

DISSEMINATING THE MENENGAGE APPROACH TO ADDRESS GENDER-
BASED VIOLENCE IN RWANDA:
BETWEEN (RE)POLITICIZATION OF GENDER PROGRAMS AND
MASCULINIZATION OF THE WOMEN'S AGENDA

ZÉLIE JOBERT

*PhD Candidate in Political Science. Université Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne - Centre
européen de sociologie et de science politique (CESSP)*

Abstract

Since the 2000s, there has been increased use of the MenEngage approach to address gender inequality and gender-based violence (GBV) in Rwanda. It aims to encourage men to become actively involved in the fight against gender inequalities and to make them question their place as men within a patriarchal system. This contribution intends to show that the MenEngage approach is introduced by its advocates as an attempt to (re)politicize GBV prevention programs, on the one hand by trying to take into account the importance of all the masculine norms, practices and representations that govern the mechanisms of domination of men over women; on the other hand, by trying to mobilize men to play a role in the movement for gender equality. However, this approach can raise criticisms, and even competitive relationships between actors involved in this movement, particularly those who favor accompanying and supporting women. These tensions arising from the gradual expansion of the MenEngage approach in Rwanda relate to the increasing space given to men - practitioners or beneficiaries - within a space initially devoted to the cause of women.

Keywords: *MenEngage Approach, Masculinities, NGOs*

INTRODUCTION

Since the early 2000s, the MenEngage approach has been increasingly used to address gender-based inequalities and violence in Rwanda. While this fight was previously led mainly by women's organizations supporting and defending women's rights, over the past fifteen years,



organizations founded and led by men, whose programs are aimed at men, have emerged⁴⁷. These non-governmental organizations (NGOs) promote the MenEngage approach, which consists of encouraging a male audience to support gender equality and deconstruct their representations and behaviors in order to embody a so-called « positive masculinity ». In their implementation, these programs combine awareness-rising campaigns, educational sessions on gender relations and male domination, and training sessions on male practices and behavioral changes. The Rwandan NGOs that promote the MenEngage approach have received significant support from government institutions⁴⁸, which have increased their support for their programs and adopted their lexicon. At the same time, governmental institutions seem to participate to a form of « state relief » (*décharge de l'État*)⁴⁹ to these organizations regarding gender policies. This growing support and institutionalization of the MenEngage approach is leading to a shift in the « space for women's cause »⁵⁰ (*espace de la cause des femmes*). The development of the MenEngage approach, carried out mainly by men and targeting men, has thus led to a form of masculinization of programs to address gender inequalities. This masculinization of the women's agenda is subject to numerous criticisms. Whether it is the capture of material and financial resources allocated by donors by men for men, discursive strategies to encourage the mobilization of men centered on a rhetoric of the costs of masculinity, an over-valorization of male figures considered « positive », or the investment of social configurations characteristic of a patriarchal system to facilitate the implementation of certain programs; certain aspects of the MenEngage approach may constitute pitfalls in a project that claims to eradicate gender inequalities.

However, the targeting of men as beneficiaries of gender and development programs, as well as male involvement in the fight for gender equality, are core arguments of the advocates for MenEngage approach. Thus, it is conceived as a way to overcome the criticism of NGOs as being too depoliticizing. This article aims to interrogate this ambivalence, this paradox, in the MenEngage programs implemented in Rwanda. How can we explain the fact that the fight against male domination produces a masculinization of the movement against gender inequalities? And what are the effects of a struggle against male domination that is based on male involvement in it? This contribution intends to study the way in which the advocates of this approach try to legitimize their action. This attempt at legitimization is based in particular on the assertion that they repoliticize the treatment of gender issues by placing male domination as the main target of their action. The notion of politicization here refers, on the one hand, to the process of designating the absence of men as part of the movement for gender equality as a problem that institutions and organisations must address. Accordingly, the promoters of the

⁴⁷ Carlson, K. & Randell, S. « Gender and development : Working with men for gender equality in Rwanda ». *Agenda*. 27(1), 2013, pp. 114–125.

