



ENGAGING YOUNG MEN IN ADVANCING GENDER EQUALITY



A Guidance Note to Inform the Development of National Policies and Programmes Based on Results from the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES) – Middle East and North Africa.

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The International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES MENA)

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The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region continues to see progress – driven by new government policies and civil society initiatives – in health and education indicators, and toward greater gender equality, including the advancement of women’s rights. However, as in all regions of the world, there is a long road ahead before women attain true equality with men. To make further strides in advancing women’s rights, freedoms and access to justice, programmes and policies must consider the role of youth, notably of young men, in achieving gender equality. True gender equality is possible if Governments, civil society actors and individuals continue to build upon existing youth-led initiatives centred on how issues relevant to young people can be recognized, discussed, challenged and transformed. The issues include the traditional expectations and conventions that manhood brings in the MENA region, the harmful norms that support the use of violence and discrimination, widespread unemployment and economic insecurity.

There is an urgent need to engage young men in the future of gender equality in the region. Across the Arab World, young people in the 15 to 29-year age category represent more than 30 per cent of the population.¹² Moreover, the IMAGES MENA findings, presented in more detail below, underscore how young men often have inequitable attitudes about gender roles and stereotypes in society. Furthermore, between 24 per cent of men in Lebanon and 41 per cent of men in Morocco in the study of four countries agreed with the notion that “more rights for women means that men lose out.”^{3,4}

This guidance note draws on data and recommendations from *Understanding Masculinities: Results from the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES) – Middle East and North Africa*⁵ on the topic of engaging young men in partnership with young women to advance gender equality for the well-being of women, men, children and societies. The recommendations put forward in this note are intended to serve as regional guidance and should be further contextualized and adapted for use at the national level. These efforts are crucial to the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. This guidance note was produced in combination with three other thematic guidance notes on the topics of gender socialization, violence against women and fatherhood and caregiving.

The International Men and Gender Equality Survey – Middle East and North Africa (IMAGES MENA) was designed to take a holistic look at the lives of men and women in the region. The nearly 10,000-person (men and women) study led by UN Women, Promundo and local research partners in Egypt, Lebanon (including Syrian and Palestinian refugees), Morocco and Palestine⁶ investigates many of the stereotypes commonly associated with men and women in these countries, and highlights pathways to equality. This guidance note draws directly upon data first presented in the IMAGES MENA regional report.

THE STATE OF YOUNG MEN IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA⁷

The population in the region, overall, is very young: for example, approximately 61 per cent of Egypt’s population is under the age of 30, with 40 per cent of the population between 10 and 29 years.⁸ The IMAGES studies conducted in other regions in the world, using a selection of statements expressing attitudes towards gender that were inputted into the Gender Equitable Men (GEM) scale and weighted, show that younger men generally have more equitable attitudes than their older counterparts. However, in Egypt, Morocco and Palestine – using a regionally adjusted version of the GEM scale – younger men’s views on gender equality were found not to differ substantially from those of older men.^{9,10} By and large, women of all ages also had more equitable attitudes than those of men, as was the case in other regions, and young women held more equitable views than older women. The reasons for these trends are undoubtedly complex, and economic tensions are certainly at play. Many young men in these three countries report difficulties finding a job, hence they may feel they are not living up to the social convention that men are the financial providers in a family. As one young man in Ramallah admitted:

“A man has to bring a house, a dowry and a car when he gets married. He has to have a job. He needs to have established himself to be able to marry. By the time he has achieved all that, he’ll be 70 years old! ... Such is society’s pressure on men.” – 20-year old male university student, Ramallah, Palestine

This struggle to fulfil gendered expectations may lead young men to feel particularly stressed and disadvantaged. Some 43 per cent of all men surveyed in Lebanon (both Lebanese nationals and those of Syrian origin), for example, reported frequent feelings of stress or depression over their lack of income, while 39 per cent reported that earning insufficient income made them feel ashamed in front of their family.¹¹ Youth unemployment rates range from 21 per cent in Lebanon to 42 per cent in Egypt,^{12,13} although these numbers do not include participation in the informal economy. In Egypt the informal sector has been estimated to account for 30 per cent or more of all employment).^{14,15} Not surprisingly, a recent study in Egypt noted that youth frequently stated that their aim was to gain job security through integration into the formal sector.¹⁶ Ultimately, under pressure to attain the often unattainable norm of “man as financial provider,” some men concluded that they receive priority at any economic opportunities that are available, despite women’s far higher rates of unemployment and discrimination.

