

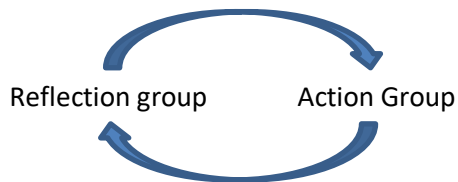
MASCULINITY REFLECTION GROUPS FOR MEN AND WOMEN

Strategy Document

*developed by Men's Resources International
in collaboration with CARE Mali & Niger*

DEFINING A MASCULINITY REFLECTION GROUP (MRG)

A Masculinity Reflection Group (MRG) is defined as any group of men and/or women who meet together to explore how male socialization and a dominant form of masculinity impacts boys and girls, women and men, relationships, families and communities. A Masculinity Reflection Group uses participatory activities, sharing of personal experiences and group discussion to analyze the costs and benefits of this masculinity, and to envision healthier, more compassionate and responsible models of manhood. Participation a Masculinity Reflection Group often leads to and supports personal and collective action.



THE NEED

Socialized masculinity is a source of rigid, unhealthy and dominating attitudes, beliefs and behaviors associated with men that have damaging consequences for women, children and men themselves. Understanding how boys and men are recruited and trained to conform to and reinforce this masculinity encourages and enables men to step outside of this “Man Box.” A reflection group creates opportunities for men and women to collectively envision and promote “positive masculinities” and to develop ally relationships for personal and social change.

PURPOSE OF AN MRG

The purpose of a Masculinity Reflection Group is to support men and women to become role models for positive masculinity, women’s empowerment and gender equality.

METHODOLOGY OF THE MRG

The way we go about accomplishing this purpose is by creating a safe space for men and women

- 1) to reflect on, share and analyze their experiences with boys and men, and
- 2) to develop support, strategies and skills for making changes.

GOALS OF AN MRG

1. Men and women understand how masculinity affects the lives and of women and men.
2. Men and women recognize both the privileges and the vulnerabilities of masculinity
3. Men and women are able to talk about their experiences with masculinity and violence in a safe and supportive environment.
4. Women and men understand the role of both men and women in reinforcing the socialization of boys and men.
5. Men increase their ability and willingness to listen to women and other men.
6. Women experience men’s listening and caring.
7. Men learn and practice respectful and compassionate behaviors with the women, children and other men in their lives.

8. Men learn how to get feedback about their own behaviors from women and other men.
9. Women and men feel empowered to talk with others about what they are learning and practicing.
10. Men and women learn how to talk and work together as allies and partners towards healthy manhood, women's empowerment and gender equity.

CORE CONCEPTS

1) Masculinity is one factor in the construction of social identity for males.

A man's roles, relationships and access to resources are influenced by the intersection of his gender, race, ethnicity, caste, economic class, religion, sexual orientation, physical/mental ability, among other factors. Masculinity influences how he experiences and expresses his other social identities. And his other social identities affect the kinds of masculinities he adopts.

2) Women have much to offer and to gain from transformations of masculinity.

Masculinity has a profound impact on women and girls as well as boys and men. In relationships and families and social institutions, men's individual and collective enactments of their masculinity affects the lives of women and girls. Women's experiences and perspectives offer critical insights into the dynamics of masculinity. Women have much to gain from the reconstruction of dominant forms of masculinity, and feminism and the women's movement have much to offer as men learn to engage in gender analysis and activism for gender justice.

3) Men are trained to be masculine.

Masculinity, men's gendered attitudes, beliefs and behaviors, is taught and learned. In every culture men are trained to be masculine, as women are trained to be feminine. This training is carried out by both men and women, and reinforced by social institutions and cultural practices.

4) Men are naturally loving, caring and sensitive with other men, with women and with children.

Men are not born dominating and violent, but rather with an inherent human desire for connection and the natural capacity for compassion. While these natural capacities can be suppressed by socialization, and repressed in the service of self-protection, and social acceptance and advancement, they cannot be destroyed.

5) Masculinity has both pro-social and anti-social characteristics.

Some aspects of masculinity promote health and well-being for individuals, families and communities. Others reinforce domination and perpetrate violence on women, children and other men.

6) There are diverse masculinities.

In each culture the socially accepted expressions of masculinity take different forms. Even within cultures, specific social groups (e.g. economic) have different norms and behaviors associated with masculinity. Individual expressions of masculinity reflect unique personal experiences and social contexts.

