

Men, Masculinities, and Feminist Foreign Policy.

A review of how governments with
feminist foreign policies address the
engagement of men and boys



MenEngage Alliance
working with men and boys for gender equality

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About MenEngage Alliance

We are the world's largest collective working to bring men and boys into the work of women's rights, LGBTQIA+ rights, and gender justice for all, while supporting men and boys to break free of stereotypes of what it means to be a man. Together, we are more than 1,000 groups in some 90 countries coming together around shared values and standards for how to work with men and boys for gender equality.

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Introduction

This document is aimed at civil society organizations, governments, UN Agencies and other stakeholders interested in exploring how engaging men and boys and transforming patriarchal masculinities can add value to Feminist Foreign Policies, when integrated through feminist-informed, intersectional and accountable approaches which seek to dismantle patriarchal power from the individual to the systemic levels.

Over the past decade, Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP) has gained growing prominence in the foreign policy frameworks of several countries. This emerges within a longer history of women's rights activism and movement building that has laid the theoretical groundwork for today's feminist foreign policy approaches. Grounded within this context, we explore the role that a “men and masculinities” perspective plays—or could play—in shaping the design, implementation and potential impact of Feminist Foreign Policies in achieving their transformative aims. We are not specifically advocating for the inclusion of men and boys in all FFPs, although we do believe it can add value when done through a robust feminist political framework – and can harm when not. Our goal is to analyze the extent to which current FFPs incorporate this lens and the value it

may offer to broader feminist foreign policy practice.

This paper reviews all publicly available government articulations of FFP to assess how they address the engagement of men and boys, both at the individual level and in efforts to challenge and transform patriarchal norms around masculinity at institutional and ideological levels.

Our findings show that references to men and masculinities are generally limited across FFP policies, though countries like Germany, Canada, the Netherlands, and Sweden show a more consistent willingness to engage with this perspective. France has recently begun exploring this lens as well. A focus on masculinities can be a powerful tool in holding patriarchal structures to account—structures that

often define Ministries of Foreign Affairs. Men and boys, especially men in positions of power, have a responsibility to help dismantle gendered systems of privilege and use their platforms to support a feminist foreign policy that benefits everyone, including women, girls, and LGBTQI+ people. Recognizing the patriarchal foundations of most political institutions is a crucial step, and those who lead them must take active responsibility for driving change.

Feminist civil society organizations (CSOs), long-time advocates in international forums, continue to champion key priorities such as peace, climate action, gender equality, sexual and reproductive health and rights, and the elimination of gender-based violence within FFPs. They have also emphasized the need for transparent government budgeting and increased funding for feminist movements. These demands reflect the fundamental principles of any meaningful feminist foreign policy to tackle patriarchal masculinities, ideologies, and systems and must be taken seriously by governments if they intend to live up to the label. Engaging men and boys must be done through gender-transformative approaches that

seek to tackle male power, privilege and impunity and to shift to alternative expressions of masculinities based on peace, care, non-violence and collaboration.

We honor the contributions of the dedicated advocacy of feminist collectives working from national, to regional, to global level to hold Governments to account for envisioning and implementing a transformative vision for FFP, moving beyond rhetoric to real world feminist systemic change, including:

- **Red Mexicana de Política Exterior Feminista (RMPEF);**
- **Australian Feminist Foreign Policy Collective (AFFPC);**
- **African Feminist Collective on Feminist Informed Policies;**
- **PEFAL (Política Exterior Feminista en América Latina; Feminist Foreign Policy in Latin America) and;**
- **Feminist Foreign Policy Collaborative (FFPC).**

Men, Masculinities and Dismantling Patriarchy within Feminist Foreign Policies

Foreign policy has traditionally been shaped by masculinist and patriarchal ideologies in both form and content, reflecting and reinforcing power structures rooted in domination, control, and exclusion. These ideologies have been embedded and upheld through a variety of strategies.

At its core, **the practice of foreign policy has privileged aggression, military strength, and competition—**qualities historically coded as masculine. **National security is often framed through ideals of toughness and deterrence, while diplomatic tools associated with care, empathy, or collaboration are undervalued.**

This orientation sidelines peacebuilding, humanitarian aid, and relational diplomacy, which are often labeled as “soft” or secondary concerns. As a result, militarism is not only normalized but valorized as a marker of state power.

The arena of foreign policy has also been dominated by men, with leadership positions—such as diplomats, defense ministers, and negotiators—largely occupied by those adhering to masculine norms.

This male-dominated landscape has shaped the lens through which global affairs are interpreted and acted upon, often excluding the perspectives and needs of women, LGBTQI+ communities, Indigenous peoples, and other marginalized groups. Decision-making processes have historically ignored the gendered impacts of foreign policy decisions, creating frameworks that are gender-blind at best and actively patriarchal at worst.

Moreover, the field of international relations has been shaped by colonial histories and structures, which overlap with patriarchal logics. The foreign policies of Global North countries have often perpetuated neo-colonial relationships through extractive economic practices, imposed governance models, and development programs grounded in Eurocentric gender roles. These policies mirror domestic patriarchal systems, reinforcing hierarchies that position the Global North over the Global South, men over women, and white Western norms over diverse worldviews.

