

Engaging Men

The Abatangamuco and Women's Empowerment in Burundi

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Design: Studio 7 www.studio7.no
ISBN: 978-82-7288-438-2
ISBN: 978-82-7288-439-9



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Photo taken by Hilde Wallacher:
Fausin Ntiranyibagi with the
motorcycle he bought with
money he says he could save up
because he's been living as an
Abatangamuco.

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ISBN 978-82-7288-438-2 (online); 978-82-7288-439-9 (print)

Cover design: www.studiosju.no

Cover Photos: Front: Hilde Wallacher

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1. Executive summary

It is challenging to address gender inequalities and related gender-based or gender-specific violence through soft measures such as awareness raising and capacity building, not least from the perspective of sustainability and motivation. Sometimes, aid organisations provide a range of short-term incentives for addressing structural inequality and abuse, including direct and indirect financial benefits that are made contingent on the recipient making certain changes to their behaviour and family life.

CARE Burundi have been struggling to find the right way to deal with the country's pervasive problem of domestic violence, as well as the more general overall dominance of men over women. This situation of violence and oppression has made it significantly harder for the organisation to reach the women in rural communities who were the main targets for their women's empowerment programmes including so-called village savings and loans (VSL) schemes. They would receive repeated feedback from local women participating in these micro financing projects and other female-capacity building and empowerment efforts to the effect that the projects weren't as efficient as they could have been. The women told the project staff that while they benefitted from participating in the VSL schemes in terms of increased personal awareness and knowledge building, they were struggling to implement this knowledge with their families and to fully make use of the resources made available to them because of the hostility or scepticism that came from their husbands. CARE realised that the impact of their empowerment efforts would be significantly greater if the male population also received attention. Particularly, they should receive capacity building to help them appreciate the potential benefits of women's contributions as an equal in all aspects of family production, finances and organisation.

One of the ways in which CARE has tried to address the problem of men preventing women's empowerment in Burundi is through a local organisation called the Abatangamuco (which means: *those who shine light where there was darkness*). The Abatangamuco is a group of rural men who have decided to change the way they live in their families and with their wives, ending abusive and oppressive practices and instead collaborating with their wives in all aspects of family life. They use testimonies, theatre, personal consultations and other peer-to-peer activities to convince other men to make the same changes and, potentially, join the organisation and contribute their testimonies to the group's activities. If a man becomes a member of the Abatangamuco, he must commit to no longer using force against his wife, not to try and force the family to do as he says, no longer to spend money that belongs to the family without consulting with his wife, and to contribute to all aspects of work in the family even if the tasks are traditionally considered "women's work."

The goal of this study was to find out how being a member of the organisation has changed the individual men, and what CARE can learn from this. The research is based on twenty in-depth interviews with members of the Abatangamuco, carried out by the researcher during a three-week field study to three rural department regions of Burundi. The study has produced three main findings, all illuminating which aspects of the way the Abatangamuco function can be seen to be essential to their relative success. These findings can be summarised as follows:

1. When promoting change to the fundamental way in which people live, it is beneficial that the target group can identify with those promoting the change. The activities of the Abatangamuco are based on a structure of men from an impoverished rural background speaking to other men with an impoverished rural background, and that the advice they

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give is based on their own lived experiences. This gives a strong local ownership and sense of relevance to the project.

2. Sustainability is improved when the benefits of change are incremental to the change itself instead of just being in the form of some externally provided reward. What the Abatangamuco members gain is a better everyday life, a better income, higher status in their local communities, and an overall increased sense of well-being. This is in contrast to rewards that are provided externally which only provide incentives to change insofar as these rewards can be secured.
3. The Abatangamuco appear to be self-sustainable because they have morphed from being an organisation to being something more like a movement. This means that the members take on the Abatangamuco identity and are active in spreading the organisation's values in their community even if there is minimal or no interaction with a central organisational structure.

Based on these findings, the main recommendation for CARE is that the best way they can support these activities is to maintain their current role as a facilitator, for example by providing the necessary resources for travel and to facilitate meeting points for them to give testimonies and perform their theatre pieces for new audiences. The Abatangamuco's relative success is closely dependent on its local ownership and organic evolution. The best course of action that CARE can carry out to help it grow is to maintain and expand the support that they are providing to help the group reach new communities, while keeping the necessary distance to organisational and substantial decision-making to allow the organisation to maintain a maximum independence and grass-root foundation.

2. Preface

The present project is a collaboration between CARE Norway and PRIO researcher Hilde Wallacher, born from the research interests of the gender research team at PRIO and CARE's preference for research-based evaluations of their activities. Over the last couple of years, the question of the role of men in women's empowerment processes has become increasingly pervasive.¹ At the same time, actual programming for this purpose tends to be limited to small-scale, single-issue projects related to, for example, HIV protection or reproductive health. This study will address CARE's efforts to work with and through a local Burundian organisation of rural men, the Abatangamuco, as a way to address the need to engage men in a more fundamental and holistic manner in their on-going efforts for women's empowerment.

I would like to thank CARE Norway for inviting me to carry out this study, and for their help and support along the way. I would also like to thank everyone at CARE Burundi who facilitated in an efficient and professional way my field visits and made my stay in Burundi interesting and enjoyable. I particularly owe great gratitude to the research team who helped me with the interviews and provided me with their views and local insights to guide me through the work: my research assistant Christian Ngendahimana from Fountain Isoko, my translator Lambert Ntiguma, and Domitille Ntacobakimvuna from CARE. I would also like to mention Jean Nimubona from CARE Burundi who gave me invaluable input before, during and after my visit.

¹ See the United Nations Population Fund's overview of resources here: <http://www.unfpa.org/gender/men.htm>

3. Background

3.1. Gender inequality and abuse in rural Burundi

In Burundi, it is an established understanding among aid and development practitioners that the challenges facing women involved in different capacity building programmes are intimately linked to the pervasive problem of gender based violence, particularly domestic violence.² Traditionally as well as in national family law, the man is the head of the family. It is generally tolerated, and to a large extent expected, that he may use force to ensure that his wife is obedient and that she performs the role expected of her in the family. The wife is expected to have full responsibility for the household tasks and the child rearing, as well as bearing the brunt of the burden of income-generating activities such as ploughing, harvesting and other agricultural tasks.³ At the same time, many men are unwilling to let their wives be involved in activities that involve significant contact with strangers, preferring to retain the responsibility for bringing produce to the market or otherwise carrying out commercial activities. The men would in most instances be in sole control of the family finances, often keeping the money hidden from the wife and not sharing with her either the money itself or information about the amount earned.

What became evident as a central theme during conversations with informants from government organs as well as local NGOs was the pervasiveness of gender-based violence and domestic abuse as a feature of tradition and how it would take a generation to change. According to one informant at the Department for Women's Promotion under the Ministry for National Solidarity, Human Rights and Gender, there are structures in place at the national as well as the local level to sensitise people about gender based violence and, as she put it, "that men and women should complement each other." However, the informant also admitted that the Department did not have the resources, financial or human, to follow up and carry out all the activities and elaborate structures they have created on paper in order to reach the population with their messages.

3.2. CARE and women's empowerment in Burundi –the role of men

It may sound like a truism, but working with women in a vacuum without addressing the wider cultural expectations and biases is unlikely to be effective in the long run. These biases are often promoted by men and women alike, and shape their lives and the relative spaciousness of their assigned gender roles. In Burundi, CARE is faced with the challenge of a pervasive, almost pandemic presence of domestic violence, and an overall dominance of men over women in the family.⁴ This has made it significantly harder to reach out to the women in rural communities who are in fact the main targets for women's empowerment programmes including so-called village savings and loans (VSL) schemes. Often, women from the most impoverished backgrounds or in the most vulnerable situations are prevented from attending the meetings organised under these projects and in other ways benefitting from these and other empowerment

² Researcher's interviews with knowledgeable others from CARE, local authorities and local NGOs.

³ International Women's Rights Action Watch's Burundi report 2000, available from <http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/iwraw/burundi.htm>, accessed 25.02.2012.

⁴ Academic literature on gender relations in Burundi is sparse. However, see Hakan Seckinelgin, Joseph Bigirumwami & Jill Morris (2011); Conflict and gender: the implications of the Burundian conflict on HIV/AIDS risk; Conflict, Security & Development, 11:01, 55-77 for an introduction, particularly pp 59-63.

programmes due to the unwillingness of their husbands to let them spend time outside the home or to interact with the NGOs.

For CARE, this challenge was brought to light through repeated feedback from local women participating in VSL schemes and other capacity building and empowerment projects targeting the rural female population. These women imparted that while they benefitted from participating in terms of increased personal awareness and knowledge building, they were struggling to implement this knowledge in their families and to utilise the resources made available to them through the schemes. This was primarily a result of the men being unwilling to accept that their wives could have anything to contribute to the way the family produced and the finances were organised, and more generally that they were unwilling or unable to accept the wife as a partner rather than as a subordinate. After investing significant time and resources inquiring into the interplay between women's involvement in empowerment programmes and the challenges faced by them from their husbands, CARE realised that the impact of their empowerment efforts would be significantly heightened if the male population also received attention and capacity building that would help them to appreciate the potential benefits stemming from accepting the contributions of their wives to the family production, finances and organisation.

3.3. Origin of the Abatangamuco

The Abatangamuco group sprung out of personal initiatives by local Burundian men in the province of Gitega, although it only took on an organisational framework once these men started collaborating with CARE Burundi. The organisation thus came about as a joint initiative of CARE Burundi and local men, but it was based on local initiatives that were not a part of CARE's women's empowerment projects. In fact, the origin of the movement and its involvement with CARE is something that even local CARE staff often has problems explaining to outsiders such as myself, as it seems to have come about by a combination of chance, unintended consequences of other CARE activities, and grass-root and organised initiatives playing off each other.

From the start of their involvement in Burundi, women's empowerment initiatives were the backbone of CARE's structure, and they still are. Their work is focused on four pillars: Women's economic empowerment as an entry point to other forms of empowerment, especially through village savings and loans (VSL) programmes; promoting positive behavioural change; promoting good governance and an enabling environment; and conflict resolution and peace building. After interviewing a number of CARE staff working specifically on women's empowerment, it seems clear that the VSL projects and other capacity building programmes for women, all function as a hub for the organisation's wider women's empowerment efforts.

At the beginning of the Umwizero Project, we trained women [...] and they were acting to empower women in order to increase the family income and help women to get some means to improve their living conditions. The purpose was to get in touch with them and after to deal with gender based violence. (Jean Berchmans Ntamahangarizo, Provincial Coordinator of CARE's Umwizero Project (a VSL project), Ngozi office)

The Umwizero project is a women's empowerment project based on the establishment of women's solidarity groups that function as semi-autonomous platforms for micro-finance, savings and loans, reproductive health and family planning, conflict management, and capacity building. CARE leaves it to the local women to organise their solidarity groups themselves but provides resources, training and so on at regular intervals.

The above quote resonates with information received from Abatangamuco members and their wives during the course of data gathering – that their first encounter with the Abatangamuco

movement was through a meeting with one of CARE's projects for women's economic empowerment, or otherwise through information filtering down through encounters with one of these projects.

