



Gender transformative approach to foster male participation in domestic work: A case study of the Bandedereho project in Burera District, Rwanda

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the impact of the Bandedereho Program in Burera District, Rwanda, using the Gender Transformative Approach (GTA) and Judith Butler's gender performativity as its theoretical underpinnings. The program seeks to overturn deeply embedded gender norms by having men do household and caregiving work. The research subjects were the direct beneficiaries of the program (the couples who attended the educational groups of the Bandedereho program employing qualitative research instruments, including interviews, focus group discussions, and observation). The research subjects included couples, focus group discussions, and community health workers, and the informants were staff members of the Bandedereho project, a local government leader, and a gender activist. Before the intervention, women handled domestic work alone, thereby reinforcing gender inequality and household power relations, according to the study. The results are characteristic of drastic changes with the introduction of Bandedereho: men began contributing to childcare, cooking, and joint decision-making, and women reported reduced workloads, improved marital relationships, and improved responses. The intervention also encouraged greater community acceptance of men's involvement in domestic work, although there are still challenges such as stigma, cultural resistance, and issues around sustainability. The discussion situates these findings within broader GTA literature, and it shows that guided reflection, role modeling, and community sanctioning are crucial in changing gendered practices. The study concludes that Bandedereho offers an expandable model for driving gender equity, improving family well-being, and informing policy interventions in similar contexts. The study recommends that expanding Bandedereho or analogous programs need to be integrated with established community structures, including health centers, schools, and local governance systems.

Keywords: Burera District, Bandedereho Program, Domestic Work, Gender Transformative Approach, Masculinity

I. INTRODUCTION

“Gender equality and women’s empowerment hold the keys to an inclusive, just, and sustainable future for humanity; yet, the progress in advancing women’s rights, as outlined by the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action” lags behind projected goals (Goryunova & Madsen, 2024). Gender equality is regarded as a cross-cutting issue in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); however, it is unclear how they are considered when making a plan (Leal Filho et al., 2023). This means that achieving gender equality is an important step in achieving other indicators of Sustainable Development Goals. Sustainable Development Goal 5 is gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls (McCullough et al., 2022). SDG 5 was launched as a response to various issues affecting women and families, including poverty, food insecurity, water shortages, limited access to education, unemployment, and issues related to economic growth. SDG 5 also draws attention to the burden of domestic chores carried by women in its fourth target, and claims the sharing of domestic chores and the value of unpaid care work.

Domestic work is often conceptualized as unpaid household chores aimed at maintaining the home and meeting various family or extended family needs (Staland-Nyman et al., 2021). Domestic work is undervalued, “as these workers also perform traditional care and household tasks (unpaid work) within households” (Oelz & Rani, 2015). Research from several countries suggests that women often perform the majority of domestic work in addition to their paid labor (Staland-Nyman et al., 2021). In Rwanda, women perform most of the household activities; moreover, women in Rwanda spend a higher average number of hours per week on domestic activities compared to



the time men spend per week (Nsabimana, 2022). The disparity in housework participation tends to be greater among adolescents and young adults compared to children. While both boys and girls are more likely to take part in domestic tasks when their fathers are involved, the influence of paternal participation is noticeably stronger on sons than on daughters. This indicates that the transmission of household responsibilities is shaped by gender, with significant consequences for the perpetuation of gender inequality.

In Rwanda, as in many rural societies of the Global South, women have traditionally been assigned subordinate roles to men. For instance, it was often considered inappropriate for women to speak in public, as doing so risked labeling them as “loud” or “immoral.” “Nor were women allowed holding or inheriting property in the same way as men, and their business activities, if they had any, could be appropriated by their spouses or fathers”. It is unclear “to what extent this was a product of the colonial encounter or whether it reflected a longer tradition in Rwandan society; however, it was well established by the latter half of the twentieth century” (Wallace et al., 2008).

The Gender Transformative Approach (GTA) seeks to critically interrogate and shift rigid gender norms and power inequalities in pursuit of both Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) and broader gender equality goals, operating across all levels of the socio-ecological model. GTA-based programs and policies aim to raise critical awareness of gender roles, norms, and power dynamics, highlighting the financial, social, and psychological costs of harmful practices while also demonstrating the benefits of adopting equitable alternatives. In practice, this approach empowers women, girls, and individuals of diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, expressions, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC); engages men and boys in advancing SRHR and gender equity; and involves duty bearers in rethinking gender and power relations. (Van Schendelstraat, 2018).

