

# Engaging Men, Changing Gender Norms: Directions for Gender-Transformative Action



The **MenEngage Alliance** is a global alliance in over 30 countries that seeks to engage men and boys in effective ways to reduce gender inequalities and to promote the health and wellbeing of women, men and children, including ending all forms of gender-based violence (GBV). The alliance is comprised of a consortium of NGOs from the Global South and North who work in collaboration with numerous international NGOs and UN partners. A Steering Committee and International Advisory Committee coordinate MenEngage.

The **United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)** is an international development agency that promotes the right of every woman, man and child to enjoy a life of health and equal opportunity. UNFPA supports countries in using population data for policies and programs to reduce poverty and to ensure that every pregnancy is wanted, every birth is safe, every young person is free of HIV/AIDS, and every girl and woman is treated with dignity and respect.

This MenEngage-UNFPA advocacy brief explores the importance of changing social norms related to men's ideas and behaviors and examines several questions: Can men support gender equality and learn to live gender-equitable lives? Can men transform the ideas and practices they associate with manhood? Can the spheres where men and boys are socialized and often learn inequitable norms – home, school, work, sports, religion, the media, and others – be changed? This brief will consider responses to these questions in three parts:

I. **“Gender Relations, Gendered Social Norms, and Masculinities,”** which discusses the context of societal gender norms and their impact on behaviors.

II. **“Building on the Changes that are Already Happening,”** which outlines the broad shifts in men's attitudes, and the gender equitable policies and programs that are taking hold globally.

III. **“Principles and Key Recommendations for Promoting Gender Equitable Norms Among Men and Boys,”** which highlights underlying principles for work with and successful engagement of men and boys to transform gender norms.



## Background

Men's conceptions of manhood can change; so can the places where and the ways in which these conceptions are formed. Many men are already taking part in this change, but the challenge remains in determining how to best encourage and support the process. Those who wish to spark and support men's evolution toward gender equality must determine what stands in the way of men's change, and what types of advocacy and activism, social and economic policies, educational campaigns, legal reforms, and programs best facilitate this process. What has been learned from more than 30 years of gender equality work with men and boys? What are the areas that must be approached with caution? It is clear that to do this work effectively the scarce resources available to engage men and boys must be well utilized, while at the same time enhancing, not diminishing, the work to empower women and girls.

### I. Gender Relations, Gendered Social Norms, and Masculinities

Every society has sets of norms that influence behaviors. Although these apply to the gamut of human relations, many core norms relate to gender. Or, to put it more precisely, many norms flow (albeit in complex ways) from gendered relations.

Gender, as distinct from biological sex, holds the ideals of masculinity and femininity; it is the relations of power between women and men, boys and girls (and shapes relations among men and among women, boys and girls); it is both the beliefs and the practices of gender that structure our experiences as men and women.

Every society and every era has distinct gender norms; this is because gender itself is a fluid and ever-changing entity. However, most societies have some common denominators when it comes to specific norms for women and men. Indeed, patriarchal cultures, where men hold power and women are to varying degrees excluded from power through both formal and informal mechanisms, are the global norm.

The norms that flow from and reinforce gender relations and definitions are important because they are behavioral guides. Like any norms, they can play a positive role, but

many gender norms become justifications for individual self-censorship and collective social control. In this sense, gender norms have a strong ideological character: they reflect and reinforce relations of gender power.

Men's gender norms have an enormous impact on their behavior in ways that are often harmful to both women and men. For example, if it is the norm that men are in charge of sexual and intimate relationships, then women lack autonomy and may experience physical and sexual violence. If norms that flow from the gendered division of labor stipulate that it is not manly to do housework or look after children (and takes time away from men's prescribed roles as breadwinners), then this creates enormous hardship for women and ensures that generations of men grow up with reduced empathetic ties to children. If it is normal to see a man as weak if he seeks help or unmanly if he shows physical or emotional vulnerability, then men may be more likely not to look after their own health needs, both physical and emotional.

