

Concept Note

Ubuntu Symposium

3rd MenEngage Global Symposium
2020-2021

Feminisms

Intersectionality

Accountability

Transformation

Power with

***Advancing feminist approaches
to engaging men and boys
and transforming masculinities***

Co-Organized by:

MenEngage Alliance, Rwanda Men's Resource Center (RWAMREC), Rwanda
MenEngage Network (RWAMNET), and MenEngage Africa



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Introduction

We believe that now is the time for those working and engaging in the field of transforming masculinities and engaging men and boys in gender justice, women's rights, LGBTIQ+ rights, SRHR for all, and other relevant issues, to come together to take stock of the current 'state of the field'. We need to share learnings, promising practices and exchange experiences from across various areas of work, contexts and sectors.

The previous global and regional symposia of MenEngage Alliance and its regional networks served as opportunities to highlight and reflect upon the work to engage men and boys in gender equality. Additionally, the global symposia consolidated MenEngage as a network with the UN and bilateral aid agencies, the women's rights field, and increased the credibility of the work (politically and technically) as a field of practice and activism.

This led to a deepening of the political stance of the work to transform masculinities and engage men and boys in women's rights and gender justice. The outcomes of these symposia have served as a compass for MenEngage Alliance and its members' work on the ground, and hence, has informed the majority of the programs, research, campaigns and initiatives in this field of work across various regions and globally.

The *Ubuntu Symposium* - the 3rd MenEngage Global Symposium - seeks to advance the political agenda by affirming the need for greater alignment and building common cause with social justice movements globally and nationally who are seeking to achieve a full social justice agenda.

By exploring the roles and responsibilities of the field of work on men and masculinities to the core-concepts of Feminisms, Accountability, Intersectionality, Transformation and Power with, we envision that the symposium will provide support to the field to clarify and reaffirm its political stance and set directions and ways forward for strengthening the transformative agenda of the work to 'transform masculinities and engage men and boys' in advancing women's rights, and gender and social justice.

Most importantly this series of events will be a key space for the Alliance, members and partners to strengthen collective movement-building efforts contributing to the larger feminist women's rights movement.

What, when, where, who, why, how?

What & When

The *opening event* of the Ubuntu Symposium will take place from 10-12 November 2020. Given the current situation and the increased relevance of the issues amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, the organizers have opted for a *virtual* kick-off event, with a smaller in-person hub in Kigali, Rwanda. This opening event in November will be followed by a *series of events* and ongoing mobilization worldwide throughout 2020-2021. This will be mostly virtual, as well as in-person locally at the national and regional levels, as circumstances allow. The Symposium will culminate in a *closing event* in the second half of 2021, at a date yet to be determined.

Who

The Symposium is organized by [MenEngage Alliance](#), bringing together members and partners from women's rights and social justice organizations. MenEngage is a global civil society network working to transform masculinities and engage men and boys in women's rights and gender justice for all, within the broader context of advancing human rights and social justice. The Symposium is co-organized with the [Rwanda Men's Resource Centre](#) (RWAMREC), the Rwanda MenEngage Network (RWAMNET) and [MenEngage Africa](#).

The Symposium will bring together participants from diverse sectors, including activists, researchers, practitioners and students from civil society and the international development sector, policy makers, private sector and the donor community.

Why

"We live in a world of profound inequalities and unbalanced power relations, where rigid norms and values about how people should behave fuel and exacerbate injustices. We have to change that."

- [Delhi Declaration and Call to Action](#), 2014, MenEngage Alliance

As the need to engage men and boys in gender equality has become more accepted, the conversation has shifted from the 'Why' to the 'How'.

- [MenEngage Global Strategic Plan](#), 2017-20

MenEngage Alliance has, since 2009, played a key role in convening the field of 'men and masculinities' in the women's rights and gender justice agenda. MenEngage's [Delhi Declaration and Call to Action](#) set a benchmark for members, partners and the broader field on gender-transformative approaches to engage boys and men in relation to women's rights, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR)-including HIV/AIDS, unpaid care and fatherhood, non-violence and peace, LGBTIQ rights, among many others. (*Refer to Annex-Track Record for more information*)

Following the direction set-forth by the 1st and 2nd MenEngage Global Symposia, the Alliance's members and partners developed and implemented numerous programs, projects, campaigns and initiatives to generate more knowledge and evidence for the work on 'engaging boys and men in gender equality'. As a result, we have seen the number and extent of policies and programs that

include ‘engaging men and boys’ around the world grow. Yet, as more stakeholders take this on, it behooves us to strategically circumscribe the work of ‘engaging men and boys for gender equality’ into the women’s human rights conceptual and political frame, and to prioritize the transformation of masculinities more broadly. The moment is ripe to move from programmatic and individual interventions to systems and structural changes that align with other social justice efforts to uphold human rights and democratic principles.

