MenEngage Alliance at the 63rd Session of the Commission on the Status of Women

Participation and advocacy of a global network for engaging boys and men in gender equality and the rights of all women and girls

11-22 March 2019

MenEngage Alliance
working with men and boys for gender equality
The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) is the principal global intergovernmental body exclusively dedicated to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women. Every year, CSW is a pivotal opportunity for activists, civil society organizations (CSOs) and others working for gender equality around the world to come together with governments to take stock of progress made towards gender equality, and collectively identify ways forward. The theme of 2019’s CSW was ‘Social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls’.

Each year there is a specific theme, and governments negotiate an outcome document known as the ‘Agreed Conclusions’, in which they make commitments to advance gender equality. Every year, governments also evaluate the implementation of agreed conclusions from a previous session. This year’s review theme was ‘Women’s empowerment and the link to sustainable development (Agreed Conclusions of the Sixtieth Session)’. 

Contents

Advocacy successes and progress......3

Challenges and opposition......6

What is Beijing+25?......7

Youth Participation......8

MenEngage Alliance caucus meetings & capacity building......13

UN Reform Process......17

MenEngage Alliance member side events......18
A long and arduous process, the negotiation of the Agreed Conclusion requires the sustained advocacy of thousands of activists from around the world, in both supporting and putting pressure on Member States for the successful adoption of a progressive outcome document. MenEngage Alliance compiled the technical inputs of 12 members, participating in 4 rounds of language negotiations and coordinating language submissions to various allied governments.

Additionally, the Global Secretariat of MenEngage Alliance participated in the Women’s Rights Caucus in order to engage meaningfully in the broader feminist/women’s rights activism of the session, striving for accountable advocacy throughout our engagement.

In this year’s Agreed Conclusions, governments made commitments to improve social protection systems, public services and sustainable infrastructure to advance gender equality, the first time this theme had been considered.

For the first time the Agreed Conclusions recognized the right to universal access to social protection and that women’s access to social protection is often restricted due to high levels of informal employment. The document acknowledges that budget cuts and austerity measures restrict women’s access to social protection, public services and sustainable infrastructure, and recognizes the link between gender responsive social protection and the prevention of gender-based violence. Governments also committed to ensuring that levels of protection previously achieved are not reversed.

**Advocacy successes**

**1. Gender Based Violence**

Despite several governments opposing language that articulated the gendered nature of violence against women and girls, the final document is clear that gender is often the underlying factor and that violence against women and girls is “rooted in historical and structural inequality and unequal power relations between men and women” (Paragraph 13)

**2. Sexual and reproductive health**

After much opposition from various governments, language around sexual harassment and sexual and reproductive health is included in the Agreed Conclusions. The text notes language from CSW62 which calls on governments to “ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights in accordance with the
Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population” (Paragraph 47(uu))

3. Civil society and women human rights defenders

Language was adopted on the importance of supporting civil society and women human rights defenders (paragraph 47(ooo)) – another strong gain amidst continued pressure to have this language removed.

4. Engaging men and boys

When it comes to engaging men and boys, the UN conclusions include several impactful statements around eliminating stereotypes and dismantling patriarchal power inequalities. Encouragingly, these had strong support from most governments and drew on language from Human Rights Council Resolution 35/10, which calls for men and boys to be engaged in preventing and responding to violence against all women and girls. The Alliance also lobbied successfully to avoid the inclusion of regressive language around the stereotypical role of the men as the sole provider in the family. Such framings serve to reinforce an imbalance in gendered power relations and the Alliance will continue to advocate for gender-transformative language.

The Agreed Conclusions of CSW63 call on governments to fully engage men and boys as agents and beneficiaries of change, and as strategic partners and allies in promoting women’s and girls’ access to social protection systems, public services and sustainable infrastructure.

Townhall Meeting of Civil Society and United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres
Specifically, the conclusions call on governments to:

Call for the elimination of all forms of violence and discrimination against women and girls, in both public and private spheres, by understanding and addressing the root causes of gender inequality, such as unequal power relations, gender stereotypes and practices that perpetuate discrimination against women and girls; designing and implementing national policies and programmes that address the roles and responsibilities of men and boys, including the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men in care and domestic work; ensuring the enforcement of child support laws; and transforming, with the aim of eliminating, negative social norms that condone violence against women and girls and attitudes by which women and girls are regarded as subordinate to men and boys.

