GENDER NORMS, VIOLENCE AND CONCEPTS OF MASCULINITY

A qualitative research report on faith communities' perceptions and experience in Bangui, Central African Republic

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Front cover photo shows a man in an internally displaced persons' camp in Bangui, CAR. This photo is for illustrative purposes only and has no links to the research featured in this report.
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ACRONYMS

AIDS	Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome
CAR	Central African Republic
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
FATEB	Faculté de Théologie Évangélique de Bangui (Faculty of Evangelical Theology in Bangui)
GBV	Gender-based violence
GEM	Gender-equitable men
HIV	Human immunodeficiency virus
IMAGES	The International Men and Gender Equality Survey
IPV	Intimate partner violence
KII	Key informant interviews
MINUSCA	United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in the Central African Republic
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
SGBV	Sexual and gender-based violence
UN	United Nations
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

GLOSSARY

Early marriage — the Central African Republic Act defines a child as someone who is below the age of 18 years. Early marriage is defined as marriage to a child (under 18 years) and in this case the child is not considered to be able to give free and fully informed consent.

Faith-based organisations (FBOs) — organisations formed on the basis of their faith, whose work (often on social concerns) is a response to their faith.

Faith leaders — clergy (eg pastor, imam) or lay believers (both male and female) who have responsibilities within the faith group (eg women's group leader, youth leader) and who play influential roles within their faith communities and the broader local communities.

Femininity — a set of attributes, behaviours and roles generally associated with girls and women. Femininity is often perceived as a social construct, combining socially defined and biologically created factors. This makes it distinct from the definition of the biological female sex, as both men and women can exhibit feminine traits.

Gender equality — the absence of discrimination on the basis of a person's sex in terms of opportunities and allocation of resources, benefits or access to services.

Gender equity — fairness and justice in the distribution of benefits and responsibilities between women and men. The concept recognises that women and men have different needs and power and that these differences should be identified and addressed in a manner that rectifies the imbalances between the sexes.

Gender stereotypes — beliefs about the psychological traits and characteristics of men and women, as well as the activities appropriate to each sex.

Masculinity/ masculinities — set of attributes, behaviours and roles generally associated with boys and men. Masculinity is a combination of socially defined and biological factors. Masculinity traits include courage, independence and assertiveness. These traits vary by location and context, and are influenced by social and cultural factors.

Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) — physical, mental or social abuse, including of a sexual nature, that is directed against a person because of his or her gender or gender role in a society or culture. In these cases, a person has no choice to refuse or pursue other options without severe social, physical or psychological consequences.

Social expectation — a social norm that is constructed by one's beliefs about what others do and by one's beliefs about what others think one should do.

Social norm — what people in a group believe to be typical and appropriate actions in that group.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents a summary of the findings from a qualitative piece of original research that was carried out in Bangui, Central African Republic (CAR), in December 2015. The objective was twofold:

- to explore existing social norms, practices and attitudes of men, women, youth and particularly faith leaders, relating to gender, masculinities and gender-based violence (GBV)

- to find out the intersections between faith and gender issues.

The overall key findings are as follows:

1. The norms of masculinities are largely influenced by harmful stereotypes of what it means to 'be a man' in Bangui. As a result, these norms can be root causes and consequences of widespread gender inequalities and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) prevailing in the country. These social norms are often justified or condoned by faith teaching.

2. At societal levels, there are deep-seated ideals of masculinities, which may be difficult for men to attain within a conflict-affected, insecure environment with high levels of unemployment. This is having an impact on sexual and social relationships for both men and women, and the frustration and shame of not meeting the social criteria of masculinity may also contribute to violence.

3. Despite a widespread acceptance of violent and gender-inequitable norms among women and men, there was also a small number of men and women who actively challenged these norms, and whose voices showed some positive forms of masculinities. These included caring, non-violent and responsible masculinities, which equated men with job holders and thus better providers for their families. There is potential that harmful norms can change, as evidenced by these responses. This can be encouraged if faith leaders can work with women, girls, men and boys simultaneously to challenge and transform these harmful gender norms, particularly where these norms are backed by certain interpretations of religious texts.

4. The majority of participants viewed faith leaders as currently contributing to rigid norms of masculinities, grounded on selective reading and interpretation of sacred texts, which may lead men and their partners into poor health outcomes. However, a few participants perceived them also as having a crucial role to play in trying to transform masculinities in faith communities and in society at large.

In the area of sexual and reproductive health, heterosexual dating was perceived as a normal thing to do. However, harassment of all types, including of a sexual nature, would be seen as an offence. Wives who refused to have sex with their husbands would be viewed as 'sinners' and 'criminals' and this would justify their partners in either forcing sex or having extramarital affairs. Married women were largely seen as the property of their husbands, once parents had been provided with the bride price. While child marriages were widely perceived as having harmful effects on the youths themselves (as well as their partners and their parents), many young people were said to have experienced early sexual debut.

With regard to the Gender-Equitable Men (GEM) scale,[1] the majority of respondents believed that women were economically disempowered and were led by emotions, rendering them weak and vulnerable. However, some participants recognised that certain women have already entered into work spheres previously reserved for men and could be viewed as significant contributors to societal and family development. Meanwhile, men were perceived as tough and intelligent, and as providers. However, these ideals were contested amid the current political instability which, coupled with financial hardships, makes many men economically disempowered. Since women were thought to have limited agency to prevent pregnancies, the participants suggested that men and boys should be engaged as partners in women's and children's health. This may lead to the formation of more positive concepts of masculinities, which may bring substantial and mutual benefits.

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1 The Gender-Equitable Men (GEM) scale was developed by Horizons/Population Council and Promundo, and by surveys carried out by the Medical Research Council of South Africa on sexual violence and physical violence against women.

These may include better relationships between women and men and between girls and boys, helping to ensure healthier children and building towards a future generation that may reject all forms of SGBV.

In the field of SGBV, the majority of participants seemed to reject all forms of violence against women. Yet some (including both women and men) felt strongly that married women should tolerate violence in order to take care of their children. There was also a belief that some types of women put themselves at risk of rape, or were 'asking for it' – those of 'bad reputation' and those 'wearing sexy clothes'. Although some believed that marital sex could also be a form of forced sex, marital rape was viewed as a common occurrence, happening between many couples. Cultural and religious factors were perceived as catalysts that endorsed marital rape, and some participants did not agree with the concept of rape within marriage.

In the domain of domestic and daily life, household decision-making processes were largely skewed in favour of men, since they have to be obeyed as 'masters' by women. These men were also portrayed as the ones having the final word in household matters. But these traditions of masculinities may gradually be changing in the current context of socio-economic hardship, where some women have entered into more highly paid work.

The participants reported that both Christian and Islamic teachings promote gender equity and justice. In this sense, a few faith leaders, women, men, girls and boys held some positive ideas about masculinities and supported gender equality. In addition, they suggested some strategies that demonstrated some existing 'voices of resistance', agency and resilience to challenge traditional norms of masculinities. These need to be acknowledged, supported and built upon. But in reality, the majority of attitudes and interpretations of sacred texts given by participants contradicted this, since particularly the male informants seemed to be strongly adhering to a faith-based understanding of male superiority over women. As a result, many women interviewed had also internalised some of these norms, grounded on the interpretation of sacred texts, that justify and sustain their subordinate positions to men. There was therefore a tendency to view men as having natural and God-given power over women and the household. In spite of the existing female leadership at the highest national level, the participants tended to see women as 'too emotional' to lead in their society.

Based on these findings, the following recommendations are suggested at policy and programme levels. Their aim is to equip faith leaders as key catalysts, to engage men and boys and to work with communities in changing social norms, bringing gender equality and reducing SGBV in CAR.

Recommendations at programme level

- Tearfund, its partners and other peer agencies need to develop safe spaces or processes to allow women and men to come to understand each other better. Men and women need to understand the reasons inequitable gender norms persist, the harmful consequences of these for both sexes, and when and how they may change.

- The conspiracy of silence related to SGBV should be addressed at all levels of society, since the process of change in gender norms and relations needs to be driven by several factors simultaneously. Of these, education, economic change, exposure to new ideas, and political, religious and social mobilisation are key.

- The role of faith leaders in shaping social norms, including concepts of masculinities, is vital to the successful dissemination of gender equality values. Therefore, faith leaders need to be fully equipped in addressing these topics with innovative and creative theological discourses that can free people from norms of hegemonic masculinities, restore hope and enable more positive and non-violent relationships between men and women.

- Fruitful partnerships should be promoted linking national programmes, bilateral organisations and civil society groups with Tearfund and its partners on ways of engaging women, men, girls and boys to address sexual and reproductive health issues.

- In response to the challenges, more effort and resources are required to engage women, men, girls and boys directly for change. More needs to be done to identify and support leadership within communities that promotes gender-equitable attitudes, particularly positive male role models. To this end, men and women who are currently in leadership positions in faith institutions and communities are key actors to target:

where properly engaged and equipped, they can use their position of influence to speak out publicly in support of gender equality, human rights and women's and girls' well-being, and to act as change agents.

- Recognising that certain women and girls may intentionally and unintentionally contribute to constructing and maintaining hegemonic masculinity stereotypes, Tearfund and its partners must work with the whole community and, alongside engaging with men and boys, also commit themselves to building women's and girls' capacity to transform masculinities.

- Community-based work with women and girls, men and boys, should promote new ideals of masculinities based on respect for women, responsible sexual behaviours and the non-use of GBV.

- Unequal gender power relations and sexual violence against women exist in almost every society and affect both women and men, while slowing down the growth and development of the society. However, challenging and changing such inequalities is a complex and sensitive task and should be done with respect for and in equal partnership with local counterparts, and responses and approaches should be contextualised.

Recommendations at policy level

For international organisations and donors:

- **Increase early and continued engagement of faith leaders as key stakeholders in challenging harmful masculinities and tackling SGBV.** Faith leaders hold unparalleled in-depth local knowledge and an influential position in their communities. They often contribute to the root causes of SGBV by shaping harmful social norms through their faith teaching and their behaviour towards women. It is therefore vital to engage them early, and on an ongoing basis, so that they can act as key catalysts for positive change in their communities.

- **Strengthen faith literacy among staff.** Although faith leaders and teachings play an important role in shaping social norms, staff of humanitarian agencies and donors often lack the faith literacy required to understand and to know how to draw on this resource when tackling SGBV, including challenging harmful masculinities. Staff need to be trained in this area so that they have strong faith literacy and are equipped to engage with faith-based organisations effectively to tackle SGBV.

- **Conduct further research into the impact of men's access to education on their views in relation to gender equality and gender-based violence.** The findings of this research project suggest that increasing men's access to education has a positive impact on their attitudes and behaviours in relation to gender equality and gender-based violence. Further research is required in CAR to explore this in more depth.

- **Promote partnerships between different actors, including faith-based organisations, who are focused on engaging young men and women to tackle SGBV in CAR.** Collaboration and coordination between diverse actors are key to delivering a strategic and effective response, ensuring the best use of the resources available. Faith-based organisations must be included because they are well placed to challenge local faith leaders and communities about harmful faith teachings at the root of SGBV and engage them to address this, particularly young men and women.

