# = should a boy give in to tears? South Africa: the land of the children of the world absent fathers about their fathers: "He should be caring" fathers matter! Save the Children

EDITOR'S THOUGHTS

## ANGRY BOYS AND GENTLE GIRLS?

Syria, Ukraine, Gaza, South Sudan... We find ourselves in a time of human disasters. And I cannot help thinking that it is almost always men holding the guns.

on't get me wrong. I don't mean that it is men's fault, that they are born violent. The problem is of course much bigger than that. Conflicts arise in a historical context and perpetrators act in a cultural setting.

Obviously, individual perpetrators need to be accountable for their actions against girls, boys, women and men and we must continue to question the

injustices that women and girls face. But an important part of the efforts to combat the violence, is also analyzing how we construct masculinity and femininity, that is, what kind of expectations we have on the different sexes.



All over the world masculinity is associated with being tough, aggressive, strong, brave, sexually active and dominant. For women, the ideals are quite different.

The narrow gender roles become straitjackets, not only for women but also for men. They become obvious not only in conflicts, but also within the family. It is still women who take the primary responsibility for the household and children, this is the case even in a relativly gender equal country like Sweden.

In this edition of the magazine we talk about how Save the Children is working all over the world to engage boys and men in a conversation about gender roles and fatherhood, for the benefit of girls and women - and boys and men themselves.

Sophie Arnö editor in Chief

PER-ANDERS PETTERSSON is a freelance photographer who lives in South Africa. For this edition, he has documented the work with fatherhood groups in Cape Town.

- It was inspiring to meet the Lindela family and Nosicelo Mraqisa and their children. It is rare that you meet a whole family in the townships, fathers often disappear when they find out that the woman is pregnant.

#### LINDA FORSELL

is a freelance photographer based in New York with the whole world as her workplace. -Children are incredibly honest in an unexpected way. It is very rewarding to hear them talk about their fathers, many times they manage to pinpoint and exemplify difficult things. For example, how fathers' and mothers' roles traditionally differ.



JÖRGEN HILDEBRANDT is a freelance photographer. For this edition, he has been to Nepal - I have never experienced such an incredibly welcoming country. Driving in Nepal wasn't always easy, but the view was amazing. It was wonderful to see the children who are involved in the Save the Children projects, and see the progress these projects bring.



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winding road with ragged edges takes us to the remote villages beyond the mountains in Surkhet, one of Nepal's poorest and most remote areas. Once

upon a time, criminals were sent here as punishment. There are still problems with poverty, huge gender gap, tension between Hindus and Muslims and trafficking across the border to India. But it is also breathtakingly beautiful with rice paddies and blooming yellow mustard fields.

The village Chinchu is located in a broad valley.

-It's very difficult to be a girl here. There is a lot of violence and many child marriages, says Rishi Raj Kharel, an old man who is an active

member of the village child protection committee.

Save the Children has been working in the area for a long time, in partnership with a local partner.

-We began with starting groups to strengthen girls selfconfidence and raise awareness of their rights, says Laxman Belbase who's been responsible for the work.

-Then the girls suggested that young boys also should have the opportunity to reflect on how they are treated and expected to act as men. The idea was to make those who were part of the problem, part of the solution!

Uttam Sharma, 24, is chairperson of the first boy group created under the project »Allies for Change: Together against Violence & Abuse«, where the participants are now over 20 years old and still continuously working on the same issue and getting together to challenge the existing gender stereotypical norms and values.

-It was incredibly exciting when we started to think about how we as boys and young men can play a role and stand up against the violence, he says.

-I think in a completely different way now. I have realized that my language may contribute to repression. I am aware of my body language and how I express my feelings. I will definitely behave differently with my life partner once I get married than I would have done if I had not participated in the group.

He plans to support his wife in her studies and work by participating himself in the housework at home, which he has already started to engage in.

-By looking at myself and changing my behavior, I can be a role model, he states.

The girls who were in the first conversation group have started their own NGO, Safer Society, which now operates 92 children's clubs in nine villages in the area, supported by Save the Children.

When the children's club in Chinchu meet they discuss issues such as: Can a girl be loud and domineering? Can a guy be close to tears?

-In this culture being 'a real man' means being; tough, strong, brave, sexually active, dominating others, daring, always ready



Child marriage is still common in Nepal's poorest areas. Samita, 17, refused when her uncles tried to marry her off.

Now she is studying to become an engineer.

to fight, etc, says Laxman Belbase. However boys and men can also be soft, show emotions, be loving, fearful, sensitive, and cry.