#### Traditional Norms and Gender Equitable Norms

Many cultures' traditional, usually inequitable, gender norms contrast with emerging, gender equitable ones. In many cultures, it is the norm (accepted by both women and men) for a father not to be present at the birth of his children; a more equitable norm defines him as present to support his spouse, to bond with his child from birth, and to signal that the birth of his child is a pivotal moment in his life. It is the norm for men not to question another man's autonomy in his own home, including the use of violence against his wife and children. A more equitable norm says it is men's responsibility to speak out against physical, sexual or emotional abuse being committed by other men. In some cultures, it has been the norm for men not to pay attention to their health, seeing such concerns as signs of weakness; a gender equitable norm has men taking responsibility for their health and well-being.

While there can be no single, global definition of what equitable norms for men should be, the participants at the 2009 Global Symposium on Engaging Men

and Boys in Gender Equality affirmed this as a starting list:

- Never commit, condone, or remain silent about men's violence against women or against other men;
- Respect and support girls and women as equal members of society in all walks of life;
- Share equitably and enthusiastically in care-giving, child rearing and home-making, treating boys/sons and girls/daughters equally;
- Make mutual decisions around sexual and reproductive health issues as well as those in other intimate domains;
- Express sexuality free of stereotypes, coercion or violence in ways that are safe, pleasurable and mutually desired;
- Feel proud without necessarily being the sole breadwinner, or a father (especially of sons), or having many sexual partners, or being aggressive;
- Accept and feel comfortable with aspects of men's own personalities and with those of other men that may not follow "traditional" notions of what it means to be men;
- Feel comfortable expressing emotions in positive and non-violent ways;
- Be capable of forming emotionally supportive friendships with men as well as women.

Gender norms reflect the historically unequal power relations between men and women in the public and private spheres; all individuals live within a set of norms, and in turn reinforce the underlying social structures that make those norms seem timeless and natural (or essential). This is particularly true since norms are reflected, reinforced and celebrated in the media, religious practices, sports, schools, workplaces and families. For example, if for generations it has been the norm for women to carry babies and to do the bulk of childrearing, then it is assumed that men don't have the "natural" ability to look after children. Or, if generations of men in patriarchal societies are trained to kill in war and deny their own fears, then it is assumed that men are "naturally" or biologically violent.



## **Changing Gender Norms**

Since norms reflect deeper social structures, and since they are held in place and reinforced by numerous social institutions, changing norms is a daunting task. Change is even more difficult because some people benefit (or perceive that they benefit) from the status quo. If a society says that only men can hold certain jobs and professions (particularly trades such as doctors, senior managers, politicians, etc.), then a man only has to compete with half of the population for those positions. If men are paid more than women, then men are given a tangible privilege (in the European Union, for example, women earned 17.5% less than men in 2008). If governments, religions, families, economies, media and educational systems are structured with men in charge, then power (and the benefits that come with it) is apportioned to men over women. Moving toward gender equality produces apparent winners and apparent losers and, thus, there are those who are invested in defending the status quo.

Changing norms is even more challenging because personalities are in part constructed through the internalization of gender norms and practices. From birth onward, children absorb and personalize gender definitions into their developing brains. Since individuals come to embody gender relations and gender norms, helping men (and women) to change what is not only perceived as, but also experienced as, normal behavior for men (and women) can be a difficult task. While there is often a belief that such norms are ingrained, and thus fixed or rigid from an early age, research on the dynamic nature of human behavior finds that attitudes and practices change all the time, in different contexts throughout the life cycle, and that children are active – not merely passive – participants in the process. Inequitable norms are taught to boys and girls at very young ages, but they are never inevitable nor unchangeable.

## **Contradictions of Gender and the Challenge to Gender Norms**

There are numerous factors that encourage people to question their own deeply held beliefs and allow social actors to intervene and challenge harmful gender norms: first is that rigid gender norms cause harm and internal conflict; they often oppose deeper human needs, desires, expectations and abilities. For example, though boys and men are told in some societies that they are superior to

women and girls, their life experiences often tell them otherwise in the form of powerful, capable women and girls. Indeed, for some men change comes because of a deep sense of injustice they feel when witnessing the inequality that women and girls face. For other men, attitudes are changing due to the impact of women's changing roles, particularly in the workplace and in politics.

For other men, there is an even deeper-seated reason to question traditional norms. While men may have power and privilege in male dominated societies, individually they have contradictory experiences with that power (Kaufman, 1999). The ways men construct power and privilege bring self-doubt, pain, fear and isolation for men, and also mean that many men are dominated by other more powerful men.

