



MenEngage Alliance

working with men and boys for gender equality

Transforming Masculinities: Towards a Shared Vision

*Exploring international and cross-regional
perspectives on engaging men and boys
in gender equality and women's rights*

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Introduction: Towards a Shared Vision



Humberto Carolo
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Recent years have seen an expanding interest in ‘men and masculinities’ in media narratives, policy priorities, everyday conversations, and even in global consumer brands.

As we work to understand the ever-shifting socio-cultural, political and economic landscape, we must reflect on what increased public attention for men and masculinities means in the context of feminist movements. The question of how our contributions support the rights of all women and girls – and people of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities – is one that calls for continual reflection, as well as open, honest discussion.

If interest around masculinities is indeed increasing, it is crucial to recognize this is a result of the actions and demands of countless women and girls who speak up through movements like #MeToo and #NiUnaMas. Progressive voices around the world are making themselves heard and demanding recognition and realisation of their rights. An energised youth movement continues to unflinchingly call for justice. Feminists of colour, trans people and LGBTQI communities are illuminating the full complexity of the human experience and refusing to accept reductive versions of how to think about society. These are the people whose experiences we – as a global alliance for engaging men and boys in gender equality – must centre in our minds, words and actions.

The value we can add to these efforts is based on deconstructing patriarchal systems by engaging with those who have historically constructed, benefited from, and reinforced those systems. It involves an understanding of how to transform unequal power relations at all levels. It means centralising an engagement with the concept of privilege, and having an understanding of how gender inequality relates to other forms of oppression.

The impetus for this work is more urgent than ever. Right wing backlash – on the world stage

and in local communities – has been well-organised and efficient. Inaction is not an option. But action without critical reflection often has a counter-productive impact.

A key learning we strive to put at the centre of our work – as individuals, organizations, and as a collective – is that action is only useful if it is accountable to those groups whose rights we aim to support, including the most marginalised people. Since different forms of oppression compound each other, we can only be truly accountable if we look at the world through the lens of intersectionality.

In August 2018, we were fortunate to meet as a diverse group of MenEngage Alliance members to explore these big, conceptual issues, and what they mean in practice for work to engage men and boys in gender justice and women’s rights. The result was an invaluable and often challenging exploration of questions at the heart of our work. What does it mean to be accountable? When and how should we mobilise collectively? How might we deal with anti-feminist and anti-women backlash? What do we need to do as a network working on men and masculinities to move beyond a binary understanding of gender? What does a feminist framing for our work look like?

While this report does not have all the answers to those questions, it does convey the direction of debate taking place among the MenEngage Alliance board and other representatives from across the worldwide network. It can be useful reading for members, partners, and anyone interested in understanding the issues at the heart of work to engage men and boys in gender justice. We hope that it will inspire both critical reflection and accountable action for feminist-informed, gender-transformative and human rights-based work to engage men and boys in gender equality and women’s rights for all.



What is MenEngage Alliance?

MenEngage Alliance is an international network of civil society organisations that implement, research and advocate for gender-transformative approaches to engaging men and boys for women's rights and gender justice. The Alliance currently has more than 700 member organisations across 70 countries worldwide and is organised in decentralized country and regional-level networks.

In partnership with women's rights and gender justice activists and organisations, the Alliance seeks to add value to existing initiatives by exploring how transforming patriarchal masculinities and engaging men and boys can contribute to the joint objectives set by feminist and social justice movements.

The work brings a men and masculinities lens to initiatives that seek to eliminate gender-based violence and discrimination, advance sexual and reproductive health and rights for all, redistribute unpaid care work, and transform militarized masculinities in order to achieve peace and security.

Men and Masculinities

MenEngage Alliance understands 'men and masculinities' as a perspective through which it can support the broader movement for women's rights and gender justice, and considers itself part of the growing approach that explicitly involves 'men and masculinities' in broader work for gender justice. This field seeks to understand and analyse men and boys' experiences as gendered beings, how rigid notions of masculinities shape their attitudes and behavior, and their roles and responsibilities in achieving gender justice for all.

The Alliance seeks to challenge stereotypical male gender roles and patriarchal expressions of manhood, and support manifestations of non-violent, equitable and inclusive attitudes and behaviors by transforming social norms that are the root causes of gender inequalities. By doing so, the Alliance seeks to create a more just and equal world for women, men and people of all genders.

About this report

This report is based on discussions held at the Global Strategy Meeting of MenEngage Alliance from 28-30 August 2018 in Santiago, Chile. Individuals from 20 countries across 7 regions, representing the Alliance's global board, regional networks and the global secretariat, took part. It marks a midpoint in the 2017-2020 Strategic Plan.

Participants shared their experiences from diverse contexts, discussed the state of the 'men and masculinities' field, and strategized on how the Alliance can collectively work to advance its mission to dismantle patriarchy by transforming masculinities through intersectional feminist approaches and in partnership with feminist women's rights movements.

Participants discussed key issues that regional and country networks struggle with and exchanged ideas and possible strategies that can help address them. The discussions explored how to politicize the Alliance's agenda and strengthen advocacy efforts, while examining how to promote accountable practices, and the strengthening of networks at all levels. A number of challenging issues were discussed, such as the space for addressing men's vulnerabilities within the Alliance, and how to respond to increasing backlash against women's rights and social justice. The meeting was wrapped up with a strategy session on mobilizing the alliance towards the 3rd MenEngage Global Symposium.

Who is this report for?

This report will be valuable reading for members and partners working to engage men and boys for gender equality, as well as anyone interested in understanding more about the Alliance and its work and mission. It provides an overview of the discussions at the MenEngage Alliance Strategy Meeting 2018, and the ways forward for the alliance collectively identified by the participants. It does not aim to be an exhaustive account of the current state of the entire 'engaging men and boys' or 'men and masculinities' field. However, it does explore some of the latest thinking regarding key themes and challenges for MenEngage Alliance, at the midpoint of the current Strategic Plan.

Progress and resistance

The #MeToo movement has brought a sense of momentum that has broadened and further politicized the work to engage men and boys in gender justice.