Bandebereho scale-up is a program that employs gender transformative approach to engages men in promoting maternal, newborn, and child health (MNCH), violence prevention, and caregiving, which RWAMREC is implementing in collaboration with the Ministry of Health (MOH)/Rwanda Biomedical Center (RBC)/Maternal Child, and Community Health Division (MCCH), Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion (MIGEPROF), National Child Development Agency (NCDA), and Burera District with financial support from Global Innovation Fund (GIF) and Grand Challenge Canada (GCC). By fostering an environment where men feel empowered to engage in domestic work, this approach can lead to a more equitable distribution of responsibilities and enhance the overall quality of family life. Such initiatives often include educational programs, community workshops, and campaigns that highlight the value of shared responsibilities, aiming to reshape societal perceptions about masculinity and caregiving roles. These efforts can also foster open dialogue among family members, enabling a deeper understanding of each person's needs and preferences, which in turn strengthens familial bonds and promotes mutual respect.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The Sustainable Development Goal 5 aims to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. Realizing gender equality would mean promoting women's literacy level, strengthening and facilitating women's access to health services, and ensuring access to employment (Hirsu et al., 2019). One of the indicators of Goal 05 is to value unpaid care and promote shared domestic responsibilities (Küfeoğlu, 2022). Gender equality holds the keys to an inclusive, fair, and sustainable future for humanity, yet the progress in advancing women's rights and men's engagement in domestic work, as outlined by the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, lags behind projected goals (Goryunova & Madsen, 2024).

According to a 2018 report on equality in the EU, home and family are largely considered the female domain: “More than four in ten Europeans (44%) believe the most important role of a woman is to take care of her home and family. Women's increase in labor force participation was expected to lead to a revolution in the gendered division of labor under which men are breadwinners and women spend their time in unpaid domestic activities, depending on their husbands for economic support. The revolution in the gendered division of labor, however, stalled at the door of most households, while women's labor force participation continues to rise across countries, the increase in men's share of domestic work and childcare has been modest, remaining about one-third of the time contribution of women (Breen & Cooke, 2005).

The Government of Rwanda has discovered that gender equality is one of the key steps to accelerating sustainable development; the recent Gender Gap Report 2020 of the World Economic Forum ranked Rwanda as the first country in Africa and the 09th country globally in promoting gender parity between men and women. The current situation of gender parity and men's participation in domestic work in Rwanda needs more efforts and contributions from all stakeholders, starting from government bodies, international organizations, and local non-government organizations. This study explored how the gender-transformative approach of the Bandebereho project leads to the realization of shared domestic responsibilities between men and women.



1.2 Research Objectives

- i. To assess the effectiveness of the Bandebereho Project at encouraging men's active and sustained participation in domestic work and identify the activities that have successfully altered male attitudes and behaviors towards housework and childcare.
- ii. To provide practical recommendations for upscaling or adapting GTA-based interventions to other rural communities across Rwanda.
- iii. To identify barriers and facilitators that influence men's participation in domestic work, to inform policy and program design.
- iv. To enhance community-level advocacy and sensitization for promoting equitable sharing of labor within the household.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

This study's research framework explores the influence of gender transformative approaches on changing the social and gender norms, and the institutionalization of gender roles towards male participation in domestic work and gender equality outcomes in Rwanda.

2.1.1 Gender Transformative Approach (Judith Butler's Framework)

Judith Butler's gender theory positions gender not as an immutable self but as a performative, social construction of identity that is produced and reproduced in the repeated acts, practices, and norms attributed to men and women (Butler, 1990). In terms of this conception, the Gender Transformative Approach (GTA) attempts to actively disrupt and re-signify these repetitive acts to challenge patriarchal norms and enable more equitable gender relations (Butler, 2004).

