



Feminist Approaches for Working with Men or Not?

Master's Tool Will Never Dismantle Master's House.

"What does it mean when the tools of patriarchy are used to examine the fruits of that same patriarchy? It means that only the most narrow parameters of change are possible and allowable...Women of today are still being called upon to stretch across the gap of male ignorance and to educate men as to our existence and our needs. This is an old and primary tool of all oppressors to keep the oppressed occupied with the master's concerns. Now we hear that it is the task of women of Color to educate white women, in the face of tremendous resistance, as to our existence, our differences, our relative roles in our joint survival. This is a diversion of energies and tragic repetition of racist patriarchal thought...Feminists have educated themselves about such an enormous amount over the past ten years, how come you haven't also educated yourselves about Black women and the differences between us -white and Black - when it is key to our survival as a movement"

- Audre Lorde -



Our approach as black feminists from the global south on working with men and narrative on male engagement is inspired by the above-stated Audre Lorde's speech. First, we find the framing of the question itself problematic and wrong as it assumes even before we have begun our reflection that we will find ways to work with men. If that is the framing then, our response to the question “what are the feminist approaches in working with men” is saying NO, we do not have approaches for working with men. Therefore, reframing the question to “**Feminist Approaches for Working with Men or Not**”

The conversations that are prefaced with ‘What about men’ change the conversation on women and girls and take away focus. This changes the direction of the conversation and the women’s asks. It becomes a language of challenge, as to what women are not doing, we then must spend time and argue why we are not doing it. Yes, men have issues, but we won’t do it. Arguing this point often makes women feel small and gives the impression that women hate men when they do not work with them. How come men are not seen as hating women, could it be that in patriarchal systems women are seen as their property?

Men's engagement in feminist spaces is **A PUSH BACK, DEROGATION, NEUTRALIZATION, and DIVERSION** of our feminist work, progress, and focus.

Why are men suddenly interested in championing women’s and girls’ rights work?
Is it about the **OPPRESSION** women and girls are going through or the **OPPORTUNITY?**



Why can't men use the spaces that they have or hold to expand spaces for feminism, why does it have to be through joining feminist spaces?

We think the “**whataboutism**” narrative is pushed intentionally or through a lack of conceptual clarity to neutralize the efforts of women and girls in dismantling patriarchy while dividing fewer available resources into supporting men's groups and their allies who are now seen as champions of ending oppressive systems against women, girls, and children. Funding is also being used as a tool to coerce women's rights organizations to demonstrate how they are engaging men to prove themselves worthy of getting support. We think instead of conforming to this pressure, we need to provide feminists conceptual clarity and leadership in the broader women and funding landscape that **this is an old and primary tool of all oppressors to keep the oppressed occupied with the master's concerns.**

The questions on “what about men?”, “what about boys?”, exist because of a lack of EMPATHY on girls' and women's issues, many times people who ask those questions, do so, not because they feel empathetic about issues girls and women face on daily basis, the exclusion, violence, marginalization etc., rather they do so based on the lens of discrimination. They think of discrimination whenever they see programs on girls/women



rather than feeling empathetic on issues women and girls are going through which need transformation.

There are clear incidences where “men” who claim to engage in gender equality work have been at the forefront of reproducing the same oppressive behaviours like sexual abuse, entitlements, power over, and toxic masculinity to name a few. Clearly, the engagement has been turned to be a badge of honour with no political consciousness or desire for personal transformation.

We would like to reiterate that as feminists we do not hate men, we just want to assert our position that it is not our task to educate men or expect their mercy in standing and demanding our rights, it will be a tragic diversion of energies and a tragic repetition of racist patriarchal thought. Feminists have educated themselves over the years regarding the form and changing nature of patriarchy, how come men can't also educate themselves? Feminists are expected just like women in social settings to take a motherly role and teach men how they can change their oppressive behaviours. We think this is not the job of feminists.

Understanding that some of the men also go through violence, however, their organising does not have to be through women's and girls' rights organising. They can find their own spaces to organise and design strategies for their own unique type of violence they are going through, like using the Kinshasa declaration on Positive Masculinity etc.



Not denying there are issues, then men should deal and have the time to address their issues, not to expect women/want women to do so. It's almost saying women are not taking care of men and as women you must take care of men. If men want to have their organisation, then let them do and leave women's organising for them and their self-care. The women's issues are so overwhelming and they should not be asked to do more.

