



MenEngage Alliance
working with men and boys for gender equality

10 Policy Recommendations

from lessons learned on
**effective transformative
work with men and boys
for sustainable gender
equality**

Collectively with our members and partners around the world, MenEngage Alliance has worked for over two decades with men and boys for gender equality and social justice. The recommendations in this document are distilled from the evidence that we have gathered over this time. They are meant for policymakers and thematic experts working with governments to consider in their work on women's rights, gender equality, human rights, and racial, environmental and social justice.

Context



The current context in which we seek to advance gender, racial, social and environmental justice is undoubtedly a complex and crises-ridden one. We see on the rise worldwide anti-democracy, ethno-nationalist, white supremacist, masculinist and well-funded anti-rights movements, and repressive, authoritarian governments, which have increased their attacks on gender equality and the rights of women and LGBTIQ people, particularly those who are most marginalized. We see the continued expansion of economic models shaped by corporate interests and built upon the exploitation of people and the planet - resting upon colonial histories and the present neoliberal economic order - which widen inequalities and escalate poverty for those already at the margins, rendering people underserved, voiceless and invisibilized.

The global COVID-19 pandemic laid bare the flaws of our care systems, including the unacceptable levels of inequality in access to care and preventive vaccines all over the world. We see the levels of femicide and gender-based violence against women, girls, trans and non-binary individuals - the longest standing and neglected pandemic in humanity - escalating.

Normative expectations of masculinity continue to pressure men and boys to accept violent behavior as a legitimate form of power and to exercise power through bullying, harassment and violence, including to punish non-normative behaviors. The interconnected violence perpetrated by law enforcement, military forces and authoritarian governments against their own citizens is on the rise. We see an increase in limitations of individual and collective mobilization and freedom of assembly and speech, as well as attacks on women's rights, racial and environmental justice and human rights defenders.

It is in this context of interrelated challenges, converging crises and alarming regression that we advance our work on gender justice. It has become evident that a critical element of our collective action must be to bring an end to all forms of patriarchal masculinities, as well as patriarchal patterns of exploitation, domination and control over institutions, decision-making, people and planet. Here we share 10 recommendations for how Governments and civil society can work together to tackle these challenges, in particular by transforming patriarchal masculinities and working with men and boys for gender, racial, social and environmental justice.

LGBTIQ stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer.

Care systems refer to social protection as well as health care systems implemented by governments at the national and sub-national levels.

Patriarchal masculinities refer to stereotypical, hegemonic expressions of male gender roles, masculinities and of manhood, which often present as men's and boy's entitlement, power and privilege in society, and over women, girls and gender non-conforming people.



Our Recommendations

1 Apply a **gender transformative** approach in the work on men and masculinities.

2 Support a **feminist systems change** agenda by recognising the links between patriarchal masculinities and structural barriers to gender

3 Apply an **intersectional** feminist lens to the work on men and masculinities.

4 Center **accountability** in all policies and programming that include work on men and masculinities.

5 **Broaden** how policies and development programs focus on 'gender'.

6 Engage and equip men and boys to counter patriarchal **backlash**, especially from men, in their families, local and virtual communities, and institutions of power and decision making

7 Reimagine knowledge by supporting **grassroots and practice-driven**, decolonizing, **transformative** work.

8 Invest in building **partnerships** and decolonizing the development field and agendas.

9 Create funding mechanisms for robust, **sustainable**, long-term support for gender equality.

10 **Reform** state policy by embracing feminist analysis and principles, including in the form of feminist foreign policy.

1

Apply a gender transformative approach in the work on men and masculinities



The work to advance gender equality must aim to transform gender norms, stereotypes and patriarchal masculinities, and includes uprooting the underlying assumptions that shape harmful notions and expressions of manhood. In this way, we can advance nonviolent, equitable, and inclusive standards of humanity for people of all gender identities and expressions. At the root of gender transformative work with men and boys is addressing and dismantling patriarchal power and privilege, and shifting to models of power-with vs. power-over.

