right to be happy, to work, to stay safe and I feel good that I earn a living though it [the business] is not doing so well…I feel relieved so much. I no longer rush to eat food. I do things because I am now independent. I sleep well and when I look at myself I look healthy! I feel that once [a woman] is determined, she can develop further than any [others] (Woman, 30 years, cassava vendor).

Interestingly, women remarked that women’s rights discourse made them feel more like women.

Now [that I know about rights] I feel peace and I am sure I have my respect. I also feel loved and now other women admire me. They do respect me and indeed I am a full woman (Woman, 45 years, water vendor).

This is a critical shift in discourse in the community because the label of ‘woman’ in common language is often used disparagingly. “Culture is culture, a woman will remain a woman, I mean a woman will
always take orders from a man” (Man, 40 years, carpenter). Hearing about women’s rights made many women want to associate with other women and recognize the value of being female. Women reported feeling proud to be women which has important implications for preventing domestic violence, as breaking isolation and silence can create increased solidarity among women. This contributes to creating a supportive environment for change.

I feel secure now, I can talk openly to my husband in public without fear. I also feel very happy that I have lived to see the age of women’s rights, seeing women advocate for their rights, being leaders (Woman, 48 years, housewife).

Women also reported that learning about women’s rights helped them feel more valuable and useful. They described how women’s rights empowered them to go beyond their traditional roles and helped them imagine and create different lives for themselves. This personal growth and sense of accomplishment gave women increased self-esteem.

At least I feel powerful, my rights have enabled me to work. I can also give a speech at a function. I can also address a big number of people in a crowd, including men. I have the capability, but in those days no one could listen to a woman. Women were like children, they couldn’t make decisions (Woman, 40 years, hawker).

Women’s rights discourse also added to a sense of safety, solidarity and community for women -- all important determinants of change. Women were able to break out of isolation

... (Woman, 40 years, teacher).

Women also reported being more able to assert their needs and rights and even joked that rights was making them ‘too proud’.

... (Woman, 40 years, owns bar).

For four percent of women responding to the questionnaire, the process of learning about human rights brought decreased self-esteem because something that they recognize as important to them seemed unattainable. “I would love it [women’s rights] but I don’t have it myself” (Woman, 23 years, housewife). Yet even for women who were not able to enjoy their rights still largely remained hopeful that they too would at some point be able to enjoy their human rights.

I feel bad about myself sometimes, especially when he demands my money and I have no help. But I console myself and get determined to move on. I see many women [single women] and it’s not easy but what can one do. I have a right to a happy life, I want to be happy and for my children to be happy (Woman, 28 years, owns food kiosk).

2.1c Women’s Assertiveness

Armed with knowledge of human rights and an increased feeling of self-esteem allowed many women living in the community to be more assertive in their relationships with 76 percent of women reporting that human rights discourse made them more able to assert their rights. Assertiveness, or the ability to act positively to realize positive change in one’s life, is closely linked to new human rights knowledge.

Although he often says to me that a king is a king, meaning that a king is not asked where to go, what to do, etc. I am also a queen on my own! (Ibid).

Increased assertiveness was instrumental to many women in helping them convince their husbands that they should work and that they could contribute to the well-being of their families.

I am now calm, I no longer want anything that interferes with my thoughts or dignity. I feel I am happy, comfortable and self motivated. I cannot wait for my husband to do everything. I also make good decisions on my own and they are appreciated by my husband (Woman, 45 years, actress).
2.1d Economic Independence

Working not only allowed women to contribute to family finances but offered increased independence and further source of self-esteem. Many women said working, even their so-called ‘petty’ jobs of selling vegetables, small food items, etc., enhanced their self-perception and belief in their abilities to be useful and important.

Women’s rights have brought respect, especially to me. He [husband] allowed me to work and I feel I am of importance to our family. I fit everywhere, even in groups that include men. I have peace now (Woman, 32 years, bar assistant).

I also feel good that I earn a living and can make independent decisions on my own. I try to compare the past when I was not working and now and realize there is a change in the way I am living, I am fairly happy. I have come to realize that women too have the ability to run homes, be strong leaders, run businesses and it has helped me to get something to do since I am tired of begging my husband” (Woman, 28 years, kiosk owner).

2.2 Men’s Perceptions

2.2a Men’s Knowledge of Human Rights

When men were asked if they knew about women’s human rights 84 percent of them said they were familiar with the discourse. Men also identified women’s right to work, to not be beaten, and to respect. “I normally hear that we men have equal rights and responsibilities with women” (Man, 66 years, night watchman). Some men recognized that women’s rights were human rights “A woman also has rights in our relationship, she is also entitled to things like me” (Man, 20 years, unemployed). Some men connected women’s rights discourse to their intimate relationships and recognized that this included issues related to domestic violence. “I have heard that women are not supposed to be beaten or humiliated in any way” (Man, 41 years, builder). Still others had a distorted perception about the meaning of women’s rights. “Rights means everyone has a right to do anything he or she wants” (Man, 31 years, driver).

However, it was difficult for many men participating in the assessment to talk about women’s rights clearly and objectively. This could be a result of genuine lack of knowledge about women’s rights or resistance to the ideas. In comparison to women, the knowledge men had about women’s rights seemed shallower. There was more confusion about the issue among men, and they did not seem to have as developed an understanding of women’s rights as women. Many men remarked that they heard about the discourse but did not really understand what it meant for their own lives. “I hear about the talk but I do not know exactly what women’s rights is all about” (Man, 41 years, builder). Still others had a distorted perception about the meaning of women’s rights. “Rights means everyone has a right to do anything he or she wants” (Man, 31 years, driver).

Many men found it difficult to speak objectively about women’s rights and instead asserted their opinions about what these rights meant for their own lives and relationships. These often times mirrored the common misperceptions and skepticism that some men and women hold about the consequences or implications of women’s rights discourse.

I have heard that women have rights and these rights make women big-headed (Man, 42 years, security officer).

I have heard about women’s rights. I hear that women are not supposed to be beaten or mistreated, but that is unavoidable (Man, 37 years, accountant).

2.2b Men’s Self-esteem

When asked how the talk of rights affected how they felt about themselves 58 percent of men responding to the questionnaire said it made them feel better about themselves. Only eight percent said they felt worse about themselves and a further 34 percent said there was no change or they were unsure. Some men felt that the introduction of women’s rights discourse into families and the community offered an opportunity for more stable and happy homes and relationships.

I feel good about the way I have changed from being a violent to a peaceful man. I feel respected by the community if they trust me to be a leader. I also feel happy to stay in a safe and harmonious home despite any shortcomings like limited funds – but this is our Uganda!” (Man, 49 years, rears poultry).

However, not all men viewed the emergence of women’s rights as something positive for themselves and their families. Instead, these men said it made them lose self-esteem. “I feel that I am being
minimized. They [women] have been given too much human rights” (man, 50 years, sells used motorbike parts). Women’s rights discourse, for some men, was upsetting their traditional roles and expectations about themselves as men as well as their wives. Some men reported feeling disempowered and marginalized by the talk of women’s rights.

I feel my former role in the family is diminishing. My wives are supposed to be submissive to me. What they are doing is completely the opposite (Man, 53 years, motorbike owner).

As the situation stands on women’s rights I am not happy. Men are pushed around the corner (Man, 41 years, builder).

2.2c Men’s Accountability
The acceptance of women’s human rights discourse is related to the level of accountability that men are willing to accept. Many men participating in the assessment said they now feel more accountable in their relationships as well as in the community as a result of the increased attention on domestic violence and women’s rights in the community. Some men saw this as a benefit, believing that if they were respectful of women’s rights they would be seen as ‘modern’ men, which they regarded as positive. Other men expressed anger at the increasing accountability on men for their violent behavior. They remarked that this was meddling into private affairs and were uncomfortable with the increased attention domestic violence was given in the community.

Most interesting, however, is to whom men felt accountable for their violent behavior. Whereas the talk of human rights for many women made them feel more accountable to their partners or themselves (i.e., they felt personally responsible for upholding their partner’s rights) men, more often felt accountable to outsiders (i.e., neighbors, community leaders, extended families, etc.)

Where I would have used a stick, now we use only the mouth. All this is because we fear the repercussions (Man, 25 years, herbalist).

Few men said they felt accountable to their wives, but they did feel increased pressure from peers and other people they viewed as socially relevant. This has important programmatic implications for the work of CEDOVIP. It may also reveal that the idea of women’s human rights is not fully internalized by men and or that many men still view their wives less valuable or important within their social hierarchies.

