MenEngage and the post-2015 development agenda

By Hanna Jansson

MenEngage has since 2013 engaged in the global process of developing a Post-2015 Development Agenda, advocating for the inclusion of men and boys as partners and allies under a stand-alone gender equality and women’s empowerment (GEWE) goal.
Background

The eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), established in 2000 and aiming to improve the lives of the world’s poorest and the most vulnerable people by the year 2015, have been a milestone in global and national development priorities. In the past 14 years, the world has seen great strides towards achieving the MDGs: global poverty continues to decline; more children (particularly girls) than ever before are attending primary school; child deaths have dropped dramatically; and targeted efforts in fighting malaria, HIV and AIDS and tuberculosis have saved millions of lives.

However, the prospects for achieving all of the eight MDGs differ severely across and within countries and regions, and bolder efforts are needed to achieve a world of prosperity, equity, freedom, dignity, and peace beyond 2015. The international community has therefore initiated a process to plan for a Post-2015 Development Agenda.

Post-2015 Process

One of the main outcomes of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio +20) in 2012 was the agreement by Member States of the United Nations (UN) to develop a set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which will build upon the MDGs. The process of developing these SDGs is meant to be an inclusive and transparent intergovernmental process, open to all relevant stakeholders.

Currently, there is a 30-member Open Working Group (OWG) of the UN General Assembly (UNGA), comprised of 5 regional sub-groups, tasked with preparing a proposal on the SDGs. This OWG has thus far put together a set of focus areas, which will guide the drafting of SDG targets and indicators, to be presented as a final report at the 69th Regular Session of the UNGA, 16-29 September 2014. This report will form the basis of the intergovernmental process, to commence after the UNGA session, which will culminate in a Summit of Heads of States in September 2015 for the adoption of the final Post-2015 SDGs.

Engaging men and boys for gender equality in the Post-2015 Development Agenda

The engagement of men as partners and allies in achieving gender equality often receives little mention in development frameworks, particularly in the MDGs. 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.

MenEngage recognizes that the Post-2015 development framework must embrace a human rights-based approach and stands with UN Women and women’s rights NGOs in advocating for a stand-alone GEWE goal in the Post-2015 Development Agenda, as well as promoting gender equality and women’s and girls’ rights as a cross-cutting issue in all other future SDGs. To achieve gender equality, it is essential to work with men and boys: as men not only have a responsibility to contribute to transforming oppressive gender systems to improve the lives of women; they stand to benefit from transformation as well. Therefore, MenEngage sees work with men and boys for gender equality as integral to the new global Post-2015 Development Agenda.

Mr. Khumalo, on behalf of MenEngage Africa, highlighted the importance of working with men and boys to transform social norms perpetuating GBV, including understanding and addressing root causes of gender inequality.

MenEngage Post-2015 Call for Action

In 2013, the MenEngage Alliance developed its Call for Action, a policy advocacy and programming tool outlining MenEngage’s priority goals and suggested indicators within the Post-2015 Development Agenda, including to: end poverty; empower girls and women; and achieve gender equality; provide quality education and lifelong learning; ensure healthy lives; and ensure stable and peaceful societies.

MenEngage has thus far promoted the Call for Action at different conferences around the world, including at the African Union (AU) First High Level Panel on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment in the Context of Post MDGs (Abidjan, Ivory Coast, 2-4 October 2013).

The general objective of the AU High Level Panel was to generate contributions by African women to the African Common Position on the Post 2015 Development Agenda for inclusion. Sonke’s Bafana Khumalo, together with Seynabou Tall (UNFPA), presented on engaging men as partners and allies in ending VAW in the Post-2015 Development Agenda in one of the panels. Mr Khumalo, on behalf of MenEngage Africa, highlighted the importance of working with men and boys to transform social norms perpetuating GBV, including understanding and addressing root causes of gender inequality, such as unequal power relations, practices and stereotypes, and promoting alternative role models for boys.

Sonke Gender Justice’s work on the Post-2015 process in South Africa (SA)

Sonke is currently collaborating with UN Women SA to influence SA’s government position on a stand-alone GEWE goal in the SDGs, ahead of the intergovernmental negotiations that will start in September 2014. Sonke and UN Women SA have met with the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO), which is the leading department in SA on this process, with regards to CSO involvement in national consultations.

