

# Positioning GAGE evidence on masculinities

A mapping of stakeholders and  
policies relating to the engagement of  
boys and men for gender equality



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# Executive summary

Engaging boys and men in development and humanitarian interventions provides an important counterpoint for activities that seek to promote gender equality by addressing the needs and interests of women and girls only. The argument for such a collective approach can be made on the basis of established thinking that gender equality is achieved on the basis of a progressive interchange of social relations between girls, boys, women and men, as well as programme interventions that rely on the participation of men and boys in order to be efficient and effective (Kabeer and Subrahmanian, 1996; Barker et al., 2007). Furthermore, there are arguably three major foundational areas through which interventions focused on masculinities have gained traction. The first arises from the 2001 Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS; the second is the 2013 Call for Action, promoted by the MenEngage Alliance for the post-2015 development agenda; the third is the Human Rights Council Resolution 35/10 (2017), which unpacks the importance of 'Accelerating efforts to eliminate violence against women: engaging men and boys in preventing and responding to violence against all women and girls'.

This brief summarises research undertaken to determine the range of key players and policy opportunities in engaging men and boys in promoting gender equality (see Annex for in-depth data and country-level data). The mapping of associated stakeholders and policies provides guidance to researchers, policy-makers and practitioners seeking to engage on subject matter relating to the inclusion of men and boys in interventions aimed at gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. The research findings show that there are gradual but noticeable shifts in global and national

conversations on how best to engage men and boys over the past few decades. These shifts have been supported by the development of normative standards (particularly over the past 15 years) such as the Human Rights Council Resolution 35/10 (2017), and also the various standards mapped in this study, but also by a handful of influential actors who have driven the agenda at global and national levels.

This expansion in the prominence of discourse on the engagement of men and boys in the gender equality and women's empowerment space has nonetheless garnered concerns over competition for resources in an already constrained operating environment. As this brief explains, these shifts are largely occurring in four dominant policy or thematic areas: violence and bodily integrity; sexual and reproductive health (SRH); shared reproductive roles; and peace and security. In terms of action, the findings demonstrate the need to:

- better disseminate and promote global normative frameworks and policy documents relating to men and boys at the national level to encourage North-South and South-South partnerships;
- address the significant demand for evidence on the part of practitioners that robustly measures behaviour change among men and boys;
- understand that the sharing of knowledge in the 'masculinities space' takes place primarily through formal, large-scale and infrequent events such as global symposia, as well as through informal (intra-agency) networking;
- define and expand ways to ensure accountability to the principles of feminism in male-oriented organisations.

# Introduction

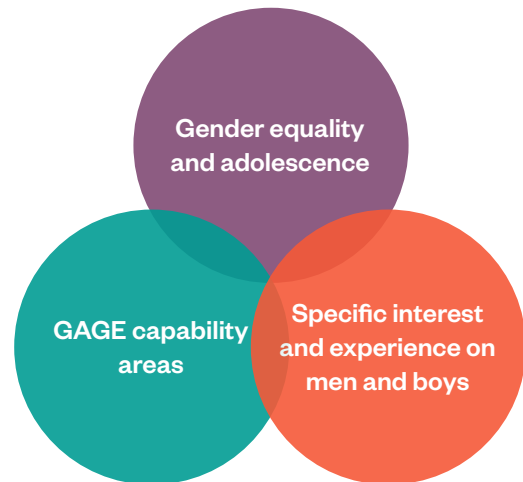
Programmes that engage men and boys in gender equality efforts have increased significantly in the past 10–15 years. This increase can be attributed to a growing recognition of the potential of engaging men and boys in efforts to redress gender inequalities and shift harmful gender norms.

To map the opportunities that are possible through engaging men and boys, the Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) research programme conducted a review of key stakeholders and policy discussions.<sup>1</sup> The mapping was framed by five central questions:

- Where have we been, and where are we going with respect to policy debates on engaging men and boys to promote gender equality?
- Where can development actors participate in the global policy landscape with respect to engaging men and boys?
- On what basis or thematic area do development actors participate in the global policy landscape with respect to engaging men and boys?
- What are the main policy strengths, weaknesses and opportunities in focusing on men and boys?
- How can actors working toward gender equality facilitate further engagement with men and boys through the production and targeting of evidence to help change policy or practice?

These questions are addressed in relation to the six GAGE capability domains<sup>2</sup> in a number of different contexts (see Figure 1). The mapping targeted GAGE focus countries (Ethiopia, Rwanda, Nepal, Bangladesh, Jordan and Lebanon), associated regions and the global policy environment.

**Figure 1: Policy and stakeholder mapping areas**



## Where have we been, and where are we going with respect to policy debates on engaging men and boys to promote gender equality?

International fora and implementation of key mechanisms such as the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the 1975–1985 UN Decade for Women put gender equality centre stage on the global agenda and intensified grassroots pressure for further change. More than four decades ago, the first World Conference on Women, in Mexico City, highlighted the influence of gender norms and power differentials in social and health outcomes for women and girls. As a result, the negative impact of harmful gender norms on the health and well-being of women and girls (and especially their sexual and reproductive health) has long been the focus of gender programming.

However, shifts in the conversation about comprehensively addressing the impact of gender equality for girls and women, or the achievement of rights for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) youth, have increasingly stressed the parallel importance of tackling the complex, hegemonic masculine identities underlying the behaviours of boys and men. As one key

<sup>1</sup> We conducted a remote portfolio review of 41 actors, organisations and networks (iteratively highlighted as key players working on the engagement of men and boys). Subsequently, we undertook 12 key informant interviews with individuals representing a sample of these organisations, together with a survey targeted at 15 other individuals.

<sup>2</sup> GAGE's six capability domains are: education and learning; bodily integrity and freedom from violence; health, sexual and reproductive health and nutrition; psychosocial well-being; voice and agency; and economic empowerment.

informant explained, by explicitly articulating the role of men in reproduction, the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) held in Cairo, and the summary report that followed, marked a change in how the development sector engaged with masculine gender norms in the field of SRH. Soon afterwards, the United Nations (UN) Family Planning Report highlighted the importance of SRH programmes for all people in promoting 'a different interpretation of masculinity, replacing the one based on domination to one defined by shared responsibility' (United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), 1995).

In 1995, the Beijing Platform for Action stressed the precondition of constructive engagement of men and boys for achieving gender equality and 'people-centred development' (UN, 1995a). This agreement on a detailed plan to affirm the human rights of women and girls set the base for further international action on issues ranging from economic exclusion of women to girls' education – seen as a watershed moment for broadening the conversation on the scope of action required to reverse harmful gender norms.

More broadly, male engagement has also gained attention with the viral UN-led HeForShe movement in 2014. This high-profile initiative focused on collecting 'commitments' of solidarity with the principles of gender equality, aiming to bolster men and boys as agents of change in challenging negative stereotypes and behaviours. One of the main vehicles supporting the HeForShe movement is the IMPACT 10x10x10 framework, which engages 10 heads of state, 10 chief executive officers (CEOs) and 10 university presidents to advance gender equity via disbursement of relevant research grants, scholarships, and corporate champions.

The above coincided with the shift from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015. Although neither set of goals mention male engagement specifically, the SDGs recognise the crucial role of gender equality in achieving most, if not all, the other SDGs – thus highlighting the importance of gender equality as a central aspect of development. Nevertheless, in comparison to the detailed 2013 Call for Action (MenEngage Alliance et al., 2013), the SDGs fall noticeably short of including cross-cutting or standalone recognition of men's and boys' strategic interests in promoting gender equality (ibid.).

