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**Discussion papers
of the 3rd
MenEngage Global
Symposium**



MenEngage Alliance

working with men and boys for gender equality

About the symposium

The 3rd MenEngage Global Symposium represents the most ambitious collective activity that MenEngage Alliance has ever embarked on as an international social change network working to transform patriarchal masculinities and engaging men and boys for gender, social, and climate justice.

The convening (also known as the MenEngage Ubuntu Symposium) was adapted from plans to meet for three days in person to a seven-month online event. It was an unprecedented journey for the Alliance and for everyone involved: 5,000-plus registered participants from 159 countries and 600-plus speakers involved in 178 global sessions (plus many more at the regional, country, and local levels).

MenEngage Alliance members and partners came together to take stock of the work being done and assess what is needed going forward. The symposium provided space to share experiences, evidence, and insights on how to effectively challenge and dismantle oppressive patriarchal norms and constructions of masculinities; to identify new goals, frontiers, and strategies; and to create a forum to rearticulate a political agenda that seeks to transform unjust and deeply embedded power structures.

The [*Ubuntu Declaration & Call to Action*](#) is one of the key outcome documents from the symposium.

About MenEngage Alliance

MenEngage Alliance is an international social change network harnessing the collective energies of its members towards ending patriarchal power and supporting women's rights; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer (LGBTIQ) rights; and human rights—and achieving gender justice and social justice for all.

The Alliance is a space for organisations to come together, in solidarity with those most targeted by gender injustice and patriarchal systems, to collectively dismantle structural barriers to women's rights and gender equality. As a global network, MenEngage Alliance brings together people and organisations with a shared vision of a world in which gender justice and human rights are recognised, promoted, and protected and in which all people are equal and free from discrimination and oppression.

The mission of MenEngage Alliance is to transform unequal power relations and dismantle patriarchal systems by transforming patriarchal masculinities and rigid, harmful norms around 'being a man'; by working with men and boys on gender justice through intersectional feminist approaches; by building inclusive collaborations from the local to regional to global levels; and by developing joint actions in partnership with and accountable to women's rights, gender justice, and other social justice movements.

As members, and as a collective, the Alliance aims towards a shared vision and mission for positive change and to transform unequal power for the benefit of all.



Table of contents

Executive summary	5
Backlash and fundamentalism	13
Engaging men and boys in ending gender-based violence	31
Men, masculinities, and climate justice	76
Peacebuilding and countering militarism	99
Sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and sexual orientation, gender identity and expression and sex characteristics (SOGIESC)	120
Unpaid care and economies of care	149



Hon. Prof. Jeannette Bayisenge, the Minister of Gender and Family Promotion in Rwanda, responds to questions after officially opening the MenEngage Ubuntu Symposium at the Opening Event in Kigali, Rwanda, in November 2020.



Executive Summary

The 3rd MenEngage Global Symposium (the MenEngage Ubuntu Symposium) represents the most ambitious collective activity that MenEngage Alliance has ever embarked on as an international alliance working to transform patriarchal masculinities and engage men and boys for gender, social, and climate justice.

The symposium's overarching framework, as determined collectively by Alliance members and partners, was 'Ubuntu': 'I am because you are.' As the [Ubuntu Declaration & Call to Action](#) explains, 'Ubuntu' is a Nguni Bantu term from Southern Africa that speaks to the universal connection between all humans—a shared sense of compassion, responsibility, and humanity for all. The Alliance collectively sought to honour this wisdom and to build with it in full recognition of its origins, roots, traditions, and thought leadership arising from the African continent.

MenEngage Alliance co-organised the symposium with the Rwanda Men's Resource Centre, the Rwanda MenEngage Network, and MenEngage Africa. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the convening was adapted from a three-day in-person event in Kigali, Rwanda, to a seven-month virtual event. It was an unprecedented journey for the Alliance and the over 160 members and partners who were instrumental in making this happen, as well as for everyone involved: 5,000-plus registered participants from 159 countries and 600-plus speakers involved in 178 global sessions (plus many more at the regional, country, and local levels).

The symposium provided a meaningful opportunity for MenEngage members and partners to build on their values and advance in their resolve to 'walk the talk' under three objectives:

1. Make 'men and masculinities' work more effective and impactful for gender justice through collective sharing, questioning, learning, and knowledge-strengthening
2. Strengthen a global community that acts responsibly, purposefully, inclusively, and in solidarity with our partners, friends, and each other—across social justice movements
3. Inspire, develop, and renew a common political agenda and strategy to meet the urgency of today's existing and emerging challenges

These discussions took place within the context of five key frameworks, which were determined over the two to three years of preparation by Alliance members and partners: **feminisms, intersectionality, accountability, 'power with', and transformation.** Using the lens of these five core topics and the [Ubuntu Declaration & Call to Action](#), the symposium particularly honed in on intersectional feminisms, decolonizing, feminist systems change, 'power with' and movement-building, transforming patriarchal masculinities, accountability, and youth.

The six symposium synthesis papers—written by subject matter experts in the respective fields—provide an overview of key experiences, evidence, and insights from the symposium on **how to effectively challenge and dismantle oppressive patriarchal norms and systems and how to transform masculinities.** While no single paper could fully capture the rich diversity of the conversations and sessions that took place across seven months, these knowledge products do provide an entry point to conversations on the current state of the field and the path forward.

The MenEngage Ubuntu Symposium's six synthesis papers cover:

- *Backlash and fundamentalism*
- *Engaging men and boys in ending gender-based violence*
- *Men, masculinities, and climate justice*
- *Peacebuilding and countering militarism*
- *Sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC)*
- *Unpaid care and economies of care*

“ **The patriarchal backlash we’re witnessing today is deep, it’s insidious, and it’s complex. It’s both online and offline and has spread deeply into all areas of our lives.**

— NIKKI VAN DER GAAG (SENIOR FELLOW, PROMUNDO),
[*BACKLASH, BODY POLITICS AND ONLINE MISOGYNY*](#)

Backlash and fundamentalism

While resistance to feminism and gender equality has always existed, patriarchal backlash is a relatively new form of opposition to gender justice that has become increasingly popular, organised, and well funded in recent years. All around the world, in fact, there has been an intensification of anti-gender rhetoric; regression in women’s reproductive rights and rights for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer (LGBTIQ) individuals; and the shrinking of civil society space—all underpinned by a rise in authoritarian populism and fundamentalist movements both online and offline.

The symposium sessions involved discussions on several key forms of backlash: online, offline, in United Nations and global policy spaces, and in country and regional spaces. After breaking down these forms of backlash, the synthesis paper on backlash and fundamentalism discusses four core domains and narratives of backlash against gender justice: rising ethnonationalism and narratives around the ‘national family’; men as victims; family and nation; and ‘natural’ gender order, individual freedom, and social hierarchies.

In today’s context—the symposium showed—efforts to realise gender equality and justice require an awareness of patriarchal backlash and its adaptability. The paper ends with specific steps that progressive movements could take to stay informed and prepared, and it provides specific recommendations for the gender justice movement as a whole—including for MenEngage and its partners.

“We need to look into the totality of how patriarchy operates.... As long as we work on the margins of tinkering with patriarchy... and do not have the courage to work with feminist theologians, to work with feminist cultural gender experts...we will continue to be measuring the instrumentalistic indicators without being transformative to the fundamentals of patriarchy.

— NYARADZAYI GUMBONZVANDA (FOUNDER AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE, ROZARIA MEMORIAL TRUST), [INTERSECTIONAL FEMINIST MOVEMENT VOICES PANEL](#)

Engaging men and boys in ending gender-based violence

The MenEngage Ubuntu Symposium set the stage for reviewing and assessing the effectiveness of work to transform masculinities and to engage men and boys in gender-based violence prevention and response. It offered the space to engage in critical conversations on the importance of specifically addressing the social norms, stereotypes, and gendered power dynamics relating to patriarchal masculinities that lie at the root of gender-based violence against women, girls, and LGBTIQ individuals. For this, symposium speakers and participants offered practical guidance on developing integrated plans that incorporate the links among various forms of violence and exploitation in their totality. The exchanges by experts and practitioners from around the world demonstrate the need to measure and evaluate the impact of work to transform masculinities, dismantle patriarchy, and prevent and respond to violence.

The synthesis paper on engaging men and boys in ending gender-based violence looks at the global context in terms of meta-trends and where and how the work on engaging men and boys fits into the broader social justice work taking place. Then, it brings forward analysis on five key areas shaping masculinities and violence: militarization, militarism, and war; the diversity of masculinities; the humanisation of male violence as a structural problem; the links between cyber-violence and gender-based violence; and drivers of intimate partner violence. Before offering recommendations, the paper also assesses the state of the field of men, masculinities, and gender-based violence prevention, honing in on:

- Ethical considerations, based on the evidence emerging from the field
- Accountability to feminist and women's rights movements
- The problem of 'men' as a homogeneous category
- Effective programme approaches
- Working with Indigenous men and boys and with men and boys from subaltern groups/ socially marginalised communities



We need to be radical dreamers and radical listeners. We need to dare to move into uncomfortable places to make things move in the right direction.

— MARCELO SALAZAR (HEALTH IN HARMONY EXECUTIVE COORDINATOR IN BRAZIL AND AMAZON RAINFOREST CLIMATE ACTIVIST),
MASCULINITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Men, masculinities, and climate justice

Before the wider population became aware of the climate crisis, feminist movements—especially those from Global South—were already applying a gender-power analysis and exploring the interconnections with systems of oppression, domination, and extraction. Indeed, most women and girls face double injustice due to climate change and gender inequality in all aspects of their lives: women and children are more likely to drown during disasters than men, for example, and more often live in poor conditions that make them more vulnerable during crises.¹

The synthesis paper on men, masculinities, and climate justice consolidates the symposium's lessons, experiences, and discourses on men, masculinities, and the climate crisis using the five core themes (feminisms, intersectionality, accountability, 'power with', and transformation), also offering recommendations specifically targeting each of those themes.

Feminist and eco-feminist organisations have developed numerous practices that engage women and girls in the environmental movement. However, practices working with men and boys on environmental topics from a transforming masculinities perspective are much less common. To shine light on promising work in this area, the paper highlights [men's reflective groups](#) in Sweden addressing gender transformation within the context of the climate crisis; a photo exhibition placing a spotlight on fathers and children involved in nature protection and also a men's discussion group initiative, both in Russia; and the [Coastal Youth Action Hub](#), a space for the co-creation and knowledge management of youth-developed [innovations and solutions](#), in Bangladesh.

¹ Syazwani, H. A. F., Hafizah, S. N., & Noraida, E. (2016). *Women, gender, and disaster: A case study of flood victims in Kota Bharu, Kelantan*. http://eprints.usm.my/31296/1/Farah_Syazwani_Hayrol_Azizi.pdf; also see: Blaikie, P., Cannon, T., Davis, I., & Wisner, B. (2004). *At risk: Natural hazards, people's vulnerability and disasters* (2nd ed.). Routledge; UN WomenWatch. (2009). *Women, gender equality and climate change*. https://www.un.org/womenwatch/feature/climate_change/downloads/Women_and_Climate_Change_Factsheet.pdf

“Military institutions not only rely on but also perpetuate images and narratives of patriarchal masculinities.

— ALAN GREIG (COFOUNDER, CHALLENGING MALE SUPREMACY PROJECT)

Peacebuilding and countering militarism

Research tells us that socially constructed gender norms that associate masculinities with power, violence, and control play an important role in driving conflict and insecurity worldwide.² These norms are enabled by individuals, institutions, and ideologies that glorify violence and fund the war system. To advance feminist peace, it is critical to transform the currently accepted gender norms, ideologies, and institutions. This is particularly important with the increased complexity of violent conflicts and humanitarian crises, including the various means by which state and non-state actors engage in violent conflict, the rise in military spending, and increased tensions over the use of resources.

The synthesis paper on peacebuilding and countering militarism explores this vital issue by describing key themes explored over the course of the symposium and providing related recommendations. The themes include:

- Understanding current political, economic, social, and technological forces and factors
- Focusing on systems and structural change
- Changing systems in solidarity
- Addressing military systems of power and culture, including war culture
- Moving beyond the individual towards institutional change
- Focusing on institutional power brokers and decision-makers
- Using digital communications and online spaces
- Meaningfully engaging with young people, including as leaders
- Building peace and countering militarism through better interventions

² Wright, H. (2014). *Masculinities, conflict and peacebuilding: Perspectives on men through a gender lens*. Saferworld. <https://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/publications/862-masculinities-conflict-and-peacebuilding-perspectives-on-men-through-a-gender-lens>



“The field of sexual and reproductive healthcare has tried to involve men and boys in family planning and sexuality education for the last 30 years, but the field is fraught with assumptions and stigma about gender and sexuality. To complicate things, healthcare is a very power-driven sector with its own hierarchies, and SRHR touches the heart of the male-female binary that defines patriarchy as a system. So, the first thing we need to do is to acknowledge this complexity as we work to transform patriarchal gender norms and improve SRHR.

— MAGALY MARQUES (SENIOR ADVISOR, MENENGAGE ALLIANCE GLOBAL SECRETARIAT), [WHAT IS THE RESEARCH AND EVIDENCE AGENDA FOR ADDRESSING MASCULINITIES IN THE CONTEXT OF SRHR?](#)

Sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and sexual orientation, gender identity and expression and sex characteristics (SOGIESC)

The ‘shared vision of gender, social, economic and environmental justice for all, everywhere, now and in the future’ described in the *Ubuntu Declaration & Call to Action* relies on the realisation of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) for all. It also requires the freedom to be our full selves in all our diversity of sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC). Now more than ever, it is clear that (as the declaration puts it) ‘the only path ahead is towards inclusion, equity and justice’ and we must ‘cherish the diversities that exist among us’.

The symposium sessions reflected a breadth of SRHR and SOGIESC issues, shaped by elements such as the current context, political and economic factors, and the priorities of participating organisations and individuals. Key conversation points described in the synthesis paper on SRHR and SOGIESC include pushback against gender and conservative backlash, COVID-19, bodily autonomy, harmful practices, SOGIESC flashpoints, toxic masculinities, safe abortion, and critical and emerging SRHR conversations.

Alongside a discussion of recommendations, lessons learned, and the path forward, the synthesis paper contains promising practices and examples shared across the symposium that offer guidance for continuing, expanding, and enhancing the work to engage men and boys in SRHR and to uphold the rights and dignity of LGBTIQ people. These examples include—among others—programming with gender-synchronised approaches in Zambia, Uganda, and Georgia; a community-based approach to reduce child marriage, school dropout, and harmful practices among adolescent girls in remote Indigenous communities in Guatemala; and regional work in Eastern Europe and Central Asia to address harmful gender norms and gender-responsive family policies.

“By virtue of being a human, we care and care for others. There are hypermasculine ways that say you don’t need care and you don’t need to give care. It translates into relationships and the type of work that we do. We are not taught to care. Care is not a feminine trait; it is a human trait. Do everything with love; have love at the centre of all your work.

— ASHLEE ALEXANDRA BURNETT (FEMINITT CARIBBEAN AND THE CARIBBEAN WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO NATIONAL CHAPTER), [YOUTH LEADERSHIP AND MOVEMENT BUILDING PANEL](#)

Unpaid care and economies of care

Much of the symposium’s specific focus on care in the field of men and gender equality—and by many feminists over the years—has been on the gender division of care work at home. More specifically, it has been on the unequal way in which unpaid care and domestic work is divided, with women and girls bearing the responsibility for most of the care work needed for the family’s survival and with this unequal burden acting as a major barrier to women’s full participation in public life. However, the concepts of ‘family’ and ‘the home’ are intrinsically problematic, in that they are often portrayed or seen as binary and nuclear—Eurocentric notions that were enforced through colonization and do not reflect the family structures in Global South contexts. The symposium’s [Contexts and Challenges paper](#) addressed this issue head-on, challenging the field to ‘transcend the masculine-feminine binary separating production from social reproduction.’

The synthesis paper on unpaid care and economies of care addresses the symposium discourse across seven topics—intersectional feminisms, decolonizing, feminist systems change, ‘power with’ and movement-building, transforming patriarchal masculinities, accountability, and youth. Along with an analysis of gaps, recommendations, and the path forward, the paper provides five vibrant examples of promising practice:

- In Nicaragua, research into advocacy in the MenCare campaign
- In the Philippines, Oxfam’s WE-Care Programme
- In Palestine, a positive deviance approach to working with communities on unpaid care
- In South Africa, advocacy for improved parental leave for all
- In Uruguay, the National Care System

Cross-cutting recommendations

The MenEngage Ubuntu Symposium brought together a diverse range of speakers and participants from around the world: activists, researchers, practitioners, and advocates—among others—from civil society and the international development sector, policymaking entities, the private sector, United Nations bodies, and the donor community. From these speakers and participants, the summary paper authors each derived recommendations for the MenEngage Alliance's members, its partners, and others working on men and masculinities. Looking across all six papers, several key themes consistently emerged. These cross-cutting recommendations include:

- **Become more intersectional in our conceptions of 'men and boys'.** Work on men and masculinities must acknowledge that 'men and boys' are not a homogenous group. Best practice involves focusing on particular groups of men and boys that vary by country and context. We must also consider—and apply—our learning on how race, class, caste, sexuality, gender identity, geography, ability, and age (among other facets of identity) influence men and boys, and thus, the work on men and masculinities.
- **Work as allies with, collaborate with, and be accountable to feminist women's rights, LGBTIQ rights, and youth movements, as well as other movements led by underrepresented or marginalised groups across various contexts.** Organisations working on transforming masculinities and engaging men and boys in gender and social justice must link up with national or local women's rights or feminist organisations. This must be done in a collaborative, humble, and accountable way and under the leadership of feminist movements' agenda. In the same way, men and masculinities work must be accountable to—and take the lead from—advocacy movements surrounding other facets of identity, such as LGBTIQ and youth movements, among many others.
- **Address underlying feminist systems change alongside individual change.** The majority of the work with men and boys focuses on individual behaviour change. While this is important, it is equally vital to ensure that work on men and masculinities centres the systems change agenda in order for this field to meaningfully add value to advance the broader feminist agenda of equality and justice. For systemic shifts to take place, we must transform the very structures that underlie our economic, political, and legal decisions and institutions. The 'glocal' perspective (global connection and local action) is key to any transformation and is the scale of our ambition.
- **Decolonize knowledge, fostering and prioritising learning from the Global South and locally owned solutions.** Opportunities for South-to-South learning have the potential for significant impact through movement-building and mutual learning. However, the focus on 'South-to-South' often ignores the crucial work of 'South-to-North'—or simply 'South' without intervention by the Global North. We must decolonize the knowledge base for this work and build movements that not only develop locally owned solutions but also prioritise that local ownership and knowledge versus handing down prescriptions on 'what works' from the Global North.
- **Incorporate a focus on the climate crisis and its manifold effects.** Across the symposium, the climate crisis emerged as an existential concern. Among the recommendations related to climate (with many more in the summary paper on climate justice) were to carry out gender-transformative work with men and boys on how to relate and behave in ways that can help achieve gender equality and climate justice, as well as to develop climate responses that centre human rights and gender justice.
- **Think through how gender-transformative work with men and boys can be implemented digitally**—through digital communications and in online spaces—frequently, strategically, and in a much more targeted way. This should include contemplating how digital platforms could be used in advocacy against rising backlash.
- **See youth as key stakeholders, not beneficiaries,** with meaningful participation at all stages and in all spaces. This diversity of voices and leadership enhances our collective work. Youth leadership can be better supported by recognising the efforts of young people, and LGBTIQ youth must be explicitly and meaningfully involved.



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Backlash and fundamentalism

Shantel Marekera

A summary report of discussions at the 3rd
MenEngage Global Symposium (the Ubuntu
Symposium), 2020-2021



MenEngage Alliance
working with men and boys for gender equality



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Table of contents

1. Context and problem analysis	15
1.1. Background	17
2. Backlash in its various forms	18
2.1. Online backlash	19
2.2. Offline backlash	19
2.3. Backlash in United Nations and global policy spaces	20
2.4. Backlash at the regional and country levels	21
3. Core domains and narratives of backlash against gender justice	22
3.1. Rising ethnonationalism and narratives around the 'national family'	22
3.2. Men as victims	23
3.3. Family and nation	24
3.4. 'Natural' gender order, individual freedom, and social hierarchies	25
4. Recommendations and the way forward	26
Annex 1. Links to the symposium sessions on backlash and fundamentalism	29

“The patriarchal backlash we’re witnessing today is deep, it’s insidious, and it’s complex. It’s both online and offline and has spread deeply into all areas of our lives.

— NIKKI VAN DER GAAG (SENIOR FELLOW, PROMUNDO),
[BACKLASH, BODY POLITICS AND ONLINE MISOGYNY](#)

1. Context and problem analysis

This paper aims to consolidate the insights, collective discussions, and recommendations provided by panellists and speakers during the 3rd MenEngage Global Symposium (also referred to as the MenEngage Ubuntu Symposium) in a bid to understand the political contexts in which MenEngage Alliance and its partners work. This context is informed by anti-gender politics, accentuated by the global growth of fundamentalist groups and movements and by the increased patriarchal backlash against women’s rights and gender equality. The content of this paper is shaped by crosscutting themes identified by MenEngage Alliance and its members to help shape the symposium: intersectionality, feminisms, accountability, ‘power with’, and transformation. Together, these themes represent the symposium’s overarching political framework.

Definitions

Women Against Fundamentalism defines **fundamentalism** as ‘a type of modern political movement which uses religion as a base from which to try to gain power and extend social control.’¹ Over the years, ‘fundamentalism’ has been widely used as an umbrella term for literalist, ultraorthodox movements that derive their identity primarily from a posture of resistance to modern movements they view as threats to their religious doctrines.²

By contrast, the term ‘**patriarchal backlash**’ is heavily contested, and our understanding of the concept is constantly evolving. In her 1991 book *Backlash*, feminist author Susan Faludi defined patriarchal backlash as the outrage, growing conservative resistance, and intense pushback against women’s rights and against ideas of gender equality and diversity more broadly. She specifically characterised it as ‘an attempt to retract the handful of small and hard-won victories that the feminist movement did manage to win for women.’³

¹ Feldman, R., & Clark, K. (1996). Women, religious fundamentalism and reproductive rights. *Reproductive Health Matters*, 4(8), 12–20. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0968-8080\(96\)90297-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0968-8080(96)90297-9)

² Wenzel, N. G. (2011). Postmodernism and religion. In P. B. Clarke (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of the sociology of religion*.

³ Faludi, S. (1991). *Backlash: The undeclared war against American women* (1st ed.). Crown.

In terms of recent efforts to understand today's patriarchal backlash against gender justice, scholar David Paternotte cautions scholars and activists in the field against reducing such attacks to mere reactions. In fact, Paternotte prefers not to even use the word 'backlash', although he recognises that it offers a framework to examine the advances of the far-right's conservative, anti-feminist, anti-rights movement.⁴ While these attacks and responses to the liberal achievements of the 1990s and 2000s can be observed as 'resistance to progressive social change, regression on acquired rights or maintenance of a non-egalitarian status quo',⁵ Paternotte and sociologist Roman Kuhar emphasise that so-called 'backlash' as a political strategy involves: 'discursive and conceptual struggles...to increase confusion among average citizens and to re-signify what progressive voices have been trying to articulate over the last decades.'⁶

In that sense, 'backlash' as a social phenomenon seeks to re-signify human rights values, concepts, and aims in support of a strictly binary (male-female) family structure, male authority, and power structures that negate the universality of human rights. Paternotte and Kuhar also contest the idea that progressive action always precedes conservative reaction. Instead, they argue, anti-gender campaigns against sexual and reproductive rights; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer (LGBTIQ) rights; children's rights (including the right to sex education); gender justice; and protection against violence, discrimination, and hate speech are often employed to impede and derail future efforts to reform policies and systems that uphold progressive values.⁷

Several panellists and speakers during the symposium described the phenomenon of backlash as a rise in authoritarian populism and right-wing political leadership (with strict positions against feminism, LGBTIQ rights, and activism by men for gender equality) in an attempt to hinder progress.



⁴ Paternotte, D. (2020, March 30). Backlash: A misleading narrative. *Engenderings*. <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/gender/2020/03/30/backlash-a-misleading-narrative/>

⁵ European Parliament resolution of 13 February 2019 on experiencing a backlash in women's rights and gender equality in the EU (2018/2684(RSP)). (2019, February 13). https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2019-0111_EN.html, as cited in Paternotte, D. (2020, March 30). Backlash: A misleading narrative. *Engenderings*. <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/gender/2020/03/30/backlash-a-misleading-narrative/>

⁶ Paternotte, D., & Kuhar, R. (2015). *Gender ideology: Mobilization of conservative groups against gender equality and sexual citizenship*. <https://eige.europa.eu/resources/Report%20%20Gender%20Ideology%20-%20strategies.pdf>

⁷ Ibid.

1.1. Background

During the symposium sessions, panellists and speakers agreed that while resistance to feminism and gender equality has always existed, patriarchal backlash is a new form of opposition to gender rights that has become more dynamic over the past few years. For example, men's rights movements began using the language of equality, discrimination, and rights in order to politicise a narrative of male victimhood and exclusion, denouncing 'feminist bias against men' in all things gender. This form of co-opting or re-signifying meaning was effective in undermining initiatives to protect the rights of women and girls, and it led to portrayals of feminists as domineering and exclusionary. It was also an attempt to promote disagreements among feminists themselves.

Similarly, conservative opponents of gender justice felt traditional patriarchal masculinities were threatened when national gender policies took up gender as a concept to articulate discrimination against LGBTIQ people and recognise their human rights (such as in the early 2000s in the Caribbean). In this context, backlash emerged as a focus on exclusively binary (male-female) families as 'natural' to impede gender from being brought in as a category of analysis. Men could still be equally centred, and normative family life could be emphasised in a way that precluded LGBTIQ rights. Thus, backlash narratives kept adjusting to each case and context to emphasise their own values and concepts.

In *Backlash, Body Politics and Online Misogyny*, Neil Datta of the European Parliamentary Forum for Sexual and Reproductive Rights explained that three forces at play in Europe are resulting in a strategic effort to impose conservative views and conditions: far-right fascist movements, populist forces, and religious fundamentalism. While these movements have always existed in society, they were isolated forces with different agendas until the early 2000s. Over the past two decades, however, leaders in each of these movements have begun to come together and engage in transactional ways, and they have even begun to fund each other. Far-right fascist movements are made up of right-wing extremists whose politics centre around features such as fear of difference, machismo, rejection of modernism, and social frustration.⁸ Populist forces claim 'to represent the unified will of the people in opposition to an enemy, often embodied by the current system—aiming to "drain the swamp" or "tackle the liberal elite".'⁹ Religious fundamentalism undermines individuality in an effort to construct a collective identity based on religious norms.¹⁰

The amalgamation of these forces has made it possible for far-right fascist movements, populist forces, and religious fundamentalists to become more influential by accessing official government positions. Thus, backlash has grown more powerful through reorganising and rebranding, which has allowed these actors to expand their scope and create a form of patriarchal backlash that is more pervasive, nuanced, and complex.

⁸ Eco, U. (1995). Ur-fascism. *The New York Review of Books*, 42(11), 12–15.

⁹ Moffitt, B. (2020). *The global rise of populism*. Stanford University Press.

¹⁰ Castells, M., & Cardoso, G. (Eds.). (2005). *The network society: From knowledge to policy*. Johns Hopkins Center for Transatlantic Relations.

2. Backlash in its various forms

“We’re in a moment of history that is not easy to navigate and where we have legitimate worries about the kind of world that this resistance, these anti-progressive movements will create, and we can see how their triumph would lead to a world with more fear, more insecurity, more hatred, and more violence, and that’s something we legitimately want to prevent.

— RAEWYN CONNELL, [MEN AND MASCULINITIES PANEL \(PART 1\)](#)

All around the world, there has been an intensification of anti-gender rhetoric, a regression in women’s reproductive rights, and a shrinking of civil society space, all underpinned by a rise in authoritarian populism and fundamentalist movements both online and offline. This backlash is expressed through full-frontal assaults, overt myth-making, and undercover myth-making, among other tactics.



Soraya Chemaly (executive director of The Representation Project) speaking at “Digital Contexts: Media, Attention Economies and the Manosphere”.

2.1. Online backlash

The digital age has resulted in the rise of a manosphere 'constructed around a narrative of feminism's oppression of men, and a rejection of the evidence of men's patriarchal oppression of women.'¹¹ The manosphere is made up of four broad groups: men's rights activists, pick-up artists, incels, and 'Men Going Their Own Way' (MGTOW).¹² These groups use the internet to troll, slut-shame, and make rape threats against feminists, LGBTIQ people, and male gender justice activists, as well as to manufacture outrage through fake news and WhatsApp. An example of this online hostility can be seen through the vicious troll attacks against musician Rihanna and climate justice activist Greta Thunberg after they tweeted in support of farmers' protests in India. Another example is 'Gamergate' in the United States, when video game promoters ran a general harassment campaign against women in the video game industry under the guise of 'ethics in journalism'—all to express their anger over increasing diversity in the video game industry.

In the session *Digital Contexts*, Soraya Chemaly (executive director of The Representation Project) explained that we should not underestimate the efflorescence and power (in scope and scale) of transnational networks created by the internet through the manosphere. Transnational solidarity has made it possible for misogynists in, for example, the United States to attack and harass a female politician in South Africa. In extreme cases, the trolling begins online and translates into political action.

It is through such online spaces, and among young people, that false narratives of masculinities circulate; this includes the politics of victimhood, which fuels anti-feminist sentiments. Stereotypical ideas about feminists 'being out to get them' are intentionally circulated online to influence antidemocratic organising and to claim power. Under this impression, young men seek justice for themselves by leading the offensive against LGBTIQ people and women's rights defenders through doxxing, hacking, and threatening. Of particular concern is the fact that these misogynistic spaces sometimes appeal to young people as a place of guidance, safety, and understanding among a group of peers. As Christian Mogensen (specialist consultant at the Centre for Digital Youth Care) said during *Angry Young Men and the Misogynistic, Populistic Backlash in Europe*:

Joining a counterculture moves the focal point from me who is unhappy and 'I don't want to focus on me; I don't want to deal with the fact that I'm unhappy' to someone else, to those that are making me unhappy. Now, I'm not a victim. Now, I understand myself as a fighter. I get a sense of belonging, I have a way, a place to direct my anger. I have a purpose, and most importantly, I have a purpose with other people.

2.2. Offline backlash

At the forefront of offline backlash are religious and secular groups resistant to the concept of gender equality, as well as authoritarian political leaders and right-wing groups that oppose recognition for women's and LGBTIQ rights. In United Nations and global policy spaces, for example, we see attacks against long-accepted sexual and reproductive rights positions adopted by international conferences, as well as new alliances of conservative governments and religious leaders seeking to reverse debates about gender equality. As Gary Barker (CEO of Promundo-US) said during the *first part of the Men and Masculinities* panel:

My two home countries of Brazil and the US have seen leadership that we can only call fascist, and they've rolled back health rights, human rights, economic rights, gender equality.

¹¹ MenEngage Alliance. (2021). *Contexts and challenges for gender transformative work with men and boys: A discussion paper*. <http://menengage.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Contexts-and-Challenges-for-Gender-Transformative-Work-with-Men-and-Boys-A-Discussion-Paper-English.pdf>

¹² Basu, T. (2020, February 7). The "manosphere" is getting more toxic as angry men join the incels. *MIT Technology Review*. <https://www.technologyreview.com/2020/02/07/349052/the-manosphere-is-getting-more-toxic-as-angry-men-join-the-incels/>

2.3. Backlash in United Nations and global policy spaces

Through a competitive mimicry of feminist nongovernmental organisations (NGOs), ultraconservative voices seek to obstruct negotiations in United Nations and global policy spaces. Conservative civil society organisations and NGOs continue to work with government delegations to revisit accepted United Nations language, re-signifying accepted terminology to convey patriarchal views. Conservative nations and leaders are consulting with each other and forming global alliances to actively influence United Nations discussions and decisions through their lobbying efforts in the Commission on the Status of Women in the United Nations General Assembly, and even within the Human Rights Council:

Conservative NGOs' advocacy in the [United Nations] includes investing substantial effort in preventing feminist NGOs from furthering women's rights. At the same time, they work hard on reversing the norms and interpretations that feminists have already enshrined in the [United Nations].¹³

Their efforts involve mobilising outside United Nations venues, conducting social media campaigns, and setting up shop in key human rights locations (e.g., Geneva, where the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights meets).

Outside of United Nations spaces, conservative NGOs are also capturing, twisting, and re-signifying gender justice policy advocacy, portraying it as 'gender ideology'; they are advancing the claim that these are biased views by extremist feminist groups. This can be seen in the French anti-gender movement *La Manif Pour Tous*, which was created to oppose a bill on same-sex marriage in France but has since broadened its remit to the defence of the 'traditional', exclusively gender-binary family. In the *Hijacking Gender?* session, Tessa Lewin (research fellow at the Institute of Development Studies) explained that two immediately apparent expressions of discourse are used in the group's name. '*Manif*' is short for *manifestation* (the French word for demonstration, a phenomenon traditionally associated with the left in France), and '*pour tous*' means 'for all', co-opting the language of the same-sex marriage bill (*le mariage pour tous*, or 'marriage for all').



PHOTO CREDIT: weniliou / Shutterstock.com

¹³ Cupać, J., & Ebetürk, I. (2021). Backlash advocacy and NGO polarization over women's rights in the United Nations. *International Affairs*, 97(4), 1183-1201. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iab069>

2.4. Backlash at the regional and country levels

In addition to concerted efforts within United Nations negotiation spaces, several countries are increasingly adopting legislation that denies women their reproductive rights and criminalises same-sex relationships and behaviours by LGBTIQ people. The emergence of campaigns and legislative proposals to restrict or ban abortion in the United States is a clear example of efforts to revoke existing laws—and these campaigns have provoked a mushroom effect of 83 abortion restrictions enacted across 16 states in the United States from January to early June 2021.¹⁴ Other countries, such as Brazil, have also attempted to curtail access to legal pregnancy termination in cases of rape during the COVID-19 pandemic. Similarly, Bangladesh’s adoption of a British colonial penal code section criminalising same-sex relationships has meant a complete exclusion of LGBTIQ people from the rights afforded to others.



Stine Holding and Christian Mogensen, from Centre for Digital Youth Care, Denmark, speaking at “Angry young men and the misogynistic, populist backlash in Europe”.

¹⁴ Nash, E., & Cross, L. (2021). *2021 is on track to become the most devastating antiabortion state legislative session in decades.* (updated June 14, 2021). <https://www.guttmacher.org/article/2021/04/2021-track-become-most-devastating-antiabortion-state-legislative-session-decades>

3. Core domains and narratives of backlash against gender justice

At the core of the messaging employed by fundamentalist groups is the idea of the male ‘other’ and narratives around the ‘national family’ and its ‘others’, often referred to as ‘outsiders’—such as immigrants, men of colour, and Jewish and Muslim men. The conservative rhetoric evokes the image of the male protector, but also of men as victims of the so-called ‘gender ideology’.

3.1. Rising ethnonationalism and narratives around the ‘national family’

“**There is a growing tangled relationship between renewed forms of authoritarian nationalism and a masculinized version of multiculturalism, one that selectively incorporates some people of color into a nationalist framework performed as patriarchal traditionalism, online ultra-misogyny, or street-brawling bravado. Masculinity bridges racial difference for populist, fascist, and even white-nationalist politics.**

— HOSANG AND LOWNDES (2019),¹⁵ QUOTED BY ALAN GREIG (COFOUNDER, CHALLENGING MALE SUPREMACY PROJECT), *UNDERSTANDING THE GLOBAL TIDE OF PATRIARCHAL BACKLASH*

¹⁵ HoSang, D. M., & Lowndes, J. E. (2019). *Producers, parasites, patriots: Race and the new right-wing politics of precarity*. University of Minnesota Press.

Rising ethnonationalism can be observed in growing narratives about the 'national family' and its 'others'. Feminists, LGBTIQ people, and pro-feminist groups are portrayed as a threat to the social order, and as such, a danger to the future of the nation. Ethnonationalism that emphasises the male protector is also used to mobilise fundamentalist movements under the guise of defending women and children against the perceived threat of feminists, LGBTIQ people, and human rights and gender justice groups.

For example, former US President Donald Trump described immigrants from Mexico to the United States by saying: 'When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists.'¹⁶ Trump demonized immigrants as a threat to white women and exhorted white men to sound the alarm and act as protectors. The European far-right has also used the idea of the sexual threat from the male other to support its anti-immigrant rhetoric. As Alan Greig of the Challenging Male Supremacy Project said during *Understanding the Global Tide of Patriarchal Backlash*:

The idea of the male protector is being reinvigorated by a racialization of masculinities, so the racialization of the sexual threat of the male other is a significant part of the far-right discourse around men needing to step up and protect their families.

3.2. Men as victims

“**The common narrative between all the young men that we talked to was that they needed to belong to this violent or this oppositional or antagonistic group because, if not, someone would hurt them or trump them or just roll over them.**

— CHRISTIAN MOGENSEN (SPECIALIST CONSULTANT, CENTRE FOR DIGITAL YOUTH CARE), *ANGRY YOUNG MEN AND THE MISOGYNISTIC, POPULISTIC BACKLASH IN EUROPE*

The narrative around male victimhood and vulnerability is a favourite tactic used by men's rights activists and fundamentalists to garner support among men and spearhead patriarchal backlash. A commonly employed discourse is that feminism has gone too far and men are now experiencing 'reverse discrimination'. For example, a fathers' movement recently formed in Trinidad and Tobago opposes feminism by 'positioning men as the real victims of (mothers') childhood abuse, (women's) partner violence, (feminised) state discrimination and an ideologically sexist gender division of labour.'¹⁷

¹⁶ Phillips, A. (2017, June 16). 'They're rapists.' President Trump's campaign launch speech two years later, annotated. *The Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2017/06/16/theyre-rapists-presidents-trump-campaign-launch-speech-two-years-later-annotated/>

¹⁷ Hossein, G. (2021, June 23). Fathering in a pandemic. *Trinidad and Tobago Newsday*. <https://newsday.co.tt/2021/06/23/fathering-in-a-pandemic/>



During the [Social Contexts](#) session, Alan Greig of the Challenging Male Supremacy Project referenced a quote from a 2019 article titled 'The New Authoritarians Are Waging War on Women':

At stake are advances made to legalize same-sex marriage, achieve gender-wage parity, access contraception and abortion services, balance care work with greater feminization of the economy, and end discrimination of LGBTQI persons. Importantly, challenging the far-right's war on gender is also central to advancing racial justice, ensuring the rights of refugees and migrants, and promoting inclusive societies.¹⁸

3.3. Family and nation

At the centre of backlash on gender equality and justice, we see more than the defence of 'family values'. The neoliberal worldview is a strong component of these tactics to protect a form of government that is centred around ethnonationalistic feelings, state non-interference in family and private matters, and liberal tax codes for corporations (along with the reduction of social welfare).

This type of government structure has created an enormous gap in the social justice agenda of countries that are predominantly under neoliberal economic models. That gap has been filled in many cases by conservative religious groups, such as Catholic charities. Others have also acted: For example, local gangs and politically active fundamentalist religious groups see in this social welfare gap an opportunity to advance their views and values. By providing needed support to the most marginalised people, they could also share and legitimise conservative views about the role of government, family structures, and gender and sexual identity.

For that reason, fundamentalist organisations can be effective in their missions, particularly because they provide answers, a safe space, and a sense of purpose in organising against 'other' social actors that they identify as a threat to the moral order they seek to represent—with the added impact of meeting the community's basic needs (such as through zakat, food hampers, and donations).



¹⁸ Beinart, P. (2019, January/February). The new authoritarians are waging war on women. *The Atlantic*.

3.4. ‘Natural’ gender order, individual freedom, and social hierarchies

It is important to recognise the various forms of backlash, as well as their intended effect on the social fabric. Organised conservative groups usually address people’s material needs and expectations to engage with those who become supporters. By fulfilling survival needs, they also provide ‘order’ and a sense of stability. Even hierarchical, exclusionary, and arbitrary forms of order tend to be well accepted when contrasted to conspiracy theories. The narrative used in ultraconservative tactics—such as by populist leaders and fascist forms of government—promises to protect people, defeat the chaos and uncertainty caused by ‘socialist’ and ‘feminist’ political views, and restore a ‘natural social order’ and way of life.

In the effort to win power, gain followers, and become influential, conservative movements are betting on long-term tactics. By infiltrating well-established structures—such as judicial courts and the boards of essential industries (such as healthcare, medicine, news, technology, and media)—their aims and principles can have lasting effects and be mutually reinforcing. Collaborating with religious groups and charities, and demonstrating support for their agenda, are a means of securing reciprocity.



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4. Recommendations and the way forward



We seek a radical transformation of a world in crisis, putting women, people, and the planet over profit.

— WOMEN RADICALLY TRANSFORMING A WORLD IN CRISIS,¹⁹
QUOTED BY ALAN GREIG (COFOUNDER, CHALLENGING MALE SUPREMACY PROJECT), [SOCIAL CONTEXTS](#)

The various symposium panels that addressed backlash in different parts of the world, and in its many forms, sought to understand and analyse the phenomenon. They also considered the impact of backlash and the conditions making it possible for backlash to thrive and advance, with the goal of finding solutions or strategies to counter backlash's effect in today's social and political human rights agenda. Presenters and attendees alike, however, did raise the need to be mindful of backlash narratives and tactics.

In today's context—the symposium showed—efforts to realise gender equality and justice require an awareness of patriarchal backlash and its adaptability. Some steps that progressive movements could take to stay informed and prepared include:

- Organising a learning initiative on how to better understand and respond to backlash from a feminist-informed and men and masculinities perspective
- Synthesising and sharing feminist critical analysis of anti-gender, men's rights, and anti-feminist offensives globally
- Identifying and sharing lessons from how members and partners are confronting men's rights and conservative anti-feminist messaging and mobilisation
- Developing regional and global messages to counter anti-feminist narratives, including by elevating messages from members and partners doing such work

The following are specific recommendations for the gender justice movement as a whole—including for MenEngage and its partners.