Sonke urges MenEngage Africa organizations to advocate with their own respective governments in this very important process, in order to push for a stand-alone GEWE goal that includes the engagement of men and boys.

You can also join this process online:

- www.myworld2015.org: vote for the changes that will make the most difference to your world
- www.worldwewant2015.org: learn more about beyond 2015 and how you can contribute.
- www.beyond2015.org: an online global civil society campaign includes small community based organizations, to international NGOs, academics and trade unions.
Editorial Letter

By Tapiwa Manyati & Kristen A. Daskiewicz

Providing a broad overview of MenEngage Africa (MEA’s) political global agendas, while also shining light on the achievements by the presence of MEA and its impact on individuals in local communities, this edition of the MEA newsletter spans a wide range of work performed by specific member organisations to this network.

We open with Hanna Jansson of Sonke Gender Justice describing the political climate as 2015 approaches, explaining the year’s significance as the world evaluates and reflects on the last 15 years in light of the targets of the Millennium Development Goals. Sonke team members Laura Pascoe and Tim Shand continue this thread in their piece advocating for sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) as part of Sonke’s post-2015 initiative, particularly calling for men’s positive involvement in SRHR. Pascoe and Lucinda van den Heever then close this edition with their piece “Whose story do we believe, and to what end?”, emphasizing how crucial it is for us to take a stand as LGBTI allies in the wake of increasing political hostility in Uganda and Nigeria.

Throughout this edition, we also include highlights from MEA’s member organisations creating positive change in their communities. This issue particularly focuses on the context and impact of trainings offered in South Africa and Mozambique, with features from Tanya Charles, coordinator of the MenEngage Africa Training Initiative (MATI), who works with men and women on integrating gender equality into their work, and with and Cremildo Churane of The Men for Change Network (HOPEM Mozambique) who writes of her work on transforming men’s understanding of gender norms. Additionally, Hayley Thomson-de Boor and Emily Miles provide an evidence-based approach to better understanding the links between masculinity, alcohol use, and gender-based violence drawing on academic literature to provide recommendations for GBV prevention interventions.

What shines through in this issue is MenEngage Africa’s multipronged approach to engaging with men to prevent and respond to GBV: working closely with women’s rights, human rights, LGBTI rights, child rights, SRHR, and substance abuse prevention movements to improve the lives of men and women. We encourage you to expand your approach with this edition, and focus on the articles in that may focus on topics outside of your current scope of work. Does your organisation work on HIV prevention? Take a look at Thomson de-Boor and Miles’ piece and reflect on how addressing alcohol use can strengthen your efforts. Working to empower youth in your community? Chura’s piece may have some tips for how to approach gender equality by using a familiar context—the household. We encourage you to apply the knowledge shared herein to further enhance our work to end GBV.

Kenya policy report launched!

As part of a large scale policy scan on engagement with men to prevent gender-based violence (GBV), the team at Sonke and MenEngage Africa partners threw an event to launch our Kenyan policy report in June of 2013. The launch attracted almost 100 government representatives, members of parliament, representatives from UN Women, the media, and a large contingent of Kenyan civil society organisations. It is certainly an exciting time in Kenya for policy development, as an action group formed out of the policy report launch and has advocating for the long-awaited Domestic Violence Bill. As of the time of the launch, UN Women in Kenya was responsible for the printing of 2000 copies of the Kenya report.

All of the current country policy reports can be found at: http://www.genderjustice.org.za/projects/policy-advocacy/afrika-policy-reports.html and http://menengage.org/menengage-africa-policy-advocacy-tools/

ARASA and MenEngage Africa: policy partnership potential

Over the last year, MenEngage Africa has been building a relationship with the AIDS & Rights Alliance for Southern Africa (ARASA), a regional partnership of over 70 non-governmental organisations working together to promote a human rights based response to HIV and TB in a number of countries where MenEngage networks exist. So far, we have collaborated on a policy training initiated by ARASA in November 2013 and a protest to the Cape Town Convention Centre where the 17th International Conference on AIDS and STIs in December.

Both organisations share many of the same values and MenEngage Africa will continue to strengthen their relationship with ARASA during 2014.

MenKen: The struggle for the youth continues!