INTRODUCTION

The Central African Republic context

Since 2004, coups d'état and rebellion in CAR have caused a sustained crisis in the country and have negatively impacted national institutions' capacity to provide services and protection to the population. The current humanitarian crisis and emergency follows two years of political unrest and dispute, which have led to the instability and widespread violence perpetrated by opposing armed groups (including the Seleka and Anti-Balaka militia groups) and the deaths of thousands of civilians from both Christian and Muslim communities. In 2015 UNHCR estimated that 25 per cent of CAR's population has been internally displaced by the conflict, which has divided the country along ethno-religious lines since 2013.[2] The conflict in CAR has a regional impact, as thousands of refugees have fled to neighbouring countries. As a result of these challenges, the country remains one of the poorest in the world, with some of the worst indicators related to health, education, income and gender (see table below).

Table: Key indicators of human development in CAR, 2015[3]

Indicators	CAR
Population	4.7 million
Health Under-five mortality rate (per 1,000 live births) Life expectancy at birth	 139.2 50.7
Education Adult literacy rate (% aged 15 and older) Mean years of schooling (years)	 36.8 4.2
Income GDP per capita (USD) People living on less than 1.25 USD per day (%)	 584.4 62.8
Gender Maternal mortality ratio (deaths per 100,000 live births)	 880

Sexual and gender-based violence in CAR

Although it is recognised that SGBV pre-existed within communities, the ongoing conflict in CAR has exacerbated this violence, and it is widely acknowledged as a public health concern within the current humanitarian crisis. However, it remains under-reported and there is a scarcity of published data regarding its prevalence in CAR. Recent data from the UNFPA-led GBV sub-cluster in Bangui reports 60,208 GBV survivors since 2014, who received at least medical and/or psychosocial care according to their needs. Among those are 29,801 cases of sexual violence, including rape, gang rape, sexual slavery, sexual exploitation and abuse, and sexual aggression. Armed men, including parties to the conflicts, self-defence groups, peacekeepers, national security entities and unidentified armed men, were reported as responsible for 58 per cent of these incidents.[4]

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2 UNHCR (2015) *Global Appeal 2015 update: Central African Republic*. See http://www.unhcr.org/5461e5fd0.html

3 Source: UNDP (www.hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/CAF)

4 See www.reliefweb.int/report/central-african-republic/unfpa-fighting-against-gender-based-violence-car-need-inter

According to a baseline study carried out by Mercy Corps in 2009, the study participants widely accepted rigid norms of hegemonic masculinities that equate masculinities with abuse of women.[5] The violence is not just conducted by armed combatants: a reported 25 per cent of women in CAR experienced violence from a partner in 2009.[6] The findings of Mercy Corps also suggest that 80 per cent of women aged 15–49 think that it is normal for a husband/partner to hit and/or beat his wife for a number of the following reasons: 'if she burns food', 'argues with him', 'goes out without keeping him informed', 'neglects children' or 'refuses to have sex with him'. Moga-Kpely suggests that this may be the consequence of the lack of law enforcement prohibiting SGBV, as well as under-reporting of incidents of rape due to societal stigma and discrimination.[7]

It is clear that the incidence of SGBV is extremely high in Bangui and has been exacerbated by the conflict. However, it is also clear that SGBV existed in Bangui before the conflict, is found both outside and inside the home and is connected with gender-inequitable attitudes and low socio-economic status for women.[8] Previous conflict and insecurity in CAR has also exacerbated sexual violence and contributed to an ongoing cycle of violence. A 2004 report by Amnesty International brought attention to the widespread and systematic rape of women in CAR. These awful rapes were perpetrated by both militia and rebels, and the same report suggests that girls as young as eight years old and women as old as 60 were raped.[9] The report documented ways women who attempted to resist were severely beaten up, stabbed or killed, and also highlighted the impunity that perpetrators enjoyed. Tearfund's report into survivors' experiences in the current conflict reflects the same brutal paradigms.[10]

In the same vein, in 2013 the United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner found that the rule of law was almost inexistent in CAR and abuses of power and impunity were not exceptions but the norm.[11] The Social Institutions and Gender Index describes a complex web of factors that fuel gender inequality and SGBV in CAR. These include the lack of democratic government, perceptions that women are inferior to men, and high rates of poverty. As noted by Moga-Kpely, the prevailing norms in CAR hold that a woman cannot raise her voice, and that after her parents have received the bride price she is then the 'property' of her husband. According to these norms, she should fulfil her reproductive role by giving birth to many children while satisfying her husband's perceived sexual and domestic needs.

Under Article 209 of the Family Code, the minimum age for marriage in CAR is 18 years for women and men. However, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) reported that the practices of forced and early marriages were customary in CAR.[12] While the constitution grants women and girls equal rights to own property and to inherit family property, CEDAW noted that in practice women are discriminated against with regard to inheritance rights. The constraints on women's reproductive rights in CAR mean that women have limited control over what happens to their bodies. Indeed, marital rape is not criminalised and abortion is prohibited, except where necessary to save a woman's life. Abortion is not allowed in the case of pregnancy after rape, partly for religious reasons.[13]

5 Mercy Corps (2009) 'Fighting for their homes', Mercy Corps blog, 25 September 2009. See www.mercycorps.org.uk/cassandranelson/blog/16406 (accessed 10 October 2013)

6 US Department of State (2011) *2010 Human Rights Report: Central African Republic*. See www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/2010/af/154337.htm (accessed 10 October 2013)

7 Moga-Kpely A C, Zewei Y (2013) 'Gender-based violence in Central African Republic', *International Journal of Social Science and Humanity*, 3(1): 13–16

8 Ministry of Economy, Planning and International Cooperation (2007) *Central African Republic: Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper 2008–2010*

9 Amnesty International (2004) *Central African Republic: Five months of war against women*. See www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr19/001/2004/en/ (accessed 10 October 2013)

10 Tearfund (2015) *To make our voices heard: Listening to survivors of sexual violence in Central African Republic*. See http://tilz.tearfund.org/~/media/Files/TILZ/HIV/Make%20our%20voices%20web.pdf

11 United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner (2013) 'Central African Republic: UN human rights experts raise alarm on continuous violence and insecurity'. See http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=13607&LangID=E (accessed 16 September 2013)

12 CEDAW (2013) *Considerations of reports submitted by states parties under Article 18 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women: Central African Republic: Fourth periodic report of states parties* (original in French)

13 United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2013) *World Abortion Policies 2013*

The influence of religion in shaping norms of masculinities

There is limited research examining the role of religion and religious institutions in promoting issues of gender equality, and none of the literature surveyed has focused on the role of faith communities as a key influencer in CAR. However, in such a context of ongoing conflict and displacement where the state provision of services breaks down, faith groups remain. Most people in CAR identify as belonging to a religion, and faith leaders are thus influential leaders of opinion within communities.

There is a growing body of research that finds both negative and positive connections between religion and gender norms in Africa. For instance, on a negative note, religious individuals are much more likely to support the idea that men are supposed to inhabit the public sphere while women are meant to take care of the domestic or private sphere.[14] Similarly, Moyo argues that many uphold notions of male supremacy in terms of male headship, which confers authority and power to men, including the control of women's bodies and female sexuality.[15]

On a positive note, Chitando and Chirongoma suggest that religion can be an important tool in the development of masculinities that are life-giving in a world facing the effects of violence.[16] To this end, Freij has highlighted the importance of actively engaging religious leaders, which contributed to ending early child marriage in one context. This resulted in improved health and social outcomes and an increased value placed on girls and their education.[17] Similarly, Lusey et al. found a small number of youths who challenged current gender norms and suggested alternative ways of being a man and a woman.[18]

In spite of these mixed results, this research is based on the belief that better understanding of what faith leaders say and think about masculinities is of the utmost importance. Faith leaders may have influence on people's attitudes and sexual behaviours in their respective faith-based organisations and in the society at large. Where faith leaders are adequately engaged and equipped, they can be vital catalysts within communities for positive change around social norms. As mentioned at the outset of this report, research on masculinities among faith leaders is relatively scarce and has received little attention in faith settings in CAR to date.

Tearfund's response

Tearfund began working in CAR again in 2013 as a response to the current crisis, seeking to meet multi-sectoral emergency needs. As part of its engagement with faith-based partners and the displaced communities of CAR, Tearfund seeks to mobilise and equip faith leaders and faith groups to address SGBV within their communities. In April–May 2015, Tearfund conducted research with 151 survivors of sexual violence, to map their experiences and priorities in order to ensure a more survivor-centric response.[19] Following this, Tearfund initiated trainings on SGBV for faith leaders (both Christian and Muslim) in Bangui in September 2015. In order to address root causes of the violence and tackle harmful social norms, Tearfund is now initiating a catalyst programme to train faith leaders and members of faith communities to understand the cost of traditional norms of masculinities in relation to culture and theology, and to engage in transforming harmful norms within their communities.

14 Whitehead A L (2012) 'Gender ideology and religion: Does a masculine image of God matter?' *Review of Religious Research* 54(2): 139–156

15 Moyo F (2005) 'Sex, gender, power and HIV/AIDS in Malawi: Threats and challenges to women being church', *Journal of Constructive Theology* 10(1): 85–102

16 Chitando E, Chirongoma S, eds. (2012) *Redemptive masculinities: Men, HIV and religion*, 1–28

17 Freij L S (2010) *'Safe age of marriage' in Yemen: Fostering change in social norms – A case study*, USAID

18 Lusey H et al. (2014) 'Conflicting discourses of church youths on masculinity and sexuality in the context of HIV in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo', *SAHARA* 11(1): 84–93

19 Tearfund (2015) *To make our voices heard: Listening to survivors of sexual violence in Central African Republic*. See http://tilz.tearfund.org/~/media/Files/TILZ/HIV/Make%20our%20voices%20web.pdf

AIMS OF THIS RESEARCH

To support and contextualise this response, and in an attempt to fill the gaps in research noted above around issues of gender and masculinities in CAR, particularly from a faith perspective, Tearfund commissioned a piece of qualitative research. This research had the following aims:

- to explore existing social norms, practices and attitudes of men, women, youth and faith leaders on gender, masculinities and SGBV

- to find out the intersections between faith and gender.

Ethical considerations

The research consultant, Hendrew Lusey, sought and obtained verbal informed consent and permission to take notes from all participants. These informants were also assured that their participation was voluntary and were guaranteed anonymity and non-judgemental attitudes during interviews and focus group discussions.

METHOD

Research participants

The inclusion criterion for participation in the study was to be a faith leader (either male or female, and from various levels of leadership). All informants were purposefully chosen to include demographic, geographic and faith background variation. The participants' ages ranged from 18 to 65 years and their education level from high school to university. They belonged to Catholic, Protestant and Muslim communities. The informants came from Bangui and were reimbursed the equivalent of $2 USD for travel expenses.

