

Communications Plan for Engaging Men and Boys to End Violence Against Women and Girls In Central Asia

This communications plan was prepared for the UNFPA Country Office in the Republic of Kazakhstan under the Spotlight Initiative Regional Programme for Central Asia and Afghanistan



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Spotlight Disclaimer

The Spotlight Initiative is a global initiative of the United Nations which has received generous support from the European Union. It aims to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls. The Initiative represents an unprecedented global effort to invest in gender equality and women's empowerment as a precondition and driver for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

The Spotlight Initiative Regional Programme for Central Asia and Afghanistan fosters legal reforms, strengthening capacities of the respective institutions and women's movements, promoting gender-equitable attitudes, and enhancing systems for collecting data on violence against women and girls. The Spotlight Regional Programme partners with a broad range of actors, including civil society, donors, practitioners, academia, and media, to facilitate the elimination of harmful practices and advocate further gender transformation in the region. Find out more at www.spotlightinitiative.org

Introduction

The *Communications Plan for Engaging Men and Boys to End VAWG In Central Asia* provides recommendations on how to develop effective communications strategies and activities engaging men and boys in preventing VAWG. The *Communications Plan* is based on promising advocacy and campaign practices for engaging men and boys in gender equality, as well as findings from the *UNFPA Situational Analysis of Men and Gender Equality in Central Asia*.

This *Communications Plan* is for civil society and public organizations, development actors, activists, members of state institutions who address gender equality and gender-based violence as part of their mandate (such as Ministries of Social Development, for example), and UN agencies.

Main Goals

Evidence from the *UNFPA Situational Analysis of Men and Gender Equality in the Central Asia Region* shows that, at the institutional level, more work needs to be done to demonstrate how men's engagement can help governments and other institutions achieve the goals set out in their national action plans and policies, while at the community, relationship, and individual levels, evidence shows that men's and women's attitudes, perceptions, and practices, though changing, are often gender-inequitable and can prevent the achievement of true gender equality. Therefore, this communications plan has three overarching goals:

1. To challenge harmful gender norms and promote more positive messaging supporting gender-equitable manhood and boyhood.
2. To shift public perceptions in ways that make it clear that men and boys have an important role in ending violence against women and girls (VAWG).

3. To make visible how stereotypical portrayals of manhood also harm men and boys.

Effective communications strategies should complement existing initiatives that already work directly within communities by raising more public awareness about how men and boys can promote gender equality and end VAWG. Below is a *Theory of Change* that hypothesizes how communications strategies and activities will work to shift such gender norms and perceptions.

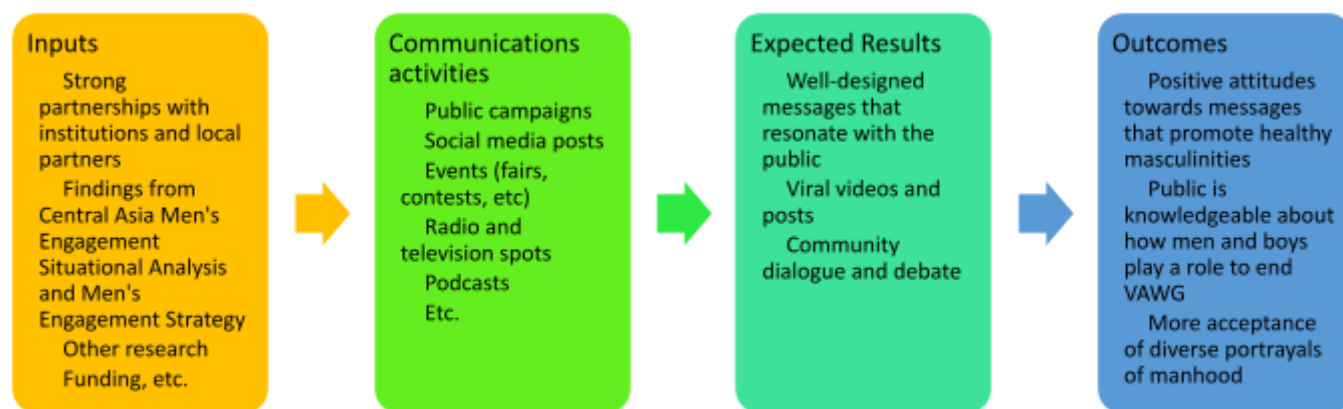


Figure 1 - Communications Theory of Change

Social and Behavior Change Communications (SBCC)