In Butler's view, change occurs when individuals and groups: Deconstruct dominant norms, fundamentally challenge how "being a man" or "being a woman" is tied to socially scripted practices, i.e., assigning domestic labor only to women (Jejeebhoy, 2024). Re-signifying practices replace constraining norms with alternative ways of "doing" gender, i.e., men engaging openly and proudly in caregiving and housework (Butler, 2004). Institutionalize new performances – embed new behaviors in everyday life and community culture so they become normalized and enduring (Hillenbrand et al., 2015). In this study, Butler's theoretical framework can be applied to comprehend how the Bandebereho Project promotes male involvement in domestic work by disclosing the performative nature of gender and creating space for men to enact new, equal forms of masculinity (RWAMREC, 2021).

2.1.2 Why Gender Transformative Approaches (GTA) Theories

Interest in and thinking on GTAs stems from a number of critiques of gender integration practice. First is the common framing of gender analysis on "gaps" that focuses on visible manifestations of gender inequality while ignoring and subsequently not addressing underlying factors. Second impetus for GTAs is a related common exclusive focus on the different roles of women and men and the differences between women and men, particularly women's and men's differential access to resources, which ignores other intersecting social dimensions such as age, social status, race, ethnicity, etc. As part of this process, they become understood as binary opposites, with the dominant category (men) becoming the norm against which its opposite (women) is explicitly and implicitly assessed. The third reason for interest in GTAs is an acknowledgement of the limits of an exclusive focus on women's empowerment. This is particularly troublesome when women are understood as an undifferentiated category, as described above, and the focus is only on women's agency, with no account taken of the gender relations that women and men experience (Wong et al., 2019).

According to Judith Butler's Gender Transformative Approach, this study does not observe male participation in domestic chores as a simple shift in behavior, but rather as a consideration of gender performances. Through interventions like Bandebereho, rigid gender scripts can be re-scripted, making more equitable and sustainable household relations in Burera District attainable.

2.2 Empirical Review

Rutgers (2018) studied about Adopting the Gender Transformative Approach in sexual and reproductive health and rights, and gender-based violence programs, and this study highlighted that gender-transformative approaches can reshape gender relations to be more gender equitable, largely through approaches that free both women and men from the impact of destructive gender and sexual norms. According to Hillenbrand et al. (2015) in their study about measuring gender-transformative change, they concluded that transformative approaches aim to move beyond individual self-improvement among women and toward transforming the power dynamics and structures



that serve to reinforce gendered inequalities. Gender transformative programs directly work to change the social order or the underlying factors that give rise to disparities among men and women (Morgan, 2014). McDougall et al. (2021) bring the idea of the Gender Integration Continuum that positions policies or programs along a continuum ranging from “gender blind” (ignoring gender considerations) to “gender aware” (examining and addressing a range of gender issues, relations, and dynamics). Within the “gender aware” area, the spectrum moves from gender exploitative: reinforcing or using unequal gender dynamics to achieve project goals which should be avoided; gender accommodating: recognizing but working around the gender barriers and inequalities, for example engaging women within the homestead; and; and gender transformative: fostering examination of gender dynamics and norms and intentionally strengthening, creating, or shifting structures, practices, relations, and dynamics toward equality.

This approach entails engaging groups in critically examining, challenging, and questioning gender norms and power relations (Hillenbrand et al., 2015). A gender-transformative approach to development goes beyond the “symptoms” of gender inequality to address “the social norms, attitudes, behaviors, and social systems that underlie them (Hillenbrand et al., 2015). According to Nsabimana (2022), in his study about the analysis of the Sugira Muryango project in community behavior changes: case of male engagement in household responsibility in Ngoma district of Rwanda, he concluded that although men play a vital role in family and community development, they still play a low proportion in household responsibilities or unpaid care work.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Paradigm, Approaches, and Types of Research

This research explored the existing gender patterns between men and women in the Burera district, the presence of the Bandedereho program in the district, and the relationships between the Bandedereho program and the engaged men. It explores how the approach of engaging men contributes to achieving gender equality. A paradigm is a disciplinary matrix that presents the theories, methods, exemplars, and images of a subject. This study uses an inclusive approach rather than traditional gender programs focused on women's empowerment and it shows how changing men's mindset towards gender is critical to achieving gender equality. This study used an innovative approach that is under-researched in gender studies. It advocates for an inclusive approach to achieving gender equality. This study is worth sociological and gender studies as it contributes to the knowledge in the field. It shows the benefits of a men-engaged approach and inclusivity in achieving gender equality.

