



MenEngage
UBUNTU
SYMPOSIUM
I AM
BECAUSE
You care

Unpaid care and economies of care

Nikki van der Gaag

A summary report of discussions at the 3rd
MenEngage Global Symposium (the Ubuntu
Symposium), 2020-2021



MenEngage Alliance
working with men and boys for gender equality

About the symposium

The 3rd MenEngage Global Symposium represents the most ambitious collective activity that MenEngage Alliance has ever embarked on as an international social change network working to transform patriarchal masculinities and engaging men and boys for gender, social, and climate justice.

The convening (also known as the MenEngage Ubuntu Symposium) was adapted from plans to meet for three days in person to a seven-month online event. It was an unprecedented journey for the Alliance and for everyone involved: 5,000-plus registered participants from 159 countries and 600-plus speakers involved in 178 global sessions (plus many more at the regional, country, and local levels).

MenEngage Alliance members and partners came together to take stock of the work being done and assess what is needed going forward. The symposium provided space to share experiences, evidence, and insights on how to effectively challenge and dismantle oppressive patriarchal norms and constructions of masculinities; to identify new goals, frontiers, and strategies; and to create a forum to rearticulate a political agenda that seeks to transform unjust and deeply embedded power structures.

The [Ubuntu Declaration & Call to Action](#) is one of the key outcome documents from the symposium.

About MenEngage Alliance

MenEngage Alliance is an international social change network harnessing the collective energies of its members towards ending patriarchal power and supporting women's rights; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer (LGBTIQ) rights; and human rights—and achieving gender justice and social justice for all.

The Alliance is a space for organisations to come together, in solidarity with those most targeted by gender injustice and patriarchal systems, to collectively dismantle structural barriers to women's rights and gender equality. As a global network, MenEngage Alliance brings together people and organisations with a shared vision of a world in which gender justice and human rights are recognised, promoted, and protected and in which all people are equal and free from discrimination and oppression.

The mission of MenEngage Alliance is to transform unequal power relations and dismantle patriarchal systems by transforming patriarchal masculinities and rigid, harmful norms around 'being a man'; by working with men and boys on gender justice through intersectional feminist approaches; by building inclusive collaborations from the local to regional to global levels; and by developing joint actions in partnership with and accountable to women's rights, gender justice, and other social justice movements.

As members, and as a collective, the Alliance aims towards a shared vision and mission for positive change and to transform unequal power for the benefit of all.

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“The only path ahead is towards inclusion, equity and justice, and a sustainable social economic order based on care. It is a path that must affirm our interdependent humanity and our universal human rights for everyone everywhere.

— UBUNTU DECLARATION & CALL TO ACTION¹

1. Context and problem analysis

In its broadest sense, the entire 3rd MenEngage Global Symposium (also referred to as the MenEngage Ubuntu Symposium) was about care—for ourselves, for each other, for our communities and societies, and for the planet. Indeed, the symposium’s theme—‘I am because you are’—points to the interconnections among personal, interpersonal, and collective approaches to care.

This paper covers only the 19 symposium sessions focused specifically on men and masculinities in relation to unpaid care, mainly in the home. However, the paper brings with it an awareness of the wider context of care in many other sessions, from self-care to working with boys and young men to climate change and many more. To quote Berenice Fisher and Joan C. Tronto, cited in the symposium’s four ‘Politics of Care’ sessions:

We suggest that caring be viewed as a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our “world” so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, our selves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web.²

Some of the symposium sessions talked about care in this wider context of building a caring rather than ‘care less society’.³ There were calls for a wider framing of care, as UN Women emphasised in its 2018 report on the Sustainable Development Goals; that report noted that care includes the family and the divisions of labour within the family, but also states, markets, and the not-for-profit sector in a ‘care diamond’.⁴

The symposium discussion paper *Contexts and Challenges for Gender Transformative Work With Men and Boys* describes the ways in which capitalism has framed our understanding of care as female, thus giving more value to profit than to caregiving.⁵ In fact, feminist analysis of the gender divisions of labour has pointed out the problems associated with separating productive and reproductive work, in which care is labelled a service in opposition to the work that produces a concrete or measurable outcome. Based on sustainable and equitable growth and an expansion of Earth-mindful sources of energy, feminist economists have developed a framework for an economic policy agenda to eliminate gender and racial inequality and reduce poverty, with attention to jobs that support this economic model.⁶

In a 2019 strategy meeting in Mexico City, feminist activists noted this and cited the following as pillars of such an economy:

Ensuring universal access to quality public care services; guaranteeing living wages

¹ MenEngage Alliance. (2021). *Ubuntu Declaration & Call to Action*. http://menengage.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Ubuntu-DCTA-Advanced-Edited-Version_eng.pdf

² Fisher, B., & Tronto, J. (1990). Toward a feminist theory of care. In E. K. Abel & M. K. Nelson (Eds.), *Circles of care: Work and identity in women’s lives*. SUNY Press.

³ Chatzidakis, A., Litter, J., & Rottenberg, C. (2020). *The care manifesto: The politics of interdependence*. The Care Collective, Verso.

⁴ UN Women. (2018). *Turning promises into action: Gender equality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2018/sdg-report-gender-equality-in-the-2030-agenda-for-sustainable-development-2018-en.pdf?i=en&vs=4332>

⁵ MenEngage Alliance. (2021). *Contexts and challenges for gender transformative work with men and boys: A discussion paper*. <http://menengage.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Contexts-and-Challenges-for-Gender-Transformative-Work-with-Men-and-Boys-A-Discussion-Paper-English.pdf>

⁶ Slatyer, C., Smiles, S., & Sen, G. (2015, November 7). *Summary of: The remaking of social contracts: Feminists in a fierce new world*. Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era. <https://dawnnet.org/publication/summary-of-the-remaking-of-social-contracts-feminists-in-a-fierce-new-world/>



and access to social protection in care jobs; significantly increasing public investment in the care economy; mandating paid parental and family leave; and providing pension care credits for time spent out of the labour force to raise children/care for dependants.⁷

More recently, feminist organisations—such as the Women’s Budget Group in the United Kingdom—have constructed a broad agenda for care-related policy changes. As a recent Women’s Budget Group report notes:

A caring economy...is a dynamic and innovative economy in which humans, and our shared planet, thrive. In a caring economy, everyone gives and receives care on the basis of their capacities and needs....A caring economy ensures that everyone has time to care, as well as time free from care.⁸

Latin American feminists working on issues of care and economic justice explain that:

It is essential to understand care from a rights perspective, which means recognising that all people have the right to care, to be cared for, and to self-care⁹...regardless of gender, place of birth or residence, or labour insertion. For this to be a reality, care must cease to be conceived as an exclusive responsibility of women and become a collective social responsibility.¹⁰

The COVID-19 pandemic—and its many setbacks to gender equality—have been an impetus for these ideas, and for this work. As the pandemic spread, we were all making sense of what care means, how it is built on pre-existing inequalities (including racial inequalities), and how it is leading to an increasing divide within and between societies. Care as a collective effort, of solidarity beyond binaries and with the oppressed, was very much in evidence in the symposium, alongside a recognition that while care is something that affects us all, it affects us differently according to our gender, race, class, geography, economic situation, sexuality, and many other factors.