The #MeToo movement broke long-standing walls of silence around sexual harassment and misconduct, and unveiled a culture of complicity running through all levels of society. In its wake, several members across MenEngage Alliance reported a surge in interest among men and boys wanting to engage in discussions on sexual harassment and gender equality. It seems that #MeToo has led some men and boys to question and reflect on their behavior and privileges – often for the first time in their lives. Yet some organizations note a growing sense of uncertainty among many men and boys regarding how to act in relation to women and girls. In fact, members from across different regions of the Alliance report a similar societal trend in their contexts, in which some men feel the #MeToo movement has ‘gone too far’, or that men are being ‘blamed unfairly’.

Members of MenEngage Alliance in Latin America report seeing these patterns as representing two broadly opposing trends observed across the region, and mirrored in other contexts around the world. On the one hand, they have seen a growing feminist movement – especially since #MeToo – with many men and boys getting involved in challenging the status-quo. On the other hand, there is growing resistance from conservative and some right wing forces seeking to undermine progress on women’s rights.

While #MeToo had a strong focus on holding people to account for sexual misconduct, and particularly ‘calling men out’, it is also important for the Alliance to see this as an opportunity to ‘call men in’.

Despite the apparent contradictions in attitudes among men and boys regarding gender equality, members across the Alliance are generally optimistic that the uncertainty some men and boys feel can act as a starting point for engagement with them. That includes speaking to men’s experiences, and providing them with alternative ways of understanding manhood.

As well as understanding men’s individual behaviors and responsibilities, it is important to think in terms of the structural systems, cultures of impunity, and social norms and attitudes that lead to those behaviors and allow sexual harassment to happen and go unchecked in the first place. There is an opportunity for those working to engage men and boys in gender equality to build on the momentum provided by #MeToo and other grassroots movements to advance work for gender equality and women’s rights.



Grappling with backlash

Women’s rights and gender justice actors in diverse contexts are facing conservative backlash to their work, including from “men’s rights” groups, faith-based groups, and States who are anti-women’s rights and dispute key aspects of gender equality.

Resistance to progress on gender equality manifests through a variety of different groups in which men play significant roles, including ‘father’s rights’ groups, religious groups, nationalist groups, the so-called ‘incel movement’ and various other ‘men’s rights activists’ (MRAs). These groups can be well-funded and are often well-organized, with a significant popular following. They often promote flawed data and research. Besides organised groups, there is backlash at the individual and micro level. This may, for example, result from a feeling that young men and boys are being left behind in terms of educational achievement, or that the emphasis on advancing the rights of women and girls is at the expense of men and boys. These trends highlight the need to better communicate messages and research that deconstruct regressive ideas and promote positive, healthy, egalitarian and human-rights based thinking.

Attacks on feminism tend to follow a pattern that aims to maintain the status quo. It is often rooted in concerns that are particular to men and the maintenance of male power and privileges alongside other systems and structures of oppression such as white supremacy, colonialism, eurocentrism, heteronormativity and so on. As the discourse around gender has become more mainstream, an anti-women counter-narrative that aims to discredit feminism has been emerging. Broadly declaring discussions that address gender issues, inequalities, and identities as ‘gender ideology’, this counter-narrative aims to

undermine the human rights-based imperative for this work. This forms part of a broader sociopolitical context of rising nationalisms and fundamentalisms in many world regions, resulting in shrinking spaces for women’s rights leaders and organizations and civil society more broadly to work on gender and human rights issues.

But what should be the response of those working with boys and men to support feminist goals? The Alliance needs to be cognizant that ‘men’s rights’ groups are attracting a large number of followers, especially young men, in diverse contexts around the world. They are appealing to those who feel they are losing out or are being left behind by advances in women’s rights. Some MenEngage Alliance members see a challenge of engaging with some men who may be unlikely to listen to an approach based solely on acknowledging male privilege, without addressing their perceived powerlessness. Careful thought and work is ongoing – and needs to continue at pace – in order to understand how to effectively engage with these men to counter the men’s rights narrative versus women’s rights, and to help them see that existing patriarchal notions of masculinities are at the root of the problems they face.

Some members working with men and boys find that certain language around gender and feminism can be off-putting and counterproductive to effecting change in people’s understandings. Members in different contexts are exploring various entry points to having discussions with men and boys. For instance, engaging with the public health system, or running public campaigns that appeal to popular culture can provide opportunities to work with men and offer discussion, repackaged messaging and statistics, alongside tangible examples of inequalities. Engaging with religious leaders and communities on progressive interpretations of religious scriptures has, in some contexts, been found to be an effective way of

countering conservative messaging. Several Alliance members have achieved good results by engaging faith leaders and have expertise and resources on this. Rather than playing into tendencies to see gender equality as a zero sum game, some members see an increasing importance in recognizing men’s experiences in order to counter the messaging of men’s rights groups.

On the whole, the Alliance needs to better understand whether to engage with or respond to ‘men’s rights groups’ and other conservative forces, and when to avoid doing so. In some cases, engaging with such groups may serve to increase their visibility, validate their message and promote their rhetoric. While the field continues to develop understanding on an appropriate approach, there are some cases in which it may be appropriate to engage, such as when women’s rights organizations request support or if members receive threatening messages.

A more beneficial approach may be engaging with men who are ‘on the fence’. They might, for instance, feel a sense of anger or frustration at expectations on them as boys or men, but fail to see the issues through a feminist lens, and can be a prime target for anti-women and anti-feminist rhetoric. How those working in this area do a better job of reaching those men and boys is an important question that needs to be further explored and addressed.

In conclusion, there is an acute awareness of the need across the Alliance and membership to make messages clear and communicable to a broad range of audiences. New and existing entry points need to be developed to communicate these messages to those men and boys who are either undecided, ambivalent, skeptical, or hostile to efforts for gender equality. Crucially, this must be done without any watering down of the values and principles of this work.



“It is a great irony that many of the problems identified by so-called ‘men’s rights activists’ are caused by patriarchy, and the solution is a more gender-equitable system. The solution to these problems is more feminism, not less.”

– Anthony Keedi, Technical Lead for Masculinities, ABAAD-Resource Center on Gender Equality, Lebanon

Examples of practical approaches to engaging men and boys shared by MenEngage Alliance members

Challenging gender stereotypes and deconstructing privilege with young men.

- Croatia NGO, Status M¹, are working with young men in schools and prisons to deconstruct privilege and its historical relationship to violence and war.
- Advocates for Youth² in the USA organizes retreats for young people in which they are supported to discuss and unpack their privilege, and how systems have impacted them and their bodies, and provides them with pathways for action.