The narrative on promoting gender equality has been reduced to attaining it at the permission of men without centring the question of power relations. It is almost like women and girls are socialized to believe/expect that their movements will not yield results if men will not **ALLOW** that to happen. However, the politicization of our movements actually requires us to question who holds power and to question power relations, the pattern of socialization, and interests, which for so many years have disadvantaged women and girls. We believe this is a tool that is used to silence the agency and voice of women and girls, neutralize them, and divert attention without employing power analysis tools in the whole male engagement narrative.

We need to decipher the noise from the main work, it is not the duty of women to educate men; we cannot depend on or expect women to be saved by men.

When feminists organise, they are working with women, not men. They are not doing gender. Women's organisations that do gender work with men, when dealing with women's empowerment, need to create spaces where women can be on their own as



there is an internalising of oppression. The women live unseen and unheard, this they have internalised so there is a need to unlearn within a safe space. Interestingly enough, men go for initiation in those spaces in which women are not allowed, how come no one asks these questions? Women's organising does not need to make excuses for having spaces for themselves only.

How does patriarchy look like in the frontline? There is a fear of women in leadership and empowered women. COVID had a pushback on the girl child, they were more girls that lost out and, as a result, the gains that were before were lost. We should stop lying about the realities. Yes, we want men as champions and yet they take over and try to be the head again. There is less funding for women's organising and so much more for men organising on gender. Society is anti-women; we need radical love and self-care. We need to defend women-only spaces to be able to deal with trauma and experiences that women have internalised. This is not really about spaces but more a form of self-care.

When the question 'what about men' within GBV activism is asked, this trivialises and devalues the work women are doing. This is disrespecting women and saying women should solve the problems of society. In organising with women-only spaces, it is about taking back our power. How do we keep the levelling of terrain and create space in an area where we have the influence to keep doors open to the glass ceiling?



The discourse of 'what about men' is a discourse of language and conversation rhetoric and is used to control the narrative. It is dismissive of the work women do for themselves, without learning about the work but to point out that women don't work with men, hence taking away the power from their organizing. This insinuates the language and rhetoric of control into women's lives and organising.



About INEVAWG

The International Network to End Violence against Women and Girls (INEVAWG) is a network conceptualized and formulated in South Africa by a group of women from the Global South representing five continents, and who have decades of experience of working to end violence against women and girls.

INEVAWG was founded in response to heightened global concerns about violence against women and girls, increasing levels of impunity, and poor state accountability. Prioritizing the need for and importance of working from the margins to ensure that local realities inform national, regional and global human rights and social justice approaches to end violence against women and girls, INEVAWG works in solidarity with sister activists and organisations across the world, to repoliticise analyses of, and approaches to end violence against women and girls, as well as feminist activism.

INEVAWG's vision: A world where all women and girls live without violence and enjoy equality, autonomy, freedom, and justice.

INEVAWG's mission: To end all forms of violence against all women and girls, through intersectional solidarity and feminist movement building, which disrupts and transforms structural oppressions, for the realization of women's and girls' human rights with and alongside young feminist activists to widen spaces and approaches to issues and activism will be a key approach.



INEVAWG is consciously and unapologetically created to be led by, and for, women of colour, with many members of the founding group identifying with the concept and practice of political blackness. Located in the South, INEVAWG is hosted by Masimanyane Women's Rights International, South Africa.

INEVAWG recognises that there are many existing networks and allies in those regions reflected among the membership of INEVAWG and globally. INEVAWG will work with these existing networks to build solidarity platforms around issues that focus on structural transformation and link black women's experiences of VAWG to other violent systems.

INEVAWG's approach is rooted in intersectional feminist analyses that recognizes and seeks to address violence against women and girls within the realities of patriarchy, neoliberalism, militarism, the surveillance state, corporate capture of public institutions, white supremacy, casteism, hetero-normativity, and the legacy of colonialism.

Our conceptual standing on repoliticization of violence against women and girls

Over the past decades there had been a depoliticization in making visible how violence against women had been used as a tool to exercise power to uphold male dominance, patriarchy and keep women insubordinate in all spheres of society, including social, economic, political and cultural spheres.



INEVAWG, therefore, declares that central to our movement must be the repoliticization of our work on violence against women. We define this process as follows: A political ideology and an agenda that seeks to reinvent, redefine, clarify, understand, question power, dismantle oppressive systems and structures, and reframe narratives for conceptual clarity; in the efforts to sustain, strengthen, and revitalize the movement to end violence against women and girls.

INEVAWG, hereby, resolves to take back our power, reclaim our feminist political spaces, and continuously revisit the political agenda and priorities based on a robust and collective analysis of the current political, ideological, and global context in which we have to do this work of fighting for violence against women. INEVAWG will do this in an inclusive, intergenerational, and intersectional way.