Furthermore, many young men cannot escape the reality of conflict. Syrian men in Lebanon, displaced due to the war in Syria, reported higher levels of stress, depression and shame than Lebanese male nationals, for example. In many instances, according to qualitative research, Syrian men in Lebanon were no longer able to provide financially during the war, leaving women to take on the role of provider, further marginalizing young men in some cases. Similarly, in Palestine, the occupation may contribute to a yearning for the inequitable gender order and security of the past,¹⁷ and to allowing certain voices in Palestinian society to justify inequitable social structures as a means of protecting and defending women and the family. At the same time, entrenched violence, initiated and perpetuated by militarism, enhances violence in all its aspects and manifestations. The odds are stacked against unemployed Palestinian men as they attempt to realize their socially assigned role as providers and breadwinners against a background of extreme economic deprivation due to the prolonged occupation, its attendant unemployment and low incomes.

In these and other countries of the region, the language and symbolism of traditional masculine “provider and protector” roles have allowed violent extremist groups to take advantage of both “push”

and “pull” factors to recruit disenfranchised young men. A complex interlinkage of push factors, such as poverty, political grievances and social and economic marginalization of certain groups of men, and pull factors, such as the enticement of economic opportunity, marriage prospects and traditional male dominance and power, helps in this recruitment, particularly where few alternatives were available.¹⁸ Extremist groups like the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham entice young men by offering services: health services, education, loans and entrepreneurial capital and arranged marriages that provide opportunities for men to fulfil traditional gender expectations, which otherwise they could not fulfil.

The IMAGES MENA findings also show that educational attainment is associated with more equitable views on gender among both men and women. More educated men and women, with more educated mothers and with fathers who carried out traditionally feminine tasks in their childhood homes, were generally more likely to hold equitable views. Yet public spending on education varies throughout the region, from 25 per cent in Tunisia to less than 6 per cent in Lebanon – indicating that education is often not a priority.^{20,21} Unlike men, however, younger women in most countries held more equitable views than their older counterparts. The conclusion that emerges is that younger women in the region are yearning for more equality, but their male peers – particularly those with lower educational attainment – fail to share or support such aspirations. Some may even be working actively to oppose gender equality. The young man quoted below, a participant in qualitative research in Morocco, is a case in point when he reports on the disturbing backlash to gender equality in his community:

“To be honest, it’s rare to find a real man. Men have lost their masculinity in the wake of these new laws that give more advantages and freedom to women.” – Male student in his twenties, in Khémisset, Morocco

Programmes and policies that support female empowerment and women’s rights must therefore find suitable methodologies to transform the gender norms that perpetuate these harmful attitudes and practices. This includes methodologies that invite

and challenge men to be true allies in the pursuit of greater gender and social equality, and to see how gender equality is also their cause. A recent review of policies to partner with youth on public governance institutions in the region found an absence of gender considerations in such policies.²² Ultimately, young men and women in the region can be agents of positive change in their communities if they are given equal opportunities for development and growth.

PROGRAMMATIC GUIDANCE: ADDRESSING YOUNG MEN'S MULTIPLE NEEDS AND CONSTRAINTS

As IMAGES MENA data show, there are many complex constraints and challenges facing young men from diverse backgrounds in the MENA region, even as many young men continue to demonstrate inequitable gender norms and perpetrate various forms of violence even as many do believe in something closer to equality. This leaves program designers, funders, and implementers a tremendous task as they set out to simultaneously address harmful gender attitudes, ensure greater economic opportunity, and prevent family, political, and extremist violence alike, all while simultaneously recognizing the disproportionate negative consequences of persistent gender inequality for women and girls. Drawing on IMAGES MENA data and recent programming in the MENA region and elsewhere, it is possible to point to concrete guidance to improve their efforts.

WHAT PROGRAMMING IS BEST SUITED FOR YOUNG MEN IN THE MENA REGION?

According to global evidence and promising practices, the best programmes that address the following: young men's gender attitudes; the perpetration of aggressive behaviours and violence in relationships; economic and social exclusion; and involvement in political, extremist, or gang violence include certain traits such as those listed below. To the extent possible, programmes that challenge young men's harmful notions about manhood should involve them in programme design and in related communications, or advocacy work.