¹⁹ Women radically transforming a world in crisis: A framework for Beijing+25 shaped at a strategy meeting of feminist activists: Mexico City, 22-24 August 2019. (2019, September 29). https://resurj.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/eng_mexico_city_strategy_meet_framework_for_beijing25_0.pdf

Conduct cross-movement-building. Fascist movements, fundamentalists, and populist forces have managed to access positions of power and expand their scope of influence through cross-movement-building. Through a shared analysis and understanding of the problem, progressive movements could identify and build alliances to prevent further erosion of the human rights and gender justice agenda. We need to not only have intersectionality of identities but intersectionality of struggles as well.²⁰

The way forward is reframing the gender justice agenda, at all structural levels, in a way that acknowledges the intersectionality of the various social justice struggles, with solidarity between movements working on different causes: 'Structures that exist in our society do not operate in a siloed manner, and thus cannot truly be discussed as mutually exclusive.'²¹

Therefore, women's rights are related to LGBTIQ rights and male privilege. Progressive social justice movements must equally work with other movements, including climate justice, economic justice, and racial justice movements, to strengthen capacity and develop resilience. As Undariya Tumursukh (advisor at the MONFEMNET National Network) said during the [first part of the Men and Masculinities panel](#): 'There needs to be this cross-fertilization and solidarity between different kinds of movements.'

Have critical awareness and accountability by having critical dialogues about patriarchal structures that must be transformed, by challenging men to see patriarchy not as personal but as political and economic systems of oppression, and by questioning the root causes of the patriarchal backlash we see today. As Michael Flood (associate professor of Queensland University of Technology) said during the [first part of the Men and Masculinities panel](#), 'Accountability is about trying to live in gender-equitable ways.'

Acknowledge young people as leaders. By working with young people, listening to and amplifying their voices, social justice movements can be more effective and creative. Understanding the types of platforms that young people consider worth investing in and the political spaces they see benefits in occupying, older leaders can open doors and facilitate real change. During the [Youth Leadership and Movement Building panel](#), Abel Koka of Restless Development advised:

Invest in programmes which will unleash the power of young people, amplify their voice, but also nurture their leadership ability in order for them to stand at the front and centre of making gender equality a reality.

Embrace feminist systems change. A key element addressed during the symposium sessions on backlash was the need for feminist systems change that is rooted in discursive subversion, displacement, and reconstruction. To facilitate such a reconstruction, there is a need for a structural understanding of power and

²⁰ Davis, A. Y. (2016). *Freedom is a constant struggle: Ferguson, Palestine, and the foundations of a movement*. Haymarket Books.

²¹ *The intersectionality of struggles*. (n.d.). Northeastern University. Retrieved November 23, 2021, from <https://northeastern.edu/diversity/event/the-intersectionality-of-struggles/>

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Sandra Pepera (senior associate and director of gender, women, and democracy at the National Democratic Institute) speaking at "Political Contexts: Authoritarianism Ethnonationalism and Militarism"

domination using a feminist approach to power analysis.

The question of gender has always been defined and contested by different kinds of patriarchy, and women and girls have always been forced to conform to societal norms of what it means to be a 'good woman'. A radical systems change involves overhauling structures and institutions that have facilitated and promoted inequality. It may start with questioning family norms and structures, but it is about broader institutions—capitalism, colonialism, faith, and more—that support patriarchy and its gendered division of roles; therefore, it requires change in workplaces, cultural traditions, government institutions, and the economy. Sandra Pepera (senior associate and director of gender, women, and democracy at the National Democratic Institute) said during [Political Contexts](#):

We are in a moment of anti-imperialism, which is more than decolonization, which is obviously a moment of an inherently feminist change. We are being asked to revisit decolonization and put the final nail in the coffin of neoliberalism, but we first have to hold the mirrors up to ourselves and understand and accept our own privilege and power, and in doing that, we may be able to move into a transformative state with less hubris, more honesty, and more humility.

Annex 1. Links to the symposium sessions on backlash and fundamentalism

1. 10 November 2020: [*Opening plenary*](#)
2. 11 November 2020: [*Youth Leadership and Movement Building panel*](#)
3. 11 November 2020: [*Intersectional Feminist Movement Voices panel*](#)
4. 11 November 2020: [*Men and Masculinities panel \(part 1\)*](#)
5. 12 November 2020: [*Men and Masculinities panel \(part 2\)*](#)
6. 1 December 2020: [*Understanding the Global Tide of Patriarchal Backlash*](#) ('Backlash' series session 1)
7. 2 February 2021: [*Political Contexts: Authoritarianism, Ethnonationalism and Militarism*](#)
8. 4 February 2021: [*Backlash, Body Politics and Online Misogyny*](#) ('Backlash' series session 2)
9. 9 February 2021: [*Angry Young Men and the Misogynistic, Populistic Backlash in Europe*](#)
10. 18 February 2021: [*¿Qué Rol Juegan los Hombres Para Contrarrestar el Avance de Discursos Contra la Igualdad de Género?*](#) (What Role Do Men Play in Counteracting the Advance of Discourses Against Gender Equality?)
11. 2 March 2021: [*Social Contexts: Anti-Feminism, Normalized Violence and Politicized Religion*](#)
12. 10 March 2021: [*How to Recover From the Global Gag Rule*](#)
13. 11 March 2021: [*Hijacking Gender? Backlash in Policy and Practice*](#) ('Backlash' series session 3)
14. 20 April 2021: [*Digital Contexts: Media, Attention Economies and the Manosphere*](#)
15. 12 May 2021: [*Backlash, Radicalization and Prevention Strategies in Working With Young Men*](#)
16. 13 May 2021: [*Deconstructing the Logic of Masculinist Protection*](#)
17. 13 May 2021: [*Movement-Building to Counter Patriarchal Backlash: A Conversation Space*](#) ('Backlash' series session 4)
18. 1 June 2021: [*Uniting to Counter Backlash: A Roundtable Discussion Looking Forward*](#) ('Backlash' series session 5)



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Engaging men and boys in ending gender-based violence, including violence against women and girls

Rimjhim Jain

A summary report of discussions at the 3rd MenEngage Global Symposium (the Ubuntu Symposium), 2020-2021



MenEngage Alliance
working with men and boys for gender equality

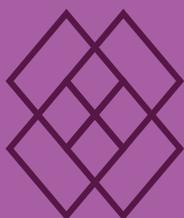
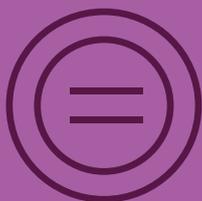


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Table of contents

1. Overview	34
2. Global context	35
2.1. Meta-trends	35
2.2. Where the work on engaging men and boys fits in	41
3. Critical analysis of the shaping of masculinities and violence	46
3.1. Masculinities, militarism, and war	46
3.2. Diversity of masculinities	48
3.3. The humanisation of male violence as a structural problem	50
3.4. Male involvement in cyber-violence	52
3.5. Drivers of intimate partner violence	54
4. State of the field: Men, masculinities, and gender-based violence prevention	55
4.1. Ethical considerations	55
4.2. Accountability to feminist and women's rights movements	58
4.3. The problem of 'men' as a homogenous category	59
4.4. Effective programme approaches: Learning and the way ahead	60
4.5. Working with Indigenous men and boys and with men and boys from subaltern groups/socially marginalised communities	67
5. Recommendations	72
Annex 1. Links to the symposium sessions on engaging men and boys in ending gender-based violence	74

1. Overview

At the 3rd MenEngage Global Symposium (also referred to as the MenEngage Ubuntu Symposium), leading voices on gender and social justice looked at how far the field of men and masculinities has come in terms of commitments to gender justice. The symposium served as a space to critically look at what has changed within this field, as well as what needs to change and where the field needs to go. It was a safe space to dig deep and advance a critical conversation on men and masculinities and on preventing and responding to gender-based violence (GBV), including violence against women and girls.

The 2nd MenEngage Global Symposium—held in 2014 in New Delhi—affirmed the need to transform masculinities and to commit to having feminism and human rights inform that work. This third global symposium discussed being in a period of global backlash against gender justice and progressive social change, which must be countered through greater solidarity, allyship, and accountability to women’s rights; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer (LGBTIQ) rights; youth; climate justice; and racial justice movements. These insights and voices have never been clearer than in the eight years since the Delhi symposium in demanding full recognition of their rights.

Indeed, speakers and participants in the MenEngage Ubuntu Symposium discussed how these movements must be mainstreamed into work with men and boys—and, importantly, how this work must learn from these movements. Advocating against single-issue approaches, speakers and participants spoke of engaging in gender justice by addressing issues ranging from neoliberalism to gender binaries and hierarchies to even language. They emphasised the primary link between patriarchy and economies, and—recognising that underlying hegemonic and structural economic factors have an interest in maintaining inequalities but are often overlooked in the face of more visible social norms and cultures—they advocated for engaging with the complete triangle of economy, culture, and politics without getting stuck in one corner.

Additionally, speakers and participants challenged ‘either-or’ approaches, bringing out the need to complement individual behaviour change—getting out of the ‘man box’—with attention to systems and political change that reframes structural inequality. The symposium also brought out examples of how addressing structural inequalities alone is not enough in the absence of personal change. It also demonstrated a shift in thinking to an ecological-frame theory of change in the personal, group, institutional, and systemic spheres. As GBV prevention work with men and boys has evolved, there has been tension between the work developing as a professional arena (with programme interventions and targets) and it being a mobilising effort along with feminist movements to advance social change. Speakers and participants discussed the importance of not de-politicising GBV work to attract participation, as well as recentring accountability to feminist movements, particularly during COVID-19. The pandemic has disproportionately and differently impacted women, girls, and LGBTIQ people and brought out the need to ensure their equal representation in all COVID response planning and decision-making.

During the symposium, speakers and participants talked about masculinities more broadly than just engaging men and boys. They used the lenses of intersectionality and decolonization. That legitimising authenticity—honouring cultures that have been undermined—must inform social agendas. In the symposium, these lenses brought to the forefront the postcolonial feminist critique of global hierarchies of North and South, in which perspectives from the diversity of the Global South are not fully informing the work, as well as how this absence means a loss of autonomy and ownership among Global South activists and leadership in efforts to end GBV.

Two key insights that emerged were the need to prioritise community engagement and participation in all approaches to violence prevention programming, as well as the need to incorporate greater sexual and gender diversity. Just as the category of ‘women’ has opened up in the field of women’s rights work, the category of ‘men’ is problematic. Importantly, the symposium provided rigorous evidence that change is possible in men and boys—in transforming masculinities, in transforming family and power relationships, in reducing violence against women and children, and in becoming more equitable in their own lives, including equally sharing care responsibilities.

Speakers and participants made a strong case for embracing ‘inner work’ as a foundation for transforming power structures. This emerged as a priority area of work for MenEngage Alliance as a collective, converging with the ‘Ubuntu’ theme of connectedness among all beings in the world, emphasising looking within oneself through intentional practices of self-reflection to grow, heal, and transform patriarchal systems.

2. Global context

2.1. Meta-trends

Critically analysing the global and regional meta-trends that are currently the greatest threats to the advancement of gender equality, and also those positive trends that could be leveraged, symposium speakers and participants assessed the global state of work to eliminate patriarchal masculinities.

Anti-gender movements

“**The resistance and backlash to feminist work has in the last 10 to 20 years gained a dangerous new dynamism and new ideas. In many parts of the world, there is the rise of authoritarian populism in politics, leading to heavily patriarchal and misogynist national leaders. Politics itself is being restored into a toxic power cult, and at the same time, there is the rise of culture wars—sometimes from religious groups, sometimes secular—which are hostile to the concept of equal gender relations.**

— PROF. RAEWYN CONNELL (UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY),
[MEN AND MASCULINITIES PANEL \(PART 1\)](#)

At the centre of symposium conversations was the growing dominance of fascist and fundamentalist agendas across societies. Right-wing political mobilisation against feminism, LGBTIQ rights, racial justice, and men’s activism for gender equality was taking place in countries from France to Brazil to India to the United States. The worry was that movements of fear, hatred, and violence would grow as a consequence of these anti-progressive global political trends. As Gary Barker (CEO of Promundo-US) said during the [Men and Masculinities panel \(part 1\)](#):

My two home countries of Brazil and the US have seen leadership that we can only call fascist, and they’ve rolled back health rights, human rights, economic rights, gender equality against the opposition of key civil society organisations who have kept up the fight for rights and gender justice.

Speakers and participants identified the worldwide regression on gender equality as a powerful global movement of ‘anti-gender fundamentalism’ that has strengthened the abuse of men’s power over women, girls, and gender-nonconforming individuals. One of its clearer impacts is violence against women, girls, and LGBTIQ people, with its many variants. The sessions discussed how gender discrimination is strongly back on the agenda through labels like ‘protection of the family’ or ‘traditional values’, which are really a signal to reinforce a particular understanding of gender roles for women and girls, one that questions their right to decide and leads to promoting violence against them. These ideologies and religious fundamentalisms are also seizing on

regressive constructs like gender-binary identities.

Youth panellists worried that the current world order's hydra heads of patriarchy—fundamentalism, nationalism, and militarism—are resonating with millennials and members of Generation Z. Bangladeshi feminist activist Sanam Amin, noted during the [Intersectional Feminist Movement Voices panel](#):

Things we thought were closed in the history books, like, 'Oh, we used to burn women as witches...we used to deny education to women and make them stay at home.' No, that's still true in many parts of the world.

The conflicts are rooted in conservative groups in various parts of the world—including white supremacists—propagating the idea of a 'pure' and 'perfect' tradition and culture. In fact, evidence presented at the symposium showed the phenomenon has transcended regions and religions.

Closer attention is needed on how these agendas and actors are not fringe players but rather occupy positions of religious, political, and economic power, residing at the heart of the world's dominant political, financial, and multilateral institutions. Cindy Clark (co-executive director of the Association for Women's Rights in Development [AWID]) observed during the [Intersectional Feminist Movement Voices panel](#):

I am from the US...These are actors that target women, girls, people who are nonconforming in their gender identity or expression or sexual orientation. They target migrants, people of colour, and any community they can label as 'other' in order to defend what they understand as their religion, culture, or tradition. And so they advance this myth, either that we have a homogeneous nation—and we certainly hear that in [US President Donald] Trump's 'Make America Great Again'—or a return to what we were, which is a lie of what we ever were, or claims to uphold some kind of ethnic or racial superiority or purity.

These well-coordinated and well-resourced movements are undermining the universality of human rights everywhere. Across Europe and the United States, fundamentalist anti-rights actors focused on gender and sexuality are forging links with those focused on nationalism and anti-immigration actions. As Clark said during the panel, 'Look at the huge impact the organising of evangelicals and their money had in influencing political agendas against comprehensive sex education, advancing homophobia.'

Symposium participants also raised red flags of a scenario playing out in South Asia that echoes the toxic masculinity in political power and leadership seen during the 2020 US presidential election. Sharanya Sekaram of the Coalition of Feminists for Social Change (COFEM) highlighted during the [Intersectional Feminist Movement Voices panel](#):

This idea of a strongman and increased militarisation...in Sri Lanka, in a recent election that we had...there were implications that [those who lost power] were queer, and therefore, they couldn't provide the masculine leadership the country needs. And also, that idea of, 'You're protecting your motherland; you're protecting your mother; you're protecting women.'

Against the backdrop of the rise of anti-rights actors, Sekaram called upon feminists to unite and prepare much more.

Turkey's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention

The Council of Europe's Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence—commonly called the Istanbul Convention—is a lightning rod for right-wing groups resisting the so-called 'gender ideology' it represents. Turkey's withdrawal from the convention in March 2021—the same year as the convention's 10th anniversary—starkly reflected the attacks on women's hard-won rights and reduced protection against GBV as an outcome of growing political radicalisation and strongman politics. What was a demand from newly formed men's rights groups and religious fundamentalist alliances found an echo at the highest political levels, with the repercussions of Turkey's decision being felt on women's and LGBTIQ rights around the world.

The Istanbul Convention requires states to implement a multidisciplinary response to prevent violence against women. Currently ratified by 34 Council of Europe member states and by the European Union, the convention 'is the most advanced legally binding treaty in Europe which provides a holistic, intersectional approach to addressing the full continuum of violence against women, including online violence,' Iliana Balabanova (president and cofounder of the Bulgarian Women's Lobby, also representing the European Women's Lobby) said during the session *Turkey Leaving the Istanbul Convention*. Turkey's women's and LGBTIQ rights groups have long resisted the move, which came during the pandemic, when violence against women had peaked.

The withdrawal was part of a decade-long build-up against women's rights and gender identity, said Selen Lermioğlu Yılmaz of Eşitlik İçin Kadın Platformu during the session:

It was facilitated by a continuous weakening of the role of international alliances like the Council of Europe and the [European Union] and its member states. The undermining of women's and human rights in Turkey has been legitimised.

It was discussed at the session that world powers did not apply sanctions against Turkey for human rights violations, and antidemocratic actions did not prompt consequences from the international community. Berfu Şeker of Women for Women's Human Rights - New Ways said that before withdrawal, 'There were lots of violations of human rights, and the European Union didn't say anything for this, so this is an empowering matter for this withdrawal decision, I think.' She added that:

[Global anti-gender movements] support each other with similar discourses. So, what these groups have been saying is that the terms 'gender', 'sexual orientation', and so on are against our traditional family values....All the policies with regards to women turned into family issues.

Anti-gender discourse and narratives against the Istanbul Convention are tools for authoritarian populist governments propounding nationalistic agendas, which seek to polarise communities by criminalising and demonising progressive values as 'Western phobias' and by mobilising right-wing segments against new 'enemies' for electoral gains.

Speakers and participants at *Turkey Leaving the Istanbul Convention* feared withdrawals from other human rights conventions and treaties. The Parliament of Poland, for instance, has discussed a domestic 'family rights convention' to replace the Istanbul Convention, while Bulgaria has refused to ratify it. Speakers and participants noted the rise of far-right movements and governments—allied with, for instance, religious anti-abortion groups and groups against providing state-subsidised childcare services—had succeeded in creating a backlash against women's and LGBTIQ rights in multilateral spaces. Şeker said that for many years, Christian anti-gender, anti-abortion groups have been trying to make the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women and the United Nations Human Rights Council 'take a step back from the commitments to advancing women's rights':

The multilateral systems are also under attack. So, why these conventions are being targeted at the national level is very apparent. There is a rise in far-right movements

and far-right governments in the world, and [the] Istanbul Convention has been one of the things these governments have been using to symbolise what they are against—women’s rights, human rights, rule of law, and democracy.

As David Kiuranov (member of the MenEngage Europe Steering Committee) said, ‘It must be recognised this is no uncontrolled backlash but a coordinated plan.’ A countermovement against women’s rights, human rights, and the rule of law and democracy has been fostered since the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action, when these rights came into mainstream discourse. Nevertheless, there are tools and strategies by which ‘power with’ could be leveraged both domestically and internationally, said Luis Lineo of the MenEngage Europe Secretariat.

The European Union, its state parties, the United Nations, and civil society allies could take action to pressure the Council of Europe on the withdrawal. The Venice Commission’s opinion could be put forward, for example, or the issue of women’s loss of rights could be used as an entry point to frame a larger erosion of democracy and civil liberties. The work for gender justice and preventing violence against women is interconnected with working for freedom, democracy, and rule of law.





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Changes in political economy and structures of patriarchy

The symposium flagged another trend of global concern: the enormous influence of international financial markets and institutions in global economies, the enormous degree of corporate power, and the impact of the dominant economic model on gender equality and human rights. Not only does 1 per cent of the population own as much wealth as the rest of the world combined but also 71 of the largest economic revenue collectors globally are corporations.¹ Even as much of rights defenders' advocacy is at the national level, many states cannot uphold economic rights or respond to citizens' demands because they are beholden to powerful, embedded corporate interests. It is 'a model that's based on prioritising profit at the expense of workers, people, the environment, and exploiting all of those,' Cindy Clark of AWID said during the [Intersectional Feminist Movement Voices panel](#). Linked to this, Bangladeshi feminist activist Sanam Amin, said during that panel:

Take all the money from the billionaires...set up global healthcare and pension systems, end all the conflicts, make all the arms and weapons disappear...shut down all the extractivism and start rewilding...shut down all of the fossil fuel companies. All of these things would make our structures of patriarchy get dismantled, our structure of neoliberal capitalism dismantled. They work together, and that's what I would do.

The COVID-19 pandemic had made visible these major economic shifts and intensified resource redistribution: 'The poor are becoming poorer, and those with wealth in their hands are profiting from the financial and economic fragility of those who have been structurally and historically excluded,' said Undariya Tumursukh, PhD (advisor at MONFEMNET National Network, Mongolia) during the [Men and Masculinities panel \(part 1\)](#).

Feminist-informed solidarity

Solidarity among feminist movements is gaining momentum, and participants highlighted the importance of taking this opportunity to collectively strengthen in order to reclaim, reframe, and advance the agenda of gender, social, racial, and climate justice. These movements have reached a stage in which feminist perspectives on power, inclusion, equity, and the problems of power hierarchies are being used to understand processes of dominance in all aspects of life—from people to land and environment—without being limited to one aspect of gender. By always centring those experiencing oppression, not because they are survivors but because they are the experts in the solutions, this intersectional framework of feminism has brought something forward that is less competitive, violent, and hostile. What movements for feminism and social justice have is the power of empathy, love, and solidarity for the reality of the lived experiences of the oppressed, something that has not occurred historically. Using one's privilege to speak up and speak out for them is radical for bringing about social change, said Bangladeshi feminist activist Sanam Amin during the [Intersectional Feminist Movement Voices panel](#).

¹ Coffey, C., Espinoza Revollo, P., Harvey, R., Lawson, M., Parvez Butt, A., Piaget, K., Sarosi, D., & Thekkudan, J. (2020). *Time to care: Unpaid and underpaid care work and the global inequality crisis*. Oxfam International. <https://oxfamlibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/620928/bp-time-to-care-inequality-200120-en.pdf>; Babic, M., Fichtner, J., & Heemskerck, E. M. (2017). States versus corporations: Rethinking the power of business in international politics. *The International Spectator*, 52(4), 20–43. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03932729.2017.1389151>

Lessons from youth-led movements

During the [Youth Leadership and Movement Building panel](#), youth leaders shared their experiences of being involved in youth-led movements, with the following overarching lessons:

- **Be more inclusive.** Many mainstream movements can be inaccessible, which youth-led movements have addressed by encouraging volunteering and by holding intergenerational conversations that involve diverse groups. Feminist spaces can sometimes be exclusionary—particularly for youth—because these spaces’ language is not easily accessible to the layperson, because it is expensive to participate in events, or because only certain ‘types’ of women and girls are welcomed at events.
- **Explore a different type of activism.** Youth movements focus heavily on online activism, which has proven to be a highly beneficial way to reach and mobilise diverse people and groups. Youth movements are built through volunteerism and education, and they give space to elevate the voices of dissidents, including around LGBTIQ masculinities. Youth movements are not bogged down by traditional organising’s bureaucracies, hierarchies, and power games. They are also not institutionalising, are collaborative and not careerist, and are not disconnected from the cause by a ‘saviour’ complex.
- **See what young people can contribute.** Youth movements see young people as decision-makers who bring value to the table, recognising them and giving them a voice. They do not see young people as lacking experience, skills, maturity, or ability.



Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda (founder and chief executive, Rozaria Memorial Trust), speaking at “Intersectional Feminist Movement Voices Panel”

2.2. Where the work on engaging men and boys fits in

Coming to the heart of the matter, the symposium interrogated where engagement with men and boys in ending GBV fits into the broader social justice work taking place: What should its constructs and framing be? How do the concerns of equality, rights, and social justice relate to the work with men and boys?

Allying with diverse social movements and building shared political agendas

“**We need to look into the totality of how patriarchy operates... As long as we work on the margins of tinkering with patriarchy... and do not have the courage to work with feminist theologians, to work with feminist cultural gender experts...we will continue to be measuring the instrumentalistic indicators without being transformative to the fundamentals of patriarchy.**

— NYARADZAYI GUMBONZVANDA (FOUNDER AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE, ROZARIA MEMORIAL TRUST), *INTERSECTIONAL FEMINIST MOVEMENT VOICES PANEL*

The symposium brought out that transforming masculinities means seeing the connections with the larger feminist struggles to dismantle patriarchy and its multiple intersecting inequalities. Participants and speakers saw shifting the dominant notions of masculinities as being critical to building necessary alliances. Additionally, as feminists, men and boys must be involved in other movements that fight injustice, such as climate and labour movements. ‘This needs to be one of the most important goals of the work with men and the MenEngage Alliance,’ said Gabrielle Jamela Hosein (senior lecturer at the Institute for Gender and Development Studies at the University of the West Indies in Trinidad and Tobago). This, she said, would support an accountability-centred approach to stopping men’s violence against women.

From the perspective of organisations and groups working with men, having an alliance with diverse, progressive social change agendas and participating groups has become increasingly relevant as anti-gender, anti-rights agendas have gained traction globally. Throughout the symposium, this work was defined much more broadly than just how men treat women and how boys treat girls. It was also defined as being about the multiple structures of society that are patriarchal, oppressive, and perpetuating patriarchal masculinities.

The symposium brought out that one cannot talk about gender justice without addressing climate justice, racism, and inequality. As Jeff Hearn (professor emeritus at the Hanken School of Economics, Finland, and senior professor of gender studies at Örebro University, Sweden) said during the *Men and Masculinities panel (part 2)*, ‘There are lots of ways of actually thinking how men can be involved, and I think issues of violence, oppression, postcolonialism, and racism are absolutely central.’ Kate Gilmore (fellow at the Carr Center for Human Rights Policy at Harvard University) said during the *Intersectional Feminist Movement Voices panel* that the struggle for gender equality is intersectional at its core ‘in a way that really challenges our fixed ideas about gender binary, or our fixed ideas about North and South, or our fixed ideas about how social change can come about.’

Black Lives Matter movement reshaping gender, patriarchy, and masculinities

“ It starts with us honouring the lived experiences of our world’s most marginalised communities, those who white supremacy attacks first.

— PRESTON MITCHUM (FORMER POLICY DIRECTOR, UNITE FOR REPRODUCTIVE AND GENDER EQUITY [URGE]), [OPENING PLENARY](#)

Linking issues of gender, violence, race, and the criminal justice system within the context of the Black Lives Matter movement, the symposium’s speakers and participants said that for masculinities work to become more intersectional and political, the Black Lives Matter movement’s call to action needs amplifying and solidarity.

The [opening plenary](#) included a notable focus on Black Lives Matter, which originated in the United States but has messages that have resonated around the world. Darren Walker (president of the Ford Foundation), for example, placed the symposium in the context of concerns over growing authoritarianism:

It is a context of recognition of the legacy of white supremacy, of colonialism, that has contributed to and enabled so much of the toxic patriarchy that is at the centre of the challenge before us.

Preston Mitchum of URGE reiterated the intersectionality of Black Lives Matter, which was founded by three Black women (two identifying as queer):

The Black Lives movement affirms the lives of Black queer and trans folks, disabled folks, undocumented folks, folks with records, women, and all Black lives along the gender spectrum. Our network centres those who have been marginalised within Black liberation movements.

Through its organising, mobilising, and politics, Black Lives Matter addresses the combined dynamics of power, privilege, racial discrimination, and systemic harm. It is also connected with intersectionality. ‘It brings out the need to speak up and build communities,’ said Bandana Rana (vice-chair of the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women).

Speaking of gender violence as not only violence by men against women, Geetanjali Misra (cofounder and executive director of Creating Resources for Empowerment in Action [CREA]) said exploring violence in the criminal justice system reveals the extent to which masculine identity is shaped by relations between men themselves, and also:

As feminists, we need to bring these together much more—that this community of violence both inside and outside the state is a gender issue, but it’s also a race issue, as well as a criminal justice issue.



Building accountability to LGBTIQ individuals

Symposium speakers and participants powerfully described how shifting conceptions of gender are linked to a crisis of masculinity, exploring the links among GBV, homophobia, transphobia, and the recent backlash against trans rights. Conceptions of gender have gone through a profound transformation in recent years, collapsing the neat binaries of 'men' and 'women' into which the world and its people could be organised. As Geetanjali Misra of CREA noted during the [opening plenary](#), the terms 'violence against women' and 'gender-based violence' are often used interchangeably, but a GBV approach also includes looking at violence against people who transgress societal norms around sexuality and gender.

Activists for LGBTIQ rights are increasingly calling into question programmes and policies designed by social justice actors in civil society and government that are based on binary constructs. However, as Misra said, 'Striking at the roots of patriarchal and heteronormative power structures is resulting in a backlash that can be categorised as anti-gender politics.' Anti-gender politics stems from a deep sense of fear and vulnerability, built around the crisis of 'masculinity' fundamentally differentiating itself from 'femininity' and womanhood's perceived lower status.

LGBTIQ people are suffering a hostile climate in this reactionary context, which has been increased by COVID-19. Unpacking the concept of power and intersectionality, Preston Mitchum of URGE said during the [opening plenary](#) that violence, disempowerment, and decentering happen to the most marginalised and underrepresented people, which includes queer, trans, gender-nonbinary, and intersex people. He said the field of engaging men and boys must continually interrogate that it is not working in a way that affirms a gender binary that has led to so much toxic masculinity. Not all men and boys experience masculinities in the same way. Space should be given to the voices of dissident masculinities, including LGBTIQ masculinities.

Embracing this diversity in masculinities work—moving away from binary language; listening to the experiences of lesbian, bisexual, trans, and intersex (LBTI) women and of gender-diverse people; creating an affirming, respectful environment; celebrating bodily autonomy and diversity; and recognising intersecting struggles—makes it easier to engage in gender justice and to be an ally of women, girls, and trans and nonbinary people.

Tokenism has been an important issue within the gender and social justice movements, speakers and participants highlighted. Describing how most global social justice movements only 'tick the box' on queer young people in leadership, Martin Karadzhev (chair of the Youth Steering Committee for the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association) said during the [Youth Leadership and Movement Building panel](#):

LGBTIQ youth issues are too often sidelined on [the] global level, and new young queer people are often invisible from other movements. There are multiple harmful practices, like sterilisation requirements or conversion therapies or surgeries on intersex people or violence against LBTI women. They're often left out from the global harmful practices and on any conversation on bodily autonomy or [sexual and reproductive health and rights]. So, that challenge was already apparent there, and these issues were deemed as too political, too controversial, to be addressed in those spaces.

This hurts queer young people in multiple ways: putting their lives at risk due to being outed; hindering their meaningful participation as leaders in civil society, particularly at a time when COVID-19 has further isolated and marginalised the community; and impeding the design and availability of infrastructure and services such as healthcare.

The symposium's speakers and participants also discussed the need to address and dismantle unequal power dynamics within movements, saying it involves acknowledging the diverse needs and challenges within a movement, recognising privileges within it, and giving space to its diverse communities to speak on the issues that impact them. Karadzhev said:

Too often, all of our identities are bulked up together...not going into depth on our communities' needs and issues. Far too often, our spaces are dominated by cisgender or gay, white, middle-aged men.

Understanding the individuality of different experiences, challenges, struggles, identities, and harmful practices is crucial for the health of movements.

With the recent backlash against trans rights and fearmongering around transgender people—including trans children, trans youth, and trans women—speakers and participants discussed the denial or undermining of the rights of groups that fall out of global agenda-setting spaces because they do not conform to certain norms and narratives. Significantly, this is part of a broader effort to deny gender equity and equality, to undermine sexual and reproductive health and rights, and to fuel the larger backlash against the rights, choices, and inclusion of women, gender-diverse people, and people of colour. Reaffirming the feminist principle of centring the most vulnerable and most marginalised people, those at the symposium discussed the need for full inclusion in the work on transforming masculinities.

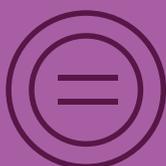


PHOTO CREDIT: Carolina Jaramillo / [Shutterstock.com](https://www.shutterstock.com)

Integrating the individual into systemic transformation

“What patriarchy does—and that’s what we need to shift...is to transfer and institutionalise collective power and responsibility and personalise it to the male identity....It may be a parliamentarian...or a police officer. We need to reframe the premise of engagement.... The moment we reframe power, we are able to be transformative.

— NYARADZAYI GUMBONZVANDA (FOUNDER AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE, ROZARIA MEMORIAL TRUST), [INTERSECTIONAL FEMINIST MOVEMENT VOICES PANEL](#)

While it was important to target behaviour change and support the transformation of individuals, the symposium’s speakers and participants brought out the need for stronger connections and calls to action on the required systems change. While personal changes are valuable, they must lead to an effort to change the structures that support inequalities. Work is needed across all levels in which power and privilege manifest. Institutional change efforts in relation to preventing and addressing GBV must involve the individuals within the institutions changing their misogynistic mindsets, attitudes, and behaviours. There are numerous instances of systems change efforts being resisted and sabotaged because they failed to target fundamental changes in sexist and masculinist social cultures among the people within the institutions. Linking this to the importance of interrogating underlying economic factors, Undariya Tumursukh of MONFEMNET National Network said during the [Men and Masculinities panel \(part 1\)](#):

There needs to be greater realisation that social and economic structures matter. We cannot continue talking about the political, the institutional, and the cultural levels as if they were separate from the underlying structural economic factors.

Addressing COVID-19’s impact

In terms of COVID-19’s significance for men and masculinities, Noelene Nabulivou (cofounder of Diverse Voices and Action for Equality [DIVA]) framed it thus during the [Men and Masculinities panel \(part 1\)](#):

On the frontlines of the Corona pandemic impact are women and those already marginalised or experiencing violence,...Societies have responded in all kinds of ways to being locked down, with infrastructure, transport, food, medical supplies not being available...and a reversal of many of the gains around women and children’s rights. There are these extremely urgent, immediate needs for people who are going through hardships right now, including sex workers and the LGBTQI community...and one also has to try to plan and think about the long-term impact of this, which is in some ways hard to predict.

Another issue raised at the symposium was a reversal of the gains in men’s accountability to women and children under COVID-19. The pandemic represents a time in which women everywhere have been experiencing higher rates of unemployment and economic insecurity, while at the same time having a greater burden of care. The contraction of economies has also severely hurt men’s ability to survive economically and access an income in the legal labour market. An increase in men’s participation in the informal sector and in the illegal economy has exacerbated their own insecurity and also increased the pressure on women and children. In some areas, men’s rights groups have pressured the state for a moratorium on men making maintenance payments for their children because of the high unemployment rates.

3. Critical analysis of the shaping of masculinities and violence

The symposium involved sharing knowledge on the advancements—and blind spots—in understanding how race, class, gender, ability, sexuality, nationality, and age have impacted notions and expectations of manhood and masculinities, as well as what role marginalisation, discrimination, oppression, militarization, crime, and violence play in the lives of men and boys. 'It is in understanding this that one becomes aware of the most effective ways of breaking through and creating effective change,' said Iman Amrani (multimedia journalist for *The Guardian*) during the [Men and Masculinities panel \(part 2\)](#). The symposium also involved discussions on the historical context shaping masculinities in some regions of the world.

3.1. Masculinities, militarism, and war

“War is constantly a fabrication of strongmen. It is one field where masculinity becomes so simple and so brutal.

— BRIGITTE BAPTISTE (COLOMBIAN RESEARCHER AND BIOLOGIST), [MEN AND MASCULINITIES PANEL \(PART 2\)](#)

The speakers and participants discussed how conflicts have affected specific cultural ideas of masculinities and violence, creating notions of masculinities that have caused men to treat others inhumanely. For example, participants from Rwanda spoke of the close link between men’s involvement in genocide and their shaping of masculinities. The International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES) also indicated a direct link between the prevailing perceptions of masculinities in Rwanda and men’s involvement in violence and genocide.² Evidence from multiple settings around the world and from

² Rwanda MenEngage Network & Rwanda Men’s Resource Centre. (2010). *Masculinity and gender based violence in Rwanda: Experiences and perceptions of men and women*. <https://promundoglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Masculinity-and-Gender-Based-Violence-in-Rwanda-IMAGES.pdf>

work like IMAGES has shown that conflict-affected settings have higher rates of men’s violence against their partners. Fidele Rutayisire (founder and executive director of the Rwanda Men’s Resource Centre) said during the [Men and Masculinities panel \(part 2\)](#):

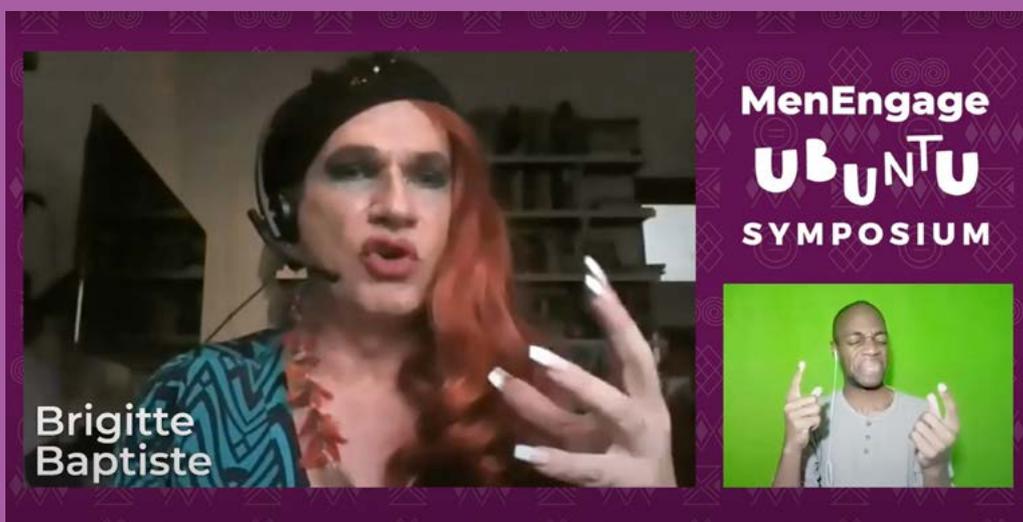
During the genocide, there was a slogan of being a man, as if being a man means killing as many Tutsis as possible. So, again, this international gender equality survey, the IMAGES, shows that there is a link between the violence of adult men against their female partners.

A nation’s defence budget may not be an obvious link to gender, masculinities, and violence. However, defence budgeting and investments communicate the state’s priorities. Prioritising military might, war, and overpowering people and states reflects an insistence on maintaining the society’s current power relations. Speakers and participants in the [Men and Masculinities panel \(part 2\)](#) said more work is needed to investigate why states participate in war and how conflict in a region shapes masculinities, taking a macro-level look at conflict and how it affects individual men and boys. In a challenge to the field, David Duriesmith (lecturer in gender and politics at the University of Sheffield) said gender is not only present in research presented to students of international relations, which led him to research the relationships among masculinities, militarism, and war:

The involvement of states in war; the promotion of militarism; the justification of martial violence as natural, inevitable, and unchangeable is a profound blind spot for the subject of conflict.

Duriesmith said masculinities interventions in sites of conflict often miss the people holding power in the institutions that are based on performances of martial masculinity:

There is a challenge and a risk that sometimes our interventions can focus exclusively on how young, poor, marginalised men need to change their behaviour—which, again, I’m not saying that they don’t, but then what gets left out of the conversation are, ‘What are the structures and institutions that compel these men to pursue dominance, violence, and wealth?’ So, for example, men within military institutions are very often not targeted in the same way as you might have men who are within gangs or men who are in militia groups.



Brigitte Baptiste (Colombian researcher and biologist), speaking at Men And Masculinities Panel (Part 2)

3.2. Diversity of masculinities

Symposium speakers and participants analysed the key factors that shape ideas of masculinities globally. This deconstruction aimed to understand how cultural characteristics and the prioritisation of values in various contexts help build the identities that people collectively share.

Europe

There isn't only one type of masculinity in Europe, said Hearn during the [Men and Masculinities panel \(part 2\)](#), and even the word 'masculinity' is understood differently (in Latvia, for instance, compared to Ireland). Thus, researchers prefer to talk instead about 'men's individual and collective practices' to avoid confusion. European research such as CROME (Critical Research Network on Men in Europe) and *The Role of Men in Gender Equality—European Strategies & Insights* has shown great similarity across diverse settings—on violence against women and children and on power centres such as top management and governments. It has also shown substantial difference in terms of political movements, forms of racism, and histories of feminism.³ Hearn said the projects show that regarding men's role in gender equality, 'There are slow, gradual increases in men's involvement in those things in Europe, but it's very variable, slow. So, women are changing faster than men, basically.'

Latin America

In recent decades, the factors directly contributing to issues around masculinities in Latin America have included the progressive values, policies, and identities building up the advancement of conservative, neoliberal forces in politics promoting religious fundamentalism, dominant masculinities, and a strong so-called 'family values' agenda. 'We realise those rights are not eternal; they're not permanent....There's a constant fight in terms of those rights and advancements, and we have to be there ready to respond,' said Marcos Nascimento of Fiocruz during the [Men and Masculinities panel \(part 2\)](#).