The National Aids Control Council, jointly with MenEngage Kenya Network (MenKen) and other partners, presented the Youth Pre-Summit Meeting last September to acknowledge the complex environment and challenges young people in Kenya face, including peer pressure, poverty, insecurity, and unemployment, which all escalate their vulnerability to HIV and AIDs. The summit set the stage for the National Summit held 17-18 September 2013. MenKen is now preparing for the 6th International Conference on Peer Education, Sexuality, HIV and AIDS to be held on 18-20 June 2014 in Kenya. For more information on the upcoming conference, visit: www.nope.or.ke/conference

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Twenty-five African men and women came together to explore how to engage men in gender equality work in the training course offered in September, “Masculinities, Leadership and Gender Justice in sub-Saharan Africa.” The course provided 18 modules, such as “Why Engage Men?”, “Men’s vulnerabilities to HIV and AIDS,” and skills building sessions covering topics such as “How to do Policy Advocacy and Monitoring and Evaluation.” Post-course evaluations revealed that the participants’ knowledge on these topics increased by twenty-five percent, suggesting successful knowledge transfer through training.

However, what happened within the classroom is only one aspect of MATI’s success. For many of the MATI 2013 participants, the knowledge they gained over that short period has allowed them to work more effectively in their various fields. For example, Olufunlayo Bammke, a sociology professor at the University of Lagos, has used the insights and resources from MATI to implement a Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights project targeting young men on her campus. As Bammke explained, “…MATI 2013 not only validated my conviction that to achieve gender justice men must be engaged; it also equipped me with the tools to do so.” Similarly, Ugandan Danny Gatto’s reported that his project, “Enhancing Male Involvement in Reproductive Health through Positive Deviant approach” benefitted from the ongoing project development he received during and after MATI 2013. On the basis of this project, he was nominated for the second stage of the STAR Impact AWARDS.

Gotto and Bammke are by no means the only examples of gender justice leaders in the making with the support of MATI. We continue to learn of the impact of MATI from other fellows, including those belonging to the 2012 cohort. Orbert Chigodora from Zimbabwe, who attended MATI in 2012, said of his experience, “The MATI training course pushed frontiers as far as my understanding of male engagement in addressing gender-based violence is concerned. I learnt a lot of new things which I adapted to fit my context and it is working well for me.”

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Since the end of last year, Sonke Gender Justice, MenEngage Africa, and the Women’s Health and Research Unit at the University of Cape Town have overseen the implementation of two highly successful MenEngage Africa Training Initiative (MATI) training courses in Cape Town, South Africa—one in September 2013 and one in February 2014.

Deviant approach” benefitted from the ongoing project development he received during and after MATI 2013. On the basis of this project, he was nominated for the second stage of the STAR Impact AWARDS.
It is widely accepted that alcohol abuse is a risk factor for violence, including gender-based violence (GBV). While much has been written about this link, the ways in which negative masculine gender norms influence alcohol abuse and GBV have been less explored. Sonke Gender Justice, on behalf of MenEngage Africa (MEA), therefore decided to conduct a literature review to explore these links further.

From this exercise a concept note has been developed to highlight relevant concepts for those who wish to conduct further work in this area. By outlining the multiple and complex links between alcohol, masculinities, and GBV, the concept note aims to provide a basis and direction for expanding MEA’s work in combating GBV, including through alcohol abuse interventions, across the region. Here we include some of the key findings from the concept note, as well as recommendations to aid MEA’s work on these issues.

Alcohol and masculinity
Alcohol abuse is linked to notions of masculinity in a variety of ways. For example, traditional expectations of what it means to be a man can cause men to feel they should not reveal vulnerability or “weakness”. Therefore, when men are facing challenging and difficult circumstances, like unemployment for example, they may find it difficult to express their feelings of helplessness or fear. Additionally, alcohol consumption is not only portrayed in our society as an acceptable past time for men, it is actually seen as a way to prove one’s masculinity: a ‘real’ man should be able to handle his alcohol. This may therefore make is acceptable for them to reveal feelings of worry, stress and doubt and seek help so that they are able to cope with such circumstances in a healthy and constructive manner. Society should not encourage men to anchor their identity on the idea of having to prove their masculinity, especially through destructive behaviour patterns such as violence, aggression, risk-taking and alcohol consumption.

Alcohol and sexual violence
Coercive sex, or rape, has been found to most likely occur in relationships where alcohol was ever consumed in conjunction with sex and where the man perceives his “biological need for sex” to be more powerful than his partner’s. Opportunistic and usually alcohol-related group rape, or “gang rape”, is often associated with “feminine assertiveness in the face of unwanted propositions,” which is interpreted as an “unhealthy arrogance” that is then punished through rape. This demonstrates the need for further research into the interplay between gender norms, alcohol and violence, particularly sexual violence. Until men are enabled to recognise the benefits of gender norms transformation for everyone, they may continue to feel threatened by the shift towards gender equality.

