



# UBUNTU

DECLARATION &  
CALL TO ACTION

2021

**MenEngage**  
**UBUNTU**  
**SYMPOSIUM**



**MenEngage Alliance**  
working with men and boys for gender equality

# ABOUT THE UBUNTU DECLARATION AND CALL TO ACTION

**The Ubuntu Declaration and Call to Action proposes a collective vision and a set of commitments for those working to engage men and boys and transform masculinities.**

It has been co-developed by participants during the 3rd MenEngage Global Symposium, the Ubuntu Symposium (November 2020 - June 2021). It builds on the visions from the MenEngage Global Symposiums in Delhi (2014) and Rio (2009).

Following the longstanding lead of feminist movements, the Delhi Declaration and Call to Action set a benchmark of identifying patriarchy as the root of the problem-analysis. It affirms that transforming masculinities is part of the work to dismantle patriarchy.

The Ubuntu Declaration and Call to Action expands on this. It adds nuances, aiming to deepen and strengthen our collective political work to transform patriarchal masculinities.

It lays out a set of common directions, aspirations, and commitments in our joint efforts towards the realization of gender, social, economic and environmental justice.





**The Ubuntu Declaration and Call to Action draws upon the expertise, experiences, insights, and collective hopes of activists, researchers, advocates, academics, and practitioners working to advance women’s rights, gender equality, LGBTQI rights, and social justice for all.**

It reflects an agenda that was shaped over the course of more than 300 hours of discussions of the MenEngage Ubuntu Symposium, involving more than 600 speakers and more than 5,000 participants globally.

72 people from 54 countries were directly involved in drafting the text, mandated to create a platform that represents the shared commitments and aspirations of the symposium. More than 100 technical inputs were also received. A working group was formed that met 13 times during the symposium, developing the text over 8 rounds of revisions and refinements.

On behalf of all the symposium participants, the symposium co-organisers would like to sincerely thank the Working Group and Editorial Group who led this process.

# WHO WE ARE



We, **standing together** - activists, thinkers, learners, doers, and change-makers, from all corners of the world, have joined hands and voices at the 3rd MenEngage Global Symposium - the **“Ubuntu Symposium”**.

We come together with the shared recognition that we are all **interconnected in a world of profound injustices** that can no longer be hidden. We believe things must urgently change.

We must end all **patriarchal patterns of exploitation of people and planet, extractive economic models**, and their many forms of control over bodies, land and livelihoods, entrenched within political systems of privileges and power hierarchies.

Over the course of seven months , we have gathered for critical dialogues, collective reflection, for listening, learning and defining joint actions to **dismantle the oppressive power structures we face in the world today.**

# WHAT WE SEE

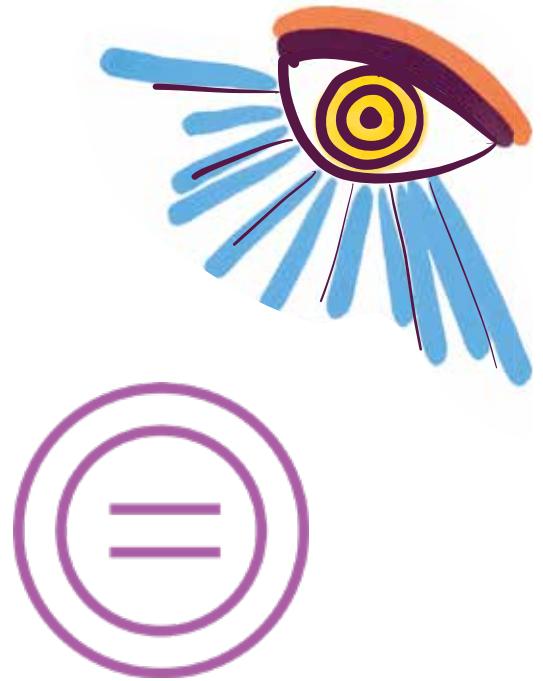
On the one hand, we look at the world and see daunting challenges that can seem insurmountable.

On the other, we see **meaningful advancements in the struggle for gender equality and justice**, including more girls going to school, fewer girls forced into early marriage, more women serving in parliament and positions of leadership (although insufficient), and the legal reforms towards the criminalization of violence against women and girls, as well as the establishment of global human right treaties, the Agenda 2030 for sustainable development, the Program of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), development of Yogyakarta Principles, COP 25 High-Level Climate Action 2019 among many other regional and national advancements.