- **Programmes must open up the “man box” and get young men to reflect critically on, and ultimately reimagine, their definition of what it means to “be a real man.”** Many years of evidence support the conclusion that programmes aimed at addressing gender-related issues must not shy away from discussing gender directly. In the case of programming on harmful masculine norms addressing them requires direct, frank discussion about what it means to “be a real man.”²³ These discussions must also include a variety of approaches that recognize the uniqueness of young men and young women, in which factors of diversity -- age, race, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation and others play a role.
 - In particular, the social expectation that a “real man” achieves financial success and is the primary provider for himself and his family intensifies the pressure on men in situations of high unemployment, political instability and limited economic opportunity. Programming should help economically marginalized young men in the MENA region identify and seek alternative ways of finding a sense of purpose and self-worth— those that better reflect their interests, abilities and opportunities. Then, they can begin to experience these different benchmarks of manhood in their life. Rather than focusing only on economic objectives, programming should help young men take pride in their identity as a caregiver, friend, artist, student, group leader, activist. The economic realities of these young men's lives cannot be ignored, but shifting the emphasis away from the role of provider as the most important way they can contribute to society and their families has the potential to relieve some stress.
 - Likewise, open and active political or inter-State conflicts puts excessive demands on the expectation that “a real man” be a physical protector for his family, particularly if a family becomes displaced. The urge to protect one's family is certainly a positive urge, but individual men have limited capacity to truly affect the complex political drivers behind war and conflict. If physical protection is the only avenue societies in MENA allow

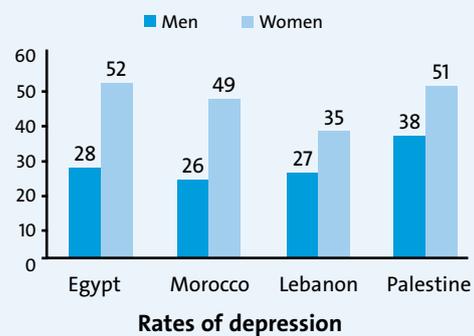
young men to achieve or prove their manhood, then it is not surprising that they turn to violence or force. Programmes should elaborate on and amplify the many other community-focused ideas and inclinations that young men in the region share. They should also provide opportunities for young men in conflict and violence-affected areas in particular to discuss the impact that violence has had on their lives, and to reflect on, elaborate and develop more positive non-violent coping mechanisms to resolve conflict.

- IMAGES MENA respondents' high levels of reported depressive symptoms and suicidal tendencies in the IMAGES MENA data also point to the underlying emotional dilemmas at the heart of mainstream definitions of manhood or masculinity. Young men in the MENA region are often taught and socialized not to display any emotional vulnerability or perceived "weakness." But a full range of emotional intelligence and expression is vital for all people, regardless of their gender. Amid the context of war, displacement, violence, including young men's own experiences of sexual violence, unemployment and otherwise limited prospects -- feelings of sadness, fear, stress, disappointment and frustration are inevitable and natural. Young men are taught to heap pain upon pain by denying themselves the ability to be fully emotionally honest and expressive. Programmes with young men in the MENA region should alleviate, not amplify, this stress: safe spaces should be created by promoting trust-building activities, open dialogues, one-on-one counselling sessions and using other methodologies to allow young men to more fully express their emotions and to heal where necessary.
- As young men begin to unpack and unlearn these socially constructed ideals of manhood, the lessons learned must take place in partnership with young women leading to their empowerment and

equality. While young men face particular gendered challenges and vulnerabilities, they must acknowledge the inequality and discrimination that young women face, and work together towards greater gender equality for the benefit of all. Young men, who display both attitudes and behaviour of gender equality, should be included in programmes as role models for other young men.

BOX 1

Depressive symptoms are highly prevalent



Percentage of respondents in four countries who scored above the depression-screening threshold on the 20-item CES-D²⁴ depression scale²⁵

- **Peer group influences are particularly important for young men therefore group-based programme models have proven more effective than some others.** Younger programme participants are more likely to embrace new ways of thinking and acting when their friends and other peers they admire are embracing the same changes. Following this theory, many effective programmes that aim to shift gender norms and accelerate young men's uptake of healthier or non-violent behaviours have used group education methodologies. Programmes with young men in MENA should allow for gender norms to change socially. Working with young men alongside their peers will give them a chance to understand new ideas at an individual level, and to observe their respected peers embracing these ideas.

