MenCare+: caring for gender equality

Sexual 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 (rutgerswpf.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), an international NGO known for its ground-breaking 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
Stronger together: Are MenEngage and women’s rights organisations natural partners?

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.

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.

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.