- We need to bring boys and girls together, and bridge the gap that separates them. The goal for both boys and girls is to learn to listen to each other and to express their own needs and feelings, and understand each other's hopes and rights.

Different forms of gender based violence, sexual violence, masculinities, and gender equality are common topics for the discussion and reflection in the groups.

-A girl got beaten at home because she joined our group. Then we went to her home, talked to her parents and explained the purpose, so now she's allowed to come

here, says Sarasowati Regmi, 13.

Another topic is gender roles.

-Here in Nepal girls are regarded as sub-ordinate to boys and men, men's property, rather than people who can contribute, says Reejan DC, 15.

There is also a strong focus on child marriage, a common phenomenon in the area.

Samita, 17, refused when her uncles tried to marry her off. Now she is studying to become an engineer.

-It was my uncles who planned it, she says. They arranged a meeting at their house for me and the boy, who came from another village. I felt so pressured that I couldn't think clearly.

But she still said NO to the marriage.

-I thought about what I had learnt in the group about my rights. It had convinced me to stand up for myself, my rights and to think about my own needs.

-At first, my parents and uncles were really angry. But then I explained my arguments; I want to be independent and finish my studies before I get married. Mom understood. My family has dropped it now and only talk about my studies.

Samita's courage is a radical example of the change that is underway. Naturally, there are still huge challenges. Many still believe that boys and men should make all decisions. Sons are preferred, female fetuses are aborted. Girls are harassed, raped and trafficked.

-One of the challenges is that the police and other authorities in the district didn't always want to cooperate with us, says Laxman Belbase. They protect the perpetrators when they hold politically important positions in the local hierarchy. Bribes are common

But many have also begun to see how the whole family can benefit from building girls self-confidence and strength, and that boys and men stop using violence.

The elders, community leaders, attending the children's group's meeting have seen great changes; an increase in women's literacy and awareness of their rights, are two examples.

-In my day, we weren't even allowed to leave the house, says Ganga Devi Taisi, 58 years old and the children's group's treasurer.

-Now boys and girls even play football together! 🗶







#### SARASOWATI REGMI. 13

-I can do what I want, although I'm a girl. It depends entirely on one's own self-confidence what you can and what you can't do. My parents want both me and my brothers to become independent and make money so that we can look after the family.

-Through the group, I have become stronger.
Before, I didn't even dare say my own name out loud.



#### JIWAN OLI, 11

-Guys have always been forced to support the family, but women can do that too. I have started doing housework, washing dishes, washing my clothes and cooking. There is nothing that girls can do that we guys cannot.



#### REEJAN DC, 15

-Men are expected to show strength and not weakness. If you show weakness, you get harassed and teased for being feminine, a guy that »cannot even do the slightest thing.« But guys can and should cry. They cannot always be strong.

Now I even think that women can become prime ministers. And that guys can cook and take care of the household.



#### SUNITA GURUNG, 15

-I think things have changed a lot. Nowadays, girls can do the same things as boys. Except during our period. Then we have to be and sleep in a separate room, we can't be in the kitchen or in the prayer area, no one can touch us. It's not right.











Culturally, fatherhood is also often associated with violence. A father should be the superior, the one who disciplines the family by using physical punishment.

In a survey 57 percent of parents admitted to having used violence to punish their children, 37 percent of them with implements such as belts and sticks.

-When we talk to people about the harmful effects of physical punishment they listen, but they are skeptical. It's because they don't realize there are better alternatives, says Wessel van den Berg.

There are also many men who are completely absent in their children's lives. In South Africa, a staggering 64 percent of children live without their biological fathers present.

In 16 percent of these cases, the fathers are deceased. In the remaining 48 percent the fathers have left the family.

-Unfortunately the popular opinion here is that being present requires financial resources, says Wessel van den Berg. As a father you are expected to support the family. You are more or less seen as an cash machine.

The mother's family often denies the man access to his children if he hasn't paid for pregnancy, marriage and livelihood.

-We try to help all parties understand that

men too can contribute in other ways. They can be engaged, take their children to school, give them a bath, understand what is wrong... and thus also increase the equality in the relationship so that women can have more time for other things.

Many men would also like to be more involved and present in their children's lives.

In the efforts to improve fathers' contribution to care it was discovered early on that the first meeting with the child, the initial connection, is crucial for the continued involvement. Therefore, Sonke Gender Justice, among other things, try to engage young men in Fathers' Groups during their partners' pregnancies. Thulani Velebayi, is employed by Sonke and recruits participants at the local maternal health clinic in the

> township of Mfuleni, where he also lives himself. -I recruit via the women when they are there

> for a visit, he explains.