Engaging men as fathers and caregivers.

- Many Alliance members work through the global MenCare Campaign³ to engage men as active fathers and caregivers.
- Men and Boys for Gender Equality⁴, Botswana, are working to transform social and cultural norms around men and caregiving, such as those that prevent men from entering the delivery room.
- Status M are working with fathers and have started to see changes in men’s behavior and attitudes, particularly among younger men.

Engaging men in positions of power

Much of the work on engaging men and boys has been with individual men, and there is a need now to engage better with men in positions of power. In doing this, it is important to ensure men in power are engaging for the right reasons, and not to gain more privileges. For example, in response to #MeToo, MÄN⁵ held discussions with Sweden’s top business and technology leaders, building on increased interest to engage with these topics. The organization is now seeking to work with five companies as leaders on this topic and exploring ways to engage with the private sector. MÄN also helped create a network of politicians in the Swedish parliament to which members of almost all major parties in Sweden signed up and pledged to make ending gender-based violence their main election promise.

White Ribbon Canada is also collaborating with businesses, governments and institutions to promote gender equality in the workplace and beyond. At the advent of the #MeToo movement, the organization joined efforts with the business and technology sector to organize “Being a Good Man: Masculinity + #MeToo”. The panel discussion focused on how men can be part of the solution to end sexual assault and harassment, not just in the tech sector but in all the spaces that we inhabit. We all have something at stake in creating safe and equitable workplaces, and good policies only go so far. On a daily basis, there are many things men in positions of power can do to contribute to equality and empathy at work, at home and in the world at large. The organization provides capacity building and consulting services to community-based organizations, start-ups, corporations, and governments.

¹ status-m.hr

² advocatesforyouth.org

³ men-care.org

⁴ facebook.com/mbgebw

⁵ mfj.se

Applying intersectionality

It is important to acknowledge that there is a gap between the language of 'intersectionality' across the Alliance, and the realisation and uptake of what it means in practice for work with men and boys. Theoretical and critical understandings of how individuals experience oppression at multiple intersections of identities – as advanced by black feminists, LGBTQI communities, youth movements and other groups leading calls for transformative action – are crucial to understanding the complex world and contexts in which we work, and ensure our work towards transformation benefits those who are most marginalized.

Many members of the Alliance recognise that there is often an assumption that intersectionality is automatically at the heart of feminism but that in reality it becomes an implied concept rather than an applied concept. There is a need to consciously and proactively include intersectional understandings and approaches in work with men and boys for gender justice and the rights of all women and girls. While such practices are not currently the norm, the impetus is there to advance intersectional thinking and approaches throughout the Alliance. Such approaches mean understanding specific circumstances of individuals based on multiple, interacting and complex identities related to ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, caste, (dis)ability, economic circumstances and other aspects of identities.

Intersectionality makes it clearer to see that in an unequal world, to be free of systemic oppression, stigma or marginalization (in each form it takes) is a privilege. An intersectional approach therefore helps to center inequalities in privilege and power at the heart of work with men and boys.

While there may be an increasing motivation among some members to advance the understanding and application of intersectional thinking, the significant challenge of applying it throughout all levels of the network remains apparent. Directions to take, as suggested by some members, include improving the way work with men and boys engages them to reflect on their relationships with and responsibilities towards those on the margins of society. Working in a field in which language, meaning and representation are vital to the political nature of this work, there is an ongoing push from both within and outside of the Alliance to ensure the language we use and the work we do is inclusive and representative of diverse experiences.

As understandings of intersectionality – that go beyond simply 'paying lip service' to the concept – advance across work with men and boys, the Alliance must ensure initiatives are not done in isolation, nor from a single-issue approach. As one member emphasized at the Global Strategy Meeting 2018, any single-issue movement that does not look at how identities overlap will continue to further marginalize those already at the margins.

“If we only look at issues - like gender, or sexuality, or race, or class - individually, we're not seeing the whole picture. We don't pick up on how experiences are impacted by layered identities, and so we fail those individuals whose experiences are at multiple intersections. So it's important not to take a single-issue approach in this work, but to look carefully and holistically at the layers and intersections of identity”

– Tonya Lovelace, Chief Executive Officer,
Women of Color Network Inc, USA

How MenEngage Alliance understands intersectionality

MenEngage Alliance acknowledges that oppressive institutions (racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, xenophobia, classism, and so on) are interconnected and cannot be examined separately from one another. This interplay of multiple identities can increase vulnerability and inequalities in privilege and power, and further entrench inequalities and injustices. The Alliance seeks to contribute to an intersectional understanding of men and boys' roles and responsibilities, and support members in exploring this perspective in their work and contexts.

Promising practices towards intersectionality

Promoting youth leadership and youth-centred advocacy

Advocates for Youth run eight Youth Councils, including for queer and trans youth, Muslim youth, youth living with HIV, and on sexual assault on college campuses. They support young advocates develop their own campaigns and partner with government and other NGOs to build their institutional capacity on what a youth-centered approach means. Their 'adult-youth partnership approach' aims to ensure the benefits for young people come first, and youth participation is not done as a token gesture.

Towards a feminist framework

While there appears to be increased attention and effort around some of the 'soft entry points' of engaging men and boys (such as fatherhood), there seems to be less around the more political and complex issues of transforming masculinities and challenging male power and privilege in institutions such as the workplace, corporations and politics. Deeper work with men and boys that helps them reflect on their experiences from an understanding of privilege and power-dynamics, and how this affects themselves and others in their lives, is still largely missing.



Oswaldo Montoya, Global Secretariat of MenEngage Alliance

“It’s important in this work not only to help men and boys recognize and unpack their privilege, but to provide them support and pathways to take positive action.”

Leila Younis, President of Status M, Croatia.



The MenEngage Alliance Theory of Change⁶ aims to provide a strong conceptual model for achieving a collective vision as a social justice network, with intersectional feminist strategies throughout our work. In practice, there is a need to deepen and strengthen understandings among the membership of the Alliance, and explore how the network’s collective work can contribute to women’s rights and gender justice. This need for a critical masculinities lens must not fall within a narrow or singular understanding of feminism, but recognize the diversity within feminist movements. A diverse, feminist-informed perspective must be expanded to include emerging issues for the Alliance, including peace and security, militarism, climate change, economic inequalities, and other pressing societal issues.