The Caribbean

The violence of the colonial encounter has had a lasting legacy that continues to shape the Caribbean, a region with the highest rates of sexual violence in the world.⁴ As Gabrielle Jamela Hosein of the Institute for Gender and Development Studies said during the [Men and Masculinities panel \(part 2\)](#), gender relations began to transform when African women were brought to plantations and enslaved and when Native women were brought as indentured workers and became part of the

³ *Crome: Critical Research Network on Men in Europe*. (n.d.). The European Men Profeminist Network. http://www.europrofem.org/contri/2_04_en/en-masc/55en_mas.htm; Belghiti-Mahut, S., Bergmann, N., Gärtner, M., Hearn, J., Gullvåg Holter, Ø., Hrženjak, M., Puchert, R., Scambor, C., Scambor, E., Schuck, H., Seidler, V., White, A., & Wojnicka, K. (2013). *The role of men in gender equality—European strategies & insights*. European Commission Directorate-General for Justice. <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/f6f90d59-ac4f-442f-be9b-32c3bd36eaf1>

⁴ *GBV in the Caribbean*. (n.d.). UN Women. Retrieved December 8, 2021, from <https://caribbean.unwomen.org/en/caribbean-gender-portal/caribbean-gbv-law-portal/gbv-in-the-caribbean>; Plan International. (2020, May 19). *Surge in violence against girls and women in Latin America and the Caribbean*. ReliefWeb. <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/surge-violence-against-girls-and-women-latin-america-and-caribbean>

wage economy in mass numbers, earlier than elsewhere in the world. Male ideologies resulted in brutal backlash to ‘women going against the social order’. Hosein said the region continues to negotiate not only a highly exploited colonial economic structure but also a legacy of family violence and sexual violence. This includes child sexual abuse, incest, and high rates of violence and discrimination against LGBTIQ communities, with boys who grow up in fundamentally violent households witnessing, experiencing, and potentially reproducing violence later on.⁵

There have also been important contradictions. From the 1970s to 1990s, well-organised feminist movements brought systemic changes at the state level, the LGBTIQ movement successfully mobilised, and men also became involved in work for gender equality and social change. However, states took a turn to the right in terms of gender, homophobia, sex, and sexuality starting in the early 2000s, supported by an influx of US Christian fundamentalist missionaries. Hosein said during the [Men and Masculinities panel \(part 2\)](#):

Hegemonic masculinity or the traditional ideas of men are caught between these different currents, both of which are located and intersected with global movements. And so, in a sense, the retreat to putting women back in a certain place, or at least in a manageable place or in a place that’s not too powerful, becomes part of a strategy of coping.

Hotline for men in China

The China White Ribbon Volunteers Network set up a hotline for men in China in 2010. The hotline is part of community-level interventions with men on preventing GBV in more than 80 cities. Activities include:

- **Advocacy and communication:** Creative strategies to engage with the issue have included staging a drama titled ‘Penis Monologue’; developing the ‘Men’s Story’ project, during which the country’s first male nurse also shared his story; and bringing out children’s books that take up domestic violence.
- **Counselling, training, and capacity-building:** The hotline for men is a mobile phone number, which was also expanded to a WeChat account; additionally, the network has conducted ‘Witness to Violence’ trainings and organised workshops for perpetrators, particularly since the enactment of a 2016 law against domestic violence.
- **Youth education:** Issues of GBV and male engagement were integrated into sexuality education for young people, expanding the curriculum from imparting only biological or reproductive knowledge.

Describing the hotline experience, network founder Dr Fang Gang said during [Male Involvement in Gender-Based Violence](#) that skilled psychologists provide counselling through the hotline, which mainly targets men; however, 85 per cent of the callers are female victims of domestic violence, while the remaining 15 per cent are men, including some perpetrators. The hotline’s support has been life-altering for some men and boys, with Gang describing a male caller who went from using violence to becoming an active volunteer.

⁵ Crichlow, W., DeShong, H., & Lewis, L. (2014). Vulnerability, persistence and destabilization of dominant masculinities: An introduction. *Caribbean Review of Gender Studies*, 8, 1–14. https://sta.uwi.edu/crgs/december2014/journals/CRGS_8_Pgs001-14_EditorialVulnerability_CrichlowDeShongLewis.pdf

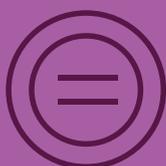
3.3. The humanisation of male violence as a structural problem

The symposium included discussions on the humanisation of male violence, with one panel arguing that when violence is seen only as an individual act, the tendency is to pathologize the individual without observing the violence as a structural phenomenon. Panellists and speakers during [La Humanización de la Violencia Masculina Como Problema Estructural \(The Humanisation of Male Violence as a Structural Problem\)](#) said we can understand the process of men and boys embodying violence by interrogating the two complementary elements: demonisation and humanisation of the aggressor.

The speakers shared that one general response to male violence is to demonise and dehumanise the aggressors (e.g., ‘They’re devils’; ‘They’re sick’). This reaction helps recognise the aggression as unacceptable, generate solidarity with the survivor, and sanction and campaign against the aggressors. However, in some cases, survivors may find it difficult to demonise someone they see as a multidimensional human being, someone they consider to be a ‘good’ man whom they also love. Additionally, survivors may not recognise the violence because society has normalised male aggression—even blaming the survivors (which is quite common, for example, with date rape or street harassment). Society focuses on the action and on the victim, staying in the dichotomy of ‘good’ and ‘bad’, without fundamentally questioning the man’s role as an aggressor.

Activist and researcher Icla de Fátima Aranda Castro proposed in the session that it is important to work with the concept of ‘re-humanisation’ of the aggressor, acknowledging they are not a ‘devil’ or ‘sick’ because, for instance, incidents normalising rape culture demonstrate that this is not an issue of everyone having a mental illness. It is an issue of a system that celebrates sexual and gender-based violence, teaching men and boys to replicate it and women and girls to normalise it. Individual men and boys do not create this narrative of masculinities on their own—it takes the whole of society to construct masculine narratives in relation to femininities and to enforce it. ‘Demonisation is unidimensional,’ Aranda Castro said. ‘It individualises the abuse, essentialises the aggressor and, therefore, avoids having to deal with the system that fosters and valorises such behaviours and attitudes among men and boys.’

Re-examining the aggressor is also important for individual survivors to recognise that the person whom they may have considered ‘good’ can also be an abuser; this makes it easier for the survivor to take needed action. The dialectic of demonisation-humanisation allows for an awareness of how society is structured to manage the aggressor and condemn the survivors, as well



as allows for an understanding that while the perpetrator is culpable, they are not the only participant in the circle of violence. 'It is important to recognise systemic sexism as a structure that fosters and reproduces violence, its justification, and invisibility,' said political historian and anthropologist Juan Manuel Espinoza Benza, who noted cultural factors like the normalisation of machismo in Latin America during the session.

From a societal perspective, 'male violence has [a] structural and social background and, therefore, it also requires an approach at this level,' specialist in gender and masculinities Pablo Ramírez Solano said during the session. He said strategies to address the full extent of male violence in society have not been developed. Statistics on male homicides, assaults, participation in conflicts, aggression, and self-abuse help visualise the depth of male violence beyond the issue of violence against women and girls.

Using a broader lens to examine male violence does not diminish the importance of work to prevent GBV and violence against women and girls or work to compare forms of violence. Rather, it aims to position male violence as a phenomenon not only of individual and social norms but also of social institutions and structures (e.g., state, education, religion, and family) that accept and promote it. Calling for deeper research into the social construction of violence and masculinities and its consequences—from public health to militarism to environmental crisis—Espinoza said, 'An essential element of preventing violence against women is to develop multidimensional social policies to intervene in male violence as a structural phenomenon.'



3.4. Male involvement in cyber-violence

Examining the links between cyber-violence and GBV, symposium speakers and participants shared the troubling realisation that new tools have been used to attack the human dignity of people (including women and girls) in situations of oppression and discrimination. Technology-facilitated GBV follows the same pattern as offline violence does, resulting in psychological, sexual, and physical violence and exploitation. However, it has the potential to be even more harmful due to it being anonymous, pervasive, unregulated, and easily perpetrated remotely. A byproduct of societal misogyny and heteronormativity, cyber-violence reproduces inequalities and discrimination against people who are systematically oppressed and discriminated against. The (mostly male) perpetrators feed off the lack of accountability the medium's anonymity offers and off a sense of deindividuation that leads to moral disengagement.

Areas of cyber-violence

Key areas of cyber-violence discussed during [Male Involvement in Gender-Based Violence](#) include:

- **Cyberstalking:** All forms of online stalking, controlling, emails, texting, publishing offensive comments, hacking, and using stalkerware
- **Nonconsensual sharing of images:** Includes sextortion, revenge porn, sharing intimate photos or videos, and creepshot voyeurism
- **Cyber-harassment:** Various forms of cyberbullying, slander, doxxing, threats of violence, using sexist jokes, human trafficking, and exploitation
- **Child pornography and online solicitation or grooming**

Underlying all these types of cyber-violence are the intersecting systems of patriarchal oppression, misogyny, sexism, racism, colonialism, homophobia, and transphobia. Also cutting across these forms of oppression is the radicalisation of young men to extremist ideologies through online platforms, which can involve an intersection of misogyny and white supremacist beliefs. The crossover between an internet subculture of misogyny and male violence on the one hand and offline violence on the other is visible in the rise of the incel ('involuntarily celibate') groups and incel-linked mass attacks and shootings in parts of the world.

The field of transforming masculinities and working with men and boys on gender justice must strengthen its understanding and knowledge on these new expressions of violence to address the multifaceted nature of patriarchal violence and its many manifestations. Speakers highlighted that this is even more relevant during COVID-19 because of the greater reliance on the internet and because cyber-violence against women, girls, and LGBTIQ individuals may be more pervasive. Placing online violence within the framework of a continuum of violence, Alessandra Pauncz (executive director of the European Network for the Work with Perpetrators of Domestic

Violence [WWP EN]) said during *Male Involvement in Gender-Based Violence* that more coherent and coordinated approaches by governments, the private sector, and civil society are needed on the issue. Examining domestic violence’s manifestation in cyber-violence, Pauncz cited data on the heavy use of coercive control tools like stalkerware software—typically by men to control their partners.⁶

However, technology can also be a versatile solution to prevent GBV at the ground level, say those working at the intersections of gender, data, tech, urban design, and community engagement. New approaches range from SOS apps to crowdmapping violence. For example, the Red Dot Foundation’s initiative Safecity is a digital platform that collects information from users in India, Kenya, and Malaysia on their experiences of sexual harassment in public spaces. Safecity then identifies hot spots and location-based trends, helping individuals, local communities, and governments work on strategies to encourage equal access to public spaces, including for women and girls. Founder ElsaMarie D’Silva said during *Use of Technology to End Gender Based Violence*:

When used productively, the digital world...helps give a vocabulary to your experience... of sex, sexuality, and gender...allows you to then find resonance, find a community of peer support...maybe the courage to break your silence...and access resources like legal support and police support.

Ritu David (founder of The Data Duck, a digital development firm in Mumbai and Melbourne) said during the session that women’s #MeToo stories on social media led to policy changes in countries and organisations. In the next step, tech can respond by using artificial intelligence (AI) to bring preventive solutions, not only punitive measures. Advocating for massively resourcing and scaling up technological solutions for GBV, Tanya Maringo (founder and executive director of Blink International) believes, ‘The decolonization of evidence and data, to ensure that we lead and own any change process, can take place through digital technology.’



ElsaMarie D’Silva (founder, Red Dot Foundation) speaking at “Use of Technology to End Gender Based Violence”

⁶ Baroncelli, L. (2020). *Same violence, new tools: How to work with violent men on cyber violence*. European Network for the Work with Perpetrators of Domestic Violence. https://www.work-with-perpetrators.eu/fileadmin/WWP_Network/redakteure/Campaign/2020/How_To_Cyber_Violence.pdf; Kaspersky Lab. (n.d.). Digital stalking in relationships. https://media.kasperskydaily.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/86/2021/11/17164103/Kaspersky_Digital-stalking-in-relationships_Report_FINAL.pdf

3.5. Drivers of intimate partner violence

The speakers and participants discussed continuing high rates of intimate partner violence (IPV)⁷ and femicide as a serious human rights violation and also a major public health problem. The World Health Organization reports that globally, about one in three women worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual IPV or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime. Most of this violence is IPV; 27 per cent of women aged 15 to 49 who have been in a relationship have experienced some form of physical and/or sexual IPV.⁸ Risk factors for experiencing both intimate partner and sexual violence include lower levels of education and access to paid employment, according to the World Health Organization. The violence may increase the risk of acquiring HIV in some settings, and as discussed during *Violence Against Women - Lifelong Consequences*, IPV can continue over the lifetime in the absence of a prevention strategy.

GBV and older adults

There's a stereotype that GBV exists only within younger couples. However, older women may experience not only IPV or other forms of GBV but also concurrently endure elder abuse or neglect. GBV against older adults must be addressed at several levels—by healthcare institutions, as well as victim support services—but few services have the capacity to meet older women's needs. WWP EN's Multi-Agency Responses to Violence Against Older Women (MARVOW), discussed during *Violence Against Women - Lifelong Consequences*, is a community response model that works with survivors and also perpetrators of violence against older women, examining the effects of power dynamics formed over long periods of time.

The speakers shared that one driver of IPV is patriarchal masculinities, which are linked to stereotypical gender norms and roles associated with men and women. Such drivers lead to women and girls being 'punished' for transgressions; IPV being condoned because of the societal acceptance of violence and women's perceived lower status; and inadequate responses by institutional governing structures that often side with the power holders and further victimise survivors and their families. Additionally, as Bonginkosi Ndlangamandla of MenEngage Swaziland shared during the *Skills Building Session on Intimate Partner Violence*, the dual legal system of customary laws prevailing over weakly enforced constitutional laws plays a key role in condoning GBV in Africa: 'In many communities, the traditional court has more power than the constitution, and the headman always rules in favour of the man rather than helping the abused woman.' Focusing on the key learning in engaging stakeholders, Klaivert Assis of MenEngage Namibia emphasised putting out information on the issue, creating forums for a multisectoral approach to IPV, and engaging community structures during the session. 'We have gone beyond seeing the traditional leaders and religious structures as just entry points,' Assis said. 'They are our partners in ensuring GBV is a development issue for the community.'

⁷ The World Health Organization defines intimate partner violence as 'behaviour by an intimate partner or ex-partner that causes physical, sexual or psychological harm, including physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse and controlling behaviours.' *Violence against women*. (2021, March 9). World Health Organization. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-women>

⁸ *Violence against women*. (2021, March 9). World Health Organization. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-women>

4. State of the field: Men, masculinities, and gender-based violence prevention

4.1. Ethical considerations

In recent years, more programmes around the world have engaged men and boys in efforts to end GBV (including violence against women and girls). Several key ethical questions have emerged on research, implementation, and funding, which are underpinned by the multiple perspectives on accountability and ‘power with’. Emerging from various deliberations during the symposium, these questions could help interrogate if the work in its current form reinforces global patriarchal structures, inequities, and power hierarchy. They include:

1. What do accountability to feminist and social movements and a ‘power with’ approach really look like for programming with men and boys to end GBV?
2. How much progress has been made to tip the scales of expertise in programming and research to low- and middle-income countries and communities?
3. How have feminist approaches been integrated and/or used in research around GBV and gender equality, if at all?
4. How can we disrupt and decolonize power and patriarchy in programmes, research, activism, and knowledge generation?
5. From the perspective of donors in this field, what does accountability mean?



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Feminisms, intersectionality, and decolonization

“**A feminist approach ensures programming and policies for responding to violence against women are grounded in women’s realities and in transformative approaches. The work should be framed in ways that are emancipatory both in process and intended outcome. It should support structural change and improve women’s lives in meaningful ways. This approach is of added significance in the context of COVID, when women have become more vulnerable in multiple ways, including being at greater risk of violence.**

—ZAINAB SULAIMAN (RESEARCHER, COFEM),
[BY THE WAY...DID YOU ASK WOMEN?](#)

From a feminist standpoint, existing inequalities must be challenged throughout the process of research, programming, and funding. Practising such an approach would mean balancing short-term survival needs during the pandemic with rights-based approaches. It would also mean that short-term approaches to address the pandemic do not overlook (as they largely have) men’s role in perpetuating and condoning GBV in the home, community, institutions, and political institutions or overlook men’s potential role in reducing the vulnerability of marginalised groups. Research would balance aspects like listening to women’s voices and ensuring they are not placed at risk of increased violence. In knowledge production, it would mean overcoming the power imbalance by decolonizing how knowledge is produced, valued, disseminated, and used.

‘Two key concepts to keep in mind in the violence against women space are how to be intersectional and accountable,’ said Angelica Pino (grants manager and capacity-strengthening specialist at the Sexual Violence Research Initiative [SVRI]) during [By the Way...Did You Ask Women?](#) Pino pointed to the relevance of decolonization in the process:

Intersectionality is a mechanism to understand gender does not exist in isolation from race, sexuality, caste, class, religion, and ability, among others, and that these identities are multiple and intersecting, impacting experiences of resultant power, privilege, inequalities, and exclusion.

The conceptual understanding of power and privilege helps subvert it. In the case of decolonizing knowledge, it meant challenging Eurocentrism and a colonial legacy in which knowledge production has privileged white male scholarship. Providing a reality check on the imbalance in knowledge production, Pino cited data showing the ‘Big Five’—the United States, the European Union, China, Japan, and Russia—account for 72 per cent of all researchers.⁹ Africa had 169 researchers per million inhabitants in 2013—4.6 times fewer than Asia and 24 times fewer than France (with 4,125 researchers per million inhabitants).¹⁰

⁹ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. (2015). *UNESCO science report: Towards 2030*. <http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/unesco-science-report-towards-2030-part1.pdf>

¹⁰ d’Aiglepierre, R., & Botton, S. (2020). *Rethinking international funding of African research: Towards a coalition of stakeholders* (AFD Policy Paper no. 3). Agence Française de Développement. <https://www.afd.fr/en/ressources/rethinking-international-funding-african-research-botton-daiglepierre>

Strengthening resource equity

“ **To reset the violence against women field, the situation of little resources going to low- and middle-income countries...as compared to the high-income countries has to change. What we need to do to subvert power is question what knowledge is, how, and by whom it is produced; be innovative in methods of subverting knowledge hierarchies; apply feminist principles to research, promoting ethical research centring women as actors, not subjects; and strengthen research capacity and resources of low- and middle-income countries.**

—ANGELICA PINO (GRANTS MANAGER AND CAPACITY-STRENGTHENING SPECIALIST, SVRI), [BY THE WAY...DID YOU ASK WOMEN?](#)

Describing SVRI's redistribution of resources in research and knowledge production, Angelica Pino said during [By the Way...Did You Ask Women?](#) that most of the organisation's grant-making has been in Africa, Latin America, and Asia since 2014. Additionally, SVRI invites proposals in multiple languages, and it encourages partnership among researchers, programmers, and policymakers in proposals, as well as between researchers from the Global North and South to develop shared global research agendas. During the session, Liz Dartnall (executive director of SVRI) suggested promoting nontraditional discourse—such as blogs or storytelling—and translations to overcome the English-language bias in research and knowledge production.

Advocating for a real shift in resource inequity, Annika Lysén (senior programme manager of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency) described a need for wealthy and powerful European and North American donor organisations to be accountable during [By the Way...Did You Ask Women?](#) To reach Sustainable Development Goal 5, donors should see the connections between tackling violence and a larger patriarchal system and thus take a strategically holistic approach. She encouraged donors to support a diverse portfolio of actors, including work with men that complements women's rights organisations' work in a constructive way and prioritises accountability to the feminist movement. Lysén said:

An important aspect of being ethical and accountable for us as donors is valuing efforts and research based in the South; practitioners and researchers there are in a much better position to advocate within their countries to policymakers, governments, and communities.

She also suggested that donors need to collaborate to scale up scattered violence prevention programmes, proposing that one method of donor partnership is building common guidelines for ethical funding.



Programming to support fathers

Anne Çocuk Eğitim Vakfı's (AÇEV's) father-support programme serves as an entry point for democratising the home environment and preventing violence. It also illustrates accountability to women and communities in developing programming with men and boys. Suna Hanöz-Penney of AÇEV said:

Most often, acts of violence begin at home, so change must begin at home. The programme partners with fathers for an equal division of labour, participation in decision-making and healthy parenting, tackling masculinities to be able to impact fatherhood and vice versa.

This is also tied to AÇEV's advocacy on parental leave policies and its efforts to bring women into the workforce, thus continuing individual work with men and boys while also connecting individual engagement with systemic change.

4.2. Accountability to feminist and women's rights movements

“When I came into the feminist movement around 1995... the engagement that feminists should have with the idea of transforming masculinities had already been established...that we cannot give up the terrain of engaging and transforming masculinities to men, that feminists always have a role to play in making sure it did not become a space for them for reinforcing patriarchy and excluding women.

—GABRIELLE JAMELA HOSEIN (SENIOR LECTURER, INSTITUTE FOR GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT STUDIES, [MEN AND MASCULINITIES PANEL \(PART 2\)](#))

Sharanya Sekaram of COFEM said during the [Intersectional Feminist Movement Voices panel](#) that programmes must be designed to be accountable to women and girls at all levels, from the individual to the organisational and structural. When male allies don't follow or engage with women and women-led GBV efforts, Sekaram said, they reinforce gender inequality. Sekaram also warned that we need to stop depoliticising GBV work to attract people to participate.

In terms of women's involvement in the work on masculinities, Anthony KKeedi (masculinities technical advisor at ABAAD) said during the [Men and Masculinities panel \(part 2\)](#) that men talking to other men alone would not reach the field's overall goals of men and boys seeing how male privilege blinds them from understanding its impact in diminishing women's power and contributions, as well as of men and

boys working together with women and girls. Marcos Nascimento of Fiocruz also said during the session:

Sometimes, it's so complicated; they can't see they have privileges. In situations of social vulnerability...working with groups of Black youth in Brazil, I find they all agree on racism, but the girls always point out the issue of gender inequality and violence against women and against Black girls as a very important issue.

When men engage without feminists or without people across the spectrum of gender identity, it tends to strengthen the collective resistance of men's rights groups. As Keedi warned:

Without working collectively with...people from all gender and sexual orientations from the whole spectrum...we risk creating a nouveau patriarchy...of men talking to men and men dominating the field, and before we've known it, we've helped patriarchy evolve faster than this COVID-19 is evolving.

4.3. The problem of 'men' as a homogenous category

Symposium speakers and participants interrogated the fixed category of 'men', with calls to go beyond simplistic ideas and broaden the definition of who is identified and recognised as a man. In fact, some voices questioned whether the current work uses ideas based largely on Western theories of a 'universal' man that do not account for men's differences. The ways in which gender work is done with men needs to be closely examined and done in terms of gender transformation. As Jeff Hearn of Hanken School of Economics and Örebro University said during the [Men and Masculinities panel \(part 2\)](#):

I want to really, actually problematise the category of men....This might sound a bizarre thing to do, but I think it's not always clear at all actually, like, 'Who qualifies to be a man? What is a "real man"?' I want to basically deconstruct men, actually, as well.

A related point is that a fundamental part of men's role as allies is being able to look to solutions from feminism in terms of creating a safe space to discuss masculinities, discuss the category of 'men', and address trauma and the impact of violence in their lives. Activist Carlos Toh Zwakhala Idibouo from the North American MenEngage Network said during the [Intersectional Feminist Movement Voices panel](#):

How can men express their alliance, their support alongside women, if even for them, the impacts of violence in their lives haven't been resolved?...If there isn't a secure space where these men can say, 'I have to deconstruct what I have been through,' if there isn't a secure space where gay men and other men who have sexual relations with other men can really have a voice and can understand how to deconstruct the mechanisms that have been put in place at the time when he is discovering himself, discovering his gender identity—I think it's going to be problematic being able to engage or to have men easily embarking in feminism.

4.4 Effective programme approaches: Learning and the way ahead

Do programmes engaging men and boys to end GBV (including violence against women and girls) work? What does the evidence say about the different approaches? The speakers and participants discussed that it is through the dialogue between researchers and practitioners—needed now more than ever—that evidence-based decision-making can occur and inroads be made in prevention programmes.

Trauma-informed interventions

While much of the work with men and boys has involved educational models to change the gender and societal norms driving GBV, another approach is to explore the connections between men’s trauma and their use of violence against their partners. Data is used to understand how violence, displacement, loss of livelihoods, and stress are significant drivers of men’s increased use of different forms of GBV, self-harm, and alcohol and substance abuse, as well as of their increased experiences of common mental health issues. Data can also help in understanding how these drivers and their outcomes create layers of trauma for women and for men.

In conflict settings, in particular, the work with men on GBV and IPV is modelled on the belief that this work not only needs to change the norms associated with men’s use of GBV; it also must look at their trauma by developing interventions using a ‘trauma lens’, in the same context in which women have been traumatised in far more abhorrent ways. Thus, programmes in these areas are integrating their work with men with their mental health interventions, and these programmes are reporting enhanced outcomes. Studies show conflict-affected settings have much higher rates of men’s use of multiple forms of violence against their partners, including against those women who faced sexual violence during the conflict.¹¹ Participants in *A Researchers and Practitioners Dialogue* highlighted that practitioners have a better understanding that men and boys also experience sexual violence in conflict, war, and post-conflict settings—which had largely been a taboo topic. Participants also reiterated the importance of enacting appropriate measures to cater to their needs.

¹¹ Sleg, H., Barker, G., & Levto, R. (2014). *Gender relations, sexual and gender-based violence and the effects of conflict on women and men in North Kivu, Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo: Results from the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES)*. Promundo-US & Sonke Gender Justice. <https://promundoglobal.org/resources/gender-relations-sexual-and-gender-based-violence-and-the-effects-of-conflict-on-women-and-men-in-north-kivu-eastern-drc-results-from-images/>

Living Peace intervention

The Living Peace Institute and Promundo implemented the Living Peace pilot intervention programme to prevent men’s violence against women in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, working specifically with male partners of women survivors of conflict-related rape and IPV. The results of a 2016 programme impact evaluation were shared during *A Researchers and Practitioners Dialogue*. The intervention involved a combination of men’s group education sessions and individual therapy to select members by mental health professionals, and the evaluation found this led to reductions in IPV and improvements in men’s mental health outcomes. (Therapy was also made available to the women.) Group discussions, community interactions, and the involvement of female partners prompted men to assume social responsibility and accountability within their relationships, as well as established collective community social control over men’s violence.¹²

Programmes linking mental health and addiction issues with IPV—such as reducing alcoholism as a pathway to reducing domestic violence—risk making the gender norms and patriarchy-supportive attitudes shaping a male sense of entitlement and responses invisible. They also risk countering men’s accountability for their own behaviours. The speakers in *A Researchers and Practitioners Dialogue* said there are still a number of questions and lack of clarity as to whether psychosocial interventions can make a lasting change in ending GBV and IPV. While those with severe mental health issues and/or addictions undoubtedly need specialised mental health services, there is the danger that a mental health approach pathologizes men’s use of violence. Programmes like Living Peace have highlighted the importance of this work being gender-transformative and anchored in norms change towards equitable gender relations, individual accountability, and community social control.



Jennifer A. Wagman (assistant professor, University Of California, Los Angeles, Jonathan And Karin Fielding School Of Public Health), speaking at “Researchers and Practitioners Dialogue: Do Programs Engaging Men to End Violence Against Women Work?”

¹² Tankink, M., & Sleghe, H. (2017). *Living Peace in Democratic Republic of the Congo: An impact evaluation of an intervention with male partners of women survivors of conflict-related rape and intimate partner violence*. Promundo-US. <https://promundoglobal.org/resources/living-peace-democratic-republic-congo-impact-evaluation-intervention-male-partners-women-survivors-conflict-related-rape-intimate-partner-violence/>

Addressing violence as a public health issue: Combining HIV and IPV prevention



One of the big gaps in the care, treatment, and prevention of HIV/AIDS is that adoption of services of a variety of different kinds tends to be lower among men and boys compared to women and girls, and this has really contributed to ongoing challenges with HIV prevention, as well as high fertility rates and delayed treatment of other reproductive health services.

—JENNIFER A. WAGMAN (ASSISTANT PROFESSOR, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, LOS ANGELES JONATHAN AND KARIN FIELDING SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH), [A RESEARCHERS AND PRACTITIONERS DIALOGUE](#)

The speakers in [A Researchers and Practitioners Dialogue](#) shared learning from applying interventions in contexts with high HIV prevalence that aimed to change men's use of health services while ending IPV and advancing sexual and reproductive health. An evaluation of the SHARE project in Rakai, Uganda—a gender-transformative intervention with men and boys combining HIV and IPV prevention—found decreased IPV and HIV incidence, for example.¹³ The speakers shared that a lesson from the intervention is that any programmes with men and boys to reduce IPV must include approaches that use local cultural touchstones; same-sex discussions with men and boys, while also employing a gender-synchronised approach; a multilayered intervention framework; and sustainability strategies for the change process to last beyond the project intervention.

In a context of high sexual violence and justification of 'wife-beating' in Burundi, as well as disproportionately high HIV prevalence among women, the government-initiated Burundians Responding Against Violence and Inequality (BRAVI) project sought to improve sexual and gender-based violence prevention and response efforts and integrated family planning.¹⁴ Implemented from 2014 to 2019, BRAVI used EngenderHealth's Men As Partners (MAP) model, implemented in 30 countries since 1996. As shared during [Working Directly With Boys and Men to End GBV Through Gender Transformative Approaches](#), the programme resulted in a significant increase from baseline to the end of project in the number of men who believed women should be treated equally and in men who voluntarily sought HIV testing. Lucie Nyamarushwa (senior GBV technical director on the project) said learning included that 'MAP would have been more effective if coupled with gender-synchronised approaches that recognise the intentional intersection of gender-transformative work that engages male and female simultaneously.' Oswaldo Montoya of the MenEngage Alliance Global Secretariat said:

¹³ Wagman, J. A., Namatovu, F., Nalugoda, F., Kiwanuka, D., Nakigozi, G., Gray, R., Wawer, M. J., & Serwadda, D. (2012). A public health approach to intimate partner violence prevention in Uganda: The SHARE Project. *Violence Against Women*, 18(12), 1390–1412. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801212474874>

¹⁴ Burundians Responding Against Violence and Inequality. (2019). *End-of-project evaluation of the Burundians Responding Against Violence And Inequality (BRAVI) project in Ngozi Province*. EngenderHealth. <https://www.engenderhealth.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/EngenderHealth-BRAVI-Endline-Report-Final-3.28.20.pdf>



Key in preventing IPV and HIV transmission in contexts around the world has been promoting the role of men as active agents by employing creative gender-transformative approaches that engage them in conversations about power and harmful power dynamics and norms.

The session also involved a discussion of the Unite for a Better Life programme in rural Ethiopia for reducing HIV and IPV. The programme involved sessions with groups of men, women and couples in the setting of the traditional Ethiopian coffee ceremony, an important forum for community dialogue where women typically prepare and serve coffee. This offered the programme a cultural touchstone to model more gender equitable norms. The programme was implemented from 2012 to 2018, and a randomised controlled trial of demonstrated its effectiveness in reducing IPV.¹⁵ Pointing to the historical underfunding of IPV and GBV-prevention programming and research, Dr Vandana Sharma (global health researcher at Harvard University) said that rigorous, evidence-based programming such as Unite for a Better Life that addresses the interaction of individual, relationship, community, and societal factors is needed to ensure sustainable results.

Strengthening resource equity



Perpetrators are usually addressed as a category that's very resistant to change...but we also see a lot of perpetrators that actually do want to change their behaviours....Even within a patriarchal system that minimises and normalises men's violence, there is also a social awareness that hitting women and children is something wrong....If we address men with a language that is respectful of what they're feeling but also that addresses the fact that they may perceive there's a problem, our experience is that men respond to this.

—ALESSANDRA PAUNCZ (EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, WWP EN),
[IMPROVING COORDINATED COMMUNITY RESPONSE TO PERPETRATORS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE](#)

Faced with continuing high levels of male violence, an emerging field is programming with male perpetrators of GBV—or 'perpetrator programmes'; these work with men who may be either judicially convicted or participating voluntarily. Some see the work as necessary to address recidivism by re-socialising a male population assessed at high risk of violence and to increase women and children's safety. Nevertheless, there is debate about these programmes' effectiveness and accountability to feminist agendas. Francisco Aguayo (doctoral researcher at Pontifical Catholic University of Valparaíso) clarified during *[Mapeos con Hombres Agresores](#)*

¹⁵ Sharma, V., Leight, J., Verani, F., Tewolde, S., & Deyessa, N. (2020). Effectiveness of a culturally appropriate intervention to prevent intimate partner violence and HIV transmission among men, women, and couples in rural Ethiopia: Findings from a cluster-randomized controlled trial. *PLoS Medicine*, 17(8), e1003274. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1003274>

[en Brasil, Europa y América Latina \(Mapping With Male Aggressors in Brazil, Europe, and Latin America\)](#):

It is important not to confuse this work being carried out with male aggressors—with this specific population of men who have exerted violence against women—with prevention work with masculinity in general or with men. Both works are very important in the current debate.

During that session, Adriano Beiras (professor at Federal University of Santa Catarina) emphasised the need to reposition the work in the context of larger public policies and comprehensive national frameworks for reducing violence against women. In 2020, Brazil's groundbreaking Maria da Penha Law on violence against women—which came into effect in 2006—started to recommend individual and group psychosocial work with men who commit violence as urgent protective measure. Still, Beiras said:

Though there is a policy for violence against women...we need to create a complementary national public policy specific to this sector to connect the work with men with violence against women [prevention] work, and create minimum guidelines for recommendations from the courts, as well as integration with services and networks.

During the session, panellists presented reports on mappings of perpetrator programmes in Brazil, Latin America, and Europe to discuss the global evidence landscape for this work.¹⁶ The speakers said most programmes had a mix of individual and group sessions, and many worked with low- or middle-income segments. Delivery challenges in this evolving field include working only with the perpetrators in some cases (without contact with their partners or families) and not always following a differentiated approach to addiction, mental health pathologies, or the more severe forms of sexual aggression in the spectrum of violence.

Notably, in many contexts—including in North America—there are no funded programmes to support men who arrive voluntarily to a perpetrator programme. Funded programmes are usually tied to court-mandated interventions for perpetrators and, therefore, are accessible only to those who have been charged and brought before a judge. These men attend the programmes perforce, while the men who choose to avail of perpetrator programming have no option other than paying for individual counselling. This creates a missed opportunity and inequality between those able to pay and those who may not have the resources to do so, thereby increasing the risk of continued harm to survivors.

Additionally, panellist Franciso Aguayo of Pontifical Catholic University of Valparaíso shared that a significant finding from the Latin American study's¹⁷ literature review was 'the evidence of the colonization of knowledge, with hegemony of the Global North in design, evaluation, and research on programmes for male aggressors.' The study leads to the broad conclusion that more interventions are needed that have greater cultural relevance, and supporting Southern knowledge development and expertise can better address contextual complexities. Taken together, studies presented at the session reinforce the importance of using feminist-informed, reflective group processes that follow gender-transformative principles.

Speaking of experiences working with perpetrators in Europe, Heinrich Geldschläger (director of research and international projects at Conexus, Spain, a WWP EN member) said during [ENGAGEing Frontline Professionals to Address Gender Based Violence With Male Service](#)

¹⁶ Beiras, A., Nascimento, M., & Incrocci, C. (2019). Programs for men who have used violence against women: An overview of interventions in Brazil. *Saúde e Sociedade*, 28(1), 262–274. <https://www.scielo.br/j/sausoc/a/BkkGwctw6WzsBbJbxSbPsNg/?format=pdf&lang=en>; Spotlight Initiative, United Nations Population Fund, Promundo, Fundación EME, & CulturaSalud. (2021). *Programs with men who have committed gender based violence in Latin America and the Hispanic Caribbean. Executive summary.* https://lac.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/ha_-_resumen_ejecutivo_ingles_corregido.pdf; Hester, M., Lilley, S. -J., O'Prey, L., & Budde, J. (n.d.). *Overview and analysis of research studies evaluating European perpetrator programmes.* https://www.work-with-perpetrators.eu/fileadmin/WWP_Network/redakteure/IMPACT/Daphne_III_Impact_-_Working_paper_2_-_Overview_and_Analysis_of_Research_Studies_-_Evaluating_European_Perpetrator_Programmes.pdf; Scambor, C., Wojnicka, K., & Scambor, E. (2014). *Possibilities for multi-site/multi-country European evaluation studies on domestic violence perpetrator programmes.* https://www.researchgate.net/publication/275338461_Possibilities_for_multi_-_sitemulti_-_country_European_evaluation_studies_on_domestic_violence_perpetrator_programmes

¹⁷ Spotlight Initiative, United Nations Population Fund, Promundo, Fundación EME, & CulturaSalud. (2021). *Programs with men who have committed gender based violence in Latin America and the Hispanic Caribbean. Executive summary.* https://lac.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/ha_-_resumen_ejecutivo_ingles_corregido.pdf

Users that indicators demonstrated changes to men's behaviours around anger management, violence reduction, reduced disconnect (with recognising and not minimising their violent behaviours), and improved conflict resolution and responsibility for care work. He said it is important to place the work in close collaboration with feminist movements, not simplifying it into the realm of pathologizing men but instead paying attention to men's accountability. During *Mapeos con Hombres Agresores en Brasil, Europa y América Latina*, Geldschläger said:

There has to be a theoretical basis and an explicit work model which includes the unacceptance of the violence and the total responsibility of the aggressors, and within this concept, the gender and masculinities perspective.

During the ENGAGEing Frontline Professionals workshop, he recommended cooperating with women and children's support and health services, and importantly, embedding the programmes within a coordinated community response to ending GBV. As Alessandra Pauncz of WWP EN said during *Improving Coordinated Community Response to Perpetrators of Domestic Violence*: 'It takes a village to raise a child, but it also takes a village to change a perpetrator.' Pauncz described the network's role in building capacity among professionals on the issue, even as she acknowledged the limitations of using the 'perpetrator' terminology. While the carceral approach addresses the tip of the iceberg through restrictive measures that temporarily stop the violence, well-designed perpetrator interventions can reach hidden aspects of beliefs around gender roles and of how men structure their masculinities within violent behaviours. Emphasising there is no single profile of a perpetrator, Geldschläger said during *ENGAGEing Frontline Professionals to Address Gender Based Violence With Male Service Users*, 'There's quite a complexity in understanding men's violent behaviour, and traditional models of psychotherapeutic interventions are usually not sufficient to change or stop it.'

Creating sustainable change

A multilayered socioecological approach in which everyone's contribution counts is key to implementing sustainable gender-transformative programmes that target men as agents of change, according to symposium speakers and participants. *Creating Lasting Change in GBV Programming* included a discussion on the evaluation of the five-year, multi-country Prevention+ programme addressing the root causes of GBV.¹⁸ Dr Damian Hatton (project director and lead researcher at inFocus Consulting, which evaluated the programme) said:

The programme's findings advance the importance...of a vision of community sustainability, of community-level changes continuing to evolve in the community, going beyond the scope of the programming...the institutionalisation of gender-transformative approaches and change...and systems-wide thinking that catalyses change across a socioecological model working at individual, community, institutional, and government levels.

Examples of work acknowledging contextual realities include the creation of a common forum for faith groups in Uganda to collaborate on efforts to prevent and end GBV, as well as collaboration with local government and the police in Indonesia.

¹⁸ Hatton, D., & Ridout, H. (2020). *Final evaluation of the Prevention+ programme (2016- 2020)*. inFocus Consulting, https://www.dropbox.com/s/dib7gsqcbcbq530/Prevention%2B%20Final%20Evaluation%20Report_Dec%202020.pdf?dl=0

Programming insights from the evaluation of Prevention+ in Rwanda, Indonesia, Uganda, and Lebanon¹⁹

Insights for community sustainability

- Use targeted formative research to understand community needs and mechanisms of change.
- Incorporate greater sexual and gender diversity into the programming, using nontraditional or innovative methods if required.
- Address safeguarding issues for field implementers and participants related to backlash.
- Develop 'lighter-touch' methods to continue supporting participants post-intervention.

Insights for institutionalising a gender-transformative approach

- Strengthen informal GBV networks, ensuring cross-sectoral representation and links.
- Leverage digital platforms to reach wider audiences, to network, and to exchange knowledge.
- Use long-term engagement and training strategies for institutionalisation processes.

Insights for sustainability through systems-wide change

- Use flexible and responsive strategies as per the needs emerging as GBV prevention evolves.
- Create forums for sharing lessons, formalising knowledge exchange.
- Provide 'backbone' support to GBV networks and collaborations to address governance issues.

A number of speakers and participants emphasised the importance and urgency of having more critical dialogues between researchers and practitioners. For example, Angelica Pino of SVRI and other speakers at [A Researchers and Practitioners Dialogue](#) recentred the importance of research. Pino said:

In the past 20 years, programmes engaging men and boys as allies in ending violence against women have increased, but very few have been thoroughly evaluated, and some of these programmes, unfortunately, have left the foundations of patriarchy untouched. In an age of negating the need for research and evidence-based decision-making, dialogue between researchers and practitioners in the field is needed more than ever if we really want to make inroads in ending violence against women.

Speakers and participants during [By the Way...Did You Ask Women?](#) also stressed the importance of valuing and accepting community-based research outside of academic institutions and also research that is rooted in Indigenous knowledge in order to decolonize knowledge generation. Not doing so could lead to reinforcing colonial, privileged, and hierarchical approaches. However, it may not always be easy to convince funders to support this type of nonformal, non-academic research that is based on valuing the involvement of community-based organisations.

The Rwanda Men's Resource Centre showcased the successful implementation of key learning in IPV programming during the [Men and Masculinities panel \(part 2\)](#) and [Prevention of](#)

¹⁹ Ibid

[Men's Violence Against Women and Girls in Madagascar and Rwanda](#). The Indashyikirwa programme aimed to reduce IPV through couples' training, community activism, building women's safe spaces, and engaging opinion leaders. A cluster randomised controlled trial found a 55 per cent reduced likelihood of experiencing IPV among women and a 47 per cent reduced likelihood of reporting IPV perpetration among men for couples participating in the training at 24 months post-baseline compared to couples in the control group.²⁰ A randomised controlled trial of Bandebereho (a fathers and couples programme to promote men's engagement in reproductive and maternal health, caregiving, and healthier relationships) found that two years after participating, men were nearly half as likely to use violence against their female partners and spent almost an hour more per day doing household chores.²¹ The Rwanda Men's Resource Centre's founder and executive director, Fidele Rutayisire, said during the [Men and Masculinities panel \(part 2\)](#):

The reasons behind this success are actually threefold...[a] holistic approach of supporting individual change by addressing all levels of men's reality, from the intimate personal space...to interpersonal, community, governmental, and structural; institutionalisation by including the gender-transformative programmes into local government action plans; [and] centring lived experiences of women...by working with women's rights organisations.

