



Summary

Review of Iceland's Barbershop efforts

Division of Results and Evaluations, July 2021

The Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA) has actively advocated for gender equality in international fora and supported various initiatives to enhance dialogue in international venues. One of these initiatives is the Barbershop.

The aim of the Barbershop is to create a space and a process for men in senior positions of authority to reflect on and speak out on the roles that they, as men, can play in promoting gender equality. The emphasis is on mobilizing men, especially elite men, to see themselves as “part of the solution” to patriarchy. The Barbershop builds on more than two decades of international experience in targeting men and boys with specific programs to enlist their support for and involvement in promoting gender equality.

The review used a survey questionnaire and key informant interviews to answer core questions. Additionally, relevant documents, such as discussion leader summaries and commentaries from events, were analyzed.

Core Questions:

- How should Iceland “brand” and promote its efforts for engaging men and boys for reducing gender inequality?
- How accessible and appropriate are the available tools and toolkits?
- What opportunities exist to create synergies with other projects of the MFA, such as within Project Generation Equality?

A total of 10 recommendations are formally presented in the review. The recommendations are presented below, together with a short summary of the strengths and weaknesses regarding the toolbox and Barbershop events.

Response to #MeToo

The *#MeToo* revelations and protests of recent years, especially concerning the violence and harassment perpetrated by elite men against women, has heightened public concern about the persistence of gender inequalities, patriarchal masculinities, and the widespread impunity for men's violence against women.

The first Barbershop Conference was held at the UN Headquarters in New York in January 2015, with around 400 participants.

The Toolbox was launched at UN Headquarters in 2017 during the 61st session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW61) where it was officially handed over to UN Women's HeForShe team in New York.

The Icelandic Government made a Barbershop toolkit in 2017 that is now available on the [HeForShe website](#), which enables interested parties to host events based on the concept. It contains a set of activities that were developed by adapting tools from experts in working towards gender equality with men and boys.

The Toolbox is intended for use by governments, the private sector and NGOs to host Barbershop events to get men more involved in the fight for gender equality.

Since the launch of the Toolbox in 2017, the Government of Iceland has hosted 15 Barbershop events, internationally as well as within Iceland.

The review was conducted by the Icelandic UN Women National Committee, and Alan Greig, an independent consultant.



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Toolbox and Barbershop event strengths

Main Strengths

- Flexibility of the toolbox
- Makes gender issues accessible and practical
- Eye opening
- Informal educational tool
- Conversation starter
- Emphasizes personal reflection and discussion

The Toolbox has been used by different actors for a variety of diverse audiences; **its flexibility is one of its strengths**. Many mentioned that the Barbershop approach made the **conversation about gender issues accessible, practical, and flexible** and that **its main strength was to open men's eyes to the issue of gender equality without being an educational tool as such**.

Many Key Informants agreed that the Barbershop events, and **especially the small group discussions, provided an important space to start a conversation with men on**

gender inequality and to help them see, often it seemed for the first time, their role in putting an end to it.

The Toolbox is based on current best practices for community-level work with men on the links between masculinities and gender inequalities, **with an emphasis on “making it personal”** for men to increase their commitment to take action for gender equality. This approach lays great **emphasis on personal reflection and discussion**, with skilled facilitation, to 'unpack' processes of gender socialization and think critically about the nature and effects of patriarchal gender norms and how to address them.

Toolbox and Barbershop event weaknesses

Main Weaknesses

- Short duration of event
- Limited opportunity to deepen conversation
- Inadequate time to prepare and debrief
- Confusion about the Barbershop concept
- Branding inappropriate and unrepresentative
- Toolbox needs updating
- Toolbox lacks mechanism

The Interviewees noted that they were faced with several constraints. These included the typically **short duration of the event itself**; in some cases, this meant that the group discussion element was not implemented, thus **limiting the opportunities to deepen the conversation about masculinities and patriarchal ideas and practices**. Other constraints included a **lack of adequate preparation time** for Moderators and Discussion Leaders to meet beforehand to prepare for the event in detail, and the **absence of any formal mechanism or opportunity to debrief the event afterwards**.