⁴⁸ Debusscher, Petra, Ansoms, An. « Gender Equality Policies in Rwanda: Public Relations or Real Transformations ? ». *Development and Change*. The Hague : Institute of Social Studies, 2013

⁴⁹ Hibou Béatrice. «Retrait ou redéploiement de l'État ? », *Critique internationale*, 1, 1998, p. 151-168.

⁵⁰ Laure Bereni. « Penser la transversalité des mobilisations féministes : l'espace de la cause des femmes ». Christine Bard. *Les féministes de la 2ème vague*, Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2012, pp.27-41.

MenEngage approach are willing to change the routine, rules and norms underlying gender policies. On the other hand, the notion of politicization refers to the desire to take into account and objectify the power relations that govern gender relations and male domination. Therefore, the framing proposed by the promoters of the MenEngage approach, which identifies male participation and the transformation of masculine norms as the solution to the public problem of gender inequality, would underpin an examination of the root-causes of women's oppression and exploitation. Nevertheless, this masculinization of the women's agenda could participate in the maintenance of a balance of power where men are in a dominant position. To a certain extent, using the MenEngage approach is not just a method to address effectively gender issues, but can be seen as a strategy for accumulating the resources needed to access to privileged positions within the social space of the fight against gender inequality.

This article focuses on the practitioners who hold positions of responsibility within these local NGOs, in order to examine the way in which this approach is discussed. The analysis presented in this article is based on a qualitative ethnographic study currently being carried out for a political science PhD dissertation. As part of this study, twenty-five interviews were conducted with various practitioners, founders, executives, programme managers and programme officers from NGOs and programmes using the MenEngage approach. The survey protocol also involved participant observation of training sessions for the programmes in question, as well as preparatory meetings. Finally, the qualitative material collected using the ethnographic method is cross-referenced with the analysis of a body of documentation drawn from the grey literature produced by the NGOs studied, their partners and Rwandan government institutions involved in the formulation and implementation of gender policies.

By positioning itself in a critical perspective of gender and development programs, in which the institutionalization of feminism, the individualization of the conditions of female emancipation and the disinterestedness of social relations between the sexes would have failed to effectively subvert the gender order, the MenEngage approach claims a project of politicization of the fight against gender inequalities. The following paragraphs will focus on the tensions and criticisms directed to this conception and what they reveal about the actors involved in the fight against gender inequalities in Rwanda. We will see first that the involvement of men in this cause is put as a criticism of some effects of the NGOization of feminist movements, in particular the effect of depoliticization of the programs linked to the absence of consideration for the social relations between the sexes. Carried and defended by men who present themselves as "gender conscious", the MenEngage approach can nevertheless be seen as a way for men to access and to maintain within the space of the women's cause.

BEWARE OF BLIND SPOTS. A CRITICAL APPROACH TO GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

The positive reception of the MenEngage approach in Rwanda has been facilitated by a context of a proliferation of NGOs at the international level, promoting a shared agenda that addresses gender inequalities through the transformation of male behaviors. The last two decades have been characterized by the development of programs that seek to shape a counter-hegemonic

masculine agency⁵¹ and supportive practices by NGOs involved in addressing male violence⁵², HIV/AIDS, and gender inequality⁵³. The multiplication of these initiatives has notably contributed to the constitution of a transnational network, the MenEngage Alliance, bringing together NGOs, associations and United Nations agencies. This network of actors and groups of actors who promote this common approach that seeks to transform men's behaviors has helped to legitimize and institutionalize the MenEngage approach in national contexts, as was the case in Rwanda. The growth, dissemination and acceptance of the MenEngage approach should be situated in a global context of critical reflection on the Platform for Action issued by the United Nations at the end of the World Conferences on Women. To a certain extent, the initiatives led by MenEngage NGOs are part of the Gender and Development approach adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, which was held in 1995 under the aegis of the UN. This approach tends to differ from previous ones by taking into account the distribution of roles and activities of women and men in each context and in each society, in order to move towards a balance of power relations between men and women. The systematic integration of a gender perspective in development programs (gender mainstreaming) is thought to be necessary to apprehend the root cause of male domination over women. However, if their action is in line with the Beijing Conference, actors and groups of actors promoting the involvement of men in the fight against gender inequalities are committed to pointing out the unanswered questions raised by UN conferences concerning the role of men in this effort⁵⁴. For them, evacuating the male subject, both in the analyses of the mechanisms of domination of men over women, and in the implementation of tools and programs to fight against inequalities between these two groups, constitutes an impasse⁵⁵. According to this criticism, the majority of gender and development programs have failed because they do not take into account the deep-rooted structural process by which sexual difference becomes hierarchy and a source of inequality⁵⁶. It appears from this research that the advocates of the MenEngage approach in Rwanda tend to highlight the blind spots in gender policies that focus solely on aid to women, or those that promote an entrepreneurial conception of female emancipation. In interviews with program managers, they seek to legitimize their action by their ability to place the study of male domination at the heart of their approach, in order to subvert the structure of