Guarantee access to maternity protection, and promote, inter alia, paid maternity, paternity and parental leave and adequate social security benefits for both women and men, taking appropriate steps to ensure they are not discriminated against when availing themselves of such benefits and promoting men’s awareness and incentivizing their use of such opportunities, as a means of enabling women to increase their participation in the labour market; recognize the social significance of maternity, paternity, motherhood, fatherhood and the shared responsibility of parents in the upbringing of children; and provide appropriate assistance to parents and legal guardians in the performance of their child-rearing responsibilities through the development of universal and affordable services and facilities for the care of children, including breastfeeding facilities in the workplace.

Despite this progress, several key feminist issues remain absent from the Agreed Conclusions. Governments failed to commit to integrating sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression into the design of social protection, public services, and infrastructure systems, and, as in previous years, the Conclusions fail to acknowledge the ‘rights’ in sexual and reproductive health and rights. The Conclusions also fail to acknowledge corporate accountability and the role and responsibility of the private sector in promoting women’s human rights.
Visa Denials

CSW63 continued to experience strong activism in response to ongoing issues surrounding visa denials for activists seeking to attend the session from around the world. The US is obligated under a 70-year-old treaty not to restrict the participation of any person to a conference at the United Nations Headquarters. However, for many consecutive years in a row, over 50 participants (by civil society estimation) have had visas denied, particularly young and rural women and girls and women and girls from geopolitically sensitive regions.

MenEngage Alliance collectively signed onto this statement put forward by NGO CSW in response to visa application denials to attend CSW63. As a delegation, we also disseminated a joint mapping in order to make note of all our members who were also excluded from joining the session due to visa denials.

Increased Opposition Backlash

The 2019 session saw a marked increase in targeted anti-rights groups. As the negotiations unfolded, the facilitator of the Agreed Conclusions Koki Muli Grignon from Kenya, was targeted by opposition groups. In a coordinated malicious effort, Ms Muli’s email inbox and personal cell phone was flooded with anti-abortion and “anti-gender” messages. Civil society mobilized to unequivocally condemn this effort to intimidate Ms. Muli, noting that women human rights defenders, including those who work within the UN system, are harassed in all regions of the world.

MenEngage Alliance collectively signed onto a statement put forward by the Women’s Rights Caucasus is support to Ms. Muli which noted that she had been targeted in order to stifle efforts to advance women’s sexual and reproductive rights during CSW. This is occurring in the context of other tactics meant to intimidate meeting participants, including the presence of an anti-abortion bus outside the UN headquarters.

Once again this year saw the US take a regressive stance on key issues such as sexual and reproductive health and rights, joining countries such as Russia, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and the Holy See, and on climate change and migration.

The Role of the Holy See as a UN Permanent Observer

This CSW session saw an advocacy effort arise seeking to revoke the Holy See’s Permanent Observer status at the UN. Through their problematic engagement in this year’s session, this sign-on was based on an official complaint filed with the Secretary General (pointing towards several critical considerations including:

• Three failures of the Holy See to comply with treaty obligations
• Inconsistent and worrisome levels of support for women’s and girls’ rights
• Ongoing clerical sex abuse scandals

These three issues bring into serious question the alignment of the Holy See to gender justice. In addition, and perhaps most worryingly from a governance and accountability perspective, the Holy See is not a ‘state’ in any normal sense of the term.

MenEngage Alliance collectively signed onto this complaint and petition.
In 2020, the global community will celebrate the 25th anniversary of the signing of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, a landmark global agreement on women’s rights and gender equality. This pivotal year also marks the 5-year point of the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, the 20th anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security, and 10 years since the creation of UN Women itself.

Over the next year, all states must undertake comprehensive national-level reviews of the progress made and challenges encountered in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. There will also be a regional level review and intergovernmental review in each region. These processes will feed into the sixty-fourth session of the Commission (CSW64) in which governments will review progress towards gender equality over the last twenty-five years.

In June 2020 a Global Gender Forum will be held, led by UN Women, civil society and co-hosted by the governments of Mexico and France. This will not be an intergovernmental forum like previous world conferences on women, although the outcomes from the forum and CSW64 will be considered by the general assembly in September 2020 at a one-day high-level meeting.

