



Beyond Girl-Child Empowerment: Preparing Boys for Gender-Transformative Adulthood in Africa

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ABSTRACT

For decades, gender and development interventions across Sub-Saharan Africa have rightly concentrated on dismantling systemic barriers facing girls (Grown et al., 2005; World Bank, 2012). However, as these initiatives successfully expand female agency, educational attainment, and economic participation, an urgent theoretical and practical question emerges: Are adolescent boys being socialized to thrive in the gender-transformative adulthood these advancements create? Moving beyond deficit-based narratives that frame boys as forgotten victims, this conceptual paper establishes that sustainable gender transformation requires a relational model of development (Connell, 2005; Morrell et al., 2012).

We introduce the *Boy-Child Readiness Framework for Gender-Transformative Adulthood*, a multidimensional model comprising six interdependent domains: Educational, Emotional, Relational, Economic, Civic/Social, and a catalytic core domain—Masculinity Readiness. Drawing on critical masculinity studies (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Ratele, 2013), social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978), and African gender theory (Oyěwùmí, 1997; Nnaemeka, 2004), the paper demonstrates how the collision between traditional breadwinner socialization and modern socioeconomic realities threatens social cohesion. We explicitly integrate an intersectional lens accounting for sub-regional variations, rural-urban divides, and informal economy dynamics, while detailing policy mechanisms to navigate resistance from traditional and faith institutions. Finally, we operationalize this framework via the *Boy-Child Readiness for Gender-Transformative Adulthood Scale (BCR-GTAS)*, a refined 24-item proposed psychometric instrument structured for future cognitive pre-testing and factor validation. By establishing that boys' development and girls' empowerment are mutually reinforcing components of structural equity, this paper provides a rigorous conceptual roadmap for researchers, educators, and policymakers across the African continent.

Systematic Literature Review Methodology

To establish a defensible research gap and ground the framework in contemporary empirical evidence, this study utilized a systematic literature search guided by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA 2020) statement (Page et al., 2021).

PRISMA 2020 FLOW DIAGRAM SUMMARY

Identification:

- Databases searched (Scopus, WoS, ERIC, JSTOR, PubMed): n = 1,620
- Grey literature repositories (UNESCO, UNICEF, WB, etc.): n = 222
- Total records identified: N = 1,842



Screening:	
• Duplicates removed: n = 412	
• Records screened by title/abstract: n = 1,430	
• Records excluded (irrelevant focus/population): n = 1,215	
Eligibility:	
• Full-text reports assessed for eligibility: n = 215	
• Full-text reports excluded with reasons: n = 167	
- Non-SSA geographic focus (n = 62)	
- Focus on adult male samples without youth socialization (n = 58)	
- Purely technical/vocational without gender lens (n = 47)	
Inclusion:	
• Total synthesis sample included in conceptual synthesis: n = 48	

Search Strategy & Information Sources

A comprehensive search was conducted across five academic databases: Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, JSTOR, and PubMed; alongside specialized institutional repositories including UNESCO, UNICEF, the World Bank, MenEngage Global Alliance, and Equimundo. The search strategy targeted English- and French-language publications released between January 2020 and mid-2026 to capture recent post-pandemic structural shifts in African educational and gender landscapes.

The boolean search matrix combined three primary keyword clusters:

- **Population:** ("adolescent boys" OR "boy-child" OR "young men" OR "male youth")
- **Context:** ("Sub-Saharan Africa" OR "Africa" OR "West Africa" OR "East Africa" OR "Southern Africa")
- **Concepts:** ("masculinity" OR "gender transformation" OR "gender-responsive education" OR "socialisation" OR "disengagement" OR "waithood")

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

- *Inclusion Criteria:* (1) Peer-reviewed empirical studies, conceptual frameworks, or major policy reports published between 2020 and 2026; (2) Substantive focus on adolescent boys or young men (ages 10–24) within Sub-Saharan Africa; (3) Direct engagement with themes of education, gender socialization, health, or economic transition.
- *Exclusion Criteria:* (1) Studies focusing exclusively on adult male demographics without links to youth socialization; (2) Editorials, opinion pieces, or non-peer-reviewed commentaries lacking empirical or theoretical rigor; (3) Research focused purely on technical/vocational instruction lacking a gender analytical lens.