In this wider sense, then, the concept of care permeated every symposium session. However, much of the symposium’s specific focus on care in the field of men and gender equality—and by many feminists over the years—has been on the gender division of daily care work at home. More specifically, it has been on the unequal way in which unpaid care and domestic work is divided, with women bearing the responsibility for most of the care work needed for the family’s survival and this unequal burden acting as a major barrier to women’s full participation in public life. This conversation has historically been shaped by a heteronormative analysis that leaves little room for diversity and that is driven by a concept of gender equality perhaps rooted more in the feminist thinking of the Global North than that of the Global South.

The concepts of ‘family’ and ‘the home’ are intrinsically problematic, in that they are often seen as binary and nuclear. The symposium’s *Contexts and Challenges* paper addressed this issue head-on, challenging the field to ‘transcend the masculine-feminine binary separating production from social reproduction.’¹¹ Symposium sessions—such as [Todos Somos Familia \(We Are All Family\)](#)—attempted to do just that, not only from an LGBTIQ perspective but also acknowledging, as presenter Soledad Rodríguez Cattaneo said:

We normally talk about the nuclear household. But families are very diverse: There are extended families, mono-parental families, patchwork families, and many other kinds of families.

That said, feminists and women’s rights organisations have long recognised that unpaid care and domestic work in the home is a key factor in advancing or hindering gender equality, with feminist campaigns on the issue dating back to the 1970s. Feminist economists refer to this work as ‘reproductive labour’ and argue that although it is the foundation on which our societies rest, reproductive labour remains unvalued and unrecognised. Prof. Diane Elson’s ‘Three Rs’ framework calls for unpaid care to be **recognised** and valued; **reduced**, both through the state provision of services such as childcare and through time- and labour-saving devices; and **redistributed** between women and men, as well as from individuals to the state.¹²

A fourth ‘R’—**representation**—was added to ensure the voices of women, in particular, of carers

⁷ Women radically transforming a world in crisis: A framework for Beijing+25 shaped at a strategy meeting of feminist activists: Mexico City, 22-24 August 2019. (2019, September 29). https://resurj.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/eng_mexico_city_strategy_meet_framework_for_beijing25_0.pdf

⁸ Women’s Budget Group. (2020). *Creating a caring economy: A call to action*. https://www.thewomensorganisation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/WBG-Report-Final_.pdf

⁹ Pautassi, L. C. (2007, October). *El cuidado como cuestión social desde un enfoque de derechos* [Care as a social issue from a rights perspective]. United Nations. https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/5809/1/S0700816_es.pdf

¹⁰ Translation of text from: Martelotte, L. (2018). *La reorganización social de las tareas de cuidado: La revolución pendiente* [The social reorganisation of care tasks: The pending revolution]. In I. Arduino, V. Boronat, G. Carpineti, G. Carracedo Villegas, M. J. Elioso Ferrero, P. Lateral, L. Martelotte, V. Mutuberría, G. Nacht, B. Paz, C. Rodríguez Enríquez, & Scasserra. (2018), *Aportes de la economía feminista desde Argentina* [Contributions of the feminist economy in Argentina]. Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung. <https://dawnnet.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Econom%C3%ADa-Feminista-desde-Argentina.pdf>

¹¹ MenEngage Alliance. (2021). *Contexts and challenges for gender transformative work with men and boys: A discussion paper*. <http://menengage.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Contexts-and-Challenges-for-Gender-Transformative-Work-with-Men-and-Boys-A-Discussion-Paper-English.pdf>

¹² Elson, D. (2017, May 1). Recognize, reduce, and redistribute unpaid care work: How to close the gender gap. *New Labor Forum*, 26(2), 52–61. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1095796017700135>

themselves, were heard in these debates. The International Labour Organization proposed a fifth 'R' for **reward or remuneration** to push states and workplaces to pay for this and shift responsibility from the individual to the state, a concept embedded in longstanding feminist discourses on equal pay for women and men in paid work.¹³

Despite decades of work on this issue, there is no country in the world where unpaid care and domestic work is shared equally between women and men—or girls and boys. Women still do three to ten times more than men, often on top of paid work, and girls are largely responsible for household chores.¹⁴ The deeply held norms that women are carers and men are providers lie at the heart of this problem, with societies structured around the idea that women are always there to do the essential work of caring for their families and communities. On top of this, the pandemic has revealed the importance of care to all our societies, while continuing to take this work for granted and to give it little value. The International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES) in 15 countries found no country where the majority of women report that their male partners 'share routine daily childcare equally'—the figures ranged from 4 per cent to 45 per cent—and men consistently reported they do more than women say they are actually doing.¹⁵

The field of 'men and boys for gender equality' has taken up the issue of unpaid care in the past decade, with the formation of the MenCare campaign in 2011 and the publication of the biennial *State of the World's Fathers* reports since 2015, as well as many programmes and projects around the world. Most of these programmes and projects focus on fatherhood as a key entry point for men: it is a time in a man's life when he wants to, and is able to, share the care of a new baby—or it is when he cannot be there because he is the main earner in the family or does not feel competent.

It is increasingly being recognised that work on unpaid care must also involve structural change, as described in the 2018 UN Women document on the state, market, private sector, and non-for-profit sector's involvement, as well as the discussion paper for the MenEngage Ubuntu Symposium.¹⁶ There are two key challenges in making structural-level changes to men's involvement in care: first, the 'structural' elements of policy, production, and public life are already quite patriarchally masculine, and second, men's activity in the domestic social reproduction space remains low. Both these concerns must be addressed simultaneously, and increasing the value of care as a societal principle would achieve both of these, especially if care is decoupled from gender.

More specifically, successful advocacy on parental and paternity leave has become a major part of the work on unpaid care among those working on men and gender equality.¹⁷ This change is clearly linked to feminist campaigns on maternity and parental leave, as well as to work on wider care system reform (for example, in countries such as Uruguay).¹⁸ But there are more opportunities for men—and men- and gender equality-focused organisations—to join with women's rights organisations to press for funding, legislation, and policy change in wider areas of the care economy, such as better childcare, pension reform, and investments in water and energy infrastructure or social protection. As UN Women Deputy Executive Director Åsa Regnér said in the symposium's [opening plenary](#), 'The unfair division of domestic work between men and women should be the target of public policies, and not just a family issue.'

¹³ Gammage, S., Hunt, A., Díaz Langou, C., Rivero Fuentes, E., Isnaldi, C., Aneja, U., Thomas, M., & Robino, C. (2018). *The imperative of addressing care needs for G20 countries*. Consejo Argentino Para las Relaciones Internacionales & CIPPEC. https://t20argentina.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/TF4-4.3-Policy-Brief-on-Care-June_final-1.pdf; United Nations. (2017). *Leave no one behind: Taking action for transformational change on women's economic empowerment*.

