

SSMJ talks to Data Gordon about Men4Women

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INTRODUCTION

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) impacts individuals, communities, and societies across the globe. Data from the World Health Organization indicate that 1 in 3 women worldwide have experienced VAWG in their lifetime, either through intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence.

During times of conflict and crisis, violence towards women and girls worsens, leading to increases in sexual exploitation, domestic violence, forced marriage, rape, and transactional and prostituted sex.

Gender-based violence (GBV) in South Sudan is often met with impunity due to societal gender norms that consider women to be under men's control and stigmatize victims of sexual violence. Women are often discouraged from reporting violence for fear of being rejected by their family and community.

While men commit these forms of violence, men are not born violent towards women and girls and not all men commit violence. Many men, in fact, are deeply concerned about the violence that other men commit, and believe that women and girls deserve respect, opportunities, and equality. Men have daughters, mothers, sisters, wives, girlfriends, and friends about whom they care. All around the world, men have important roles to play in helping to create peaceful and safe communities.

Men4Women is a national NGO in South Sudan that recognizes the important role that men and boys can play in preventing VAWG. So, **the South Sudan Medical Journal (SSMJ) interviewed Data Emmanuel Gordon, Executive Director of the Men4Women**, to learn more about it.

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Figure 1. Men-led Cooking Challenge at the South Sudan Council of Churches Ground

SSMJ: Data Gordon, thank you for meeting with SSMJ. What are Men4Women’s mission and aims?

Gordon: Men4Women’s mission is to promote young people’s sexual and reproductive health and rights, their meaningful participation in the decisions made about their lives, and the importance of making men and boys allies for women and girls.

SSMJ: When did Men4Women start in South Sudan, and what does it do?

Gordon: Men4Women has been active since 2019 as an initiative and was officially registered by South Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Commission in January 2022 as a National Non-Governmental Organization. An initial activity was to combat period poverty by raising awareness and improving education about menstruation for men and boys including women and girls.^[5] While handing out sanitary pads in schools, we begin the conversation about the taboo subject, hoping that both girls and boys will grow more comfortable talking about periods in order to end the stigma and promote women’s health.

“Men4Women’s mission is to promote young people’s sexual and reproductive health and rights, their meaningful participation in the decisions made about their lives.”



Figure 2 Facilitator giving EMAP training for men

SSMJ: Data Gordon, what is your role in Men4Women?

Gordon: Apart from founding the Men4Women initiative, I was appointed in 2022 as its Executive Director. My role is to help to lead the organization in achieving its vision, mission and objectives and, most importantly, to set up systems and have a team that works towards the promotion of positive masculinity and social norms transformation. I am also tasked to come up with innovative ways to engage men and boys hence the ‘Men Talks’, ‘Talking Circles’, ‘Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SHRH) Camps’, and the ‘Men-led Cooking Challenge’ (Figure 1) among others. You can find details of these groups on our Twitter/X feed - @men4womens. Men4Women works with men and boys to promote ‘positive masculinity’ in schools and the community through a network of Champions.

SSMJ: What is a ‘Champion’? How are they trained?

Gordon: Under Men4Women, applications were sought from young people who want to be trained and become Champions. Both men and women applied, and thirty young people (24 males, 6 females) were selected and trained as facilitators of ‘Engaging Men on Accountable Practices (EMAP)’ for five days.

After training, they are divided into two groups to continue engaging with community members in two locations. Female facilitators engage female community members per location for eight weeks to collect their voices on GBV and other harmful practices, and these voices informed the engagement of men for sixteen weeks in their respective locations.

Upon completion of the community engagement and impact assessment, both facilitators and community members graduated and were awarded certificates respectively and became known as Champions. (Figures 2 and 3).

The Male Champions continue to be engaged in other Men4Women activities on promotion of positive masculinity as I described above.

SSMJ: Tell us more about EMAP

Gordon: Engaging Men in Accountable Practices (EMAP) is a one-year primary prevention intervention created by the International Rescue Committee (IRC). It is based on work done in Dadaab Refugee camp.^[4,6]

Recent research^[6] indicates that “gender transformative” interventions may reduce men’s intimate partner violence against women. Such interventions challenge deeply held beliefs by men and the power structures that support them.