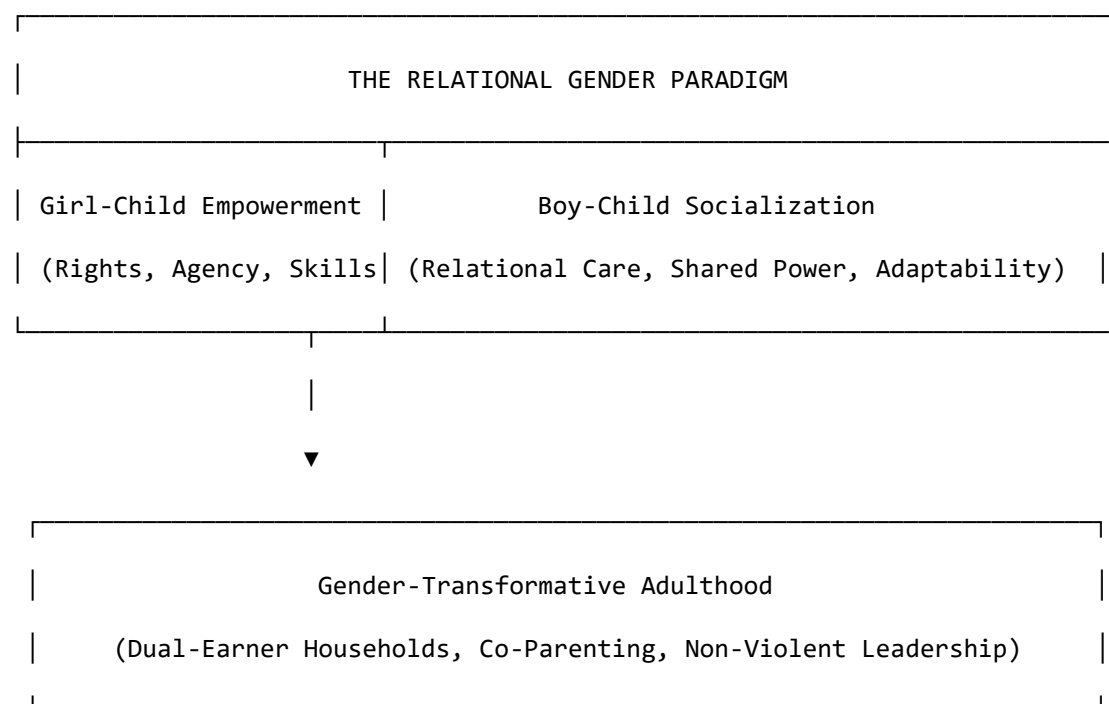


Data Extraction & Thematic Synthesis

The final synthesis sample ($n = 48$) was extracted into a matrix categorized by study design, sample demographics, geographic context, and theoretical orientation. Inductive thematic synthesis revealed three dominant literature paradigms: Instrumental Harm Reduction, Educational Access, and Economic Waithood: confirming the critical research gap that this conceptual framework addresses.

Introduction

Over the past three decades, gender and development initiatives across Sub-Saharan Africa have rightly concentrated on dismantling the structural, economic, and cultural barriers restricting girls and women (Grown et al., 2005; Unterhalter, 2007; World Bank, 2012). Through targeted investments in basic and secondary education, legislative protection against gender-based violence, and economic empowerment initiatives, female agency and public participation across the continent have expanded significantly (African Development Bank [AfDB], 2020; UN Women, 2021). Yet, as these interventions contribute to transforming women's educational attainment, labor market presence, and social leadership, a fundamental relational question remains largely unaddressed: Are adolescent boys being socialized and prepared for the changing expectations surrounding masculinity, partnership, employment, fatherhood, and citizenship?



The central premise of this paper rests on a crucial intellectual move: arguing for boy-child readiness is not a call for diminishing investment in girls, nor does it stem from an anti-feminist narrative that boys are the "new victims" of gender equity (Greig & Edström, 2012; Ratele, 2015). Rather, sustainable gender transformation is inherently relational (Connell, 2005; Morrell et al., 2012). Gender equality requires systematic transformation on both sides of the gender relationship. If educational institutions and socialization systems successfully expand the rights, capabilities, and autonomy of women without preparing boys to navigate, support, and thrive within non-patriarchal social orders, gender equality initiatives will inevitably face structural resistance, relationship instability, and heightened identity conflict (Dworkin et al., 2013; Barker et al., 2011).

The core research problem is not the complete absence of boy-focused interventions. Recent literature (2020–2026) from UNESCO (2022), UNICEF (2021), and critical masculinity scholars (Ratele, 2021; van den Berg et al., 2020) demonstrates an increasing institutional focus on male educational disengagement, dropouts, and violence prevention. The critical research gap lies in the *nature and scope* of these interventions. Current programs operate largely through instrumental and reactive frameworks: educational policies address male dropout as an administrative efficiency issue (UNESCO, 2022), while development programs treat boys



primarily as vectors of disease or potential perpetrators of violence (Jewkes et al., 2015; Heilman et al., 2017). Very few initiatives provide a constructive, prospective framework that equips boys with the emotional, relational, and psychological competencies needed to share authority, accept female leadership, manage loss of sole-provider status, and engage in co-parenting and domestic care (Barker et al., 2021; Levtoev et al., 2015).

When adolescent boys are socialized with traditional, rigid expectations of male breadwinning and household dominance, but enter an adult society characterized by high youth underemployment and rising female autonomy, an acute structural collision occurs (Honwana, 2012; Soma-Pillay et al., 2016). This paper addresses that collision by proposing a prospective, multi-dimensional conceptual framework: the **Boy-Child Readiness Framework for Gender-Transformative Adulthood**.

The framework organizes boy-child preparation across six interdependent domains:

- **Educational Readiness:** Fostering academic persistence, critical thinking, and deconstruction of gender stereotypes in learning spaces (Freire, 1970; Vygotsky, 1978).
- **Emotional Readiness:** Cultivating affective self-regulation, emotional literacy, and help-seeking behaviors over stoicism and aggression (Goleman, 1995; Miller, 1986).
- **Relational Readiness:** Building skills for power-sharing, affirmative consent, non-violent conflict resolution, and shared domestic responsibility (Bowlby, 1982; hooks, 2000; Gilligan, 1982).
- **Economic Readiness:** Developing financial literacy, entrepreneurial resilience, and a co-provider mindset suited for volatile dual-earner economies (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2000).
- **Civic and Social Readiness:** Instilling commitments to active bystander intervention, community mentorship, and structural gender equity advocacy (Biernat & Sesko, 2013; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004).
- **Masculinity Readiness (Catalytic Core):** Developing the psychological flexibility to decouple male identity and self-worth from sole economic provision and patriarchal control (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Ratele, 2013).

