MenEngage is a global alliance of NGOs and UN agencies that seeks to engage boys and men to achieve gender equality. We have a global steering committee with representation from all over the world and different regional networks in Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, North America, South Asia and Europe. We believe in working with boys and men from a positive perspective and encouraging them to be full partners in fostering a world where peace is possible, violence is reduced and equality is achieved.

This Call for Action outlines MenEngage’s priority goals within the Post-2015 Development Agenda as well as suggested indicators for inclusion in the measurement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The engagement of men as allies in achieving gender equality often receives little mention in the development frameworks (particularly the Millennium Development Goals). Yet, a broad and growing base of evidence shows that effectively engaging men for gender equality can have significant benefits for women, children and men themselves.2

Promoting healthier and more equitable gender norms with regards to manhood and developing public policy aimed at engaging men and boys have been shown to inter alia: improve men’s and women’s access to HIV treatment and other health services; reduce men’s violence against women and children; increase men’s support of their partners in accessing health services; reduce the disproportionate burden of domestic tasks on women; increase men’s involvement in their children’s lives; engage men as partners in women’s economic empowerment; achieve more equitable relationships at the household, community and societal levels; and reduce homophobia and discrimination towards LGBTI people.

Work with men and boys is therefore integral to the new global Post-2015 Development Agenda, and in particular to maintaining the momentum on addressing gender inequalities, strengthening human rights, promoting women’s empowerment and leadership and improving the health and wellbeing of all.3

We believe in a strong focus on women and girls as part of the new SDGs. We view these recommended indicators and commentary on the goals to be a complement not a replacement to the gender goal suggestions put forth by agencies like UNWomen. This Call for Action can be used as a policy advocacy and programming tool to strengthen a focus on engaging men for gender equality within the Post-2015 Development Agenda. Its key audiences are local, national, regional and global civil society, policymakers, UN agencies, donors and other decision-makers.
### MenEngage’s key priorities and suggested indicators

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| **1. End poverty** | 1.1 Engage men as partners in efforts to improve women’s economic empowerment | • % of men who tell their partners what they earn  
• % of men and women who report joint financial decision-making  
• % of men’s income dedicated to the household  
• % men who support their partners’ work/income generation |
| **2. Empower girls and women and achieve gender equality** | 2.1 Work with men and boys to prevent GBV  
2.2 Encourage men’s contribution to caregiving | • % of youth who witness and/or experience violence in their household  
• % of men who hold rape supportive attitudes  
• % of men who know about existing GBV laws  
• % of men who support existing GBV laws  
• % of children with paternal registration at birth  
• # of average weekly hours spent providing care for children and others  
• % of men living apart from biological children who make regular financial contributions  
• % of men compliant with state regulations related to child support  
• Number of countries with paternity and maternity leave  
• % of children under five with access to quality state-supported childcare |
| **3. Provide quality education and lifelong learning** | 3.1 Engage the education sector in addressing gender inequality  
3.2 Increase comprehensive gender equality and rights education in schools for both boys and girls (which includes GBV prevention) | • % of boys and girls who complete secondary education  
• % of youth who support gender equality  
• % of youth who hold homophobic attitudes  
• % of schools offering gender equality education programs  
• % of youth who participate in gender equality education programs in secondary school  
• % of youth who witness or experience violence in their educational environment  
• # of countries that have outlawed corporal punishment  
• % of boys and girls who hold rape supportive attitudes  
• % of schools who provide psycho-social support to children  
• % of teachers trained on gender transformative educational practices |
### Goal 1: End Poverty

#### 1.1 Key priority: Engage men as partners in efforts to improve women’s economic empowerment initiatives

Economic empowerment of women and girls is hindered by rigid gender norms and discriminatory laws and policies. Women’s low status in society, as well as their unequal access to education, legal protection, and economic opportunities, coupled with poor sexual and reproductive health outcomes and experiences of sexual and domestic violence, has perpetuated gender inequality and limited women’s decision-making power. At the same time, increasing income and job instability among men has resulted, in some cases, in a backlash against women, including in the form of violence.