Yet the huge diversity in perspectives among members, and limited opportunities to come together to have in-depth discussions on the purpose of the work or the network itself, is a significant challenge in developing a common understanding. The MenEngage Alliance Strategy Meeting 2018 therefore provided a rare opportunity for members from across the world to discuss some of the most challenging topics on engaging men and boys in gender equality and women’s rights.

⁶ MenEngage Alliance Theory of Change, 2018

Beyond a binary understanding of gender

Much of the work to engage men and boys fails to adequately go beyond a 'masculine' versus 'feminine' binary understanding of people's realities, or fully recognise and represent diversity of gender identities and sexual orientations.

Many members – plus the Alliance as a collective – are committed to moving away from heteronormative, binary conceptualisations. To do so, the Alliance recognises the need for significant work in challenging the normative language, cultures, and systems the Alliance is part of.

Approaches to engaging men and boys must take into account the diversity among men, and avoid making essentialist comparisons between men and women. The work must aim to engage all who identify as masculine, being inclusive of diverse gender identities. At the same time, members working in the field of engaging men and boys in gender justice and women's rights, recognise the binary framing that exists as a strong and ubiquitous social norm through many aspects of culture, from media and entertainment to institutional systems. In short, it is important to recognise the binary interpretation of gender in order to challenge or deconstruct it.

Many members of the Alliance continue to be inspired by the creativity and innovative actions of youth movements – including calls from many young voices for more nuanced understandings of gender and sexualities. The Alliance is committed to further connecting and collaborating with other social justice movements, including youth and LGBTQI movements.

Diversity in masculinities

Experiences of power or marginalization are relative, and vary not only between men in comparison to women, but within and among men.

Men and boys do not form a homogenous group. Some men have more power than others, and some men experience vulnerabilities in relation to other men – based on ethnicity, class, age, religion, sexual orientation, expressions of gender, and other identities. A prevalent theme in discussions on engaging men and boys is to what extent such efforts should appeal to 'men's vulnerabilities', such as mental health issues or poorer educational performance on average compared to girls. Some members see this as a risk that takes the 'easier' route of engaging men and boys in a way that resonates with them, at the expense of prioritizing the needs of women and girls and those most affected by gender inequality.

While many members of MenEngage Alliance find addressing men's vulnerabilities – such as their experiences of marginalization, humiliation, or exclusion – an effective approach to open doors to engage with men and boys, there is a concern that it might become limited in terms of their meaningful engagement in understanding and dismantling the patriarchal systems that create these vulnerabilities in the first place. Moreover, such approaches can easily fail to centre the disproportionate vulnerabilities that women, girls and people of diverse gender identities are facing, and have historically faced.

It is important that the Alliance bases its work within an understanding of eliminating patriarchy as a system that favors the masculine over the feminine, and that tends to benefit men over women,

girls, and people of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities at all levels. Agreement is therefore growing across the Alliance that rooting an approach in 'men's vulnerabilities' is a risky and potentially misguided strategy. An intersectional approach is becoming more widely recognized across the Alliance as a central framework for understanding men's power and privilege.

Such approaches may not explicitly address men's own needs and vulnerabilities. However, supporting men and boys to transform masculinities can bring benefits for their own health and wellbeing, as well as that of women, girls and people of diverse gender identities and sexual orientations. Men's vulnerabilities should therefore be addressed – first and foremost – in relation to the vulnerabilities of women, girls and LGBTQI groups within a gendered framework, which explores the ways power dynamics impact individuals differently based on multiple and intersecting forms of identity.

It is important that when discussing men's needs, language does not come across as 'men's rights' language that ignores or pitches men's experiences against the realities of women and girls, or against women's rights activists and feminist movements. Approaches should focus on expanding understandings of how men's vulnerabilities result from the ways in which boys are socialized, and how this also severely impacts other groups.

“People do not, in reality, experience their lives within a gender binary. But people experience discrimination if they present a certain way that doesn’t fall neatly within the binary. We need to deconstruct and demystify what it means to ‘be a man’, and recognize and celebrate ways of being outside the gender binary.”

- Preston Mitchum,
Senior Legal and International Policy Analyst,
Advocates for Youth, USA



Accountability

Strengthening accountable practices is a central pillar of work with men and boys for gender justice.

Growing interest in engaging men and boys in recent years has led to questions over how this work may be falling short of being fully supportive of efforts for gender equality. Indeed, if work with boys and men is not informed by feminist-human rights and gender transformative approaches, then there is a realistic chance such programs can be harmful to gender equality. Women's rights advocates have expressed concerns regarding the direction of the growing field of engaging men and boys, such as how it may be reproducing and reaffirming male privileges, taking up space in feminist discourses, and competing for funds and limited resources.

Thanks to critical voices and growing realization within the 'men and masculinities' field, accountability has become a fundamental issue for MenEngage Alliance. At a global level, this has led to conversations and initiatives over the past few years to refine our mission statement and develop Accountability Standards and Guidelines and a Training Toolkit⁷. The aspiration behind the creation of these documents by MenEngage Alliance is that members and networks use them as a reference to create their own contextualized accountability standards, core principles and codes of conduct, as has been done by several regional and national networks. Participants at the Strategy Meeting 2018 recognized that conversations about

accountability must continue, and efforts must be made to ensure they reach all levels of the Alliance.

Strengthening accountable practices therefore continues to be a priority focus for all regional networks of the Alliance in the coming years. The ongoing efforts to strengthen MenEngage networks at regional level have started centering the processes around accountable practices, in addition to other areas of governance and movement building approaches. That means increasing the representation of women's rights, LGBTQI, youth leadership and other social justice organizations and movements within the regional networks' structures, and building partnerships with key regional women's rights movements – including listening to the concerns they have among those that are critical or sceptical of the work of the 'engaging men and boys' field.

Across the regions, MenEngage Alliance – in partnership with the respective regional networks – is organizing capacity strengthening workshops for the membership on accountability, and co-creating and updating the MenEngage Alliance Core Principles, Code of Conduct and Accountability Standards. In addition, institutional policies and procedures for preventing and responding to cases of sexual misconduct are being reviewed, reflected on and improved. A session at the

MenEngage Alliance Strategy Meeting 2018 reviewed the Sexual Misconduct Policy of MenEngage Global Alliance, and made recommendations as part of ongoing improvements of the policy and procedures. MenEngage Alliance aspires to high standards in preventing and responding to cases of sexual misconduct, and hopes to promote high standards across the network.