¹⁴ Addati, L., Cattaneo, U., Esquivel, V., & Valarino, I. (2018, June 28). *Care work and care jobs for the future of decent work*. International Labour Organization. http://www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/WCMS_633135/lang-en/index.htm

¹⁵ Barker, G., Garg, A., Heilman, B., van der Gaag, N., & Mehaffey, R. (2021). *State of the World's Fathers: Structural solutions to achieving equality in care work*. Promundo-US. <https://promundoglobal.org/resources/state-of-the-worlds-fathers-2021/>

¹⁶ UN Women. (2018). *Turning promises into action: Gender equality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2018/2/gender-equality-in-the-2030-agenda-for-sustainable-development-2018>; MenEngage Alliance. (2021). *Contexts and challenges for gender transformative work with men and boys: A discussion paper*. <http://menengage.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Contexts-and-Challenges-for-Gender-Transformative-Work-with-Men-and-Boys-A-Discussion-Paper-English.pdf>

¹⁷ van der Gaag, N., Heilman, B., Gupta, T., Nembhard, C., & Barker, G. (2019). *State of the World's Fathers: Unlocking the power of men's care*. Promundo-US. <https://stateoftheworldsfathers.org/report/state-of-the-worlds-fathers-helping-men-step-up-to-care/>; Barker, G., Garg, A., Heilman, B., van der Gaag, N., & Mehaffey, R. (2021). *State of the World's Fathers: Structural solutions to achieving equality in care work*. Promundo-US. <https://promundoglobal.org/resources/state-of-the-worlds-fathers-2021/>

¹⁸ Amarante, V., Colacce, M., & Tenenbaum, V. (2019). The National Care System in Uruguay: Who benefits and who pays? *Population and Development Review*, 45(S1), 97-122. <https://doi.org/10.1111/padr.12271>; Aguirre, R., & Ferrari, F. (2014). *La construcción del sistema de cuidados en el Uruguay: En busca de consensos para una protección social más igualitaria* [The construction of the care system in Uruguay: In search of consensus for more equal social protection] (p. 87). United Nations.

2. Unpaid care and domestic work (by Ubuntu theme)

The MenEngage Ubuntu Symposium had several key themes: intersectional feminisms, decolonizing, feminist systems change, 'power with' and movement-building, transforming patriarchal masculinities, accountability, and youth. This section includes a summary of the ideas on these themes in the sessions on unpaid care and economies of care, including quotes and ideas from those sessions.

2.1. Intersectional feminisms



Men are essential actors in shaping power structures and achieving just solutions. But we can't design programmes based on the idea that all men are equal or experience masculinities in the same way.

— GEETANJALI MISRA (COFOUNDER AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, CREATING RESOURCES FOR EMPOWERMENT IN ACTION [CREA]), [OPENING PLENARY](#)

The family is perhaps the most central hegemonic institution. It is where gender norms begin and are entrenched. It is, therefore, problematic to import a 'familism' into state responsibilities: addressing care at a structural level does not mean attempting to turn the state into 'one big happy family'. Although women and girls all over the world do more unpaid care and domestic work than men and boys do, there is not enough recognition of how identities—class and economic circumstances, race, disability, and sexuality, among others—play a major role in this. We also need to recognise that there is no 'typical man'; that is, class, location, and many other factors shape and influence men as well as women. For example, parenting programmes often fall into the trap of only focusing on a heterosexual father and mother in couples.

In a discussion on nonresidential fathers in South Africa and their negative portrayal, Asanda Ngoasheng of Oxfam South Africa said in the [first 'Politics of Care' session](#):

Care is a class thing. How could working-class men be more caring? How much more care would they contribute if they didn't have the economic pressures they have and the kind of jobs that require presence at work?

She went on to say that it is important to think in terms of intersectionality. For example, some men must migrate for work, having to live far from their children in order to earn money to support the family and sometimes not seeing them for a full year. The structures and norms are not there to support men's caregiving. It is important to note, however, that some fathers who don't live with their family have found ways of staying in touch with children and caring for them emotionally, if not physically.

The symposium also more generally discussed what Gary Barker (CEO of Promundo -US) called 'the demonization of low-income men'. During the [second 'Politics of Care' session](#), he said:

Even the [term] 'absent father' assumes that if he is not living in the household, he has no connection—it is better to use 'nonresidential' or 'noncustodial'. In the United States, we have the expression 'deadbeat dads' and similar in other places. It might be better to say 'dead-broke' dads. We need to bring the class aspect—then, we understand how poverty and social disadvantage so often drives whether men are participating in the household or not.

Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda (founder and chief executive of the Rozaria Memorial Trust) also addressed issues of class during the same session:

We need to be bold around issues of class and patriarchy. Men are also victims of patriarchy because it moves power to elite middle-class men, and poor men transfer their frustration to the poor women. For Africa, it is also about coloniality and language.



PHOTO CREDIT: Jonathan Torgovnik/Getty Images/Images of Empowerment



PHOTO CREDIT: Juan Arredondo/Getty Images/Images of Empowerment

2.2. Decolonizing

“**The greatest form of love is solidarity, every moment we step out and step up and share our love and solidarity for others and we acknowledge the truth and reality of those who are oppressed.**

— SANAM AMIN,
[*INTERSECTIONAL FEMINIST MOVEMENT VOICES PANEL*](#)

European colonizers introduced their own family systems to the places they colonized, a process that often fragmented and changed these places' existing family systems. The effects of colonization continue to play an enormous role in defining family systems and formation in many parts of the world. The nuclear family and 'male provider/female carer' model are often seen as the 'ideal' family structure, while being far from reality in many countries with bigger, more complex traditional family structures.

The colonial agenda continues to permeate the field of unpaid care and domestic work: for example, as women from the Global South travel to engage in domestic work for Global North middle-class households. These women may have left their own children behind to find work, and they may experience poor pay and conditions. Men may also have to migrate for work and, therefore, may not be able to be resident fathers. South Africa is a case in point—discussed during the [first 'Politics of Care' session](#)—where income is directly associated with the coresidence of fathers and children. Low-income households are likely to have fathers living elsewhere, and high-income households are likely to have fathers coresiding with children.

While it is key to support gender equality and to value 'women's work', it is also important to invest in the infrastructure, equipment, and technology to increase the efficiency (reducing the arduousness) of these activities (such as washing, cleaning, and cooking). Fair, adequate, and just compensation for childcare, eldercare, and healthcare is also vital. However, it is important to note that these responses to inequality in the distribution of paid and unpaid work are based on profoundly systemic biases—and ultimately do not address the conditions of unpaid (care) work, or the low monetary value placed on the people who do caring services.

2.3. Feminist systems change

“Because we are so focused on fatherhood, we often forget that the state has a responsibility to support gender equality. One of the key ways [the state can do this] is to provide free, quality early childcare and education. This supports the feminist agenda of women being able to make a choice on whether they want to spend their time on care or not.

— WESSEL VAN DEN BERG (RESEARCH, MONITORING & EVALUATION AND LEARNING UNIT MANAGER, SONKE GENDER JUSTICE), [MENCARE ADVOCACY, MEDIA AND CAMPAIGNING WEBINAR](#)

In the field of engaging men and boys in gender equality, much of the work on unpaid care and domestic work has focused on redistribution, with the aim of men and boys doing their equal share in the home. Fathers and fathers-to-be, in particular, have been a focus of programming in many countries. This work is important, but it needs to be done with a wider focus on feminist systems change that challenges patriarchal norms around care and acknowledges the wider structural contexts of patriarchy. This means not just focusing on individual fathers or fathers in groups—or even working with couples. Instead, it is looking at the laws, policies, social norms, and patriarchal institutions that prop up existing understandings of who cares and who provides. As Rukia Cornelius (regional gender lead for Southern Africa at Oxfam) said in the [third 'Politics of Care' session](#):

The valuing of care as a political act, it is not just looking at individual care but centring collective care. What does true well-being mean in terms of our homes and our communities, how we depend on one another, how we recognise and redistribute care? Recognition: this is what makes it political, that everything—gender, race, class, and privilege—impacts how we give care, receive care, and how we shift and transform care in all of its manifestations. When we talk about care, we need to centre it as political and personal.