Throughout this review process it will be crucial for civil society to be actively engaged and hold their governments to account.

The dates for the regional consultation are:

- Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), Geneva – 29-30 October 2019
- Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), Santiago, Chile – 4-8 November 2019
- Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), Addis Ababa, Ethiopia – November 2019
- Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), Bangkok, Thailand – November 2019
At CSW63, MenEngage Alliance increased its focus on youth participation, with 5 youth delegates from the Alliance attending the event from Uganda, Kenya, Nicaragua, Sri Lanka and Lebanon. The Alliance was a member of the organizing task force of the CSW Youth Dialogue, along with 17 other NGOs and networks, coordinated by UN Women. The Alliance also coordinated a youth-led side event on sexual and reproductive health and rights, organized an accountability dialogue with young feminists from the Athena Network, and held a youth caucus meeting.

CSW Youth Dialogue

The CSW Youth Dialogue took place over 3 events during the first week of CSW. On 9 March, over 300 young people from around the world came together for a pre-CSW Youth dialogue, in which they shared the challenges they face and stories of activism, and had an intergenerational dialogue with policymakers and experts on social protection, public services and sustainable infrastructure. MenEngage Alliance youth delegate Kapila Rathnayake facilitated a session and presented his experience using last year’s youth policy recommendations to hold a dialogue with his local government.

The event resulted in the development of a set of Common Minimum Standards – policy recommendations for governments to ensure that social protection systems, public services and sustainable infrastructure meet the needs of young people and advance gender equality, and for increasing meaningful youth participation in policy-making processes. The recommendations were presented to the Chair of CSW, Geraldine Byrne Nason and the Deputy Director of UN Women Åsa Regnér.
Highlights from the recommendations:

Introduce education on human rights, gender equality and healthy relationships into school curricula from a young age, including comprehensive sexuality education and education which seeks to transform harmful gender norms and stereotypes;

Invest in public awareness campaigns that address unequal power relations and harmful stereotypes of masculinity and femininity. Ensure stricter regulation of media that features stereotypical gender roles and hold media accountable for the negative impacts that they have on the body image of women and girls;

Implement measures to ensure young people in all their diversity are meaningfully consulted and represented in leadership and decision-making processes at all levels, including by reducing the minimum age to hold public office and fostering intergenerational dialogues and partnerships;

Provide support, protection and resources to young advocates, human rights defenders, youth-led and youth-serving organisations and networks to participate fully and equally in international policymaking fora and address barriers to meaningful participation, including visa refusals;

Formally initiate meaningful youth delegate programmes where delegates are selected through a transparent process to represent youth-led networks and organizations, as well as national youth interests, at United Nations forums, including the Commission on the Status of Women;
Government ministers were put in the ‘hot seat’ in the second Youth Dialogue event, in which young people had the opportunity to ask high-level panellists about how they planned to implement the common minimum standards.

On March 13, youth leaders had the opportunity to question representatives of several governments. Marta Lucia Ramirez, Vice President of Colombia committed to creating entrepreneurship opportunities for young people, supporting young people to enter politics and ensuring young people have access to quality education.

Nadine Gasman, Head of the National Institute for Women of Mexico shared that her government would create policies that include indigenous women, Afro-Mexican women and women of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities.

Adriana Salvatierra, the youngest person to be elected President of the Bolivian Senate promised to create more youth councils in local governments and advocated for lowering the minimum age to hold public office to 18 years. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Executive Director for UN Women, told the young people present that she would ensure the Beijing+25 commemorations center young people’s voice and leadership. Click here to watch the event.

Finally, on 15 March, youth at CSW came together to develop a youth-led strategy on how young people can be mobilized and engaged in the lead-up to the Beijing+25 commemorations. Participants discussed innovative approaches that can be used to engage young people in the lead up to 2020 and beyond and participated in a range of creative workshops including on the power of the music influencer, gaming as a way to tackle gender inequality, digital storytelling, and the power of dance.

Youth empowered to demand universal access to SRHR

This youth-led side event focused on young people’s sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR).

Nadege Munyaburanga spoke about the challenges facing youth, and in particular youth living with HIV in Rwanda. She argued that youth need affordable, stigma-free and non-judgemental SRHR services and that civil society needs more support from the state to implement such services. She also drew attention to the failure of governments in her region to implement international agreements they have signed to ensure LGBTQI rights and access to services.