Communications, or more specifically, social and behavior change communications (SBCC), was initially developed as a strategy to influence health behaviors. SBCC strategies are not just simple messages or slogans but rather comprehensive approaches (e.g., mass media, community-level activities, peer-to-peer communication, etc.) to impact not only individuals' beliefs, attitudes, and practices but also community norms and supportive policies. These communications strategies are generally grounded in research and formed through consultative processes. SBCC can be used to make men's and boys' roles more visible in efforts to combat gender stereotypes, inequalities and the prevention of VAWG. Such approaches can be used to specifically influence broad audiences of men and boys or specific stakeholders who have the power to make institutional changes (e.g., policymakers) or create noise around a particular issue (e.g., civil society organizations and public organizations).

Conduct Research to Better Understand Audiences

Effective SBCC, including campaigns, should be based on secondary data analysis and, in some cases, may need to include primary data collection and subsequent analysis. For example, when preparing to launch the #HeForShe Central Asia Campaign, UN Women conducted research in all five Central Asian countries to better understand the context. This included:

- Conducting in-depth online and offline interviews with CSOs, experts, human rights and gender activists, documentary filmmakers who cover gender topics, business people

who practice a human-centered approach, journalists, and Central Asian men of various professions;

- Collected and analysed men's comments on high-profile YouTube videos that related to gender-based violence in Central Asia (e.g., Ala Kachuu, The Wife, Run);
- Analysed social media posts on gender-based violence and their respective comments section;
- Analysed podcasts created in Central Asia, popular fiction series, and mobile apps that cover violence-related topics (e.g., Kyrgyz series "Akyrky Sabak" and a mobile app that gamifies the topic of eliminating bride kidnapping Swallows: Spring in Bishkek), documentaries related to gender issues (e.g., Tajik animated film "Huvido's story," film "Farangis: the stigma of being beautiful").

Conducting research is essential because key messages and activities cannot be developed based on presupposed assumptions.

Types of Research Questions to Inform Communications Strategies

1. What research, publications, reports, and other data are available that give you an insight into existing knowledge, attitudes, perceptions, and practices related to gender and men's engagement?
2. What are the specific entry points for engaging men and boys in the *"A Journey to Manhood: A Regional Strategy for Engaging Men and Boys to End VAWG"* for Central Asia developed by UNFPA's Spotlight Initiative?
3. What clear patterns or stories are emerging to inform your communications activities?
4. What specific men's engagement "problems" and "opportunities" do you see emerging from the data? How can women and girls also be engaged?
5. How would challenging or promoting these perceptions, attitudes, and practices contribute to the meaningful engagement of men and boys in ending VAWG?

Establishing Partnerships

To reach a diverse audience, strategic partnerships are important. To do this, start by mapping potential partners from popular mass media outlets, civil society organizations, UN agencies, social media influencers, relevant and popular podcasts, and more. For example, there may be a civil society organisation that creates engaging videos about gender equality and who would be interested in integrating themes on men's engagement, or a potential partner that may have strong relationships with a hard-to-reach audience. Finally, there have been high levels of coordination between UNFPA's men's engagement activities and UN Women's #HeforShe Central Asia communication campaign. Continuing this collaboration and sharing recommendations for good practice in future joint UN programs would be good.

Once mass media and other strategic partnerships are established, partners should be encouraged to:

- Learn more about the Spotlight Initiative’s communications strategy in your country
- Share all campaign press releases and updates
- Take and share interviews with campaign advocates and UN representatives
- Produce and share photo and video content from campaign press conferences and events.
- Reach out to other advocates, influencers, target audiences, and more.

Target Audiences and Their Communications Needs

All developed communication strategies should influence the audiences listed in the table below. Beside each audience is a set of “Potential Communications Needs” informed by the *UNFPA Situational Analysis of Men and Gender Equality in the Central Asia Region*. In your context, it will be critical to define the target audience for the campaign further since this will also drive the key message development and selection of effective communication channels, including influencers, to reach that audience.