By shifting the academic and policy discourse from harm reduction to holistic, prospective socialization, this paper offers a defensible framework for educators, researchers, and policymakers committed to achieving sustainable gender equity across Sub-Saharan Africa.

Research Gap and Justification

While the imperative to address boys' development alongside girls' advancement is increasingly recognized, a critical synthesis of the 2020–2026 literature reveals that existing scholarly and policy discourses suffer from structural fragmentation. Current interventions targeting adolescent boys across Sub-Saharan Africa fall predominantly into three isolated paradigms, each leaving a significant theoretical and operational gap.

EXISTING INTERVENTION PARADIGMS		
Educational Access (UNESCO, World Bank)	Violence & SRHR Focus (MenEngage, Equipundo)	Labor & Waithood (Development)
Retention & completion rates in upper secondary	Harm reduction & GBV mitigation in relations	Job skills & market access for young men



THE RESEARCH GAP

A missing systemic framework that prepares boys for the relational, domestic, and psychological realities of gender-transformative adulthood

The Instrumental Reductionism of Harm-Reduction Models

The vast majority of gender-transformative initiatives engaging young African men focus almost exclusively on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), HIV prevention, and Gender-Based Violence (GBV) mitigation (Dworkin et al., 2013; Jewkes et al., 2015; Gibbs et al., 2020). Programs like MenEngage Alliance and Equimundo's Program H have made vital contributions to reducing harm (Barker et al., 2011; Promundo, 2019). However, these frameworks position boys' gender socialization instrumentally: rearing boys primarily as potential perpetrators of violence or vectors of disease, rather than as relational beings undergoing complex identity formation (Greig & Edström, 2012; Ratele, 2015). They teach boys what *not* to do (e.g., do not exercise power through violence) without providing a constructive, prospective blueprint for what *to* do when negotiating non-patriarchal domestic authority, co-parenting, or female leadership in professional settings (Levtov et al., 2015).

The Educational Access Fallacy

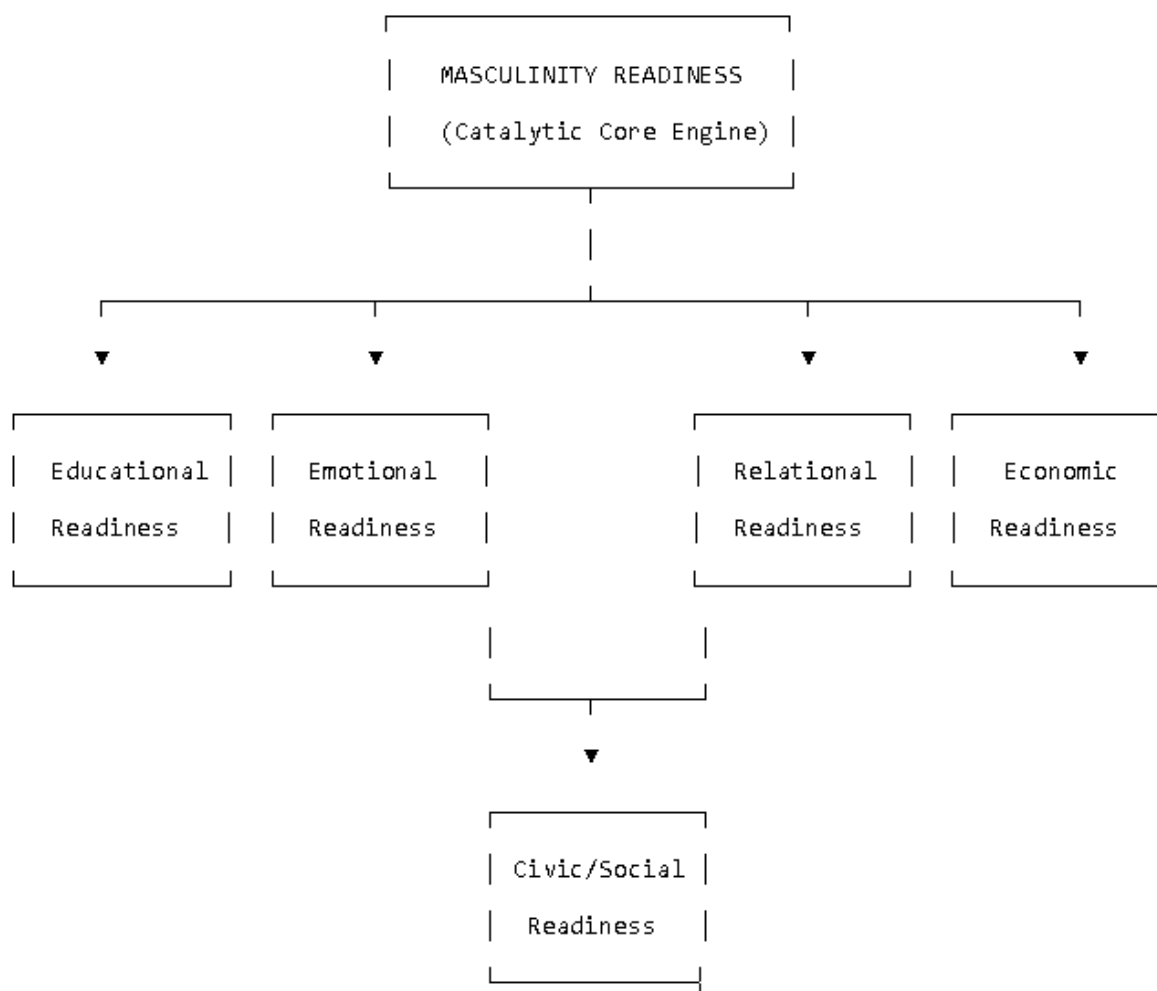
Global institutions—including UNESCO's (2022) landmark report on boys' disengagement—have documented rising rates of male grade repetition, absenteeism, and dropout in upper secondary education across parts of the continent (UNESCO, 2022; World Bank, 2021). Yet, policy responses remain largely fixated on access, retention, and vocational tracking. Current educational frameworks treat male educational disengagement as a mechanical efficiency problem rather than analyzing how traditional scripts of male breadwinning collide with structural poverty (Jha & Kelleher, 2006; Morrell et al., 2012). By failing to integrate socio-emotional learning and critical masculinity studies directly into formal curricula, educational systems keep boys in classrooms without altering the outdated gendered expectations they carry out of them.