**We also see resistance, hope, vision, and disruption by women-led and grassroots movements, no longer willing to accept injustice as the norm.**

We hear them raising their collective voices for transformation in politics, economies, culture, and mindsets.

**And yet despite progress made, violations to the fundamental universal and indivisible human rights of women, girls, trans and non-binary individuals persist around the world.**



As we gather, we witness the **global Covid-19 pandemic** that has laid bare the flaws of our care system and the unacceptable levels of inequality in access to care and preventive vaccines all over the world.

We see the escalating levels of femicides and gender-based **violence** against women, girls, trans and non-binary individuals- **the longest standing and unaddressed pandemic in humanity.**

Normative expectations of masculinity continue to pressure men and boys, and raise boys and young men to identify with violent behavior as a legitimate form of power, and to exercise power through bullying, harassment and stigmatization of non-normative behaviors.

We see the violence perpetrated by **law enforcement, military forces and authoritarian governments** against their own citizens.

We witness the increasing limitations for **individual and collective mobilization, protest and freedom of assembly**, as well as the **shrinking of civil society spaces** for those committed to justice; and we see **increased attacks on human- and environmental rights defenders**.

We witness the rising tide of **anti-democracy, ethno-nationalism, white supremacy, masculinist and well-funded anti-rights movements**, and **repressive, authoritarian governments** which have increased their attacks on gender

equality, women's rights, and the rights of LGBTQI people, particularly those most marginalized.

We see the continued **expansion of economic models** shaped by the whims of corporate interests and built upon the exploitation of people and the planet, which widens inequalities and escalates poverty for those already at the margins, rendering people uncared for, voiceless, and invisibilized.

It is in this context of interrelated challenges, converging crises, and alarming regression that we meet with a deep sense of urgency. Humanity is at a critical turning point, and must act decisively.

# WHAT WE ENVISION



**We have come together with a shared vision of gender, social, economic and environmental justice for all, everywhere, now and in the future.**

The only path ahead is towards inclusion, equity and justice, and a sustainable social economic order based on care, **responsibility and accountability**. It is a path that must affirm our interdependent humanity and our universal human rights for everyone everywhere.

We acknowledge our own individual and collective responsibilities in this path ahead, for people, the planet, and for future generations.

**I AM**  
**BECAUSE**  
*you care*

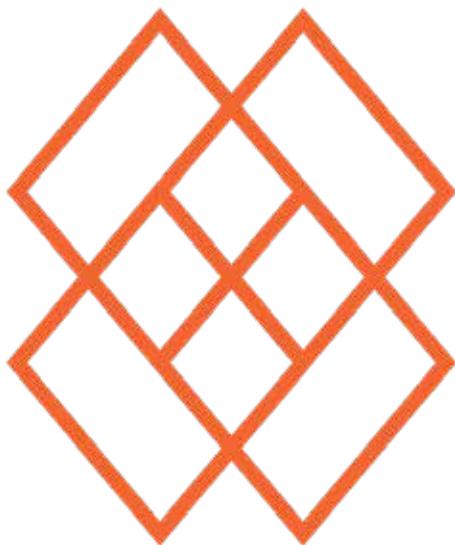
We are united under the banner of **Ubuntu** *“I am, because you are”*, with the belief in the universal bond of solidarity and interconnectedness of all people and the planet, and as an aspiration to build collective movements to take us into the future. Ubuntu is often used in a philosophical sense to express *“the belief in a universal bond of sharing that connects all humanity”*. **We honor this wisdom, and seek to build with it, in full recognition of its origins, roots, traditions and thought-leadership arising from the African continent** (See Annex: Ubuntu).

**We cherish the diversities that exist among us and welcome the richness of the different regions, histories, and contexts from which we come.** We recognize and build upon the strengths of our unique, yet interwoven, perspectives; and respect our multiple positionalities and identities.



<sup>3</sup>Ubuntu is often translated as “humanity towards others” or “I am because you are”. It is a Nguni Bantu term from Southern Africa. ‘Ubuntu’ speaks to the universal connection between all humans . A shared sense of compassion, responsibility, and humanity for all. It is a concept that is grounded in African thought and identity, and has an important and positive message for the whole world.

