

# 5 Reflections and directions for research

## Dr Michael Flood

Gender synchronisation is a valuable extension of the ways in which we understand and engage in work to end gender inequalities. It highlights the value of working with both women and men in synergistic ways which intensify impact. At the same time, its character, rationale, and implementation need refinement. Five tasks are vital if gender synchronisation is taken up.

First, gender synchronisation should be framed as an *addition* to feminist or gender-transformative approaches, not a replacement for them. Gender-transformative approaches actively seek to transform gender inequalities. In essence, they are feminist, and it is dismaying that the 'f-word' is all but invisible in this field. Gender synchronisation involves synchronising or coordinating work with women and men to build gender equality, and is a refinement of such work, not a radically new approach to it.

Second, gender synchronisation should mean *more* than simply working with both women and men. There is some slippage in Greene and Levack's original IGWG paper and in other accounts between gender synchronisation as referring simply to working with *both* women and men and as something greater. To earn the label, programming must show evidence of coordination or synchronisation.

Gender-transformative work may involve synchronisation of: (a) *logic*: programs' logic models and theories of change; (b) the *phenomena* – the behaviours, relations, or processes – they seek to *target*; and/or (c) the *strategies* and processes of change they use, such as mixed-sex processes. While gender synchronisation is compatible with sex-specific groups and programs, some practitioners will misread gender synchronisation as requiring mixed-sex processes throughout.

Third, the *rationale* for gender synchronisation should be developed further. There are good reasons for efforts aimed at building gender equality to engage men (Flood 2007). However, these are not central to the rationale for gender synchronisation. Instead, important rationales for gender synchronisation include:

- to improve interventions' logic and theory of change
- to target gender relations and interactions in particular
- to facilitate greater change by using mixed-sex processes.

A gender-synchronised approach may be valuable particularly in addressing gender *relations* – the ways in which men and women interact with, relate to, and treat each other. So far, however, there is little sense of *how* — by what processes and mechanisms — gender synchronisation may increase the impact of our efforts.

Advocates for gender synchronisation must warn against at least four problematic framings of this approach.

- (a) Essentialist understanding of gender will be reinforced if practitioners understand gender synchronisation as a response to gender 'difference' or 'complementarity', to alleged differences between men and women.
- (b) Gender synchronisation may be used to play down gender inequalities and neglect men's privilege.
- (c) In describing the field, advocates should recognise that work with men can be motivated by pro-, non-, and anti-feminist agendas.
- (d) Advocates should discourage the conclusion that gender-specific programming now is redundant.

Fourth, as with any approach, gender synchronisation should be evaluated against *evidence*. Empirical support so far is thin. For example, while Greene and Levack cite positive results from programs which work with both women and men, it is not clear that their impact on gender inequalities is any greater because of this. There is no doubt that mixed-sex interventions can have positive impacts, and cross-gender dialogues may be particularly fruitful. At the same time, evidence regarding the merits of single-sex versus mixed-sex groups e.g. in violence prevention is mixed, and there is some evidence that men benefit more than women from mixed-sex programs (Flood *et al.* 2009: 47-50). Mixed-sex programming should be mindful of resistance to feminism and oppressive dynamics of gendered interaction.

Finally, gender synchronisation approaches should move beyond an emphasis on *norms*. In these and in public health and violence prevention approaches more generally, a focus only or above all on norms and attitudes neglects the structural inequalities, collective relations, and social practices which sustain gender inequalities (Pease and Flood 2008).

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**Towards transformation**  
**Synchronising work with women and men for gender equality**

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with contributions from Dr Michael Flood and Dr Patrick Kilby

**gender**  
**MATTERS**

Issue #1, August 2012

*When women benefit, the whole community benefits.*

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## Acknowledgments

Elizabeth Starman deserves a special mention for sharing with us the concept of gender synchronisation. Particular thanks are also due to Di Kilsby whose early feedback helped shape thinking about the issues explored here, and to Patrick Kilby, Joyce Wu and Michael Flood who provided critical feedback on the initial draft. We also appreciated the comments and input of IWDA staff.

## Partners featured in this publication

**IWDA recognises partnership and collaboration as fundamental to development effectiveness. As we work with partners, we build our capabilities and strengths to advocate for gender equality. Together we create space for women's voices to be heard and amplify those voices through networking, advocacy and research.**

### Banteay Srei

Banteay Srei ('Citadel of Women') is a Cambodian NGO that works to empower vulnerable women and their communities in Battambang and Siem Reap Provinces to improve their political, economic and social situation through community development activities, advocacy, and networking. Since establishing as an independent Cambodian-registered organisation in 2000, Banteay Srei has become a leading NGO supporting women leaders in rural areas, at village, commune and district level, so they can advocate for their rights and overcome the challenges they face.

### Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association

The Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC) was founded by a group of former political prisoners in December 1991 after the signing of the Paris Peace Agreements on October 23, 1991. ADHOC is an independent, non-partisan, non-profit and non-governmental organisation. Its Women's and Children's Rights Program works towards improving the situation for women through investigation and intervention in cases of abuse; empowering women and informing them of their rights; anti-discrimination training; assisting women who have been victims of abuse in their reintegration; training in safe migration to ward against human trafficking; and advocacy.

## Institute for Sustainable Futures

The Institute for Sustainable Futures (ISF) was established as a flagship research institute of the University of Technology, Sydney in 1996. Its mission is to create change towards sustainable futures through independent, project-based research. In the WASH sector, ISF provides evidence to support better WASH policy, advocacy and practice in developing countries. It participates in international groups working to improve action on WASH and is a founding member of the Australian WASH Reference Group. From 2008 to 2010, ISF worked with IWDA on an AusAID-funded research project, *Making the Invisible Visible: Gender and Pacific Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Initiatives*, to identify gender equality outcomes from NGO WASH initiatives in the Pacific.

## Live and Learn Environmental Education

Live and Learn Environmental Education (LLEE) started in 1992 as a group of volunteers promoting environmental education, and has since grown to operate in eight countries. LLEE specialises in community participatory education to promote sustainable livelihood development and conservation of environmental resources in some of the most vulnerable communities and biologically diverse regions in Asia and the Pacific. From 2008 to 2010, LLEE Fiji and World Vision Vanuatu were involved in research on gender and WASH undertaken by ISF and IWDA. The research explored gender outcomes from two LLEE Fiji projects which emphasised socially inclusive community engagement strategies.

## World Vision Cambodia

World Vision Cambodia and IWDA worked together from 2006 until 2010 on an AusAID-funded integrated mine action project, *Community Strengthening and Gender Mainstreaming in Mine Action*, to deliver an integrated package of assistance to communities most affected by mines. The initiative made a significant contribution to improving land clearance and livelihoods for vulnerable households, including people with disabilities. It also advanced thinking and awareness of gender in mine action, including through publications, guidelines and modeling, and building evidence regarding the value of single-sex and mixed-sex de-mining groups.

## World Vision Vanuatu

From 2008 to 2010, World Vision Vanuatu worked with IWDA, ISF and LLEE Fiji to investigate gender outcomes from WASH initiatives, focusing on two rural communities on Tanna Island involved in World Vision Vanuatu's WASH program. World Vision Vanuatu has been developing its community engagement approach to WASH since 2004 using the Participatory Hygiene and Sanitation Transformation methodology, with a particular emphasis on socially-inclusive community engagement and planning. The research found this approach played a critical role in achieving positive gender outcomes.