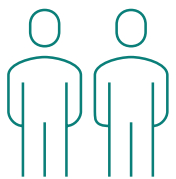


Beijing+25: Accelerating Progress for Women and Girls

The Way Forward



4. Engage with powerful men and traditional authorities.

Women cannot achieve gender equality on their own. The movement toward the equal participation and full empowerment of women and girls requires the support of male champions, as men still occupy most positions of power. Enlisting support from powerful men who respect women's leadership—from the highest echelons to the local and household levels—can accelerate progress toward equality by weakening resistance to change and promoting norms of power sharing between men and women.

Men need to advocate publicly for gender equality from their positions of power in global corporations, political parties, and peace negotiations. This advocacy requires challenging harmful notions of masculinity, publicly condemning violence against women, and questioning the power dynamics that prevent women's full political, social, and economic inclusion. Coalitions like [Male Champions of Change](#) recognize that "Men invented the system. Men largely run the system. Men need to change the system." Male leaders can be galvanized to alter the conditions and cultures that prevent women from thriving, while making clear that advancing gender equality yields universal, absolute gains across society. The report suggests the following strategies:

Engage men and boys at the household and community level to effectively bridge gender gaps by changing norms. Best practices include:

- Promundo's [Program H](#) encourages young men to reflect on gender norms and perceptions of masculinity, and build skills that challenge those norms in a way that empowers women. Through training, public events, door-to-door discussions, and community meetings, program participants around the world exhibited more gender-equitable attitudes and behaviors, including reduced gender-based violence and improved attitudes around caregiving.
- In Uganda, a [World Bank program](#) encouraged women entrepreneurs to enter male-dominated sectors through exposure and support by influential male role models, family, and friends. Women who crossed over into male-dominated industries earn as much as men—and three times more than women who stay in female-dominated industries.
- [MenCare+](#) has offered fatherhood preparation courses, communication and task-sharing discussions, and information campaigns in Brazil, Indonesia, Rwanda, and South Africa, which improved participants' attitudes about gender equity, taught fathers about health, and led to more equitable divisions of caregiving.

Ensure religious leaders, who shape community values, become allies and agents of change. The notion of “preserving culture and values” in religious traditions is too often used to justify practices that harm women and girls, such as violence against women, male dominance in household decision-making, and restrictions on access to reproductive healthcare. When religious leaders use their platform to champion women’s rights, they can set an example and inform communities on the congruity between faith and rights, ultimately changing harmful norms. Best practices include:

- In Nigeria’s Muslim-majority Sokoto state, religious leaders play a powerful role in defining social values. [The Strengthening Health Outcomes for Women and Children \(SHOW\) project](#) with Plan International Canada in Nigeria engages government authorities, religious leaders and Islamic values of equality and justice to improve maternal, newborn, and child health (MNCH) and sexual and reproductive health. It also engages them to promote gender-equitable relationships and become more gender and adolescent responsive. Similar SHOW projects have been implemented in Bangladesh, Ghana, Haiti, Nigeria, and Senegal.
- The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the World Bank’s [Sahel Women’s Empowerment](#) initiative engages religious and traditional leaders to promote dialogue and community-based interventions through life-skills training and sexual and reproductive health initiatives for adolescent girls and women. The success of the initiative—which is also targeted at engaging men and boys—has prompted its adoption in Cameroon, Guinea Conakry, Madagascar, Senegal, the Gambia, and Togo.

Engagement with traditional authorities at grassroots and national levels is a mutually reinforcing process: enlisting local leaders in the fight for equality requires systemic reinforcement from national institutions, which in turn depends on community actors to elicit support for change.