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## Transforming initiatives: Using the Gender Continuum to understand the target audience

*"With others I use a condom, but not with the girl I love. If she gets pregnant, it's an act of God" - Young man, 18*

In Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire this is one of the main insights which came from the Transform/PHARE project activity using Human Centered Design (HCD) to target young men, 15 - 24, working in the informal sector. HCD was used to better understand the context in which these young men live and work, and to learn relevant ways to approach them. The project aimed to engage them in conversations with their sexual partners about contraception and family planning.

Transform/PHARE also made a commitment to work towards designing gender transformative, or at a minimum, gender accommodating interventions. The road-map provided by USAID, the Gender Integration Continuum Tool, developed by Inter-agency Gender Working Group was incorporated into the project's gender strategy, and through brainstorming the tool was adapted to identify the stages in which different target audience segments fell on the spectrum as either gender exploitative, accommodating or transformative.

### GENDER INTEGRATION CONTINUUM

#### Ignores:

- The set of economic, social, political roles; rights; entitlements; responsibilities; and obligations associated with being female & male.
- Power dynamics between and among men & women, boys & girls

**GENDER BLIND**



**GENDER AWARE**

#### EXPLOITATIVE

Reinforces or takes advantage of gender inequalities and stereotypes.

#### ACCOMMODATING

Works around existing gender differences and inequalities.

#### TRANSFORMATIVE

- Fosters critical examination of gender norms\* and dynamics
- Strengthens or creates systems\* that support gender equality
- Strengthens or creates equitable gender norms and dynamics
- Changes inequitable gender norms and dynamics.

#### GOAL

**Gender equality and better development outcomes**



\* Norms encompass attitudes and practices

\* A system consists of a set of interactive structures, practices and relations

Early in the process it was discovered that the goal of bringing the target audience (young men between 15-24, working in the informal sector) to the gender transformative stage was unrealistic, at least in the short-term, based on the following insights derived from the inspiration phase of the HCD process:

- ✓ Young men's number one goal is having sex
- ✓ Young men emulate their bachelor bosses, but dream of a traditional future
- ✓ Growing up among unspoken expectations, no one is equipped to talk about sex
- ✓ Young women want to use condoms, but only men are allowed to carry them
- ✓ HIV matters, but pregnancy is not a young man's problem
- ✓ Contraceptive methods are not relevant, and risks are an afterthought to sex
- ✓ As relationships progress, men's supportive behavior often turns coercive
- ✓ Women are becoming aware of their desires, and young men are curious to learn how to please them

Men participating in the inspiration research seemed to fit into one of four groups, which were categorized as four archetypes: the hustler boss, the oblivious playboy, the honey-mooner, and the curious virgin<sup>1</sup>. Having identified four different archetypes, it was obvious that our target audience could no longer be thought of as one group of young men working in the informal sector since within this context differing characteristics exist for many men. Ideally, targeted messaging and approaches should be used for each archetype, however, such effort went beyond the scope of our activity. That being said, traits of all archetypes were taken into account when designing the prototype.

Although this is not the way that the gender equality continuum tool is used, Transform/PHARE used it as a guide it was possible to map where the target audience seemed to be. We translated the stages of the continuum into behavioral expectations as inhibitors (exploitative), supporters (accommodating) or enablers (transformative).



It became evident that the target audience was not ready to engage in discussions about contraception and number or timing of children right away. The project found that instead it was necessary to facilitate a progressive change, using the stages of change model (Prochaska & DiClementi) as a reference, to help young men move from the stage of inhibitors, into the stage of supporters with the long-term goal of helping them move into the role of enablers (of gender equitable reproductive health behaviors). According to the model, change happens gradually, step-by-step and an individual rarely changes behavior or beliefs dramatically before going through a series of stages.

Regardless of which archetype they belong to, young men are not interested in discussing contraception, they are more interested in discussing and learning about sex and relationships, and are also open to learning and discussing topics such as women's pleasure, how to engage with their girlfriends and how to tell their parents that they have a girlfriend; they are more likely to be able to first discuss how they interact with girls when it comes to sex and romance before they are ready to discuss topics of couples' communication, joint decision making, mutual responsibility, and contraception.

So, using the gender integration continuum as guidance helped make sure that the intervention would focus on influencing male-oriented gender norms and roles, rather than focusing only on reproductive health and contraception.



To address these desires a comic book style story was prototyped on Facebook, which proved appealing to young men. The story, which can be found here [touched on topics of sexuality, unplanned pregnancy, condom use and gender equality.](#) Interaction with the story on the social media page has increased over time, and although it captivated young men beyond the informal sector, it did show that social media could be an effective tool to use when discussing traditionally unspoken topics such as sexuality, unplanned pregnancy and gender equality.

1. Detailed description of archetypes not relevant for this success story, but available in the project reports