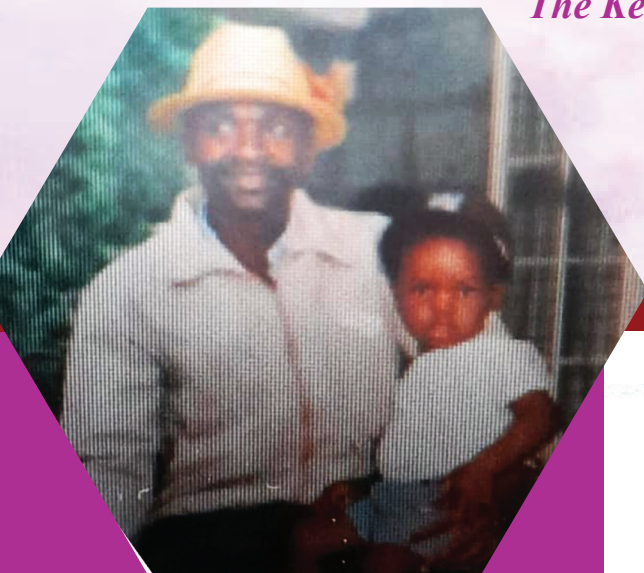


Harnessing the Role of Men as Responsible, Engaged and Loving (REAL) Parents and Ambassadors to Improve Early Childhood Outcomes: The Kenya and Tanzania Experience



Background

Men spend a lot less time with their children compared to women in most countries. This is particularly the case during infancy, when men usually have minimal involvement in providing care such as feeding, changing nappies or diapers, or helping with domestic chores. If they do engage, it is usually as the child gets older, spending time helping with homework or playing with them¹. This is despite overwhelming evidence on men's positive engagement in nurturing care and ECD, unpaid care work and maternal health and the related potential to bring multiple benefits to young children as well as to women, families and men themselves. These benefits accrue from the early stages of the child's development and cut across into adulthood. They range from good health, high educational achievement, better peer relationships, higher self-esteem and lower rates of depression as young adults to lower rates of criminality and substance misuse.

It is worth noting that young children depend completely on their primary caregivers for their health, nutrition, safety and stimulation needs and their caregivers are usually women². When mothers and fathers are supported in parenting, there is even greater potential for improving early childhood development outcomes³. Numerous studies and programs have also found that many men want to be engaged with their children⁴ and enjoy having close relationships with them. Men caregivers play an important role in ensuring all children receive nurturing care. From supportive services to enabling policies and beyond, men can be supported to provide nurturing care for their children from pregnancy to early childhood. However, in many countries, men's engagement in ECD remains limited, and men who are interested in engaging may face multiple barriers to doing so. These barriers include restrictive gender norms and institutional and policy barriers. Consequently, when ECD programs do not work systematically to promote men's engagement and to address the barriers to their involvement, they risk reinforcing inequitable gender norms and stereotypes around who is responsible for caregiving.

Early childhood is the period where children learn about the gendered norms, attitudes and expectations of their community and society. Whereas the effects of these early experiences and systematic gender differences may not be evident until adolescence, the seeds are sowed from the earliest phases of a child's life. Children need their fathers and fathers need their children. Throughout history fathers have been considered a valuable and important part of both a child's and a family's life. Recent research overwhelmingly supports the benefits that accrue to children and families through positive father involvement and strongly points out the unique benefits that men gain through active involvement in fathering and family life. Nurturing fathering enhances the growth and well-being of men as well as children (and women who are part of the family unit).

1. MenCare (2015). *op. cit*

2. Cuartas, J., Jeong, J., Rey-Guerra, C., McCoy, D.C., & Yoshikawa, H. (2020). Maternal, paternal, and other caregivers' stimulation in low- and middle-income countries. *PLoS One*. 15(7):e0236107.

3. Diniz, E., Brandão, T., Monteiro, L., & Veríssimo, M. (2021). Father involvement during early childhood: A systematic review of the literature. *Journal of Family Theory and Review* 13: 77-99

4. Van der Gaag, N., Heilman, B., Gupta, T., Nembhard, C., and Barker, G. (2019). *State of the World's Fathers: Unlocking the Power of Men's Care*. Washington, DC: Promundo-US.

There is thus a growing exigency for quality of ECD programs and services that contribute to closing the gender divide and reducing the negative impacts of gender inequality later in life. This means that ECD programming needs to be gender-transformative by engaging men in childcare and domestic work as well as equal sharing of responsibility. They also need to engage parents, caregivers, community leaders and all men in a child's ecosystem in equitable ways to change how children are raised, so that unequal gendered norms and attitudes are challenged from an early age, ensure that girls and boys are provided with equal care and opportunities.

