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**UNDERSTANDING  
MASCULINITIES IN GENDER  
PROGRAMMING:**

**HOW TO ENGAGE MEN AND  
REORIENT PROGRAMMING  
AND ADVOCACY ACTIVITIES  
TARGETING WOMEN IN THE  
GAZA STRIP, PALESTINE**

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Important advances have been made in theory, policy and programming around understanding and developing methodologies to address the needs of women and girls in development and humanitarian interventions. Despite these important steps forward, it is generally agreed that work towards gender equality has been slow and the emancipatory vision of much of this work has yet to be realized. Recently however, NGOs, practitioners, academics and policy analysts have begun to explore why, after decades of gender work, progress has been so slow in achieving gender equality. Many argue that this is due in part to the fact that processes such as 'gender analysis', 'gender mainstreaming', 'gender-sensitive evaluations', etc. have largely equated the word 'gender' with women, thus ignoring the social and cultural lives of men. Masculinity has become the invisible side of gender equality efforts. Reflecting this new emphasis in international debates, Action Against Hunger undertook a study on men's attitudes, roles and social attitudes titled Study on Masculine Identities and Men's Roles in the Gaza Strip, Palestine. The study aimed to:

- Understand, through men's own experiences, how narratives of masculinities are constructed in the Gaza Strip;
- Examine how masculine gender identity relates to gender equality work; and
- Identify key entry points and develop tools to build and integrate a masculinities-informed gender approach to programming in Gaza.

Qualitative research was conducted across Gaza's 5 Governorates in with key stakeholders; local women's NGOs, associations, co-ops, legal aid clinics and service providers; local partners; Action Against Hunger staff; and Action Against Hunger beneficiaries and the husbands of Action Against Hunger beneficiaries. Data was collected through five focus group discussions with 34 men and 22 women, and 19 in-depth interviews with 14 women and 5 men; with data being collected from a total of seventy-four participants, 39 men and 35 women.

**Below are 5 key entry points and recommendations:**

- 1) Frame Projects and Interventions Around Teamwork**
- 2) Work with and Promote Male Role Models**
- 3) Create Safe Space to Consult and Engage Men**
- 4) Engage Female Beneficiaries in Work on Masculinities**
- 5) Engage with Islamic Scholars when designing messaging**

### FRAME PROJECTS AND INTERVENTIONS AROUND TEAMWORK

Many Gazan families report a lack of cohesion, solidarity and sense of being on the same team. The notion of teamwork should be the underlying theme or framework for all interventions aiming to engage men and incorporate a masculinities approach into gender equality work.



Framing marriage, or the family, as a team is a crucial step towards eliminating the competition, jealousy, and resentment sometimes seen between husband and wife.

- As part of the application process, questions could be added regarding what, according to the potential beneficiary, the anticipated roles will be of their husband or wife (depending on who the target beneficiary is) in supporting the project. These questions could ask something along the lines, “What do you anticipate the role of your (husband or wide) being in supporting your project/participation?” Asking this question alone will get the beneficiary thinking about the project as something requiring the support of both partners. Moreover, after collecting this information, it can be used to identify the baseline perceptions of beneficiaries, something that can be used later in the project, or at the end of the project cycle, to revisit and measure change in perceptions.
- Moreover, the partners of beneficiaries could be asked to attend one workshop or training as part of the requirements/criteria. During the workshop/training, Action Against Hunger staff could present material and exercises focusing on the following three points, this material will form the foundation of a ‘masculinities training package’:

**1)** Providing for the family is not solely a man’s job. The fact that 83% of men and 70% of women believed that when work opportunities are scarce, men should have preferential access to jobs before women (IMAGES, 2017, p. 33), reflects the belief that employment is still largely a male domain. Although this is not surprising, the impact of this is noteworthy. As long as employment is understood as a male domain, women will always be ‘visiting’, their engagement in more formal income generating activities will be framed as temporary and thus, the possible benefit to their overall empowerment will likely be negated. This points to a potential target area for awareness raising intervention; highlighting that the economics of the house is as a joint endeavor. It is not the responsibility of men alone. This will have the double benefit of legitimizing women’s inclusion in the work force, as well as alleviating the pressure and sole responsibility of breadwinning on men. It is important to note however, that this messaging must go hand-in-hand with similar messaging around the fact that housework is not solely a women’s job, rather it is a family good and must be part of a team effort.

**2)** Housework and childrearing is not solely a women’s job. In order to do this, two things need to occur. First, there needs to be awareness raising efforts focusing on the burden of housework and how time consuming it is. Secondly, the emphasis of messaging needs to be placed on the importance and value of this work highlighting the fact that it is integral to the survival of the family. Participants should leave the workshop/training with (at least in theory) housework being valued equal to wage labor outside of the home. This will help encourage men to engage in this work with dignity; feeling that they are, contributing and providing for their family.



**3)** Ending the blockade and building a better future requires the teamwork of both men and women. It is known that external crises can help create the conditions for change by galvanizing people to catalyze change. One way of capitalizing on the economic crisis, and integrating messaging around teamwork could be by highlighting the interdependence of women and men for sumud, resistance, and for building a brighter future. Perhaps a campaign based on the Nicaraguan example would be impactful. Nicaragua faced an external crisis in the wake of Hurricane Mitch in 1998. Seizing this opportunity, the NGO Puntos de Encuentro used this external crisis to spark national conversations on gender equality and domestic violence. They developed a campaign whose slogan was, “Violence against women is a disaster that men can prevent.” In the Gazan context, perhaps something along the lines of “The blockade wont block gender equality!” or “Violence against women is a catastrophe that we can prevent” [around Nakba day].

