



## **Interview of the Month Promundo August 2017**

### **1) GenderHopes: For our readers who aren't familiar with Promundo, can you explain briefly your work and objectives?**

Founded in 1997 in Brazil, Promundo has since become a global leader in promoting gender equality and preventing violence by engaging men and boys in partnership with women and girls. We believe that working with men and boys to transform harmful gender norms and unequal power dynamics is a critical part of the solution to achieve gender equality.

Promundo's formative research and rigorous evaluation, evidence-based programs, and targeted advocacy efforts strive to create change at multiple levels, and reveal that promoting healthy masculinity (or positive notions of "what it means to be a man") and femininity (or "what it means to be a woman") leads to improvements in the lives of women and girls, and in men's and boys' own lives.

Our work focuses on transforming gender norms and masculinities in the institutions where they are constructed (such as schools and the workplace) and in high-violence and post-conflict settings. Through our programming, we promote men's involvement as gender-equitable caregivers and involved fathers, as partners in women's economic empowerment, and as advocates in the prevention of children's and adolescents' sexual exploitation and gender-based violence, including harmful traditional practices.

### **2) Promundo works across the globe in countries such as Rwanda, Brazil and Indonesia. How do you address the cultural differences to make your work the most effective?**

Each country and context is different. The success of our approaches lies in the adaptability of our methodologies, and in the strength of our local partners, located in over 40 countries. While we rely on globally proven methodologies for our work with young men and women, with new fathers and mothers, and with those who have experienced trauma, these approaches undergo rigorous adaptation with local partners when applied in new contexts.

Through formative research we are able to generate new evidence and gain

additional insights into men's and women's attitudes and behaviors when it comes to being a man or being a woman in a particular context. Then, we use this information to adapt our high-impact, gender-transformative interventions and programs to be locally relevant, as well as to design and identify advocacy priorities with local partners.

Our work strives to create change at multiple levels: with individuals, with communities through campaigns and local activism, and with institutions and governments through advocacy efforts aimed to influence policies and institutionalize approaches. Through rigorous evaluations, we are able to determine the impact of our programs in each context, and then to further adapt them for future implementation.

**3) One out of three women is victim of domestic violence at some point in her life. How do you explain this pandemic and how can we work with men to prevent gender-based violence from occurring, especially in the home?**

Promundo and partners have carried out the largest, most detailed study ever on how men around the world are responding to gender equality. The International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES), a multi-country survey on men, has been fielded or is in process in nearly 30 countries, with more than 30,000 interviews. Its results have shaped policies and programming around sexual and gender-based violence prevention; women's economic empowerment; and men's partnership in maternal, newborn, and child health.

IMAGES, alongside other research in the field, has provided us with crucial information on some of the factors that influence men's use of violence, such as witnessing their own father or another man use violence against their mother, or being involved in fights as children/adolescents. Alcohol abuse, economic stress, and inequitable gender attitudes are also associated with men's use of violence, but at lower levels and not as consistently across countries. IMAGES has also provided key data on factors that influence men's support for gender equality and caregiving: men who saw their fathers participate in traditionally feminine household work and caregiving, or who were taught to do this work as children, are far more likely to report contributing in this way within their own marriages.

Having this data in hand, we needed evidence-based solutions that could tap into the underlying norms that drive men's use of violence.

At the heart of Promundo's approaches is individuals' active questioning of what it means to be a man or woman in society and of how such expectations can cause harm to themselves and to those around them, as well as building an understanding of how these expectations are key drivers of gender-based violence. For example, men who adhere to harmful definitions of masculinity often believe that "real men" do not cry, or that "real men" should defend their

honor with force, if necessary. Such beliefs limit men's capacity for emotional expression, often resulting in poor mental health, and rigid ideas may also encourage harmful or violent behaviors.

Since 2004, Promundo and partners have reached more than 250,000 young men and women in over 25 countries with actions to reduce gender-based violence. Our innovative Program H and Program M methodologies combine group education with youth-led activism to achieve equality, reduce violence, and improve sexual and reproductive health. The theory behind Programs H and M hypothesizes that if students learn to recognize harmful gender norms and are provided safe spaces to practice questioning these constructs, then they have a greater likelihood of internalizing new ideas in support of non-violent behaviors.

Program H has been named a best practice by the World Bank and the World Health Organization and has been cited by UNICEF and the United Nations for its effectiveness. It has been officially adopted by ministries of health in Brazil, Mexico, Chile, and Croatia, among other countries. The Womanity Foundation is supporting Promundo's adaptation of this work in Lebanon – Program H's first implementation site in the Middle East – proving the universality and adaptability of Promundo's approaches. The results of eight, mostly quasi-experimental studies on Program H around the world have found evidence of positive changes among program participants: from more gender-equitable attitudes and behaviors generally to improved couple communication and reduced gender-based violence.

#### **4) How can advocates for gender equality make men and boys understand that equal rights is not a fight against them but rather benefits all member of society?**

As men begin to embrace more gender-equitable roles, they experience the various effects of this change. Some of these effects may be challenging, such as letting go of power, but others may lead men to feel more connected to their partners and children, to have better mental health, and to experience less stress with regard to fulfilling the expected masculine role of sole breadwinner, for example.

Our *State of the World's Fathers* report, produced by Promundo as an advocacy publication of MenCare: A Global Fatherhood Campaign, illustrates the global data around how men's participation in unpaid care work enables them to share the pleasures of child-rearing and to build more meaningful relationships with their communities, their friends and peers, their partners, their children, their own parents, and other caregivers. It also provides an opportunity for men to break free of narrow and restrictive constructs of manhood, and it can have positive effects on their mental and physical health. While not all of this hands-on care work may be immediately enjoyable, gender equality's long-term benefits for men are clear.