This study employed a qualitative case study to explore how the Bandedereho project promotes male participation in the domestic sphere, thereby enhancing the realization of gender equality and increasing male engagement in domestic chores. Qualitative methodology refers, in the broadest sense, to research that produces descriptive data, including people's own written or spoken words, and observable behavior. Qualitative methods, like quantitative methodology, are more than a set of data-gathering techniques. It is a way of approaching the empirical world (Tenny et al., 2022). Case studies are generally strong precisely where quantitative studies are weaker; case studies have the potential to achieve high conceptual validity, strong procedures for fostering new hypotheses, usefulness for closely exploring the hypothesized role of causal mechanisms in the context of individual cases, and capacity for addressing causal complexity (Rebolj & Possibilities, 2014). A case study enabled the researcher to explore the strategies, opportunities, challenges, and impacts of the Bandedereho project within the local context of Burera District, Rwanda.

3.2 Focus and Location

This study explored the existing gender patterns between men and women in the Burera district, the existence of the Bandedereho program in the Burera district, and the relations between the Bandedereho program and the engaged men. It explores how the approach of engaging men plays a role in achieving gender equality. Rationale of the Study Site

Burera District in Rwanda's Northern Province provided an appropriate and pertinent venue in which to research the Gender Transformative Approach (GTA) targeting male engagement in domestic work. This is one of the locations for active implementation of the Bandedereho Project, which is a gender-transformative intervention that is being implemented by the Rwanda Men's Resource Centre (RWAMREC) in collaboration with the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion, and other stakeholders. In 2023, Bandedereho ran the 1st cycle in Burera in 10 health centers. The Bandedereho scale-up program enrolled 3,564 parents (1,782 males and 1,782 females) with a total of 2,951 children under five years old for the first cycle in 10 out of 17 health centers (Rwamrec, 2023). The project engages men in supporting maternal and child health, prevention of gender-based violence, and male engagement in care and household chores (Doyle et al., 2018). Conducting research in Burera, therefore, allows for direct observation and assessment of a program that is already well-established in GTA principles.



Socio-culturally, Burera District is rural and patriarchal with deeply established norms where domestic work and care are perceived primarily as women's work. In such settings, interventions like Bandedereho can generate intense norm change, and therefore, the district is a good case study to assess the ability of GTA to transform gender attitudes and behaviors (Jewkes et al., 2015). Economically, Burera is characterized by subsistence agriculture and little exposure to paid domestic work. This background finds expression in the redistribution of domestic responsibility among women and men, having a direct positive effect on household welfare, from time use, quality of care for children, and economic opportunities for women (Kabeer, 2016).

Finally, the research contributed to the limited body of literature on implementing GTA in rural African contexts. There is a preponderance of existing evidence relating to urban or peri-urban populations (Dworkin et al., 2015). Through its focus on Burera District, the study helped to provide results that can inform rural gender-transformative programming in Rwanda and beyond.

3.3 Subjects and Informants

Sampling method: Qualitative research approaches justify minimal attention to sample size estimation principles and largely depend on subjective judgments and arbitrariness. However, an adequate sample size is essential for a study to address the core elements of validity and credibility in qualitative research. The recommended sample sizes for single-case studies range from 4 to 30 (Sharma et al., 2024). The study employed a purposive sampling method to select participants who have information about the Bandedereho program and its activities, including program beneficiaries, Bandedereho staff, other NGOs in the same scope, and local authorities. Researchers suggest different sample sizes for qualitative research based on the research design. 5 to 25 interviews are required for phenomenology and 20 to 30 for grounded theory (Sharma et al., 2024).

Subjects: The subjects were the direct beneficiaries of the program (the couples who attended the educational groups of the Bandedereho program. The list of subjects is as follows: The research sample involved subjects to reflect household, community, and institutional perspectives of the Bandedereho program in Burera District. It included six couples from Butaro Sector couples who had directly participated in the program and provided testimonies on household-level effects; a focus group discussion in Kinyababa Sector to capture group community information; and two community health workers, who described how male participation in domestic chores had influenced maternal and child health.

Informants: the informants were a staff member of the Bandedereho project was interviewed to describe the program design and its implementation, a local government leader to provide insight into the impacts and community perception of the program, and a gender activist from a different organization, who was interviewed to assess the overall image of gender transformative implementation in the Burera district and Rwanda in general. The interviews continued until the findings reached a sufficient sample size or saturation point. Subjects and informants were selected based on their involvement with and knowledge of the Bandedereho project.