⁵¹ Connell, Raewyn. « Hégémonie, masculinité, colonialité ». *Genre, sexualité et société*, n°13, 2015.

⁵² Chopra, Radhika. *From Violence to Supportive Practice : Family, Gender and Masculinities in India*. New Delhi, United Nations Development Fund for Women, 2002.

⁵³ Cornwall, Andrea. « Men, masculinity and 'gender in development' ». *Gender and development*, Vol. 5, 1997, 105 pp. 8-1.

⁵⁴ MenEngage Alliance, « Language from the Beijing Platform for Action and UN CSW agreed conclusions (1995-2017) on the roles of men and boys in achieving gender equality », April 2017.

⁵⁵ Cornwall, Andrea. « Men, Masculinity and 'Gender in Development.' » *Gender and Development*, vol. 5, no. 2, 1997, p. 8–13.

⁵⁶ Cornwall, Andrea. « Taking off International Development's Straightjacket of Gender », *The Brown Journal of World Affairs*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (Fall/Winter 2014), pp. 127- 139

gender relations in society. By pointing to examples of programs run by established women's NGOs or associations in the country, MenEngage program leaders highlight the practical and theoretical failures of programs aimed at female empowerment.

« There was a project that was implemented by [name of NGO]⁵⁷, which aimed at the economic strengthening of women [...]. But the problem was that there were no results. Because the money that these women earned... At the end of the day, it was the husbands who collected it and spent it. And since nothing was explained to them, they didn't like it. That's why we came here to work on the commitment of men for the economic strengthening of women »⁵⁸.

This excerpt illustrates how the shortcomings of women's emancipation programs - which have been highlighted in various studies⁵⁹ - are being pushed aside by those who promote the idea of male integration. At the heart of the MenEngage approach is a criticism of the shift from "acting on gender" to "acting for women". Thus, the claimed objective of NGO leaders is to get out of a sclerotic situation, where women are subjected to male domination, do not benefit from the effects of the programs from which they should benefit, and where men are neither considered as a target audience, nor held accountable for their role in the perpetuation of hierarchical gender relations. To overcome these pitfalls, the solution would therefore be to deconstruct and transform male behaviors and representations, and to engage men in the cause of women.

⁵⁷ For the sake of anonymity, we do not mention here the names of the interviewees or the names of the NGOs studied.

⁵⁸ Excerpt from an interview with a MenEngage NGO Head of programs, February 2020. Translated from French.

⁵⁹ For a case study of the contrasting effects of empowerment, see:

Verschuur, Christine. "L'« empowerment », des approches contrastées ; études de cas en Amérique latine", in Christine Verschuur et Fenneke Reysoo, *Genre, pouvoirs et justice sociale, Cahiers Genre et Développement*, n°4, Genève, Paris : EFI/AFED, L'Harmattan, 2003, pp. 235-250

On the challenges and difficulties of defining and measuring empowerment, see:

Kabeer, Naila. "Réflexions sur la mesure de l'« empowerment » des femmes", in Christine Verschuur et Fenneke Reysoo, *Genre, pouvoirs et justice sociale, Cahiers Genre et Développement*, n°4, Genève, Paris : EFI/AFED, L'Harmattan, 2003, pp. 253-274,

On the idea that empowerment programme have contributed to formalizing some forms of exploitation of women's labour , and thus have failed to reduce gender and class inequalities, see : Destremau, Blandine. « 9. Au four, au moulin... et à l'empowerment. La triple captation et l'exploitation du travail des femmes dans le développement », Margaret Maruani éd., *Travail et genre dans le monde. L'état des savoirs*. La Découverte, 2013, pp. 89-97.