Recommendations
The concept note recommends a number of interventions that can be initiated or strengthened in order to address some of these issues:

- Conduct more research on the statistics and prevalence of alcohol addiction in other MEA countries outside of South Africa
- Lobby/combat alcohol advertising that links drinking alcohol to notions of masculinity
- Target job centres and queues for daily work permits outside Home Affairs with leaflets and posters inviting men to gender and alcohol workshops
- Education programmes on transforming masculinities, alcohol-abuse, SRH information and condom distribution in alcohol-serving venues and pubs
- Publicity campaigns - using media messages to highlight links between GBV and alcohol, while providing examples of positive masculinity
- Lobby/advocate governments to provide more funding for addiction rehabilitation centres
- Collaborate with addiction rehabilitation groups and centres; work with them to provide gender transformation training to clients
- Refugee workshops should involve a focus on trauma counselling and alcohol
- Run alcohol and substance abuse interventions in schools with a GBV prevention focus
- Run parenthood groups aimed at alcohol-addicted mothers and fathers, and integrate a focus on alcohol addiction in existing fatherhood groups and the MenCare campaign
- Work with LGBTI communities, including the alcohol-serving venues of gay and lesbian subcultures, to raise awareness of GBV prevention

However, MEA members are generally encouraged to consider these linkages within their current projects and consider ways to integrate interventions to address alcohol abuse into their gender transformative programming. If MEA members have stories to share of work they are already conducting in this regard, please send them to Sonke so that they can possibly be included in the next MEA newsletter.

Download the concept note [here](#) or on the Sonke website under the resources section.
As we make our way through 2014 and look ahead to the renewal and proclamation of global agendas, such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), in 2015, there are opportunities everywhere to make clear our commitment to ensuring the sexual and reproductive health and rights for all people.

While a stand-alone gender equality goal in the post-2015 MDGs increasingly looks successfully advocated for, it remains uncertain whether they will include the security of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) for all, such as women's right to access voluntary family planning or all people's right to access HIV testing and treatment services. And although the urgent need to include men—as supportive partners as well as individuals with their own needs—has been recognized as critical to reducing the burden of SRHR on women and improving health outcomes overall since the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Programme of Action—these efforts have remained insufficient in depth and in scale. It is in this climate that the MenEngage Alliance is launching a global initiative—with national and regional components—to promote men's positive involvement in sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), with MenEngage Africa taking a key role in defining and shaping the agenda for this initiative, particularly at the regional level.

As such, Sonke convened an African regional consultation meeting at the end of February 2014 with MenEngage partners and other key stakeholders, including women's organisations, LGBTI activists, and research working in field of SRHR. Through this meeting, we sought to engage our partners and SRHR experts around the MenEngage SRHR campaign and seek their input on key next steps to ensure this initiative is relevant and complimentary to their work and SRHR efforts in the region. The key themes of the initiative are: 1) men's share of contraceptive use and SRH services, such as vasectomy; 2) men's support for women's contraceptive use and SRH services; including women's right to safe and legal abortion services; and 3) engaging men in HIV prevention, treatment and care. These key themes have been identified in order to clearly differentiate between men's responsibility for their own contraceptive use and SRH service utilisation, and the importance of men supporting, but not controlling, women's contraceptive use and SRH service utilisation. Engaging men in HIV prevention, treatment, and care has been identified as its own key theme in order to highlight the specific goals within this initiative around increasing men's access to and utilisation of HIV testing and treatment services.

The meeting in February was lively and full of valuable input, with many participants affirming the critical importance of having a campaign that focuses on increasing men's positive involvement in their own and their partner's SRHR. Participants highlighted the need to challenge patriarchy and homophobia as part of engaging men in SRHR and addressing gender-based violence within an SRHR framework, as well as continuing to ensure that we do not simplify all “men” to fit into one category, or all “women” into another. Participants also highlighted the need to be aware of both the supply as well as demand side of services, such that that if we are seeking to increase demand for SRH services, particularly SRH services for men and couples, that health care systems are equipped and ready to handle the increased demand. Participants also felt strongly that this was a valuable opportunity to promote a positive, rather than fear-based, approach to SRHR, and to incorporate sexual pleasure in capacity building across civil society.