Though progress has been made on accountability, many questions remain, such as what mechanisms or processes need to be in place to ensure accountability; how should accountable standards be monitored and maintained; and to whom does responsibility ultimately fall?

The Alliance must ensure accountability to diverse women and girls – women of colour, trans women, indigenous women, and other marginalized groups. There is a need to create spaces for critical reflections on intersectionality, and how power and privilege play out in different contexts. The Alliance must also recognize that women's rights organizations are not a homogenous group, and there is not one singular 'women's rights movement'.

It is important to recognise the complications of men 'standing up' for people with less power. Those promoting such efforts need to emphasise that solidarity means working with, rather than speaking for, people with less power. That means consulting on what form of support – if any – marginalized groups would like to receive before taking any action. In discussions on accountability it is important to address the difference between being an 'ally' versus the paternalistic narrative of a 'protector', and discuss the concept of benevolent sexism, whereby seemingly harmless attitudes or comments reinforce gendered power differences.

Trust is crucial to building relationships with other social justice movements. Trust is not given, but earned through strong, credible, and transparent accountable practices.

MenEngage Alliance must work to make itself fully aware of the reality of shrinking political and financial space for women's rights work. There are concerns that work with men and boys diverts funding from women and girls, or that MenEngage Alliance members are able to get into spaces where women leaders and activists have not. It is important to recognize these as legitimate concerns, and offer solidarity and solutions to address these funding gaps. MenEngage Alliance can advocate on how ever-decreasing funding is being distributed. While women's rights organizations may feel too much funding goes to work with men and boys, that does not mean they do not see the value in engagement with men and boys. Rather, it is a question of priorities, and recognizing that in some contexts work with women and girls is severely underfunded and must be prioritized. Accountability therefore means not only consulting and partnering with women's rights and other social justice organizations but also sharing funds and creating funding opportunities for women's rights organizations.

⁷MenEngage Alliance Accountability Standards and Guidelines, and MenEngage Alliance Accountability Toolkit are available at www.menengage.org/accountability



“It is crucial that work with men and boys adds value to the broader movement for gender equality. This can only be achieved with strong and meaningful partnerships with feminist women’s rights organizations at local and regional levels.”

- Lydia Mungherera, Director-Mama’s Club, Uganda, ATHENA Network

‘Constructive’ criticism and accountability in language and framing

Words and their meanings are of vital importance to political and social justice work – especially that which aims to deconstruct and challenge long-held beliefs and mindsets. Indeed, critically reflecting on semantics forms an important part of efforts to be accountable. For example, the Accountability Standards and Guidelines of MenEngage Alliance said that accountability means “being open to constructive criticism”. But could this seemingly straightforward sentence inadvertently suggest that only certain types of criticism are welcome? Who decides whether criticism is constructive or valuable?

It was discussed at the MenEngage Alliance Strategy Meeting 2018 that the use of the word ‘constructive’ in this context empowers those receiving criticism to write it off – if they wish – as ‘unconstructive’. This would have the effect of eroding the power of the person or organization making the criticism. The Alliance should be open to all criticism and then decide how it can improve.

‘What does accountability mean to you?’

The MenEngage Alliance Accountability Toolkit contains exercises for facilitating a discussion on accountable practices for working with men and boys for gender equality. In one discussion at the MenEngage Alliance Strategy Meeting 2018, participants began by responding to the question, ‘what does accountability mean to you?’. Responses included:

- **Responsibility**
- **Taking stock of your actions**
- **Awareness of power structures, even if we are working as individuals**
- **Incorporating feminist human rights principles in all that you do**
- **Mutuality**
- **Transparency**
- **Recognising harm can occur and taking steps to minimise and eliminate that harm**
- **Constant reflection**

Working together for an inclusive alliance

The MenEngage Alliance Strategy Meeting 2018 provided an opportunity to bridge geographical distances and bring representatives together to discuss some of the challenges faced by the members when it comes to working as a collective.

While some challenges might be specific to a certain region, many are applicable across the global network. Many regions, for instance, lack sufficient capacity and resources to meet the demands and aspirations of their growing network. In most cases, regional networks are coordinated and managed by members committing their time voluntarily, often with limited available time. Such limitations can stand in the way of efforts to foster information sharing around the network. Often the regional Steering Committees – the governing bodies leading the regional networks – find it challenging to provide a steady information stream to the membership, as well as to facilitate information sharing about activities among members. However, several regional networks are in the process of establishing independent paid secretariats to carry out the functions of the network.

While each regional network is at a different stage of development and has different structures and focus areas, all regions have been undergoing a process of strengthening how they are organized and work together. As the regional networks grow and mature, there is a need to develop more formal mechanisms and processes to govern the functioning of the network, and to make these processes more participatory, inclusive and democratic. Identified as a focus area for several of the regional networks for the coming years, these processes will include the development of governance agreements, codes of conduct, democratic decision-making processes, leadership selection processes, membership strategies and databases to be

It is a mission of MenEngage Alliance to build inclusive alliances from local to regional to international levels. Developing and maintaining a vibrant and inclusive international network across borders, and languages comes with many challenges.

able to involve members meaningfully and support quality of the work. With this formalization, however, it is important that the activist, grassroots origins of this work are not lost in the process.

Regional networks are flexible in defining the precise criteria for membership around the global network, providing they meet the Core Principles. For example, in some regions, such as North America, individuals can be members. In other areas, membership is for NGOs and individuals take part on behalf of member organizations. Wherever networks are forming and growing, it is important to establish clear parameters that ensure inclusivity and openness, while ensuring the values and principles of the network are shared, understood and implemented in practice across the membership.

Strengthening youth engagement in the regional networks has been identified as a priority for several regional networks, including increasing youth leadership in the networks structure, or establishing a youth steering committee. All regional networks acknowledge the need to expand men and masculinities work to address issues of sexual orientation and gender identity and LGBTQI rights. Many have plans to build partnerships with LGBTQI organizations and increase representation of these groups in their governance structures.

“Being involved with MenEngage Alliance has linked our small organization with others doing similar work in the Caribbean and beyond. When we speak, it’s not just a small isolated group working around men and masculinities. We’re part of a global network of concerned organizations and individuals working collectively for gender justice.”