The Economic "Waithood" Misalignment

Sociological and economic scholarship extensively maps the phenomenon of "waithood": the prolonged inability of young men to achieve traditional markers of manhood (e.g., land ownership, housing, bride price, sole breadwinning) due to persistent youth underemployment (Honwana, 2012; Sommers, 2012; Resnick & Thurlow, 2021). While these studies accurately capture male frustration and identity conflict, they treat the crisis purely as a labor market defect. Concurrently, gender transformation initiatives continue to empower young women economically (World Bank, 2012; UN Women, 2021). This creates a dangerous structural mismatch: boys are socialized for a historical economy that guaranteed male provider dominance, thrown into a volatile modern economy where they cannot provide, and placed alongside increasingly autonomous women (Ratele, 2013; van den Berg et al., 2020). Existing literature documents this collision but fails to propose educational mechanisms to decouple male identity and self-worth from economic sole-provider status prior to labor market entry.

Conceptual Architecture of the Framework

The **Boy-Child Readiness Framework for Gender-Transformative Adulthood** addresses the holistic socialization required for adolescent boys to thrive in equitable African societies. Rather than viewing male development through a deficit lens, the framework organizes competencies across six interdependent dimensions.



. Masculinity Readiness (The Catalytic Core)

- **Theoretical Foundation:** *Critical Masculinity Studies* (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) and *African Gender Theory* (Oyěwùmí, 1997; Nnaemeka, 2004; Ratele, 2013).
- **Conceptual Definition:** The cognitive and psychological capacity of a young man to deconstruct rigid patriarchal expectations, decoupling his self-worth and male identity from dominance, sole economic provision, and authority over women. It serves as the primary lens through which all other readiness dimensions are operationalized.
- **Key Indicators:**
 - **Role Flexibility:** Willingness to accept female leadership and supervision in professional, civic, and domestic settings without experiencing status anxiety or identity conflict.
 - **Rejection of Hegemonic Dominance:** Rejection of the belief that manhood is defined by physical dominance, sexual conquest, or unilateral household decision-making.
 - **Provider Flexibility:** Psychological resilience when traditional breadwinning expectations cannot be met, alongside acceptance of women as primary or co-earners.



- **Active Partnership:** Normalization of men's participation in unpaid care, domestic labor, and nurture-oriented roles as standard adult responsibilities rather than "favors."

2. Educational Readiness

- **Theoretical Foundation:** *Social Constructivism* (Vygotsky, 1978) and *Critical Pedagogy* (Freire, 1970).
- **Conceptual Definition:** The cognitive engagement, persistent learning orientation, and critical thinking required to navigate evolving knowledge economies, moving beyond the belief that schooling is merely a transactional pathway to immediate male authority.
- **Key Indicators:**
 - **Academic Persistence:** Sustained engagement and completion of secondary/tertiary education despite economic pressures or temptations toward short-term informal labor.
 - **Critical Gender Literacy:** The ability to critically analyze and deconstruct gendered stereotypes embedded in curricula, peer cultures, and media.
 - **Non-Traditional Academic Aspirations:** Willingness to pursue educational and career pathways historically categorized as non-masculine (e.g., care professions, humanities, early childhood education).
 - **Intellectual Adaptability:** Commitment to lifelong learning and skill acquisition in rapidly shifting job markets.