The origin of the Abatangamuco movement can apparently be traced back to a couple of men in the Gitega province who, after attending capacity building courses arranged by CARE partners, began to question some of the ways in which their home lives were organized. Ntamahangarizo explains that:

In 2004, I was working in Gitega implementing two projects, one on local governance and the other one on food security. The beneficiaries came to show significant maturity and progress. For instance, through a meeting with the communal administrator, the chief could previously speak from the beginning to the end without question or comments from citizens attending the meeting. However, people who had been trained through these projects had an increased awareness, and were the first to ask questions in meetings with local administration. This awareness led to Abatangamuco and we don't know what will happen after this. Abatangamuco is not a result of a proposal but they are the result of a long process as an impact of the previous activities. (Jean Berchmans Ntamahangarizo)

Some of the men referred to by Ntamahangarizo began realizing that one of the most important things holding them back and keeping them from progressing in their communities and financially was the way in which their families were organized and the way that they were treating their wives. It is important to realize that the men in question primarily or exclusively rely on agriculture for the livelihoods of their families. Thus, the family is also a work unit sharing the responsibilities for such activities as ploughing, sowing, herding livestock (for most of these families, that would at most amount to a couple of goats, occasionally a cow) and selling produce at the market. Additionally, the upkeep of the household is labour-intensive as they do not have electricity, access to water or other conveniences. A significant effort every day therefore has to go into activities such as fetching water and firewood, preparing and cooking food, and so on. For the majority of rural Burundian families, it is the women who bear the brunt of the work load. Not just what is related to the household and childrearing, but also the agricultural task, something that is often physically straining.⁵ At the same time, a significant number of these women are subjected to domestic abuse including violence, psychological abuse, insufficient nutrition, and so on. The men are usually exclusively in control of the family's finances, to the point where a man will not disclose the amount of money he has or where he keeps it to his wife. In many families, the money will not be spent on food, investments, clothes or other necessities, but rather spent by the man on alcohol, prostitution or in other ways that are at the man's discretion.⁶

Naturally, this situation is far from the ideal setup for a family wanting to get the most out of their limited resources. The unhelpful and ultimately unsustainable nature of this way of organizing family life, work and finances became apparent to these men in Gitega after seeing it in the context of the capacity building sessions they had attended, and they, individually and without any organizational structure or philosophy in place, made changes to their behaviour that would

⁵ International Women's Rights Action Watch's Burundi report 2000.

⁶ Ibid.

address these paradoxes but which also ran counter to cultural expectations of family life, gender relations and the traditional role of the man in the family.

3.4. CARE and the Abatangamuco – partners or patron and client?

CARE's efforts to find out how best to involve men in their women's empowerment programmes led them to the hypothesis that men could best be reached through other men. They envisioned men telling their stories of family life, domestic abuse, livelihood and so on in a way that would be recognisable to the audience and that would inspire them to reflect on their own lives and behavioural patterns.⁷ This hypothesis sprung from a research project sponsored by CARE, tailored to gathering life stories from beneficiaries of CARE projects with the aim of identifying how the organisation's projects had translated into changed awareness and increased capacities among those participating. Having heard about the men in Gitega making significant changes to their behaviour and family lives, they approached a man named Salvatore, who was said to be the first man to make these changes.

We went into the communities. The first person we reached was Salvatore. He agreed to testify his family secrets. Before, there had been a big debate in CARE over whether, culturally, it would be possible to testify family secrets. We asked him if he could share his experience so that others could imitate his example, and he accepted. He had already changed, but the Abatangamuco as such didn't yet exist. When he shared his testimonies, this influenced positively Faustin [who became a leading Abatangamuco] because it was in his community and then, Faustin repented and he took the same way. (Domitille Ntacobakimvuna, Learning and Gender Advisor, Program Quality and Learning Unit, CARE Burundi)

It was in this context that the Abatangamuco as an organisation came to be – driven by these men's wish to structure, organize and expand their efforts to share their stories and help other men change. The activities of the Abatangamuco will be elaborated in the next sub-chapter. Simply put, the organisation requires members to end all violent and abusive behaviour towards their spouses, to replace the strongly paternalistic organisation of the family with one in which tasks are shared, financial resources are administered in partnership, and decisions are made jointly between the husband and wife. They also require the men to testify at open meetings to their previous behaviour and to the transformations that they have made, and to testify also in the event that they transgress their new values. The organization exists in close collaboration with CARE, who supports them structurally and helps financing travel and other costs in order for the men to visit more remote communities as part of their activities. In other words, the Abatangamuco are very closely associated with CARE, both in their inception and in their everyday activities, but the ownership, legally and practically, stays with the local men who make up the membership base.

The Abatangamuco are unique in that, while they are connected to CARE and have been so since their inception, they are for most intents and purposes a home-grown movement made up of, and controlled by, a membership base of men from rural, mostly poor and often illiterate backgrounds. At the same time, they have a significant interaction with CARE through a number of projects and platforms, which makes it necessary to reflect on the extent to which the changes

⁷ Author's interview with Domitille Ntacobakimvuna, Learning and Gender Advisor, Program Quality and Learning Unit, CARE Burundi.

these men go through, and the activities they engage in, influence their peers in a sustainable manner that will continue in the long run without the presence of CARE and any incentives that may stem from their connection with the organisation.⁸ It is therefore very interesting to attempt to identify these men's personal incentives for moving away from domestic violence and oppression of their wives, and to try to understand how this change interacts with their perception of masculinity and of themselves as men. Assuming that the sustainability of such changes is contingent on, or at least benefits from, internalised rather than external benefits, this will give us some insight into the likely sustainability of the Abatangamuco project.

3.5. The activities of the Abatangamuco

The name Abatangamuco means, literally, “those who shine light”. The men involved see themselves as people who have realized the errors of their old ways, have “seen the light” in terms of how they ought to live, and who want to spread this knowledge and outlook to as many as possible. A man who is a member of Abatangamuco is called an Umatangamuco – “one who shines light.” The term was coined by Faustin Ntiranyibagira, one of the first men who heard Salvatore's testimony in Gitega and decided to make the same changes himself.

The activities of the Abatangamuco still reflect the approach that CARE suggested and engaged Salvatore to carry out: namely to try and challenge persisting values, behavioural patterns and gender role expectations through the format of testimonies from those who have moved away from these values. The main goal is to make as many men as possible come to the realisation that domestic violence, heavy drinking, leaving all the work to the wife, and excluding the wife from all decision making is both morally wrong and hampering their possibility for financial and social progress. The activities they engage in to fulfil this overarching goal can be roughly divided into two sets of approaches – the public and the personal.

3.5.1. Public activities

What I call the public approach includes those activities where the movement is closest associated with CARE and its partners. Often, it involves going to communities where some type of open meeting is scheduled, sometimes in the context of projects such as Umwizero and other capacity building projects, sometimes under the auspices of local authorities, and sometimes by religious entities. They will then use this opportunity to give their testimonies to the audience – sometimes only men, but usually men and women together – focusing on how their lives have changed fundamentally for the better since they made the initial changes to themselves, their value sets and their behaviour. The testimonies may also include direct advice and arguments for why the Abatangamuco approach is the right way to live, morally as well as pragmatically. For example Faustin Ntiranyibagira presented the following argument when trying to reason with people at a meeting in the Muyinga province:

Look here people, development must start at the nucleus of the family. Look at this example: A man is mistreating his wife. The former production of one ton of beans at the farm is going down because she is carrying the work load at the same time as being mistreated. Probably, the production will be diminished until she will be able to produce only 50 kilos. Multiply this

⁸ It is worth noting that beyond some logistical and financial support for concrete activities, the organisation does not receive any material benefits from CARE.

family's loss with all the families that are living like this, and then imagine the extent of loss all over Burundi. Don't focus on the organizations that bring you cows, focus on what you can do to improve yourself. You mistreat your wife. When she goes to work, she is not sure if she will be able to benefit from her own work. She will work to avoid a beating, but half-hearted and in fear. You men spend the year in bars and the market, the wife is the only source of production, and she is mistreated. How can one source be enough for a family? If you mistreat your wife, even if she is ploughing, she will not plough as she should do if she is not mistreated. If you are not careful, you will be going backwards, get poorer and poorer, and you yourself are the root of it!⁹ (Faustin Ntiranyibagira, Gitega)

In addition to the testimonies that form the backbone of the movement's activities, they also present their message through entertainment such as traditional dancing and theatre. They particularly target wedding parties with their sketches, attempting to communicate their messages to young newlyweds who are just about to establish their own families.

3.5.2. Private activities

The personal approach is much less formal, but nevertheless a very important reason for the impact that the movement has. When an Umatangamuco is made aware of a family where the wife is being mistreated or where there are significant problems regarding the division of labour and the interpersonal relationship between the husband and the wife, he may make a choice to attempt to advise the man directly. More often than that, this will involve a small group of Abatangamuco men from the community (given that there are more than one, which is not always the case) going to the man's home, try to reason with him, tell him their own stories, and advise him to change his behaviour for his own sake as well as for the sake of his wife and family. When interviewing Umatangamucos about these activities, they often told me that the men they went to council would often angrily reject them, sometimes violently, but that as they persisted in visiting him without retaliation or a personal agenda, he would often calm down and make at least some changes in line with the advice they brought.

3.5.3. Making the change

For men who are convinced by the arguments of the Abatangamuco and who chose to change, this essentially happens in one of two ways. The least complicated outcome is quite simply that he listens to the advice of his local peers or the testimonies and performances at the community meeting, whatever the case may be, and makes changes accordingly. Such changes will often take place with the support of local Abatangamuco, given that the man in question lives in a community where there are already Abatangamuco members present. He will implement the principles and philosophy as he sees it best pertaining to his situation, and his family will go on with their lives.

A more involved outcome is when the man in question elects to become an Abatangamuco member himself. There is a very important distinction to be made here – the Abatangamuco is an organisation with legal recognition, registered members and an inner structure. Not all men who have changed after being at the receiving end of the messages and testimonies from the

⁹ Referenced in the author's interviews with Faustin Ntiranyibagira and with Domitille Ntacobakimvuna.

Abatangamuco are themselves Umatangamuco once they have changed. In order to be an Umatangamuco, the men must make several commitments and expose themselves to scrutiny from their local peers. First and foremost, they must commit to changing their behaviour in several important ways – they can no longer beat or otherwise abuse their wife, but must commit to treating her as an equal. This means that there can no longer be tasks in the house or in their agricultural work that is solely for the man or the women. While one of them is busy with one task, the other will do whichever other task must be done, regardless of whether this is seen as “women’s work” or not. The man can no longer be the sole guardian and beneficiary of the family’s income, he must share with his wife all information about the money they have, and give her equal access to it. He must also apologise to her for his former behaviour, and commit to apologising to his wife and testify to his Abatangamuco peers should he transgress again.

In addition to the change itself, the prospective Umatangamuco must commit to testifying about his former behaviour and his change, often at an open meeting where the Abatangamuco are scheduled to give testimonies. He must also commit to helping other men to change, both through the format of the public testimonies and through personal consultations with men in his community who are abusing their wives. These commitments mean that there is a significant difference between men who have changed for the sake of improving their own and their families’ lives, and men who have joined the Abatangamuco and thus committed to the activism that goes with that involvement and that particular identity.

4. Methodology

With the expressed goal to inquire into the sustainability of the Abatangamuco with the presupposition that this is conditioned or will benefit significantly from the participant's motivation being internalised rather than external in nature, the following research questions will guide the analysis:

- How do the men negotiate and interpret the conflicting models of masculinity that respectively form the foundation of their traditional lifestyle and the values of the Abatangamuco?
- How do the Abatangamuco men conceptualise the rationality and benefits of their change?

Additionally, it is an overarching guiding presumption of this study that sustainable behavioural change must necessarily be based on a perception of real benefit to the individual for it to be realistically obtainable in the long run. In other words, for a Burundian man to be convinced that he should stop beating his wife, allow her to participate in family production, finances and organisations as his equal, and to recognise her inalienable rights as a person, he must somehow see this to be a change that is in his own self-interest to make. Incentives do not have to be financial in nature; they can come in the shape of changed family dynamics, a changed sense of ethics and morality in the relationship between husband and wife, or any other change that will shape the self-interest of the man. Whatever form it takes, it must be personal in nature and the perception of the benefit must be integrated in the individual in order to be sustainable.