# HOW WE DO WHAT WE DO



We commit to center intersectional feminist systems change, accountability towards one another, decolonization of our minds and practices, and solidarity to transform patriarchal masculinities and unequal forms of power, through movement-building and gender transformative work with men and boys.

We must name and call out the power abuses and violent practices that have driven the world to this situation and we accept the responsibility to join the broader call for systems change by intersectional feminist, environmental- and social justice movements.

**We build on the work of feminist women's rights defenders who articulated gender and patriarchy in connection with systems of oppression; LGBTQI rights activists who fought for inclusion and dignity in our journey for equal rights; and racial, social justice and environmental movements who paved the way before us.**

We are grateful for the leadership and generosity with which feminist, women's rights, youth, LGBTQI rights and environment- and social justice activists and organizations contributed to the discussions throughout the journey of the Ubuntu symposium, and commit to continue learning from their critical analysis in our work with men and boys.

# HOW WE BUILD ON OUR PREVIOUS COLLECTIVE ORGANIZING & AGREEMENTS



**We reaffirm our commitments made in the previous MenEngage Global Symposia: the Rio (2009) and Delhi (2014) Declarations and Calls to Action, as well as Regional MenEngage Symposia (2009 and 2018) in Africa, and Masculinities colloquia (2017 and 2019) in Latin America.**

The Delhi Declaration and Call to Action set a benchmark for members, partners and the broader field, following the long standing lead of feminists movements, of identifying patriarchy at the root of the problem-analysis, and affirming that transforming masculinities is part of the work to dismantle patriarchy.

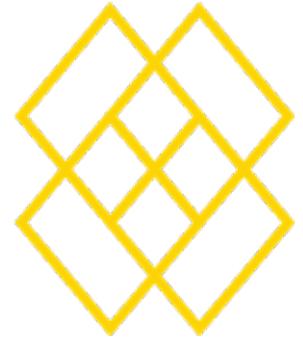
Since Delhi, we have sought to expand, nuance, deepen and strengthen our collective political work to transform patriarchal masculinities. We are committed to the principles expressed in our previous agreements, as well as to those we now share in this Declaration.

# COMMITMENTS AND CALLS TO ACTION



As an outcome of the Ubuntu Symposium, we affirm the following commitments and calls to action, for NGOs, INGOs, Research Institutions, Networks, Campaigns, UN Agencies, Governments, Donors, Multilateral Agencies, Private sector, Media, the MenEngage Alliance members and others, institutions and individuals, who are involved or planning to be involved in this work. We acknowledge that learning and commitment are needed, in order to ensure that all our efforts and actions are advanced through the comprehensive approaches and lenses outlined below, which form the central pillars for the work we do:

# INTERSECTIONAL FEMINIST APPROACHES



**We commit to firmly rooting our work with men and boys to transform patriarchal masculinities in intersectional feminist principles and analysis.**

We seek to adopt approaches that take learning from historical and contemporary feminist and social justice struggles to dismantle patriarchy and its intersecting systems of oppression, including, but not limited to, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, racism, colonialism, adultism, ableism, xenophobia, classism, casteism, and capitalism.

We commit to following the leadership of feminist women's rights and

intersectional environmental and social justice movements across our programs, advocacy, research, collective organizing and movement building. Critical to this task is centering and elevating the agency, voices, analysis and demands of women; LGBTQI individuals; people of color; Black, indigenous and youth communities - centering those living at these intersections and who are on the margins of the margins. We commit to unpacking how systems of oppression are gendered, and how they create hierarchies that devalue the experience of women, girls, and gender non-conforming people from spheres of power and decision making, while elevating those of men and masculinities.

*(See annex Intersectional Feminisms)*

# FEMINIST SYSTEMS CHANGE



**We commit to gender transformative work with men and boys** that learns from, is informed by, and builds upon intersectional feminist analysis and practice. We commit to working to **dismantle unequal power structures and patriarchal systems** to advance the feminist systems change agenda towards social, economic and environmental justice, given the interwoven nature of global patriarchal exploitation with other systems of oppression.

