



GENDER ACTION PLATFORM (GAP) ENGAGING MEN AND BOYS



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✓ GAP SUMMARY

The Gender Action Platform (GAP) strengthened Australian non-government organisation (NGO) programming to achieve gender equality outcomes in developing countries. In summary:

- The GAP included six projects to address women's economic empowerment, gender-based violence and women's leadership.
- The GAP design prioritised innovation, collaboration, and shared learning
- Implementation dates: July 2017 to December 2020
- The GAP reached 226,131 people including 144,139 women and girls (64%); 96,340 women (42%) and 47,779 girls (21%) and 4,217 people with disabilities (2%).

🌱 PROJECTS, PARTICIPATING NGOS AND LOCATIONS

Lead NGO	Project	Location
Marie Stopes International Australia and WaterAid Australia	'I'm Prepared' Equality for refugee women in the return- reintegration context	Papua New Guinea and Timor-Leste
Act for Peace	Action Against Gender Violence: Engaging Men, Youth and Children	Sri Lanka, India, Thailand and Myanmar
ActionAid	Keeping girls in school through improved reproductive and menstrual health	Cambodia, Kenya, Vanuatu
CARE Australia	Gender Responsive Alternatives on Climate Change	Cambodia, Myanmar
ChildFund Australia	Rights, Respect, Resilience: skills for safe, equitable and respectful relationships	Papua New Guinea
World Vision Australia	Enhancing Women's Voice to Stop Sexual Harassment (STOP)	Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu

Good gender programming involves four main approaches: Increasing consciousness about gender equality, improving access to resources and opportunities, influencing policies and institutions and challenging norms and attitudes¹. These are not discrete, but they reinforce each other to contribute to gender equality.

¹ Rao, Sandler, Kelleher and Miller (2016): *Gender at Work: Theory and Practice for 21st Century Organisations*, Routledge



Engaging men and boys is crucial for success with each of these approaches as men have an equal role to women in promoting gender equality. Men often have greater access to financial resources and opportunities and dominate decision and decision-making in many contexts. Male partners are the primary perpetrator of violence against women, which is informed by attitudes that normalise gender inequality. Finally, men benefit from gender norm change which expands societal attitudes about masculinity. Below are examples of approaches used by GAP partners to engage men and boys.

Men and boys were engaged in all GAP projects to raise awareness of gender equality, violence against women, menstrual health and hygiene, sexual and reproductive health, gendered impacts of climate change and repatriation of refugees. For example, **Marie Stopes International Australia** Timor-Leste produced a short video to raise **awareness of menstrual health and hygiene** with men to combat myths and social taboos. The video was shared on Facebook and at events and education sessions in Timor-Leste. In addition, Marie Stopes and WaterAid found that involving men and boys in discussions surrounding menstruation contributed to transforming negative gender stereotypes and traditional beliefs.

Act for Peace engaged men to address the barriers to **women's control over financial resources**. The program addressed this through Community Economic Development Forums, partly comprised of influential leaders in the community and businesspeople - usually men - who the program hoped to harness as champions of change. The Forums were designed to help refugee women access markets and engage male leaders as champions of change to promote understanding of women's contributions to more sustainable, safe, and dignified processes of returning to their home countries. They also supported leaders and men in the broader community to understand and support gender-sensitive preparedness and women's rights. However, Act for Peace found that it is difficult to quickly shift some of the entrenched cultural norms, which require a long-term commitment.

CARE Australia improved **women's access to workplaces free from sexual harassment**. CARE Australia engaged with senior leadership of garment factories and presented them with a business case on how addressing sexual harassment improves productivity. Through the GAP, CARE Australia supported the development of sexual harassment policies in 29 factories in Cambodia and Myanmar.

ChildFund Australia and **Marie Stopes International Australia /Water Aid Australia** were based in schools and communities and focused on **adolescent boys and girls to influence attitudes about gender equality and sexual and reproductive health** through the school curriculum. ChildFund Australia and Marie Stopes International Australia /Water Aid Australia found that teachers were reluctant to teach sexual education due to social norms. In particular male teachers found it challenging discussing menstruation and sexual and reproductive health. This issue was tackled by providing more training, materials and ongoing support for teachers. At the end of the project, male teachers stated that they felt comfortable approaching these topics within their mixed-gender classes.

Action Aid Australia focused on **increasing women's visibility in community leadership** positions to increase positive female role models. This challenged norms of male leadership in contexts where community leaders were predominantly men. ActionAid Australia also engaged with male partners of the women leaders to encourage them to support their partners.

World Vision Australia piloted a new approach of **working with known male perpetrators of violence** to change norms associated with men 'disciplining' their wives by building an understanding of gender inequality as the driver of violence coupled with anger management techniques.

All projects resulted in **changes in policies and practice** within the private sector, government and church, which were male-dominated. Successful strategies included identifying male champions who had aligned values and ensuring that policies aligned to national and international commitments to gender equality. For example, Marie Stopes International Australia /Water Aid Australia invested in strategic government engagement to integrate comprehensive sexuality education into the school curriculum in PNG, primarily



due to the sensitivity of the content. Engagement included coordinating the Community of Practice and ongoing consultation with government agency staff in curriculum development.

CHALLENGES: RESISTANCE AND BACKLASH

The majority of GAP partners reported challenges with engaging men, particularly balancing pressure for change against the risk of resistance and backlash.

Resistance and backlash are expected in programs that challenge gender norms and tackle harmful attitudes of men to women and girls. Resistance can take several forms, from passive resistance to physical violence against women. GAP partners reported tension between challenging gender norms and working within existing norms to affect change. The GAP partners did not find a specific solution to this issue but found that challenging norms requires constant testing and refining approaches. Planning for backlash through partnerships with violence support service agencies (counselling, shelter, health and police) was also a key strategy.

Managing resistance and backlash are closely related to Do No Harm approaches. A Do No Harm approach to aid programming recognises that programs can cause unintended harm to participants – including violence against women – and that programs can also perpetuate and reinforce gender norms and gender inequality. These risks were actively managed by most of the GAP partners through approaches such as developing partnerships and referral processes with existing violence response services (counselling, police, health services). It was also crucial for project staff to have training on referring cases of violence to appropriate services.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Issues with managing resistance and backlash were not necessarily resolved, but strategies recommended by GAP partners for future gender equality projects included:

- Plan for backlash through **partnerships with violence response services**. The first step is to identify what support services are available. GAP partners created formal partnerships with existing violence response services.
- Provide **project and partner staff training on managing disclosures of violence and referral pathways to violence response services**. Women who experience violence must be referred to existing services. Project staff should not provide counselling because these are specialist skills and can put project staff at risk of violence. Referral skills include survivor centred approaches that support women's decision making rather than telling women what they should do.
- Foster stronger **relationships between schools, violence support services** for adolescents experiencing family violence. Childfund facilitated visits from violence support services to schools and communities.
- Identify and **test entry points for issues that are taboo and difficult to discuss**. Challenging norms is built over time and based on good relationships with community members and integrated through a range of training and interventions.
- **Start small and test strategies**. World Vision Australia's work with male perpetrators of violence was a risky approach that could increase violence against women. Therefore, World Vision Australia accessed technical advice and rolled out the project as a small pilot, supported by research by the Australian National University's (ANU) School of Regulation and Global Governance.
Identify male champions. The identification of male champions is based on relationships and political economy analysis. In addition, male champions should demonstrate a willingness to engage with gender equality training.

