

HeForShe

# HeForShe WEBINAR SERIES

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IMPACT OF  
COVID-19 ON  
MASCULINITIES

*Wednesday 5th August 2020*

# Purpose

To understand the impact of COVID on masculinities and how different actors have engaged men to play a positive role as partners and parents.

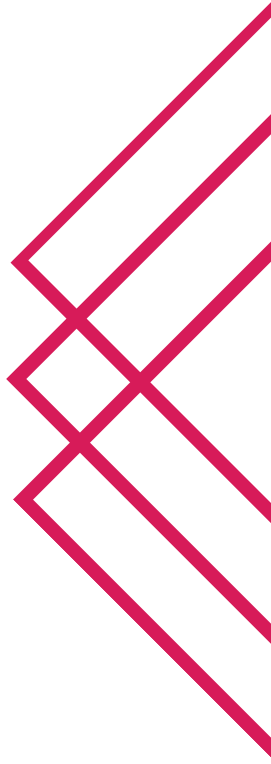
# Speakers

Speakers consisted of individuals from HeForShe, UN Women and partners drawn from CSO and government from 6 regions across the world

- **Bafana Khumalo**, MenEngage, South Africa
- **Edward Wageni**, Head of HeForShe Initiative
- **Hadeel Abdo**, UN Women Arab States
- **Kennedy Otina**, FEMNET
- **Mohammad Naciri**, UN Women Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific
- **Pamela Mkwamba**, UN Women Malawi
- **Peter Mancha & Angela Muruli**, UN Women Nigeria
- **Başak Tuğsavul**, ACEV, Turkey
- **Ebru Tuzecan**, Koc Holding & **Zeliha Unaldi**, UN Women Turkey
- **Jacqueline Nzisabira**, UN Women ESARO
- **Nick Quigley**, HeForShe Portfolio Management Advisor
- **Phuong Le Thi Lan** and **Thao Hoang**, UN Women Vietnam
- **Robert Mafinyori**, HeForShe Taverns South Africa
- **Rodrigo Montero**, UN Women Arab States

# Introduction

Since the emergence of COVID-19, its impact has been felt far and wide. The pandemic has deepened pre-existing inequalities, exposing vulnerabilities in social, political and economic systems which are in turn amplifying the impacts of the pandemic.[1] Amidst the crisis there is hope as norms and behavioral change is taking place in response to challenges posed by the pandemic.



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[1] UNSG- Policy Brief: Impact of COVID on Women, April 2020




# Impact of COVID-19 on Masculinities and Gender Equality

Changing a social norm is often a complex and non-linear process. With COVID-19 it is observable from everyday interactions how much has changed within a relatively short period and how easily, albeit with initial difficulty, new patterns of life have been accepted.







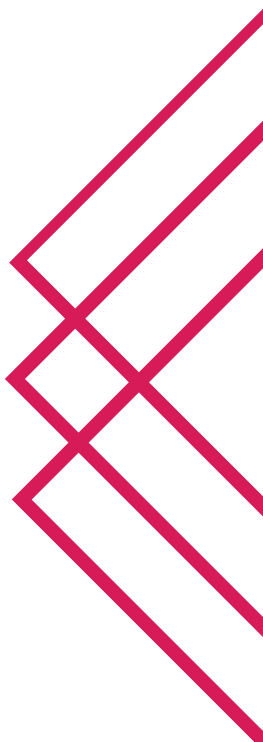
The pandemic has challenged masculinities by imposing rapid and abrupt conditions. It has been a challenging time for men, having to navigate through the fear that lies at the heart of the experience of men and boys: fear about not living up to the demands and expectations associated with masculinities and trying to understand what is socially acceptable and adapt their behaviour.

The abrupt change on masculinities has had a direct bearing on gender equality, manifested in relationships at the household, community and national levels. Emerging data shows that since the outbreak of COVID-19 reports of violence against women, particularly domestic violence, have increased in several countries as security, health, and money worries create tensions and strains accentuated by the cramped and confined living conditions.[2]

The impact on social norms are likely to be long-lasting even as the world aims for recovery. It is thus important to gain a better understanding of the impact and to provide avenues to inform programming and policy work on engaging men going forward.

Whilst it was clearly reinforced that the feminist movement must continue to be led by women, there was a clear consensus that creating awareness among men and about men's behaviour is a key element to the achievement of gender equality.

Drawing from experts from across the world, the webinar focused on how different actors have engaged men to cope with the impact of the pandemic and encouraged men to play a positive role as partners and parents. The webinar highlighted the stories of these men and demonstrated through fostering collective action, how positive changes in division of labour in the household have occurred with men carrying out domestic tasks and looking after children.