In the Rwandan context, the dissemination and circulation of the MenEngage approach, as well as the desire to "raise men's awareness," cannot be analyzed separately from the trajectories and sociological profiles of its advocates.

AN APPROACH CARRIED BY « GENDER CONSCIOUS » MEN

The profile of MenEngage program managers in Rwanda provides an insight into the reasons for claiming a "gender conscious"⁶⁰ stance in order to legitimize the approach they defend.

In most interviews with male practitioners, they invoke the register of commitment by vocation, the disgust they feel towards injustice and gender-based violence. Moreover, they refer to biographical narratives describing the family as a very first place of observation of gendered socializing injunctions. According to them, these observations would have made possible the emergence of feminist convictions. Similarly, getting involved in activist circles during their university studies would have helped them become aware of the mechanisms intrinsic to the patriarchal system. The register of fatherhood or the heterosexual couple relationship is also used to confirm a desire to deconstruct their masculinity. However, it is more their trajectories and the resources they have at their disposal that seem to shed light on the one hand, on the putting forward of a "gender conscious" posture, and on the other hand, on their will to place the transformation of masculinities at the heart of the programs they defend. These founding members have all studied social sciences, and claim an activism for women's rights that often predates their professional careers. The male managers of the MenEngage NGOs interviewed for this research have studied humanities, social sciences or education and hold various higher education degrees. Their careers are systematically distinguished by their time spent at the Center for Gender Studies, a department attached to the Kigali Institute of Education. Most of them have had international work experience during their professional career. Thus, these different practitioners have a high level of higher education, characterized by a specialization in gender studies. This specialization allows them to assert their capacity to use critical and deconstructed views on gender-related issues. The high level of mobility of these actors within the world of development, at a national and/or international level, also helps to identify the features of the build-up of their professional careers, as well as the resources acquired during that time, which they use to highlight the empirical foundations of their work on masculinities. The interviews conducted with founding members of MenEngage NGOs are marked by the systematic demonstration of solid knowledge on gender that allows them to affirm that masculinities constitute the blind spot of most programs to fight gender inequalities. The specific socialization of these actors, as well as their strong endowment of capital, especially cultural capital, is critical to understanding the place they give to empirical knowledge and scientific knowledge that shed light on mechanisms of male domination, as well as how they put it into practice in program implementation.

The observational research, in particular of the "positive masculinity" training sessions offered by MenEngage programs, is useful for identifying this willingness to place social science and gender studies knowledge at the center of program implementation. These trainings do not

⁶⁰ Jaunait, Alexandre. "Investigating gender in a world of gender consciousness". *Bulletin of Sociological Methodology/Bulletin de Méthodologie Sociologique*, 153(1), 2022, p.8-45.

simply prescribe good behavior or disqualify some representations or practices deemed negative. For example, in some of the trainings spread over several weeks, the different sessions include the study of fundamental notions or concepts to highlight the relationships of domination that are at play in gender relations. For instance, these programs begin with an in-depth study of the concepts of "power," "domination," "biological sex," "gender," "masculinity" and "femininity," before moving on to "putting gender equality into practice" in subsequent sessions. In doing so, the aim is twofold: on the one hand, it raises awareness on gender inequalities among beneficiaries. On the other hand, it ensures that violent male trajectories are not individualized, by revealing the social mechanisms governing the construction of male and female roles and gender relations.