Input provided at the African regional SRHR consultation was then also fed into the global meeting on the MenEngage SRHR campaign, convened by Sonke, Promundo, MenEngage and the UN Foundation and held on March 7, 2014 in Washington D.C., which brought together key policymakers, practitioners and donors in the field of SRHR, including stakeholders from regional and global bodies such as UNFPA, USAID, IPPF, and EngenderHealth.

All in all, the African regional SRHR consultation meeting generated valuable input, rich discussion, and an exciting space to build from, as was echoed at the March 7 global MenEngage SRHR meeting. While there is a huge amount of work yet to be done to ensure that SRHR is strongly represented in the post-2015 agenda, Sonke and MenEngage Africa are committed to being vocal advocates. So, the question is: what are you doing in your country to promote SRHR at the local, regional, and global levels?
The campaign, Justice for Liz, was spearheaded locally by the Coalition on Women Against Violence (COVAW), Youth Deliver, FEMNET and Africa UNiTE Kenya Chapter in which MenEngage Kenya Network is a member.

As a result of a Daily Nation newspaper article highlighting this story, well-wishers mobilised and donated more than Sh700,000 towards Liz’s medical care. Additionally, MenKen mobilised men and joined hundreds of Kenyans for a peaceful march to the office of the Inspector General (IG) demanding for justice for Liz as a symbolic case of the many other GBV cases in the country, which attracted numerous international media.”We are aware that the young men who committed the offence are at large,” William Thwere Okello, chief of staff in the IG’s office, told demonstrators outside his Nairobi compound upon receiving the petition on behalf of the IG. “We are looking for them wherever they are and they will soon be arrested and be taken to court.”

“This madness must stop,” said head of MenKen Fredrick Nyagah in response. “It has become like a norm. It is being accepted. People see violence everywhere: in the streets, on the TV, at home. And therefore they think it’s okay.”

Almost one year down the line in a press conference organised jointly by COVAW, FEMNET, and AUKe, it was revealed little progress has been made in putting the suspects behind bars. To date, only one of the six suspects identified has been arrested, despite reports that the whereabouts of the remaining five suspects is known. One suspect has so far been arrested and his charges amended to include gang rape and causing grievous bodily harm to reflect crimes of sexual violence under the Sexual Offenses Act. It will however be futile to charge one suspect with ‘gang’ rape. On the 24th of March, the office of the UN Association of World Citizens wrote to the DPP and the AG airing their concerns regarding the delay of the case and the arrest of the five suspects. In his reply, the DPP depicted involvement and directive to arrest being reinforced. These public statements have not yet been backed up with convincing action.

The main court hearing is set for the 24th of June. MenKen joins COVAW, FEMNET and AUKe in continuing to call on the state apparatus to fulfil its obligation to ensure Liz and other GBV survivors get the justice they deserve. MenKen further urges the Director of Public Prosecution and the Attorney General to make the arrest and charge the five remaining suspects with gang rape and causing grievous bodily harm. As lack of commitment from the state has and continues to cripple efforts to eradicate SGBV, a gross human violation, justice must be found.
Kenyans took to the streets on 15 May to demand the return of the 300 Nigerian girls who were abducted three weeks prior when heavily armed attackers stormed the Government Girls Secondary School in Chibok, Nigeria during the night of 14-15 April. Additionally, early in the week of 4 May, suspected Boko Haram gunmen abducted at least eight more girls – some possibly as young as eight years old – from a village in Borno State, Nigeria. In view that the efforts to rescue the girls so far have fallen desperately short, Kenyans marched to Kenya’s Nigerian High Commission to add to the voices of so many others in the content demanding for their release. The march was organized by The African Women’s Development and Communication Network (FEMNET) and they were joined by MenEngage Kenya Network (MenKen) and Africa Unite Kenya Chapter (AUKe) members, whom also did issue a press release urgently calling on the government of Nigeria to:

1. Take immediate action to locate and rescue the girls
2. Prosecute those responsible for the girls’ abduction and exploitation
3. Provide psychosocial support services for the survivors, their families and their communities
4. Rebuild the schools and reaffirm the girls’ rights to safety, security and education as a process of restoring their dignity
5. Take steps to ensure schools and public places are safe spaces
6. Immediately institute, in consultation with civil society, measures to protect the safety and human rights of women and girls throughout Nigeria, which are further endangered by the volatile political situation in conflict areas
7. Guarantee the safety and security of the families who have been internally displaced, as a result of the ongoing conflict in the region