In contexts in which gender inequality remains unquestioned, the privileges and benefits men gain outweigh their negative experiences of manhood. In this situation they tend not to notice gender inequality, but focus their own unhappiness and alienation on class, religious or racial discrimination. They may well blame others for their problems or, if they're more socially progressive, might direct their desire for change toward labor or civil rights movements. But when women start becoming empowered and challenge men's privileges, the balance between men's power and the costs of their definitions and practices of manhood shifts: men's power no longer outweighs men's pain. This means that the costs (to men, as well as women) of rigid ideals of gender start becoming more obvious to men, and this in turn opens up the possibility for a rapid shift in men's own attitudes and actions.

How much, though, are men's beliefs and behaviors actually changing, and how can we speed up this change?



## II. Building on Changes that are Already Happening

### *The International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES)*

Starting in 2009 and 2010, MenEngage partners carried out large-scale household surveys on men's attitudes and practices. Led by Promundo and the International Center for Research on Women, partner researchers, supported by UNFPA in several countries, administered the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES) to more than 20,000 men and women in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Chile, Croatia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, India, Mali, Mexico and Rwanda. (Subsequent surveys are underway in Malawi and other settings. A similar survey, based in part on IMAGES, is being coordinated in several countries in Asia by the UN project Partners for Prevention, also in collaboration with UNFPA). The survey covers attitudes and practices relating to men's employment, education, childhood experiences, domestic and parenting duties, ideas about gender equality, sexual relations, use and experience of violence, health issues, and men's opinions on laws and policies related to gender equality (IMAGES, 2011b).

Such data is important for gauging men's actual support (or rejection) of gender equality. This allows for a realistic assessment of national attitudes and helps advocates refine their messages and policies, as well as providing a baseline to measure the impact of future campaigns and initiatives.

The data suggests broad shifts are underway in men's relations with gendered social, economic and political structures. It shows that men can quickly accept new gender-equitable policies. There is clearly a generational shift: the IMAGES data shows that younger men and men with some secondary education are more likely than older men or those with less education to have gender-equitable attitudes, gender-equitable behaviors, and to support gender-equitable policies. Another important finding: men with more equitable attitudes generally had better mental health, were happier overall, and reported more satisfying relationships with their partners. Women who reported that their male partners exhibited more gender-equitable behaviors and were more involved in caregiving activities were generally more satisfied with their male partners (and more satisfied with their sexual relationships with their male partners).

## Younger Men Embrace Greater Gender Equality

IMAGES shows significant generational changes. For example:

- In **Rwanda**, 62% of men aged 18-24 report playing an equal or greater role in at least one domestic chore compared to 48% of men aged 35-49. In **Chile**, 62% of men in the 18-24 range report doing so, compared to 51% of men aged 35-49 and 37% of men aged 50-59.
- Men aged 18-34 in **Croatia** show higher rates of frequent communication with their partners about personal issues than do older men.
- Younger men in both **Chile** and **Croatia** are more likely to take parental leave and be present during their children's births than older men, in some cases more than twice as likely to do so.
- Younger men in **Chile** and **Croatia** are more likely to seek help when depressed.
- In all countries studied, younger men are less likely to use physical violence against a female partner in all settings (for monogamous men).
- Not all changes are positive: younger men are more likely to report binge drinking than older generations of men.

## The Revolution in Fatherhood and Household Life

Perhaps in no area of men's gender norms is there a faster global change than in the rapid evolution of the role of fatherhood, and the sharing of domestic activities or care work; these may well prove to be the most profound and transformative changes in the lives of men.

Like many changes in gender norms, men's increasing participation in care work emerges primarily from the advances of women. Most upper and middle income countries, and some lower income countries, have seen widespread entry of women into the paid work force over the past 40 years; these changes interact with declining birth rates and higher levels of academic achievement for women. In some settings, this movement has led

to demands by women, both within relationships and in the public discourse, for men to do their share of the housework and parenting. In other settings, women and girls continue to carry out the bulk of the care work in the domestic sphere.

