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AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT**

(Panel II of the tentative programme)

WORKING WITH MEN FOR GENDER EQUALITY*

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Men's roles in the promotion of gender equality in the Asia-Pacific region

Introduction

Men's role in the achievement of gender equality is now on the international agenda. The belief that it is desirable to involve men in efforts towards gender equality is rapidly becoming institutionalised in the philosophies and programs of international organisations. The question of male involvement is now being explored in relation to such diverse fields as interpersonal violence, development, sexual and reproductive health, parenting and families, and work and economy.

How is it that men's and boys' roles in progress towards gender equality is now the subject of such attention? This is the outcome of over three decades of social change. The women's movements and feminism have offered a wide-ranging critique of the attitudes, practices and cultures among men which sustain gender inequality. There have been disruptions to and contestations of the social organisation of gender in at least three realms. In power relations, the legitimacy of men's domination has weakened dramatically, in particular under the influence of global feminism. Production relations in capitalist countries have undergone fundamental changes since World War II, for example, with married women's increased entry into paid employment and the decline of traditionally male areas of primary industry. There have been important shifts in sexual relations, in particular with the emergence and stabilisation of lesbian and gay sexualities as public alternatives to heterosexuality (Connell 1995: 84-85). Finally, cultural representations of manhood are changing, and new images of men are appearing. Traditional images of manhood now sit side by side with newer images of the involved father, the sensitive boyfriend, and the 'metrosexual'.

Social, economic, and political shifts have dented the old rules of manhood. Males now are faced with contradictory expectations about how to behave. Men are asking themselves, "Should I be a stoic breadwinner or a nurturing father, a 'real man' or a sensitive metrosexual?" Some men are confused, lost, or angry. But many men are flourishing. They are enjoying having fairer and more trusting relationships with their wives and partners, developing greater connections with female and male friends, and being involved fathers to their new babies and children. There are other signs of positive change among men. Young men are taking greater responsibility for contraception and safe sex, fewer males agree with myths about domestic violence, and more men are throwing themselves into involved and quality fathering.

Men's lives have been questioned and debated with passion, beginning in the 1980s and 1990s in advanced capitalist countries and increasingly in other countries. Men have been interrogated 'as a sex, in a way until recently reserved for women — as a problem' (Segal 1993: x).

Men show a variety of public responses to these shifts in gender relations, from active support for feminism to efforts to shore up male privilege. Small groups and networks of men across the globe, often in collaboration with women, are engaged in public efforts in support of gender equality, and men's anti-violence activism is the most visible and well-developed aspect of such efforts (Flood 2001). On the other hand, 'men's rights' and 'fathers' rights' groups are engaged in an energetic defence of patriarchal masculinity and men's power, particularly in families (Flood 2003: 37-42).

Beginning in the mid 1990s, men's role in progress towards gender equality has been the subject of growing international commitments and activity. In the Beijing Declaration, adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, governments expressed their determination to encourage men to participate fully in all actions towards gender equality. This was reaffirmed and extended in the follow-up meeting in 2000. The role of men and boys has also been addressed by other intergovernmental fora, including the World Summit on Social Development (1995) and its review session (2000), as well as the special session of the General Assembly on HIV/AIDS of 2001. Across the globe, a wide variety of initiatives focused on or inclusive of men are proliferating in such fields as men's violence against women, sexual and reproductive health, HIV/AIDS, and fatherhood and families.

In the most recent international expression of this trend, 'the role of men and boys in achieving gender equality' was one of the themes adopted for the forty-eighth session of the Commission on the Status of Women in March 2004, New York. Part of the preparation for this undertaken by the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) was an Expert Group Meeting, held in Brazil on 21-24 October 2003. I attended the meeting, along with 13 other invited experts from Brazil, Bulgaria, Fiji, India, Kenya, Peru, South Africa, Sweden, the US, the UK, and Yemen, as well as 24 observers largely from Brazil.