The symbolic framing of the state itself also plays a role in reinforcing patriarchal norms. **States are frequently imagined as masculine protectors of the national family,** invoking gendered notions of honor, sovereignty, and national interest to justify interventions, militarization, and exclusionary policies. For example, the image of “rescuing oppressed women” has been used to legitimize military

actions, such as in the case of the war in Afghanistan, while simultaneously ignoring the agency and voices of the women involved.

Underlying all of this is a bias that privileges rationality over emotion—a hallmark of patriarchal ideology. Diplomatic decisions are expected to be objective and detached, leaving little room for values like care, vulnerability, or emotional intelligence. These characteristics, often feminized and dismissed, are essential to building peaceful, inclusive, and just international relations. **Overall, traditional foreign policy has not only reflected patriarchal and masculinist ideologies but has actively upheld and institutionalized them on a global scale.**

A feminist foreign policy, by contrast in its most aspirational form, seeks to dismantle these norms and replace them with values rooted in **equity, cooperation, care, accountability, and justice.**

Why include a men and masculinities lens in Feminist Foreign Policies

For any policy that claims to support the realization of feminist movements' agendas—grounded in feminist analysis and principles—it is essential to hold it accountable to these ambitious commitments. Feminist movements have long advanced agendas for gender, social, climate, and peace justice, and have consistently supported governments in integrating these priorities into national, regional, and international political frameworks. Building on the knowledge and insights offered by feminist movements, this section explores what must be upheld, transformed, and dismantled for foreign policy to be genuinely imbued with feminist ideals and directed toward feminist goals, especially in work to engage men and boys and transform patriarchal masculinities.

However, such engagement must be approached with political nuance and a critical lens. Without grounding it in feminist principles, even well-intentioned initiatives on men and masculinities risk reinforcing existing inequalities and causing harm. It is important to distinguish that this is not just about individual change, but about transforming institutions and conducting a deeply gendered analysis of power.

A feminist analysis identifies patriarchy as the root cause of all gendered power inequalities, violence and discrimination, and of the oppressive systems that sustain them. It calls for the transformation of these structures through a gender-transformative approach—one that seeks to rectify discriminatory power relations, dismantle harmful gender norms and stereotypes, transform patriarchal masculinities, and promote gender relations based on equality, dignity, freedom, and justice. This analysis also

recognizes that women may uphold patriarchal systems, just as men may work to dismantle them. Crucially, it places responsibility on those who hold and benefit from patriarchal privilege—often men—to acknowledge this privilege and work actively to dismantle it, under the guidance of feminist leadership.

As a policy brief by CARE Netherlands titled ‘Engaging men and boys in gender equality as a key approach of feminist foreign policy’ succinctly states:

“I share power. I challenge my behavior.”

These two feminist principles must remain central when developing FFP and when engaging men and boys.

Therefore, a Feminist Foreign Policy must aim to transform patriarchal masculinities not only at the individual level, but also at the institutional and ideological levels.

While engaging individual men and boys—such as in efforts to eliminate gender-based violence—can be a component of FFP, this must be accompanied by broader strategies to transform social norms and dismantle the patriarchal behaviors that currently shape foreign relations. These include old masculinities notions prioritizing state security, competition, military

might, resource extraction and accumulation, violence, and hierarchy. Coherence is also needed between foreign policy objectives and domestic gender equality efforts.

Historically, male-dominated leadership has emphasized control and violence, often driven by fear and rooted in outdated paradigms of state power. These behaviors are expressed through realist and conservative interpretations of international relations, resulting in the securitization of perceived threats to the state or its interests. Such ideological underpinnings must be challenged if FFP is to achieve its goals.

Integrating feminist systems-change agendas into foreign policy inherently disrupts colonial, extractivist, and militarist power structures at both state and inter-state levels. Evidence shows that policies lacking a feminist political lens often engage men and boys in ways that reinforce gender inequalities—for example, through paternalistic, protectionist, and savior narratives that ultimately limit the autonomy, empowerment, and rights of women and girls.

Men have always been central actors in foreign policy spaces, making it essential to clarify that the desired engagement of men in FFP is not merely about inclusion. Rather, it is about

transforming how men engage—holding them accountable within the spaces they already occupy, and guiding their roles, responsibilities, and influence through feminist approaches. The aim is to shift the institutions, practices, and ideologies of foreign policy itself.

Some Feminist Foreign Policies have begun incorporating components focused on engaging men and boys. Fewer, on challenging patriarchal masculinities at a societal/systemic level. These are welcome developments—provided they are developed in close consultation with feminist movements and are guided by gender-transformative, intersectional feminist analysis. Without this

foundation, such efforts may cause more harm than good.

For this reason, it is vital to critically assess how governments conceptualize and apply men and masculinities frameworks within their FFPs. It is not enough to simply include men and boys; the approach must be politically grounded and analytically robust, ensuring it contributes meaningfully to transforming gendered power relations and masculine norms—**not only among individuals, but through the very foundations of the structures foreign policy, diplomacy, and international relations.**

How to engage men and boys and transform masculinist practices and institutions within Feminist Foreign Policy

In every region and context, patriarchal ideologies rooted in men's entitlement, rigid gender norms, and enforced stereotypical roles continue to shape how men and boys are socialized.

These systems normalize violence and dominance, both in intimate and social relationships and in broader political and international spheres, including how nation states approach conflict. Feminist foreign policy (FFP) must recognize that transforming these harmful constructs is critical to dismantling the patriarchal systems that underpin violence and inequality on all levels. As such, work with men and boys is not an end in itself but a necessary and complementary strategy to achieve the broader aims of gender justice and feminist transformation across societies.