In many settings, though, a rapid shift in men's expectations and practices as parents has occurred in the last decade, shaped by their experiences as children beginning in the 1980s. In many countries, this generation of boys grew up in more gender-equitable environments, seeing girls' school achievements and seeing their mothers pursue jobs and careers. Many of them had fathers who participated more than previous generations in parenting, and eventually those boys found themselves in relationships—both personal and professional—with women who expected more gender-equitable environments. IMAGES data also found that men who reported that their own fathers participated in care work and equitable decision-making with their mothers, were themselves more likely to repeat this pattern in their homes.

MenEngage partners, including UN agencies, have actively encouraged such changes. The first MenEngage coordinated campaign, MenCare,<sup>1</sup> focuses on involved fatherhood and men's caregiving and provides templates for training materials and campaigns to be implemented in diverse settings. The goal of the campaign is to promote men's involvement as responsive, non-violent and gender-equitable caregivers.

Within the MenEngage Alliance there is a wide range of national and local programs focused on promoting more involved fatherhood, teaching nurturing and parenting skills (including keeping violence out of parenting), and promoting equitable parenting relationships and gender equitable views of girls and boys. The acceleration of such programs, and the enthusiastic response of men to them in some settings, are an indication of swift changes in gender norms, all taking place in the course of two or three generations.<sup>2</sup>

Changing gender norms and relations isn't only about an attitudinal shift or a shift in consciousness. The greatest shift in men's involvement in parenting arguably has occurred in countries that have progressive paternal and family leave policies. The Nordic countries have taken the greatest strides: in Norway, fathers receive 45 weeks at

80% pay or 35 weeks at 100% pay. Various incentives encourage fathers to take advantage of this benefit: they must take a minimum of six weeks or lose the paid leave, and there are ten weeks paid leave reserved exclusively for fathers – that is, that cannot be transferred to the mother (Barker, et al., 2010:42, 58).

Some middle and low-income countries are also taking these policy steps. The Philippines now sponsors seven paid days of paternity leave and Rwanda and Guatemala each have two days. While limited, they are symbolically important for acknowledging in policy the roles of men in caring for children (and supporting women as mothers) (Barker, Greene, et al. 2010:42, 58).

Such policies institutionalize fathers' involvement and thus influence gender norms. For example, in 1988 Brazil passed a law providing a minimum of five days of paternity leave to new fathers; today 61% of Brazilian men take paid paternal leave. A 2009 policy in Chile included measures to increase the participation of fathers in pregnancy, birth and childcare. As a result of this and other policy changes, a recent survey found that half of Chilean men are now present for the birth of their children, and among the youngest generation of men (ages 18-24), 90% are present in delivery rooms during the birth of their children (IMAGES, 2011a: 31, 28, MGEPP:27). While more work and support are needed to ensure that men are involved throughout the lives of their children, these are important first steps and affirm how policies can expedite the changes in gender norms that are already happening.



## ***The Success of Social Norm Change Initiatives Around the World***

One strong indication of changing and more gender-equitable norms among men is the rapid expansion and ever-wider acceptance of a range of programs and initiatives that embrace these more equitable norms. These examples show not only the potential for engaging men and boys, but also the wide range of project types utilized. In some cases, relatively low-cost activities can be rolled out in one city or even in one school, as seen in examples from India (see box).

### **Activity-Based Initiatives to Change Gender Norms**

In some cases, relatively easy-to-implement activities can be a creative means to start a discussion around gender norms. Men's Action for Stopping Violence Against Women (MASVAW) in Uttar Pradesh, India modified the popular board game "Snakes and Ladders." It now focuses on promoting a discussion among children and youth about changing gender norms, promoting girls' education, and ending "eve teasing," or sexual harassment. In their version, the "board" is a large cloth that children stand on as the game is played. This game has now spread elsewhere in the region (MASVAW, 2008).

In another example, from Mumbai, a consortium of NGOs that included MenEngage partners developed a program of school festivals. Leading up to it, students designed posters and wrote comic strips and stories. On the actual day, there were games, role-playing, and races based on the program themes. One example was a contest that involved both girls and boys in a race to stitch a button, dribble a ball, and fold a shirt – thus giving greater value to women's/girls' traditional skills and making the point that these are indeed skills which both girls and boys can learn (ICRW, CORO, & TISS, 2010).

In other cases, ongoing, highly structured, longer-term and well-financed initiatives are critical for changing long-held and deeply imbedded beliefs. In some of these cases, work to transform gender norms is one component of a community development strategy and involves men and women together. Tostan's efforts provide a good example of this (see box).

