**Engaging men in family welfare and development.**

**“The Etesot Father (TEF) social-cultural approach”**

**Origins and rationale for TEF approach**

The “The Etesot Father” (TEF), a social-cultural values approach has its origins in a collaboration between Fidelitas Scientific Execution Facility (FSEF) and Iteso Cultural Union (ICU). The design process was led by John King Odolon, a development practitioner born in Teso, raised in Teso, studied in Teso, worked in Teso as well as other regions in Uganda and overseas, and now back to Teso working on community level transformation. The approach is premised on the failing and appalling state of the Iteso family structure that has adversely affected the child survival and their potential to thrive. The co-design process was informed by the deep sense that innovative ideas come from older people with practical wisdom, therefore, engaging cultural leaders’/clan representatives and elders was very crucial in the design and actual creation of lasting change at family level.

At Fidelitas Facility, we hold the view that you cannot change or create any new culture in a community without considering existing social-cultural values, traditions and norms. In most of Africa, family level roles are culturally sanctioned and meaningful change in roles can only be successful to the extent that it is aligned and fits the social cultural values systems.

The respect that people accord to culture, traditions and norms is way deeper than the respect given to technocrats and politicians. Therefore, development interventions however much they are well designed, well intentioned and wellbeing oriented, they must first pass the cultural fit test if they are to be spread for wider impact and community system change. In a nutshell, culture determines how fast or slow communities change or are transformed.

The Fidelitas facility worked with Iteso cultural union to originate the concept of “The Etesot Father”, a values-based, culturally adaptable, mindset change pathway aimed at deepening family and social responsibility among fathers across 12 districts of Teso kingdom. Fathers are conveniently met in their homes, cultural functions like Clan meetings and local-brew drinking men’s groups; where positive values, practices and norms of “The Etesot Father” are passed on, reminding them of wholistic family management.

TEF social-cultural approach is rooted in our understanding of Africentric science, aimed at nurturing indigenous knowledge and evidence. The underlying principles are cultural heritage restoration and preservation of cultural fidelity, cultural decontamination and transforming hitherto negative cultural beliefs and practices.

**Problem statement**

In the present day, a large number of Fathers in Teso region are detached from their families and family wellbeing. There is high level of neglect of fatherhood responsibility and family nurturing, they spend most of their time and financial resources at local brew men’s groups taking alcohol/local brew (Ajon) and continue giving birth to many children than they can take care of. This increases the plight of neglected and uncared for children, hence an intergenerational dependence burden. Figure one below shows the average household size per region.

At the Fidelitas Facility, we recognize that health is the only means and guarantor for continuity of culture and life. However, access to affordable health services is a challenge in Teso sub region. The national household survey 2019/2020 revealed that 70% of the health facilities are privately owned and thus charge a fee for any health service. In addition, 93% of the people in Teso don’t know about health insurance, and only 1% of those who know have health insurance.

This means that 99% of the communities in Teso don’t have health insurance. Therefore, from a cultural-centered development lens, Fidelitas Facility and Iteso cultural union are developing a clan based cultural health insurance scheme, managed and controlled by the clan leadership. Our approach is to strengthen the clan structures, build their outcomes-based influencing ability targeting men as house hold heads across Teso region.

In addition, UBOS survey 2019/2020 shows that the enrolment into school above the official age was more pronounced in the sub region of Teso (142%). In Karamoja, Busoga, Teso and Bukedi, there is a persistent high dependency ratio, Teso has the largest average household size and 61% of the children 3 – 5 years in Teso sun region are not attending school. Children are the most affected by these challenges, and community. Figure 2 below shows that 74% of the men in Teso are the household heads, hence they are expected by the communities to provide for all needs of the family. The contrasting situation in Karamoja (which still affects children adversely) shows that women form the biggest proportion of household heads. Most of the men are absentee fathers, neglect their families and thus need to be meaningfully engaged and restored their cultural fidelity, which ensures that they take care of their children and extended family members.

**About the solution**

The Etesot Father approach (TEF) is a norms transformative and cultural heritage restoration intervention. It is designed to use a bi-directional approach to restore positive but abandoned norms and practices while transforming the negative norms and or practices. It is uniquely designed and operates below the water line up to the bedrock of the iceberg approach for transformative change programming.

TEF has a largescale change potential not to necessarily introduce new or partially new value systems but rather catalyze the positive norms and values that are cherished and guarded jealously by social cultural institutions. The approach is premised on the African culture and African values which catered for human wellbeing outcomes especially child care related outcomes.

