



Written Comments on CEDAW 'Draft Update on the General Recommendation No. 19 (1992): accelerating elimination of gender-based violence against women'

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1. Introduction

The MenEngage Alliance¹ is pleased to have the opportunity to submit the following comments on the Draft Update on the General Recommendation No. 19 (1992): accelerating elimination of gender-based violence against women (GBVAW). We welcome many of the proposed actions, including those that **support women's voices and leadership, provide support measures and reparation to victims/survivors of gender based violence against women, and those that seek to address the root causes of such violence, and urge the committee to retain these in the future.**

Specifically, we welcome paragraphs 10 and 14 which acknowledge that the root causes of gender-based violence include **stereotyped gender roles, the idea of men's entitlement over women, and the need to assert male power**, and recommend policies and programmes aimed at eliminating these practices and prejudices. Any effort to prevent gender based violence cannot ignore these underlying norms and beliefs that lead to violence and must seek to transform them.

We are pleased to see paragraph 15b)i which calls for the integration of gender equality into school curricula including **comprehensive sexuality education for boys and girls**. We believe that CSE and discussion of gender from an early age in schools is key to preventing the development of harmful social norms and practices that lead to violence against women.

We also welcome paragraph 15b)ii which calls for **educational programs with traditional religious leaders**. Traditional and religious leaders are key power holders and gate keepers in society who can shape community norms related to violence and can be important allies for change.

We welcome paragraph 15c)i and 15c)iv which encourages non stereotyped portrayals of men and women in the media and the **capacity of human rights organizations to confront media institutions that promote violent masculinities**. The media is a powerful transmitter of social norms and should

¹ MenEngage Alliance is a global network of over 700 CSOs, (I)NGOs, research institutions and activists working to transform masculinities and engage men and boys in women's rights and gender justice for all. <http://menengage.org/>

be held to account for promoting violent versions of manhood and engaged as an ally for the transformation of social norms related to violence.

Finally, we are pleased to see paragraph 15d)i which calls for mandatory training for all judiciary, lawyers, law enforcement officers, health-care, education and social personnel that includes the impact of gender stereotyping and bias, their contribution to gender based violence and inadequate response. It is of vital importance that such personnel **examine their own attitudes to gender, are made aware how they contribute to violence by condoning or not reporting it, and take their responsibility to prevent such violence.**

2. Recommendations on the content of the Update

While a lot of attention is given to women as victims/survivors, and rightfully so, there is a **considerable blind-spot in relation to the roles of men and boys as perpetrators of violence against women, as well as potential allies for change.** Despite the emphasis placed on addressing the root causes of violence, there is a lack of recognition of the need to specifically address the social norms relating to masculinity that can cause gender based violence against women, and the potential of policies and programmes that target men and boys in their various roles to hold them to account and challenge these norms and attitudes.

A number of international instruments have acknowledged the need to engage men and boys in the elimination of violence and discrimination against women and girls, such as Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development (in particular paragraph 20), the Beijing Platform for Action (including recently agreed conclusions of the 60th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women), the International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (including CRC General Comment 15). However, existing international instruments on violence against women have yet to make explicit calls for **scaling up and implementing universal primary prevention programs to end men's and boys' use of violence against women and girls.** The time has come to make primary prevention a part of national and international policies and platforms.

MenEngage Alliance considers the update of General Recommendation on GBVAW a critical opportunity for the Committee to further develop more detailed standards and guidelines on primary prevention, including on rights-based interventions that engage men and boys, in addition to and alongside work with women and girls, as a contribution to achieving sustainable progress towards the elimination of GBVAW.

3. Ending GBVAW and engaging men and boys: the links

Work with men and boys must be done in manners fully accountable to women and girls, and other marginalized groups. Work on engaging men and boys and transforming masculinities is not an end in itself, rather a strategy for the achievement of the overall goal of women's rights and gender justice for all. Interventions should be carried out in close collaboration with women and women's rights organizations.

Various studies have affirmed links between rigid attitudes about gender roles, power inequalities, and men's use of violence against women.² Different social, economic and cultural interpretations of

² Barker, G., J.M. Contreras, B. Heilman, A. Singh, and R. Verma (2011) Evolving Men: Initial Results from IMAGES Survey. Men + Gender Equality Policy Project. International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) and Promundo; Fleming, P.J., G. Barker, J. McCleary-Sills and M. Morton

masculinities and rigid gender norms that link masculinities with power over women continue to be a significant factor in leading men to engage in gender based violence. **Any government strategy to prevent gender based violence, therefore, should address these social norms, attitudes, behaviours and constructs of masculinities.**

Studies confirm that primary prevention programmes that engage men and boys can work to change the social norms and other factors associated with men's use of violence against women.³ Nonetheless, programmes remain mostly NGO led, small scale, short term and have yet to reach large numbers of men and boys. **In order for work with men and boys to have the required impact, a more concerted effort is needed to take these initiatives to scale and institutionalize them.** This should involve a multi-sectoral approach and committed partnerships between the government and CSOs, the health, education and justice sectors, the media and the private sector.

To ensure they are scalable and sustainable, strategies for engaging men and boys should include interventions and transformations at different levels, based on a socio-ecological model: Interventions that aim to change men's individual behaviour and behaviour within relationships, together with women and girls; interventions targeted at communities that aim to transform dominant social norms regarding gender and violence; interventions that aim to embed positive gender norms into institutions such as the health and education systems, the military, etc.; and government policies and laws that engage men and boys in gender-based violence prevention.