4.5. Working with Indigenous men and boys and with men and boys from subaltern groups/socially marginalised communities

The symposium moved beyond comfortable conversations in terms of working with Indigenous men and boys and men and boys from subaltern/socially marginalised communities. It raised difficult questions on the fundamentals of the field in its current form and on engaging with issues of colonization, loss of autonomy, and global hierarchies of North and South.

These critical conversations advanced an understanding of how to work meaningfully in violence prevention by understanding the complexity of people's lives, as well as hierarchical systems of power and oppression imposed on men, women, and nonbinary people. They included questions on how intersectionality and the different forms of power and oppression that impact men and boys' lives also affect their ability to engage with autonomy in violence prevention; how these intersections might provide strength-based solutions to preventing violence; and what solutions exist for decolonizing the field and reinforcing concepts of 'power with'.

²⁰ Dunkle, K., Stern, E., Chatterji, S., & Heise, L. (2019). *Indashyikirwa programme to reduce intimate partner violence in Rwanda: Report of findings from a cluster randomized control trial*. What Works to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls Global Programme. https://www.rwamrec.org/IMG/pdf/indashyikirwa_report.pdf

²¹ Prevention+, Rwanda Men's Resource Centre, & Promundo. (n.d.). *Bandebereho / role model*. https://www.rwamrec.org/IMG/pdf/a_summary_of_mencare_randomized_control_trial_results.pdf

Recovering local autonomy in prevention efforts

“‘Prevention Puppets’ is something that I started to use a few years ago after going through personal experience of being noticed by non-Indigenous people working in the sector and being picked up by them to be the face of preventing violence, but not having the autonomy. I was handed all this information and tools to be able to do this prevention work, but I had no say in the matter and how it was done, even though I came from the [Aboriginal] community and had a personal experience and awareness of how domestic and family violence was occurring and how my own community was also preventing that.

—DESMOND CAMPBELL (NORTHERN TERRITORY COMMUNITY MEMBER), [“BEYOND PREVENTION PUPPETS”](#)

During [“Beyond Prevention Puppets”](#), panellists (who were all Indigenous and people of colour) discussed their experiences of being placed at the front of violence prevention campaigns as a tokenistic gesture without the space to contribute as change agents from their own locations. Speaking on loss of autonomy, Khamsavath Chanthavysouk (policy specialist on preventing violence against women at UN Women) said:

In a few developing countries I have been working with, the tools, approaches, and methodologies in the social sector are developed from Global North by academic institutions, researchers, and international practitioners. Despite claiming to adapt to local contexts, oftentimes, the work does not sufficiently engage with Indigenous feminists or Indigenous men; the approach is simplified and superficial.

This led to a discussion on who gets to determine the value of certain types of masculinities and male identities, and even what gender equality would look like. Bhiemie Williamson (research scholar at the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Australian National University) said, ‘There are multiple issues with the colonial system rewarding narrow definitions of a Eurocentric model of masculinity imparted onto men from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds.’ The catastrophic impact of colonial impositions on communities and lands has been well documented, with Williamson saying, ‘The idea of masculinity coming from that place is really detrimental.’ Thus, it is important to confront that narrative by trying not to reconstruct but instead to engage with Indigenous notions of men and masculinities from Indigenous men and Indigenous feminists, as well as to have a culturally grounded, place-based understanding of gender relations and justice.

For the long-term future of violence prevention efforts, a better understanding of diverse masculine identities would lead to an enriched field. Chanthavysouk said, ‘We need to find ways to situate the reframing of masculinity in a broader context of different systems of oppressions and inequalities’—adding that violence prevention work must be linked to other forms of justice in the lives of men, women, and LGBTIQ individuals. Panellists suggested that colonial forms of accountability for men who

use violence contribute to the mass incarceration of Indigenous men and boys.

Examining accountability outside the criminal justice system, Williamson said a central part of male roles and identities in precolonial Indigenous societies was communal accountability, with no division between the public and private persona. By contrast, Euro-American-influenced societies—with their high premium on the private—allowed for an ecosystem of violence unpoliced at the family or community levels. On systems transformation, Williamson also stressed: ‘We need to move beyond the work of engaging men and boys as an individualistic endeavour to a more structural, community-driven approach.’

Addressing the concern that not all community justice systems are perfect and harmony could also be maintained by silencing women, Emma Fulu (founder and executive director of The Equality Institute) said healthy communities must be built that enact measures creating an enabling environment for the community to address solutions. Additionally, Desmond Campbell challenged the notion of global best practices, saying such thinking comes from colonizing machinery of everything having to be the same, wondering if it ever worked. Laxman Belbase (co-director of the MenEngage Alliance Global Secretariat) asked:

Currently, the development sector is considering and creating the work with men and boys as something like a ‘silver bullet’ driven by those who are from the Global North, and the ideals of gender equality and equal societies and those that we consider or see as evidence are driven by the Eurocentric narratives and approaches. When it comes to defining the work, it is mostly driven by perceptions of donor countries...so then, those who are doing this work [are] the recipient and becoming puppets. How can we strengthen the grounded or Global South leadership in this work? How can we decolonize this work in general?

Chanthavysouk said:

To decolonize the process and make it sustainable, we need to reconnect with local processes on the ground; democratise knowledge at the community level by disrupting hierarchical knowledge systems, and documenting, acknowledging, and elevating the work happening at the micro-level, and critically examining moving away perhaps from global monopolized notions of best practice or universal solutions.

The session involved discussion on disrupting hierarchical knowledge systems and documenting and elevating the work happening at the micro-level, moving away perhaps from global notions of best practice or universal solutions. It is important to take a place-based approach of engaging with people of particular communities or locations within the context of their unique needs, practices, and solutions. Speaking to learning from feminism, Williamson said:

To not be part of the colonial machinery, those doing this work must examine not just the subjects but themselves equally—their standpoints, where they come from, deconstructing themselves before going in to work with communities, because otherwise they get drawn into the saviour mentality.



Looking to Indigenous cultures for learning on violence prevention

Practitioners in communities on US and Canadian reservations focused on the need to place intersectionalities and decolonization in the foreground. Members of the North American MenEngage Network spoke during *Organizing Native Men and Youth in Native Communities (part 1)* of framing a response to violence in Indigenous communities by understanding their civilizational and historical experiences. The use of traditional tools, values, and a community-based approach promoting healthy relationships could give men direction in supporting women-led efforts against domestic and sexual violence.

Jeremy NeVilles-Sorell shared experiences of using culturally specific tools and ideas to engage men in Native North American communities, creating the wellness needed for the communities to heal and thrive. For NeVilles-Sorell, this work reinforces the importance of spiritual traditions and interconnected relationships as the foundation of cultural strength. Community organisers must understand the impact of the loss of self-identity and self-worth—due to colonizers devaluing the traditional customs that had ensured community interconnectedness—as well as the impact of colonizing societal messages that continue today and contribute to a continuum of violence. ‘We are not served in stores; they are for white people. There are no jobs for us. We’re still constantly being traumatised,’ said NeVilles-Sorell. Institutionalised racism in the broader context of everyday life affects how systems and services respond to Indigenous people and has negative social and economic consequences, such as internalised depression and lateral violence (e.g., involving drug use, crime, and alcoholism), with high carceral response by the state. NeVilles-Sorell said:

The process of colonization outlawed our cultural traditions and spiritual practices...that maintained safety and harmony in relationships through value systems...which were underpinned by notions of women’s sacredness and sovereignty. Bringing the teachings of our traditional ways to what we do...is inherently violence prevention.

Placing historical evidence of precolonized Indigenous communities having a low incidence of violence against women amidst a strong sense of community²² at the foreground can help develop Indigenous-specific cultural approaches to engaging men in responding to GBV and simultaneously find a way out of the intergenerational trauma suffered due to the loss of clan identities, Indigenous cultures, and change in the status of women, said Harvey Herne.

Running programmes for violent male offenders in reservations and also programming for Indigenous youth on healthy masculinities, Karatoten ‘Pray’ Lazore said, the Seven Dancers Coalition digs into ancestral culture, values, and knowledge on how these teach Indigenous youth to be men:

We look at our historical trauma. They pulled families apart, beat and raped, took away our religion, languages, removing cultural pride in the ways of our ancestors and leaving only grief and shame. Each generation since then gets more violent and adversarial in dealing with that...and the oppressors still keep them in confusion and fear.

²² Artichoker, K., & Gullickson, V. (2003). Raising public awareness of domestic violence in Indian country. National Resource Center on Domestic Violence. <https://wicaagli.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/11-Raising-Public-Awareness-DV-Indian-Country.pdf>



For men who come to the coalition having suffered sexual violence (often in childhood), healing comes from unpacking the norms and behaviours of control and ‘power over’ that have pervaded interactions with the ‘conquerors’, being reintroduced to their traditions, and focusing on their rights as people. Integrating this approach of incorporating Indigenous communities’ culture, the coalition works to increase awareness on GBV and runs batterers’ programmes and services for women.

In North America, rates of GBV—including femicide, trafficking, and exploitation—among women and girls are significantly higher in Indigenous versus non-Indigenous populations.²³ Discussing intersectionality, decolonization, and the implications and accountability around engaging men against gender oppression, the North American MenEngage Network sessions brought out that one cannot ignore the role of colonialism and systemic discrimination, faith-based violence, neglect and abuse, and the lack of accountability towards Indigenous peoples, past and present. The sessions explored the continuing links and intersectionality in North America among colonialism, race, the tyranny of ‘civilizing’ residential schools, GBV, generational trauma at the erasure of Indigenous rights and identities, and the brutality that has resulted in thousands of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls.

Speakers and participants in *Organizing Native Men and Youth in Native Communities* ([part 1](#) and [part 2](#)) advocated for allying with the calls for action of movements like Canada’s Every Child Matters, which honours survivors of residential schools for Indigenous children. They suggested that integrating strong positive cultural values into interventions can create more responsive interventions that better address the needs of survivors, prevent partners from engaging in abuse, and help anchor the interventions at the community level.

During [part 2](#), Raun ‘Moon’ Mitchell also tied healing to undoing the human process of striving for dominance and power over the land, environment, and animals. Using the centrality of the horse in Indigenous culture, Greg Grey Cloud (cofounder of the nonprofit Wica Agli) integrates work with horses into the work with violent offenders:

The model we redeveloped, of working with animals...also with growing things like cedar trees, re-emphasises our primary spiritual relations with the land. It helps us recover ourselves through a shared sense of responsibility, compassion, and humanity, which cuts across cultures...as the African ‘Ubuntu’ concept also demonstrates.

²³ Heidinger, L. (2021, May 19). *Intimate partner violence: Experiences of First Nations, Métis and Inuit women in Canada, 2018*. Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Statistics. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2021001/article/00007-eng.htm>; National Congress of American Indians Policy Research Center. (2018). *Research policy update: Violence against American Indian and Alaska Native women*. https://www.ncai.org/policy-research-center/research-data/prc-publications/VAWA_Data_Brief_FINAL_2_1_2018.pdf

5. Recommendations

The MenEngage Ubuntu Symposium set the stage for reviewing and assessing the effectiveness of work to transform masculinities and to engage men and boys in GBV prevention and response in view of the scale and scope of the world's current challenges. For the speakers and participants, the symposium offered practical guidance on developing integrated plans that incorporate the links among various forms of violence and exploitation in their totality. The exchanges by experts and practitioners from around the world at the symposium demonstrate the need to measure and evaluate the impact of work to transform masculinities, dismantle patriarchy, and prevent violence.

Specific recommendations for MenEngage Alliance, its partners, and others working on men and masculinities include:

- **Understand that dismantling hegemonic masculinities means critiquing and altering power structures in multiple ways.** It means exploring how to redistribute relationship-level power inequalities between genders and looking at power dynamics at the level of broader political engagement between peoples, geographies, economies, and cultures. During the symposium, critical questions on race, colonialism, and gender binarism were posed that promoted widening the scope of the work's accountability. In the face of a world order in which authoritarianism, hypernationalism, white supremacy, and justifications of intolerance of diversity and women's reproductive rights are shaping masculine identities and leading to growing vulnerabilities to violence and discrimination, we must urgently reiterate key principles of inclusion in our work.
- **Take a socioecological approach.** The intertwining patterns of individual and structural violence were explicit, and they informed the discussion on setting strategic goals for the work based on a whole-system or ecological approach. Systems transformation, community change, and individual masculinities change must be strongly linked. The pandemic laid bare gender inequities and the extent of violence, which has prompted a sobering reflection on gaps and failures and also indicates what the priorities in the field's response should be in a post-COVID world. Discussing advances in feminist movements—including the #MeToo movement, which was the trigger for rethinking masculinised collective spaces—has helped clarify feminism's place in the lives of men and men's accountability to feminism.
- **Invest in truly intersectional approaches.** Lessons on the importance of investing in truly intersectional feminist approaches contribute to a new way of thinking about building relationships and partnerships to engage men and boys in ending GBV. Participants brought out the need for the work to address outcomes covering the full spectrum of social justice, equality, and diversity. They said this could be done by helping recentre narratives—for instance, by allying with and taking lessons from the Black Lives Matter movement or the uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa that have been organic, unstructured, and very different from the organising movements of previous generations.
- **Encourage donors to look beyond the traditional and redefine what is considered 'working with men and boys to end GBV'.** Symposium discussions aimed to influence funding and donor support to programmes and movements that may not fit traditional paradigms. The symposium was instrumental in redefining work with men and boys to prevent violence, using a transversal approach involving humanitarian issues, human rights, sexual rights, Earth rights, and community and democratic rights as a way of working hand in hand for power disaggregation and gender rights.

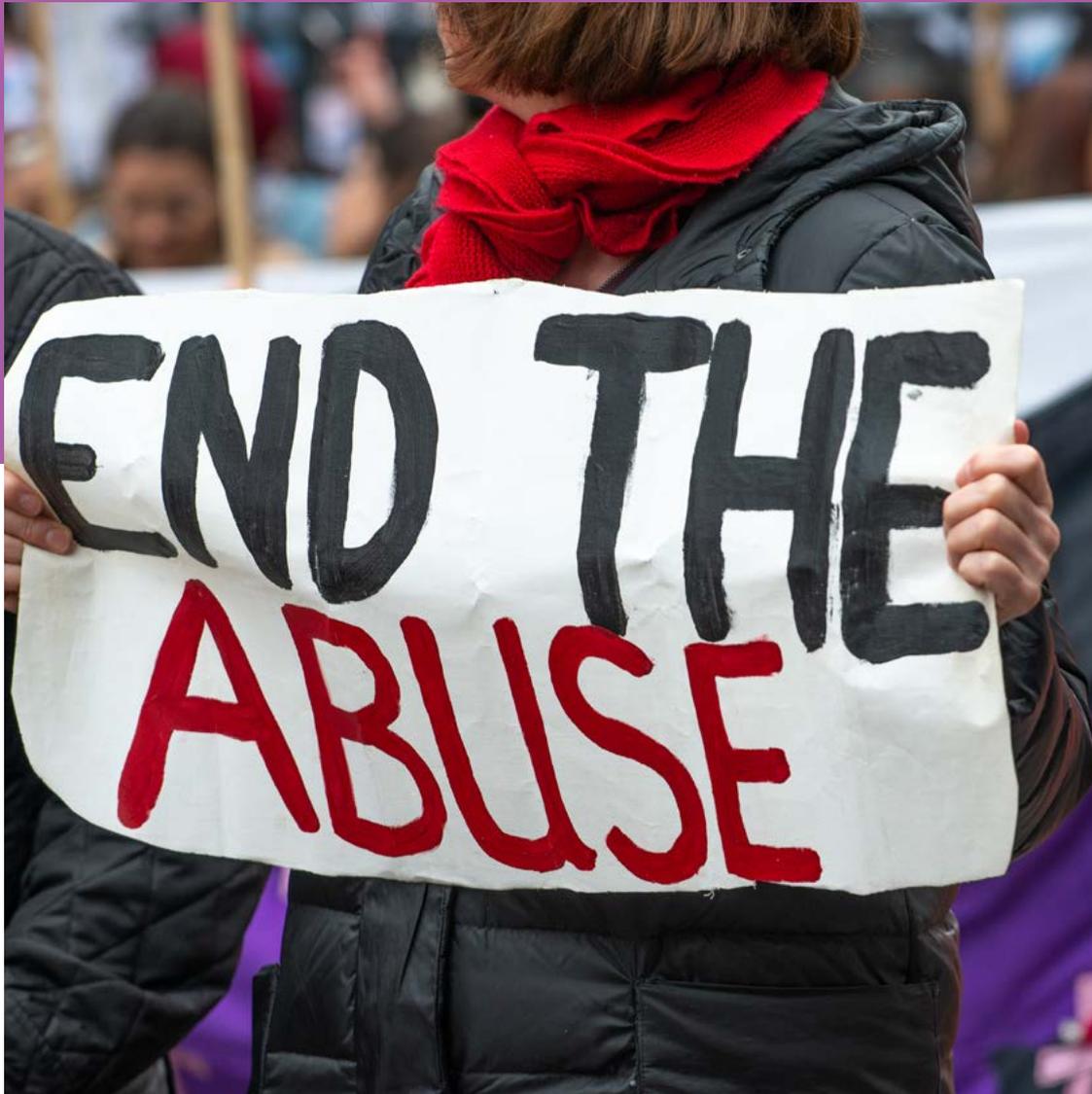


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- **Adopt gender-synchronised approaches.** Work with men and women, boys and girls, and gender-diverse people must challenge gender norms from the framework of power. It is important for individuals of all gender identities to work together to understand power structures and inequalities and to develop effective gender-transformative strategies. This is also important in the context of ensuring intersectionality.
- **Decolonize the international development field of violence prevention.** We must strengthen the work's Global South leadership and knowledge base, reshaping it to be grounded in and led by local communities who know best their lived contexts and complexities. To decolonize the process, we must commit to working with local and Indigenous communities, local feminists, and mobilisers to start processes on the ground. Rather than being external or internationally determined, change agendas and solutions should be driven by communities themselves. We must decolonize how knowledge is generated and valued in this field by democratising and honouring knowledge processes at the community level and particularly by Indigenous communities. We must collect evidence and develop tools, materials, and resources by investing in micro-level work and solutions, as well as re-examine if what is currently valued comes from Global North/Eurocentric parameters and structures.

Annex 1. Links to the symposium sessions on engaging men and boys in ending gender-based violence

1. 10 November 2020: [Opening plenary](#)
2. 11 November 2020: [Youth Leadership and Movement Building panel](#)
3. 11 November 2020: [Intersectional Feminist Movement Voices panel](#)
4. 11 November 2020: [Men and Masculinities panel \(part 1\)](#)
5. 12 November 2020: [Men and Masculinities panel \(part 2\)](#)
6. 19 November 2020: [Prevention of Men's Violence Against Women and Girls in Madagascar and Rwanda](#)
7. 17 December 2020: [Creating Lasting Change in GBV Programming: Learnings on Sustainability in the Prevention+ Program](#)
8. 12 January 2021: [By the Way...Did You Ask Women? Ethical Considerations When Researching, Implementing, and Funding Programmes Engaging Men and Boys to End Violence Against Women and Girls \(VAWG\)](#)
9. 21 January 2021: [ENGAGEing Frontline Professionals to Address Gender Based Violence With Male Service Users](#)
10. 21 January 2021: ["Beyond Prevention Puppets" – How to Meaningfully Engage Men and Boys in Preventing Violence Against Women and Girls](#)
11. 11 February 2021: [La Humanización de la Violencia Masculina Como Problema Estructural \(The Humanization of Male Violence as a Structural Problem\)](#)
12. 25 February 2021: [Male Involvement in Gender-Based Violence \(GBV\)](#)
13. 11 March 2021: [Use of Technology to End Gender Based Violence](#)
14. 7 April 2021: [Organizing Native Men and Youth in Native Communities \(part 1\)](#)
15. 8 April 2021: [Organizing Native Men and Youth in Native Communities \(part 2\)](#)
16. 8 April 2021: [Working Directly With Boys and Men to End GBV Through Gender Transformative Approaches](#)
17. 15 April 2021: [Improving Coordinated Community Response to Perpetrators of Domestic Violence: The Response of Frontline Professionals and the Collaboration With Women's Support Services](#)
18. 22 April 2021: [Mapeos con Hombres Agresores en Brasil, Europa y América Latina \(Mapping With Male Aggressors in Brazil, Europe, and Latin America\)](#)
19. 28 April 2021: [Skills Building Session on Intimate Partner Violence](#)
20. 27 May 2021: [A Researchers and Practitioners Dialogue – Do Programmes Engaging Men to End Violence Against Women Work? What Evidence Is Telling Us?](#)
21. 17 June 2021: [Violence Against Women - Lifelong Consequences](#)



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Men, masculinities, and climate justice

Katrien Van der Heyden

A summary report of discussions at the 3rd
MenEngage Global Symposium (the Ubuntu
Symposium), 2020-2021



MenEngage Alliance
working with men and boys for gender equality

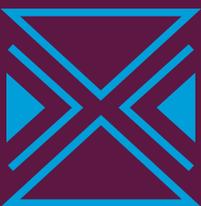
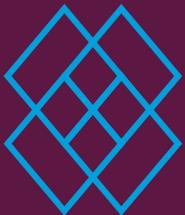
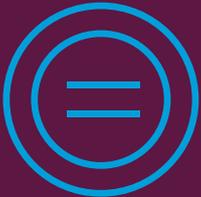


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Table of contents

1. Context and problem analysis	79
1.1. Background	80
1.2. Basic concepts	81
2. Promising practices and examples	83
2.1. <i>Sweden: Men in the Climate Crisis</i>	84
2.2. Russia: Center ANNA and men's discussion groups	85
2.3. Bangladesh: Coastal Youth Action Hub	86
3. Men, masculinities, and climate justice (by Ubuntu theme)	87
3.1. Feminisms	87
3.2. Intersectionality	88
3.3. Accountability	90
3.4. 'Power with'	91
3.5. Transformation	92
4. Recommendations	94
4.1. Feminisms	95
4.2. Intersectionality	95
4.3. Accountability	96
4.4. 'Power with'	97
4.5. Transformation	97
Annex 1. Links to symposium sessions on men, masculinities, and climate justice	98



For me, the COVID crisis showed that politicians are capable of handling a crisis and listening to scientists. It is a matter of taking it seriously enough and feeling the urgency. The [thing] is, the climate crisis is worse. The climate crisis is way bigger and will affect many more people than the COVID crisis did, so I hope people will remember after COVID what a healthy reaction to a crisis looks like.

— ANUNA DE WEVER VAN DER HEYDEN (YOUNG CLIMATE ADVOCATE),
[MASCULINITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE](#)

1. Context and problem analysis

While some MenEngage Alliance members had been involved in the climate justice movement for years prior, the Alliance itself explicitly named climate¹ justice as an ‘emerging priority area’ in its 2017–2020 strategic plan.² This new focus has led to several key efforts, including an interactive online workshop in 2020 on the relationships between masculinities and the climate crisis. The 3rd MenEngage Global Symposium (also referred to as the MenEngage Ubuntu Symposium) marks another effort to stress the links between masculinities and climate crisis, using a dual-track initiative with seven virtual sessions and a series of workshops for practitioners.

This document aims to consolidate the symposium’s lessons, experiences, and discourses on men, masculinities, and the climate crisis. It is not an exhaustive retelling, but rather a reflection on the views shared during the symposium—by both academics and activists—that could be stepping stones to a broader debate in the future.

Notably, MenEngage Alliance created a new interim working group focused on climate justice and masculinities during the symposium. This working group aims to strengthen the Alliance’s engagement, position, and clarity on climate justice in order to mobilise and work with members and partners, with the goals of deconstructing patriarchal masculinities and creating a climate- and gender-just world. This document could help shape the working group’s—and the Alliance’s—strategic direction in terms of the programmatic, campaign, and policy agenda.

¹ In this paper, ‘climate’ or ‘environment’ refers to all three central problems of today’s natural world: CO₂ emissions, pollution, and the loss of biodiversity.

² MenEngage Alliance. (n.d.). *MenEngage Global Alliance strategic plan 2017–2020*. <http://menengage.org/4451-2/>

1.1. Background

A worldwide wake-up call on climate has been building momentum for decades—even though the potential devastation of CO₂ emissions were documented as far back as the early 19th century and CO₂ concentration measured in the air starting in the 1950s. Despite the warnings—and, increasingly, alarms—most human beings have continued their fossil fuel-based lifestyles unabated, supported by governments and corporations that do not prioritise the environment and promote consumerism as the way to happiness.

In 2009, a detailed follow-up to the famous 1972 report *The Limits to Growth* documented the nine main environmental challenges of our time, revolving around nine planetary boundaries that should not be crossed in order to maintain the planet's health.³ We crossed four of the boundaries set forth in the report by 2015: on climate change, loss of biodiversity, nitrogen and phosphorus flows, and land system change.⁴ Despite knowing the problem exists, and despite the tremendous efforts of feminist and environmental organisations on climate justice, a global response has remained mostly absent. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change reports have built broad scientific consensus, but their political impact on cutting back emissions has remained limited, and women's voices are hardly heard in such venues.

In 2018, the fight against climate change gained an enormous boost through the School Strike for Climate started by Greta Thunberg in Sweden and followed by millions of students all over the world. A young, mostly female generation is challenging the old, male, and white emblems of power. The gender dimension—more specifically, young women and girls challenging older men—cannot be ignored.

For decades prior to the school strike movement, though, feminist organisations had pointed out the many intersections of gender justice and climate justice and had demonstrated how fighting for human rights means solving the climate crisis in a way that cares for the most affected people and areas. Most women and girls face double injustice due to climate change and gender inequality in all aspects of their lives: women and children are more likely to drown during disasters than men, for example, and more often live in poor conditions that make them more vulnerable during crises.⁵ At the same time, women are more likely to recycle and have on average a smaller ecological footprint than men do.⁶ Gender stereotypes around care are well documented, putting most of the care duties on women and girls' shoulders all over the world—often, including care for nature.

In recent years, MenEngage Alliance members and partners have increasingly realised the importance of engaging on climate justice given its intrinsic connections with gender and social justice issues, most importantly from the systems change perspective.⁷ The realisation has grown among members that MenEngage should contribute to the climate justice discourse with the men and masculinities lens, as well as support and build activism inspired by the work of feminist gender and climate activists. Increasing recognition of the connections between

³ The nine planetary limits are biodiversity loss and extinctions, chemical pollution and the release of novel entities, climate change, ocean acidification, freshwater consumption and the global hydrological cycle, land system change, nitrogen and phosphorus flows to the biosphere and oceans, atmospheric aerosol loading, and stratospheric ozone depletion. See: Stockholm Resilience Centre. (n.d.). *The nine planetary boundaries*. Retrieved November 29, 2021, from <https://www.stockholmresilience.org/research/planetary-boundaries/the-nine-planetary-boundaries.html>

⁴ Steffen, W., Richardson, K., Rockström, J., Cornell, S. E., Fetzer, I., Bennett, E. M., Biggs, R., Carpenter, S. R., De Vries, W., De Wit, C. A., Folke, C., Gerten, D., Heinke, J., Mace, G. M., Persson, L. M., Ramanathan, V., Rayers, B., & Sörlin, S. (2015). Planetary boundaries: Guiding human development on a changing planet. *Science*, 347(6223). <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1259855>

⁵ Syazwani, H. A. F., Hafizah, S. N., & Noraida, E. (2016). *Women, gender, and disaster: A case study of flood victims in Kota Bharu, Kelantan*. http://eprints.usm.my/31296/1/Farah_Syazwani_Hayrol_Aziz1.pdf; also see: Blaikie, P., Cannon, T., Davis, I., & Wisner, B. (2004). *At risk: Natural hazards, people's vulnerability and disasters* (2nd ed.). Routledge; UN WomenWatch. (2009). *Women, gender equality and climate change*. https://www.un.org/womenwatch/feature/climate_change/downloads/Women_and_Climate_Change_Factsheet.pdf

⁶ Bloodhart, B., & Swim, J. K. (2020). Sustainability and consumption: What's gender got to do with it? *Journal of Social Issues*, 76(1), 101–113. <https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12370>

⁷ 'Systems change' refers to the realisation among activists that the problems humanity is facing cannot be solved by quick fixes that leave the ground rules in place; rather, the current neoliberal system inherently creates these problems and thus needs to be fundamentally replaced by another system. Often, this new system is called the transition economy, the circular economy, degrowth, or the doughnut economy. See: Hayworth, K. (2017). *Doughnut economics: Seven ways to think like a 21st-century economist*. Random House; Hickel, J. (2021). *Less is more: How degrowth will save the world*. Windmill Books.

climate and human rights is also happening at the intergovernmental level. For example, the United Nations Human Rights Council recently appointed a special rapporteur on human rights within the context of climate change, marking a critical moment in addressing this intersection.⁸

1.2. Basic concepts

Martin Hultman and Paul M. Pulé achieved a major milestone in their 2018 work *Ecological Masculinities*, developing a theoretical framework for masculinities and climate justice; the authors further explored their theory in the 2021 book *Men, Masculinities, and Earth*.⁹ The authors developed a typology of three major constructions of masculinities related to the environment, which was referred to often for much of the symposium discussion:

- **Industrial/breadwinner masculinities** view ‘mankind’ to be the pinnacle of nature, having the distinct objective of dominating, exploiting, and pushing for exponential growth. Within industrial capitalism, many (mostly Western/Global North) cultures have been dominated by this form of masculinities—an embodiment of patriarchy, with its norms and values leaving the planet polluted, destroyed, and depleted while creating structural inequalities that leave millions in poverty. Often, industrial/breadwinner masculinities result in climate denialism and climate delay rhetoric.¹⁰
- **Eco-modern masculinities** are firmly rooted in industrial/breadwinner norms associated with masculinities, but they ‘greenwash’¹¹ by claiming technological solutions will fix all environmental problems without needing a systems change or questioning the patriarchal norms and values that produce the neoliberal capitalist system and its devastating planetary impact. Climate delayers can be found in this group: aware of climate problems, but trying more of the same old patriarchal recipe to fix them. These masculinities can sometimes be found in a military context.
- **Eco-logical masculinities** are shaped by a systemic transformation of how we view men and boys’ place in their environment, upending men’s dominant position and firmly placing them within the intricate lacework of all life on Earth.

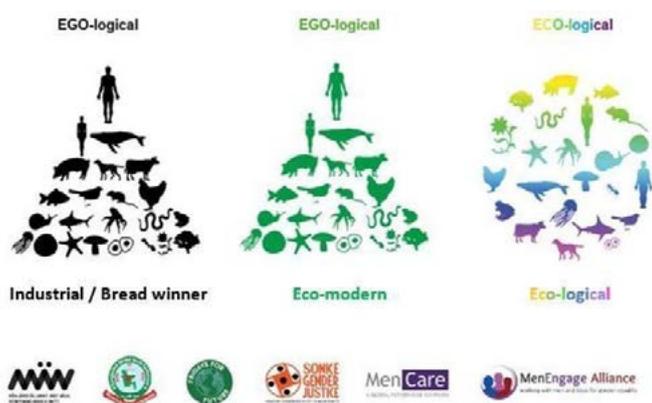


Figure 1: The relationship between masculinities and nature (SOURCE: Unknown for the original two black images of EGO and ECO; colours and three categories added by Vidar Vetterfalk, Martin Hultman, and Paul M. Pulé)

⁸ United Nations Human Rights Council. (2021, October 8). *Human Rights Council appoints a Special Rapporteur on the protection of human rights in the context of climate change and a Special Rapporteur to monitor the situation of human rights in Burundi*. <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/Pages/NewsDetail.aspx?NewsID=27639&LangID=E>

⁹ Hultman, M., & Pulé, P. M. (2018). *Ecological masculinities: Theoretical foundations and practical guidance*. Routledge; Pulé, P. M., & Hultman, M. (Eds.). (2021). *Men, masculinities, and Earth: Contending with the (m)Anthropocene*. Springer Nature.

¹⁰ ‘Climate denialism’ refers to people denying the overwhelming scientific evidence that climate change is taking place due to human CO₂ production in the atmosphere. ‘Climate delayers’ are those who agree that the human production of CO₂ does affect the atmosphere but who cast doubt on the urgency and gravity of its impact. Both climate deniers and climate delayers are part of a larger strategy (funded by the fossil fuel industry) to cast doubt and, thereby, delay when fossil fuel production needs to end.

¹¹ ‘Greenwashing’ includes actions taken to fight the climate crisis but that only have a symbolic impact, existing to convince the public that something is being done and to provide companies with ecological branding when they continue to harm the climate.

As Vidar Vetterfalk of MÄN said during [Voices From Women and Girls Leading the Feminist Climate Justice Movement](#):

Industrial/breadwinner and eco-modern masculinities are built on an EGO-logical order based on scarcity, telling people they have to buy more and more to stay happy, whereas in reality, true love and intimacy [are] prevalent in the ECO-logical order. It is abundant and for free. Thirty seconds of looking into somebody's eyes is life-changing. And it is for free. The same with nature: when you stop seeing it as an object that is there for consumption, that is revolutionary. It is not about moving back to the Stone Age; it is about moving forward to a world that is much richer than what we have right now.

During the symposium sessions on men, masculinities, and climate justice, presenters shared that the deconstruction of patriarchal gender stereotypes implies we will ultimately move beyond binary gender roles and transcend eco-logical masculinities towards an eco-logical humanity. Thus, the typology serves only as a framework to understand the current situation, not as an agenda for future actions.

As such, the climate crisis and gender inequality can be viewed as mere symptoms of a disease. The disease is patriarchy, together with other systems of oppression, like capitalism and colonialism. From a climate justice perspective, addressing the root causes of the climate crisis also requires tackling social inequalities and eradicating forms of oppression that movements can also reproduce, including gender inequalities. By focusing on curing the disease, we get to the root problems that connect movements: we cannot attain gender equality without tackling the climate crisis, and vice versa.



2. Promising practices and examples



Climate crisis is not only an environmental or development issue. It is an economical issue with global politics. It is also [a] human rights and youth issue, so we young people need to have a say in this. As young people, we have the obligation to protect our future and present. We young people in Bangladesh feel abandoned by the international community. We are unheard, but not voiceless.

— SOHANUR RAHMAN (YOUTH CLIMATE ACTIVIST),
[MASCULINITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE \(PART 2\)](#)

Feminist and eco-feminist organisations have developed numerous practices that engage women and girls in the environmental movement. However, practices working with men on environmental topics from a transforming masculinities perspective are much less common. This section highlights some of the existing programmes and projects addressing men and masculinities that were discussed during *Masculinity and Climate Change* ([Part 1](#) and [Part 2](#)), which were about good practice examples.



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2.1. Sweden: Men in the Climate Crisis

In 2019, Swedish MenEngage Alliance member [MÄN](#) worked in close collaboration with Chalmers University of Technology and the permaculture garden Under Tallarna to develop a prototype tool for men's reflective groups addressing gender transformation within the context of the climate crisis. [Men in the Climate Crisis](#), which has been pilot-tested in Sweden and translated into English and Russian, involves practising active listening as a central methodology and is meant to come after the first four sessions of MÄN's [reflective #aftermetoo group sessions](#). *Men in the Climate Crisis* is based on the theory and practice developed in two books: *Ecological Masculinities* and *Coming Back to Life*.¹² Research based on in-depth interviews with participants has shown promising results.¹³

The experiential work—based on *Coming Back to Life* and the concept of 'active hope'—follows a spiral sequence flowing through four stages: gratitude, honouring our pain for the world, seeing with fresh eyes, and going forth. When working with men and boys, it is crucial to focus on changing masculine norms about difficult emotions: going from ignoring these emotions to learning not to shy away from them. Then, men must learn to connect with and relate to the existential challenges we now face, feeling how much they care and finding the deep motivation, longing, strength, creativity, and love needed to create systems change. The authors of *Coming Back to Life* call this 'active hope': we care and love no matter how big the challenges are. By contrast, passive hope involves caring from a distance, with our level of hope based on a calculation of how likely something is to succeed.



Men in the Climate Crisis guide
(SOURCE: MÄN)

¹² Hultman, M., & Pulé, P. M. (2018). *Ecological masculinities: Theoretical foundations and practical guidance*. Routledge; Macy, J., & Brown, M. Y. (2014). *Coming back to life: The guide to the work that reconnects*. New Society Publishers.

¹³ Hedenqvist, R. (2020). *Exploring ecological masculinities praxes: A qualitative study of Global Northern men who have participated in pro-feminist and pro-environmental reflective groups* [Master's thesis]. Stockholm University. <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?fbclid=IwAR2ztIpuF55dcjNPZwSOKY1GjAOIh6VxwLbklBhFWnla9RM6rrkLNI81POi&pid=diva2%3A1450738&dswid=3588>

2.2. Russia: Center ANNA and men’s discussion groups

Since 2016, [Center ANNA](#) in Russia has held an annual photo exhibition, ‘Papino Delo’ (‘Papa’s Business’), which is dedicated to 20 fathers photographed doing activities with their children. In 2019, the centre chose to present images of fathers and children involved in nature protection, asking fathers: ‘What kind of environment would you like to bequeath to your children?’ The deeply moving portraits were shown in several Russian cities, including Moscow, where the photographs were placed on billboards in the largest city park.

A male psychologist in Astrakhan, Russia, implemented another notable initiative ending in September 2021. The initiative involved two men’s discussion groups, with each group holding eight meetings to talk about nonviolence; these meetings often evolved into discussions on what it means to be a man acting in the world without detachment and aggression. For some men, it was difficult to talk about responsibility to oneself, one’s loved ones, and the future since these topics involve feelings that are usually hidden in nontherapeutic conversation groups, such as anger and shame. The conversational jumping-off point for some men was detachment: participants willingly discussed men’s detached attitude towards their health, towards their bodies, and consequently, towards women and nature. The ideas of an unaggressive, empathic attitude towards oneself and towards women helped the men to discuss environmental problems. The initiative’s success has led to plans to implement it with businesses going forward.



SOURCE: Center ANNA photo exhibition

2.3. Bangladesh: Coastal Youth Action Hub

In Bangladesh, the *Fridays For Future* movement has merged with the work of gender equality activists, deeply embedding both climate justice and gender justice topics into all their actions. By refusing to treat these topics as separate, climate and gender activists are reinforcing their call for systems change.

The Bangladesh Fridays For Future movement has set up a *Coastal Youth Action Hub* as an activist vehicle. The action hub is a space for the co-creation and knowledge management of youth-developed innovations and solutions, and it envisages three angles of work:

- Enhancing access to knowledge and resources (capacity-building, mentoring, fellowship, idea incubation, digital platform)
- Research, advocacy, and campaigning (study/action research, movement-building, advocacy, campaign, youth parliament)
- Linking local to global actions (mapping youth organisations database, networking, solidarity)

Its action plan involves a study circle on climate change, monthly district meetings, a newsletter, a social media campaign, social audits of climate projects, and youth capacity-building.



3. Men, masculinities, and climate justice (by Ubuntu theme)

This section discusses men, masculinities, and climate justice within the context of the five overarching symposium themes to advance the work on transforming patriarchal masculinities and on working with men and boys on gender equality and social justice. These themes include feminisms, intersectionality, accountability, 'power with', and transformation.

3.1. Feminisms



We feel so much pain precisely because we are so connected to the Earth. Grief is connection. Disruption of binaries also opens up space to have a wider and deeper understanding of the world. It creates space for eco-feminism.

— MARNA HAUK (ACADEMIC), [MEN, MASCULINITIES AND EARTH](#)

Even before the wider population became aware of the climate crisis, feminist movements were already applying a power and gender analysis of systems of oppression, domination, and extraction. Eco-feminist theory, research, and movements have highlighted oppression by patriarchal structures and by men in power, as well as the situation of many (often marginalised) women and girls in relation to environmental problems. However, eco-feminism also looks at women and girls' resilience, courage, and creativity in healing the planet. As Greta Gaard said during [Men, Masculinities and Earth](#): 'If we genuinely want to create an environmental culture and a shift, we need to make more conscious choices about the gendered lenses through which we view environmental actions.'

At the same time, men and boys must contribute to the creation of a gender-equitable and ecologically sustainable society. However, feminist climate movements have not yet addressed, analysed, or integrated the inherent potential of working with men and boys as part of the solution or explored their contribution to the problem in depth. Addressing the climate crisis, gender equity, (and the interconnections of the two) is labour that women should not and cannot shoulder alone. However, as Kézha Hatier-Riess, vice president of external relations at Global Greengrants Fund, said during [The Climate Crisis, Men and Climate Justice](#), the traditional framing of empowerment in virtually every society expects women to be the main participants in gender equality actions and asks them to take on the unequal systems alone. Also, when it comes to gender in climate issues, the lens is most often on women and girls as ‘victims’ or ‘heroes’ on the front lines of climate change. Men and masculinities’ destructive or positive role in creating change remains invisible.

