

**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**

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*When women benefit, the whole community benefits.*

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## 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.

# Summary

**Working with women and men in addressing gender inequalities makes sense. These inequalities are located in the socially-accepted roles of men and women and in the wider institutions that shape their rights and opportunities. Yet decades after Gender and Development overtook Women in Development as the primary framework for analysis and programming, in practice much development work to promote gender equality focuses predominantly on women, or on men (Greene and Levack 2010).**

This first issue of *Gender Matters* explores the proposition that gender inequalities and harmful gender norms may be most effectively addressed by working with both women and men, *in an intentionally coordinated or synchronised way*. Greene and Levack, on behalf of the Interagency Gender Working Group,<sup>1</sup> propose the concept of ‘gender synchronisation’ to capture this idea. While we have some reservations about the language, we believe the concept warrants further discussion in relation to its potential, limits and requirements. We refer regularly to Greene and Levack’s paper in doing so as there have been few subsequent citations.

We explore the relevance of gender synchronisation beyond public health, drawing on practical examples from IWDA’s work with partners in diverse fields including intimate partner violence, water, sanitation and hygiene, and de-mining. We suggest that strategically linking gender-related work with women and men can strengthen outcomes. This includes identifying productive spaces for change and ways of negotiating change as positive for both women and men. Our aim is to encourage dialogue about what this approach adds to existing efforts to transform gender injustice, and where further development is required. We also want to encourage evaluation in light of evidence – what difference does gender synchronisation make? What are the practical limitations – for example, is it feasible in the services area given the inherent complexity of the operating environment?

In their reflections on the concept, Dr Michael Flood and Dr Patrick Kilby balance promise with caution, draw our attention to risks, and point to work that needs to be done in further developing the concept and building evidence for its use.

Gender synchronisation does not imply abandoning gender-specific initiatives, but rather, argues that these may be most transformative when pursued *in intentional association*. As programs work to support more diverse and equitable roles and opportunities for women and tackle discriminatory institutional and cultural barriers, it follows (for example) that engaging men and institutional power holders about the individual and collective benefits of making space for those changes can hasten or extend positive outcomes. We recognise that transforming inequalities in power, in the family and wider community, is difficult, long-term work that requires change at many levels – so identifying where men and women might have a shared interest in change is important.

At a time when ‘gender’ is still too often equated with a focus on women, a focus on *linking* gender strategies underlines the importance of exploring gendered roles and expectations with both women and men, at the same time or sequentially. We believe real opportunities lie in building greater synergies within and between programs targeting women and men, and in designing new initiatives that intentionally coordinate such work to enable change.

While this paper focuses on the primary categories of women and men, and on addressing unequal gender relations, it is not our intention to prescribe or describe only male-female sexual relationships, or to suggest that gender is the only identity that shapes how women, and men, relate. In working to advance gender equality, we are interested in ‘how people in the full diversity of roles and relations with one another can overcome negative and discriminatory gender attitudes and behaviours’. (Greene and Levack 2010: 2)

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<sup>1</sup> A network comprising USAID Cooperating Agencies, non-government organisations, and the USAID Bureau for Global Health.

# 1 Introduction

Linking work with women and men towards gender equality makes sense. It is consistent with the move from focusing on women's inclusion in development initiatives (a Women in Development or WID approach) towards a Gender and Development (GAD) approach that 'focuses on the socially constructed basis of differences between men and women and emphasises the need to challenge existing gender roles and relations' (Reeves and Baden 2000: 33). In practice, much gender-focused development work involves an either/or approach, focusing on either working with women or engaging with men (Cleaver 2002, Greene and Levack 2010, Kilby and Crawford 2011). While a sex-specific focus is unsurprising and necessary given the power differentials and social norms at play, transforming gender inequality also requires attention to the *relational* aspect of gender relations.

