

LEARNING BRIEF

“Learning from what we’ve done and how we did it”

What about the vulnerable boy child?

Date: 22 July 2017	Abstract	MIET Africa’s learning briefs are developed to share new ideas, best practices and learnings arising from our specific experience in implementing a project or through some other activity, so as to grow knowledge and share learning , with the ultimate aim of <i>improving the lives of children and youth</i> .
Author: Lynn van der Elst	As SADC’s implementing partner for CSTL, MIET Africa is increasingly aware of the paucity of support for boys and young men as compared for that of vulnerable girls and young women.	
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References See list at end of document.	The paper highlights the vulnerability of boys and young men, and argues that engaging them in a more holistic approach to gender equality, and addressing their own specific vulnerabilities, has the potential to benefit both boys and girls. It concludes with recommendations for strengthening support for boys and young men within the CSTL framework.	

INTRODUCTION

Care and Support for Teaching and Learning (CSTL) is a programme of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) that addresses the multiple vulnerabilities negatively impacting the education rights of children and youth in the region. Through CSTL, vulnerable learners in the seven targeted Member States (the Democratic Republic of Congo, Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe) have been supported by their schools in meaningful ways. For example, in 2016, 74 273 learners from 90 CSTL laboratory schools, or 82% of those enrolled, benefitted from care and support services such as school feeding, safety and protection and health screenings. And, as the seven Member States mainstream CSTL into their education systems, their increased capacity has enabled them to facilitate care and support services to close on 30 million learners across their schools.¹

However, as SADC’s implementing partner for CSTL, MIET Africa has become increasingly aware of the disparity in the provision of support for vulnerable girls and young women

compared with that provided to boys and young men. Worldwide, and across economic and social divides, many boys and young men suffer various forms of hardship and abuse. Yet, when compared with the numerous support programmes targeting vulnerable girls and women, such as Keeping Girls in School, DREAMS, and She Conquers, the support received by boys is negligible.

This brief discussion paper places the spotlight on the vulnerability of boys and young men and argues that, whilst there has been and continues to be a justifiable focus on support for girls and women, engaging boys in a more holistic approach to gender equality, and addressing their own specific vulnerabilities, has the potential to benefit both boys and girls. The paper concludes with recommendations for strengthening the responses towards addressing the needs of boys and young men within the CSTL framework.

CHILD AND YOUTH VULNERABILITY IN THE SADC REGION

Southern Africa continues to be one of regions in the world most affected by the HIV&AIDS epidemic. With adult HIV prevalence at 4.7%, sub-Saharan Africa accounts for 71% of the global HIV prevalence; this alarming statistic is primarily attributable to the high prevalence in SADC Member States such as Swaziland (28.5%), South Africa (19.2%) and Zambia (14.7%).² HIV&AIDS has left millions of children and youth in extreme deprivation and vulnerability. Estimates for South Africa suggest that 2.3 million children have been orphaned due to AIDS, and over two million children in the rest of the SADC Region have experienced a similar fate.

Orphanhood is not the only vulnerability that hinders the development and wellbeing of children and youth. Over the past decades, southern Africa has been deeply affected by political instability, environmental extremes and stunted economic development. Approximately 41% of the population in the SADC Region lives on less than \$2 a day,³ and nine of the fifteen SADC Member States have been categorized as Low Human Development countries according to the UNDP.⁴

In the past few years, a number of environmental, political and economic events occurred in the SADC Region that have greatly increased the vulnerability factors for children and families. In 2015, massive floods hit southern Malawi and northern Mozambique, the effects of which continue to have significant repercussions on communities of both countries as food growing cycles were disrupted and numerous families displaced. Notwithstanding the floods, much of southern Africa has been experiencing a prolonged drought due to a severe El Niño weather pattern; these droughts have significantly reduced water supply, affected harvests and negatively impacted livestock. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Aid reports that the drought has resulted in a drastic increase in the number of children suffering from acute malnutrition, and has left 3.2 million children with reduced access to safe drinking water.⁵

In addition to environmental disasters, political and economic instability has also affected Mozambique, Zimbabwe and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Mozambique's northern region has experienced political and military instability since late 2015, displacing families who are fleeing the violence. The DRC experienced political unrest leading up to the end of the