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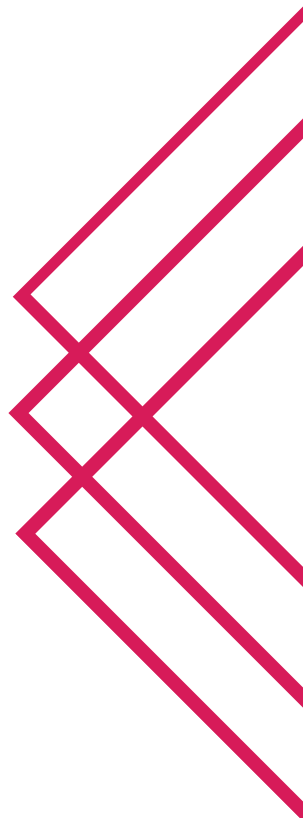
[2] UNSG- Policy Brief: Impact of COVID on Women, April 2020

# Impact of COVID on Social Norms

## Challenges faced by men in lockdowns

Across the globe it was made evident that **all** people have experienced the repercussions of COVID-19, however the impact on individuals is often varying greatly based on gender. In many communities, women undertake majority of the unpaid labour and this societal imbalance of the workforce has consequently placed a large dependency on the labour of men for families to survive the pandemic. A widespread loss of income especially has also heightened tensions over control of resources. It was also identified that the new way of working and confinement of families is largely impacting upon family and social interaction. As seen in Nigeria, UN Women's *HeForSheAtHome* campaign was highlighted as an example of how this change in interaction can be positive for men and act as role model behaviour to inspire men to take up care work in the household.

The social norms that have traditionally shaped masculinities has placed men at a higher risk of overlooking their health concerns, and when compared with women, are far less likely to seek medical help. In the context of COVID-19 this has led to a higher death rate amongst men often as a result of lifestyle or mental health factors. **Bafana Khumalo** of Men Engage identified that men have been less likely to abide by safety regulations in South Africa explaining that *"the issue of men's negative impact from COVID-19 is highly linked to a more general issue with patriarchy and that men resist social distancing measures more highly than women do as a result of how they are taught to socialise"*. The pressure of abiding to traditional masculinities though this example of men's resistance to engage with public health initiatives is resulting in a disproportionately higher rates of COVID-19 cases and consequently largely placing the lives of men at risk.



## How have male role models and male voices been used and made it safer for other males to speak out and get involved in promoting gender equality?

Allyship and solidarity are an essential part of progression in any social movement and men have a critical role to play in achieving gender equality. The webinar discussed how through infiltrating spaces that are male dominated and challenging the current norms men can begin to alter how they perceive their role within their families and champion change within their communities. **Hadeel Abdo** of UN Women spoke of her team's work in the Arab States region utilising the 'Positive Deviant' approach, in which they conducted community-based focus groups. Through constructive and informative discussions with men on topics including child marriage, women's rights and division of household labour, these focus groups enabled men to become advocates for positive messaging across their communities even after the program concluded. In using the 'male champion' device, a common UN Women employed strategy for gender initiatives, this program was able to create a ripple effect through the region.





## Malawi

In Malawi, UN Women representative **Pamela Mkwamba** identified a range of tools currently employed to utilise positive male roles models to engage more men in the conversation around gender equality. The [HeForShe Barbershop toolkit](#), which provides men with tools to address gender inequality and become agents of change, as well as training manuals and the utilisation of comic books has enabled Malawi to reach over 6000 activists in male spaces. The engagement of traditional and religious male leaders has enabled these men to become activists and role models for gender equality and women's empowerment and enabled them to advocate to combat issues of child marriage and GBV in target districts. Through attending consultations at a national and community level, these leaders have implemented initiatives that conduct dialogue sessions across the community with local leaders on gender related issues and aim to enable a holistic approach to solve them. The Barbershop toolkit has created a safe space for men in Malawi to feel inspired and confident in how they can participate in accelerating gender equality progress.

## Nigeria

In Nigeria, **Peter Mancha** and **Angela Muruli** of UN Women identified some strategic actions undertaken by male traditional leaders and HeForShe champions in addressing pre-existing gender inequality under the COVID-19 context. These included strategic advocacy for the domestication of gender laws and policies; monthly traditional council meetings with women actively engaged and jointly taking decisions on development issues, including the gender dimension of the pandemic; mobilization and sensitization of other men on their roles in addressing gender inequality, especially the rapid increase of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) across the country. It is pertinent to note that these traditional leaders were celebrated in 2017 for breaking historical discriminatory cultural practices that exclude women in the traditional council. Through their strategic actions, a total of 486, 107 and 246 women are now Members / Advisers of the traditional councils in Adamawa, Plateau and Gombe states, from a baseline of 0, 0 and 40, respectively.