Given that economic empowerment and microcredit programmes reach between 100-125 million individuals worldwide, more than 90% women, such programmes could be a tremendous entry point for engaging men. Studies show that engaging men as partners of female beneficiaries of micro-credit programmes leads to: more equitable household decision-making; increased couple communication; decreased couple conflict; and higher income gains for families.

MenEngage calls for economic empowerment, income generation and microcredit programmes targeted at women to either include men’s participation, or to establish separate groups targeting men within these programmes.
**Goal 2: Empower Girls and Women and Achieve Gender Equality**

### 2.1 Key priority: Work with men and boys to prevent gender-based violence (GBV)

GBV is a violation of human rights, and compromises physical, emotional and mental wellbeing. The high levels of gender-based violence around the world are inextricably linked to stereotypical masculine gender norms and unequal power relations between men and women. Gender norms can socialise men to think that it is acceptable to: respond to problems with violence; abuse alcohol; and control and dominate their partners. Gender norms can also make it unacceptable for a man to seek help or to express feelings of fear or vulnerability. In order to prevent GBV, it is therefore important to work with men and women to change the social norms perpetuating GBV, including by providing alternative and non-violent role models for young men and boys and supporting men to take a stand against GBV.6

MenEngage calls for programmes and policies focusing on preventing violence against women to include a focus on engaging men as partners, allies and potential victims.

### 2.2 Key priority: Encourage men’s contribution to caregiving

Fatherhood, and more generally, men’s contribution to caregiving and unpaid domestic labour, provides a tangible opportunity to improve gender equality. Women carry out a disproportionate share of care-related activities worldwide, including domestic work and childcare, thus limiting their potential to earn income, and perpetuating income and social inequalities between men and women. Encouraging men’s participation in this care work contributes to alleviating the burden of care on women. When fathers are involved in their children’s lives at an early stage, preferably starting at birth, there is a higher likelihood that they will remain connected to their children throughout their lives. Men can then contribute both in terms of care work and finances to the household for the lifetime of the child, further reducing the burden of care and financial responsibility often left to the mother alone.

MenEngage calls for a scaling-up of the global MenCare campaign, and for programmes and policies to encourage men’s greater contribution to caregiving, and for improved maternity and paternity leave globally and other state supports for the care of children.

**Goal 3: Provide Quality Education and Lifelong Learning**

### 3.1 Key priority: Recognising the education sector for its critical role in addressing gender inequality

Recent studies show that younger men and men with higher levels of education (completed secondary education and above) reported more gender equitable attitudes, less use of violence, and higher rates of participation in care work.7 However, education systems have also been found to perpetuate and reinforce traditional and inequitable gender norms, and to be settings for violence against both boys and girls. Research also shows that boys who are strongly connected to school through various activities such as music, dance, sport, or other such activities, are able to use these avenues to challenge stereotypical and harmful constructions of masculinity and femininity and have greater freedom to explore gender equitable behaviours.8 Given this, the education sector needs to be recognised for its critical role in addressing harmful gender attitudes and practices, and in creating a sustainable shift in cultural norms, particularly for boys and young men. Therefore, gender equality should ideally reach and guide all levels of the education system.

MenEngage calls for education sector policies and practices to promote gender equality, including by challenging harmful stereotypes about men and women, and by adapting school curricula to promote healthy notions of masculinity and femininity and so that it advances gender equality. Education programmes should incorporate basic principles of a gender equitable teaching-learning experience. All teacher-training curricula should contain gender training and an emphasis on the importance of the engagement of parents, including fathers, in school governing bodies and through community outreach.
3.2 Key priority: Increase comprehensive sexuality and rights education in schools for both boys and girls

Comprehensive sexuality and rights education for young people can lead boys and girls to make positive, healthy choices about sex and contraception and promote more healthy and equitable relationships. Traditionally, sexuality education in schools tends to focus very narrowly on girls. This means communities are missing a key opportunity to engage young men in gender-sensitive initiatives, which is key to their own awareness of sexual and reproductive health and critical for the needs of their partners.

MenEngage calls for current sexuality and rights education to be broadened to include a stronger focus on engaging boys and young men, both to increase their own awareness of sex, sexuality and human rights, and to educate them about the needs and rights of others. This education should also address human rights and gender equality, offering accurate and complete information, such as the range of female controlled contraceptive methods, and also focus on positive sexuality, LGBTI issues and building skills for negotiating sexual behaviour. Making access to contraceptives and information on sexual and reproductive health and rights available only to girls can no longer be accepted practice in educational systems.