Nevertheless, although significant evidence points to the efficacy of male engagement programmes, there are some key concerns about engaging men and boys in gender equality. For instance, with funding for gender

equality programming already limited, some women's rights organisations have expressed concern about dedicating entire programmes to targeting men and boys rather than women and girls. In one sense, this could be interpreted as perpetuating gender inequity. In light of this, many practitioners and scholars recognise the need for male engagement programmes to work with and maintain an 'accountability lens' to women's rights organisations, rather than compete for limited funding (Peacock and Barker, 2014).

These important issues are being addressed as male engagement organisations partner with and learn from women's movements. In particular, the MenEngage Alliance has dedicated a section of its website to framing the 'accountability lens', while providing tools for organisations that want to work on male engagement and incorporate it into their programming and practice. MenEngage defines 'accountability' as:

- being critically aware of one's own power and privilege, and being open to criticism;
- taking action to address personal and institutional practices that go against our principles of gender equality and human rights, acknowledging any harm caused and making amends;
- respecting and promoting women's leadership in the gender equality movement;
- creating structures of consultation and partnerships with women's rights organisations (MenEngage Alliance, no date).

Finally, global evidence suggests that male engagement programmes that use a 'gender transformative' approach will be more successful in changing gender attitudes and behaviours (Barker et al., 2007). There is an increasing appreciation that engaging men and boys – as opposed to merely involving them – can promote shifts toward a view of gender relations based on gender equality and human rights. Furthermore, transformative approaches are increasingly recognising the need to understand and reflect critically on the complex and deeply rooted social constructions of male identities – i.e. how men experience different but interconnected consequences from internalising traditional gender norms. Because gender is relational, men and boys are seen as active participants in either perpetuating or redressing gender inequalities, voluntarily or involuntarily; they should therefore take responsibility for their role through careful self-reflection and intentional behaviour change.

Taken further, 'gender synchronisation' arguments posit that a 'transformation of deeply held norms requires the participation of all those who uphold and live out that set of interlinking values and expectations' (Greene and Perlson, 2016). This approach is premised on five broad principles:

- Promoting the intentional intersection of gender transformative work with men and with women.
- Engaging both sexes in challenging harmful constructions of masculinity and femininity.
- Equalising the balance of power between men and women in order to ensure gender equality and transform social norms that lead to gender-related vulnerabilities.
- Viewing all actors in society in relation to each other.
- Identifying and creating shared values that promote human rights, non-violence, equality and gender justice.

A recent update on the gender synchronisation debate recognises diverse sexualities as an aspect of gender norms, which circles back to the importance of intersectionality in male engagement activities (Greene and Perlson, 2016; Acker, 2006).<sup>3</sup>

### Where can development actors participate in the global policy landscape with respect to engaging men and boys in promoting gender equality?

At the global level, recommendations for engaging men and boys in achieving gender equality were first taken up explicitly in the global agenda in 1994 during the ICPD. These recommendations gradually took hold and were subsequently expanded in a series of key UN documents.

At the Cairo ICPD (5–13 September 1994)<sup>4</sup> we found a total of 15 instances where the engagement of men and boys was explicitly mentioned as a strategy to achieve its goals, mainly in relation to SRH rights, education, and sharing of family responsibilities. This was to be achieved through (formal and informal) education programmes, awareness-raising campaigns, appropriate policies and legislation, involvement of the media, as well as increasing scientific research.

Violence against women and children, as well as early childhood education and the need to include male responsibilities in family life so as to prevent discriminatory

The ICPD is comprehensive, and stresses the need for member states and civil society to take action to 'emphasize men's shared responsibility and promote their active involvement in responsible parenthood, sexual and reproductive behaviour, including family planning; prenatal, maternal and child health; prevention of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV; prevention of unwanted and high-risk pregnancies; shared control and contribution to family income, children's education, health and nutrition; and recognition and promotion of the equal value of children of both sexes' at the level of the household, work and schools.

norms from developing, were not core messages of the ICPD document but were mentioned. There was also a specific emphasis on sexuality, sexual education, and availability of SRH services for adolescents of both sexes, who are seen as a key demographic to foster more equal gender relations, increase sexual and reproductive well-being, and guarantee women's SRH rights. One innovative recommendation from the ICPD that was not found in any other policy document involved conducting research on male attitudes, including on 'sexuality and gender roles and relationships in different cultural settings', 'sexual behaviour' and 'male attitudes towards sexuality and procreation... and gender roles', as well as the 'development of new methods for regulation of fertility for men'.

A complementary document with recommendations on the further implementation of the ICPD was developed in 1999. While it has a lesser focus on the engagement of men and boys, it still makes mention of it in several ways (UNFPA, 1999). For instance, the document highlighted the need for men to 'take responsibility for their own reproductive and sexual behaviour and health'. There was also a call to the sector to conduct further research on 'men's sexuality, their masculinity and their reproductive behaviour'. Another new aspect included in the complementary document to the Cairo ICPD was the recommendation that the 'provision of services to meet men's reproductive and sexual health needs should not prejudice reproductive and sexual health services for women'. This might be interpreted as an early sign of concerns that the inclusion of men in the global agenda on gender equality would dilute women's rights and the availability of services and programmes to women and girls.

<sup>3</sup> Acker (2006: 443) defines intersectionality as the 'mutual reproduction of class, gender and racial relations of inequality'.

<sup>4</sup> Its resulting Programme of Action is the steering document for the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).



The Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development (1995) stresses the need to promote men's full responsibility in family life, to create harmonious and mutually beneficial partnerships between women and men in sharing family and employment responsibilities, in order to create the conditions for 'sustained economic growth and sustainable development' and guarantee women's 'full participation in the labour market and their equal access to employment' (UN, 1995b). With women's empowerment and gender equality underlying these statements, the case for men's equal participation in family life and care work is framed in a utilitarian manner (for the benefit of the economy).

In stating that the signatories are determined to 'encourage men to participate fully in all actions towards equality' (ibid.: 4 para 25) the Beijing Declaration and, in particular, the Beijing Platform for Action (1995) unmistakably mark a watershed moment in engaging men and boys for gender equality, creating the foundation for subsequent global policy documents in this area. The inclusion of the engagement of men and boys in the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) is particularly significant as it is one of the most comprehensive documents on gender equality, with clearly defined commitments under 12 critical areas of concern that are still an important source of guidance for the global agenda on gender equality.

The BPfA's mission statement notes that gender equality is for the benefit of all and that it can only be achieved with the principle of shared responsibilities between men and women in all spheres of life, and with the active participation of women and men, girls and boys. 'The principle of shared power and responsibility should be established between women and men at home, in the workplace and in the wider national and international communities'. It also notes 'that women share common concerns that can be addressed only by working together and in partnership with men towards the common goal of gender equality'. This is significant insofar as all subsequent recommendations in the BPfA implicitly also apply to men and boys.

The Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS (2001) stresses the importance of encouraging the active involvement of men and boys to reduce HIV prevalence among young men and women, and challenge gender stereotypes and attitudes, and gender inequalities, in relation to HIV/AIDS (UN, 2001). This statement marks a renewed commitment to engage men and boys in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

From the BPfA, the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) has gradually taken up the engagement of men and boys in almost all sessions since its CSW 40 in 1996 (MenEngage Alliance, 2018). This is significant, since CSW is a commission of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and is one of the principal UN organs – together with UN Women – responsible for promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women. The main output of each CSW is a series of agreed conclusions that summarise what has been achieved, what more needs to be done, and ongoing gaps and challenges. These agreed conclusions also contain a set of concrete, non-binding recommendations for action by member states, which can provide an opportunity for civil society organisations (CSOs), non-government organisations (NGOs), academia, and research and funding organisations to work with their national governments to deliver positive change on gender equality.

