

BRIEF: 10 strategies to engage men and boys in partnership with women and girls to achieve gender equality

Lessons Learned from UN Women's Regional Programme Men and Women for Gender Equality

Gender Equality in the Arab States

In the last few decades, there have been significant gains toward achieving gender equality and women's empowerment in the Arab region. New constitutions, laws, and policies have secured women's rights in many instances, and have provided better protections from violence and discrimination. Despite these efforts, high rates of gender-based violence and discrimination persist, and the region is characterized by gaps in power, influence, and access to resources between men and women.

For gender equality to become a reality in the Middle East and North Africa, change must happen within families, communities, religious institutions, and societies at large; and men and boys must be part of this effort. Engaging men and boys as partners alongside women and girls to advance gender equality must be done thoughtfully, using human-rights, feminist-informed, and gender-transformative approaches; and it must complement and not compete with existing, direct services and support for women and girls themselves. Furthermore, in challenging harmful gender norms and stereotypes, it is essential to ensure that male engagement does not inadvertently end up preserving the power structures which are meant to be abolished.

UN Women's Regional Programme on Men and Women for Gender Equality

The UN Women Men and Women for Gender Equality Programme seeks to better understand the root causes of gender inequalities in the Arab States and to address them. This regional programme – working with 30 community-based organizations and 11 national partners since 2015 – has specifically focused on Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco and Palestine and is funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida).

10 Strategies that Work to Engage Men and Boys as Partners in Gender Equality

The regional programme has built upon and produced key strategies for engaging men and boys as partners in gender equality. This brief shares lessons learned on how working with men and boys to advance gender equality – when done through feminist and human rights-based approaches – can support women's movements and leadership, transform masculinities, and strengthen the capacities of local and national partners. The following 10 strategies aim to inform and inspire programmes around the world.

1. **Conduct comprehensive research on men and gender equality to inform programming, campaigns, and advocacy.** National - or more localised – quantitative and qualitative research on men's and women's attitudes

regarding gender equality – such as the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES) – should be conducted and analysed as a starting point to define areas of need and opportunity; to design messaging; and to develop approaches for targeted programs and campaigns to engage men in advancing gender equality.

"The findings of IMAGES are very interesting as they provide an overview of men's and women's attitudes and behaviours towards a wide range of gender equality issues in our society. We need to use these data to develop and implement initiatives aiming at promoting women's rights and gender equality in the region of Rabat-Salé-Kénitra"

- Ms. Fatima-Zahra Hirate, President of the Regional Authority for Parity and Equal Opportunities, Morocco

2. **Thoughtfully engage women's rights organisations and women's rights campaigns – from the start of any initiative, ensuring that all programs to engage men are ultimately accountable to women and girls.** Work together with key women's rights stakeholders to determine which strategies to engage men and boys in gender equality can best support feminist objectives and ongoing efforts to promote women's rights and gender equality; and how they can be part of a cohesive and holistic approach. Strengthening male engagement to advance gender equality should not take away from the continued efforts needed to sustain, build, and promote the work of women's rights organisations in the region.
3. **Consider and address intersections of identity.** Not all women, and not all men, have the same experiences. When designing initiatives, place gender equality within a human rights perspective and create spaces that are inclusive, participatory, and understanding of multifaceted forms of discrimination. Include representatives of all target beneficiary groups in the design and planning of a program and provide comprehensive training for facilitators and volunteers, and partners on how to adapt language and programming.
4. **Work with religious and faith leaders to promote alternative interpretations of religious texts, as a way of promoting gender equality in the Muslim family.** Religious leaders – who are primarily men – are highly influential figures in their communities. Engaging with moderate religious leaders and those who already support women's rights, can be a starting point. Using research-informed, feminist-interpretations of Islam, integrating Islamic teachings, international human rights principles, national guarantees of equality, and lived realities into the

"There's also this idea in Egypt that their religion gives men qiwamah (control) over women. [...] To counter this, we worked with local religious leaders, who push back against these harmful interpretations, pointing our verses from the Quran and saying, 'Our Prophet Muhammed treated his wife in an equal way.' Most men agreed."

- Mariam Ezzat Nathan, a senior field supervisor at CARE International in Egypt

discourse can help to shift these leaders' views to greater support for gender equality and to share these values in their communities.