BOX 2

Programme focus: ABAAD

ABAAD is a non-profit, non-politically affiliated, non-religious civil association that aims to achieve gender equality as an essential condition to sustainable social and economic development in the MENA region. ABAAD seeks to promote women's equality and participation through policy development, legal reform, gender mainstreaming, engaging men, eliminating discrimination and advancing and empowering women to participate effectively and fully in their communities. ABAAD also seeks to support and collaborate with civil society organizations involved in gender equality programmes and advocacy campaigns.

In brief, ABAAD believes that attaining gender equality and combating gender-based violence can only be achieved through holistically addressing the constraints that exist at different levels: policy, institutional and among individuals. ABAAD is committed to “deconstructing” negative gender stereotypes that are instilled during childhood and early adolescence, and to reconstructing such stereotypes according to principles of gender equality.

Their work with young men centres on their Programme Ra – taken from “rajol”, the Arabic word for man, which encourages critical reflection about rigid norms related to manhood. Taking Lebanon's refugee crisis into account, Programme Ra was adapted from Programme H. This Programme was developed by Promundo and has been used in more than 22 countries. It was designed to target young men between 14 and 24 years, from refugee and marginalized host communities living in both urban and rural areas. As a capacity-building training curriculum for young men, Programme Ra focuses on issues like non-violence, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), substance abuse and gender equality.

ABAAD has amplified all of this work through media campaigns and film. In partnership with Heartland Alliance for Human Needs and Human Rights and the Lebanese Ministry of Social Affairs, and in collaboration with the Forum for Development Culture and Dialogue, ABAAD launched a nationwide media campaign, entitled “Be a Man. Real Men Take a Stand Against Violence”. This media campaign took a new approach: rather than blame the perpetrators, it highlighted those men who refuse to remain silent about gender inequality and violence against women. In 2011, with WonderBox Productions, ABAAD also sponsored 16 young men from Iraq and Lebanon to create TV spots, each sending the message that everyone has a role to play in ending violence against women.

- **Given their immense popularity in the region, social media platforms should also play a role in shifting public conversations and attitudes about gender, masculinity and other social conventions. Programmers must also assume responsibility for the potential harmful influence of these platforms.** Community-based or national campaigns to address pressing issues facing youth and young men in the region must include social media components, including careful efforts to confront and counter the harmful messages too often disseminated on these platforms. The recently-launched “Because I Am a Man” campaign of UN Women in the four IMAGES MENA countries, for example, seeks to raise awareness and initiate discussions on gender equality issues with young men through social media.

BOX 3

Programme focus: Dialogue and artistic expression as a means of transforming group stereotypes

The European Union-funded project, “Better Together: A Youth-led Approach to Peaceful Coexistence,” is an initiative of Search for Common Ground in Lebanon, partnering with the Lebanese Organization for Studies and Training (LOST) in the Bekaa Valley and the Department for People and Nature Association (DPNA) in South Lebanon. The project centres around summer camps in which Syrian and Lebanese youth participate in conflict-resolution trainings and artistic workshops alongside one another, including drawing, theatre, music and film-based activities. Over 300 young people are expected to participate in the programme whose goal is to enable them to better express themselves through art, and to overcome stereotypes and misconceptions the groups may harbour about one another.²⁷

Youth Gender Innovation Agora: UN Women established this youth network in 2017 as a dialogue platform with young people. The Youth Gender Innovation Agora consists of 30 youth members – activists, civil society professional and social media influencers – from 13 countries in the region who work together to develop innovative gender equality solutions, mobilize young people and disseminate information to networks and organizations throughout the region.

Sharek Youth Forum: The NGO is implementing the project, entitled “Promoting gender equality through Mobile Theatre,” under the UN Women regional programme “Men and Women for Gender Equality”. Thirty young people are currently benefiting from this project and received a training on gender equality and masculinities, which will be followed by trainings on leadership and theatre performance.

- **Recent data show that even in the context of extreme economic challenges and political uncertainty, many youth remain optimistic about**

the future; programme efforts would do well to nurture and embody this positive outlook.

Multiple surveys show the relative optimism of youth in the region. The recent Survey of Young People in Egypt, for example, reveals that many young people are optimistic about their future, despite the general feeling of dissatisfaction with current living conditions.²⁶ This is another reminder that programmes do best when they adopt a positive outlook rather than depicting the lives and opportunities of youth in the region in sombre terms.