The value of working in a *coordinated* way with both women and men to challenge and transform inequitable gender relations remains surprisingly under-discussed in the literature and under-used, or at least under-reported, in practice. Recently, 25 development and gender specialists with long experience in working with men and with women came together to explore the strengths and weaknesses of sexual and reproductive health programs that address gender inequities by working with men, or women, or both. They identified some inherent limitations in pursuing change through separate initiatives with women and men and promoted the value of intentionally intersecting such work. They argued that programs to address gendered health inequalities and progress gender equality will be more sustainable and transformative if strategies work with both women and men in 'a coordinated or synchronised way' (Greene and Levack 2010: 2). They conceptualised this as '*synchronising gender strategies*'.

We think this approach has broad relevance for development practitioners, beyond its public health origins. It provides a way of focusing on the relational nature of gender work, and on the value of working with men and women together, as well as separately, in transforming the social norms and power structures that root gender inequality deep in all cultures. In so doing, gender synchronisation draws attention to the lack of success in locating gender as central to effective, equitable and sustainable development, beyond high-level policy commitments. It is not just that gender is still too often treated as an add-on or a secondary or peripheral concern. *Integrating gender is also too often approached as primarily a technical matter, rather than as a process of analysing and transforming power inequalities.*

In this context, we think there is value in a stronger focus on coordinating interventions that work with men and women, boys and girls, 'in an intentional and mutually reinforcing way that challenges gender norms, catalyses the achievement of gender equality, and improves health' (Greene and Levack 2010: vi). This is *not* an argument for stopping initiatives that work only with women or with men, but rather, *for building on this work by identifying where an intentional association between such efforts can advance gender equality.* While the literature examining the specific benefits of intersecting work with women and men may be limited, in practice there are existing development initiatives that incorporate such an approach. Some of these are noted in Greene and Levack's 2010 paper. This issue of *Gender Matters* seeks to add to this work by reviewing a number of IWDA's initiatives with partner organisations in Asia and the Pacific, through the lens of 'gender synchronisation'. The aim is to explore what cooperative approaches to advancing gender equality may offer and encourage further dialogue and reflection about how such approaches can help to close the gender gap.

## 2 Why gender synchronisation?

**In this section we look more closely at the concept of gender synchronisation as an approach to addressing gender inequities – what does it involve and what value can it add?**

### **From gender-specific towards gender-synchronised approaches**

Although it is possible to identify practical examples of gender-focused programs that intentionally relate work with women and men, to date, and in general, interventions targeting gender inequality have been predominantly gender-specific – working with women or with men – with initiatives to address women’s disadvantage remaining more typical. Indeed, gender work is often read as synonymous with a focus on women ‘despite all the calls and claims to the contrary’ (Zarkov 2007).

To understand the rationale for gender synchronisation, a brief overview of approaches to addressing gender inequality in development is useful. From at least 1963 when a draft of the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women was first formally considered, international concerns were being expressed about the impact of discrimination against women on their realisation of rights and access to development. As women’s movements were emerging around the world, ‘women’s issues’ were also a focus within the United Nations system. In 1970, the UN agreed that 1975 would be the International Year of Women and mark the start of the UN Decade for Women (1975-1985). The three objectives for the Decade agreed at the First World Conference on Women in Mexico in 1975 included ‘The integration and full participation of women in development’.<sup>2</sup>

The focus on bringing women into development, known as Women in Development (WID), highlighted that development was not neutral and that women needed to be considered, as women. Not only were women missing out but some development initiatives were actively disadvantaging women because their needs and interests had not been considered (Boserup 1970). This was a problem for the women concerned, and counter-productive for development, given women’s central role in agriculture, food production, care and community. The Second World Conference on Women in Copenhagen in 1980 acknowledged the disparity between women’s

formal rights and their capacity to exercise them in practice<sup>3</sup>, naming sexism as a contributing factor. Gender-specific initiatives were developed to engage and benefit women. For women in developing countries, decolonisation struggles and the process of transition to independence provided impetus and urgency to claims for women’s rights.

Data presented to the Third World Conference on Women in Nairobi in 1985 highlighted that few women had benefited from improvements to date and that more concerted efforts were required, including constitutional and legal measures. *The Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women* (FLS) were agreed as ‘a blue print for action to advance the status of women in national and international economic, social, cultural and legal development to the year 2000’ (Sandler 1987: 5). The FLS reflected growing recognition of the need to address the structural issues that perpetuated women’s marginalisation and disempowerment relative to men, and ‘a greater awareness of the ways in which global issues affect women’s lives’ (Sandler 1987: 5).