Goal 4: Ensure Healthy Lives

4.1 Key priority: Address men’s health and health-seeking behaviour

The top ten contributors to the global disability-adjusted life-years (DALY) actually present greater burdens on men than women. Addressing these challenges is important for everyone’s sake: while it is bad for men’s health, it also places expensive and unnecessary burdens on women and on health systems. Rigid gender norms may increase men’s vulnerability to illness and injury and create reluctance to seek critical health services. This reluctance stems, in part, from traditional gender norms and conceptions of masculinity, which equate ill-health with weakness. These rigid gender norms also increase men’s vulnerability to ill-health by, for example, encouraging men to equate manhood with risk-taking, having power over women and the pursuit of multiple sexual partners; and make it less likely that they will access critical services such as HIV testing, treatment and psycho-social support. Structural barriers can also prevent men from accessing health services. These barriers include ill-equipped and unwelcoming clinics, negative attitudes from healthcare providers, lack of confidentiality, and a lack of training and skills on male-specific health issues. When men do not utilise health services, it puts them and their partners at risk.

MenEngage calls for a stronger focus on addressing men’s health within national policies and guidelines, as well as UN and international agreements. Efforts to better address men’s health and health-seeking behaviour should include the transformation of gender norms that equate risk-taking with manhood and illness with weakness. Health systems must play an active role in promoting improved health-seeking behaviour by men. This transformation will have benefits for the lives of women, men, and children.

4.2 Key priority: Engaging men as supportive partners in the promotion of SRHR, maternal health and in the prevention of HIV

In many parts of the world, sexual and reproductive health (SRH) is largely considered the sole responsibility of women. This leaves women and girls to bear the burden of their own and their families’ SRH, allowing too many men to neglect their own SRH needs and responsibilities. While we must continue to support and promote accessible SRH services and freedoms for women, we must also place attention on the specific role of men and boys as partners in SRH.

Men, as well as women, will benefit a great deal from such attention: interventions with men and boys on SRH have been shown to effectively increase men’s support for their partner’s SRH, address gender inequality which can causes women and girls to be more vulnerable, and to improve the health of men, women and children. It must always be emphasised that men’s roles as partners should be supportive, and should always respect women’s rights over their own bodies and choices.

MenEngage calls for a greater focus on engaging men as supportive partners in the promotion of SRH, particularly in prenatal and antenatal maternal health, the prevention of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT) of HIV, and in the roll-out of new HIV prevention technologies.
Goal 11: Ensure Stable and Peaceful Societies

11.1 Key priority: Engage men and boys in efforts to end GBV in conflict and post-conflict settings (and roll-out of large-scale psycho-social support interventions)

Most programmes addressing GBV prevention and response in conflict and post-conflict settings currently focus primarily on women and girls. They currently do not focus enough on the need to address the root causes and drivers of violence, which must include addressing boys and men as well. However, while men and boys are part of the problem in relation to such violence, they also experience substantial trauma themselves. Addressing men’s own experiences of violence allows them to become part of the solution. Gender norms transformation work is imperative to address generalised cultures of violence, in which men demonstrate their masculinity through violence against women, children and other men.

MenEngage calls for interventions in conflict and post-conflict settings to ensure that men play a positive role in changing attitudes towards female and male survivors of GBV, in advocating for perpetrators to be held accountable for their crimes, and in transforming the norms of their respective societies, so that GBV - both in and out of war - becomes a thing of the past. Given the high exposure to multiple forms of violence during conflict, MenEngage also calls for a large-scale roll-out of psycho-social support that enables men, women, boys and girls to overcome this trauma.

Lead Authors: Hanna Jansson (Sonke Gender Justice/MenEngage Africa); Tim Shand (Sonke Gender Justice/MenEngage Africa)

Contributing Authors: Gary Barker (Promundo-US/MenEngage Global); Marc Peters (MenEngage Global); Dean Peacock (Sonke Gender Justice/MenEngage Global)

Acknowledgements: Alexa Hassink; Oswaldo Montoya; and Ruti Levtov

End Notes

11. Ibid.