

BRIEF: Establishing a framework for the engagement of men and boys

Highlights from the Report of the Office of the High Commission for Human Rights (OHCHR)

Review of promising practices and lessons learned, existing strategies and United Nations and other initiatives to engage men and boys in promoting and achieving gender equality, in the context of eliminating violence against women.

(A/HRC/38/24)

FRAMEWORK FOR THE ENGAGEMENT OF MEN & BOYS

- Ensure interventions and policies are fully accountable to women and girls, as well as SOGIESC people.
- Ensure interventions and policies are gender-transformative and address centrally the transformation of male power, entitlement and privilege.
- Ensure interventions to engage men and boys at carried out at all levels of society from the individual to the political sphere, especially as men continue to hold positions of power at all levels.
- Ensure the utilization of a rights-based approach.

BACKGROUND

It is acknowledged in the preamble (para. 14) to the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women that a change in the traditional role of men as well as the role of women in society and in the family is needed to achieve full equality between men and women. Article 5 (a) of the Convention places a legal obligation on States parties to modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and

women, with a view to achieving the elimination of prejudices and customary and all other practices that are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women as one of the means to eliminate discrimination against women. The Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women also observed that the root causes of gender-based violence against



MenEngage Alliance

working with men and boys for gender equality

women included the ideology of men's entitlement and privilege over women, social norms regarding masculinity, the need to assert male control or power, enforce gender roles, or prevent, discourage or punish what was considered to be unacceptable female behaviour and the need to transform them.

Engaging men and boys is a critical element of strategies to dismantle patriarchy in order to achieve gender equality and eliminate gender-based violence against women and girls. Clearly, the transformation of beliefs, attitudes and behaviours of men and boys is necessary to achieve these goals. In order to be transformative, interventions that focus on men and boys must challenge unequal power relations and structures, based on the recognition of how patriarchy is privileging men and boys and oppressing women and girls.

In the absence of these premises, there is a risk that initiatives to engage men and boys may preserve and reinforce gender inequality and patriarchal and discriminatory gender stereotypes. In the same vein, interventions focused on men and boys should be designed in consultation with women's rights advocates to make sure their concerns and perspectives are considered.

Engaging men and boys as agents for achieving gender equality and eliminating gender-based violence must be based on a critical analysis of the privileges they enjoy as a result of discriminatory power structures, and re-engage them as allies and partners to support the human rights of women and girls and gender equality. In the process, the benefits for men and boys of such a transformation will also be realized, including more positive, non-violent, equal and inclusive gender relations based on full respect for the human rights and dignity of all.

Many promising practices of efforts to engage men and boys in gender equality exist from the programmatic to the policy sphere, working from the individual to the political level.

KEY MESSAGES FROM THE REPORT

The ultimate aim of efforts to engage men and boys is to rectify discriminatory power relations based on the subordination of women and harmful gender stereotypes, which lie at the heart of gender-based discrimination and violence against women — a gender-transformative approach.

Importantly, for efforts to engage men and boys to successfully contribute towards a transformative gender-equality agenda, they must be fully informed of the views and experiences of women and girls, respectful of their rights and autonomy and complementary to — and supportive of — women's rights movements. In fact, women's organizations, feminist groups and organizations working on the rights of women and girls take the lead in — or partner with — many initiatives to engage men and boys in gender equality issues.

Men and boys interface with the implications of gender inequality from different positions. They can be perpetrators of discrimination against women and gender-based violence, agents for change, or victims/witnesses of violence — including violence against children. Men and boys can also be victims of gender-based violence, including sexual violence, in various contexts. Perpetration of such violence is deeply intertwined with the same discriminatory gender norms that cause gender-based violence against women and girls. Likewise, men and boys can be engaged as members of a community or society to join efforts to mobilize demand for gender equality and women's rights or as political, traditional, community, religious or youth leaders to advocate for gender equality and denounce discriminatory social norms, such as harmful practices, and misogynist hate crimes and hate speeches.

Establishing a comprehensive legal and policy framework on gender equality, non-

discrimination and the elimination of all forms of gender-based violence is the foundation for progress towards gender equality. A number of contributions indicated that a lack of or weak legal and policy frameworks or the existence of discriminatory law undermine the capacity of actors, including Governments, national human

rights institutions and civil society organizations to combat gender-based violence against women. Men are often in decision-making positions with respect to efforts to reform such laws and policies, and thus engaging them will be crucial.