The MenEngage Alliance has identified some of these agreed conclusions that relate to engaging men and boys (MenEngage Alliance, 2018). One significant milestone in pushing the engagement of men and boys further up the policy agenda was the 48th CSW session in 2004, which focused on the 'the role of men and boys in achieving gender equality'. Not only does this reflect greater momentum in efforts to engage men and boys within the global agenda, but it also means there are wide-ranging options for how to engage men and boys effectively in advancing gender equality and promoting women's empowerment.

The latest breakthrough in pushing the engagement of men and boys further up the global agenda was the passing of the Human Rights Council (HRC) Resolution Res/35/10, 'Accelerating efforts to eliminate violence against women: engaging men and boys in preventing and responding to violence against all women and girls' (2017). The HRC, created in 2006, is the principal forum within the UN system for resolving questions related to human rights; it emits resolutions, which although not legally binding, imply strong political commitments for member states. Sponsored by the government of Canada, Resolution 35 may mark a global turning point in the engagement of men and boys; however, it is too early to assess its outcomes, as well as the global momentum of efforts to eradicate violence against women and girls.

A direct outcome of Resolution 35 was the request to produce a 'Review of promising practices and lessons learned, existing strategies and United Nations and other

initiatives to engage men and boys in promoting and achieving gender equality'. This review was presented at the 38th HRC session and has recently been published (UN General Assembly, 2018). The findings provide a detailed overview of the global framework on engaging men and boys, as well as an assessment of existing strategies to successfully engage men and boys in achieving gender equality. Key strategies include changing harmful practices and prejudice in the areas of SRH rights, violence against women and girls, and gender-based violence, working with key stakeholders such as religious and traditional leaders, fathers and teachers.

The recommendation to increase 'financial, technical and human resources' for engaging men and boys stands out among the seven recommendations in the review. There is also a strong emphasis on the need to collaborate closely and form partnerships with women's organisations and feminist groups, to utilise their experience in working on gender issues and gender equality, and to avoid diluting or diverting resources for work on women's empowerment and women's rights.

The review also mentions LGBT+ people – who were overlooked by other policy documents. Particularly important are the explicit mention of 'non-binary persons' as well as the recommendation to promote non-violent, equal and inclusive relationships that 'must be inclusive of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons'. Gender-based discrimination and gender-based violence, and homophobic and transphobic violence are closely interlinked, and unless both are tackled systematically, neither one will be eradicated completely.

In terms of civil society engagements, two of the most influential global policy documents are the Rio de Janeiro Declaration on Engaging Men and Boys on Achieving Gender Equality, and the Delhi Declaration and Call to Action on Men and Boys for Gender Justice (both convened by MenEngage Alliance and Promundo). Both are the result of two global symposiums on men and boys held in 2009 and 2014 respectively, in which CSOs from more than 80 countries participated. The declarations have been widely circulated among NGOs worldwide and provide a global reference point for actors working in this area. The Rio de Janeiro Declaration collects all previously existing global commitments to the engagement of men and boys by UN bodies. The MenEngage strategy was remarkably successful in advocating for the engagement of men and boys to take a more central stage in the global policy agenda, including at the UN.

As well as making a call to action, the Rio Declaration also defines an extensive list of areas for action, including: violence against women; violence against children; violence among men and boys; violence in armed conflict; gender and the global political economy; men and boys as caregivers; sexual and gender diversities and sexual rights; men's and boys' gender-related vulnerabilities and health needs; sexual exploitation; SRH and rights; HIV and AIDS; youth and the education sector; recognition of diversity; environment; and strengthening the evidence base.

As for the SDGs, SDG 5 (achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls) does not explicitly refer to engaging men and boys to achieve this goal, as they are not mentioned in any indicators. This is a major policy gap in the global normative agenda.

### **On what basis or thematic area do development actors participate in the global policy landscape with respect to engaging men and boys in promoting gender equality?**

The evidence shows that there is a broad consensus regarding the key actors involved in engaging men and boys for gender equality, in what is a relatively limited and clear-cut operational space. The primary interface at the global level is the MenEngage Alliance, with more than 700 CSOs as members. It is mainly active in Africa and South Asia, and, to a lesser extent (formally), in the Middle East and Arab region. Promundo is an associated lynchpin organisation, providing multiple programming, evidence-building, and convening roles at global level, including within GAGE focus countries. There is also a small selection of bilateral actors – the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad), and Global Affairs Canada (GAC) – who are relatively prominent in global dialogue on engaging men and boys, although their substantive programming presence in this area has been challenging to locate.<sup>5</sup> In addition, anecdotal evidence gained from various key informants suggests that there are critical geographic gaps in terms of programming or advocacy presence in South East Asia and the Pacific, with a particularly noticeable gap in West Africa.

The two main areas of programming on engaging men and boys, from the perspective of the GAGE capability

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<sup>5</sup> Key informant interviews, 2019. Corresponding evidence from programme reviews or annual reports does not provide sufficient depth to confirm or deny this statement

domains, are: (1) bodily autonomy, integrity, and freedom from violence; and (2) SRH, health, and nutrition. Together, these two capability areas cater for more than half of the observed and self-reported activity among stakeholders reviewed. The least reflected capability areas are those focusing on economic empowerment, education and learning, and voice and agency. These findings are largely in keeping with those presented by Marcus et al. (2018) in their rigorous review of evaluations of programming aimed at engaging men and boys. However, it is important to note that these capability areas are constructs, and that programming areas relating to men's and boys' engagement can be framed beyond the GAGE capability areas – e.g. in terms of contexts, stakeholders or change pathways (as per the GAGE theory of change).

An increase in evidence-sharing networks is seen as a priority by male engagement actors – particularly on issues such as education, bodily integrity and psycho-social well-being. The voice and agency and economic empowerment themes were less of a priority.

There is an active community of actors meeting opportunistically at national and regional levels on men's and boys' engagement, while global-level meetings and events are sporadic. As a 'network of networks', the MenEngage Alliance provides the most structured forum for actors to learn, influence and develop partnerships for work on engaging men and boys for gender equality. While there are some regional and country gaps in these networks, there are also complementary fora linked to specific GAGE themes – such as the Sexual Violence Research Initiative (bodily integrity), Family Planning 2020 (SRH rights), the Interagency Gender Working Group's Male Engagement Task Force (SRH rights), and MenCare (a global fatherhood campaign active in more than 50 countries across five continents). More significantly, the major or 'watershed' interfaces for these actors remain either irregular OSW events, or the five-year rolling global symposia organised by MenEngage (Rio de Janeiro 2009, Delhi 2014, and the forthcoming event in Beirut in 2020).

Much of the demand for insights into what works for engaging men and boys for gender equality comes from CSOs, NGOs, and a small handful of bilateral agencies. However, there is still no major broader normative agenda or framework (such as the SDGs or UN resolutions) demanding a steady stream of evidence in this area. This dynamic is also present at the national level, where (perhaps with the exception of Rwanda, Lebanon and Bangladesh) there is likely to be limited demand by

government ministries for an increased or enhanced evidence base on 'what works' for engaging men and boys.