THE RISK OF MALE MONOPOLIZATION OF THE WOMEN'S CAUSE

The MenEngage approach and the high representation of men in the NGOs that promote it are being challenged. This can be seen in the competition between women's organizations and organizations that claim a male engagement approach, but also in the dilemmas of feminist activists working in MenEngage programs. Indeed, in interviews with female practitioners, they express concern about the likelihood of men dominating the women's space in Rwanda. In the 1990s, initiatives for gender equality were structured around the formation of numerous women's rights NGOs and associations, particularly in support of women survivors of the genocide against the Tutsis⁶¹. They played a leading role in the mobilization to put on the agenda the fight against gender inequalities in Rwandan public action, and subsequently made possible the systematic introduction of a gender mainstreaming approach in the content of public policies⁶². The shift towards the end of the 2000s with the development of the MenEngage approach and the arrival of NGOs fighting against gender-based violence targeting a male audience led to a form of masculinization of the women's cause. This has been facilitated by donor support for this approach, as the extract below suggests:

« For the first time now men are opening their eyes, and you see feminist men in the public sphere, like saying the right thing at the right moment. So there was also a big excitement for that. Then I think, because a lot of this work is strongly evidence based [...] they [the donors] have the evidence showing that it works. So I also understand the donors : why would you want to maybe... I mean, you would want to see something that works so if you have evidence, that for example this positive masculinity programme works, why not financing it ? So definitely that was this excitement... And then I think, on the other hand, well sometimes, you might also feel like « I don't know, like maybe okay, let's also bring the men back and occupy some space ? » There might be also a little bit of it. »⁶³

⁶¹ Mwambari, David. « Women-Led Non-Governmental Organizations and Peacebuilding in Rwanda. » *African Conflict and Peacebuilding Review*, vol. 7, no^o1, 2017, p. 66–79.

⁶² Debusscher, Petra, Ansoms, An. « Gender Equality Policies in Rwanda: Public Relations or Real Transformations ? ». *Development and Change*. The Hague : Institute of Social Studies, 2013.

⁶³ Excerpt from an interview, conducted in English, with a program manager, November 2022.

« Bring[ing] the men back » to « occupy some space » is precisely one of the major criticisms of the MenEngage approach. Some NGOs, for a long time, operated without female participation - on the part of both practitioners and beneficiaries. In addition, the dissemination and gradual adoption of this approach has changed the programs, discourses and tools used to address gender inequalities in Rwanda. This has therefore contributed to reinforcing the opposition between two approaches that lead a claimed project to fight against gender inequalities: one giving priority to accompanying and supporting women, the other to deconstructing and transforming masculine practices and representations. This tension and this criticism of the masculinization of the space of the women's cause is regularly formulated by women working in feminist organizations:

« All the men who want to be allies, feminist allies, but they're not really involving women in their programs, they are not targeting women, they are not ,you know, doing feminist analysis [...] So we have organisations headed by men, not inclusive at all in their programs, yet engaging men and boys for women rights, it's ridiculous [...] they are using that ticket to get money. You know, that has been the case in so many organisations, especially NGOs that say « we're working around empowerment of women through engaging men ». So it's really important to make sure that we are not giving the men space that they shouldn't occupy »⁶⁴

As this excerpt suggests, these programmatic tensions and disagreements occur in a context of competition for resources provided by the State and by international funders, who seem increasingly keen to value the participation of men in addressing gender inequalities. This implies a situation in which men control the resources that women need to make their claims effective,⁶⁵ and it is not only a concern that men will take over a space that is supposed to be dedicated to women's causes, but also a fear of monopolization of resources by men in charge of programs designed for men.

In fact, if the representation of men within organizations fighting against gender inequalities is questioned, this criticism is linked to a questioning of male capitalization for professional purposes.

MALE CAPITALIZATION FOR PROFESSIONAL PURPOSES

The NGOization of the fight against gender inequalities, its institutionalization as a result of the appropriation of gender issues by public authorities, as well as the multiplication of organizations and programs that these phenomena underlie, contribute to the

⁶⁴ Excerpt from an interview conducted in English with a women's organization executive, March 2020.

