

Transforming Lives, Families, and Communities



EngenderHealth's Men As Partners® (MAP) program mobilizes men to take a stand against gender inequality and violence against women and to promote health in their families and communities.

The MAP program began in South Africa—a country with the largest number of HIV infections in the world and one of the highest rates of reported rape. There, and in many other countries, violence, multiple sexual partners, and the domination of women are equated with masculinity, and men who seek health services are perceived as weak.

MAP actively challenges these norms by engaging men and communities through interactive workshops, peer education, and media outreach. The MAP model, which encourages men to be supportive partners, active health care clients, and agents of change, has been adopted by local partners in 18 countries. It is transforming family and social dynamics and improving the health and well-being of people worldwide.

Recently, several members of EngenderHealth's South Africa staff and partner organizations discussed the impact of the Men As Partners® (MAP) program on their lives, families, and communities.

What motivated you to get involved with MAP?



PASCAL: I grew up amidst violence; originally I am from Burundi, where the Hutus and Tutsis killed each other. But I also experienced violence in my family. At times I saw my father abuse my mother. Later I came to realize it was not only in my family, it was in many homes. When I grew up, I said, I want to do something to help people like my mother and other children.



JULIANA: I was blown away by the content of the MAP material. It moved me to places I did not want to go before, dealing with my own past—the sexual abuse I suffered as a child and the physical abuse my mom went through.



GUGULETHU: I was raised in a family where women and men were treated equally, so I learned to be independent. But I kept quiet when things happened to me, and I even stayed in very abusive relationships. When I participated in a MAP workshop, I saw that keeping quiet is not the solution.



DUMISANI: For me it was when I was working for another organization and I was coordinating a project with unemployed mothers who reported abuse and other negative behavior from their boyfriends and husbands. I realized then how important it is to engage men. I had heard about EngenderHealth, and I arranged for the organization to train us.



JACOB: I had been working with an organization running support groups for people living with HIV and their children. The support groups were in villages where men used their power to violate women and children. But the challenge was keeping men in the group; they would join and drop out. Then I heard about MAP and saw men ending the cycle of violence.

I asked the management of our organization if we could work with EngenderHealth to learn skills and techniques for working with men. I said to myself, whether we get funds or not, we must use MAP to motivate others.

How has MAP changed you personally?

PASCAL: For me, MAP has changed my personal attitudes toward women. Growing up in a violent family, I came to believe that women couldn't do anything without men. I didn't have respect for women and didn't even want to talk to them. But now I've changed. After MAP, I know how to express my emotions, and I support my partner. I respect my sisters, mothers, and every woman I see.

JULIANA: Two years ago, I was at a point in my life where I had lost all faith in men: A male friend attempted to rape me. But through MAP, I met very committed men who make an effort to bring about change in their lives and better their relationships. I have learned through MAP that stereotyping will keep you from building great relationships.

Men As Partners® Roundtable



JACOB: I matured. I realized how, as a male, I should handle my relationships. My partner was surprised; before, I wouldn't wash dishes, now, I wash dishes for her. Before, I wouldn't help her with the washing, now, when it's time to do the washing, I help her by taking the clothes to the lake. Before, although I knew how to cook, I wouldn't, because I thought it was women's business. But now, I'm motivated, I can do all these things. And I try to show others in the community as well. My personal involvement is not only at work; I practice it 24 hours a day.

What are the gender stereotypes that you are trying to change?

DUMISANI: There are a lot of stereotypes. The ones that bother me the most are the ones I think are very subtle, but still prevail. It's a belief of superiority: that if you're a man, you're better off, you're stronger.

PASCAL: Men are seen as providers. And if they can't provide today or tomorrow, they feel like they're not man enough. Personally, I've had friends commit suicide because of this pressure. Or some of them stole and are in jail—they wanted to prove their manhood to their partners or even their colleagues. But we have to look at things differently. If you don't have money today, it doesn't mean that you're not a man. If you don't beat your wife, it doesn't mean you don't love her. Many people still believe that.

JULIANA: Domestic violence is a norm; here, people make fun of a woman when she is beaten up. Another problem is the way that lesbians and gays are discriminated against in South Africa. There is this myth that being homosexual in Africa is somehow a betrayal of our African culture. Infringing on human rights and not allowing people to be what they want to be—that is a betrayal of our African culture.

How are you changing these perceptions in your community?

GUGULETHU: I stand up against stereotyping in my family; I have two brothers and male cousins, and I challenge their behavior and thinking around women, especially in their relationships. I also speak up in church and my community. I believe you have to make the change you want to see in the world.

DUMISANI: It's best to live a life that you can believe in. And I think the best place to start, which is also the most challenging, is with your family. I have discussed these issues with every member of my family.

PASCAL: I use my voice positively. I organize workshops for the community and go to schools to talk to students about these issues. I believe that if we don't invest in youth, we're not thinking about the future. We need to change the way people view things in the village, in the community, in society. It's going to take time, but at least we're talking about it.