MenKen also supported the call by MenEngage Global and MenEngage Africa for men to stand in solidarity with the Nigerian girls and mobilised MenKen members and AUKe members to do the same. MenKen will continue to join with others and continue to stand in solidarity until the girls are brought back.
Men in the Kitchen: gender equality begins at home in Mozambique

By Cremildo Chura (The Men for Change Network, HOPEM Mozambique)

As many studies have documented, this pattern results in (and replicates) deep socioeconomic inequalities between men and women, and further makes it impossible for many young men to strengthen their life skills and enjoy the pleasures associated with housework. Because of gender stereotypes, Mozambican men’s participation in the domestic sphere is often not seen beyond “putting food on the table.”

Furthermore, the cultural (self-)exclusion of men from domestic work is also one of the contributing factors to the context of domestic violence against women. In fact, some research and media reports have demonstrated that in many cases violence against women was a result of men’s efforts to “punish” their partners for “faults” committed in the domestic realm which is constructed as female (therefore it is assumed that any failure in this realm should be the woman’s “fault”).

Under this context, the Men for Change Network, HOPEM, has partnered with the Institute for the Promotion of Small and Medium Companies (IPEME) to implement the “Men in the Kitchen” programme. The programme aims include: (1) increasing male engagement in domestic duties by increasing their knowledge of cooking, nutrition education, hygiene, and agro-processing; (2) contributing to the reduction of violence against women as a result of rigid social roles for men and women; (3) challenging, in a very practical way, stereotypes of masculinity and femininity that reproduce social inequalities between men and women, that hinder their personal development.

The programme was launched with a training in May 2012. Since then, it has reached 846 men aged between 18 and 64 years old, with the majority being young men between 18 and 24 years old. The programme has proved to be an effective way to challenge harmful gender norms that for centuries shoved men away from the kitchen. Vicente Alexandre, one of the youngest participants, demonstrated when he commented of the Men in the Kitchen programme, “The training changed my attitude toward women, since what I thought is right is not. I thought the kitchen was my mother’s place and not my dad’s place. Through the training I learned that the male involvement in housework is good and healthy to the family.” Another participant, Marcolino Nhancale, welcomed the training because according to him men culturally do not have the habit of going into the kitchen in Southern Mozambique where he comes from, as he could be seen as “put in the bottle” by a woman.

The programme’s success is reflected by the many men seeking to participate and the changes related to housework that the participants report after attending the training sessions. Additionally, the Men in the Kitchen programme has generated considerable media interest, having been broadcast on Germany National Radio, as well as on Mozambican local television stations, radios and newspapers.
sadly, far too many people in Africa, as around the world, grow up being told similar stories about lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex (LGBTI) and gender non-conforming people, that are based on fear rather than truth, strung together with moralistic viewpoints and poorly articulated “culture”-based arguments that tell us that homosexuality is ‘unAfrican’. Left unexamined, these stories perpetuate the notion that certain individuals are fundamentally flawed, simply because of the people they choose to love or the way they dress and express themselves. These stories also fail to recall our accurate history, which is that homosexuality was home grown and embraced in Africa long before colonial powers came and promoted its criminalisation.

When President Goodluck Jonathan of Nigeria passed the Same Sex Marriage Prohibition Act in January of this year, and this was followed by Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni passing the Anti-Homosexuality Act in February, it raised serious questions about the commitment of African leaders to the rights and well-being of its citizens. These kinds of laws—which not only limit the human rights of citizens, but also send a dangerous message that fear-fuelled decision-making is an acceptable political strategy—also pose a huge risk for the future of sexual and reproductive health and rights on the African continent.

One must ask: if one’s access to sexual and reproductive health services is dependent on how ‘heterosexual’ and ‘normal’ you look as a man or woman, what will be the fate be of so many

Whose story do we believe, and to what end? LGBTI rights and sexual and reproductive health

“I came out while presenting a keynote address about HIV research at the AIDS conference in Washington DC, in 2012. After that I knew I would not be able to go home,” says Paul Semugoma, a 43 year old gay doctor and HIV researcher. “In Uganda, you grow up being told gays are bad. You’re told that they prey on children.”