⁶⁵ Raewyn Connell, « Change among the Gatekeepers: Men, Masculinities, and Gender Equality in the Global Arena », *Signs*, vol. 30, n°3, 2005, p. 1801–1825.

professionalization of this cause⁶⁶. The insistence on expertise and technical skills in programs to eradicate gender-based violence within various institutions and organizations leads to a demand for trained staff and to a recruitment based on specific skills and professional experience in the world of development. Thus, the NGOs mentioned in this paper represent places where professional trajectories are built for a certain number of actors. Therefore, the dissemination and implementation of the MenEngage approach contributes in a certain way to increasing the professional career prospects of men within the gender machinery. As mentioned earlier, male MenEngage program managers tend to justify their professional situation with a narrative that invokes a sense of vocation, coupled with a strong commitment to feminist causes and social justice. However, the professionalization of the fight against gender inequality has made it a space of professional opportunities, which implies the possibility of making a career in it. The point here is not to suggest that men's commitment is self-serving, or solely motivated by financial and symbolic rewards. In fact, it is conceivable that their position articulates these different dimensions, and that their feminist commitment may even be reinforced by socialization and politicization at work, depending on the capital and resources available to the practitioners⁶⁷. As we have seen, program managers share a specific socialization, characterized by the accumulation of knowledge and technical skills that give them a position as "experts" in the fight against gender inequalities and in the implementation of development programs. Also, when they relate this expertise to the individual level and when it comes to talking about their career prospects or their professional choices, the managers interviewed anticipate possible rewards:

« The great thing about working in this field is that gender is everywhere. Gender is absolutely everywhere. So basically we're needed in a lot of areas... In education, in health, even in agriculture! And everybody needs gender, the young, the old... So it basically leads us to collaborate with a lot of people, to have working meetings with the ministries. Also participate in conferences, even workshops... And sometimes even at the international level. So that's a lot of great opportunities. »⁶⁸

The opportunities mentioned by this respondent, which can be interpreted in the sense of symbolic rewards, seem to promote inter-connection with ministry representatives and are therefore likely to constitute important professional resources, particularly in a context

⁶⁶ Jad, Islah. "L'ONGisation des mouvements de femmes arabes" in Christine Verschuur, *Genre, postcolonialisme et diversité de mouvements de femmes*, Genève, Cahiers Genre et Développement, n°7, Genève, Paris : EFI/AFED, L'Harmattan, 2010, pp. 419-433

⁶⁷ Romero, Alice. *Le travail féministe. Le militantisme au Planning familial à l'épreuve de sa professionnalisation*. Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2022.

⁶⁸ Excerpt from an interview, conducted in English, with a founder and executive director of a MenEngage NGO specializing in the education of young men, November 2021.

favorable to gender mainstreaming⁶⁹. For some managers, putting gender issues on the agenda seems to have motivated certain choices:

- So I got my bachelor's degree, and then I made the choice to do my masters in development studies, with a focus on gender.
- Why did you make that choice?
- Well... you know... I think that somehow... I wanted to find a way to work for a good cause... Actually, it could have been ecology, but at the time I thought there would be more opportunities in the gender area. »⁷⁰

In a way, gender expertise contributes to the achievement of professional goals to the construction of a "gender and development compatible" career. In a national and global context of dissemination and implementation of the MenEngage approach, this allows some men to capitalize professionally in the fight against gender inequalities.

This male professionalization of the struggle for gender equality is being questioned, in particular because of two consequences that it induces and that seem to be interconnected in the case of the MenEngage approach: on the one hand, the neutralization of the protest dimension linked to the need to operationalize the eradication of gender inequalities. And on the other hand, the invisibilization of feminist claims and practices that results from it.

APPROPRIATION AND NEUTRALIZATION OF FEMINIST KNOWLEDGE

The NGOization of the fight against gender inequalities can give rise to criticism regarding the disqualification of the protest dimension of the movement for equality, the diluted register of advocacy, or the dependence on donors⁷¹. In the case of the MenEngage approach in Rwanda, the professionalization, technicalization and masculinization of the fight against gender inequalities cannot be analyzed separately. It is precisely the intersection of these three phenomena that is at the heart of the criticism formulated by women, which concerns the appropriation of feminist knowledge and women's experiences. On the one hand, the need to operationalize the eradication of inequalities between men and women, as with any gender and development program, implies certain choices of tools and notions. These choices would be motivated by a willingness to produce consensus. This need for consensus covers the satisfaction of the expectations of donors and the strategies of adhesion of the beneficiaries to their cause. Because of these constraints, the feminist scope of the MenEngage approach, as claimed by its promoters, is watered down, if not erased. The most significant example of this

⁶⁹ Burnet, Jennie. « Gender Balance and the Meanings of Women in Governance in Post-Genocide Rwanda ». *African Affairs*, Vol. 107, N°428, 2008, p. 361-386.