3.4 Data Collection Method

Semi-structured interviews: the interview is the “favored digging tool” of social researchers (Kvale, 1996). Semi-structured interviews were organized with the beneficiaries of the project (the couples in group education), Bandedereho project staff, and local government leaders. **Data collection tool:** an interview guide was available containing questions covering the domestic work status, the barriers and motivation from the community, and the impact of the program, challenges, and opportunities.

Focus group discussion: Focus groups are designed to use group dynamics to yield insights that might not be accessible without the kind of interaction found in a group (Basnet, 2018). Two focus group discussions were organized with the program beneficiaries to discuss their experience, challenges, and opportunities they gained from program activities. **Data collection tool:** A Focus group guide was used to explore the program satisfaction and the program's impact on the beneficiaries

Observation: This method was used to watch and record the participants' events, behaviors, and physical appearances during the Bandedereho program and their natural settings. Participant observation helped to understand the flow of activity in a setting of interest (Kawulich, 2005). **Data collection tool:** Note-taking and video-audio recordings were employed to record the participants' behaviors and physical characteristics.

3.5 Data Analysis

Thematic Analysis: The data from interviews and focus groups were transcribed and analyzed using a thematic analysis approach. This approach enabled the identification, analysis, and reporting of themes within the data, facilitating an understanding of patterns related to male engagement, community dynamics, challenges, and impacts. **Coding Process:** Transcripts were coded in three phases: open, axial, and selective coding to organize data into themes relevant to the research questions. **Ensuring data validity:** Well-defined concepts were used, such as



gender-transformative approaches and male participation in domestic work. The theory of performativity was used to illustrate how the Bandebereho project fosters male involvement in domestic work through a structured change process.

Triangulation: To enhance both validity and reliability, data were collected from multiple sources, including interviews, focus groups, and document analysis. By cross-verifying findings from these different methods, the study ensured a comprehensive and accurate assessment of the Bandebereho program's impact on male participation in domestic chores and gender equality. This approach helped minimize biases, strengthen the credibility of the results, and provide a more holistic understanding of the program's effectiveness. Context-specific design: Socio-cultural and economic context considered in analyzing data. Expert validation: Pretest surveys are conducted, and the gender equality experts' inputs are considered.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Findings

4.1.1 Division of Domestic Work before Bandebereho

The division of household tasks before the Bandebereho program was introduced in Burera District was characterized by an unequal distribution of domestic labor, deeply rooted in traditional gender roles and patriarchal modes of society organization that regulated everyday life. Household operations took place within a close social order, where men were predominantly perceived as breadwinners, engaging in activities outside the home to earn a living. At the same time, women carried the heaviest reproductive and domestic load. As one of the male subjects from Butaro sector described, "I grew up watching my dad never do any chores, and I thought that is what a man is supposed to be outside working, providing food, but not to prepare it."

Before Bandebereho, the division of domestic work was highly unequal: women bore the lion's share of cooking, cleaning, childcare, and water/firewood collection-often in addition to engaging in agricultural work. Male non-participation was culturally normalized and socially enforced: men who attempted housework risked mockery, stigma, or accusations of being "controlled" by their wives. Decision-making power reflected this further imbalance, wherein men made financial and household decisions, while the often essential labor of women remained undervalued. Women recounted experiences of exhaustion, emotional distress, and lack of recognition, while men disclosed emotional distances from their own children. These dynamics indicated that inequalities in domestic work were located not only in labor distribution but in the broader systems of male dominance and gender identity.

4.1.2 Observed Changes in Male Participation After Bandebereho

The Bandebereho program created concrete and meaningful shifts in family relationships among participating families within Burera District. Highly entrenched gender norms shift slowly, yet evidence and testimony collected indicate considerable improvements in men's attitudes, routines, and interactions with their families. For most families, the unthinkable, previously having men help with caregiving and domestic chores, became a new, valued standard.