He is already seeing results of his work. The word about the Fathers' groups has spread and there is an increase in fathers who want to take part.

One Sunday, when a group gets together in an empty classroom at the local primary school, the participants are asked to reflect on long distance relationships and polygamy, which is something traditional leaders endorse.



Wessel Van den Berg

#### SURVEY WHAT HAS THE FATHERHOOD GROUP MEANT TO YOU?



AVIWE MIKE, 19 Has not become a father yet, but would like to have two to four children.

-Being part of the Fatherhood Group has strengthened my belief that it is important to be a responsible and loving father. My own father was rarely home because he worked far away. I was alone with my mother and grandmother and lacked male role models. In the township where we lived there was a lot of abuse and violence. It has made me think about life and to realize that I can choose how I want to be.



MCEBISI ELLIOT, 37 Father of a boy who is four and a airl who is ten.

-When I meet this group, I feel happiness! The bond I have with my children grows when I get the opportunity to focus on them. We talk more now. I teach them things." "Before, I was one of those who often went out and drank, even in the middle of the day. I only thought of myself, not about the kids at home. Now I just go to bars for a couple of hours, and only if my wife is at home. Because I have a family to look



#### THOZAMILE, 23 Father of a two year old son.

-Before I came here I used to always lose my airlfriends

and I did not understand why. Now I have learned to guestion who I am. I understand that I can't make decisions for others, I have to respect them." "I've also changed my view on spanking. I used to use a rod. Now I know it only makes things worse. I know it is better to talk to each other.



MASIXOLE, 24 Father of an eight months old

-Every time I come here I learn something! I grew up without my dad. It wasn't easy. When the others were called in for talks at school. they came there with their dads. I was alone. I was about to become someone who didn't care about anything. But now I've realized that I shouldn't do the same thing to my children. Since I joined the Fatherhood Group, I've come to understand that I am important.

-For me, what is interesting is whether you would allow your partner to have a second man, says Thulani, somewhat teasingly, and everyone starts laughing.

The atmosphere is intimate and familiar. The harsh attitude the guys have when they are outside this room is left outside. The conversation gets going.

What are the advantages and the disadvantages of having just one partner? The conversation starts being about the risk of HIV and AIDS, about fights and conflicts, about the feeling of being betrayed, the anxiety when you are not sure if a woman is pregnant with your own or someone else's child.

One of the guys in the group wants help with controlling his anger towards his girlfriend.

-You have to be humble and talk to her, things might not be what you think they are, says one of the other participants.

During the session there's a part included when the young fathers in a circle mark how they allocate their time. How much of their time is allocated to work? To friends? To the children? To listening to their partner and maybe do something fun together?

-Your wife doesn't only need you at night! Thulani's

kidding. And everyone starts laughing again.

As usual, the conversation also touches the participants' own upbringing. What are they repeating? What could they do differently? What do you need as a little child?

One of the guys, who recently became a father for the first

-I don't know my own dad. He didn't care about me at all. I started messing about in school and was called into meetings. I couldn't care less. I might as well just carry on. There was no one who cared. No one stood up for me. So I didn't care. And quit school.

The talks in the Fathers' group has meant a lot to him.

-I've learned that a nice man is a good man. I need to find a responsible way to relate to things around me. And I want to be there for my child.

Now, men join their partner's visits to the maternal health

-Before, even the nurses thought it was a stigma for men to come there, says Thulani. As if the clinic was only meant for pregnant women, not for the fathers to be.

-I like seeing men getting involved!

## >>TRADITIONAL GENDER ROLES WERE ABOUT TO BREAK OUR RELATIONSHIP

His attitude was macho.
She thought he should be punished.
Now they've learnt to talk to each other.
>We don't want our children to grow up in a warzone, «
says Lindela and Nosicelo Mraqisa.

LIKE MOST MEN in the township of Gugulethu, Lindela Mraqisa, 32, liked going out to party with his friends after work. The fact that he had two little children at home didn't stop him.

-I always wondered why he didn't bring me, says Nosicelo Mraqisa, 27, and looks teasingly at her husband. When I asked him to help me with the laundry he just said, what will people think? They might believe that I had bewitched him. Seriously!



Traditional gender roles and the expectations of what it means to be a man constantly challenged their relationship. There was always trouble.

