



# DISCUSSING MASCULINITY FOR IMPROVED ART ADHERENCE

Using Community  
Conversations to  
facilitate reflection  
and action



## Public Engagement Toolkit

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## INTRODUCTION

# WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS BOOKLET?

This booklet reports on the findings of a study done in Manicaland, Zimbabwe. The study looked at some of the social factors shaping access and adherence to antiretroviral therapy in rural community settings.

One key finding was that ideas of what it means to be a real man influence access and adherence to antiretroviral therapy.

The aim of this booklet is to share with community members and health staff these observations and to encourage community members and health staff to think about ways to consider and address masculinity-related barriers to antiretroviral therapy access and adherence.



# WHAT ARE COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS?

Community Conversations is a forum where community and group members can discuss and explore the tensions and challenges around a topic that marginalises a group of people – in this case: notions of manhood and its impact on men's access to HIV services – and collectively come up with suggestions and recommendations for change.

The idea behind community conversations is that they provide people with a platform to discover community strengths and weaknesses such as community assets and capabilities and unequal power relations and harmful traditional practices. Community conversations recognise that communities have capacities, knowledge and resources to make a difference.

## Community conversations can create space for:

- Listening
- Speaking
- Inclusion
- Respect for each other
- Agreement or disagreement
- Opportunities to brainstorm ideas for action



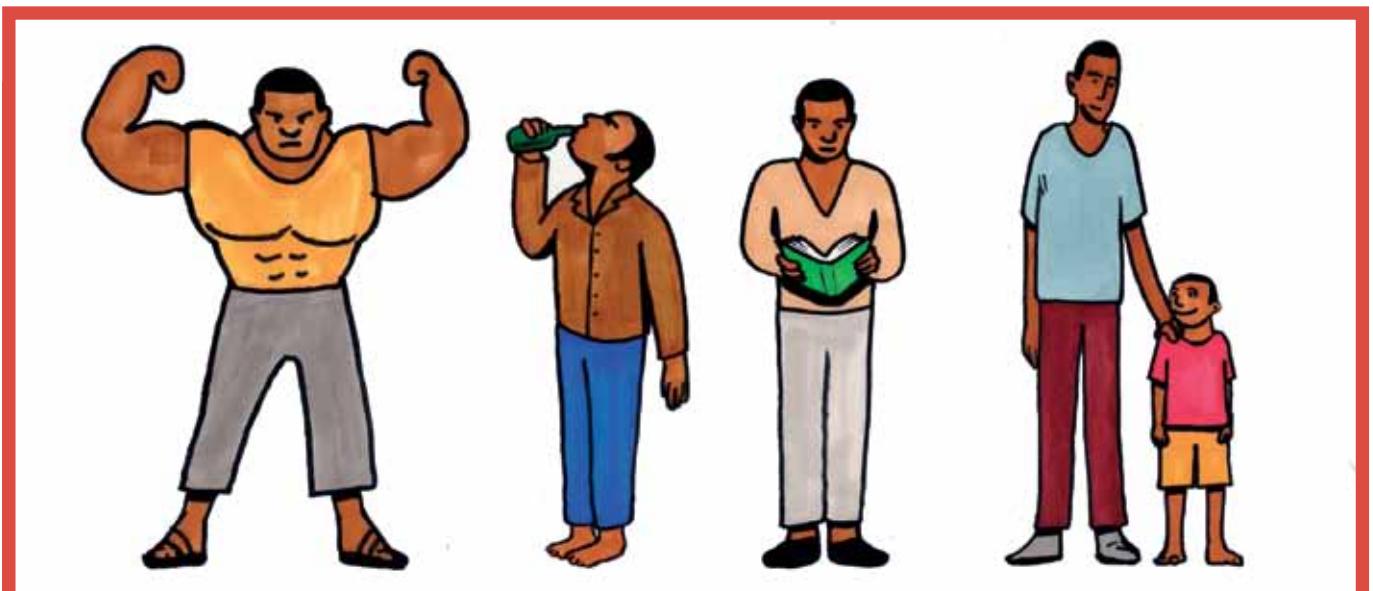
WHAT IS  
MASCULINITY?

# WHAT IS MASCULINITY?

Masculinity refers to a manly character and the way men behave in order to be a 'real man'. These are some of the ways to think about masculinity:

- Masculinity is a socially and traditionally considered characteristic of being a male
- A 'real man' is essentially different from a woman
- A 'real man' is characterized by toughness, competitiveness, strong physique, aggression and unemotionality
- Many societal structures favour men, which means men have more power and control than women
- Some of the more common forms of masculinity have a tendency to dominate men who do not have the characteristics of a 'real man' and subordinate women

However, understandings of a 'real man' change over time and are different among various societies. This shows that what it means to be a 'real man' is not fixed but instead depends on what people think at a certain time and place. This opens up for opportunities to challenge and change damaging understandings of what it means to be a 'real man'.