I chose as the preferred methodology to develop an interview guide for semi-structured interviews, formulating questions designed to encourage the participant to provide longer, more reflective replies.¹⁰ The questions focused partly on the respondent's history regarding his relationship with his wife and their interpersonal dynamic and division of labour in the house, and partly on his thoughts and reflections regarding masculinity, the expectations of men in his community, and how his involvement with the organisation had impacted these views. I particularly wanted the participants to reflect on the motivations that initially led them into contact with the movement, and which incentives were present for them in order to maintain this involvement and their behavioural change. I also asked the respondents to describe their understanding of how their community viewed the Abatangamuco, as well as how they understood their community's expectations of men and the male gender role.

The questions thus centred on their past and present livelihood situations and how their involvement with the Abatangamuco had translated into positive or negative challenges in their home and social life. The inherent perspective and limitation of the study was to get to the men's self-perception and perception of the opinions of others. This means that rather than getting to some objective truth about the Abatangamuco and its impact, I seek to study the personal experience of the men and how they make sense of it. Before undertaking the interviews, I consulted with local CARE staff as well as the translator hired to accompany me on the field trip. The goal of this was twofold. First, to make any changes necessary in order to secure that the

¹⁰ See appendix 1.

interview guide was appropriate and relevant for achieving the information necessary for the study; second, to ensure that the translation from the original English into Kirundi retained the essential meaning of the questions as I intended them. This exercise proved to be of crucial importance, especially as several concepts and phrases used in the interview guide would take on a somewhat different meaning, or in some cases would make no sense at all, when translated into Kirundi. By making the necessary adjustments, and in the process translating the interview guide in its entirety into Kirundi, I avoided the risk of discrepancies arising between the original meaning and what was communicated to the recipient during the course of the interviews. Such discrepancies would probably not be discovered during the interview, as the researcher has no knowledge of Kirundi and most respondents would have no knowledge of English.

The interviews were in almost all cases carried out in the respondent's own home, limiting the cost to him of participating in the study. The appointments were made in advance by staff from the respective local CARE offices by staff members who were working with the Abatangamuco project and thus knew the respondents. The selection of respondents was made by the local CARE staff, with the expressed aim of presenting a selection that represented diversity in geography, age, living standards, social standings, and length of involvement with the Abatangamuco. While there is a risk that the staff members may be biased towards a certain type of respondent, for example the more articulate, successful or content members, there was no viable alternative to this method of selection due to time constraints and barriers to communication between the researcher and the rural Burundian men. Moreover, in hindsight the selection does indeed appear diverse enough to discourage any perception of one or more strong biases of selection.

Another question worth asking is the impact that the researcher as a white woman dependent on a translator has on the respondent's self-representation and the stories they chose to tell. One thing that I expected, and to some extent experienced, was that the men appeared to have a strong urge to portray the organisation in a positive light, and to play down any difficulties or challenges that they faced as they became involved and started making substantial changes to their lifestyle. However, many of them would reflect upon such difficulties after some probing. It is also likely that there were other ways in which the presence of the researcher influenced how the men chose to tell their stories. Still, this would be mitigated by the fact that there were several people present during the interview, including local research staff, CARE staff and the men's wives, who could (and sometimes did) challenge the men's self-representation. In sum, I expect that the stories I have been told were to some extent tailored to fit the audience that I represented. However, based both on the presence of several others in a position to challenge the stories and the fact that personal testimonies is such an important part of the Abatangamuco identity, I do not consider it likely that any aspect of the stories have been false. And considering how the personal change and the way the men make sense of it is the overarching object of this study, self-representation is exactly what the interviews were meant to produce.

The men were asked to set aside about an hour and thirty minutes for the interview, and were ensured that they were free to cut it short if they for any reason should wish to do so. The visits were made by a team consisting of the researcher, an interpreter, a local research assistant with Kirundi as his mother tongue and a good command of English, a staff member from CARE headquarters in Bujumbura and a staff member from the relevant local office. After some deliberation, the prepared letter of informed consent was replaced by an information sheet¹¹ that

¹¹ See appendix 2

the interpreter read aloud to the respondent before the interview commenced, asking the respondent whether he understood and accepted the terms of the study. This information sheet made it clear that the men could withdraw from the study at any time during the interview and within a couple of weeks following my visit. It stated the institutions involved, the intended audience and how and where the output would be disseminated. It also gave the respondents contact information for CARE staff that would be able to assist them with any concerns stemming from their participation in the study. While we would have preferred to leave the respondents with a letter of informed consent and also get a copy with their signature as reference, this was not a viable option considering how the vast majority of the respondents are illiterate. Asking them to sign a document they cannot read, even after having it read to them, did not seem to be particularly respectful, particularly since many of the men would not in fact be able to sign their names. In this light, the solution settled upon appeared to be the most honest and practical in this particular situation.

It is worth noting that none of the men had any objections to any aspect of the study, and only one of them asked any questions about the execution and subsequent use of the study that could be construed as critical. Most of the respondents told us that telling their stories was an irreplaceable part of their involvement with the Abatangamuco movement, and as such that no questions pertaining to their home life past and present were in any ways off limits. Quite to the contrary, they were amused that they were asked whether they would consent to being named in the study, emphasising how their main goal as members of the Abatangamuco was to reach as many people as possible with their personal stories with the aim of inspiring change in others. Several of the respondents were very grateful for the opportunity to participate in the present study, as they considered it a good opportunity for reaching an audience that would otherwise not be exposed to their testimonies. While the importance of testimonies will be addressed in depth in the analysis, it is worth noting at the outset how this is an integral part of the change following a man's integration into the movement. This, as we shall see, posed both opportunities and challenges for the data gathering.

In addition to the interviews with the Abatangamuco members, I interviewed five locally based individuals with a capacity related to the work of the Abatangamuco, such as human rights, gender relations, community welfare and so on. These so-called knowledgeable others were interviewed with the aim of providing me with valuable local knowledge and local outside perspectives on the Abatangamuco. These interviews are not considered part of the primary data, and will only be referred to in this paper insofar as they provided concrete empirical inputs that the analysis in some way relies on. Primarily though, these interviews were a valuable source that provided me with an improved contextualised understanding of Burundian society, gender relations and local culture.¹²

¹² The informants making up the "knowledgeable others" have been anonymized. They include two local government officers, one youth organisation member, one human rights practitioner, one government official, one academic, and one local religious official.

5. Analysis

The data for this study was gathered during a three week visit to Burundi during the fall of 2011. In the course of these three weeks, a total of 20 in-depth interviews were conducted with men in the Abatangamuco movement in the regions of Gitega, Ngozi and Bubanza, as well as a number of interviews with government and civil society staff with mandates overlapping or intersecting with the activities of the Abatangamuco. The interviews with the Umatangamuco's constitute the backbone of this study, while the interviews with the "knowledgeable others" primarily provide an additional layer of understanding as well as an attempt at a check on the men's self-representations. The interviews were all based on the same interview guide, although we allowed the men to steer the conversation onto additional topics during the conversation. The interviews have been analysed with a particular focus on the following topics: history of abuse; initial contact and involvement with Abatangamuco; the family's division of labour; the relationship between the man and the wife; family finances; self-perception of the interviewee's own status in the community; the community's reaction to the change; motivation for change; and views on what constitutes "a real man."

Most of the interviews ran for about one and a half hours, and we allowed the men to spend significant time on topics of particular interest to them. In almost all the interview situations, the wives were present. Initially, the researcher had some reservations about this due to a fear that the presence of the spouse would prevent the respondent from speaking freely on certain topics. However, the presence of the spouse turned out to be an advantage, as she often was able to expand on the man's answers, and sometimes to correct his memory on certain details. It soon became clear that wives often accompany their husbands to Abatangamuco meetings where they are to testify or perform.¹³ It also became clear that when Abatangamuco men approach men in their communities who are mistreating their wives, the wives of the Umatangamuco will often take the abused wife aside and address some of her concerns or provide her with shelter or other types of assistance that she may need. The men's involvement with the Abatangamuco is thus in many ways a family matter and involves the active, if informal, participation of the wife as well as the change and activism of the man.

The following analysis will seek to capture the narrative specificities of the stories told by the respondents. These stories were told with a noticeable uniformity of structure, focusing on past destitution, the moment and process of change, and the present and future results of this change. The men presented their stories in a way which represented the moment of change as a "point of no return", after which they assumed the identities of Umatangamuco and reaped the benefits that were promised to follow from making these changes. Inherent in this narrative structure is a progression from one (traditional, unproductive) to another (new, productive) model of masculinity. Whether this reflects the actual experience or whether it is a notion that is encouraged by the communal self-perception of the movement is not clear, but it appears as if this narrative structure provides the men with a sense of pride in their progress that discourages backlashes and provides a strong incentive for retaining the changes they've made regardless of negative reactions from their peers. The significance of this structure of storytelling and this narrative of change and gain will be discussed towards the end of the chapter.

¹³ All the Umatangamuco interviewed for this study were married, but this is not a prerequisite for joining. However, according to the Umatangamuco that I spoke to, the organisation does not allow their members to have more than one wife.

5.1. History of destitution

The common narrative started with an explanation of how their lives had been much worse before they became involved with the Abatangamuco and thus made the significant changes dictated by the values of the movement. None of the informants deviated from this approach in any relevant way, there were in other words none among the 20 respondents who told us that their lives were fine before they changed, that they had a similar or better material and financial life at that time, or that their status in the community was higher.¹⁴ The destitution, as understood in retrospect by the informants, was related to violence and other forms of abuse as well as to poverty, alcoholism, abuse of family finances, lack of peace and trust in the family, and low status in the community.

5.1.1. Abuse

The respondents were never asked a direct question about their previous abuse of and use of violence against their wives. However, they all touched upon this at some point during the interview, usually right at the start before any questions had been asked. The previous pattern of domestic violence and the measures taken to overcome it is a significant part of the Abatangamuco identity, and most of the men were eager to share this part of their history in order for the researcher to be able to properly understand and appreciate the nature and extent of the change that they have undertaken. It is also quite evident from the way that the men talk about their previous patterns of violence that they are very familiar with their own story and comfortable with telling it. Testifying to your past transgressions is, as explained above, one of the key aspects of being an Umatangamuco, and the stories that we are presented with often come across as rehearsed and told through a very specific moral lens informed by the ethos and expectations of the Abatangamuco movement.

Violence as instrumental

The tales of violence told by the men were all related to how violence was used as a means of punishment as well as a pre-emptive measure to ensure that the woman performed her duties as these were perceived by the man. The men chose either to tell the researcher about one specific act of violence that they put forward as representative of their past behaviour or a culmination of their use of violence, or they presented a more general idea about how violence was previously a feature in their family life. One respondent told me how “I would abuse and beat her until she ran out of the house and hid under a tree for the night. The tree is still there, to remind me of my old sins.” Faustin, one of the leaders of the movement, told us about how he and his peers as they were approaching their wedding days were faced with the perception that violence against their future wives was expected, and was furthermore a precondition for a successful marriage.

When I was younger, the other boys used to tell me that their fathers told to them: “My son, you have to be careful! If you get married, you will need to beat your wife so that she will respect you”.

Also, after having married, we decided as a team that we had to beat our respective wives as soon as we arrived at home and we did it at the same time and made noises in our village. (Faustin Ntiranyibagira, Gitega)

¹⁴ The significance and understanding of status is somewhat more nuanced, and will be discussed in-depth towards the end of the chapter.