Kabila presidency, exacerbated by a lack of clear transition of power. The economic crisis in Zimbabwe continues to deepen as government reserves deplete. At the beginning of the year, banks put strict limits on daily withdrawals from ATMs and banks, resulting in long queues at banks and increased civil unrest. These political and environmental uncertainties have widespread effects on children and youth across the region. And accentuate their vulnerability

SADC has undertaken several key initiatives to strengthen the region's response to support vulnerable children and youth, including the development of the SADC Minimum Package of Services for OVC&Y and the SADC Strategy and Business Plan 2008/9-2015: Comprehensive Care and Support for Orphans, Vulnerable Children and Youth. The CSTL Framework further assists Member States in this effort. The rationale for adopting the CSTL concept and developing it into a regional framework is based on the obvious interrelationship between education and socioeconomic development: universal access to quality education is key to attaining SADC's vision of improving economic growth and development; alleviating poverty and enhancing the quality of life of the people in the region; supporting the socially disadvantaged through deeper regional cooperation and integration; and achieving political stability, regional peace and security.

GENDER EQUALITY: THE CURRENT SITUATION

Addressing the specific vulnerabilities and realities of girls and women dictates the current gender equality discourse, and globally, the majority of funding targets programmes that directly support women and girls. And there is good reason for this. Discrimination and violence toward women and girls continue: they are more at risk of HIV infection; gender-based violence; exclusion from education; harmful practices such as early marriage and female genital mutilation; and unintended pregnancy. This despite the promotion of the rights of women and girls and gender equality in global, regional, and many national policies and frameworks.

Worldwide, however, there is a growing recognition of the need to constructively engage men and boys to bring about change in gender equality, and the past decade has seen a growth in the body of research and the number of interventions addressing the needs of men and boys. Attention and support for involving boys and men as allies for a wider gender equality agenda is on the increase, as evidenced by the following examples of organizations and interventions targeting boys and men.

- CARE is an international organization committed to transforming gender inequalities that are perpetuated by social, cultural, economic, religious and political systems. To achieve this the organization has adopted two main approaches: (1) women and girls' empowerment; and (2) engaging men and boys. Two examples of the organization's several programmes related to gender equality are:
 - The Inner Spaces, Outer Faces Initiative (ISOFI) toolkit is designed to help programme staff to identify, explore, and challenge their own understanding of gender and sexuality in their lives, the lives of project participants and the organizations within which they work. The programme provides gender-reflective

activities that encourage young men to reduce their risky sexual and violent behaviours.

- MenCare is a global fatherhood campaign whose mission is to promote men's involvement as equitable, non-violent fathers and caregivers in order to achieve family well-being and gender equality.⁶
- Programme H is a gender-sensitive programme created by a Brazilian NGO, Insituto Promundo. Used in more than 22 countries, it encourages men between the ages of 15 and 24, to reflect critically on rigid norms related to manhood. This includes encouraging men to respect their partners, to avoid using violence against women, and to take precautions to avoid HIV and other sexually transmitted infections.⁷
- Save the Children developed a package of three interventions designed to achieve gender equity: *Choices*, *Voices* and *Promises*. The *Choices* curriculum, developed in Nepal in 2009, targets very young adolescent boys and girls (10-14 years) to help them discover alternative views of conventional gender roles and behaviours. Choices curricula have been adopted in Bolivia, Bangladesh, Egypt, Ethiopia, El Salvador, Malawi and Zambia. The *Voices* curriculum was developed to encourage parents to challenge rigid and gendered expectations held by their children, and to facilitate dialogue between parents and children about gender equity. The *Promises* curriculum shifts community and social norms on girls' education and protection, with a focus on keeping girls in school and preventing domestic violence.⁸
- MenEngage Alliance is a global alliance made up of country networks, NGOs and UN partners. MenEngage members work collectively and individually toward advancing gender justice, human rights and social justice. Through country-level and regional networks, MenEngage seeks to provide a collective voice on the need to engage men and boys in gender equality, to build and improve the practice around engaging men in achieving gender justice, and to lobby policymakers at the local, national, regional and international levels.⁹
- Sonke Gender Justice, the Africa chair of the MenEngage Network, is a not-for profit organization that works across Africa to strengthen government, civil society and the capacity of citizens to promote gender equality, prevent domestic and sexual violence, and reduce the spread and impact of HIV and AIDS's. Its flagship programme, the One Man Can Campaign, is dedicated to supporting men and boys to take action to end domestic and sexual violence and to promote healthy, equitable relationships.¹⁰
- Kwakha Indvodza (meaning 'building a man') is a male mentoring organization based in Swaziland with a vision of healthy, resilient and more equal communities guided by positive, informed male influences. The organization achieves this by mentoring men and boys within a positive third space, inspiring respectful and responsible community members. Five flagship projects include: Community Chapters; Social Entrepreneurship and Income Generation (SEIG) project, Lihawu Male Mentoring Camp, Tertiary Institutions Project, Training and technical support. The organization is the MenEngage chair for Swaziland.¹¹
- Originally designed in Uganda in 1995, and now expanded beyond Africa to Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, Stepping Stones is a participatory