## Changing Norms in the Context of Community Development

Tostan is a Senegalese, community-led development organization which works in eight African countries and focuses on community education and empowerment. In a given village, Tostan's programs directly involve 60 adults and adolescents who meet three times per week for two-and-a-half years to explore a range of human rights, health and community development issues.

The meetings are organized by a community mobilization committee that fosters participation and sustainability. Female and male facilitators are trained, and materials and supplies are provided. One of Tostan's most significant efforts has been toward ending female genital cutting; in part due to its efforts, 2,600 Senegalese villages have abandoned the practice (Tostan, UNICEF 2008).

The White Ribbon Campaign, started in Canada in 1991, is a decentralized campaign focused on engaging men and boys to end violence against women through outreach, media campaigns, education and fundraising. It is an example of how a relatively simple and low-cost effort, that is locally controlled and locally defined, can find huge support among men. White Ribbon has since expanded to some 70 countries (Kaufman, 2011).

At times educational and training efforts are institutionally based, including in public or government institutions. These tend to have a longer start-up time due to fostering organizational buy-in and carrying out pre-testing and baseline research. See below how Turkey has adopted this kind of approach.

## Institutional Programs in Turkey to Engage Men in Norms Change

All male recruits entering the Turkish army participate in a one-day program that focuses on sexual and reproductive health, men's violence, and men's roles and responsibilities as fathers. 600,000 soldiers complete the program each year.

Two other Turkish programs also have the capacity to play a transformational role in gender relations. In one partnership focused on violence against women, 250 police officers participated in in-depth, long-term training. They in turn have trained 50,000 of their fellow officers on how to properly respond to incidents of violence against women. Interest in the program has taken these trainers to Jordan, Germany and Holland.

In the latest of these initiatives, UNFPA is working with the government's Directorate of Religious Affairs to educate imams and other religious leaders and scholars about gender equality and their role in ending violence against women. To date, nearly 20,000 local religious leaders have participated in the training sessions, strengthening awareness and action on the issue.

Norm-change interventions based in schools (often run directly in schools or in youth programming affiliated with schools) have been important in many countries, have led to measurable results in shifting gender norms for boys and young men, and are one of the most promising ways to scale up norm change.<sup>3</sup> Program H materials are now implemented as a component of government-mandated sexuality education in Brazil and are reaching millions of students. Similar approaches in India and the Balkans are showing how youth-led campaigns in schools, together with group education, can change the gendered cultures of schools, leading to attitude change related to homophobia and attitudes supportive of violence against and harassment of girls (Barker, et al., 2012).

Many campaigns have a strong social marketing element and use techniques developed for commercial advertising. For example, One Man Can – a campaign of the Sonke Gender Justice Network in South Africa – is focused on reducing the spread of HIV/AIDS and domestic and sexual violence. In addition to manuals to help groups of men reflect on these issues and develop local action plans, the campaign has produced billboards, radio and TV ads, stickers, songs, video clips, posters and flyers (Sonke, 2009).

In all these programs and activities, there are common objectives and approaches: to encourage men and boys

– and women and girls – to critically reflect on gender norms, and to understand these norms for what they are (that is, socially constructed rather than defined solely by biology), and to create safe spaces to try out new attitudes and behaviors. In the final section of this brief, key principles of these approaches are highlighted.

### ***In Times of Change, the Perception of Current Norms Often Lags Behind Current Beliefs and Behaviors***

When contradictions exist within men’s gendered experiences (as previously addressed), gender norms may seem solid or timeless, but they are in fact fragile: this is why change can happen so quickly. At the same time, however, there can be a lag in the awareness of the change that is happening. There is substantial literature on the gap between what people believe are the social norms held by their peers and what their peers actually believe and do.

US sociologists were among the first to explore this gap, first through research in attitudes concerning racism, and subsequently in a wide range of attitudes and behaviors (Miller & McFarland, 1991; Toch & Klofas, 1984; Perkins, Berkowitz & Perkins, 1986). Their studies (particularly of young men) consistently show that men overestimate the prevalence of harmful and violent attitudes and behaviors among their peers. This includes peer support for rape myths, unsafe sex practices, homophobia, drug and alcohol use, drinking and driving, violence against women, and sexist attitudes and behaviors (Berkowitz, 2011). Similarly, these men underestimate how much their peers hold healthier, non-violent, equality-minded attitudes. For example, men think their peers consume alcohol and other drugs more frequently and in greater quantities than they actually do; they also believe their peers hold attitudes more in favor of sexual violence than is actually true.