The coronavirus pandemic has exposed the faultlines of today’s capitalist patriarchal structure, and brought into focus the well-known social, gender and racial inequalities and health disparities of most nations including the so-called developed world. As the world struggles to respond and adapt to COVID-19, the global feminist movement reflects on and articulates what must change moving forward. The symposium too will address the intersection of patriarchy and our fragile health system, exclusive and undemocratic governance model, and impoverished communities.

We strive to create an innovative format that will enable us to have important conversations about transforming masculinities and embracing women’s rights and gender justice for all, within the broader context of advancing human rights, protecting democratic principles, and respecting diversity. We aspire to an engaging and inclusive format that will break with common barriers to participation such as high costs, long distances, visa requirements, and family and work obligations.

The Ubuntu Symposium thus represents a significant opportunity to build on our own values and advance in our resolve to ‘walk the talk’. It will provide space to: share experiences, evidence, and insights on how to effectively challenge and dismantle oppressive patriarchal norms and constructions of masculinities; take stock of how this work has evolved in the past few years; identify new goals, frontiers and strategies; and create a forum to rearticulate a political agenda that seeks to transform unjust and deeply embedded power structures. By aligning ourselves with and adding value to the work of women’s rights and social justice movements, we believe we will contribute to building a better world, and one we share with all people in solidarity.

As we know, there is risk involved when initiatives that work with men and boys are neither feminist-informed nor gender transformative, as they may end up reenforcing male power and privilege and ultimately harming the cause of gender equality. The symposium will create opportunities for constructive conversations and learning experiences. It will foster creative exchanges about ways to ensure that programs and policies focusing on men and boys are both gender transformative and guided by feminist principles and practices. A strong framework for how to approach this work is necessary, so that it may contribute towards the realization of gender justice for all.

The Ubuntu symposium will bring together knowledge and expertise from across various sectors and parts of the world to showcase how the work with men and boys can be done critically, and can holistically tackle male power and privilege as part of the process of transformation. In addition, it’s time to develop a collective knowledge base on and tools for effective and meaningful engagement of men and boys, which must align with the Alliance’s strong commitment to women’s rights and gender justice. With know-how and standards the field will be able to lead the way in scaling up the engagement of men and boys in gender justice, and in a way that does not detract from vital women-led initiatives, or compete with our allies for resources, such as funding or spaces, which are increasingly shrinking for women’s rights and feminist groups.

The symposium will create spaces to address and explore how this work is being carried out from national to regional to global spaces of influence and contributing to the central aim of the realization of women’s rights and gender justice for all. MenEngage’s Ubuntu Symposium will bring

together local and international actors for inspiring conversations and opportunities for collaborative agenda-setting for gender transformative approaches to engaging boys and men in advocacy for gender justice.

How

As a network rooted in feminist principles and approaches of shared power and horizontal organizing, MenEngage Alliance seeks alternatives to top-down, prescriptive models of organizing. The symposium is therefore organized through contextualized regional plans and processes that support the movement-building and mobilization of civil society membership and partners from academia, UN agencies and governments across Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Europe, North America, Latin America and the Middle East. This bottom-up agenda-setting is being connected globally through one collective effort of organizing and holding the Ubuntu Symposium.

We warmly welcome your support and interest to be part of the ongoing momentum building and symposium events.

Political context: why a critical look at men & masculinities is relevant now

Ten years after the first MenEngage Global Symposium, where do we stand in terms of engaging men in gender equality?

The global community has worked and prepared to commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women and adoption of the [Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action](#) (1995). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic the events scheduled to happen in 2020, have now been cancelled or postponed until 2021. Similarly, the [Generation Equality Forums](#) organized by UN Women and the governments of Mexico and France in 2020, and which we envisioned as global conversations about the need for urgent action and accountability for gender equality, have also been postponed.

With the goal taking stock of progress and setting in motion an agenda of concrete actions to realize gender equality by 2030, these events were intended as a celebration of the power of persistent women's rights activism, feminist solidarity, and youth leadership for transformative change.

2020 also marks the 20th anniversary of [UNSCR1325](#), the 5th Anniversary of the [Paris Climate Agreement](#), and the 75th Anniversary of the United Nations and, a five-year milestone will be reached towards achieving the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#). 2020 is therefore a pivotal year for the accelerated realization of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, everywhere.¹

Recently, while the world was gearing towards the 64th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women, the [UN Secretary General António Guterres](#) made strong commitment to prioritizing the agenda of gender equality and ending 'default male thinking within the UN system'. In his [remarks at the New School "Women and Power"](#), he urged governments, parliaments and all institutions to prioritize repealing laws that discriminate against all women and girls; increase protection against

¹ unwomen.org/en/csw/csw64-2020

violence; guarantee full access to sexual and reproductive health services and rights; and ending the gender pay gap.