PHOTO CREDIT: Paula Bronstein/Getty Images/Images of Empowerment

2.4. ‘Power with’ and movement-building

“ We have to target behaviour change and the transformation of masculinities, ensuring that we connect individual change to the systemic changes that we are fighting for. Feminism means putting those who experience oppressions at the centre not because they are victims but because they are experts in their own oppression. So, feminists have to be in other movements fighting injustice.

— CINDY CLARK (CO-EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ASSOCIATION FOR WOMEN’S RIGHTS IN DEVELOPMENT [AWID]), *INTERSECTIONAL FEMINIST MOVEMENT VOICES PANEL*

Women’s groups and organisations have long built alliances around the issue of women’s unequal share of unpaid care and domestic work, seeing these as key instruments of patriarchal oppression. But care is much wider than this, and increasingly, we are seeing world leaders, faith and community leaders, teachers, and activists talk about the importance of care. Indeed, many would include both care for ourselves and care for our planet, as well as care for each other through intersectional movements, such as Black Lives Matter. These connections stem from an increasing awareness that there are interconnected and shared problems at the roots of various oppressions. This means that a wide range of progressive movements could be said to fall under the umbrella of care in an anti-patriarchal alliance, working together through a model of ‘power with’ to challenge and transform systemic power injustices.

The concept of ‘power’ as related to men’s roles and masculinities was central to the four ‘Politics of Care’ sessions during the MenEngage Ubuntu Symposium. The framework presented looked at the underlying ethics of care and its relationship to power, particularly in relation to the four phases of care as defined by Joan C. Tronto: receiving care, giving care, taking care of, and caring about.¹⁹ The sessions went on to examine men’s role in these phases and their responsibility to work on the ground while bearing in mind questions of power, using a feminist approach, and holding themselves accountable to what women think, feel, and do.



Figure 1: Four phases of care (SOURCE: ‘Politics of Care’ sessions)

¹⁹ Tronto, J. C. (1993). *Moral boundaries: A political argument for an ethic of care*. Routledge.

2.5. Transforming patriarchal masculinities



By virtue of being a human, we care and care for others. There are hypermasculine ways that say you don't need care and you don't need to give care. It translates into relationships and the type of work that we do. We are not taught to care. Care is not a feminine trait; it is a human trait. Do everything with love; have love at the centre of all your work.

— ASHLEE ALEXANDRA BURNETT (FEMINITT CARIBBEAN AND THE CARIBBEAN WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO NATIONAL CHAPTER), [YOUTH LEADERSHIP AND MOVEMENT BUILDING](#)

Care equality is a radical agenda. It is one of the key ways in which patriarchy, and patriarchal masculinities, can be transformed. It means breaking the idea that women are the carers and men are the providers. This theme was a strong element of the symposium: How can men be better humans? How can we make sure that care is central to the lives of people of every gender, not only women and girls? As activist and scholar Srilatha Batliwala said during the 2nd MenEngage Global Symposium (held in New Delhi in 2014), while the main survivors of patriarchal masculinities are women, people of other genders—including men—also suffer.

Mbuyiselo Botha (commissioner of the South African Commission for Gender Equality) said in a 'Politics of Care' session:

There is nothing that inherently stops us [as men] from caring. It is artificial, toxic, man-made creations of what it means to be a 'real man' that deny us the opportunity to be caring. And this is the sad part: that there is a system that really oppresses us as well. It divides us from our humanity. It denies us our own vulnerability.

The symposium included clear calls to action from feminist activists that men have to step up, show up, and take more responsibility for transformative action. Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda of the Rozaria Memorial Trust said in the [Intersectional Feminist Movement Voices](#) panel:

There are too many good men in the world who are doing nothing to dismantle patriarchy and yet who profess to be doing great stuff. There are too many in positions of responsibility who are irresponsible. They are the majority of leaders, parliamentarians, religious leaders, doctors...So, when we ask, 'Where are the men?', the men are there. But they are not making decisions that advance gender equality, human rights, and dignity. It is not about involving or including men; it is about everybody in a position of responsibilities to use their power responsibly.

2.6. Accountability



Work with men has to be done carefully and with accountability. We need to focus on practice, not just on principles. We need to be guided by and accountable to women at all levels, whether individual or structural.

— SHARANYA SEKARAM (COALITION OF FEMINISTS FOR SOCIAL CHANGE [COFEM]), [INTERSECTIONAL FEMINIST MOVEMENT VOICES](#) PANEL

Feminists and women's rights groups have invested decades of research, analysis, and campaigning to frame work on unpaid care as social reproduction and to organise for change. Since the 1970s, when activists such as Selma James and Silvia Federici campaigned for wages for housework, it has been clear that the unequal sharing of this work has impeded advances towards gender equality and continued to prop up patriarchy. For transformation to happen, work by men on this issue needs to acknowledge these decades of resistance, and it must focus not just on redistribution—on men doing their fair and equal share—but also on the wider context of gender equality and how structural and institutional factors prop up patriarchy. As feminists of the Global South have noted, a feminist care economy calls for placing political value on activities and on the work that goes into caring. Care should be understood as all that is needed to reproduce the conditions for well-being and to maintain health and well-being alongside productive and creative work, beyond the boundaries of the productivity logic.

As economists at Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN) explain:

From the beginning, DAWN's approach to feminism has been based not on a calculus of identity alone but on the recognition that women's human rights are lost or gained in the midst of the interplay between the personal and the structural environment....The household and family relations are a critical site of gender power expressed in multiple dimensions. At the same time, women are workers juggling double and triple burdens under increasingly harsh conditions; are members of communities struggling for land and livelihoods; are agents in societies undergoing cultural transformations; are actors in economies shaped by globalization and militarism; and are parts of production systems unmindful of ecological limits.²⁰

Policymakers of all genders must be made accountable to the principles of care and an ethic of care that goes beyond a gendered association of care with women. This work must also be co-created with women's organisations and be accountable to feminist organisations and wider feminist movements.

²⁰ Sen, G., & Durano, M. (Eds.). (2014). *The remaking of social contracts: Feminists in a fierce new world*. Zed Books.

2.7. Youth



As boys we were kept at a distance from nurturing and tenderness, the very qualities we want to offer our children.

— ERIC MARSH SR., *THE FATHERING CIRCLE*



The fact that women and girls do so much more unpaid care and domestic work than men and boys do is grounded in social and gender norms that are learned from a very early age. It has its roots in the patriarchal systems within which we live that teach and repeat that girls care and boys fight. Therefore, enormous effort is needed to change social norms from a very young age and to ensure school curricula—and even early childhood care—teach boys to care as much as girls through a life cycle approach. Work with children and young people is key to transforming gender norms and stereotypes that socialise girls to care and boys to not be involved in the domestic sphere. Young people themselves have been at the forefront of challenging such stereotypes, bringing fresh ideas to campaigns that we can all learn from.



Eric Marsh Sr. speaking at "The Fathering Circle: Parenting with Accountability"

3. Promising practices and examples

Most of the symposium sessions on unpaid care described initiatives working from the perspective of men and masculinities, with a gender equality lens. Many looked particularly at fatherhood, and good examples of promising practice emerged over the course of the symposium. While some of these examples might seem ‘purely programmatic’, they also often aim for more systemic and political change—on parental leave, for example. The presentations highlighted a wide range of voices, from members and partners of MenEngage to politicians and faith leaders.