Our goal in the Expert Group Meeting was to clarify the roles that men and boys could play in achieving gender equality. In both plenary sessions and smaller working groups, we assessed approaches which have been successful in engaging men and boys in gender equality, identified obstacles to their participation, and began to map out the roles of governments, the private sector, civil society, and communities in encouraging men's contributions. Over the final two days, at breakneck speed, we wrote an Expert Group Report, containing a summary of the discussion and recommendations addressed to different actors at different levels. The Expert Group (2003) Report provided the basis for a report of the Secretary-General on this theme to the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in 2004.

Why then should men be involved in efforts towards gender equality, and if so, how?

Why involve men?

At its broadest, the impetus for involving men in work on gender equality is based on the recognition that men are both part of the problem and part of the solution. Gender injustice will only cease when men join with women to put an end to it. Many men's attitudes and behaviours will need to change in order for gender equality to be achieved. Many men participate in sexist practices and the maintenance of unjust gender relations, men often play a crucial role as 'gatekeepers' of the current gender order and as decision makers and community leaders, and patterns of gender injustice are tied to social constructions of masculinity and male identity. In addition, men's own health and wellbeing are limited by contemporary constructions of manhood (Kaufman 2003: 1-3). As the Commission on the Status of Women agreed in its forty-eight session in New York in March this year, men and boys, through taking responsibility themselves and working jointly in partnership with women and girls, are essential to achieving the goals of gender equality, development and peace. (Commission on the Status of Women 2004: 1)

What are some examples from the Asia-Pacific region of this recognition? In the field of sexual and reproductive health, feminist researchers have begun to investigate

men's experiences of reproductive health. The International Reproductive Rights Research Action Group (IRRRAG) began a project in 1999 focused on male involvement, involving participants from Malaysia, the Philippines, Brazil, Mexico, and Nigeria (Abdullah 2001: 15-16). In Malaysia, as gender awareness has developed within the credit cooperative movement, men have been encouraged to increase their share of household and domestic labour, and male-only 'men's clubs' have been adopted as tools for developing men's self-awareness and gender-sensitivity (Sinappan 2001: 42). In Vietnam, Care International has run the project 'Men In The Know', developing sexuality training for men to promote safer sex within relationships. As with much of the work among men, this project's focus on men came initially out of women's needs and concerns. In a previous course for women, the women expressed a desire for their male partners to receive training in women's sexuality and safer sex (Doyle 2000; 2002).

Agendas of gender equality have been widely seen as the concerns of women and not men. It was women, of course, who placed gender issues on the public agenda. The logic goes that, given that it is women who are disadvantaged by gender inequality, it is women who have a claim for redress, and thus gender issues are of no concern to men. However, this logic can no longer be sustained, for as Connell (2003: 3) notes: 'Men and boys are *unavoidably* involved in gender issues.' Most immediately, men (or more accurately, specific groups of men) control the resources required to implement women's claims for justice. But, more broadly, gender inequalities are based in gender relations, in the complex webs of relationships that exist at every level of human experience (Connell 2003: 3).

Including men in gender equality work is necessary because gender inequality is intimately tied to men's practices and identities, men's participation in complex and diverse gender relations, and masculine discourses and culture. Fostering gender equality requires change in these same arenas, of men's lives and relations. At the same time, involving men in efforts towards gender equality runs the risk of reinforcing men's existing power and jeopardising resources and funding directed at women (Kaufman 2003: 5). The goal of promoting gender justice must be central, as I discuss in more detail below.

Rather than seeing men only as obstacles to women's empowerment, it is also worth recognising that some men already are playing a role in fostering gender equality. Some men are living already in gender-just ways. They respect and care for the women and girls in their lives, and they reject traditional, sexist norms of manhood. Individual men in trade unions and government organisations have been important advocates for women's rights. Small numbers of men are engaged in public efforts in support of gender equality, in such fields as violence against women, HIV/AIDS, and schooling.