Data collection

Data was directly collected by the consultant in Bangui during the period 7–14 December, 2015. Key informant interviews (KII) and focus group discussions (FGD) are useful tools in gaining insights into the meaning people make of their lived experience and were methods used to collect data in this study. In total, 157 participants, of whom 67 (43 per cent) were women, were interviewed through ten FGDs and nine KIIs, which lasted two hours each. An interview topic guide used by Tearfund for similar masculinity studies in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) was adapted to suit the Central African context. This topic guide helped to explore Christian and Muslim faith leaders' perceptions of masculinities and femininities. For security reasons, Christians were interviewed at the Faculty of Evangelical Theology of Bangui (FATEB) conference rooms, where the risk of disturbance was low. For Muslims, the interviews took place at an imam's residence. At each session, those present introduced themselves and participants were informed of the aim and purpose of the FGD or the interviews, and guidelines were agreed upon.

The participants freely chose either French or Sango (the local language spoken in Bangui). The consultant ensured that the interviews were conversational, allowing him to gather data by engaging in a flexible and open dialogue with the respondents. All interviews were fully transcribed verbatim. The participants responded to issues of masculinities covering the following programmatic areas: sexual and reproductive health, Gender-Equitable Men scale, SGBV, domestic duties and daily life, and the intersection of faith and gender. At the beginning of FGDs, most groups appeared reserved when talking about masculinities, femininities, violence and sexuality. But as discussions progressed, these conversations became more relaxed, and the participants' willingness to respond emerged. The participants discussed whether they 'agreed' or 'disagreed' with a number of statements regarding their attitudes and those of other community members towards the issues under investigation, and then talked through their responses (see Appendix 1).

Data analysis

Four steps were used in the process of the thematic data analysis: immersion, coding, categorising and generating themes.[20] The first step was immersion in the data, which was characterised by repeated reading of the interview scripts. Secondly, the data was coded by making notes in the margins of the transcripts. After the preliminary analysis, the codes were revisited to check their relevance; if necessary, they were then re-coded. This process required moving forward and backward through the transcripts. The third step included the creation of categories to find out different codes that shared the same relationships. Similarly, codes that indicated contradictions were also sorted into certain categories. The final step was the theme identification and interpretations, moving from a simple descriptive process into analysis of issues related to masculinities.

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20 Green J, Willis K, Hughes E, Small R, Welch N, Gibbs L, Daly J (2007) 'Generating best evidence from qualitative research: the role of data analysis', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health* 31(6): 545–550

FINDINGS

The overall themes that emerged from FGDs and KIIs fall under the following five programmatic areas:

- sexual and reproductive health

- Gender-Equitable Men scale

- SGBV

- domestic duties and daily life

- the intersection of faith and gender.

The different themes are described below, and direct quotations from participants are presented in italics.

1 Sexual and reproductive health

This section mainly focuses on the participants' perceptions of relationships between men and women. These included the following key themes:

- Heterosexual dating of women and girls is allowed

- Wives who refuse to have sex with husbands are seen as 'sinners' and 'criminals'

- Married women: husbands' property and/or partners?

- Challenges of underage marriage.

1.1 Heterosexual dating of women and girls is allowed

Many participants noted that heterosexual dating would be seen as an acceptable practice within this context. Men and boys may display signs of romantic love and inquire about women's and girls' availability for friendly and possibly sexual encounters. In the same vein, the participants reported that women and girls viewed dating as a normal way to begin to engage in heterosexual relationships with potential lovers and partners. A young woman explained the dating process as follows:

'I'm a woman whose heart is human and I can't accept being harassed. On the other hand, single and married men very often try to pick me up. Throughout the process, I exercise my freedom to choose my sexual partners on the basis of my values.'

Despite a growing trend of sexual harassment in the city (reported in personal communication), the participants commented that harassment of all types, including of a sexual nature, would be perceived as both an insult to and an offence against women and girls.

1.2 Wives who refuse to have sex with husbands are seen as 'sinners' and 'criminals'

The participants noted that gender norms related to sex and sexuality often place men in dominating roles and women in subordinate or passive roles in Bangui. These unequal relationships were perceived to be reinforced by larger legal, social, economic and religious gender inequalities. As a result, inequalities in power between men and women would limit women's abilities to control whether, when and how to engage in sexual relationships.

In this sense, some participants reported that 'real women' should make themselves available for sex, and those who refuse to have sex with their partners were seen as 'sinners' who cause an irreparable situation that may pressurise their male partners to become violent and possibly to have extramarital sex with multiple concurrent partners. Such men were seen as more likely to become infected with HIV and infect their wives and other sexual partners. Therefore, married women refusing to have sex with their husbands could be

viewed as 'criminals' who may by their behaviour increase the risk for their husbands of contracting and spreading HIV and dying of AIDS-related diseases. One young man angrily argued as follows:

'Quite often, women may deprive their husbands of sex with them. If I'm suffering and my wife refuses to have sex with me, that could make me become violent. I could go with other women to satisfy myself sexually… After all, she's not the only woman in town. But I might contract HIV and die of AIDS.'

In addition, the participants stressed that women who refuse sex with their partners would be more likely to allow their husbands/partners to spend their slim resources on additional sexual partners, whom the informants called 'second bureaux', 'small houses' or mistresses. These women were considered as people who may financially and economically ruin partners' entire families because of their consumerist mentality and extravagant expense on jewellery and fashionable clothes. Despite these mixed feelings, the overall perceptions of participants, especially for female participants, were that women can refuse sex. According to them, too much sex would harm women's and men's health as they may lose weight. An old woman insisted:

'Having sex all the time can cause both men and women to lose a lot of weight. When a man loses weight, people may say that his wife isn't looking after him properly.'

Furthermore, a minority of participants said that a married woman can decline opportunities for having sex with her husband for a number of reasons. These include the 'lack of interest in it', 'menstruation', 'unhappiness in having sex' and 'when they are exhausted'. A female partner reported:

'When your wife isn't willing to have sex, you (the husband) can wait for another opportunity.'

1.3   Married women: husbands' property and/or partners?

When it comes to issues related to partnerships in marriage, the participants highlighted the fact that certain husbands and in-laws may view the bride price as a commercial transaction for sex. This mirrors an image of modern slavery for some married women, given that their husbands allow them only restricted movement beyond the home. A young woman commented:

'Once the bride price has been paid, the husband thinks he has bought a woman and may stop his wife from travelling even to visit her relatives, colleagues and friends. As a result, married women usually find themselves reduced to the status of slaves.'

Because of the bride price, married women would be obliged to give birth to numerous children. Where the married woman is perceived to be infertile, the husband is allowed to look for additional women, since his family members may say that the woman 'bought' is not producing children. According to the participants, men are supposed to father children in CAR. It is only when the couple is divorced and the woman remarries and becomes pregnant by another man that people may have the evidence of the first husband's infertility, resulting in the reimbursement of the dowry. Conversely, the majority of participants felt that married women are human beings whose bride price should be considered as a symbolic act demonstrating a social alliance between two families. These married women should be viewed as partners and not as their husbands' or partners' property. A young woman painfully explained:

'I'm a woman, not a slave. The bride price should be seen as a badge of honour for myself and my husband. In fact, the bride price shouldn't be seen as an opportunity for men to have sex every day. My husband shouldn't make me suffer by having unplanned sex given that I'm his other half.'

1.4   Challenges of underage marriage

The majority of participants perceived early marriage as entailing harmful effects for parents, the youths themselves and their partners. It was associated with negative health outcomes and would be prohibited by certain religious and cultural precepts, yet was reported as something that occurs within communities. Many youths face financial hardship and would be unable to provide for themselves and their children, given their physical immaturity. They may therefore be unprepared for such a marriage, as they are still dependent on their parents for the provision of basic amenities. According to the participants, young people may choose early marriage as an opportunity to have early sexual activities, but this might result in unwanted

pregnancies. Consequently, they may discontinue their studies and become abandoned and delinquent youths, and without support end up living in the streets. Negative health outcomes included malnutrition, high risk of caesarean sections for young women, and increased youth morbidity and mortality. A young man lamented:

'Our little sisters of 13 or 14 years of age fall pregnant and get married prematurely and they die when they try to give birth to their children.'

One participant shared the opinion that young women may get married when they turn 17 since, according to her, their hips would then be large enough to bear a child.

2 Gender-Equitable Men scale

The themes that emerged from this section were:

- Economically disempowered women versus women as contributors to development
- Women as carers of children
- Not all women have agency to prevent pregnancies
- Men as breadwinners for nuclear and extended families
- Men are economically disempowered
- To be a man, a man has to be tough
- Alternative forms of masculinities.

2.1 Economically disempowered women versus women as contributors to development

There were contradictory perceptions voiced, with women seen both as economically disempowered and incapable, and also as contributors to society and family development.

2.1.1 Economically disempowered women

The participants reported that female empowerment may not lead to increased decision-making power for women in the family, and generally perceived working women as suspicious and arrogant people who could undermine a husband's authority. Overall, the participants viewed women as passive, lazy, unskilled, unemployed, dependent on men and incompetent. A young man raised concerns about the capacity of women by saying:

'Making a significant contribution to the development of their households poses various challenges for women quite simply because they are incompetent.'

2.1.2 Women as contributors to society and family development

Contrary to the above perceptions, women were nonetheless expected to share responsibilities and to work together with their partners as contributors to social and family development in a complementary way. Certain women were even thought to be able to do some prestigious jobs that had previously been the preserve of men. For instance, a few respondents referred to the incumbent president of CAR, who is a woman. Viewed through these lenses of gender dynamics, these kinds of women were also perceived as significant contributors to social development, given the political instability and economic hardships in the country. However, where traditional gender roles are challenged, resultant conflicts within families were noted. An elderly man explained:

'Many men don't have any money at present. While some women put a lot of effort into getting money to build houses, it may be that the land belongs to the husband and the house to the woman. This way of doing things can cause divisions between the children, especially as some will back their fathers and others their mothers.'

In this sense, women as contributors to family development were portrayed as having specific needs, such as resource provision for their own children. For these women, such needs were not met by jobless, careless and uncaring men. An elderly woman shared her experience as follows:

'In the neighbourhood where I live, I know someone who got married to a man who seemed like a Prince Charming at the time. As soon as my colleague began to get pregnant and have children, her husband refused to pay for the medical care of his own children. My colleague began to ask her friends for help from time to time and was forced to take her children to health centres where the quality of care leaves a lot to be desired.'

To overcome the above challenges, women as contributors to family development were viewed as mothers, educators of children and family managers. In so doing, they were considered as a positive asset for their families, as hard workers and advisers to their husbands and/or partners in the fulfilment of their projects. Another elderly woman shared her example of contributing to her children's education:

'My husband was an administrator in the public sector who is now retired. The small-scale trading I'm doing in China means that it's me who's earning a bit of money to pay for the children's education.'

2.2 Women as carers of children

The social expectations about it being the woman's role to care for the children were discussed from many different perspectives. The participants said that women are already prepared by their parents to fulfil their responsibility to care for children and to carry out domestic activities such as cooking, washing clothes and ironing. Several participants reported that people in Bangui do not see the care of children as 'work' but rather as a natural part of being female. Referring to the context of financial hardship in Bangui, some female participants tried to justify women's burden of care when their husbands were busy looking for food. An older woman stressed:

'It's normal for a woman to look after her children. My husband goes out every morning to earn enough to feed the children. He very often comes back tired and worn out. He often visits his elderly mother in another camp for internally displaced people and comes home just to eat and sleep. So long as this man goes on battling to make ends meet, I can't expect him to look after the children.'