This quote resonates with information received from all informants that the researcher met during the three week visit to Burundi. Domestic violence is not only a pervasive problem, but a mainstream expectation within family life and something which is seen as a necessity and, to an extent, as a good thing. It reflects the woman's status as being inferior and as a means rather than as an end in herself. The woman is expected to carry out a disproportionate amount of the burden of the family's work, whatever the man assigns to her. Additionally, she is expected to give birth within about a year and a half of the wedding. If a couple are unable to conceive, it is always perceived as a fault of the woman. Several informants related stories about conflicts and violence in the family stemming from the failure to conceive, or from the wife giving birth to only girls or, interestingly, only boys. Essentially, violence is seen as a normal tool for ensuring that women obey and respect their husbands, that they do whatever tasks are assigned to them, and that they are punished for failing to perform as expected or conform to the gender-specific expectations the men and the community has of them.

Sexual violence

Several respondents talked about sexual violence as a form of abuse that they exposed their wives to, and this too was understood in the context of using violence to ensure that the wife performs the duties that are expected of her. They explained how there was no trust and affection between them and their wives, and that they would complete intercourse by force. A young man in the Bubanza region reflected that

I mistreated my wife and I knew it was bad because I often beat her in the night and to make sure that I corrected her I may go out and spend all the money I had in order to leave it outside. Because of the mistreatment, my wife could spend three days in the house and I realized that I was losing because of it. After we got married she started looking down on me and I thought that I had to mistreat her in order to correct her. I often got and kept resentment in my heart whenever she did wrong to me until she did a fifth mistake. Then I could decide to punish her and from that day I would never discuss with her for a whole week for example and when it came time for having sexual intercourse, I did it without understanding and later I discovered that it was a kind of rape. I wanted to mention that many men do not know that they rape their wives in this way. (Alexandre Niragira, Bubanza)

None of the other men spoke about the forced intercourse as rape, but rather as a symptom of the lack of trust and respect in their family, and as something that the men thought they were entitled to do if the wife would not consent to perform sexually. For the most part, they did not perceive this as a type of violence, but rather as one aspect of what they now perceive as the disrespectful and morally wrong way in which they behaved before they changed.

5.1.2. Family life

The gender-based violence that is so pervasive in Burundian society appears to be strongly linked to the gender role expectations of men and women in family life. Men are expected to assert their dominance through violence, and women are expected to be submissive and obedient of their husbands. As has already been seen, the Abatangamuco movement is not limited to addressing domestic, gender based violence, but rather it addresses the relationship dynamic and the household structures that underpin the traditional role of violence in family life. I therefore thought it was of significant importance to ask the respondents to talk about their family life before and after their change, including how they divided the labour and the household chores, how the man and the wife's relationship was prior to the change compared to now, and how they handled and previously had handled the family finances.

According to several of the respondents, the most challenging aspect of the men's effort to change the power relations with their wives was to establish mutual control and command over all financial resources available to the family. Money was a key signifier of power, and to many men their sole command over the family income put them in a position where they could deny their wives' basic necessities such as adequate food and clothes as a means of punishment or discipline. At the same time, their control over the money meant that they could maintain social relations outside the family in a way which reinforced their masculine status, including drinking in bars, gambling and paying for prostitutes. Many of them made it clear that before they changed, they would not allow the woman to participate in VSL-schemes or other potentially income generating projects, even though the family would benefit significantly from additional financial resources. The money available to the family was seen as the man's domain, and if the woman was to bring money into the family he feared that this would challenge his domination. In other words, money was essential to the disparity between the man and wife in most of the families we met. Men drew aspects of their power and masculine dominance from the fact that they were in charge of the finances and that the woman, even though she often did the majority of the income generating work, was considered not to contribute to the wealth of the family. At the same time, many men were weary of allowing their wives to attend workshops and projects geared towards their economic empowerment, an activity that could give the family a much-needed added income, as this may challenge the dominance which the man drew from his undivided control over the family finances. A respondent in the Gitega province illustrated this power dynamic in this way:

Before I changed, I thought that I was the only one to be responsible of the wealth of the family. My wife had to beg for everything, even for soap. After I have changed, everything is shared based on dialogue in my family.

I used to sell immature crops from my field but now banana and others crops are very helpful for the family instead of me selling them for my personal needs. (Daniel Bitungimana, Gitega)

The unrestricted ability to use any financial resources available to them for their own personal good was a source of masculine pride to many of the men that we spoke to, and several of them told us how this was essential for how they were perceived by their local peers. Being able to buy beer, both for himself and sometimes for his friends, was a sign that he was a strong and successful man who was in charge of his own house.

Inequalities and power

All the respondents clearly stated that prior to their involvement with the Abatangamuco, there had been no trust, or no peace, in their house. For most families, this was a case of the man completely dominating and terrorising the wife (and the children, in many cases), including extensive use of physical and psychological violence. However, a number of the respondents painted a picture that was more nuanced, in which the wife used the limited powers available to her to assert her dissatisfaction with the behaviour of her husband and the way in which his lifestyle choices impacted negatively on the livelihood and quality of life of the family as a whole. Such means could include a refusal to speak to the man, or a refusal to wash his clothes. In one case, a man who told us about how he had planned to force his wife out of the house, or even to kill her, in order to restore his own pride which had been damaged by his community's reaction to their marriage as she was older than him.

After the fourth birth, we continued quarrelling. We couldn't do anything together and she took a decision not to wash my clothes. Then, I decided to take another woman. (Léonidas Ndayimirije, Ngozi)¹⁵

In other words, the women attempt to retain whatever agency they can in a situation where they have severely limited room to act and are strongly dependent on the husband for their livelihood. Women do not inherit in Burundi, and in a country where as many as 90% of the population solely or partly rely on agriculture for their sustenance, there are few alternatives available for women wanting to secure their own livelihood.

Division of labour

The division of labour in an average, rural Burundian household is, according to general consensus among my informants, strongly weighted in favour of the man doing a significantly smaller amount of work while retaining control of the income and the resources. Women often do the majority of the ploughing and sowing in the fields, as well as the harvesting and other necessary tasks. This is heavy, labour-intensive work as access to modern tools and aids is extremely limited. Additionally, women are for the most part exclusively responsible for the maintenance of the household, including heavy and time consuming chores such as gathering water, finding and chopping firewood, and preparing and cooking food. Among the informants, there were a wide range of stories about the way in which their household had been organised prior to the men's involvement with the Abatangamuco. For some, tasks were to an extent shared between the man and the wife, but always according to the decisions of the man and always with a disproportionate burden on the wife. For example, they could go to the fields together to plough, but the man would make the wife carry his hoe¹⁶ as well as her own, and he would make her stay in the fields and continue to work if he himself left to go to a bar, to the market or in other ways take a break from the heavy work. The wife would also be solely responsible for cooking, including all labour intensive preparations, after the work was done. Others would tell the researcher about how the wife was the only one to do any work at all. This was primarily the case for the poorer families in the selected pool, those who cultivated only a small – often rented – plot and who had no livestock or other additional sources of income. One respondent, who had seen significant improvement in his livelihood situation since joining the Abatangamuco movement, gave us an example of such a setup:

Before I changed, I couldn't do it [assist the wife with the work]. She went early in the morning to the field with the workers and at about 10 o'clock, she knew that she had to come to look for food and warm it in order to go back to feed the workers in the field. (Daniel Bitungimana, Gitega)

Another one echoes the same sentiment, telling us how he used to believe that there was no reason why he should have to do any work when he had the power to command his wife to carry out all the tasks instead.

¹⁵ This man is no longer married to the second woman, as the Abatangamuco does not condone bigamy. However, it was not quite clear what happened to this second woman.

¹⁶ Hand-held ploughing tool.

I couldn't fetch water, now I do it. I couldn't look for firewood, now I can do it. I couldn't cook, now I can cook. From my understanding, I thought that my wife was a house worker. Even ploughing, I thought that I didn't have to help her. (Léonidas Ndayimirije, Ngozi)

The notion that the man is in no way obliged to contribute to the work of the family was echoed by several respondents;

Before I changed, I never accompanied my wife to the field for ploughing. If she asked me to go with her, it was like an insult.

If she was busy doing tasks in the house, I never realized that I have to help her. I wanted her to deal with all tasks alone. (Frédéric Minani, Bubanza)

What all these men communicated to me, was that their pride as men of the house meant that they should not have to do anything that they did not want to do. Being able to relax, drink beer with your peers and leave all tasks to your wife was perceived as a sign of manliness and strength. Doing “feminine” tasks or helping the wife out with the work was seen as a weakness and to be emasculating. An informant aptly put this traditional view in the context of the pervasive use of violence against women.

While mistreating her I thought it was the way of showing her that I was powerful but later, I discovered that it was unawareness. Being powerful for me meant that all what I wanted had to be done, either selling a chicken, a goat or having sexual intercourse whether she agreed or not. At the time, I thought this was how a real man behaved. Many Burundians still think like this. (Ntahobakuriye Melthus, Bubanza)

Clearly, this reflects a profoundly unequal power dynamic between husband and wife, one which is reinforced by mainstream society and culture, and passed on to boys and girls by their parents and their peers.

5.1.3. Status, masculinity and wealth

The stories of status and social standing have an odd and unresolved duality about it that suggest that these men, prior to their change, were negotiating conflicting notions of masculinity in their everyday lives. On the one hand, they want to be perceived as prosperous and successful, as a man of honour, his integrity stemming from his success. On the other, they have grown up with a notion of manliness under which a man is defined as someone who has the power to follow his own whims and desires without having to answer to his wife or anyone else and who has the power to not have to work but rather to make others, primarily their wives, wait on them and fulfil their every wish. One respondent illustrated this by telling us how, before he became an Umatangamuco, he would call his wife over to where he was sitting, taking her away from the task she was performing in the house or the yard, in order to give him something that was right in front of him, well within his reach:

Even if she was not around, I had to call her so that she came and give me things which were within my reach. (Ntahobakuriye Melthus, Bubanza)

According to him, this was something that he did not so much because he was unwilling to stretch out to reach for whatever he wanted himself, but to ascertain his power and dominance. This very specific example illustrates a trend running through the vast majority of the responses – namely that masculinity within the context of the family meant an ability to assert the perceived

right to always have things done the way you want, and never have your wife (or your children) question your decisions, commands or judgment. For many men, this expectation was interpreted to mean that the man was to be “the king” of the household in a very literal sense of the word, with the rest of the family as unquestioning servants. The perception that it is the man’s right to spend the family income according to his personal desires should he wish to do so, seems to follow from this aspect of masculinity for many of the men.

Another important aspect of the role of status has to do with the men’s interaction with their local peer group and with their local community more generally. As has already been hinted at, the ability of the men to go to the local bar and buy beer with their friends was for many an important part of their lives. They would relate in our conversation how they would sell off produce, animals or belongings in order to get money for beer, and how they could elevate their status in the group by buying beer for the others as well.

The big challenge was to leave the company. It was difficult for me to leave my company and I wondered how I will go alone to drink beer and to eat meat like I used to do before I change.
(Laurant Nsaguye, Ngozi)

The experience that Nsaguye describes echoes a number of the responses that we received when asking the men about the most challenging aspect of their change. Many others refused to acknowledge any difficulty at all associated with their change, claiming that once they had “seen the light”, they knew what they had to do and did so immediately. This is in contrast to the expectations of the research, namely that peer pressure and identity conflicts regarding masculinity and male gender role expectations would pose significant challenges for the sustainability of the change. As most of these men spoke with several years’ hindsight however, it may be worth factoring in the possibility that their story has been consciously or unconsciously tweaked to conform to their current set of values. Such retrospective self-editing makes sense when one considers the strong testimonial imperative of the movement, and the role of the men’s own stories of transformation.