Section 3: Relationship Changes

Women and men participating in the assessment were asked if hearing about human rights influenced how they felt about their partners. 46 percent of women said they felt better about their partners and 26 percent said they feel worse about them, others said there was no change or they were not sure. Even more surprisingly, 58 percent of men said they feel better about their partners and only 14 percent said they feel worse about them. 28 percent of men said there was no change or they were unsure. These results were somewhat surprising as popular culture usually emphasizes that women begin to ‘hate men’ as a result of gaining human rights knowledge and that men feel angry and resentful toward their partners when they begin asserting their rights. The key components explored within relationships are:

- perceived benefits;
- open communication;
- gender roles, and,
- mutual respect.

3.1 Perceived Benefits
Many women participating in the assessment reported feeling better about their husbands as their rights were recognized and respected by their partners. This made many women hold their partners in higher esteem because they recognized the effort and sensitivity this required. Women recognized that women’s rights discourse and making change within a relationship was challenging for men and were appreciative of efforts of their partners, even if they were not entirely satisfied.

I am strong, happy, contented with my work, husband, and children. And I am grateful that my rights are respected by my husband. Of course not all, but I am okay” (Woman, 40 years, businesswoman).
Men also reported feeling that there was potential for positive change and they remarked that women’s rights discourse helped them to understand their wives better and to recognize their humanity. “I have changed in my thinking about my wife. I feel the issue of being a boss to your wife is not good. You hurt her and it violates her rights” (Man, 54 years, farmer). Men described how human rights discourse helped them see that rights held potential for increased happiness of both partners. These men did not see women’s rights as necessarily threatening their own status and respect in the house.

I see her as a partner, not a slave. I see her as a mother of our children, my wife who needs my assistance, not instructions (Man, 49, rears poultry).

The efforts that many men made to respect their wives rights and to reconceptualize her as a partner and loved one had benefits for the husbands. Women had an increased sense of respect for their husbands when they felt respected and they explained that this respect was out of love, not fear or obligation. There were emotional as well as financial rewards for men in respecting their partner’s rights and increased benefits for their families.

I see her as a partner, not a slave. I see her as a mother of our children, my wife who needs my assistance, not instructions (Man, 49, rears poultry).

I also feel that it is important to respect our wives views. You know women are strong home managers but most of us men do not give them a chance to do home management. We try to influence and subordinate them but it violates their rights and kills their morale (Man, 49 years, rears poultry).

I feel good about him. I go an extra mile to care for him. I can prepare him juice so that by the time he gets home, he has something to take. I listen to him and we plan together for our children. He is so loving now, more than ever before. So I also love him so much (Woman, 45 years, actress).

Many women reported enjoying a new found freedom to work even though this put them in the traditionally male role of provider. Many women respected this change and did not exploit it, even though many men feared potential exploitation of a position of power.

I also feel that it is important to respect our wives views. You know women are strong home managers but most of us men do not give them a chance to do home management. We try to influence and subordinate them but it violates their rights and kills their morale (Man, 49 years, rears poultry).

Even though I am the bread earner at home, I still respect him, he is my husband and so I don’t look down on him (Woman, 32 years, bar assistant).

Negative Perceptions of Partner. 26 percent of women said they felt worse about their partner after hearing about women’s rights and domestic violence. For these women, knowing about their rights, seeing other women enjoying their rights and yet not realizing their own created internal conflict and negative feelings toward their partners.

I can’t exercise my rights. I do not enjoy this thing they call women’s rights because my husband doesn’t take it as a point. I fear to be beaten, so if I insist [on my rights], he can even kill me I think (Woman, 42 years, hairdresser).

For some women, their partner’s refusal to respect or recognize their human rights made them feel resentful and disappointed. Women’s most common response to this was to withdraw emotionally from their husbands. They chose to stop investing energy into the relationship and described that while they went through the motions of being a wife, the trust and intimacy was seriously damaged or lost.

I simply sympathize with him because he forgets I know my rights and responsibilities. At times I feel like taking him to court, chasing him out of the house since I pay for it, but he is my husband and father to my dear children. I pray he changes gradually. In fact, I look down on him, even though I don’t show it all the time (Ibid).
Women expressed a range of emotions that arose when they did not feel their husbands understood or respected their rights. More common emotions were disgust, resignation or pity, but surprisingly few women said that they felt angry at their partners as a result of their disrespect.

14 percent of men also reported that they felt worse about their partner after hearing about human rights discourse. For some men, hearing about women’s right to live free of violence made them angrier toward their partners, which resulted in even stronger resistance toward rights. Men were much more likely to express anger than women.

She [his wife] has become big-headed and stupid. Why can’t she think about my rights? I don’t personally feel good about her rights. She has to know that she is only a woman (Man, 42 years, security officer).

It has not changed how I feel about her. I still expect her to play her roles as a woman, to be submissive (Man, 27 years, hawker).

This has important implications for CEDOVIP as the backlash against women’s rights can put women at risk for higher violence. Certainly this is not a reason to suspend human rights programs, but to understand the implications fully so as to be prepared with support mechanisms and activities that help women and men deal with these reactions directly.

3.2 Open Communication

One of the indicators for acceptance and positive change as a result of women’s rights discourse is the level and tone of communication between partners. 70 percent of the men participating in the assessment said they had talked to their partner about rights and 54 percent of women responded the same. Therefore, an average of 62 percent of women and men participating had discussed rights with their current partner, which is an encouraging indicator for positive change. Several themes emerged as participants described the communication they had with their partner about human rights.

*Increasing Understanding and Common Language.* Many women described how they used opportunities in the community such as newspaper articles, radio programs or community dramas or dialogues to raise the issue of women’s rights with their husbands. They did not seem to fear talking about rights and both they and their partners saw it as an opportunity to learn each other’s thoughts and perceptions.

*I often talk about it [human rights]…When I read the newspaper first I make sure I highlight anything concerning women’s rights or violence. He can’t miss it because he knows that I just want him to think about it. If it is insensitive, say it’s blaming men, or a woman beat up a child, he opens up and asks me what I think (Woman, 28 years, kiosk owner).*

Many women said that they used these external opportunities to correct their husband’s perceptions on rights or to convince their partners of the legitimacy of rights and its growing acceptance in the community.

*I discussed violence with my husband and neighbors. We talked about how to treat women and what women should do when faced with such situations. He realized it and said that even touching a woman without her consent is violence. He seemed to understand (Woman, 32 years, bar assistant).*

*When we listen to a program over the radio about women’s human rights we discuss it and I correct my husband’s negative thinking about rights (Woman, 36 years, teacher).*

These discussions with husbands, neighbors and peers seemed to increase women’s self esteem, deepen their thinking about rights and enhance their respect for their husbands. They saw that their husbands were willing to think about this issue, take it seriously, and to consider their opinion on it. This increased intimacy in relationships for both women and men.

*I certainly have no problem with my wife having her rights, and in fact, every woman. I feel bad when I remember how I used to behave to her and my children. Of course she could not challenge my decisions but now it is like our honeymoon – we discuss a lot! (Man, 54 years, farmer).*
The discussions prompted a new, shared value system between intimate partners and the larger family. Many women and men said they recognized that there was potential for increased happiness and used the discussions to develop a common language about how members of the family should behave with each other.

In most cases, we now sit and talk about how we should respect each other, how we should look after our family and how we should behave (Man, 33 years, barman).

Encouragingly, these discussions seemed benefits-based where all members of the family could identify and attain the rewards of a new value system based on mutual respect and protection of each other’s rights.

We sit and discuss it [human rights] at our home. We talk about our behaviors and tell each other how we want to be treated. And the children do too. We discuss about rights and domestic violence because we are now at par (Woman, 45 years, water vendor).

Clarifying Expectations or Warning. While many women and men created opportunities for discussing rights to express values, other women reported using the platform of increased dialogue about human rights in the community to assert expectations about their partners. In many of the descriptions of talks between partners, women use veiled threats or warnings to alert their partners that they know about their rights and to tell them about the potential consequences if those rights are not respected.

I learned that assaults [rape] by men to their wives are punishable by law so this helped me to open up a talk with my husband. He was surprised to hear that, I gave him a pamphlet to read and he was glad to know it (Woman, 40 years, teacher).

While some partners were not ready to engage in mutual discussions about women’s rights and its implications, women used the opportunity to raise the issue and to declare their intentions if their rights were not respected.

There are radio programs I hear and I call my husband to listen but he says those speaking are mad and insane. I try to convince him and add on what we hear. I tell him words like ‘have you heard that if you beat me you will be taken to prison?’ He then calms down and listens (Woman, 28 years, water vendor).

Women’s efforts to indirectly communicate their rights and the consequences for violating those rights were heard by many men. This was a powerful communication strategy for women who were not able to be direct with their partners.

“When we talk about human rights, my wife supports it. She says, when you keep beating me I will sue you. Although she says it in a humble way, she tells you what will happen in the future” (Man, 28 years, bricklayer).

Male Refusal to Discuss Rights. None of the men participating in the assessment reported that their wives were unwilling to discuss human rights yet 24 percent said they did not discuss rights with their partner. Misconceptions or fear of rights emerged as an important theme in men’s avoidance or refusal to talk about rights. While some men were resistant to discussing rights with their partners, others flatly refused.