### **What are the main policy strengths, weaknesses and opportunities focusing on men and boys and engaging them in promoting gender equality?**

Across global, regional and national contexts, there are generally four predominant bodies of policy statements or activities taking place to engage men and boys in gender equality. As discussed in the Annex on stakeholder mapping and policy mapping, there appear to be two dominant policy areas: bodily integrity and SRH rights. In addition, policies focusing on shared reproductive roles and on peace and security represent two other streams of ongoing work. Notably, these four streams together coincide closely with the priorities outlined in the MenEngage 2016–2020 global strategy.

The policy landscape relating to the engagement of men and boys is dominated by joint advocacy mechanisms and relative short-termism, rather than commitments to longer-term advocacy agendas. Our evidence shows that actors working at the global and national levels are constrained by a limited range of global compacts and normative commitments through which they can systematically promote dialogue on how to engage men and boys. At the global level, there are few bilateral and multilateral 'champions' committed to promoting a stronger focus on masculinities in policy dialogue – although GAC and Sida are notable exceptions. Moreover, several key informants noted that policy debates focusing on the engagement of men and boys prove risky if they are not framed collectively and working alongside another organisation focusing on addressing women's and girls' issues.

Furthermore, several survey respondents and key informant interviewees urged a shift towards a long-term commitment to male engagement in policy dialogues. One survey respondent stated that funding is 'not always tailored to build the local capacity needed to sustain [long-term, sustainable partnerships]'. Another stated that there should be a move beyond 'one-off partnerships' towards 'long-term collaborations for sustainable, scalable change'.

The policy mapping at national level revealed a key weakness, being a lack of clear articulation about how policies were interpreted and applied in relation to global normative agreements. Where documentation was available, there was a tendency for policy statements to either

overlook connections with global normative standards or fail to present a narrative on how they applied to individual contexts. In this sense, there is a need to better disseminate and promote global normative frameworks and policy documents on engagement of men and boys at the national level to encourage local–global articulation. This would also significantly contribute to the available resources, as an advocacy tool for CSOs and a guiding document for policy-makers. Special emphasis should be put on the BPfA, the agreed conclusions of the 48th CSW, as well as the recent HRC resolution 35 and the ensuing report.

There are several discrete policy opportunities relating to the engagement of men and boys, although further investigation is required to determine their specific entry points and timelines. At the regional level, the African Union is developing a draft strategy (2018–2023), which includes components on mobilising the support of men and boys for ‘wider societal changes’, while the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is finalising its regional Action Plan to End Child Marriage – and has apparently constructed tailored social mobilisation training toolkits that can be reviewed in relation to their content, implementation and impact.

The biggest forthcoming policy opportunity for global-level actors on engaging men and boys in promoting gender equality is the Lebanon 2020 symposium (the third global symposium to date to focus on engaging men and boys for gender equality). The agenda is currently in the early stages of development through conversations with MenEngage partner networks and ABAAD,<sup>6</sup> which suggests there is still significant room for stakeholders to direct its course and framing in relation to critical evidence and policy gaps.

### How can actors working toward gender equality facilitate further engagement with men and boys through the production and targeting of evidence?

The GAGE consortium, through its theory of change, seeks to promote its emerging evidence base with policy-makers, practitioners and analysts in three main areas: (1) by using evidence to improve policies and interventions; (2) to access and engage with evidence on what works; and (3) to suggest the need for additional evidence where gaps

exist. These three activities can be used to frame the ways in which stakeholders engage men and boys in achieving gender equality.

In terms of using evidence, there is not enough evidence looking at behavioural change, only indicators of changing attitudes. There is significant demand for this, as well as for evidence demonstrating ways to take interventions and measurement to scale. Several respondents outlined the limitations of the current evidence base, including the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES) database,<sup>7</sup> in providing evidence of behavioural change among men and boys as a result of interventions to achieve wider gender equality. This perspective often included concerns that there is insufficient understanding of the pathways that enable men and boys to support more gender-equitable outcomes. Stakeholders can therefore seek to provide evidence-based insights on the relevant key pathways of change where men and boys have a critical role in advancing gender-equitable outcomes.<sup>8</sup> Established evidence bases on rigorous programme evaluations (see Marcus et al., 2018) and other emergent practice-based knowledge will be particularly useful.

With respect to accessing and engaging with evidence on what works, there is space to recognise the significant opportunity regarding the emergent evidence base among several actors working on engaging men and boys. The findings show that the sharing of knowledge in the ‘masculinities space’ mainly takes place through formal, large-scale and infrequent events such as the global symposia, and CSW, as well as through informal (intra-agency) networking. Actors could more routinely recognise these opportunities as major conduits for presenting best practices in relation to engaging men and boys – particularly through conversations with Promundo and the MenEngage Alliance. More concretely, the emerging agenda of the Lebanon 2020 symposium could be shaped to include particular evidence demands. The symposium also offers an opportunity to enter into the ‘masculinities space’ more formally, and to develop conversations that inform the consortium’s own strategic direction.

<sup>6</sup> The Resource Center for Gender Equality, based in Lebanon, is a organisation that aims to achieve gender equality as an essential condition to sustainable social and economic development in the MENA region.

<sup>7</sup> IMAGES measures men’s attitudes and practices – along with women’s opinions and reports of men’s practices – on a wide variety of topics related to gender equality.

<sup>8</sup> GAGE change pathways include the role of peers, types of community environment, role of schools and role models within schools, the potential of systems and services strengthening work for adolescents to be taken to scale, as well as how adolescents perceive services that affect them.



Adolescent boys in a dance group in Jordan © Nathalie Bertrams/GAGE 2019

Promundo in particular is shifting from a programming role to a convening, knowledge development and brokering role in the international arena. It is undertaking and promoting a number of rigorous evidence reviews and campaigns, including a synthesis of its IMAGES database, as well as a collaboration with MenCare to review data on caregiving developed across 12 countries. Interested parties can liaise with Promundo on these ventures to determine where overlaps exist that are mutually reinforcing to their research interests. In such a dialogue, or independently, actors could remind themselves of the outcomes of HRC resolution 35, which sought to bring about a 'Review of promising practices and lessons learned, existing strategies and other initiatives to engage men and boys in promoting and achieving gender equality'.

In order to constructively support actors working on engaging men and boys, stakeholders can seek to define how accountability is understood vis-à-vis women's rights and other gender equality-oriented organisations. The mapping shows that many gender equality NGOs have been concerned about funding being directed toward male engagement, as well as men's voices being raised in gender equality discussions. There is therefore a growing interest in defining ways to ensure accountability to the principles of feminism in male-oriented organisations. In response, MenEngage has put into place standards of accountability, as well as a toolkit to train practitioners, but there has been little research to expand the range of pathways or explore inadvertent effects that threaten this accountability at grassroots level.

In demanding evidence to fill gaps, stakeholders can recognise the suite of requests for improved and expanded evidence on engaging men and boys. As outlined earlier,

these requests may relate to behavioural change and taking interventions to scale, but there is also a noted interest for evidence on the experiences of younger boys, and their role in addressing gender inequality during adolescence. Other gaps include: the role of sports or other 'fun factor' elements to improve the engagement of boys in interventions; the question of addressing boys as 'brothers' or as 'peers' to improve intervention outcomes; the implications of high-risk behaviours on gender equality outcomes among adolescents; and the role of boys as influencers at the household level to enhance behaviour change.