Further, movements like #MeToo and #NiUnaMas have challenged long-standing walls of silence around sexual harassment and abuse of power. The women's rights movement is increasingly addressing structural issues that impede gender justice, such as economic and environmental injustices, militarization and conflict. An energised youth movement continues to unflinchingly call for justice, inclusion, a transformative and radical response to the climate crisis and racial injustices, and full recognition of bodily autonomy. Feminist systems-analysis and critiques around power, privilege and rights have been informing the gender justice movement. Feminists of colour, trans people and LGBTQI activists continue to highlight the complexity of the human experience, and particularly the experience of people living under multiple layers of oppression, exclusion and denial. Now the #BlackLivesMatter movement is bringing to the fore the longstanding rule of white supremacy globally and in the US specifically, a system of power, dominance and oppression that works hand in hand with patriarchy and militarism

However, despite many achievements, violation of women's rights persists in both the private and public spheres in all regions of the world. The advancement of women's rights and full equality is too slow, uneven and far from global. Furthermore, women's hard-fought achievements now risk being reversed.²

Public visibility has predictably been met with backlash. Taking learnings from progressive movement building, conservative political ideologies and fundamentalists have built up a well orchestrated **offensive against women's rights and gender equality**. The global surge in repressive, authoritarian governments and reactionary movements has increased its attacks on gender equality, women's rights, and the rights of LGBTQI people, particularly those most marginalized.

Considering these developments and social demands, it is important for men and boys, and those working to transform masculinities, to reflect on the roles and responsibilities we have to support and advance the work of these movements.

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

Pamela Saavedra

Sociologist and researcher of men and masculinities, Cultura Salud, Chile
MenEngage Alliance member

In the midst of opposition to women's rights and gender justice activism, **some men and boys are questioning and reflecting on their behavior and privileges - often for the first time in their lives.** Coupled with this, recent years have seen an **expanding interest in 'men and masculinities' in media narratives, policy priorities, everyday conversations, and even in global consumer brands.** It is crucial to recognize this is a result of the actions and demands of countless women and girls who speak up in private and in public, and who dare to stand up to the systematic denial of their rights.

The impetus for work on men and masculinities is more urgent than ever. Inaction is not an option. But action without critical reflection often has a counter-productive impact.

² ipu.org/wmn-e/classif-arc.htm, www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=22759&LangID=E
unesco.org/new/en/natural-sciences/priority-areas/gender-and-science/
unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/9789241507226_eng.pdf

As we work to understand the ever-shifting political landscape, our work for gender justice requires an honest reflection on the roles and responsibilities of men and boys to advance women's rights and gender justice. As well as the role of men and boys towards standing in solidarity with feminist agendas on systems change. Never has this been more prescient than now, as we face our need to work across movements towards a feminist post-COVID-19 future.

When men and boys, and those working to transform masculinities, are invited, praised and included in the various spheres of power and decision making, how will we ensure that our contributions support the movement for equal rights, for all women and girls – and for all people regardless of sexual orientation and gender identities? How will we ensure accountability in workplaces, the corporate sector, among policymakers, in UN systems, etc.? How will we strengthen our capacity to forge alliances, commit to continual reflection, honest and inclusive discussion, and accountability to gender equality and shared power? How do we ensure that this work contributes towards systems change and does not merely address the individual, community and institutional levels? And how will we embrace the practice of replacing privileges with rights? These are some of the questions that the Ubuntu Symposium seeks to address.

It aspires to reaffirm our support of feminist goals and our commitment to gender equality and justice, and will speak to the pressing social justice issues of our time, including: gender justice; racial justice; LGBTQI rights; universal sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR); realization of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); countering militarism; and advancing climate justice.

Relevance of the Rwanda and African focus

For the first time, MenEngage Alliance is organizing its global symposium with a specific focus on the African region. We are building on the experiences of the MenEngage Africa network and its members who have successfully organized two regional symposia in the region. And so, despite not being able to host a large in person event in Kigali, the symposium remains centered on this important region.

Why Rwanda and Africa?

We believe that Rwanda has the supportive and progressive political climate to host the MenEngage Symposium around key issues related to women's and LGBTQI rights in the country. The Government of Rwanda is committed to support and create a safe and inclusive environment to speak openly on the issues of women's rights, LGBTQIA+ rights, SRHR for all, gender and social justice. The choice of location also recognizes Rwanda's commitments and achievements when it comes to gender equality, evident from the fact that Rwanda has the highest number of women parliamentarians worldwide, with women occupying 63.8% of seats in the lower house (Source: UN Women Fact Sheets) and the 9th country worldwide and the first in Africa in terms of closing gender gaps (Global Gender Gap Report 2020). RWAMREC has itself worked for 10 years to build program approaches and alliances with women's rights groups that put MenEngage accountability into practice in its work. Additionally, Rwanda, and the city of Kigali, are ranked the third most popular destinations in Africa for hosting international meetings and events, especially the high level political events on the issues of women's rights, LGBTQIA+ rights and other social justice issues.

