



## ENGAGING MEN AND BOYS IN SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS – LEARNING FROM THREE DIVERSE CONTEXTS

This policy brief summarises learning from three IPPF Member Association research projects on engaging men as clients, partners and change agents between 2016–2020. Despite diverse settings, common key insights include the primary importance of changing norms to enable engagement; identifying key influencers and networks to achieve this; and centralising positive masculinity. Initiatives should involve men and boys initially to localise approaches to the context and establish the most effective entry point to engage men and boys as clients, partners and agents of change.

Across the world, rigid gender norms and harmful perceptions of masculinity have negative consequences on the health and wellbeing of men and women. Growing evidence shows that where men and boys are engaged in tackling gender inequality, men and women enjoy more equitable, healthy relationships and positive health outcomes.

The Innovation Programme commissioned a literature review to identify gaps in knowledge and practice and challenged Member Associations to address these, finding new ways to engage with men and boys in all their diversity, as clients (to improve their own sexual and reproductive health (SRH) outcomes); partners (of other men, women and children), and as change agents (to challenge harmful gender norms and promote gender equality).

Three Member Associations successfully implemented their ideas in partnership with researchers, undertaking both formative and impact assessments of their interventions.



"In India, girls are held back, even by parents. Now I see this and can change it." **PE, MALE, INDIA**

**INDIA: ENGAGING, EMPOWERING AND ENABLING MEN AND BOYS (E3MB) FOR SRHR (FPAI AND CENTRE FOR OPERATIONS RESEARCH AND TRAINING (CORT))**

**GOAL** – to improve attitudes to gender equality and participation in SRH services.

**INTERVENTION** – in urban poor areas of Hyderabad, private medical practitioners (PMPs) and barbers were engaged for the first time, alongside young peer educators, to provide counselling, referrals and condoms, while service providers received male SRH service provision training.

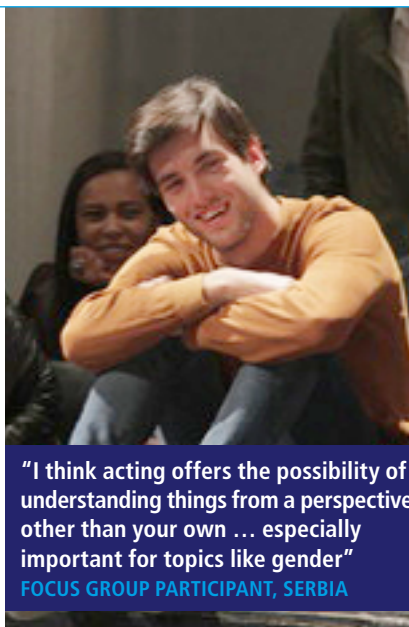
**EVALUATION FINDING** – a quasi-experimental design showed a 12 per cent improvement in the primary outcome of gender equality measurement (GEM) in adolescent boys and 8 per cent in adult men (p value unavailable). Secondary analyses found an 18 per cent reduction in substance abuse and a 5 per cent increase in contraceptive use.

### **SERBIA: CHANGING ROLES TO CHANGE ATTITUDES (SRH SERBIA AND IPAK CENTAR)**

**GOAL** – to challenge traditional gender roles and enable more gender-equitable attitudes

**INTERVENTION** – theatre-based education (TBE) touring Serbia that explored differentiation between biological sex and socially constructed gender categories, where participants role-played as the opposite sex.

**EVALUATION FINDING** – the quasi-experimental design demonstrated that the TBE had a positive impact on participants' perception of gender roles, particularly for young men. For example, participants were less likely to agree that 'men are more talented for some professions' (p<0.001).



"I think acting offers the possibility of understanding things from a perspective other than your own ... especially important for topics like gender"

**FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT, SERBIA**



## KEY FINDINGS

On engaging men and boys:

- as **clients** – addressing supply side barriers such as male-only clinic times can have significant impact but must be accompanied by socio-cultural norm change to enable male access to services.
- as **partners** – localised messaging on positive masculinity can strengthen the concept of men as caregivers to partners and families, with equal agency and responsibility for their health. Spousal communication on SRHR is a potential indicator for capturing this.
- as **change agents** – all projects demonstrated progress for men and boys directly involved in the projects (e.g. peer educators), but changes in the wider community take longer. All projects highlight the importance of engaging key influencers of all ages.
- the anecdotal (Togo) and evidenced (India) correlation between exposure to childhood violence and its subsequent perpetration suggests transformative potential to improve outcomes for men and boys, and women and girls, in all their diversity.
- SRH Serbia's project demonstrates that pleasurable activities enable reflection and learning even on sensitive and challenging topics and are effective for young people.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ENGAGING MEN AND BOYS IN SRHR

- 1) Ensure locally appropriate interventions by first engaging with communities to identify the best entry point for engagement (as clients, partners, change agents or a hybrid); identify key influencers; and test impactful messages.
- 2) Tailor 'positive masculinity' so that it is meaningful in the local context. It is a powerful tool and underpins a gender-transformative approach to tackle the structural causes of inequality.
- 3) Include efforts to break intergenerational perpetuation of harmful gender norms. Further research could focus on this area.

## Conclusions

Despite varied contexts, the three projects' experiences produced informative insights. With varying focus on engaging men and boys as clients, partners or change agents, findings suggest that the best entry point for engagement varies, suggesting the need for a specific and localised change theory to underpin programming.

All projects could both contribute to and benefit from understanding what works in other areas of programming. For example, peer education approaches (developing and testing key messages; pedagogical support for peer educators; financial and non-financial incentives); network analysis (identifying and engaging key influencers) and evaluation approaches (measuring self-reported and observed attitudes, intentions and behaviour change with regards to male engagement in SRHR).

### FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

- [Global SRH Service Package for Men and Adolescent Boys \(2017\)](#)
- [IPPF Gender Equality Strategy and Implementation Plan \(2017\)](#)

This research project supported by IPPF's Innovation Programme aligns with IPPF's commitment to enable and empower more young people to claim and enjoy their sexual rights, receive comprehensive sexuality education, and have access to youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health services.

IPPF's Innovation Programme funds projects between Member Associations and independent researchers, which test new ideas and approaches to improve the sexual and reproductive health and rights of under-served populations. For more information, please visit our website [www.ippf.org](http://www.ippf.org)

<https://www.ippf.org/our-approach/programmes/innovation-programme>

### TOGO: MEN AND BOYS STAND UP TO PROMOTE REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS (ATBEF AND UNITÉ DE RECHERCHE DÉMOGRAPHIQUE (URD))

**GOAL** – to contribute to reduced mother and child mortality and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV)

**INTERVENTION** – community and religious leaders were engaged to endorse and support community Husband Schools and Youth Clubs which used a peer education model to share messaging on SRHR, including positive masculinity. Service providers were trained on male SRH services and provided outreach to communities.

**EVALUATION** – a quasi-experimental impact evaluation found a 10 per cent increase in behaviours conducive to contraceptive use in intervention areas ( $p < 0.1$ ), supporting the project change theory towards reduced mother and child mortality and SGBV.



"Reassured by the message of the contraceptive training, I encouraged my wife to switch to the injectable [from a traditional method] and since then she has never experienced the blood loss as rumours claimed. We have even planned to adopt a longer-term method, the IUD."

HUSBAND SCHOOL PARTICIPANT, TOGO

Photos:  
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