Me and my wife discuss family things. We don’t discuss things that are not important to us. These rights are to break people’s families. I don’t find it important to talk about them (Man, 42 years, security officer).

He thinks I do not respect him, so whether we talk at length or not, he doesn’t take it serious. He thinks women’s rights like a right to decide for yourself is interfering with our cultural settings (Woman, 40 years, kiosk owner).

He does not have time for discussing issues he does not understand. Whenever something is said on radio, he says he cannot understand these issues of rights. He tells how families were operating in the past without these confusing gender and equality issues (Woman, 48 years, housewife).
Male insecurity was also a barrier to dialogue for several men. These men were obviously threatened by the talk of human rights and instead of opening up space and potential for a shift of power within their relationships, many asserted male privilege and made the final decision of what was important and necessary for the family to discuss and what was insignificant.

> She knows I am the family head and we don’t need to talk about it (Man, 27 years, hawker).

> We have never discussed rights. I do not have that time to sit. Besides, what do we discuss? (Man, 38 years, municipal worker).

Finally, many men described feeling powerless in the face of change and they perceived opening a dialogue on human rights as a threat to their power. These men felt that even discussing rights could leave them without any leveraging power in their relationships and that opening dialogue was, in effect, creating a no-win situation for them.

> How can you start to tell your wife that when I beat you, you are supposed to go to the police!? (Man, 29 years, carpenter).

Women’s fear of violence. For women, the lack of communication with their partner about human rights emerged from different concerns. 30 percent of women said they did not discuss human rights with their husbands. The primary reason they described was fear of more violence.

> I fear to talk to him, he is harsh to me, so only what I talk about is whether I should work to support him, but he shuts me down, saying or asking what doesn’t he provide for us, so I just keep quiet (Woman, 24 years, unemployed).

> It is hard to start a talk about women’s rights to my husband. He, sincerely speaking, does not want to hear anything about women’s rights. That annoys him so much that it can spark off a quarrel or even him threatening to beat me (Woman, 30 years, cassava vendor).

Some women remarked that they were unable to even approach their husbands with topics of rights because they belittle and disparage their efforts. Several women said this destroyed their hope and they felt resigned to remain with the status quo.

> We have never talked about rights. First of all he doesn’t seem to understand why women and children's rights should be promoted. I put posters in my house and he laughed at me and asked if I was beginning to challenge him. So I have no morale to start a talk because I know his attitude toward that (Woman, 35 years, unemployed).

3.3 Gender Roles

Strong adherence to traditional gender roles is one predictor of domestic violence within families (Heise et al., 1999). When women and men behave in strictly prescribed roles where women are submissive and stay within the realm of the home and men are seen as the ‘head of the household’ and responsible for matters outside the house, the likelihood of violence increases. A loosening of, or flexibility to go beyond, traditional gender roles could signify a positive shift in relationships.

78 percent of men responding to the questionnaire said that the talk of human rights and domestic violence influenced how they felt they were expected to behave as men and 86 percent of women responded that it also influenced how they felt they should behave as women. This suggests that women’s rights discourse can open new opportunities for change and growth in personal identities.

Women and men in the community talked about new roles being played within the family, that women were able to do things that were traditionally male, especially working out of the home.

> They [women’s rights] have changed things as when a man in the home gives a woman a chance to work, things get easy. Men are helped and it is good (Man, 39 years, painter).

Many women and men discussed women beginning to work and how this changed how the partners viewed each other in that there was an increased sense of partnership and joint effort for the family.
“Men should always consult their wives when taking family decisions. The family belongs to all of them” (Man, 46 years, builder).

While it was clearly more common and easier for men to accept women’s expanded gender roles, there were a few men who were also able to stretch beyond their traditional masculine identity. A key issue within this is widening the roles that women and men play in the upkeep and running of the household. Some men remarked that they now help women at home and that they see that they are able to do things like cooking, cleaning and childcare without it being an affront to their masculinity. “I can now also do some simple chores like ironing, organizing the sitting room and anything I can do depending on where my help is needed” (Man, 54 years, farmer). Some men participating in the assessment were willing to contribute in these ways to the family, especially when they saw that their wives were working or contributing in a new way to the family.

“These days I can even wash her dress, but not in public. I know we have to assist each other. I even can cook for her when she has gone to sell her tomatoes” (Man, 66 years, night watchman).

They also discussed that within a marriage, it was right and good to work together for the good of the family. “You should share family responsibilities like buying food and looking after the children” (Man, 50 years, shopkeeper).

Women in particular talked about the importance of widening gender roles in the family so that their children grow up with different beliefs about men and women. They saw this as a way to contribute to better families in the future and they took their role in raising their children seriously. Many women said the talk of human rights changed how they raised their children, with more fairness toward their boys and girls and less rigidity around what a boy/man and girl/woman should be.

In my home, I told my husband that every child should be treated the same way with no segregation of duties. Why should a boy not cook? (she points to son preparing sauce in the courtyard) He is better than even his sister! That is good. He is trained to be a responsible man who also respects women’s rights and shares responsibility (Woman, 45 years, actress).

The shift in gender roles as described by participants went beyond their individual roles as women and men to their expectations of how they should behave and be treated by their partners. When asked if the talk of rights influenced how men should behave toward their partners 74 percent of men said yes, and 60 percent said that it changed how they think their wives should behave toward them. When women were asked the same questions, 76 percent said human rights discourse influenced how they felt they should behave toward their husbands and 66 percent said it changed how they think their husbands should behave toward them. These questions provide insight into the personal expectations of women and men and that they perceive cultural norms as flexible and changing. When the typical roles and boundaries of relationships are expanded, it provides opportunity for positive growth and change.

I think all the domestic violence and abuse of women is because our men and culture do not think about women generally, but now that rights are talked about I see some changes on the way men behave toward their women. Some go an extra mile to help with house chores which was not the case before this issue of rights was spearheaded (Woman, 40 years, owns kiosk).

I know my rights but what I need is to sit and talk about our home affairs. My husband doesn’t need to be above me in everything (Woman, 25 years, unemployed).

Although there was a shift in thinking for many women and men in the community, there was some resistance from those who believe that women and men should remain in their traditional roles. They saw human rights discourse as disrupting family life and a threat to the traditional order.

When a woman works and gets money, the woman becomes a rebel, especially when she gets money and her husband doesn’t. This so-called women’s emancipation has brought much violence and families end up separating (Man, 39 years, carpenter).
There were some women as well who were uncomfortable with having new expectations of men. They defended the traditional male/female roles within the family and felt it was being unfair to men to expect them to take on women’s responsibilities.

Women have neglected their responsibilities because of the misinformation on their rights. Some want their men to cook, to bathe children? Which is not fair. It could be good when he does it willingly but not because you are not home (Woman, 54 years, retired market vendor).

To some men, maintaining the status quo was also very important and they expressed anger and resentment that many women and men in the community are changing. This has the potential to lead to increased violence against women.

He doesn’t want to hear me talking about the topic [of rights]. Immediately when I start he says ‘you take away your big-head, who told you that you also have rights? Your rights deal with cooking, eating and sleeping.’ If I insist, he loses his temper and for the fear of beating me I keep quiet because he is a real woman beater (Woman, 40 years, hawker).

And clearly, there were men who were uncomfortable with women’s new found self-esteem and belief in her rights. “Women have been given too much freedom. She is my master and I am below her now” (Man, 46 years, builder). Some women described how their partner’s resistance to change was a challenge to them and the new hopes they had for themselves and for their families.

I think it is men who think that there is a big difference between women’s rights and ‘their’ rights. My husband thinks … that rights like letting a woman work is dooming a family (Woman, 35 years, unemployed).

3.4 Mutual Respect

54 percent of women and 62 percent of men responding to the questionnaire said they now think about their partner’s rights. When discussing the level of consideration given to their partners when there was mutual respect, the regard and protection of the other’s rights increased considerably. When women felt their husband’s were respecting their human rights, they expressed desire and obligation to do the same.

I really think about his rights much as I love him although he over drinks, shouts and abuses me. I however give him food, iron his clothes…I do it for the sake of it…I know he has a right to good food, to safety, to respect but he does not know his responsibilities as a man (Woman, 24 years, unemployed).

When husbands recognize and respect their partner’s rights, it creates a different kind of respect from their wives.

I feel respected now. I mind about my dignity so much. My husband is open, abandoned drinking. He is polite when he is talking to me so I am more polite to him. We are generally happy in our family (Woman, 45 years, actress).

Where respect for many women, used to be based on fear, they reported that it is now based more on appreciation and respect.

After getting information about human rights and women’s rights, our relationship became even better than it used to be. My husband now fears to abuse my rights. He allows me to take up decisions (Woman, 45 years, water vendor).