When firmly grounded in intersectional feminist approaches, work with men and boys can have transformative impacts not only for women, girls, and LGBTIQ+ people but also for men and boys themselves. It enables them to act as partners, allies, and advocates in challenging deeply embedded gender norms, ending discrimination, and addressing all forms of gender-based violence. Moreover, this work must confront and dismantle the culture of impunity that allows patriarchal masculinities to thrive unchecked—whether through personal behaviors or within institutions and systems that

sustain domination, exclusion, and control. In the context of FFP, this also includes challenging how patriarchal power manifests in global politics, military aggression, and interstate relations.

Globally, there is growing consensus—reflected in frameworks such as CEDAW, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and other international human rights treaties—that engaging men and boys is essential to achieving gender equality. Over the past two decades, governments, international agencies, and civil society organizations have increasingly recognized the strategic value of this work and incorporated it into their policies. Importantly, feminist foreign policy frameworks are beginning to reflect this shift, embedding more nuanced and transformative language around men and masculinities.

However, this growing recognition must be matched by strategic and feminist-informed implementation. As more stakeholders take up the agenda of engaging men and boys, there is a pressing need to ensure this work remains accountable to feminist, LGBTQIA+, youth, and other marginalized movements. There are significant risks when such efforts are not grounded in gender-transformative or intersectional approaches—they may

inadvertently re-center male experiences or reinforce the power dynamics they aim to disrupt. Therefore, FFPs must take care to ensure that policies addressing men and masculinities explicitly challenge gendered power relations and contribute to systemic change, not symbolic inclusion.

In recent years, there has been a notable increase in references to the engagement of men and boys and transforming masculinities within international instruments—from CEDAW General Recommendations to CSW Agreed Conclusions, Human Rights Council (HRC) resolutions, and United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) texts. These developments point to a shift from simply acknowledging the need to engage men and boys to establishing clear expectations and standards for how to do so in ways that are feminist, accountable, and transformative. Still, further progress is needed to ensure these commitments are operationalized effectively and consistently. Feminist foreign policy frameworks now increasingly reflect the inclusion of initiatives to engage men and boys, but they must continue to do so in more political and systemic ways.

If governments choose to incorporate a lens on men and masculinities within their FFPs, it is essential that they do so

strategically, without over-centering the role of men and boys. Their inclusion should serve to advance feminist aims, such as eliminating violence, discrimination, and exclusion against women, girls, and marginalized communities. Policies must be informed by intersectional feminist analysis, be deeply aware of gendered power

relations, and hold men—particularly those in positions of authority—accountable for their roles in upholding patriarchal structures. Ultimately, feminist foreign policy must ensure that engaging men and boys contributes to dismantling the systemic roots of gender injustice, rather than reinforcing them.

Key Considerations

Align the Engagement of Men and Boys With Feminist Aims within FFP

At the heart of any gender-transformative work with men and boys within FFP must be the explicit aim of dismantling patriarchal masculinities and male supremacy. This work must actively promote non-violent, equitable, and inclusive notions of manhood, not as an end in itself, but as a strategic means to achieve feminist foreign policy goals—namely, the advancement of women’s rights, gender justice, and the transformation of power relations across all levels of society and governance.

Clarify Intent and Long-Term Objectives

Programs and policies that include men and boys must clearly communicate that their engagement serves broader feminist aims and contributes to structural and systemic change. FFPs should not instrumentalize men and boys but engage them as accountable allies and agents of change in solidarity with feminist movements, advancing the long-term project of social, gender, and global justice.

Target Patriarchal Power in Governance and International Relations and Diplomacy

Since power structures—particularly in foreign policy, defense, and diplomacy—remain overwhelmingly male-dominated, FFPs must challenge the concentration of patriarchal power. Male leaders, policymakers, and diplomats must undergo transformative processes themselves to prevent them from perpetuating gendered hierarchies. FFP must reimagine international relations away from dominance and militarism, toward cooperation, shared power, and peacebuilding rooted in feminist principles and men within these structures must participate in spaces of reflection and transformation in order to achieve these aims.

Ensure Feminist Leadership and Accountability

All FFP policies that engage men and boys must be developed and implemented in direct consultation with feminist movements, women’s rights organizations, LGBTQIA+ groups, and other social and environmental justice movements. These policies must be

accountable to the most marginalized communities—those at the intersections of multiple systems of oppression—and center their priorities, voices, and visions.

Protect and Strengthen Feminist Resourcing

FFPs must actively safeguard the political space, funding, and visibility of women-led, feminist and LGBTIQ organizations, particularly those working on the frontlines of rights struggles. Efforts to include men and boys must never come at the expense of feminist initiatives, which are already under-resourced and increasingly under attack in shrinking civil society spaces globally.

Institutional Accountability

Engagement strategies must move beyond targeting individual behavior change and address the broader systems—legal, political, economic, military, and corporate—that uphold patriarchal masculinities. FFP must hold national governments and international institutions accountable for their roles in sustaining systemic gender injustice.

Advance Structural Transformation Through a Socio-Ecological Lens within FFP: FFP must embed engagement with men and boys within a broader feminist

systems-change framework. Using a socio-ecological model, policies must recognize the interconnections between individuals, communities, institutions, and global systems, and tackle the foundations of patriarchal power—militarism, extractivism, and capitalism—simultaneously.