ADVOCACY FOR ACTION: CREATING AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR ENGAGING YOUNG MEN IN GENDER EQUALITY

There are many international mechanisms, goals, resolutions and platforms for action, for example, designed to hold National Governments accountable for advancing gender equality on the global stage.²⁸ A wide array of national policies that focus on these topics are in place throughout the region. These should be further assessed when adapting recommendations for policy change at the national level.

Advocacy for gender-transformative policies is of particular importance. Such policies actively seek to address, challenge and transform existing, harmful gender dynamics and power imbalances, and provide opportunities and support to all young adults to reach their potential and achieve gender equality. The policies and objectives should be realized in consultation with the voiced needs and engagement of young men and women directly. The table below provides gender-transformative policies to advance young men’s engagement in gender equality.

Civil society and United Nations key players can play a role in influencing policymakers, key stakeholders and relevant audiences to advocate for policy change in this direction.²⁹ Advocacy can be conducted in many ways: through written statements, meetings or briefings with policy-makers and decision-making bodies; by building and taking collective action with partnerships, coalitions, and alliances; or by leading targeted communications campaigns or media engagement efforts. UN Women has developed a youth and gender advocacy toolkit which can help young people to more effectively advocate for gender equality.

LEVERAGING INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS: THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Many international mechanisms (goals, resolutions and platforms for action) have been designed to hold National Governments accountable for advancing gender equality on the global stage.³⁰ The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)³¹ of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development³² provide the opportunity for continued global attention on how to successfully engage young men in advancing gender equality and achieving peaceful and prosperous societies. In particular, SDG Goal 4 aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education, Goal 5 aims to achieve gender equality by 2030, Goal 8 focuses on labour productivity and reducing the unemployment rate, especially for young people, and Goal 16 aims to create peaceful societies.³³ Civil society and United Nations partners can support Governments³⁴ in reaching these goals by undertaking the following actions:

- *Building* their capacity to understand how young men’s support for gender equality may be tied to their education and economic opportunities, and reinforced by underlying inequalities;
- *Providing* evidence-based best practices in programmatic approaches and policies to promote quality, gender-transformative education and job skills and opportunities;

- *Collecting* disaggregated data on young men’s and women’s attitudes and behaviours when it comes to topics related to gender equality, including on education, employment and on issues like violence and discrimination; and
- *Building* civil society partnerships to effectively implement policies, protocols and programmes to advance the SDGs.

ENTRY POINTS AND TARGETS FOR ADVOCACY AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL

Supportive laws, policies and practices implemented within workplaces and schools represent additional mechanisms for supporting young men alongside young women in ensuring job skills, employment and concrete pathways are in place to advance gender equality. However, laws and policies are seldom designed or implemented with the specific objective of promoting young men’s effort in support of gender equality, or of acknowledging the specific needs and vulnerabilities of young men and young women. There are many examples of national policies (listed in the table below) which can be advocated for, implemented and enforced to support young men’s support for gender equality, both by involving the younger generation in the policymaking process, but also by mainstreaming their concerns in public policies and strategies.³⁵

Areas for advocacy in the MENA region to advance men’s engagement in gender equality

Policy	Status	Recommendation
Employment and Job Skills	<p>The youth unemployment rate in the region is increasing, in part due to a mismatch between the and economic opportunities in the MENA region. This leads young people, particularly women, to become economically inactive, spend long periods of time searching for jobs, and move toward insecure jobs in the informal sector, some with no opportunity for advancement.³⁶ The impact of this shift on young men can delay their economic independence, a symbol of manhood, increase stress, especially for men feeling pressure to be the provider, and delay milestones, such as marriage and starting a family – factors than can be perceived as emasculating.³⁷</p> <p>Among 15-29-year olds in MENA, obstacles to decent paying jobs are most frequently perceived as due to a dearth of good jobs, or a lack of economic preparedness, coupled with needing connections to get a job, or selection system readiness, lack of proper training, or lack of workforce readiness.³⁸</p>	<p>Numerous structural barriers persist that must be addressed first and foremost. This includes a more efficient allocation of resources, more equitable access to opportunities,³⁹ and greater job opportunities for young women and young men in both public and private spheres.</p> <p>Job training and vocational programmes need to be restructured to be better tailored to the labour and skills market, thereby increasing the availability and affordability of these programmes. They should also include “stepping stone” programmes.⁴⁰ The overall educational process should be connected to job placement programmes, ensuring that students have access to internships, part-time work, or other skill-building opportunities. Such opportunities should be available to everyone, irrespective of gender.⁴¹ Finally, workplaces should create supportive policies and cultures that are gender-equitable and free from violence and discrimination.</p>