Despite the numerous challenges in the Africa region on the issues of gender equality and justice, hopes and opportunities abound. The African continent has registered important progress at the level of legislation, policies and services for the realization of women's rights, gender equality and

human rights. In addition, the African Union recognises ‘gender equality’ as a fundamental human right and an integral part of regional integration, economic growth and social development and has developed the [AU’s strategy for Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment](#) (GEWE) to ensure the inclusion of women in Africa’s development agenda. Given the current status, there is optimism that African governments are headed in the right direction. **This optimism will only be justified if efforts are sustained in countries, like Rwanda, where the most progress has been made and intensified in countries that are lagging behind.**

The Alliance members in Africa have been working increasingly and progressively, together with the respective authorities and governments, to translate their international and regional commitments to realize the agenda of women’s rights and transforming masculinities and engaging men and boys in gender justice. Rwanda MenEngage Network works closely with the Government of Rwanda in the implementation of the national gender equality policy, with a key focus on ‘engaging men and boys in gender justice’. Similarly, at the regional level, with the work of MenEngage Africa members regionally with the 23 country networks, in conjunction to the work of the Alliance globally, there has been significant achievements and progress made towards realising increased gender equality and improved SRHR in Sub-Saharan Africa through engaging men and boys in a gender equitable manner to transform gender norms, influence policies and promote human rights and accountability.

How will the Symposium advance gender equality work in Rwanda and Africa?

Given the ever growing interest within Africa for gender transformative work on engaging men and boys among civil society organisations, governments, UN agencies and regional bodies, the organizing of 3rd MenEngage Global Symposium in the region comes at an important time. Recently there has been an increase in requests for technical assistance in designing strategies and capacity strengthening on ‘men and masculinities’ from the MenEngage Africa network members, as well as willingness to support the programmatic work in this area. This interest provides exciting opportunities for those seeking to advance gender justice work within Africa.

It also enjoins us to continue to ask critical questions about the work we do, the impact we aim to achieve, our accountability to women's rights groups and how work with men and boys seeks to address both relational and structural issues.

The symposium is expected to have a longer term impact on the host country and Africa at large by creating opportunities to showcase the impactful work that the members and partners of Rwanda MenEngage Network (RWAMNET) have been doing in Rwanda as well as that of other country networks in the region. The symposium will also: result in supporting leaders to further understand the importance of inclusivity; be a capacity building and knowledge sharing opportunity on models and approaches that have worked best in different contexts; reinforce the longstanding local and African feminist movement and discussions around LGBTQI and people with specific needs; and be an opportunity to raise awareness of the host population which will positively influence gender cultural norms and future laws and policies. Further, civil society in Rwanda and Africa will be strengthened in terms of its lobbying and advocacy capacities as well as its connections, networking, influencing skills and understanding thematic areas such as SRHR, unpaid care and LGBTQI.

MenEngage Africa being one of the largest regional networks of the Alliance, we believe that this series of events will further strengthen the work with men and boys in the local context and its regional strategic plan. Furthermore, sharing lessons from the Africa region will inspire and strengthen work on men and masculinities in all other regions of the world.

Symposium objectives

The overall objective of the Ubuntu Symposium is to elevate the impact and accountability of work to transform masculinities and engage men and boys for women's rights, LGBTQI rights, and gender justice for all within a collective human rights-based agenda.

The Symposium aims to:

- 1. Make 'men and masculinities' work more effective and impactful for gender justice through collective sharing, questioning, learning, and knowledge-strengthening.**

The Symposium will be a space for being challenged to listen, reflect, question, learn, share, and grow – on individual, institutional, and collective levels. The events will bring together and elevate diverse knowledge and experiences from around the world. It will make existing knowledge more visible and accessible, and provide critical space for the creation of new understandings. Ultimately, this will result in a lasting platform for the elevation of standards and promising practices across the work to transform masculinities and engage men and boys in gender justice.

The symposium **Knowledge Management, Documentation and Dissemination strategy** will ensure we create a lasting body of tools, resources, stories of change, presenting of new discussions/ideas/experiences - in a variety of mediums.

- 2. Strengthen a global community that acts responsibly, purposefully, inclusively, and in solidarity with our partners, friends, and each other – across social justice movements.**

Building inclusive, vibrant, open and accountable communities across local, regional, and global levels is a core aim of the Symposium. This includes strengthening links and collaborations with other social justice organizations and collectives with aligned visions for feminist-informed social transformation. This rare opportunity will strengthen relationships for future collaborations and actions. It will create space for further developing processes for improving collective, institutional, and individual accountability.

