

# Case Study: Engaging Adolescent Males in Nigeria

In Nigeria, an activist started a long-term program focusing on sexism and critical thinking skills. Boys meet for weekly discussions about such topics as gender-based oppression, sexual rights, violence, power within the family, intimate relationships, sexual health, human rights, and democracy. To help the boys develop as critical thinkers, the teachers rely heavily on Socratic dialogue and teach logic and verbal skills. Rather than target the out-of-school young people at highest risk, the program recruits participants who are in school and who are particularly bright social leaders.

The program focuses on boys ages 14–20 because its founder believes that boys in this age group are impressionable and typically “absorb the most backward social prejudices against women.” He also believes that, because boys are “the beneficiaries” of a system characterized by inequality and oppression, they cannot be reached effectively until they are at least 14 or 15—an age when they can engage in intellectual debate and see parallels between patriarchy (a social system characterized by male dominance) and other forms of oppressive power, such as the oppression of ethnic minorities and the exploitation of the poor.

The principal objective of the program is to engage adolescent males in ongoing discussion groups to increase their awareness of gender-based oppression. A second and equally important objective would be to foster participants’ skills in critical thinking and analysis, teaching them “to question information and reality before bowing before them.” In this way, boys could arrive at a new set of values on their own, internalize them, and hone their ability to analyze what they discerned of the world around them. In addition to the discussion groups, the program provides counseling services and carries out community advocacy work. (Men as Agents of Change)

## Reference

Population Council. 2003. *'My Father Didn't Think This Way': Nigerian Boys Contemplate Gender Equality*. New York: Population Council.