7) Men are rewarded for conformity to the dominant forms of masculinity.

Sometimes called "hegemonic masculinity", the characteristics of this kind of masculinity are remarkably consistent within the hierarchical power structures of most societies. Conformity to this dominant masculinity is rewarded by the social norms and institutions that protect, enforce and preserve these hierarchies of privilege and power.

8) The dominance of men and other privileged groups is protected and preserved by a violent masculinity.

In personal and institutional forms, violent masculinity is used to keep women and other marginalized and devalued groups in positions of servitude for the benefit of men and other dominant groups.

9) Men and boys are damaged by masculinity.

Masculinity, and the process of male socialization, can be damaging to the physical, mental and emotional health of men and boys. The training of boys into masculinity is reinforced both by the privileges that come with “manhood” and the physical, emotional and psychological violence that is used against boys and men who do not conform to the dominant standards of masculinity. In addition to women and children, non-conforming men and masculinities become marginalized, disempowered and targeted for violence. Men’s natural desire for connection and capacity for compassion - our “humanness” – is sacrificed, suppressed and repressed in the service of this masculinity.

10) Masculinity can be changed.

Because it is socially constructed, masculinity can be re-constructed. There are men all over the world who are eager to reclaim their humanness, have healthy, non-dominating relationships with women, children and other men, and challenge systems of dominance and privilege. There are women all over the world who are eager to welcome men into the struggle for gender equality, and work together with men to define and promote “positive masculinities.” By joining together within communities and around the world, a gender transformational movement can be created.

GUIDELINES FOR MASCULINITY REFLECTION GROUPS

A. Group membership

- 1) Masculinity Reflection Groups can be for men only, women only, or men and women together. A combination of single gender and mixed gender sessions is recommended.
- 2) Inclusivity and diversity of membership is encouraged. It is especially valuable to include a combination of adults and youth in the group.
- 3) Use existing connections and relationships to recruit group members.
- 4) Participatory activities and personal discussions are best done with a small group size (20 or less is recommended)
- 5) Encourage consistent participation of all group members. If someone cannot be at a meeting, they are expected to let the group know.
- 6) Decide how many group sessions are required before participants receive a “completion certificate.”
- 7) Remind group members one day ahead of time about the next group meeting.

B. Involvement of women and accountability to women’s empowerment

- 1) A Masculinity Reflection Group should always be designed and promoted as part of a larger effort towards healthy manhood, women’s empowerment and gender equality, and promote recognition of the personal and social inequities women experience from men and the historic and current struggle of women for safety, human rights and equality.

- 2) An MRG should be implemented in relationship to a woman's group and/or a women's empowerment initiative. Women should be involved in the planning and organizing of an MRG. Identify the women leaders in the community and ask for their ongoing advice and support.
- 3) Ideally, a Masculinity Reflection Group includes time for men and women to meet together and separately.
- 4) Experienced women facilitators should be available when women are meeting separately.
- 5) Developing cross-gender communication skills and the ability for men and women to work as equal partners is an important goal for a Men's Reflection Group.
- 6) Teach men to check in with women colleagues, family and community members for reflections on men's actions and behavior. Teach men to say "thank you" and "I'm sorry" in response to feedback, and to identify goals for changes in their behavior.

C. Facilitator requirements

- 1) Strong group facilitation skills are required.
- 2) Each group session is facilitated by at least one skilled senior trainer who has completed the MRG training. Preferably, each group is co-facilitated.
- 3) Men and/or women can facilitate a masculinity reflection group.
- 4) Facilitators should have a clear understanding of the personal and social inequities women experience from men and the historic and current struggle of women for safety, human rights and equality.
- 5) Facilitators should demonstrate knowledge and skills with a compassionate approach to engaging men in reflecting on masculinity and gender, privilege and dominance, and the process of change.
- 6) Facilitators should have already gone through a process of exploration of their own personal attitudes and beliefs related to masculinity and gender issues, and must have demonstrated the practice of promoting positive masculinities in their own lives.
- 7) Facilitators must have practice facilitating MRG activities with colleagues and peers.
- 8) Facilitators must have the ability to facilitate non-judgmental discussion about diverse attitudes and beliefs.
- 9) Experience with the Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) methodology as described in the ISOFI toolkit is preferred.