The same studies “suggest that misperceptions of other men’s attitudes and behaviors” with respect to dangerous, unhealthy or violent actions “may inhibit men...from intervening” (Berkowitz, 2011:169). That is, men are less likely to speak out against violence against women, homophobia, or unhealthy behavior because they incorrectly perceive the degree of support (or lack thereof) for such behaviors.

All this hinges on an important observation by scholars researching men and masculinities: “For almost all issues, boys are more concerned with what other boys think and do than with what girls think and do. They look to their peers and men as models for shaping their own behavior as boys” (Berkowitz, Jaffe, Peacock, Rosenbluth, & Sousa, 2003). Again, if dominant definitions of manhood are largely idealized and unachievable, it stands to reason that men (especially when they are young) will be preoccupied with the models of manhood presented by their peers that appear to offer direction to them. And, even more so, it becomes important to boys and young men to appear to fit into those models, even when they don’t: after all, their self-identity as “real men” is at stake.

This observation of the importance of peer opinion for men seems true globally. On the other hand, when it comes to the research on this gap in social norms, it may well be that this research, largely from the US, reflects progress in recent decades in advancing gender equality and raising awareness around a range of health-promotion and public safety initiatives. It may be that in countries where the women’s movement hasn’t been as strong, the gap between men’s actual beliefs and their perceptions of men’s social norms is not as great. More research and more initiatives are necessary to raise awareness among men of the actual social norms of their peers, and to use this awareness to advance a gender equitable and gender transformative agenda.

### **A Gender Transformative Approach to Prevent Sexual Violence and Unplanned Pregnancy in Nicaragua**

A UNFPA supported initiative in Nicaragua called “Que Tuani No Ser Machista” worked with adolescent boys aged 10–15 years on preventing sexual violence and adolescent pregnancy. The campaign operated in 43 municipalities with young adolescent males, and encouraged questioning gender norms including stereotypes and behaviors. This involved challenging the concept of ‘machismo’ through exercises that encouraged boys to express their feelings especially in terms of what it means to be a young man. Using group education and advocacy that promotes respect for women and girls and non-violent behavior, the initiative prompted young men to reflect on who defines what it means to be macho and why. Using a gender

transformative approach and techniques that were appealing to this age group, the campaign aimed to tackle challenges surrounding:

- Not making pregnancy prevention a priority;
- Identifying sex as uncontrollable;
- Using violence, blackmail and other pressures on partners to obtain sex;
- Not using a condom during sex.

The campaign created a significant impact in terms of using the media and various modes of communication to reach other adolescent groups within the municipalities. It is estimated that about 3,000 teenagers joined the first stage (2009-2010) and up to 20,000 in the second stage (2010-2011). In 2012 the campaign was implemented on the Caribbean Coast; the campaign will be evaluated in its totality in 2012. Numerous other UNFPA Country Offices are supporting similar initiatives within their programs.

### III. Principles and Key Recommendations for Promoting Gender Equitable Norms Among Men and Boys

This section highlights: 1) two underlying principles for work to shift gender norms among men and boys, and 2) key components for successfully engaging men and boys to transform gender norms.

#### **Two Principles to Shift Gender Norms: Gender-Equitable, Focused on Human Rights and Equality**

A core principle of MenEngage's work is to support gender equality and the advancement of the human rights, health, well-being and the full participation of women and girls. While numerous studies affirm the advances being made in rights and well-being for women and girls, there is still much left to accomplish. At its core, gender is about relations of social power. Since social structures and institutions are still largely dominated by men, it is clear that men have a critical role to play alongside women and women's rights organizations in advancing equality and women's rights, and in dismantling the gender status quo. Efforts to engage men must include channels of accountability to women and must be complementary to work with women and girls to promote gender equality.