Many women expressed an obligation to respect their partner’s rights even if theirs were not being respected. Women felt it was their duty to take care of their partners and even protect their partner’s rights even when their partners were violating their own rights. Human rights discourse to these women underscored the importance of seeing their partner’s humanity.
I think I have only good thoughts about my husband. The bad thoughts I had went because I know he has his rights and I also have my rights. Before knowing this I could sometimes wish he would die in an accident and was gone. I saw him as a burden to me. I always wanted him to die and leave me in the house, but these days, even though he is poor, I feel he has a right to live and be on the earth (Woman, 40 years, hawker).

Other women participating in the assessment felt that respecting human rights had to be mutual and when they recognized that their husbands were violating their rights, they felt unwilling to safeguard the rights of their partners.

I do not think about his rights too much. It is normal and I have to be frank about this, if he uses all the money without considering helping me but gives it to my co-wife, then how can I think about his rights? (Woman, 28 years, food kiosk owner).

His rights!? How do you expect me to think about the rights of a person who doesn't have thoughts about my rights. I have never thought of his rights. It has never crossed my mind (Woman, 42 years, hairdresser).

Section 4: Community / Social Change

Many women told stories of how, in the past, they were taught and expected to be submissive and compliant in their marriages. These expectations were passed on through ssengas [aunts] and older women and created a culture in the community that required women to sacrifice their rights for the 'good' of their families and community.

Women were advised to put water in their mouth to avoid answering back to their husbands in case they quarreled with them. I learned that, though now I feel it was just meant to oppress us women (Woman, 54 years, retired market vendor).

One of the key components of reduction in levels of domestic violence is a broader climate in the community, which rejects violence and supports women’s rights. The Resource Guide stresses that the process of wider social change must support and bolster individual efforts toward change. It asserts that in communities where there is public awareness about domestic violence and a culture of non-tolerance for abusive behavior, there is potential for sustainable change. The key issues explored in the assessment were:

a) support of family, friends and neighbors;

b) level of tolerance of violence against women;

c) existence of woman friendly institutions; and,

d) degree and intensity of human rights messages.

4.1 Support of Family, Friends and Neighbors

Families play an important role in the level of violence that is tolerated in relationships. Some men remarked that they learned violent responses from their fathers and grandfathers as children. These men carried those beliefs and behaviors into their own relationships with their wives. “I feel I am really changed from the way I used to think and act. You know, I used to behave like my grandfather – what I said is what he said exactly” (Man, 54 years, farmer). The discussion of rights helped some men who had grown up in abusive families recognize the violations of human rights.

At times when I sit down and look back to how I used to behave, I feel so bad, but then I can’t lie to you, it had never crossed my mind at all. I grew up knowing [there was] nothing bad about abusing or criticizing women or children (Man, 49 years, rears poultry).

Within the family, children also influence their parent’s behavior. Both women and men reported feeling ashamed to fight in front of children. They worried about how this would impact their own lives and what it was teaching children about relationships.

Mainly he fears our children to see him quarrelling all the time. You know children, then can decide to isolate you if you quarrel a lot (Woman, 40 years, businesswoman).
Many women and some men said they felt a heavy responsibility to be good role models to their children. They felt it was their duty to their children and the next generation to raise boys and girls who knew their rights and were non-violent.

> Our children have also played a part in our harmony. You know children bind you, they also shape you as a parent on how you should behave if you want them to be grownups with responsibility...Some parents fear that if they continue to misbehave maybe their children will learn to be violent too (Woman, 45 years, actress).

The assessment found that extended family was also playing an important role in the level of violence that is tolerated in relationships. Women and men described how they relied upon and got strength from their relatives and friends during difficult times in their relationships and as they were beginning to change.

> I used to fight my wife so much and my home was a mess. But parents from both sides had to talk with me seriously. Action was taken also by my wife’s parents (Man, 49 years, rears poultry).

The intervention by family members played a large role in influencing men who had been violent against their wives. This man continued:

> Many problems came up after that [beating his wife severely]. I had a lot of responsibilities. I was almost arrested by her relatives. In fact they did arrest me, I spent a lot of money and from that I stopped being too violent. It was her parents that pushed things far up to the police. You know this was not the first time I had severely hurt her. I often slapped her or did anything to her. I now wonder what was wrong with me those years. You know I grew up in a family where my father had no consideration for women. He could beat up my mother like cattle. Though I saw how she suffered, I had never thought about my actions till that incident. Anyway, things have changed. I am a different person (Ibid).

Women interviewed also stated that they felt supported in making positive change by their friends and family. Women told stories of their own parents, in-laws, aunts, etc. who intervened in times when they were experiencing violence or when men were ‘deciding’ whether or not to accept the talk of women’s rights. This support seemed critical to women and greatly increases their determination and capacity to make difficult life changes.

> Consulting with friends who advised me [helped] so much. That is why I got determined and despite the hardships, like him [husband] asking for my money to drink, I am happy that I can earn a living, care for my children and myself (Woman, 38 years, fried food vendor).

Women also discussed the important influence men have on their peers. Many women said that even when their husbands do not talk to them about rights, they hear and know they talk with their male friends. Men seem to be in the process of exploring what their peers think about the issue of rights and are trying to work out their feelings and beliefs about it in same sex peer groups. This seems to provide more safety and reassurance to men.

> I think if they are in their groups with fellow men, then discuss it because there are days I think he will kill me, like one time I went to the theatre to see a drama and I came back late. I thought he would kill me but to my surprise he kept quiet (Woman, 40 years, hawker).

In Kawempe Division, people live very close together and families often share courtyards. The close proximity of people and the cultural norms of relying on neighbors and community members is important social capital that women and men draw on for support. It is especially useful to women as many involved in the study described how neighbors intervened to stop violent attacks. Beyond violent incidents, participants described how neighbors act as ‘monitors’ to abusive men and troubled relationships. Some men reported that they now feel more accountable and watched by others, which has shaped their behavior.

> He [my husband] beat me up and if it was not for my neighbor who helped, it would have been terrible for me. I didn’t report him but my neighbor talked to him and threatened to take him to court next time, so he stopped beating me but now although his actions [toward me] are still terrible (Woman, 24 years, unemployed).
4.2 Tolerance of Violence
The level of tolerance of violence in a community is difficult to measure. It is visible in the tone of the community, the degree of openness about domestic violence, how men are expected to act, the types of relationships others see around them, and the level of support to women experiencing violence. It is a complex mix of factors that can contribute to or diminish the tolerance that people feel toward domestic violence. Many women and men participating in the assessment shared their thoughts about how they perceived the community changing:

When I look at our community I think men are beginning to realize that women have rights though it is a process to change their attitude towards women (Ibid).

According to me, domestic violence has decreased in our community because before this awareness, you could find couples fighting here and there, but now at least men decreased their habits of beating women (Woman, 40 years, hawker).

I heard from women and they were discussing how our rights can be practiced. They told me that I should not allow my husband to make decisions for me and if he beats me, I should report him (Woman, 30 years, unemployed).

In my zone, there was a couple fighting as the order of the day. He used to chase the women and children out in the night, make noise for us, but now its just a completely changed family. They are happy, the woman is healthy, she is a leader unlike those days (Woman, 54 years, retired market seller).

I now think that people who severely beat their wives should be punished (Man, 66 years, night watchman).

An important aspect of reducing level of acceptance in the community is holding those who are violent accountable. Those who are violent begin to feel that their actions will not go unnoticed, that instead there will be consequences for the violation of another person’s rights. Many men remarked that now they thought about the consequences for themselves before being violent.

4.3 Women-friendly Institutions
In research from over 90 societies by Levinson shows that “immediate intervention designed to stop the beating or to prevent it from ever starting is a key first line of defense in controlling wife beating” (Levinson in Pickup et al., 2001:155). The local court system in Uganda means that community leaders are right in the community, living among others and available on a regular basis to offer assistance and support. The Local Councils are contributing to increasing male accountability and women’s protection. CEDOVIP has been working closely with Local Councils, and in particular the Secretaries for Women who are playing a large part in creating an environment that does not tolerate domestic violence.

Assessment participants said the existence of women-friendly institutions helps women feel more protected and men feel more accountable.

The talk of rights has changed me because he could beat me, do what ever to me, but now I see I am not the same. He doesn’t step on me as he used to because he knows I will report him to the LC [local councils] (Woman, 36 years, tomato vendor).

I involved friends, relatives and church leaders. They also helped him change (Woman, 45 years, actress).

4.4 Degree and Intensity of Human Rights Messages
A new and radical (to many) idea such as human rights, in order to truly take root, needs to be present in many different ways in the community for an extended period of time (Heise, 1997; Michau and Naker, 2003). Messages, dialogue and forums, all need to be present in a community as the beliefs about women and men and the rights and dignity that each hold in their families and communities are deeply held and will not change quickly.
Many community members said that the existence of many different messages and activities about women’s rights and domestic violence contributed to their understanding of the issues and changes in their beliefs and behaviors.