- 3. Inspire, develop, and renew a common political agenda and strategy to meet the urgency of today's existing and emerging challenges.**

The Symposium aims to strengthen the human-rights based, feminist-informed political agenda for MenEngage Alliance to collectively effect change in programs, policy, and public opinion in the years ahead. In particular, it will provide a roadmap for how 'men and masculinities' approaches can add value to advocacy and activism on today's biggest challenges. This includes addressing the regressive, populist, and male-dominated backlash against feminism and social justice movements around the world. These events will help move beyond discussion, recognizing the need for renewed urgency and accountable action.

Symposium framework & themes

The theme of the 3rd MenEngage Global Symposium is: *Ubuntu: Transforming Power to Benefit all Humanity.*

Ubuntu (Zulu pronunciation: [ùbùnt'ù]) is a Nguni Bantu term meaning "humanity." It is often translated as "I am because we are," or "humanity towards others," or in xhosa, "umntu ngumntu ngabantu " but is often used in a more philosophical sense to mean "the belief in a universal bond of sharing that connects all humanity."

With the global community brought together by the Symposium, we will explore the **roles and responsibilities of men and boys** to advance a broad range of issues related to women's rights, gender justice, human rights and social justice. We will seek to learn from theory and practice **how a masculinities perspective within a gendered-power analysis has harmful or positive influences** on the human rights and social justice issues we seek to resolve.

The collective development and evolution of MenEngage Alliance's political agenda, combined with the consultative process to gather inputs for the symposium thus far, provide clear guidance on the framework and themes of the 3rd MenEngage Global Symposium:

Power with, Transformation, Accountability, Intersectionality, Feminisms

The way we understand the role of men and masculinities within gender and social justice work has evolved. To continue this journey, we have developed a political framework of cross-cutting themes. They are not intended as final definitions, but as a starting point to guide us in how we reflect, share, learn, explore, critically examine, and advance together as an alliance. Together, they form our political framework for the Ubuntu Symposium. (see below)

In centering these issues at the heart of the discussions in the Symposium, we will act on this organizing principle: **The work of the MenEngage Alliance is firmly rooted in feminist principles and analysis and builds on the historical heritage of feminist women's rights organizations and movements across the globe.** This means that for every issue we discuss, we must ensure that we build on and add value to the perspectives, knowledge and needs of feminist women's rights organizations and others who struggle to **end patriarchy**. In order to do so, we must be inclusive and accountable to those voices.

The thematic tracks for the Symposium include:

- ❖ Ending Violence
- ❖ Peace and Security / Militarisms and conflict
- ❖ SRHR for all
- ❖ Unpaid Care and equitable parenting
- ❖ SOGIESC rights
- ❖ Climate Justice
- ❖ Economic Justice
- ❖ Social justice - including racial, ethnic, age, disability justice
- ❖ Countering backlash

Within these themes there will be dedicated space to explore and address contextual issues, particularly in Rwanda and the African continent. These include **Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), Child Marriage, Indigenous Rights and Faith-based approaches.**

As a community of practice, we will ask ourselves – individually, as organizations, and as a global community:

- What do these cross-cutting themes mean for my work on masculinities and/or with men and boys?
- How do they turn up in the contexts I work in?
- What lessons have I learned, and what can I share?
- Where are our ‘blind spots’ and opportunities to strengthen our work?
- What actions do we commit to taking to advance these themes in our work?

Power With

“When activists try to change people’s lives, or tackle the injustices they face, we are actually trying to change power equations”. These words – from the book [All About Power](#), by Srilatha Batliwala and [CREA](#) – remind us that power is the concept at the heart of the issues we work on.

The symposium will create spaces, with support from the feminist activists and leaders, to dive deep into the concept of power. We assume that this will support our aspirations to dismantle unfair, unbalanced, and harmful forms of power by engaging with the people and groups who are (on the whole) benefitting from the way power is currently distributed. The symposium will create opportunities to collectively unpack the way power is distributed within our own communities, families and institutions that shape social and gender norms; especially to collectively seek responses to the following key questions:

1. How do we incorporate the concept of ‘power with’ into our programs, campaigns, and advocacy work with men and boys in an accessible and transformative way?
2. How do we work with policy and decision makers to challenge and transform unequal divisions of power in our organizations, institutions, and systems, without creating further resistance and inviting backlash?

The social transformation we must support is from ‘power over’ to ‘power with’, within each of the political agenda items, elaborated below:

Transformation

Building on to the vision set forth by the MenEngage Delhi Declaration and Call for Action, the Alliance and its members and partners have been designing and implementing programs and projects that examine the roots of injustices, and nurture a process to change the underlying norms, attitudes, beliefs, and practices that cause them to happen. Within this premise, these initiatives proclaim to identify, name and work to alter the root-causes of the existing inequalities and injustices especially those around the concept of ‘what it means to be a man’ (masculinities). These initiatives work to engage men and boys in the struggle to destabilize stereotypical male gender roles and hegemonic expressions of manhood, and support manifestations of non-violent, equitable and inclusive notions of manhood, by changing social norms that shape boys’ and men’s behavior.

