



LEARNING BRIEF

Engaging Men and Boys: Learning from the Men and Women for Gender Equality programme – Phases I & II

A regional (6 country) intervention from UN Women's Office for the Arab States

Between 2015 and 2022, UN Women implemented the Men and Women for Gender Equality (MWGE) programme across four 'Phase I' countries (Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco, and Palestine) and then an additional two countries in 'Phase II' (Jordan and Tunisia). The six-country programme has a strong focus on addressing patriarchal

masculinities and seeks to improve understanding of the root causes of gender inequalities in the Arab States, and address these through a bottom-up approach, including through the engagement of men and boys for gender equality. This brief summarises the key lessons from this vanguard regional programme developed through an evaluation from Itad.

Our evaluation found that the engagement of men and boys to promote gender equality can be effective...

1

IF multiple levers of change are pulled across society to address individuals, communities, thought-leaders and legal frameworks

2

IF programming with men and boys is accountable to women's movements and communities in order to reduce backlash and friction

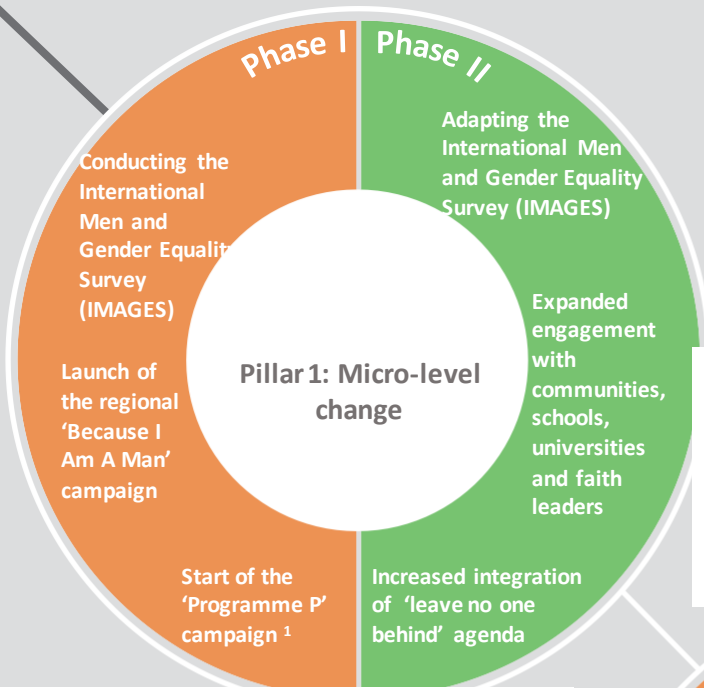
3

AND IF a commitment to a 'regional approach' rather than a 'multi-country' approach is recognized by all implementing partners



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The UN Women Men and Women for Gender Equality programme – in action

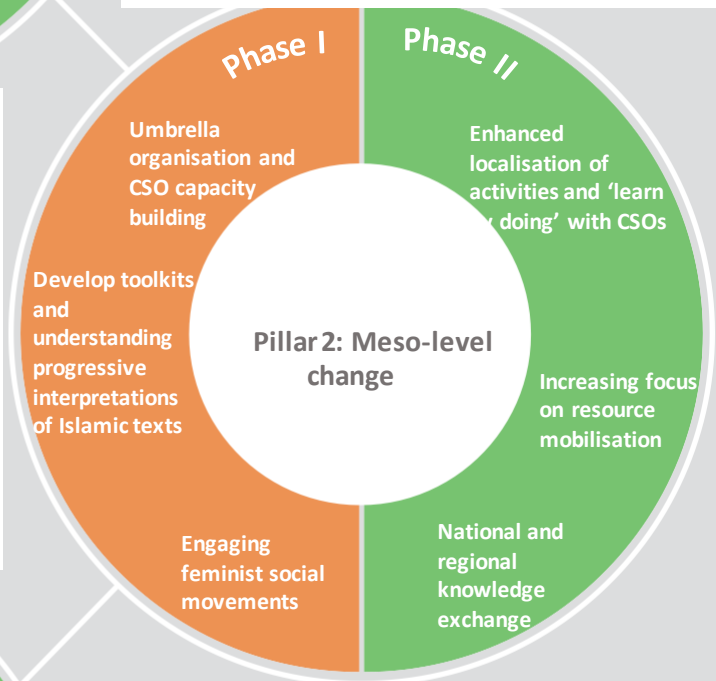


What did the MWGE programme aim to do?

