

Transformation by 2030: How Ending Gender-Based Violence and Engaging Men and Boys will Contribute to the World's Next Development Framework

Findings from an expert consultation among Indian government and civil society representatives on gender equality, with a special focus on men, masculinities and the post-2015 development agenda



Ahead of the September United Nations General Assembly, where the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, or 2030 Agenda, will be adopted, approximately 60 representatives from government offices, academic institutions, philanthropy and civil society in India convened to discuss how to address gender-based violence (GBV). GBV is one of the world's most pervasive human rights abuses and severe challenges to social and economic development. Successfully addressing and mitigating the causes and consequences of this violence will be crucial to the success of the 2030 agenda.

Convened by the International Center for Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and University

Research on Women (ICRW), with support from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and University College London (funded by Economic and Social Research Council), UK, this discussion focused on solutions. Specifically, representatives at the convening considered what is known about how to prevent and respond to gender-based violence, with a special focus on the strategic engagement of men and boys, and how these lessons can be applied at scale in the Indian context.

Although India is often portrayed in global media as a scene for GBV, it is also host to a vibrant feminist movement demanding change, a laboratory of innovative and promising interventions, and is an emerging leader on the global stage able to influence other players in South Asia and beyond. Against this backdrop, representatives at the convening were able to examine the 2030 Agenda critically. This policy brief focuses on the extent to which the 2030 Agenda allows for gender-transformative change, and outlines recommendations for key stakeholders on best practices and lessons learned from the Indian experience.

Goal 5: Achieve Gender Equality and Empower All Women and Girls

- 5.1: End all forms of discrimination
- 5.2 Eliminate violence against women & girls
- 5.3 Eliminate child, early, and forced marriage and female genital mutilation
- 5.4 Recognize the value of unpaid care and domestic work
- 5.5 Ensure women's full and effective participation in political, economic, and public life
- 5.6 Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive rights
- 5.7 Undertake reforms to give women equal access to economic resources
- 5.8 Enhance the use of ICTs
- 5.9 Adopt and strengthen policies and legislation to promote gender equality

The 2030 Agenda

The 2030 Agenda retains a stand-alone goal on gender equality (see above box for summary). Beyond this, and very importantly, gender has been included throughout the Agenda and across many goals. The Agenda encourages the strategic mainstreaming of gender to achieve sustainable results, and includes specific language on the importance of including men and boys in efforts to end discrimination and violence. This mandate served as a centerpiece of the convening in India.

Recommendations from the High-Level Convening on GBV

Some of the key findings from the convening centered on the importance of engaging men and boys, working at the community level to mobilize change, emphasizing survivor-friendly health services, and addressing gender norms and sexual and reproductive health during adolescence. Particularly in male-dominated health systems, there is a need for an increased recognition of and training on gender-based violence, as well as safe mechanisms for reporting.



The recognition of the importance of engaging men and boys and of working with young people mirrors the guidance already in the 2030 Agenda. Convening participants noted that the most successful efforts are those which engage with boys and girls at formative stages during adolescence, before gender biases and social norms are fully internalized. These efforts should aim to transform aspects of masculinity which are harmful to the economic and social success not only of women and girls, but to all members of society. Men and boys should not only be trained on healthy masculinity, but be involved at all levels of gender based violence prevention and response.

These approaches are long-term and many are process-based, and the convening participants recommend that a commitment to the true engagement of men and boys on issues of GBV be reflected in specific guidance from UN agencies and donor institutions, and funded through targeted programmatic efforts.

In India, as in other countries, a two-pronged approach to reaching adolescents is needed. Young people should be reached both in and outside of educational institutions. Practitioners at the convening cited successes in engaging young adolescents in group settings which promote equitable relationships between boys and girls, and which support boys in questioning and challenging harmful norms of masculinity. They noted the importance of educators, whether in formal or informal settings, being familiar with the physiological changes that occur during adolescence and being comfortable discussing these in a youth-friendly manner. Discussions around healthy views to establishing and maintaining positive and responsible relationships, questioning stereotypes and discrimination, preventing substance abuse, avoiding peer pressure, and ensuring that boys and girls can exchange ideas and experiences will prepare youth to tackle these challenging issues. These strategies should be institutionalized, allowing a cadre of role models and champions to create structured networks for others to follow. Further, the convening underscored the need to institutionalize mechanisms for young people to have voices within the UN and throughout the implementation of development programs.

Health systems are in a unique position to both address the consequences of violence and intervene in a timely manner to prevent future occurrences of violence. Health care providers, in particular, are uniquely positioned to recognize physical signs of violence in ways other community members are not. They also have access to other important information that can assist in recognizing specific triggers or contributors of violence, for example, substance abuse and misuse, which are inextricably linked to the exacerbation of GBV. Health care providers are thus a critical target audience for preventing and responding to GBV.