Madelynn Bovasso spoke about how US domestic and foreign policy affects the SRHR
of youth and key populations around the globe. She argued that the Global Gag rule is a massive overstretch of US power, affecting not only abortion services but also limiting what NGOs can do with their own money and the kind of counselling they can provide youth, robbing youth of their autonomy and creating distrust within the medical field. She also shared how the US policy the Anti Prostitution Loyalty Act is preventing people affected by HIV/AIDS to receive the counselling and services they need.

Kuriash Mubiro spoke about gender based violence and its impact on young people’s SRHR and the importance of engaging young men to prevent violence and HIV/AIDS, as well as other stakeholders such as parents and law enforcement officials. He highlighted the importance of comprehensive sexuality education, adult-youth partnership approaches, and peer-to-peer education programmes designed, implemented and monitored by young people.

Cynthia Cordero spoke about how patriarchy and harmful social norms of masculinity affect young people’s SRH, by encouraging men to engage in risky sexual behaviour. She stressed that engaging and educating boys and men around their own and their partners’ SRH is essential to reduce the burden of SRH on women and girls, and prevent STIs and unwanted pregnancies.

MenEngage Alliance held a youth caucus meeting on 13 March – a dedicated space where youth representatives from the Alliance got together to discuss their experience at CSW and strategize on strengthening youth leadership and engagement within the Alliance. Some key points included:

Participants enjoyed the experience at the pre-CSW Youth Dialogue, but felt that there were too many high level speeches, instead of real intergenerational dialogue with policymakers about concrete ways to advance youth’s demands. Participants felt the venue in a high school infantilized participants and a venue in a university, professional space or within the UN building would have been more appropriate.

Young people felt disappointed that the questions in the ‘Take the Hot Seat’ event were pre-prepared, resulting in the high-level speakers present using the event as an opportunity to congratulate themselves on measures they are already undertaking, rather than truly being held to account.

More young people are needed on panels throughout CSW, but these must be the right young people – those that are most affected by the issues being discussed.

Participants discussed MenEngage Alliance’s plans to strengthen youth leadership and engagement in the lead up to the 3rd
Global Symposium and beyond. Key elements of this plan are the strengthening of a Youth Reference Group to anchor this work, the organization of a youth consultation, and the collective development of a MenEngage Youth Strategy.

Strengthening youth representation in the governance structures of the regional networks was identified as a key priority. The structure of MenEngage Africa was identified as a model for others to follow, which has a Youth Advisory Committee, whose Chair sits on the regional Steering Committee. The regional MOU also mandates the inclusion of youth and LGBTQI representatives on all country and regional Steering Committees.

A pre-consultation or survey of all Alliance members on youth leadership and engagement would be useful in advance of the youth consultation to feed into the youth strategy.

The Alliance should identify youth networks to potentially connect with at all levels, taking into consideration diverse groups of young people, including LGBTQI youth, and youth with disabilities.

MenEngage Alliance is committed to strengthening meaningful youth leadership and engagement at CSW and throughout our activities at all levels in the coming years. We look forward to continuing our partnership with UN Women and the Youth Dialogue task force to ensure the Youth Dialogue is more meaningfully connected with larger CSW processes, that more diverse groups of youth can participate, and that the process is inclusive and transparent for CSW64 and the Beijing+25 commemoration.
MenEngage Alliance held an interactive capacity building dialogue for its delegation on 11 March, the first day of CSW63, in which experts within the Alliance shared their reflections on current trends and how to engage with this important space.

**Accountability and meaningful allyship to women’s rights and feminist organizations at CSW**

Madeleine Rees, Secretary General – WILPF

Madeleine Rees spoke about how feminist leaders have been engaging in CSW as a strategic space for the advancement of women’s rights and the challenges and opportunities involved.

**Key points from the discussion included:**

Space for civil society to engage directly with and lobby policymakers at CSW is becoming more restricted, creating an ‘us’ and ‘them’ structure. WILPF have been advocating for a plenary session with governments and civil society in the main hall of the United Nations for several years but this has not happened. In many cases, states have civil society on their delegations to legitimize what they are doing and give them respectability, instead of meaningful engagement. Often, civil society is siloed on the outskirts of the main session.