The symposium will create spaces to showcase such programs and initiatives, share experiences, research, ideas and inspirations, and collectively develop knowledge-bases to strengthen the work on ‘gender-transformative approaches to engaging men and boys in gender equality’, that can accelerate the advancement of the feminist agenda on gender equality and social justice.

Key questions:

1. What evidence on gender transformative approaches is out there that we can learn from? What practical aspects and strategies do we have in the field?
2. How can different actors and stakeholders support each other to work across the layers of the 'socio-ecological framework' in order to transform society from the individual to the institutional levels?
3. What can we learn from transformative approaches from the feminist women's rights and social justice movements, to strengthen the work of engaging men and boys?
4. How can work engaging men and boys contribute to transforming root causes of inequalities?

Accountability

The work to transform masculinities and engage men and boys in gender equality can have exciting and positive results to advance women's rights, LGBTQI rights, and other social justice causes. At the same time, despite good intentions, it can also cause more harm when done without proper care and consideration for the full impacts of our actions. With the increased attention for the work to engage boys and men in gender equality, there is already tension among the feminist women's rights and social justice movements that the field is not upholding accountable practices resulting in diversion of priority and attention away from women's empowerment and equality work. This is especially true when the work is done with groups who may not acknowledge their relative privileges, nor their roles and responsibilities for social justice.

This symposium will be a milestone for Alliance members and the broader field engaging men and boys, to continue our journey of learning and improvement to promote and uphold the principle of 'do no harm'. The symposium will build on and create spaces to listen to, learn from and act as responsible partners and allies to groups experiencing marginalization and injustices. Whenever and wherever we find ourselves with an opportunity to have a platform, a voice, or a 'seat at the table', we must always remember there are countless groups who find themselves excluded, silenced, and made invisible. We commit to continue reminding ourselves and each other of the principle: 'nothing about us without us.'

Key questions:

1. When men and boys, and those working to transform masculinities, are invited, praised and included in the various spheres of power and decision making, how will we ensure that our contributions backup and support the movement for equal rights, for all women and girls – and for all people regardless of sexual orientation and gender identities?
2. How will we strengthen our capacity to forge alliances, commit to continual reflection, honest and inclusive discussion, and accountability to gender equality and shared power?
3. How will we embrace the practice of replacing privileges with rights?

Intersectionality

We recognize that the work to transform masculinities and engage boys and men for gender equality needs to be intersectional, recognizing that the complex interconnections of various powerful, and often oppressive, institutions impact people differently depending on their gender, race, age and ability identities, among other circumstances. As a result, different people and communities experience multiple forms of oppression while some people may experience only one. We will delve into conversations that contribute to strengthening intersectional understanding of men and boys' roles and responsibilities, and enhance this perspective in the work.

The symposium will create space for unpacking what an intersectional approach to work with boys and men looks like, and what we have learnt from ongoing work in this field. Most importantly we will aim to learn from the feminist movements on their approach and engage in conversations on contextualizing this approach to the work to transforming masculinities and dismantling patriarchy keeping in mind the accountability at the center of our activism and movement building approach.

As the concept of intersectionality becomes more mainstream, we must ask ourselves:

1. What evidence is out there that applies an intersectional lens to men and masculinities work - including addressing matters of gender identity, sexual orientation, age, race, ability, etc?
2. How does intersectionality relate to working with ideas around 'being a man'?
3. How can an intersectional lens help make work with men and boys more impactful for gender equality and social justice?
4. How can we use intersectionality in ways that are true to the original purpose of the concept, and avoid it being misunderstood and misused?

Feminisms

In our mission statement the Alliance commits to ensuring its work to be an intersectional feminist approach. The Alliance and its members are committed to strengthening our work by embracing a women's rights perspective and feminist analysis, including placing inequalities in privilege and power that result from patriarchy at the heart of our work with men and boys.

The symposium will be another space, based on the collective analysis of various political frameworks of this work (as described earlier in details) and discussions with feminist leaders, to re-articulate the political direction for the field of 'men and masculinities' for the coming period. We will work to understand these tools and use them when we work on the concept of masculinity and in our interventions with men and boys. Sharing, discussing, and advancing this approach is crucial for working together towards our shared vision of gender and social justice for all.

Key questions:

1. What would an intersectional feminist agenda look like when it comes to gender-transformative approaches to engaging men and boys in gender equality and social justice?
2. What examples - both positive and negative - can we learn from?

