



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

# **CRITICAL DIALOGUE ON ENGAGING MEN AND BOYS IN GENDER JUSTICE - SUMMARY REPORT**

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**Authentic help means that all those who are involved help each other mutually, growing together in the common effort to understand the reality which they seek to transform.**

Paolo Freire



# INTRODUCTION

Work with men and boys for women's rights and gender justice is receiving increasing attention from the international community, and is supported and implemented by many women's rights and other social justice organizations. At the same time, however, a number of concerns and challenges have emerged, including the implications of this work for the rights and empowerment of women and girls, as well as its place among other social and economic justice issues, such as the rights and equality of people with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities.

The MenEngage Alliance, a global network of more than 630 organizations working with men and boys for women's rights and gender justice, has worked to enhance accountability in this field for some time, building on many years of work by women's-rights organizations. The MenEngage Alliance understands accountability as the commitment that activists and organizations working in the engaging boys and men field must have toward women's rights groups and other social justice movements. It also involves the responsibility to listen to, consult and partner equally with such groups, making sure that the work of engaging men and boys makes a real contribution to social justice and gender equality, rather than being a detraction from this struggle.<sup>1</sup>

The MenEngage Alliance is currently in the process of developing a dialogue and a mutual understanding of accountability, while acknowledging the different meanings that it has for different people and institutions.

To this end, from 19th - 21st April 2016 the MenEngage Alliance facilitated an online discussion of key constituents on a range of strategic and practical questions relating to engaging men and boys and transforming masculinities in the women's rights and gender justice field. We invited participants working on engaging men and boys, and those working on women's rights and empowerment from all corners of the globe to come together and share experiences, concerns, lessons learned and recommendations about partnership, accountability and transformative work in the field of engaging men and boys in gender justice. A total of 134 people from 41 countries registered for the event.

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<sup>1</sup> The MenEngage Alliance Accountability Standards and Guidelines <http://menengage.org/resources/menengage-accountability-standards-guidelines/>

Each day of the dialogue focused on a different topic and a number of key guiding questions. Day One focused on sharing positive experiences of collaboration and partnership, as well as emerging concerns and challenges experienced around working with men and boys in women's rights and gender justice and approaches. Day Two took a deeper, more analytical approach to the key concepts of partnership, accountability and gender transformation and what these meant to participants. Day Three then focused on recommendations and ways forward, what we can do individually and together to advance the cause of women's rights and gender justice and what we recommend to donors, governments and UN agencies. What resulted was a lively, thought provoking dialogue with over 100 contributions over the course of three days.

This report summarizes and shares the key discussion points, trends and recommendations that emerged from the dialogue. A number of themes are elaborated in this report, including accountability, power, privilege and patriarchy, intersectionality and men's motivations for doing this work. It also explores how this work might become truly gender transformative by challenging structures and politicizing work with men and boys, building partnerships, addressing the question of funding, working both together and independently, working with faith leaders and with boys and young men, improving monitoring and evaluation and importantly, building networks for change.

The MenEngage Alliance would like to thank all those who participated and provided such rich, inspiring contributions. The experience helped us think more constructively about partnership, accountability and transformative work with men and boys. We hope it has inspired you too, and brought us all closer to a shared understanding and agenda for gender justice, as well as generating ideas for your own work in this area. We look forward to continuing the discussions and building partnerships in the coming months and years.

# ACCOUNTABILITY

## What is accountability?

It is clear that accountability is an issue that contributors to the e-dialogue have given a lot of thought to, and something they work actively to incorporate into their personal and professional lives. Accountability, however, means different things to different people. Several contributors commented on the lack of a clear definition of the concept. Exactly who should be accountable to whom, or what, in this field was a key topic of discussion. Accountability to the women's movement was highlighted as an important strand, as well as to programme beneficiaries, communities, donors, partner organizations and colleagues. Participants referred to accountability to their own families, to the next generation, and to the ideals of gender equality and social justice. Accountability of governments, UN agencies and the private sector to the public, as well as men's responsibility to hold other men to account, were other important aspects identified in the discussion.

Various levels of accountability, such as horizontal, vertical and diagonal; interpersonal and institutional; and personal and professional accountability were discussed. In this context, horizontal accountability refers to the responsibilities that different civil society actors and organizations have to act accountably towards one another. Vertical forms of accountability are those in which citizens and their associations play direct roles in holding the powerful to account for their actions. Personal accountability was described as how we address our own practice, striving to ensure we behave in equitable ways. Interpersonal or relational accountability involves strategies to build gender-equitable dynamics and processes in interaction. It addresses the politics of whose voices are heard, who decides and who leads, who does the less visible behind-the-scenes work, whose efforts are given attention and praise, and so on. Institutional accountability involves structures of consultation and collaboration between the different strands of the gender justice movement. This was identified as particularly important when planning new initiatives to work with men and boys, so that they are accountable to, and consult with, women's rights activists and other social justice groups. Many contributors stressed the importance of accountability at all these levels. In particular, personal accountability was seen as essential for professional accountability. Our personal beliefs, behaviours and relationships must reflect those we want to see in the world. Accountability, therefore, is not something that can be exercised in one environment and switched off in another.