In the light of Nsaguye’s statement, the following quotes show how tightly interwoven male camaraderie, drinking and access to money is in these men’s social context.

If you behave like I did, the community considers you as brave man. Also, it is very difficult to leave the company. I used to give beer to my friends and while coming back home, some of my friends used to lift me like a king for having bought some beer to them. (David, Bubanza)

Before, I was not ploughing; my job was to drink beer. (Melchiade Ndabatinye, Bubanza)

Looking at these stories of peer relations, we see that social pride in these male peer groups is intimately tied to the ability of the men to spend money on things they desire, such as beer, rather than on things that the family needs for sustenance or improving their livelihoods. These stories align with the very common statement made by many of the men considering how important it used to be to them to be fully in control of the family finances, not letting their wife know the amount of money he had or allowing her to spend any of it. The dominant model of masculinity illustrated by these stories is thus one of recklessness, irresponsibility and male camaraderie, rather than of success and accumulated wealth.

5.2. History of change

For a lot of the respondents, their initial contact with the Abatangamuco movement came about through real or perceived prospects of a small financial gain. Some of them were tricked by a friend or neighbour who was already in touch with the movement with the promise of a day's work or a small amount of money, and some of them were exposed to the movement through community meetings which they attended for capacity building purposes. Rural Burundians are exceedingly poor, and their disposable income is generally very low. Many respondents spoke about money in a way that illustrated that very often they quite simply did not have any cash at all, depending primarily on their own produce and stored food for sustenance. It is unclear from the data gathered whether this is the common modus for the movement to attract an audience of potential members to their public happenings, or whether these lures and promises were the personal initiative of individuals seeking to attract the participation of particular acquaintances or other members of their community. Either way, the data suggests that most of the men were not aware of the Abatangamuco when they first encountered them either at a public event or in a personal consultation. Those who first encountered them at a public meeting all described the situation as one where they thought they were going to a meeting of a different nature, or that indeed they were, but that the Abatangamuco utilised this platform to spread their message and recruit prospective members. The following sub-chapters detail stories of how the men reason around their process of change when it comes to abuse, family life, and status and masculinity.

5.2.1. Abuse

The tales invariably come across as very firmly set in the past, as the “bad old days”; a place that it is now close to impossible to return to as the man has “seen the light” and could never act in such an uninformed way again. The wife usually confirms that there have been no transgressions since the commitment to change, although this is of course very difficult to confirm. At the very least, it is clear that the men have internalised a new set of expectations concerning what is the proper way for them to treat their wives, expectations that are incompatible with their former lifestyles and the traditional expectations that most of them report to have grown up with.

A common theme among the responses we got was that the men, after making their decision to change, would go to his wife and ask for her pardon for the way he had treated her. This is also a requirement in the Abatangamuco value set, an action that goes hand in hand with the mandatory testimonies as a way of showing that the new Umatangamuco is committed to his change. This quote from a respondent in Ngozi is illustrative of the types of stories the men told us about giving this commitment to change to their wives;

Then I decided to go with her in the fields in order to discuss and find that I had to change. After, I proposed her to go to a bar and when we arrived, I bought to her a bottle of beer, we discussed and then I got an opportunity to ask for pardon. (Léonidas Ndayimirije, Ngozi)

For Ndayimirije, it was very significant that he brought his wife to the bar and bought her a bottle of beer. Prior to his change, as was the case for many of the men, he would take whatever money was available and spend it on beer for himself in the company of his social peers. Bringing his wife along and letting her indulge in this small luxury was for him a powerful signal that she had the same right as him to enjoy herself, and that she was his equal in value.

None of the men we spoke to would admit to having resorted to violence against their wives after becoming Umatangamucos. Some of them admitted to the occasional instance of quarrelling or too much drinking, and this seemed to most of them to be considered natural and unavoidable.

The main point for most of them was that they would realise that they had transgressed, and ask their wife for pardon.

Even if we changed, we are still human beings and we are tempted. It happens that we come in conflict but we remember immediately that we are Abatangamuco and think about what others who are not Abatangamuco would think, and then we stop quarrelling. (Protais Barumpozako, Gitega)

Domitille Ntacobakimvuna, a Learning and Gender Advisor at CARE Burundi, explains that there have not been many so-called backsliders. She attributes this to it being an honour to the men to be called an Abatangamuco, and that they have no incentive to lose this. As she puts it, “to be someone trusted is priceless in this culture.” She does, however, give one example of such a transgression, and how the movement dealt with it.

On 8 March, women’s day, a man came and officially testified about change. It was a big meeting, many people were there, including government officials. He then went back to his community and did something wrong: He drank too much, he insulted a community leader, and he slept with another woman. The community then stood up and said: we’ve had enough of you. Stop cheating people by saying you are an Abatangamuco. Abatangamucos also came, brought him down [figuratively], and deleted him from their lists. Then they sat down and thought about how to deal with people falling back who then want back in. Shall we leave them behind forever? Or are there alternatives? They agreed to let him testify in the community that he will no longer make these mistakes. Maybe he can convince us to allow him back in. He will be observed – when real change and repent is observed he will be accepted, but their eyes remain on him. This happened early during the movement, and is not common. Small slip-ups happen, they are dealt with internally. (Domitille Ntacobakimvuna, CARE Burundi)

At the same time the Abatangamuco seem to be strictly protecting their image by reacting strongly and seriously to any transgressions by its members, and allowing for some pragmatism in dealing with single instances of abuse. A man who continues to beat or otherwise abuse his wife after becoming an Abatangamuco will be excluded from the organisation, while one who has one instance of a smaller incident will be dealt with by his Abatangamuco peers. Crucial to this, again, is the role of testimony and apologising. A man who apologises and redeems himself in the eyes of the movement and his wife is still allowed to be called an Umatangamuco. One who tries to get away with it is considered to be a fake, and will not be granted a second chance.

5.2.2. Family life

The men tend to focus on two sets of motivating factors when relating what it was that convinced them to join the Abatangamuco. One is the financial aspect, relating how testimonies made them understand that changing their behaviour and the interaction with their wives would be conducive to an improved family economy and material progress. The other factor is more complicated, and on the surface seems to contradict the dominating model of masculinity that creates expectations of wasteful use of money, non-accountability towards the wife, and a focus on short-term pleasure that was described above. Many of the men describe a sense of shame upon hearing the testimonies of the Abatangamuco for the first time. They recognised their own situation and the wrongfulness of it, and many of them said that they felt that the testimonies were in reality a description of *his* situation, making him feel exposed and ashamed that everyone would know their family secrets. This is quite interesting considering how elsewhere, the impression given is that the way these men were living was in fact in line with local expectations of manliness, and

thus should not be something to keep secret, be ashamed of, or at all recognise as problematic. This again suggests that there are two competing masculinities that these men are negotiating, and that which one is presented depends on the social context that the man finds himself in at any given time. A representative from a local organisation fighting gender-based violence provided the following perception on this conundrum;

For some people in the community, a man is the one who takes a lot of beer and who has many wives. People who expect this conduct from a man, they perceive Abatangamuco as people who are not serious and who are revealing the family secret. According to them, Abatangamuco are to be isolated.

For the other category of the community, they have a good view on Abatangamuco because these people are the best examples for pacific cohabitation in the family and in the community. They share the family wealth and their families are developing. They don't waste the family wealth. For example, when a man takes three bottles of beer he wastes a quantity of beans to be consumed during a whole week by a family made of six members. (Informant from local organisation working against gender-based violence)

With this in mind, it is interesting to look at how a selection of the respondents described their first interaction with the Abatangamuco, and what it was in that encounter that spurred them to make the significant changes necessary to become one of the Umatangamucos. For some, the perception of shame was the main trigger that started them on the road towards Abatangamuco membership:

When I attended the session of testimonies, they were saying that misusing the family wealth is not good and that to mistreat the wife is bad. I thought that they were addressing themselves to me while others were looking at me as abnormal. I thought I should join the initiatives and when they said about Abatangamuco movement, I decided to join it. One day I testified to my wife and asked for pardon. After, I wrote to my friends to tell them that I gave up their company. (Bonito Nzigirabarya, Gitega)

Nzigirabarya's statement is interesting not only as it describes the transformative power that the perceived negative judgement of others had on him, but also in how he sees this change as incompatible with remaining in his social group. This again points to the presence of two distinct models of masculinity that for some people are considered incompatible. The data collected suggests that for a majority of the respondents, the primary reason from moving from one model to the other was the realisation that the behaviour they were engaged in was counterproductive to progress and increased wealth.

When I listened to them testifying, I realized that all what they were saying was happening in my house and wondered if I had to change. My wife was a member of UMWIZERO Project. My wife was a hard working woman. Besides taking the harvest in order to sell it at the market, I used to steal the money she earned from this work. (Laurant Nsaguye, Ngozi)

When they came, they told stories about their families. Some of them were stealing beans and bananas from their houses because they thought that all family wealth was belonging to husbands. I discover that it was also my case. Through their testimonies, they told about many cases regarding how a man could help in the household tasks. For instance, a man could fetch

water and look for firewood. On some aspects, I was not very convinced but they kept teaching me and later I totally changed. (Sylvestre Hatungimana, Bubanza)

I attended a meeting organised by CARE where a man testified. I saw my own situation in what the man said about wasting his family's wealth and potential. (Salvator Bigirimana, Gitega)

I heard the testimonies of Salvator and I found that what he was saying was happening in my house. I decided to try even if I was not really convinced. I was committed to test what I have heard about advantages of the change and things started to change. I got peace and energy by making dialogue with my wife and then gradually, we decided to testify each to the other. (Faustin Ntiranyibagira, Gitega)

Parallel to the impact of the shame and the acknowledgement of the destructive aspects of their then-current lives, an overarching feature of the testimonies that made up the men's minds seems to be how they were able to identify with the stories that were being told. This sentiment was present in all the responses I received, and appears to be a key feature of the Abatangamuco's recruitment success. Or more simply put:

Faustin and Bonito via CARE staff facilitation came and gave their testimonies to people in my community. When I heard about their testimonies, their problems were like mine and I decided to change. (Gaetan Minani, Gitega)

Living the change

As we have seen, one of the underlying changes that the Abatangamuco movement promotes, and that the respondents report, is that an Umatangamuco must collaborate with his wife instead of insisting on remaining the sole power in the family. This includes planning the division of work and household tasks together, managing the income together, and deciding on investments and other changes to the family life together. Both the researcher and local and Norwegian CARE staff that were interviewed for the study expected such changes to come about slowly, be subject to frequent setbacks and shortcomings, and involve significant resistance in the men's communities. However, the responses we received suggested that the men simply decided to change, returned to their wives and told them about their resolution, and seamlessly transitioned into a new structure for their family life. There is reason to believe that this may not have been the case, and some respondents did admit as much after significant probing. Still, this is an instance where it appears that the men have a strong vested interest in showcasing their change, in line with the established expectations of Abatangamuco members.

Several informants told us that the primary negative reactions they got from their communities to their choice to become an Umatangamuco, and the ones that they found it most problematic to deal with, came from those friends who questioned their loyalty and masculinity when they stopped drinking and buying beer in their company.

Some of them [my friends] excluded me and thought that I was bewitched but now, they are joining us because they see how my family is improving our living conditions.

