

# MenCare+: caring for gender equality



**S**exual and reproductive health and rights of girls and women are critically hindered by rigid gender and cultural norms for women and men. Women lack decision-making power and are at greater risk of HIV and gender-based violence. MenCare+ engages boys and men in social change and as caregiving partners to improve the health of women, men and children, to stop gender-based violence, and to build respectful relationships.

Fatherhood offers an opportunity to reach young and adult men with a new perspective on manhood. When men become more involved and supportive as fathers and partners, intimate relationships improve and violence decreases, women's rights advance, and children have better development outcomes. Research shows that

men's involvement as caregivers also enhances the quality of life of men themselves.

In Brazil, Indonesia, Rwanda and South Africa a full set of strategies is implemented to provide this perspective. MenCare+ partners work with young men, fathers and their partners, and health sector workers to engage men as partners in gender equality, SRHR, maternal and child health. In addition, MenCare+ provides counselling with men who have used violence; and raises community awareness of the positive influence that men can have through fatherhood and caregiving.

MenCare+ is a three-year, four-country collaboration between Rutgers WPF and Promundo-US, working with long-term national and regional partners who possess

extensive local knowledge and expertise. MenCare+ is supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands. To ensure sustainability, MenCare+ partners work directly with national public health systems.

**Rutgers WPF** ([rutgerswfpf.org](http://rutgerswfpf.org)) is known for its expertise in the field of sexual and reproductive health and rights in the Netherlands and internationally. Rutgers WPF coordinates the program with **Promundo-US** ([promundo.org.br/en](http://promundo.org.br/en)), an international NGO known for its groundbreaking work with boys and men to promote gender equality and prevent violence against women, children and youth. ■

For more information, visit [www.men-care.org/plus](http://www.men-care.org/plus)

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# Men Care +

ENGAGING MEN IN A 4-COUNTRY INITIATIVE

MenCare+ is a three-year programme engaging men as caregiving partners to improve the health of women, men and children, to stop gender-based violence and to build respectful relationships. Page 4 >>

[#MenCarePlus](https://twitter.com/MenCarePlus)

**W**e came to the Men Engage symposium in New Delhi to be inspired, to learn and exchange experiences how to engage men in gender equality. During the symposium we held four kitchen table discussions on different topics. In this brochure we summarise the four main lessons from each of these discussions.

Thank you all in taking part in the meetings as your ideas, experiences and stories will help all

of us working to engage men in gender justice to be better at doing our work. Sexual and reproductive health and rights, maternal and child health and gender based violence are not issues that only concern women. We think that gender justice can only be reached when boys and men are actively involved.

Be a role model, act your part as a caring man, and help others to follow the example.

## Starting the conversation: How to get men around the table?

**To mobilise men, we need to include local systems: social workers, community health workers and local authorities.**

**Be where they are: To mobilise young men you need to use the (social) media they use and talk their language.**

**A convincing factor to get men to buy-in to gender equality and caregiving is to provide a safe space to discuss their ambitions, hopes and insecurities with other men.**

**Find out what men are struggling with every day. Mobilise them by demonstrating how caregiving will make their lives easier.**



## Stronger together: Are MenEngage and women's rights organisations natural partners?

See it as a dynamic thing, not a static one. It's like a dance and it should happen at all levels of the organisations.

Organisations - like men and women themselves - often move too quickly into action, without investing enough time and energy into the relationship.

Acknowledge that there may be different opinions, but show leadership and face these differences. Remember that we are working towards the same goal.

Be open to sometimes step back, take time to reflect, instead of going ahead full steam without everyone on board.



## Is MenCare+ a comprehensive approach to male caregiving?

When engaging with a government don't start talking about costs and budgets, but build the partnership around the content issue and aim.

It takes time to understand complex - government - structures and how to connect with decision makers.

A six-pronged approach like MenCare+'s also needs a multilevel outcome measurement with all required funding.

Building alliances is key to synergies on all levels: We have to choose who is our best strategic partner at the start and not forget unconventional partners. Using existing mechanisms and infrastructures is a great entry point.



## Absent Fatherhood - What if the father is out of the picture?

To ensure fathers remain present, we should stimulate fathers to be at home when their partner gives birth and directly afterwards.

We need to work with employers and institutions that make that fathers are absent, such as the military and prisons.

When the biological father is absent, we should support others to take a role in caregiving, be it a man in or near the family or the community as a whole.

Society should recognise the importance of father figures in the lives of children: We need to push schools, health facilities as well as social workers to include men in a child's upbringing.

