

Advocacy And Policy



WHAT IS ADVOCACY?

While engaging men and boys through group education, health services and community mobilization can have a significant impact on their attitudes and behaviours, there is also a need to advocate for changes in the political, legal, cultural and economic structures which shape the lives of women and men and often perpetuate many gender inequities.

Advocacy can be defined as the process of building support and positively influencing decision-making and hence policy on a given issue. It can entail a multitude of approaches and tactics that can be undertaken at various levels: from capacity building and dialoguing with community leaders to garnering political commitment and support for the scaling-up of successful interventions and policies that target men and boys.

Advocacy for gender equality, therefore, includes lobbying for changes in laws or regulations that perpetuate inequality. Advocacy means pushing for legislation that, for example, criminalizes violence against women and grants paternity as well as maternity leave, promotes the presence of men in pre-natal services and the delivery room and guarantees women equal pay and employment opportunities—to name a few.

During the last 15 years, an increasingly positive international climate, as reflected in a series of milestone conferences and meetings, has favoured the engagement of men and boys in health and gender-equality (see Box 1 in the Introduction). Likewise, a growing body of programme experiences and evidence has highlighted myriad strategies for engaging men and boys in Sexual Reproductive Health, Maternal, Newborn and Child Health, fatherhood, HIV/AIDS, and violence prevention. More importantly, this evidence has confirmed that there are real benefits for both male and female health. The emergent research and program experiences around the issue of male involvement can be utilized for advocacy around engaging men and boys.

The strategies and tips presented in this section draw from advocacy experiences related specifically to promoting male involvement in health and development agendas. Specific topics include engaging community stakeholders, media and government and building alliances.

CREATING AN ADVOCACY STRATEGY

The first step to creating an advocacy strategy designed to engage men and boys is to carry out a needs-assessment about how gender norms influence male attitudes and behaviours—and the opportunities, programmes and services needed to effectively involve them.

This assessment should be followed by another needs assessment to determine what types of advocacy have already been undertaken or are underway—not only with respect to engaging men and boys—but also with other related issues such as gender mainstreaming.

The advocating organization should familiarize itself with the political climate in the country and region and the potentials and possibilities as well as drawbacks or consequences of the assumed advocacy strategy. Once the decision has been made to move forward, it will be necessary to train staff in advocacy techniques.

Developing and executing a plan designed to influence legislators and policymakers requires a skill set of its own and needs to be developed among staff tasked with planning and implementing advocacy activities. Still, this should not deter organizations from getting involved in advocacy—especially on issues they understand intimately. Box 1 examines common myths about grassroots advocacy and highlights reasons for organizations to be involved even if they have no previous experience.

When launching an advocacy campaign, it is necessary to identify key stakeholders at different levels, from schools and communities to local and national government, and to develop clear and simple messages for mobilizing them. These messages

should revolve around the benefits of applying a gender lens—including how socialization and gender norms shape male attitudes and behaviours and put both themselves, and women and girls, at risk. It is especially critical to argue what men and boys will stand to gain and what they stand to lose if they do not get involved. Messages need to be tailored to specific stakeholders and their standpoints.

As will be discussed in the next section, it is particularly important to be aware of the resistance and concern stakeholders may express in relation to working with men and to be prepared to address them. For example, some women's rights groups often want to know how male involvement will directly benefit women, and want to be assured that it will not detract from funding or support for women's issues. Likewise, governments and donors often want to know how working with men and boys will contribute to broader social and development issues. Other groups may directly oppose your work. The tools section includes an activity for dealing with such groups (Tool: Dealing with the Opposition).

BOX 1

MYTHS ABOUT GRASSROOTS ADVOCACY

MYTH #1: Grassroots advocates must fully follow and understand the details of complex legislative processes in order to be effective.

MYTH #2: It takes hundreds or thousands of people taking action in order to get a legislator's attention.

REALITY #1: You don't have to be an expert. In fact, while it's helpful to understand the basic steps that policymaking follows, good grassroots advocates shouldn't try to become professional lobbyists. You can still build an effective grassroots operation, because you know everything you need to know:

- You know the elected officials who work for you.
- You know your story.

- You know the issue and your position on it.
- Grassroots advocacy is all about sharing those basic points with the people who represent you.