Audience	Potential Communications Needs
Boys and Young Men	<p>Messages that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Highlight boys’ capacity for empathy and emotional connection ✓ Challenge harmful gender stereotypes about young men and masculinities (what it means to be a man) ✓ Promote the benefits of seeking support from others ✓ Challenge online and offline bullying and gender-based violence ✓ Challenge victim blaming (e.g., how women dress can provoke sexual violence) ✓ Promote everyday actions young men and boys can take to get engaged in the prevention of VAWG ✓ Promote an understanding of gender equality as a universal human right
Fathers and Other Male Caregivers	<p>Everything above, plus messages that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Highlight the everyday fears, motivating factors, and hopes that can drive men to make a positive change in their lives and the lives of those they care about ✓ Communicate the benefits for men when they have more respectful, communicative, and loving relationships with partners

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Communicate the benefits of men's involvement in child development and family planning ✓ Promote the benefits of shared household decision-making and household/caregiving responsibilities ✓ Encourage men to take an equal role in household and caregiving responsibilities ✓ Promote the benefits of raising healthy, emotionally connected sons
Older Men (Influential Role Models)	<p>Everything above, plus messages that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Highlight the ways older men can serve as gender-equitable role models for their children and grandchildren ✓ Highlight the role men play in ending harmful traditional practices ✓ Show how gender equality does not have to be in contradiction to tradition or important family values
Girls and Younger Women	<p>Messages that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Question harmful gender stereotypes about men and masculinities (what it means to be a man) and the benefits of gender-equitable manhood ✓ Promote girls' leadership and empowerment ✓ Challenge harmful narratives of victim-blaming ✓ Promote everyday actions girls and young women can take to end VAWG
Mothers and other Female Caregivers	<p>Everything above, plus messages that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Question the unequal household and caregiving burden ✓ Promote the benefit of both women's empowerment alongside men's engagement in families ✓ Promote everyday actions women can take to encourage men's engagement in families ✓ Encourage women to raise sons and daughters with equal opportunities ✓ Promote the benefits of raising healthy, emotionally connected sons

Older Women (influential role models)	<p>Everything above, plus messages that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Promote the ways mothers-in-law and other influential female members of the family can promote gender equality at home ✓ Challenge the harmful ideas and norms that perpetuate harmful practices
Governing Institutions (e.g., Ministries and Individual Policymakers)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Encourage them to complement existing efforts of the Spotlight Initiative by highlighting how men's engagement in VAWG prevention is directly connected to their existing legislative priorities and goals ✓ Encourage them to support/participate in communications activities and initiatives engaging men and boys ✓ Provide them opportunities to share and find policy solutions to address men's engagement to end VAWG

Did you know?

In April 2022, #HeforShe Central Asia conducted an online survey reaching 999 men in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan to understand the tolerance of Central Asian men to gender inequality, discrimination and violence against women and girls, as well as to inform the overall communications strategy's key messaging pillars.

Findings included:

- 79% of men reported that being a “modern man” includes taking responsibility for the well-being of his family, while none reported that it includes helping his wife pursue her career
- Many male respondents reported that taking care of the children should be a shared responsibility and not only the burden of women. Many men rejected the term “help” when it came to taking care of the home and children and instead preferred “shared responsibility”
- In terms of who influenced how they treat the women in their lives men reported that their mother, father, grandparents, and public figures had the most influence
- One-fifth of men reported that they had witnessed their own male caregivers mistreat their mothers
- Approximately 49% of men reported that the greatest source of stress in their lives was due to political and economic instability
- 60% of men were supportive of women speaking out if they had experienced violence or discrimination
- With regard to bride kidnapping, nearly 56% of men condemned the practice, while 40% said it was inconsistent with the modern way of life

- 73% of men agreed that violence against women is an urgent problem that needs to be addressed

Important Communications Principles

It is essential that communications strategies focused on engaging men and boys in gender equality are guided by principles that challenge unequal power dynamics, create accountability to women's rights organizations and domestic violence survivors, and have a deep understanding of the unique challenges men face as gendered beings. *A Journey to Manhood: A Regional Strategy for Engaging Men and Boys in Ending VAWG in Central Asia* includes key principles that can guide your communications activities, and the Global MenCare Campaign also has a set of guiding principles to adapt (<https://men-care.org/about-mencare/guiding-principles/>).