gender-focused process that engages men and women in community dialogue around environmental factors that make them vulnerable to HIV and the actions they can take to address this. It is also sometimes described as a life-skills training package, addressing questions of gender, sexuality, HIV/AIDS, gender violence, communication and relationship skills. The workshops provide opportunities for participants to examine their values and attitudes towards gender and relationships, to build on their knowledge of aspects of sexual health and HIV/AIDS, and to develop skills that will help them communicate their needs and wants to others.¹²

Yet, despite these activities and the raised awareness of involving men and boys in gender equality, the reality is that they are still seldom targeted. A recent review of the implementation of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Programme of Action revealed that only 22 % of governments prioritized gender norms and male engagement. Of particular concern is that this was not prioritized in most low- and lower middle-income countries.¹³ There is an urgent need to strengthen the engagement of boys and young men - around supporting gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment, as well as in addressing their own specific social, emotional and development needs.

VULNERABILITY AND BOYS

Evidence increasingly demonstrates that boys are made vulnerable by rigid norms related to manhood. In his article "Are Men More Vulnerable?", Dr Wayne Giancaterino suggests that males have a greater need for belonging and connection than females. He offers two possible reasons: firstly, boys start out more "constitutionally adrift" than girls because women come from women whereas men don't come from men and, secondly, men and boys tend to abide by society's expectation that emotions matter less to men, and so their emotions are ignored.¹⁴

The latter is confirmed by the myth, 'Real men don't cry'. Society trains boys to be emotionally naive and inexpressive, especially when it comes to vulnerable feelings. Through how their parents, teachers and peers relate to them, by the games they play, and by what they experience on TV and social media, boys learn to be ashamed of such feelings.¹⁵ This shame turns into resentment, hate and self-loathing – described by Kastner as a 'toxic brew'. Without an outlet, the frustration can lead to depression, behaviour disorders, loneliness, problematic relationships and violence.¹⁶

Many boys drop out of school, engage in violent behaviour and unsafe sex, or practice other risky behaviours because this is what they believe they have to do to be regarded as "real men" by their friends and their communities. This behaviour impacts negatively on women and girls and impedes the development of healthy relationships. And because they don't seek the support and help they need, their emotional, psychological and other needs are not addressed. These realities are harmful to the lives of both boys and girls.

A research study on the masculinity, sexuality and vulnerability of young men in South African contexts suggests that the emphasis on the risk to young women, and in particular the risk in the context of HIV and male violence, has limited our understanding of male vulnerability, possibly even concealing it. The study highlights the importance of taking the multifaceted nature of being a boy and man into account. During focus group discussions, young men

revealed that their experiences of masculinity were influenced by what other young men say and do (including 'silencing myths' and 'terrible teasing') as well as by the fear of what young women say and do. These narratives are further enforced through community and family expectations and norms. The focus group participants reported shame, silence and violence as consequences of the pressures of meeting these stereotypical forms of manhood.¹⁷

Perceiving boys only as perpetrators of violence and abuse and not as survivors and victims, denies them the care and support they need as well as perpetuates the cycle of violence. Gender norms further intensify the vulnerability of boys by making it difficult for them not only to disclose being victims of violence and abuse, but also to seek help.