MenEngage Alliance, being informed by feminist approaches, commits to create spaces to continue to engage in strengthening partnerships, networks and alliances as a political act to change and a tool for empowerment within movement building. We work 'glocal': where ideas from the local to the global are jointly identified, shared, negotiated, changed, and disseminated. These overarching concepts are seen to inform a range of other complex and challenging topics, including youth, diversity, inclusion and LGBTQI rights, power and privilege, racism, peace, militarisms, decolonization, and breaking the gender binary.

How you can support

- **Contribute to the organizing costs of the event and local hubs**, such as venues, catering, development of symposium branding and conference materials, conference logistics, platform development, translations and human resources. Any conference needs this kind of support to make it possible.
- **Sponsor participants to attend local events**, for their travel, hotel stay and registration fees. (For example, if you work with a Global North country or UN office based in a Global South country with locals who want to attend the Symposium, you can support their participation)
- **Sponsor a thematic discussion** during the symposium series of events, that is of particular interest to your work, for example around GBV, harmful practices, SRHR, unpaid care, etc. (see the list above)
- **Support knowledge development** emerging from the symposium, by sponsoring experts who will keep track of thematic discussions and develop critical thought pieces on these topics, that will further strengthen the knowledge development in this field of work.
- **Support the virtual meeting infrastructure to allow for increased online participation**. We are committed to offering engaging and interactive online participation opportunities to reduce the need for travel.
- **Support remote participation**, by organizing a local or regional gathering to attend a plenary or specific session virtually. This can be followed by discussion with participants with calls to action focused on local needs and realities.

Contact information

To find out more about how you can support, please contact:

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menengage.org/symposium

ANNEXES

1) About MenEngage Alliance

MenEngage Alliance is a global network of civil society organisations working to transform unequal power-relations and dismantle patriarchy through transforming masculinities and engaging men and boys to advance women's rights and gender justice for all. The Alliance currently has more than 700 member organisations across 70 countries worldwide and is organised in decentralized country and regional-level networks.

MenEngage Alliance membership consists of many of the leading voices on men and masculinities in the world, including practitioners, service providers, researchers, activists and donors. The Alliance brings together significant social capital to address the pressing development, rights, equality, health-outcomes and justice issues of our time, in partnership with other organizations and activists in the field.

In partnership with women's rights and gender justice activists and organisations, the Alliance seeks to add value to existing initiatives by exploring how transforming patriarchal masculinities and engaging men and boys can contribute to the joint objectives set by feminist and social justice movements. MenEngage centers a "do-no-harm" principle: the Alliance plays an important role to ensure that work on men and masculinities is gender-transformative, human-rights based and above all: *accountable* to women, girls and people of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities.

Working with men and boys is never an end-goal in itself. MenEngage Alliance sees this work as providing an added value to the joint struggle to end patriarchy, within the broader agenda of advancing people's health and well-being, human rights and social justice. MenEngage Alliance does not support, but takes a stand against, men and groups of men who are against women's rights and feminism (commonly referred to as "men's rights activists (MRAs)").

MenEngage facilitates collaborative action across constituencies: the Alliance is the space where main actors meet, share information and promising practices, learn from and empower each other, and embark on partnerships for joint research, programming and advocacy. MenEngage Alliance plays a pivotal role in agenda-setting on men and masculinities within a feminist discourse. Because of MenEngage Alliance's existence, work with men and boys in matters of health and well-being, women's rights, violence prevention, and gender equality for all has grown significantly in size and scope over the past decade.

2) Track record of MenEngage Alliance Global Symposia in 2009 & 2014

The Alliance has an internationally acknowledged track-record of creating spaces where stakeholders from diverse contexts, regions, and backgrounds come together to discuss critical issues, identify ways forward, raise standards and promote promising practices in this work:

In 2009, the 1st Global Symposium on Engaging Men and Boys for Gender Equality in Rio de Janeiro brought together more than 400 participants from diverse countries and contexts. With the theme 'Going to Scale', the event marked a major advance in articulating, operationalizing and scaling up work to engage men in gender equality. The [Rio Declaration and Call to Action](#) highlighted the importance of working with men and boys to achieve gender equality in all spheres of human rights and international development. This had never been done before.

The 2nd Global Symposium, held in New Delhi in November 2014, brought together 1200 participants and marked the further maturing of ‘men and masculinities’ work. The event placed patriarchy at the centre of its problem analysis, and deepened intersectional understandings of how gender interplays with matters of race, class, economic status, age, etc. The gathering resulted in the [Delhi Declaration and Call to Action](#), which serves as the compass for MenEngage Alliance’s mobilisation and political advocacy agenda, as well as for many others who have since taken up work with men and boys, such as UN Women.

With a wealth of new evidence, research, experiences, and understanding around work to engage men and boys in gender justice and women’s rights, the 3rd Global Symposium in November 2020 will be a critical moment of reflection, consolidation, standard-setting, and advancing a renewed political agenda.