The structured discussions, couple-based sessions, and reflection exercises of the Bandebereho program catalyzed meaningful change. Participants moved through identifiable "stages of change," beginning with awareness that gender roles are socially constructed rather than biologically fixed. It was this realization that freed men to experiment with new behaviors-peeling potatoes, fetching water, preparing porridge, holding babies-despite initial fear of ridicule. As wives encouraged and community role models emerged, positive behaviors were reinforced and gradually diffused across households. Eventually, some men internalized these new roles, redefining fatherhood and masculinity in more nurturing and cooperative terms.

Significant improvements in domestic work sharing were observed: Men increasingly contributed to basic chores and childcare, accompanied wives to antenatal care, and took responsibility for newborn care. Such changes reduced women's workload and improved their well-being. Women reported improved communication and emotional intimacy, and marital harmony. Several families also reported economic benefits, as shared responsibilities enabled women to pursue small income-generating activities while men reduced expenditures on alcohol. Children benefited from increased paternal involvement, characterized by stronger emotional bonds and more engaged caregiving.

Women's perspectives confirmed both progress and complexity. Whereas most expressed appreciation for their husbands' involvement, some felt embarrassed when community members mocked their husbands for performing tasks considered feminine. Similarly, a few men limited their participation to "less stigmatized" chores, unwilling to challenge deeper community norms. These findings illustrate that though attitudinal change is happening, transformation is uneven and influenced by household dynamics and external social pressures alike.



4.1.3 The Role of Gender Transformative Approaches (GTA)

Bandebereho relied on three interconnected strategies: facilitated conversations, couple-based sessions, and structured reflection exercises. Facilitated conversations created safe and supportive spaces for men and women to discuss sensitive issues, power dynamics, gender roles, and family welfare, often for the very first time. As a subject from Butaro explained, “We had never talked about these things. At home, you keep quiet. In these meetings, we spoke openly, and I heard other men say what I was afraid to say.” These dialogues allowed participants to compare experiences, learn from others who had already made small changes, and critically question the norms they had long taken for granted.

Couples’ sessions proved especially effective in promoting joint decision-making. They encouraged spouses to plan together, share duties, and resolve disagreements constructively. A father from Kinyababa reported, “*Before, I decided everything. If there was a problem, we quarreled. Now, we sit together, talk, and solve it without shouting. We work like a team.*” This approach helped move families away from hierarchical patterns toward more collaborative partnerships. “*Beyond childcare, I now actively plan family matters together with my wife. We sit down to make decisions jointly and have built trust through shared responsibilities.*” A man said

GTA strategies, therefore, played a central role in enabling these shifts. Facilitated discussions allowed couples to challenge harmful norms and consider the emotional, social, and financial consequences of unequal labor. Exercises in joint decision-making helped families to replace conflict with dialogue. Reflection tools, such as mapping a typical day's workload, proved pivotal in helping men understand the level of domestic burden their partner was under. Being witness to other respected men publicly engaging in domestic work also contributed to normative change, rendering such practices respectable rather than shameful.

4.1.4 Obstacles and the Remaining Challenges

Patriarchal values are strong, especially in public settings where community judgments affect behavior. Some women internalize these norms and discourage husbands from helping due to the fear of gossip about their intimate relations. Not every family experienced a dramatic transformation. In most cases, men's participation was either symbolic or limited to less stigmatized activities, such as peeling potatoes or fetching water. As one wife commented, “*He helps with some domestic activities, but he still finds others shameful, like washing clothes, holding a newborn baby, and bathing them.*”

Deep-rooted opposition still exists in communities and families where traditional masculine norms remain strong. Some women also restrain themselves from embracing men's domestic involvement, out of fear of judgment. “*I love when he helps, but some neighbors say I am lazy or controlling him,*” one participant explained.

Sustainability is a concern. With no continuing reinforcement, participants are vulnerable to reverting to old behaviors, especially if broader community norms do not support new behaviors. As a facilitator of the group education (GE) from Kinyababa put it, “*If the community does not change, the man who tries will feel alone, and he may stop.*”

Overall, the findings show that Bandebereho has been associated with more equitable domestic practices, improved couple relations, better childcare, and broader norm shifts at the community level. While resistance persists, this study demonstrates that gender-transformative programming can drive profound social change when embedded in dialogue, local context, emotional reflection, and visible role modeling. The program has built solid foundations for lasting gender equality and provides a model that could be scaled up for Rwanda and other contexts where patriarchal norms are deeply entrenched.