Education data from the seven CSTL Member States indicates that there is little difference between the number of boys and girls enrolled and retained in the school system, and in 90 of 113 countries, boys are more likely to repeat a primary grade than girls.¹⁸ Whilst girls are more vulnerable to specific types of abuse, such as sexual violence, forced child marriage and intimate partner violence, some boys are victims of these same abuses. For example, 73 million boys under the age of 18 have experienced sexual violence; 56 million men alive today were married as children, yet little is known about child grooms. Further, boys are vulnerable to other forms of abuses: 6 in 10 children aged 2-14 are regularly physically punished by caregivers and boys are more likely to experience violent discipline than girls; 90% of the 250 000 child soldiers in the world are boys; 1 in 5 victims of homicide are children and boys make up 70% of adolescent victims; and in sub-Saharan Africa, over 50% of boys are physically abused by an adult relative, intimate partner or authority figure during their childhood.¹⁹

The UNFPA/Promundo report *Adolescent Boys and Young Men: Engaging Them as Supporters of Gender Equality and Health and Understanding their Vulnerabilities*,²⁰ uncovers the specific risks and realities of boys and young men in relation to health, sexual and reproductive health, sexuality, media violence, sexual exploitation, and other vulnerabilities and provides a useful analysis of the implications, both on the lives of boys and girls. To achieve gender equality, the report highlights the importance of involving boys and young men as partners and as well as the importance of addressing the specific health and social development needs of boys themselves. The key findings of the report include:

- *General Health:* Harmful definitions of manhood and masculinity increase young men's vulnerability to premature illness and death.
- *Sexuality:* Many boys desire intimate contact and connection more than they do sexual conquest.
- *Sexual and Reproductive Health:* Gender norms and sexual narratives place pressure on young men to demonstrate unhealthy forms of masculinity.
- *Experiences of Sexual Violence:* Boys find it difficult to speak out against sexual abuse and exploitation because of stereotypical definitions of masculinity and deep-rooted homophobia.
- *Education:* Studies have found that boys view seeking help as a weakness and achieving in school as a "girl thing"; they may have to drop out of school to earn an income, and they lack male role models in the classroom.

- *Mental Health*: Men are less inclined to admit poor mental health problems or seek help, and health systems are generally less welcoming to men than women.
- *Media*: Through the media men are rewarded for aggressive, tough, and misogynistic behaviours, reinforcing ideas about hyper-masculinity.

ADDRESSING BOYS' VULNERABILITIES

So, what are the solutions?

We can draw on several lessons and strategies from experiences in the field, some of which are shared here.

- Drawing on global research, the UNFPA/Promundo report *Adolescent Boys and Young Men: Engaging Them as Supporters of Gender Equality and Health and Understanding their Vulnerabilities* provides some useful strategies for working with adolescent boys and young men on sexual and reproductive health services, comprehensive sexuality education, fatherhood and caregiving, and the elimination of violence against women and girls, as well as how a masculinity lens contributes to understanding youth violence prevention in general:
 - *Talk About Gender*: programmes that address gender or power are five times as likely to be effective in achieving improved sexual and reproductive health outcomes.
 - *Redefine Norms*: comprehensive sexuality education and violence prevention programming in schools or communities can be thought of as a space to redefine gender norms and to question other cross-cutting inequalities, such as those based on ethnicity, social class, or sexual orientation.
 - *Improve Access to Services*: engage boys in sexual and reproductive health services (e.g., screenings; clinical diagnosis and treatment; and information, education and counselling) as an entry point to question harmful masculinities.
 - *Implement Comprehensive Sexuality Education*: comprehensive sexuality education is an essential approach to remaking and reinforcing gender-equitable norms in connection to health.
 - *Harness the Power of Media*: the media reinforces ideas about hyper-masculinity in which men are rewarded for aggression, toughness, and misogyny—but it can also be used for positive change.²¹
- Through its programmes, the international organization CARE found that where men were initially brought into conversations to enable women's participation in programming, they began to examine how patriarchy affects their own lives and opportunities.