-We couldn't talk about anything. Sometimes I asked myself why we married at all, she says. It felt as if we had nothing in common and I didn't know how to cope with it.

-If one of our children was crying, he would just hand it over to me. He did the dishes once a month, at most.

But after Lindela attended the Sonke Gender Justice Fathers' group, things started changing. He stayed at home more, and became more involved in the housework and with the children.

-He does everything now! He was even present when I gave birth to our youngest child, something he flatly said no to the first two times, says Nosicelo.

-Wow, that made me realize what women go through, the sacrifices they make. It's not a child's play, he says.

It was a difficult birth.

-Had he not been there encouraging me, I don't know what had happened, says Nosicelo.

Now the couple share everything, not only the care of their three children, they've also joined group counselling together - a continuation of the Fathers' group. It has led to that Nosicelo has also started to think about what kind of patterns she has brought into the relationship.

-When I grew up there was always trouble in my family. I used to witness my father abuse my mother. Both my brother and I were terrified, she says.

When she and her brother her got older her brother started to hit back. In order to protect himself and their mother. When he became

an adult, got married and had children, he continued to beat. Even Nosicelo ended up in the same kind of pattern.

-Things that I was beaten for as a child, I would beat my own children for, she says. I didn't know what to do. . . Oh, it feels like I want to kill myself when I think about it.

Through the group counselling, she has understood that it was wrong and she's received tools to do things differently. Both in regard to her children and the relationship with her husband.

-We used to never give the other time to speak. Now we practice listening to each other, to meet halfways and to involve each other in decision making.

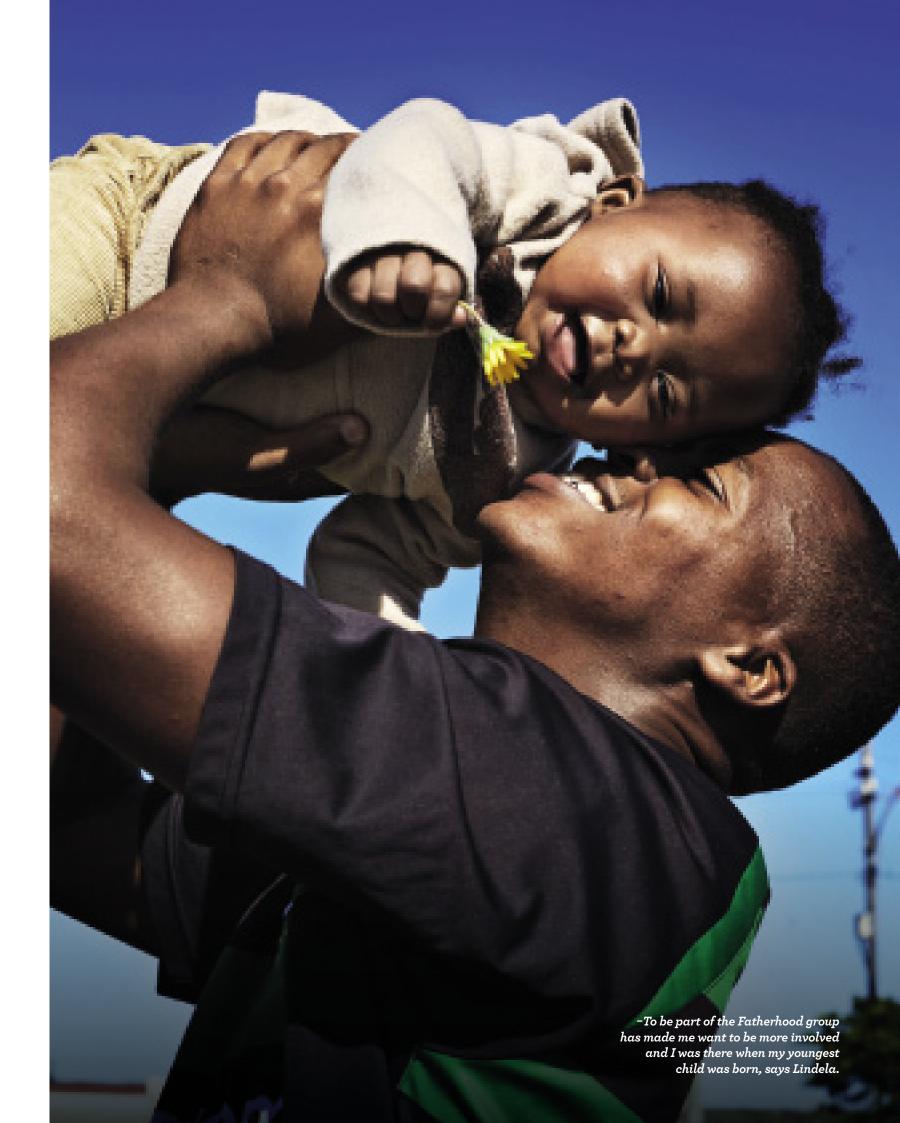
-It's like learning a whole new language to me. I grew up without that kind of communication. I couldn't even say sorry before when we had been fighting. Instead, I would be quiet for a week just to punish him.

