SPREAD 2 *The decline of the breadwinner: Men in the 21st century*

Across societies and cultures, most men and boys have strong ideas about how they should behave and feel as men. From traditional roles in the family such as acting as the household head—the main provider and main authority—to personal characteristics including strength, toughness, and ambition, the desirable attributes for men are clearly summarized by two young men in Moldova: "*The man is a conqueror, which is why he always needs to conquer something, a title, a woman, social status, a job.*"

Most men recognize that the prevalent social norms in the community prescribe the dominant roles they should perform.[1] The main role for men is the one of primary income-earner and breadwinner in the family. In all 19 countries in the study, income generation for the family was the first and most likely mentioned definition of a man's role in the family and of a good husband: "*A good husband is a good provider of things such as food, clothes*" *(Afghanistan)*. "*A good husband is one who provides for everything in the house. He pays all the bills*" *(Burkina Faso)*. "*A good husband is one who earns a decent income and keeps his family in good comfort. . . . He has to be a good provider and has to put in extra hours, if necessary for this purpose*" *(India)*. "*He should go to his work in the early morning and get money for his children*" *(North Sudan)*. Only under specific conditions can a man be excused from this role: "*A good husband must be a good provider unless he is seriously sick and is unable to work. A husband who is not a good provider has no power at all in his family*" *(Vietnam)*.

The provider role also influences men's perceptions of their social status and power: "*[A man] is responsible, has a job, it is an element of pressure that he must give a sense of security*" *(Poland)*. "*His income is the biggest and the most important for functioning of the household. It gives him self-respect*" *(Serbia)*. "*One of the reasons why many men are not respected in the homes is that they cannot provide or provide little and women have become big providers in the homes. So, you find that the husband is not in control of the family*" *(Tanzania)*. The power earned also gives men the final say in household decision making.

But gender relations have evolved, and men are now also required to adapt to new demands, new expectations, new roles. Being authoritative and ensuring the family's economic well-being was once enough to define a good husband and father. Now men also are expected to share child-care tasks, to help in the household, and to show emotion and feelings, as well as to value their partner's voice in decision making. A good husband today has "*to be able to balance his job with family life, a good husband should have a better time management, and love enough his family in order to be open to spend much time with his family members*" *(Moldova)*. In a community in West Bank and Gaza, all men participating in the group agreed that "*a good husband today helps in the house more and consults with his wife and children about things in the house, whereas in the past he used to do things without discussing it with the household or the wife.*"

Men are adapting, but in many cases not as fast as women are changing their views and ways. While women are gaining power and freedom, men are resisting change. Many men feel their male authority and dominance is being challenged on multiple fronts. Rural men express this discomfort more than urban men. "*Everything has changed and gone the opposite direction these last 20 years, as if 200 years have passed, everything that was not normal is normal today. Everything has been radically changed. The whole system of values has disappeared,*" said a group of rural men in Serbia. Men from Papua New Guinea echoed this discomfort, attributing it to new laws and rights granted to women: "*We do understand that there are laws relating to rights of women but most of us do not take these seriously. As men, we are heads of the family. In the past, women and men did not know these laws, and women respected husbands. Now, because of these laws, women try to control their husbands, which is not good. Women, especially educated women, undermine their husbands; they must and should submit to their husbands.*" Men from South Africa and North Sudan agreed with these statements.

Men feel that their power in society has stagnated over the past 10 years. Partly because of changes in norms and laws but also because of lack of economic progress in their countries or communities, men report little to no power gains during the 10-year period. When asked to rank a group of 100 men in their communities by the degree of power they held now and 10 years earlier, men in about 60 percent of the communities report no or little increase in the share of men moving upward and gaining power. The remaining 40 percent sees some changes but these are not as large as women's.

Men's gains in power largely depend on economic conditions in their countries and communities, particularly economic growth and the functioning of local and national labor markets. An examination of the explanations men provide for changes in their power, points to several combinations of factors. First, the explanatory model that described forces behind perceived expansions in female

empowerment held no explanatory power when applied to men (see spread 1). In fact, the pathways for men and women are entirely different. Female pathways to greater empowerment include a broader range of factors, largely dependent on the ability to make decisions, be free of violence, and participate in social networks. Male pathways are much narrower and dominated by the economy and the existence of and access to jobs. Only two possible combinations of factors were robust, both including development in the country (measured by the country's Human Development Index [HDI] score):

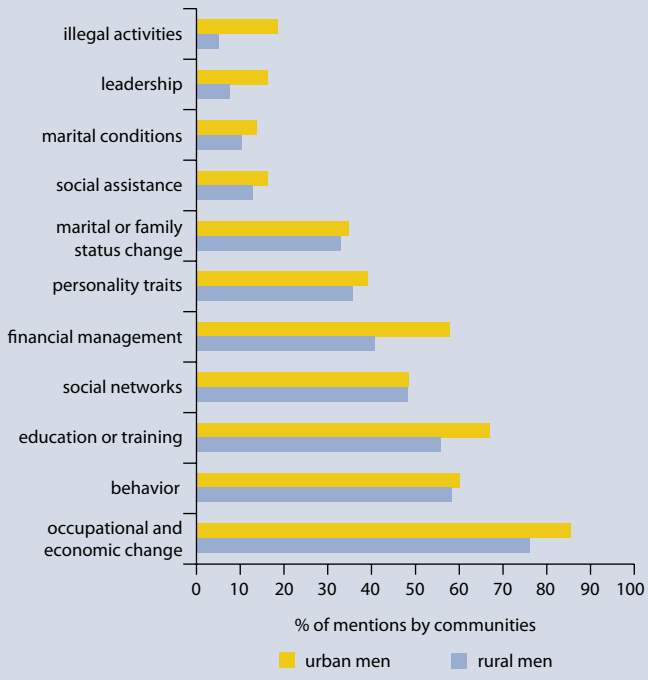
- The combination of the availability of private sector jobs and a high HDI explains power changes in 56 percent of the communities.
- The combination of a high HDI, a high score for active local markets (as perceived by the men in the community), and high male labor force participation at the national level explains changes in 39 percent of the communities.