Stakeholders can also recognise the observed lack of coherent dialogue and strategy relating to the engagement of men and boys among multilateral actors, particularly UN agencies. In this regard, the key entry points are via the dominant policy and implementation pathways in which the engagement of men and boys features prominently – namely, gender-based violence, SRH rights, and reproductive care roles (caregiving). In terms of gender-based violence, stakeholders can seek to develop space with major programme investments, such as the Spotlight Initiative, to explore the most effective means of engaging men and boys.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, focusing on male engagement via the Family Planning 2020 Global Partnership is another significant opportunity to be explored, particularly as discussions are already developed via the MenEngage Alliance network.

<sup>9</sup> The EU-funded (€500 million) Spotlight Initiative aims to respond to all forms of violence against women and girls, with a particular focus on domestic and family violence, sexual and gender-based violence, and harmful practices, femicide, trafficking in human beings, and sexual and economic (labour) exploitation.

# Annex

This annex presents findings of the policy mapping exercise by looking at GAGE focus countries in turn, as well as associated regional spheres.

## Mapping in GAGE focus countries

### Jordan

Jordan's focus on engaging men and boys for gender equality in national policies is limited, as the vast majority of policy statements analysed situate women and girls as the direct beneficiaries. There is a particular focus on women's economic empowerment through reforming labour policy, offering microcredit schemes, providing more vocational training for women, offering incentives for private sector companies to hire women and to provide flexible working arrangements for women. Overall, it is clear that Jordan largely views the engagement of men and boys through the lens of international frameworks and instruments.<sup>10</sup>

The engagement of men and boys is largely absent in policies on gender-based violence (GBV) and violence against women and girls (VAWG). This is notable, given that this policy area is typically one that does see significant references to men's and boys' engagement. The sole exception is a 2008 report, Status of Violence Against Women, by the National Council for Family Affairs, which aims to introduce programmes 'targeting men's responsibilities to prevent violence, focusing on types of prevention from the different kinds of violence, including sexual violence, sexual harassment, and violence within the family'. However, this policy statement is already dated, and it seems that it has not been given continuity in subsequent years.

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<sup>10</sup> No government policy shows a mention of engaging or involving men and boys as a strategy. All gender-related policies encountered in the sectors of health, education and labour target women and girls. There is also no mention of engagement of men and boys despite the fact that the National Council for Family Affairs Strategy 2009-2013 shows a main objective "To improve methods and tools for the protection of the Jordanian family and its members from violence". Furthermore, there is no mention of engagement of men and boys with respect to "The National Framework for Family Protection against Violence"

There are signs that men and masculinities have been taken into account in the legal sector, which presents both an opportunity and a challenge in terms of ongoing policy engagements. In an effort to distribute the gendered division of work more evenly, the Civil Service Code was amended in 2013 to grant male employees paternity leave and female employees a daily nursing hour for nine months following maternity leave. This institutional step towards taking fatherhood into consideration in policy may represent an opportunity to further utilise fatherhood as an entry point to engage men and boys in gender equality – although it should be noted that the Resource Center for Gender Equality (ABAAD) in Lebanon has consciously chosen to avoid this path.

There are a series of policy statements related to engaging men and boys on gender equality in documents directed at international bodies and instruments, such as CEDAW periodic reports, position papers, and other international commitments. In Jordan, there is a tendency for issuing policy statements on men's and boys' engagement in relation or in response to international bodies, treaties or commitments. However, these do not seem to necessarily translate into domestic policy statements.<sup>11</sup> For example, in its fifth National Periodic Report to the CEDAW committee, and in relation to the educational sector, Jordan pledged to '[forge] ahead with modernizing and developing curricula to become 100% gender-specific, removing any discrimination-based references that identify stereotypical roles for men and women...'. Another example is provided in Jordan's Position Paper on Beijing+20, which mentions 'develop[ing] training opportunities and awareness raising programs targeting youth and children (specifically young boys) to readdress cultural stereotypes and societal misconceptions on girls'. Also, Jordan's commitment to UN Women's StepItUp initiative states, as an objective, 'enhancing women's access to justice and promoting gender sensitization among judges in regular and Sharia courts, general prosecutors and judicial police' – institutions that are heavily (and in the case of Sharia courts, entirely) male-dominated.

Despite relative peace in recent decades, security is a priority sector for Jordan given the numerous tensions

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<sup>11</sup> As mentioned in the constraints and limitations section, the policy mapping at times saw itself severely affected by, first, frequent language barriers, as many documents are only available in Arabic; and second, by unavailability of information and policy documents on government websites, or technological faults.

and conflicts that have devastated the region, but we have not found any engagement policies in this sector nor with refugees, despite the policy and intervention opportunity this provides. The huge influx of refugees from the ongoing Syrian conflict has exacerbated tensions. Accordingly, there are a series of policy statements in relation to women and security in Jordan's National Action Plan for the Implementation of UN Security Council resolution 1325 that include increasing the engagement of men and boys. This is again in line with the previously mentioned tendency that policy statements on men's and boys' engagement are aligned with international frameworks and external instruments. The plan mainly focuses on awareness training of military personnel (overwhelmingly men), as well as religious and intellectual leaders, in gender equality, women's rights and women's role in peacekeeping. For instance, the plan aims to make 'staff of the security sector, especially at the decision-making level ... gender-aware and capable of identifying and responding to harassment, gender-based violence (GBV) and discrimination within the security sector'.

Furthermore, there is a focus to de-radicalise religious discourse by involving clergy 'to address misconceptions and stereotypes related to women, men, religion and traditions', as well as to 'support spaces for broadened religious discourse through the design of religious speeches and media messages targeting local communities' with the aim to question 'hyper-masculine messaging of radicalized groups, and emphasize women's role in peace and security, and in preventing violent extremism'. The latter two policy statements stand out insofar as they pursue a double aim by critically engaging masculinities: contributing to gender equality, but also tackling violent extremism, where toxic masculinities have been shown to play a central role (Ezekilov, 2017).

## Lebanon

The strategies of engaging men and boys in Lebanon largely focus on general awareness-raising, with particular emphasis on the educational sector and schools. While not dominant, there is some thematic focus on GBV.

The National Commission for Lebanese Women is the most active government body in engaging men and boys, and demonstrates a unique collection of media-oriented activities among the countries reviewed. The National Strategy for Women in Lebanon 2017–2019 mainstreams 'engaging the highest number possible of men' in its objective of raising awareness on GBV, which

includes 'preparing and publishing booklets simplifying relevant laws, and highlighting women's rights within them', 'developing and broadcasting TV spots on these laws and the procedures that need to be taken in case these were violated', 'conducting workshops and awareness sessions for women and girls on the forms of gender-based violence, and on the importance of reporting violence and the consequent procedures that need to be followed', 'encouraging playwrights, TV series and programs' script writers to address the issue of violence against women and girls, including the suffering of domestic workers and how to address it', and 'developing and broadcasting short documentaries on social media about gender-based violence, and its consequences and ways to address it'. Engaging men and boys in the production of media material, as well as targeting them with that material, is an innovative approach and unique among the selected countries.

The National Commission further emphasises awareness campaigns targeted at the 'importance of lifting the reservations on the articles 9 and 16 of the CEDAW Convention through the media and through workshops', specifically in various universities and student clubs to sensitise the general student population on 'the negative effects, such as the psychological and other consequences, of gender-based discrimination on men and boys, and women and girls'. This strategic inclusion of men and boys – both as targeted beneficiaries as well as a topic of conversation – is not included in other activities and plans of the policy document, such as the goal to increase 'public awareness on the forms of violence targeting women and girls, and on their results and consequences on women, families, and society'.