Many contributors described accountability as an intentional process, a way of working and living, rather than just an outcome in itself. Accountability in that sense is not merely a reactive process, holding people to account when they do something wrong, but rather a proactive, positive process of being an ally, supporting others and preventing problems. Acknowledging privilege and being sensitive to power in relationships were identified as key factors in the process of accountability. Privileges, beliefs and assumptions, as well as power in relationships, must be identified and challenged in order for us to act accountably. As put by one contributor, accountability is 'the unlearning of power and privilege' (see also the section on "Power, Privilege and Patriarchy"). In this process, mistakes are inevitable, as we are all products of patriarchy. Nonetheless, a number of common actions to maintain accountability emerged from the contributions, including actively seeking feedback and criticism, truly listening to others, being transparent in decision-making processes, acknowledging wrongdoing and making amends. Several contributors described accountability as asking difficult questions, or putting oneself in uncomfortable situations. Honesty and respect were key values associated with accountability.

Accountability is a vital underpinning to all work for social change and transformation, and is particularly important in social movements with diverse actors and allies. Many contributors stressed the importance of establishing mechanisms for accountability such as training and policies, and were committed to building or strengthening such mechanisms within their organizations. However, others warned that the process of creating accountability mechanisms could in itself pose accountability problems as they risk being imposed from above in a patriarchal manner. 'Self-facilitated', participatory accountability mechanisms are therefore seen as preferable to those imposed from outside or above. However, accountability guidelines targeting the field of work on engaging men and boys, such as the International Rescue Committee's 'Engaging Men Through Accountable Practice' (EMAP) tool and the MenEngage Alliance Standards and Guidelines of Accountability can be support tools, as an entry point for organizations to discuss the issue and come up with their own context-specific standards and mechanisms.



**One test of accountable practice is that we have to do things which may make us uncomfortable. In specific terms, it means how do we reach out when it is not part of the project design or overall fund envelop? How do we listen to those we haven't heard from before? How do we share our resources when we know the resources are scarce? And finally, how do we face up to questions about 'breach of conduct' from those who have no authority?**

Abhijit Das - Centre for Social Justice, India



**Accountability in my personal life is about trying to practice equality and respect each and every day. It is about the way I relate to the women, the girls, the boys and the men in my life, making sure I practice what I preach in every interaction.**

Ruben Reyes - Puntos de Encuentro, Nicaragua



## Accountability to women's rights movements

Accountability towards women's rights movements is seen as fundamental to the work of engaging men and boys in gender justice. Many contributors from organizations working with men and boys described how these organizations grew out of the women's-rights movement and continue to actively partner with them. Those from groups and organizations working with men and boys explained how they were founded on feminist principles, and owed their existence to the ground-breaking work of the women's movement. They therefore have gender equality, the rights and empowerment of women and girls as their overall objective and vision. Many started their organizations to support the work of women's-rights organizations and later realized that this was not enough; they had to work with men on their own roles and responsibilities. These organizations are generally trusted and supported by women's-rights organizations.

However, as the field of engaging men and boys has grown rapidly in recent years, many new organizations have emerged that do not necessarily have the same grounding in feminist principles or connection to women's-rights movements. The work of engaging men and boys may be done by development organizations that do not seek partnerships with women's-rights organizations nor have women's rights and/or gender equality as a key area of focus, but rather see it an issue to be 'mainstreamed' or 'integrated'. Gender can be used to depoliticize the feminist challenge to patriarchy, to compel it to be 'nice' and soft, so that it becomes something technical that focuses on individual empowerment rather than on the structural factors that underpin patriarchy. This can also mean that work with men and boys is sometimes seen as separate from working towards gender equality. On the other hand, some of these organizations have pro-actively sought to build trust and credibility with the women's rights movements.

Overall, contributors from organizations working with men and boys reported high levels of support and collaboration with women's-rights organizations and a growing acceptance that working with men and boys is essential to the achievement of gender justice for all. However, some highlighted experiences in which women's-rights organizations have been critical or sceptical of their work, and many had been warned of the dangers of reinforcing paternalistic roles, taking over leadership positions from women, dominating spaces for conversation and siphoning off funding for work with women and girls. Many contributors have been working actively to address these concerns, to partner with women's-rights organizations and to build accountability into these partnerships. This involves pro-active processes that require a great deal of time and attention.

