

**Authors**

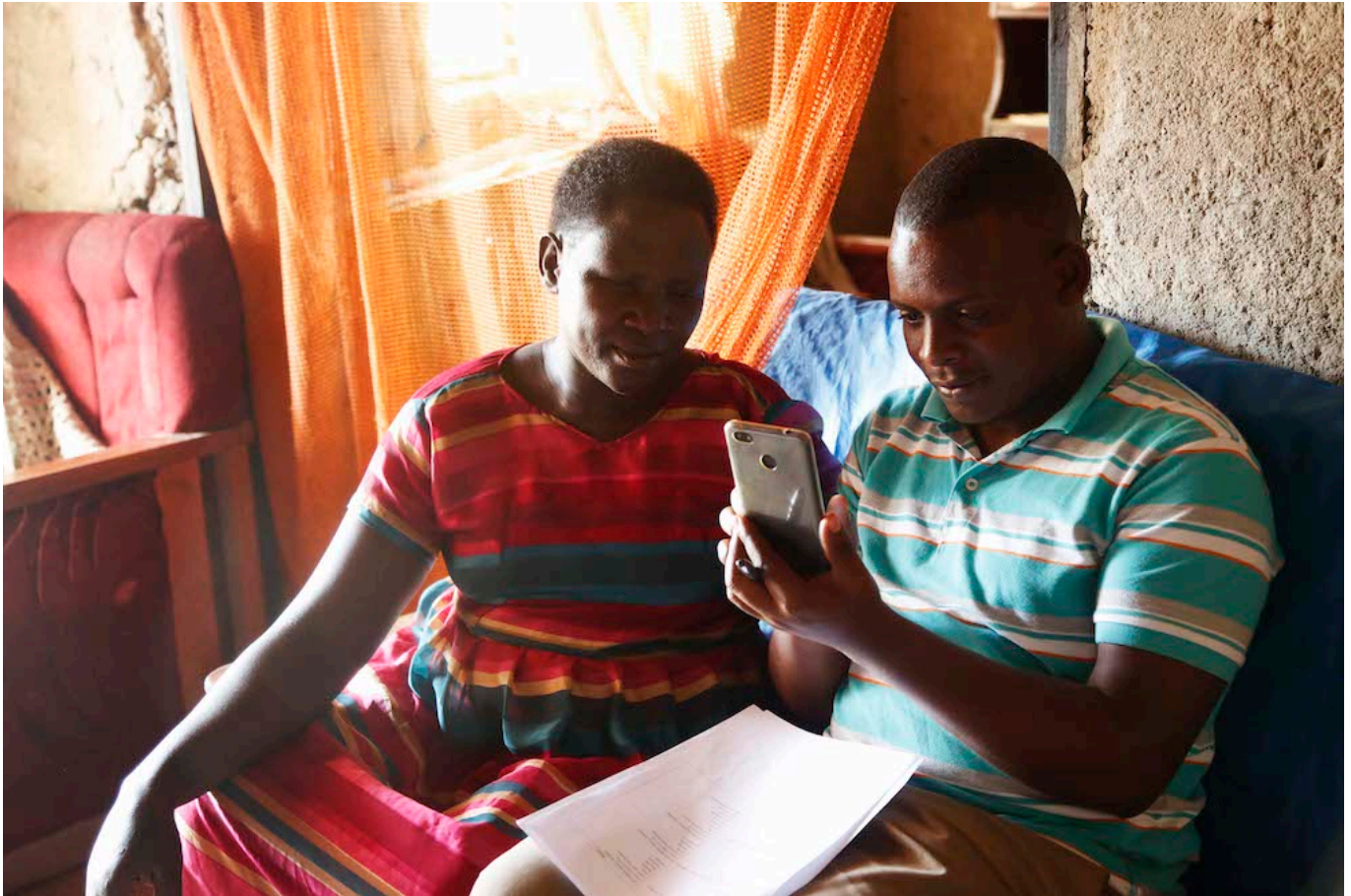
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# Friends Not Foes: Engaging Male Allies for Gender Equality

This summer, I had the pleasure of representing IPA at the Women Deliver Conference, held in Africa for the first time. Convening policymakers, academics, civil society leaders, activists, youth, and media, Women Deliver prides itself on being one of the largest multisectoral platforms for advancing gender equality on a global scale. Promoting lasting solutions to combat gender inequality through co-created spaces and collective action was encapsulated in this year's theme: Spaces, Solidarity, and Solutions. Woven throughout the conference was a call for gender equality, including engaging men to help break the barriers of oppression disproportionately affecting women and girls. For avid supporters of this notion such as myself, the idea of women teaming up with male allies serves as an encouraging reminder that men can also be part of the solution to an enduring problem.



*A male enumerator working in the Kamwenge District of Uganda teaches a female faith leader how to use a smartphone for the Becoming One impact evaluation. Engaging men as part of the solution is a central element of the program. © 2018 Aude Guerruci/IPA*

Male engagement programming can take different forms, including in the fight against gender-based violence (GBV). Couples-based programming to reduce intimate partner violence (IPV) between married and cohabiting couples was featured in a plenary session at Women Deliver, highlighting its promising effects. An example of such programming is Becoming One, which was evaluated by IPA Uganda. That evaluation showed that Becoming One produced a 12 percent reduction of IPV—and also shifted power within the relationship from men to women and improved the overall quality of relationships 12 months after implementation. Given the evidence, the prospect of scaling GBV prevention programming involving both men and women is promising as long as the design is evidence-informed, comprehensive, and context-specific.

Women Deliver also covered another area in which men can be important allies: in addressing the issue of unpaid care and domestic work—an area where women and girls are disproportionately affected worldwide owing to hegemonic socio-cultural constructs entrenching depictions of women as caregivers and homemakers. Studies have shown that the disproportionate burden of unpaid work can be detrimental to women’s physical, mental, emotional, and social well-being. The burden of unpaid work can also disempower women financially as a result of reduced paid working hours or exclusion from the labor market. According to an article in *The New York Times*, women’s unpaid labor was worth \$10.9 trillion globally in 2020. These outcomes can be more debilitating for women at intersecting

dimensions of poverty, single or adolescent motherhood, ethnicity, forced displacement, disability, and other markers of oppression.

To address the issue of unpaid care and domestic work, [UN Women](#) developed a toolkit known as the 5Rs framework. The framework has become one of the basic guiding principles for addressing unpaid care and domestic work. It identifies interlocking pathways to tackle the issue by:

- *Recognizing* the significance of unpaid care and domestic work to society and the economy through budgetary allocation and data or evidence-informed policymaking;
- *Reducing* the burden, drudgery, and time spent on unpaid care and domestic work for women and girls to allocate more hours to economic, educational, leisure, and political activities;
- *Redistributing* the tasks and responsibilities associated with care work equitably between women and men within and outside the household;
- *Representing* and elevating the voices of unpaid carers by including them in policy, planning, and decision-making processes; and
- *Rewarding* unpaid carers and domestic workers fairly as well as improving working conditions within the care economy.

The discussions on male engagement and redistribution of unpaid care work between men and women serve as an invitation for husbands, sons, brothers, and other male members of the household to participate in the process of reconfiguring gender roles to alleviate domestic pressure. Gender inequality that disfavors women cannot be effectively mitigated if one-half of the equation—men— is excluded. Women Deliver provided a solid reminder that male engagement—whether in the realm of unpaid care work or reducing GBV—can be part of the solution.

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