3. Emotional Readiness

- **Theoretical Foundation:** *Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Theory* (Goleman, 1995) and *Relational-Cultural Theory* (Miller, 1986).
- **Conceptual Definition:** The capacity for emotional self-awareness, affective expression, self-regulation, and psychological help-seeking, countering traditional masculine socialization that demands emotional stoicism and translates vulnerability into anger or aggression.
- **Key Indicators:**
 - **Emotional Literacy:** The ability to identify, name, and articulate a broad spectrum of human emotions (e.g., grief, fear, insecurity, joy) beyond anger.
 - **Help-Seeking Behavior:** Willingness to utilize mental health services, psychosocial support, or peer networks when experiencing distress, rather than resorting to substance abuse or violence.
 - **Affective Self-Regulation:** Capacity to manage frustration, conflict, and rejection without resorting to verbal, physical, or emotional hostility.
 - **Empathy & Compassion:** Demonstrated capacity to understand, validate, and respond constructively to the emotional experiences of partners, peers, and family members.

4. Relational Readiness

- **Theoretical Foundation:** *Attachment Theory* (Bowlby, 1982) and *Feminist Relational Ethics* (Gilligan, 1982; hooks, 2000).

- **Conceptual Definition:** The interpersonal skills required to establish, negotiate, and sustain non-hierarchical, mutually respectful, and non-violent relationships with partners, peers, and community members.
- **Key Indicators:**
 - **Power-Sharing & Negotiation:** Willingness to make household, financial, and personal decisions through mutual consensus rather than unilateral authority.
 - **Consent Literacy:** Deep, operational understanding of affirmative consent, bodily autonomy, and sexual rights across all relationship stages.
 - **Constructive Conflict Resolution:** Utilization of non-violent communication and problem-solving strategies during interpersonal disagreements.
 - **Shared Domestic Responsibility:** Active, equal participation in household management, cooking, cleaning, and family caregiving.

5. Economic Readiness

- **Theoretical Foundation:** *Capabilities Approach* (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2000) and *Sustainable Livelihoods Framework* (Chambers & Conway, 1992).
- **Conceptual Definition:** The financial, entrepreneurial, and professional competencies required to secure sustainable livelihoods, coupled with the adaptability to thrive in dual-earner households and volatile labor markets without relying on male economic privilege.
- **Key Indicators:**
 - **Financial Literacy:** Competency in personal budgeting, debt management, savings strategies, and understanding business fundamentals.
 - **Adaptability & Entrepreneurial Resilience:** Capacity to navigate underemployment or changing economic landscapes without internalizing failure as a loss of manhood.
 - **Co-Provider Mindset:** Comfort with entering relationships where financial contributions are shared, variable, or where the partner is the primary earner.
 - **Workplace Gender Equity:** Professional conduct that actively respects, collaborates with, and advocates for female colleagues and leaders.

6. Civic & Social Readiness

- **Theoretical Foundation:** *Critical Citizenship Education* (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004) and *Social Justice Pedagogy* (Nieto, 2000).
- **Conceptual Definition:** The moral, social, and ethical commitment to active citizenship, ethical leadership, and the active dismantling of patriarchal structures that harm women, girls, and vulnerable men in the broader community.
- **Key Indicators:**
 - **Active Bystander Intervention:** Willingness to interrupt, challenge, and report acts of gender-based violence, sexual harassment, and misogynistic discourse among male peers.



- **Community Mentorship:** Engagement in peer-to-peer mentoring that models non-violent, gender-transformative adulthood for younger boys.
- **Advocacy for Gender Equity:** Active support for policies, legislation, and community initiatives that advance women's rights and structural gender equality.
- **Ethical Leadership:** Exercise of community or professional leadership based on inclusivity, accountability, and service rather than authoritarian control.

Intersectional Analysis: Sub-Regional Variations, Rural-Urban Divides, and Informal Economies

To prevent overgeneralizing the African socioeconomic landscape, the application of the Boy-Child Readiness Framework must account for how structural intersecting identities shape boys' socialization trajectories across diverse sub-regions (Crenshaw, 1991; Ratele, 2013).

INTERSECTIONAL SOCIALIZATION MATRIX		
Context Dimension	Structural Dynamics	Socialization Impact
Rural vs. Urban Divides	Traditional lineages, land tenure, and elders vs. urban exposure	Stronger patriarchal norms in rural zones; fluid identity in cities
Informal Economy Dominance	Unregulated labor, gig work, and high job insecurity	Daily wage strain incentivizes early school exit for money
Faith & Traditional Institutions	Religious dogma and customary norms	Traditional breadwinner expectations enforced by family elders

1. Rural-Urban Divides and Customary Norms

In rural Sub-Saharan Africa, male socialization is deeply embedded in customary land tenure, agrarian livelihoods, and traditional elder governance (Nnaemeka, 2004; Morrell et al., 2012). In these settings, patriarchal authority is often reinforced by communal structures, making rigid breadwinner models and early marriage expectations more entrenched. Conversely, urban environments present adolescent boys with fluid, cosmopolitan gender roles, greater female labor force participation, and digital media exposure. However, urban boys face heightened exposure to hyper-masculine peer cultures and gang dynamics driven by urban poverty. Interventions must therefore adapt: rural programs require stronger integration with traditional land and customary leadership, whereas urban programs must target peer-group dynamics and digital literacy.