The big challenge was to leave their company. It was difficult for me to leave my company and I wondered how I will go alone to drink beer and to eat meat like I used to do before I changed. (Laurant Nsaguye, Ngozi)

Similar experiences were echoed by other informants, who told us how their changed behaviour and outlook was disapproved of by their group of male friends.

People from my former company started looking down on me. When people who used to share beer with me heard me testifying, they concluded that I had been bewitched. (David, Bubanza)

It is also worth reiterating another part of David's story, referred to previously on page 27, as it is very representative of the role of the men's social peer group:

If you behave like I did, the community consider you as a brave man. Also, it is very difficult to leave their company. I used to give beer to my friends and while coming back home, some of my friends used to lift me like a king for having bought some beer to them. (David, Bubanza)

Their experiences illustrate expectations of masculinity prevalent in all-male social groups in the countryside, expectations that to a large extent are in line with the expectations of society as a whole. A strong man is one who is able to entertain his own fancies and desires without being challenged by his wife, which according to the general feedback from the informants in practice often means that status in these groups is measured in the ability of a man to buy beer for himself and his friends, and to spend a lot of time in their company.

5.2.3. Status, masculinity and wealth

The impression that many of the responses give is that many of the men only discovered that there were alternatives to the destructive model of masculinity that they had always identified with. Interestingly, these alternatives seem to exist in Burundian society independently of the Abatangamuco, but the men that we spoke to did not appear to have seen this identity as available to them. As the informant from the NGO working against gender-based violence explained, quoted on page 30,

For many men, becoming an Umatangamuco meant having to find a new way to see themselves as men. One reason why they have managed to do so may be that the Abatangamuco values, while far removed from the model of masculinity that these men were used to identifying with, still resonated with other ideals in the Burundian society. (...)

For the other category of the community, they have a good view on Abatangamuco because these people are the best examples for pacific cohabitation in the family and in the community. They share the family wealth and their families are developing. They don't waste the family wealth. (Informant from local organisation working against gender-based violence)

Particularly, the status that comes from being a trusted man in the community is something that the Abatangamuco values can potentially make available for the men, and something that appears to carry a lot of weight.

In our culture, to be someone who is trusted, that has no price. To them to see that people are coming to look for your help that is very valuing. When they look at the peace they have in their house that is more than money. So these engaged men are not automatically Abatangamuco. They know that they will not call every person an Umatangamuco because there is a lot of steps and requirements to fulfil to be called an Umatangamuco. (Domitille Ntacobakimvuna, Gender and Learning Advisor, CARE Burundi)

For some men, the first introduction to the Abatangamuco brought these competing masculinities into confrontation with each other. Listening to testimonies about how the traditional family dynamics and abusive behaviour of other men had harmed the prospects of their families illustrated how behaving in line with the “man-as-king” male gender role prevented the men from gaining respect, honour and trustworthiness from being prosperous and successful. For many, this was the start of a thought process that made them aware of the destructiveness of their behaviour and of certain aspects of the way they organise their families. One man who had been mistreating his wife for years in the hope that she would leave his house so that he could bring his mistress to live there described his experience in this way:

At that day, I had planned to chase away my wife and bring the other one. When people from Bubanza started to testify, I realised that they were talking about my case. They were talking all about what was happening in my house. I came back here and I decided to change because up until then I was even willing to destroy this house to make her leave. (Etienne Nzobagora, Ngozi)

This man’s description of his reaction to the testimonies is telling in that it shows how he realised that his behaviour, more than being morally wrong because of the abuse it entailed, had to change because he was acting in a way that sabotaged his access to increased prosperity and wealth, values that he closely associates with his male pride. Simultaneously, the behaviour he decides to change, namely adultery and violence against his wife, are also traits that he associates with masculinity – acts that he has every right to carry out should he wish to do so, and acts that he would be considered weak by his peers for avoiding for the sake of his wife.

We see, then, a clear trend in the issues that the men report as being decisive for their choice to join the Abatangamuco and make all the fundamental changes necessary to assume this identity. Very few speak of the mental and bodily integrity of women, of their right to be a part of the decision-making processes in the family or the morality associated with abuse. Rather, the trend we observe is that the men focus on how their traditional modes of behaviour are holding them back, keeping them from progressing and causing them to lose honour and status in the wider community because of their poverty, disruptive and noisy family life, and other observable markers of failure.

I used to quarrel with my wife. We hadn’t enough time to work for our family and couldn’t get to eat unless I work for money. I realized that I have to change so that my family should improve their living conditions. I decided to change because people who were testifying were poor like me before they changed. (Protai Barumpozako, Gitega)

The thought process behind their decisions to change thus seems to lead to an alteration in their perception of masculinity. Their new perception, and the behavioural change that it entailed, was incompatible with that of their social peers, creating tensions such as described by Etienne Nzobagora from the Ngozi province;

My companions rejected me and excluded me. I was isolated. Even at the job, they thought that my wife had bewitched me and was over my control. They excluded me and thought that I wasn’t worthy to remain a part of them.

The community didn’t understand. They even concluded that I have been bewitched. Even today, some of them are still convinced that it is witchcraft.

Now, they view me as someone who can help them. They appreciated the way I'm living with my wife. If someone among them gets into trouble, they even call on me and I help them. (Etienne Nzobagora, Ngozi)

For most of the men I spoke with, manliness was intimately tied to status and position in the community. The opinions of others are important, and one man told us how, at the start of his involvement with the Abatangamuco, he would sneak out after dark in order to fetch water or firewood. Even if he was determined to attempt following the values of the Abatangamuco, he was not willing to face the mocking and the drop in status that would follow from being observed by his peers carrying out such feminized tasks. In this context, the evolution narrative makes a lot of sense as a tool for the men to understand and make sense of their change in the context of the wider community. They are very much aware, and proud, of their otherness. At the same time however, this otherness takes away aspects of their lives that they put a high premium on, such as status and companionship. Seeing their change as being in the forefront of a wider change to the dominant views of their community makes it easier to accept and deal with the initial negative reactions of the community. As one respondent in Gitega quite simply put it,

I had no negative reactions except that in the beginning, they thought that I'm not a real man. Now they start thinking that I am a real man. (Bonito Nzgirabarya, Gitega)

I asked all the respondents to tell me what, in their opinion, constituted a “real man”,¹⁷ whether this opinion had changed, and what they perceived to be the dominant perception of masculinity in their communities. The answers were remarkably similar across the sample, varying primarily by degree in terms of whether they considered their own (new) perceptions to be in conflict with the majority perception in the community. In fact, the answers were so similar that they gave the impression of being rehearsed; giving a strong impression of a movement that relies heavily on the internalization of common norms and perceptions as identifiers for the movement. The first respondent eloquently explained his positions past and present, and the views of his community, in this way:

Before, I could not understand how a man who was not beating his wife was worthy to be called a man.

For some, a real man is the one who is able to own his own things and others' things. An example, before I changed, in our group, we used to say that a man who is all the time with his wife, supporting her to cultivate instead of spending all his money in the bar was not a real man. For us who changed, we see things differently.

A real man is the one who takes care of the family, who informs the family on what he got. Those who didn't yet change used to say that: “wives don't need to know the wealth of the man.” It is not true, when the family will face financial problems and that you say that you hadn't money, how your wife will trust you?

A real man is the one who helps his wife. (Salvator Bigirimana, Gitega)

¹⁷ Phrase chosen as the closest English equivalent of the most appropriate Kirundi term.

This response proved to be a prediction for the remaining 19 interviews for several reasons. First of all, it illustrates a very black-and-white view of the difference between his views pre- and post Abatangamuco. Second, it draws on the prevalence of machismo and misogynist values in the community, pointing out how their previous views were in line with and sanctioned by their peers. Finally, it relies on a narrative in which the men who have changed have, by the nature of this change, progressed not only in terms of morality and values but also financially and materially. It creates an understanding whereby the Abatangamuco identity is construed as a “step up” from the traditional values and modes of living, and whereby responses from the community are interpreted within this frame of reference. Negative responses are based on people’s lack of understanding and “backwards” ways, positive responses are interpreted as unavoidable as soon as the community understands that the Abatangamuco way leads to progress and increased development. In this framework, the Abatangamuco members interpret themselves as pioneers; whether the community receives them as such or rather responds by exclusion and suspiciousness is interpreted as a function of the level to which the community itself has evolved.

Some of the respondents emphasised how the dynamic between their father and mother was a key factor in shaping their expectations for masculine behaviour and family life. They would watch their fathers dictate the everyday life of the family, terrorising their mothers and behaving solely with regard to their own pleasures and preferences. This they perceive in hindsight as being the source of their pre-Abatangamuco behaviour, outlook and self-perception.

In my family, I have never seen my father helping my mother and I thought that this was the way of living. After I changed, I realized that a real man is the one who supports the family. Who initiates a dialogue in the family and who implies his wife in the decision making process.

Those who are not Abatangamuco think that a real man is the one who can't help the family and who decide alone on how to use the family's income. (Daniel Bitungimana, Gitega)

A similar explanation was provided by a respondent in Ngozi:

I thought it was my right to behave this way and thought that women didn't have any rights.

My father had four wives, two here at Mihigo and two others in Kirundo Province and none of his wives had a right to say anything in his house. I figured that I had to behave like he did. Later on, I realized that it was not good to behave like he did because it was a negative aspect from the tradition.

A real man is the one who gives up to negative aspects from the tradition. A real man is the one who asks for advice from his wife, and who plans and does everything with his wife. Very few are sharing my understanding but more and more men want to join us. (Bernard Ngenzirabona, Ngozi)

When asked about the source of his previous convictions, one man in Ngozi emphasized the intrinsic nature of the traditional male gender role, saying that he was never directly told to behave in a certain way, but that he learned from what he saw around him.

I learned from only negative masculinity roles! No one advised me to do so. A real man is the one who collaborates and works together with his wife, advise members of his family, supports others while facing problems, and says and acts accordingly. (Laurant Nsaguye, Ngozi)

Another man explains how the strength of his father's model faded when he saw the benefits of the change that he undertook as an Abatangamuco. Again, this man's self-representation illustrates the importance of the elevated status some of the Abatangamuco members come to enjoy in their communities as the improvements to their material wealth and family life becomes apparent.

The views of how a man should be are caused by customs based on the culture. The way I saw my father, he lived like a king.

Before, I was called a man but the man I was is not the man I look alike today. Actually, I have peace in my house and even people trust me and I am among the five community leaders. While walking in the community, people say: "look over there, an Umatangamuco is passing". This expression builds me a lot and encourages me to behave as an Umatangamuco. (Sylvestre Hatungimana, Bubanza)

The responses I received all pointed to a trend where the community slowly adjusted to, and came to appreciate, the changes and values of the Abatangamuco. Many explained that they were initially looked down upon by the greater community, accused of being bewitched by their wives or of receiving bribes from CARE or other organisations. However, they all emphasised how this has gotten better. There are degrees of improvement though, seeming to roughly correspond with the strength, prevalence and longevity of the Abatangamuco presence in the community. Some, such as Sylvestre Hatungimana's quotes above, describe a situation in which a large enough critical mass in his community has come to view the Abatangamuco as an asset and as being imbued with increased social status. Others find that their community remains divided in their view of the Umatangamucos in their midst, and others again speak of a situation where they are still looked down upon by the majority of their community, but receive support and positive feedback from a small core group consisting of their family and immediate neighbours as well as fellow Umatangamucos and often local religious or administrative authorities. There is not enough data to say anything definite about the progression of acceptance and progressive heightening of status for Umatangamucos in their communities, but there is significant support for a hypothesis that increased material wealth and domestic peace and stability generate increased acceptance for this alternative mode of masculinity. It is possible to understand this as a function of the two competing models of masculinity previously discussed. The fact that successful masculinity can entail, on the one hand, selfish and destructive behavioural patterns and, on the other hand, material success and personal improvements may facilitate an easier acceptance of the Abatangamuco model.