Several participants emphasized the need to frame engagement with men and boys as complementary to the overall goal of the rights and empowerment of women and girls. Others highlighted the importance of seeking feedback from women's-rights organizations and involving them in their decision-making processes, for example allocating a certain number of board seats to members of women's-rights organizations, or creating 'advisory councils' of women's organizations. Others have invited women's-rights organizations to conduct programs together with men and boys, have contributed to women's-rights programmes by adding a men and masculinities lens, or have engaged in joint advocacy.



A number of participants raised the notion of mutual accountability in this context, highlighting a need for accountability of those working with men and boys to women's-rights organizations, and also mutual accountability, respect and learning between all gender justice actors. All organizations working on gender issues must be accountable to each other, but also to feminist principles, to a shared set of values and to the overall goal of gender justice.



**One thing that strikes me is that in many of these experiences, the work with men and boys has grown out from women-led organizations and interventions. This is a key example of where accountability moves from principle to practice - how do you ensure your work is accountable to the individuals and organizations that started it off, and created the space for it to happen?**

Jacqui Stevenson - ATHENA Network, UK



## Men's accountability to other men

Another strand of accountability that was discussed was the responsibility of men to hold other men to account for harmful behaviour. (Pro-) feminist men have a responsibility to stand up against violence, discrimination and any other harmful behaviour they witness. As one contributor mentioned, it should not be women's role to hold men to account. Men should hold each other to account. Several contributors discussed the importance of calling out other men for negative behaviour or comments, and highlighted the courage required to do so. The rise of regressive, 'anti-women's rights' groups was mentioned, and the key role that the engaging men and boys in women's rights and gender justice movements could play in response to such groups

## North/South accountability

Accountability between those in the global North and those in the global South was another important layer identified. A number of participants expressed the need for greater worldwide solidarity based on principles of justice and equality. It was also noted there is a danger of pushing Northern goals and aspirations on the global South, ignoring cultural context and mimicking patriarchal power relations. Large, Northern organizations have a responsibility to the organizations and communities they work with in the South to listen to their concerns and make meaningful adaptations of their interventions to local cultures and contexts. In order to truly work in locally rooted approaches, small, local NGOs working on gender equality must be supported and funded, including by large development organizations. Mid- and small-size organizations, including in the global South, should also have direct access to and ownership over their own resources, on their own terms.

# TACKLING POWER, PRIVILEGE AND PATRIARCHY

The recognition of the power and privileges granted to certain groups under patriarchy is essential to the pursuit of accountability and meaningful partnerships. Many contributors reminded us that privilege and injustice are often invisible to the dominant group in society, and that most men are unaware how they are both privileged and harmed by the patriarchal system. For this reason, acknowledging power and privilege is a crucial component in interventions with men and boys. It is also an essential exercise for all those working in the field of gender justice; in particular, those granted certain privileges based on gender, class, ethnicity or other factors. Many contributors described having struggled with the question of how to use their privileged position in a positive way to challenge the unequal/unjust system, and how to avoid replicating patriarchal power structures in their work. While there was no clear-cut answer to this question, constant reflection on power and privilege was identified as an important element that has brought added value to contributors' personal and professional lives.

For many, it was identified as a missing dimension which has provided a link between the personal and the political in their work.

Many contributors described uncomfortable experiences of being faced with the reality of the privileged position they hold in society at the expense of others, and the difficulty of beginning to dismantle such deeply ingrained privileges. A number of contributors, however, acknowledged a level of scepticism among the women's-rights movements that men would ever truly renounce their privilege and noted that some 'pro-feminist' men display only symbolic change and want to continue to enjoy privileges in their work and relationships. Several contributors highlighted the fact that a lot of the work with men and boys for gender equality is done without an in-depth analysis of patriarchy and gender power relations. In addition, while emphasizing the damage patriarchy causes to men is an important aspect of the work, power and privilege must be tackled head on in order to go beyond superficial change.



**I have seen many well intentioned men in the field of male engagement having to look inwards and recognize ways in which they may still be perpetuating behaviours which reflect the use of power, privilege and patriarchy. These attitudes and behaviours are so deeply ingrained within each person. I have watched with wonder and respect how these men ... chose the tough road to be not only more accountable in their work, but in their personal lives too.**

Kamani Jinadasa - Independent Consultant, Sri Lanka



# INCORPORATING INTERSECTIONALITY

A number of contributors referred to the importance of addressing and including diversity and intersectionality. They noted that men and women experience privilege and oppression in different ways, depending on class, sexuality, ability, faith, nationality/ethnicity etc., and that therefore there can be greater differences among women and among men than there are between the sexes. Women too can face oppression along these same axes, and not all development work with women and girls takes a feminist analysis or addresses the issue of power and privilege that go beyond individual empowerment or agency.