Create communities where men and women in Arab States' societies are able to exercise their rights and opportunities equally

What role did MWGE play?

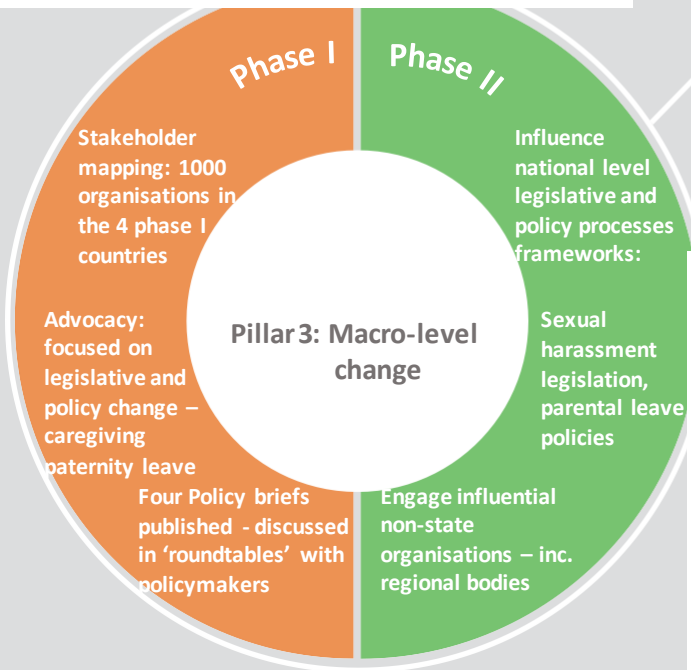
The programme built the capacity of over 25 community-based organisations, as well as over 130 000 men and women at community level. Academia and Islamic scholars, and policymakers were also engaged to allow space for men and boys to be more engaged in the movement for gender equality.



How did it work?

It built up momentum across Phase I in four of the 6 countries by undertaking intensive capacity building of partner organisations, including detailed training on advocacy approaches, tools for engaging men and boys, and building a robust evidence base to understand attitudes, practices and behaviours across the region.

Phase II saw the programme expand to two new countries – which built on the lessons of the previous four. The original four countries then expanded implementation focus on 1. Micro-level change at community level, 2. Intermediate-level change through key institutions, and 3. Macro-level change through laws and policy change.



What were the results?

Over its two phases, the programme has (amongst other achievements) conducted and published ground-breaking and regionally influential research on men's and women's attitudes to gender equality using the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES) methodology both at the national and regional levels; developed and implemented programming aiming to transform gendered power dynamics, attitudes and behaviours based on the findings of the research; affected policy change in several countries; and established capacity at the community and national level with local partners to take the work forward to a third phase.

¹ 'Programme P' - pioneered by Equimundo (formally Promundo) - provides concrete strategies and activities to engage men globally in active fatherhood from their partner's pregnancies through their children's early years: <https://men-care.org/resources/program-p/>

Key lessons

What works?

1

Rapid attitudinal and behavioural change is achievable despite entrenched societal views on concepts of masculinity

The MWGE Regional Programme - using the Gender-Equitable Men Scale (GEMS) developed as part of the IMAGES survey - developed contextualized evidence of intervention outcomes. The scale combines 27 statements that determine degrees of progressive or discriminatory attitudes and behaviours. Significant results were noted for both male and female programme participants - particularly for men. In Palestine and Morocco for instance, relative changes (percent) in the GEM scale were as much as 41% and 48% respectively. Overall, it was demonstrated that many men gained an understanding of their own prejudices and realised that violence against women could include verbal insults, child marriage and female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C). Many men came to understand the impact of children witnessing violence and of how cycles of violence were repeated within families.