We work to create spaces for men to 1) learn through questioning and critical reflection about gender norms, 2) rehearse equitable and non-violent attitudes and behaviors in a comfortable space, and 3) internalize these new gender attitudes and norms, applying them in their own relationships and lives. Men can then begin to explore some of the positive benefits that the women and children in their lives – and that they themselves – may experience as they begin to embrace attitudes and behaviors more supportive of gender equality. We need to complement this work with policies that enshrine and enable gender equality, as well as campaigns and media that illustrate some of the positive benefits of gender equality for all.

**5) Can you tell us how Promundo’s program MenCare concretely works to engage men in as fathers? How can fathers be encouraged to take longer paternity leave and be involved in the early years of their children? Would a policy change have an impact on the career of mothers who want to stay in the workforce?**

MenCare: A Global Fatherhood Campaign is active in over 40 countries. MenCare works at multiple levels to engage individuals, communities, institutions, and policymakers. We work with partner organizations around the world, offering a suite of media resources, educational programming, and advocacy initiatives that can be customized to different countries, languages, and cultural contexts. Promundo, as a global co-coordinator of the campaign, has impacted millions of fathers and targeted policymakers in over 40 countries.

Through the MenCare campaign, Promundo’s programs have empowered more than 50,000 fathers across 10 countries to become better parents, breaking family legacies of violence. Program P, a toolkit for reaching expectant fathers as partners in maternal and child health and violence prevention, has been implemented in more than 10 countries and officially adopted by health ministries in five countries, with promising results.

MenCare’s major advocacy focus is parental leave that is paid, equal, and non-transferable. Leave for fathers – in conjunction with leave for mothers and additional structural solutions, and when enshrined in national policies – has the power to contribute significantly to the recognition and redistribution of care work and to transform deeply rooted inequalities between men and women. These policies can be an effective mechanism for changing the gendered dynamics of caregiving at home and elevating the status of caregiving more broadly. Leave for fathers promotes women’s equal pay and advancement in the workforce, as well as men’s connectedness at home. It boosts employees’ morale and productivity and reduces turnover. It allows governments to send a clear signal that all parents matter in the lives of their children.

In cultures all over the world where masculinity is defined by economic and career success – and where caregiving is seen as “women’s work” – men can

face significant social pressure against participating in their children's lives, and women continue to do the majority of the care work. The written and unwritten rules of work culture often tell boys and men that parenting and work/life balance should not be a significant concern. Employers often expect that men will make paid work their top priority, and their leave policies and workplace cultures reflect this expectation. Mothers also face challenges in the workplace, including short- and long-term repercussions for their own careers as a result of taking leave. These negative consequences include missed opportunities, lack of advancement, lower wages, and the perception that women are not committed to their jobs.

We need employers to offer incentives; we need employers to ask when – and not if – their employees intend to take leave, to help to reduce stigma and encourage the use of leave by all parents. We also need to shift the way we think about fathers, moving away from the social expectation that fathers will be helpers, or secondary caregivers. We need to encourage, enable, and expect men, as fathers, to be equal partners in caring for their children.

## **6) What are the main or most surprising findings of Promundo's recent report "Understanding Masculinities"?**

*Understanding Masculinities: Results from the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES) – Middle East and North Africa* is the largest multi-country study of its kind in the region. Coordinated by Promundo and UN Women, in collaboration with local research partners, the report takes a never-before-seen look at what it means to be a man in Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco, and Palestine today. Exploring key issues at home and at work, in public and private life, the research confronts many of the stereotypes commonly associated with men in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region and highlights pathways to gender equality.

The study reveals that although traditional attitudes about gender equality dominate, at least one-quarter of men hold more open and equitable views, supporting women's economic, social, and political equality. Personal histories, family influence, and life circumstances are among the factors that impact men's support for gender equality.

Certain findings in MENA deviated from previous IMAGES results. For example, in nearly every other country where the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES) has been carried out, younger men have consistently shown more equitable attitudes and some key practices than their older counterparts; in three of the four countries included in IMAGES MENA, this was not the case. In Morocco, Palestine, and Egypt, younger men's views on gender equality do not differ substantially from those of older men. Why? Young men's inequitable views may be a result of challenging economic circumstances: many young men in these three countries report difficulties finding a job, and as such, they struggle to achieve the socially recognized hallmark of a man as financial provider, which may be producing a backlash.

Young men's views may also be a result of a general climate of religious conservatism under which the younger generation has come of age. While other research in the region has noted similar trends and posited similar drivers, further study is necessary to explore this phenomenon.

The study also highlights the tremendous stress in men's lives in the region, namely the challenge of finding paid work and fulfilling the traditional masculine role of a provider in times of economic uncertainty, particularly in those countries affected by conflict. The effects of conflict and unemployment were frequently cited as reasons for, or aggravating factors in, men's depressive symptoms. One-third to one-half of men in the four countries reported being ashamed to face their families because of lack of work or income.

Promundo and partners are using these results to drive programming, advocacy, and action around engaging men in gender equality in the region.

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*Founded in Brazil in 1997, Promundo works to promote gender equality and create a world free from violence by engaging men and boys in partnership with women and girls. Promundo is a global consortium with members in the United States, Brazil, Portugal, and Democratic Republic of the Congo that collaborate to achieve this mission by conducting cutting-edge research that builds the knowledge base on masculinities and gender equality; developing, evaluating, and scaling up high-impact gender-transformative interventions and programs; and carrying out national and international campaigns and advocacy initiatives to prevent violence and promote gender justice. For more information, see: [www.promundoglobal.org](http://www.promundoglobal.org)*