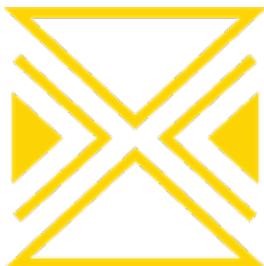
**We commit to critical reflection about patriarchal masculinities in our work with men and boys, including institutional and ideological levels, as well as efforts to change individual men's attitudes and behaviors.**

We acknowledge the importance of working to transform harmful practices and behaviours at individual and group levels. But we know that working at the micro-level is not enough, and we commit to support the feminist systems change agenda towards social, economic and environmental justice, and to bring men and boys onboard as advocates for systemic transformation.

*(See annex Feminist Systems Change)*



# ACCOUNTABILITY



**We commit to accountability and taking responsibility as the only way forward.**

We will uphold accountable practices that are responsive to the intersectional feminist social change agenda. We will transparently address potential harm, conflicts of interest and unintended effects of all our interventions, organizing and fundraising.

**We commit to holding ourselves accountable to the principles and standards** that we have developed for the work on transforming masculinities and engaging men and boys in gender equality and justice including developing and strengthening our own capacities and practices to do so.



**We commit to staying alert to inequalities around us, and to acting accountably** so that, whenever we have the opportunity to access a platform, a microphone, or a 'seat at the table', we shall check whether and why countless groups are excluded from such opportunities, and explicitly voice concern for these inequalities and exclusions.

Whenever some individuals or groups are silenced or made invisible when we are granted voice and privilege, we shall make all efforts to center them by either stepping back ourselves or sharing the space if that strengthens their position. In that light we commit to the principle: 'nothing about us without us', and seek to be held accountable for this principle in our work moving forward as a collective.

*(See annex Accountability)*

# YOUTH

**We, including young leaders, commit to valuing the agency, perspectives and leadership of youth movements and young people in all our diversities, to centering young voices in our decision-making and agenda-setting, and mutually sharing knowledge, resources and opportunities to support and advance meaningful youth participation towards system change.**



**We commit to working intergenerationally, building on the histories and expertise across the movements;** creating spaces for meaningful participation of youth; fostering intergenerational dialogue, peer-peer spaces of support, and mentoring. We commit to meaningful youth participation in programs and policies that seek to transform patriarchal masculinities as contributors, decision-makers, and as stakeholders.

*(See annex Youth)*

# DECOLONIZATION



**We commit to questioning and unpacking how colonial, eurocentric, Global-North hegemonic structures of power and dominance continue to produce inequalities around the world.**

We acknowledge that the field of gender transformative work with men and boys, including funding for this work, is not immune to these dynamics and we commit to gearing our efforts to dismantling such practices and systems.

**We commit to challenging unequal structures and manifestations of power and control that perpetuate privileges over universal rights in our own thinking, organizing and actions,** and to work towards decolonizing our minds, practices and organizing, including how knowledge is produced and shared.

*(See annex Decolonizing)*



# INNER WORK FOR SOCIAL CHANGE



**We commit to an ongoing reflective practice for transformative awareness of self and others, as well as of the systems from which complex social problems arise.**

We acknowledge that all our commitments made here may not be possible unless we do the inner work required to propel social change. **We believe that personal transformation is deeply interwoven to social change**, and we call for reflection on power and privilege, as well as how we are positioned within the systems of oppression. This is particularly pertinent in the work with men and boys, who are historically privileged by patriarchy. We commit to continuous self-reflection and related change processes to become the change we want to see in the world.

# POWER-WITH, ALLYSHIP AND MOVEMENT-BUILDING

**We commit to supporting and acting in solidarity, as meaningful allies, to intersectional feminist, environmental and social justice movements and organizing,** both on the streets and in the halls of power. We seek to do so by radically listening and learning from these movements and from the lessons they have learned and shared over time, from their leadership, and to reach out, build bridges and work together in allyship.

**We commit to centering and elevating the knowledge and thought leadership arising from feminist movements' efforts to work as diverse collectives towards shared visions,** and the contributions of global south feminists and leaders in capturing these lessons learned on how power can be held horizontally and collectively.