It was downright torture, says Lindela.

Their new skills have led to fewer rows.

-We are happier! And I think that our children will benefit from everything we've worked on. We've set a good example for them

PHOTO: SOPHIE ARNÖ PHOTOGRAPHER: PER-ANDERS PETTERSSON



## MANY ARE INTERESTED IN AN ENGAGED FATHERHOOD!

»Childrens childhood cannot be a concern for women only. Fortunately, there are many men who want to make a difference!«

what role do men and fathers play in order for children to have a safe home and positive upbringing? That's what this edition of our magazine is about and it is an issue that has been attracting more and more attention around the world. Families can look very different, but something that has become very obvious is men's importance for children.

Recently, during the Commission of Status of Women (CSW) Summit at the UN, we invited people to a seminar about the role that boys and men play for women's and children's rights and gender

equality at large. The hall inside the UN building was so full that many had to sit on the floor and along the walls - and the majority of those who came were men, mainly from countries outside Europe. It was quite a sight to lead the seminar with all these men in fancy suits who edged down on the floor. Participants from Rwanda, Indonesia, South Africa and Brazil talked about how they, in different ways, have involved boys and men to be good role models and dedicated husbands and fathers and how this had changed children's opportunities in a profound way. Children's life/childhood cannot be a concern for women or mothers only. Fortunately, there are a lot of men who want to make a difference. "We don't want to be just cash machines, we want to play an important role in our children's lives, even if the family doesn't live together," said a participant.

In many parts of the world parents are forced to leave their children behind in order to get a job and many children grow up with relatives. Every morning, 61 million Chinese children wake up without their biological or immediate parents. Best case, they live with their grandparents, but sometimes they live with extended



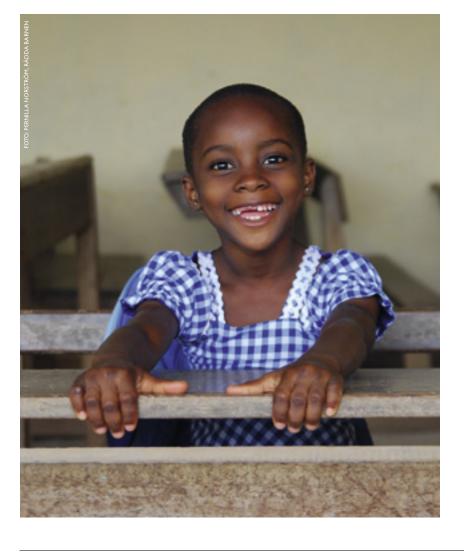
families, neighbors or with acquaintances. Children need safe, reliable adults when growing up. If not, they are always at risk of being exploited in different ways and this is something many of the parents who work far away from home are worried about. Can you be a good parent even if you don't live with your children? This is exactly what we are working with in China, not least through parental education in various forms, in order to strengthen parenting including working with corporates on ensuring a child-friendly parental policy. Children need both the parents. Even if you don't live together. And parents want to be good parents

and gain knowledge. This particular training about positive parenting for migrant parents, was developed earlier on in Moldova. It has now been adapted to China, and we are working with it through our Centre for Child Rights and Corporate Social Responsibility there.

I'm incredibly glad that my own father was very active as a parent and this in a time when it wasn't common for fathers to take care of their little newborns. He was a father who discussed all kinds of matters and issues with me and my sisters and inspired us to find out about facts. He encouraged his children and taught me not only how to find worms for angling/fishing but also how to clean a perch properly and add the right amount of salt (as much as you think and then double that).

To be confirmed and acknowledged as a child gives you a good start in life. Fathers are important in this. That is why we work with boys and men and fathers' roles as a way of ensuring children's rights. Both here at home and in the United Nations.

Elisabeth Dahlin secretary general





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## Tack alla huvudpartners för att ni hjälper oss att göra världen mer barnvänlig



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