⁷⁰ Excerpt from an interview with a program manager of a MenEngage NGO specializing in the prevention of gender-based violence and HIV/AIDS, September 2022. Translated from French to English.

⁷¹ Siméant, Johanna. « 6. La transnationalisation de l'action collective », Éric Agrikoliansky éd., *Penser les mouvements sociaux. Conflits sociaux et contestations dans les sociétés contemporaines*. La Découverte, 2010, pp. 121-144

is the fact that program managers have assumed that the term "feminism" is not used, which could discourage a male audience from joining the cause. The views of women activists in feminist groups, working in MenEngage programs, reveal a strong tension over the neutralization of feminist tenets:

« Those guys only focus on a MenEngage approach and I don't believe in it. To fight gender inequalities, you need to take a real feminist approach, and it is surely not by focusing on men that you could reach that. Well, actually they might argue they take a feminist approach. But those guys aren't feminist activists, so I think they don't really fight patriarchy. Women are the key. Women experience patriarchy. And all of them are men, so...»⁷²

This excerpt, which suggests that the MenEngage approach is not *really* feminist, is interesting in that it excludes MenEngage NGO practitioners from feminist activism. This identification of « real activism » seems to be part of a broader critique of the erasure of the protest dimension within programs addressing gender inequalities, which argues that the NGOization of women's issues is a hindrance to the visibility of a feminist social movement in Rwanda, as elsewhere. While the phenomenon of NGOization of feminist movements in Rwanda predates the emergence of the MenEngage approach, feminist critics point to a further invisibilization of the social movement and more contentious collective actions through the foregrounding of men committed to the cause of women. These positions, in the context of this research, are expressed by the respondents through a criticism of the valorization considered as exaggerated of male practices of support or expression of « positive masculinity ». In this sense, the use of the expression « male champions » to designate non-oppressive male behavior is often mocked by the interviewees - when they are not obviously tired of seeing men being given such labels - when it is women's mobilizations that, in their opinion, allows for a real subversion of gender norms. This tension between the NGOization of the cause and the "real activism" is perceptible in the identity tug-of-war and the socialization conflicts that some feminists working in NGO MenEngage display. Their double anchorage, within an NGO and within feminist activist groups induces difficulties of positioning, in particular in their relations with feminist circles.

ENGAGING MEN IN THE WOMEN'S CAUSE WITHOUT MAKING IT A MALE-DOMINATED AREA: A CRITICAL CHALLENGE FOR MENENGAGE NGOS

« Not taking all the spotlight is something we are now working on. And we are conscious, our executive director is conscious, I am conscious, people also, the project coordinators are conscious. But it's not an easy process at all, because whatever you do, whatever you touch... definitely I am aware that sometimes we have a lot of fundings because we are MenEngage. And, how do we redistribute them? How do we

⁷² Excerpt from an interview, conducted in English, with a program manager, February 2020.

sometimes even hold on so that the women rights, women led organizations also can... Can have them. But now it's also the fault of the donors to sometimes... So yeah, it's not easy, it's not easy at all. »⁷³

The MenEngage approach is supported and promoted by a network of actors who claim to have expertise in gender issues and who assert their possession of a certain amount of skills and capital in the area of development programs. The legitimacy of the approach they defend is based in large part on their ability to overcome the limitations of other gender and development approaches. By claiming a critical perspective, which would compensate for the theoretical and practical neglect of gender relations and gender socialization, they claim a greater capacity to place relations of domination at the heart of their program. Addressing men and changing their masculinity in order to eradicate gender inequalities is seen as a way to tackle systemic injustices « by the root », thus legitimizing the MenEngage approach and its ability to politicize its action. However, this attempt to address one of the main challenges to the NGOization of women's issues, has been challenged by the male monopolization of a space of struggle by women for women. As a result, the claim of politicization does not seem to resist the maintenance of a specific situation where NGOs participate in the institutionalization and professionalization of the women's cause while contributing to its masculinization.