D. Group structure and venue

- 1) A Masculinity Reflection Group can be a single session or can continue indefinitely. An MRG can be part of a formal NGO program or an informal gathering of people on the street.
- 2) An introductory session is helpful to inform people who are interested in learning about the goals, structure and expectations of an ongoing group.
- 3) An MRG meeting can be as short as one hour, or last several days.
- 4) Meeting at least once each week helps maintain continuity of the group discussion.
- 5) Choose a comfortable setting for group meetings where distractions and interruptions are minimized.
- 6) Group members should be sitting in a circle so everyone can see each other, without tables in front.
- 7) Start each group session with a welcome and a "check-in" where each person introduces themselves and shares briefly about why they are part of this group.

- 8) End each group session with a “check-out” where each person says something that was important to them about this group meeting.
- 9) If the group has developed a pledge/pledges, end the session with the group saying the pledge(s) together.
- 10) Encourage informal conversations among group members outside of the formal group meetings.
- 11) Encourage group members to talk with non-group members about what they are experiencing and learning in the MRG.

E. Identification of topics for group reflection

- 1) The MRG Curriculum provides guidelines for leading a series of structured Masculinity Reflection Group sessions.
- 2) Any topic can be addressed in a Masculinity Reflection Group as long as the following two questions are discussed. “In what ways is dominant masculinity expressed in this situation?” “In what ways can positive/healthy masculinities be expressed in this situation?”
- 3) Descriptions and discussion about what participants are observing about dominant masculinity in their own lives, and what they are doing differently to practice and promote positive masculinity is an important MRG topic.

F. Safety

- 1) Welcome everyone individually and personally as they come into the group.
- 2) Give everyone the opportunity to introduce themselves.
- 3) Complement everyone for being part of the group. Appreciate everyone’s comments. Respect everyone’s opinion.
- 4) Talk about how the group can work together to make it a safe space for everyone. Work together to create group agreements/ground rules. These should include
 - Listen carefully to each other. Share “air time.”
 - Practice respect. Don’t judge others. Learn from our differences.
 - Share your feelings. Ask questions. Be real.
 - Speak from your own experience. Use “I” statements.
 - Allow yourself and others to change our minds.
 - Participate as much as you want. Anyone can “pass.” No one is pushed to share personal information.
 - Personal statements and experiences shared in this group are completely confidential.
- 5) Acknowledge that participating in this reflection process at times can feel uncomfortable.
- 6) Have skilled counselors who are familiar with gender issues available as a resource for group members.
- 7) Teaching and practicing listening skills in every group session.
- 8) Group members are encouraged to communicate to others about what they are learning in the group, but do not use people’s names or information that could be traced back to an individual group member.

G. Avoiding and managing conflict within a group setting

- 1) Pay attention to the emotional energy of people as they come into the group. Notice if certain individuals are having challenges with each other.
- 2) Remind everyone about the group agreements/ground rules.
- 3) Acknowledge the emotional challenges of this work.

- 4) Teach participants to recognize and tolerate discomfort
- 5) Check in individually with people who seem agitated at breaks or after the session.
- 6) Teach breathing skills as a way to de-escalate emotional reactions.
- 7) Using physical ice-breakers and energizers to release energy.
- 8) Limit how much time each person talks.

H. Facilitator/staff support

- 1) Schedule regular MRG facilitator/staff reflection meetings to discuss their experiences and observations and help each other with facilitation challenges.
- 2) Remind staff that the work is both personal and professional. Practicing respectful listening, gender sensitivity and cross-gender partnerships is important both at work and at home.
- 3) Encourage gender sensitivity and reflection in all meetings and conversations.
- 4) Create opportunities for men to listen to women's observations and experiences and feedback about their behaviors.
- 5) Have a clear organizational policy about respect and gender equality with explicit consequences for staff who violate this policy.
- 6) Acknowledgement and praise staff, individually and publicly, who are role models for their engagement, in the personal and professional reflection and change process. Acknowledge staff as a group for their collective efforts and commitment.

I. Evaluation

- 1) Provide a facilitator evaluation tool to be completed after each MRG session.
- 2) Schedule regular MRG facilitator/staff reflection meetings to identify and document the accomplishments and challenges for individual group members and the group as a whole.
- 3) Schedule focus group meetings of MRG group members to get their feedback about successes and obstacles.
- 4) Solicit feedback from women community leaders, colleagues and family members about observed changes in MRG participants.