

FRANCIS AND ADAMA KAMARA

THE GENDER MODEL FAMILY AN ICEBREAKER IN FOSTERING GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE ROLES

A man molded by societal beliefs, Francis Kamara was a typical traditional Sierra Leonean man who was raised to believe that the man holds all authority in his home and owes no any explanation for his actions.

"Before the WISE project, I behaved like any primitive man, did things with no consultation with my wife and even beat her mercilessly. As the man and leader, my wife was a slave and no one had the authority to question me, to the extent that if I return home and meet my wife and children watching movies on the TV, I would immediately turn it off", Francis recounts.

Francis Kamara is a well known man in 5-mile community as he holds the position of "Head Man" which he attained after election in 2017 by traditional authorities. At home, Francis would subject his wife to violence by beating her physically and starving her of food on some occasions solely because she offered an opinion on household related issues. Francis is no different from many other men in the culture of Sierra Leone.

Over the years, SEND Sierra Leone had implemented the Gender Model Family (GMF) approach in several districts and in 2018, Trocaire- an Irish International NGO with funding from Irish Aid supported SEND, to implement the Gender Model Family approach in communitiies in Western Area Rural District under the Women Igniting the Spirit of Entrepreneuership (WISE) project. The project seeked to empower women economically but realised the extent of domestic servitude most of the women faced and so



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encouraged the women who had formed groups under the WISE project to invite their spouses for gender transformative training. Adama, Francis's wife was however keen on improving her marriage and empowering herself so she decided to suggest to her husband to attend the program. To her surprise, he agreed and joined her on a three day Gender Model Family training session where both husband and wife were taken through gender awareness to enable them adopt positive behaviors and practices to promote gender equity for sustainable household development.

"I was introduced to the GMF approach, and this has positively impacted my life. This project is an Icebreaker," emphasized Francis Kamara.

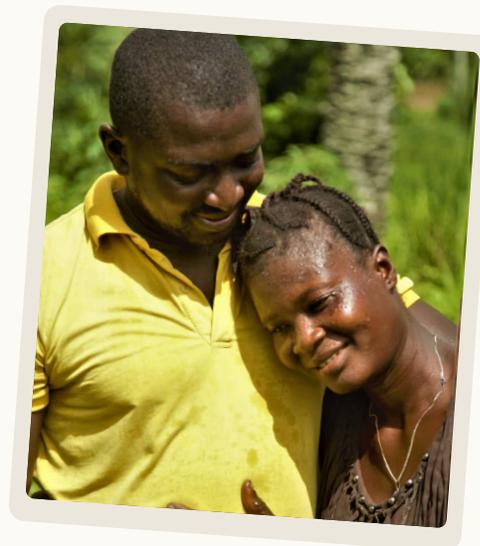
After successfully, completing the GMF training together with her husband, Adama and 13 other women who had participated in the GMF training sessions with their spouses formed GMF solidarity women groups. To ensure regularization, the project facilitated the legal registration of the GMF women group at the Western Area Rural Council and the creation of a bank account. The project then provided an unconditional cash transfer of Le 7,000,000 equivalent to \$700 to this GMF women group as support to enable them invest into business ventures. Adama like her other group members, received \$50 each of the total sum as an interest free loan to make investments into business activities so as to enable them earn an income and enhance their understanding of managing resources in the home.

Francis became a champion for his wife in his home. He stopped all forms of violence against his wife and supported her in household and farm activities which came as a disappointment to most community members who saw it as a taboo for the "Headman" to support his wife in domestic chores. Francis, his wife and children would each day take turns in performing domestic chores such as washing dishes, fetching water, cleaning the house and attended to the family farm. Adama Kamara she notes that she is a fulfilled wife as her opinions matter in her home.

"I use to cry every day due to the beatings, but I had no one to turn to. But now, I take decisions without fear of his reaction. This is a life-changing experience for me! My husband is a new man now, and I am happy"



Francis assists his wife in her vegetable farm



Francis and Adama share a compassionate hug after cultivating their farm



Adama smiles as she prunes crops in her farm

As Francis continued to support his wife, he educated other men within his community on the need to support their wives and desist from outmoded societal practices that discriminate against women. Many men within the community have emulated Francis's example as he narrates that, "the community was blemished with lawlessness like fighting, gender-based violence but since the project was embraced in 2018 there has been significant transformation and reduction in domestic violence cases especially on wife battering. The community is relatively peaceful, with community members taught how to use the referral pathways to seek justice instead of taking them into their own hands. Francis is committed to seeking re-election on community leader but this time would ensure that a woman candidate is his deputy to promote the involvement of women in decision-making within the community.

"My properties are now accessible to my wife even if I want to use it. I discuss things with her first. I support her in the household chores, taking care of our children and her agricultural activities. As the headman of the community, I am expected to marry more than one wife because of tradition but the GMF training impacted me greatly, and I don't want to destroy my family's current happiness. I am maintaining my wife and the two children or more if we decide to have more," Francis smiles as he explains.

With the skills Adama received on managing her business, she invested the profits in expanding her farm size where she grows krain krain and potato leaves, okra, corn, cassava, and other crops and trades in clothing. To support other women in 5 Mile who were not fortunate to be part of the GMF training, Adama and members of the GMF solidarity group are mentoring 20 women to make savings into their box.

The Kamara and the 13 other families in 5-mile community are catalyst for a transformative society where gender equality is championed from the household leading to enforced equitable practices in societal structures.