REALITY #2: Collective action by even five people can get the attention of elected officials, depending on the timing, context, and nature of the contact. The truth is that government officials don't often hear directly from their constituents, so if you generate a few personal contacts that are effectively planned and if you maintain those contacts, you will set yourself, your views, and your cause apart.

TAKEN FROM THE GLOBAL AIDS ALLIANCE'S ACTIVIST TOOLKIT AVAILABLE AT: [HTTP://WWW.GLOBALAIDSALLIANCE.ORG/ACTION/SHARPEN_YOUR_SKILLS/](http://www.globalaidsalliance.org/action/sharpen_your_skills/)

ADDRESSING COMMON CONCERNS

Although there has been increasing recognition and evidence regarding the importance of involving men and boys in the promotion of health and gender-equity, there is still some resistance to the idea. Some of this comes from donors who have no prior experience working with men; women's groups who fear that resources are being shifted from the very pressing needs of girls and women; and NGOs and other providers who believe men are difficult to work with (Rivers and Aggleton, 2002). Some of the most common concerns and reservations related to working with men and boys are described below. It is important to be aware of these and to be prepared to address them.

WHY SHOULD MEN CHANGE?

A common rebuttal to work with men and boys is that it is futile to expect men to change their attitudes and behaviours because they are the ones who benefit from gender inequality. However, as has been discussed throughout this toolkit, rigid gender norms also leave men and boys vulnerable to various health problems. Moreover, other factors, from ethnicity to socio-economic class, may interact with gender and aspects of masculine identity to further increase vulnerability. Advocacy strategies should therefore call attention to the "double-edged nature" of gender stereotypes—that is, the fact that benefits and privileges bestowed upon men in patriarchal and sexist societies also come at a cost and even

more so for certain groups of men. This should be used as leverage to promote awareness of why it is necessary to change and what the benefits are of building relationships between men and women based on equality and mutual respect rather than fear and domination (Peacock and Levack, 2004).

It can also be useful to cite the increasing body of evidence that shows that men can, and do change, as a result of well-designed interventions—principally those which incorporate a gender perspective—and that these changes lead to benefits for everyone (Barker et al., 2007).

ADVOCACY AUDIENCE

COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS

The process of building support for working with young men begins at the local level. Community stakeholders—from parents and teachers to religious leaders and popular figures—play a prominent role in ensuring that programmes and policies are rooted in, and relevant to, local realities and culture.

These groups speak up for the establishment of positive policies as well as reinforcing the constructive changes in men's attitudes and practices, which are promoted in workshops and campaigns. Stepping Stones—originally developed in Uganda and now adopted in a number of regions—is one example of an intervention model that incorporates community-based advocacy. The intervention consists of a series of educational workshops focusing on young and adult men and women about gender-roles, communication, relationships and HIV prevention. The first step is to engage community leaders and to obtain their support. Leaders then go on to invite other community members to participate in the workshops. **The support and involvement of community leaders lends credibility to the intervention and ultimately strengthens the community's commitment to sustaining change.** Other strategies for engaging community stakeholders are presented below.

It is also important to involve community stakeholders in advocacy actions with media and government, which are described below. Among the most essential community stakeholders are the men and boys themselves. Men and boys can be particularly valuable and persuasive spokespersons when it comes to addressing media and government and mobilizing other men and boys on issues related to gender-equality and health (Ingham and Mayhew, 2006). To this end, they should be provided with ample

opportunities to communicate their ideas and opinions within and outside the community.

Faith-based organisations (FBOs) are also valuable community stakeholders. Even though different interpretations of religions or religious texts are frequently used to support gender inequality, religious leaders and institutions can be an avenue for questioning inequitable attitudes. Owing to their influence and their involvement in social development (FBOs provide 30 to 70 per cent of health services in developing countries), FBOs can help to challenge inequitable interpretations of different religious scripts and can be powerful allies to promote gender equality. Also, because they are mainly male-led institutions (99 per cent of religious leaders are men and 85 per cent of FBOs are led by men), FBOs are a natural partner when it comes to working with men to address traditional male gender norms (UNFPA, 2008).

MEDIA

The mass media is a powerful forum for shaping attitudes and opinions. It can therefore be a strategic vehicle for influencing public opinion with respect to the importance of engaging men and boys in the promotion of gender-equity and health.