In the Asia-Pacific region, some of the most powerful examples of male support for gender equality are centred on the issue of violence against women. In 1997 in Katmandu, Nepal, at the UNICEF, UNIFEM and UNDP sponsored Regional Meeting 'Ending Violence Against Women and Girls in South Asia', the 100 or so men present added the following statement to the Katmandu Commitment which was issued; 'We men, realizing that no sustainable change can take place unless we give up the entrenched ideas of male superiority, commit ourselves to devising new role models of masculinity.' (UNICEF, 1998, cited in Hayward, 1999: 9) In the Philippines, the Kauswagan Community Social Centre had been working on violence

against women, and in the late 1990s its staff developed a growing interest in the links between violence and men's roles or masculinity (Ragas 2001: 29-31). The Centre received funding to conduct the Southeast Asian Regional Workshop on Men's Role in Violence Against Women. This conference, the first of its kind in Southeast Asia, was intended to 'support the emerging movement of community groups involving men in advocacy and campaigns on violence against women.'¹ It was held in the Philippines on 16-20 April 2001, and attracted participants from Singapore, Vietnam, Philippines, Cambodia, Thailand, and Indonesia.

In Cambodia, the Cambodian Men's Network is 'an alliance of men from all walks of life, religions and ethnicities who are committed to the eradication of violence against women for a fairer and more just society'.² The network aims 'to encourage men to be good models for young men in the society, to campaign against social trends that give impunity to violence against women and to advocate for positive change.' The Cambodian Men's Network has run the White Ribbon Campaign, an international campaign to encourage men to wear a white ribbon to show their support for stopping violence against women.

Some projects working with men in the Asia-Pacific region aim both to lessen gender inequalities and to address men's health. In 2002, men from American Samoa, Fiji, Kiribati, New Zealand, Niue, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, the Solomon Islands, Tonga, and Vanuatu participated in the Pacific Men's Health Workshop. Run by the Australian Reproductive Health Alliance in conjunction with the Reproductive and Family Health Association of Fiji, the five-day workshop aimed to increase Pacific men's knowledge and skills in addressing issues of sexual and reproductive health and to establish networks among health workers and policy-makers across the Pacific (Kenyon *et al.* 2003). 'Masculinity, Mental Health and Violence' is a three year project in Fiji, Kiribati, and Papua New Guinea, and addresses young men's poor mental health, drug and alcohol abuse, and crime and violence (especially violence against women).³ A 1998 project on reproductive health in the Philippines worked with a federation of tricycle drivers outside Manila. Male peer educators ran workshops among the drivers, and the drivers then disseminated health messages through their vehicles and at passenger terminals (Bacudo 2001: 33-34).

The agenda of engaging men in gender issues is not novel because of whom it addresses, but how. Men have long been the target of public policy efforts – as workers and bosses, as husbands and fathers, as perpetrators or survivors of crime, as patients, and so on. But men have been largely treated as generic and ungendered human beings, representatives of all humanity, and the specifically gendered character of men's lives and relations has been ignored or taken for granted. This has perpetuated masculine norms and gender inequalities. The agenda of engaging men is novel because it addresses men *as men* — as gendered beings who participate in gender relations.

The impetus for male inclusion is fuelled in part by important shifts in particular fields of gender-related work. In the field of development for example, the overall shift from 'women in development' (WID) to 'gender and development' (GAD) 'has embodied greater reference to men, and arguably created greater space for the

¹ <http://www.wao.org.my/news/20010509menandviolence.htm>. Accessed 25 August 2004.

² <http://www.bigpond.com.kh/users/gad/cmn/cmnfront.htm>. Accessed 25 August 2004.

³ <http://www.fspi.org.fj/program/masculinity.htm>. Accessed 25 August 2004.

inclusion of men as actors and clients in gender interventions' (Chant and Guttman 2000: 6). This has intensified attention to men's roles in two ways. First, GAD approaches are characterised in part by the goal of 'gender mainstreaming', in which gender issues are made an integral part of organisational thinking and practice. They aim to transform mainstream policy agendas from a gender perspective (rather than merely integrating gender into pre-existing policy concerns) and to re-work the cultures and functioning of development institutions (Chant and Guttman 2000: 2-10). This has provoked greater interest in addressing the attitudes and practices of men, whether as clients of development agencies or as policy-makers and practitioners. Second, GAD approaches embody a shift towards a more overt focus on gender relations and the aim of creating structural changes in male-female power relations. While they continue (ideally) to address women's experiences and social situations, they also situate these in the context of the social and power relations between men and women. There are three broad areas in which men's involvement may be enacted: (1) working with men as decision makers and service providers; (2) integrating men into the development process with a 'gendered lens'; and (3) targeting groups of men and boys when and where they are vulnerable (for example in relation to issues of poverty or sexuality) (Lang 2003: 8-9).

