



Scaling REAL Fathers

in northern and karamoja regions of Uganda

WHAT IS REAL FATHERS?

Responsible, Engaged, and Loving Fathers (REAL) is an effective, evidence-based, sustainable violence prevention program. REAL works with first-time fathers with toddler-aged children to build positive partnerships and parenting practices. Specifically, respected men in the community mentor young fathers and their partners in positive child discipline, caregiving, gender equity, health, and communication (Figure 1).¹

SCALE UP OF REAL FATHERS IN UGANDA

REAL was first implemented and evaluated in Northern Uganda in 2013 and again in 2015 in Northern and Karamoja regions within economic savings and Early Childhood Development (ECD) programs. Both studies found REAL had positive effects on fatherhood parenting practices, perpetration of violence, and other outcomes, which were sustained for over one year.^{2,3}

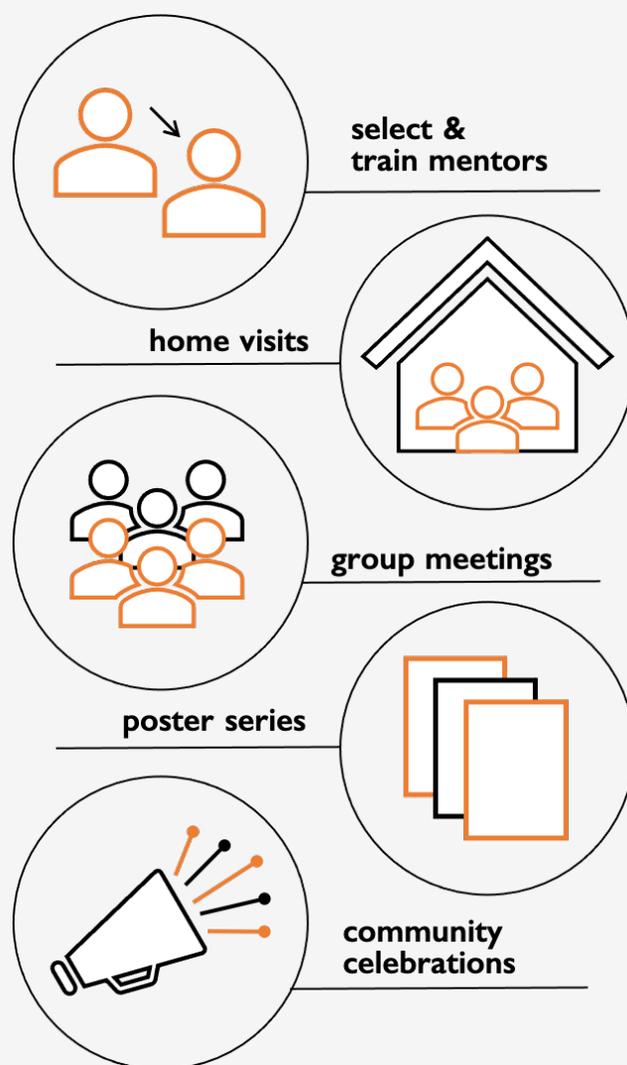
Starting in February 2021, led by the Ministry of Gender, Labour, and Social Development (MGLSD), the Impact and Innovations Development Centre (IIDC) and the University of California San Diego (UCSD) partnered to support expansion of REAL to new communities in Karamoja and Northern Uganda. The current project aims to integrate the intervention into existing Early Childhood Development (ECD) programs implemented by local community-based organizations in these regions and into national and district government priorities, policies, workplans and budgets.

RESULTS FROM SCALE UP

STEP I. Engaging the Ugandan Government to Scale REAL Fathers

Scale up of REAL Fathers first engaged the national government to lead the process. This involved three government ministries, MGLSD (lead), the Ministry of Health (MOH) and the Ministry of Education (MOE). District governments were then engaged to integrate REAL into early childhood development programs in their workplans and budgets.

Figure 1. Elders mentor young fathers as they learn new skills and engage communities to support these changes.



What did we learn from government engagement?

- **Governments prefer to support programs that have been tested and demonstrated positive results in contexts like those poised for scaling.** Ministry leadership were enthusiastic about REAL because research has shown that it works to improve family health and wellbeing in the same regions of Uganda where scaling will occur and met a felt need.
- **Government leadership accelerates identification and participation of relevant stakeholders.** Leadership and prioritization of REAL by the national government led to high participation to support scale up from community-based groups, organizations, and individual stakeholders.
- **Involving the national government first is critical to accelerate uptake of the program at the local level.** During REAL scale-up, district governments agreed to participate and support scale-up because the central government led the expansion process and prioritized REAL activities.
- **Adding stakeholders to support scale-up increases ownership and uptake but adds time and complexity.** Each stakeholder added to support scale-up required additional time and resources for training, communications, and consensus building. Thus, actions such as involving multiple government ministries (health and education) and having multiple community partners delayed REAL expansion but increased sustainability.

STEP 2. Stakeholder Mapping

Next, seventy-eight individuals and organizations were identified who were important to involve in scale up or who would be affected by the program. Stakeholders were then consulted to better understand target community's awareness of REAL Fathers, common parenting practices among fathers, individuals and organizations with expertise in violence against children (VAC) or ECD, and opportunities and barriers to REAL's expansion in Uganda.

What did we learn from stakeholder mapping?

- **Many organizations in Uganda are implementing parenting programs targeting men but few-to-none are using practices that are evidence-based.** REAL Fathers was the only approach identified in target communities which had been tested in a research study and had demonstrated multiple positive outcomes for children, fathers, and families.

- **Existing early childhood development organizations require capacity building to successfully implement REAL.** Organizations required capacity building in the REAL Fathers program, project management, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation, requiring financial and human resources.
- **District governments expressed interest in implementing REAL programming, in addition to community-based organizations.** Governments can implement programs and provide leadership on strategies and policies to aid expansion. Future initiatives are required to understand challenges and opportunities between private versus public expansion,
- **Although REAL requires few resources, some groups that were initially enthusiastic to contribute to expansion of REAL programming later dropped out due to minimal funding opportunities.** Additional funding must be identified and allocated to further expand and sustain REAL implementation by community organizations and district governments.

1. <https://irh.org/resource-library/real-fathers-mentor-curricula/>
2. Ashburn K, Kerner B, Ojamuge D, Lundgren R. Evaluation of the Responsible, Engaged, and Loving (REAL) Fathers Initiative on Physical Child Punishment and Intimate Partner Violence in Northern Uganda. *Prev Sci.* 2017 Oct;18(7):854-864. doi: 10.1007/s11121-016-0713-9. PMID: 27738782; PMCID: PMC5602091.
3. Kohli, A., Spindler, E., Fultz, H., Lundgren, R., Okello, F. and Arono, R. (2019). REAL Fathers Scale Up and Adaptation Process: Endline Report. Washington DC: Institute for Reproductive Health, Georgetown University, and Save the Children for the US Agency for International Development.

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