Examples of Effective Communications Messaging

Below are examples of messages used in popular communications campaigns engaging men and boys in gender equality. However, the populations in Central Asian countries have become multipolar, so it is recommended to adapt and test such messages to different audiences in languages understandable to them through focus groups (e.g., rural men, migrant men, urban men, religious men, divorced men, fathers of children with special needs, etc.).

Engaging Men and Boys to Challenge Harmful Stereotypes

Messages should actively question what it means to be a man and a woman in society and challenge inequitable gender norms and power imbalances. The messages should speak to men's hopes and dreams for their families and relationships and how violence creates harmful environments that prevent them from achieving their future aspirations.

Example messages can be:

- *"Every day, I choose to be a loving partner."* Taglines like these speak from men's own point of view on how they live more gender-equitable lives alongside their partners.
- *"Are You Okay?"* This tagline was used in The Young Men's Initiative in the Balkans to lift the mental health stigma and to encourage young people to take charge of their mental health and seek help.

Engaging Men in Fatherhood and Caregiving

There is no country in Central Asia where men and women spend equal amounts of time on paid work, caregiving, and domestic chores. Men and women also hold highly inequitable attitudes reinforcing women's roles at home and men's roles as breadwinners and

decision-makers. Promoting messages about “equality at home” is a key way many European and Central Asian countries have aimed to engage men and boys.

- *“I like that you respect my mother. You are my father.”* Messages like those from the [Global MenCare Campaign](#) speak from a child’s point of view. They can be compelling in making the link between violence against women and violence against children.
- *“Super Dads.”* Led by UNICEF and by UNFPA in Kyrgyzstan. The main goal of this campaign was to remind everyone that one does not need to have a superpower to be a “super dad.” You need to play with your child, hug, love, protect and spend more time. Similarly, messages from a child’s perspective can articulate the importance of the father’s involvement from the beginning.
- *“Daddy, Read Me A Book.”* This tagline was an early part of the MenCare Campaign led by UNFPA in Georgia. It encourages fathers to be more involved in their children’s development and learning, a unique entry point to challenge VAWG.
- *“Father, be with me”¹* - This message challenges the phenomenon of “absent father,” which was widely encountered in Soviet times. The state considered the man/husband/father as a guide for the family while limiting opportunities for men to engage in the private sphere. Instead, the state considered men to be nothing more than fulfilling the social roles of “worker” and “defender of the Motherland.”
- *“For a father, raising a child is more meaningful and valuable than daily payment of a significant alms”* (Hadith).² In Islam, the father is the embodiment of authority and discipline. The mention of “male authority” often leads to the incorrect belief in the supremacy of a man over a woman, so messages that clarify the diverse roles of fathers in religious texts would be a way to challenge singular interpretations.
- *‘Children with special needs especially need their fathers’* – this tagline came from a story from Ruslan Kazybayev, a senior member of the Fathers’ Union in Kazakhstan. He became passionate about the issue of involved fatherhood through his own experience of having a child with special needs. When his family began communicating with other people in similar situations, he discovered how mothers of children with special needs are left alone without support.

Lessons Learned From UNFPA-Georgia On Engaging Men And Fathers In Communications Activities:

- Fatherhood is the safest (non-divisive nor controversial) topic to be used as a pathway for promoting gender equality.
- Communication on fatherhood has to be carefully tailored to avoid a negative backlash. For example, it is important not to over-exaggerate and celebrate men for doing activities that are generally considered “natural” and an everyday reality for women.

¹ The message is suggested by the national consultant based on UNFPA’s Manual for men ‘How to be conscious father and husband’ where the notion of absent father is given as a main challenge of traditional family roles. The manual is available at [here](#).

² Ibid, page. 19

- The age group of the involved men must be considered when developing communications activities. Promoting involved fatherhood is well-received and accepted among expectant or “new” fathers, but fatherhood begins during the antenatal.
- By working on fatherhood, our campaign initiatives not only encourage fathers to become allies of gender equality but also better value the unpaid care work done by women in the households.