Growing policy interest in men and gender issues also is fuelled by non-feminist, or even anti-feminist, motivations. These include the misguided perception that policies and programs have 'focused on girls and women for too long and it is time to include men', that 'the pendulum has swung too far towards women and men are now the victims', and even that 'feminism has taken over and men must take back their rightful places at the head of the family and society'. Anti-feminist men's rights and fathers' rights groups are vocal advocates of such positions (Flood 1997), and they have had some influence in swaying the policy agendas of governments in the US, Australia, and elsewhere. More widely, governments may be sympathetic to simplistic notions of male disadvantage, especially as there are areas of social life such as health and secondary schooling in which some boys and men suffer. This makes it all the more necessary that we ensure that gender equality remains the guiding principle of any engagement in 'men's issues'. Governments certainly should address areas of male pain, but not at the expense of women.

Support and resistance

Men show both support for, and resistance to, gender equality. Including men in gender work ideally involves the recognition of this diversity, and the adoption of different strategies in responding to resistance while mobilising and building on support. Many men receive formal and informal benefits from gender inequalities, including material rewards and interpersonal power. At the same time, men also pay significant costs, particularly to their emotional and physical health. More widely, men can be and are motivated by interests other than those associated with gender privilege. There are important resources in men's lives for the construction of gender-equitable masculinities and forms of selfhood, such as men's concerns for children, intimacies with women, and ethical and political commitments. Thus, while men ought to change, it is also in men's interests to change. There is a moral imperative that men give up their unjust share of power, and men themselves will benefit from advancing towards gender equality.

There are further reasons why efforts at gender reform should address men, to do with both the detrimental effects of male exclusion and the positive effects of male

inclusion. First, the longstanding equation of 'gender' with women potentially marginalises women and women's struggles (Kaufman 2003: 3). In the field of development for example, leaving men out of efforts towards gender equality can provoke male hostility and retaliation, arising out of both exclusion and more general anxieties among men (Chant and Guttman 2000: 25; Lang 2003: 9). Focusing only on women, in relation to such issues as economic participation, credit, or sexual and reproductive health, can leave women with yet more work to do and thus intensify gender inequalities. Women-only projects can mean that women still have to deal with unsympathetic men and patriarchal power relations, and can leave women with sole responsibility for sexual health, family nutrition, and so on (Chant and Guttman 2000: 26).

Including men in grassroots work on gender equality has important benefits. Given that many women already interact with men on a daily basis in their households and public lives, involving men can make interventions more relevant and workable (Chant and Guttman 2000: 26). Male inclusion increases men's responsibility for change. Explicitly addressing men can increase men's belief that they too will gain from gender equality and can engage men directly in the renegotiation of gender relations. Male inclusion can speak to many men's sense of anxiety and fear as 'traditional' masculinities are undermined. Men's suffering (such as men's growing burden of illness or social and economic marginalisation among young, poor men) is worth addressing in its own right, and in terms of its potential impact on women (Chant and Guttman 2000: 26-28).

None of this means that women's groups and gender-related programming must include men. There continue to be reasons why 'women's space', women-only and women-focused programs are vital: to support those who are most disadvantaged by pervasive gender inequalities; to maintain women's solidarity and leadership; and to foster women's consciousness-raising and collective empowerment. Nor should growing attention to male involvement threaten resources for women and women's programs. At the same time, reaching men to reduce gender inequalities against women is by definition spending money to meet the interests and needs of women, and will expand the financial and political support available to women's programs (Kaufman 2003: 11).