Expose and Shift Power Relations

The language and implementation of FFP strategies must provide a critical analysis of the ways men and boys are implicated in gendered power hierarchies, and define their specific responsibilities in disrupting and transforming these systems. This clarity is essential to avoid reproducing patriarchal structures under the guise of their inclusion.

End Impunity and Reinforce Legal and Political Accountability

FFP must address men's entitlement, privilege, and the systemic impunity that allows patriarchal norms and violence to persist. Men in positions of power—whether in politics, diplomacy, law enforcement, or the military—must be held accountable when they uphold or fail to challenge laws, policies, and practices that obstruct gender justice and entrench patriarchal dominance.

Lessons Learned: Feminist-Informed policy-making inclusive of men and masculinities

A recent feminist informed analysis of 9 policies from across 6 regions¹, inclusive of a men and masculinities lens, highlighted challenges and opportunities in ensuring these frameworks truly support gender justice.

These lessons learned are particularly important; most Governments who have incorporated men and masculinities elements within their FFP, did so as an extension of their national policy frameworks, already incorporating this approach. This research emphasizes the importance of examining the entire policy cycle to assess whether feminist processes and analyses are being implemented at all stages of the policy process - design, content, implementation and impact measurement. Too often, progressive policy frameworks serve merely as

signposts to political commitment, while the context of their emergence, the development process, and the necessary follow-up actions to achieve real transformation fall short.

The study underscores the need to evaluate if policies are feminist-informed throughout their development, content, design, and implementation phases. This is particularly crucial when policies involve work with men and boys aimed at transforming patriarchal masculinities, which should be part of broader efforts toward justice, rooted in historical insights on previous gender

¹[Policy Analysis Toolkit](#): A methodology for feminist-informed analysis of policies inclusive of a men and masculinities lens (FemJust & MenEngage Alliance Policy scorecards, 2022)

justice strategies, and in consultation with feminist movements to avoid marginalizing those most affected. Notably, none of the reviewed policies that included work with men and boys had successfully applied feminist principles throughout the entire policy cycle.

The policies reviewed, including those of Turkey, Czech Republic, Mexico, Costa Rica, Sri Lanka, Trinidad and Tobago, Rwanda, Canada and Indonesia², all saw the emergence of various transversal and cross-cutting themes, which lend important insights to the integration of a men and masculinities lens in FFPs.

The policy's approach towards engaging men and boys through a feminist policy process is assessed across **four areas:**



Policy Analysis Toolkit³

² [Accountable feminist policy-making inclusive of a men and masculinities lens](#) (FemJust & MenEngage Alliance Policy scorecards, 2022)

³ [Policy Analysis Toolkit](#): A methodology for feminist-informed analysis of policies inclusive of a men and masculinities lens (FemJust & MenEngage Alliance Policy scorecards, 2022)

Cross-Cutting Themes

Across All Score Cards

- Almost universally, gender inequality is not fully understood, particularly how patriarchal norms lead to social control of sexuality, sexual behaviour, bodies and gender identities, and how this results in oppression and violence against not only women but also queer and trans men, intersex and nonbinary people.
- LGBTQI groups and organisations are largely absent from the processes of design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies focused on gender equality, gender-based violence and sexual and reproductive health, and policies often reinforced the gender binary.
- Nearly all the policies include gender-transformative strategies to engage men and boys, with a focus on changing the knowledge, attitudes and behaviour of men and boys; challenging oppressive social norms and stereotypes; adoption of gender-transformative programs and policies by social institutions; and strengthening the legal and policy framework in favour of gender equality.
- Across the board, human and financial resources are insufficient for the effective implementation of the policies assessed. Often national budgets lack the systems and/ or the transparency required in order to track the funds allocated towards the implementation of specific policies.
- Oftentimes there is a disconnect between a policy's stated intentions and the implementation on the ground, which may be poor, or even nonexistent. There is even an instance where a robust policy has been adopted but the government through its actions is actively undermining gender equality and the rights of women and LGBTQI people.
- A large majority of the policies have adequate accountability mechanisms in the form of monitoring and evaluation strategies; however, these are not followed through with sufficient funds or action. Moreover, indicators intended to monitor progress are often quantitative and focused on outputs or outcomes, rather than processes or impact.

At this time, when FFP remains quite a recent development within policy discussions, and with so few having reached the point of substantive implementation, it is imperative to continue to advocate for a feminist lens, power analysis and feminist processes to guide the entire policy cycle of FFP. This is critically important when policies include strategies or lines of work that bring in men and boys as actors in the effort to achieve gender justice. Much of the research and mapping that follows, into current FFP frameworks

inclusive of men and boys, constitutes a cold reading of the content phase of the policy cycle. Little is known about how Governments arrived at these strategies to transform masculinities and if feminist and LGBTIQ organisations helped inform these proposals. In most cases, even less is known regarding the implementation and impact measurements of such interventions. More work is needed to ensure that FFPs that include engaging men and boys, are not inadvertently creating more harm than good.

At a glance: Feminist Foreign Policies and the inclusion of men & masculinities

Explicit references by FFPs to a men and masculinities lens	
The FFPs which explicitly reference to engaging men and boys	Canada, France, Germany, Netherlands and Sweden
FFPs which include aims and objectives such as changing social norms and gender stereotypes , including around masculinities	Argentina, Netherlands, Canada, France, Germany and Sweden.
FFPs which include aims and objectives such as dismantling patriarchal power structures	Argentina, Mexico, Spain, Germany and Sweden.