As a result, responsibility for childcare often limits women's and girls' access to productive resources, such as income-generating activities and food production, and sadly certain girls may be unable to attend school. Many participants noted that a mother is well placed to take care of children since she knows their needs better. Conversely, men were viewed as people who would be insensitive towards children's well-being, since they spend most of resources on womanising and alcohol. Another woman said:

'I don't know how much my husband earns or what he does with the money. At the end of each month, he gives me just a little money but then disappears with the rest of his salary. When his money runs out, he comes to me to take back what little money I have left for feeding the children.'

Still, a few participants argued that children's care and education is a shared responsibility that requires fathers' and mothers' concerted efforts. In embracing this, parents demonstrate their love towards their offspring. An elderly man puts it as follows:

'Both (father and mother) should be responsible for looking after the children. My wife goes to town three times a week to try to sell her wares. I'm a builder with no stable employment in Bangui. When she's travelling, I take responsibility for looking after our three children.'

2.3 Not all women have agency to prevent pregnancies

The informants' perceptions were that certain women would have limited agency to prevent pregnancy because they were viewed as not owning their bodies. Instead, they were forced to have unprotected sex, which might end in unwanted pregnancy. These women were seen as suffering during pregnancy. In certain instances, women whose husbands travelled for work were thought to be impregnated by them before they travelled away from home to keep them busy. Several women were perceived to be at risk of being abandoned

if they refused to have sex with their husbands/partners. Refusing to acknowledge paternity was also a common practice among married and unmarried young men, and unwanted children might not be cared for. An older woman lamented:

'Women have limited ability to prevent pregnancies, so lots of young women fall pregnant. This explains the large numbers of street children in Bangui.'

However, the participants considered certain women as having the agency to prevent and control pregnancy, since they were regarded as highly educated, economically independent women who are aware of childbearing issues and able to avoid having unplanned children. In so doing, they might use contraceptives in order to space their children and to remain in a good health. A young woman described her own example as follows:

'I'm already the unmarried mother of one child. If I go on having children all over the place, I might have to stop studying and end up destitute.'

The participants were aware that women alone cannot effectively control and prevent pregnancies, since some of them were forced by their partners to have sex during ovulation or were not able to access birth control. To avoid the culture of blaming the victim, the participants suggested that men and boys should be more engaged in preventing pregnancies for a number of reasons. These included the fact that they determine the terms of sex and may be willing or unwilling to use condoms.

2.4 Men as breadwinners for nuclear and extended families

From the participants' perspective, most 'real men' normally assert their power and privileges of masculinity when they are able to share their goods with members of nuclear and extended families. Sharing food was perceived as an obvious example of consolidating social and societal ties that may protect them from jealousy, envy and witchcraft within extended families. According to female participants, the household is secure when the man shares his food. Otherwise, his needy family members may suspect his wife of being a witch who negatively influences her husband to stop sharing. As a result, his nuclear family can break down. A young man put it as follows:

'In Bangui, real men are seen by their capacity to buy food and drink to feed their family members.'

Another reason that was cited for men to share their goods with nuclear and extended families included some social security measures in a time of financial challenges. Therefore, family members may stand in solidarity with that man in exchange for help. Conversely, certain male breadwinners were criticised as being selfish people who may eat expensive food in luxury restaurants downtown while their own children are starving at home. Similarly, the study participants referred to certain breadwinners as selfish people who may use costly modern phones while their own wives do not have any modern means of communication.

2.5 Men are economically disempowered

Contrary to these social expectations of men as being breadwinners and providing financially for their families, most men were currently perceived as economically disempowered and jobless. There was a perception that they have lost their identity as men because of the recurrent civil wars in Bangui. A young man regretfully explained his socio-economic situation due to the ongoing conflict:

'Before the war, I had opened some cybercafés which were then pillaged by the militia. I don't know what to do now. I'm waiting for peace to be restored in the country.'

Consequently, such men viewed themselves as degraded men, given the fact that some women would be increasingly seeking paid work either to supplement family income or to fill the gap resulting from the absence of a real earner (ie a man). The perception was that when such hardworking women might come back home late or would be absent, the economically disempowered partner or husband would be undermined. A young woman noted with pride:

'These days, our men are useless because they just hang around at home and don't take care of their wives. After a few days' intensive work, I sometimes come home tired and worn out. This stupid man (my husband) can't go questioning me about where I've been.'

However, some participants recognise that, given the current economic circumstances in Bangui, women's contributions from paid work should be encouraged. The challenge was that the extent to which disempowered men would support the continued work of some working women outside the home was unclear and deserves further investigation.

2.6 To be a man, a man has to be tough

Most participants linked toughness with the key masculine characteristic of being a protector, especially of their family members, peers and girlfriends and of themselves in the current political instability in Bangui. The majority of male participants identified toughness as an important way to display power, privilege, pride and the reputation of their masculinities in their communities. Nevertheless, some participants who contested men's toughness thought that a tough man would not be communicating with people living around him. In addition, tough men would not be popular in the community and may miss job opportunities if they are unemployed because many people would not let them know about them. More importantly, there was a perception that such men may be unapproachable by their own children, since they would be nicknamed in the Sango language 'django men', meaning violent men. A young man lamented:

'Tough men may terrify their children and those around them. So then what's the point?'

2.7 Alternative forms of masculinities

While there was a widespread acceptance of violent and gender-inequitable norms among both women and men, there were also men and women who actively challenged these norms and whose attitudes reflected positive forms of masculinities. These included caring, non-violent and responsible masculinities. Responsible masculinities were defined in terms of men being providers, breadwinners and working men, who were seen as able to prevent both pregnancies and HIV. Where necessary, these men could be found engaging in self-defence positions to safeguard their families. Caring men were viewed as responsible, sympathetic, enthusiastic, tender, listening, laughing and helping. An older woman expressed appreciation for her husband:

'My husband is an extraordinary man who looks after his children, although his parents don't like him doing so. If our child falls ill, my husband will take him to the nearest health centre for attention. He'll also buy medicines if necessary and show me how to administer them to the child.'

The participants were cautious as they considered that there are multiple ways of being a man in CAR. While certain men were seen as authoritative, others were perceived as collaborative. In their opinion, men would be biologically the same; however, their behaviours are completely different according to their levels of education and instruction. They went on to say that compared to an unskilled man, an educated one was more likely to manage his family successfully.

3 SGBV

In some FGDs, the participants developed and discussed causal flaws or problem trees in order to identify causes and consequences of violence. This section reports on the following key themes that emerged:

- Rejection of all forms of SGBV – but stigma for survivors

- Women 'should tolerate violence'

- Women 'asking' to be raped

- Marital rape is forced sex

- Marital rape is a common occurrence

- Factors that enable marital rape

- Complexity of rape as an issue within this context.

3.1 Rejection of all forms of SGBV – but stigma for survivors

The participants acknowledged the existence of SGBV, and most of the informants said that SGBV should not be tolerated under any circumstances because it would be a human rights abuse which may have negative implications in children's lives and education. In this sense, the participants perceived raped women as tortured and traumatised people whose health might be jeopardised by problems such as fistulas. They went on to say that children whose fathers are absent (including those born as a result of rape) may feel abandoned and may end up as street children, and noted the cyclical nature of violence, as these abandoned children may also violate their own partners when they grow up. They noted that the current political upheaval, characterised by massive internal displacement, exacerbated violence against women. This was portrayed by the participants as an evil to be rejected. Some focused the blame on the perpetrators. A young man angrily criticised men inclined to violence:

'A woman is not a horse needing to be broken in all the time. A man who rapes a woman is a criminal who may be roughly treated by his neighbours. An educated man will negotiate with his wife.'

However, it was clear that most of the stigma of rape was borne by survivors, particularly in the context of Bangui where women are mainly seen with an eye to future marriage markets. The participants viewed women who were violated as enslaved, degraded, reduced and disrespected. Though SGBV would be occurring behind closed doors, certain violated women were perceived as disfigured by losing their physical beauty. Female survivors were commonly perceived as bearing the stigma and shame of rape.

3.2 Women 'should tolerate violence'

While most participants stated they rejected SGBV in principle, as the discussion progressed, in contradiction to this, many (both male and female) stressed that there are times women deserve to be beaten and disciplined. Women who 'deserved' physical discipline included those who were perceived as capricious, those seeking confrontation with men, those hating their husband's siblings, drunkards, women living beyond their means and those who refuse to have sex with their husbands/partners.

'Two weeks ago, I refused to have sex with my husband and he really beat me up. For personal reasons, I decided not to take him to court. Now I'm living under the same roof as him just to take care of my children.'

This quote underscores the perceptions of the majority of female participants who thought that married women should tolerate violence for the opportunity to educate and care for their own children. In their opinion, should divorce occur, step-mothers may dislike their partners' children and this may result in them becoming delinquent. Meanwhile, remarried women themselves would be stigmatised for having sex and possibly children with multiple partners. In this way, they would be viewed with disrespect and disdain.

A few respondents thought of violence as a sign of love:

'Some women tolerate violence on the pretext that their partners love them. For that kind of woman, violence is a clear sign of love.'

Alongside these discussions, an older woman confirmed the perception of an overall trend of both female and male participants to suggest that women should tolerate violence if they cannot fulfil their perceived female obligations.

'As a woman, wife and mother of four children, I have a lot to do to keep my house clean, tidy and smart for members of my family and my husband. If it turned out that I couldn't fulfil my social roles of cooking, cleaning and looking after my children, my husband would be entitled to discipline me.'

3.3 Women 'asking' to be raped

Among the participants, there was a widespread belief that women with 'bad reputations' and those 'who dress in sexy clothes' might be encouraging rape – or 'asking for it'. Women with bad reputations included night walkers, commercial sex workers and those having sex with multiple partners. In the same vein, women

wearing provocative, extravagant, revealing, sexy and tight clothes were viewed as complicit and as inviting rape. As a result, men would be tempted visually to make a sexual assault. These kinds of women would be raped because of their ignorance and arrogance in wearing such clothes. Some participants reported that some men rape women as a way to discipline, dishonour and punish them for such behaviour – and so these women should change their behaviours. An older man commented:

'Women who wear sexy clothes that reveal their underwear and private parts should be criticised and disciplined. It attracts men who may rape them when they see these things on show.'

The perception was that women who do not want to be raped will definitely fight back. To this end, an old woman described a situation that recently took place in Bangui:

'A young woman was picked up by a former militiaman. After they'd agreed the terms of their partnership, they went to a military camp where the young woman was gang raped by three soldiers. When the fourth soldier tried to have sex with her, she got up to run away, but she was shot in the leg.'

However, several participants, mostly young women, contested these descriptions related to women inciting rape, and instead placed the blame on the perpetrators. For them, these rape perpetrators were 'sick', 'not normal', 'illiterate', 'drunkards' and 'useless guys'. Although the participants did not reach a unanimous resolution on whether or not women can provoke rape, the perception was that very often society still blames women for rape. A young woman disapproved of this societal complacency about rape and angrily said:

'A woman can't enjoy being raped. If she raises her voice to speak out, that's because she really doesn't like this unpleasant and bestial sex act.'