The interviews also revealed some **confusion about the Barbershop concept itself**. Is it for men only? Is the emphasis on personal commitment or on organizational

change? With the evolution of the Barbershop concept to be a space for not only men, but also women and people of other gender identities, many expressed concerns that the branding of the events as a **“Barbershop” was no longer appropriate**. Furthermore, they noted that this branding does not represent or address women, and that, yet again, women are being asked to enter men's territory and that this was offensive to women.

the Toolbox and its resources have not been updated since the launch, although a lot has changed regarding gender in recent years. What began as an event for men only has evolved into a mixed gender space. This development was mostly welcomed, along with the fact that Barbershops include both mixed-gender and single-gender processes. However, several noted that the Toolbox remains attached to a man/woman gender binary which takes little account of diverse gender identities and expressions and fails to name the oppression of trans and non-binary people as a problem of gender injustice.

The toolbox contains no mechanisms for follow-up to assess translation of commitments into action. This absence of follow-up for attendees at Barbershop events was criticized, and



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thus the absence of any accountability for the commitments made; in many cases, it seems that next steps were not even discussed at some events.

Interviewees emphasized the **accountability of those who host and organize Barbershop events**, and that there needs to be clearer guidance and support for such accountability, and the follow-up that will be required. Follow-up meetings, guidance notes, and questionnaires were some of the ideas that were put forward. Likewise, participants need to have a clear vision from their senior management from the beginning, so they can understand clearly why they are participating.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Articulate more clearly the Barbershop Theory of Change: it is recommended that the original conception of the Barbershop (as a space and a process for men in senior positions of authority to reflect on and speak out on the roles that they, as men, could play in work for gender equality) be re-stated more clearly and consistently across all Barbershop guidelines and materials.

Recommendation 2: Amplify synergies with MFA's Gender Equality agenda: it is recommended that the Barbershop focus on mobilizing elite men in support of gender equality work in their organizations and/or sectors be framed as working in synergy with MFA's Gender Equality agenda to counter patriarchal authoritarianism and backlash.

Recommendation 3: Strengthen oversight and coordination on capacity for Barbershop events: It is recommended that a Barbershop Coordinator position, with related budget for Barbershop event oversight and coordination, be created and that a joint decision be made between MFA and UN Women Iceland as to where this Coordinator position should be located.

Recommendation 4: Develop the Toolbox as a reflexive learning process for work with elite men: it is recommended that the Toolbox be revised to include minimum standards, guidance and processes for Barbershop event documentation, participant feedback, Moderator/Discussion Leader de-briefs and post-event follow up.

Recommendation 5: Emphasize the commitment-to-action as a key component of Barbershop: it is recommended that the Toolbox be revised to include a greater emphasis on inspiring participants to make commitments to action in support of gender equality in their organizations/sectors.

Recommendation 6: Improve Accessibility: Make the Toolbox Digital First: it is recommended that the Toolbox be revised to be a Digital First product, with the content and format of its material being redesigned to take full advantage of its web-based presentation.

Recommendation 7: Support Flexibility: Provide guidance for use with different sectors: It is recommended that the Toolbox be revised to include sector-specific guidance and case examples for using the Barbershop methodology with different audiences and organizations.

Recommendation 8: Deepen Complexity: Address the diversity and complexity of gender: it is recommended that the Toolbox be revised to integrate a more complex understanding of gender diversity and complexity, and the rights and interests of LGBT+ people.

Recommendation 9: Ensure Quality: Set and support minimum standards for implementation: it is recommended that the online hosting of the Toolbox be designed in such a way that potential users must complete an online registration, which then 'unlocks' the technical tools.

Recommendation 10: Re-define Identity: Review and revise the Barbershop branding: It is recommended that any revisions of the Toolbox undertaken as a result of this review also include specialist input into re-branding the methodology in line with the findings outlined above.