Ten years later, at the Fourth World Conference and NGO Forum on Women in Beijing in 1995, thousands of women from every region came together to highlight that development practice biased towards economic growth often increased women’s poverty and workload and undermined the basis of women’s traditional status and power. While there had been positive developments in the decade between Nairobi and Beijing, profound and interconnected gender inequalities remained, underlining the continued relevance of a focus on women in development, and the urgent need to take account of gender in mainstream development. The outcomes from Beijing marked a turning point, recognising that working with women

**must sit alongside strategies that engage men and women in working together towards mutual goals and greater equality, and address the wider social, economic, cultural and political factors that perpetuate women’s inequality (Kilby and Crawford 2011: 3).**

As WID was evolving towards GAD, the impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic first began to be felt. Men – especially gay men – began to mobilise to raise awareness among

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.un.org/en/development/devagenda/gender.shtml>  
<sup>3</sup> <http://www.un.org/en/development/devagenda/gender.shtml>

other men on health issues and around issues of identity and masculinity, informed by seminal work such as Altman's 1971 *Homosexual: Oppression and Liberation*. Programs sought to 'engage men' following the example of groundbreaking work in South Africa through the MenEngage program<sup>4</sup> and Project H in Brazil.<sup>5</sup> Like women-specific interventions, interventions with men were also influenced by theory. In the 1990s, Connell, Kimmel and others contributed to the emergence of the field of masculinities, which offered a new way of conceptualising multiple, constructed masculine identities and roles. Altman's 2001 *Global Sex* overlaid thinking about sex and gender with the dynamic of globalisation, examining the ways in which desire and pleasure and ideas about gender, political power, and public health are shaped by global economic forces.

In the context of growing attention to men and masculinities, Cornwall (1997) raised concern about the limited focus on the complexities of 'men's experience as men' in Gender and Development work. Further, failing to adequately consider the diversity of individual women and men – characterising men-in-general as 'the problem' and women-in-general as 'the oppressed' – risked also failing

**'to address effectively the issues of equity and empowerment that are crucial to bringing about positive change. To make gender 'everybody's issue', strategies are required that take account of the complexities of difference, and which return to the basic premises on which GAD is founded: that gender relations are fundamentally power relations' (Cornwall 1997: 8).**

Cleaver's edited collection *Masculinities Matter! Men, Gender and Development* (2002) sought to wrestle with some of the challenges of bringing a deeper understanding of men and masculinities into the Gender and Development frame.

This brief overview highlights how a focus on women, or on men, in development emerged in particular contexts with a clear rationale. Working with women, or men, remains central to understanding the circumstances and complexity of women's and men's lives, safely exploring gender norms and their implications, and addressing power inequalities. But in the face of persistent gender inequality and the continued association of gender with a focus on women, might efforts to transform gender inequality be strengthened by coordinating work with men and women? (Greene and Levack, 2010: 2)

## **What is gender synchronisation?**

In their 2010 paper, *Synchronizing Gender Strategies: A Cooperative Model for Improving Reproductive Health and Transforming Gender Relations*, Greene and Levack define gender-synchronised approaches as:

**the intentional intersection of gender-transformative efforts reaching both men and boys and women and girls of all sexual orientations and gender identities. They engage people in challenging harmful and restrictive constructions of masculinity and femininity that drive gender-related vulnerabilities and inequalities and hinder health and well-being (Greene and Levack 2010: 5).**

4 [www.menengage.org](http://www.menengage.org)

5 The genesis of both programs is briefly summarised in the Green and Levack paper.

## Why synchronise gender strategies?

### Consistency with Gender and Development thinking:

GAD has largely supplanted WID as the theoretical framework for considering gender issues in development. However, evidence suggests less internalisation of the idea that GAD involves working with both women and men to address the socially constructed and unequal power relations between them. A core insight of GAD is that such inequality is reproduced in relationships, structures and institutions, and transforming inequality will require change at each level. Using a synchronised approach to intentionally address the relational nature of gender is a logical progression within Gender and Development.