The 2017 UN Country Team document also focuses on awareness-raising – especially in schools – but with a greater focus on GBV and VAWG. The UNCT document focuses on supporting government entities in 'the production, analysis and adoption of knowledge products on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE), including engaging men and boys', and supporting 'national partners to provide improved and equitable prevention of and response to violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect including gender-based violence of boys and girls and women'. However, these programmatic goals of the UN country system are not followed up with corresponding policies at national level.

Similar to Jordan, a bill granting three days' paternity leave for fathers was passed in 2018, which points

towards a greater recognition of the importance of influencing gendered divisions of labour through policy reform. However, a respondent from ABAAD declared that the organisation preferred to disengage from this opportunity in favour of promoting approaches that more clearly and substantively engage men and boys as allies for gender equality. This comment was based on the limited corresponding work at national level to ensure that male parental leave leads to outcomes in terms of more equal care roles, or any direct impact on women's economic empowerment. Consequently, according to key informants, ABAAD's success in Lebanon is based on framing its activities from a feminist perspective, and downplaying its identity as an organisation focused on men's and boys' issues.

The Mental Health and Substance Use Strategy 2015–2020 uses progressive concepts and language to recognise most at-risk populations, but does not provide detailed reflection on the engagement of men and boys. While the document is an excellent strategy plan that tackles subjects that are traditionally taboo (such as homosexuality, transsexuality, HIV/AIDS, sexual violence, and suicide), it does not make mention of engaging men and boys. However, tackling social norms around masculinity and manhood in drug prevention programmes could be an important opportunity to engage men and boys in discussions about gender equality. Despite their greater burden of disease, studies have shown that young men and boys are more prone to engaging in risky behaviour than women and girls, and are less likely to seek health care than young women – a pattern that continues into adulthood, for a variety of factors related to social and self-imposed expectations of their gender (Marcell et al., 2002; Thom, 2003; Harrison et al., 2006; Hamilton and Mahalik, 2009).

No policy statements on refugees and internally displaced persons have been found that mention engaging men and boys, despite the policy and intervention opportunity this provides. As a respondent from ABADD stated, there are multiple opportunities for debates concerning masculinities to be raised in discussions of conflict and displacement interventions. Research undertaken by ABAAD et al. (2018) found that male refugees in particular have a higher tendency for depression, to show aggressive or confrontational conduct, or to engage in risky behaviour. The social and economic hardships faced by refugees, combined with constant situations of stress, often leads to a reconfiguration of

household dynamics, as well as increased tensions in the household. Because the role of 'breadwinner' and provider of security and income is so deeply entwined with normative notions of masculinity, a 'loss of this provider role both during the war and afterwards' – and sometimes to their wife and children – often means a 'loss of identity' for men, which results in increased aggressive behaviour towards their wives and children. According to a respondent from ABAAD, the changing gender roles in refugee, displacement and post-conflict settings are a policy opportunity for 'debunking long-held traditional notions and beliefs around what it means to be a man and a woman', yet programme interventions do not appear to recognise this opportunity.

## Occupied Palestinian Territories

Of all countries studied in the Middle East, Palestine had the narrowest approach with regards to engaging men and boys for gender equality. Similar to Jordan and Lebanon, the policies found were concentrated in a few documents, first and foremost the National Strategy to Combat Violence Against Women (2011–19).<sup>12</sup> The policy document distinguishes itself with its comprehensive vision of VAWG and the number of strategies to raise awareness among men and boys, including framing 'VAWG as a general and essential socio-economic issue' and targeting 'coffee shops and popular recreation sites attended by men'. Additionally, there is an effort to create 'an alternative image of men's role in dealing with women's rights' by encouraging men to 'protest against VAWG and to provide support to women survivors'. As the policy is currently being reformulated, there is an opportunity to review how men's and boys' engagement activities were operationalised in practice, and what learning can be taken forward into the forthcoming policy.

Apart from the Palestine Ministry of Women's Affairs' recognition of the gendered nature of drug abuse, the Education Ministry is the only other actor that has been found to loosely include a reference to the engagement of men and boys. The Education Strategic Plan 2017–2022 fleetingly recognises the 'absence of gender-related policies (males, females, co-ed) and school distribution mechanisms', including shortfalls in the presence of male teachers, as issues of concern during the implementation period. However, this reflection is not accompanied by

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<sup>12</sup> Not available on government websites but found through researching third-party websites.



affirmative policy statements relating to men's and boys' engagement for gender equality per se.<sup>13</sup>

UN country teams provide a platform for men's and boys' engagement policies, largely through themes of violence and family planning, although these statements are dated and not comprehensive. In its cross-sectoral National Gender Strategy 2011–13, UN Women notes the lack of studies 'on the reasons behind VAWG', highlighting the need to involve 'men who disapprove of violence in campaigns against VAWG'. However, such campaigns have been found in the mapping. Additionally, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) country office has a framework for UNFPA Palestine on male engagement according to its 'Evaluation of UNFPA support to the prevention, response to and elimination of gender-based violence, and harmful practices'. It includes three outputs: 'men as partners and advocates'; 'men as service providers of better family planning and maternal health services'; and 'men as clients of family planning services specifically and reproductive health services in general'.

## Ethiopia

In Ethiopia, there is no obvious governmental policy focus on engaging men and boys for gender equality in national planning documents, which represents a significant missed opportunity – particularly in relation to the major portfolio of work taking place in Ethiopia to address child marriage. Key policy documents – such as the National Policy on Ethiopian Women, the Growth and Transformation Plan (National Development Plan), and the National Gender Mainstreaming Policy from the Ministry of Women, Children and Youth Affairs – do not include any references to male engagement. We were unable to find up-to-date women's and gender policies, as websites did not contain policy documents, and many were inaccessible due to the language barrier.

The health sector is, however, a notable exception to the lack of formal policy recognition on the engagement of men and boys, as we found evidence of a view on men's and boys' engagement to address health outcomes. The Health Sector Gender Mainstreaming Manual recommends including male engagement throughout: 'Gender mainstreaming can include specific projects that empower women to work towards gender equality

and can engage with men and boys in addressing harmful behaviour and promoting their health.' The document urges people to 'examine how gender norms, roles and relations influence male behaviour and health outcomes, and how these factors shape the role of men in promoting gender equality'. The manual understands that 'teaching boys to be men according to harmful norms and rites of passage encourages them to put their lives and those of others at risk'. It recognises rites into adulthood that can involve tobacco, alcohol or drug consumption, or unsafe sex with multiple partners. The health repercussions of such socialisation are shown to include delays in seeking healthcare, as well as substance, alcohol and tobacco use, which can lead to chronic health problems and even death. Other consequences include increased exposure to sexually transmitted infections (including HIV).

The Ministry of Health's HIV/AIDS Strategic Plan (2015–2020) recognises the need to work more directly with men, but does not strongly include a lens on outcomes of gender equality beyond the remit of HIV/AIDS issues. The plan aims to 'promote male partner testing' and increase 'male involvement in HIV/AIDS programmes'. It also aims to develop an advocacy campaign and work more closely with men at the community level, but linkages to women's rights organisations and wider health outcomes are not explicitly documented.

## Rwanda

In Rwanda, there is a general recognition among government agencies that men and women and boys and girls have different needs and interests. This is specified in multiple policy statements, including the current National Gender Policy, the Health Sector Strategic plan (2018–2024), children's rights policies (2011), and it is integrated into various policy documents, such as the National Strategic Plan (2016–2019).<sup>14</sup> The National Gender Policy lists the engagement of men and boys in gender issues among one of its four main strategies. Also, the Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion recognises that the limited engagement of men has been identified as a threat in the SWOT (strengths, weakness, opportunities, threats) analysis in its Gender Cluster Strategic Plan 2010–2012. This reflects a more holistic view of gender issues compared to other countries we have studied. For instance, the Strategic Plan for the Implementation of the

<sup>13</sup> It should be noted that, due to language and access restrictions, we were not able to find a national gender or family welfare policy to review.