For the men who are still struggling to receive acceptance from a significant strata of his community, particularly his male peers, it may be more difficult to maintain a sense of masculinity, and the responses from some of these men suggest that they rely heavily on the Abatangamuco identity as an alternative source of masculine pride. They express masculinity as an identity that is dependent on whether they view themselves as having succeeded and progressed, removing it from the requirement of acceptance by others.

They [other men] conclude that we are not serious men because according to them, they think that we haven't control of our wives. They think that our wives undermining us. A real man is

the one who lives peacefully with his wife. A real man is the one who plans what to do together with his wife. My change does not diminish my manhood. (Melchior Nyabenda, Ngozi)

The following respondent contextualised this by focusing on how he had realised that his wife actually had a right to personal freedom and could be an asset to the family. This man was somewhat of an outlier in the study in that he articulated directly thoughts that related to the rights of his wife, and of women as such.

Before, I was told that if I bought clothes for my wife, she will be above me. I believed that the wife has nothing to say and that I was the one to take decision on the use of the wealth of the family. When I am advising them some of them tell me that I am not a real man and that I had nothing to advise them considering that my wife is above me. A real man [as seen by the community] is the one who never helps his wife and who hides his money from his wife. To me, the real man is the one who shares the wealth with his family, and who gives peace and freedom to all members of the family. (Gaetan Minani, Gitega)

In sum, we see that the men have navigated the challenges of opposing established male gender role expectations through emphasizing the status stemming from success, progress and stability. There is reason to believe that the pre-existing competing masculinity models in Burundi has made this easier, as they could identify aspects of status elevating features in existing models, even though they still had to face the challenge of breaking with their primary peer group who remained within the more destructive masculinity model that the Umatangamucos were seeking to leave behind.

6. Discussion

The Abatangamuco initiative is fascinating for many reasons, chiefly because it appears to sidestep obstacles of tradition and established gender roles that would usually be perceived as almost insurmountable. Underlying this study is therefore a wish to understand whether the Abatangamuco project is something independently sustainable that can potentially be a model for similar initiatives elsewhere.

6.1. The importance of status and trust

Because of the perceived strength and rigidity of traditional gender role expectations and their importance to social structures, I expected to find that the changed men were struggling to be accepted in their communities. It was therefore interesting to find that the men who became Umatangamucos experienced an improvement in their social status, albeit often after an initial period of hostility and ridicule.

The men are breaking with their traditional perception of masculinity, which for many meant that they were losing their network of peers with whom they would socialise in bars and the like. What came out during the course of this study was that these men could access an alternative source of masculine pride which replaced the destructive male gender role with which they previously identified. Their change meant not only that they moved from being dominant, tyrannical and abusive in the household to being collaborative, peaceful and harmonious. At the same time, they went from being among the poorest to among the successful and prosperous; from being a noisy nuisance of a neighbour to being a peaceful and quiet one; from being a drunkard to being a hard worker; from having a skinny wife in dirty clothes to having a wife with meat on her bones and several items of clothing to choose from; from being an unstable presence in the community to being reliable. They, and the researcher, found that these qualities were also associated with masculinity. Taken together, they are the hallmarks of a trustworthy man, and trust means elevated status in these communities.

The high premium put on being trusted in Burundian society provides the new Abatangamuco members with an alternative source of male pride, and a strong foundation for building an alternative masculinity that can be read as a version of a pre-existing ideal instead of a radically new, unfamiliar, and thus potentially undesirable version of manliness. The support received from senior members of the movement helps the men maintain their change, and observing the material benefits as well as the increased status these peers have in their communities reinforces the alternative model of masculinity as an ideal.

Several of the men described the reactions of their communities in a way which suggested that their status followed an initial downwards trajectory which, after a while, when the community observed the tangible benefits of their change, turned upwards and eventually settled them in a higher position of status and honour than what they had prior to their change. A smaller number of the men have moved up to occupy actual positions of power and trust in the community administration, while others tell us about how their neighbours and peers have started turning to them for advice when they have conflict in their own families or otherwise are in need of advice. One of those who now occupy a position of power explained it like this:

I have been chosen to be the chief of this community! All the population under my control knows that I'm responsible and trust me. Before I changed, the population wouldn't have trusted me to

collect money for common goods, and this will help all the community. (Faustin Ntiranyibagira, Gitega)

Others explain how an increasingly large part of their community start turning to them for advise, and using them and their families as models of good when advising others. One Gitega respondent told us that:

When they see me, they discover a big change and wish that I teach them so that they change too. My family and peers wanted me to teach them so that they could change as I changed.
(Donatien Ndundu, Ngozi)

In the same vein, another man explained his experience in this way:

In the beginning, some of my friends excluded me saying that I was no longer worthy to be a man. Slowly, I went on advising them and now some of them are joining me in the movement.

Now, I help even others. For instance, I helped two families which were always quarrelling and now they live in a total harmony. People respect me now. (Léonidas Ndayimirije, Ngozi)

The experiences of these two men are representative of the vast majority of the men that I spoke with. They report that the initial hostility and ridicule subsided little by little once the community was able to perceive the benefits that their family was enjoying in terms of prosperity, peace and calmness. They would rise to a higher status than they used to have, and the pride and honour that they gain from this increased status would outweigh the remaining negative attitudes of some men who no longer accept them as peers and who perceive their masculinity to be weakened.

In other words, one can see that the competing masculinities help limit and potentially resolve the expected challenge to the project of the Abatangamuco movement stemming from the social sanctions from peers and community coming as a response to a perceived abandonment of traditional masculine values on the part of the men involved. The reactions they are met with become more positive over time, possibly providing incentives rather than disincentives for the men to maintain their change, or to get involved in the first place. The testimony-heavy, buddy-based structure of the movement allows the more senior members of the movement to communicate their experiences of challenges, peer reactions and the development of these over time to prospective new members. It is likely that such stories make it easier for the men to negotiate the conflict between the two models of masculinity, as well as hostility and ridicule from their peers, without giving up on their new values.

6.2. Organisation or movement?

It has been challenging during the course of the research to determine whether it is more precise to label the Abatangamuco as an organisation or as a movement. The group displays evidence of being both things, and the easy and probably correct response would be to accept that they are a hybrid entity which functions both as an organisational unity and as a grass-root movement. However, the relationship between these characteristics deserves some deliberation as it is an important part of the characteristics of the Abatangamuco.

One important point is that, as has been seen, the Abatangamuco started out as a private initiative by a couple of men, and that it was CARE who approached them to take this initiative further and use it to help other men make the same changes as the initiators made. Prior to CARE's

involvement, there was no structure or common identity to the initiative, only a vague sense of common values and experiences. One of the priorities for the men once they started organising in collaboration with CARE was to register as a legal entity and to establish the necessary founding documents and manifestos. It was in this context that the name “Abatangamuco” came about, and it seems clear that the origin of this identity is intimately linked with the founding moment of the organisation. In other words, there is no question about the Abatangamuco being an organisation in the legal and practical sense. The question is rather whether it also makes sense to analyse the role of the Abatangamuco entity as an organisation when it comes to the values it is working for and the way in which its members are attempting to spread these, or whether the activities that the Umatangamucos undertake are better understood in the framework of a movement.

There are a couple of reasons why this may be the case. First of all, as the influence and membership base of the Abatangamuco has spread beyond its origin in the Gitega province: the members have been further removed from the initiators both geographically and organisationally. Most of the informants interacted with fellow Abatangamuco members on a very local and informal basis, not primarily through organised meetings in specific locations. Secondly, the content of the Abatangamuco identity and the value set translates into the men internalising calls for significant personal initiative in terms of spreading the message and getting more men involved. This can of course also be the hallmarks of an ambitious membership-based organisation; however the ambition of the Abatangamuco are wider than that. While they are eager to recruit new members, they are equally eager to help men change the way they live with their wives without bringing them into the organisational fold. A repeated chorus from many of the respondents was that their goal was to make their message heard by as many men as possible, in Burundi and beyond, so that these men would understand that they need to change the way they live and adopt the values of the Abatangamuco. Their goal was not necessarily that these men should also become Umatangamucos in the proper sense of the term, including organisational membership, participation in events, commit to giving personal testimonies, and so on. The need to recruit more Umatangamucos was founded on the instrumental necessity of, quite literally, manpower in order to expose as many men as possible to the organisation’s message and values.

One of the most accepted definitions of a social movement was offered by Turner and Killian in 1957, suggesting that a social movement is “a collectivity acting with some continuity to promote a change or resist a change in the society or group of which it is part.” Accepting this definition, one can observe the Abatangamuco as an organisation that utilises the structure of social movements to reach its goals, which are fundamentally to transform an unproductive, abusive model of masculinity into a progressive, productive and harmonious one. Its ambitions go beyond recruitment and membership growth to take on a quasi-missionary zeal focused on inspiring change beyond its own ranks. As this study is focused on the respondent’s experience of their own change after becoming Abatangamuco members, I chose to employ the concept of movement rather than organisation in this text.

6.3. Pseudo-religiousness, missionary zeal and uniformity

This testimony-based structure is also what gives an observer the sense of a missionary aspect to the movement, it is in fact what can make an observer, including the present one, read this phenomenon as being more of a movement than an organisation. So what does this pseudo-religious form mean for the level of internalisation of the values and thus, if the assumption of this study is correct, the sustainability of the change in the long run? On several occasions throughout the analysis, I have shown how there was a surprising uniformity not just in the content of the replies, but also in the wording of specific phrases used to explain the rationale, content or benefits of making the changes proscribed by the Abatangamuco. These responses left

the impression just described, namely that of speaking to members of a religious group who had learned a number of doctrines by heart rather than having arrived at their convictions through a combination of teaching, discussions and personal reflection. It is of course impossible to make an informed judgement about the extent to which these views were in fact internalised by the informants, still uniformity needs to be addressed here, as it may pose some challenges to the integrity of this study.

After the first couple of days of interviewing the respondents, the researcher was struck by how the men tended to use very similar phrases and narrative structures when relaying their story and experiences. One of the recurring themes was how they all referred to the time at which they got involved with the Abatangamuco as “when I changed.” The narratives were structured with this as a turning point as well as a point of no return, after which they had changed forever as human beings and would never contemplate, nor be able to, return to their previous state and outlook. The respondents were always challenged on this point, asked to reflect on their conflicting values at the time and what impact that had on their attempts to change different aspects of the way they lived. While some would acknowledge that they faced difficulties, that some aspects were a lot more difficult to change than others – particularly the aspect of shared responsibility and control of family finances, as discussed at length above – many refused to entertain the notion that fundamental changes of this nature cannot be expected to be achieved easily and without any temporary setbacks or intrapersonal conflicts. A recurring response was a variation of the view that “once I realised what was right, I could never turn back.” The responses alluded to a quasi-religious experience of “seeing the light,” making all internal and external challenges bearable and preventing any possible transgression against the new-found value set.

The structure of the men’s involvement with the Abatangamuco, as well as the activities that the organisation is primarily engaged in, emphasises this quasi-religious form. There is a strong missionary zeal to the movement, and for a man to be a true Abatangamuco he must commit to this aspect of the movement. It is not enough for the man to live according to the prescribed values and norms, he must also dedicate time and effort to testifying about his personal change and the difference between his past and present life, as well as committing to guiding and advising other men who are still, as several respondents put it, “in the dark”. Most of the men I spoke to saw this as a very important part of their identity and their everyday life. As discussed above, the pride and honour they perceived to have gained from the heightened status in the community was of great significance to them. A lot of this pride was stemming from the self-appointed mentoring capacity that they stepped into in their community as a part of their Abatangamuco identity. However, there seems to be an inherent contradiction between the movement’s emphasis on testimonies of lived lives and the strikingly uniform messages and stories rendered by the men during the interviews. While certain similarities are to be expected, the impression the researcher was left with was one of a group of people working from the same list of talking points engineered to create a specific common narrative of destitution, redemption and progress.