To some families, like a family near my home, there is a very big change. These people used to fight everyday, abuse and criticize one another had no had respect. But as they went on watching the dramas, attending the dialogues, reading posters and attending seminars about rights, no one can tell that such a couple used to fight on an daily basis. I have also come to admire their relationships and wish mine too could change like that. But I pray to God for such a better change (Woman, 28 years, owns food kiosk).

Communities are appreciating and say activities like drama are very practical. It actually helps partners to change their behavior. Men have tried to change. For example here in our zone we no longer hear screams in the night of women being beaten. Men try to work to provide for their families and women also do some work (Woman, 45 years, actress).

Section 5: Changes in Experience of Domestic Violence

This section explores changes in the experience of domestic violence as described by women and men in Kawempe Division. It examines each of the types of violence and attempts to understand if change is happening in relationships, whether that change is positive or negative, and how women and men understand these changes. The four types of violence explored are:

- Physical
- Emotional
- Sexual
- Economic

5.0 Overview

Overall, women and men reported significant decrease in domestic violence within the community over the past two years as the figures below demonstrate.
Many women described how they believed the talk of women’s rights in the community had helped decrease the level of physical violence in their relationships. In many instances this was due to an increased assertiveness in women. Women described how the direct and indirect messages they sent their husband’s about their personal changes in perspective greatly assisted in also changing the behavior of their husbands.

*Because of him I have a permanent scar on my face. Since I know my rights now I reported him and they imprisoned him. I had no option but to sue him. He now fears me so much that … when we disagree on any issue, he simply goes away* (Woman, 40 years, rears poultry).

Women remained determined to assert their rights even when they could not always ensure their safety. Many said it was a calculated risk they were willing to take in the hope that it would contribute to changing their partner’s behavior. One woman, described her relationship,

*It [level of physical violence] has [changed] because much as he drinks and comes home late, he no longer beats me or kicks me as he used to do in the last five years of our marriage. What he does is slap me and shove me, especially when I look at him straight in his face. I know about my right to safety, freedom to express my views, so by looking at him straight, I just want to let him know that much as I am a woman, I now know my rights. I don’t bring it out straight, but I feel he understands, that is why he shoves me* (Woman, 38 years, fried food vendor).

While the physical violence for some women participating in the assessment has not ceased completely, they described a decrease in the severity of violence. Many women and men remarked that they thought this was the first step to cessation of the violence all together. “Men these days just slap, they don’t beat the way they used to beat women as if they were children” (Man, 26 years).

Many women also appeared to be patient and willing to respect the slow pace of change within their husbands. They recognized the deep-rooted beliefs linked to domestic violence and saw that some men were beginning to change.

*Women’s rights are the same as human rights, but men cannot understand that we are also people. They think they bought us from our parents, so are free to do anything with us. So that is why they think when you people talk of women’s rights you want to make women become unruly. But if I look back how women were treated in the past and now, I think there is a very big difference in the way women are living happily. Although some are beaten still, there is a great change* (Woman, 48 years, housewife).
Interestingly, while women were willing to be patient and felt hopeful about even small changes that
they saw in their partners, there were some men who considered any change of increased
assertiveness or empowerment in their wives intolerable. They threatened that it would lead to an end
to the relationship. “When a woman takes me to the police the relationship just ends right there” (Man,
32 years).

Even men who did not accept the legitimacy of women’s right to live free of violence, did remark that
they have reduced levels of physical violence.

*Human rights talk has had a big impact, because you now fear to beat your wife
and my wife has become too bossy* (Man, 29 years, carpenter).

When men were asked about their mechanisms for dealing with conflict now that they did not use
physical violence, they shared a number of tactics that could explain the reported increase in more
subtle types of violence.

*I just reduce the amount of money I leave behind* (Man, 40 years, carpenter).

*I just go and sleep outside* (Man, 50 years, shopkeeper).

*I marry another wife and leave her alone* (Man, 44 years, army officer).

*Things are now very different. To avoid battering, when you come back and find
when she has messed up certain things, you just go away to avoid being arrested* (Man, 48 years, self-employed).

While many women and men reported decreases in physical violence, 8 percent of women
responding to the questionnaire said the violence actually increased as a result of increased attention
in the community about domestic violence as did 18 percent of men. Some of the increased violence
is clearly due to backlash against women’s rights. Some men feel threatened by and resistant to
increased empowerment of women and reacted violently toward their partners as a result.

*It [the talk of rights] has increased violence instead. My wife behaves differently.
She is ever threatening to take me to the police if I ever touch her. She even
quarrels quite often, prompting me to batter her* (Man, 38 years, municipal
worker).

Some men felt angry that domestic violence prevention efforts had emerged and they saw it as
detrimental to their lives and position in their families. “Women are now masters in homes because
they are not allowed to be beaten” (Man, 50 years, shopkeeper).

Other men described their unwillingness to change as a deliberate strategy to wield power over their
wives. A few men explained how they would use physical violence to keep women in their place.

*No man is willing to give up power just because women are protected. If she
insists on abusing me, I just show her that I am in charge by beating her up* (Man,
40 years, carpenter).

Common in these narratives are descriptions of men who blame women for the continued violence
against them. They refuse to take responsibility for their own violent behaviors and maintain that their
violence is a result of women’s negative behavior.

*Men do not always want to fight, but women have provoked it. We [men] try hard
to protect the rights but women have always stood in the way* (Ibid).

Other women felt empowered to stand up to their husbands and assert their rights, but learned that
this sometimes put them in danger. There was sadness and disappointment felt by women who
attempted to claim their rights only to be dismissed by their husbands or to even experience increased
violence.

*It [human rights discourse] brought me problems because I thought asking my
husband about a letter another woman brought him was my right but when I asked
him he kicked me and even embarrassed me in front of neighbors* (Woman, 25
years, unemployed).
16 percent of women and 14 percent of men completing the questionnaire said there was no change at all in the level of physical violence in their relationship. The domestic violence prevention efforts did not appear to make a difference in the lives of these couples. These men seemed to resort to violence in defiance in the face of human rights discourse. “If I am annoyed I will still beat and kick her” (Man, 39 years). Other men took a deterministic stance revealing that they thought it was natural and unavoidable to resort to violence when angry or in conflict.

I cannot avoid getting angry when I am provoked, and I end up shouting and abusing my wife (Man, 44 years, taxi conductor).

5.2 Emotional Violence
Emotional violence in relationships was reported to have decreased for women and men exposed to CEDOVIP’s activities. 54 percent of women said the emotional violence in their current relationships decreased and 52 percent of men said the same. Women reported to feeling more respected in their relationships and families, with a decrease in the shouting and verbal abuse in their relationships. They also reported increased ability to move about freely to visit family and friends.

He no longer shouts or criticizes me as he used to do. He is now a very quiet man. It hurts me when he stays over quiet even if a mistake is done, but at least that harshness stopped! (Woman, 48 years, housewife).

It has changed because those days I could not even visit friends or relatives or attend seminars, but now he lets me go provided I can transport myself (Woman, 56 years, matoke vendor).

My husband tries to change, tries to smile, and be calm when talking to me, but he feels shy to change completely. I believe he has a feeling that I may overpower him by behaving the way he should be (Woman, 40 years, kiosk owner).

In my area I have seen many [men] who have stopped beating, shouting and even refusing their wives to work after knowing about their rights. I have also seen women slowly making their husband's realize they have rights without causing too many problems to themselves (Woman, 30 years, cassava vendor).

Many men reported being more willing to listen to their wives, to respect their opinion and to treat them with more respect.

It has greatly changed. Those days, I had a principle – my word was final, I was the boss and king. No man or woman could answer back to me. I used to take myself as king, but now I am totally changed. I respect my wife’s views and interests. I cannot just shout, in fact, I do not shout. We are mature and respectable people (Man, 49 years, rears poultry).

20 percent of the men reported that emotional violence had increased in their relationships as did 10 percent of women. These men remarked that while some men were now more fearful of the consequences of physical violence, they did not feel outsiders could hold them accountable for emotional violence, so this type of violence could continue without consequence.

I don’t think human rights talk has changed emotional violence. Some people may just fear beating, but not necessarily changing their minds about their wives (Man, 66 years, night watchman).

5.3 Sexual Violence
Like intimacy between partners, sexual violence is also a private issue that many women and men feel is outside the realm of public scrutiny. When asked, however, 52 percent of men said sexual violence had decreased in their relationships since the initiation of CEDOVIP’s activities and 42 percent of the women said the same.