Gender inequality is not the only axis that matters to people. It operates in conjunction with other forms of inequity (racism, homophobia, economic elitism/inequality etc.). Contributors shared that it is important, therefore, that we look at how these issues intersect. Work with men and boys, and on masculinities, as well as work with women and girls, needs to be clear that intersectionality is part of the framework to promote transformative change in gender power relations. That means programs and interventions should not fragment men only into categories like caring father, responsible partner, men who have sex with men, etc. and move beyond the male/female sex-binary to look at the intersecting social hierarchies of inequality and oppression, in each local context. Connecting patriarchy with other manifestations of social injustice can support men to re-frame their ideas about gender equality, and policies that recognize intersectionality can reach those who are marginalized by traditional approaches and create change on a larger scale.

Intersectionality means looking at the deeper problems and issues of the day and asking how they relate to sexism. What are the other bodies of thought and political currencies that need to gain traction in order to better understand the issues? How can we identify promising new alliances and advance or sustain global movements for social justice? Leaving these deeper questions out of our analysis risks reinforcing both patriarchy and heteronormativity.

There was also a recognition that the 'how to' of working in intersectional ways, and translating this into policies, programs and interventions, is challenging and still needs clarification by both civil society and donors. Contributors shared some interesting experiences and practical suggestions. For example, in India, linking work on men and gender equality with class/caste inequities at community and institutional levels. Contributors wanted to see increased funding for cross-issue and intersectional work, and more grants accessible to smaller organizations working on critical aspects of this work. Some argued that the close links between gender justice and other movements must be better documented and the many shared goals across related social justice movements be elaborated.



**There is a need to explore how intersectionality can be applied and used in making connection across movements and issues, to root it more squarely in the new and evolving struggles for social justice today.**

Jerker Edstrom - Institute for Development Studies, Sussex University, UK



# MEN'S MOTIVATIONS AND WAYS OF WORKING ON GENDER EQUALITY

There was disagreement about how and why men are or should be motivated to be involved in work on women's rights and gender justice. Some contributors were clear that we should not highlight the benefits of gender equality for men themselves, because they should not be doing this work out of self-interest, and need instead to learn to give something up. They argued that, in their experience, men involved in gender justice work are doing so because they care about other people's lives, and about the pain and the suffering women experience because of sexism. They stressed that it should be altruism that is fuelling the commitment to change. We should be careful about prioritizing men and boy's sense of comfort with this work, or their centrality to it.

Other contributors felt there was need to acknowledge and address men's own gendered needs and vulnerabilities, and the ways that they too suffer, for example through male violence against men, alcohol and drug use, male suicide rates, lower life expectancy, and homophobia. This group argued that the international development community often refuses to recognize men's plight because it is too invested in the binary construction of women as victims and men as perpetrators. Here a link was made to neoliberalism and globalization, and the pressure the current system puts on men to perform economically. This pressure to fulfil society's expectations comes not only from male peers and leaders, but also from their own wives and partners, sisters and mothers.



**I would suggest that we do not need to engage men and boys by first convincing them that gender justice is in their own best interest. In many ways, it is not. And it does not address the individual's reality that they will have to give some stuff up, if men and women are to be really equal.**

Chuck Derry - Gender Violence Institute, USA



**We cannot ask men and boys to become allies to 'do something good' for women and girls. If we want to sustain their engagement we must address their needs.**

Rujuta Teredesai - Equal Community Foundation, India





**Feminism is not just about women and their lives but it provides a critical view of the world. Feminism takes a position on many issues and has a lot to offer us.**

Anand Pawar – SAMYAK, India



It was noted that economic insecurity could destabilize gender power relations and lead to violence or create a backlash from men as they lose some of their power and privilege. This is key to addressing the growing number of regressive groups of 'angry men', and to understanding their 'pain', whether this is real pain or simply the loss of privilege. Some contributors saw it as important to understand men's needs and vulnerabilities and the links to socio-political developments in order to prevent men from undermining women's rights and gender justice.

## Men and feminism

The concepts of 'feminism' and 'feminist' arose a number of times in the discussions, but were not fully explored. There was general agreement that the work with men and boys needs to be rooted in feminist principles, but little debate about what this meant. There was some discussion about the fact that there are many feminisms, not one, and that feminists are also divided by race, class, sexuality and geography, and take different positions on issues such as prostitution/sex work and pornography, democracy, militarization, peace and security, nationalism, religion, love- relations- sexualities, development, globalization, privatization, private profit, private property, access and control over resources, food security, social securities, macro-economic, military expenditures, property rights, North-South debates, etc. Those working with men and boys and masculinities also take different positions on this, and there needs to be dialogue and mutual understanding, though not necessarily consensus, on these issues when they arise. Feminist movements across the world have a lot to offer in this regard.