[Tell me more](#)



[Further Reading](#)



We must uproot patriarchal privilege and power in all their manifestations, by embracing an intersectional feminist analysis of power and a systems change approach. The work on masculinities must move beyond educating individual men and boys about gender roles and harmful practices, to change entrenched patterns of discrimination and abuse, as well as institutional forms of exclusion.

Gender transformative work considers the role of both individuals and institutions in creating (or preventing) change. Gender transformative policy frameworks acknowledge gendered systems of oppression and the harms caused by gender inequality alongside other forms of inequality. It is key to acknowledge how individuals and communities are often trapped in—and encouraged to fit into—systems that perpetuate gender discrimination, and work to transform those systems. It is also vital to transform leadership, institutions and policies that embody patriarchal masculinities, gender norms and stereotypes.

[COFEM Feminist Pocketbook Tip Sheet #6: Men as Allies and Activists \(COFEM, 2018\)](#)

[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 \(A/HRC/38/24\), articles 5 & 10 \(United Nations, 2018\)](#)

[State of the World's Fathers 2023 \(Equimundo, 2023\)](#)

A 'power-with' model entails supporting and acting in solidarity, as meaningful allies, to intersectional feminist, racial, environmental and social justice movements and organizing, both on the streets and in the halls of power. This entails radically listening to these movements and learning from the lessons they have learned and shared over time, centering their leadership, and reaching out, building bridges and working together in allyship

Intersectional feminist analysis recognizes the complex interconnections of various institutions, ideologies and systems, that confer power and privilege or oppress people differently depending on their sex, gender, race, sexuality, age and ability, among other identities and circumstances. The work to transform patriarchal masculinities and engage boys and men for gender equality and justice must seek to understand these interconnections, and their interplay in the direct and disproportionate impact on the lives of people often marginalized and excluded by racism, classism, casteism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism and adultism. Critical to this task is listening to, centering and elevating the voices, analysis and demands of structurally excluded and disenfranchised people, such as black, Indigenous and women/girls of color, immigrants, persons with disabilities, and LGBTIQ people, especially young people.

A systems change approach seeks to dismantle unequal and discriminatory power structures, ideologies, institutions and systems. Work with men and boys must center a critical reflection about patriarchal masculinities, and seek to transform gender inequality at the institutional and ideological levels, as well as changing individual men's attitudes and behaviors. It must seek to advance a holistic agenda of systemic transformation based on feminist principles towards social, economic, racial and environmental justice, given the interwoven nature of global patriarchal exploitation with other systems of oppression.

2

Support a feminist systems change agenda by recognising the links between patriarchal masculinities and structural barriers to gender equality



Replacing unequal patriarchal power structures with fair and inclusive systems is key to enabling equal access to resources and information, eliminating gender-based violence, and building social, economic, racial and environmental justice.

Tell me more



Critical reflection about the role of patriarchal masculinities in preventing gender equality informs the work for social norms change. The work on men and masculinities that focuses on preventing harmful practices among men and boys at the individual and group levels is important. But to be sustainable, it needs to also catalyze change at the institutional and systems levels.

Transforming the norms and systems that perpetuate gender-based discrimination and violence is a long-term endeavor. It requires sustained challenges to the systemic inequalities and barriers that prevent progress in the realization of women's and LGBTIQ people's rights, gender equality and social justice.

Work to transform social gender norms must highlight how men's and boys' own interests and future are at stake, and how they can become advocates for systemic change towards a more just and sustainable world. The systems change agenda also identifies the need to build

'power with' and stand in solidarity for women's and LGBTIQ people's rights, gender, racial and social justice; for new, inclusive economies of care; for equal rights, peace, and justice; and for a sustainable green future.