Generally he takes things easy and I think the sensitization campaign has also played a role. I can even find him reading a book on violence or rights, so it could be this, and his nature as a man. This makes me happy so I also do not disturb him too much now if he tries to have sex (Woman, 30 years, unemployed).
Forced sex was discussed in detail by women and they remarked that they often found themselves in a dilemma over the issue because they had new-found knowledge that they could refuse sex or demand for safe sex, but many men seemed unwilling to accept this. In the case of six percent of the women, sexual violence reportedly increased since the introduction of human rights discourse in the community. These women felt that even raising the issue of her rights within the context of sexuality made partners more angry.

On the issue of sex, I know that if one partner does not want sex, she is free to refuse because of my right to safe sex and health. So this brings problems when I deny him sex and what he does in response is rape me (Woman, 38 years, fried food vendor).

Instead of dealing with the complexity of negotiating safe sex and working on intimacy and trust within relationships, many women, fearing HIV infection, made a decision to refuse sex from their husbands permanently. They described how they were no longer interested in sexual relations with their partners. In some of these cases, informal arrangements were made where the men went outside for sex yet the couple stayed together in their formal marriage, even though it is void of sex. This seemed to suit some women quite well; they appeared more secure and happy with this arrangement and did not say that they were interested in finding other men. I feel secure because as you know I got married sometime back when women's rights were not talked about. Sexual violence was too common and since family issues were not exposed I could have died by then because my husband is unfaithful. So now that I know I have a right to say no to sex, it has kept me safer. I separated from my husband and now he is sick [HIV positive] but I am glad I am not. I am sad that he is sick and dying but what can I do? (Woman, 56 years old, matoke vendor).

We no longer have sex and it is too long. He has reported me to several people but I cannot change my mind. Sex needs love and for sure I lost love for him. So I suspect he has a woman but it is up to him. Regarding sex, there is no change in that I am still not with him and I hope not to change [this]. I simply don't trust him. I tested and know I am safe (Woman, 40 years, kiosk owner).

Resistance toward the issue of sexual violence still existed in some of the men involved in the assessment. They seemed unwilling to consider that women have a right to bodily integrity, even discussing the issue was uncomfortable and anger provoking for these men.

Women should not even talk about that [forced sex]. How can they say it? Husbands are entitled to sex. This does not make me happy. I feel that people should not talk about certain things like a man raped me (Man, 41 years, builder).

Sex should be separated from domestic violence because it just can't happen. How do I beg for sex from my own wife? (Man, 42 years, security officer).

On the issue of sexuality, some men reported feeling confused about how to manage their sexual relationship with their wives. They believed that women were not forthcoming when it came to sex and so men were forced to second guess their partner’s desires. I think it [forced sex] has reduced because I do not force her anymore. If she is not feeling well, then I go without. But sometimes it is hard to know if I am forcing her or not. Women will never tell you that they are ready for sex (Man, 46 years, builder).

There was also confusion about what many men see as ‘competing rights’. These men said that they had a right to sex from their wives, and even if they recognized their wives right to deny sex in a theoretical sense, when it came down to it, men seemed unable to imagine how to resolve this conflict. While there were circumstances where a woman’s right to say no was respected above the man’s right to have sex, this was primarily in situations where she was sick or a tragedy had occurred in the family. Otherwise, the negotiation was open to a male analysis of the legitimacy of her denial. I respect her response, but you know most women deny us or abuse our right to sex. They are different from us generally. Even something so small can contribute to her loss of appetite for sex. This makes her moody so we feel affected as...
men…If my wife says no for a week isn’t that abuse of my rights, especially if she is not sick but just moody or stubborn? (Man 54 years, farmer).

5.4 Economic Violence
Economic violence in relationships emerged as highly controversial in the assessment. After cessation of physical violence, women saw economic independence as most fundamental to the enjoyment of their rights. 48 percent of the women reported that economic violence in their relationship had decreased as a result of increased awareness in the community about domestic violence. The same number of men reported a decrease as well. These numbers could be misleading, however, because a phenomenon arose where women began enjoying more economic rights such as working, participating in decision-making, maintaining control of her earnings, etc. while another form of economic abuse emerged. Many women and men described the practice of men abdicating all financial responsibility for their families once ‘granting’ economic rights to their wives. This has been found in other studies in Uganda as well. In her study of women who had committed violent crime, Ekirikubinza found that men frequently disregarded / abandoned their traditional “male role of providing for the family, but weren’t willing to give up controlling family finances and resources” (1999:69).

When he realized that I am determined to do the business, he gave up and tried a method of neglecting family responsibilities all together (Woman, 38 years, fried food vendor).

Once in a while he buys a sack of rice, beans and cooking oil, but then he can spend months without thinking of buying more. He once told me that since he brought me to his house he has been spending on me, so it is high time I took up the responsibility, after all, we claim we are equal to men (Woman, 28 years, food kiosk owner).

For me, I think equality means what a man can do, I can do as a woman. But men use it to abandon responsibilities saying that since we are equal, you look after the family” (Woman, 54 years, retired market vendor).

Other women, however, enjoyed increased freedom to work and the opportunity to contribute to the family decision-making. Women remarked that this increased their self-esteem, made them feel valuable, and strong. Men also remarked that their wives were now helping raise the standard of living for their families and saw this as a positive change.

I feel I can play a bigger part in the family because I work. I am now responsible and I don’t wait for the man to bring everything." (Woman, 36 years, teacher).

The talk of rights has changed our home because now I work, he allowed me to work, and we have developed. We also sit and discuss our relationship. I corrected him where he thought that women’s rights are about ruling men, or that it emphasizes women to stomp on men (Woman, 32 years, bar assistant).

Actually, fighting stopped and even emotional violence stopped. You know when a man is poor, he doesn’t make any mistakes (Woman, 32 years, bar assistant).

While women reported seeing improvements in some areas, many did not feel that their full range of economic rights were respected.

When he gets money, he doesn’t give it to me but he shows me and we even opened a joint account. But I still have some difficulties, the little money I get from [selling] water he tells me how to use it, he even grabs it forcefully (Woman, 45 years, water vendor).

Other women were still battling to convince men that they could handle working and their other ‘traditional’ duties as wives. Some men, while trying to change, still had not shaken the perception that as men they felt they are more capable to make decisions around family finances. Some women saw this as patronizing and as an indirect means to maintain control. There was a degree of tokenism in some men’s narratives about involving their wives in decision-making.
We always consult each other in matters concerning with finances although there are things I have to decide as a man (Man, 31 years, porter).

When we disagree, I listen to her side before I take my last decision (Man, 38 years, municipal worker).

Of the community members involved in the assessment, 14 percent of the women and 28 percent of the men reported that economic violence had increased since the advent CEDOVIP’s activities in the community. Some men described how they used money as a way to show displeasure at their wives behavior or as punishment. This was seen as a ‘non-violent’ way of maintaining power in the family although women saw this as violence.

If she brings a big head on me, I will reduce accordingly the money I give her. Say for example if I used to leave home 5000/- everyday, I will now leave 2000/- (Male, 40 years, carpenter).

Economic violence has increased instead because when my wife has annoyed me what I do is to reduce on the money I used to give her (Male, 29 years, carpenter).

Section 6: The Process of Change

When change occurs at a personal, relational or societal level, there is a shaking up of old traditions, habits, norms. This is bound to bring confusion and conflict within individuals and more generally in the community (Butgewa in An-Na’im, 2002). At an individual level, some community members are struggling to figure out what women’s rights discourse means to them in their own lives, and what it means for the lifestyle they are accustomed to in the community. There seems to be a genuine debate among community members as to what the changes mean and how to respond or move on within a different climate. The section explores the process of change including resistance and factors that women and men describe as reasons for change. Finally, the section explores how women and men are coping with changes within their relationships and the community.

6.0 Creating a Human Rights Culture

In a focus group discussion a man trying to figure out the origins of the emergence of women’s rights commented, “A man is no longer the master at home. The government has taken over control” (Male, 36 years, mechanic). But another participant responded by correcting him adding his own perspective, “The government has not taken over, people are in control but they do not know what to do in an actual sense” (Male, 28 years).

Other men felt that human rights just didn’t fit the cultural context of Uganda and called for them to be ‘reinterpreted’ to make them more ‘appropriate’ for communities here. These men saw human rights as negotiable and changeable, the universality of human rights did not appear to be a viable concept to these men.

To be sincere, these human rights in Uganda need to be redesigned…I think women have misinterpreted them, only to favor their side and the government is too lenient on their side (Male, 37 years, accountant).

Human rights are one sided. Women are favored at the expense of their husbands. Unless the whole process is changed to include men, the crusade to eliminate it [domestic violence] in society will not be changed (Man, 48 years, builder and porter).

My husband does not want to hear anything about women’s rights. He asks questions like ‘what do you benefit from such things?’ In fact he does not want me to participate. He is too rigid, he can even jeer if a program on the radio is talking about rights. He says it is for ‘whites’ who want to mislead us (Woman, 56 years, matoke seller).