3.4   Marital rape is forced sex

According to the participants, certain married women may consider as forced sex any sexual activity that they may have with their husbands without informed consent. For them, marital rape would be considered as a tiring, dangerous, inhuman sexual practice, which is unprepared for and unaccepted, as it may lead to unwanted pregnancies. The majority of female participants said that for sex to be satisfactory, it should be consensual and carefully prepared for. They went on to say that the male partner should come home in due time to dialogue with his partner and to touch her intimately. The feeling of romantic love will progressively emerge as the partner will appreciate his female partner's looks and clothes. A young woman said:

'A man is not a cockerel who can have sex without his partner's consent. Some men are brutal, selfishly forcing their partners to have sex, and women don't like that. Sex should be planned at least over a day so that it's consensual and gives both partners pleasure.'

3.5   Marital rape is a common occurrence

According to the participants, marital rape is a common occurrence in this context, and a sexual practice that many married women experience very frequently. They viewed marital rape as any sexual activities that these women are subjected to just to please their husbands sexually while they themselves may suffer in silence. These women would be afraid to refuse such non-consensual sex for fear that their partners would seek extramarital affairs. To increase the potential for a husband's faithfulness in a marriage relationship, an elderly woman suggested firmly:

'A married woman can't refuse to have sex with her husband because you get married for better and for worse. Married women who make themselves available for sex with their husbands are trying to keep them faithful.'

Meanwhile, men who have many sexual partners were viewed as wasting scarce resources on womanising and heavy alcohol consumption. Given its perceived domestic nature, the informants felt that the issue of marital rape would be sidelined by ill-equipped faith leaders, and more importantly that a specific law condemning marital rape does not exist in CAR.

3.6 Factors that enable marital rape

Given the bride price requirement in marriage, and the fact that Christian and Islamic teaching allows sex to take place within marriage bonds, many participants firmly believed that marriage gives a man total sexual access to a woman. Therefore, alongside the discussions, some participants would not consider that a man could be committing rape within the context of marriage. An older man said:

'From my point of view, there can be no marital violence in the case of a marriage sealed in the presence of the administrative authorities, church pastors and members of both families in the community. If a married man can't have sex with his wife, who else will provide him with those intimate sexual services that lay the foundations for a marriage?'

3.7 Complexity of rape as an issue within this context

The participants raised many issues related to the complexity of rape. They shared examples of conventionally well dressed women who are raped in their family homes, which are supposed to provide them with safety and security. The above examples of marital rape were also listed. In their opinion, old women as well as girls are equally violated. Participants identified men who are unsuccessful in dating, and men who are inclined to violence, as those who rape women, and reported that even soldiers of the UN in Bangui (MINUSCA) rape women. They concluded that, given an enabling environment, any man can rape a women. In this sense, young men noted that some of their peers pressurise young women to have sex with them by threatening to leave them if they do not comply. After such an episode of rape, a young woman said that she might continue providing sexual services to her partner but without a firm commitment of true love. Given these mixed feelings and complex experiences, this may be an interesting area for further research.

4 Domestic duties and daily life

In this section, the participants reflected on how they construct the image of men and women in their society. The subsequent themes that emerged included:

- Gender norms as a relational, religious and economic construct
- Men are the masters
- Men as the heads of household
- Women as decision-makers
- Women's work
- Men doing women's work
- Inheritance of family land.

4.1 Gender norms as a relational, religious and economic construct

The participants debated the importance of women obeying men who were viewed as heads of families, working, providing, controlling, masters, decision-makers, commanders, marriage initiators, made by God in his image, and created first by God. Two older women referred to the Bible and the Qur'an to confirm women's obedience to men as a spiritual requirement:

The Bible says that women should be completely submissive to their husbands.'

'In Islam, the Qu'ran tells women that they should be submissive to their husbands so they can go to Paradise.'

In spite of these religious requirements, some women argued that they would only obey men who are good, caring, providing, respectful and non-violent.

'My husband trusts me all the more because I obey him. Sometimes he does the washing for the whole family. When he's travelling away from home, he keeps me informed. He is open towards my parents and doesn't waste resources.'

Overall, the perception was that men can listen to women and do not need to obey them because women were 'created from men's rib', were 'too emotional' and would be the weaker sex in bed. A man who obeys a woman may be marginalised, since his family members may believe that he is bewitched by his wife. As a result, such men would be advised to divorce their wives. Some female participants noted that women would be obeyed by men when they had some money and looked beautiful enough to seduce men who were 'hungry' for sex, but that this power was transient. A young woman explained:

'When women have a bit of money, men may sweet talk them just to get their hands on it. Similarly, when men need sex, they might promise you everything. Unfortunately, after sex, they won't need you any more though, you'll see!'

This seems to imply that relationships between some men and some women would be less about friendship, mutual respect and support, and more about money and sex. In this vein, the participants shared their perspectives of multiple and concurrent partnerships that seem to be a common understanding in this context, in an interlocked system that includes transactional and intergenerational sex. Gender inequality is translated into norms that link love and sex to material giving and receiving in the context of Bangui, where the material needs and aspirations of young women are growing faster than the ability of parents and boyfriends to meet those needs and aspirations. As a result, several young women would be entering into multiple partnerships with at least four male sexual partners. These different partners fulfil different needs, including companionship, good sex, transportation fees, help with school fees, clothing and entertainment. Another young woman stressed:

'Men are very poor in Bangui these days. Many girls can no longer count on just one man to meet their needs. So we go out with several men as sexual partners to get as much as we can. Sometimes a young girl may have four or five partners to satisfy different needs. Young women are nevertheless obliged to do their best not to disclose their lovers' secrets.'

The participants believed that a man who does not have an income would be of no value. In addition, men were expected to make investments and purchase goods of a high value to uphold their family's reputation.

4.2   Men are the masters

Most participants subscribed to rigid ideas of gender roles in the home, and because of men's perceived strength, resilience and intelligence, they were considered as best placed to provide for the family. By contrast, women were rarely perceived to be leaders in the home, since their movements outside the home were restricted. Consequently, they were considered as emotional, irresponsible and bad managers, and most women felt excluded in the management of productive services in society at large. However, their added value was largely recognised in the field of reproductive matters and in managing basic items such as food and drink for the household. In some instances, certain relationships ended in divorce where this provision was not met. One young woman described her situation as follows:

'My husband was a teacher and stopped giving me money when he was taken back onto the government payroll. For several years, I struggled to endure this dreadful financial situation for the benefit of my children. When I realised he wasn't going to change, I divorced him.'

Despite the prevalence of such discourse related to the norms of hegemonic masculinities, certain participants were aware that men are not all the same. Some would obviously act like masters, but others were collaborative. According to these participants, men are biologically the same; however, their behaviours would be heavily influenced by education and instruction. For them, an educated man would manage his family effectively by handling conflict peacefully, but where the man is considered as a master he would rebuke his wife in public. An old woman painfully expressed her view on the ways in which men who are considered as masters act:

'Because the man is seen as a master, I have to obey him because he might hit me, insult me and mistreat me in the presence of other influential people. This is a matter of shame for us women.'

4.3   Men as the heads of household

Religion and traditions were seen to play a particularly strong role in constructing masculine identity and were usually connected to the home. As noted by several participants, the influence of religion depended on men's importance in the family. In this sense, some men were even seen as a 'god' in their families, possessing divine power. Therefore, they were viewed as enlightened decision-makers able to control their spouses and children. Given these privileges and their perceived high education status, these men would have the final word in matters concerning their families. A young man said:

'It's an obligation! It's the man who leads, commands and decides everything.'

Some participants said that religion and the current socio-economic situation in Bangui played a very important role in negatively influencing masculinities, since men were now unemployed, disempowered, subordinated and considered as objects and as lacking in dignity. Therefore, they were seen as part of the problem regarding the socio-economic situation both within families and in the country. Two young men stressed:

'In Bangui, quite a few men are unemployed and corruption is a daily problem. This partly explains the precarious position of our families and the ongoing conflict in the country.'

'The role of male leadership is not necessarily related to our fragile socio-economic situation. God created men as leaders and they should stay that way.'

4.4   Women as decision-makers

As stated earlier in this report, a few participants were aware that some women have already entered into workplaces that were initially reserved for men. Such women were perceived as modern, working and highly paid, and may therefore have the final word concerning their health and other family matters. This was seen as reflecting negatively on the man. An older man shared his perspective on women having the final word:

'So long as the woman can be the one working, she can keep her money. She can also reject her husband's decisions, because it's the person who pays who calls the shots. The man's dignity is threatened, especially if the children know that the money on which the household depends comes from their mother. As a result, the man loses his worth as a man, all the more so because his wife has the last word.'

Most participants' perception was that, regardless of the women's status and prominent roles that certain women may play in society, men are the masters and should have the final word. Furthermore, some women may have money and refuse to contribute to the well-being of their families. Given these mixed feelings about women as decision-makers, the overall consensus was that it is mainly about economic power: the better-off person (male or female) has the final word.

4.5   Women's work

All the participants viewed women as the main cooks, cleaners and carers of children. They were considered as good managers who know their children's and family's needs. Several cultural aspects and interpretations of sacred texts were highlighted to endorse the compulsory caring work of women within the home. However, some participants (mostly men) felt that when women are left alone to do this work, they may end up exhausted and fragile, and may not be able to satisfy their partners sexually at night. Alternatively, they suggested a shared responsibility between men and women for daily chores, citing this as something some European men would do. There were perceptions that whenever women were unable to contribute economically to their households, they would not be respected by men. To overcome this constraint, women and men were both expected to contribute to the well-being of the household. A young woman said:

'Both (the man and the woman) should manage the home consistently, and either one could come up with the ideas for increasing their household's prosperity.'

4.6 Men doing women's work

Despite reported levels of joint decision-making processes in the home and discussion that boys and girls may be socialised to do so-called caring work traditionally considered as the preserve of women, the group discussions show that currently men doing 'women's work' are gossiped about and discriminated against and can be perceived negatively as irresponsible or bewitched men. Most of the ways in which the participants described men who show support for gender equity and involve women in the decision-making process, or share household chores, denote weaknesses in the CAR context. The stigma was strong, and certain conservative parents would not condone their boys doing 'women's work'. The general tendency was that women and girls should not expect men to do such work, as men worried about how they would be perceived by others. An elderly man noted:

'If men keep doing women's work, they'll lose their honour, their values and their pride in being men and get referred to [disparagingly] as "sœurs Béatrice" in Bangui.'

However, men who were perceived to contribute to household work, such as doing dishes, cleaning and cooking, were more widely supported by educated young people. For them, doing these jobs was an obvious sign of love and support for their wives or female partners. Educated older men were also more likely to share these roles when their spouses were incapacitated or busy with other domestic duties. A young man pointed out:

'An educated couple can resolve matters of domestic work in a peaceful way.'