This section provides excerpts from the presentations, highlighting promising practices and programming from a diverse range of settings globally.



PHOTO CREDIT: Jonathan Torgovnik/Getty Images/Images of Empowerment

3.1. Nicaragua: Research into advocacy in the MenCare campaign

During [Paternidades y Cuidado en América Latina \(Fatherhood and Care in Latin America\)](#), Douglas Mendoza of Fundación Puntos de Encuentro described MenCare in Latin America's work in Nicaragua.

We at MenCare Latin America wanted to put paternity on the agenda in Nicaragua and to start a campaign. We started with an investigation in Managua of 244 men from ten neighbourhoods. We wanted to find out their ideas about fatherhood and care, so we focused on men between 18 and 35. We found that many men did not have good experiences of their own fathers and that the top five ideas about fatherhood were:

1. *That the father is the main provider, and even if he is not working, he is the main authority.*
2. *That fathers may use violence and humiliating punishment to prove they are the authority in front of their wives, sons, and daughters.*
3. *Fathers want to be a role model for their kids.*
4. *Men do not show affection to their sons or to their daughters after the age of 6. Before that, they are affectionate with their sons, but after, they are not for fear of homosexuality. For girls, it is more acceptable.*
5. *Men don't have time to play with their sons or daughters. They don't have the idea that playing could establish a bond with their children.*

So, how could we shape a campaign about fathers and paternity that called on men to be more involved in care with their sons and daughters, as well as being good partners, or ex-partners, who don't use violence against children or women? With colleagues and with Puntos de Encuentro and Promundo, we designed a manual and a media campaign. The media campaign featured the reality of these men's lives. We had three messages:

1. *'You are my dad when you spend time with me.'*
2. *'You are my dad when you don't use violence against my mum.'*
3. *'You are my dad when you hug me, kiss me.'*

We also found that most men didn't know about the laws on parenthood, so we were able to publicise these. And we worked with health personnel, too: for example, with our colleagues from CulturaSalud, we created a health card that doctors could keep in their pocket. We also worked with staff so that when a pregnant woman arrives, the man is also registered. And there is a talk for the dads on men's [sexual and reproductive health and rights] and things like prostate cancer, family planning. We have seen progress and setbacks over this time, but we also see that young men are more open to being involved with their children as part of these campaigns.



3.2. Philippines: Oxfam’s WE-Care Programme

WECare is an Oxfam programme on women’s economic empowerment and unpaid care and domestic work. It builds on the three ‘Rs’ of feminist economists, in that it works on redistribution of unpaid care between women and men and between families and the state; reduction through time- and labour-saving devices; and recognition through campaigning and policy work.

In the Philippines, the ‘iLabaYu’ media campaign, developed with a marketing firm on a pro bono basis, reached millions and was coupled with work with local political leaders to change local laws. (‘Laba’ is Filipino slang for ‘laundry’/washing but also sounds like ‘love’.) During [From Programs to Policies](#), Leah Anadon-Payud (resilience portfolio manager for Oxfam Philippines) and Hon. Leo Jasper Candido (vice mayor of the Municipality of Quinapondan in the Philippines) discussed the campaign. According to Anadon-Payud:



The response to the project’s public communications was overwhelmingly positive. Continuous investment in a wide range of media can expand the reach of—and continually reinforce—positive messages on unpaid care and domestic work so that the dialogue that began with social norms activities can continue at home, at work, and in public spaces.

Social media and TV are often the best channels in urban areas, while radio, posters, banners, and roadshows can be used in areas where electricity is scarce or unaffordable for poorer households.

Products that are visually and emotionally engaging and that use simple language, such as the iLabaYu campaign and HowIcare campaign, run by Oxfam and Promundo, have proven to be effective in appealing to mass audiences.

Tailored messages that resonate with the practices and beliefs of particular groups, that enable people to see things from others’ point of view, and that give people access to new information about the benefits of their actions can motivate powerful change.

In the Philippines, the campaign led to changes in local laws, called ordinances. Working with local mayors and authorities, the WeCare ordinance led to investment in time- and labour-saving equipment, the municipal social welfare office leading sessions on understanding unpaid care work, local government leading sessions on unpaid care work as part of Women’s Month, and care dialogue sessions with husbands and wives as part of family development sessions.

SOURCE: Leah Anadon-Payud (resilience portfolio manager, Oxfam Philippines) and Hon. Leo Jasper Candido (vice mayor, Municipality of Quinapondan, Eastern Samar, Philippines), [From Programs to Policies: What Does It Take to Shift the Dial on Gender Norms and Unpaid Care?](#)

3.3. Palestine: Positive deviance approach to working with communities on unpaid care

During "[The Arab Fathers' Revolution](#)", Azhar Besaiso (programme officer of the NGO Development Center, Palestine) described the organisation's programme to change norms on unpaid care in Palestinian communities.

How did the programme work? *We looked for men who were against early marriage and supporting women's participation and sharing unpaid care and domestic work. In the first phase, we worked with neighbourhood chiefs and community leaders. In the second phase, we worked with married couples and university students.*

What have the challenges been? *Our biggest challenge has been misunderstanding of religion; religion is usually used as a pretext to justify gender inequality. We also found that it was important to work with women. Men said, 'Please work with our wives because they don't believe we can share childcare and work with them.'*

Why was it successful? *We believe [it's] because of the peer-to-peer approach. Men worked with other men from their own community, as did women and students. This means they are more open to listen and feel that change is possible. It has proven to be very effective, and easier, for people to make the change when they see that people they respect have already done so. When a man is approached by a similar man in a conservative society, it is easier for him to change. After the first phase, participants continued with the new norms without any intervention from the programme. It has been one of our most successful interventions.*



PHOTO CREDIT: Yagazie Emezi/Getty Images/Images of Empowerment

3.4. South Africa: Advocating for improved parental leave for all

Wessel van den Berg (research, monitoring & evaluation and learning unit manager, Sonke Gender Justice), explained the campaign on parental leave during [MenCare Advocacy, Media and Campaigning Webinar](#).

Sonke Gender Justice and MOSAIC, a women's rights organisation in Cape Town—along with trade unions and other members of civil society—advocated for a change in the law on parental leave, using media and the global influence of the 2015 MenCare Parental Leave Platform and the first *State of the World's Fathers* report to advocate for equal paid parental leave, particularly for fathers, in order to achieve gender equality for mothers. Before the campaign's advocacy, the 2014 Labour Laws Amendment Act in South Africa allowed for:

- Four months' maternity leave on a sliding scale, up to 54 per cent paid
- No specified parental leave for fathers or other parents
- Three days' family responsibilities for employees other than a biological mother

In 2016, the campaign culminated in a hearing in Parliament. Sonke Gender Justice and MOSAIC presented alongside the Congress of South African Trade Unions. A MenCare team member from Sonke Gender Justice was there; he had benefited from Sonke's parental leave policy, which is a fully paid four-week leave policy for fathers. He attended with his wife, who talked about what his presence meant to her during their son's first few weeks of life.

The new labour law amendments were approved in 2018 and implemented in 2020. Some of the changes mandated that:

- Maternity leave should be maintained, and there should be an increase in paid allocation up to 66 per cent.
- Ten days' paid parental leave for those who did not qualify for maternity leave; the largest group was fathers.
- In addition to maternity leave for mothers specifically, the language was gender-neutral—including all genders and sexual orientations.
- Paid parental leave of ten weeks for adoptive parents and parents who commissioned a surrogacy.