Convening attendees highlighted the need for systematic assessments of medical training at educational institutions on the ways in which gender and GBV could be better addressed, particularly at a critical time when health care providers are just entering the profession. In addition, those already in the medical field should receive better training on how to recognize signs of violence and substance abuse, as well as on concepts such as patriarchy, gender and power relations, construction of sexualities, and on gender-related legislation and policies, such as those pertaining to abortion and sexual harassment in the workplace. In addition, health systems should be monitored to enable a better understanding of pathways of care for survivors of violence. This should include rigorous assessments of access, acceptability, and quality of care.

Recommendations for Indian Medical Schools

- Undertake gender assessments of medical school curricula.
- Develop modules and undertake advocacy incorporating gender equality and GBV prevention and response into curricula

In addition to broader reform and policy changes, experts highlighted that the 2030 Agenda goals will work best when they are supported, both financially and institutionally, by community-led initiatives. Communities know best what works for them, and real change in gender norms and violence prevention begin at the local level. Evidence from practice in India has shown that approaches that mobilize men to take action in support of women's empowerment in their communities are the most successful. Convening representatives recommended several strategies to build on this success, including particularly identifying and training male champions to share and reflect on issues related to gender equality with their peers, whether at the community level, in the workplace, or in schools. Within the Indian context, men be encouraged to work with women leaders within the *panchayat* (local governance) framework on issues of gender equality.

Conclusions

A summary of the convening recommendations for ending GBV and improving gender equality follows:

Start young, before gender norms are set: Shifting gender norms must begin early, before gender norms become established and rigid. It is imperative to sensitize parents in order to intervene early in their children's lives to promote gender equitable attitudes and behavior. Parents can model gender equality through instances of equal participation in work, inside and outside the household. Boys should be encouraged to question gender roles and the privileges associated with masculinity, and must learn to respect women and girls.

Identify and support men to be advocates of gender equality:

Gender-equitable men in the community, workplaces, schools and institutions should become role models and champions of change. Organizations and institutions need to find creative ways to engage these men to foster normative change and challenge the collective habit of discounting women.

Regulate commercial interests: Promoting gender-transformative change needs to go hand-in-hand with regulation of 'health-reducing' products. Gender is driven by both social and commercial interests and thus improving the health of men and women would mean regulating commercial interests of those industries that encourage or promote images of aggressive and violent masculinities and risky behavior, such as the alcohol, tobacco, entertainment, and even automobile industry.

Approaches must be multi-sectoral and multi-level: Approaches for engaging men and boys should be coordinated across different institutions, ministries, and government departments, i.e., education, police, judiciary, health, women, and child development. Moreover, they should be done at multiple levels, reaching different constituencies, such as girls, boys, women, men, parents, and other gatekeepers like teachers, religious leaders, community leaders, elected representatives, service providers, etc.

Barriers to engaging men

Accountability barrier: "I don't beat my wife, go and talk to those guys who do."

Awareness barrier: "Violence sometimes occurs with women."

Privilege barrier: "Alcoholic, poor, and unemployed men are violent." – Others do it/we don't.

Men's silence: "If I intervene, my friends will make fun of me." – Men know that they are perpetrators, but they don't claim to be a part of the change.

Monitoring and evaluation of existing programs is important: Applying data and program evidence to frame national policies and programs is imperative because it supports realistic assessments of the challenges and harmful norms that must be addressed, while also ensuring that programs intended to effect change are evidence-based. While many civil society and local organizations do commendable work, it is the government's responsibility to adapt and scale successful initiatives. To do this effectively, programs must be appropriately evaluated and documented. Such evaluations should be participatory and include key stakeholders, including adolescents.

Prepare adolescent boys confidently to tackle peer pressure: Organizations working with adolescents should take extra care to help adolescents withstand peer pressure and break gender stereotypes rather than perpetuate them. Support systems should be created within the community so that young boys do not feel isolated.



Support male peer groups: Fostering alternative male peer groups is an important way to sustain men's adoption of more equitable norms, by creating networks of both support and accountability for men to help them in dealing with peer pressure to conform to dominant and harmful norms of masculinity.

We need a shift from “Engaging Men and Boys to address VAWG” to “Engaging Individuals and Institutions to Address Violence”: Moving from individual to system-wide changes will require understanding, changing and challenging inequitable and oppressive gender norms and practices at

the institutional level. Institutional reform requires internal champions. Male engagement programming must identify and nurture male champions who can provide the necessary leadership to initiate and sustain institutional reform. There is also a need to invest sufficient time and resources to train and mentor the internal training capacity that is required to fully mainstream such gender training.

The aforementioned conclusions reinforce that, as we look ahead to the next 15 years of development policy and programs, there are strong foundations in India upon which to build an integrated focus to achieve gender equality, and specifically to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls, as called for in Goal 5 of the 2030 Agenda. If we are to truly achieve the ambitious goal of achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls, we must work together, across all levels and sectors of society to challenge individual and institutional patriarchy, as well as harmful notions of masculinities, and to actively promote gender equality and real, transformative empowerment of women and girls.