Ending harmful practices (child marriage, bride kidnapping, and all forms of exploitation)

Promoting women’s economic empowerment is seen as an entry point to prevent harmful practices, promote women’s participation in the workplace, and engage men and boys. To this end, UNFPA in Uzbekistan will launch a new campaign featuring short films about women in diverse businesses and careers. This campaign will show the benefits of women’s economic empowerment for the whole family and future generations. UNFPA will also air short animated videos (fairytales) promoting more egalitarian family relationships with images of men as supportive husbands and caring fathers.

How to Address Gender Equality in Conservative Societies

The #HeforShe Central Asia Campaign has several themes (key messaging pillars) that will guide their communication strategies, including “Non-Critical Traditionalism.” This theme was selected as a result of research that found evidence of a return to religious and conservative values in many communities. The #HeforShe theme states the following:

“Not all of the old traditions are suitable for a modern, rapidly changing world. Some of them are not just outdated but harmful. Objectively good, beautiful traditions which help strengthen national identity should be preserved and passed down to future generations. However, those that are harmful, dividing, and undermining gender equality should be rejected. We need new inclusive, not dividing traditions to strengthen equal rights of all individuals regardless of their gender, age, physical ability, social class, and ethnicity.”

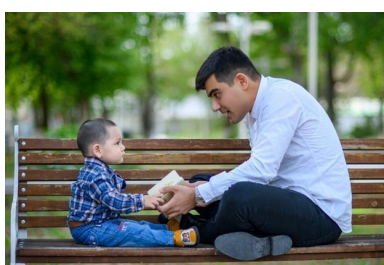
HeForShe Central Asia Campaign plans to film several one-minute videos under the singular title “Create your own traditions.” The videos will be interconnected and have a shared message “Our family is our traditions. We can create them ourselves” – slogan to be clarified, the music, editing techniques, titles, design, and dynamics all be consistent, allowing the videos to be easily identified and linked by a common theme.

In general, all communications messages should follow these guidelines:^{3,4}

- **Be credible.** A good message is clear and simple. Short, clear messages that people can understand and remember are much more effective than long or overly complicated messages.
- **Be relevant.** It starts with a person's interests – what they already know and think – and moves them to where you want them to be
- **Be compelling.** It should inspire people to act. The messages should be focused on the concrete actions men can take to be true allies of women in achieving gender equality
- **Use personal stories that touch people's emotions.**

Need an Example? Check out the video, "Being a Dad," from MenCare in Bulgaria
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jsch1SDwlso>

- **Communicate clear values and principles on gender equality.**
- **Be thought-provoking** enough to a wide range of stakeholders to promote critical analysis of inequality and initiate discussions.
- **Use high-quality images** and high-quality visualization and utilize relevant communications channels.



³ Adapted from "A Communications Guide for MenCare Partners: Male Engagement in Maternal, Newborn, and Child Health/Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights." (2015). MenCare, Promundo-US and Plan International.

⁴ Adapted from "Creating and Communicating an Effective Message:" a publication by the Center for Health and Gender Equity (CHANGE).

[http://genderhealth.org/files/uploads/change/Tools_for_Advocacy/Communicating_an_Effective_Message.pdf]

- **Do not reinforce harmful (negative) gender stereotypes.** It is often tempting to praise men and boys (e.g., “hero fathers,” “male champions”), but it is critical that such discourses do not elevate or privilege one gender group over another.
- **Do not use gender-neutral language.** Be specific about who you are targeting and why.
- **Are well coordinated with various sectors and government departments.** Such coordination should aim to achieve coordinated messaging and understanding between government, civil society, and communities on promoting gender equality and men’s engagement.

Effective Communication Dissemination Strategies

Effective dissemination strategies include:

- Websites that provide information about how your country is engaging men and boys and opportunities to join specific communication events
- Press releases that include information about important communications-related events
- Online streaming of important interviews with gender-equitable men (e.g., Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, TikTok, etc.)
- Social media posts that include highly visual content, slogans available in a variety of languages
- Public events such as fairs, contests, talks
- Radio and television spots
- Podcasts
- Brochures, pamphlets, and other informational materials
- Via religious centers and other faith-based institutions

Need Examples?