One small step

In reflecting on the need to incorporate men in gender-related work, it is worth remembering that a policy concern with women and with gender equality remains marginal or even non-existent in many countries. Even in countries where governments have adopted policies and institutional structures that are supportive of women, only rarely has gender equality been integrated into the depth and breadth of government policies and processes. The same goes for many local decision-making bodies, community organisations, and international agencies. In the field of development for example, there is little evidence that a concern with women, let alone with gender, has been integrated into programs and planning among development agencies, bureaucracies, funding agencies, or governments (Chant and Guttman 2000: 2,14). Despite three decades of effort, actual development work has continued to marginalise women and women's concerns. This also means that 'male-inclusive' gender initiatives are relatively undeveloped.

There are both good and bad reasons for the ongoing absence of men-as-men in gender policy and programming. Given the persistence of widespread gender inequalities which disadvantage women, and the limited availability of resources for gender-related work, there are good reasons for continuing to focus on women (Chant and Guttman 2000: 16-19). In the field of development for example, there are understandable fears as to what may happen if men are invited in, in the context of a history of grassroots examples where women have lost out, men have taken over, and women-oriented projects have been diluted or subverted (Chant and Guttman 2000: 19). Women may be hesitant to share a realm which has been historically a place of sanctuary for women (Lang 2003: 3). The patriarchal organisational structures and cultures of development organisations, and governments, inhibit attention to men's roles in gender equality (Lang 2003: 2-3). Women's sectors often are weak, marginalised, under-funded, and have had little impact on mainstream developmental policies, programs and processes (Chant and Guttman 2000: 21). In this context:

Men may feel threatened by women's challenge to male entitlements, they may feel that gender has nothing to do with them, they are less likely to recognise gender relations as unequal, or may avoid raising gender issues for fear of disapproval and ridicule (Chant and Guttman 2000: 21-22).

Men may also feel that as men they have been seen as 'all the same', and may resent approaches that are tactless or overly negative. Overall, as Chant and Guttman conclude (2000: 23), there might be more willingness to include men in gender-related work if women had been given an equal place and say in policy in general and if worldwide gender inequalities had lessened. Nevertheless, including men will be critical to the successful creation of gender equality.

Engaging men

How should men be included in gender-related work? The bottom line of course is that any incorporation of men and men's gendered issues into practice and policy should further the feminist goal of gender equality. There is the danger that in speaking to men's concerns, interests and problems, the impetus for justice for women will be weakened and slide into anti-feminist backlash (Connell 2003: 10). Yet gender equality initiatives must include an engagement with men and masculinities if they are to be effective. Thus the rationale of gender equality must be kept central.

Beyond the overarching principle of gender equality, there are further elements to any effective and beneficial strategy of male inclusion. One is that funding for work with men and boys should not be at the expense of funding for gender equality work with women and girls (Expert Group 2003: 14). Another is that work with men should be done in partnership with women. Partnerships with women and women's groups enable men to learn from existing efforts and scholarship rather than 'reinventing the wheel'. They lessen the risk that men will collude in or be complicit with dominant and oppressive forms of masculinity. And they are a powerful and practical demonstration of men's and women's shared interest in democratic and peaceful gender relations. Another element is that rather than having separate and parallel policies for women and men, we should adopt integrated gender policies which address the relations between women and men (Expert Group 2003: 13).

Organisations and agencies themselves must also model gender equality, addressing their own policies, staff and organisational culture (Lang 2003: 1). This should include reflection by male staff on their own experience, privilege, and gendered practice. One detailed example of such a process comes from the United Nations Working Group on Men and Gender Equality. Formed in the late 1990s, this group involved both male and female staff from UN-based organisations in New York. The group invited men to reflect on the connections between gender equality and their personal and professional lives, using this as the springboard for broader organisational change. Lang (2003: 4-7) reports that the promotion of greater gender self-awareness can produce shifts in organisational culture and gender relations and encourage deeper partnerships among and between different groups of men and women.