#### **Transforming Masculinity in the Lives of and for the Benefit of Everyone**

The ways men's power and dominant renderings of masculinity have been constructed bring both rewards and problems for boys and men. Transforming the gender status quo is about transforming the lives of men and women. This includes addressing the **gendered vulnerabilities of men**. The gendered experiences of men and boys have not been well understood nor taken into account in the development of public policy, professional practice, or activism across a wide range of areas. Men and boys are made vulnerable by non-equitable and violent versions of manhood.

Furthermore, men's experiences are shaped and modified by relationships of social power based on their socio-economic class, sexual orientation, color of their skin, ethnicity, caste or tribe, religion, physical abilities, among others. Transforming social norms for men requires working within a social justice framework that values diversity and opposes discrimination against specific groups of men, for example, against gay, bisexual and transgender men, and that helps make visible men's conflicting experiences of power.

#### **Keys for Engaging Men and Boys to Create Gender Equitable Norms**

**1. Community-based collaboration and broad-based partnerships.** At the heart of gender-transformative work with men and boys is developing partnerships that bring these efforts into the mainstream consciousness. Such collaboration is a way to make efforts diverse and responsive to different age groups and parts of the population. This is critical because it allows for a discussion of masculine norms to be translated into the concerns of different parts of the population. Partnerships are also one way to promote accountability to women's organizations, and are a way of going beyond short-term initiatives and ensuring sustainability.

**2. Work within public institutions.** Because public and large institutions (like schools, the health sector and the workplace) are critical locations for the transmission of gender norms, and because of their potential to reach millions of individuals, they are also critical locations for work to promote gender equitable relations and transformations. Schools, for example, are the best

place to reach boys, not only because they spend their days there but also because schools are places where negative gender norms are frequently reinforced. It is important to bring campaigns into schools and to work within the school system to develop programs, teacher training, teaching materials, and male student activism in partnership with female student activism. Given that nearly universal educational enrollment has been achieved at the primary level, and that enrollment is increasing at the secondary level in many parts of the world, implementing school-based, evidence-based comprehensive sexuality education that promotes a critical reflection about gender norms – for boys and girls – is a key strategy for changing gender norms.

The workplace is also a critical location for many core gender equality issues including equal pay, equality in advancement, parental leave, ending workplace sexual harassment and promoting more flexible work hours to support better work-life balance and more equitable sharing of parenting and care work. Work within institutions also includes NGOs, UN agencies and governments. Promoting internal changes helps ensure that norms of gender equality are lived organizational realities (Greig & Edström, 2012).

**3. Create safety for stepping out of the “gender box” for men and boys, women and girls.** Although men have long been the dominant group, most men struggle to conform to the idealized and exaggerated gender norms for manhood. One result of this is they don’t necessarily feel safe taking part in a dialogue about gender equality or changing ideas of manhood. This means we must create conditions of safety in which men and women, boys and girls, can challenge widely held inequitable norms. For example, if working in a community or school, it can be helpful to have joint male and female, or separate if helpful, educational or discussion groups. It might mean doing social norms interventions (see box) that allow men or boys to see that they’re not alone in their beliefs. It also implies that activism and educational outreach do not seek to shame and humiliate men, thus creating defensiveness, but create safe spaces where they can try out new ways of being men under the guidance of positive male leaders and role models.

Safety can also mean focusing on the gatekeepers, those men – from media celebrities and politicians, from religious

authorities and opinion makers – who play a pivotal role in promoting or epitomizing the status quo. It means finding ways to challenge oppressive and destructive behavior that men may be carrying out while, at the same time, reaching out to them with empathy and compassion. This does not mean providing excuses for abusive or dangerous behavior; rather it means understanding men’s lives in their totality.

Providing safety also means being aware that particular groups of men and boys are less safe than others because of their race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, physical ability, or for other reasons. Care must be taken, whether in a campaign, educational activity, or legal reform, to recognize that, like women and girls, males are not a homogeneous group. The process of creating safety must take into account the specific barriers, obstacles, and even threats that some men experience.

### **Social Norms Interventions & Marketing Campaigns**

Evidence shows that a gap can occur between actual norms relating to men’s attitudes and behaviors and what men and boys believe their peers are thinking or doing.