# LOCAL UNDERSTANDINGS OF MANHOOD AND HEALTH

As men try to live up to local understandings and expectations of what it means to be a 'real man', they behave in ways that may have a negative impact on their health and that of their family.

Men, for example, may...

- Ignore health messages
- Not be concerned about their health
- Believe they cannot get sick
- Refuse to go to the doctor
- Engage in dangerous activities that put them at risk

Socially constructed versions of manhood can therefore have a negative impact on the well-being, and indeed even the very survival of 'the real man' himself as well as his family by

- Engaging in risky behaviours (eg, unprotected sex with different partners)
- Preventing him from taking advantage of life-saving HIV services.



# QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS

## **In your community...**

- What are the differences between men and women?
- What are the characteristics of a 'real man'?
- How do these characteristics conflict with men's health seeking behaviours?
- Are there different views on what it means to be a 'real man'?

## **As a community...**

- What can you do to challenge the 'real man' stereotype that encourages men to behave in certain ways?





HOW DOES  
MASCULINITY  
STOP MEN FROM  
ACCESSING HIV  
SERVICES?

# MEN AND HIV SERVICES

In Manicaland and elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa, men are less likely to...

- Get tested for HIV
- Enroll onto an antiretroviral programme and
- Adhere to antiretroviral therapy

## Tensions and challenges

Local understandings of manhood suggest that a 'real man' is strong, in control, disease free, sexually promiscuous and the breadwinner of his family. As AIDS may prevent men from being 'real men', men often deny the presence of AIDS.

Local expressions of manhood and fear of AIDS are in conflict with what nurses expect from men with HIV and in need of antiretroviral therapy. Nurses require...

- Men to accept their vulnerability and HIV status and to be concerned about their health
- Men to regularly go to the hospital – a place women normally go to
- Men to refrain from unprotected and extra-marital sex and drinking of alcohol



# QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS

## **In your community...**

- How do men react to AIDS?
- Do men and women react differently to AIDS? Why do you think that is?
- What manly behaviours may have a negative impact on men's own health?
- Do men fear getting tested for HIV? How come?
- Do men struggle to adhere to antiretroviral therapy? How come?
- Have you seen changes to understandings of what it means to be 'a real man'? And do these changes help men adhere to antiretroviral therapy?

## **As a community...**

- What can you do to encourage men to make use of HIV services and to adhere to antiretroviral therapy?





HOW DOES  
MASCULINITY  
STOP OTHER  
FAMILY MEMBERS  
FROM ADHERING  
TO ART?



# MEN AND THEIR FAMILIES

Men's acceptance and involvement with HIV services is not only important for themselves, but also their wives and children.

Studies suggest that men's disengagement with AIDS services makes it more difficult for women to make use of HIV services, both for their own treatment and for that of their children.

## Tensions and challenges

In our study in Manicaland, we found that in the process of distancing themselves from AIDS, some men prevented their wives from adhering to antiretroviral treatment:

- Women felt unable to share their HIV status with their husbands and had to take their medicines in secret – undermining the regimen
- Women were without an important treatment partner
- Women were occasionally not given permission by their husbands to take the medicines
- Husbands occasionally stole the medicines for their own benefit



# QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS

## In your community...

- How do men impact on women's adherence to antiretroviral therapy?
- How do men impact on children's adherence to antiretroviral therapy?
- How do these interferences relate to local understandings of what it means to be a 'real man'?

## As a community...

- What can you do to encourage men to become more involved and engaged in the treatment of AIDS for infected household members?





WHAT CAN  
BE DONE TO  
ADDRESS THESE  
CHALLENGES?

# FROM REFLECTION TO ACTION

The findings presented in this booklet suggest that local understandings of manhood need to be reformulated in such a way that men can freely engage with HIV services and be supportive of family members with HIV/AIDS.

Hospitals also need to provide services that are more friendly and considerate of the fears that men have of HIV and the challenges women face at home as they try to adhere to antiretroviral treatment.

More specifically, there is a need...

- To create spaces where men can freely talk and transform their sense of manhood. This may be through local support groups
- To scale up community-outreach programmes that consult men about their fears of HIV/AIDS and develop responses accordingly
- To scale up couple's testing and encourage men to come for antenatal clinic visits
- For clinics and AIDS services that target men



# BUT WHAT CAN YOUR COMMUNITY DO?

## Developing Social Action Plans

Reflecting on what has been talked about in this session, how can you as a community respond to these tensions and challenges?

1. Brainstorm possible and actionable activities and solutions
2. Discuss the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the activities and rank them.
3. Construct an action plan for one of the above activities, detailing:
  - What is the problem your project seeks to address?
  - What is the objective of the proposed project?
  - What are the activities you plan to do?
  - Who is your target?
  - What is the location of the proposed project?
  - What is the time frame of the proposed project?
  - What resources will you draw on for your project?
  - Who will be responsible for the project?



PROBLEM	OBJECTIVE	ACTIVITIES	TARGET	LOCATION	TIME FRAME	RESOURCES	PERSONS RESPONSIBLE