The Fidelitas Facility focuses on indigenous evidence and solutions which are nurtured and improved. The approach does not require fitting and contextualizing which are often costly and prone to community resistance. The approach is adaptable to different cultures of Uganda since all cultural institutions in Uganda have values and customs that gather people and or men together

The Etesot Father as a male engagement approach is implemented to realize outcomes of improvement on the behavior and practices of the father whilst improving the general management and welfare of the home and largely the health outcomes of a child.

**Target population**

The approach targets all men in the capacity of a father, biological and non-biological. All fathers/husbands aged 18 - 50 years, who are fathers of children 0-12 years, whose family wellbeing doesn’t conform to the expectations of “The Etesot Father” as prescribed by Iteso culture are targeted for mindset change and transformational conversations.

**Goal:** A culturally oriented Itesot community where all women, men and children find joy, develop and thrive.

**Purpose of the intervention**

To build a movement of fathers that are routinely involved in their family affairs around health, education, environment, food security and nutrition.

**Objectives of the approach**

* To revitalize and restore positive cultural values and practices that improve the quality of life and wellbeing for Itesot families.
* To incorporate comprehensive family care conversations in the discussions of men in social cultural activities, meetings and daily events.
* To increase the amount and quality of personal interaction between fathers and their family members

**Theory of change**

IF mindset focused, peer-led, values based and culturally appropriate conversations are held with fathers in Teso who spend more time in non-productive social-cultural events for example Ajon/local brew men drinking joints, extractive social gatherings, quick-cash betting etc. on values, beliefs and practices of a thriving family oriented “The Etesot Father”, through the social values and cultural values pathways, THEN most fathers will stop behaving and acting contrary to what their cultural identity dictates, which will lead to marked reduction of absentee fathers in homes, stronger bonding among couples, a reduction in family and child neglect and more productive and thriving homes that will cause positive cultural restoration, transformation and re-establish the family as a development unit for Teso region.

**The Etesot Father**

* Strong and self-reliant
* Defends his home and family
* Ensures availability of enough food in a home
* Provides medical care to sick family member
* Ensures children go to school
* Spends time with the wife and children

**Current father**

* Spends most time in drinking joint taking alcohol
* Returns home late while drunk
* Does not care about the wellbeing of children (does not check on children)
* Does not provide food at home
* Beats his wife

**Theoretical framework of the Etesot Father approach**

While we are guided by the theory of transformation, “The Etesot Father approach” is largely rooted in the grassroots theory (Saul Alinsky, 1971). Our theory is based on the belief that grassroots or community organizers view power as changeable and dynamic, not something held exclusively by elites. Fidelitas Facility and Iteso Cultural union believe that groups of people can create power by taking mutual action to achieve social change. Mutual action can only be accepted when communities feel attached to the change, and culture is a center-piece for holding people together and sustaining mutual attachment. Other theories that support the approach are diffusion theory where planned and spontaneous spread of new ideas change the social system and the coalition theory by Paul Sabatier et al where individuals have core beliefs a problem’s seriousness, its causes, society’s ability to solve the problem, and promising solutions for addressing it.

**Expected intervention outcomes**

**Multi sectoral outcomes of the intervention**

**The Etesot Father and his family responsibilities**

Progress results indicate that the participation of males in the male engagement approach of “The Etesot Father” has supported improved father engagement and responsibility towards the children, wives and their homes that is to say;

* Strengthened families with fathers engaged in the care and wellbeing of the family and children. Fathers actively participate in protecting and promoting the health, wellbeing and development of their partners and children – including through providing emotional support, financial support and physical support;
* Fathers spending a considerable amount of time with their family and are emotionally involved with their partners and children; hence increased communication, better family planning practices, and increased joint resource mobilization for the home.
* Fathers engaged in activities that are beneficial to their families. Fathers help their wives on home chores
* Fathers who spend less days/ time at drinking joints and more time engaged with family assume joint responsibility with their partner for the workload (including unpaid care work, child-rearing and work outside the home) and for the development of a happy, respectful, non-violent, healthy and caring couple relationship;
* Fathers make informed decisions together with their partners and support their partner’s autonomous decision-making; and resolve differences of opinion and potential conflict without violence, and make active efforts to stop cycles of violence by promoting love, affection, respect and active communication.

**Sector specific outcomes**

**The Etesot Father and Reproductive, maternal, neonatal and child Health**

Active engagement of fathers and overall spousal participation in reproductive maternal and new child heath (RMNCH) is associated with improved decisions and actions for the use of antenatal services, delivery, and post-natal services beneficial for women, their children, and their communities.