The often feminist and lesbian leadership of the youth climate movement (e.g., Fridays For Future) is no coincidence. These girls and women have already struggled on other fronts (e.g., LGBTBIQ rights and mental health activism) and used the lessons learned in climate movements.¹⁴

3.2. Intersectionality

“ **The climate crisis is not neutral to rich and poor; the climate crisis is not neutral to women and men. The climate crisis is not neutral to Global North and Global South. MAPA—most affected people and areas—need priority. Climate crisis finance is not charity. It is compensation. It is justice.**

— SOHANUR RAHMAN (YOUTH CLIMATE ACTIVIST),
[MASCULINITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE \(PART 2\)](#)

Solutions to the climate crisis can never be one-size-fits-all since its impact on people’s lives varies profoundly depending on socioeconomic status, race, gender, and other aspects of identity. Indeed, diversity exists not just among humans but also when we expand our lens to include the natural world (e.g., plants and nonhuman animals). As Greta Gaard said during [Men, Masculinities and Earth](#):

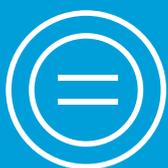
Family doesn’t have to be by blood, and it doesn’t have to be humans. Kin-centrism, nature is family. We are family to nature; we are family to other species. It is not that nature is our family—it is that we are all family, and science catches up with that.

This diversity brings richness to our discussions but can also lead to privilege and/or discrimination, including in terms of gender. Most often, masculinities create privileges in

¹⁴ De Wever, A., Neubauer, L., & van der Heyden, K. (2020). Fridays For Future – FFF Europe and beyond. In C. Henry, J. Rockström, & N. Stern (Eds.), *Standing up for a sustainable world*. Edward Elgar Publishing.

a person's life and femininities create discrimination—including in terms of the mechanisms leading to the climate crisis and its paths to a solution (e.g., resilience and mitigation). Other structures of oppression—such as in terms of race and socioeconomic status—also require an intersectional perspective to ensure work is not complicit with colonial systems. For example, wealthier men and men in the Global North contribute much more to climate destruction relative to poorer men in the Global South.

Too often, we have a tendency to speak for others. Intersectionality does not only mean acknowledging intersectionality and privilege in terms of pain inflicted by the environmental crisis. It also means passing the microphone to the most affected people and areas. For example, one speaker discussed geo-scientific speculation during *Men, Masculinities and Earth* and how ideas are typically proposed by Western men with a heavy 'superman' complex about carrying the world on their shoulders and saving humanity. Concepts hailed in a Global North context as the key to systems change—like degrowth¹⁵—might translate to increased poverty among those already stripped of privilege in the Global South. So, the challenge is to interrogate the concept of 'degrowth', define what it means in Global South contexts, and understand how it can connect to development in a way that achieves well-being for all.



Sohanur Rahman (young climate activist) speaking at "Voices from women and girls leading the feminist climate justice movement"

¹⁵ See: Hickel, J. (2020). *Less is more: How degrowth will save the world*. William Heinemann.

3.3. Accountability

“ [The] youth climate movement is extremely successful in touching the emotions of the ‘elite men’ and by making them realise they really have a responsibility. It is a collective action of holding them accountable, which is very important.

— MARTIN HULTMAN (ACADEMIC), [*VOICES FROM WOMEN AND GIRLS LEADING THE FEMINIST CLIMATE JUSTICE MOVEMENT*](#)

The origin of the climate crisis is well known and directly connected to the exponential development of the fossil fuel industry and to related industries. Male dominance and patriarchal norms in the fossil fuel sector are rarely studied or used as a strategic argument in the public discourse. A handful of fossil fuel companies account for the majority of CO₂ emissions,¹⁶ but they avoid accountability through tactics like spreading misinformation and doubt (well documented in the documentary *Merchants of Doubt*¹⁷), delaying, and lobbying for legislation that guarantees they can act with impunity. Thus, accountability is needed for many diverse groups—first and foremost, on a systemic level, fossil fuel and polluting industries and also governments and policymakers; both groups are also male-dominated. On an individual level, though, consumers all over the planet must be accountable, particularly those in the Global North, given their larger contribution to the climate crisis.

Governments and big business have long been happy to push the narrative that it is individual consumers’ sole responsibility to tackle the climate crisis. While individual actions are important, the only real solution is a dramatic political shift and changing the systems in place now—especially of finance, energy, transportation, industry, and agriculture. Only some people—often Indigenous peoples—choose not to take part in these destructive lifestyles, and these Indigenous peoples end up being the first victims of devastating environmental disasters of all kinds.

Fossil fuel and polluting industries are not only based on industrial/breadwinner masculinities or eco-modern masculinities. They also take these industries’ premise to their logical extreme by producing ‘Island Kings’, as it is fashionable among super-rich men to buy an island and a super-yacht to alienate themselves from the rest of humanity.¹⁸ Sherilyn MacGregor and Matthew Paterson describe typical attributes of these ‘kings’ as including extreme wealth; impunity from human and natural laws; feeling justified in domination over that which is owned (land and people); separation, isolation, and detachment; arrogance and wilful ignorance; and the pursuit and assumption of invulnerability.

However, their islands are prone to flooding, too. Disasters can change the relationship men have with the environment, confronting them with their own fragility. Disaster recovery can be a stimulus to develop new caring and responsible ways of relating to and behaving with others and nature. However, there are few studies on masculinities and male experiences with regards to the climate crisis, and the feeling of being invincible is often part of elite men’s inflated identity and needs to be deconstructed.

¹⁶ Climate Accountability Institute. (n.d.) *Carbon majors*. Retrieved November 29, 2021, from <https://climateaccountability.org/carbonmajors.html>

¹⁷ Kenner, R. (Director). (2014). *Merchants of doubt* [Film]. Participant.

¹⁸ MacGregor, S., & Paterson, M. (2021). Island kings: Imperial masculinity and climate fragilities. In P. M. Pulé & M. Hultman (Eds.), *Men, masculinities, and Earth* (pp. 153–168). Palgrave Macmillan.

Given the urgency of the climate crisis, accountability is needed now. However, research in Europe shows that women are more concerned about the climate crisis than men are,¹⁹ and the same might be true for Global South countries. As a 2016 MenEngage climate paper stated:

Gender socialization at the individual level, where boys and young men are often taught to be assertive, unfeeling, and unafraid, and girls and young women are taught to be passive and emotionally caring (particularly towards their families), may also impact how men and women view and respond to climate change in general.²⁰

The challenge in working on men, masculinities, and climate justice is not only to raise awareness among men and boys about the climate crisis. It is also to explore what it means to be accountable and to hold others accountable.

3.4. 'Power with'



To feel part of something simply makes it harder to dominate and easier to care.

— ROBIN HEDENQVIST, RESEARCHER, MENENGAGE FEMINIST
[ACTION FOR CLIMATE JUSTICE, GENERATION EQUALITY FORA](#)

The politics of male power centred around domination lies at the heart of most environmental crises. Transforming dominance into a caring interconnectedness is key in any attempt to move beyond patriarchy. Wessel van den Berg of Sonke Gender Justice (as quoted by Vidar Vetterfalk of MÄN) noted, 'Caring about something means you can see it and that you are willing to pay attention to it. Give care, receive care.'

'Power with' means ensuring women and girls' voices, agendas, and leadership are heard, not silenced or intimidated. Online and offline harassment of female climate activists is an enormous problem, and men must use their role as allies to ensure safety, provide assistance, fight impunity, and stand in solidarity with these girls and women. It means not only stopping any harassment but also making space for women to have their voices heard in all decision-making bodies, especially at the United Nations level (such as at the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change), but also nationally and locally.

The environment and climate crises can no longer be left to politicians and environmental organisations to solve. All movements, including the gender equality movement, need to contribute their diverse perspectives. Joint effort—versus working in silos—will also be more effective at achieving the just and sustainable world we are all striving for.

¹⁹ Pederby, T. (2019). *Cool dudes in Europe: Climate change denial amongst conservative 'white' men* (Bachelor's paper). Lunds Universitet. <http://up.lub.lu.se/student-papers/record/8975790>

²⁰ MenEngage Alliance. (2016). *Men, masculinities & climate change: A discussion paper*. <http://menengage.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Men-Masculinities-and-Climate-Change-FINAL.pdf>

3.5. Transformation

“ **We need to be radical dreamers and radical listeners. We need to dare to move into uncomfortable places to make things move in the right direction.**

— MARCELO SALAZAR (HEALTH IN HARMONY EXECUTIVE COORDINATOR IN BRAZIL AND AMAZON RAINFOREST CLIMATE ACTIVIST), [MASCULINITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE](#)

When looking at environmental destruction, we too often focus on the symptoms without looking at the root causes: neoliberal capitalism based on patriarchy and patriarchal norms, colonialism, and racism. The climate crisis is not the problem—it is a symptom. This narrative must be deconstructed, and more caring humanity built in its stead. As such, transformation means a radical systems change.

For systemic shifts to take place, we must transform the very structures that underlie our economic, political, and legal decisions and institutions. Kézha Hatier-Riess of Global Greengrants Fund said during [MenEngage Feminist Action for Climate Justice, Generation Equality Fora](#):

Some of the strongest environmental ‘wins’ globally have been brought about by social movements that started as small, unseen efforts and grew over time. The tipping points are often hard to predict, but the origins of social shifts are often small and localised.

Thus, the ‘glocal’ perspective (global connection and local action) is key to any transformation and is the scale of our ambition. Climate activism involves the metaphorical ‘small room’ and ‘big room’ (concepts developed by MÄN).²¹ The ‘small room’ involves self-reflection (e.g., openness, experience, individual, gut/emotion, ‘I and you’), and the ‘big room’ involves understanding society (e.g., critique, theory, structure, head/reason). Patriarchy, gender stereotypes, and power reside in both rooms. To create change means listening and supporting on the individual level and being critical and demanding on the structural level. For example, individuals can be encouraged to recycle, but structures and systems must be in place to encourage recycling

²¹ MÄN. (n.d.). #aftermetoo: Reflective groups for men. <https://mfj.se/assets/documents/english/reflective-groups-guide-man.pdf>

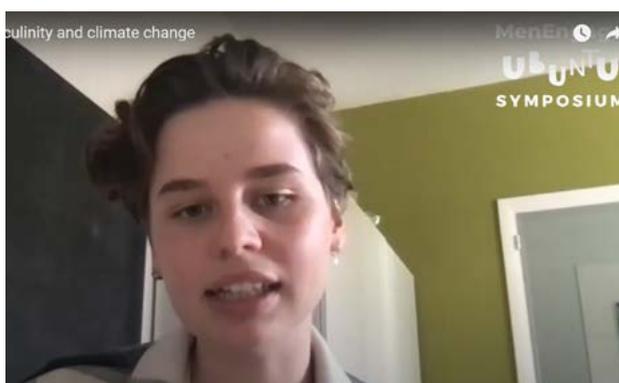
and ensure recycling systems are effective.

Another key element is deconstructing hegemonic masculinities and femininities, moving beyond these binaries. Even that human perspective is too limited, though, to facilitate the environmental transformation needed to create a balanced human presence on this planet. Inclusion that reaches beyond humans to include other species and nature itself is vital. We must recognise and be accountable for violence against nature and other species, and a legal framework on ecocide is the first step.

Transformation also means changes on a linguistic level. Too often, concepts proliferate without any thought about how they facilitate or impede the desired change or inclusivity. Warlike rhetoric in response to these crises (e.g., 'fighting climate change' or 'beating the disease') has a militaristic and masculine imprint. The language used in our movements should be much more caring: solving versus beating, healing versus fighting.

Additionally, responses to the climate crisis are often blocked or paralysed by gender stereotypes, such as men refusing to take eco-friendly actions because they are not perceived as 'manly'.²² These efforts also face gendered blowback, like the online and physical backlash against the powerful messages of next-generation eco-leaders such as Greta Thunberg. Indeed, youth voices and intergenerational aspects are often as overlooked as gender aspects in climate justice movements—yet these younger generations will bear the brunt of the crisis without being responsible for its cause. This means climate-related discourse must be inclusive of all generations to come, including the current ones.

Additionally, the climate crisis has already had a devastating impact on the most affected people and areas, but its impact will grow and be felt in all areas of the planet, now and in the near future. Global solidarity is the foundation of any resilience-building.



Anuna de Wever van der Heyden (young climate activist) speaking at Masculinity and climate change

²² Brough, A. R., & Wilkie, J. E. B. (2017, December 26). Men resist green behavior as unmanly. *Scientific American*. <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/men-resist-green-behavior-as-unmanly/>

4. Recommendations

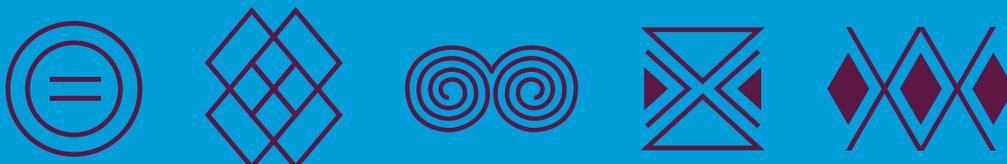
“National political leaders, scientists, writers, public figures—typically white men in privileged, powerful positions—came to help us, young climate girls. That is quite unique; it means a transformation is possible. Also, Indigenous people linked up with us because they heard us speaking the same language. It is a common fight that should unite all.

— ANUNA DE WEVER VAN DER HEYDEN (YOUNG CLIMATE ACTIVIST),
MASCULINITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

As practitioners, we can jointly build a globally just world in which systemic change transforms our planet into a place of inclusiveness and natural richness. To achieve this, we must stand shoulder to shoulder with all those who are not voiceless, but as yet unheard. Overshadowed by patriarchal norms and values, many people—mostly women and girls and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer (LGBTIQ) people—suffer the consequences of various destructive masculinities that urgently need to be held accountable and deconstructed. This calls not only for a deep ecological transformation but also for a clear position of solidarity, setting privileges aside unless they can be used as a responsible call to action.

There will not be any climate justice without gender justice, and vice versa. Developing a caring humanity is central to achieving goals in climate justice and in other domains, such as sexual and reproductive health and rights and gender-based violence prevention. Without seeing these topics' interconnectedness, we cannot make progress. In this context, care also means creating safe spaces for men to be vulnerable and to learn how to care for themselves, their communities, and the planet. This glocal perspective needs to be present in all our actions.

The following recommendations—centred around key objectives—can help us to collectively achieve a world that fosters both climate justice and gender justice.



4.1. Feminisms

Objective: Listen to and learn from feminist, youth, and climate justice movements and act together as allies; deconstruct industrial and eco-modern masculinities and construct an inclusive, caring humanity.

Recommendations:

- **Advocate for systems change as allies in diverse feminist movements and institutions,** such as in relevant United Nations bodies.
- **Promote education on feminist climate justice concepts.** Within this, the role of industrial and eco-modern masculinities and patriarchal structures must be made visible as a cause of climate problems.
- **Carry out gender-transformative work with men and boys on how to relate and behave in ways that can help achieve gender equality and climate justice.** This includes making meaningful connections between rational and emotional journeys in solving the climate crisis, as well as learning to heal and deal with eco-anxiety.
- **Encourage further empirical research, quantitative and qualitative, to develop relevant concepts and theory.** Diverse theories must be allowed to grow and change, and a community of practice must be built to develop the topic of masculinities and climate justice.
- **Challenge and deconstruct the idealisation of hegemonic masculinities based on dominance.** This includes, for example, being hunters or looking at hunting as a rite of passage.

4.2. Intersectionality

Objective: Be inclusive of all humans and nonhumans in our work, breaking the male-female gender binary and the human-nature binary; work to deconstruct other systems of oppressive power, like colonialism, racism, classism, and ageism.

Recommendations:

- **Develop an intersectional perspective on all genders and across all themes.** This requires deconstructing patriarchal masculinities into caring humanities and redefining relationships with other species to replace ownership with relationships and an ethic of care for all. It also means looking beyond the myopia of a Global North worldview and decolonizing work.
- **Pass the microphone to the most affected people and areas and amplify their voices, especially women and girls and LGBTIQ people.**
- **Develop climate responses that centre human rights and gender equality.** Refuse to partake in actions that are not in line with global justice movements.



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4.3. Accountability

Objective: Contribute to justice (in relation to climate, gender, and human rights) while simultaneously being accountable to those leading climate justice efforts.

Recommendations:

- **Be accountable to women, girls, and LGBTIQ people, as well as to feminist and youth climate movements.** Whenever possible and welcome, men should use their privilege to assist climate justice movements, and they should be accountable for harm done in the past and present.
- **Hold men in power, corporations, and governments accountable for their responsibilities to tackle climate change.** If need be, prosecute men who are guilty of planetary destruction or ecocide through their activities. Make their harm visible while making the link with patriarchal norms and values clear.
- **Hold those accountable who are harassing activist women, girls, and LGBTIQ people in person and online and help build safe spaces that allow for constructive dialogue.**
- **Ensure climate finance is analysed from the lens of the historically most polluting countries being held accountable to the most affected countries, people, and areas—not as aid.** It should be compensation for loss and damage due to the climate crisis.

4.4. 'Power with'

Objective: Conduct cross-movement-building for shared causes.

Recommendation:

- **Build democratic structures and shift power to those who are unheard, prioritising safety, care, and solidarity.** Those not belonging to the most affected people and areas should refuse to participate in venues or events where these individuals are underrepresented. Additionally, those belonging to the most affected people and areas should be able to decide if they want to speak for themselves or if they want others to use their privilege to raise sensitive issues for them.

4.5 Transformation

Objective: Demand systems change, which helps stay connected to the other movements and avoid tokenistic responses.

Recommendations:

- **Demand feminist systems change and do not become sidetracked by solutions that delay or spread doubt or false solutions.** This requires recognising inadequate solutions to climate change or gender justice and insisting on serious, meaningful action that involves a just and equitable transition.
- **Address the personal, political, and glocal (global connection and local action) concurrently,** addressing the emotional and rational in a balanced way and ensuring transformation is owned by all humans affected and is inclusive. Work on the glocal scale can involve financing small-scale, community-led, sustainable projects focused on adaptation and resilience, as well as co-creating solutions.
- **Demand policy change and address alarming global trends head-on with a sense of urgency.** This can include, for example, demanding energy and resource democracy and making sharing and equality central. Tax havens and financial flow towards elite men should be dismantled, and societies should unite behind the technical and human sciences, listening to scientists and disseminating knowledge to the grassroots.
- **Support Earth rights,** helping build legal frameworks that end impunity for ecocide and securing increased land rights for women and Indigenous people.
- **Change language on climate crisis** to avoid masculine or militaristic language (e.g., fight, battle, or tackle) and instead use constructive, inclusive language (e.g., building, inviting, and connecting).
- **Promote local and traditional knowledge in climate solutions.**

Annex 1. Links to symposium sessions on men, masculinities and climate justice

1. 10 November 2020: [Opening plenary](#)
2. 11 November 2020: [Youth Leadership and Movement Building panel](#)
3. 11 November 2020: [Intersectional Feminist Movement Voices panel](#)
4. 11 November 2020: [Men and Masculinities panel \(part 1\)](#)
5. 12 November 2020: [Men and Masculinities panel \(part 2\)](#)
6. 10 December 2020: [Voices From Women and Girls Leading the Feminist Climate Justice Movement](#)
7. 25 February 2021: [Men, Masculinities and Earth: Contending with the \(m\)Anthropocene](#)
8. 11 March 2021: [Challenges and Opportunities for Building Resilient, Sustainable Communities](#)
9. 1 April 2021: [Masculinity and Climate Change: Good Practice Examples of Men as Allies of Women in Fighting Climate Change](#)
10. 29 April 2021: Masculinity and Climate Change: [Good Practice Examples of Men as Allies of Women in Fighting Climate Change \(Part 2\)](#)
11. 6 May 2021: [MenEngage Feminist Action for Climate Justice, Generation Equality Fora. Practical Work With Men](#)
12. 3 June 2021: [Summarizing the Highlights from the Series and Establishment of a MenEngage Working Group for Climate Justice](#)



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Peacebuilding and countering militarism

Piotr Pawlak

A summary report of discussions at the 3rd
MenEngage Global Symposium (the Ubuntu
Symposium), 2020-2021



MenEngage Alliance
working with men and boys for gender equality

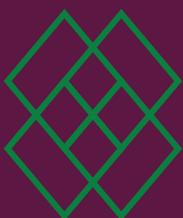
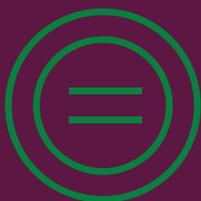


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Table of contents

1. Context and problem analysis	102
1.1. Militarized masculinities	103
2. Key conversation points on peacebuilding and countering militarism	105
2.1. Understanding current political, economic, social, and technological forces and factors	105
2.2. Focusing on systems and structural change	107
2.3. Changing systems in solidarity	108
2.4. Addressing military systems of power and culture	110
2.5. Moving beyond the individual towards institutional change	111
2.6. Focusing on institutional power brokers and decision-makers	112
2.7. Using digital communications and online spaces	113
2.8. Meaningfully engaging with young people	115
2.9. Building peace and countering militarism through better interventions	116
3. Recommendations	117
Annex 1. Links to the peacebuilding and countering militarism symposium seminars	119

1. Context and problem analysis

Research tells us that socially constructed gender norms that associate masculinity with power, violence, and control play an important role in driving conflict and insecurity worldwide.¹ These norms are enabled by individuals, institutions, and ideologies that glorify violence and fund the war system. Institutions of war—and the people who hold power within them—are highly masculinized: war is built on mobilising men’s bodies to fight, and it exploits ideas about manhood to encourage and pressure men to engage in conflict. Men and boys, together with women and girls, need support to better understand these dynamics and be resilient to political strategies that harm them.

To advance feminist peace, it is critical to transform the currently accepted norms, ideologies, and institutions. This is particularly important with the increased complexity of violent conflicts and humanitarian crises, including the various means by which state and non-state actors engage in violent conflict, the rise in military spending, and increased tensions over the use of resources. With large numbers of internally displaced persons and the doubling of the number of refugees in recent years, more and more people are being affected by conflict.² Among women, this situation is exacerbated by conflict’s links with increased rates of violence against women and girls (including political violence and hate speech), weak rule of law, and drastic cuts to funding for Women, Peace, and Security programmes globally.

Feminist activists and scholars have noted the ways in which the nationalist rhetoric of control and protection is both masculinized and militarized; nationalism, militarism, and patriarchal masculinities have always been closely linked. Addressing conflict and militarized masculinities requires drawing attention to the political and economic forces that drive the war economy and that exploit and manufacture ideas around militarized masculinities.

The online sessions on peacebuilding and countering militarism during the 3rd MenEngage Global Symposium (also referred to as the MenEngage Ubuntu Symposium) allowed for an unprecedented level of discussion, reflection, and knowledge-building around how gender-transformative work with men and boys can best address militarism and its associated militarist cultures and militarized masculinities. This document consolidates lessons, experiences, and discourse from those sessions, analysing the state of the field of engaging men and boys in peacebuilding and countering militarism, as well as presenting the opportunities, challenges, and gaps in continuing to advance this thematic area. This document can help shape the programmatic, campaign, and policy agenda of the MenEngage Alliance and of members and partners engaging men in peacebuilding and countering militarism. In this way, the MenEngage Alliance, its members, and partners can strengthen their engagement, position, and clarity on these issues and on supporting the Women, Peace, and Security agenda.

¹ Wright, H. (2014). *Masculinities, conflict and peacebuilding: Perspectives on men through a gender lens*. Saferworld. <https://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/publications/862-masculinities-conflict-and-peacebuilding-perspectives-on-men-through-a-gender-lens>

² United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2019). *Global trends: Forced displacement in 2018*. <https://www.unhcr.org/5d08d7ee7.pdf>



PHOTO CREDIT: Shutterstock.com

1.1. Militarized masculinities

Around the world, militarized masculinities take different forms but share several key characteristics. Across the sessions, panellists generated a loose consensus that ‘militarized masculinities’ are a combination of traits and attitudes that are hypermasculine, hegemonic, violent, and associated primarily with military members and other militarized institutions (like the police, private security, and border patrols). The panellists also conveyed that militarized masculinities are not the exclusive domain of men in formal military institutions; they are also practised by ordinary citizens who have internalised the dominant values of militarized societies. Examples of militarized masculinities shared by the panellists include:

- In **Rwanda**, a study on the gender, masculinities, and reintegration of former combatants found the prevailing perception of masculinity was directly linked to men’s involvement in the 1994 genocide of members of the Tutsi ethnic group.³ In this sense—as Fidele Rutayisire (founder and executive director of the [Rwanda Men’s Resource Centre](#)) said—conceptions of Rwandan masculinity during these catastrophic times were linked to the idea of ‘killing as many Tutsis as possible’ as an expression of power and manhood. Today, this ideal of violent, militarized masculinities manifests in the widespread phenomenon of men using violence against women and girls, Rutayisire said.
- **Brazil** has a long history of military rule, and the prevalence of militarized masculinities has recently intensified, with violence being channelled into a form of political power. In 2018, Jair Bolsonaro’s victory in the presidential election helped consolidate right-wing populism and, consequently, restored and glorified militarism and militarized masculinities. Brazil’s

³ LOGiCA & Promundo. (2014). A study of gender, masculinities and reintegration of former combatants in Rwanda: Results from the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES). <https://promundoglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/A-Study-of-Gender-Masculinities-and-Reintegration-of-Former-Combatants-in-Rwanda.pdf>

military plays a major role in Bolsonaro's government. 'Around a third of Bolsonaro's cabinet is composed of retired or active-duty military, with dozens more in key government positions elsewhere.'⁴ Over the years, Bolsonaro has not only embodied and praised hegemonic and militarized forms of masculinity but also actively projected himself as a crusader against 'gender ideology', with rhetoric targeting women and the LGBTIQ community.

- In the **Middle East and North Africa**, the concept of militarized masculinities comes directly from the widespread patriarchal values that shape and reinforce patriarchal masculinities. It is characterised by obedience to the hierarchy of power, with 'power over' valued more than 'power within' and national propaganda detailing the sacred notion of fighting and dying for one's nation. In Syria, for instance, President Bashar al-Assad emphasised the relationship between national 'belonging' and military service in a landmark July 2015 speech, saying: *'The fatherland is not for those who live in it or hold its nationality, but for those who defend and protect it.'*⁵ In Lebanon, the concept of militarized masculinities is born out of decades of conflict and a military regime that has shaped what it means to be a man today—which is 'masculinity on steroids', as Anthony Keedi (masculinities technical advisor at [ABAAD](#)) suggested.⁶ It is also gradually becoming dangerously central to all characteristics of being a man, as jointly concluded by speakers in the [second part of the Men and Masculinities panel](#).

Such a militarized version of masculinity strives for dominance over others (men and women alike). It devalues others' political and social assertiveness, and when its superiority is contested, militarized masculinities demand and justify the use of repression, aggression, and violence rather than offering opportunities for peaceful dialogue. According to Gabrielle Jamela Hosein (senior lecturer at the [Institute for Gender and Development Studies](#) at the University of the West Indies in Trinidad and Tobago), this reflects a global turn towards authoritarianism, ethnonationalism, and neoliberalism, from the election of President Donald Trump in the United States to Brexit in the United Kingdom, from the nationalist policies of Japanese Prime Minister Shinzō Abe, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to the success of far-right parties in Italian, German, and Austrian elections in 2017 and 2018.⁷ It symbolises the rise of fascism, racism, xenophobia, supremacist ideologies, and fundamentalism, as well as militarism and its associated militarist cultures and militarized masculinities. This, in turn, creates the social, political, and economic contexts for our gender-transformative work with men and boys, and it results in specific challenges ahead for the field of men and masculinities.

⁴ Winter, B. (2019, December 16). "It's complicated": Inside Bolsonaro's relationship with Brazil's military. *Americas Quarterly*. <https://www.americasquarterly.org/article/its-complicated-inside-bolsonaros-relationship-with-brazils-military/>

⁵ *يوم جوي وهدنة عفا دي نمل لب هيف نكاسي نمل سويل نطولنا: سؤالاً* [Assad: The homeland is not for the one who lives in it, but for the one who defends and protects it]. (2015, July 26). Al Jazeera. <https://mubasher.aljazeera.net/news/miscellaneous/2015/7/26/نملنا-ب-هيف-نكاسي-نمل-سويل-نطولنا-سؤالاً>

⁶ ABAAD is a non-governmental organisation based in Lebanon 'that aims to achieve gender equality as an essential condition to sustainable social and economic development in the [Middle East and North Africa] region...ABAAD advocates for the development and implementation of policies and laws that enhance women's effective participation through a rights-based approach that would bring about tangible change to gender justice.' See: About. (n.d.). ABAAD. Retrieved November 15, 2021, from <https://www.abaadmena.org/about>

⁷ Bremmer, I. (2017, May 11). The wave to come. *Time*. <http://time.com/4775441/the-wave-to-come/>; Whither nationalism? (2017, December 19). *The Economist*. <https://www.economist.com/christmas-specials/2017/12/19/whither-nationalism>

2. Key conversation points on peacebuilding and countering militarism

2.1. Understanding current political, economic, social, and technological forces and factors

Speakers and panellists recognized the rise of extremely conservative, authoritarian, ethnonationalistic, and neoliberal powers and leaders globally as the issue of highest concern and an area that needs to be strategically tackled. As Alan Greig (cofounder of the [Challenging Male Supremacy Project](#) and lead author of a key symposium discussion paper⁵) said, these forces thrive on homophobia, transphobia, and misogyny; they reinforce and promote an anti-gender, anti-feminist, and anti-human rights agenda and rhetoric in the name of 'family values', organised around a patriarchal binary of masculine authority and feminine domesticity. By doing so, the prevalence of militarism and its associated militarist cultures escalates around the world. As Anthony Keedi from ABAAD argued, this reinforces the dominant, controlling versions of patriarchal and militarized masculinities, in which men hold control and power over other men and women are perceived—and subordinated—as subservient.

⁵ MenEngage Alliance. (2021). Contexts and challenges for gender-transformative work with men and boys: A discussion paper. <http://menengage.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Contexts-and-Challenges-for-Gender-Transformative-Work-with-Men-and-Boys-A-Discussion-Paper-English.pdf>

Symposium speakers agreed that around the world, forces such as authoritarianism, ethnonationalism, and neoliberalism are threatening progress on all women and girls' human rights and on gender justice more broadly. In the context of peacebuilding, as speakers collectively affirmed during [Networking and Advocacy for the Integration of the African Great Lakes Regional WPS-YPS Agenda](#), the rise of militarism and its associated militarist cultures and militarized masculinities has reversed the progress made since the landmark United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325; the Women, Peace, and Security agenda; and other international declarations and agreements since the Fourth World Conference on Women and its adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 1995.

In many ways, the growing influence and impact of these circumstances are '*crises that have been long in the making*', as articulated by Netsai Mushonga (commissioner of the [Zimbabwe Electoral Commission](#)), and are being intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, research suggests that in countries such as the Philippines, India, Uganda, Kenya, Qatar, Hungary, and Russia, militaristic approaches have been used to exploit COVID-19 as a pretext for repressive measures by the state. This includes justifying violence, violating human rights, and undermining democratic institutions.⁹

In [Conflict, Militarism and Securitization of the Virus](#), speakers said COVID-19 and public health measures have been used as an excuse to strengthen the notion and prevalence of militarism and its associated militarist cultures. This, in turn, has created a milieu conducive to control and repression and to the dominance of militarized versions of masculinity, according to Anthony Keedi from ABAAD. In Syria, Salma Kahale (founder and executive director of [Dawlaty](#)¹⁰) said COVID-19 has been used to increase the state's power to control content and access to information among citizens, as well as to repress and restrict democratic, liberal, and progressive civil society. Under the umbrella of public health measures, male-dominated, militarized groups—including police and other security forces—have been empowered to exercise aggressive authority and control over citizens' mobility.

The global turn toward authoritarianism, ethnonationalism, and neoliberalism have (re) introduced, strengthened, and sustained militarist cultures and militarized masculinities.

Against this backdrop, the field of men and boys for gender equality—and gender justice more broadly—is greatly concerned for those doing work on men and masculinities. It is urgent for the MenEngage Alliance and its members and partners to tackle these forces as part of the gender justice movement and broader efforts to promote social, political, and economic justice and equality.

⁹ Mapp Frett, L. (2020, April 29). *COVID-19 poses an existential threat to human rights activists worldwide*. openDemocracy. <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/covid-19-poses-existential-threat-human-rights-activists-worldwide/>; United Nations. (2020, April 27). *Toxic lockdown culture' of repressive coronavirus measures hits most vulnerable*. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/04/1062632>, as cited in Ruxton, S., & Burrell, S. R. (2020). *Masculinities and COVID-19: Making the connections*. Promundo-US. <https://promundoglobal.org/resources/masculinities-and-covid-19-making-the-connections/>

¹⁰ Dawlaty is a non-governmental organisation based in Lebanon that 'works on suggesting alternatives and on democratic transition, building capacity, transitional justice, human rights and conflict management in Syria.' See: *Salma Kahale*. (n.d.). Bond. Retrieved November 16, 2021, from <https://www.bond.org.uk/person/salma-kahale>

2.2. Focusing on systems and structural change

The symposium sessions on peacebuilding and countering militarism emphasised the importance of the link between the current systems of power—political, economic, and sociocultural—and their contribution to the rise of militarism and its associated militarist cultures and militarized masculinities. These sessions also highlighted that although the current social and economic systems are profoundly based on hegemony and patriarchy (and, consequently, reinforce and sustain these ideologies), those in the field of men and boys for gender equality—including MenEngage and its members and partners—have largely overlooked systems change.

Feminist groups around the world have long drawn attention to many of the systemic issues faced not only by women, girls, and gender-nonconforming people but also by men and boys. They have long advocated for the systems and structural change needed to address widening gender and other inequalities, as reflected in several symposium sessions. The symposium speakers and panellists acknowledged the wealth of existing transformative work on culture and society's role in reinforcing and sustaining patriarchal masculinities. However, they also concluded that the work needs to move beyond that focus. Systemic issues intertwine in complex ways, requiring us to expand beyond the subjects of culture or society; we must look at them in relation to each other and develop multilevel, multisystem strategies to create a system of equality between men and women. This suggests the MenEngage Alliance, its members and partners, and the field of men and boys for gender equality more broadly must develop a radical, strategic agenda to address systems and structural change. Gabrielle Jamela Hosein of the Institute for Gender and Development Studies said any further articulation of the meaning and practice of gender-transformative work with men and boys on patriarchal and militarized masculinities must reflect on the political, economic, and sociocultural forces shaping gender hierarchies and relations of power.

A clear and critical point emerged from the symposium: **For systems change to take place, the MenEngage Alliance and its members and partners must focus on transforming the systems of power underlying the social, economic, and political systems, institutions, and decisions that shape the current state of the world.** Furthermore, to tackle the patriarchal backlash that has emerged against progress on gender justice, the field needs a bold agenda that prioritises social and economic justice. The concept of social and economic justice is not only a cross-cutting concern for a broad group of individuals and their communities but also resonates with those who may not be concerned with gender justice and those who may oppose gender equality and women's empowerment.

To this point, Mary Ellsberg (founding director of the [Global Women's Institute](#) at the George Washington University) discussed the importance of understanding the context in which political, economic, social, and technological forces and factors justify and sustain militarism and its associated militarist cultures and militarized masculinities before addressing them. In Nicaragua, for example, Ellsberg said much of the current backlash against gender equality has roots in the backlash decades ago against the work of the feminist movement addressing violence against women and girls. Moving forward, the MenEngage Alliance and its members and partners must better understand the context in which the powerful forces and factors against gender equality and justice operate.

2.3. Changing systems in solidarity

Speakers in the [first part of the Men and Masculinities panel](#) concluded that **to more effectively do gender-transformative work with men and boys on transforming unjust, unequal systems of power, a new kind of ‘men and boys for gender equality’ movement is needed.** Such a movement must engage with feminist movements more strategically, more closely, and more inclusively, as well as work in solidarity with broader gender and social justice movements.

A fundamental understanding and a strategic tackling of contemporary global issues are needed, said Nick Galasso (head of research at [Oxfam America](#)). To do so, Alan Greig of the Challenging Male Supremacy Project argued, the field of men and boys for gender equality—including the MenEngage Alliance and its members and partners—must build new and strengthen existing engagement with feminist, LGBTIQ, climate, and other social justice movements. This includes building intersectional partnerships with antiracist movements (e.g. Black Lives Matter¹¹) and movements for the rights of Indigenous people, immigrants, and refugees (among others) to confront and address militarism and its associated militarist cultures and militarized masculinities. A stronger intersectional perspective on all genders must be part of the ‘new’ kind of movement, which must also tap into and use the local knowledge, experiences, and priorities of Indigenous movements. For example, experience in local gender and social justice movements in the Caribbean can be an asset in developing global strategies, as Gabrielle Jamela Hosein of the Institute for Gender and Development Studies noted:

Collaboration between men and women groups is a tradition in the Caribbean. The inherent tradition of intersectionality among cultures, races, gender, sexuality is a key legacy that offers opportunities for better connection between movements in order to address global crisis.

Overall, the symposium also highlighted a need for more strategic engagement with leaders and organisations working on gender and on social, political, and economic justice to build cross-movement solidarity. This also includes mobilisation across feminist civil society, men and boys for gender equality organisations, national governments, and multilateral institutions. This cross-movement solidarity would allow for powerful global efforts to transform patriarchal structures and to challenge the inequalities produced by the current socioeconomic and political order. This process must move beyond the responsibility of one network, one organisation, or one individual issue, said Annie Matundu Mbambi (president of [Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom \[WILPF\]](#) Democratic Republic of Congo). Referring to her organisation’s work in mobilising men for feminist peace, Madeleine Rees (WILPF’s secretary-general) said we should no longer play the role of a women only feminist- organisation but instead must work with men against structures that inform inequality and reinforce militarism and militarized masculinities that inherently threaten women in peacebuilding, their empowerment, and the progress on gender equality.

Changing systems of power in solidarity requires pursuing objectives through interconnected, clear, and consistent language around countering militarism and its associated militarist cultures and militarized masculinities. Uniform messaging around ‘men and boys for

¹¹ The Black Lives Matter Global Network Foundation is ‘a global organization in the US, UK, and Canada, whose mission is to eradicate white supremacy and build local power to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes.’ See: *About - Black Lives Matter*. (n.d.). Black Lives Matter Global Network Foundation. Retrieved November 15, 2021, from <https://blacklivesmatter.com/about/>

gender equality' among the MenEngage Alliance and its members and partners—shared understanding, consistent vocabulary, and harmonised messages—is central to this pursuit. Too often, across the field of men and masculinities, organisations are inconsistent (and sometimes even conflicting) in the type, format, and most importantly, content of issue-based policy advocacy statements, campaign messages, and language describing the reasons for engaging men and boys. This includes, for example, messaging that promotes men as agents of change, statements that present men as saviours of women, and even language based on shaming and blaming men and boys for perpetrating violence.

This leads to neutralisation, and often polarisation, of the shared goals and objectives, said Sanam Naraghi Anderlini (director of the [LSE Centre for Women, Peace and Security](#)) during the [Political Contexts](#) panel. What is needed, symposium speakers and panellists concluded, is for the MenEngage Alliance and its members and partners to ensure synergy and consistency in the messages and language used at the global, regional, and country levels to shape gender-transformative work with men and boys for gender and social justice. During the session [Digital Contexts](#), speakers agreed that countering militarism and transforming patriarchal, militarized masculinities require uniform and consistent messaging and a shared language to speak to all kinds of men and boys worldwide.

Symposium speakers and panellists also concluded that multi-movement solidarity, and subsequent collaborations among networks and partners, are necessary to develop and implement global, regional, and national policy agendas that address existing power structures. This is particularly important along the fault lines of resource and wealth disparities between countries, between rich and poor, and between men and women. To change systems of inequality, according to Gary Barker (founder and CEO of [Promundo](#)), much more needs to be done in terms of collaborative interventions across feminist civil society, organisations focused on men and boys for gender equality, national governments, and multilateral institutions. One example of effective collaboration referenced during the [first part of the Men and Masculinities panel](#) was the [companion programme to Brazil's Bolsa Familia](#)¹² initiative developed by Promundo. The companion programme 'promotes women's economic empowerment by engaging men as allies in transforming harmful gender attitudes and behaviors that impact progress in Brazil',¹³ and it is an example of a long-term collaboration between civil society and the national government to address resource and wealth disparities and inequality.



Anthony Keedi, Rida Altubuly, Salma Kahale and Rasha Jarhum speaking at "Conflict, militarism and securitization of the virus: feminist peace and states' accountability"

¹² Established in 2003, Brazil's Bolsa Família Program 'is one of the first and largest conditional cash transfer programs in the world, with around 1 in 4 Brazilians registered in the program nationally. The Bolsa Família Program aims to eliminate extreme poverty and increase access to services among the country's most economically and socially vulnerable populations. The conditionalities of the program, which include ensuring up-to-date vaccinations, regular school attendance, and annual medical checkups, are all child-centered.' See: *Bolsa Família Companion Program*. (n.d.). Promundo. Retrieved November 15, 2021, from <https://openstax.org/r/bolsa-familia-program>

¹³ Ibid.

2.4. Addressing military systems of power and culture

One important conclusion that emerged during the symposium was that to counter militarism and transform the associated militarized masculinities, we must also reach and change the institutional systems and cultures of military institutions and organisations themselves. Speakers highlighted a strong connection between military institutions and hegemonic representations of masculinity. For example, Alan Greig of the Challenging Male Supremacy Project said, '*Military institutions not only rely on but also perpetuate images and narratives of patriarchal masculinities.*' Yet, as concluded, the field of men and boys for gender equality has seldom focused its work on these institutions in a strategic and continuous way. Calling on the MenEngage Alliance and its members and partners, Ingrid Tatiana Abril Peña (lecturer at [Universidad Central](#) in Colombia) said that collectively, the alliance and its members and partners need to look at international industries, security forces, and paramilitary groups to counter militarized masculinities. Other speakers also made this argument, including Dean Peacock (director of the Confronting Militarized Masculinities Initiative for WILPF).

To this extent, the MenEngage Ubuntu Symposium's speakers and panellists concluded that a strategic, deliberate agenda must be in place to work with military institutions and organisations. According to Alan Greig of the Challenging Male Supremacy Project, this means addressing institutional structures of militarization—from values and norms to codes of conduct, from budgets and spending to recruitment strategies and recruitment and retention messages. As Dean Peacock of WILPF said, the field of men for gender equality has historically targeted men who do not have the institutional power to change structures and cultures that reinforce and sustain militarized masculinities.