<p>Young Adult Engagement in Government</p>	<p>Despite playing prominent roles during the civil uprisings of the Arab spring, young adult engagement in the political process is still low, and the needs of the younger generation are not effectively addressed.⁴² Several countries in MENA have begun to include youth-engagement terminology in their constitutions and policies, including in Egypt, for example, by assigning a minimum share of seats in local councils; and in Morocco, a consultative council for youth was established.⁴³</p> <p>There are promising examples of Governments acknowledging the potential power of youth, such as the President’s Leadership Programme in Egypt, which seeks to provide future leaders with analytical skills and job opportunities, or the UNDP Arab States’ Youth Leadership Programme to support young men and women from across the region to address sustainable development challenges - whether through social enterprises, non-profits, NGOs, initiatives, or campaigns - with a specific focus on gender equality and women empowerment.⁴⁴</p>	<p>Create new opportunities and spaces (online or in person) for the meaningful engagement of young people of all genders, socioeconomic statuses, in political processes and in holding Government accountable, helping to ensure that services are also responsive to youth needs.⁴⁵ Support for this engagement could include youth leadership training for young men and young women through university coursework, and in gender-transformative programming and opportunities for internships and mentoring for youth leaders.⁴⁶</p> <p>Governments should create and implement a National Youth Policy that identifies youth problems, aspirations and develop a specific plan to address these challenges, which includes the identification of and plan to address gender inequalities among young women and men. This is an area where civil society advocacy can encourage implementation.</p>
<p>Education</p>	<p>Most MENA countries have closed the gender gaps in enrolment.^{47,48} However, the quality of education is generally below international standards,^{49, 50} and has not translated into equally higher rates of women’s economic and political participation, or of an equal share of unpaid care work in the home. Education is crucial as young people learn about gendered expectations – the roles they should play as providers or caregivers – from a young age.⁵¹ Moreover, a small number of gender studies courses are offered at universities across the IMAGES MENA countries so that an expansion in their scope that included the study of men and masculinities in their programmes would be beneficial. Partnering with academic institutions, particularly those in the Global South with long-standing experience in these fields, would also be valuable.⁵²</p>	<p>In addition to structural policies and issues that should seek to improve the quality of education, policies should be in place that: require school curricula to be gender-transformative; include the promotion of gender equitable values, the notion that care is a valuable skill and everyone’s responsibility; that all boys and girls are equally capable of succeeding at science and math; and that allocate resources to do so. This should complement policies which ensure that schools are safe places for all children to thrive, and that the technical quality of education meets international standards. This includes the need to mainstream courses in secondary schools and universities that focus on students’ abilities to think critically about transforming inequitable gender norms and practices.⁵³</p>

Sometimes, current policies may support young men’s engagement in gender equality on paper, but lack the political will, resources, or public awareness to put them into practice. Conducting successful policy advocacy means not only

passing gender-transformative policies, but also fully implementing them and holding Governments accountable for their commitments and plans of action.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE POLICY CHANGE

Advocacy efforts to advance young men's engagement in promoting gender equality should be gender-transformative at their core. These policies and programmes must also adhere to the central principle of accountability to local women's rights organizations and women's leadership in the pursuit of gender equality. The recommendations below are intended to serve as regional guidance and should be further contextualized and adapted for use at the national level.