(See Annex B)

What trends do we see?

Overall we see a wide range of examples across the spectrum of Feminist Foreign Policies in terms of their address, inclusion or implication of the need to work with men and boys in advancing women's rights and gender justice, and to transform patriarchal masculinities. These range from policies that explicitly include the need to engage men and boys, those with a

focus on social norms transformation and those with aims of dismantling patriarchal systems of power. Some, while not specifically calling on or identifying men and boys' roles and responsibilities in achieving gender equality, do centre key aims such as eradicating GBV, which fundamentally requires work with men and boys. However, this section will focus

primarily on those policies which have been explicit in articulating a men and masculinities lens within their policy frameworks.

As discussed prior, even the most progressive articulation is not enough, if the entire policy cycle has not been carried out in feminist approaches – so

we must continue to assess if the strategies were developed in consultation with national feminist, queer, youth and other marginalised movements, and if the implementation and impact are yielding measurable results towards achieving gender justice.

Key trends across the FFPs with a men and masculinities lens

- The policies that called for the engagement of men and boys did so with the goal to support in the achievement of justice across a variety of issues, including ending GBV, SRHR for all, ending violent conflict, and in the redistribution of unpaid care work
- Most policies included an understanding of the need to shift social norms that perpetuate gender injustices, with several making links to patriarchal masculinities
- Most policies had the aim to transform patriarchal systems, but the links between working with men and boys, and working to change harmful norms, practices and stereotypes around masculinities were not clearly laid out as key areas of focus to do so, including by working with men in positions of power
- Only one policy discussed the need to work on supporting new manifestations or alternative notions of manhood, building masculinities based on care, non-violence and peace, or working to redefine what it means to be a man
- No policy assessed how patriarchal masculinities are implicated in the ongoing marginalisation and exclusion of LGBTIQ peoples, with most maintaining the gender binary in place, and some reinforcing the need for equality ‘between men and women’.
- No policy addressed the impact of its strategies to engage men and boys and very few clearly articulated the strategies which they planned to implement.

CASE STUDY

French Feminist Diplomacy Policy

The articulation of the responsibilities of men and boys to upholding their reproductive responsibilities is a clear example of the importance of nuance in calls for engaging men and boys. The policy includes naming the gender-based norms which privilege men into considering SRHR a “woman’s issue” and why men and boys must therefore contribute to dismantling these. It is also important to recognize that these patriarchal privileges cause harm, from men and boys ignoring the sexual and reproductive health needs which further creates a care burden on women and girls. It also recognizes that men and boys themselves are subject to limitations under patriarchal systems, although it would be good to note that these are disproportionately felt by women, girls and gender non-conforming peoples. The language also reinforces the gender binary, which we strongly advocate against:

“This approach includes social change with regard to the respective roles of women and girls, men and boys. Involving men and boys in the promotion of gender equality is important because they are also subject to gender-based social norms and stereotypes that may free them of “reproductive” responsibilities and tasks while at the same time confining them to certain roles. They must therefore be an inherent part of the process of challenging traditions and customs that perpetuate gender inequality.”

Within the articulation of the policy's aims to guarantee women and girls are free and have equal access to rights and justice as well as their protection against all forms of violence - there is a commitment for the "involvement of men and boys ([as in] rehabilitation for aggressors, violence prevention initiatives for boys)", which includes both preventative strategies (in which it would also be critical to include adult men), and in efforts to break cycles of violence, for those men and boys who have already engaged in patriarchal violence.

The policy is sound in its call for men and boys to step up and be active stakeholders in the achievement of gender equality and in its centering of a gender-transformative approach which addresses gendered power relations:

“Essential structural and social changes to ensure gender equality require changes in attitudes and behaviours across society. This means involving and engaging boys and men in the process, in order to make them active stakeholders in changing and improving the condition of girls and women. This strategy will therefore support initiatives to break down stereotypes and power relations and to eliminate gender-based discrimination.”

A closer look at implementation of the French FFP: In the case of French FFP, the inclusion of strategies to engage men and boys within the policy was not carried out in consultation with feminist CSOs, and there was subsequent pushback from them, including with concerns about funding being diverted to work with men and boys and away from work to advance gender equality with women, girls and gender diverse peoples. This serves as a key example of why accountability is essential in the articulation and implementation of all efforts within policies to engage men and boys.

CASE STUDY

Canadian Feminist International Assistance Policy

The Canadian Feminist International Assistance policy provides clear strategies for how to engage men and boys in shifting harmful norms around masculinities, and is explicit in naming the consequences of these patriarchal behaviours upon all genders. It also addressed the need for men and boys to be active participants in shifting these harmful norms. What would strengthen this policy articulation is to seek to advance gender-transformative curricula in schools, which can support all youth, especially young men in understanding the root causes of unequal power relations and to learn ways to express alternative notions of masculinities:

“It is essential that men and boys be engaged in this effort through gender-responsive curricula in schools, work to address and transform harmful behaviours that can have negative consequences for all genders (such as sexual risk-taking, substance abuse and violence) and implement programming to better support fathers so that they gain the skills and confidence needed to care for their children—boys and girls—on an equal basis with their partners”