In the narratives of many men, there is confusion as to how to manage their relationships and families within a climate that does not allow violence. Men talked about feeling out of control, uncertain as how
to handle new assertions and expectations from their partners, and unfamiliar with non-violent strategies for solving problems.

*We no longer punish our wives, even if you attempt to correct her, she won't be keen to listen. Family problems have now become hard to talk about because a woman is protected* (Man, 23 years).

Some men, however, were more able to cope with the changes and respond appropriately in their relationships. “My husband knows about rights. He says these days you only need to sit and talk. He has changed his ways of behaving towards me” (Woman, 48 years, teacher).

Other men seemed genuinely confused about this new social order.

*The talk of rights has had a big impact on our family. Any silly mistake like hurting your partner will cause trouble. It has also changed my thinking, because instead of fighting, I just go away for some time* (Male, 33 years, barman).

### 6.1 Resistance toward Change

As is common with any marginalized group’s struggle to enjoy their fundamental human rights, there is resistance from the dominant group. This holds true for discussions about women’s rights and domestic violence. Many men participating in the assessment described their resistance to change their established patterns and the balance of power with their partners. Several themes emerged:

a) fear;

b) misunderstanding or distortion;

c) minimizing;

d) powerlessness; and,

e) women’s response.

#### 6.1a Fear

Men described many fears that arose for them when contemplating women’s rights and seeing change within the relationships of peers and other family members. The most common fear was loss of power and becoming ‘a woman’ or being ‘under a woman’. The language that these men used reinforced traditional masculine identity that exists as opposite of the female which is common in strongly patriarchal societies.

*I am aware that women are supposed to be equal to men, but if you do not get tough a woman will step on you* (Male, 28 years).

[A man] has to be tough, to avoid becoming the wife (Male, 40 years, carpenter).

*If women have changed to be worse, then I will not change. They [wives] should remain under the control of their husbands. If this changes then men are in trouble* (Man, 53 years, motorbike owner).

*Because of fear, men have changed their attitudes toward women but they are doing this because of NGOs and women’s councils. In other words they swept their grievances under the carpet. This does not sound healthy for them* (Man, 50 years, shopkeeper).

Men’s reaction to these fears was often further entrenchment and rigidity around their beliefs about women and men, gender and the ‘natural’ world order.

*I am a traditional man. If our great, great fathers did not change anything, why do I change? We must leave everything as they were* (Man, 42 years, security officer).

Women were surprisingly willing to try to understand men’s fears around women’s rights. “Culture shapes women to be subordinate to men so the issue of rights seem to uplift them which is uncomfortable to men” (Woman, 45 years, actress). Some women even took it upon themselves to help men understand women’s rights more. This was done even in situations where their partners had been or were currently violent. There was a surprising lack of anger and impatience with men and considerable willingness to help them. This contradicts the common assumption in the community that women’s rights makes women hate and want to ‘destroy’ men.
6.1b Misunderstanding or Distortion
There was also ongoing misinterpretation of women’s rights by both women and men. It was difficult
to discern if this is deliberate manipulation of the core concept behind rights as part of the backlash
against them or genuine misconceptions about the discourse. This confusion and distortion was found
primarily with men but women also felt concerned about misinterpretation of women’s rights
discourse.

What I hate most about the talk on rights is that even if you catch your wife
cheating, there is almost nothing you can do (Man, 31 years, porter).

Most women misinterpret this term [women’s rights] they think that their rights give
them the power to misbehave and do whatever they think they want. Some
women mistreat their husbands saying ‘I have my rights, I can enter any time I
want and if you beat me you will see I will take you to court and they will imprison
you’. So women need to be taught what women’s and human rights mean
(Woman, 32 years, unemployed).

Other men seemed to deliberately distort the message behind women’s rights, taking it to the
extremes, which made it difficult for other women and men to deconstruct.

Women have been falsely made to believe that they are equal to men. This has
made them to behave recklessly at home. When I talk something, they reply
abusively (Man, 53 years, motorbike owner).

6.1c Minimizing
Another tactic that men used as resistance to the idea of women’s rights was minimizing the
importance or relevance of the issue. In their descriptions of how they saw changes in the community
the men minimized its importance. “My husband says, these issues of women’s rights just want to
excite you women!” (Woman, 45 years, water vendor).

Other men made dire warnings about the destructive nature of women’s rights, arguing that it would
break families, make women ‘run wild’, turn ‘women into men’, and even increase lesbianism.

Women’s rights should not be taken seriously because it will make many families
break up (Man, 38 years, municipal worker).

Talk about women’s rights can destroy our families (Man, 37 years, accountant).

The men think equality is meant to disorganize their relationships. They think if a
woman is empowered, she will become unruly and disrespectful (Man, 54 years,
farmer).

6.1d Powerlessness
There were some men participating in the assessment who talked about resisting opening up a
dialogue about human rights with their partners because they already felt in a subordinate position in
their relationship. This was found in several men who were not working and depended on their wives
to sustain their families. These men already felt disempowered and thus were unwilling to further
‘weaken’ (in their perspective) their position within the family.

People who have the money talk about human rights at home. But what do you
talk when you have not brought the sugar with you? You can’t talk with an empty
stomach! (Man, 40 years, carpenter).

Conversely, men who had a position or stake in the community found more incentive and pressure to
change. When men feel empowered they are more likely to be able to withstand sharing power within
their relationships.

My responsibilities in the community have also played a role [in being non-violent].
As a leader you are supposed to be a role model, so the community also shaped
me when it gave me certain responsibilities. I am also a leader in the mosque and
this has also changed me so much (Man, 49 years, rears poultry).

6.1e Women’s Response
Despite the distortion, resistance, and backlash against women’s rights among some men in the
community, women were surprisingly patient and understanding toward men and the difficulties of
changing. Many women still seemed to feel hopeful and willing to wait for change, even in the midst of experiencing violence.

Some [men] have changed. As I told you, my husband used to beat me so much – kicking, hitting but now it is just a slap or shoving, so given time even he will change (Woman, 38 years, fried food vendor).

As much as I don't think always good about my husband, when he comes home, I try to be polite, help him with anything he wants, care about him and try to make him feel at home. You know I want my children to be responsible people and I'm glad he does too, so I try to avoid showing them what is happening between me and their father (Woman, 28 years, food kiosk owner).

This was a source of relief for many men who feared that hearing about women’s rights would turn their partners against them and make them rebellious.

At first I thought she would change, but she did not. I used to think she would want to abandon one of her roles, but she did not and nothing has changed (Man, 44 years, taxi conductor).

6.2 Reasons for Change
Women and men participating in the assessment shared their thoughts on why people in the community were beginning to change their ideas about women’s rights and domestic violence.

6.2a Human Rights
Women and men explained that knowing about human rights influenced their beliefs about women and men and their positions in the family and community. The connection between domestic violence as a violation of human rights also was indicated as an important conceptual shift for community members.

Once you know that everyone has a right and take things easy there’s no more fighting, kicking, and harassing so you play it cool (Man, 20 years).

Maybe that is why we haven’t had any domestic violence because we know each other’s rights. We always agree on issues (Man, 34 years, teacher).

In fact, before, you could be despised by society and even herself if you didn’t beat her! But now I realize that surely no one enjoys being hurt (Man, 54 years, farmer).

6.2b Supportive Environment
Women and men remarked that pressure from friends and family members contributed to a reduction of violence in their relationships. Both women and men alike reported asking for advice and practical support in terms of counseling, a safe place to stay, mediation, calling police, and intervening in violent episodes. This reinforces international literature that points to the importance of social networks for changing violent behavior (WHO, 2002; Pickup et al., 2001; Heise, 1997).

Maybe when he is too violent, community members talk to him and there is some change, although small (Woman, 38 years, fried food vendor).

Men fear now mistreating their partners. They know that women are no longer to be beaten. They have their rights and so it is bringing some changes in the community or the society at large (Woman, 45 years, water vendor).

I feel she is protected and therefore only answerable to women’s councils, local councils and the police, not to me. She is untouchable (Man, 50 years, sells used motorbike parts).

Women’s rights creates fear among family members -- the fear to fight (Man, 33 years, barman).

I think radio programs have helped him a lot to change his behavior and maybe even his friends talk to him. I think he fears spoiling his name at his work place.
But radio programs even more, he likes them so much and never misses (Woman, 28 years, owns food kiosk).

6.2c Age
Violence was less prevalent between older couples participating in the assessment. While there are certainly couples over 40 who were still living in abusive relationships, the trend seemed to be that age was an important factor in the reduction of violence in relationships. Older people remarked that they now had to be ‘mature’; that they were expected to be role models and set an example for the younger generations. They also felt, as heads of families, it was important to be promoting non-violence as they saw the benefits of it for families and even regretted that they were not exposed to the discourse of human rights earlier as it could have made a difference. This has important programmatic implications for violence prevention programs and deserves further study.