It was also pointed out that, as the work with men and boys in women's rights and gender justice is becoming more popular, there are likely to be increasing numbers of initiatives that will not have the feminist roots that were common in the past. (see section on Accountability to the women's movement above.)

However, it was also noted that there are many men, particularly young men, who are acutely aware, well-informed and plugged-into feminist work. Many men described their organizations as based on a feminist framework or rooted in a women's rights perspective, and stressed that alliances with the women's rights movements and feminist politics have to be an intrinsic part of work with men and boys, rather than just a separate strategy.

## Approaches to engaging men and boys

The e-dialogue highlighted the many approaches taken to engaging men and boys in the context of promoting gender equality. It also explicitly brought to the fore that there were many different perspectives and that there is not always consensus. Acknowledging this, and the diversity in our movements, is important in itself. There is no 'one-size-fits-all' but as many different approaches as there are contexts. For example, while some contributors felt it was important not to be 'too soft' on men, or 'let them off the hook', others argued that a positive approach is needed so that men are not discouraged from engaging in this work.

The former group is concerned that focusing on the ways gender norms harm men and boys themselves, or the 'soft' way in to the work, reinforces a gender binary that fails to address patriarchy, power and privilege and only serves to address men's self-interest. It is then easy for work with men and boys to fall into the paternalistic trap. 'Gender' can be used to depoliticize a feminist challenge to patriarchy, and to make women's work that of also addressing problems of masculinities.

The latter group argued that it is important not to scare men away, and that starting with violence, for example, may not be an effective strategy if it makes men feel accused. Starting with an issue such as fatherhood and then moving into some of the more difficult discussions of power, privilege and patriarchy may be a more effective and positive entry point into gender equality for men.

One contributor described the dilemma within his organization of wanting to make campaign messages targeted at men positive and encouraging, but at the same time recognizing it is difficult, and possibly undesirable, to create positive campaigns about tough issues such as femicide. Another suggested that a 'soft' start might then lead men into the more difficult and harder analysis on patriarchal privilege. But for this to happen, as one contributor noted: "Male activists - as well as the male subjects in our interventions - [should] not confuse the paternalistic milestone as a comfortable goal or the end of their journey of change." Thus, engaging men based on their own lived realities, can be an entrance point to engage them in a more political, women's rights and gender justice agenda, provided - and this is crucial- that this engagement does not stop with the 'soft' approach.

It was clear from the discussion that more work and more analysis needs to be done on the spectrum of ways in which men and boys can be engaged in gender equality.



**My dilemma is, how to balance the twin goals of developing feminist, critical consciousness and this demand to present a soft, innocent and harmless male image so more men can listen to the message of gender equality?**

Madhu Kushwaha - Banaras Hindu University, India



# HOW TO MAKE THE WORK WITH MEN AND BOYS GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE



**A narrow focus on changing individual men and boys may not really challenge patriarchal structures and systems like caste, race, religion or institutions like media, state or militaries, which create the meaning of masculinities.**

Anand Pawar – SAMYAK, India



**I believe the inevitable evolution of work with men and boys will be towards better understanding/ more integration of engagement around masculinities (systemic power differentials, discrimination/ oppression, political economy, militarization, etc.) to complement the individual work and a more intersectional lens to all our engagements.**

Abbas Mancey - Carya, Canada



Addressing power and privilege is central to the work of transforming masculinities and promoting a equal world. Yet at the same time, the word "transformative" is being used without apparent conceptual clarity. To make progress, what is needed is the transformation of gender systems that involve everyone, and the building of a unified movement for the common goal of gender justice and gender equality. This means viewing the work with men and boys and the women's movements as having a common goal, that of enhancing women's rights and gender justice for all, even if different approaches are sometimes taken to reach it.

## Challenge structures and politicize work with men and boys

There is opportunity, through gender analysis, to make men aware of patriarchy and how it interplays with different injustices. From there, they can be mobilized for broader social justice issues, for example economic or climate injustice. However, some interventions with men and boys remain apolitical and do not focus on issues like sexual diversity or sexual rights.

The difference between working with men and boys and working with masculinities emerged as a common theme. While working at an individual level with men and boys is important, it is also important to challenge the larger, political structures of patriarchy and issues such as homophobia, militarization, political economy, etc. There is a need to politicize work with men further, as many of you reminded us that 'the personal is political'. Men also need to learn how to turn their changed attitudes and behaviours into action in their community, where they are often still the power-holders. As one contributor noted, most of the work on men and boys is still with those who hold the least power in their communities, even if they still wield it in the home.