3.5. Uruguay: The National Care System

Gabriel Corbo (former director of Infancia Sistema Nacional de Cuida in Uruguay) explained the National Care System that had been introduced in his country during Launching the State of the World's Fathers 2021 Report:

The law codifying the National Care System passed in 2015, and it was rooted in the universal right to care and the co-responsibility of governments and communities to provide that care. It represents advances in previous national care legislation, including childcare pension credits within the national social security system that recognised unpaid care work as work through the expansion of pension credits, as well as laws supporting domestic workers. Prioritising the most vulnerable households, the plan includes care for children, those with disabilities, and dependent adults.

The law was passed by a progressive government, with widespread support from feminist and women's rights groups and from UN Women through its HeForShe initiative. It was based on the awareness of the 'triple challenge': an ageing population, changing family compositions, and a labour market that put increasing strains on families (especially women), coupled with time-use surveys that highlighted the glaring inequality in unpaid care work faced by women and also the double burden they face at work. The Uruguayan government sought to create a national care plan that was ambitious in its coverage and promoted gender equality. Importantly, the law includes incentives for men to carry out their share of care, although to date, this has had limited success.



The three pillars of care in Uruguay's National Care System
(SOURCE: Gabriel Corbo, [Launching the State of the World's Fathers 2021 Report](#))

4. Gaps, lessons learned, and recommendations



The global community now has a fundamental choice: we can either recycle failed austerity measures, which are likely to further deepen inequalities, or set things right by enabling a recovery that re-values care, encourages men to play full and equitable roles in unpaid care, and builds an inclusive feminist future.

— BOLIS ET AL., 2020²¹

4.1. Gaps and lessons learned

The binary assumption that ‘women care and men provide’ lies at the heart of patriarchy. It has been of central concern to feminists and women’s rights organisations since at least the 1970s, and yet—like violence against women (to which it is also linked)—this assumption has been hard to shift. In this sense, we could say the work on care underpins all other work in the field of engaging men and boys, transforming masculinities, and gender equality. Where this field is part of international development work, however, a lack of understanding remains on how concepts of care (as service) are rooted in colonialism and racism—including how the low value attributed to care is linked to white supremacy in family and gender roles. The connections among care, colonialism, and racism have been clear during the coronavirus pandemic: for example, the number of people of colour working in health services in many Global North countries who have died due to the virus.²²

In general, the field of ‘men and boys for gender equality’ has worked on the issue of care mainly through the lens of fatherhood as a key entry point to addressing the imbalances between men and women in unpaid care and domestic work. Many of the sessions in the MenEngage Ubuntu Symposium reflected this approach—from *“The Arab Fathers’ Revolution”* to *The Fathering Circle*. This work is important and can be transformative when done in a way that also includes women and focuses on relationships as well as structural transformation. Often,

²¹ Bolis, M., Parvez, A., Holten, E., Mugehera, L., Abdo, N., & Moreno, M. J. (2020, June). *Care in the time of coronavirus: Why care work needs to be at the centre of a post-COVID-19 feminist future*. Oxfam. <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org/resources/care-in-the-time-of-coronavirus-why-care-work-needs-to-be-at-the-centre-of-a-po-621009/>

²² COVID-19: *The risk to BAME doctors*. (2021, August 24). British Medical Association. <https://www.bma.org.uk/advice-and-support/covid-19/your-health/covid-19-the-risk-to-bame-doctors>

this work is coupled with advocacy on policy issues (such as paternity and parental leave) and sometimes with research (as in Oxfam’s WE-Care Programme and many programmes in Latin America). It extends, too, to working with health and education services (as in much of the work on this subject in Latin America) and to work on preventing violence against women and violence against children.

Working on care through the lens of fatherhood is relevant, and it is happening in many countries. A MenEngage paper in the *International Journal of Care and Caring* (2018) pointed out that it’s important that fatherhood is not the end-goal or objective, but rather an entry point for advancing the recognition, reduction, and redistribution of unpaid care, and gender justice more broadly. The paper notes:

Increased global attention and recognition of men’s roles and responsibilities in unpaid care is a positive development, and promising initiatives have emerged to engage men as active and equitable fathers and caregivers. However, achieving the ultimate goal of gender equality in the provision of care will be a challenge. It will require a fundamental shift in how caring, gender norms and masculinities are perceived, and will depend on efforts at all levels of society, from individual efforts with men and boys, to the adoption of progressive policies and legislation, to the transformation of institutions. Crucially, it will require both government support and action and meaningful partnerships with local civil society organisations, including those that are women-centred and women-led, to ensure that initiatives to engage men in caring contribute to the overall goal of a more gender-just world for all.²³

There is also the danger that work on care will be co-opted by the many parenting and family programmes springing up worldwide that are funded by right-wing organisations and movements; these programmes generally aim to promote ‘family values’—that is, a nuclear gender-binary family with one father and one mother, in which the father is the provider and the mother is the caregiver. By adopting the terminology of ‘care’, these bodies promote an understanding of ‘family’ as exclusively heteronormative and of gender as firmly attached to biological sex differences that overlap with traditional gender roles. Interestingly, these programmes seem to be less about fathers’ rights than they were perhaps a decade ago and more about the gender binary of a strong male figure and a submissive female carer. They are, however, well funded and broadly disseminated through social media. We saw evidence of some of this in the symposium sessions on backlash.

The answer, however, is not to stop working with fathers. Rather, it’s to ground this work firmly in gender equality—the MenEngage Alliance accountability standards²⁴ and MenCare campaign principles²⁵ can be useful here—and to build this work from the ground up in conjunction with women’s rights organisations so that there is clear accountability. Finally, we must constantly be aware that this work is just one small part of the much wider systems change that is needed. As Tom Churchyard (founder and executive director of Kwakha Indvodza—‘Building a Man’—in Eswatini) noted during *MenCare Advocacy, Media and Campaigning Webinar*: ‘Legal and structural reform should always be at the heart of our campaigns but as a long-term aim.’

It is clear that change happens at different levels, as well as that the pressure often needs to occur on many of these levels at the same time for transformative change to occur. At the same time, this is where the risks lie—if we think about social change without systemic change, for instance.

²³ van de Sand, J., Belbase, L., & Nolan, S. (2018). Engaging men as fathers and caregivers: An entry point to advancing women’s empowerment and rights. *International Journal of Care and Caring*, 2(3), 425–431. <https://doi.org/10.1332/239788218X15351945466012>

²⁴ MenEngage Alliance. (2014). *The MenEngage Alliance accountability standards and guidelines*. <http://menengage.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/MenEngage-Accountability-Standards-and-Guidelines.pdf>; MenEngage Alliance. (2018). *MenEngage Alliance accountability training toolkit*. <http://menengage.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/MenEngage-Accountability-Toolkit-English-WEB.pdf>

²⁵ *Guiding principles*. (n.d.). MenCare. Retrieved November 4, 2021, from <https://men-care.org/about-mencare/guiding-principles/>

4.2. Recommendations for practitioners

Feminist principles underpinning work on unpaid care

1. Work as allies to, collaborate with, and be accountable to feminist organisations.

Organisations working on unpaid care with a fatherhood lens must link up with national or local women's rights or feminist organisations working on care in all or any of its facets, including care for ourselves and each other, unpaid care, and care for the planet. This must be done in a collaborative, humble, and accountable way. These relationships need to be nurtured with care and respect, bearing in mind that our patriarchal conditioning does not always make these bonds easy. Those working on men and gender equality must be open to feedback and learning from feminist and women's rights organisations, leaders, and networks. Additionally, the content of work on fatherhood needs to be properly informed and grounded in feminist theory and practice within the specific location and context. Even with good programmes, we need to be in ongoing dialogue with feminist movements to keep checking that what we say our 'achievements' are resonate with and support feminist movements' agendas and add value to what they are doing.