- Frame the advocacy focus of young men's engagement in gender equality within the broader **gender justice movement**. Policies designed to encourage job skills, to mainstream gender-transformative education and employment opportunities for young adults exist in the region, but should not be endpoints in and of themselves. These policies contribute to achieving greater gender equality, justice and peace for all if they: educate both boys and girls that care is a valuable skill and everyone's responsibility; demonstrate that all youth are equally capable of succeeding at science and math; encourage the development of job skills and placements in non-gender traditional careers; and provide equal access to job opportunities for all genders.
- Build upon existing national and regional **alliances** among local women's rights organizations and those working on young men's engagement in gender equality, peacebuilding, job skills training and youth engagement. This step is essential to identify common goals and to map out the potential negative, unintended consequences of "engaging men and boys" work so as to avoid them. This coalition building will add strength to advocacy efforts, and will ensure that the goals of any advocacy effort are shared, inclusive, and **accountable** to the needs of key stakeholders, thereby addressing and challenging – rather than reinforcing – existing inequalities.
- Consult and **involve youth** directly in the design, development and implementation of gender transformative programmes and policies, including as youth producers and partners, to design messaging in support of gender equality.
- Identify and support key **political leaders**, both in the public sector and civil society, and **religious leaders** as visible allies to lead policy change. Join and amplify existing initiatives, but also find new progressive voices in political and religious leadership to articulate these issues. Displays of personal leadership in support of gender equality helps inspire young adults' engagement in the policymaking process and provides examples of masculinity and femininity that young men and young women can aspire to.
- Any efforts to bring young men more fully into gender equality work should also **take special consideration of young women's needs**, particularly in support of their opportunities and preparedness to enter the paid workforce, and in challenging underlying norms inhibiting their free and full access to their rights.
- Generate research and evidence-based programmes and platforms for young adults that are informed and driven by the **Sustainable Development Goals**, particularly Goal 4 on education, Goal 5 on gender equality, Goal 8 on employment and Goal 16 on peaceful societies, and contribute towards the holistic implementation of a gender-responsive 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
- Recognize the **diversity** of boys and girls, men and women, including sexual orientation, race, class, religious affiliation, employment status, for example. With this diversity in mind, advocacy efforts must address the **structural barriers** that have the greatest impact on certain individual "identities" by providing them with fewer opportunities for high-quality education, or putting them at higher risk of violence. Policies can never be "one-size-fits-all."
- Actively seek to **transform gendered expectations and power imbalances**; particularly those which are reinforced from a young age around the roles men and women can play domestically and economically. This includes the assumption that men identify exclusively as providers or protectors, and women exclusively as nurturers or carers. In this quest for change, youth should be consulted in the design of

campaigns, media engagement and activism to promote gender equality in the region.

- While using a rights-based approach, highlight the **positive social and economic impacts** of employment and education for the younger generation at home and at school. For example, youth employment and engagement in the workplace and in public policy can contribute meaningfully to economic advancement and to gender equality when female and male adolescent needs are under consideration and addressed in a gender-transformative way.

Conclusion

Full gender equality in the Middle East and North Africa will only be attained when youth, female and male, collaborate in partnerships with fully gender-transformative approaches and goals. IMAGES MENA data provide compelling evidence to underlie gender-transformative programming and evidence-based advocacy young men's attitudes and behaviours concerning gender equality. These data also shed light on the broader environment shaping these harmful norms and/or point the way toward pathways for change.

END NOTES

- 1 The figure is 16.7 per cent in Egypt; 18.6 per cent in Lebanon; 16.6 per cent in Morocco and 21.2 per cent in Palestine.
- 2 Silatech and Gallup. (2009). *The Silatech Index: Voices of Young Arabs*. Doha: Silatech and Gallup.
- 3 The Moroccan survey was implemented in the Rabat-Salé-Kénitra region of the country and is not nationally representative.
- 4 El Feki, S., Heilman, B. and Barker, G. (2017). *Understanding Masculinities: Results from the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES) – Middle East and North Africa*. Cairo and Washington, D.C.: UN Women and Promundo-US.
- 5 Ibid.
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- 28 These include the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Platform for Action, the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), and the Universal Periodic Review, among others.
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- 30 These include CEDAW, the Beijing Platform for Action and the ICPD, among others.
- 31 The SDG strategy is informed and guided by international standards and mechanisms including CEDAW, which all Arab countries, except Somalia and Sudan, have ratified, although the majority have reservations to some of its main provisions; the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action; the ICPD Programme of Action; relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions; the Commission on the Status of Women agreed conclusions and other applicable United Nations instruments and resolutions on gender equality and women’s empowerment.
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UN WOMEN IS THE UN ORGANIZATION DEDICATED TO GENDER EQUALITY AND THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN. A GLOBAL CHAMPION FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS, UN WOMEN WAS ESTABLISHED TO ACCELERATE PROGRESS ON MEETING THEIR NEEDS WORLDWIDE.

UN Women supports UN Member States as they set global standards for achieving gender equality, and works with governments and civil society to design laws, policies, programmes and services needed to implement these standards. It stands behind women's equal participation in all aspects of life, focusing on five priority areas: increasing women's leadership and participation; ending violence against women; engaging women in all aspects of peace and security processes; enhancing women's economic empowerment; and making gender equality central to national development planning and budgeting. UN Women also coordinates and promotes the UN system's work in advancing gender equality.



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