Having to prove that they are 'not women' in a patriarchal society where men are meant to assert their hegemonic masculinities, many men would keep their salaries unknown to their partners. The underlying reasons for doing this included fear of being treated as equals and being blamed in the presence of other men for not doing the expected household jobs. This would have negative implications, since men were viewed as the gatekeepers within the current social order that enables the prevailing norms of gender inequality. An older man noted:

'I'm the husband; if I'm in bed, my wife must prepare breakfast for me and not tell me she's already tired. Culture doesn't change; it's only women's access to certain work that has changed.'

4.7 Inheritance of family land

The participants reported that culturally boys would be entitled to inherit family land, as they are expected to stay in the family property even after they get married. They would be expected to take care of family land and defend it against robbers. In so doing, they would keep alive family names. Such requirements were understood as written in the Bible, where young men would be instructed and educated to keep the inheritance for their children. Similarly in sharia law, women and girls would be meant to inherit only small gifts from their husbands and immediate families. Therefore, young men would inherit the permanent items in terms of land, whereas young women would inherit only disposable items, such as gifts.

'Responsible boys who are more inclined to bind than break up family ties can inherit and make rational use of the family property for the benefit of other members of the family.'

However, some participants raised concerns about some boys who may behave irresponsibly by being selfish and spending family gains on womanising, the heavy consumption of alcohol and the prevalent culture of hook-ups (short-term sexual encounters). Hence, providing family land to such boys was perceived as wasting scarce family resources. A young woman voiced her concern by saying:

'A fair share-out of family property is essential. If girls are excluded, some boys may confiscate the property in their own self-interest.'

The consensus that the participants reached was that responsible boys and/or girls may inherit family property, since boys and girls would have the same rights in the current legislation in the country and in the Bible. However, it is clear that this is not always reflected in common attitudes or practice.

5 Intersection of faith and gender

The intersection of faith and gender was complex and the participants provided answers that fall into two categories:

- Negative tendencies
- Positive tendencies.

5.1 Negative tendencies

The following sub-section discusses the participants' perceptions of men's superiority over women, the concept that God created women and men as unequal, the way that faith leadership can promote gender inequality, the fact that faith leaders can demonise survivors of sexual violence, and the ineffective advocacy efforts to end the conflict in the country.

5.1.1 Men's superiority over women

Overwhelmingly, the Christian participants were of the opinion that Adam was created first by God in his own image. His mandate would be to lead, to protect and to provide for his family, and God gave him an imposing physique and authority to be the stronger sex in bed. Both Christians and Muslims who were interviewed strongly felt that male headship in the society, community, faith and family was ascribed to men by God.

'God called on Moses to liberate the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. God gave specific tasks to some men such as Abraham, Samson and Jesus. From those biblical times until today, it has been men who have had to meet society's expectations of what it means to be a man.'

Similarly, the Muslim participants reported that men are the gatekeepers who hold the key that will open the doors of paradise to submissive women. In this sense, the Muslim code would contain clear measures for punishment of prohibited acts, such as refusing sex. An elderly man declared:

'If a woman declines the opportunity to have sex with her husband, she will be cursed by the angels.'

5.1.2 Women's inferiority

The majority of participants believed that Eve was created second and was made in Adam's image, since she came from his rib. This would justify her submissiveness and her role as a second-class citizen, whose role it is to cook, care and provide for her family in the absence of the man. She would also be seen as the weaker sex in bed. While in some progressive evangelical churches, skilled women may play some leadership roles, in mainline churches and in Islam, women were not supposed to lead men either in the home or in religious settings. Two old women lamented:

'In our Baptist denomination, no woman is allowed to preach the word of God from the pulpit. On the contrary, she can only share it during certain women's meetings. On these occasions, a woman may welcome the participants and do the administrative work if necessary. But sharing the word of God is strictly reserved for male pastors.'

'Most men consider women as the weaker sex because women can't cope with stress. Religious leaders, who are men, continue to infantilise women. They think that it's only women who should be submissive and not men.'

The underlying reasons for women's inferiority included their biological make-up, menstruation disturbances, emotions and their perceived lack of focus and tenacity in decision-making processes that would disqualify them for God's ministry. Faith leaders interviewed interpreted certain teachings of Paul that advised women (of his time) to refrain from speaking in public, to justify, defend and perpetuate women's inferiority in faith communities and in society at large. An older man stressed:

'Since the Bible declares that a man is superior to women, the church cannot promote gender equality.'

5.1.3 God made men and women as unequal

Based on these perceptions of men's superiority and women's inferiority, many participants referred to the scriptures to justify men's natural and divine superiority over women. In their understanding, men came from the earth and women from men, and this is why men are physically stronger than women. For them, this would explain the reasons certain jobs are exclusively reserved for men and others for women. In terms of intimate relationships, men were expected to initiate marriage and impregnate women. Marriage initiated by women and girls was perceived by some as a new, mistaken and misleading trend of the younger generation. But this was contested by a young woman who argued as follows:

'The world is changing and some Central African women have successfully initiated marriages.'

Another perceived notable difference that these participants highlighted was the fact that men would urinate while standing up, whereas women urinate seated. Again, the interpretation of scriptures was used to support these biological attributes between women and men and ascribe to them social norms that sustain gender inequality. With these issues in mind, many participants believed that God created men and women as unequal. This viewpoint was shared and repeated by both men and women across different respondent groups.

5.1.4 Ill-equipped faith leadership promotes gender inequality

The participants viewed most faith leaders as gender-inequitable, ill-equipped leaders lacking role models, and abusive leaders who demonise sex and sexuality. These pastors think that sexuality is a taboo subject and a domain that belongs to the devil. As a result, young people are ill-informed about safer sex practices and so may end up with unwanted pregnancies:

'The pastor at my church has never talked about matters of sex and sexual violence. This pastor thinks he shouldn't speak of these things in church, given that some worshippers are under 18. Meanwhile, these young people are already sexually active. Because of the silence, some young girls of 13 or 14 years of age are already getting pregnant. All this is due to the ineffectiveness of the religious leaders who don't educate them for the simple reason that they are not equipped to address these matters of sexuality.'

The participants highlighted that many faith leaders would not be ready to teach gender equality values, as such discourses would weaken men's position and dominance in faith communities and in society at large. An elderly man declared:

'In Islam, a woman is considered like a field belonging to her husband which he can harvest (lie with) and control as he wishes because the man is superior to the woman.'

Several faith leaders were perceived as being pressurised by the gap between social expectations and the realities of being men in faith-based organisations. These constraints include poverty, lack of connections with national and international partners to fund projects belonging to faith groups, dependence on local poor Christians and Muslims, a lack of positive role models from their hierarchies, feelings of powerlessness in the face of the ongoing pervasive conflict, and the eagerness to dominate in the home and in faith communities and to earn respect from faith members. An older man commented:

'Some pastors promote sexual inequality through their teachings and behaviour, wanting to stand out and be seen as stars in their faith communities.'

5.1.5 Faith leaders stigmatise survivors of sexual violence

The participants stressed that, in theory, the task of the church is to care for survivors of sexual violence who suffer because of the consequences of male violence. However, the participants acknowledged significant barriers, including the fact that conservative faith leaders demonise survivors of SGBV. These barriers included stigma, shame, a desire to keep confidentiality, guilt, distrust, poor implementation of the law and, in the case of married women, fear of losing their marriages. An older man described the situation facing raped women:

'Women who are raped by militiamen are abandoned by their husbands. Because of the stigma, these women have to leave their neighbourhoods to seek shelter elsewhere. Their husbands are afraid that raped women will be HIV-positive and so they abandon them.'

Rather than punishing abusers, faith leaders were viewed as blaming the victims by dismissing the rape of women as a family matter or something meant to be resolved internally. According to the participants, these faith leaders might show compassion only towards survivors who were perceived as being of good morality, particularly virgin girls who were raped. These young women were considered as innocent and pure women who happened to have sex for the first time in a brutal way. These perceptions were also shared by some of the participants. An older woman said:

'It's not a big deal for sexually active women to be raped. In any event, they are already used to having sex with several partners… They can reap what they have sown.'

5.1.6   Ineffective advocacy efforts

Some participants argued that faith communities have failed in their primary mission of evangelisation. Therefore, CAR has become a hell on earth, given the many challenges related to politics and the other difficulties people are facing in the country. As a result, the current conflict has divided people along religious and ethnic grounds, and unequipped faith leaders find it difficult to make any visible impact in terms of advocating for an end to SGBV, the impunity of perpetrators and conflict in the country in general.

5.2   Positive tendencies

Contrary to these negative tendencies, a few participants discussed positive intersections between faith and gender that showed potential for hope and change. They conceptualised an effective leadership that encourages positive forms of masculinities through workshops and promotes the idea of men and women as equals in God's sight. They spoke of effective faith leaders who take care of survivors and preach God's disapproval of the rape of women, and who undertake advocacy efforts to end conflict in CAR.

5.2.1   Effective faith leadership promotes positive forms of masculinities

An older woman described the way her husband, a faith leader, was a helping hand for her and a role model in the attempt to promote gender equality:

'My husband helps me a lot with household work. My husband is an imam who is obliged to apply what he teaches other people at the mosque. I think only people who really believe and are God-fearing can try to promote the values of gender equality. When I was growing up, I witnessed my father's attitude; he didn't want my mother to get tired after doing the domestic work relating to cooking.'

A young woman also expressed a word of appreciation about her husband's support in their family, relating that is influenced by faith teaching:

'While you are interviewing me, my husband is doing the washing. Apart from that, he sometimes prepares the meal for the children and myself. This man is both fantastic and kind. Our pastor always tells us to give priority to our love over what people might say.'

5.2.2   Training workshops

Several participants said that men were either absent from their churches or would not follow church teachings on issues related to sex and sexuality, as they feel blamed by their faith leaders. However, according to these participants, there are several strategies that faith leaders may apply in the attempt to transform men and their masculinities. These include the organisation of masculinity workshops, during which they can accompany men pastorally and pray for them. This creative pastoral attitude towards men was perceived as another path to converting men to new ways. In so doing, faith leaders may influence men to be God-fearing people whose households may be blessed. In addition, God-fearing people would be more likely to change their attitudes and practices for the sake of their wives' and children's well-being.

'Central African culture doesn't talk about sex, sexuality and gender-based violence, which have become weapons of war. However, our pastor's ability to speak of these things has been boosted at the workshop on masculinities organised by Tearfund this year. Our pastor is now denouncing those things. People are happy to see the president of the Association of Evangelical Churches of Central Africa (AEC) talking seriously about sexual violence against women despite the risks he faces.'

The church was perceived as an important player to challenge and change rigid norms of masculinities and to bring peace and reconciliation between people whose relationships have been broken down. A young man shared his testimony of a refusal to acknowledge child paternity and the church's input to solve the problem:

'In 1995, someone made my sister pregnant and refused to acknowledge paternity of his son because he had been looking for a fling rather than a marriage. After the child was born, he came back to our house and tried unsuccessfully, especially as my parents refused to acknowledge him as the little boy's biological father, to take him away. It was the religious leaders who restored peace through their peacemaking efforts with the two families. The father is now genuinely taking care of his son, although he is married to a woman other than my sister.'