CASE STUDY

Germany's Feminist Foreign Policy & Feminist Development Policy

The German **Shaping Feminist Foreign Policy: Federal Foreign Policy Guidelines** and the German **Feminist Development Policy** contain in their totality, strong language on engaging men and boys, transforming social norms and dismantling patriarchal systems. Firstly, the FFP Guidelines articulate clearly that men and boys are essential to the achievement of gender equality and focus on the particularly important role of male leaders as 'gate-keepers' within communities, institutions and other organisations, and as such the need to work with them. A deeper understanding of the strategies that would be employed to work with this constituency of men would fortify the articulation, especially as men in positions of power or authority are the most privileged and powerful among men, and can easily be pedestaled merely for 'standing for equality' without being compelled to undergo a transformative process themselves which is deeply internalised and leads to more feminist and gender just actions, behaviours, power sharing and decision-making:

“Men and boys, male decision-makers or local, traditional and religious authorities should also be addressed on a targeted basis as key Agents of Change.”

When addressing the desire to engage men and boys more broadly, the examples of potential interventions present strategies that may fall short of a transformative approach. Furthermore, it is especially important to consider how one is framing issues that may centre men's vulnerabilities, which leads to overlooking the fact that men and boys systematically continue to experience disproportionate benefits from patriarchy on the whole, as compared to the women, girls and gender non-conforming people in their lives:

“In promoting gender equality, we also specifically want to incorporate men into our project work and support them, for example by funding projects by UN Women Deutschland e.V. and the global campaign HeForShe, in order to better realise our programmes’ gender-transformative objectives. At the same time, we take into account risks that men and boys face. That includes forced recruitment and a greater risk of dying or being injured or detained during fighting.”

The German **Feminist Development Policy** (2023) calls for gender-transformative approaches to critically explore norms around masculinities. This articulation supports the understanding that not only men as individuals must change, but so must the patriarchal masculinities and masculinist forms of the exercise of power. The articulation fails to unpack what these gender-transformative projects will entail:

“Gender-transformative projects [which] critically examine conventional images of masculinity, for example, and involve male stakeholders in this process. (...) Together with partners, the BMZ is rolling out gender-transformative approaches in its projects and programmes and thus supports the reform of discriminatory social structures and norms. Society at large should be involved in the critical appraisal of power relations and gender norms.”

The Development Policy also centres key language on the patriarchal power structures that have stood in the way of achieving equality and justice and articulates the ways in which patriarchy as a system of oppression and marginalisation, has worked in tandem with other systems of oppression, acknowledging the need for a feminist intersectional approach which tackles multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, and further centres colonial histories and present realities with the German FFP acknowledging the “historical responsibility” of the country for its colonial past:

“Around the world, people continue to be discriminated against and oppressed (...) women and girls are the largest disadvantaged group within the population. This is the consequence of patriarchal power structures, which have prevailed worldwide for hundreds of years. For too long, it was considered normal for men to dominate within society. (...) Power inequalities within societies are grounded in deep-rooted structural and often interlinked systems such as patriarchy, racism, sexism, ableism and classism. These systems perpetuate violent and unequal power structures. In the countries of the Global South, they are also associated with European colonialism and a colonial mindset which continue to have effects today. (...) BMZ is convinced that systemic change is necessary”.

C A S E S T U D Y

Sweden's Feminist Foreign Policy

(Currently withdrawn)

While the Swedish Feminist Foreign Policy is no longer in force, having been withdrawn, it is included here as the most substantial example of a robust and political framework for the engagement of men and boys, transforming patriarchal masculinities, and shifting social norms within any of the policy frameworks developed. Amidst this assessment, there is also a recognition for areas of improvement and continued politicisation of the men and masculinities agenda.

One highlight of the Swedish Feminist Foreign Policy, was its ability to tackle the way in which men and boys are complicit in the expression of various manifestations of gender injustice, and as such, are key stakeholders in changing harmful norms around masculinities across various key thematic areas. This includes addressing their roles and responsibilities in ending violence against women and girls, including in conflict settings as well as more broadly within society, in supporting SRHR for all and in the need for men and boys to take up their equitable share of unpaid care work. Clear

links are made between norms around patriarchal masculinities, violence and conflict, and men and boys are identified as essential actors to engage, in order to shift these cultural patterns, including via the need to change their attitudes and behaviours. The policy is also the only one to clearly articulate the need to **“involve boys and men in the work for gender equal societies [including by] promot[ing] positive forms of masculinity (p. 74/75)”**, centering the importance of advancing alternative socializations around what it means to be a man.

On GBV and conflict:

“All forms of violence against women and girls affect both the individual and society at large, and are a barrier to gender equality and development. (...) Among other initiatives, Sweden has worked to raise awareness of and counteract destructive masculinity norms, strengthen countries’ ability to bring proceedings against perpetrators, assist victims of crimes and rehabilitate soldiers. (...) Sweden has for example: Carried out extensive work to highlight the link between destructive masculinity norms, violence and conflict. (p. 22/23). (...) Influencing negative and stereotypical masculinity norms is important, as is changing attitudes and behaviours among men and boys who represent and act based on such norms (p. 23). (...) It is important to involve men and boys in the work to prevent conflict and to combat gender-related and sexual violence (p. 25). (...) Aid efforts are carried out within all objective areas for the Swedish feminist foreign policy. This includes...combat[ing] men’s violence against women, to strengthen women’s roles in peace processes and to increase women’s political participation and access to SRHR (p. 75).”