This shrinking space is aggravated further by increasing visa denials for civil society participants. Two years ago WILPF did not attend CSW and instead organized an alternative event in Geneva on reforming the...
UN system. However, CSW continues to be a valuable space for networking among civil society.

The UN Human Rights mechanisms in Geneva are a more impactful space, and have recently been able to pass progressive resolutions.

The issue of transgender rights is an important faultline in the feminist movement at the moment, with pushback from some feminists claiming trans women are taking over the agenda. Fear of violence is the supposed primary reason for this non-acceptance of trans women, although it has many other dimensions related to stigma against trans people more broadly.

Family is another contentious area, which is being used by states such as Russia and China as a pretext for the inclusion of regressive language. The language of gender is also under attack from conservative forces worldwide and is gradually being forced out of the UN lexicon.

‘Men’s rights’ language has been creeping into the Women, Peace and Security agenda through an increased focus on sexual violence against men. These groups are wrongly using the gender binary to put men and women in opposition through a hierarchy of harms, which undermines the agenda.

In recent years, WILPF has been saying that the international community does not need any further resolutions, rather it needs to focus on existing resolutions including the Beijing Platform for Action which has been implemented poorly across the world.

The UN system as it currently stands – and in the current political climate – is not working, but civil society should not give up on it. It is important to hold the line and ensure language and agreements do not regress until governments realize once again that they need a multilateral system.

The evolution of MenEngage Alliance at CSW

Bafana Khumalo, Co-Director - Sonke Gender Justice

Bafana Khumalo spoke about the evolution of activism of MenEngage Alliance at CSW and the many roles and opportunities that civil society organizations have.

When MenEngage first came to CSW it was a difficult space, for good reason, and
there was a lot of mistrust among feminist organizations who feared the Alliance would take over the space. Over the years the Alliance has had to prove itself and its partnership approach and learn to listen more. It has not always got it right, but there is more willingness among the feminist movement to collaborate with the Alliance and some appreciation of our interventions.

A lot of this initial hostility was due to the fact that engaging men and boys work was new and appealing to donors and was receiving funding when women’s rights organizations were having to close. The Alliance needs to keep challenging funders on this issue and emphasize that it is not a case of ‘either/or’ between work with men and women, but a case of ‘both and’, and that engaging men and boys work is just one part of the broader contribution to achieving gender justice.

It is exciting that there are now more progressive men on CSW delegations, but the UN remains a patriarchal institution. In the negotiation rooms there are still few women. How can we ensure that the men in those rooms are transformed men?

Activism is missing at CSW in recent years, and civil society have become too comfortable with the space. A new phase of revolutionary thought is needed to unsettle the space.

Moving towards radical inclusion at CSW and beyond: Taking a transversal approach to Youth Leadership/Engagement and individuals with diverse SOGI/LGBTQIA+ persons in all our efforts

Preston Mitchum, Senior International Policy Advisor - Advocates for Youth

Preston Mitchum spoke about the barriers that need to be dismantled at CSW in order to guarantee the radical inclusion of marginalized voices, as well as integrating the voices that are systematically excluded such as youth, LGBTQI, people with disabilities and other marginalized voices.

Through a dialogical exercise, with Q&As he led a conversation about important issues. He explained how the binary logic that organizes our narratives often manifests itself in disguise. Through exclusion and silence it reinforces the accepted norm that ‘human rights’ are the rights of those with a voice, which puts in question the humanity of others, those who have been disenfranchised.

Whose rights are being protected and promoted in the CSW resolutions? Whose rights are being questioned? Are sexual rights inclusive of LGBTQI rights? In denying LGBTQI people the right to social protection, the narrative exposes itself as a non-LGBTQI voice, and most likely as a white, adult, male, heterosexual voice.

In this polarized environment, to advocate for LGBTQI rights can be perceived
as asking for special protection for a special group of people, rather than being included as equal human rights. 

Binarism appears as a hyper polarized view of the world that assumes a normative role and voice. The polarized understanding of sexuality and gender relations is limited to male/female where female is viewed in the negative - less than, lacking, in need of help and support, defective, superfluous.