4.2 Discussion

The impact of the Bandebereho program in Burera District is best appreciated from the perspective of Gender Transformative Approaches (GTA). Gender-transformative interventions and programs interrogate critically the gender expectations and norms that underpin power relations, and they seek consciously to promote attitudes and behaviors that further gender equity, usually by working through the social construction of masculinity (Stewart et al., 2021). The practices used in Bandebereho align closely with these principles and provide compelling evidence of how structured interaction, reflection, and peer support can drive sustainable change in both households and communities.

4.2.1 Bandebereho and the Evidence Base on GTA Interventions

Its findings concur with other international reviews of Gender Transformative Approaches in indicating that reflective programming over several months can shift masculine identities and improve equity between household responsibilities. According to (Casey et al., 2018) “programs can be categorized as gender transformative if they explicitly focus at least in part on a critical examination of gender-related norms and expectations (particularly those related to masculinity), and on increasing gender equitable attitudes and behaviors”. Bandebereho's randomized controlled trial showed reductions in intimate partner violence, increased male accompaniment to antenatal visits,

improved joint decision-making, and improved sharing of household work (Doyle et al., 2018). The results have shown that the Bandedereho program has successfully challenged traditional and social norms that prevented male participation in domestic chores. Similar results have been reported in other applications of GTA, such as Program H, a peer-group-based curriculum that was first introduced by Promundo. Program H has proven there is increased couple communication, higher men's openness to performing caregiving, and reductions in gender violence in various countries (Dunson, 2024).

Evidence is increasingly emerging that healthy relationship skills and healthy communication can contribute to men's respectful behavior. Community-based programmes like SASA! in Uganda have also proven that norms change can foster increased male participation in domestic work, joint decision-making, and reduce IPV (Kyegombe et al., 2014). SASA! Men, for example, were significantly more likely than their control counterparts to report participating in domestic work and valuing women's work (Kyegombe et al., 2014). This aligns with the findings from the Bandedereho program, where men who participated in group education sessions reported higher participation in domestic work after changing their behavior about the domestic tasks rooted in gender and social norms.

Moreover, the program's emphasis on relational practice working with couples rather than individuals alone facilitated the renegotiation of roles and expectations within the home's domestic space concurrently. This dual emphasis on self-reflection and collective action is consistent with GTA's underlying principles, which recognize that sustainable change requires both internal attitudinal change and external social support. to facilitate a process that creates a supportive environment for implementing GTAs that address the underlying barriers to both project success and to achieving gender equality (Larson et al., 2024).

4.2.2 Mechanisms of Change in GTA

The results illustrate that gender transformation is a progressive process, not a single event. Butler's theory of gender performativity explains how repeated acts (e.g., cooking, caregiving) reconstitute masculinity. GTA literature (Doyle et al., 2018; Hazra et al., 2023; Hillenbrand et al., 2015) confirms that interventions are most effective when they combine personal reflection, relational reinforcement, and community-level validation. The evidence from Burera District shows that Bandedereho successfully guided participants through each stage, though challenges remain in sustaining and normalizing these practices under economic and cultural pressures.

The drivers of change observed in the study facilitated group discussion, couples therapy sessions, peer modeling, and reflection mirror the core strategies of successful GTA programs globally. GTA Instead of burdening women with the responsibility for equality, engage men and women together as agents of change, promoting critical awareness about gender norms, transforming social norms and policies, and respecting the conceptualized, designed, and implemented flexibility and adaptability to varied contexts (Mendes, 2025). Bandedereho program employs peer-facilitated group discussion, critical reflection, and role-play to promote new behavior in emotionally safe environments, which align with the GTA strategies.

Likewise, the SASA program in Kampala, Uganda, activates communities in progressive stages of start, awareness, support, and action, emphasizing conversation about power relations and normative expectations to alter social network behaviors (Kyegombe et al., 2014). All these illustrations confirm that modifying gender norms requires internal motivation (through reflection and skill-building) as well as external support (through visibility, peer encouragement, and spreading norms).