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One must ask: if one’s access to sexual and reproductive health services is dependent on how ‘heterosexual’ and ‘normal’ you look as a man or woman, what will the fate be of so many
individuals who live outside the narrow expression of ‘heterosexual woman’ or ‘heterosexual man’? Similarly, as these laws also criminalise ‘aiding and abetting homosexuality’, which includes the provision of health services, how will these laws impact health providers’ willingness and ability to provide nondiscriminatory services to anyone who needs them?

Unfortunately, there have already been reports of these laws directly impacting people’s access to sexual and reproductive health services, particularly HIV services. In Uganda, a Kampala antiretroviral (ARV) clinic operating through a non-profit partnership between Makerere University and the U.S. Military HIV Research Program (MHRP) was raided in early April on account of its reputation for serving homosexual clients along with non-homosexual clients. The clinic is one of very few that willingly provides ARV treatment and other HIV services to LGBTI individuals, and activists are now warning LGBTI individuals to stay away from the clinic until further notice.

In countries with these colonial-era anti-homosexuality laws, such as Uganda and Nigeria, individual access to services may not be the only consequence that impacts the sexual and reproductive health and rights of individuals. There are also reports of donors slashing (or threatening to slash) their funding in these countries in protest of these laws, which will have a major impact on health services and health research. The World Bank, for example, has reportedly indefinitely delayed a US$ 90 million loan package they were preparing to offer Uganda, which would have been aimed at strengthening the country’s health care system. This amount represents twenty percent of Uganda’s total 2013-2014 health budget.

What is particularly disturbing about these trends is that while donors are cutting or suspending funds which would aim to directly benefit the health and well-being of ordinary citizens, investors—including private equity firms which generally only benefit the rich—are reportedly continuing to invest, suggesting their dismissal of the human rights of the country’s citizens over their own financial gain. Nevertheless, it should be noted that Orange, a global phone and internet company, pulled its adverts from an anti-gay tabloid in Uganda after a worldwide petition challenged their continued payment to the tabloid for advertising. In the face of this troubling climate for LGBTI rights on the continent, acknowledging that positive change can be created through public pressure holding governments and corporations accountable serves as a reminder of our power as activists.

As MenEngage Africa, it is critical that we actively promote non-discrimination and sexual rights, and that includes recognising and respecting the diversity of sexualities and gender non-conforming persons. As Sonke, the MenEngage Africa chair, we are clear on our stance: we, as a human rights organisation that promotes gender equality, recognise that the human rights of LGBTI persons are in jeopardy and we do not support these anti-gay laws. As we vocalise our support as allies for the human rights of LGBTI persons, we hope that our voices are joined by many others across the continent.

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In countries with these colonial-era anti-homosexuality laws, such as Uganda and Nigeria, individual access to services may not be the only consequence that impacts the sexual and reproductive health and rights of individuals. There are also reports of donors slashing (or threatening to slash) their funding in these countries in protest of these laws, which will have a major impact on health services and health research. The World Bank, for example, has reportedly indefinitely delayed a US$ 90 million loan package they were preparing to offer Uganda, which would have been aimed at strengthening the country’s health care system. This amount represents twenty percent of Uganda’s total 2013-2014 health budget.

What is particularly disturbing about these trends is that while donors are cutting or suspending funds which would aim to directly benefit the health and well-being of ordinary citizens, investors—including private equity firms which generally only benefit the rich—are reportedly continuing to invest, suggesting their dismissal of the human rights of the country’s citizens over their own financial gain. Nevertheless, it should be noted that Orange, a global phone and internet company, pulled its adverts from an anti-gay tabloid in Uganda after a worldwide petition challenged their continued payment to the tabloid for advertising. In the face of this troubling climate for LGBTI rights on the continent, acknowledging that positive change can be created through public pressure holding governments and corporations accountable serves as a reminder of our power as activists.

As MenEngage Africa, it is critical that we actively promote non-discrimination and sexual rights, and that includes recognising and respecting the diversity of sexualities and gender non-conforming persons. As Sonke, the MenEngage Africa chair, we are clear on our stance: we, as a human rights organisation that promotes gender equality, recognise that the human rights of LGBTI persons are in jeopardy and we do not support these anti-gay laws. As we vocalise our support as allies for the human rights of LGBTI persons, we hope that our voices are joined by many others across the continent.