Social norms interventions and marketing campaigns are specific techniques that use this gap as a tool for promoting change. Social norms interventions are based on a belief that campaigns or group education to promote change (for example, around sexual violence, safe sex, or the consumption of alcohol and other drugs) have a greater chance of success if we avoid telling men what to do and using scare tactics, and instead give men information about what other men actually think.

Such an approach is geared to situations where there is a gap between perceptions of gender norms and actual behaviors; it is not appropriate if a vast majority of men actually hold (and not just say they hold) strong gender inequitable beliefs or engage in practices we hope to change.

Social norms interventions involve:

1. Collecting data to measure actual norms and behaviors. The structure of such questionnaires is

usually a series of parallel questions asking what the respondent thinks and does, and then asking what he thinks most of his peers believe or do. This can be conducted on a large scale or within a school, sports team or classroom.

2. Choosing the key normative message based on the collected data. For example, 80% of the boys in a given secondary school think it is wrong to pressure a girl to have sex. 60% of the men at X University drink alcohol only once a week, and 90% never binge drink.
3. Selecting the normative message delivery strategy. Is it a public campaign with billboards and radio ads? A campaign with handmade posters around a school? Will it be delivered in small group workshops or classrooms (as an exercise that also includes data collection)?
4. Testing the message and any campaign materials with the target group.
5. Delivering and evaluating the effectiveness of the campaign or activity.

Social norms interventions (especially those aimed at university students in the US) have been widely assessed and many show impact in rigorous impact evaluation. Sources: Berkowitz 2010, 2011

**4. Positive perspectives that focus on change that is already happening.** Messages are most effective when they show what men and boys will gain from a more gender-equitable world without violent versions of manhood. It is more likely that men will do more domestic work and childcare if it is shown that this will lead to closer relationships with their children and a greater level of happiness, or if it will allow their wives to bring more income into the family. It is more effective to have messages of men speaking out against gender-based violence, than to have endless depictions of women who are beaten. Whenever possible, use the positive language of opportunity and responsibility rather than collective guilt or collective blame, and in turn, celebrate changing norms and examples of men supporting gender-equitable changes in their homes and communities.

**5. Importance of social policy and legal reform.** Campaigns, social marketing and working within institutions or among small groups of men all are important.

But legal reform and shifts in social policy are critical for accelerating the pace of change and effecting permanent shifts in gender relations and gender norms. Through policies and legal reform, countries can institutionalize more gender-equitable relations in homes and offices, factories and fields, in government and on the street. Mobilizing men to support legal change is key to change schools of thought. For example, public campaigns and educational programs for expectant or new fathers will not get far without social, legal and financial support for individual men and families in the form of paternal leave legislation, supportive workplace policies and fair and equal wages. Similarly, ending gender-based violence requires comprehensive policies and legal reform. It also requires attention and training so that the duty-bearers of the law (who are predominantly men) effectively implement the laws.

**6. Create conditions for boys and men to redefine the norms of manhood for themselves and to own that change.** Efforts like MenCare and the White Ribbon Campaign hinge on the knowledge that local partners know best how to reach the men and boys in their own communities, workplaces, places of worship, and schools, and that such efforts have the greatest chance of success when they are locally “owned” by men and boys, in partnership and constant dialogue with women and girls.

## Conclusion

Evidence is emerging that men and boys around the world are increasingly accepting gender equality and more equitable norms – particularly younger men, those with higher levels of education, and those in urban areas. But change toward gender equality also brings resistance. There is also a growing evidence base of interventions that have, in relatively limited spaces, shown signs of achieving change. The key to gender norm change is to provoke it and speed it up from within, acknowledging and forming alliances with those men and boys who already believe in gender equality, and identifying the conditions necessary to scale programs up in schools, the workplace, the health sector and other spaces where millions can be reached. All of this must be supported by public policies that reinforce gender equality and include penalties for those who violate rights. It must also include efforts to assess both the implementation and impact of gender equality policies, including efforts to engage men and boys in norm change.

## End Notes

<sup>1</sup> [www.men-care.org](http://www.men-care.org)

<sup>2</sup> The toolkit "Engaging Men and Boys in Gender Equality and Health," contains a number of programmatic examples from our partners around the world (Promundo & MenEngage Alliance, 2010, pp 55-64 and 134-138).

<sup>3</sup> Many good examples of this educational work are found in the Promundo & MenEngage toolkit and in WHO, 2007.

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