It is essential to address violence perpetrated not just by men as individuals, but also by institutions led by men and designed to privilege masculinities, which impact women's rights and the advancement of gender equality. We must create strategies to work with power-holders, including men in positions of power, to facilitate the transformation of institutions, policies and systems to uphold gender, racial and environmental justice.

Further Reading



[Ubuntu Declaration & Call to Action](#) (MenEngage Alliance, 2021)

3

Apply an intersectional feminist lens to the work on men and masculinities



Transformative work on masculinities is rooted in a vision of human rights and justice that is feminist in how it understands the many systems of power and privilege that reinforce current forms of dominance and exclusion. The work with men and boys must acknowledge and respond to local contexts and historical challenges to gender equality by learning from historical and localized feminist and queer movements. By anchoring this work in intersectional feminist principles and political analysis, we can align the transformative goals of the work on masculinities with the goals of gender equality and empowered women, girls, and non-binary people.

Tell me more



Work to engage men and boys for sustainable gender equality must acknowledge that ‘masculinities’ are used to measure and orient positions of power and dominance. Patriarchal power and oppression relies on hierarchies that devalue the lived experiences of women, trans, and non-binary people and exclude them from spheres of influence and decision-making while elevating those traditionally associated with patriarchal masculinities.

Men and boys are many and diverse. Men, boys, women, girls, trans, and non-binary individuals are all human beings in specific geopolitical contexts whose diverse experiences and identities are shaped by patriarchal, racial, and other hierarchies and norms. Black, Indigenous and men of color, queer and disabled men — while maintaining relative gender privilege over women, girls, and LGBTIQ people — are discriminated against by all systems, institutions, and norms that privilege standards of masculinities based on white, cisgender, heterosexual, able-bodied, educated, and politically influential ideals.

Further Reading



[Ubuntu Declaration & Call to Action](#) (MenEngage Alliance, 2021)

[All About Power: Understanding Social Power and Power Structures](#) (Batliwala, n.d.)

Resolution 35/10: Accelerating efforts to eliminate violence against women: engaging men and boys in preventing and responding to violence against all women and girls

OHCHR Report: 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



Principles in Practise

How to operationalize a gender transformative approach and intersectional feminist analysis in policies inclusive of work with men and boys, in design, content, implementation and impact measurements?

In 2019, FemJust and MenEngage Alliance carried out analysis of 10 policies inclusive of work with men and boys, to assess how well they had integrated an intersectional feminist approach, based on principles of human rights, with a focus on accountability. The highest scoring policy was the National Policy for the Attention and Prevention of Violence against Women of All Ages, Costa Rica 2017- 2032 / Política Nacional para la Atención y la Prevención de la Violencia contra las Mujeres de Todas las Edades, Costa Rica 2017-2032. It demonstrated some promising practices in intersectional feminist policy making although more work is needed to ensure the application of this lens across the entire policy cycle.

“The policy’s primary goal is to advance gender equality, with a strong focus on transforming machista culture and building new, positive masculinities. The policy is grounded in human rights principles of equality, participation, transparency and accountability. It focuses not only on dismantling machista culture, patriarchal norms and stereotypes but also on reimagining and building new, positive masculinities. It focuses not only on men not being violent, but also on equality, care, co-responsibility and sexual pleasure. The policy recognizes multiple sexualities and diversities, which is often missing in strategies to engage men and boys.

The policy design and development process engaged feminist and women’s rights activists and organizations and diverse stakeholders including rural women, afro-descendent women, transgender women, lesbians, indigenous women, teenagers and young women, women with disabilities, women living with HIV, women sex workers, as well as men from various sectors, leading to robust policy proposals that are intersectional. Despite these promising practices, some lesbians and trans women were included in the policy design and development process, and LGBTQI activists and organizations were not extensively engaged. In policy implementation and monitoring efforts, there has been poor engagement with feminist and LGBTQI activists and organizations, as well as women, girls and LGBTQI people.”