- Tyrone Buckmire - Chairperson, CariMAN



Recognizing power differences

Member organizations within the Alliance vary significantly in scale and scope. While some are large international NGOs with a seat at policy discussions, others are small grassroots organizations implementing interventions within a smaller community or geographical scope. The diversity in organizations means there will be inherent power differences, with some organizations having more influence than others, particularly in macro discussions.

Larger organizations – such as the at-large members – need to be mindful of the way their international programs relate to and impact local member organizations. Local organizations and larger organizations that implement programmes in partnership must navigate how they will collaborate in ways that benefits local organizations, avoids competition for resources, and is based on feminist principles of power sharing, autonomy and empowerment of people on the margins. South-South learning and partnerships between Alliance members and partners are one area that might be explored that eschew historical global power dynamics.

The MenEngage Alliance Strategy Meeting 2018 saw the formation of a group of members to discuss and reflect on organizing and managing relationships in a global network. The group will explore how to work collectively to create broad-scale social changes while maintaining the identities of individual actors. There is particular interest among some members to explore new and innovative values and models of feminist organizing, including how to operationalize principles of empowerment.



Who are the at-large members of MenEngage Alliance?

MenEngage Global Alliance has a number of at-large member organizations that have a seat on the Global Board. They anchor specific priority issues based on their area of expertise within the work of the Alliance, adding value to discourse development and political agenda-setting. Many of the at-large members contributed to this report via their participation and contributions at the global strategy meeting in 2018.

At-large members ensure meaningful participation and representation of key constituencies such as women's rights, LGBTQI and youth representatives. Many of these organizations have branches or offices at international, regional and country levels and all of them are part of international networks and partnerships, which further strengthens the network building aspects of the partnerships within MenEngage Alliance.

As well as supporting the Alliance with insights and expertise on key topics and approaches, at-large members benefit from grassroots support from local members when implementing local, country and regional level programs and campaigns.

There are 10 at-large members on the Global Board: Advocates for Youth, African Men for Sexual Health and Rights (AMSHer), ATHENA Network, Breakthrough, Centre for Health and Social Justice, CARE International, International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), Promundo, Sonke Gender Justice, White Ribbon Canada, and Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF).

Regional networks

MenEngage Alliance has more than 700 members across 70 countries. Members not only belong to the global alliance, but usually a regional network that provides opportunities to network, collaborate, shape the discourse, and enact joint activities at a regional level. The current networks are:

- MenEngage Africa
- Caribbean Men's Action Network (CariMAN)
- MenEngage Europe
- MenEngage America Latina
- North American MenEngage Network (NAMEN)
- MenEngage Alliance South Asia

A growing political voice: **Advocacy in a shifting 'men and masculinities' discourse**



The collective voice of MenEngage Alliance in global policy advocacy has become increasingly political, visible, organized and influential.

UN agencies and other intergovernmental bodies are increasingly turning to those working in the field to help shape key discussions on engaging men and boys in gender equality and women's rights.

When done appropriately and responsibly, the Alliance welcomes the increased interest and uptake of men and masculinities analysis in the work of governments and intergovernmental agencies. Engaging men and boys as allies is one of the approaches needed to eliminate patriarchal masculinities and allow structural transformation to take place.

With a growing number of organizations adding - to varying degrees - a 'men and masculinities' lens to their work on gender, the Alliance's political agenda has moved from promoting the 'why' of engaging men and boys to the 'how'. Specifically, the agenda of the Alliance has shifted to call for work with men and boys to be done from a critical perspective, and aiming to holistically tackle the issue of male power and privilege as part of the process of transformation.

“Engaging men and boys should never be seen as the end goal. It should be seen as a means to an end – to achieve gender justice for all. These initiatives are one complementary strategy to the broader work being carried out to achieve gender justice.”

– Bilquis Tahira,
Director, Shirakat, Pakistan



What does MenEngage Alliance advocate for?

As an Alliance, our advocacy efforts aim to promote the uptake of feminist-informed, human rights based, and gender-transformative policies on engaging men and boys in women's rights and gender justice for all.

While we advocate for governments and intergovernmental bodies to create policies that are inclusive of engaging men and boys, we call for such policies to be developed in partnership with feminist women's rights and social justice actors and movements. The Alliance strives to encourage ongoing critical reflection – and openness to criticism – on what it means to have a voice in these policy spaces.

Trends in global advocacy

Global frameworks on women's rights and empowerment are increasingly including language on the roles of men and boys. However, policy discussions around the engagement of men and boys are largely taking place in intergovernmental spaces such as the UN, and are not yet being significantly translated to national and local level policies.

Where targeted policies related to transforming masculinities do exist, many lack a clear political understanding on the roles and responsibilities of men and boys in dismantling patriarchy, and as such, are not implemented under a gender transformative framework. Not only can such policies be ineffective, they risk being counterproductive – and even harmful – to the realization of the rights of all women and girls.

At the same time, international policy spaces are seeing a rise in nationalist, fundamentalist and regressive blocs which are diluting feminist women's rights voices and spaces. Amid shrinking political and financial space for women's rights and civil society organizations, there is an ever-increasing need for accountability in advocacy efforts to engage men and boys.

Yet some feminist groups (for example, Coalition of Feminists for Social Change, COFEM) are reporting a lack of accountable practices in engaging men and boys work. Advancing accountability in all areas of work with men and boys is therefore a key priority for MenEngage Alliance (see page 23 for more on accountability).

Advocacy in action: helping shape global discussions and policy

MenEngage Alliance members have been vocal in key UN spaces to help ensure discussions and policies around engaging men and boys are framed by feminist-informed, human rights based, gender-transformative language.

The UN Human Rights Council (HRC) in Geneva has become a key focus for the Alliance. As the epicentre for the global monitoring of human rights, the HRC provides an open, dynamic and relatively progressive environment for civil society engagement, compared to the increasingly restricted spaces observed at UN convenings in New York.

A milestone in UN policy on engaging men and boys

The 35th Session of the Human Rights Council (HRC35) saw the passing of a key Resolution⁸ on engaging men and boys in the prevention and response to violence against all women and girls. Along with other partners and women's rights advocates, MenEngage Alliance participated in lobbying efforts to help ensure the resolution was grounded in feminist-informed, human rights-based, gender-transformative framing throughout the text.