## WORK WITH AND PROMOTE MALE ROLE MODELS

The question is not ‘if’ men exhibit masculinities, but rather ‘which’ masculine discourses to engage in, and here, whatever choice is available is highly context specific. Men who speak about women’s rights and exhibit ‘alternative masculinities’ can have a profound effect on other men. Working with these men as role models in their family, community and country has the power to shift mindsets and begin the long process of norm changing. The logic is simple; men imitate the behavior of other men, particularly men they look up to.

- Male Action Against Hunger staff should be trained as positive male role models. This would require them to exhibit gender equitable behavior during the trainings, be highly educated and aware of the various issues related to power in Gazan families, and armed with anecdotes around the benefits of gender equality. They should not be afraid or embarrassed to talk about sharing responsibility for housework with their home, and should be coached in how to deal with ridicule in order to have the confidence to stay steadfast to these principles in front of a group of men.
- Male Action Against Hunger staff should be well versed in the ‘masculinities training package’ and be comfortable presenting the material and facilitating the necessary conversations.

## CREATE SAFE SPACES TO CONSULT AND ENGAGE MEN

Men need safe spaces to learn about gender equality, ask questions and to not feel judged for their ignorance around gender equality. Men also however, need safe spaces and opportunities to talk about issues facing them in their daily lives, their feelings and emotions, their concerns and fears. Make space and plan to consult with men and integrate their feed-back around all areas of intervention, especially if they themselves are not beneficiaries.

- Create safe spaces and consult with men, as well as offer emotional support if needed, as part of all gender programing.



- Incorporate a focus group with husbands of female beneficiaries prior to commencing an intervention targeting women. Initiate conversation and ask prompting questions around how they feel about their wives participating in the project. Ask what their concerns are, if any. Give them the opportunity to talk about the frustrations they are feeling in a judgement free environment! If conversations move towards GBV and other sensitive topics, rather than lecturing or correcting their view points, first let them speak. Make sure they feel heard, doing so is an important step in reducing defensiveness and can make them more open to consider new approaches etc. later on. At the end of focus group session, shift into delivering the 'masculinities training package' which should address many of the topics brought up in the focus groups.
- Subsequent field visits should first consult with female beneficiary, second with husbands, and third with the couple together. This ordering is intended to create an environment where female beneficiaries have the opportunity to speak about any challenges they are facing regarding their husbands vis-à-vis their projects. This also gives men a chance to speak about their feelings about the project in private. Lastly, by talking to the two of them together, this reiterates the teamwork aspect of the masculinities approach. During the joint conversation, be sure to talk about the importance of co-supporting one another.
- In any intervention, if a participatory session is held with women, men should, also be consulted. This does not mean that men should always be present in the same session, or that every intervention for women needs to be matched with an intervention for men. Rather it means that collecting and incorporating men's perspectives should be part of community consultation, even when interventions target women.

### **ENGAGE WITH FEMALE BENEFICIARIES IN WORK ON MASCULINITIES**

Wives, mothers, sisters and daughters all play an important role in shaping, teaching and encouraging certain behaviors, beliefs and roles. Women reinforce their expectations of appropriate male roles and discourage attitudes and behaviors they do not see as masculine

- Work extensively with Action Against Hunger staff to ensure common understanding of gender equality and its goals. Train staff to deliver 'masculinities training package' to female beneficiaries.
- When working with female beneficiaries, remember to communicate the point that changing expectations of masculinity such as providing etc. is not only beneficial for them because it will ultimately contribute to more equality, but it is also beneficial to their marriage, and their family.
- Speaking to female beneficiaries about the way young boys and young girls are treated is an important starting point when working with women. Talk about how to more equitably distribute the chores they ask their children to help them with such as washing the dishes after dinner,



sweeping the floor, making tea, going to the store, highlight that these should be distributed equally between children regardless of their gender. A way of enforcing this with beneficiaries could be through implementing a “chores report card” program, like one that children receive at school. Beneficiaries can be asked to fill out a monthly report card for their children which both details the chores they are responsible for, and grades them on their performance.

- Mothers also should be encouraged not to instill notions of guardianship of brothers over their sisters. Instead, siblings should be taught to look out for each other, to help and stand up for each other, but as equals, not as one who needs the protection of the other.
- In addition to engaging women in order to help change norms around masculinities in Gaza, it is also important to work with them to rise their confidence. Livelihood projects should also incorporate an aspect of confidence and skills building around financial management. This training should also engage men by holding a joint workshop/training with both husband and wife using both the “carrot and the stick” method. Meaning, educate both men and women around women’s legal financial rights, and also suggest why a more equitable distribution is beneficial for both men and women.

## **ENGAGE WITH ISLAMIC SCHOLARS WHEN DESIGNING MESSAGING**

Political Islam forms the scaffolding around which Gazan society now rests. Because Islam strongly influences the social, economic and political spheres of life in Gaza, it is crucial to understand how religion is used to legitimize, or de-legitimize, women’s rights and gender equality and to work within this framework.

- Having counter-statements and counter-interpretations to level back at beneficiaries when they cite Islamic teachings that they feel are justifications for their unequal behavior or beliefs would be very useful. Ultimately this can help to overcome an aspect of ‘western imposition’ that beneficiaries sometimes felt was attacking their religion, culture and way of being. Moreover, it can help support the adoption of reform-oriented and gender-equitable interpretation of Islam in Gaza
- Engage with Islamic scholars to compile a document containing commonly cited verses and teachings that beneficiaries use to justify unequitable behavior, values and assumptions. The document should then offer alternative interpretations, other contradicting verses, rebuttals and/or clarification of verse and teaching.
- Try to incorporate, as much as possible, Qur’anic verses and sayings that highlight equality, teamwork, respect etc. into ‘masculinities training package’ and lessons, advocacy, and trainings provided to beneficiaries around gender equality.





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