2. Informal Economies and the Livelihood Strain

Across Sub-Saharan Africa, over 80% of young workers operate in the informal economy: characterized by daily-wage labor, gig economy vulnerability, and lack of social protection (Resnick & Thurlow, 2021). In settings



where formal employment is scarce, the pressure on adolescent boys to generate immediate cash through informal avenues (e.g., *okada/boda-boda* transit driving, artisanal mining, street hawking) directly conflicts with long-term secondary educational persistence (Sommers, 2012). Economic Readiness must acknowledge these informal dynamics by emphasizing entrepreneurial resilience and financial literacy tailored for informal markets, while decoupling a boy's internal self-worth from unpredictable daily cash flow.

3. Sub-Regional Contextual Nuances

Sub-regional variations further moderate socialization pathways. In conflict-affected or post-conflict regions (e.g., parts of the Sahel, Eastern DRC, or Northern Mozambique), hyper-masculinity is often militarized, framing violence and physical force as primary survival mechanisms (Botha, 2014). In Southern Africa, high historical labor migration patterns have structurally disrupted co-residential fatherhood, requiring relational readiness interventions to focus heavily on non-co-residential caregiving and fatherhood. In West and East Africa, strong religious and customary institutions play a dominant role in framing marital roles, necessitating tailored theological and cultural dialogues.

Dimension Matrix Summary

Dimension	Primary Focus	Key Competency	Target Outcome
Masculinity (Core)	Identity & Power	Role flexibility & non-dominance	Decoupling male identity from sole authority/provision
Educational	Knowledge & Persistence	Critical gender literacy & retention	Sustained learning free from gendered peer pressures
Emotional	Internal Regulation	Affective expression & help-seeking	Replacing stoicism/aggression with psychological resilience
Relational	Interpersonal Dynamics	Shared decision-making & active caregiving	Non-hierarchical, non-violent, equitable partnerships
Economic	Livelihoods & Work	Individual financial management & adaptability	Resilience in volatile, dual-earner informal/formal economies
Civic/Social	Community & Rights	Bystander intervention & equity advocacy	Active male allyship in democratic, equitable societies

Potential Risks of Inadequate Preparation

When societal expectations of gender shift without a corresponding transformation in how adolescent boys are socialized, structural friction develops between internalized male identities and lived adult realities (Honwana, 2012; Ratele, 2015). Failing to prepare boys for gender-transformative adulthood does not merely leave them unprepared; it generates specific systemic risks across educational, interpersonal, psychological, and social domains.

SYSTEMIC RISKS OF LAG IN MALE SOCIALIZATION

Educational & Labor	Interpersonal & Family	Psychological & Societal
Academic disengagement	Intimate partner	Identity crisis & male



& early labor flight	violence (IPV) &	"waithood" frustration	
driven by provider	relationship breakdown	susceptibility to anti-	
pressures	under status threat	feminist backlash	

1. Educational Disengagement and Early Labor Flight

When boys internalize the belief that male worth is exclusively tied to immediate economic earning, formal schooling can be perceived as an inefficient path to adulthood: particularly in under-resourced settings (Jha & Kelleher, 2006; UNESCO, 2022). Pressure to generate income frequently prompts adolescent boys to abandon upper secondary education prematurely in favor of dangerous, low-skilled, or short-term informal labor (Sommers, 2012). Furthermore, classroom peer cultures often equate diligence and academic achievement with non-masculine behavior, framing compliance with school norms as submissive (Morrell et al., 2012; Frosh et al., 2002).

2. Identity Crisis and Prolonged "Waithood"

The mismatch between traditional provider expectations and modern economic realities leaves many young men in a state of extended structural suspension: frequently referred to in African youth studies as "waithood" (Honwana, 2012; Resnick & Thurlow, 2021). Young men socialized to expect automatic head-of-household status find themselves unable to achieve traditional markers of manhood (e.g., securing independent housing, paying bride price, or serving as sole provider) due to persistent youth underemployment (Sommers, 2012). When male self-worth is rigidly tied to economic control, the inability to fulfill provider roles leads to chronic internal shame, anxiety, and social marginalization, which frequently manifests as substance abuse or complete civic withdrawal (Ratele, 2013; van den Berg et al., 2020).

3. Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) and Relational Instability

The inability to adjust to women's expanding social and economic autonomy represents a key driver of domestic conflict and gender-based violence (Jewkes et al., 2015; Gibbs et al., 2020). When a male partner encounters a female partner who earns more, holds higher educational qualifications, or exercises independent decision-making, it can be interpreted as a direct status threat (Heilman et al., 2017; Dworkin et al., 2013). In the absence of relational and emotional readiness competencies, physical, verbal, or economic violence can be weaponized to re-establish dominance.

4. Resistance to Gender Equality and Ideological Extremism

Improperly socialized male youth present an ideological vulnerability that can undermine broader democratic and human rights advancements (Greig & Edström, 2012). When young men perceive gender equity initiatives as zero-sum processes that privilege women at their expense, they become vulnerable to anti-feminist rhetoric, misogynistic online cultures, or populist movements that promise a return to patriarchal order (Ratele, 2015). Furthermore, extremist groups and illicit networks often leverage traditional ideals of male honor, agency, and financial reward to recruit underemployed, identity-conflicted young men (Sommers, 2012; Botha, 2014).

Proposed Psychometric Instrument & Refined Scale Architecture

To operationalize the framework into empirical research, this section presents the refined **Boy-Child Readiness for Gender-Transformative Adulthood Scale (BCR-GTAS)**. Designed as a self-report measure for adolescent boys aged 14–19 in secondary school settings, the items have been carefully reworded to ensure strict factor separation: specifically distinguishing individual financial capabilities (Economic Readiness) from shared



domestic decision-making and non-dominance (Relational/Masculinity Readiness) to prevent cross-loading during Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) (Kline, 2016).