This was a key moment for the Alliance, demonstrating its potential when members engage in advocacy in a strategic and coordinated way, working to reflect the inputs from – and working in partnership with – critical women's rights voices.

Building momentum

The HRC35 Resolution (HRC35/10) mandated the UN High Commissioner on Human Rights to conduct a review of promising practices for engaging men and boys in preventing and ending gender-based violence. MenEngage Alliance members and partners under the coordination of the Global Secretariat, provided more than 20 submissions for the report.

⁸Office of the High Commission on Human Rights, 2017, 'Accelerating efforts to eliminate violence against women: engaging men and boys in preventing and responding to violence against all women and girls', A/HRC/RES/35/10, Available at: <http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/>



Jennifer Rodriguez, MenEngage Alliance Advocacy Coordinator, discusses advocacy with members and partners at the UN Human Rights Council in 2018

This resulted in the final report recommending a strategic policy framework and agenda closely aligned with that of the Alliance. Namely, a framework promoting gender-transformative, human-rights based, feminist-informed, intersectional and accountable policies and programs to engage men and boys.

Aiming to build on those successes, MenEngage Alliance returned to the HRC in 2018 for its 38th session. 24 Alliance members and partners from Prevention+ – a 5-year multi-country program for preventing gender-based violence – convened in Geneva to develop capacity for coordinated advocacy work in Geneva, including Special Procedures, reviews done by the Committee on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and the Universal Periodic Review. In addition, the majority of the representatives held meetings with their permanent missions to help build relationships within this key global policy

space for the advancement of human rights.

Supporting UN mandates to eliminate discrimination against women

MenEngage Global Alliance organized a briefing with the CEDAW committee on how engaging men and boys can contribute to the achievement of CEDAW's mandate. It was the first time in the committee's 38 year history that it held a targeted discussion on men and masculinities.

The Alliance is exploring further ways to support CEDAW to play a role in holding governments to account so that the increased work on engaging men is done in ways that are complementary and contribute to women's rights and gender equality work.

What are 'gender-transformative approaches'?

The phrase 'gender transformative approaches' (GTAs) has become quite common in programs working on gender equality – especially those seeking to engage men and boys. Put simply, such approaches aim to transform the underlying causes of gender inequality – namely, gendered norms, attitudes, values, practices and societal roles.

GTAs encourage equitable attitudes, norms and practices. They challenge the distribution of resources and allocation of duties between men and women, and/or address the unequal power relationships between girls and women and others in the community, such as service providers or traditional leaders. The ultimate aim of GTAs is to achieve gender equality, empower women, girls and gender nonconforming people, promote health and eliminate violence.

GTAs can take the form of policies, processes and strategies. GTAs with men and boys are those that go beyond merely 'engaging men and boys', or educating or raising awareness of men and boys on a particular issue, and seek to create a fundamental shift in attitudes and behaviors related to masculinity and what it means to be a man in a particular society.

Challenges and opportunities of advocating as an Alliance

The increased attention among policy makers for a men and masculinities lens brings opportunities for advocacy for MenEngage Alliance, but also raises key challenges.

First and foremost, the Alliance aims to be a true ally to women's rights, LGBTQI rights, youth rights, and other social justice movements. This means that any influence in policy spaces should be used to advocate for inclusion of key feminist asks in resolutions on engaging men and boys. From the outset, advocacy efforts must ensure the Alliance is never the primary voice, but plays a supporting role to these movements.

The Alliance needs to better understand the agendas of other social justice movements and put its weight behind them, adding men and masculinities perspectives when relevant. The presence and expertise of women's rights, youth rights, and LGBTQI rights within the Alliance is a vital part of the diversity of the network and crucial to ensuring accountability in advocacy efforts. Further supporting and listening to colleagues from a broad range of backgrounds and experiences on these issues is an important area identified by members of the Alliance.

While the Alliance advocates from – and has as a core mission concerned with – a men and masculinities approach, many members of the Alliance are critically aware of the risk of reinforcing gender as a binary framework. More needs to be done to unpack binary notions of gender and sexuality in the language and thinking across MenEngage Alliance, and strengthening LGBTQI inclusion, to reflect the complexity, instability and fluidity of 'gender'.

Since effective advocacy must be informed by accurate information, there is a growing need to map existing national level policies that are inclusive of engaging men and boys, as well as the efficacy of such policies, and monitor the efficacy of such policies where possible. Overall, the Alliance needs to establish what evidence it has – and what research is still missing – to support its continued advocacy efforts.

Connecting global discussions to local contexts and priorities

Connecting high-level political advocacy work with regional priorities, and ensuring ownership of issues and action at local level, is a challenge. Many regional networks recognize the need to develop their skills and capacity to be more effective advocates in their respective policy spaces. For many members working at national and regional levels, there is a considerable gap in terms of disseminating the political underpinning of the Alliance's work.

Members from across the Alliance are bridging this gap through the formation of an Advocacy Working Group. The group links local and regional advocacy efforts towards a unified, multi-level and cross-regional approach involving members and partners. It will address the need for regionally specific capacity approaches to joint advocacy that take into consideration the policy structures and institutions at regional level such as the African Union, or European Union – or recognizing the absence of such intergovernmental bodies in many regions. This collaborative effort aims to make political advocacy work more effective, as well as more accountable to women's rights and feminist movements.

Increased international credibility does not automatically give MenEngage Alliance or its members more credibility at local level, either in policy spaces or in building relationships with local women's rights and social justice movements. Any credibility at a global level must be translated to local level in order to carry out policy advocacy effectively.

While regional and country level networks are free to identify the issues relevant for them to engage in on a policy level, some members cannot advocate in their own contexts due to legal repercussions and closed or oppressive regimes. However, where some must use less publicly vocal approaches to ensure their safety, others in the Alliance can speak out on behalf of those who cannot.



Bafana Khumalo, Director, Sonke Gender Justice

“The Alliance needs to further politicize its agenda. This means considering any issue that is a feminist issue as a MenEngage Alliance issue, and contributing with the value addition of a men and masculinities lens.”

– Pamela Saavedra, Sociologist and researcher of men and masculinities, Cultura Salud, Chile



Expanding the political agenda

The scope of the Alliance’s agenda at an international level needs to be defined broadly to advance progress on contested issues. Advocacy efforts are not yet reaching crucial issues such as comprehensive sexuality education, and creating an enabling environment for policies supporting diversity and full inclusivity of all sexual orientations and gender identities.