Several symposium sessions highlighted that the field of men and boys for gender equality has been effective in understanding, and subsequently implementing, what works in transforming masculinities at the individual and community levels. However, according to panellists in [Political Contexts](#), the field has not yet fully focused on or been effective in addressing organisational systems and institutions of power, including the military. Panellists agreed that the next chapter in transformative work with men and boys must engage power brokers and decision-makers within these institutions and organisations. In addition, the MenEngage Alliance and its members and partners must look beyond holding individual men accountable for their patriarchal and 'militaristic' behaviour to include holding institutions and organisations accountable for their respective roles and responsibilities in transforming patriarchal and militarized masculinities.

2.5. Moving beyond the individual towards institutional change

The MenEngage Ubuntu Symposium highlighted the need for gender-transformative work with men and boys to move beyond its current focus on individual-level change. There has been a recognition and acknowledgement that the framework for gender-transformative work with men and boys needs updating to include a focus on the institutional and organisational structuring of male power, privilege, and supremacy.

During the symposium, speakers and panellists emphasised that many effective approaches have been developed to work with individual men and their local communities. Programmes and interventions in both the Global South and the Global North have been effective in changing personal attitudes around violence and building more equitable interpersonal behaviours. A growing body of evidence also shows that well-designed interventions can increase men and boys' gender-equitable attitudes and behaviours, including regarding violence. Over time, as Gary Barker of Promundo said, programming with men and boys has also expanded to include strategies to address change in patriarchal social norms through social action campaigns. However, Dean Peacock of WILPF made a point about a longstanding critique, both within and of the 'men and boys for gender equality' field, that its work remains too focused on the attitudinal and behavioural change of individual men. Individual-level changes are important but not enough to build a more democratic, equitable, fair, and peaceful world; a focus is needed on changing the structures of inequality, Barker said.

The majority of symposium speakers acknowledged a growing recognition of the need for more emphasis on working with institutions to change their patriarchal (and often militarized) and male-dominated structures and cultures. Several symposium presentations focused on expanding the gender-transformative work with individual men and boys and on designing, testing, implementing, and evaluating strategies, approaches, and interventions that address institutional change. The [first part of the Men and Masculinities panel](#) referenced some efforts attempting to do that. For example, since it launched in 2011, the [Portal Equidade de Gênero nas Escolas](#) (Portuguese for 'Portal for Gender Equality in Schools') has provided online training for teachers to implement gender-equality education with students in Brazilian public schools, with the goal of taking [Program H and Program M](#)¹⁴ to scale in partnership with the public education sector. Similar efforts are clearly instrumental for institutional change and for transforming patriarchal and other limiting, restrictive versions of masculinity. However, Gary Barker of Promundo said this experience suggests a process that is complex, multifaceted, and full of challenges—a lesson learned for the MenEngage Alliance and its members and partners.

¹⁴ Program H and Program M were developed to engage youth in critical reflections on gender and help them build skills to act in more empowered and equitable ways. The complementary interventions use educational workshops, community outreach strategies and a multi-media campaign to empower young women to feel a sense of agency and control over their lives and to sensitize young men to some of the harmful ways they are socialized and introduces ways to take on more gender-equitable attitudes and behaviours. Program H and Program M have been carried out in diverse contexts in Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as in Asia, sub-Saharan Africa and the Balkans.' See: Pan American Health Organization & Promundo. (2010). *Program H and Program M: Engaging young men and empowering young women to promote gender equality and health*. <https://promundoglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Program-H-and-Program-M-Evaluation.pdf>

2.6. Focusing on institutional power brokers and decision-makers

The MenEngage Ubuntu Symposium’s speakers and panellists concluded that any approach that does not consider work with men who hold institutional and organisational power may not yield the desired results or transformative changes. In *Political Contexts*, panellists suggested the field of men and masculinities needs a new strategy, a targeted agenda, and concrete approaches focused on the role of military institutions and leadership in embedding positive gender norms into their structures and organisational cultures.

Dean Peacock of WILPF said to address the forces that shape our ideas and options related to gender, we will have to expand our strategies beyond a primary focus on working with men in local communities. We will have to augment the approaches our field has historically used to also focus on holding men in the institutions that foment and profit from war accountable. This includes governments, the arms industry, the extractives sector, and other multinational corporations that are involved in the proliferation of weapons or in dispossessing communities from their land to extract natural resources, thereby creating the conditions that generate violence, conflict, and war. In addition to changing social norms at the community level, we will also have to connect with other social movements, use national and international law, mobilise public pressure, and work together to advance gender equality and social justice more broadly.

The symposium’s speakers and panellists agreed that the field of men and masculinities needs a multipronged strategy that:

1. Engages with men in military institutions who are power brokers and decision-makers
2. Holds these men accountable and requires them to take institutional responsibility for their roles and responsibilities in transforming patriarchal and militarized masculinities
3. Requires accountability to feminist organisations leading the work on feminist peace, and promotes the leadership of and coordination with these organisations

In turn, as jointly agreed throughout the symposium, this calls for more focus on united movement and cross-movement solidarity among stakeholders working to advance gender equality.





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2.7. Using digital communications and online spaces

Across all symposium sessions on peacebuilding and countering militarism, one key theme was the role of digital communications and online spaces. Digital communications and online spaces are particularly important to men and boys around the world, and they are increasingly the main environment in which men and boys connect with one another, feel safe, and conceptualise and form their attitudes, ideas, beliefs, and practices. They facilitate not only interpersonal communication but also specific actions, panellists and speakers said. In many cases, also at work on the internet are the forces that reinforce and promote an anti-gender, anti-LGBTIQ, anti-feminist, and anti-human rights agenda and rhetoric, as well as propel authoritarianism, ethnonationalism, and militarism. The internet is also terrain for mobilising fundamentalism and the rise of militarism, with an extraordinary volume of social media content celebrating war and militarism.

Political and other ideologies that fuel the rise of militarism and its associated militarist cultures and militarized masculinities are shared through digital communications and manifested in the online ecology of websites, memes, and message boards. This is where, according to one panellist, 'misogynistic notions of gender roles and shared beliefs about heterosexuality, male supremacy, and the need to violently re-establish "traditional" gender norms are shared.' Today, young men and boys from both the Global South and the Global North are recruited into such ideologies online, and several speakers sounded the alarm on the increased proliferation of far-right messaging and memes online. In the context of militarism, the internet is where many men and boys are encouraged and enticed to join militarist agendas, where they are deliberately groomed to become protectors and defenders of social values, and where they are successfully recruited into specific ideologies, groups, practices, and behaviours. It was concluded that the field of men and masculinities cannot underplay international connections or the global online presence of militarism and its associated militarist cultures. Yet, as the symposium's speakers and panellists concluded, the internet remains untapped by the MenEngage Alliance and its members and partners in gender-transformative work with men and boys.

Select sessions of the MenEngage Ubuntu Symposium highlighted an urgent need to think through how gender-transformative work with men and boys can be implemented through digital communications and online in a frequent, strategic, and much more targeted way. Several speakers suggested methods to do this:

¹⁵ One speaker described 'manospheres' as the online ecology of sites, memes, and message boards constructed around a narrative of feminism's oppression of men and a rejection of the evidence of men's patriarchal oppression of women. 'Incel forums' are online forums where men speak about their inability to have sex with women ('involuntarily celibate') and blame it on feminism.



1. **Establish dedicated online spaces and share them widely.** This includes discussion forums, groups, chats, and websites in which men and boys can connect with one another and in which positive, healthy, nonviolent versions of masculinity can be promoted as alternatives to militarized masculinities.
2. **Focus on strategic outreach in the places where authoritarianism, fascism, nationalism, xenophobia, supremacist ideologies, and fundamentalism thrive.** This includes confronting and addressing online spaces where dangerous misogyny is being reinforced and sustained. Part of this process should include identifying manospheres and incel forums¹⁵ and targeting online spaces where militarized masculinities thrive. It is crucial that this strategy places in the centre positive alternatives to patriarchal and militarized masculinities.
3. **Use visuals in digital communication and online advocacy.** More needs to be done to intervene with individuals' behaviours through online media-based visual elements. Exploring the connections between visual communication design and behaviour change and creating persuasive visual communication designs and elements are important strategic steps forward in countering militarism and its associated militarist cultures and militarized masculinities.
4. **Infuse positive role models into digital communication and into online spaces and advocacy.** Panellists achieved clear consensus on the overpowering examples of negative role models that men and boys are exposed to online, including role models representing strong, dominating, controlling, aggressive, and militarized versions of masculinity. At the same time, the symposium's speakers and panellists said, there are few positive alternatives. Recent years have witnessed the rise of 'strongman' leaders around the world, manifested through the repression of democratic institutions and free press, the lack of separation of powers, and the complex arrangements of patronage and nepotism on the one hand and aggression, repression, and coercion of individuals and communities on the other. With the abundance of negative examples of being a man and a vacuum of positive ones online, one priority is identifying and presenting positive alternatives that are attractive to men and boys.
5. **Nurture a community of knowledge.** This includes countering the rise of digital misinformation and tackling falsehoods about feminism, human rights (including LGBTIQ rights), and climate justice, all of which have significant implications for gender justice. The production and circulation of factual, evidence-based information to counter the deliberate spread of false information online should centre around affecting users and not merely sharing facts.

In addition, the symposium's speakers and panellists concluded, offline and digital communications need to be much more inclusive in terms of language and vocabulary, reflecting a balance between 'academic' language and the language used and understood by 'ordinary' men and boys (as well as women and girls). The language of engaging men and boys to advance women and girls' human rights and fundamental freedoms must change depending on the recipients. The MenEngage Alliance must put more effort into developing shared and well-understood language around male engagement in peacebuilding and countering militarized masculinities. It needs to learn how to speak the language of youth, the working class, and those with opposing views. This includes using more specific, nuanced statements about the particular roles and responsibilities of individual (and specific groups of) men and boys in promoting peace and security, as opposed to general—and sometimes vague—phrases such as 'engaging men'.

At the same time, greater attention is needed on how specific language—for instance, the language of male victimhood and vulnerability or the anti-feminist messaging of men's rights organisations—gradually migrates to the mainstream vocabulary, where it becomes normalised and legitimised in schools, peer groups and forums, media, and online spaces. This also includes war-like rhetoric in response to various global crises—for instance, 'beat the disease' or 'fight climate change'—that has a strong imprint of militarized masculinities. Additionally, panellists and speakers collectively recognised the need for greater attention to safety and security in digital communications and online activism when developing new methods of digital communications and online-based gender-transformative work with men and boys.

2.8. Meaningfully engaging with young people

Young people are powerful agents for resolving and preventing conflict. They also have a role in building peace, and their leadership in this process is a potential force to counter militarism and its associated militarist cultures. Yet the field of men and masculinities has engaged young people more as passive recipients of knowledge or sometimes as active bystanders in programmes rather than as activists and leaders in peacebuilding and countering militarism.

The MenEngage Ubuntu Symposium's speakers and panellists concluded that the first step towards more meaningfully and effectively engaging youth as activists and leaders in peacebuilding and countering militarism is better recognising their essential role in addressing structural issues that impede gender justice, such as economic and environmental injustices, militarization, and conflict. This involves moving away from seeing youth as disengaged, removed, and unconcerned with global issues. On the contrary, research suggests that most young people are resilient and peaceful; they can and do represent a vast source of innovation, ideas, and solutions around peacebuilding and countering militarism.¹⁶

Across subcultures and geographies, young people have connected and formed communities on- and offline. Increasingly connected to one another, they can—and in many cases, already do—drive social progress, act at the forefront of environmental activism, and inspire global political, economic, and social transformation. The symposium speakers and panellists concluded that the MenEngage Alliance and its members and partners, as well as organisations working on men and masculinities, must support young people in fulfilling their full potential as a positive force for building peace and countering militarism. While doing so, these actors must ensure the process is inclusive, empowering, effective, and efficient.

The intersectionality of the process must receive special attention, panellists and speakers emphasised throughout the symposium sessions on peacebuilding and countering militarism. This area's lack of diversity in youth engagement has been one key shortcoming and challenge; cisgender white men dominate youth leadership movements around the world, often excluding groups such as LGBTIQ youth and gender-nonbinary individuals. The symposium's speakers and panellists concluded that the MenEngage Alliance needs to develop and implement a comprehensive youth leadership and engagement strategy to support young people's meaningful participation and leadership in building peace and countering militarism.

¹⁶ Simpson, G. (2018). *The missing peace: Independent progress study on youth and peace and security (A/72/761-S/2018/86)*. United Nations General Assembly & United Nations Security Council. https://www.un.org/peaceanddevelopment/leadresource-ipl/progress_study_on_youth_peace_security_A-72-761-S-2018-86_ENGLISH.pdf

2.9. Building peace and countering militarism through better interventions

By supporting effective interventions, enhancing the efficacy of promising programmes, and disseminating results with members and partners globally, the MenEngage Alliance plays a pivotal role in (re)shaping the discourse and agenda for gender-transformative work with men and boys around the world. Deliberations during the symposium sessions concluded that the alliance should ensure that all of its current and future programmatic efforts to engage men and boys intensify their feminist orientation. To this extent, and in the context of peacebuilding and countering militarism, the MenEngage Ubuntu Symposium's speakers and panellists suggested critically rethinking and revising the concept of 'male champions'. While it is widely considered effective, 'male champions' may be a problematic idea that centres men in a way that fuels the tendency to engage men and boys as protagonists, overshadowing the needs and voices of women and girls.

Engaging men and boys to advocate for the rights of women and girls is not new, including in violent conflicts and humanitarian crises, and many of the men and boys involved have been chosen by their communities because of their passion for gender equality. However, not all of these men and boys have a solid track record of a commitment to feminist values and principles of gender equality (or, more broadly, to principles for maintaining peace and security). 'Male champions' and similar conceptual approaches risk being '*liberal self-betterment initiatives for men and boys*' as opposed to truly feminist-informed, gender-transformative efforts to counter militarism and transform patriarchal and militarized masculinities, as feminist activists and panellists explained.

Another important point made by symposium speakers and panellists was the need to rethink and revise how interventions and programmes in violent conflicts and humanitarian crises attempt to counter militarism and associated militarist cultures and militarized masculinities. These interventions and programmes focus only on conflict-affected or conflict-involved men and boys (and often, those who are poor and marginalised). Programmes must focus more on the institutions—and their leadership—that propel and sustain the use of violence as a means to achieve the ideal of militarized masculinities. Furthermore, interventions often overlook and do not hold accountable men with institutional power who endorse militarism and militarized masculinities through institutional structures. These men, as symposium speakers and panellists concluded, are the engine of why and how patriarchal and militarized masculinities prevail. Alan Greig of the Challenging Male Supremacy Project said, 'Interventions tend to place attention on the "*bad guys*"—those men considered aggressors or troublemakers, members of street gangs, and others who directly carry out acts of violence—'*and not on men in positions of power who are left out.*'

3. Recommendations

From the symposium sessions on peacebuilding and countering militarism, 10 specific recommendations emerge. While they apply more broadly to actors in the gender justice movement, these recommendations also include specific steps that the MenEngage Alliance can take.

- 1. Tackle the rise of authoritarianism, ethnonationalism, and militarism**—which (re) introduces, strengthens, and sustains militarist cultures and militarized masculinities—as part of the gender justice movement and through broader efforts to promote social, political, and economic justice and equality. To do so, the MenEngage Alliance must develop and continuously advance a radical and strategic systems change agenda.
- 2. Focus on transforming systems of power** that underlie the social, economic, and political systems, institutions, and decisions that shape the current state of the world and give rise to militarism and militarized masculinities. To start the process, the MenEngage Alliance must better understand the context in which the powerful forces and factors against gender equality and justice operate. The alliance must also strengthen existing engagement and build new connections with feminist, LGBTIQ, climate, and other social justice movements.
- 3. Ensure synergy in the messages and language shaping gender-transformative work with men and boys for gender and social justice**, including against militarism and its associated militarist cultures and militarized masculinities. This alignment must take place at the global, regional, and local levels.
- 4. Work with sectoral institutions to change their patriarchal, male-dominated, (and often militarized) structures and cultures.** To do so, the MenEngage Alliance must:
 - Expand the gender-transformative work with individual men and boys into designing, testing, implementing, and evaluating strategies, approaches, and interventions that address institutional change.
 - Develop a dual strategy to engage with men in military institutions and those who are power brokers and decision-makers in the disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration process (for ex-combatants). These men should be held accountable and take institutional responsibility for their roles and responsibilities in transforming patriarchal and militarized masculinities.
- 5. Think through how gender-transformative work with men and boys can be implemented digitally**—through digital communications and in online spaces—frequently, strategically, and in a much more targeted way. This should include contemplating how digital platforms could be used in advocacy against rising backlash.
- 6. Develop and implement a comprehensive youth leadership and engagement strategy** to support young people's meaningful participation and leadership in building peace and countering militarism.
- 7. Enhance the efficacy of promising programmes and share results with members and partners globally, in addition to supporting effective interventions.** To shape the discourse and agenda for gender-transformative work with men and boys around the world, the MenEngage Alliance should pay better attention to ensuring all current and future programming to engage men and boys intensifies its feminist orientation.

8. Foster multistakeholder and multisectoral engagement, including collaboration with feminist organisations and other social justice movements, to strengthen initiatives countering militarism, its cultures, and militarized masculinities.

9. Unpack how militarized masculinities play out similarly and differently across contexts.

The characteristics uncovered in this process must be nuanced and be described more clearly than they are now. For example, greater analysis is needed on how aspects of one context (e.g., a conflict-affected setting or situation) differ from another using the lens of militarized masculinities; resistance, victimisation, protectionism, and control of wealth might be important factors (among others) to analyse each case. Motivations are not always similar. Some men and boys forced to carry guns choose to never use them, for example, while others do choose to use them for glory, wealth, or dominance.

10. Take an intersectional feminist approach to studying militarized masculinities. There is a tendency for work in militarized masculinities to stay quite binary in its rhetoric and analysis. Further analysis must unpack, for example, what this discussion means for gender-nonconforming people.



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Annex 1. Links to the symposium sessions on peacebuilding and countering militarism

1. 10 November 2020: [Opening plenary](#)
2. 11 November 2020: [Youth Leadership and Movement Building panel](#)
3. 11 November 2020: [Intersectional Feminist Movement Voices panel](#)
4. 11 November 2020: [Men and Masculinities panel \(part 1\)](#)
5. 12 November 2020: [Men and Masculinities panel \(part 2\)](#)
6. 14 January 2021: [Conflict, Militarism and Securitization of the Virus: Feminist Peace and States' Accountability](#)
7. 26 January 2021: [Why Is the Oldest Women's Organization Mobilising Men for Feminist Peace?](#)
8. 2 February 2021: [Political Contexts: Authoritarianism, Ethnonationalism and Militarism](#)
9. 11 February 2021: [La Humanización de la Violencia Masculina Como Problema Estructural \(The Humanization of Male Violence as a Structural Problem\)](#)
10. 2 March 2021: Social Contexts: [Anti-Feminism, Normalized Violence and Politicized Religion](#)
11. 8 April 2021: [Networking and Advocacy for the Integration of the African Great Lakes Regional WPS-YPS Agenda into Beijing +25 and Generation Equality Global Forum, and the Inclusion of Men and Boys in Advancing the Agendas](#)
12. 20 April 2021: [Digital Contexts: Media, Attention Economies and the Manosphere](#)
13. 13 May 2021: [Deconstructing the Logic of Masculinist Protection](#)
14. 20 May 2021: [Masculinidades del Conflicto Armado en el Cine Colombiano](#) (Masculinities of Armed Conflict in Colombian Cinema)
15. 17 June 2021: [Deconstruyendo el Establecimiento de Masculinidades: Una Experiencia Interseccional](#) (Deconstructing the Establishment of Masculinities: An Intersectional Experience)



MenEngage
UBUNTU
SYMPOSIUM
I AM
BECAUSE
You are

Sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and sexual orientation, gender identity and expression and sex characteristics (SOGIESC)

Tyler Crone
Jacqui Stevenson

A summary report of discussions at the 3rd MenEngage Global Symposium (the Ubuntu Symposium), 2020-2021



MenEngage Alliance
working with men and boys for gender equality

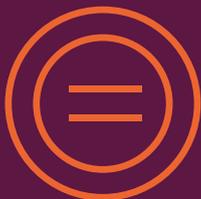


PHOTO CREDIT: Paula Bronstein/Getty Images/Images of Empowerment

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The views and analysis presented in this paper are those of the author, as well as the speakers during the 3rd MenEngage Global Symposium (the MenEngage Ubuntu Symposium).

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Table of contents

1. Context and problem analysis	123
1.1. Background	124
1.2. Current threats and challenges identified during the symposium	127
2. Key SRHR and SOGIESC conversation points	129
2.1. Pushback against gender and conservative backlash	130
2.2. COVID-19	131
2.3. Bodily autonomy	131
2.4. Harmful practices	132
2.5. SOGIESC flashpoints	133
2.6. Toxic masculinities	134
2.7. Safe abortion	134
2.8. Critical and emerging SRHR conversations	135
3. Promising practices and examples	137
4. Lessons learned, recommendations, and the path forward	139
4.1. Lessons learned	139
4.2. Recommendations	141
4.3. The path forward	144
5. Selected resources on SRHR and SOGIESC	146
Annex 1. Links to symposium sessions on SRHR and SOGIESC	147

1. Context and problem analysis



So, in terms of the learnings on the field of engaging men and boys, or [what] gender equality broadly needs to do, the first thing we must do is begin with the questions: What have I learned? What have I learned that has harmed people? What can I unpack? In my experience, when we start to do a deep dive on power and privilege, it's easier to realise the harmful things we have learned in our life's course and the ways we can work to unpack the power that we have. Oftentimes, this disempowering, decentring, and violence happens to the world's most marginalised communities, including Black people; Indigenous people; young people; sex workers; people living with HIV; queer, trans, and nonbinary people; and intersex people. In the field of engaging men and boys, one thing we must continually interrogate is how we show up for those that are not men and boys, and doing so in a way that doesn't necessarily affirm the gender binary, which has contributed to so many of our understandings of harmful and/or toxic masculinity. Once we do that, it becomes just a little bit easier to engage in gender justice and be in solidarity with women, trans, and nonbinary people.

— PRESTON MITCHUM (FORMER DIRECTOR OF POLICY, URGE: UNITE FOR REPRODUCTIVE & GENDER EQUALITY), [OPENING PLENARY](#)

1.1. Background

The 3rd MenEngage Global Symposium (also referred to as the MenEngage Ubuntu Symposium) took place in a moment of great complexity, challenge, and disruption due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which formed a unifying thread throughout the symposium discussions. Across panels, topics, and debates, similar experiences emerged around COVID-19's impact: The pandemic and its consequences have exacerbated harmful gender norms and undermined years of progress in work to achieve gender equality.¹ Moreover, the pandemic has brought efforts to advance sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) for all to a standstill. And together within this, the work toward inclusion, health, dignity, and equity for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer (LGBTIQ) people continues to be a site of contest and debate. Continued country-level efforts to criminalise people based on who they are, whom they love, and how they express themselves are now aligning with a specific and intentional effort by conservative actors to deny the rights, agency, and humanity of LGBTIQ people in United Nations spaces, frameworks, and beyond.

As we finalise this document in late 2021, we are nowhere near through the COVID-19 pandemic. The toll has been greatest on those already carrying the burden of inequality, who are facing multiple layers of marginalisation and oppression and are also shouldering the greatest burden of disease and death. Not only are efforts to advance SRHR at a standstill, but we are also witnessing an accelerated rollback of any gains and a deprioritisation of SRHR worldwide. Frontline community health advocates and human rights defenders are citing, and global networks are documenting, increases in unintended pregnancies among young people, reports of violence, the collapse of HIV prevention programmes (including programmes to prevent vertical transmission), and ever-more challenges to accessing safe abortion.² COVID-19 lockdowns have disrupted livelihoods and made seeking services or commodities even more difficult, with individuals finding some services are no longer available and stockouts of essential commodities becoming routine. Notably, symposium panellists from across Africa cited stockouts of contraceptives, sexually transmitted infection prevention tools such as condoms, and antiretroviral drugs for those living with HIV as key concerns.

The MenEngage Ubuntu Symposium provided a space where policymakers, programme managers, community advocates, researchers, and frontline human rights defenders from around the globe could come together and jointly consider what this moment means for our collective work. Against a backdrop of a global pandemic that needs, yet still lacks, a globally coordinated and just response, there is a key political moment and recognition that, as the *Ubuntu Declaration & Call to Action* states:

¹ Azcona, G., Bhatt, A., Encarnacion, J., Plazaola-Castaño, J., Seck, P., Staab, S., & Turquet, L. (2020). *From insights to action: Gender equality in the wake of COVID-19*. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/09/gender-equality-in-the-wake-of-covid-19#view>

² ATHENA. (n.d.). *Action alert: Adolescent girls and young women are watching: Our rights and lives matter*. Retrieved November 23, 2021, from <https://us18.campaign-archive.com/?u=1d26f7842344ac89d18ee4bb7&id=d7d52e7d6f>

We are all deeply interconnected in a world of profound injustices that can no longer be hidden...[We also see] resistance, hope, resilience, vision, and disruption from 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.

The 'shared vision of gender, social, economic and environmental justice for all, everywhere, now and in the future' described in the declaration relies on the realisation of SRHR for all. It also requires the freedom to be our full selves in all our diversity of sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC). Now more than ever, it is clear that (as the declaration puts it) 'the only path ahead is towards inclusion, equity and justice' and we must 'cherish the diversities that exist among us'.³

Five cross-cutting themes shaped the MenEngage Ubuntu Symposium, each of which contributes to and furthers our understanding of SRHR and SOGIESC in the context of men and masculinities: feminisms, intersectionality, accountability, 'power with', and transformation. Both SRHR and SOGIESC are broad topics (as the definitions in the box indicate), and the symposium sessions reflected a breadth of SRHR and SOGIESC issues, shaped by elements such as the current context, political and economic factors, and the priorities of participating organisations and individuals. Many key issues within SRHR and SOGIESC came through strongly in the symposium, including youth leadership, harmful practices, dignified menstruation, the global gag rule, safe abortion, and the rights and dignity of transgender individuals. Other, equally critical issues received less focus in these discussions but are nonetheless a core part of the ongoing conversation.

This knowledge product aims to provide an overview of the presentations and discussions on SRHR and SOGIESC throughout the MenEngage Ubuntu Symposium, drawing on 22 symposium sessions and wider conversations. It is neither a full record of the symposium nor a complete picture of the role of men and masculinities in addressing SRHR and SOGIESC. Rather, this document is a snapshot and jumping-off point to continue building this vital, complicated, and multifaceted conversation.

³ MenEngage Alliance. (2021). *Ubuntu declaration & call to action*. http://menengage.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Ubuntu-DCTA-Advanced-Edited-Version_eng.pdf

Definitions

Sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) has two key elements:⁴

1. **Sexual and reproductive health** 'is a state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being in relation to all aspects of sexuality and reproduction, not merely the absence of disease, dysfunction or infirmity. Therefore, a positive approach to sexuality and reproduction should recognize the part played by pleasurable sexual relationships, trust and communication in promoting self-esteem and overall well-being. All individuals have a right to make decisions governing their bodies and to access services that support that right.'
2. **Sexual and reproductive rights** must be achieved to realise sexual and reproductive health. These rights are based on all individuals' right to 'have their bodily integrity, privacy and personal autonomy respected; freely define their own sexuality, including sexual orientation and gender identity and expression; decide whether and when to be sexually active; choose their sexual partners; have safe and pleasurable sexual experiences; decide whether, when and whom to marry; decide whether, when and by what means to have a child or children, and how many children to have; [and] have access over their lifetimes to the information, resources, services and support necessary to achieve all the above, free from discrimination, coercion, exploitation and violence.'

SOGIESC includes sexual orientation (SO), gender identity and expression (GIE), and sex characteristics (SC):⁵

- **Sexual orientation** refers to 'each person's capacity for profound emotional, affectional and sexual attraction to, and intimate and sexual relations with, individuals of a different gender or the same gender or more than one gender.'
- **Gender identity** refers to 'each person's deeply felt internal and individual experience of gender, which may or may not correspond with the sex assigned at birth, including the personal sense of the body (which may involve, if freely chosen, modification of bodily appearance or function by medical, surgical or other means) and other expressions of gender, including dress, speech and mannerisms.'
- **Gender expression** refers to 'external manifestations of gender, expressed through one's name, pronouns, clothing, haircut, behavior, voice, or body characteristics. Society identifies these cues as masculine and feminine, although what is considered masculine and feminine changes over time and varies by culture. Typically, transgender people seek to make their gender expression align with their gender identity, rather than the sex they were assigned at birth.'
- **Sex characteristics** 'include primary sex characteristics ([e.g.,] inner and outer genitalia and/or the chromosomal and hormonal structure) and secondary sex characteristics ([e.g.,] muscle mass, hair distribution and stature).'

⁴ Definitions of 'sexual and reproductive health' and 'sexual and reproductive rights' from: Guttmacher-Lancet Commission on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights. (2018). *Accelerate progress: Sexual and reproductive health and rights for all: Executive summary*. https://www.guttmacher.org/sites/default/files/page_files/accelerate-progress-executive-summary.pdf

⁵ All definitions adapted from: ARC International, International Bar Association, and the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association. (2016). *Sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics at the Universal Periodic Review*. https://ilga.org/downloads/SOGIESC_at_UPR_report.pdf; definitions of gender identity and gender identity adapted by those authors from: Yogyakarta principles on the application of international human rights law in relation to sexual orientation and gender identity. (2007). <https://yogyakartaprinciples.org/>

1.2. Current threats and challenges identified during the symposium

“The field of sexual and reproductive healthcare has tried to involve men and boys in family planning and sexuality education for the last 30 years, but the field is fraught with assumptions and stigma about gender and sexuality. To complicate things, healthcare is a very power-driven sector with its own hierarchies, and SRHR touches the heart of the male-female binary that defines patriarchy as a system. So, the first thing we need to do is to acknowledge this complexity as we work to transform patriarchal gender norms and improve SRHR.

— MAGALY MARQUES (GLOBAL SRHR COORDINATOR, MENENGAGE ALLIANCE GLOBAL SECRETARIAT), [*WHAT IS THE RESEARCH AND EVIDENCE AGENDA FOR ADDRESSING MASCULINITIES IN THE CONTEXT OF SRHR?*](#)

The MenEngage Ubuntu Symposium took place in an intense and tumultuous point in history, and it provided a space in which those who are actively working to create a better world could be in active dialogue to identify challenges and their solutions. Any roadmap we thought we had—or any understanding we shared—had been pushed and pulled by this moment.

So, COVID-19 was top of mind in the symposium discussions on SRHR and SOGIESC. Panellists and participants discussed how they were struggling to envision, adapt to, articulate, and influence how we as a global community navigate COVID-19, learn from earlier pandemics such as HIV, and build resilience and new strategies to rise to the moment. COVID-19 has only intensified the headwinds faced by change agents committed to gender justice, 'power with', accountability, and intersectional feminism. A global environment of conservatism and backlash continues, even as bright spots for feminist leadership have taken place in tandem with the MenEngage Ubuntu Symposium, notably the Generation Equality Forum in Mexico City and Paris.



PHOTO CREDIT: Jonathan Torgovnik/Getty Images/Images of Empowerment

The key ongoing threats related to SRHR and SOGIESC that were discussed across the symposium panels include:

- Threats to civic spaces and to the ability to assemble
- Attacks on human rights defenders
- Conservative backlash, growing opposition to feminism and women’s rights, and the promotion and preservation of toxic masculine ideals
- Increased resourcing and investment in anti-rights efforts⁶
- Violence and discrimination against, as well as the criminalisation of, LGBTIQ people, who are left out of conversations about violence, harmful practices, and SRHR
- COVID-19’s disproportionate impact on the most marginalised, who are the most affected in all settings and for whom the economic impact is devastating, both now and in the medium to long term
- Harmful practices, including female genital mutilation, child marriage, and bias against girls, which continue to be widespread and impact millions of girls each year
- Toxic masculinity, which both is rooted in and perpetuates harmful gender norms

These global trends are reflected and replicated at the regional, national, and local levels. They impact the work of promoting and protecting SRHR and SOGIESC, as well as those committed to doing this work. A critical thread weaving through many symposium panels was the burden carried by change agents doing this work, exacerbated by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has uprooted support systems, increased care responsibilities, created deep, lasting anxiety and financial insecurity, and compounded the challenges in working to create change in the face of backlash and opposition.

⁶ Association for Women’s Rights in Development (AWID). (2021, August 11). *Key anti-rights trends: 47th session of the Human Rights Council*. <https://www.awid.org/news-and-analysis/key-anti-rights-trends-47th-session-human-rights-council>

2. Key SRHR and SOGIESC conversation points

The discussions across the symposium were far-reaching, cross-regional, multigenerational, and intersectional. With such a vibrant and diverse tapestry of sessions, we have identified notable conversation points to provide a sample of the range and breadth of discussion. However, it is important to note that these conversation points do not fully capture the depth of the analysis shared across dozens of sessions.

As UN Women Deputy Executive Director Åsa Regnér noted, the world is not on track to achieve the SRHR aims of the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action, although there has been demonstrable progress in the area of maternal mortality. Coupled with being offtrack even before COVID-19—which has stalled and reversed progress—we are witnessing a moment of conservative backlash and of reckoning across justice movements, including racial justice and environmental justice. Despite this, panellists across sessions evinced a shared hope for learning from the past to collectively build a better future, looking ahead with both realism and optimism.



PHOTO CREDIT: Jonathan Torgovnik/Getty Images/Images of Empowerment

2.1. Pushback against gender and conservative backlash

“Gender is a form of programming. If we think of ourselves as a computer, then gender is more software than hardware. It gets tipped into our operating systems by our surrounding environments at almost every turn, in almost everything we do. We have to disrupt that software wherever it is malware—wherever its messaging promotes inequality or is dehumanizing, wherever it is so fixed and rigid that it’s imprisoning.

— KATE GILMORE (CHAIR OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES, INTERNATIONAL PLANNED PARENTHOOD FEDERATION),
INTERSECTIONAL FEMINIST MOVEMENT VOICES PANEL

Conservative backlash, retaliation against advances in gender equality, and increasing violence against women and girls are threatening to roll back any progress that has been made in achieving gender equality. This backlash is joining forces with those who oppose diversity and migration to gain ground around the world. Across Europe and the United States, for example, fundamentalist anti-sexual and -gender rights actors are forging links with those focused on nationalism and anti-immigrant rights to advance agendas against universal human rights and comprehensive sexuality education.

Gender is part of every aspect of people’s lives, and the inequalities built on stigma, harmful gender norms, and restricted gender roles are ingrained in societies and communities worldwide. Despite this, panellists described being inspired by diverse, intersectional feminist movements, including LGBTIQ movements, and by the possibilities to further expand work that engages men and boys through engaging critically and reflexively with gender norms and roles.



Kate Gilmore (présidente du conseil d'administration de la Fédération Internationale Pour La Planification Familiale) s'adressant à panel « les voix du mouvement féministe intersectionnel ».

2.2. COVID-19

As panellists spoke to COVID-19's impact on SRHR—particularly in terms of reaching youth—we saw patterns of prior pandemics and epidemics repeating themselves: long-standing inequities being exacerbated, and those already marginalised being pushed further to the margins. However, we also saw innovation, resilience, and shared humanity rising to meet great challenges and complexity.

COVID-19 has brought into sharp relief long-existing inequalities, namely in terms of who is providing care and caregiving. It has also led to insecurity and school closures globally, and there is concern that girls will not return because of heightened family duties, families' economic fragility, large numbers of orphans, and unintended pregnancies due to contraceptive stockouts. Panellists called for prioritising efforts to ensure women and girls aren't left at the centre of the storm of COVID-19, as has been the case with HIV and Zika.

Panellists also held a broad consensus that an ongoing gendered analysis and centring women are key to a just COVID-19 response and recovery. One panellist in [Impact of Covid-19 on the SRHR Rights of Women & Girls](#) made the distinction between 'protecting women's rights' and 'protecting women', though, with the latter increasing subjugation and inequity. The speaker described this as the risk of COVID-19 becoming a 'law-and-order' pandemic rather than a health pandemic.

2.3. Bodily autonomy



Work with men has to be done carefully and with accountability. We need to focus on practice not just on principles. We need to be guided by and accountable to women at all levels whether individual or structural.

— MARCOS NASCIMENTO (FIOCRUZ), [POWER, BODILY INTEGRITY AND SRHR](#)

The right to bodily autonomy and the right to be free from harm and rights violations belong to all human beings, including children. Any nonconsensual intrusion is a violation of bodily autonomy, from unwanted touch to forced marriage. Harmful practices that violate bodily autonomy are often perpetrated or supported by family, friends, and communities, and they are wrongly seen or understood to be in the 'best interest' of the the person whose bodily autonomy was disregarded or violated. Respect for bodily autonomy is foundational to SRHR and to the rights and dignity of LGBTIQ people.

Symposium panellists highlighted the need to centre not just the concept but also the ethical commitment to intersectionality in addressing gender justice and bodily autonomy. They described the need to talk about vulnerabilities and inequalities through an intersectional lens that addresses power and inequities within and between communities, countries, and regions. This includes—for example—addressing conflict, migration, health emergencies, and other coexisting crises.

2.4. Harmful practices



We know that [child marriage is] largely banned, yet it occurs thousands of times a day around the world—cutting across countries, cultures, religions, and ethnicities—we see this practice happening. We understand it’s closely linked to poverty and the context is very important, but the unfortunate truth is that it doesn’t just limit a girl’s education; it affects her life into the future, in the long term, and it limits and inhibits her from making autonomous choices about her own body.

— LEYLA SHARAFI (SENIOR GENDER ADVISOR, UNITED NATIONS POPULATION FUND), [POWER, BODILY INTEGRITY AND SRHR](#)

In *Power, Bodily Integrity and SRHR*, speakers highlighted more than 90 widespread harmful practices that violate human rights and are carried out against girls’ will with the consent of families and communities. These practices include breast ironing, virginity testing, child marriage, female genital mutilation, and bias against daughters in favour of sons, among many others. Each practice continues to affect huge numbers of girls every year, and the rates are anticipated to increase in coming decades due to population changes unless action is taken to mitigate these risks, according to the session’s speakers. COVID-19 has also seen an uptick in harmful practices and made interventions to reduce the risk of such practices harder to implement. The United Nations Population Fund estimates an additional 13 million child marriages and 2 million cases of female genital mutilation will take place over the next decade due to disruptions caused by the pandemic.⁷

Engaging men and boys is at the heart of changing social and gender norms, both because of their roles in communities and because religious, traditional, and community leaders are mainly men. It is broadly recognised that ending harmful practices yields benefits for everyone, but the field must now shift to generating more evidence on how to do this effectively and how to move from intention to action among individual men. Gender-transformative approaches that challenge underlying power dynamics are key to this, and effective programmes are multipronged and include education (small, mixed-sex workshops or programmes with community members), wider community engagement, and a longer-lasting, gender-synchronised approach to shifting gender norms (at least three months).

Harmful practices are contextual, and intersectional approaches are necessary to address the economic, social, and other drivers behind these practices. In some settings, child marriage is effectively compulsory for the status and economic survival of girls from low-income households, and so an approach addressing drivers and norms is essential.

⁷ United Nations Population Fund. (2020, April 28). *Millions more cases of violence, child marriage, female genital mutilation, unintended pregnancy expected due to the COVID-19 pandemic*. <https://www.unfpa.org/news/millions-more-cases-violence-child-marriage-female-genital-mutilation-unintended-pregnancies>

2.5. SOGIESC flashpoints

Symposium panellists mapped how much of the LGBTIQ architecture and movement-building grew out of the HIV movement and response in the past three decades. Even as a health threat, HIV opened conversations around sex and sexuality that had not been possible before in many countries, particularly across the African continent. Moreover, investment in the HIV response and HIV movement over the past few decades has enabled LGBTIQ organisations to grow and new leadership to emerge. Panellists noted that even as LGBTIQ organisations are opening space for new momentum and leadership around gender justice, there is a continued risk of replicating patriarchy and toxic masculinity in these spaces. For example, one director of a leading LGBTIQ organisation in Africa noted during LGBTIQ Rights, Masculinities and Patriarchy that she was one of the few women leading an LGBTIQ organisation on the continent.

Panellists called to make violence against, discrimination against, and the criminalisation of LGBTIQ people a more central part of conversations about violence, harmful practices, and SRHR. When we consider men as allies who are part of and accountable to feminist movements—engaging with those demands and recognising the challenges of men as leaders—a key question posed was: Where is the space for the voices of dissident masculinities and of LGBTIQ communities and masculinities? Queer young people, in particular, said they are being left out of decision-making in civil society; they reflected on the significant barriers to their participation and tokenism by organisations, with risks to their safety, when taking on leadership roles.

A final—yet key—flashpoint raised by some MenEngage Alliance members adjacent to and within the symposium was around the role of transgender people in feminist movements and in the gender justice community. While there was a clear call for intersectional and inclusive feminisms and feminist movement-building across the panels, there remains a vocal questioning of transgender women and transgender children that suggests this will be a flashpoint for the MenEngage Alliance to directly navigate in order to uphold a community that is fully LGBTIQ-inclusive.



Leyla Sharafi (senior gender advisor, United Nations Population Fund) speaking at “Power, bodily integrity and SRHR”

2.6. Harmful practices

Messages from toxic masculinity are rooted in and perpetuate harmful gender norms: that men should be strong, refuse to show fear or emotion, be in control, and be aggressive. This has an impact on the health and well-being of men and boys directly and on the rights and welfare of women and girls, including through increased perpetration of violence and harmful practices. Panellists identified traditional and faith leaders as key actors in shifting toxic masculinities practices, as educators for their communities, and as peers engaging with each other and holding each other accountable. While it is challenging to convince such actors to cede power, panellists said working through peer networks and with those willing to bring change has been successful.