EMAP is guided by the voices of women and girls. Their testimony regarding types of violence experienced informs the curriculum used with men. EMAP activities are not

intended to diminish tradition or belief systems, but to encourage practices and beliefs that promote respect for women and non-violence.

EMAP's approach aims to transform individual behaviour and targets both women and men, with a special emphasis on enabling men to identify their role in preventing violence against women and become women's allies/Champions.

SSMJ: Tell us more about the EMAP curriculum?

Gordon: The year-long intervention contains three components:

1. A four-week training of trainers: During this period, staff will become familiar with the EMAP intervention and framework, as well as determine safety strategies, outreach plans, and support structures. After the training, facilitators will introduce EMAP to community leaders, community members, and existing women's groups and leaders.
2. An eight-week session for women which explores GBV and what women want to see change in their community.
3. A 16-week session for the men's curriculum. The men's curriculum groups are intended for men who are not currently violent against women and girls and who are interested in helping to build safer, healthier homes and communities. Over 16 weeks, men move through a process of individual behavioural change, from basic awareness of VAWG to practicing change in different areas of their own lives and acting as allies to women and girls.

There are more details of the one-year curriculum in:

- Introductory Guide (part 1) <https://oxfam.app.box.com/s/u6rhw3ujzv910x19w92e2c213iz8mhpj>
- Training Guide (part 2) <https://oxfam.app.box.com/s/e19x7oysvp1or3zkrflsjvgch1nu8tjb>
- Implementation Guide (part 3) <https://oxfam.app.box.com/s/0dcquzyuw6cbfdlx0e580thdyovu52oa>

SSMJ: What evidence is there that EMAP can be successful?

Gordon: UNHCR started EMAP in Dadaab Refugee Camp in Kenya. The project involved 480 men and women, gathered community interest, and has resulted in positive and transformative outcomes. The safety of women and girls became a central concern for the community, safe spaces for women were created, and participants became highly regarded and considered as role models in the community. Women reported increased cooperation with household responsibilities by their husbands as well as positive changes in husbands' attitudes towards violence.^[4]



Figure 3. Facilitator giving EMAP training for women

“EMAP’s approach aims to transform individual behaviour and targets both women and men, with a special emphasis on enabling men to identify their role in preventing violence against women.”

SSMJ: How do you reach out to the wider public?

Gordon: We reach out to schools and the community through our network of trained Male Champions. This is through our ‘Men Talks’, ‘Talking Circles’, ‘SRHR Camps’, ‘EMAP’ among others, as I mentioned above. Apart from Juba, we’ve expanded our activities to Yambio and Torit (where we trained boda boda riders, and students at Torit Health Science Institute, and hope to expand to other parts of South Sudan. We also reached to Rubkona (Bentiu) through Concern Worldwide to train husbands and mothers’ groups on EMAP. We will be implementing EMAP in Yambio before the end of this year.

SSMJ: Will Men4Women and EMAP training be carried out in IDP camps in South Sudan?

Gordon: We’ve not ruled out the potential of reaching IDP camps in South Sudan. Should we get support, we’re ready to reach out to the IDP Camps with an EMAP intervention.



Figure 4. Men helping with cooking

SSMJ: Are there any resources/materials that the lessons learnt by Men4Women and the EMAP training can be used by health staff working with GBV in South Sudan?

Gordon: In our first EMAP engagement in Juba, we conducted an impact assessment and the findings of the report are helping us extend the programme to other locations. We strongly believe that the lessons learnt can be used by health staff working with GBV in South Sudan. This is because, among others, the findings point out potential signs of GBV and their impact, and how negative social norms hinder GBV reporting.

SSMJ: Who supports Men4Women and EMAP training in South Sudan?

Gordon: Men4Women is currently supported by UNFPA South Sudan through Amref South Sudan and the Smile Again Africa Development Organization (SAADO).

Additional information:

Images: Men4Women own all the photographs and videos, and permission to publish has been given either verbally or in writing by all the subjects.

Videos: See videos on our X feed - @men4womenss. For example:

- Buying diapers <https://twitter.com/i/status/1699421820774953273>
- Help with cooking <https://twitter.com/i/status/1699097528640188845>
- Showering baby: <https://twitter.com/i/status/1706564260581740761>
- Ironing clothes <https://twitter.com/i/status/1703773777425735964>

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