When it comes to broader structural issues such as militarism, macroeconomics and climate change, the Alliance is yet to find its collective voice. Yet, as a network, there is a recognition of the need to advocate for a ‘men and masculinities lens’ on complex macro-level, structural issues.

Like any other area of the Alliance’s work, advocacy must take an intersectional approach. That means not only understanding the idea that people have multiple identities, but centring the agenda on those whose identities are on the margins. This also includes meaningful participation of those on the margins to define the advocacy agenda. For more on intersectionality, see page 13.

Partners from MenEngage Latin America describing human rights abuses of the Nicaraguan government, and how the Alliance can stand in solidarity with civil society actors facing repression, fear, and violence around the world.



Responding to fast-developing issues in real time

Some issues unfold and develop very quickly. In times of urgent need, the Alliance recognises the importance of standing in solidarity with fellow activists and, where necessary, to hold people and organizations to account.

Following several cases that required quick, decisive responses or actions, MenEngage Alliance members identified a need to develop a 'rapid response mechanism'. The aim of the mechanism is to generate rapid support and solidarity from across the network and its partners when significant issues occur and as they unfold. Such a mechanism would have potential to mobilize organizations from around the world to draw attention to urgent issues, calling on relevant governments, agencies, and other global players to act. In some urgent cases, there may be cause for the Alliance itself to intervene, such as where a members' safety and security is at risk.

The Alliance envisions that a rapid response mechanism would be used in a number of situations including; when there is a threat to the security and safety of members; in solidarity with human rights defenders who are being targeted and oppressed; and when there is a need to hold each other or relevant organizations accountable (for example in cases of sexual misconduct or abuse of power).

Working in partnership with – and in support of – other social justice movements and human rights defenders, the Alliance is working to put the rapid response mechanism into action.

Participants list



Members representing regional MenEngage Alliance networks

Name	Nationality	Job title	Organization	MenEngage Alliance network
Alvaro Campos Guadamuz	Costa Rica	Founder President	Instituto WEM, Costa Rica	MenEngage Latin America
Anthony Keedi	Lebanon/USA	Masculinities Technical Advisor	ABAAD, Lebanon	MenEngage Lebanon Network
Bilquis Tahira	Pakistan	Executive Director	Shirakat, Pakistan	Board member & Coordinator of MenEngage South Asia
Desmond Lunga	Botswana	Director	Men and boys for Gender Equality, Botswana	Board member & Coordinator of MenEngage Africa
Douglas Urritia Mendoza	Nicaragua	Associate Director	Puntos de Encuentro, Nicaragua	Board member & Coordinator of MenEngage Latin America
Francisco Aguayo	Chile	Director/co-director	Fundación Cultura Salud, Chile	MenEngage Latin America
Isabella Esquivel	Mexico	Consultant	Cómplices por la Igualdad, Mexico	MenEngage Latin America
Jan Reynders	Netherlands	Independent Consultant, Netherlands	WO=MEN	MenEngage Europe
Joseph Herron	Jamaica	Educator and Youth Development Specialist	-	Caribbean Men's Action Network (CariMAN)
Leila Younis	Croatia	President	Status M, Croatia	MenEngage Europe
Lena Wallquist	Sweden	International Program Manager	MÅN, Sweden	Board member & Co-coordinator of MenEngage Europe
Pamela Saavedra	Chile	Sociologist and researcher of men and masculinities	Fundación Cultura Salud, Chile	MenEngage Latin America
Phillip Carlisle	Dominica	President	CariMAN Dominica	CariMAN
Rus Funk	USA	Independent Consultant, USA	-	Board member & North American MenEngage Network (NAMEN) Representative to Global Board
Shane Joseph	Canada	Independent Consultant, Canada	-	NAMEN & Alt. Representative to Global Board
Tonya Lovelace	USA	CEO	Women of Color Network Inc, USA	NAMEN
Tyrone Buckmire	Grenada	Executive Director	Grenada Fund for Conservation	Board member & Chairperson of CariMAN

At-Large members

Name	Nationality	Job title	Organization	MenEngage Alliance network
Bafana Khumalo	South Africa	Director-Strategic Partnership	Sonke Gender Justice	Board member, MenEngage Global Board
Humberto Carolo	Canada	Executive Director	White Ribbon Canada	Co-Chair, MenEngage Global Board
Jameel Zamir	India	Acting Director of Programs	International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF)	Board member, MenEngage Global Board
Lydia Mungherera	Uganda	Director-Mama's Club, Uganda	ATHENA Network	Board member, MenEngage Global Board
Preston Mitchum	USA	International Policy Analyst	Advocates for Youth	Board member, MenEngage Global Board
Tim Shand	UK	Vice President of Advocacy & Partnership	Promundo	Board member (alt.), MenEngage Global Board
Urvashi Gandhi	India	Deputy Director Advocacy & Knowledge Management	Breakthrough India	Board member, MenEngage Global Board

Global Secretariat Team

Name	Nationality	Job title	Organization	MenEngage Alliance network
Jennifer Bruno	USA	Global advocacy coordinator	Global Secretariat, MenEngage Alliance	
Joni van de Sand	Netherlands	Global director	Global Secretariat, MenEngage Alliance	Secretary, MenEngage Global Board
Laxman Belbase	Nepal	Global networks manager	Global Secretariat, MenEngage Alliance	
Oswaldo Montoya	Nicaragua	Networks associate	Global Secretariat, MenEngage Alliance	
Sinead Nolan	Ireland	Program officer	Global Secretariat, MenEngage Alliance	
Tom Hornbrook	UK	Communications coordinator	Global Secretariat, MenEngage Alliance	

We envision a world where all people are equal and free from discrimination – a world in which gender justice and human rights are recognized, promoted and protected

The MenEngage Global Alliance works to transform unequal power relations and patriarchal systems by:

Transforming masculinities;

Working with men and boys through intersectional feminist approaches;

Building inclusive Alliances from local to regional to global levels; and

Fostering joint actions in partnership with women's rights, gender- and other social justice movements.

Find out more about MenEngage Alliance at www.menengage.org



MenEngage Alliance
working with men and boys for gender equality