2.7. Safe abortion



Our pushback is to remind people that women have the right to choose and that it is not subject to men's ratification on what is it that women can choose for themselves and what is good for them, their health, and for their bodies.

— BAFANA KHUMALO (CO-EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, SONKE GENDER JUSTICE; CO-CHAIR, MENENGAGE GLOBAL ALLIANCE)

Access to abortion is a human right. Everyone should have the right and dignity to make choices about their bodies, their health, and their lives. Though the [global gag rule](#) has been rescinded, its impact continues to be felt, with speakers describing how the rule had limited SRHR services in many countries. Restrictions persist in abortion access beyond the global gag rule, with abortions possible in many places only if strict criteria are fulfilled and in limited circumstances. Health worker bias and misinformation are another barrier, with inadequate training and capacity an ongoing issue.

Additionally, nongovernmental organisation providers of abortion and related services often lack the needed secure, long-term funding. As we move beyond the global gag rule, new funding approaches and solutions are needed to ensure continued access to safe abortions for all women and girls everywhere, despite any future policy shifts. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated inequalities and barriers to access, and this must urgently be addressed, both now and in forward planning to mitigate the impact of future pandemics and disease outbreaks.



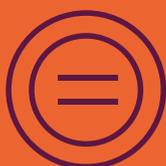
2.8. Critical and emerging SRHR conversations

“The use of euphemisms [for menstruation], where there’s that silence around menstruation, further propels silence about anything regarding the body, anything regarding sexual and reproductive health.

— MILI ADHIKARI (DIRECTOR, DIGNIFIED MENSTRUATION NORTH AMERICA CHAPTER), [*ROLE OF BOYS/MEN: RECONSTRUCTION OF POWER FOR DIGNIFIED MENSTRUATION*](#)

Calls to involve men in sexual and reproductive health have been articulated through global frameworks since at least the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development. So, the conversation is not new on working with men and boys to advance SRHR or on how to achieve SRHR for men and boys. The following symposium conversation threads illuminate the current discussions and points of consensus across the field and where flashpoints and crossroads exist:

- Sessions broadly called for MenEngage Alliance members and partners to talk about ecosystems—such as feminism, SRHR, land, and Indigenous rights—and build connections. Stigma and discrimination are interwoven with issues of power and intersect with the climate crisis, health, and education. Thus, panellists highlighted the need to start speaking about SRHR and gender justice as norms in these sectors.
- Gender justice requires full equality and equity in all spheres of life. Panellists established a clear relationship between gender justice and SRHR; one cannot exist without the other. Yet at the operational level, the discourse and language around SRHR dilute the goal of gender justice even as we are working for it: framing our goals around health or maternal mortality, for example, without directly using the language of gender justice to make our case more acceptable to power structures rooted in patriarchy.
- There is a critical distinction between the laws widely in place to protect SRHR and the reality of women’s SRHR regressing, driven by growing conservatism and regression in social norms and by resistance to implementing comprehensive sexuality education.



- In terms of gender-transformative sexuality education, new attention centres on what inclusive and rights-affirming education looks like. Even as comprehensive sexuality education continues to be an important component of cultural change, it can also discriminate and exclude large numbers of people—particularly when the experiences and needs of LGBTIQ people are absent.
- Panellists also considered the relationship between gender justice and education beyond sexuality education, citing growing conservative forces and their impact on the health and education sectors. In Brazil, for example, national and local plans for education had to remove the word 'gender'. While this affects everyone in Brazil, the greatest impact is on those who most need public health and public education (both formal and nonformal).

As a young human rights defender from Zimbabwe pointed out from her work with diverse adolescent girls and young women, engaging men and boys helps to dismantle harmful gender norms. Structural drivers of gender inequities are rooted in patriarchal community norms, and so these same communities need to engage with changing norms. The work with men and boys needs to be accountable to feminist and women's rights leadership by supporting, not prescribing, and by recognising the risks of reinvigorating gender inequities if 'engaging men and boys' further facilitates their control over women and girls. This must also be set against the backdrop of the potential harm in engaging men and boys within families and communities where conservative and regressive views are the norm. Male involvement can directly lead to harm and violations of SRHR, and so it must be approached carefully. One example given during the opening plenary was an intervention that taught men the value of folic acid for women, leading some men to force their wives and daughters to take it. Engaging men and boys must be done cautiously to avoid reinforcing gender norms or overriding the autonomy, agency, and choices of women and girls.



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3. Promising practices and examples

As we consider the way forward, promising practices and examples shared across the symposium offered guidance for continuing, expanding, and enhancing the work to engage men and boys in SRHR and to uphold the rights and dignity of LGBTIQ people. The following are examples of what has worked in practice and what holds promise for impact:

- The MenEngage Alliance SRHR Changemakers is an initiative to promote youth leadership in SRHR, and it brings together young activists in regional and global forums to collaborate, cross-pollinate learning, and develop shared agendas. In symposium workshop sessions, Changemakers shared promising practices from different countries and regions. In Bangladesh, for example, Changemakers developed a gender-sensitive curriculum to end early and forced marriage and conducted advocacy to ensure its implementation. In the Caribbean, Changemakers led regional engagement with civil society, United Nations agencies, and others to develop a regional declaration on SRHR and the need for comprehensive sexuality education. In Africa, Changemakers developed a strategy to determine how MenEngage members and allies could advocate for SRHR with a focus on safe abortion, which remains a taboo topic with access highly restricted in many African countries.
- Programming with gender-synchronised approaches at different levels (including individual and community) has been impactful. This includes, for example, a United Nations Population Fund programme in Zambia to reduce the risk of child marriage for vulnerable adolescent girls by creating (separate) safe spaces for boys and girls; by building life skills, health, and social and economic assets; and by fostering individual-level norms change. Additionally, the SASA! initiative in Uganda is an example of 'good practice' in shifting social gender norms away from harmful attitudes and behaviours. The SASA! approach has demonstrated a significant impact in participants' perceptions of gender inequality and in their attitudes towards HIV and violence against women. In Georgia, the United Nations Population Fund, MenEngage, Promundo, and other partners are working on community-level initiatives to challenge norms on reproductive health and unpaid care.
- Sonke Gender Justice and MenEngage Africa developed a regional campaign to engage men and boys in advocating to end female genital mutilation. The campaign has reached men and boys in all their diversity, and implementers have seen increased receptiveness among men and among women's rights organisations over the years. However, this work has sometimes been misinterpreted as 'restoring men to their legitimate place' or rejected by men



PHOTO CREDIT: Jonathan Torgovnik/Getty Images/Images of Empowerment

as taking away their rights with no benefit to themselves. The campaign experience demonstrates that policies alone are not enough; it takes time and community-level initiatives to effect change, as well as interventions at the policy level.

- Regional United Nations Population Fund work in Eastern Europe and Central Asia has been effective in addressing harmful gender norms and gender-responsive family policies. This has involved a range of activities, including advocacy and knowledge products, awareness-raising campaigns, partnership, policy advocacy, curriculum-based interventions, research, and a regional MenEngage platform as a knowledge management tool.
- In Guatemala, a Population Council initiative has used a community-based approach to reduce child marriage, school dropout, and harmful practices for adolescent girls in remote Indigenous communities. The Abriendo model has provided safe spaces for girls to meet regularly in culturally relevant sessions led by young women mentors from the community. It has been implemented at scale, with 50 groups in a single district, which has led to visibility. Weekly meetings are provided over 12 months, with capacity-building and regular training for mentors. Building on the initiative's success with girls, the mentors adapted and contextualised the approach and materials, with activities in secondary schools to reach and engage boys.
- In terms of COVID-19-specific programming, community health workers and advocates in Uganda began transporting antiretroviral medication for HIV treatment to young people in hard-to-reach places or who were unable to travel long distances.

Across programmes, several general lessons learned during the symposium include:

- Setting up a new global queer-youth network and structure would be beneficial, both to take ownership of issues and to collaborate as queer feminists working with other groups and networks across health and justice movements.
- 'Phones are our revolution': Online movement-building and connection among young people show that virtual advocacy and global connectivity will continue to build strength and momentum going forward.
- Telemedicine and self-care interventions are also increasingly important: for example, using SMS, phone calls, and WhatsApp for SRH information, mental health counselling, and linkages to SRH services.
- Gender-transformative approaches that question power and inequitable gender norms are effective in programmes on gender-based violence, maternal health, and access to contraception.
- Investments in financial empowerment, creating opportunities, and strengthening agency, quality education, and related interventions are key for girls and women.

4. Lessons learned, recommendations, and the path forward

4.1. Lessons learned

When we look across the tapestry of sessions and diversity of voices that constituted the MenEngage Ubuntu Symposium, we see emerging consensus and key conversation points on what works, what does not work, and why. While we have woven this analysis throughout this paper, several elements are worth pulling out for consideration in future work, research, advocacy, and collaboration.

First and foremost, what works is clear: carving out more time and space for dialogue, using self-reflection, learning across regions and generations, building new alliances, and creating collective spaces to see a global picture, recognise trends, and learn with and from one another. As we learn from one another and strengthen our means of virtual collaboration, panellists noted, we need intentional space for South-to-South learning and leadership. For far too long, our work across the health, development, humanitarian responses, and justice movements has replicated and perpetuated colonialism.

To meaningfully advance SRHR for all and create a world where LGBTIQ people enjoy equality, we must centre rights, justice, equity, and inclusion in our work. Otherwise, we risk SRHR programmes, policies, and initiatives that replicate harmful gender norms and undermine the dignity, autonomy, safety, and well-being of those who already face marginalisation, stigma, and discrimination.

Working to advance the SRHR of men and boys is one enterprise; working to engage men and boys to advance the SRHR of women and girls is another—one that can generate as much risk as potential benefit. As the field of engaging men and boys evolves, we must be clear in our definitions and assumptions so that we can speak a shared language. Panellists pointed to feminist scholar Gita Sen's call for a more inclusive approach to the right to health, a call that MenEngage has the opportunity to uphold and realise. One potential pitfall, though, is assuming that involving men and boys in SRHR is automatically beneficial without clarity on why, how, or to whom.

We are still struggling to achieve social norms change at scale. Too many of our efforts, initiatives, workshops, and educational materials are time-bound, small, limited, and neither documented nor measured—and sometimes not measurable—in their impact. How do we catalyse a bigger movement (or movements), especially to address discriminatory norms? A louder, more impactful voice for change? The United Nations Population Fund has published guidance on achieving social norms change at scale, and it is critical now that this work is at scale. The Generation Equality Forum has opened a new door, with heightened attention to



Mili Adhikari (director, Dignified Menstruation North America chapter) speaking at "Role of boys/men: reconstruction of power for dignified menstruation"

and conversation on feminist leadership and movement-building, and the COVID-19 recovery requires that we think bigger and with greater boldness.

Impacted communities should be leading change, with community leaders as key stakeholders and change agents. Within this approach, transformation requires ongoing support and space—as SAfAIDS has demonstrated—for community and other leaders to safely learn, grow, and shift their own attitudes first.

Naming vulnerability is not the same as silencing it: Measuring and uncovering who is affected and who is left out are part of making the systems of oppression visible for what they are. Racism, sexism, patriarchy—systems of discrimination that deliberately make life precarious—need to be named and uncovered to break cycles of vulnerability. Part of doing this work is considering our own individual roles and privileges so we learn to talk with, listen to, and join the change. Change efforts do not work when awareness, capacity, knowledge, and training on gender and issues of power are absent. Panellists shared anecdotes of competitions for people to submit photos of how badly they have been beaten, which advances vulnerability and victimhood rather than transforming power. Panellists also spoke of how men are sometimes unaware of their power and so cannot use it to support gender justice. At other times, men are very aware of their power and use it to harm or violate rights, such as when spousal support or permission is required to access healthcare.

Ultimately, panellists across the MenEngage Ubuntu Symposium pointed to systems of power, systems of harm, and the need for structural, systemic change. Too often, we collectively fall back on individual blame and/or individual responsibility, forgoing an analysis of—or attention to—the systems and structures that each of us is part of. A painful but telling analysis was made underscoring that even as men are the primary perpetrators of gender-based violence—and protests have taken place saying ‘men are trash’—‘This man was a boy growing up in a system that is broken.’ To change the system, we must all be collectively committed to doing so. Further, we need to ensure that the work with men and boys toward gender justice, inclusive of SOGIESC rights and realising SRHR for all, is about changing systems together.

4.2. Recommendations



Now, we are daring to be transformative in co-creating a new world, a new language, a new thinking.

— NYARADZAYI GUMBONZVANDA (FOUNDER AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE, ROZARIA MEMORIAL TRUST)

Drawing from the depth and breadth of conversations on SRHR and SOGIESC through the MenEngage Ubuntu Symposium, a number of recommendations and key considerations emerge for those involved in transforming masculinities and working with men and boys in gender and social justice. An overarching and unifying recommendation is to ensure that COVID-19 does not turn the clock back on SRHR and on rights for LGBTIQ people. In the rhetoric around a 'new normal', we must collectively stand firm to demand that the regression and disruption too often engendered by COVID-19 do not solidify into a new—but worse—normal. We must also carry forward our learning from living through a pandemic, recognising and embracing the messy reality of full human lives and that caregiving, advocacy, and work are all interconnected and all of value.

Many speakers also highlighted the need to continuously evaluate and re-evaluate our own positions, particularly for men involved in this work. Being aware of power structures and problematic norms that we may (inadvertently or intentionally) replicate or reinforce is critical to keeping the work of transforming masculinities and working with men and boys in gender and social justice accountable.

Speakers across panels and sessions also brought forward specific recommendations in relation to each of the organising themes and key priorities of the MenEngage Ubuntu Symposium. Again, this is not a complete list but rather a summary and suggested path forward informed by the symposium.

Intersectional feminisms

- **Recognise backlash and build intersectional and cross-movement alliances to bolster our resistance.** Increasing conservative forces, traditional/regressive norms, expectations around 'family', and growing religious fundamentalism are fuelling a pushback and regression on SRHR and LGBTIQ rights in national and international spaces, including United Nations settings. Informed, intersectional, and broad alliances are needed to resist these changes.
- **Recognise diverse experiences and intersecting discrimination and how these impact SRHR differently in different settings.** This recognition is critical to a reflexive and impactful movement. The MenEngage Ubuntu Symposium demonstrated growth in the adoption of intersectional analysis, the integration and cross-fertilisation of social movements, the strengthening of allyship, and the solidarity across movements. These positive trends must continue.
- **Expand the tent in feminist movements to bring in diverse LGBTIQ people,** and work to normalise and mainstream queer youth issues with meaningful inclusion, including in decision-making at all levels. Similarly, queer movements need to step up to be true allies in return, such as by speaking up on reproductive justice.

Decolonization

- **Address unequal power dynamics in our own movements.** This is hard but important work: Racism and white supremacy are pervasive ways of thinking. Decolonization and intersectionality are critical to addressing, understanding, and overturning racism and white supremacy. We must reflect on our own positions and how they affect our work.

Feminist systems change

- **Recognise whose burdens are greater.** The systems we are working in are toxic and hard to engage, and so it is important to recognise the increased burden carried by those doing this work who are women, who are LGBTIQ, or who are otherwise marginalised. Changing a system that devalues you exacts a heavy toll, and our movements must be safe and supportive to offset this.
- **Ensure systemic change is a core mandate and priority across our movements.** Systems are not designed for collectives and organisations to be viable. Structural, funding, and systemic barriers restrict the reach and impact of our work, and so systemic change should be a core mandate and priority across our movements.

'Power with' and movement-building

- **Meaningfully address the barriers that LGBTIQ people face.** Violence and discrimination against LGBTIQ people persist, including within our movements. LGBTIQ people are often left out of conversations about violence, harmful practices, and SRHR. Critically, they are also left out of decision-making and meaningful participation in civil society at all levels. Work to understand and address specific barriers, prevent tokenism, and ensure meaningful participation is key.
- **Encourage fruitful collaboration and partnership.** Cross-movement collaboration, building shared agendas, and allyship are vital to movement-building. This should include cross-movement issues and priorities, such as the climate crisis, HIV, and safe abortion. Partnerships are also important, especially with feminist movements and organisations that have a feminist objective and are key interlocutors for those most left behind and excluded. It is critical to reach the systemic level and engage governments, both for scale and for changing norms: Patriarchy must be tackled from all angles.
- **Foster South-to-South learning and locally owned solutions.** Opportunities for South-to-South learning have the potential for significant impact through movement-building and mutual learning. We must build movements that develop locally owned solutions, mitigate dependence on governments and international funding streams, and bolster against the impact of policy impositions like the global gag rule.
- **Avoiding repeating mistakes of the past.** We must recognise the existing barriers and that public spaces are masculinised. To promote dignity and human rights, we have to create spaces that allow us to create change. This must include change to the system and efforts to link with other issues, including climate justice. We need to learn from what did not work in the past and what can be done differently.

- **Explicitly conceptualise men's power.** Given power imbalances, failing to explicitly conceptualise men's power could mean our work actually does harm (for example, when addressing male involvement in contraception). Addressing power, acknowledging complexity, and conceptualising power relations are key to gender-transformative approaches. The field of interventions to involve men and boys in SRHR is growing, but we must recognise the gaps and work to build the field in a more substantive way. Building the evidence base and ensuring that community-based knowledge is taken up in the evidence base are both critical priorities.
- **Recognise the geographical specificity to developing masculinities.** War, conflict, genocide, social norms, societal structures, and other factors mean the impact is different, and so the required response is different.

Accountability

- **Build accountability between and across movements and generations—as well as among men, women, and gender-nonconforming people—and recognise that this applies to everyone.** The issue of leadership and voice is ongoing. Addressing power imbalance and inequitable access includes ensuring that the quality of analysis and insight determines who gets the platforms and who gets to speak. Men are critical as allies and accountable to feminist movements, but it is important to avoid praising men for the basics. An accountable movement must engage with the demands for accountability and recognise the challenges of men as leaders, including through holding space for the voices of dissident masculinities and LGBTIQ masculinities.

Youth

- **See youth as key stakeholders, not beneficiaries,** with meaningful participation at all stages and in all spaces. Panellists described youth-led movements emerging to add to existing movements, networks, and spaces—'not taking the reins but joining the ride'. This diversity of voices and leadership enhances our collective work. Youth leadership can be better supported by recognising the efforts of young people, from community-level volunteering on up; we must provide space for their ideas to be heard.
- **Address barriers to youth participation.** Youth movements are also emerging in response to the inaccessibility of existing feminist or women's movement spaces, with barriers including those related to cost, access, and inclusivity. Some speakers highlighted a pushback against progressive views around SOGIESC in some feminist spaces, indicating a need for our collective movements to reflect on and address barriers.
- Explicitly and meaningfully involve queer youth. Meaningful participation of young queer people at all levels is more essential now than ever. Recognising privileges and diversity within our movements requires making space for the depth and breadth of community needs and issues, including those of queer youth. It also requires recognising and addressing where spaces are dominated by unrepresentative voices.
- **Learn from youth movements' work during COVID-19.** Youth movements have spearheaded good practices throughout the pandemic, such as conducting virtual organising and meet-ups, ensuring access through means such as closed captioning, and providing platforms for diverse voices. These efforts offer invaluable learning for all.

4.3. The path forward

Looking beyond the MenEngage Ubuntu Symposium, we can build on the learning and collaboration it generated to create an agenda for where the movement should go next. This includes issues that were raised in the symposium that require more thought, as well as issues that were underrepresented in the sessions but are worth prioritising.

The former includes the need for more evidence and a clear research agenda, bringing in both community knowledge and formal quantitative and qualitative research. Linked to this is the need to develop measures to gauge the costs and harm to men of gender norms and masculinities, as well as the impact of gender-related inequalities on all people. Thematic issues such as harmful practices and maternal health can be gateways to working with men and boys to address underlying gender inequalities; however, failing to explicitly name gender justice in SRHR efforts can risk depoliticising and removing gender justice from this work. Nuanced, careful, and contextualised approaches are needed, and more discussion on how to achieve these approaches would have value.

The symposium featured a focus on youth, which was evident in sessions on issues such as dignified menstruation and comprehensive sexuality education. Missing, however, was a life course approach recognising the shifting but constant impact of gender inequalities on girls and women throughout their lives. Menopause appeared to be absent from the symposium, and it would be fruitful to explore how to engage men and boys in supporting dignified menopause; access to informed, high-quality, and evidence-based menopause care; and upholding rights in the home, workplace, and community for women and others experiencing menopause.

Additionally, in sessions focused on and providing a platform for youth voices, there were sometimes suggestions of an ahistorical analysis or a gap in learning from experience. Intergenerational and multigenerational approaches would also yield important conversations, recognising overlapping priorities but also distinct priorities and issues.

The consensus across symposium panellists is that the work on men and masculinities needs to embrace a feminist analysis and look at issues around agency, autonomy, choice, and power when it comes to SRHR for all. This is important with regards to girls and women in their diversity. This is important with regards to the dignity and fundamental right to exist for people across the LGBTIQ community. This is important when considering people who face multiple layers of marginalisation, such as people of colour, people living with a disability, people who are Indigenous, and many others. Too often in the SRHR sphere, the work with men and boys reproduces harmful gender norms and power relations.

Moreover, we are in a moment of historic challenge with a once-in-a-century pandemic and in a moment of tremendous transformation. The work with men and boys must bring in a more political and reflective analysis to avoid perpetuating and reproducing systems of harm, including colonialism, and to effectively navigate a world changing even during the course of the convening. The time is now for bold action and for a bolder vision of what a more equal, healthy, just, safe, and vibrant world can be.

The challenge and opportunity for the MenEngage Alliance is to translate the dialogue into action: for example, through members considering how they show up in their spaces or how the policies, programmes, and decision-making in their sphere of influence put principles into practice. This could include questioning why there are no women at a table discussing women's health, for example, or asking how an all-male panel of experts could have definitive analysis

without the meaningful inclusion of diverse lived experiences.

The symposium provides a roadmap for how to navigate a rapidly changing landscape and complex historic moment through:

- Creating space for cross-regional dialogue, experience-sharing, and learning
- Putting a spotlight on emerging issues and areas of contest/concern
- Focusing on human rights issues and analysis that are emerging or contentious
- Building more links between theory and practice, practice and theory
- Providing cross-generational conversation, collaboration, learning, and alliance-building
- Developing and working with clear definitions across the field
- Thinking big to address changing contexts and growing backlash, and being louder and bolder in advocacy
- Promoting a research agenda bringing in both community knowledge and formal research
- Adopting a life course approach to understanding gender equality/inequality and SRHR
- Embracing a feminist analysis that interrogates agency, autonomy, and power
- Translating principles into practice



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5. Selected resources on SRHR and SOGIESC

Child marriage. (n.d.). United Nations Population Fund. Retrieved November 26, 2021, from <https://www.unfpa.org/child-marriage>

Ellingrud, K., & Hilton Segel, L. (2021, February 13). COVID-19 has driven millions of women out of the workforce. *Fortune*. <https://fortune.com/2021/02/13/covid-19-women-workforce-unemployment-gender-gap-recovery/>

Female genital mutilation. (n.d.). United Nations Population Fund. Retrieved November 26, 2021, from <https://www.unfpa.org/female-genital-mutilation>

Gender-biased sex selection. (n.d.). United Nations Population Fund. Retrieved November 26, 2021, from <https://www.unfpa.org/gender-biased-sex-selection>

Gesund, J. (2021, June 22). How is COVID-19 affecting women's employment? Evidence from the World Bank's Gender Innovation Labs. *World Bank Blogs*. <https://blogs.worldbank.org/jobs/how-covid-19-affecting-womens-employment-evidence-world-banks-gender-innovation-labs>

International Center for Research on Women Asia [@ICRWAsia]. (2021, June 17). #UbuntuSymposium #Pride2021 Diti shares her powerful story on being a north-eastern, trans masculine person. Her journey from being labelled a TOMBOY girl to having self-actualization is awe inspiring! [Tweet]. Twitter. <https://twitter.com/ICRWAsia/status/1405525129656819726?s=20>

International Center for Research on Women Asia [@ICRWAsia]. (2021, June 17). #UbuntuSymposium Watch Hemlata Verma, ICRW analyze how gay men and trans men inhabit and perform hegemonic masculinity or how queer women may reinforce hegemonic masculine norms. Thrilling conversation! Join us. [Tweet]. Twitter. <https://twitter.com/ICRWAsia/status/1405516175728017412?s=20>

United Nations Population Fund, Avenir Health, Johns Hopkins University, & Victoria University. (2020, April). *Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on family planning and ending gender-based violence, female genital mutilation and child marriage*. <https://www.unfpa.org/resources/impact-covid-19-pandemic-family-planning-and-ending-gender-based-violence-female-genital>

Annex 1. Links to the symposium sessions on backlash and fundamentalism

1. 10 November 2020: [*Opening plenary*](#)
2. 11 November 2020: [*Youth Leadership and Movement Building panel*](#)
3. 11 November 2020: [*Intersectional Feminist Movement Voices panel*](#)
4. 11 November 2020: [*Men and Masculinities panel \(part 1\)*](#)
5. 12 November 2020: [*Men and Masculinities panel \(part 2\)*](#)
6. 19 November 2020: [*Impact of Covid-19 on the SRHR Rights of Women & Girls*](#)
7. 26 November 2020: [*Empowering Youth With SRHR Information and Services During the COVID-19 Pandemic*](#)
8. 2 December 2020: [*SRHR Changemakers' Workshop*](#)
9. 8 December 2020: [*Power, Bodily Integrity and SRHR*](#)
10. 17 December 2020: [*LGBTIQ Rights, Masculinities and Patriarchy*](#)
11. 14 January 2021: [*What Is the Research and Evidence Agenda for Addressing Masculinities in the Context of SRHR?*](#)
12. 21 January 2021: [*Engaging Men and Boys for Gender Justice and Ending Harmful Practices*](#)
13. 11 February 2021: [*Engaging Young Men in Gender-Transformative Relationship & Sexuality Education in South America, Africa and Europe*](#)
14. 18 February 2021: [*Changemakers Working to End Stigma, Exclusion and Harmful Practices*](#)
15. 25 February 2021: [*Africa Experiences: Working With Men and Boys in Advocating for SRHR for All*](#)
16. 4 March 2021: [*Shifting Gender Norms and Narratives, Championing Partnerships and Linkages to Promote Sexual Health Amongst Young People*](#)
17. 10 March 2021: [*How to Recover From the Global Gag Rule*](#)
18. 15 April 2021: [*Addressing Gender Transformative Approaches: What Does It Mean for Men and Boys?*](#)
19. 15 April 2021: [*Engaging Traditional & Religious Leaders as Gender Equality Champions: A Stepping Stone to SRHR*](#)
20. 22 April 2021: [*Intervenciones Creativas y Participativas de y con Jóvenes*](#) (Creative and Participatory Interventions by and With Young People)
21. 29 April 2021: [*Role of Boys/Men: Reconstruction of Power for Dignified Menstruation*](#)
22. 13 May 2021: [*The Past, Present, and Future of Engaging Men In Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights*](#)



PHOTO CREDIT: Nina Robinson/Getty Images/Images of Empowerment



MenEngage
UBUNTU
SYMPOSIUM
I AM
BECAUSE
You care

Unpaid care and economies of care

Nikki van der Gaag

A summary report of discussions at the 3rd
MenEngage Global Symposium (the Ubuntu
Symposium), 2020-2021



MenEngage Alliance
working with men and boys for gender equality



This paper was authored by Nikki van der Gaag for MenEngage Global Alliance, with reviews from Sebastian Molano, Wessel van den Berg, Aapta Garg, Joni van de Sand, and Magaly Marques, with copyediting by Jill Merriman. Design by Sanja Dragojevic based on the Ubuntu Symposium branding by Lulu Kitololo.

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Table of contents

1. Context and problem analysis	152
2. Unpaid care and domestic work (by Ubuntu theme)	155
2.1. Intersectional feminisms	155
2.2. Decolonizing	157
2.3. Feminist systems change	158
2.4. 'Power with' and movement-building	159
2.5. Transforming patriarchal masculinities	160
2.6. Accountability	161
2.7. Youth	162
3. Promising practices and examples	163
3.1. Nicaragua: Research into advocacy in the MenCare campaign	164
3.2. Philippines: Oxfam's WE-Care Programme	165
3.3. Palestine: Positive deviance approach to working with communities on unpaid care	166
3.4. South Africa: Advocating for improved parental leave for all	167
3.5. Uruguay: The National Care System	168
4. Gaps, lessons learned, and recommendations	169
4.1. Gaps and lessons learned	169
4.2. Recommendations for practitioners	171
5. Selected resources on unpaid care and domestic work and economies of care	175
Annex 1. Links to the symposium sessions on unpaid care and economies of care	176

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

— UBUNTU DECLARATION & CALL TO ACTION¹

1. Context and problem analysis

In its broadest sense, the entire 3rd MenEngage Global Symposium (also referred to as the MenEngage Ubuntu Symposium) was about care—for ourselves, for each other, for our communities and societies, and for the planet. Indeed, the symposium’s theme—‘I am because you are’—points to the interconnections among personal, interpersonal, and collective approaches to care.

This paper covers only the 19 symposium sessions focused specifically on men and masculinities in relation to unpaid care, mainly in the home. However, the paper brings with it an awareness of the wider context of care in many other sessions, from self-care to working with boys and young men to climate change and many more. To quote Berenice Fisher and Joan C. Tronto, cited in the symposium’s four ‘Politics of Care’ sessions:

*We suggest that caring be viewed as a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our “world” so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, our selves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web.*²

Some of the symposium sessions talked about care in this wider context of building a caring rather than ‘care less society’.³ There were calls for a wider framing of care, as UN Women emphasised in its 2018 report on the Sustainable Development Goals; that report noted that care includes the family and the divisions of labour within the family, but also states, markets, and the not-for-profit sector in a ‘care diamond’.⁴

The symposium discussion paper *Contexts and Challenges for Gender Transformative Work With Men and Boys* describes the ways in which capitalism has framed our understanding of care as female, thus giving more value to profit than to caregiving.⁵ In fact, feminist analysis of the gender divisions of labour has pointed out the problems associated with separating productive and reproductive work, in which care is labelled a service in opposition to the work that produces a concrete or measurable outcome. Based on sustainable and equitable growth and an expansion of Earth-mindful sources of energy, feminist economists have developed a framework for an economic policy agenda to eliminate gender and racial inequality and reduce poverty, with attention to jobs that support this economic model.⁶

In a 2019 strategy meeting in Mexico City, feminist activists noted this and cited the following as pillars of such an economy:

Ensuring universal access to quality public care services; guaranteeing living wages

¹ MenEngage Alliance. (2021). *Ubuntu Declaration & Call to Action*. http://menengage.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Ubuntu-DCTA-Advanced-Edited-Version_eng.pdf

² Fisher, B., & Tronto, J. (1990). Toward a feminist theory of care. In E. K. Abel & M. K. Nelson (Eds.), *Circles of care: Work and identity in women’s lives*. SUNY Press.

³ Chatzidakis, A., Litter, J., & Rottenberg, C. (2020). *The care manifesto: The politics of interdependence*. The Care Collective, Verso.

⁴ UN Women. (2018). *Turning promises into action: Gender equality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2018/sdg-report-gender-equality-in-the-2030-agenda-for-sustainable-development-2018-en.pdf?la=en&vs=4332>

⁵ MenEngage Alliance. (2021). *Contexts and challenges for gender transformative work with men and boys: A discussion paper*. <http://menengage.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Contexts-and-Challenges-for-Gender-Transformative-Work-with-Men-and-Boys-A-Discussion-Paper-English.pdf>

⁶ Slatyer, C., Smiles, S., & Sen, G. (2015, November 7). *Summary of: The remaking of social contracts: Feminists in a fierce new world*. Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era. <https://dawnnet.org/publication/summary-of-the-remaking-of-social-contracts-feminists-in-a-fierce-new-world/>



and access to social protection in care jobs; significantly increasing public investment in the care economy; mandating paid parental and family leave; and providing pension care credits for time spent out of the labour force to raise children/care for dependants.⁷

More recently, feminist organisations—such as the Women’s Budget Group in the United Kingdom—have constructed a broad agenda for care-related policy changes. As a recent Women’s Budget Group report notes:

A caring economy...is a dynamic and innovative economy in which humans, and our shared planet, thrive. In a caring economy, everyone gives and receives care on the basis of their capacities and needs....A caring economy ensures that everyone has time to care, as well as time free from care.⁸

Latin American feminists working on issues of care and economic justice explain that:

It is essential to understand care from a rights perspective, which means recognising that all people have the right to care, to be cared for, and to self-care⁹...regardless of gender, place of birth or residence, or labour insertion. For this to be a reality, care must cease to be conceived as an exclusive responsibility of women and become a collective social responsibility.¹⁰

The COVID-19 pandemic—and its many setbacks to gender equality—have been an impetus for these ideas, and for this work. As the pandemic spread, we were all making sense of what care means, how it is built on pre-existing inequalities (including racial inequalities), and how it is leading to an increasing divide within and between societies. Care as a collective effort, of solidarity beyond binaries and with the oppressed, was very much in evidence in the symposium, alongside a recognition that while care is something that affects us all, it affects us differently according to our gender, race, class, geography, economic situation, sexuality, and many other factors.

In this wider sense, then, the concept of care permeated every symposium session. However, much of the symposium’s specific focus on care in the field of men and gender equality—and by many feminists over the years—has been on the gender division of daily care work at home. More specifically, it has been on the unequal way in which unpaid care and domestic work is divided, with women bearing the responsibility for most of the care work needed for the family’s survival and this unequal burden acting as a major barrier to women’s full participation in public life. This conversation has historically been shaped by a heteronormative analysis that leaves little room for diversity and that is driven by a concept of gender equality perhaps rooted more in the feminist thinking of the Global North than that of the Global South.

The concepts of ‘family’ and ‘the home’ are intrinsically problematic, in that they are often seen as binary and nuclear. The symposium’s *Contexts and Challenges* paper addressed this issue head-on, challenging the field to ‘transcend the masculine-feminine binary separating production from social reproduction.’¹¹ Symposium sessions—such as [Todos Somos Familia \(We Are All Family\)](#)—attempted to do just that, not only from an LGBTIQ perspective but also acknowledging, as presenter Soledad Rodríguez Cattaneo said:

We normally talk about the nuclear household. But families are very diverse: There are extended families, mono-parental families, patchwork families, and many other kinds of families.

That said, feminists and women’s rights organisations have long recognised that unpaid care and domestic work in the home is a key factor in advancing or hindering gender equality, with feminist campaigns on the issue dating back to the 1970s. Feminist economists refer to this work as ‘reproductive labour’ and argue that although it is the foundation on which our societies rest, reproductive labour remains unvalued and unrecognised. Prof. Diane Elson’s ‘Three Rs’ framework calls for unpaid care to be **recognised** and valued; **reduced**, both through the state provision of services such as childcare and through time- and labour-saving devices; and **redistributed** between women and men, as well as from individuals to the state.¹²

A fourth ‘R’—**representation**—was added to ensure the voices of women, in particular, of carers

⁷ Women radically transforming a world in crisis: A framework for Beijing+25 shaped at a strategy meeting of feminist activists: Mexico City, 22-24 August 2019. (2019, September 29). https://resurj.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/eng_mexico_city_strategy_meet_framework_for_beijing25_0.pdf

⁸ Women’s Budget Group. (2020). *Creating a caring economy: A call to action*. https://www.thewomensorganisation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/WBG-Report-Final_.pdf

⁹ Pautassi, L. C. (2007, October). *El cuidado como cuestión social desde un enfoque de derechos* [Care as a social issue from a rights perspective]. United Nations. https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/5809/1/S0700816_es.pdf

¹⁰ Translation of text from: Martelotte, L. (2018). *La reorganización social de las tareas de cuidado: La revolución pendiente* [The social reorganisation of care tasks: The pending revolution]. In I. Arduino, V. Boronat, G. Carpineti, G. Carracedo Villegas, M. J. Eliosoff Ferrero, P. Lateral, L. Martelotte, V. Mutuberría, G. Nacht, B. Paz, C. Rodríguez Enríquez, & Scasserra. (2018), *Aportes de la economía feminista desde Argentina* [Contributions of the feminist economy in Argentina]. Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung. <https://dawnnet.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Econom%C3%ADa-Feminista-desde-Argentina.pdf>

¹¹ MenEngage Alliance. (2021). *Contexts and challenges for gender transformative work with men and boys: A discussion paper*. <http://menengage.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Contexts-and-Challenges-for-Gender-Transformative-Work-with-Men-and-Boys-A-Discussion-Paper-English.pdf>

¹² Elson, D. (2017, May 1). Recognize, reduce, and redistribute unpaid care work: How to close the gender gap. *New Labor Forum*, 26(2), 52–61. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1095796017700135>

themselves, were heard in these debates. The International Labour Organization proposed a fifth 'R' for **reward or remuneration** to push states and workplaces to pay for this and shift responsibility from the individual to the state, a concept embedded in longstanding feminist discourses on equal pay for women and men in paid work.¹³

Despite decades of work on this issue, there is no country in the world where unpaid care and domestic work is shared equally between women and men—or girls and boys. Women still do three to ten times more than men, often on top of paid work, and girls are largely responsible for household chores.¹⁴ The deeply held norms that women are carers and men are providers lie at the heart of this problem, with societies structured around the idea that women are always there to do the essential work of caring for their families and communities. On top of this, the pandemic has revealed the importance of care to all our societies, while continuing to take this work for granted and to give it little value. The International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES) in 15 countries found no country where the majority of women report that their male partners 'share routine daily childcare equally'—the figures ranged from 4 per cent to 45 per cent—and men consistently reported they do more than women say they are actually doing.¹⁵

The field of 'men and boys for gender equality' has taken up the issue of unpaid care in the past decade, with the formation of the MenCare campaign in 2011 and the publication of the biennial *State of the World's Fathers* reports since 2015, as well as many programmes and projects around the world. Most of these programmes and projects focus on fatherhood as a key entry point for men: it is a time in a man's life when he wants to, and is able to, share the care of a new baby—or it is when he cannot be there because he is the main earner in the family or does not feel competent.

It is increasingly being recognised that work on unpaid care must also involve structural change, as described in the 2018 UN Women document on the state, market, private sector, and non-for-profit sector's involvement, as well as the discussion paper for the MenEngage Ubuntu Symposium.¹⁶ There are two key challenges in making structural-level changes to men's involvement in care: first, the 'structural' elements of policy, production, and public life are already quite patriarchally masculine, and second, men's activity in the domestic social reproduction space remains low. Both these concerns must be addressed simultaneously, and increasing the value of care as a societal principle would achieve both of these, especially if care is decoupled from gender.

More specifically, successful advocacy on parental and paternity leave has become a major part of the work on unpaid care among those working on men and gender equality.¹⁷ This change is clearly linked to feminist campaigns on maternity and parental leave, as well as to work on wider care system reform (for example, in countries such as Uruguay).¹⁸ But there are more opportunities for men—and men- and gender equality-focused organisations—to join with women's rights organisations to press for funding, legislation, and policy change in wider areas of the care economy, such as better childcare, pension reform, and investments in water and energy infrastructure or social protection. As UN Women Deputy Executive Director Åsa Regnér said in the symposium's [opening plenary](#), 'The unfair division of domestic work between men and women should be the target of public policies, and not just a family issue.'

¹³ Gammage, S., Hunt, A., Díaz Langou, C., Rivero Fuentes, E., Isnaldi, C., Aneja, U., Thomas, M., & Robino, C. (2018). *The imperative of addressing care needs for G20 countries*. Consejo Argentino Para las Relaciones Internacionales & CIPPEC. https://t20argentina.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/TF4-4.3-Policy-Brief-on-Care-June_final-1.pdf; United Nations. (2017). *Leave no one behind: Taking action for transformational change on women's economic empowerment*.

¹⁴ Addati, L., Cattaneo, U., Esquivel, V., & Valarino, I. (2018, June 28). *Care work and care jobs for the future of decent work*. International Labour Organization. http://www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/WCMS_633135/lang-en/index.htm

¹⁵ Barker, G., Garg, A., Heilman, B., van der Gaag, N., & Mehaffey, R. (2021). *State of the World's Fathers: Structural solutions to achieving equality in care work*. Promundo-US. <https://promundoglobal.org/resources/state-of-the-worlds-fathers-2021/>

¹⁶ UN Women. (2018). *Turning promises into action: Gender equality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2018/2/gender-equality-in-the-2030-agenda-for-sustainable-development-2018>; MenEngage Alliance. (2021). *Contexts and challenges for gender transformative work with men and boys: A discussion paper*. <http://menengage.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Contexts-and-Challenges-for-Gender-Transformative-Work-with-Men-and-Boys-A-Discussion-Paper-English.pdf>

¹⁷ van der Gaag, N., Heilman, B., Gupta, T., Nembhard, C., & Barker, G. (2019). *State of the World's Fathers: Unlocking the power of men's care*. Promundo-US. <https://stateoftheworldsfathers.org/report/state-of-the-worlds-fathers-helping-men-step-up-to-care/>; Barker, G., Garg, A., Heilman, B., van der Gaag, N., & Mehaffey, R. (2021). *State of the World's Fathers: Structural solutions to achieving equality in care work*. Promundo-US. <https://promundoglobal.org/resources/state-of-the-worlds-fathers-2021/>

¹⁸ Amarante, V., Colacce, M., & Tenenbaum, V. (2019). The National Care System in Uruguay: Who benefits and who pays? *Population and Development Review*, 45(S1), 97-122. <https://doi.org/10.1111/padr.12271>; Aguirre, R., & Ferrari, F. (2014). *La construcción del sistema de cuidados en el Uruguay: En busca de consensos para una protección social más igualitaria* [The construction of the care system in Uruguay: In search of consensus for more equal social protection] (p. 87). United Nations.