- In Tajikistan, mosques are important institutions for disseminating communication because they are heavily attended by young men every Friday. In these gatherings, elders will discuss different topics to help young men in daily life.
- In Turkmenistan, UNFPA launched a #ErkeklerHem-affiliated campaign called “Together With Dad,” dedicated to the International Day of the Family. This campaign was launched in bookstores. As part of the campaign, the following events were held: “Dad, Let’s Read Together”; “Dad, Let’s Talk.” (<https://turkmenistan.unfpa.org/en/men-engage>)

Indicators of Achievement

Though the Central Asia Spotlight Regional Program is not systematically analyzing and tracking the success of communication strategies across all 5 Central Asian countries, regular

assessments of communication messages, materials, and audience engagement would allow a communications team to understand their reach and impact. Most often, it may only be feasible to measure the number of people reached and the estimated number of users influenced as a result of communications activities. Qualitatively, it will also be essential to examine how your communications activities are being perceived, how they can shift and evolve to best meet your key audiences where they are, and ways to establish new partnerships, such as with prominent bloggers and influencers, to maintain ongoing campaigns and other communications activities. Establishing achievement indicators (e.g., evaluation rubrics, matrices, or key performance indicators) is preferable prior to developing the overall communication strategy because they will define what success looks like, what is feasible and measurable, and what types of resources the team will need to budget for.

Here below are some examples of indicators of achievement:

Example Indicator	Means of Verification	Timing
Presence of posted stories in the popular media and on the websites of partners and other stakeholders	Media monitoring – collecting online news mentions	Collection of news monthly
Social media impressions and engagement with your hashtag	Social media monitoring	Collection monthly
Participation in major country level theme based info-campaigns such as the 16 days of activism against GBV, International Women’s Day, Father’s Day, Mother’s Day, International Day of Women and Girls in Science, etc. (Such campaigns are usually organized both online and offline, so there is a massive engagement of local residents) These campaigns can be amplified by partnering with other international organizations who organize/participate on an annual basis.	Co-organize or take part in such campaigns in partnership with other international organizations. Plan beforehand to come up with something unique and engaging. (For instance: Dedicated Fun Runs, marches, photo contests, viral video relay races with a specific hashtag, etc.) Collect photographs from the event, register local media pickups, and measure the level of engagement via social media monitoring	Based on the date of the themed campaign

Celebrity Engagements	Quantitative indicator- the number of campaign advocates, actors, musicians, artists, athletes, etc. to be engaged in the campaign across the country/ region. This indicator could be further disaggregated by sex.	On a monthly basis, but depends on the overall communication design
Media Partnerships	Quantitative indicator - the number of “top tier media” to be approached to support the campaign	Quarterly/ semi-annually / annually, but depends on the overall communication design
Tone and engagement	Quantitative indicator - the % of the surveyed public who have a positive response to the campaign	Could be collected weekly but depends on the overall communication design

ANNEX - Potential Communication Activities

Below is a list of potential communication activities that could be adapted as part of the broader plan. Many of these activities were inspired by the forthcoming #HeforShe Communications Campaign in Central Asia:

- Social media posts such as short videos, quotes, photos on highly popular platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube
- Partnerships with bloggers and influencers who can also be campaign advocates who can share and create viral content among target audience and general public
- Encourage social media users to generate their own content such as photos and videos (e.g. photo contest)
- Special episodes on popular podcasts
- Social events such as public lectures at local universities
- Activities during the 16 Days of Activism to End Violence Against Women
- Development of “merch” such as t-shirts, stickers, water bottles
- Public community events that celebrate “Father’s Day” or “Family Days” with contests, games, music, and other fun activities that promote gender equality
- Televised media events: TV shows, news events that all promote men’s engagement
- Partnerships with journalists and newspaper media more broadly to feature articles on men and gender equality
- Partnerships with private companies to promote paid paternity leave and the benefits of involved male caregivers
- Events in local schools such as vocational schools to promote healthy boyhood
- Celebrities who are involved fathers as “faces” of the campaign
- Events in schools or public libraries that encourage fathers to read and engage with their children
- Flash mobs
- Partnerships with maternity hospitals to promote father’s engagement
- Billboards, posters, flyers in public spaces such as bus and train stops