Our societies should encourage and enable more men to take a stand against violence against women. Research finds that many and perhaps the majority of men around the world believe that violence against women is a violation of rights, but most men are silent when men they know carry out such violence. A growing number of individual men, as well as groups of male (pro)feminist activists, around the world are joining the fight to end violence against women and are working to raise awareness of and prevent violence against women. These men are necessary allies for change and alternative role models. Bystander intervention and community accountability approaches encourage and support men and boys who already oppose violence against women to speak out when they see other men use violence. In impact evaluation studies, such approaches - whether implemented in schools, communities, the workplace, or via sports – have shown effectiveness in changing men's attitudes and enhancing existing community norms that affirm the unacceptability of GBVAW.

Secondary prevention approaches such as group counselling and education, through which young people who have witnessed violence at home can receive support, are key to breaking cycles of violence and should be made available in all schools and community settings. Research has shown that the strongest single factor associated with men's use of violence against female partners is experiencing or witnessing domestic violence in their family while growing up. Despite this, few children exposed to violence have access to psychosocial support, and such services are seldom available in schools or in communities.

(2013) 'Engaging Men and Boys in Advancing Women's Agency: Where We Stand and New Directions'. Gender Equality & Development, World Bank; Peacock, D. and G. Barker (2012) 'Working with Men and Boys to Promote Gender Equality: A Review of the Field and Emerging Approaches'. Expert Group Meeting on the Prevention of Violence Against Women and Girls, Bangkok.

³ Peacock, D. & Barker, G. (2014) Working with Men and Boys to Prevent Gender-based Violence: Principles, Lessons Learned, and Ways Forward. Men and Masculinities, Vol. 17(5) pp.578-599

Engaging men as caregivers in parent training is a key strategy for ending cycles of violence. Programs with fathers and caregivers that emphasize alternatives to physical punishment, promote healthy and egalitarian relationships with mothers and other caregivers, and promote gender-equal childcare have shown promise in ending violence against women and children as well as promoting maternal and child health and equitable caregiving.

Holding men accountable for the violence they have carried out must be part of comprehensive national strategies to end and prevent violence against women. Programs with men who have used violence against women can be part of comprehensive community support for women survivors of violence. When such programs are part of an effective justice system, connected to the community, and combined with adequate support and protection of women survivors of violence, they can be an important part of preventing future violence. Furthermore, community approaches to hold men accountable for violence against women – in which survivors have the chance to hear and ask for justice from men who have used violence – can be important elements in changing community norms and helping communities and individuals recover from violence.

4. Text recommendations

Engaging men and boys and addressing social norms regarding masculinity

Paragraph 10: The Committee regards it to be rooted in gender-related factors such as men's entitlement, **[Add: social norms regarding masculinity]**, the need to assert male control or power, enforce gender roles, or prevent, discourage or punish what is considered to be unacceptable female behaviour. These factors also contribute to the explicit or implicit social acceptance of gender-based violence against women and the widespread impunity for it.

Paragraph 14: They also require, in accordance with articles 2 (f) and 5 (a) of the Convention, creation and implementation of measures to eradicate prejudices, stereotypes, **[ADD: harmful social norms]** and practices that are the root cause of gender-based violence against women. **[ADD: This should include the roles and responsibilities of men and boys.]** All these legal and policy measures must recognise that this violence is affected by intersectional discrimination.

Paragraph 15: All these measures should be implemented considering women as subjects of rights and promoting their agency and autonomy, including the evolving capacity of adolescent girls, and the particular situation of women affected by intersecting forms of discrimination. **[ADD: Measures should fully address the role and responsibility of men and boys in preventing and eliminating violence against women and girls and encourage active participation of men and boys as strategic partners and allies]**. The Committee also reiterates its call on States parties to examine all remaining reservations to the Convention with a view to their withdrawal.

Prevention b): Develop and implement effective measures, with the active participation of all relevant stakeholders, such as women's organisations to address the stereotypes, prejudices, customs and practices that condone or promote such violence and underpin structural inequality of women with men, as described in article 5, **[ADD: and promote positive, non-violent masculinities]**.

Integration of gender into school curricula

Prevention b) i): The integration of gender equality content into curricula at all levels of education from the early childhood level **[ADD: that addresses gender based violence and teaches tolerance and non-violent conflict resolution]**, as well as in public education programmes targeting

stereotyped gender roles and promoting **[Add: positive, non-violent masculinities]**, values of respect and equality and non-discrimination, including comprehensive sexuality education for girls and boys **[ADD: that addresses the issue of sexual consent];**

Bystander intervention

Prevention b) ii: Awareness-raising programmes that emphasise the criminal nature of gender-based violence against women, encourage its reporting, address the stigma and stereotyping experienced by survivors/victims of such violence, **[ADD: and encourage bystanders to intervene in situations of violence]**. These programmes should target: (a) women and men at all levels of society; (b) all education, health, social services and law enforcement personnel; (c) traditional and religious leaders; and (d) perpetrators of any form of gender-based violence.

Secondary prevention measures

[ADD: Paragraph 15.b.iii Secondary prevention measures in schools and communities that offer psychosocial support for men and boys who have witnessed or experienced violence during childhood.]

Mass media campaigns to engage men and boys

[ADD: Prevention c) iv: The implementation of mass media campaigns that raise awareness about gender based violence and show men and boys as part of the solution.]

Research on social norms that lead to violence

Data collection and monitoring c): Undertake or support surveys, research programmes and studies on gender-based violence against women, in order to, among other things, assess the prevalence of gender-based violence experienced by women and social or cultural beliefs **[ADD: and norms of both men and women]** regarding such violence **[ADD: and gender relations]**. These studies and surveys should take into account intersecting forms of discrimination, based upon the principle of self-identification.