## Build meaningful partnerships

Many contributors highlighted a need for collaborative or more deliberate efforts to listen to, learn from, build on and complement the women's movements' long-standing experience with analysis, advocacy and organizing. In the dialogue as a whole, the word 'partnership' was mentioned 155 times!

True collaboration means building partnerships with each other and with women's rights and feminist groups. Contributors agreed that partnerships are experienced as more positive when they are organic, rather than induced - for example by donors. They identified making time for getting to know each other, defining expectations and boundaries, and reflecting and learning from each other as important factors to be built into partnerships to make them mutually accountable. This applies at all levels: from boardrooms to the community, as well as cross-national/regional partnerships. There is a need to collaborate on an agreed set of principles, with clear terms of reference and an ethical foundation that recognizes the strengths and perspectives of all parties. Partnership involves stretching our own ideologies to understand the others' perspective, without compromising our own principles and values.

This need to build and nurture partnerships between the engaging men and boys field and the women's movements was stressed throughout the three days, as well as the need to create partnerships across the gender justice spectrum and with other social justice movements. Several contributors also mentioned the need for more partnerships with governments, institutions and service deliverers in order to maximise the impact of the work with men and boys, to advance women's rights and gender justice.



Contributors reminded us that building equal partnerships based on shared values is not easy. They take time. They may involve some difficult questions, for example, can you partner with an organization which advocates against abortion to talk about sexual violence and domestic violence? Can you talk about gender-based violence in places where women's rights are severely restricted? Partnerships are also difficult to forge in the absence of resources. They are challenged when there is competition for funding and the desire to gain recognition. We must, therefore, find new ways of sustaining partnerships that are not dependent on donor resources.



**Transparency, respect, joint decision making, collaborative leadership and a common agenda are key elements of a vibrant and viable engagement and partnership.**

Patricia T. Morris, Ph.D – Morris Consulting, USA



**I think the most critical partnerships are between women's movements and the initiatives of men and boys, intentionally working in alliance and for mutual learning and support. It is uplifting indeed to see the many examples of this kind of vibrant linkage that have been shared in this space.**

Srilatha Batliwala - AWID, India



## Address the question of funding

Several participants pointed to the issue of scarcity of resources, particularly funding, which remains a topic of much debate in the field of gender equality.

First, there is a deep concern that small NGOs, especially women's-rights groups, are being squeezed out as funding focuses increasingly on larger organizations. International development is becoming increasingly privatized to big Northern consultancies and the space for funding for smaller organizations is decreasing – which means that it is more necessary than ever to work together. This feeds into the issue of North/South accountability and the responsibility of large Northern donors to partner with local organizations instead of reproducing hierarchical power relations.

## HOW TO MAKE THE WORK WITH MEN AND BOYS GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE

Second, there is a perception that funding for women's groups may be drawn away to fund work with men and boys, thus pitting them against each other. More research is needed here, but there is a clear recognition that funding for women's rights should not decline with the increased attention given to engaging men and boys. Nor should women's and women's organizations time be taken for granted - women's thought leadership is often requested for free in a time of limited resources.



**Funding for women's-rights organizations, which is what has borne the fruits of what the men and boys' movement is riding on, should not decline with the onset and intensification of men and boys' engagement.**

Catherine Nyambura – Dandelion, Kenya



**Resources such as time, funding, etc. need to be openly and transparently considered as everyone involved needs to be treated and respected equally so as not to perpetuate dominant or oppressive power hierarchies.**

Abbas Mancey -Carya, Canada



In the light of the difficult funding environment, many contributors suggested strategies for increasing financial support for women's rights and gender justice. One such strategy is increased advocacy with donors on the importance of maintaining support for women's-rights organizations and on the politics and negative effects of structuring competition between organizations working with men and boys for gender justice and women's-rights organizations. Contributors argued that donors need to increase funding to smaller, local NGOs, strengthen grants for more collaborative and learning initiatives across the gender justice field, and understand that working with men and boys in silos is unhelpful to the discourse on gender justice. Many stressed that groups working with men and boys for gender justice must avoid direct competition with women's-rights organizations, and help to mobilize funds for women's-rights groups. One suggestion was that we could try and come to a consensus where the work with men and boys in the context of women's rights should not be allotted more than a certain percentage of overall funding. Beyond funding, contributors would like to see improved technical assistance and advisory initiatives, and the showcasing of positive initiatives on gender equality.

## Working together (and apart)

It is important that work with men and boys is not seen as a 'fix all' in gender equality/justice. While there was a recognition that most 'men's organizations' do not work solely with men and boys and many 'women's organizations' do work with men and boys, several contributors mentioned how work with men may not be relevant or productive in all aspects of women's rights and empowerment, and how certain initiatives should remain focused on, and led by, women. Contributors expressed frustration that donors often require women's organizations to work on men and masculinities when this work is not always relevant.