2. Co-create the work on fatherhood and unpaid care with women, girls, and people of other genders.

Work with men and boys, particularly with fathers and fathers-to-be, must acknowledge that this is about relationships and must involve partners, most of whom are likely women. This is important to ensure that the work with fathers centres the needs and rights of women and children in the household. Furthermore, if they are not involved, women can resist men being more involved in the home, as it is often the only space where women feel they have some power and control.

3. Become more intersectional.

An awareness of race, class, caste, sexuality, geography, ability, and age does not yet permeate the work on unpaid care. There is much more to be done in this area, and it involves working at all levels. Work with fathers must acknowledge that they are not a homogenous group, and best practice involves focusing on particular groups of fathers that vary by country and context. In Lebanon, for example, work with refugee populations has required a different approach than work with host populations. In Austria and the Netherlands, it has been easiest to work with migrant and refugee fathers; in Brazil, it was focusing on fathers-to-be.

4. Deconstruct and dismantle gender-binary conceptions of care work for children as always (and only) involving one mother and one father.

In many contexts, a wide network of people of all genders is involved with children. It is also important to not assume a nuclear family and to include not just biological fathers living in the home but also social and nonresidential fathers, step- and adoptive fathers, and same-sex parents. There is still a long way to go in this area.

5. Build a wider circle of care.

Work on unpaid care often focuses only on the family, and although this work does primarily concern childcare and domestic work, there is also a wider range of activities within health and social care. COVID-19 has highlighted this issue, demonstrating that 'care' often—and increasingly—also includes caring for elders or those with disabilities and that women in particular may also have volunteer caring roles in their communities. While the expanded definition of care may be true in ordinary times, it is especially salient in times of conflict or crisis—but was not a particular focus in the symposium.

6. Connect to inner work (self-care and collective care). A number of symposium sessions discussed self-care and collective care as a wider, more systemic way of transforming ourselves as individuals and communities. This approach to care or inner work may be understood as self-inquiry and as a spiritual practice. The summary of the session [Inner Work for Social Change](#) noted:

A growing number of feminists, including many within MenEngage, are voicing the need for embracing inner work as a foundation for our social justice work. Inner work is this looking within and among ourselves to grow, heal, and transform emotionally, socially, intellectually, and politically. Dismantling oppressive systems requires inner work. Otherwise, we are destined to recreate the same oppressive systems over and over.

The emphasis, therefore, is not on individual work for self-improvement alone—the idea of self-care has also been co-opted as an expression of capitalist individualism—but as an important aspect of social change. Men are unlikely to stop using violence and increase care until they deal with their own trauma. When the focus is on ‘men’s vulnerabilities’ as an end in itself and not a means to an end, or an end alongside a broader political vision, this may overtake a justice-focused agenda and deepen the polarisation between binary ideas of women and men’s rights. The triple advocacy triangle,²⁶ adapted from the Messner and Nixon politics of masculinity triangle, provides a framework to contextualise work on men’s vulnerabilities in an accountable way. Therefore, men’s inner work is not only a spiritual practice but also a transformational experience and process when it comes to challenging male privileges and power dynamics, including relationships.

Areas for intervention on unpaid care and wider care systems

- 7. Consider making advocacy on parental and paternity leave part of the work on fatherhood,** ensuring it presses for equal, fully paid, nontransferable parental leave for all parents as a supplement—not alternative—to maternity leave. This includes our responsibility to stand behind and support feminist groups’ call for appropriate maternity leave in places where there are not such provisions. [MenCare](#) and its [Parental Leave Platform](#) can be helpful here, as can the [State of the World’s Fathers](#) and national fathers’ reports. In addition, it is important not to assume heteronormativity or to privilege birth parents; provision for same-sex couples and adoptive parents is also key.
- 8. Link fatherhood work to women’s campaigns for state-supported, high-quality childcare** that facilitates both parents’ full participation in economic activities and that provides young children with gender-equality education. This can also be part of wider state-supported care systems (see Uruguay’s example in Section 3.5) and campaigns for childcare in the private sector.
- 9. Advocate for father-specific parent training to be part of advocacy for wider policies in the health sector to engage men in prenatal visits, childbirth, and postnatal care,** as has been done in Brazil, Chile, and elsewhere.²⁷ This father-specific parent training could include building men’s parenting and caring skills that may lead to greater confidence in their ability to be a primary or joint caretaker, as well as promoting shared responsibility for

²⁶ Triple advocacy. (n.d.). männer.ch. Retrieved November 23, 2021, from https://www.maenner.ch/kampa_page/triple-advocacy/

²⁷ van der Gaag, N., Heilman, B., Gupta, T., Nembhard, C., & Barker, G. (2019). *State of the World’s Fathers: Unlocking the power of men’s care*. Promundo-US. <https://stateoftheworldsfathers.org/report/state-of-the-worlds-fathers-helping-men-step-up-to-care/>



- 10. Look to the education sector—and beyond.** A number of symposium sessions covered working with boys and young men. Including a care approach in other work with men and boys can be positive. The early years, whether in school or outside it, often make a lasting impression on children. Raising the profile and value of 'care' in all stages of life can translate into a person's improved capacity to care for their own health and well-being, as well as for those around them. It can also prevent gender-based violence; teach the value of care to both boys and girls; and promote equitable, nonviolent, caring relationships.
- 11. Situate some unpaid care and domestic work in a wider context that includes paid work.** Some of the 'Politics of Care' sessions did refer, for example, to domestic workers' situation in the pandemic but mainly in terms of the impact on households employing domestic workers rather than on the workers themselves. And yet paid care workers suffer from their work being unvalued and underpaid—not to mention often being on top of unpaid care work in their own homes. Women's organisations such as [Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing \(WIEGO\)](#) and the [International Domestic Workers Federation](#) are doing good campaigning work. It would also be useful to investigate men in care work, as in papers such as *Men Who Care*.²⁸
- 12. Regularly collect more data on time used in unpaid care work and how it is divided between women and men, girls and boys.** This can be used to measure progress towards equality, as well as inform policymaking and budgeting decisions at the national and local levels. Men's involvement in this area would also be useful to measure in studies, such as through gender trackers.²⁹ Also, while there are some small-scale evaluations of this work's impact (and a few larger ones), evidence of impact remains largely missing, and investments are often not tracked.
- 13. Include men and boys in discussions on economies of care and life-making economies.** All of the above recommendations and more are included in some of the work by feminist organisations looking at care economies and economies of care, especially in relation to what a pandemic-resilient care economy would look like—from tax to transport to childcare to education to health.³⁰ As yet, few of these make reference to the role of men and boys; this perspective, if welcome, could be a useful form of allyship.