[Accountable policy-making](#) (FemJust & MenEngage Alliance Policy scorecards, 2022)

4

Center accountability in all policies and programming that include work on men



Transforming patriarchal masculinities for inclusive gender and social justice is a collective endeavor and must be pursued in solidarity with feminist and other social justice movements. Evidence supports that gender transformative work with men and boys can advance gender equality, support the realization of the rights of women and LGBTIQ people, and the implementation of social justice policies. It also shows that work with men and boys that does not apply feminist and human rights principles such as accountability, transparency, and solidarity — no matter how well-intentioned — can cause more harm than good, and derail the gender equality agenda.

Tell me more



Work that concentrates on men’s vulnerabilities and unique needs with disregard for power dynamics, patterns of historical and current gender discrimination and exclusion, and the rights of women, trans, and non-binary individuals, is not transformative and does not address the root causes of gender inequality.

Stakeholder accountability matters. Work with men and boys started decades ago, led by grassroots feminist activists and organizations. We build upon this precious heritage as the field of men and masculinities. It is important to remember that the underlying goal of engaging men and boys in gender and development is to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of women, girls, and LGBTIQ people. Stakeholders advancing this work must spell out that goal and align their policies and strategies with it - from design, to resourcing and implementation - and in coordination with women’s rights and LGBTIQ leaders and organizations in the field.

Further Reading



‘MenEngage Alliance Accountability Standards’ (MenEngage Alliance, n.d.)

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), articles 5 & 10 (United Nations, 2018)

Report of the Working Group on Discrimination Against Women and Girls (Position Paper on Men’s Accountability for Gender Equality, 2023)

Accountable policy-making (MenEngage Alliance Policy scorecards, 2022)



Example: Accountability to all women, girls and gender nonconforming people, as well as to feminist organizations, movements and agendas

In February 2023, the Working Group on Discrimination Against Women and Girls, a Special Procedures expert group of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Geneva, developed a Report and Guidance Document on Men's Accountability to Gender Equality - following a high level consultation with organizations working to advance anti-patriarchal work with men and boys, including MenEngage Alliance, as well as feminist organizations.

The report recommends that all programs that involve work with men and boys, move “from men's mere engagement to focusing on men's accountability for gender equality to redistributing power and dismantling systems of male privilege.” The report further elaborates on why accountability is an essential pillar of work with men and boys:

States have made normative commitments recognizing the critical contributions of men and boys to the achievement of gender equality. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action envisioned men's engagement in gender equality as a necessary means of challenging and transforming the structures, norms, practices and institutions that sustain male privilege and power. The Working Group on discrimination against women and girls considers that achieving gender equality requires a significant shift, from men's mere engagement to focusing on men's accountability for gender equality to redistributing power and dismantling systems of male privilege.³

While engaging men and boys to understand and work to transform gender inequality is important, attention to how they engage is critical. The Working Group on discrimination against women and girls considers that men and boys and the organizations that work with them need to be accountable for ensuring that engagement is constructive, respectful and centred on women's and girls' human rights. “Engagement” refers to the practice of involving or addressing men, while “accountability” refers to how it must be done. At its most basic level, accountability to women means that women's and girls' human rights should be at the centre of the work with men; strong collaboration, engagement and dialogue with women's organizations are essential.¹⁷ This means accountability to eliminate discrimination against women and girls by actively contributing to changes in attitudes, norms, systems and structures and in gender roles across all spheres. While the principle of accountability is widely endorsed among actors working with men and boys to advance gender equality, in particular in work by men to counter violence, its practice is more uneven.¹⁸ Accountability to the “women's movement” is critical, as is accountability to beneficiaries and communities at large.¹⁹ Men's accountability can be considered at three levels: (a) personal; (b) interpersonal; and (c) institutional.