FIELD VALIDATION & ANALYSIS PIPELINE

1. Cognitive Pre-Test	• Qualitative cognitive interviews with n = 30-50 secondary school boys
2. Pilot Field Testing	• Pilot sample: N ≈ 800-1,200 across urban and rural secondary schools
3. Factor Validation	• Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) • Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)
4. Reliability Analysis	• Target Cronbach's Alpha ($\alpha \geq 0.70$) • Target McDonald's Omega ($\omega \geq 0.70$)

Proposed 24-Item Instrument (BCR-GTAS)

Response Format: 5-Point Likert Scale

1 = Strongly Disagree | 2 = Disagree | 3 = Neutral/Undecided | 4 = Agree | 5 = Strongly Agree

(Note: Items marked with **(R)** are reverse-scored prior to statistical aggregation.)

Dimension 1: Masculinity Readiness (Core Engine)

- MR1:** I feel comfortable having a woman as my direct supervisor or manager in a workplace.
- MR2:** A man's dignity is reduced if his female partner earns a higher income than he does. **(R)**
- MR3:** I believe a man and a woman should have equal authority when making major life decisions together.
- MR4:** A real man must always have the final say in all family matters. **(R)**

Dimension 2: Educational Readiness

- ED1:** I am committed to completing my secondary education even if my peers drop out to look for quick cash.



6. **ED2:** Certain academic subjects, like caregiving or languages, are unsuited for boys. **(R)**
7. **ED3:** I regularly question gender stereotypes that I see in textbooks, media, and my community.
8. **ED4:** School is only valuable for making me a breadwinner, not for developing my mind. **(R)**

Dimension 3: Emotional Readiness

9. **ER1:** When I feel sad, anxious, or overwhelmed, I can talk open-heartedly to someone I trust.
10. **ER2:** A man should hide his emotional distress and never cry in front of others. **(R)**
11. **ER3:** When I feel intense anger or frustration, I am able to calm down without hurting anyone or breaking things.
12. **ER4:** Asking for professional counseling or psychological help is a sign of weakness in a boy. **(R)**

Dimension 4: Relational Readiness

13. **RR1:** Domestic chores like cooking, cleaning, and caring for dependents belong equally to men and women.
14. **RR2:** If a partner expresses discomfort or says "no" to an activity, I immediately respect her choice.
15. **RR3:** A man is justified in using physical force or intimidation if his partner insults his authority. **(R)**
16. **RR4:** When disagreements happen in a relationship, they should be resolved through calm discussion rather than male demand.

Dimension 5: Economic Readiness

17. **EC1:** I know how to manage personal savings, track personal expenses, and plan an individual budget.
18. **EC2:** If formal employment is unavailable, I am confident in my ability to learn new skills and adapt to flexible work.
19. **EC3:** I would feel like a personal failure if I could not be the sole financial provider for a household. **(R)**
20. **EC4:** Men and women should receive identical pay and promotion opportunities when performing the same job.

Dimension 6: Civic & Social Readiness

21. **CS1:** If I witness male peers harassing or disrespecting a girl in school or public, I will intervene or report it.
22. **CS2:** Young men should actively support laws and community programs that promote women's leadership.
23. **CS3:** Domestic abuse happening in another family's home is a private matter that neighbors should ignore. **(R)**
24. **CS4:** I am eager to mentor younger boys on how to build healthy, non-violent relationships.



Implications for African Education Policy and Navigating Institutional Resistance

Operationalizing the Boy-Child Readiness Framework requires moving beyond ad-hoc workshops toward systemic institutional reform (UNESCO, 2022; World Bank, 2021). African ministries of education must integrate gender-transformative socialization into the structural core of national education systems while actively navigating traditional and religious resistance outside the classroom.

POLICY & GOVERNANCE IMPLEMENTATION		
Curriculum Reform	Teacher Training	Community Governance
• Embedded SEL & Life Skills syllabi	• Critical pedagogy in teacher colleges	• Institutional PTAs
• Deconstructed gender roles in humanities	• Restorative justice over corporal punishment	• Traditional elder & faith leader partnerships to prevent backlash

1. Curriculum Reform: Integrating Prospective Masculinities

Formal national curricula must shift from treating gender as a standalone topic or a female-focused supplementary subject to embedding prospective, relational gender competencies across existing subject frameworks (Unterhalter, 2007; UNESCO, 2022).

- **Socio-Emotional Learning (SEL) as a Core Subject:** Establish structured, age-appropriate SEL modules in lower and upper secondary education. Curricula should explicitly teach emotional identification, affective self-regulation, non-violent conflict resolution, and psychological help-seeking tailored to counter normative male stoicism (Goleman, 1995; Durlak et al., 2011).
- **Gender-Transformative Life Skills Education:** Redesign national Life Skills and Civic Education syllabi to include explicit instruction on non-patriarchal domestic leadership, affirmative consent, shared domestic management, co-parenting, and navigating dual-earner households (Levtov et al., 2015; Promundo, 2019).
- **Deconstructive Literacy in Humanities and Social Sciences:** Revise History, Literature, and Social Studies curricula to critically analyze traditional gender constructs, highlighting non-violent male historical figures, caring fatherhood models, and female leadership (Ratele, 2013; Nnaemeka, 2004).