Globally, a man’s role in the household often centers a round decision making and the provision of financial and emotional support, which in many instances influences decisions related to healthcare seeking behavior, including during pregnancy. However, men’s knowledge about maternal and child health is often limited due to the perception of reproductive and maternal health as a female domain. In the absence of sufficient knowledge about maternal health, often compounded by a lack of resources, male partners can negatively influence women’s engagement in peri-natal health services, leading to detrimental impacts on health outcomes for the woman and the child. Engaging men in maternal health services provides an important opportunity to increase knowledge and support for joint and informed decisions that positively affect the mother and child (Mackson Maohosa, 2021).

Research from low and middle-income countries has linked male engagement projects to improved couple relationships, joint family decision making, increased uptake of family planning, and reduced child mortality. (Faeda Ayed Eqtait, 2019) notes that culture, exposure to information, attitudes and norms are determinants of male involvement in family planning use. Therefore, our social-cultural and values-based approach is well placed to improve RMNACH outcomes.

**The Etesot Father in Education**

Male engagement in child care giving, results into increased school enrolment rates, early learning and stimulation. Due to improvement in joint family planning and decision making, both fathers and mothers plan and mobilize resources to ensure children go to school. Parents provide the necessary adequate school requirements which improves children’s learning and stimulation.

**The Etesot Father in Food security and Nutrition**

There is increased availability of food/nutritious food production in the home hence improvement in child nutrition. Father involvement in home activities and plans allows them to plan for the feeding of their children and family. Men start to go to the gardens together with their wives which increases the food basket in the home. Fathers and mothers are encouraged through sensitization meetings to build granaries at home to keep surplus foods for use during dry spells.

**The Etesot Father in home sanitation and hygiene**

Sanitation and hygiene, especially at the household level, has been regarded as the primary responsibility of women and girls. Whether and how men and boys get involved in sanitation depends on whether men and women are raised to believe that men and boys can assume this role. The involvement of fathers in the home sanitation and hygiene will lead to sustainable and transformative changes in the household and communities (Sue Cavill, 2018). Awareness is made to fathers to engage themselves in ensuring proper hygiene of the homes. Fathers ensure the homes have clean toilets, clean water containers, rubbish pit etc.

**The Etesot Father in Child spaces**

Fathers are able to set up simple play spaces for children and spare time to play with them. Fathers make play materials for children to play with.

Fathers are taught on how to play and engage with children. Fathers are taught on how to engage with children depending on their age bracket. How your child plays, learns, speaks, acts, and moves offers important clues about his or her development. It is important for parents to check the milestones of their children at every stage of their growth. That is to say; children at 2months, 4months, 6months, 9 months, one year, one year and half months, 2 years, 3years, 4years, 5years etc. At each of these ages, fathers and mothers are encouraged to engage with their children depending. Fathers are encouraged to engage with their children in the aspects of their emotional, social welfare, how to communicate, be problem solvers, and in their physical development journey.

**The Etesot Father and greening the environment**

The environment mismanagement has been held responsible for the climate disruptions that have affected food security in Teso region, and solutions have been so much legislative, technical and extrinsic in nature. Programs have not taken advantage of the Iteso cultural heritage where each home was expected to have trees for fruits, trees for shade and adequate space for children to play. The Etesot Father approach re-ignites this sense in all men and fathers, as an expectation for one to be considered as a typical Etesot father. We integrate conversations of home and community environment conservation in simple, non-technical but culturally acceptable means that trigger community action.

**Implementation framework**

The approach is implemented through a systematic cultural change, restoration and transformation journey as below.

Stage one: Social cultural dialogues and consensus conversations

Cultural leaders are engaged to discuss about the positive and negative cultural values on fatherhood practices in the family and community. During the dialogues and conversations, consensus is made on values and practices that men and women confirm to and those they do not. This helps to identify practices that do not hold value and those that hold value in the community and on their wellbeing. At this stage, those that are non-conforming and or conforming to the positive or negative cultural values are identified.

Stage two: Social system mapping

Areas where negative social values and practices are found to be high are mapped out and all the negative issues identified. The mapping exercise helps to identify communities that are in proximity to numerous drinking joints. The activity is conducted with support of the community development officers who provide essential information and guidance at identification of the target areas/hotspots. Drinking joints with a high number of men participating will be identified.

Stage three: Orientation of cultural custodians

At this stage, community leaders and clan heads in the areas selected are engaged. FIDELITAS introduces the program and approach (The Etesot Father approach) to all relevant stakeholders in the area. These are oriented on the approach approach, its purpose, objectives and expected outcomes beneficial to households and community. Hotspots identified are presented to the stakeholders mainly the local leaders and clan representatives in the area.