Men Engage Kenya Network (MENKEN), recognizes the opportunities that ECD brings to promote the rights of young girls and boys and advance gender equality. As part of our gender transformative approach, we have been working with fathers and other male caregivers, to promote men's engagement in caregiving. Founded in 2008 in Kenya, MENKEN believes that a society that is free from all forms of gender inequalities and patriarchy is necessary for the well-being of women, men, and children. This is only achievable if men and boys will be engaged in partnership with women, girls and women's rights organizations. MENKEN promotes equitable and non-violent participation of men as Partners and Caregivers to children through promotion of positive fatherhood. In addition, we build capacities of other organizations and governments on male engagement through development of gender transformative tools and training on the same. We do this in collaboration with partners such as government agencies, civil society and networks in Kenya and the Africa region.

The Tanzania Boys and Men Ambassadors (TBMA) was created to cultivate and support the attitudes and skills for male nurturance, hoping to benefit men, women, and children in family relationships. It uses different platforms to reach its beneficiaries such as Tuongee-Lets Talk, Ndoto Yangu Campaign, Schools Health Program, Boot camps and Commemoration of Special Anti-discriminatory day such as 16-Days of activism, World Day of Boy Child, IWD, Menstrual Hygiene Day, International Family Day, Fathers' Day and International Men's Day by organizing intergenerational dialogues and activities.

About the Learning Event

MENKEN is pleased to host a 2-hour learning event at the 2024 Eastern Africa Regional Early Childhood Conference, entitled "Harnessing the role of Men as Responsible, Engaged and Loving (REAL) Parents and Ambassadors to improve early childhood outcomes: The Kenya and Tanzania Experience". The session will start with an introduction by MENKEN's Executive Director Mr. Fredrick Nyagah, and the Founder of Tanzania Boys and Men Ambassadors (TBMA), Dr Katanta Simwanza. MENKEN will give an overview of its work in Kenya, with a particular focus on male engagement in parenting and gender equality while TBMA will share about its work in Tanzania. This will include lessons from the REAL Parents project undertaken among the Maasai community that is working with Male Parental Empowerment Facilitators (M-PEFs) who are trained to empower other parents and caregivers on positive child discipline, caregiving, sexual and reproductive health, parent-child communication and addressing harmful social norms and practices.

The introduction will be followed by testimonials from the two Directors sharing their experience as Fathers, working with other males and caregivers to make them Responsible, Engaged and Loving (REAL) Parents who are also good ambassadors for male engagement in parenting. In addition, they will share their experience on how to design and implement male engagement Programs. This will provide an opportunity to amplify the voices of male parents to raise awareness, inform policy decisions and advocate for their engagement.

The session will end with a group discussion on how to apply male engagement to boost ECD outcomes in the East African region. This session will benefit various implementers of ECD and gender equality programs including ECD networks, civil society, researchers, donors as well as government representatives. We also welcome the participation of men, caregivers and parents to enrich the session with their perspectives and experiences in parenting.

Mr. Fredrick Nyagah is the Executive Director of Men Engage Kenya Network (MENKEN) is a gender expert with over 25 years' experience in working with men and boys and developing capacity-building tools on the same in Eastern and South Africa region. He was recently awarded by the President of Kenya H.E Hon. William Ruto the Trailblazer award 2023 for He-for-She Award in recognition of his immense contribution through MENKEN to the promotion of women and girl's empowerment.

Dr. Katanta Lazarus Simwanza is the Country Director for Miracle Conner's –Tanzania(MC-T) and Founder of Tanzania Boys & Men's Ambassadors(TBMA). He is a decorated Development and Public Health Expert with over 20 years of experience in the field of Gender, Family Health & Parenting, Reproductive Health, Safeguarding, Child protection and Disability. He is well renown champion of using gender transformative & Men Engage approaches to designing and implement programs promoting gender equality through positive masculinities, boys and male engagement Women Empowerment & leadership interventions respectively. Recently he received Anti-GBV Champion award from UN Women, WiLDAF & UNFPA and Child protection &Safeguarding Award from UNICEF..

Venue:

Julius Nyerere International Conference Centre, Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania

Time:

Tuesday 12th March , 16:30-18:30 hours

Primary Objective:

- ✓ Provide overview on the need for male engagement in childcare.
- ✓ Share experiences of fathers' perspectives and experiences in childcare.
- ✓ Identify gaps and how to design and implement male engagement programs
- ✓ Facilitate a group discussion on how to apply male engagement to boost ECD outcomes in the East African region

Program:

Time	Session	Presenter (s)
16:30-16:35	Opening Remarks	Catherine Githae (Program Manager-MENKEN)
16:35-16:50	Introduction to MENKEN and REAL Parents Project	Mr. Fredrick Nyagah
16:50-17:45	Testimonials on REAL Parenting and Male Engagement	Mr. Fredrick Nyagah and Dr. Katanta Simwanza
17:45-18:20	Q and A	Abubakar Ali Rehani (Moderator)
18:20-18:30	Closing Remarks	Dr. Katanta Simwanza & Fredrick Nyagah