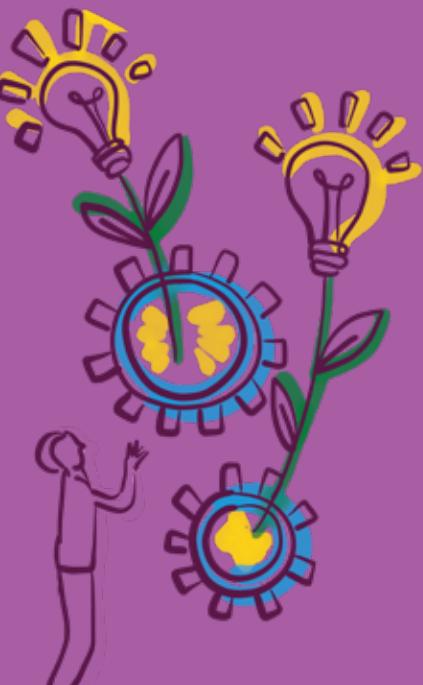


**We commit to engaging with the people and groups who are privileged and benefit from the way power is currently distributed, to transform all forms of oppressive power (power-over) and dominance.**

We commit to deep self-reflection and to creating opportunities to collectively unpack the way power is held and maintained within our own organizing. We commit to creating spaces to continue to engage in strengthening partnerships, networks and alliances as a political act and social change strategy, centering movement building and power-with in all our work towards challenging and transforming the status quo.

*(See annex Power-with, Allyship & Movement-building)*

# ANNEX



# Ubuntu

We seek to come to a careful understanding and use of the philosophy of Ubuntu, being cautious of its implications for a social change network working with men and boys to transform patriarchal masculinities. As a philosophy, Ubuntu centers a shared humanity based on dignity, beyond all binaries. However, we see how patriarchal notions and adaptations of the Ubuntu philosophy have been appropriated to imply the flourishing of men over women, utilizing the concept as a tool for the reinforcement and replication of patriarchal ideologies. Central to Ubuntu's original conceptualization, is the idea that an individual's humanity is fostered in a network of existing human relationships, as captured aptly in the Zulu definition. We believe in and elevate this understanding of the term.

## Intersectional feminisms

We recognize that the work to transform patriarchal masculinities and engage boys and men for gender equality and justice needs to recognize that the complex interconnections of various powerful, and often oppressive institutions, ideologies and systems, impact people differently depending on their sex, gender, race, sexuality, age and ability identities, among other circumstances. We seek to understand these interconnections, and their interplay in the direct and disproportionate impact on the lives of people often marginalized and excluded. Critical to this task is listening to, centering and elevating the voices, analysis and demands from those on the margins of the margins, for their imperative contributions towards dismantling the ruling power structures in light of their positionalities.

<sup>4</sup>AWID, ChangingTheir World Concepts and Practices of Women's Movements: [https://www.awid.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/changing\\_their\\_world\\_2ed\\_full\\_eng.pdf](https://www.awid.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/changing_their_world_2ed_full_eng.pdf)

<sup>5</sup>CREA, All about power

<sup>6</sup>Ibid

We acknowledge and uphold the heritage of intersectional work and theory, arising from feminist movements in the Global South, and built on and conceptualized by Global North feminists of color. We recognize that the work to engage men and boys to achieve and sustain gender equality can only be transformative when rooted in a vision of justice that is feminist in how it understands the many layers of interplay of power and privilege that create systems of oppression, noting alternatives to prevailing dominant narratives, seldom centered.

Racism, classism, casteism, ableism and adultism further exclude and disenfranchise people, but disproportionately women/girls of color, immigrants, indigenous people, and LGBTQI people, especially young people. We must recognize the experiences and voices of black women, women of color, and indigenous women, who live with disabilities and other intersecting marginalized identities, who have been excluded from higher education, professional opportunities, and resources, who –as a consequence– often live in poverty and in invisibility.

## **Decolonization**

Social justice struggles across the world confront the legacies of colonialism, including current realities of neo-colonial economic relations between the Global North and Global South, including the aid industry itself. These mutually reinforcing systems of exclusion based on male supremacy, white supremacy and eurocentric hegemony and neo-liberal global corporate power that colonial practices and knowledge have perpetuated, as well as the neocolonial structures which sustain these systems, have important implications for gender transformative work with men and boys. We recognize that we operate within a global architecture of social justice, human rights,

<sup>7</sup> James Ogude, *Ubuntu and the Reconstitution of Community*. Indiana University Press: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvh4zgdk.4>

<sup>8</sup> Kimberle Crenshaw, *Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color*

aid and development, which is rooted in colonial histories and structured on power dynamics between the “Global North” over “Global South”. We recognize the urgency to work towards decolonizing our practices and the ways we organize and advocate. It is the only path to reinventing ourselves with care and in solidarity with those who have been impacted the most by practices of systemic denial of their rights, invisibility of their needs, and exclusion from essential resources and support networks.

