

Men, gender and development

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Introduction

Should men be included in programming and policy related to gender, and, if so, how can male inclusion be made most beneficial? 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 on the agenda in gender and development work, as it is in such fields as sexual and reproductive health, fatherhood and families, work and economy, and interpersonal violence.

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 Western 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. Finally, 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). Beginning in the 1980s and 1990s in advanced capitalist countries, men's lives have been questioned and debated with passion. 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 such shifts, 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' is 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 will provide 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? The following discussion addresses these questions in relation to the field of gender and development, but its themes are pertinent for any realm of gender-related work.

Why involve men?

In the field of development, 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).

The impetus for male inclusion is associated with an important shift in how gender issues are conceived and addressed in development work. 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 inclusion of men as actors and clients in gender interventions' (Chant and Guttman 2000:6). Of course men have always been part of the policies and practices of development work, but often they have been treated as generic and ungendered representatives of all humanity, thus perpetuating masculine norms and gender inequalities. The agenda of engaging men is not novel because of whom it addresses, but how. It addresses men *as men* — as gendered beings who participate in gender relations.

The emergence of 'gender and development' approaches 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. Before addressing the extent to which the shift from WID to GAD has made a difference to efforts to address men, I outline the rationale for this inclusion.

At its broadest, the impetus for involving men in gender and development work 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).

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 and development 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.

Men show both resistance to, and support for, gender equality. Including men in gender and development work 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). 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, as some development projects have found (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 for example, 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 and development 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

Despite a plethora of policy statements and pronouncements, 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). Despite three decades of effort, actual development work has continued to marginalise women and women's concerns. Furthermore, the shift from WID to GAD did little to shake the lack of attention to male gender identities, and there is little evidence of 'male-inclusive' gender initiatives (Chant and Guttman 2000:2,14).

There are both good and bad reasons for the ongoing absence of men-as-men in GAD policy and programming. Given the persistence of widespread gender inequalities which disadvantage women, and the limited availability of resources for GAD work, there are good reasons for continuing to focus on women (Chant and Guttman 2000:16–19). 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). In addition, in development organisations there is some resistance to a GAD approach, for example, because it is harder to address gender relations, interventions into social relations of gender may be seen as inappropriate 'cultural interference', and GAD calls for more fundamental transformations which may be seen as 'confrontational' (Chant and Guttman 2000:20).

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 in development often are weak, marginalised, underfunded, 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 GAD if women had been given an equal place and say in development 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 and development work? The bottom line of course is that any incorporation of men and men's gendered issues into development practice and policy should further the feminist goal of gender equality. As in gender policy in general, 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, such that the 'involvement of men-as-men in GAD [is] couched within a clear feminist political agenda' (Chant and Guttman 2000:43).

In taking on such work, development practitioners can learn from the positive experiences of male involvement in GAD documented for example by Chant and Guttman (2000) and the pioneering work of Oxfam Great Britain. 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). Also, in pro-feminist academic 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). Pro-feminist men's writing and activism also features on the Internet, for example in the articles, lists of websites, and other resources collected at XYonline (see <<http://www.xyonline.net>>).

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).

Development 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.

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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