The same polarized logic applies to perceptions of health and harm, norm and exception. When it comes to SRHR, women and girls have their ‘rights’ limited and can only make decisions and choices within the frames of the official narrative. Are reproductive rights inclusive of a women’s right to choose to end a pregnancy in her own body? Do girls enjoy protection of their right to freely choose who and when to marry? What about young people’s right to access sexuality education and sexual health services?

The ‘rights’ in sexual and reproductive health and rights continues to be qualified or removed from the Agreed Conclusions. ‘Rights’ are accepted as long as they do not challenge the mainstream binary logic. Not only regressive states, predominantly religious nations with no separation between religion and government, but also countries with a rising nationalistic form of government question the legitimacy of the ‘human rights’ of all people. The ‘R’ in SRHR is often seen as synonymous with LGBTQI issues, but it also implies the right to access sexual and reproductive health services, which is fundamental.

There is a need for the Alliance to build long term, non-transactional relationships with youth and LGBTQ groups and to break down the binary in how it engages with people who fall outside of the binary in terms of sexual orientation and gender identity.
UN Reform Process

_Deputy Director of Programmes,
UN Women_

Daniel Seymour from UN Women presented on the reform process the UN is currently undergoing, how it is ensuring that the process is gender responsive and its implications for civil society.

The UN reform process aims to make the different agencies of the UN work more coherently together and to improve financing mechanisms.

Under the new system, the UN Development Assistance framework (UNDAF) serves as an overarching plan for each country that all agencies must align themselves to. It is important for civil society to engage in the UNDAF process and ensure they address on gender equality.

The reform process aims to strengthen the focus on norms and values, rather than the UN being merely a service provider. The process seeks to establish the UN as the inequality people, emphasizing that development does not count if some people are being left behind. This will be the basis for deciding which parts of the UN stay in country and which do not.

The position of Resident Coordinator, which used to always be a representative of UNDP, will be more powerful under the new system and will report two steps from the Deputy Secretary General. This person will be an important interlocutor for civil society and will be key to the extent to which gender equality gets addressed. It will be headed up by a new office, the Development Coordination Office.

There will be a new funding compact under the new system in which the UN commits to reporting better and donors commit to providing more predictable and less earmarked funding.

There is also a plan to have a system-wide strategic document, a kind of megaplan that all UNDAFs will be aligned to. This process is moving slowly and there are different views among member states regarding how loose or prescriptive it should be.

There are conflicting views of the relationship between the UN, governments and civil society. There are those in the UN who believe the primary responsibility of the UN is to serve governments, while others believe that the UN cannot promote human rights and be the servant of governments. The new guidance states that governments are important partners but that civil society is fundamental too. While UNDP funding is primarily though governments, UN Women mainly funds NGOs. UN Women is most effective when it is connecting both governments and civil society, although this is challenging in some countries.

The current funding system favours large NGOs and disadvantages smaller and youth-led organizations. The reform process aims to create mechanisms for providing smaller grants to small NGOs with lighter reporting mechanisms.
MenEngage Alliance Advocacy working group meeting

Members of the MenEngage Alliance Advocacy Working Group met during CSW to strategize around key upcoming advocacy moments for the Alliance.

The group agreed that the upcoming regional Beijing+25 consultations are a key opportunity, particularly in regions where there are no regional advocacy mechanisms, and agreed to track the process in their respective regions. It was also agreed that a more coordinated Alliance-wide mobilization was needed in advance of CSW64 given its significance of Beijing +25.

Advancing Gender Equality: Integrating Social Protection and Sexual Gender-based Violence (SGBV) to Create Safer Spaces for Women and Girls, 12 March

This session, hosted by SAfAIDS, MenEngage Zimbabwe and MenEngage Alliance explored the influence of evidence-informed social protection working models on the SRHR of adolescent girls and young women, with a specific focus on preventing sexual and gender-based violence. Panellists shared experiences if integrating a gender transformative approach into social protection systems, in order to advance gender equality and achieve sustainable development goals 3 (ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages) and 5 (achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls).

It was highlighted that women and girls suffer disproportionately from the privatization of health care, and that health services need to be youth friendly, non-judgemental, affordable and involve young people in their design. They emphasized that social protection does not simply mean health and child services but encompasses a wide range of interventions including violence prevention and the prevention of child marriage.

