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

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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

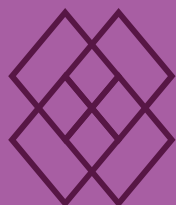
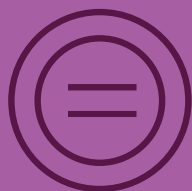


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1. Overview

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., & Heemskerk, 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 decentring 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 Karadzhov (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. Karadzhov 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.



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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):

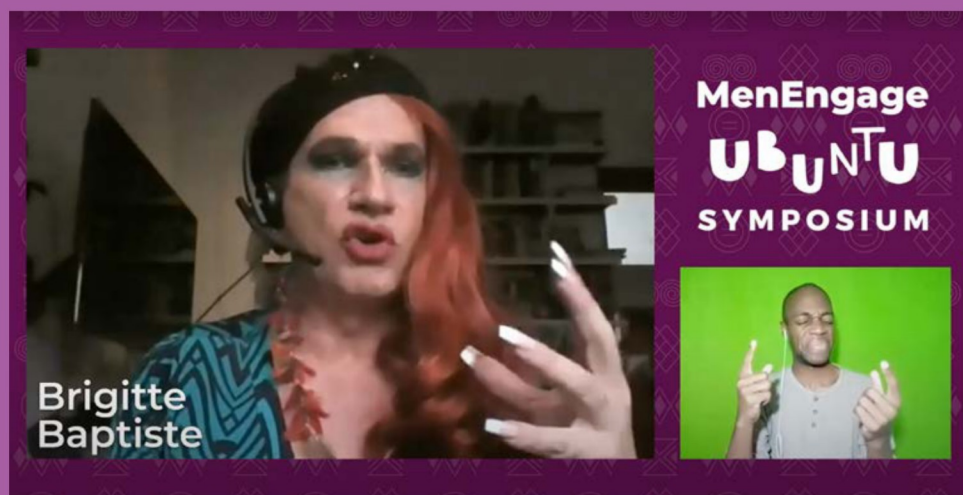
During the genocide, there was a slogan of being a man, as if being a man means killing as many Tutsis as possible. So, again, this international gender equality survey, the IMAGES, shows that there is a link between the violence of adult men against their female partners.

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 Slegh, H., Barker, G., & Levkov, 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., & Slegh, 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/10.1177/10777801212474874>

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/BkkCwctw6WzsbBjBxSpPsNg/?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/d1b7gsqcbcbq530/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 Bandedereho (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.). *Bandedereho / 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 Chanthavaysouk (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. Chanthavaysouk 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](#)

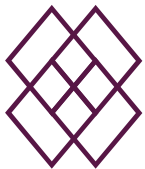
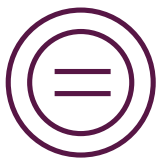


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