### Community demand:

While some women and women's organisations remain firmly convinced of the need to focus on women, and see a focus on involving men as taking the spotlight off women and their inequality, other women and women's organisations see interventions that work with men and women as key to change. In the Community Action Against Violence Against Women (CAVAW) project in Cambodia featured in case study 1, women's own analysis of the gendered nature and effects of intimate partner violence suggested the need for harmonised approaches that engaged women and men.

### Avoiding reinforcing gender stereotypes:

There is a risk that working with only one sex to deconstruct gender roles and power may reinforce stereotypes. Sex-specific approaches may also miss opportunities to build greater understanding of the difficulties that gender rigidities create for both women and men, and to explore more equal ways of organising responsibilities and relating. A gender-synchronised approach can address these risks.

### New spaces for gender dialogue:

Synchronising gender-specific approaches can provide new opportunities to bring women and men together to explore gender roles and identify where there are common interests in negotiating more equitable arrangements. Case study 2 from Melanesia is an example of this potential in practice. Safe, appropriate spaces for dialogue between men and women can also highlight the implications of negative behaviours (for example, gambling and drinking on family finances).

### Strengthening, not abandoning, gender-specific initiatives:

Gender synchronisation recognises that initiatives that work separately with men or with women are critical, but that *strategically associating* relevant interventions can assist the process of change.

## 'Gender-transformative' or 'gender-specific'?

### A word about terminology

We propose a slight modification to the initial conceptualisation of gender synchronisation, to keep the transformative purpose of this approach clearly in focus. Greene and Levack present the concept as a progression '*from gender-transformative to gender-synchronised approaches*' where 'gender-transformative' refers to gender-specific interventions that seek to transform restrictive, unequal and harmful gender norms. We think there are advantages to presenting the concept as a progression *from gender-specific towards gender-synchronised approaches*, with the ultimate goal of transforming harmful and inequitable gender norms and relations. This avoids language that, on its own, suggests a need to move beyond gender transformation. In fact, transforming unequal gender roles and responsibilities, norms and institutions is the objective of gender synchronisation – as conceptualised by Greene and Levack, and here. This formulation also makes clear that gender synchronisation proposes building on gender-specific strategies by actively coordinating such work. It is a call to move beyond co-existence of separate initiatives, not to abandon them, to optimise the potential for synergies, to focus on the relational aspects of gender equality work.

# 3 Gender synchronisation in practice

**'Gender synchronisation' may be a new way of conceptualising initiatives that intentionally intersect work with women and men towards gender equality, but such interventions themselves are not new. *Stepping Stones* in Uganda and elsewhere, *Soul City* in South Africa, highlighted by Greene and Levack, are examples. This section seeks to add to their work with examples from IWDA's work with partners that use this type of approach, although they pre-date the concept and so don't use the language of 'gender synchronisation'.**

The first case study explores a project in Cambodia that linked work with women and men in relation to intimate partner violence. The second case study considers the benefits of synchronising work with men and women in the WASH sector in Melanesia, to create new spaces for dialogue and change in highly gender-segregated contexts. The third case study outlines work with young men and boys and young women and girls in Cambodia to challenge harmful notions of masculinity.

## Case study 1: gender synchronisation and intimate partner violence

Heise and Garcia-Moreno define intimate partner violence as 'any behaviour within an intimate relationship that causes physical, psychological or sexual harm to those in the relationship' (2002: 89). To date, many efforts to understand and prevent intimate partner violence or to respond to the abuse and provide access to safety, services and justice have been gender-specific, reflecting the history of response and prevention efforts and perspectives about how violence should be addressed. Yet intimate partner violence is fundamentally gendered: it reflects and occurs because of gender inequalities, and the abuse of power. This case study explores the development of a project in Cambodia that coordinated violence prevention and access to justice work with women and men.