To be transformative, it is therefore important for social protection schemes to look within the family environment and at family dynamics. One panellist also spoke about the need to engage with faith leaders, despite their problematic positions on some issues to gently push them towards gender norms transformation.

The panel stressed that longer term projects and more flexible funding are needed in order to bring about gender norms transformation and evaluate the impact of such programmes.

MenEngage Alliance on the Spot: Critical dialogue with young feminist leaders on accountability issues 12 March

This session, co-convened by MenEngage Alliance, the ATHENA Network and the Equality Institute, was a reflective dialogue on the role and responsibility of those working to engage men and boys in gender justice on strengthening accountable practice at all levels.

The objective of this session was
to review and obtain feedback on the Accountability Initiative led in partnership by MenEngage Alliance with the ATHENA Network and The Equality Institute for updating the MenEngage Alliance Core Principles, Code of Conduct and Accountability Standards and Guidelines. Participants stressed the importance that producing the Accountability Standards document is not an end goal in itself, but that the process generates meaningful discussion and understanding of accountability among the Alliance and the standards are truly owned and implemented by members and network at all levels.

Conversations with men about men’s sexualized violence against women in the #MeToo era: Launch of a reflective Group Guide for Men, 12 March

Organized by MÄN Sweden together with MenEngage Alliance, this side event focused on the #MeToo movement and its implications for organizations working with men and boys for gender equality. Participants engaged in a dialogue about their experiences of MeToo in their contexts and highlighted that the movement is important for this field not only because it drew widespread public attention to the issue of sexual harassment but also because it highlighted that harassment and abuse can happen in our own circles and encouraged self-reflection and action in this regard.

MÄN shared their experience of a surge in interest in men wanting to engage in these issues and become part of the solution after the movement started and shared some of the actions they took, including a survey of Nordic men which revealed that while men reported changing their attitudes about the extent of the problem of sexual harassment, the movement had not caused them to examine or change their own attitudes. MÄN shared a methodology and reflective guide they have developed to hold group discussions among men about the issues raised by #MeToo which involves a combination of ‘big room’ and ‘small room’ discussions, and participants had a chance to try out the methodology.

UN Women side event: “The Road Ahead: Making Gender Parity a Reality”, 18 March

This official side event brought together senior UN officials, civil society and Member States to discuss how to expand the momentum for gender parity in the UN. The event highlighted that while progress at senior management level has been steady, achieving gender parity at middle management level has been more difficult, and the need for cultural transformation within the institution. Participants called for significantly increasing the number of women peacekeepers and police, and for building an enabling environment through measures such as family-friendly policies, flexible working arrangements, as well as standards of conduct.

Laxman Belbase, Acting Director of MenEngage Alliance, spoke about the importance of gender analysis in countering the backlash against gender parity efforts. “The pushback comes from this misunderstanding that gender is only about women. When you talk about gender, it’s not only about women, it’s also about the lives of...
men and boys who are part of the system,” he said. “We need to look at how can men play a role in dismantling the system that’s part of the problem.”

**Patriarchal Masculinity, Militarism, and the WPS Agenda**

ABAAD – Resource Center for Gender Equality, in partnership with the Women’s International League of Peace and Freedom (WILPF) and MenEngage Alliance held this expert panel discussion that explored the concept of security on the international level and the patriarchal ideals that it retains. The topic of the day aimed to answer the question: How is addressing masculinities connected to institutional change and what does this mean for the ‘women, peace and security’ (WPS) agenda?

Anthony Keedi, Masculinities Technical Advisor at ABAAD, emphasized that at the international level, the concept of security retains patriarchal ideas of what it means to be secure in all decision making, from arms trade to investments, and that sense of power is linked to violence.

Abigail Ruane, PeaceWomen Programme Director, talked about the need to revisit the transformative goal of the UNSCR 1325, which is to end the war – rather than adding women to war – and assess where we are at based on a higher standard.

Henry Myrttinen, Head of Gender and Peacebuilding at International Alert, talked about the need to integrate a gender perspective in peace building programs to start bringing men and masculinities into our world. “To address patriarchy, we must address masculinity”, he stated. Panelists concluded by reiterating the importance to push for higher standards when it comes to the WPS agenda that would bring a feminist lens, which must be more realistic and correspond to realities on the ground. A full report highlighting the main points discussed during the side event is available at [here](abaadmena.org).