It is worth noting that religion plays a very important role in Burundi. The majority are Roman Catholics, but the country has also seen a wave of charismatic evangelical “born again” Christianity.¹⁸ The pseudo-religious rhetoric observed in the way that the Abatangamuco talk about their identity and change has a lot in common with the “born again” narratives of this

¹⁸ This is not to say that a great number of Burundians have converted to a version of evangelical Christianity, only that traces of this form of religiousness could be found in religious rhetoric to an extent that it was quite noticeable to an outside observer.

particular branch of Christianity. It is therefore worth noting that the Abatangamuco members' way of talking about their experiences may be consciously or sub-consciously inspired by these narratives.

A key conundrum in this context is whether or not this doctrinal uniformity suggests a weakness in the movement when it comes to internalisation of the convictions and value set that it is promoting. This concern easily presents itself to an observer who is presented with a selection of informants who seem to be speaking from the same set of established talking points. However, there is also a chance that this particular quasi-religious uniformity of conviction is an asset to the process of value internalisation by new members of the movement. Keeping in mind the negative responses that most of the respondents would, after some probing, admit to having faced from their social peer group, regression to old models of behaviour would appear to be a likely outcome for many in the first phase of their change. The strength and uniformity of the common narrative of the movement may be a significant aid for the men to justify their change to themselves and others as they await the benefits that this narrative promises to all who adhere to the Abatangamuco value set. And the force of this narrative is strengthened by the fact that these uniform talking points actually conform to the testimonies they hear from more senior Abatangamuco members, and are observable in the lives of these senior members in their own locality.

The men that were interviewed for this study all reported that they had reaped benefits, both tangible in terms of material progress and more abstract in terms of harmony and improved interpersonal relations, from changing in accord with the Abatangamuco values. Many, as has been exemplified above, could point to very specific signifiers of material wealth that they had managed to accumulate as a result of the changes they'd made. That they actually experience the benefits that the narrative of the movement promises is in all probability essential to the sustainability and possible expansion of the initiative. Crucially, these benefits are stemming from a better management of the resources, material as well as human, already at the families' disposal. It is in other words likely that most men who make these changes, given that their resources were previously mismanaged as a result of poor collaboration between husband and wife, domestic violence, alcoholism, and irresponsible use of the limited financial resources by the man to fulfil personal desires.

It is quite possible that the key to the sustainability of the movement can be found here – in the conflation of self-interest and moral values where narratives of peers' experiences create expectations that are fulfilled when new members apply the value set promoted by the movement. The moral norms considering the role of women in the family, her personal integrity and right not to be abused makes sense from a practical, utilitarian perspective. In other words, the model of masculinity that promotes domestic violence, drinking and irresponsible use of resources is experienced as being incompatible with the ideal of material progress, elevated social status and harmonious family life. And for the Umatangamucos interviewed for this study, the latter ideal is now taking precedence.

7. Conclusion

The aim of this study was to answer the following questions:

1. How do the men negotiate and interpret the conflicting models of masculinity that respectively form the foundation of their traditional lifestyle and the values of the Abatangamuco?
2. How do the Abatangamuco men conceptualise the rationality and benefits of their change?

The analysis has provided answers to both of these questions, approaching them through the overarching concern of identifying aspects that may say something about the sustainability of the Abatangamuco initiative. The research discovered a close interdependence between these two questions, as well as suggestions to the effect that coexisting models of masculinity and perceptions of gain may be essential to mapping the Abatangamuco initiative's relative sustainability.

How do the men negotiate and interpret the conflicting models of masculinity that respectively form the foundation of their traditional lifestyle and the values of the Abatangamuco?

According to the findings of this study, Burundian men seem to be faced with two sets of ideals that appear hard to combine; one promoting the man-as-king model whereby the strong man is one who does as he pleases and gets his way in every situation and another where the ideal man is successful, prosperous and trusted by his community. The Abatangamuco movement puts forward a model of masculinity that suggests that by giving up the former ideal, the men can attain the latter. This paper has shown how the men involved in the Abatangamuco movement rely on testimonies from peers who have already changed (and, as a result, are prospering) in order to find a rationale and motivation for making the same changes themselves.

How do the Abatangamuco men conceptualise the rationality and benefits of their change?

The second research question actually came out as the most instrumentally important one, as it addressed the motivation for change. From the stories and self-representations provided by the selection of respondents, one part of the key to the sustainability of the movement seems to be found in that the men can relate to the testimonies provided, as they come from men that are from their own social strata. These tales of past destitution, change, and prosperity are believable to the audience because they are so familiar. The stories of abuse, destitution and quarrelling are described by many as being eerily mirror-like images of their own lives, and while they may initially react with hostility towards the changes that are presented as necessary, the end result of increased prosperity is something which they all want to achieve.

Another, and equally important part of this key lays in the fact that the men, after deciding to change and join the movement, actually experience benefits in line with the expectations created by the testimonies they heard from the Abatangamuco members. The fact that the expectations of benefits were created by listening to men from a similar background as themselves talking about the very specific benefits arising from their choice to make fundamental changes to themselves, their family life and their relationships with their wives means that these expectations were realistic, tangible and achievable. The incentive to change thus becomes the incentive to maintain the new lifestyle once the man is convinced of the practical benefits arising from living according to the Abatangamuco values.

There are many factors that play into something as internalised, complex and unspoken as masculinity and changing perceptions of manliness. In the case of the Abatangamuco, this study suggests that the combination of recognition, close peer-group support, tangible benefits that are inherent to the change rather than an externally provided carrot, and the presence of pre-existing ideals that the new values can relate to all contribute to the relative success of the initiative.

Appendix I: Abatangamuco Interview Guide

Phase one – Open

What is a typical day in your everyday life/Could you describe a day that you would characterize as normal?

Probes:

- What are your views about your wife's and your respective responsibilities in the family?
- What do you do, which responsibilities do you have?
- How do you share your daily work with your wife? Who does which tasks and why?

What are your main responsibilities and tasks within Abatangamuco and how are these carried out?

Probes:

- Why do you have the tasks you have and not others?
- Are there other tasks that you think you could or should do?

Why did you become involved in Abatangamuco? What was the main reason? How did it happen? What motivated you?

Probes:

- What attracted you to the movement?
- Had you started your process of change before coming into contact with CARE?
- Why was it important to you to make these changes?
- How did you become involved?
- Through who?

Phase two - reflexive

Regarding your relationship with your wife and family, what are the main differences between how you think and act now, and how you thought and acted before becoming an Umutangamuco? Can you give some concrete examples?

Probes:

- What does being an Umutangamuco mean to you in practical terms?
- Can you tell me something about what made you behave the way you did before becoming an Umutangamuco?

- What do you think are the main differences between your family life before becoming an Umutangamuco and now? Can you give some concrete examples?
- What are the main changes in your behavior? Can you give me 2 or 3 examples? What would you say were the main motivations for you for these changes?

Do you think your community views you differently now? If so, how? Examples?

- What about your family? Do they look at you in a different way – how is this expressed?
- Specifically, how do you think you are viewed by other men in your community? Examples?
 - Do you think that Abatangamucos are looked at as being very different from other men in the community? How are they viewed as different do you think?
 - Examples of how they/you are treated differently?
- Have you had any negative reactions from people in your community?
 - If so, what type of reactions?
 - And from what kind of people?

Has joining the Abatangamuco been difficult for you? If so, how?

What is a typical man like in your community? How are you similar, and how are you different?

- What, in your opinion, characterizes real/proper men in your community?
 - Do you think the community agrees with you?

Have your thoughts about what it means to you to be a man changed since you became an Abatangamuco? How?

- How is your personal identity as a man now?
 - How was it before?
 - Is it important to you that other men become Abatangamucos? Why?
 - Based on your past, do you speak to your children about Abatangamuco men and about the value of the change in behavior?
 - How do you view the men in your community who are not Abatangamucos? What are their main challenges/benefits of becoming Abatangamuco in your view?

How did you first come into contact with CARE?

What is your impression of the role CARE plays in the work of the Abatangamuco?

- Facilitate? Lead?

How do you think CARE has influenced the Abatangamucos?

Phase three - closing

- Is there anything else that you would like to tell me?
- Is there anything you would like to ask me?

Appendix 2: Letter of Information

Letter of information

My name is Hilde Wallacher, and I am a researcher with the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO). I would like to invite you to participate in research that I am undertaking as part of a study commissioned by the organization CARE Norway. The study explores the effect of the Abatangamuco movement in Burundi on the men involved, and is aimed at providing CARE Norway with information necessary for them to evaluate the impact and effectiveness of their ongoing support for the Abatangamuco.

If you agree to participate, your involvement will include an interview lasting for approximately 1 - 1,5 hours. The interview will take place in a location chosen by my partners in CARE Burundi, however I will be happy to accommodate any requests for an alternative location for the interview as long as this is practically possible. The interviews will be carried out with the help of an interpreter, and it will be recorded and later transcribed. All interview data will be securely stored, and personal data will not be shared or reproduced in the research. All information that can identify you, such as name, place of dwelling, exact age and so on will be removed from the data unless otherwise agreed. Participation in the research is voluntary, but if you at any time wish to withdraw, you will be able to do so at any time prior to October 30th 2011. Likewise, the interviews are based on voluntary participation, and the interviewee may decline to reply to any question they are uncomfortable with. The end result of this research will be one practically focused paper and one longer academic publication. Both will be published in English by PRIO as well as translated into French and disseminated in Burundi by our partners at Fontaine ISOKO.

Should you have any questions related to the research or to any aspects of this project and your involvement with it, please do not hesitate to contact me. My contact details are as follows:

Hilde Wallacher
PRIO
Hausmans gate 7
NO-0134 Oslo
Norway
Telephone while in Burundi (17th September-07th October): [xxxxxxx]

You may also contact Jean Nimubona in CARE Burundi, who may be able to reply to your questions or put you in touch with me. His phone number is [xxxxxxx].

Thank you for your collaboration.

Sincerely,

Hilde Wallacher

Engaging Men

The Abatangamuco and Women's Empowerment in Burundi

CARE Burundi is working to address and limit Burundi's pervasive problem of domestic violence, as well as the overall dominance of men over women in the country generally. The situation of violence and oppression poses challenges for CARE when it comes to reaching out to the women in rural communities who are the main targets for their women's empowerment programmes.

One of the ways in which CARE has tried to address the problem of men preventing women's empowerment in Burundi is through a local or-

ganisation called the Abatangamuco (which means: *those who shine light*). The Abatangamuco is a group of rural men who have decided to change the way they live in their families and with their wives, ending abusive and oppressive practices and instead collaborating with their wives in all aspects of family life. They use testimonies, theatre, personal consultations and other peer-to-peer activities to convince other men to make the same changes and, potentially, join the organisation and contribute their testimonies to the group's activities.

The goal of the study behind this report was to find out how being a member of the organisation has changed the individual men, and what CARE can learn from this. The research is based on twenty in-depth interviews with members of the Abatangamuco, carried out by the researcher during a three-week field study to three regions of Burundi. This report presents the findings of this study and proposes recommendations and lessons learned for CARE as well as for a wider audience of aid practitioners.