A discussion emerged about the issue of separate spaces for work with men and women. One of the common problems identified when working with mixed groups, is that men often dominate the conversation, simply because this is what they are used to doing, and therefore certain issues are best discussed in women- or men-only spaces, particularly at the start of a project or program. Contributors shared a range of ideas about how they had worked both separately and together with men and women. For example, one project conducted an initial training group with men and then, as men started taking action for change, introduced female trainers. Or in another case, there were parallel only-men and only-women workshops which at some point merged to create a mixed space to dialogue and learn from each other. A note of caution was also sounded, when it was suggested that it is easy for work with men and boys and on women's rights to take a parallel path, and then not to have any common spaces for engagement, resulting in the work being less likely to be truly transformative in building a more gender-just world.

One contributor clarified that whether we work with men and women together or separately, what is important is that work with either group does not take place in isolation. They argued that the concept of 'gender synchronization' is useful here. This approach does not require that men and women engage with one another all the time, or that interventions continually bring them together. Rather, it points to the broader awareness that efforts to expand women's autonomy, empowerment and access to resources is strengthened by work with men that questions hegemonic masculinity, and by efforts to challenge homophobia and vice versa. Men and women do not have to be in the same room for this to happen; indeed, it may be preferable that they are not. But as one contributor noted: "The twisting together of these strands of the gender equality movement creates a structure that is stronger than one strand alone."



**We are constantly in settings established to do work on women farmers or the gendered wage gap, and being told, what about the men? A valid question, but not in every setting where a little hard won space has been created.**

Gabrielle Hosein – University of the West Indies, Trinidad and Tobago





**Women and girls have earned the right to be recognized as leading the movement against patriarchy and their central role must remain just that - CENTRAL. The role of men and boys should be to support and complement.**

Catherine Nyambura – Dandelion, Kenya



On a broader level, the discussion on separate spaces led to a concern that women-oriented political spaces are gradually being eroded in favour of conversation about men and gender more broadly.

## Work with faith-based organizations and religious leaders

Many participants work with faith leaders to enhance the impact of their work in communities. They shared their stories of how they came to see religious leaders as crucial allies due to their powerful and respected position in society. While there is some scepticism around this work as faith communities have often imposed harmful norms affecting women's autonomy and rights, the contributions highlight the potential of this approach and the many religious leaders who are already promoting women's rights around the world. Faith is an important element of people's lives, so engagement can incorporate this element and help people to see that gender equality and faith are not incompatible. Working with faith leaders can be challenging, but is not impossible. Mutual respect, dialogue and contextual understanding are key in this process.



**Sermon guides, speeches and giving faith leaders what to say and do isn't enough, our interventions need to start with addressing faith leaders' own attitudes, understanding of theology and their practices. They need to subscribe to this process of transformation, before leading this in their communities.**

Prabu Deepan – Tearfund, Sri Lanka



## Work with boys and young men

The discussion underscored the importance of working with boys and young men, as attitudes towards gender are formed at an early age. Many contributors work actively with boys and young men to raise awareness of gender issues and challenge perceptions of masculinity. They find that young men are generally willing and interested to learn and get involved. They shared positive experiences of working with young men who have later gone on to work actively in their communities for gender equality. Many remarked that the younger generation are more favourable to gender equality and the issue of male involvement is less contentious for them. In many cases, organizations started to work with men and boys because of requests from young women, who understood that working on these issues would not be successful without the involvement of their male peers. Contributors highlighted the potential of establishing partnerships with universities and other educational establishments to reach and educate young people and the need to encourage and amplify young voices within the field.

## Improve follow up, monitoring and evaluation

The slow nature of gender transformative work with men and boys was emphasized in the discussion. A number of contributors stressed the need for periodic follow-up after such interventions in order to prevent men falling back into harmful patterns of behaviour, and urged donors to fund longer-term projects that take into account the gradual pace of behavioural and attitudinal change. Others argued for improved, longer-term evaluation of projects involving men and boys in order to build up a strong evidence base, and therefore increase funding and support for this work.

## Build networks and share information

To advance our common goals, many contributors underlined the importance of increased knowledge and resource sharing, and the creation of spaces, both online and offline, to share best practices and lessons learned. The importance of networks to provide links between local, national and regional actors and facilitate this sharing of knowledge and information, and provide tools for accountable practice, was repeatedly emphasised.