<sup>14</sup> It is important to note that Rwandan government websites were by far the most comprehensive in terms of accessibility and content.

National Gender Policy stipulates that for the awareness-raising activities, 'at least 10% of participants are men'.

Rwanda recognises that long-term solutions to prevent and respond to GBV must include the participation of men and boys. The 2011 National Policy against Gender-Based Violence (under the Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion) includes a subsection on involvement of men and boys; it acknowledges the need to 'change the cultural, social, economic and other systems and structures that deny human rights and equality between women and men' by increasing men's and boys' engagement in prevention and response activities. Further, it recognises that men and boys may be victims of GBV. While this is true, and especially so in conflict or post-conflict settings, the policy document also states that male victims of GBV may only make up a small percentage of GBV victims (especially victims of gender-based sexual violence), and thus does not detract attention from the fact that women are disproportionately affected by GBV. The policy also includes a subsection on the 'Involvement of men and boys', which aims to tackle GBV in the long term and in a sustainable way, by changing harmful attitudes and behaviours of men and boys, and by engaging a proportion of men and boys as allies.

In the Fourth Health Sector Strategic Plan (2018–2024), male engagement is included in SRH and family planning. The Family Planning Policy includes a strategy to engage men and boys: 'The MoH [Ministry of Health] shall identify and address causes and concerns related to the lack of involvement by males ... and will implement appropriate strategies to promote male involvement in SRH and family planning'. This suggests that SRH is seen as women's responsibility and that increased active involvement of men will have a positive effect on men's and women's health, as well as children's health. Similarly, the National Integrated Child Rights Policy states that increased access to knowledge for men will prevent households from being 'burdened with multiple child births that they cannot afford to care for'. This broader view is also reflected in the Health Sector Policy (2015), which states that healthcare delivery is more effective if 'all sectors of the community', including men, are mobilised in planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating services.

In Rwanda, children's rights policies also contain an element of engaging men and boys. One particular strength is that activities targeted towards men and boys in the Strategic Plan for the Integrated Child Rights Policy have an allotted budget. The plan aims to develop 'a programme

and training package including information, education and communication (IEC) materials for promoting positive masculinity and engaging with men and boys in the communities to address gender-based violence'. Budgets for this work are allocated under Outcome 5, 'Child abuse, exploitation and violence against children eliminated', and Output 5.2, 'A comprehensive national child protection system established'.

Fairly uniquely, Rwanda's 2011 National Policy for Family Promotion includes the recognition that care work should be shared equally in families. The policy states that 'families cannot develop without a system of equitable sharing of responsibilities between husbands and wives and between boys and girls'.

## Nepal

Nepal has limited inclusion of men and boys in its gender policies, which are mainly focused on children's rights, especially child marriage, and family planning. However, it is important to note that, similar to most of the other countries studied, accessing policy documents in English was a persistent challenge, with most government websites and documents either being inaccessible or available only in Nepali.<sup>15</sup>

The policy mapping showed limited attention to engaging men and boys in GBV and VAWG within central government policy statements, in contrast to UNFPA, UN Women and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), which include male engagement in policies for their national programmes in Nepal. Collectively, the policy statements focus on themes of family planning, sharing of care and reproductive work, children's rights, health, and general awareness-raising on gender among men and boys. This is a fundamentally different framing from several other country profiles, where the engagement of men and boys is often framed with reference to VAWG.

The National Strategy to End Child Marriage (Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare et al., no date) includes the engagement of men and boys as one of its six strategic pillars. The policy document argues that as long as there are men willing to marry girls, it will be impossible to eradicate this harmful practice. The engagement of men and boys is thus framed as a necessary component to enable

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<sup>15</sup> Particularly limiting was the absence of recent National Periodic Plans, with the most recent one available in English being the Ninth National Periodic Plan (1997–2002).

other strategies, such as updating legislation and enforcing prosecution, with the ultimate aim of ending child marriage.

It is notable that the Ministry of Agricultural Development includes the engagement of men and boys in its 2012 Gender and Social Inclusion Strategy and Action Plan. The planned action is to sensitise men and women on sharing household workloads equally, not only in the name of justice and to reduce women's workload, but also to achieve better childcare levels by increasing the number of caretakers, promoting harmony and understanding at the household level, and boosting productivity and efficiency of remunerated work. By sharing similar workloads and tasks, it is proposed that adult members of a mixed-gender household will be able to understand and develop empathy towards other household members.

UN country offices have a greater focus on male engagement than national policy documents, particularly UNFPA – which suggests that there is an opportunity for multilaterals to work with the Nepal government to improve the visibility of policy relating to the engagement of men and boys. The UNICEF Country Programme Action Plan 2013–2017 mentions that 'male participation will be promoted in order to support men in taking more caretaking responsibilities' in its strategy to increase children's access to holistic development opportunities. The plan also aims to involve men to participate actively 'in essential maternal, adolescent, newborn, infant and young child feeding and early stimulation, hygiene and sanitation' practices.

UNICEF's latest Country Programme Action Plan 2018–2022, on the other hand, does not include male engagement. This is despite the fact that the previous action plan consistently emphasised the importance of increasing male caretakers' role in childcare to lessen the burden for women, to improve children's educational opportunities, and to improve children's nutrition.

Similarly, the UN Development Assistance Framework for Nepal 2013–2017 aims to ensure that 'vulnerable groups (including women) experience greater self-confidence, respect and dignity', and mentions the engagement of men and boys as a possible strategy to achieve this – i.e. by implementing innovative programmes that 'foster sustained change in attitudes and behaviour among those who hold power and influence within communities, such as community leaders, men and boys, as well as with service providers and duty-bearers at the local level'. The current framework (2018–2022) provides no follow-up on this trajectory, and does not give any further detail on the engagement of men and boys.

The Nepal Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Working Group led by UN Women and USAID aims to raise awareness of the importance of gender equality by bringing about 'changes of attitudes of men/boys, women/girls towards women/girls to prevent violence against women and girls'.

UNFPA proves to be a leader in engaging men and boys for gender equality. In its Country Programme 2017–2022, it aims to equip and mobilise communities – particularly men and boys, families and community leaders – with the knowledge and skills to challenge gender discriminatory sociocultural norms and prevent harmful practices, such as child marriage and gender-biased sex selection.

## Bangladesh

Bangladesh is the only GAGE focus country where a National Development Plan (the Seventh Five-Year Plan 2016–2020) contains a complete programme for changing men's attitudes on gender and towards women. This suggests there are opportunities to learn lessons in terms of how the plan was developed, and is currently being interpreted and operationalised, including taking account of any 'push-back' dimensions. Actions are focused on setting up a programme for men to change their mindsets about gender roles. It is particularly comprehensive and includes aspects on men's active engagement in multiple spheres of life, such as: promoting women's advancement and curbing men's involvement in or support of harmful practices; promoting the sharing of unpaid household care to reduce women's workload; working with men to increase women's mobility outside the home and increase women's and men's access to reproductive healthcare; encouraging men to hold other men accountable for discriminatory behaviour; and strengthening advocacy for male participation in permanent and other methods of contraception.

