



**MenCare at Work**

# Sri Lanka

## Engaging Fathers for Children's Education and Family Well-Being



Photo by Jane Kalo-Wallace; Men at Work Logo by UNFPA.

Men **Care**

A GLOBAL FATHERHOOD CAMPAIGN

Website: [www.men-care.org](http://www.men-care.org)

Twitter: [@mencareglobal](https://twitter.com/mencareglobal)

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## Introduction

Sri Lanka, with a population of over 20 million people, is known as the “Pearl of the Indian Ocean.” This is partly because of the island’s teardrop shape, but also because of its picturesque and varied landscape that moves from cloud covered tea plantation fields to the calm and tropical beaches of the coasts. Despite its serene appearance, Sri Lanka has endured 30 years of civil war between Sinhalese and Tamil-speaking people. Only recently ending in 2009, this conflict exacerbated the country’s deep-seated inequalities and prejudices.

The vast majority of Indian Tamils, as classified by the Sri Lankan government, live in the highlands of the country under bonded labor-like conditions on tea plantations. Today, there are more than 850,000 self-identified Tamils living in Sri Lanka. Due to racial and historic inequalities, poverty, low child literacy rates, poor health, violence, and gender inequalities are all prevalent in these plantation areas. In these long lined rooms, workers are dependent on their managers for food, income, sanitation, housing, and other day-to-day necessities.



Photo by Yeva Avakyan

Though the structural inequalities loom large, World Vision identified child education and overall family well-being (defined as open communication between family members, equal division of caregiving and domestic tasks, and gender equality) as priority issues for the area. For this reason, World Vision invited Promundo in June 2012 to 1) conduct exploratory research with key stakeholders to conceptualize how the community defines what fatherhood means and what the barriers are to men’s caregiving and fatherhood, and to 2) carry out a workshop with program managers and government officials on approaches to engaging men in fatherhood.

Training modules were then developed with technical assistance from Promundo in order to conduct workshops with fathers and their partners. In November 2012, representatives from Promundo returned to Sri Lanka to conduct a qualitative evaluation of these workshops.

## Overview of Exploratory Research

**Interviewer:** What are your biggest hopes and dreams for the future?

**Woman:** That our children will get a good education so that they will earn money and look after us.

**Man:** Leave the life in the lined rooms and live as a separate family... A child is like a tree. We are watering and waiting for the fruit. The fear is that someone will cut it down.

Over a one-week period, Promundo conducted focus group and in-depth interviews with men, women and young children living on the plantations, as well as with teachers, principals and government officials.

Initial exploratory research revealed traditional gendered divisions of labor where women and girls are expected to do the cooking, cleaning and caring for children, and men are expected to provide economic support to the

family. However, the dynamics on the tea plantations are unique in that women tend to work longer hours than men in the fields picking tea. Exploratory research also revealed prevalent alcohol abuse, which can be a trigger for violence in the home, absent fathers and mothers and other negative societal consequences. However, key stakeholders (government officials, plantation managers and education providers) attributed the abuse to a man's character (i.e. men are bad, undependable), rather than working to understand the often more complex and interlinked root causes of alcohol abuse.

The research also revealed that many men wanted to be more involved in the lives of their children, but that 1) they did not know how, and 2) because they did not earn enough money to provide, they felt inadequate as men. Under-employment and a simple lack of money were major sources of stress for many men and women interviewed.

## Conducting the Workshop

Over the course of four days, Promundo conducted a workshop on gender transformative approaches to engaging men in caregiving. This consisted of showcasing Promundo's and other colleagues' work on how to recruit and keep men engaged in group education, develop and test community campaigns, adapt fatherhood activities from Program P, a manual for working with fathers, and how to embed indicators into the existing monitoring and evaluation framework to track change. Program managers from surrounding ADPs, government officials and education providers attended this training.

## Development and Piloting of the MenCare Fathers Groups

Following the workshop, Promundo provided technical assistance to one of World Vision-Sri Lanka's Area Development Programs (ADPs) by creating education modules targeting married couples. Many of these activities were adapted from MenCare's Program P manual, Promundo's Children Subjects of Rights manual, Program H, and Men for Gender Equality's Father Schools manual.



Photo by Jane Kalo-Wallace

Over a period of six weeks, group education sessions covered the following:

- Gender equality in the home
- Healthy sexuality and its relationship to a happy marriage
- Couples communication & family planning
- Financial budgeting and visioning for the future
- Corporal punishment and children's rights
- Alcohol and drug abuse
- Non-violent approaches to parenting

While many of the sessions engaged fathers only, World Vision also engaged couples over two days to talk about issues relating to family planning, budgeting, sexuality and children's education.

Four ADP Managers and Coordinators facilitated the groups in and around the plantation areas. Prior to carrying out the sessions, they pilot tested each activity with their own staff. Having worked in the community for almost 25 years, World Vision's ties with men and women working in the plantation areas were strong in that many of them have been participating in some type of development program for years. The ADP staff focused on recruiting men who were eager to join the program, and asked participants to bring a friend to future sessions.

Implementation of the groups took place in the evenings after men finished work and on the weekends. This was a challenge in that many of the staff already worked full eight-hour days.

## Evaluation Results

Working with men as fathers is a key entry point to discussing sensitive, and sometimes taboo, subjects with men and their partners. From this “safe” perspective, facilitators were able to talk about issues such as alcoholism, gender-based violence including sexual violence, and the ways in which these negatively affected their communities.

Key informant interviews also revealed the following results after men’s participation in the MenCare groups: Men learned to manage difficult emotions.

**“He used to get angry at minor things. Not anymore. He spends more time with children.”**

- Wife of MenCare participant

**“My dad doesn’t scold like he used to. He is more quiet and spends more time at home.”**

-Child of MenCare participant

There were several reports of a decrease in men’s use of alcohol and drugs by men, their partners and principals.

**“I don’t drink as much alcohol anymore. I spend more time with my family”**

- Father, MenCare participant

**“He used to drink and scold the children. Not anymore”**

-Wife of MenCare participant

Men were often motivated by what they learned in the workshop and spread the messages by bringing other men into the group, or by going out into their community to tell other men about what they had learned.

Having a two-day session devoted to the couple relationship was cited by women as “unforgettable” because it consisted of talking about issues related to

sexuality and family planning – subjects not often broached in the home.

The dedication of ADP staff to the implementation of the MenCare groups was a key driver in their success. World Vision, particularly the head ADP Manager, did not let Promundo’s training end here. With support from Promundo, and despite an already heavy workload, they implemented the groups and are now looking at how to integrate some sessions across various sector programs.

ADP staff reported that they themselves felt transformed by the intervention. The groups prompted them to critically look at their own relationships with their partners and children and change what they saw as harmful practices.

## Key Areas for Improvement Going Forward

- It was recommended that WorldVision staff receive additional gender sensitization training to further their understanding of the interconnectedness of masculinity, caregiving and cultural norms.
- World Vision-Sri Lanka is working on scaling up their approach to engaging men as fathers nationally to all include all of their area development programs.
- Promundo and World Vision are finalizing a manual on engaging fathers in the plantation estate region to be completed in April 2013. This manual will be available online on [www.men-care.org](http://www.men-care.org).

### About MenCare

MenCare is a global fatherhood campaign that promotes men’s involvement as equitable and non-violent fathers and caregivers in order to achieve family well-being and gender equality. Through media, program development and advocacy, the campaign works at multiple levels to engage men.