5. **Invest in partnerships with and build the capacity of diverse grassroots and national organisations.** Working to advance gender equality and transform masculinities is sensitive and nuanced, and if done incorrectly, has the potential to cause harm. It is essential to thoroughly train partners as well as facilitators –using a human rights-based approach that challenges harmful norms – and to provide the conditions for ongoing coaching and capacity-building in order to create the conditions for effective, sustainable initiatives.

6. **Design programming throughout the life-cycle, considering the specific needs and opportunities presented by fatherhood and parenting as well as adolescence and young adulthood.** Research indicates that working with men as fathers, as well as youth, may be key spaces for engagement to advance gender equality. Community

"I am really moved by this play, by the suffering of women, now if ever my wife gets pregnant, I will behave differently, I will go with her at the doctor and I will live with her every moment of pregnancy."

- Mohamed, 43, a father of 3, after attending a play developed by Théâtre Aquarium

"With a determined little grin on his face, he said, "The people think that us kids just make noise. But I want to teach my friends; I want everybody to know this: that boys and girls are equal."

- Mohammed Abed, 10, a participant in the Abnaa Saida El Balad acting workshops in Saida,

engagement in all four countries reveals men's participation in caregiving and parenting is a positive entry point for establishing gender equality in the home. This includes men's taking on responsibility in sharing household work and raising children equally, helping the children study, educating their daughters, preventing early marriage, and more. Furthermore, working directly with youth and youth organisations to develop and implement evidence-informed approaches related to gender and masculinities, and making special efforts to reach out to youth and to young men – in practical terms and language they understand – is key for long-term sustainability of the initiative in the region.

7. **Amplify reach with high-visibility celebrity or community-based role models and influencers of all genders and strategic public communications campaigns.**

Celebrities, including professional athletes and actors, can have incredible influence over individuals' attitudes and behaviours when it comes to gender equality. Recruiting those individuals as well as other community-level ambassadors – who

"Because_Iam_a_Man I reject violence against women whether verbally or physically."

- A message of the Because I am a Man campaign, which challenges gender stereotypes and raises awareness on the positive role men can play in achieving gender equality, in part by engaging celebrity influencers. The campaign's messages have received over 7 million views.

already support gender equality publicly and embrace it privately – to share key messages and participate in major programmes and campaigns can help engage men alongside women on issues of equality, expanding the works’ reach and impact.

“This peer-to-peer approach brought us lots of success because people in the community were being approached by other community members just like them, [making them more open to accepting the new ideas they are exposed to].”

- Khaled Abu Jama, 25, a program coordinator at Binaa’ Youth Center on the power of mobilizing community role models in the Gaza Strip

8. **Work with media to refine its messaging and amplify programming to a larger number of stakeholders.**

Monitor and evaluate media content, and provide training – which is comprehensive, and includes a variety of personnel from media institutions, especially editors – on issues related to gender equality and masculinities as part of a strategic approach to engaging the media to amplify the programs’ key messages and impact with the general public as well as key stakeholders.

“I used to speak on the radio that I helped my wife with dishes. Men were calling in [to the show] saying what I was doing was harām (forbidden) and ‘aib (shameful),” but then, “they started to say, ‘Yes, we, too, do housework. We cook.”

- Yousef Nassar, actor and a radio presenter, Palestine

9. **Create explicit national, regional, and international policy advocacy goals and cultivate allies.**

Patriarchal structures and policies are a key obstacle to advancing women’s rights. To promote progress towards gender equality on a global scale, and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), one strategy is to identify progressive leaders – in civic and government spaces – who already understand and support the key policy leavers to advance gender equality and women’s rights, and work with them to increase relevant budget allocations, develop gender-responsive political platforms, and create gender equal cabinets, in addition to other solutions.

“They’ve given me courage. They’ve given me information about my rights. And now the government is starting to look at us, and they’re saying, ‘These people out there on the ground— they should be given their rights.”

- Emad Chaachaa, 33, on participating in Collective for Research and Training on Development (CRTDA)’s campaign *My Nationality is A Right for Me and My Family in Palestine*

10. **Work toward scale up, institutionalization, and sustainability:** While it is necessary to focus on smaller interventions that show evidence of success that can be brought to scale, certain interventions will not achieve sustained impact without scale up. Increased focus is required to mainstream work with men and boys as partners in gender equality through systematic institutionalization with governments, including the health and education systems, the private sector, media and political institutions to engage men and boys and women and girls.

UN Women's Regional Programme Men and Women for Gender Equality identified a series of promising approaches, as well as areas that should be strengthened to accelerate gender equality in the regional context. To read the complete learning report, please see: [\[LINK\]](#)