## Turkey

In Turkey, **Ebru Tuzecan** of Koç Holding and **Zeliha Unaldi** of UN Women highlighted the impact of private sector partnerships and their potential to engage men as allies and advocates for gender equality and have a far-reaching impact. UN Women Turkey's work on masculinities adopts an evidence based, mainstreamed, transformative approach to gender equality in which they aim to address male engagement through first understanding male perceptions of issues relating to gender equality. The partnership also spotlights the power of the medium of sports, through a collaboration with Fenerbahçe football club, in which positive male role models influence over 20 million people through football. **Ms. Tuzecan** identified that through this partnership, they aim to develop a guideline on how to make sport more gender responsive and set an example to national and global sports clubs. As part of the #HeForSheAtHome campaign, the HeForShe Turkey social media account has been dedicated to raising awareness around the issue. The Koç Holding social media account and Koç Group intranet platform, KoçHub, supported the campaign in a joint and collaborated effort and successfully reached almost half a million people across Turkey with the #HeForSheAtHome campaign. Additionally, as part of this partnership Koç Holding and UN Women used the distribution channels of a male dominated business Aygaz to reach out to women during the COVID confinement period to disseminate information on referral pathways in case of violence against women.

In order to address the increased domestic violence with the Covid-19 outbreak, the informative brochures and security plan are being shared with women at Aygaz stations and through home deliveries and to date have reached around 180 thousand women. The partnership between Koç Holding and UN Women Turkey truly shows the benefit of corporate partnerships and the incredible progress that can be made through collaboration.

# Best Practices From Across the World

Examples of exceptionally positive practices that can be shared for replication elsewhere:

In this section of the webinar there appeared to be a recurring theme amongst the factors that enabled successful engagement of men within their communities. The consistent factors when it came to best practices included engaging men in a way that is relatable and relevant to their current circumstance, clearly identifying tangible ways men can support changing the gendered landscape and lastly instilling amongst men a sense of responsibility and accountability in amplifying the message.



Madem, bir daha



## Turkey

**Başak Tuğsavul** of the ACEV (Mother Child Education Foundation) in Turkey spoke of the importance of gender equal parenting as a positive practice that can be replicated. Gender equal environments in which girls and boys are raised as equal challenge traditional norms about parenting and provide an opportunity for fathers to play a more active role in their children's lives. Through their concept of 'Involved Fatherhood' the ACEV encourages men to be a more positive influence in their children's life and take on more responsibility in the home. In creating these enabling environments for groups of local fathers to stay engaged in perpetuating gender equal families and become advocates of involved fatherhood, the ACEV has seen a decrease in family violence as well as a more equal division of labour.

## South Africa

In South Africa, another case of exceptionally positive practices was shared through the example of the HeForShe Taverns. The HeForShe Taverns were born as a way of tackling two severe social issues in South Africa; alcohol abuse and gender-based violence. Through engagement within informal spaces, the HeForShe taverns have been able to discuss issues relating to men's health as well as how to address fellow men's behaviour in relation to gender-based violence. The several thousand men involved across communities in South Africa has created a network of activism, in which when activated has been highly effective in bringing justice to gender-based issues.

**Robert Mafinyori** of the HeForShe Taverns highlighted that in one instance, the collaboration of the taverns allowed for a perpetrator of rape in the community to be caught. This was achieved due to the collective effort of the community created in these taverns and most notably the respect that the patrons of each tavern have for one another and the influence they are having over younger men who look for direction. **Mr. Mafinyori** explained that it is because of our access to those at the higher end of this power dynamic that we were able to move forward at such a fast pace on gender issues in the masculinist South African context.

## Vietnam

**Le Phuong** of UN Women Vietnam spoke of the current work in Vietnam targeted at gender-based violence through conducting workshops to engage men on modifying their behaviour. This initiative calls for young men to reassess their behaviour and develop equitable attitudes regarding gender, consequently enabling for healthier and less violent relationships in their lives. The team from UN Women Vietnam identified that in cases where women had experienced sexual assault, the perpetrator was often someone the victim knew, with it more than twice as likely to be their partner. Furthermore, it was concluded that of these women only 7 % were abused by a stranger. Using this knowledge, UN Women Vietnam has established a collection of 20 advocate clubs in Da Nang with over 600 agents of change targeted towards young men and older adult men's participation in violence prevention. In an evaluation of the program, **Le Phuong** identified that through a greater awareness of the importance of sharing family responsibility within the home, as well as education around communication and conflict-resolution skills, the rates of physical and sexual violence lowered across the communities.