Approaches to work on unpaid care and economies of care

- 14. Partnerships are key.** The most successful work in this area—Promundo, Rutgers, and local partners in Brazil or Rwanda, for example, or Sonke Gender Justice's work in South Africa—has been embedded in government systems and structures and has sometimes involved working across sectors. At present, this work is mostly in health systems around pregnancy and birth, but it can and is being extended into educational systems (the Fatherhood Institute, United Kingdom), the workforce (Anne Çocuk Eğitim Vakfı [AÇEV], Turkey), the Ministry of Social Affairs (Program P-ECD, Lebanon), and the Ministry of Health (PARENT, Portugal). There are also a number of successful partnerships with the private sector. Importantly, as the first recommendation notes, this work must be done in collaboration with feminist organisations within the country.

²⁸ Barker, G., Greene, M., Nascimento, M., Segundo, M., Ricardo, C., Taylor, A., Aguayo, F., Sadler, M., Das, A., Singh, S., Figueroa, J. G., Franzoni, J., Flores, N., Jewkes, R., Morrell, R., & Kato, J. (2012). *Men who care: A multi-country qualitative study of men in non-traditional caregiving roles*. International Center for Research on Women & Instituto Promundo. <https://promundoglobal.org/resources/men-who-care-a-multi-country-qualitative-study-of-men-in-non-traditional-caregiving-roles>

²⁹ United Nations Development Programme & UN Women. (n.d.). *COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker*. United Nations Development Programme COVID-19 Data Futures Platform. Retrieved March 1, 2021, from <https://data.undp.org/gendertracker/>; Global Health 50/50. (n.d.). *The COVID-19 Sex-Disaggregated Data Tracker*. <https://globalhealth5050.org/the-sex-gender-and-covid-19-project/the-data-tracker/>

³⁰ Women's Budget Group. (2020). *Creating a caring economy: A call to action*. <https://www.thewomensorganisation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/WBG-Report-Final.pdf>; Palladino, L. M., & Mabud, R. (2021). *It's time to care: The economic case for investing in a care infrastructure*. Time's Up Foundation. <https://timesupfoundation.org/work/times-up-impact-lab/times-up-measure-up/its-time-to-care-the-economic-case-for-investing-in-a-care-infrastructure/>

- 15. Approach programming with care.** As with other development programmes and interventions, programmes on care need to be contextualised, not copied and pasted from other settings in the name of scaling up. Generally, this field needs to be humble about the concept of 'scaling up', learn from the mistakes of the past, and see programming in the context of decolonization—where partners are really partners, not 'beneficiaries', and we listen to them and learn.
- 16. Remember that there are no quick fixes...** Feminists have been working on inequality in unpaid care and domestic work for decades. This more systemic work takes many years of relationship-building prior to any intervention. Sometimes, it involves making formal agreements with governments, ensuring that the issues are championed by both senior and less senior advocates within the specific sector, and working with key personnel who are able to instigate and bring about change.
- 17. ...But there are many small steps.** On the other hand, simple steps are often the way to more systemic change. As Kathy Jones and Adrienne Burgess from the Fatherhood Institute note, 'We call it the "Trojan Horse" approach—small, simple things can make a real difference. For example, is there a space on registration forms to get fathers' details?'³¹ These simple, small steps were much in evidence during the symposium.
- 18. Use communications and advocacy—but with caution and care.** The symposium provided examples of media clips and of social media campaigns, as well as a wealth of expertise on the dos and don'ts of communicating and campaigning on unpaid care, unpaid domestic work, and involved fatherhood. 'Social media is a powerful tool—and a fickle friend'; 'Try to capture lived experiences in new and different ways'; and 'Always do a gender analysis before you start campaigning' were just a few from the [MenCare Advocacy, Media and Campaigning Webinar](#) session, and many are included in the MenCare in Africa media toolkit.³²
- 19. Beware of the language used around care.** Using negative terms contributes to the devaluing of care. Of course, some care work is burdensome, but if we want to revalue care, we need to be positive about it. Rather than talking about care as only a burden, we should discuss care as a social good.

Finally, to return to the 2nd MenEngage Global Symposium in New Delhi and Srilatha Batliwala's comment (quoted by AWID Co-Executive Director Cindy Clark during the [Intersectional Feminist Movement Voices](#) panel):

The root cause of injustice and our shared political agenda is the dismantling of patriarchy—not only because of what it does to women and other 'subordinate' genders and its dehumanizing effects on men, but also because it is the engine that fuels exploitative economic models and environmentally destructive development and all forms of war, conflict, and violence.

Care, in all its forms, can fuel the opposite: a more just and equal society. Work on unpaid care and economies of care can play a key role in promoting the valuing and sharing of care and women's economic empowerment, as well as in the broader goals of achieving gender equality and dismantling patriarchal systems rooted in historical inequalities that harm all genders. 'I am because you are' must be our mantra as we continue to centre care in all that we do.

³¹ From author interview with Kathy Jones and Adrienne Burgess.

³² MenCare, MenEngage Alliance, & Sonke Gender Justice. (2020). *MenCare in Africa media kit*. <https://men-care.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/MenCare-Media-Kit-1.pdf>

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Annex 1. Links to the symposium sessions on unpaid care and economies of care

1. 10 November 2020: [*Opening plenary*](#)
1. 11 November 2020: [*Youth Leadership and Movement Building panel*](#)
1. 11 November 2020: [*Intersectional Feminist Movement Voices panel*](#)
1. 11 November 2020: [*Men and Masculinities panel \(part 1\)*](#)
1. 12 November 2020: [*Men and Masculinities panel \(part 2\)*](#)
1. 19 November 2020: [*Men Caring About...*](#) ('Politics of Care' series session 1)
1. 26 November 2020: [*"The Arab Fathers' Revolution": A Dialogue on Social Transformations Through Men's Caregiving*](#)
1. 14 January 2021: [*Men Taking Care of...*](#) ('Politics of Care' series session 2)
1. 21 January 2021: [*Paternidades y Cuidado en América Latina: Tensiones Entre Prácticas Íntimas, Masculinidad y Políticas Públicas*](#) (Fatherhood and Care in Latin America: Tensions Between Intimate Practices, Masculinities and Public Policy)
1. 11 February 2021: [*The Fathering Circle: Parenting With Accountability*](#)
1. 16 February 2021: [*Economic Contexts: Neoliberalism, Climate Crisis and Care Economies*](#)
1. 25 February 2021: [*Men Giving Care to...*](#) ('Politics of Care' series session 3)
1. 4 March 2021: [*Masculinidades y Prácticas de Cuidado: Para una Igualdad Sustantiva*](#) (Masculinities and Caring Practices: For Substantive Equality)
1. 11 March 2021: [*MenCare Advocacy, Media and Campaigning Webinar: With Practical Cases and a Toolkit on How to Do It*](#)
1. 15 April 2021: [*Involucramiento de los Hombres en la Paternidad: Experiencias Desde Chile, Perú, México y Portugal*](#) (Men's Involvement in Fatherhood: Experiences From Chile, Peru, Mexico and Portugal)
1. 22 April 2021: [*Todos Somos Familia*](#) (We Are All Family)
1. 6 May 2021: [*From Programs to Policies: What Does It Take to Shift the Dial on Gender Norms and Unpaid Care?*](#)
1. 20 May 2021: [*When Men Receive Care*](#) ('Politics of Care' series session 4)
1. 15 June 2021: [*Launching the State of the World's Fathers 2021 Report: Structural Solutions to Achieve Equality in Care Work*](#)





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