On Unpaid Care Work:

It is important to address the underlying causes of women's under-representation in political processes and bodies, such as women's traditional main responsibility for unpaid housework and caring (p. 26). Unpaid housework and caring must be shared equally between women and men (p. 28).

On SRHR:

Access to contraception and sex education for young people and adults benefit gender equality and counteract sexual violence, involuntary pregnancies, abortions and sexually transmitted diseases. Men and boys need to be involved in order to change attitudes (p. 29).

The Swedish Policy puts forward the most comprehensive set of examples for the implementation of interventions on men and masculinities, including work both nationally and abroad via their embassies. These primarily include work around discussion regarding masculinities and transforming masculinities, promotion of positive masculinities and campaign work to amplify alternative messaging around masculinities, including through HeForeShe, paternal leave and fatherhood programs, and other social media efforts. Feminist critiques have often rightfully problematized working exclusively with “low-hanging fruit” in work with men and boys, such as in fatherhood work, when regressions in women's right to body autonomy, abortion, LGBTIQ rights and other pressing human rights issues continue to be under violation. It will be important to advocate that Governments seek to implement increasingly explicit gender-transformative work with men and boys, if they are to include this within their policies, which seeks to destabilise gendered power-inequalities through more difficult to shift areas

of work. The field of men and masculinities has also seen a history embedded in notions of development work being led by Global North countries within Global South countries, in which the ‘patriarchal masculinities’ are seen to be most present. It is critical to recognize that these manifestations of harmful norms are present across the world and require addressing in all contexts:

“Swedish Dads is a photo exhibition featuring portraits of fathers who have chosen to take at least six months of parental leave (...) an important tool in the Swedish Foreign Service’s work to encourage new approaches and values. It has been displayed at Swedish embassies in around 50 countries, and more exhibitions are planned (p. 91)... The above mentioned Swedish photo exhibition Swedish Dads has generated discussion in many countries, and has acted as a useful springboard for further dialogue and events relating to gender roles and gender equality. In other cases, discussions have been held on parental insurance, socially engaged photography, the role of fathers and destructive masculinities (p. 97).

In Croatia, the Swedish Embassy organised a Festival of Fathers and held round-table discussions in parliament in connection with the exhibition, while in Iran the embassy has taken the exhibition on a national tour. Local photo competitions for fathers have also been held in several countries, including China, Uganda, Thailand, Tunisia and Switzerland (p. 96).

In several countries, including Chile, the Swedish embassy works with many different actors to apply the feminist foreign policy. Through cooperation with the Hay Mujeres organisation, the embassy has created the “Embajadores Hay Mujeres” network with the aim of involving men in gender equality work. The embassy has also involved managers within industry in the #HeforShe campaign (p. 96).

Within cultural promotion the Swedish Embassy in Mexico City has initiated discussions on what is traditionally expected of men and women, and how gender stereotypes can be influenced in the long term by reaching new and broader groups.

One example is the work carried out by the Swedish Embassy in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to promote positive masculinity. The embassy works with boys' and young men's image of men using extensive support from Sida within the scope of development cooperation, and has also funded a study of masculinity together with UN Women.

Other initiatives have included holding essay-writing competitions for young students on the theme of boys' and men's roles in gender equality work, organising a photo competition on the theme "un vrai homme" ("a real man"), holding round-table discussions on masculinity and sharing regular messages on social media with interviews from men's networks and activists. The far-reaching impact is the outcome of the work across operational areas that has been carried out effectively within foreign policy, culture, promoting Sweden and development cooperation (p. 98).

The Swedish Feminist Foreign Policies' explicit commitment to take an intersectional lens is important. This is applied uniformly to women and men, girls and boys, and gender diverse individuals. It is true that men and boys are not a homogenous group, and we must also take into greater account the heterogeneity among men and boys themselves. Patriarchal power and privilege is shaped by many forces and factors of marginalisation and oppression. Intersecting forces of oppression spread the gains and costs of gender relations unevenly among men and boys. However, it is also true that most men continue to hold disproportionately higher power and privilege

over the women, girls and LGBTIQ peoples in their lives and within a similar intersectional location. Because of this, it would be best not to essentialise an intersectionality lens to men and boys themselves in isolation, but rather to understand boys' and men's diverse experiences, identities, positionalities and political location within patriarchy across all contexts, and especially as women, girls and gender non-conforming people bear the highest cost of multiple and intersecting forms of violence and discrimination:

These analyses should have an intersectional perspective and should take into account the fact that women and girls, men and boys are not homogeneous groups but have different identities, needs, influence and living conditions. Analyses therefore need to consider factors other than gender, such as age, geographic domicile, socioeconomic status, gender identity and gender expression, sexual orientation, ethnic origin, functional variation, level of education, declarations of faith and religion (p. 38).