Bibliography

- Bereni, Laure. « Penser la transversalité des mobilisations féministes : l'espace de la cause des femmes ». In Christine Bard. *Les féministes de la 2ème vague*, Presses universitaires de Rennes, pp.27-41, 2012.
- Burnet, Jennie. « Gender Balance and the Meanings of Women in Governance in Post-Genocide Rwanda ». *African Affairs*, Vol. 107, N°428, 2008, p. 361-386.
- Carlson, K. & Randell, S. « Gender and development : Working with men for gender equality in Rwanda ». *Agenda*. 27(1), 2013, pp. 114–125.
- Chopra, Radhika. *From Violence to Supportive Practice : Family, Gender and Masculinities in India*. New Delhi, United Nations Development Fund for Women, 2002.
- Connell, Raewyn. « Hégémonie, masculinité, colonialité ». *Genre, sexualité et société*, n°13, 2015.
- Connell, Raewyn. « Change among the Gatekeepers: Men, Masculinities, and Gender Equality in the Global Arena », *Signs*, vol. 30, n°3, 2005, p. 1801–1825.
- Cornwall, Andrea. « Taking off International Development's Straightjacket of Gender », *The Brown Journal of World Affairs*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (Fall/Winter 2014), pp. 127- 139
- Cornwall, Andrea. « Men, masculinity and 'gender in development' ». *Gender and development*, Vol. 5, 1997, 105 pp. 8-1.

⁷³ Excerpt from an interview, conducted in English, with a program manager, November 2022.

Debusscher, Petra, Ansoms, An. « Gender Equality Policies in Rwanda: Public Relations or Real Transformations? ». *Development and Change*. The Hague: Institute of Social Studies, 2013.

Destremau, Blandine. « 9. Au four, au moulin... et à l'empowerment. La triple captation et l'exploitation du travail des femmes dans le développement », Margaret Maruani éd., *Travail et genre dans le monde. L'état des savoirs*. La Découverte, 2013, pp. 89-97

Hibou, Béatrice. «Retrait ou redéploiement de l'État ? », *Critique internationale*, 1, 1998, p. 151-168.

Jad, Islah. "L'ONGisation des mouvements de femmes arabes" in Christine Verschuur, *Genre, postcolonialisme et diversité de mouvements de femmes*, Genève, Cahiers Genre et Développement, n°7, Genève, Paris : EFI/AFED, L'Harmattan, 2010, pp. 419-433

Jaunait, Alexandre. "Investigating gender in a world of gender consciousness". *Bulletin of Sociological Methodology/Bulletin de Méthodologie Sociologique*, 153(1), 2022, p.8-45.

Kabeer, Naila. "Réflexions sur la mesure de l'« empowerment » des femmes", in Christine Verschuur et Fenneke Reysoo, *Genre, pouvoirs et justice sociale*, Cahiers Genre et Développement, n°4, Genève, Paris : EFI/AFED, L'Harmattan, 2003, pp. 253-274,

Mwambari, David. « Women-Led Non-Governmental Organizations and Peacebuilding in Rwanda. » *African Conflict and Peacebuilding Review*, vol. 7, no°1, 2017, p. 66–79.

Romerio, Alice. *Le travail féministe. Le militantisme au Planning familial à l'épreuve de sa professionnalisation*. Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2022

Siméant, Johanna. « 6. La transnationalisation de l'action collective », Éric Agrikoliansky éd., *Penser les mouvements sociaux. Conflits sociaux et contestations dans les sociétés contemporaines*. La Découverte, 2010, pp. 121-144

Verschuur, Christine. "L'« empowerment », des approches contrastées ; études de cas en Amérique latine", in Christine Verschuur et Fenneke Reysoo, *Genre, pouvoirs et justice sociale*, Cahiers Genre et Développement, n°4, Genève, Paris : EFI/AFED, L'Harmattan, 2003, pp. 235-250