5.2.3   God made men and women as equals

The participants considered the Bible to be like a double-edged sword, which some participants used to justify and others to contest gender inequality among women and men. A few participants stressed that women and men were both created in God's image. For them, women and men are similar in God's sight, since he created them as equals. Therefore, women and men should live in love and harmony. These participants referred to Galatians to highlight that there is no male or female for those who are in Christ. For them, it is the intersection of positive cultural aspects coupled with progressive church doctrines that promote the equality between women and men. An old woman said:

'The Bible says that men and women were created in the image of God and, through marriage, they become one flesh.'

5.2.4   Effective faith leaders care for survivors

The Catholic Church in Bangui was viewed by a few participants as a caring church, which has a non-discriminating policy for the treatment, support and care of raped women. These women would be welcomed in Catholic health facilities regardless of their religion, class and ethnic backgrounds. The participants said that survivors of sexual violence could be counselled by staff working with Caritas. Women perceived as physically weak after sexual assault or rapes were referred to appropriate medical clinics for care. And those who sought justice would be accompanied to access legal mechanisms for justice, despite the high level of impunity that currently exists for perpetrators. In some cases, some faith leaders have raised local funds for survivors to meet their basic needs.

'We are living through faith in this country now and the grace of God can be seen in the care Caritas provides to survivors of sexual violence. It's thanks to this that the latter are alive in Bangui. In view of the scale of the shock and trauma experienced by survivors of violence, I find it hard to talk about it.'

5.2.5   God disapproves of rape

According to the participants, sex is exclusively allowed within marriage bonds and God would condemn any sexual activities taking place outside of wedlock, including the rape of women. As a result, God looks on the rape of women with anger, seeing it as a sin committed by the perpetrator. The participants' perceptions were that a few faith leaders acknowledged the rape of women as an issue of concern. Therefore, these faith leaders would be teaching that God disapproves of rape, although this teaching does not necessarily and automatically result in individual behaviour change. A male pastor said:

'The Bible clearly says that God hates sexual violence against women, and this can bring God's wrath down on this country if men go on raping women without any qualms.'

Based on the teachings about sex and sexuality in the Bible and the Qur'an, some participants went on to say that effective faith leaders would also disapprove of any forced sexual activities that women may face simply because they are women. An older man explained:

'The church speaks out against and prohibits sexual violence against women, advising married couples to come to an agreement about consensual sex which is mutually satisfying for both partners.'

In this vein, one participant mentioned a workshop that was organised by a non-governmental organisation (NGO) on behalf of church members to denounce cases of forced sex and marital rape. In such a case, church elders would meet to deliberate and advise the partners accordingly.

5.2.6 Effective faith leaders undertake advocacy efforts

While gender norms and relationships were viewed as being grounded in sacred texts in Bangui, a few faith leaders were reported to be involved in challenging and changing these norms. They have planned to create a religious platform where faith leaders would gather to reflect and take action on issues facing their community members. High-level meetings, including discussions between the Catholic Church, the Alliance des Evangéliques en Centrafrique and Muslims, would also be underway to mobilise signatures for a petition that aimed at ending the conflict in the country. In their opinion, the current conflict had nothing to do religion. In this sense, effective faith leaders were perceived to educate their community members to avoid retaliation about all the wrongdoing and violence they were facing in their day-to-day lives. Although gender norms take years to change, there are already some visible results that have been reported so far as having come about through positive faith teachings. An old woman explained how she convinced her husband to avoid revenge:

'My husband witnessed the death of several members of his family. As a result, he was traumatised and one day he sought vengeance, taking a machete to kill his enemies. When he started to leave the house to look for the people he wanted to kill, I told him in a serious tone what the pastor had taught us about avoiding vengeance. The pastor reminded us that, as children of God, we should not take vengeance ourselves against the evil done by our enemies. On the contrary, God will avenge us. I thank God that my husband listened to me and put his machete down. If it hadn't been for that lesson I learned from that sermon and was able to share convincingly with my husband, I really don't know what would have happened to him.'

Apart from the above strategies related to advocacy efforts, the participants reported that news of CAR should be widely broadcast in the media because the situation of CAR had been ignored for so long by the international community. In their opinion, the recent visit of Pope Francis may be perceived as an immediate visible outcome of the Catholic Church's advocacy in that regard.

DISCUSSION

The summary discussion will focus on the following four emerging themes:

- Norms of masculinities largely influenced by stereotypes and challenged by the current insecure context

- Ideals of masculinities linked to sex

- Widespread acceptance of SGBV

- Faith leaders as both barriers to, and enablers of, positive forms of masculinities.

Norms of masculinities influenced by stereotypes and challenged by the current insecure context

This study has shown that the current norms of masculinities are largely influenced by stereotypes of what it means to be a man in Bangui. The participants noted that men tend to live up to dominant forms of masculinities, since they are expected to be tough and masters of the household, and to have a job in order to be good providers for their families. However, these masculinity stereotypes were fraught with contradictions and inconsistencies, as the participants reported that men were economically disempowered and devalued because of poverty, conflict and unemployment. These challenges due to increasing economic pressures had weakened male autonomy to fulfil the expected male role as the head of the household having the final word over family matters. This finding is consistent with Silberschmidt's analysis of male disempowerment in rural Kenya and Tanzania, where the economic conditions had seriously undermined the conventional paradigm of female subordination and the dominance of men.[21]

Ideals of masculinities linked to sex

In this context of male economic disempowerment, the participants noted that men spent their scant resources on sex within and outside marriage to enhance their self-esteem and to boost their masculinities. This finding echoes the result from the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES) carried out in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), where men and women associate masculinities with sex, virility and dominance.[22] Similarly, in a study of masculinity in Zambia, Simpson found that many men recalled feelings of 'being a man' when vaginal penetration and ejaculation were achieved with multiple partners.[23] This attitude of men having sex with multiple partners is seen as a cultural aspect that ridicules those who have one partner. In such a context, Brown, Sorrell and Raffaelli state that a monogamous partnership may suggest poverty, low status and weakened masculinities.[24] Understanding these contradictions is crucial in ascertaining what men feel regarding the social construction of sexual behaviours and what it means to be a man.[25]

Widespread acceptance of SGBV

The study findings suggest that the masculinity stereotypes prevailing in Bangui condone or positively value aggressive sexual behaviours in intimate relationships and emphasise demonstrating toughness and physical

21 Silberschmidt, M (2001) 'Disempowerment of men in rural and urban East Africa: Implications for male identity and sexual behavior', *World Development* 29(4): 657–671

22 Slegh H, Barker G, Levtov R (2014) *Gender relations, sexual and gender-based violence and the effects of conflict on women and men in North Kivu, Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo: Results from the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES)*. Washington DC and Cape Town, South Africa: Promundo and Sonke Gender Justice

23 Simpson A (2007) 'Sons and fathers/boys to men in the time of AIDS: Learning masculinities in Zambia', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 31(3): 569-586.

24 Brown J, Sorrell J, Raffaelli M (2005) 'An exploration of constructions of masculinity, sexuality and HIV/AIDS in Namibia, Southern Africa', *Culture, Health and Sexuality* 7(6): 585–598

25 Sathiparsad R, Taylor M, De Vries H (2010) 'Masculine identity and HIV prevention among male youth in rural South Africa', *Journal of Social Science* 25(1–2–3), 159–168

strength as core features of hegemonic masculinities. Paradoxically, women have internalised this ideal of masculinity to the extent that they consider sexual violence a domestic issue and are reluctant to talk about it. This finding is in line with Garcia-Moreno et al., who argue that the domestic nature of intimate partner violence and women's reluctance to speak out mean that little is known about this problem by those outside the intimate relationships.[26] This could partly explain why much violence perpetrated against women is a result of power inequalities reinforced by gender roles. The impunity of perpetrators is exacerbated by the ongoing conflict, making women vulnerable to rape and abuse.[27]

Faith leaders as barriers to, and enablers of, positive forms of masculinities

As a barrier to positive masculinities, this study found that within the faith group context women are often not accepted as leaders, particularly in the domain of clergy. Many participants (both Christian and Muslim) appealed to religion or certain interpretations of religious texts to justify male dominance over women. For example, they claimed that Adam was created first and referred to other prominent male figures in sacred texts. For them, God would have a preference for men over women, and they assumed that, since in the Bible or Qu'ran men played the most significant roles, men in contemporary society should have control of all leadership positions. Simpson found men who cited the Genesis story of creation as an indicator of male superiority over women,[28] and this was a common perception among participants in this study. Faith leaders need to take a much more informed role in standing with community members to confront these gender stereotypes, particularly harmful interpretations of religious texts. It is clear that gender relations within the home, community and society at large are heavily based on cultural and religious beliefs and traditions that are patriarchal and condone gender injustice.[29] Faith leaders are themselves part of this context, and need appropriate training and equipping. One entry point for facilitating this would be to challenge the impact of negative cultural aspects, religious beliefs and practices which continue to perpetuate the low status of women and girls,[30] and to engage faith groups, within their mandate for caring for the vulnerable within society, to address the needs of survivors of SGBV. The community of the church or mosque, if it accepted and did not reject survivors, could address the severe social stigma and isolation they currently suffer.

On a positive note, the findings of this study suggest that these harmful norms of masculinities may change, as evidenced by responses provided by some of the study participants. Faith leaders are perceived as having a crucial role to play in making positive forms of masculinities become a reality, but for this to happen, they should be equipped to read sacred texts critically and contextually. According to West, contextual Bible studies may open up safe spaces for both challenging norms of hegemonic masculinities and articulating alternative ways of being a man.[31] In addition, faith leaders can consistently and systematically work with women, girls, men and boys (as churches and mosques serve the whole community) to challenge and change these gender norms simultaneously.[32] Norms of masculinities are not set in stone; rather, men's gendered practices are constantly altering because of socio-economic changes and sometimes as a result of programmatic interventions.[33] Sweetman argues that positive forms of masculinities may bring substantial and mutual benefits, such as better relationships between women and men and between girls and boys, healthier children and a future generation that may reject all forms of violence against women.[34]

26 Garcia-Moreno C, Jansen H, Ellsberg M, Watts C (2005) *WHO multi-country study on women's health and domestic violence against women: Initial results on prevalence, health outcomes and women's responses*, Geneva: World Health Organization

27 Kamgno H K, Mimche H, Azebaze A, Zia A (2014) 'Gender-based violence in public life in Central African Republic', *International Journal of Business and Social Science* 5(4): 212–224

28 Simpson A (2009) *Boys to men in the shadow of AIDS: Masculinity and HIV risk in Zambia*, New York: Palgrave MacMillan

29 Patterson G (2007) 'Escaping the gender trap: Unravelling patriarchy in a time of AIDS', *International Journal of Theology* 3: 102–111

30 Harris C (2012) 'Masculinities and religion in Kaduna, Nigeria: A struggle for continuity in a time of change', *Religion and Gender* 2(2): 207–230

31 West G (2012) 'The contribution of Tamar's story to the construction of alternative African masculinities', in Chitando E, Chirongoma S eds. *Redemptive masculinities: Men, HIV and religion*, Geneva: WCC Publications, 173–192

32 Van Klinken A S (2011) 'Male headship as male agency: An alternative understanding of a "Patriarchal" African Pentecostal discourse on masculinity', *Religion and Gender* 1(1): 104–124

33 Barker G, Ricardo C, Nascimento M (2007) *Engaging men and boys in changing gender-based inequity in health: Evidence from programme interventions*, World Health Organization

34 Sweetman C (2013) 'Introduction: Working with men on gender equality', *Gender and Development* 21(1): 1–13

STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS OF THIS RESEARCH

It is hoped that this exploratory study is a welcome contribution to the field, as there is very little data about men and masculinities from faith perspectives in CAR. The study has documented the challenges that are hindering the achievement of gender equality within communities, such as the entrenched social norms, widespread insecurity, unemployment and the support of male dominance over women based on a selective reading and interpretation of sacred texts. These findings also suggest the potential shown by a shift of mindset on the part of individuals, community members and authorities nationally to commit themselves to promoting gender-equitable relationships, as the country is trying to recover from several years of political instability and unrest. More importantly, the participants gave concrete examples and strategies as to how some men have begun to promote equitable relationships within households and communities. Therefore, it is hoped that this report might be an important source for CAR activists and faith leaders to help mobilise change in attitudes and norms among men in the country.