Report of the Working Group on Discrimination Against Women and Girls (Position Paper on Men's Accountability for Gender Equality, 2023)

5

Broaden how policies and development programs focus on ‘gender’



Gender is the backbone of patriarchal societies and shapes all power relations; it involves bodies, identities, hierarchies, and systems of control and discrimination that implicate all people. Currently, policies and development programs tend to address gender inequalities by focusing solely on cisgender women and girls. Working on women’s rights and empowerment is absolutely crucial for advancing gender equality and development. At the same time, the development field needs to broaden its understanding of gender and address the implications of gender norms and stereotypes for all people, including trans and non-binary people, in order to accelerate the achievement of gender equality.

[Tell me more](#)



Men and boys have a stake in achieving gender equality.

Patriarchal gender norms and stereotypes bestow power and privilege upon men and boys, but also have the potential to cause them harm, in addition to harming women, trans, and non-binary people, and fracturing societies. The scope of work with men and boys must expand beyond viewing men and boys in a supporting role.

The work with men and boys is about gender equality, and about how they must work towards gender equality for their own liberation as much as that of women, trans, and non-binary people. This can be an effective shift in the narrative about gender equality as a development goal to improve all societies and strengthen democracies and opportunities for all people. (Source: [Men, Masculinities and Changing Power](#). UNFPA, UN Women and MenEngage Alliance - 2014)

Policies, programs, and commitments to advance a nuanced understanding of gendered power inequalities can make a difference.

Men and boys play an oversized role in enforcing oppressive gender norms and stereotypes. They must be mobilized to recognise this, choose to be part of the solution, and contribute to a world that values equally all gender identities and lived experiences, including those of women, men, and non-binary people.

[Further Reading](#)



[What We See, What We Believe, and Our Strategic Approaches](#) (MenEngage Alliance, 2023)

[‘It’s Not About the Gender Binary, It’s About the Gender Hierarchy: A Reply to “Letting Go of the Gender Binary”](#) (Ward, 2017)



6

Engage and equip men and boys to counter patriarchal backlash, especially from men, in their families, local and virtual communities, and institutions of power and decision making



Democracies and the gender, racial, environmental and social justice agendas face formidable opponents who are both organized and well funded. The last decade has seen a rising tide of anti-gender, climate change denying, ethno-nationalist, white supremacist, masculinist, and anti-rights movements within and outside of governments and UN policy-making processes, as organized civil society organizations, and within the online spheres, which are well-resourced, exert disproportionate influence upon political narratives, and seek to consolidate control over the bodies and lives of women and LGBTIQ people.

[Tell me more](#)



The transnational, well-funded ‘backlash’ forces are threatening advocates and civil society organizations (CSOs) and the gender equality agenda. Environmental and racial justice, human rights and gender equality defenders are targets of conservative forces that oppose a future of equality and rights. Governments that seek to achieve gender equality can make a difference by being vocal supporters of those under attack, and investing in their holistic protection.

Take a firm stand on the values and approaches underpinning the work with men and boys, and how it aligns with the feminist framework of gender equality and inclusion, to unequivocally distinguish this work from that of so-called ‘men’s rights’ groups that harbor misogynistic attitudes.

Conservative narratives conflate anti-democracy and anti-gender equality attitudes in online messages and tactics. Conservative groups repackage and anchor their agendas on patriarchal values. The digital sphere has

become a breeding ground for their organizing efforts that support ‘strong men’ as alternatives to democratically elected leaders. Development efforts must support feminist voices that counter the stereotypes about men and masculinities that undermine justice-centered and democratic values.

Vet implementing partners for their commitment to gender equality and accountability to feminist movements. With the growing number of ultra conservative ‘men’s rights’-leaning initiatives, we must exercise care in the selection of which organizations working with men and boys to partner with and support.