## **Feminist Systems Change**

We seek to continue to respond to calls by feminist movements to work to eradicate patriarchal structures of power. This understanding of the patriarchal systems that must change is the global challenge we face today and that informs our gender transformative work with men and boys, at institutional and ideological levels including concrete changes in individual men’s attitudes and behaviors. Male-focused gender transformative work seeks to make visible with men and boys how their own interests are at stake in the systems change agenda being advanced by feminists across the world. Part of this agenda identifies the need to build power-with through movement building approaches.

We will continue to support the voices of feminist leaders and movements that urge us to stand up for social justice, for new inclusive economies of care, for equal rights and co-creation and decision making about humanity’s future, the planet’s resources and the full sharing of existing knowledge, structures and technological and scientific advances, with dignity and acknowledgement of our multiple roots and ancestry. We seek to continue an in-depth exploratory and capacity building process on systems change and identify our unique contribution from a men and masculinities lens.

## **Transforming Patriarchal Masculinities**

We firmly uphold that the essence of this work is to destabilize stereotypical male gender roles and hegemonic expressions of manhood. And to support manifestations of non-violent, equitable and inclusive notion of manhood, by changing social norms and institutions that shape boys' and men's behavior. This work must embrace intersectional feminist perspective and analysis, placing inequalities in privilege and power that result from patriarchy at the heart of our work with men and boys. This work must be informed by and accountable to feminist women's rights voices. We must extend beyond holding individual men to account for their patriarchal behavior, to include holding to account institutions across all sectors, national governments and the international community and global corporate interests for their respective roles and responsibilities in transforming patriarchal masculinities.

## **Accountability**

Evidence has shown that the work to transform masculinities and engage men and boys in gender equality can have positive results to advance women's rights, LGBTQI rights, and other social justice causes. At the same time we also acknowledge that, despite good intentions, it has also caused harm when done without proper care and consideration for the full impact of our actions. We have seen increased attention for the work to engage boys and men in gender equality in program and policy spaces, that has resulted in tensions among the feminist women's rights and social justice movements that the field is not upholding accountable practices resulting in diversion of priority and attention away from the collective feminist vision of justice and equality. This is especially true when the work is done with groups who may not acknowledge their relative privileges, nor their roles and responsibilities for social justice. We acknowledge that it is of utmost importance to build and work in coalitions led by

those most affected by gender injustices (including people with non-normative gender identities and expressions and sexual orientations) and that it requires a practice of accountability informed by shared analyses of gender injustices. Recent interest in investing in gender inequality by working with men and boys is a legitimate concern shared by feminist movements.

Accountability therefore is the only way forward. We believe that we must uphold accountable practices that are responsive to the feminist social change agenda. We must transparently address potential harm, conflicts of interest and 'blind-sidedness' about pitfalls and unintended effects of all interventions and investments. We have come to realise that to strengthen our accountable practices and solidarity, there is a need not only to enhance individual and organizational practices of accountability, but also to develop a shared understanding across those involved in the gender transformative work with men and boys in gender equality of the feminists transformative systems change agenda. We also have come to realise that we must keep updating the standards and principles that are there with new learnings and insights emerging from the work of grassroots organizations and networks.

## **Youth**

Young people are not just the future but also our present. We see young people working across the globe to address various critical gender, social and environmental justice issues of today. We consider ourselves accountable to youth movements and must ensure that we leave our societies and our planet in a better place for future generations. Young people must be at the table to ask critical questions and to be heard and make decisions. As Youth leaders within the Alliance, and the community at large, we recognize and acknowledge the leadership and power of young people to lead the way on a radical transformative agenda to advance women's rights and gender justice for all.

**MenEngage**

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**I AM BECAUSE** *You are*



**MenEngage Alliance**

working with men and boys for gender equality

[menengage.org](http://menengage.org)