C A S E S T U D Y

The Netherlands Online Guide to Dutch Feminist Foreign Policy

(currently removed from Government website)

The Netherlands Online Guide to Dutch Feminist Foreign Policy makes important strides in unpacking why the involvement of men and boys is important in feminist foreign policy, highlighting the critical role men and boys, upholders of patriarchal social norms, as gatekeepers, power- and privilege-holders have in challenging and dismantling patriarchal structures. This is often an overlooked strategy of achieving gender equality that can work to support in the shifting of systems underpinned by ideological patriarchal values. It also calls on the need for men to speak up against persistent violations of the rights of women, girls and gender non-conforming people, making clear links to the role and responsibility of men and boys as agents of change to end impunity and ongoing gender-based violence and discrimination:

Men and boys are indispensable at changing patriarchal structures. Unequal power relations will persist if men and boys are not involved in changing social and cultural norms in which discrimination and violence are rooted. Men and boys can also be negatively affected by harmful gender norms and gender stereotyping. It is important that they speak out against issues such as sexual and gender-related violence, femicide and unequal opportunities. After all, achieving equality is a task for society as a whole that benefits people of all genders.

Finally, the impact of harmful gender norms and gender stereotypes on men and boys themselves is highlighted. Harmful stereotypes about what it means to be a man continue to fuel the harmful stereotyping of women, girls and gender non-conforming people. Transforming gender stereotypes about women is not enough if the broader system remains patriarchal. Changing harmful stereotypes about masculinities is a crucial strategy to end gender-based violence and discrimination and to advance equality. Current discussions tend to focus on women and the stereotyping they are subjected to, with good cause—centered on those who experience discrimination. Expanding this focus to include those who hold power and have a responsibility to drive change is also critical. Patriarchal masculinities are built on harmful traits and behaviors. Stereotypes consistently normalize and encourage violence, discrimination, domination, exploitation, control, and a lack of accountability and care—affecting women, girls, LGBTQI+ people, children, the environment, and even men who express alternative masculinities.

CASE STUDY

Argentina's Feminist Foreign Policy

The policy's articulation is robust in seeking to eliminate gender norms that inhibit the leadership, safety, security and rights of women within foreign service, diplomatic posts and delegations and missions abroad.

Discriminatory attitudes, prejudices and practices associated with masculinist institutions, can continue to act as a hindrance to the realisation of these aims, if not tackled with clear and direct strategies. However, it fails to identify the need to work on social norms transformation more broadly within the scope of society, both domestically and internationally. It also fails to specifically name the roles and responsibilities of men and boys in addressing these issues:

“Equality policies aimed at contributing to eliminate the obstacles that women encounter in the development of their careers due to “the fact of being women” -mainly those related to tasks and care work-, to make visible the persistence of “subjection factors”, discriminatory stereotypes and a culture of privilege in hierarchical positions and power relations, to advocate for parity to be respected and achieved at all levels and areas of the foreign service, to ensure a fair and representative integration of gender in delegations and missions abroad by promoting that they are led by women, to review training plans in diplomatic schools or institutes to include subjects

on gender issues and FFP, as well as to ensure that the gender perspective is mainstreamed in all curricular subjects and training courses, and to ensure a work environment free of violence, harassment, abuse of authority and discrimination against women on the basis of gender, in all areas of the foreign service.”

As a high note, the Argentinian FFP centres the urgency to counter the backlash, a critical address amidst the rise of anti-rights and anti-gender movements worldwide. These attacks are being observed within the national, regional and international context, including at the UN, while we also observe the rise of the manosphere, men’s rights groups and other misogynist influencers who are increasingly seeking to gain affinity with young men and boys via social media platforms and other forms of alternative media. We strongly believe that clear strategies for how to engage men and boys, including men in positions of power to counter the backlash are key:

“[Need of] deconstructing the designs of traditional misogyny but also the emerging threats of neo-patriarchal movements that seek to impose an instrumental logic of authoritarian actors, stigmatising and demonising the ‘gender ideology’ and attacking feminist organisations and dissidences to prevent the recognition of emancipatory autonomies – physical, political and economic – and deny the right of all to be equal in dignity and rights”.

C A S E S T U D Y

Mexico's Feminist Foreign Policy

The Mexican FFP contains important articulations on challenging and dismantling patriarchal structures but remains silent in regard to the responsibilities of men and boys towards the achievement of gender equality. It contains thematic aims, such as eradicating GBV, but does not explicitly include aspects around participation of men and boys, and it does not mention how patriarchal masculinities are being contemplated as a root cause to gender inequalities and violence:

“It [FFP] is a multi-dimensional policy framework, which aims to elevate the experiences and agency of women and marginalised groups to examine the destructive forces of patriarchy, capitalism, racism and militarism. (...) Zero tolerance to harassment and gender-based violence (power relations and existence are manifested in multiple ways, generating abusive situations).”

C A S E S T U D Y

Spanish Feminist Foreign Policy

The Spanish FFP Guide states a short reference to the need to overcome structural inequalities and to promote the empowerment and rights of women and girls. This is an important consideration of working on the structures level, however, no strategies are identified on how it will do so. The aim to combat GBV and discrimination is also promising, but it would be strengthened by the clarity on how this will be done, with the potential articulation of how men, who are the most likely to be perpetrators of violence, are responsible for addressing this issue.

“Spain forms part of the group of countries that consider gender equality a “distinctive element” of their foreign policy and make commitments of greater political significance to reinforce their regulatory framework at an international level, to defend human rights, combat gender violence and discrimination, accelerate the closing of gender gaps, overcome the structural inequalities that cause and deepen these gaps, and promote the empowerment and rights of women and girls” (p. 3).

Annex A:

Governments with Feminist Foreign Policies

Annex B:

Mapping of the inclusion of a men and masculinities lens within FFPs



MenEngage Alliance
working with men and boys for gender equality

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