[Further Reading](#)



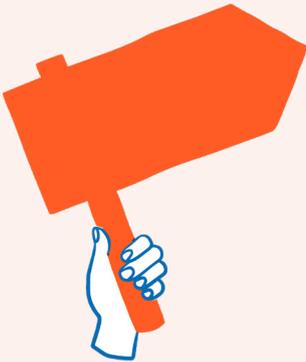
[MenEngage Ubuntu Symposium Summaries: Backlash and Fundamentalism](#) (Marekera, 2021)

[‘Grasping Patriarchal Backlash: A Brief for Smarter Countermeasures’](#) (Edstrom et al., 2023)

[‘Digital Violence: A study of the profiles of perpetrators and survivors of digital sexual violence’](#) (Campos et al., 2023)

7

Reimagine knowledge by supporting grassroots and practice-driven, decolonizing, transformative work



Investments in localized knowledge systems can accelerate change. The current field of development and human rights is often skewed towards supporting evidence-based interventions guided by large scale, well funded, quantitative research originating from Global North institutions, governments, and academics. Grassroots wisdom and practice-based work from the field, especially qualitative evidence-based promising practices of social change for gender equality from the Global South must be centered and elevated. Interventions to engage men and boys must be contextualized and scaling of one strategy across diverse regions is not always effective if not appropriately taking into account local histories, lived experiences and realities.

[Tell me more](#)



Research on men and masculinities has grown as an interdisciplinary field of academic inquiry, and more evidence is needed. Many research centers, either academic or independent, are affiliated with MenEngage Alliance, and have contributed tools, materials, and resources that inform both education programs and advocacy work on men and masculinities. Investment is needed in expanding the concept of what constitutes ‘evidence’, in qualitative studies and documentations of small scale practices in gender transformative work, and in building capacity to utilize different kinds of evidence in designing policies and programs.

The men and masculinities field still lacks a strong evidence base of gender transformative methodologies. The field can leap forward by combining local knowledge with emerging evidence regarding practices that can transform perceptions of discriminatory norms or patterns of exclusion.

8

Invest in building partnerships and decolonizing the development field and agendas



The colonial legacy that structures international development work reproduces patterns of dependency and influence between the ‘Global North’ and ‘Global South’. Achieving development goals requires acknowledgment and transformation of these power dynamics. Governments can play a key role in building bridges and fostering partnerships and alliances to accelerate change.

[Tell me more](#)



Supporting partnerships with CSOs, particularly local CSOs, and motivating stakeholders to work together in allyship, consultation, and partnership for movement-building is vital to putting resources, evidence, tools and influence to the service of the collective goals of gender equality and social justice.

Support the active involvement of local civil society in international development as partners to protect and advance human rights and gender justice. Partnerships between governments and civil society must be strengthened through engagement with local partners at various phases. By supporting grassroots organizations, including via direct funding, development agencies can maintain a robust partnership with CSOs that are stakeholders in advancing gender, racial, environmental and social justice.

Alliance-building and partnerships based on solidarity and equality with key communities, organizations and movements in the fields of women’s and LGBTIQ rights

and social, environmental, racial and gender justice make a difference. Together we can carry out better quality work that accomplishes social change, strengthens democratic processes and promotes evidence-based transformative approaches.

[Further Reading](#)



[Ubuntu Declaration & Call to Action](#) (MenEngage Alliance, 2021)

9

Create funding mechanisms for robust, sustainable, long-term support for gender equality



Feminist movements drive transformation. Yet, their work is underfunded. Despite funding commitments made, women's rights organizations receive only 0.13% of the total Official Development Assistance (ODA) and 0.4% of all gender-related aid (Dolker, et al, 2021). The commitment to support gender equality requires substantial, flexible and innovative pathways to fund feminist efforts, particularly at the local and grassroots levels. Women of color-led work needs greater funding, as does work by other structurally marginalized groups.

[Tell me more](#)



Many feminist networks and funds are well positioned to serve as intermediaries that channel funds to small organizations. International donors can avoid the micro-administrative work of overseeing small and medium-sized grants, and instead choose to strengthen existing trusted partners within feminist movements. Feminist funds, networks and consortia can fill this gap while facilitating collaboration with and strengthening small grassroots organizations.