KEY CHALLENGES

Experience has demonstrated that, although engagement with men and boys in achieving gender equality presents significant opportunities, it can also carry certain risks. In order to maximize the impact of engaging men and boys in achieving gender equality, the nature and context of such engagement must be analyzed and understood. When interventions that focus on men and boys are not gender transformative, they may not only detract from the realization of gender equality or the elimination of gender-based violence against women, but in fact perpetuate and reinforce gender inequality and harmful gender stereotypes.

Other strategies of engagement with men and boys build on the idea that women deserve respect as mothers, sisters, wives and so on.

These approaches may appear to be strategic in certain contexts of highly discriminatory societies or in order to implicate people in a more personal way. However, they risk maintaining social norms that value women only in their relation to others, rather than as autonomous human beings, entitled to all human rights. Such approaches also reaffirm patriarchal notions of men as “protectors” and, by extension, women as “victims”.

While men and boys may also suffer from discriminatory gender norms and stereotypes, ignoring the relative advantages and privileges men and boys enjoy as a result of such norms and stereotypes risks shifting the focus away from women and girls, who are disproportionately disadvantaged by them.

PROMISING PRACTICES

The report identifies a series of promising practices to engage men and boys, if carried out under the right framework. These include:

- Education and awareness-raising
- Fostering an equal share of responsibility in domestic life
- Promoting gender equality in health
- Breaking the cycle of violence
- Establishing a legal and policy framework
- Building institutional capacity
- Social and community mobilization

Additionally, the report elaborates upon these promising interventions and details the following:

- (a) Engaging men and boys in combating harmful practices through their roles as, among others, religious and traditional leaders, fathers, sons, family members, teachers, health professionals and members of the community;
- (b) Helping transform discriminatory gender norms and stereotypes and promoting non-violent, respectful and equal gender relations through education and communication, including through: gender-responsive early childhood education and development, the integration of gender

equality content into curricula at all levels of education and scientifically based and age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education;

- (c) Promoting equal sharing of responsibilities in unpaid care and domestic work, including through parental leave policies and increased flexibility in working arrangements;
- (d) Promoting full respect for the sexual and reproductive health and rights of women, girls, men, boys and non-binary persons, emphasizing the importance of dismantling discriminatory stereotypes in this area and supporting behavioural change;
- (e) Adopting a life cycle and intergenerational approach, including through the rehabilitation of perpetrators of gender-based violence to prevent reoffending and support for men and boys who have witnessed and suffered from violence, in addition to support for women and girls who have been exposed to and experienced such violence;

(f) Promoting the engagement of men in positions of authority and as advocates to support the establishment of a legal and policy framework that guarantees gender equality, prohibits and eliminates discrimination and prevents and responds to all forms of gender-based violence in all spheres of life;

- (g) Engaging men who have influence within public institutions relevant to the prevention and response to gender-based violence to address bias in such institutions and adopt gender-transformative approaches. This includes institutions in education, health, social protection, law enforcement and justice systems;
- (h) Mobilizing men and boys for gender equality and the elimination of gender-based violence at community and societal level, in partnership with women's rights movements.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In their efforts to engage men and boys to promote and achieve gender equality and to eliminate gender-based violence against women, States, national human rights institutions, civil society organizations, United Nations entities and development partners should:

- (a) Invest in efforts that engage men, boys, women, girls and non-binary persons to challenge unequal power relations and to transform discriminatory gender stereotypes and social norms to promote non-violent, equal and inclusive relationships that are also inclusive of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons;
- (b) Build a strong evidence base for effective policy and programme design and ensure rigorous monitoring to assess the actual impact of interventions on the transformation of

discriminatory gender norms and stereotypes, the promotion of gender equality and the prevention and reduction of gender-based violence against all women and girls;

- (c) Pay due attention to the intersection of discrimination and discriminatory stereotypes based on gender and other grounds, such as race, economic and social status, sexual orientation and gender identity, disability, and cultural and religious background;
- (d) Ensure the active and meaningful participation

of women and girls and effective collaboration with women's organizations and feminist groups in efforts to engage men and boys. Such participation should include policy and programme design, the delivery of programmes and services, as well as monitoring and evaluation;

- (e) Combine efforts to engage men and boys with investment in ensuring an enabling environment for the work of women and girls human rights defenders, women's rights organizations and feminist groups;
- (f) Take a comprehensive, multilevel, multisectoral and multi-stakeholder approach to transform discriminatory gender norms and relations. This

means that relevant efforts should be made at multiple levels, in the home, in the community, in local and national institutions and through legal and policy frameworks and coordinated across various sectors, including education, health, social protection, law enforcement and justice systems;

- (g) Provide financial, technical and human resources to the long-term efforts to engage men and boys in achieving gender equality and eliminating gender-based violence against women and girls, without diverting existing resources allocated to promote women's rights and support women's empowerment and leadership.