4.2.3 Contribution of Theoretical Frameworks

The Burera District findings highlight the possibility of integrating two GTA theoretical orientations: Judith Butler's performativity, wherein gender is performed by reiterating behavior such as caregiving, and Social norms theory, wherein behavior change depends on others' perceived beliefs and actions within one's social network. According to Kritsonis (2005), behavior change is affected by environmental influences, personal factors, and attributes of the behavior itself. Bandedereho permitted participants to "do" new forms of masculinity (e.g., carrying babies, cooking), whereas peer and community validation shifted the risks of extending beyond traditional roles, effectively restructuring the normative environment.

4.2.4 Special Strengths and Long-Term Challenges

Compared with broader community interventions like the SASA program from Uganda, Bandedereho's advantage is that it works with couples to bring about direct household change. Long-term, population-level change can be helped, though, by combining community-level mobilization with couple-based approaches to shift larger norms. Consistent with Bandedereho RCT findings, although male involvement in domestic work increased, the overall workload of women didn't decrease, perhaps because women created new activities or allocated tasks at the same time. This aligns with a study conducted in Nigeria revealed that a greater number of women engaged in



adequate physical activity in spite of their heavy domestic workload (Bolarinde et al., 2018). This emphasizes the importance of tracking both women's time-use and intra-household task re-allocation in future evaluations.

Directions for Future Research

Future research could trace men's engagement and women's time use over time to see whether activities are being reallocated accordingly. Testing paired models that pair GTA with livelihood or community-based campaigns can also shed light on the most effective ways of scaling.

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

The current study investigated how the Bandedereho program, rooted in the Gender Transformative Approach, has changed men's involvement in domestic and caregiving tasks in Burera District, a region characterized by strong patriarchal norms and significant, unequal gendered division of labor. Before the intervention, domestic work was distinctly regarded as a woman's domain. Women were solely responsible for most of the household chores and childcare, often in addition to agricultural work, which resulted in extreme time poverty and emotional distress for them. Men's engagement in domestic work was minimal and culturally condemned; those who tried to help faced ridicule or loss of respect or were accused of being "controlled" by their wives. Decision-making power also rested with the men, further reflecting gendered inequalities at the household and community levels.

The Bandedereho program catalyzed change with facilitated discussion groups, couples' sessions, and reflective exercises. These helped participants question long-held assumptions about gender roles. The men moved through identifiable stages of change: at first, recognizing that domestic roles are socially constructed; then experimenting with new behaviors; gradually receiving positive reinforcement from their partners; and eventually normalizing new practices. Peer influence and role models played a critical part in helping men overcome the fear of stigma, especially as respected community members adopted caregiving roles publicly. After participation in Bandedereho, men reported significant changes in attitudes and behaviors. Many men started peeling potatoes, fetching water, preparing simple meals, accompanying wives to antenatal care, and taking care of infants—all acts previously perceived as inappropriate for men. Such changes decreased the workload for women, improved communication, and increased emotional closeness among spouses. Women reported feelings of respect and appreciation, not feeling overwhelmed. Several couples reported fewer conflicts, greater cooperation, and improved household harmony. There were also benefits for children: men became more emotionally engaged and present in caregiving.

At the household economic level, shared responsibilities have enabled women to participate in small income-generating activities, while men report a reduction in spending on alcohol. Families reported improved planning and jointly budgeting for better use of resources. Appreciation by men of the valuable contribution of women's domestic work was more common, both economically and emotionally, even when chore distribution was not equal. This transformation was neither universal nor uniform, with some men continuing to limit their contribution to tasks they perceived to be less stigmatizing and avoiding domestic work in public due to ongoing community pressure. Others may resist men's increased participation out of fear of gossip or accusations of laziness.

5.2 Recommendations

Deep-rooted gender norms, community expectations, and economic constraints remain significant barriers. Sustainability remains a challenge insofar as long-term behavioral change requires ongoing reinforcement from community leaders, institutions, and broader structural support. It reiterates the appropriateness of GTA as a robust theoretical framework that reshapes and challenges entrenched gender roles. From the practical perspective, findings indicate the need for scaling up Bandedereho-like programs through community structures, such as health centers, local leaders, and schools, to ensure sustained reinforcement of new behaviors. Government and NGOs have to integrate principles of GTA into policies and social programs; they also have to invest in training facilitators and promoting male role models to reduce stigma. Sustained community dialogue and public support are essential to prevent backsliding and to expand equitable domestic practices across households.

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