Resources

This paper has said relatively little thus far about the actual strategies one should use in involving men. However, there is now a very substantial and useful range of resources with which to design and implement work with men and to encourage men's roles in promoting gender equality.

Frameworks

Practitioners and policy makers can make use of a rapidly growing literature offering frameworks with which to articulate the role of men and boys in achieving gender equality. Three recent documents which do this are Connell's (2003) framework prepared for the Brazil meeting, Kaufman's (2003) 'AIM framework: Addressing and involving men and boys to promote gender equality and end gender discrimination and violence', and the Expert Group (2003) Report itself. Other important discussions of men's roles in progress towards gender equality are given by Lang (2002) and Greig, Kimmel, and Lang (2000). Pro-feminist men's writing and activism features on the Internet, for example in the articles, lists of websites, and other resources collected at XYonline (see <<http://www.xyonline.net>>). In more academic, feminist-informed writing on men and masculinities, there is a very substantial articulation of men's relation to feminism, exploring questions of epistemology and political practice, including recent texts by Digby (1998), Gardiner (2002) and Pease (2000; 2002).

Strategies

In terms of the practical strategies and policies that should be adopted to facilitate men's role in building gender equality, one of the most thorough overviews is the Expert Group Report (2003) prepared in Brazil. As well as offering general guidance for policy-makers and others, this addresses five key areas: (1) socialization and education, (2) workplace and economy, (3) sexuality, health, and HIV/AIDS, (4) family life, domestic work, and work/life balance, and (5) gender-based violence. The report offers recommendations for key actors, including governments, public sector organizations, the private sector, and civil society.

There are a number of fields in which there has been significant reflection on how best to work with men and to engage effectively with men. These include sexual and reproductive health and men's violence against women. The United Nations Population Fund (2000; 2003) has published substantial manuals on male involvement in sexual and reproductive health. And the Internet offers an inspiring

collection of manuals, guides, and discussions on violence prevention work among men.⁴ Experience in engaging men is also rapidly developing in the fields of men's health and fathering.

Conclusion

The impetus for men's involvement in gender-related work is likely to increase in the next few years. It is fuelled by ongoing shifts in gender relations, feminist and pro-feminist recognition of the need to transform and reconstruct masculinities, and trends in particular fields such as development work, as well as more troubling agendas such as non- and anti-feminist interest in 'correcting the balance' by focusing on men. There is no doubt that involving men in efforts towards gender equality has the potential to greatly enhance the impact and reach of this work. But whether or not it does so will depend on the play of political and cultural forces and relations. Still, building a world of gender justice will bring benefit to both women and men, and the reconstruction of gender will require our shared commitment and involvement.

Note

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⁴ Discussions of violence prevention efforts among men, and examples of practice, can be found for example on the websites of the online discussion "Building Partnerships to End Men's Violence" (<http://endabuse.org/bpi/>), the VAWNet collection on "**Men in the Movement to End Violence Against Women: Campaigns and Campaign Materials**" (<http://www.vawnet.org/DomesticViolence/PreventionAndEducation/Campaigns/MenCampaigns.php>), and Brazil's Instituto Promundo (<http://www.promundo.org.br/english/vioprevpu.asp>). Discussions of educational strategies among boys and men can be found for example in the Australian "Rape Myth-Busters" program (http://www.shinesa.org.au/pdf/rape_myth_buster_manual_cards.pdf) and Jo Weinberg's "Teaching Sexual Ethics" page (<http://www.teachingsexualethics.org/home.htm>). A collection of men's anti-violence websites can be found on the XYonline website (<http://www.xyonline.net/links.shtml#2>).

Online resources on men's roles in building gender equality

- Articles on men, gender, and masculinity (100 or so accessible articles): <http://www.xyonline.net/articles.shtml>
- Web sites on men and gender, including on men's anti-violence work: <http://www.xyonline.net/links.shtml>
- The Men's Bibliography: A comprehensive bibliography of writing on men, masculinities, gender, and sexualities: <http://mensbiblio.xyonline.net/>

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