Other stakeholders engaged include; VHTs, community leaders, community development officers, bar owners, wives, Influencers/peers, media, religious leaders

Stage four: Intervention Co-design

After the approach has been introduced to the cultural custodians, Fidelitas Facility implementation experts together with the cultural leaders agree on the positive values and messages to pass on to the fathers in their clans and communities. Consensus is made on how the awareness sessions to fathers would be conducted and the messages to pass on

**Stage five: Identification and selection of fatherhood champions**

Fidelitas Facility and Iteso cultural union with support of the community development officers conduct a mobilization campaign to prepare fathers and men in the drinking joints for an introductory meeting. Groups of fathers and men are voluntarily gathered together. This is done with the help of the group leaders of the men’s groups

At this stage, after thorough introduction on the approach to the fathers and men in the drinking joints, fathers are encouraged to be part of the intervention. Fidelitas and Iteso cultural union teams identify and line list fathers willing to be part of the approach.

**Stage six: Implementation at scale/roll out of the approach**

Fidelitas teams with support of the clan leaders, local community leaders and introduce the approach in details to the fathers. At this point, fathers agree on the schedule for meetings or engagements /trainings on the approach and how it works. Fatherhood champions are oriented on the approach following a 5-day conversational guide.

**Topical discussion and conversation guide**

1st About who a real Etesot father is. “Who is he?”

2nd Reflection on the kind of fathers of today

3rd Why the changes from the expected to who a current father is today?

4th Conversations on the drivers of the negative change?

5th Alignment of the value of sticking to the expected The Etesot Father with local examples

6th Agree on actionable ideas to gradually retrospectively become The Etesot Fathers.

**Discussions and conversations on Etesot Fatherhood**

This process takes at most a minimum of six weeks. Fathers /men are engaged in discussions for a period of 1 ½ months. After the fatherhood champions have completed their 6-day orientation/sessions, these together with the support of the Fidelitas and Iteso Cultural Union structures teams and men’s group leader introduce TEF to the all fathers in social-cultural spaces. These champion the drive to create awareness among men on how to become better and The Etesot Fathers. The lead the discussions and conversation of men and fathers in their joints. The discussions and conversations are held along with fathers/men drinking their Ajon, or in clan meetings or other men’s groups.

During these conversations, the fatherhood champions brainstorm on topics about fatherhood, child wellbeing, male involvement in household activities, support to wives in home care and making family decisions and plans, education of a child, feeding for children, family planning and its methods among others. The conversations are on father involvement in family welfare for each member and other household activities. This is done continuously and periodically.

Fathers/men are monitored and followed up to determine their pace of change. As the father continues to participate in the mindset change conversations, gradually they realize the need to spend more days with their families and children and involvement in household activities hence reduction on the number of days they spend in drinking joints.

Thus fathers/men are followed up and monitored to check on what exactly is changing at the family level. This is measured on the social-cultural local brew drinking time trajectory and the family time trajectory changes. Each fatherhood champions have a list of fathers/men to follow and monitor of their pace of change around the two trajectories that is the social drinking time trajectory and the family time trajectory.

**Community-led Monitoring and evaluation**

Fidelitas and Iteso Cultural union co-designed a localized community driven approach and thus the M&E system has to be strengthened at the grassroots level, to allow for effective community led monitoring and evaluation. We engage the community in determining what they want to measure change and how they will measure that change. We recognize that our localized attention to expanding and improving the wellbeing of children and the family members at the community level also requires strengthening the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems that is applied at that level. Once communities determine their indicators, Fidelitas and Iteso cultural union teams develop and refine the M&E plan to include some standard government and global indicators.

**Stage seven: Clan leader galas**

After every end month, a report is shared by the fatherhood champions with the local leaders and clan leaders giving details of fathers and men who have successfully transitioned from the social drinking time trajectory to the family time trajectory. These are men who are spending more time with their families and are engaged in household activities and decisions together with their wives and children. Fathers/men that have transitioned to The Etesot Fathers are recognized and congratulated. These are certified by the district with support of Fidelitas to carry on the mentorship to other fathers. At this stage, the fathers give their individual testimonies about their transition process and their achievements since joining the approach/program.

After congratulatory celebrations and testimonies, another batch of fathers are selected from among the successful fathers to carry on the activities of the approach/approach. This is a continuous rotational methodology that empowers all men in the joints to keep the social values of the home and their social groups.