2. Unpaid care and domestic work (by Ubuntu theme)

The MenEngage Ubuntu Symposium had several key themes: intersectional feminisms, decolonizing, feminist systems change, 'power with' and movement-building, transforming patriarchal masculinities, accountability, and youth. This section includes a summary of the ideas on these themes in the sessions on unpaid care and economies of care, including quotes and ideas from those sessions.

2.1. Intersectional feminisms



Men are essential actors in shaping power structures and achieving just solutions. But we can't design programmes based on the idea that all men are equal or experience masculinities in the same way.

— GEETANJALI MISRA (COFOUNDER AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, CREATING RESOURCES FOR EMPOWERMENT IN ACTION [CREA]), [OPENING PLENARY](#)

The family is perhaps the most central hegemonic institution. It is where gender norms begin and are entrenched. It is, therefore, problematic to import a 'familism' into state responsibilities: addressing care at a structural level does not mean attempting to turn the state into 'one big happy family'. Although women and girls all over the world do more unpaid care and domestic work than men and boys do, there is not enough recognition of how identities—class and economic circumstances, race, disability, and sexuality, among others—play a major role in this. We also need to recognise that there is no 'typical man'; that is, class, location, and many other factors shape and influence men as well as women. For example, parenting programmes often fall into the trap of only focusing on a heterosexual father and mother in couples.

In a discussion on nonresidential fathers in South Africa and their negative portrayal, Asanda Ngoasheng of Oxfam South Africa said in the [first 'Politics of Care' session](#):

Care is a class thing. How could working-class men be more caring? How much more care would they contribute if they didn't have the economic pressures they have and the kind of jobs that require presence at work?

She went on to say that it is important to think in terms of intersectionality. For example, some men must migrate for work, having to live far from their children in order to earn money to support the family and sometimes not seeing them for a full year. The structures and norms are not there to support men's caregiving. It is important to note, however, that some fathers who don't live with their family have found ways of staying in touch with children and caring for them emotionally, if not physically.

The symposium also more generally discussed what Gary Barker (CEO of Promundo -US) called 'the demonization of low-income men'. During the [second 'Politics of Care' session](#), he said:

Even the [term] 'absent father' assumes that if he is not living in the household, he has no connection—it is better to use 'nonresidential' or 'noncustodial'. In the United States, we have the expression 'deadbeat dads' and similar in other places. It might be better to say 'dead-broke' dads. We need to bring the class aspect—then, we understand how poverty and social disadvantage so often drives whether men are participating in the household or not.

Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda (founder and chief executive of the Rozaria Memorial Trust) also addressed issues of class during the same session:

We need to be bold around issues of class and patriarchy. Men are also victims of patriarchy because it moves power to elite middle-class men, and poor men transfer their frustration to the poor women. For Africa, it is also about coloniality and language.



PHOTO CREDIT: Jonathan Torgovnik/Getty Images/Images of Empowerment



PHOTO CREDIT: Juan Arredondo/Getty Images/Images of Empowerment

2.2. Decolonizing

“**The greatest form of love is solidarity, every moment we step out and step up and share our love and solidarity for others and we acknowledge the truth and reality of those who are oppressed.**

— SANAM AMIN,
[*INTERSECTIONAL FEMINIST MOVEMENT VOICES PANEL*](#)

European colonizers introduced their own family systems to the places they colonized, a process that often fragmented and changed these places' existing family systems. The effects of colonization continue to play an enormous role in defining family systems and formation in many parts of the world. The nuclear family and 'male provider/female carer' model are often seen as the 'ideal' family structure, while being far from reality in many countries with bigger, more complex traditional family structures.

The colonial agenda continues to permeate the field of unpaid care and domestic work: for example, as women from the Global South travel to engage in domestic work for Global North middle-class households. These women may have left their own children behind to find work, and they may experience poor pay and conditions. Men may also have to migrate for work and, therefore, may not be able to be resident fathers. South Africa is a case in point—discussed during the [first 'Politics of Care' session](#)—where income is directly associated with the coresidence of fathers and children. Low-income households are likely to have fathers living elsewhere, and high-income households are likely to have fathers coresiding with children.

While it is key to support gender equality and to value 'women's work', it is also important to invest in the infrastructure, equipment, and technology to increase the efficiency (reducing the arduousness) of these activities (such as washing, cleaning, and cooking). Fair, adequate, and just compensation for childcare, eldercare, and healthcare is also vital. However, it is important to note that these responses to inequality in the distribution of paid and unpaid work are based on profoundly systemic biases—and ultimately do not address the conditions of unpaid (care) work, or the low monetary value placed on the people who do caring services.

2.3. Feminist systems change

“Because we are so focused on fatherhood, we often forget that the state has a responsibility to support gender equality. One of the key ways [the state can do this] is to provide free, quality early childcare and education. This supports the feminist agenda of women being able to make a choice on whether they want to spend their time on care or not.

— WESSEL VAN DEN BERG (RESEARCH, MONITORING & EVALUATION AND LEARNING UNIT MANAGER, SONKE GENDER JUSTICE), [MENCARE ADVOCACY, MEDIA AND CAMPAIGNING WEBINAR](#)

In the field of engaging men and boys in gender equality, much of the work on unpaid care and domestic work has focused on redistribution, with the aim of men and boys doing their equal share in the home. Fathers and fathers-to-be, in particular, have been a focus of programming in many countries. This work is important, but it needs to be done with a wider focus on feminist systems change that challenges patriarchal norms around care and acknowledges the wider structural contexts of patriarchy. This means not just focusing on individual fathers or fathers in groups—or even working with couples. Instead, it is looking at the laws, policies, social norms, and patriarchal institutions that prop up existing understandings of who cares and who provides. As Rukia Cornelius (regional gender lead for Southern Africa at Oxfam) said in the [third 'Politics of Care' session](#):

The valuing of care as a political act, it is not just looking at individual care but centring collective care. What does true well-being mean in terms of our homes and our communities, how we depend on one another, how we recognise and redistribute care? Recognition: this is what makes it political, that everything—gender, race, class, and privilege—impacts how we give care, receive care, and how we shift and transform care in all of its manifestations. When we talk about care, we need to centre it as political and personal.



PHOTO CREDIT: Paula Bronstein/Getty Images/Images of Empowerment

2.4. ‘Power with’ and movement-building

“ We have to target behaviour change and the transformation of masculinities, ensuring that we connect individual change to the systemic changes that we are fighting for. Feminism means putting those who experience oppressions at the centre not because they are victims but because they are experts in their own oppression. So, feminists have to be in other movements fighting injustice.

— CINDY CLARK (CO-EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ASSOCIATION FOR WOMEN’S RIGHTS IN DEVELOPMENT [AWID]), *INTERSECTIONAL FEMINIST MOVEMENT VOICES PANEL*

Women’s groups and organisations have long built alliances around the issue of women’s unequal share of unpaid care and domestic work, seeing these as key instruments of patriarchal oppression. But care is much wider than this, and increasingly, we are seeing world leaders, faith and community leaders, teachers, and activists talk about the importance of care. Indeed, many would include both care for ourselves and care for our planet, as well as care for each other through intersectional movements, such as Black Lives Matter. These connections stem from an increasing awareness that there are interconnected and shared problems at the roots of various oppressions. This means that a wide range of progressive movements could be said to fall under the umbrella of care in an anti-patriarchal alliance, working together through a model of ‘power with’ to challenge and transform systemic power injustices.

The concept of ‘power’ as related to men’s roles and masculinities was central to the four ‘Politics of Care’ sessions during the MenEngage Ubuntu Symposium. The framework presented looked at the underlying ethics of care and its relationship to power, particularly in relation to the four phases of care as defined by Joan C. Tronto: receiving care, giving care, taking care of, and caring about.¹⁹ The sessions went on to examine men’s role in these phases and their responsibility to work on the ground while bearing in mind questions of power, using a feminist approach, and holding themselves accountable to what women think, feel, and do.



Figure 1: Four phases of care (SOURCE: ‘Politics of Care’ sessions)

¹⁹ Tronto, J. C. (1993). *Moral boundaries: A political argument for an ethic of care*. Routledge.

2.5. Transforming patriarchal masculinities



By virtue of being a human, we care and care for others. There are hypermasculine ways that say you don't need care and you don't need to give care. It translates into relationships and the type of work that we do. We are not taught to care. Care is not a feminine trait; it is a human trait. Do everything with love; have love at the centre of all your work.

— ASHLEE ALEXANDRA BURNETT (FEMINITT CARIBBEAN AND THE CARIBBEAN WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO NATIONAL CHAPTER), [YOUTH LEADERSHIP AND MOVEMENT BUILDING](#)

Care equality is a radical agenda. It is one of the key ways in which patriarchy, and patriarchal masculinities, can be transformed. It means breaking the idea that women are the carers and men are the providers. This theme was a strong element of the symposium: How can men be better humans? How can we make sure that care is central to the lives of people of every gender, not only women and girls? As activist and scholar Srilatha Batliwala said during the 2nd MenEngage Global Symposium (held in New Delhi in 2014), while the main survivors of patriarchal masculinities are women, people of other genders—including men—also suffer.

Mbuyiselo Botha (commissioner of the South African Commission for Gender Equality) said in a 'Politics of Care' session:

There is nothing that inherently stops us [as men] from caring. It is artificial, toxic, man-made creations of what it means to be a 'real man' that deny us the opportunity to be caring. And this is the sad part: that there is a system that really oppresses us as well. It divides us from our humanity. It denies us our own vulnerability.

The symposium included clear calls to action from feminist activists that men have to step up, show up, and take more responsibility for transformative action. Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda of the Rozaria Memorial Trust said in the [Intersectional Feminist Movement Voices](#) panel:

There are too many good men in the world who are doing nothing to dismantle patriarchy and yet who profess to be doing great stuff. There are too many in positions of responsibility who are irresponsible. They are the majority of leaders, parliamentarians, religious leaders, doctors...So, when we ask, 'Where are the men?', the men are there. But they are not making decisions that advance gender equality, human rights, and dignity. It is not about involving or including men; it is about everybody in a position of responsibilities to use their power responsibly.

2.6. Accountability



Work with men has to be done carefully and with accountability. We need to focus on practice, not just on principles. We need to be guided by and accountable to women at all levels, whether individual or structural.

— SHARANYA SEKARAM (COALITION OF FEMINISTS FOR SOCIAL CHANGE [COFEM]), [INTERSECTIONAL FEMINIST MOVEMENT VOICES](#) PANEL

Feminists and women's rights groups have invested decades of research, analysis, and campaigning to frame work on unpaid care as social reproduction and to organise for change. Since the 1970s, when activists such as Selma James and Silvia Federici campaigned for wages for housework, it has been clear that the unequal sharing of this work has impeded advances towards gender equality and continued to prop up patriarchy. For transformation to happen, work by men on this issue needs to acknowledge these decades of resistance, and it must focus not just on redistribution—on men doing their fair and equal share—but also on the wider context of gender equality and how structural and institutional factors prop up patriarchy. As feminists of the Global South have noted, a feminist care economy calls for placing political value on activities and on the work that goes into caring. Care should be understood as all that is needed to reproduce the conditions for well-being and to maintain health and well-being alongside productive and creative work, beyond the boundaries of the productivity logic.

As economists at Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN) explain:

From the beginning, DAWN's approach to feminism has been based not on a calculus of identity alone but on the recognition that women's human rights are lost or gained in the midst of the interplay between the personal and the structural environment....The household and family relations are a critical site of gender power expressed in multiple dimensions. At the same time, women are workers juggling double and triple burdens under increasingly harsh conditions; are members of communities struggling for land and livelihoods; are agents in societies undergoing cultural transformations; are actors in economies shaped by globalization and militarism; and are parts of production systems unmindful of ecological limits.²⁰

Policymakers of all genders must be made accountable to the principles of care and an ethic of care that goes beyond a gendered association of care with women. This work must also be co-created with women's organisations and be accountable to feminist organisations and wider feminist movements.

²⁰ Sen, G., & Durano, M. (Eds.). (2014). *The remaking of social contracts: Feminists in a fierce new world*. Zed Books.

2.7. Youth



As boys we were kept at a distance from nurturing and tenderness, the very qualities we want to offer our children.

— ERIC MARSH SR., *THE FATHERING CIRCLE*



The fact that women and girls do so much more unpaid care and domestic work than men and boys do is grounded in social and gender norms that are learned from a very early age. It has its roots in the patriarchal systems within which we live that teach and repeat that girls care and boys fight. Therefore, enormous effort is needed to change social norms from a very young age and to ensure school curricula—and even early childhood care—teach boys to care as much as girls through a life cycle approach. Work with children and young people is key to transforming gender norms and stereotypes that socialise girls to care and boys to not be involved in the domestic sphere. Young people themselves have been at the forefront of challenging such stereotypes, bringing fresh ideas to campaigns that we can all learn from.



Eric Marsh Sr. speaking at "The Fathering Circle: Parenting with Accountability"

3. Promising practices and examples

Most of the symposium sessions on unpaid care described initiatives working from the perspective of men and masculinities, with a gender equality lens. Many looked particularly at fatherhood, and good examples of promising practice emerged over the course of the symposium. While some of these examples might seem ‘purely programmatic’, they also often aim for more systemic and political change—on parental leave, for example. The presentations highlighted a wide range of voices, from members and partners of MenEngage to politicians and faith leaders.

This section provides excerpts from the presentations, highlighting promising practices and programming from a diverse range of settings globally.



PHOTO CREDIT: Jonathan Torgovnik/Getty Images/Images of Empowerment

3.1. Nicaragua: Research into advocacy in the MenCare campaign

During [Paternidades y Cuidado en América Latina \(Fatherhood and Care in Latin America\)](#), Douglas Mendoza of Fundación Puntos de Encuentro described MenCare in Latin America's work in Nicaragua.

We at MenCare Latin America wanted to put paternity on the agenda in Nicaragua and to start a campaign. We started with an investigation in Managua of 244 men from ten neighbourhoods. We wanted to find out their ideas about fatherhood and care, so we focused on men between 18 and 35. We found that many men did not have good experiences of their own fathers and that the top five ideas about fatherhood were:

1. *That the father is the main provider, and even if he is not working, he is the main authority.*
2. *That fathers may use violence and humiliating punishment to prove they are the authority in front of their wives, sons, and daughters.*
3. *Fathers want to be a role model for their kids.*
4. *Men do not show affection to their sons or to their daughters after the age of 6. Before that, they are affectionate with their sons, but after, they are not for fear of homosexuality. For girls, it is more acceptable.*
5. *Men don't have time to play with their sons or daughters. They don't have the idea that playing could establish a bond with their children.*

So, how could we shape a campaign about fathers and paternity that called on men to be more involved in care with their sons and daughters, as well as being good partners, or ex-partners, who don't use violence against children or women? With colleagues and with Puntos de Encuentro and Promundo, we designed a manual and a media campaign. The media campaign featured the reality of these men's lives. We had three messages:

1. *'You are my dad when you spend time with me.'*
2. *'You are my dad when you don't use violence against my mum.'*
3. *'You are my dad when you hug me, kiss me.'*

We also found that most men didn't know about the laws on parenthood, so we were able to publicise these. And we worked with health personnel, too: for example, with our colleagues from CulturaSalud, we created a health card that doctors could keep in their pocket. We also worked with staff so that when a pregnant woman arrives, the man is also registered. And there is a talk for the dads on men's [sexual and reproductive health and rights] and things like prostate cancer, family planning. We have seen progress and setbacks over this time, but we also see that young men are more open to being involved with their children as part of these campaigns.



3.2. Philippines: Oxfam’s WE-Care Programme

WECare is an Oxfam programme on women’s economic empowerment and unpaid care and domestic work. It builds on the three ‘Rs’ of feminist economists, in that it works on redistribution of unpaid care between women and men and between families and the state; reduction through time- and labour-saving devices; and recognition through campaigning and policy work.

In the Philippines, the ‘iLabaYu’ media campaign, developed with a marketing firm on a pro bono basis, reached millions and was coupled with work with local political leaders to change local laws. (‘Laba’ is Filipino slang for ‘laundry’/washing but also sounds like ‘love’.) During [From Programs to Policies](#), Leah Anadon-Payud (resilience portfolio manager for Oxfam Philippines) and Hon. Leo Jasper Candido (vice mayor of the Municipality of Quinapondan in the Philippines) discussed the campaign. According to Anadon-Payud:



The response to the project’s public communications was overwhelmingly positive. Continuous investment in a wide range of media can expand the reach of—and continually reinforce—positive messages on unpaid care and domestic work so that the dialogue that began with social norms activities can continue at home, at work, and in public spaces.

Social media and TV are often the best channels in urban areas, while radio, posters, banners, and roadshows can be used in areas where electricity is scarce or unaffordable for poorer households.

Products that are visually and emotionally engaging and that use simple language, such as the iLabaYu campaign and HowlCare campaign, run by Oxfam and Promundo, have proven to be effective in appealing to mass audiences.

Tailored messages that resonate with the practices and beliefs of particular groups, that enable people to see things from others’ point of view, and that give people access to new information about the benefits of their actions can motivate powerful change.

In the Philippines, the campaign led to changes in local laws, called ordinances. Working with local mayors and authorities, the WeCare ordinance led to investment in time- and labour-saving equipment, the municipal social welfare office leading sessions on understanding unpaid care work, local government leading sessions on unpaid care work as part of Women’s Month, and care dialogue sessions with husbands and wives as part of family development sessions.

SOURCE: Leah Anadon-Payud (resilience portfolio manager, Oxfam Philippines) and Hon. Leo Jasper Candido (vice mayor, Municipality of Quinapondan, Eastern Samar, Philippines), [From Programs to Policies: What Does It Take to Shift the Dial on Gender Norms and Unpaid Care?](#)

3.3. Palestine: Positive deviance approach to working with communities on unpaid care

During "[The Arab Fathers' Revolution](#)", Azhar Besaiso (programme officer of the NGO Development Center, Palestine) described the organisation's programme to change norms on unpaid care in Palestinian communities.

How did the programme work? *We looked for men who were against early marriage and supporting women's participation and sharing unpaid care and domestic work. In the first phase, we worked with neighbourhood chiefs and community leaders. In the second phase, we worked with married couples and university students.*

What have the challenges been? *Our biggest challenge has been misunderstanding of religion; religion is usually used as a pretext to justify gender inequality. We also found that it was important to work with women. Men said, 'Please work with our wives because they don't believe we can share childcare and work with them.'*

Why was it successful? *We believe [it's] because of the peer-to-peer approach. Men worked with other men from their own community, as did women and students. This means they are more open to listen and feel that change is possible. It has proven to be very effective, and easier, for people to make the change when they see that people they respect have already done so. When a man is approached by a similar man in a conservative society, it is easier for him to change. After the first phase, participants continued with the new norms without any intervention from the programme. It has been one of our most successful interventions.*



PHOTO CREDIT: Yagazie Emezi/Getty Images/Images of Empowerment

3.4. South Africa: Advocating for improved parental leave for all

Wessel van den Berg (research, monitoring & evaluation and learning unit manager, Sonke Gender Justice), explained the campaign on parental leave during [MenCare Advocacy, Media and Campaigning Webinar](#).

Sonke Gender Justice and MOSAIC, a women's rights organisation in Cape Town—along with trade unions and other members of civil society—advocated for a change in the law on parental leave, using media and the global influence of the 2015 MenCare Parental Leave Platform and the first *State of the World's Fathers* report to advocate for equal paid parental leave, particularly for fathers, in order to achieve gender equality for mothers. Before the campaign's advocacy, the 2014 Labour Laws Amendment Act in South Africa allowed for:

- Four months' maternity leave on a sliding scale, up to 54 per cent paid
- No specified parental leave for fathers or other parents
- Three days' family responsibilities for employees other than a biological mother

In 2016, the campaign culminated in a hearing in Parliament. Sonke Gender Justice and MOSAIC presented alongside the Congress of South African Trade Unions. A MenCare team member from Sonke Gender Justice was there; he had benefited from Sonke's parental leave policy, which is a fully paid four-week leave policy for fathers. He attended with his wife, who talked about what his presence meant to her during their son's first few weeks of life.

The new labour law amendments were approved in 2018 and implemented in 2020. Some of the changes mandated that:

- Maternity leave should be maintained, and there should be an increase in paid allocation up to 66 per cent.
- Ten days' paid parental leave for those who did not qualify for maternity leave; the largest group was fathers.
- In addition to maternity leave for mothers specifically, the language was gender-neutral—including all genders and sexual orientations.
- Paid parental leave of ten weeks for adoptive parents and parents who commissioned a surrogacy.

3.5. Uruguay: The National Care System

Gabriel Corbo (former director of Infancia Sistema Nacional de Cuida in Uruguay) explained the National Care System that had been introduced in his country during Launching the State of the World's Fathers 2021 Report:

The law codifying the National Care System passed in 2015, and it was rooted in the universal right to care and the co-responsibility of governments and communities to provide that care. It represents advances in previous national care legislation, including childcare pension credits within the national social security system that recognised unpaid care work as work through the expansion of pension credits, as well as laws supporting domestic workers. Prioritising the most vulnerable households, the plan includes care for children, those with disabilities, and dependent adults.

The law was passed by a progressive government, with widespread support from feminist and women's rights groups and from UN Women through its HeForShe initiative. It was based on the awareness of the 'triple challenge': an ageing population, changing family compositions, and a labour market that put increasing strains on families (especially women), coupled with time-use surveys that highlighted the glaring inequality in unpaid care work faced by women and also the double burden they face at work. The Uruguayan government sought to create a national care plan that was ambitious in its coverage and promoted gender equality. Importantly, the law includes incentives for men to carry out their share of care, although to date, this has had limited success.



The three pillars of care in Uruguay's National Care System
(SOURCE: Gabriel Corbo, [Launching the State of the World's Fathers 2021 Report](#))

4. Gaps, lessons learned, and recommendations



The global community now has a fundamental choice: we can either recycle failed austerity measures, which are likely to further deepen inequalities, or set things right by enabling a recovery that re-values care, encourages men to play full and equitable roles in unpaid care, and builds an inclusive feminist future.

— BOLIS ET AL., 2020²¹

4.1. Gaps and lessons learned

The binary assumption that ‘women care and men provide’ lies at the heart of patriarchy. It has been of central concern to feminists and women’s rights organisations since at least the 1970s, and yet—like violence against women (to which it is also linked)—this assumption has been hard to shift. In this sense, we could say the work on care underpins all other work in the field of engaging men and boys, transforming masculinities, and gender equality. Where this field is part of international development work, however, a lack of understanding remains on how concepts of care (as service) are rooted in colonialism and racism—including how the low value attributed to care is linked to white supremacy in family and gender roles. The connections among care, colonialism, and racism have been clear during the coronavirus pandemic: for example, the number of people of colour working in health services in many Global North countries who have died due to the virus.²²

In general, the field of ‘men and boys for gender equality’ has worked on the issue of care mainly through the lens of fatherhood as a key entry point to addressing the imbalances between men and women in unpaid care and domestic work. Many of the sessions in the MenEngage Ubuntu Symposium reflected this approach—from *“The Arab Fathers’ Revolution”* to *The Fathering Circle*. This work is important and can be transformative when done in a way that also includes women and focuses on relationships as well as structural transformation. Often,

²¹ Bolis, M., Parvez, A., Holten, E., Mugehera, L., Abdo, N., & Moreno, M. J. (2020, June). *Care in the time of coronavirus: Why care work needs to be at the centre of a post-COVID-19 feminist future*. Oxfam. <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org/resources/care-in-the-time-of-coronavirus-why-care-work-needs-to-be-at-the-centre-of-a-po-621009/>

²² COVID-19: *The risk to BAME doctors*. (2021, August 24). British Medical Association. <https://www.bma.org.uk/advice-and-support/covid-19/your-health/covid-19-the-risk-to-bame-doctors>

this work is coupled with advocacy on policy issues (such as paternity and parental leave) and sometimes with research (as in Oxfam's WE-Care Programme and many programmes in Latin America). It extends, too, to working with health and education services (as in much of the work on this subject in Latin America) and to work on preventing violence against women and violence against children.

Working on care through the lens of fatherhood is relevant, and it is happening in many countries. A MenEngage paper in the *International Journal of Care and Caring* (2018) pointed out that it's important that fatherhood is not the end-goal or objective, but rather an entry point for advancing the recognition, reduction, and redistribution of unpaid care, and gender justice more broadly. The paper notes:

Increased global attention and recognition of men's roles and responsibilities in unpaid care is a positive development, and promising initiatives have emerged to engage men as active and equitable fathers and caregivers. However, achieving the ultimate goal of gender equality in the provision of care will be a challenge. It will require a fundamental shift in how caring, gender norms and masculinities are perceived, and will depend on efforts at all levels of society, from individual efforts with men and boys, to the adoption of progressive policies and legislation, to the transformation of institutions. Crucially, it will require both government support and action and meaningful partnerships with local civil society organisations, including those that are women-centred and women-led, to ensure that initiatives to engage men in caring contribute to the overall goal of a more gender-just world for all.²³

There is also the danger that work on care will be co-opted by the many parenting and family programmes springing up worldwide that are funded by right-wing organisations and movements; these programmes generally aim to promote 'family values'—that is, a nuclear gender-binary family with one father and one mother, in which the father is the provider and the mother is the caregiver. By adopting the terminology of 'care', these bodies promote an understanding of 'family' as exclusively heteronormative and of gender as firmly attached to biological sex differences that overlap with traditional gender roles. Interestingly, these programmes seem to be less about fathers' rights than they were perhaps a decade ago and more about the gender binary of a strong male figure and a submissive female carer. They are, however, well funded and broadly disseminated through social media. We saw evidence of some of this in the symposium sessions on backlash.

The answer, however, is not to stop working with fathers. Rather, it's to ground this work firmly in gender equality—the MenEngage Alliance accountability standards²⁴ and MenCare campaign principles²⁵ can be useful here—and to build this work from the ground up in conjunction with women's rights organisations so that there is clear accountability. Finally, we must constantly be aware that this work is just one small part of the much wider systems change that is needed. As Tom Churchyard (founder and executive director of Kwakha Indvodza—'Building a Man'—in Eswatini) noted during *MenCare Advocacy, Media and Campaigning Webinar*: 'Legal and structural reform should always be at the heart of our campaigns but as a long-term aim.'

It is clear that change happens at different levels, as well as that the pressure often needs to occur on many of these levels at the same time for transformative change to occur. At the same time, this is where the risks lie—if we think about social change without systemic change, for instance.

²³ van de Sand, J., Belbase, L., & Nolan, S. (2018). Engaging men as fathers and caregivers: An entry point to advancing women's empowerment and rights. *International Journal of Care and Caring*, 2(3), 425–431. <https://doi.org/10.1332/239788218X15351945466012>

²⁴ MenEngage Alliance. (2014). *The MenEngage Alliance accountability standards and guidelines*. <http://menengage.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/MenEngage-Accountability-Standards-and-Guidelines.pdf>; MenEngage Alliance. (2018). *MenEngage Alliance accountability training toolkit*. <http://menengage.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/MenEngage-Accountability-Toolkit-English-WEB.pdf>

²⁵ *Guiding principles*. (n.d.). MenCare. Retrieved November 4, 2021, from <https://men-care.org/about-mencare/guiding-principles/>

4.2. Recommendations for practitioners

Feminist principles underpinning work on unpaid care

1. Work as allies to, collaborate with, and be accountable to feminist organisations.

Organisations working on unpaid care with a fatherhood lens must link up with national or local women's rights or feminist organisations working on care in all or any of its facets, including care for ourselves and each other, unpaid care, and care for the planet. This must be done in a collaborative, humble, and accountable way. These relationships need to be nurtured with care and respect, bearing in mind that our patriarchal conditioning does not always make these bonds easy. Those working on men and gender equality must be open to feedback and learning from feminist and women's rights organisations, leaders, and networks. Additionally, the content of work on fatherhood needs to be properly informed and grounded in feminist theory and practice within the specific location and context. Even with good programmes, we need to be in ongoing dialogue with feminist movements to keep checking that what we say our 'achievements' are resonate with and support feminist movements' agendas and add value to what they are doing.

2. Co-create the work on fatherhood and unpaid care with women, girls, and people of other genders.

Work with men and boys, particularly with fathers and fathers-to-be, must acknowledge that this is about relationships and must involve partners, most of whom are likely women. This is important to ensure that the work with fathers centres the needs and rights of women and children in the household. Furthermore, if they are not involved, women can resist men being more involved in the home, as it is often the only space where women feel they have some power and control.

3. Become more intersectional.

An awareness of race, class, caste, sexuality, geography, ability, and age does not yet permeate the work on unpaid care. There is much more to be done in this area, and it involves working at all levels. Work with fathers must acknowledge that they are not a homogenous group, and best practice involves focusing on particular groups of fathers that vary by country and context. In Lebanon, for example, work with refugee populations has required a different approach than work with host populations. In Austria and the Netherlands, it has been easiest to work with migrant and refugee fathers; in Brazil, it was focusing on fathers-to-be.

4. Deconstruct and dismantle gender-binary conceptions of care work for children as always (and only) involving one mother and one father.

In many contexts, a wide network of people of all genders is involved with children. It is also important to not assume a nuclear family and to include not just biological fathers living in the home but also social and nonresidential fathers, step- and adoptive fathers, and same-sex parents. There is still a long way to go in this area.

5. Build a wider circle of care.

Work on unpaid care often focuses only on the family, and although this work does primarily concern childcare and domestic work, there is also a wider range of activities within health and social care. COVID-19 has highlighted this issue, demonstrating that 'care' often—and increasingly—also includes caring for elders or those with disabilities and that women in particular may also have volunteer caring roles in their communities. While the expanded definition of care may be true in ordinary times, it is especially salient in times of conflict or crisis—but was not a particular focus in the symposium.

6. Connect to inner work (self-care and collective care). A number of symposium sessions discussed self-care and collective care as a wider, more systemic way of transforming ourselves as individuals and communities. This approach to care or inner work may be understood as self-inquiry and as a spiritual practice. The summary of the session [Inner Work for Social Change](#) noted:

A growing number of feminists, including many within MenEngage, are voicing the need for embracing inner work as a foundation for our social justice work. Inner work is this looking within and among ourselves to grow, heal, and transform emotionally, socially, intellectually, and politically. Dismantling oppressive systems requires inner work. Otherwise, we are destined to recreate the same oppressive systems over and over.

The emphasis, therefore, is not on individual work for self-improvement alone—the idea of self-care has also been co-opted as an expression of capitalist individualism—but as an important aspect of social change. Men are unlikely to stop using violence and increase care until they deal with their own trauma. When the focus is on ‘men’s vulnerabilities’ as an end in itself and not a means to an end, or an end alongside a broader political vision, this may overtake a justice-focused agenda and deepen the polarisation between binary ideas of women and men’s rights. The triple advocacy triangle,²⁶ adapted from the Messner and Nixon politics of masculinity triangle, provides a framework to contextualise work on men’s vulnerabilities in an accountable way. Therefore, men’s inner work is not only a spiritual practice but also a transformational experience and process when it comes to challenging male privileges and power dynamics, including relationships.

Areas for intervention on unpaid care and wider care systems

- 7. Consider making advocacy on parental and paternity leave part of the work on fatherhood,** ensuring it presses for equal, fully paid, nontransferable parental leave for all parents as a supplement—not alternative—to maternity leave. This includes our responsibility to stand behind and support feminist groups’ call for appropriate maternity leave in places where there are not such provisions. [MenCare](#) and its [Parental Leave Platform](#) can be helpful here, as can the [State of the World’s Fathers](#) and national fathers’ reports. In addition, it is important not to assume heteronormativity or to privilege birth parents; provision for same-sex couples and adoptive parents is also key.
- 8. Link fatherhood work to women’s campaigns for state-supported, high-quality childcare** that facilitates both parents’ full participation in economic activities and that provides young children with gender-equality education. This can also be part of wider state-supported care systems (see Uruguay’s example in Section 3.5) and campaigns for childcare in the private sector.
- 9. Advocate for father-specific parent training to be part of advocacy for wider policies in the health sector to engage men in prenatal visits, childbirth, and postnatal care,** as has been done in Brazil, Chile, and elsewhere.²⁷ This father-specific parent training could include building men’s parenting and caring skills that may lead to greater confidence in their ability to be a primary or joint caretaker, as well as promoting shared responsibility for

²⁶ Triple advocacy. (n.d.). männer.ch. Retrieved November 23, 2021, from https://www.maenner.ch/kampa_page/triple-advocacy/

²⁷ van der Gaag, N., Heilman, B., Gupta, T., Nembhard, C., & Barker, G. (2019). *State of the World’s Fathers: Unlocking the power of men’s care*. Promundo-US. <https://stateoftheworldsfathers.org/report/state-of-the-worlds-fathers-helping-men-step-up-to-care/>

- 10. Look to the education sector—and beyond.** A number of symposium sessions covered working with boys and young men. Including a care approach in other work with men and boys can be positive. The early years, whether in school or outside it, often make a lasting impression on children. Raising the profile and value of ‘care’ in all stages of life can translate into a person’s improved capacity to care for their own health and well-being, as well as for those around them. It can also prevent gender-based violence; teach the value of care to both boys and girls; and promote equitable, nonviolent, caring relationships.
- 11. Situate some unpaid care and domestic work in a wider context that includes paid work.** Some of the ‘Politics of Care’ sessions did refer, for example, to domestic workers’ situation in the pandemic but mainly in terms of the impact on households employing domestic workers rather than on the workers themselves. And yet paid care workers suffer from their work being unvalued and underpaid—not to mention often being on top of unpaid care work in their own homes. Women’s organisations such as [Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing \(WIEGO\)](#) and the [International Domestic Workers Federation](#) are doing good campaigning work. It would also be useful to investigate men in care work, as in papers such as *Men Who Care*.²⁸
- 12. Regularly collect more data on time used in unpaid care work and how it is divided between women and men, girls and boys.** This can be used to measure progress towards equality, as well as inform policymaking and budgeting decisions at the national and local levels. Men’s involvement in this area would also be useful to measure in studies, such as through gender trackers.²⁹ Also, while there are some small-scale evaluations of this work’s impact (and a few larger ones), evidence of impact remains largely missing, and investments are often not tracked.
- 13. Include men and boys in discussions on economies of care and life-making economies.** All of the above recommendations and more are included in some of the work by feminist organisations looking at care economies and economies of care, especially in relation to what a pandemic-resilient care economy would look like—from tax to transport to childcare to education to health.³⁰ As yet, few of these make reference to the role of men and boys; this perspective, if welcome, could be a useful form of allyship.

Approaches to work on unpaid care and economies of care

- 14. Partnerships are key.** The most successful work in this area—Promundo, Rutgers, and local partners in Brazil or Rwanda, for example, or Sonke Gender Justice’s work in South Africa—has been embedded in government systems and structures and has sometimes involved working across sectors. At present, this work is mostly in health systems around pregnancy and birth, but it can and is being extended into educational systems (the Fatherhood Institute, United Kingdom), the workforce (Anne Çocuk Eğitim Vakfı [AÇEV], Turkey), the Ministry of Social Affairs (Program P-ECD, Lebanon), and the Ministry of Health (PARENT, Portugal). There are also a number of successful partnerships with the private sector. Importantly, as the first recommendation notes, this work must be done in collaboration with feminist organisations within the country.

²⁸ Barker, G., Greene, M., Nascimento, M., Segundo, M., Ricardo, C., Taylor, A., Aguayo, F., Sadler, M., Das, A., Singh, S., Figueroa, J. G., Franzoni, J., Flores, N., Jewkes, R., Morrell, R., & Kato, J. (2012). *Men who care: A multi-country qualitative study of men in non-traditional caregiving roles*. International Center for Research on Women & Instituto Promundo. <https://promundoglobal.org/resources/men-who-care-a-multi-country-qualitative-study-of-men-in-non-traditional-caregiving-roles>

²⁹ United Nations Development Programme & UN Women. (n.d.). *COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker*. United Nations Development Programme COVID-19 Data Futures Platform. Retrieved March 1, 2021, from <https://data.undp.org/gendertracker/>; Global Health 50/50. (n.d.). *The COVID-19 Sex-Disaggregated Data Tracker*. <https://globalhealth5050.org/the-sex-gender-and-covid-19-project/the-data-tracker/>

³⁰ Women’s Budget Group. (2020). *Creating a caring economy: A call to action*. <https://www.thewomensorganisation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/WBG-Report-Final.pdf>; Palladino, L. M., & Mabud, R. (2021). *It’s time to care: The economic case for investing in a care infrastructure*. Time’s Up Foundation. <https://timesupfoundation.org/work/times-up-impact-lab/times-up-measure-up/its-time-to-care-the-economic-case-for-investing-in-a-care-infrastructure/>

- 15. Approach programming with care.** As with other development programmes and interventions, programmes on care need to be contextualised, not copied and pasted from other settings in the name of scaling up. Generally, this field needs to be humble about the concept of 'scaling up', learn from the mistakes of the past, and see programming in the context of decolonization—where partners are really partners, not 'beneficiaries', and we listen to them and learn.
- 16. Remember that there are no quick fixes...** Feminists have been working on inequality in unpaid care and domestic work for decades. This more systemic work takes many years of relationship-building prior to any intervention. Sometimes, it involves making formal agreements with governments, ensuring that the issues are championed by both senior and less senior advocates within the specific sector, and working with key personnel who are able to instigate and bring about change.
- 17. ...But there are many small steps.** On the other hand, simple steps are often the way to more systemic change. As Kathy Jones and Adrienne Burgess from the Fatherhood Institute note, 'We call it the "Trojan Horse" approach—small, simple things can make a real difference. For example, is there a space on registration forms to get fathers' details?'³¹ These simple, small steps were much in evidence during the symposium.
- 18. Use communications and advocacy—but with caution and care.** The symposium provided examples of media clips and of social media campaigns, as well as a wealth of expertise on the dos and don'ts of communicating and campaigning on unpaid care, unpaid domestic work, and involved fatherhood. 'Social media is a powerful tool—and a fickle friend'; 'Try to capture lived experiences in new and different ways'; and 'Always do a gender analysis before you start campaigning' were just a few from the [MenCare Advocacy, Media and Campaigning Webinar](#) session, and many are included in the MenCare in Africa media toolkit.³²
- 19. Beware of the language used around care.** Using negative terms contributes to the devaluing of care. Of course, some care work is burdensome, but if we want to revalue care, we need to be positive about it. Rather than talking about care as only a burden, we should discuss care as a social good.

Finally, to return to the 2nd MenEngage Global Symposium in New Delhi and Srilatha Batliwala's comment (quoted by AWID Co-Executive Director Cindy Clark during the [Intersectional Feminist Movement Voices](#) panel):

The root cause of injustice and our shared political agenda is the dismantling of patriarchy—not only because of what it does to women and other 'subordinate' genders and its dehumanizing effects on men, but also because it is the engine that fuels exploitative economic models and environmentally destructive development and all forms of war, conflict, and violence.

Care, in all its forms, can fuel the opposite: a more just and equal society. Work on unpaid care and economies of care can play a key role in promoting the valuing and sharing of care and women's economic empowerment, as well as in the broader goals of achieving gender equality and dismantling patriarchal systems rooted in historical inequalities that harm all genders. 'I am because you are' must be our mantra as we continue to centre care in all that we do.

³¹ From author interview with Kathy Jones and Adrienne Burgess.

³² MenCare, MenEngage Alliance, & Sonke Gender Justice. (2020). *MenCare in Africa media kit*. <https://men-care.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/MenCare-Media-Kit-1.pdf>

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Annex 1. Links to the symposium sessions on unpaid care and economies of care

1. 10 November 2020: [Opening plenary](#)
1. 11 November 2020: [Youth Leadership and Movement Building panel](#)
1. 11 November 2020: [Intersectional Feminist Movement Voices panel](#)
1. 11 November 2020: [Men and Masculinities panel \(part 1\)](#)
1. 12 November 2020: [Men and Masculinities panel \(part 2\)](#)
1. 19 November 2020: [Men Caring About...](#) ('Politics of Care' series session 1)
1. 26 November 2020: ["The Arab Fathers' Revolution": A Dialogue on Social Transformations Through Men's Caregiving](#)
1. 14 January 2021: [Men Taking Care of...](#) ('Politics of Care' series session 2)
1. 21 January 2021: [Paternidades y Cuidado en América Latina: Tensiones Entre Prácticas Íntimas, Masculinidad y Políticas Públicas](#) (Fatherhood and Care in Latin America: Tensions Between Intimate Practices, Masculinities and Public Policy)
1. 11 February 2021: [The Fathering Circle: Parenting With Accountability](#)
1. 16 February 2021: [Economic Contexts: Neoliberalism, Climate Crisis and Care Economies](#)
1. 25 February 2021: [Men Giving Care to...](#) ('Politics of Care' series session 3)
1. 4 March 2021: [Masculinidades y Prácticas de Cuidado: Para una Igualdad Sustantiva](#) (Masculinities and Caring Practices: For Substantive Equality)
1. 11 March 2021: [MenCare Advocacy, Media and Campaigning Webinar: With Practical Cases and a Toolkit on How to Do It](#)
1. 15 April 2021: [Involucramiento de los Hombres en la Paternidad: Experiencias Desde Chile, Perú, México y Portugal](#) (Men's Involvement in Fatherhood: Experiences From Chile, Peru, Mexico and Portugal)
1. 22 April 2021: [Todos Somos Familia](#) (We Are All Family)
1. 6 May 2021: [From Programs to Policies: What Does It Take to Shift the Dial on Gender Norms and Unpaid Care?](#)
1. 20 May 2021: [When Men Receive Care](#) ('Politics of Care' series session 4)
1. 15 June 2021: [Launching the State of the World's Fathers 2021 Report: Structural Solutions to Achieve Equality in Care Work](#)



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