Uniquely across the GAGE focus countries, the National Development Plan also emphasises the importance of developing groups of men as advocates for change. Components for this include the modification of social behaviour, prevention of VAWG, sharing household responsibility, promoting gender equality, and holding other men accountable for discriminatory behaviour. The plan also includes a goal to specifically target youth to bring about behavioural change in boys by ensuring that 'men do not grow up with a discriminatory view towards women'. In practice, the goal is to create clubs for adolescents that are scaled-up nationwide.

References to engaging men and boys in policy statements in Bangladesh are not new – suggesting that there is legacy to learn from regarding the prominence of language on men and boys in the current National Development Plan. Several references to the role of men and boys are presented across the years in national-level policies. The National Women Development Policy 2011, for example, emphasises ‘involving male and youths in building up mass awareness in prevention of abuse of women’ and ‘bringing about changes in the male dominated thought process’. The Suggested Strategies for the Seventh Five-Year Plan (2016–2020), a document put forward by civil society, also demonstrates a strong recognition of the role that men and boys play in curbing ‘participation or support of harmful practices’, as well as the need to focus on ‘positive social norms’ to address unequal household care work burdens.

### Mapping – regional contexts where GAGE is active

Overall, the Arab region has the most consistent inclusion of men and boys. International documents signed by the League of Arab States (LAS) were available in English, but internal LAS documents, such as from the Arab Parliament, are only available in Arabic. While few policy documents we accessed mention the engagement of men and boys, those that do are detailed in their scope and description of the strategy, mainly covering health and family planning, VAWG, and general awareness-raising.

The 2013 Cairo Declaration most persistently refers to the engagement of men and boys as a strategy for achieving gender equality and increasing social equality more broadly. Signed jointly by the LAS, UNFPA, the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) and the UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), the Cairo Declaration aims to enhance engagement of men and boys in equal sharing of work responsibilities between the sexes, to tackle GBV, and to increase men’s and boys’ access to SRH services. It frames GBV as a health issue and includes an ambitious goal to ‘engage men and boys, policymakers, parliamentarians, law enforcement officials, educators, health care providers, the private sector and journalists, in creating an environment that is conducive to stopping GBV against women and girls’.

The Arab Strategy for Combating Violence against Women and the Platform for Action to implement the Sustainable Development Goals 2030 for Women in the Arab Region mention the engagement of men and boys as a

key component for combating GBV. Both have been created by the Arab Women Organization, a sub-body that functions as an intergovernmental organisation under the umbrella of the LAS, which was formally established during the Second Arab Women’s Summit in 2002. The Arab Strategy for Combating Violence against Women aims to ‘develop programs and mechanisms to involve men in combating violence against women’, while the Platform’s guiding principles state that eliminating VAWG can only be achieved through the engagement of men and boys. It is notable that, apart from the Cairo Declaration, the only policy documents that include male engagement in GBV strategies have been produced by the Arab Women Organization.

The LAS report for Beijing+15 mentions ‘including men in plans and activities aimed at enhancing gender equality in order for the women’s issue to become a societal one’ under the overall objective ‘to confront the challenge posed by negative cultural traditions that degrade the status of women and obstruct gender equality’. However, the same report for Beijing+20 does not include the engagement of men and boys as a strategy or action point.

The UNFPA Regional Strategy on Prevention and Response to Gender-Based Violence in the Arab States Region 2014–2017 aims to strengthen networks of men and boys that address GBV. We have not been able to find the results of this programme.

There is a specific opportunity to advocate for the inclusion of engagement of men and boys in the Arab Parliament’s Committee on Social, Educational and Cultural Affairs, Women and Youth. We have not been able to assess the documents due to language barriers and accessibility, but it is the only body in the LAS with a mandate to directly address gender issues.

### Africa

In Africa, we focused on the African Union (AU), which – with 53 member states and eight regional economic communities (RECs), and headquarters in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia – is the single most influential regional body. It is also the only regional organisation that includes both Rwanda and Ethiopia.

Overall, a focus on engaging men and boys in AU policies is largely absent, with the exception of the draft version of the African Union Gender Strategy 2018–2023. Despite its clear (albeit complex) structure, and the comparatively large number of policy documents available in English, it is notable that men and boys are largely overlooked in policy statements. The AU’s priority areas

are maternal health, ending child marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM), gendered aspects of peace and security, and increasing female representation in public office. However, the draft 2018–2023 strategy not only includes a definition and explanation of the usefulness of ‘masculinity’, but its guiding principles clearly state that ‘mobilising the support of men and boys is crucial for wider societal changes such as challenging discriminatory laws and practices’, while cautioning that ‘women’s rights and empowerment must remain central’.

The strategy also has a specific section on ‘involving men and boys’ that, among other aspects, stresses the role of men and boys to ‘end gender-based violence including in conflict situations’. This is particularly pertinent, as there is no other mention of the engagement of men and boys in relation to GBV or VAWG. Other areas where male engagement is envisioned are: increased engagement of men in the media sector to tackle stereotypes and change cultural reference points; increased recognition and distribution of care work; and promoting the involvement of men in the care and support of people living with AIDS.

Critically, key AU gender policy documents do not refer to the engagement of men and boys:

The AU Gender Policy (2009) does not contain any mention of the engagement of men and boys, despite its significance to gender inequality.

The Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa (2004) makes no mention of the engagement of men and boys. As in other gender-related AU documents, the main focus areas are women’s economic empowerment, VAWG, and women’s political participation.

In 2010, the AU declared The African Women’s Decade (2010–2020), but there is limited inclusion of male engagement. The initiative focused on a Grassroots Approach to Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment – i.e. strengthening women networks and women’s political and economic participation in civil society, as well as wider and more active implementation of Beijing commitments. Within this framing, boys are not mentioned (girls are only referenced twice specifically), while men are fleetingly and non-specifically referred to as potential champions to support gender equality.

However, it should be noted that the AU Strategy for Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment 2018–2028 (African Union, 2019) provides several references to the engagement of men and boys [add short ref here], including recognition that the ‘growing men-for-change movement is testimony to the fact that boys and men can challenge social norms’ (ibid.: 9).

## South Asia

We chose not to analyse the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), as neither Nepal nor Bangladesh are members. Instead, we opted for the much smaller, more nascent South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).

SAARC has not yet acquired a strong institutional culture. As a result, some of the main challenges it faces are the creation of modalities and mechanisms, the reinforcement of declared policies within member states, and follow-up evaluations. Also, among the scarce documentation and joint declarations, it appears that SAARC does not have a strong gender equality component, and its main charters on gender do not include any mention of engaging men and boys. The SAARC Social Charter, for example, envisages acceleration of social progress through active collaboration and mutual assistance among member states. The Social Development sector of the Charter does include a gender chapter but makes no mention whatsoever of the engagement of men and boys as a strategic approach to empowering women and girls.

The closest any SAARC policy statement comes to incorporating the engagement of men and boys is the Regional Action Plan to End Child Marriage in South Asia (2015–2018) – although the engagement of men and boys is on the periphery of the statement and aims to mobilise girls, boys, parents, media, religious and community leaders to change discriminatory gender norms. It also aims to prepare tailor-made social mobilisation training toolkits for stakeholders, among which is the MenEngage Alliance. Lastly, its workplan includes an indicator that seeks to measure the number of organisations to which successful strategies for promoting gender-equitable norms among men and boys have been disseminated.

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## **About GAGE**

Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) is a nine-year longitudinal research programme generating evidence on what works to transform the lives of adolescent girls in the Global South. Visit [www.gage.odi.org.uk](http://www.gage.odi.org.uk) for more information.

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