2. Teacher Preparation and Pedagogical Transformation

Educators often act as unconscious custodians of traditional gender norms, reinforcing hyper-masculine peer dynamics and enforcing gendered divisions of labor within schools (Morrell et al., 2012; Bhana, 2016).

- **Pre-Service and In-Service Gender-Transformative Pedagogy:** Integrate mandatory modules on critical masculinity studies and gender-transformative pedagogy into teacher training colleges and university education departments. Educators must be trained to recognize and challenge gender bias in classroom management, discipline, and questioning techniques (Freire, 1970; Bhana, 2016).



- **Abolition of Gendered Labor and Disciplining Practices:** Establish clear policy guidelines prohibiting the assignment of caretaking tasks (e.g., sweeping, cleaning) exclusively to girls while reserving leadership or physical tasks for boys. Replace punitive, physical disciplinary measures: which reinforce the idea that authority is derived from physical dominance: with restorative justice frameworks (Morrell et al., 2012).

3. Navigating Cultural Resistance & Community-Level Buy-In

A major policy vulnerability of school-based gender reforms is the risk of cultural backlash from entrenched traditional, religious, and patriarchal institutions outside the school gate (Ratele, 2015). When school teachings directly contradict home and community socialization, adolescent boys experience severe identity dissonance.

- **Faith-Based and Traditional Elder Alliances:** Ministries of Education and civil society organizations must establish institutional dialogue channels with traditional rulers, customary chiefs, and faith leaders (Christian and Islamic). Reframing gender-transformative boy socialization through culturally resonant concepts—such as communal harmony, family peace, protection without dominance, and collective prosperity (Nnaemeka, 2004): mitigates perceptions that gender equality is an alien or destructive ideology.
- **Fathers' Associations and Intergenerational Mentorship:** Scale up community-based "Fathers' Clubs" and male mentorship networks through Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs). Engaging adult men to publicly model shared decision-making, caring fatherhood, and non-violence provides adolescent boys with visible, culturally validated adult reference points (Barker et al., 2021; van den Berg et al., 2020).

CONCLUSION

Sustainable gender transformation across Sub-Saharan Africa cannot occur in a relational vacuum. For over three decades, policy interventions have focused on dismantling the patriarchal constraints facing girls and women: a historical necessity that has produced measurable gains in female education, leadership, and economic participation (Grown et al., 2005; World Bank, 2012; UN Women, 2021). However, as women’s agency transforms contemporary African societies, failure to systematically re-socialize boys creates a structural mismatch. When adolescent boys enter adulthood carrying traditional expectations of unilateral authority and sole breadwinning into a world defined by female autonomy and volatile dual-earner economies, the result is friction: male educational disengagement, domestic instability, intimate partner violence, and ideological backlash (Honwana, 2012; Jewkes et al., 2015; Ratele, 2015).

THE FUTURE OF AFRICAN GENDER EQUITY		
Theoretical Paradigm	Structural Reform	Empirical Horizon
• Shift from harm-reduction to relational readiness	• Ministry integration of SEL, prospective curricula, & training	• Cross-national psychometric scale validation (BCR-GTAS)

This paper has argued that boy-child development and girl-child empowerment are not competing agendas, but mutually reinforcing components of structural equity. By introducing the **Boy-Child Readiness Framework for Gender-Transformative Adulthood**, we provide a prospective conceptual framework centered on six core dimensions: Educational, Emotional, Relational, Economic, Civic/Social, and a catalytic core domain—*Masculinity Readiness*. The model redefines male development from an instrumental focus on harm reduction (preventing violence and disease) toward building proactive competencies for power-sharing, caregiving, emotional resilience, and constructive citizenship.

Translating this framework into social reality requires African ministries of education to enact structural policy reforms while actively partnering with community institutions to prevent cultural backlash.

Future Research Agenda

To advance this conceptual model into empirical practice, future scholarship should prioritize four key areas:

1. **Cognitive Pre-Testing & Pilot Field Validation:** Conducting qualitative cognitive debriefing interviews ($n = 30 - 50$) followed by pilot field testing ($N = 800 - 1,200$) of the proposed *Boy-Child Readiness for Gender-Transformative Adulthood Scale (BCR-GTAS)* across diverse secondary school environments to evaluate readability, item-rest correlations, and factor structure via EFA/CFA.
2. **Cross-National Intersectional Studies:** Examining how class, religion, rurality, and informal economic dynamics mediate boys' socialization and readiness across urban, rural, and conflict-affected African sub-regions.
3. **Longitudinal Impact Tracking:** Tracking cohort interventions longitudinally to determine how high scores in adolescent *Masculinity Readiness* correlate with adult outcomes, including marital stability, domestic labor division, mental health, and career adaptability.
4. **Paternal and Community Alignment:** Evaluating the efficacy of Fathers' Clubs and traditional elder partnerships in reducing cultural backlash and aligning home socialization with gender-transformative school curricula.

Ultimately, preparing boys for gender-transformative adulthood is not a concession to patriarchy, but an indispensable investment in a peaceful, equitable, and prosperous African future.

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