Media Advocacy targets decision-makers directly and indirectly by motivating the general public to pressure them. Part of a media strategy can also involve advocating directly with the media itself. This entails building capacity for media specialists (journalists, reporters, etc.) so that they understand the importance of promoting gender-equitable messages and images and the benefits of working with men and boys. It also entails setting up a network of media contacts committed to speaking up about and supporting work with men and boys. It is important

to provide the network with new information about programmes and related studies and to encourage site visits and interviews with direct beneficiaries and programme planners.

Some strategies for working with the media include providing the media with press releases or other relevant materials to support them in developing a story, informing the media about upcoming events, writing editorials in local papers, and holding press conferences.

Examples of how to do some of the above are included in the tools for this section. Information provided to the media should always be packaged in ways that capture the attention and interest of the policy actors and the public. For example, the dissemination of the Program H impact evaluation results in Brazil included headlines in national newspapers such as "Machismo is bad for one's health" and "Macho men are more at risk"(for more information on Program H, see Case Study 1 in the Introduction).

Another media strategy is to identify and endorse "celebrities" such as sports figures and musical artists who can use their charisma and credibility to advocate for the need to work with men and boys for a more gender-equitable society. For example, the White Ribbon Campaign in Brazil recruited four well-known actors to participate in a public service announcement designed to raise awareness of GBV (for more information on the White Ribbon Campaign, see Case Study 2 in the chapter on GBV).

In addition to celebrities, media advocacy efforts should also identify and recruit "everyday" men who can share their stories of how they challenge non-equitable gender stereotypes in their daily lives and relationships. These men can help to mobilize the attention of the general public and reinforce the possibilities for men to make changes in their own lives.

Either way, spokespersons for an advocacy campaign need to be scrutinized to ensure that their personal values and practices are in alignment with the organization and the advocacy campaign in which they are involved.

Also, it is important that spokespersons receive training on working with the media to promote the campaign. This can include developing talking points and going over the details about what the organization is seeking to accomplish and how this also relates to their behaviour and lives.

GOVERNMENT

Worldwide, government policies testify to a lack of attention to the gender-specific needs and realities of men and boys and strategies to involve them

in the promotion of gender equality and health. Many policies that do recognize gender as a variable continue to only focus on women and girls as the way to achieve gender equality. While it is necessary to have specific policies to promote the empowerment of women and girls and their inclusion in programmes and services, the absence of a gender perspective that also involves men and boys can ultimately detract from the effectiveness of policies

As noted earlier, media advocacy and community mobilization are critical to targeting government and policy makers both directly and indirectly. Other approaches, which target government directly, include lobbying and/or face-to face meetings with government representatives, letter writing campaigns to government representatives, and election-based campaigns designed to mobilize votes for candidates who support the issues.

In any advocacy strategy, it is also critical to demonstrate to the government how it will benefit by supporting those policies. For example, one focus of advocacy efforts targeting government can be the collection and analysis of gender-disaggregated data related to health-related behaviours and vulnerabilities. Many governments oversee or participate in large-scale censuses or surveys that collect information on various causes of morbidity and mortality and related behaviour indicators. The gender disaggregation of this information can provide valuable insights for programme planners and advocates on differential behaviours and prevention needs of men and women. It also helps government planners do their job and results in more successfully targeted strategies.

Advocacy efforts with government should also include strategies designed to integrate successful programme strategies into government agendas. To date, most successful interventions with men and boys have been mostly NGO-led, limited in duration and generally only reach several hundred to at most a few thousand. The integration of workshops, campaigns and other activities into government settings such as public schools can help to achieve the large-scale and sustained reach necessary to change existing gender norms and power dynamics related to the health vulnerabilities of men and women.

Other possible topics with which to lobby government and policymakers include paternity leave, policies that support fathers who do not cohabit with the mother, legislation that makes GBV a crime, laws and regulations that support male involvement in maternal health and permit their presence in the delivery room, and supporting SRH education for men and boys. This section includes a tool for lobbying or meeting with decision-makers to discuss issues and influence policy.



GENDER EQUALITY POLICY

Around the world, there exists an enormous variation in gender equality policies and agencies. Even when gender ministries exist and mainstreaming occurs, the ability to effect policy depends on the relative influence of the ministry itself or structures within the government and to what extent it is committed to gender equality.

Policies that engage men and boys within a framework of gender equality have been shown to have impact, although there is fewer examples to draw from compared to gender policy in general. Still, it has been shown that such policy initiatives can lead to positive impact on gender equality and in the

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