With core funding, feminist implementing partners at the local level can strengthen their ability to make change happen. This can have much needed political and programmatic influence at all levels, nationally, regionally and globally. With the rise of anti-gender backlash groups, progressive human rights defenders need long-term, flexible support and resources more than ever before.

Acknowledge and address negative funding trends in the women's rights and gender justice field, including decreases in ODA allocated to women's rights organizations, and focused on ending violence against women and girls. Reallocate and increase funding streams to optimize available resources for gender justice work.

More funding for gender equality is urgently needed, including funding for feminist-informed, intersectional, transformative and accountable work on men and masculinities. With accountable funding practices, governments can play an important part in strengthening the field as a collaborative movement of stakeholders and feminist allies.

Yes, work to engage men and boys matters, but requiring women’s rights organizations to work with men and boys causes unnecessary friction among gender equality advocates. The work with men and boys is one way to amplify the feminist agenda for gender equality, and in and by itself is insufficient. Given the state of inequalities we live in, to achieve balance, those working with men and masculinities must embrace the feminist agenda and the leadership of feminist movements, rather than imposing on them to make changes to their work.

Further Reading



[Critical Dialogue on Engaging Boys and Men in Gender Equality: Accountability & Partnerships](#)

[‘MenEngage Alliance Accountability Standards: Accountable Fundraising’](#) (MenEngage Alliance, n.d.)

[Building Peace, the Feminist Foreign Policy Way: Good Practices](#) (Balbon et al., 2023)

[Moving More Money to the Drivers of Change: How Bilateral and Multilateral Funders Can Resource Feminist Movements](#) (AWID and Mama Cash, 2020)

[Toward A Feminist Funding Ecosystem](#) (AWID, 2019)

[Where is the Money for Feminist Organizing?](#) Data Snapshots and A Call to Action (AWID, 2021)

[What is trust based philanthropy?](#) (Trust-based philanthropy project)

10

Reform state policy by embracing feminist analysis and principles, including in the form of feminist foreign policy



The number of governments that have pledged to advance a feminist foreign policy has grown to 14 in 2024, a potentially positive trend if put into practice and guided by the ongoing consultation and feedback of feminist movements. Feminist foreign policy requires work with men, especially men in positions of power, to gain support and break resistance. It also requires analyzing how patriarchal power, systems and masculinities impede the progressive political implementation of foreign policies that truly create the conditions for gender equality. It also requires policy coherence; for example, trade, law enforcement, and defense policies must align with, rather than undermine, development policies seeking to advance gender equality.

[Tell me more](#)



At its core, feminist foreign policies must follow a feminist systems change agenda that urges governments to engage with other actors in a ‘manner that prioritizes peace, gender equality and environmental integrity [and] enshrines, promotes, and protects the human rights of all’ (Thompson et. al, 2020 - in [The 2023 Edition](#)). It involves changing how policies that a government carries out impact and relate to other nations, and it calls for coherence between foreign and domestic policies. Male-dominated leadership has prioritized violence and domination, and old paradigms of state power and control. Integrating feminist systems change agendas into foreign policy challenges colonial, extractivist and militarist power structures and political mandates at the state level.

Evidence shows that policies that lack a feminist political lens often resort to involving men only to reinforce gender inequalities, including paternalistic and patriarchal protectionist mandates that hinder women’s and girls’ autonomy, empowerment and rights.

Some feminist foreign policies have begun to include elements on engaging men and boys. This is a welcome advance if carried out in consultation with feminist movements for the development of such strategies, as well as centering gender transformative approaches.

[Further Reading](#)



[Defining Feminist Foreign Policy: The 2023 Edition](#) (Thompson et al., 2023)

[Toward a Feminist Foreign Research Policy in the United States](#) (Thompson et al., 2020)

[Accountable policy-making](#) (FemJust & MenEngage Alliance Policy scorecards, 2022)





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