This model fits closely with men's descriptions of those at the top of a power ladder and those who fall to the bottom. "*A man should be powerful. But how can he be powerful when the village is undergoing such a huge crisis. Power means financial security,*" said a man in Serbia, reflecting how much weight men give to economic conditions and to jobs in defining what it means for a man to have power. Employment-based status and power help those with appropriately masculine jobs to remain buoyant, sometimes, to the point of arrogance and ostentation. "*[A] man at the top step of the ladder has big houses and a lot of wetland for farming. He will have herds of cows and can afford cow butter for cooking, and tea. His farms are more mechanized and he has many people working for him. He is a proud man and egoistic,*" said a rural man in Bhutan. In Liberia, these men will be recognized because "*they are people whose parents left them cocoa or other plantations that [are] needed by both the people at top and bottom; they can afford to buy a motor bike for income generation; they have the resources that makes them credit worthy to the top person.*" Men report occupations and economic conditions as the main factors driving movement up or down the ladder (spread figures 2.1 and 2.2).

Men who lose self-esteem in the labor market may try to claw it back in other aspects of their lives, from investments in education to violent domination in the household to risky behavior. The profound impact on male self-esteem that occurs when men lose their jobs or when women take over as primary breadwinners is exacerbated by high unemployment and lack of job security so prevalent in today's world. Young men invest less in their human capital because they see education as having low or mixed value, particularly in labor markets that do not operate on merit. Young men in Moldova, Poland, and Serbia were the most skeptical, stating that connections outstrip education in determining whether they could find a job: "*I think that education has lost its significance. Everything is now about political connections.*" *(Poland).* "*Connections are everything, and mainly the resourceful people have success. Here it is a paradox, the less education you have, the more money you can make*" *(Serbia).* High unemployment was leaving educated men either without jobs or with jobs below their skill levels: "*I have two college diplomas and one vocation school diploma, and I could not get a good job*" *(Moldova).* In some instances, there was considerable disillusionment: "*I dropped out and did not want to continue my education because I lacked sufficient will and desire. It is all the same to me, whether I got an education or not, I certainly would not be able to get a job that would provide me with a normal life*" *(Serbia).*

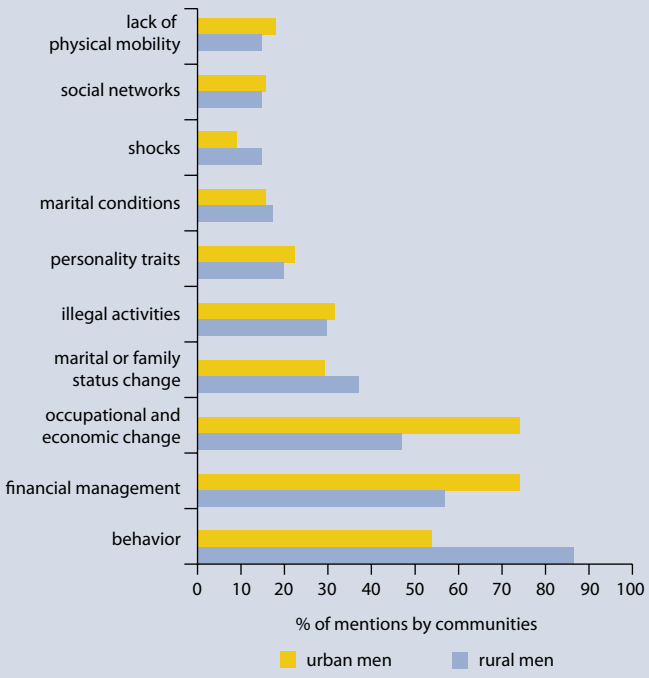
Cienfuegos, Dominican Republic, is one of the communities that has seen the largest descent of men in their perception of power—mostly stemming from the closing of the free trade zones after the economic crisis. Here,

SPREAD FIGURE 2.1 ***Factors that explain gains in power***



Source: WDR 2012 team calculations, based on "Defining Gender in the 21st Century: A Multi-Country Assessment" (dataset).

SPREAD FIGURE 2.2 *Factors that explain losses of power*



Source: WDR 2012 team calculations, based on "Defining Gender in the 21st Century: A Multi-Country Assessment" (dataset).

men see that the only way to make money today is to sell drugs or embark on some similar unlawful activity. Across the world, men's dependence on employment to assess their identity and self-worth makes them vulnerable to economic volatility: "*Men are affected more than women [by unemployment], which leads to frustration and family problems and, in some cases, leads to violence by men against women and children, and may lead to illness*" (West Bank and Gaza). Asked what men in Papua New Guinea would do in response to losing a job, men said they would "*get very frustrated, get very upset, get drunk, and beat the wife.*"

NOTE

1. The study economies include Afghanistan, Bhutan, Burkina Faso, the Dominican Republic, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Liberia, Moldova, North Sudan, Peru, Papua New Guinea, Poland, Serbia, South Africa, Tanzania, Vietnam, West Bank and Gaza, and the Republic of Yemen. The focus groups included male adults, female adults, male youth, female youth, male adolescents, and female adolescents; the adolescent groups were conducted only in a subset of 8 of the 19 countries. For further information, the assessment methodology can be found at http://www.worldbank.org/wdr2012.