This study also has some limitations. As with other pieces of small-scale qualitative research, the participants exclusively came from certain urban areas, and their views might not necessarily reflect those of the wider community, particularly in other areas of CAR. The information collected might have faced some social desirability bias, since the research sought to understand gender-equitable attitudes and behaviours among men and women through FGDs. As a result, some responses might be influenced by the dominant participants in the groups. To mitigate these challenges, probing questions were used and a non-judgemental attitude was adopted to encourage informants to reflect and speak freely on their individual experiences.

However, for security reasons, time was limited with each group, which precluded the opportunity to ask probing questions on more sensitive issues such as sexuality and relationships between women and men. This was particularly true for Muslim participants, given the location of the FGDs and the tension that prevailed between Christians and Muslims at that time. Due to time constraints of the research visit, there was also no opportunity to pre-test the topic guide within this context, and for some participants, their understanding of the questions was challenged by their low level of education and literacy.

Despite these limitations, the participants provided much invaluable information related to concepts of masculinity, social norms and gender violence issues, particularly from a faith leader perspective. This information may be relevant to wider communities in CAR, as well as to other settings where faith leaders are influential in shaping social norms and thus in challenging SGBV and harmful constructs of masculinities.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research has painted a rich and nuanced picture of faith leaders' perceptions and experiences of social norms, SGBV and, particularly, what is means to be a man in Bangui. The study found that the social construction of masculinities is largely based on unreliable sources, such as negative cultural aspects and selective reading and interpretation of sacred texts. It showed linkages between faith teachings and social norms, and indicated how SGBV in communities can relate to harmful gender norms. It highlighted a few participants who challenged these constructs and suggested alternative, positive forms of gender identities based on critical and contextual reading of the same sacred texts.

Based on these findings, the following recommendations are given, at policy and programme levels, regarding efforts to engage faith leaders, and men as well as women in communities, in bringing gender equality and reducing SGBV in CAR.

Recommendations at programme level

- Tearfund, its partners and other peer agencies need to develop safe spaces or processes to allow women and men to come to understand each other better. Men and women need to understand the reasons inequitable gender norms persist, the harmful consequences of these for both sexes, and when and how they may change.

- The conspiracy of silence related to SGBV should be addressed at all levels of society, since the process of change in gender norms and relations needs to be driven by several factors simultaneously. Of these, education, economic change, exposure to new ideas, and political, religious and social mobilisation are key.

- The role of faith leaders in shaping social norms, including concepts of masculinities, is vital to the successful dissemination of gender equality values. Therefore, faith leaders need to be fully equipped in addressing these topics with innovative and creative theological discourses that can free people from norms of hegemonic masculinities, restore hope and enable more positive and non-violent relationships between men and women.

- Fruitful partnerships should be promoted linking national programmes, bilateral organisations and civil society groups with Tearfund and its partners on ways of engaging women, men, girls and boys to address sexual and reproductive health issues.

- In response to the challenges, more effort and resources are required to engage women, men, girls and boys directly for change. More needs to be done to identify and support leadership within communities that promotes gender-equitable attitudes, particularly positive male role models. To this end, men and women who are currently in leadership positions in faith institutions and communities are key actors to target: where properly engaged and equipped, they can use their position of influence to speak out publicly in support of gender equality, human rights and women's and girls' well-being, and to act as change agents.

- Recognising that certain women and girls may intentionally and unintentionally contribute to constructing and maintaining hegemonic masculinity stereotypes, Tearfund and its partners must work with the whole community and, alongside engaging with men and boys, also commit themselves to building women's and girls' capacity to transform masculinities.

- Community-based work with women and girls, men and boys, should promote new ideals of masculinities based on respect for women, responsible sexual behaviours and the non-use of GBV.

- Unequal gender power relations and sexual violence against women exist in almost every society and affect both women and men, while slowing down the growth and development of the society. However, challenging and changing such inequalities is a complex and sensitive task and should be done with respect for and in equal partnership with local counterparts, and responses and approaches should be contextualised.

Recommendations at policy level

For international organisations and donors:

- **Increase early and continued engagement of faith leaders as key stakeholders in challenging harmful masculinities and tackling SGBV.** Faith leaders hold unparalleled in-depth local knowledge and an influential position in their communities. They often contribute to the root causes of SGBV by shaping harmful social norms through their faith teaching and their behaviour towards women. It is therefore vital to engage them early, and on an ongoing basis, so that they can act as key catalysts for positive change in their communities.

- **Strengthen faith literacy among staff.** Although faith leaders and teachings play an important role in shaping social norms, staff of humanitarian agencies and donors often lack the faith literacy required to understand and to know how to draw on this resource when tackling SGBV, including challenging harmful masculinities. Staff need to be trained in this area so that they have strong faith literacy and are equipped to engage with faith-based organisations effectively to tackle SGBV.

- **Conduct further research into the impact of men's access to education on their views in relation to gender equality and gender-based violence.** The findings of this research project suggest that increasing men's access to education has a positive impact on their attitudes and behaviours in relation to gender equality and gender-based violence. Further research is required in CAR to explore this in more depth.

- **Promote partnerships between different actors, including faith-based organisations, who are focused on engaging young men and women to tackle SGBV in CAR.** Collaboration and coordination between diverse actors are key to delivering a strategic and effective response, ensuring the best use of the resources available. Faith-based organisations must be included because they are well placed to challenge local faith leaders and communities about harmful faith teachings at the root of SGBV and engage them to address this, particularly young men and women.

APPENDIX 1: TOPIC GUIDE FOR FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION AND KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW

Socio-demographic characteristics

I would like to ask you some questions related to your age, current employment status, conditions at work, and who you live with.

1. *How old are you?*

2. *What is the highest grade that you have completed at school?*

3. *Do you belong to any religion?*

4. *What is your religion?*

5. *What is your civil status?*

6. *How many children do you have?*

7. *Where are you living?*

8. *Who lives with you?*

9. *What is your employment status?*

Sexual and reproductive health

You are doing well; thank for your enthusiasm in this conversation. We are progressing well. In this section, I will ask you your views regarding various issues of sexual and reproductive health. Please feel free to express your opinions – there is no right or wrong answer. What is your opinion about the following statements?

1. *Women should accept harassment, even of a sexual nature, because it is harmless.*

2. *Harassment becomes harmful to women only when there is physical contact.*

3. *I think that a woman cannot refuse to have sex with her husband.*

4. *I think that it is not harmful for a boy or girl to marry at an early age (underage).*

5. *I think because a man has paid the bride price he can do whatever he wants to his wife.*

Gender-Equitable Men scale

The next set of questions will ask you about your views on relations between men and women. Please indicate if you totally agree, partially agree or disagree with the following statements.

1. *A woman's most important role is taking care of her home and cooking for her family.*

2. *Changing diapers, giving kids a bath and feeding the children is the mother's responsibility.*

3. *It is manly for a man to beat his wife.*

4. *There are times when a woman deserves to be beaten.*

5. *A woman should tolerate violence in order to keep her family together.*

6. *To be a man, a man has to be tough.*

7. *It is a woman's responsibility to avoid getting pregnant.*

8. *To be a man means providing for your family and your extended family.*

9. *It is manly to defend the honour of your family even by using violent means.*

10. *Men should share the work around the house with women, such as doing dishes, cleaning and cooking.*

11. *Men should be involved in taking care of children.*

12. *I believe that a man is superior to a woman.*

Domestic duties and daily life

The next set of questions will ask you your views about domestic duties and daily life issues in Bangui. What is your opinion about the following statements?

1. *Women should obey their husbands.*

2. *Husbands should obey their wives.*

3. *Who in your household usually has the final say regarding the health of women in the family?*

4. *Who in your household usually has the final say about decisions involving your children (their schooling, their activities)?*

5. *Who has the final say on decisions about how your family spends money on food and clothing?*

6. *Who has the final say about decisions involving how your family spends money on large investments such as buying a vehicle, a house or a household appliance?*

7. *Who does the following tasks at home?*
    - *preparing food*
    - *cleaning the house*
    - *washing clothes*
    - *taking care of children*

8. *Only boys are entitled to inherit land from their families.*

Sexual and gender-based violence

The conversation is going very well. The next set of questions will ask you about your views on sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV).

1. *When a woman is raped, she usually did something careless to put herself in that situation.*

2. *If a woman did not physically fight back during rape, it is not rape.*

3. *In any case of rape, one would question whether the 'victim' is sexually promiscuous.*

4. *In any case of rape, one would question whether the 'victim' has had a bad reputation.*

5. *Some women ask to be raped by the way they dress.*

6. *Some women ask to be raped by the way they behave.*

Intersection of faith and gender

We are about to finish now and you are doing very well. Please remember that we appreciate your information. I want to remind you that whatever you share with us today will be kept confidential and will only be used for the purpose of research. The next questions are on different aspects of gender and faith.

1. *Have your church leaders spoken out against SGBV during a sermon?*
   - *How often have they spoken about it?*
   - *What was the message they disseminated?*
   - *What was people's reaction to that message?*
   - *What was the result of that message?*
   - *What would happen if church leaders did not speak about SGBV?*

2. *What is your church doing for people who are affected by SGBV?*

3. *Tell me if your church provides support for those affected by SGBV.*

4. *Can you give an example of how your church has advocated for those who have been affected by SGBV?*

5. *What can the church do for people who are affected by SGBV in Bangui?*

6. *What may be God's reaction towards the rape of women?*

7. *What can churches in Bangui do about:*
   - *promoting gender equality (equal values and rights) for women and men?*
   - *engaging men and boys to address harmful attitudes and practices?*

8. *What is your opinion about people who say that God created men and women as unequal?*

Many thanks for your time.

GENDER NORMS, VIOLENCE AND CONCEPTS OF MASCULINITY

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perceptions and experience in Bangui, Central African Republic**

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