I used to slap her when we were still youthful, but these days, we are old, we quarrel and solve it peacefully (Man, 66 years, night watchman).

The talk of women’s rights could be part of it [change], but also realizing our responsibilities, and becoming older. You know most youth tend to be violent to their partners, but as life goes on, you change in behavior, thinking and you reason maturely (Man, 49 years, rears poultry).

I also do think certain things like decrease in beating women is due to age. But still I cannot say men of my age have ceased from beating their wives. I know they are there and it is quite terrible (Man, 54 years, farmer).

6.2d Fear of the Law
Many women and men remarked that the institutional support given by the police, women’s organizations and local councils prompted changes in violent behavior. The existence of consequences outside the family structure seems to facilitate positive change, especially for men. Many men said they were now fearful that they would be arrested if they beat their wives or that they would feel publicly shamed if their wives were to expose their violence to local council members. Also, many women told their partners that they would take steps to report them. This reason for change is most often cited in terms of physical violence.

When a woman annoys, you just forgive her as you fear to be taken by the laws, so you pretend (Man, 20 years).

If it wasn’t for that [laws] we would still be beating our wives, but fear of being imprisoned makes us stop (Man, 40 years.)

I myself have given my wife a lot of freedom to move freely, because I fear to beat her because she is protected by the law (Man, 48 years, builder and porter).

It [the talk of rights] has helped, because when I hear what they say, I fear to lose my property, hence I will not fight her. This has created some discipline in our home (Man, 28 years, bricklayer).

We have come to accept women’s rights and we know that our president strongly supports it. That is why these days, when you beat your wife, you can be arrested which never used to happen in the past (Man, 66 years, night watchman).

6.2e Desire for Happiness
Very simply, many women and men participating in the assessment said that they decided to change their behavior because they saw it as an opportunity to create more happiness and harmony in their lives as individuals, couples and families. The women and men telling their stories said that they had lived under violence and denial of women’s rights and that it did not create benefits for anyone in the family. They felt with violence, children remained scared of their fathers, women were injured, sad and ‘disorganized’, and the development of the whole family was compromised because of the levels of conflict and disagreement in the family. Therefore, many women and men said their motivation for change was increased happiness and harmony in their lives. This may be a result of the deliberate efforts of the project to construct the issue of domestic violence prevention and women’s rights within
a benefits-based approach that emphasizes happy and healthy relationships rather than placing blame and pointing fingers.

I want my wife to be happy and my young children now [at] home to feel a difference, to be loved and given a chance to make decisions. I feel it is good for me and them to be exposed to human rights I believe that if a woman is happy, a man can be happy, so are the children. I also believe that rights have a connection to domestic violence. For example, when I recall how I used to treat my wife, beat her, abuse her, I feel I was violating her right to happiness and freedom and of course there was serious violence at our home. But now things have changed, there is no violence because we try to respect our rights and dignity (Man, 54 years, farmer).

She [wife] still gets annoyed, but I apologize to her in order to solve the problem. I think I have now learned how vulnerable and sensitive women can be and it has taught me how to handle my wife. Generally, we are happier now compared to the past (Man, 49 years, rears poultry).

6.2f Religion
As Uganda is such a religious country, it was surprising that only one community member involved in the assessment mentioned religion as a reason for her husband to change violent behavior. This implies that either the religious institutions are silent on the issue of rights and domestic violence, or that people are more influenced by other sources.

Sometime back he used to do all the bad habits, like drinking and coming back late, kicking, beating and slapping. He could do all types of violence, but God helped me and he [husband] was saved and it has changed his behavior (Woman, 45 years, water vendor).

6.2g Extreme Violence
Several men participating in the assessment shared experiences of how extreme acts of violence against their partners shifted their perspectives about the validity of using violence. Many men remarked that an extreme incidence of violence scared them and made them realize that force was inappropriate. The fear of seriously injuring or killing their partner acted as deterrent to further violence.

I once kicked her and thought she was dead. I thought later that it was not necessary to do that, but you know temper is something so bad. Those days any disagreement with my wife could mean a fight in most cases. I could either beat her thoroughly, slap, kick or do anything to demonstrate annoyance. Of course at times I could beat her without a genuine reason, but it was nothing I could think about (Ibid).

6.3 Coping with Change
Some men reported having difficulty coping with changes in their partners which made them angry and frustrated. While many men saw discomfort as a natural part of the process of change, others were not able to manage the emotions it raised. Some men said they were contemplating leaving their wives. This was much more common than women threatening to leave their husbands. This was much more common than women threatening to leave their partners.

I do sometimes think of her human rights and I avoid quarrelling or just leave her with the money she asks for. This is to keep peace in our family. But deep inside my heart, I am burning. Sometimes I think of separating and marrying another wife (Man, 32 years, welder).

I am getting fed up with my first wife. She is becoming an obstacle to my plans. She does things according to her without even consulting me on some issues (Man, 53 years, motorbike owner).

Only three women participating in the assessment mentioned leaving their partners because of the high levels of domestic violence and an unwillingness of their husbands to change. This was surprising because in popular culture, it is often stated that women, once they know about their rights, want to leave their husbands. The low number of women reporting a desire to leave their husbands may be a result of economic dependence on men or the desire to stay with their partner for the sake
of their children. Many women felt strong ties to the family as they did not want their children growing up without their fathers. Only two women spoke of divorcing their partners.

You haven’t asked me what I am going to do, but I am planning to divorce. Divorce could be a better solution because after hearing from radios and people and even in papers, after all this information about women’s rights and domestic violence, nothing has changed. He still behaves the same way. My husband seems not ready to change (Woman, 42 years, shop attendant).

These days I try to avoid talking about it [women’s rights] to him, though of course I am fed up. If it was not my young children, I could divorce him and go elsewhere, work and help my children (Woman, 35 years, unemployed).

Section 7: Recommendations
The following recommendations that emerged from the assessment are suggestions to CEDOVIP as they continue to work to prevent domestic violence in Kawempe.

• Working with a cross-section of community members did seem to contribute to building a supportive culture and making domestic violence move from being seen as an individual’s problem to one of the community. It would be important to shift the work with community leaders and members now into more concrete action to ensure that the emerging supportive environment also has practical response mechanisms for those experiencing or perpetrating violence.

• Women especially seem to recognize that behavior change is process and they seemed quite willing to support men along this journey. This may be a result of the phased-in approach that CEDOVIP uses. It would be useful to study this more in-depth.

• Men appear much more willing to listen to their peers, particularly around the potentially threatening issue of women’s rights. Therefore, while not minimizing voices of women, CEDOVIP may want to consider creating additional forums and opportunities for men to gather in safe space to explore these issues with each other.

• The use of a benefits-based approach while still operating within the discourse of women’s human rights proved quite successful. This seems to empower women and hold men accountable while emphasizing the positive aspects of non-violence and more equity in relationships.

• Male fear of public reprisal is a recurring theme in the assessment and therefore, it would be useful for CEDOVIP to strengthen community-based response mechanisms in the next phase.

• CEDOVIP programs need to move beyond raising awareness to help women and men figure out alternatives to inequitable or violent behaviors.

• Although programs often choose to work with young people instead of older community members, it may actually be more beneficial for CEDOVIP to work with the older generations. Despite popular notions that older people are more set in their ways, this study found that women and men over 40 seemed more open to ideas about women’s rights and change than many of their younger counterparts.

• NGOs, donors and governments must recognize that influencing attitudes and behaviors as deeply rooted as those about gender and violence requires long-term engagement with communities. Funding for projects working on prevention and women’s rights needs to be longer term and steady and results will not be produced in neat timeframes. Recognition of this would allow more meaningful programs to emerge and a shift away from campaign based human rights promotion activities.

Section 8: Conclusion
The paths toward change as individuals, within a relationship, or within the larger society are a long and varied. The communities where Raising Voices and CEDOVIP have been undertaking intense
human rights education on the issue of domestic violence for two years does show a significant change in the experiences of domestic violence as reported by community members. The physical, emotional, sexual and economic violence that women experience are all reported to have decreased by just over or just under 50 percent of women and men involved in the assessment. While there is still male resistance, confusion about alternatives to violence, and in some cases, backlash against women’s rights concepts and, overall, community members noted a marked change in the levels of domestic violence in the community. Women’s rights discourse played a role in this shift as did age, desire for harmony and happiness, fear of the law, and supportive community institutions as well as family and friends. While some levels of violence did increase, particularly the more private or intangible forms such as sexual or economic violence, a general downward trend shows encouraging results. This has important implications for further work in this community as well as other communities where domestic violence remains high.

This assessment revealed that the domestic violence prevention efforts underway in Kawempe has positively impacted the attitudes, beliefs and behaviors of women and men. Sustained discourse on women’s human rights has influenced individuals, relationships and the community at large leading to greater acceptance and support of women’s rights, particularly the right to live free of violence.
References