RECOMMENDATION:

Developing tailored and contextualized monitoring indicators - such as the GEM scale - but also social and gender norms indicators (see box 1), is vital for capturing complex changes in societal, family and intimate partner relations.

The MWGE programme results demonstrate that the use of these metrics, combined with peer-to-peer, and 'positive deviance' approaches at community level, can affect change - even in contexts where attitudes, behaviours and norms appear deeply entrenched.



2

Ensuring programme accountability to feminist movements is a vital part of developing allies and mitigating risks

Building agreement on how to promote men and boys contributions to gender equality and women's empowerment outcomes in relation to feminist movements and principles is an important step in ensuring programme effectiveness and alignment with broader national debates. Such accountability measures also help to reduce potential for both feminist and patriarchal 'backlash'.

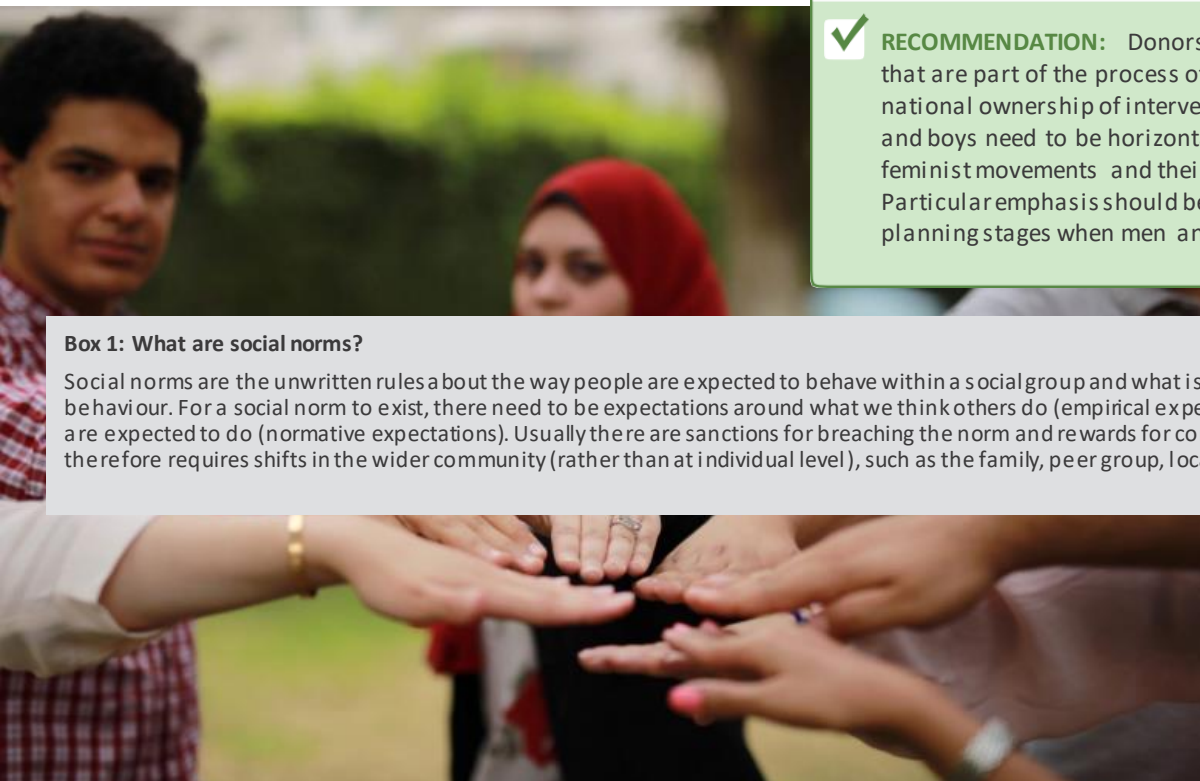
UN Women has overarching guidance on this agenda, but is still experimenting with how it is undertaken in practice. A promising example from the MWGE programme can be taken from the Lebanon experience. The UNW Country Office demonstrated a unique mediation function across an emerging feminist movement following political shifts in 2019, and the Beirut explosion in 2020. As civil society discussion space expanded, the UNW office used the opportunity to unify the voices of feminist groups and supported the production of a Feminist Charter of Demands and develop a gender responsive reform plan. The MWGE programme realigned its priorities accordingly and in so doing was held 'to account' to the national feminist movement.