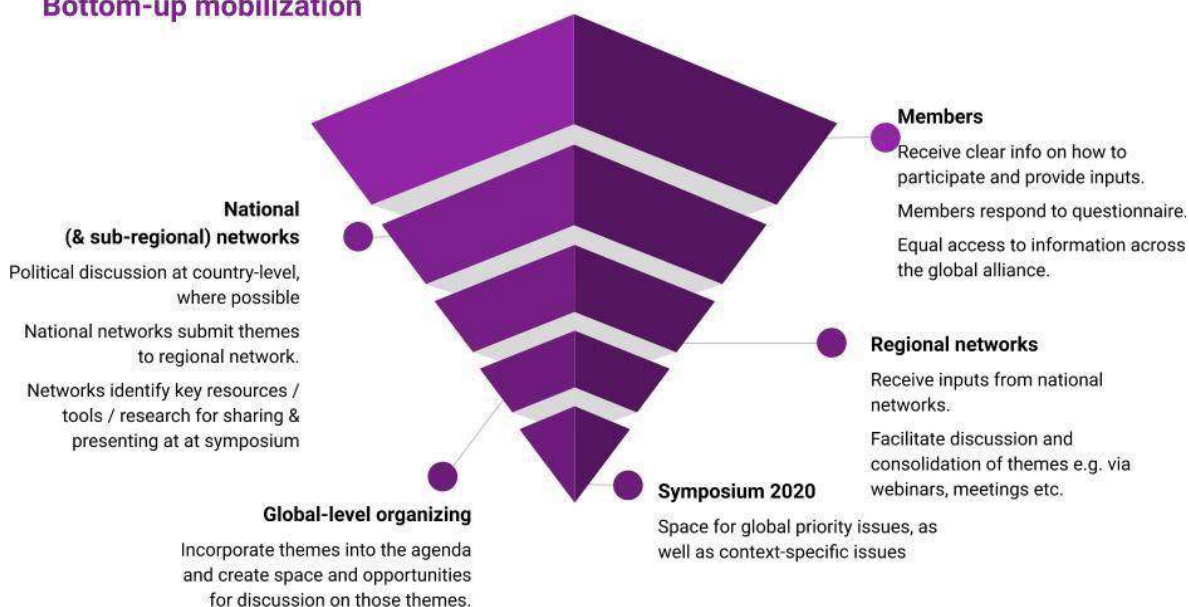
In organizing the symposium, the intention is not only to convene a compelling and engaging global gathering. This exciting and energetic event will serve as a critical opportunity to engage the global community of activists, experts and practitioners through the Alliance-wide mobilization process.

Ultimately, the 3rd Global Symposium will support the shared vision of MenEngage Alliance – for a world in which all people are free and equal, and where gender justice and human rights are recognized, promoted and protected.

3) How is the Symposium being organized: through co-creation

Since the alliance is organised in decentralized country and regional-level networks, carrying out a participatory consultative process among the regional networks is critical to ensuring the inclusion of **a diverse array of regional voices to contribute to Global Symposium organizing processes and decision-making.**

Identifying themes for the Global Symposium 2020: Bottom-up mobilization



Regional networks will **organize consultations** to gather inputs to be fed into regional/global organizing processes. These might include:

1. **Political conversations at national/regional level by feminist/SOGIESC** colleagues and partners and the articulation of men and masculinities work within this space.
2. **Share updates for national/regional members on how to participate** and join various processes in organizing the global symposium/selection on members to do so
3. **Reach out via listservs, websites, networks to identify additional themes** - what themes/topics are relevant in your country context?
4. **Share relevant resources, reports, videos, etc** of work/advocacy/movement building being carried out at national level for the symposium
5. **Gather input for the Members Assembly:** MenEngage Alliance will carry out its member's assembly during the global symposium. Key thoughts on the governance/structures/standards and guidelines of the alliance/discussion on representative voting at the assembly.

Guiding principles and organizing values are positioned prominently across the global strategic planning. These include:

- Bottom-up approach
- Expanding diversity and inclusivity
- Re-energize networks
- Representative participation
- Transparency (processes and communication, all fronts)
- Accountability (mutual and horizontal)
- Co-creation, collective ownership, meaningful membership involvement/leadership

The symposium will be a collective effort, with opportunities for all members to be involved in some way - and opportunities to play meaningful role/s in the organizing committees and working groups. The organigram below shows these committees, and how they relate to the Symposium International Steering Committee. Any MenEngage Alliance member is eligible to take part in the Symposium Committees, which will require the democratic mobilization and selection of **diverse and inclusive representative group of members from the regional networks**, in addition to Regional Coordinators, Board Members, feminist partners, the Global Secretariat staff and local host organizations.