Six key elements for engaging men and boys for gender equality have emerged from their work:

- *Synchronization*: integrated across each element, this involves coordinating men and boys' engagement approaches with women's and girls' empowerment approaches—for separate and joint activities.
- *Conscientization*: providing structured spaces for men and boys to reflect on masculinities, gender, power and privilege in their lives.
- *Intimate Dialogues*: conversations with intimate partners, and within families to promote more open communication, equitable relationships, non- violence, support and trust.
- *Building the base*: a mix of individual outreach and regular meetings to share testimonies and strengthen relationships among male allies to build and expand social support and solidarity.
- *Stepping out, Stepping up*: capacity building and support to men to facilitate discussions and to campaign around gender and masculinities to transform social norms.
- *Alliances for Advocacy*: linking with advocacy efforts led by women's and feminist movements for social and policy change at local, regional and national levels.²²

“I coordinated a workshop on masculinity and gender...and it was during this workshop that I began to view men differently. I came to realize that they are themselves struggling with the consequences and requirements of their own socialization and that they often do not even realize it.”

CARE GENDER EQUITY AND DIVERSITY MODULE 501: ENGAGING MEN AND BOYS FOR GENDER EQUALITY (2013)

- In their paper on synchronizing gender strategies, Greene and Levack attempt to answer the question: *Can gender inequities and norms that harm health be best addressed by working with men and women in a coordinated or synchronized way?* They argue that although good progress has been made in gender-transformative programmes using the single-sex approach, much more could be accomplished by working with both sexes using gender-synchronized approaches. They define gender-synchronized approaches as ‘the intentional intersection of gender-transformative efforts reaching both men and boys and women and girls of all sexual orientations and gender identities. They engage people in challenging harmful and restrictive constructions of masculinity and femininity that drive gender-related vulnerabilities and inequalities and hinder health and well-being.’²³

Drawing on the experiences of several gender-synchronized interventions, the authors identified some key elements that form the foundation of such programmes:

- Employ multiple strategies to change community norms
- Engage men—as partners, clients, and agents of change—as allies in the effort to promote the benefits of more gender-equitable relationships for the whole community and promote positive male role models

- Think about gender equality as a shared goal of programmes that work primarily with women or primarily with men
- Recognize that men and women, boys and girls, reinforce notions of masculinity and femininity, including those that might be harmful
- Adapt the strategy for synchronizing work with men and work with women to each setting
- Be open to combining very different programme elements for men or for women in a given setting
- Assess staff skills and organizations' resources to determine their ability to implement gender-synchronized activities
- Make long-term investments in promising activities that aim to change community norms
- Evaluate programme impact on gender equality as an important outcome itself; think big, anticipate broader effects in considering evaluation
- Create opportunities to bring men and women together but always consider participants' needs to safely disclose their experiences
- Recognize the unique obstacles women and girls face in overcoming gender inequalities

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are made with the CSTL framework in mind, and are intended to strengthen the impact of CSTL.

RESEARCH

Conduct research specifically around gender equality in the SADC Region, to:

- Understand better the key vulnerabilities and challenges experienced by boys and young men in the Region
- Identify and interrogate programmes that target boys and young men
- Compare the impact of gender-synchronized programmes with single-sex programmes, i.e. programmes that work with only men or only women.

POLICY

- Policy review: using a gender equality lens, review the SADC CSTL Policy Framework with the purpose of identifying those areas that require strengthening. In particular, identify policies that can create an enabling environment for gender-synchronized programming.
- Policy implementation: assist Member States to implement international and regional gender-equitable legislation and frameworks at the national level.

ADVOCACY

- With governments: use international and regional commitments to advocate for Member States to develop and/or strengthen policies that reflect their commitments to gender equality.
- With key influencers: advocate for donors, UN agencies and NGOs to harmonize and coordinate their efforts in moving the gender equality agenda forward, and to include working with boys and girls to promote gender equality for its own sake, as well as a means to reaching development outcomes.
- Media: Use the media, including social media platforms, to raise awareness amongst societal groups around gender equality, but with a focus on the needs and vulnerabilities of boys

IMPLEMENTATION

- Innovative pilots: based on the finding of the research, test new and innovative approaches that promote gender-equality
- Scale-up: find ways to scale-up proven programmes that address the needs of boys and young men
- Health and SRHR: strengthen the implementation of Comprehensive Sexuality Education in schools, promoting a gender-equality approach; facilitate and encourage access to youth-friendly SRHR services; ensure comprehensive health services, including access to SRH, counselling and mental health support are available and police, teachers, social service providers and healthcare workers are trained to address the needs of boys and young men
- Schools and teachers: integrate gender equality into all pre-and in-service teacher training programmes
- Parents and community: convene community dialogues and offer parenting programmes that address issues of gender equality and the vulnerable boy child

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