RECOMMENDATION: Donors and implementing partners that are part of the process of building and maintaining national ownership of interventions directed toward men and boys need to be horizontally accountable to national feminist movements and their associated priorities. Particular emphasis should be afforded to this process in the planning stages when men and boys are first engaged.

Box 1: What are social norms?

Social norms are the unwritten rules about the way people are expected to behave within a social group and what is considered to be acceptable behaviour. For a social norm to exist, there need to be expectations around what we think others do (empirical expectations) and what we think we are expected to do (normative expectations). Usually there are sanctions for breaching the norm and rewards for complying. Social norm change therefore requires shifts in the wider community (rather than at individual level), such as the family, peer group, local community, and institutions.





4

All implementation partners – inc. CBOs - need to have understood and internalized core feminist principles and approaches

The MWGE developed comprehensive toolkits and undertook training exercises with umbrella organisations and corresponding implementing partners (CBOs) on feminist principles and programming for men and boys. CBO capacity building data demonstrates that partners expanded their competencies dramatically, which supported programme results, as well as their sustainability.

✓ **RECOMMENDATION:** In funding or implementing interventions that target men and boys for promoting gender equality, donors and partners must take stock of their capacities to address patriarchal masculinities, and seek to build enhanced competencies accordingly. Feminist approaches and tools need to be woven into the fabric of organizational culture, particularly at grassroots levels.

5

Given emerging best practice on masculinities-oriented programming, broad knowledge exchange is crucial

! The MWGE programme coordinated and supported UNW Country Offices, Umbrella organisations and Community-based organisations in comprehensive knowledge exchange and learning with respect to programming for men and boys. These exchanges took many forms – including South-South visits and mid-term reviews. The learning from Phase I was also readily tailored and taken-up by the new Phase II countries (Jordan and Tunisia) thereby affording these countries a head-start.

✓ **RECOMMENDATION:** Given that programming for men and boys remains a relatively emergent and also complex space, practitioners and funders should emphasise systematic learning exchanges within and across organizational contexts, geographies and thematic areas in order to promote best practice.

3

Engaging men and boys for gender equality requires a broad understanding of societal drivers and enablers

! As with many societal interventions, a ‘socio-ecological’ model (see box 2 below) helps to underpin and maintain cross-cutting change. The MWGE facilitated this transformative approach by embedding activities at community level, in key regional and national institutions, as well as in the engagement of actors working on reform of relevant laws and policies. For example, in Egypt, the MWGE Programme sought to improve parental leave legislation, and worked on this both at the national level through the National Council for Women, as well as through a bottom-up advocacy approach involving the implementing partners.

✓ **RECOMMENDATION:** It should be recognized that working with men and boys to promote gender equality requires comprehensive and detailed planning and implementation to cover the multiple levers of change that can be pulled at different societal levels. These dimensions of change can be captured in situational analyses, stakeholder mapping, theories of change. However, these mapping tools need to be systematically reviewed at key reflection moments in the programme cycle to allow for course correction.

Box 2: What is a socio-ecological model?

The socio-ecological model considers the complex interplay between individual, relationship, community, and societal domains in determining wellbeing outcomes. It allows development and humanitarian practitioners to understand how different contexts and drivers of change at one societal level may have influence at other scales. In principle, transformative change is most likely when interventions affect multiple domains simultaneously, or at least acknowledge the effect that change in one domain might have in another.



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