**They shared that, while they are feeling empowered, they have been realizing, while discussing with their brothers at home, that the issues that they are working on are equally important to the young boys in their homes, schools, and communities. The leaders of the girls' groups told us "The boys in our class want to learn about child rights, child protection, gender-based violence and how they can join the girls in what they are doing, but are feeling shy and are not able to step up and express their interest openly.**

Laxman Belbase – the MenEngage Alliance, USA



# CONCLUSION AND KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The MenEngage Alliance would like once again to thank all of those involved in this rich conversation. The dialogue raised many important questions that remain to be answered and it is clear that we need to continue to create and engage in spaces for conversation with one another. The discussion brought to the fore some of the many commonalities between the various actors in the women's rights and gender justice movement, as well as some differing perspectives and areas of disagreement. Acknowledging this, and that diversity exists between those working in the field of engaging men and boys in gender justice, just as within the women's-rights movement, is crucial so as not to generalize either field of work and to ensure that dialogue remains fruitful, whether it reaches consensus or not.

Many of you have shared practical ideas that we hope we can take forward together. Some of the key recommendations were:

- Strengthen personal and professional accountability in the women's rights and gender justice movement, including through the development of context-specific accountability mechanisms within organizations, and constant awareness of privilege and power dynamics in every aspect of our work.
- Ensure that addressing power, privilege and patriarchy is central to all work with men and boys.
- Find ways of incorporating an intersectional approach into programmes and policies and moving beyond the outdated male/female binary.
- Document the close links between gender justice and other social justice movements, and build on the many shared goals.
- Politicize work with men and boys, and move towards work on transforming masculinities, including making men aware of broader systems of oppression, and not shying away from sensitive issues such as sexual diversity and sexual rights. This does mean addressing men's needs and vulnerabilities, but in the context of gender equality.
- Build meaningful partnerships across the gender justice movements in order to enhance impact and accountability. Establish organic partnerships based on a joint set of values principles, based on mutual respect, and finding ways to build and sustain partnerships both when resources are available and in their absence.
- Avoid competition for funding between 'work with men and boys' and 'work with women and girls', and ensure work with men and boys does not detract from overall funding for women's rights and empowerment.

- Advocate for increased funding for women's rights and gender justice, particularly for small, local organizations who do crucial yet often invisible work. Donors should increase funding for intersectional work and make grants accessible to smaller organizations working on critical aspects of our movements.
- Explore different combinations of male and female groups and 'gender synchronized' approaches, and ensure work with one group is not done in an isolated manner, while at the same time respecting the spaces required to build women's leadership and participation.
- Increase work and partnerships with faith-based approaches, their organizations and religious leaders.
- Support meaningful youth participation and increase work with boys and young men, and build upon the perceived generational shift towards increased cooperation for gender equality.
- Build and strengthen networks that enable the sharing of information, knowledge and best practices in the gender justice field.
- Build the evidence base for work with men and boys on women's rights and gender justice by conducting research and long-term project evaluations.

## Next steps for the MenEngage Alliance

To move forward with our work on accountability and partnerships, and building on the outcomes of the e-dialogue, the Alliance commits to do our very best to making the following actions a reality in the next phase:

- Work together, as members and partners, to develop and establish accountability guidelines, tools and mechanisms at national and regional levels, including through supporting, contextualizing and adapting the MenEngage Alliance Accountability guidelines and tools that were developed collectively by our national, regional and global members.
- While doing so, facilitate the translation of these tools in local languages, and disseminate widely among our networks, to strengthen access to information, linking and learning.
- Based on these tools and mechanisms, conduct a series of capacity development and skills building workshops with our regional network members.
- Organize a webinar series on partnership and accountability with, and for, members and partners, and open to all.
- Develop an online course on partnership and accountability practices, in order to reach and work together with the membership base of the alliance around the world, which will be open to all.

## CONCLUSION AND KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Continue, under the leadership of our national and regional networks, to facilitate and support members to build organic partnerships among organizations and individuals, across the countries and regions, who want to exchange, include and learn about accountable ways to work on the transforming masculinities and/or engaging men and boys to advance women's rights and gender justice for all".

Finally, we would like to reiterate one of the strongest themes emerging from the e-dialogue - the need not to view the engaging men and boys and the women's rights work as separate. To move forward, we need to involve everyone in building a collective but diverse movement that advances gender justice and strives for a more equal world. We hope that by being in dialogue with each other, and work together as appropriate, we will be able to do just that.

## CONTACT US

The MenEngage Alliance is exploring next steps, and would love to hear more from you about the opportunities and needs identified in this e-dialogue. Please contact Joni van de Sand, the MenEngage Alliance Global Coordinator and Advocacy Manager at [joni@menengage.org](mailto:joni@menengage.org) if you wish to share your thoughts or suggestions on any of the issues discussed.

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# MenEngage Alliance

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