## Nigeria

In Nigeria, the #HeForSheAtHome strategy recruited nine globally recognized celebrities in Nollywood, the music industry and social media influencers to engage men and boys across Nigeria. The two main strategies adopted were the #HeForSheAtHome Social Media Challenge and #HeForSheAtHome Instagram Live Series. Celebrities posted striking pictures of themselves and loved ones on social media platforms, demonstrating how they were taking responsibility for a safe and positive home environment, whilst disrupting deeply entrenched stereotypes of gender roles in the home. In the spirit of social media challenges that were popular globally at the peak of lockdown, the public figures were encouraged to tag and challenge their contemporaries to partake in the #HeForSheAtHome challenge and show their support for gender equality at home. A number of these posts were subsequently featured in online Nigerian news outlets, including Legit and The Guardian.

To further shape the campaign, UN Women Nigeria collaborated with celebrities to host Instagram Live sessions on being #HeForSheAtHome. These sessions were designed by the celebrities with technical support from the UN Women country office, using the HeForShe BarberShop Toolbox to guide these conversations to discuss the need to redistribute the unfair burden of care faced by women and address SGBV and other forms of gender inequality in the society. Moreover, Nigerian men and boys were guided on the practical ways to embody the #HeForSheAtHome and to challenge perceptions of what makes a man #HusbandMaterial. This campaign had over 40,000 engagements on Instagram and Twitter, and more than 10,000 views across the Instagram Sessions. The celebrities also committed to sustain the campaign beyond the lockdown period, in partnership with UN Women and other stakeholders.

### Arab States Region

Our final speaker of this section, **Rodrigo Montero** of UN Women's Arab States region, concluded in sharing various best practices across the region and highlighted that effective education and the research of attitudes and behaviours is critical for creating change. **Mr. Montero** explained that through a study targeting over 12,000 women and men in Egypt, Morocco, Lebanon, Palestine and Kuwait on gender equality attitudes and behaviours, it was clearly shown that a strong correlation exists between increased education and positive attitudes and behaviours towards gender equality. A key trend in the research highlights that men with more educated mothers displayed more gender equitable behaviour, as well as those men who had involved fathers in their childhood. A key take-away to acknowledge when replicating these efforts is the strength that the topic of fatherhood has for engaging men in a positive way. **Mr. Montero** refers to these male-focused topics 'easy win entry points', in which the topics of interest directly correlate with answering the question of how gender equality progress benefits men. Through various studies on civil society interventions across the Arab States region, it was clear that developing programmes targeted to national audiences and addressing issues relevant to local communities is an exceptionally positive practice for other countries to replicate.



# Recommendations for Policy Considerations and Practical Action

**Jacqueline Nzisabira** of UN Women's East and Southern African Regional office concluded the webinar by exploring policy considerations and practical actions that could be taken. In general, Jacqueline emphasised the importance of a thorough understanding of the overall impact of COVID 19 and specifically the varying impact on women and men. **Ms. Nzisabira** highlighted that it is critical to understand the consequential impact of COVID on both masculinities and toxic masculinities, as well as the impact on women and the disempowering and disenfranchising of women. Overall, in identifying policy recommendations it was clear that for an effective long-term strategy to be established, it was important to work from a *life cycle approach* and address the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, for both women and men.



# Policy Recommendations

<b>Individual, household &amp; community focused</b>	<b>Decision makers</b>
Supporting involved fatherhood behaviours and the father and child relationship as an approach to curbing toxic masculinities	Include effectively engaging men in plans and programmes addressing gender inequalities
Ensuring access to basic services for men and women (especially young women): e.g. water, sanitation, food and shelter	Adequate resources for women, especially young women empowerment and addressing toxic masculinities
A positive deviance approach to behaviour and social change, by identifying male role models – leaders, celebrities and men in the local communities – who speak in favour of gender equality has proved be a promising approach	Identify working prevention measures and ensure adequate programming around them
Working with faith leaders and CBOs for positive messaging and communication	Ensure effective dialogue between users and producers of services to ensure adequate uptake.
Ensuring critical conversations at household and community levels are sustained	Properly addressing Unemployment amongst men, women and young women
Ensuring that peer support systems in place	Invest in communication for positive change
Adopt and implement gender policies and laws to enhance gender equality and women empowerment	

# Practical Actions

1

Robust and innovative communication strategies, using traditional media, including community radios; Social media etc and leveraging on HeForShe resources such as the Barbershop Toolbox to further engage conversations amongst men on gender equality.

2

Transition to digital platforms (e.g. tavern owners and patrons using WhatsApp for continued dialoguing).

3

Ensure food security for women, especially young women, and men especially those in serious need, such as men and women on ART.

4

Work on diversification of skills, especially for young women and young men and implement remote learning programmes Linking men and women to services.

5

Mainstream gender equality in the various relief measures and services.

6

Expand the scope of the HeForShe campaign at all levels, with practical measures to monitor progress, on a sustainable basis.

7

Explore the opportunities for periodic exchange of best practices on the HeForShe Movement, at national, regional and global levels.