### Intimate partner violence in Cambodia

Intimate partner violence, or domestic violence as it is commonly termed in Cambodia (and elsewhere), became part of national policy discussions in 1996 with the publication of the first national survey on intimate partner violence in post-conflict Cambodia (PADV 1996). This report found that intimate partner violence was a

significant problem in Cambodia. Subsequent national surveys including the *Demographic and Health Survey* (2000 and 2010) and the *Violence Against Women: A Baseline Survey* (2005) show that one in four Cambodian women is estimated to be affected. A national legal framework on intimate partner violence has been in place since 2005 (the *Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence and the Protection of Victims*) although implementation has been limited and under-resourced. For many women, their lack of power is compounded by poverty, a culture of impunity, corruption, and collusion between perpetrators and authorities. Many women are unaware of their rights and legal options and there remains a broad acceptance of a man's 'right' to beat his wife (VAW 2005: 1). In this context, civil society organisations are playing a key role in prevention, the development of support services and networks, legal awareness and access to justice for survivors.<sup>6</sup>

### Understanding the space for change

In 2006, Banteay Srei and IWDA, which at that point had worked together for close to 20 years, in collaboration with ADHOC (Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association), designed the AusAID-funded *Community Action Against Violence Against Women* (CAAVAW) project to tackle intimate partner violence in Cambodia using a community-empowerment approach that linked work with women and men. The three-year project used a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods to obtain and analyse information about which risk factors affected intimate partner violence in its geographic target area. The initiative was designed over six months using a participatory approach that involved local partners and some 160 women and men. Quantitative data from the *Cambodia Violence Against Women: A Baseline Survey* (2005) was combined with qualitative data from focus groups and interviews. During this design process, local women's groups in the project area called for more interventions with men: '*A clear message from most of the women was: talk to the men!*' (*Men's Talk* 2009: 6). This focus was incorporated in the project design.

The CAAVAW baseline assessment in 2007 collected qualitative and quantitative data using 'a community-based, participatory approach consistent with the design of the project' (CAAVAW Baseline Assessment 2007: 9).

In 2008, in parallel with other community-level initiatives,

<sup>6</sup> It is important to acknowledge that some civil society organisations (e.g. religious, nationalist or cultural groups of various kinds) may also condone or tacitly support gender-based violence.



a study of men's attitudes towards violence against women was completed. *Men's Talk: Men's Attitudes Towards Men, Women, and Violence Against Women in Cambodia* used a mixed method approach and was designed to inform project initiatives and the ongoing work of partner organisations.

**Community Action Against Violence Against Women: project objectives and activities**

The CAAVAW project was designed to reach 47,640 people across 40 target villages over two and a half years in two provinces, Battambang and Siem Reap. The project identified five inter-related objectives to reduce violence against women, addressing risk factors for intimate partner violence at different levels. These objectives reflected the need – as expressed by communities and especially women's groups – to work intentionally with both men and women to prevent intimate partner violence.

**1. Community mobilisation:** To implement a range of sustainable village-based solutions that work towards a reduction in violence against women.

**2. Women's empowerment:** To increase women's awareness, knowledge and confidence to realise their needs and human rights.

**3. Working with men:** To promote village-based dialogue, understanding and action on men's issues.

**4. Working with local authorities:** To enable local authorities to respond to abused women in a respectful and non-discriminatory way.

**5. Support to women:** To provide a full range of support to women who choose to take action in the courts.

The CAAVAW project worked at the individual level to challenge beliefs and actions and inform individuals about their rights. Women were assisted to access support services and where they so chose, to take their cases to court to seek divorce on grounds of intimate partner violence. Multiple strategies were used at the community level. CAAVAW built on existing community structures including the Gender Peace Networks, gender-balanced pairs of male and female volunteers that worked at the commune level. Female and male Gender Peace Networkers worked together, but provided gender-specific support to women's groups and men's groups seeking to address intimate partner violence, and to individuals. Violence Against Women Village Funds were established to provide economic support for victims of intimate partner violence, to enable those who wished to leave violent relationships to do so. Community mobilisation activities raised community awareness about the new laws on domestic violence.



Gender Peace Networkers  
Photo: Anne Frankenberg, IWDA

Local authorities were trained in responding to violence against women and the domestic violence laws. The project worked directly and indirectly at the relationship level, through couple counselling for identified cases of intimate partner violence and through its work with individual women and men who were partners.<sup>7</sup> These different interventions were critical to addressing the underlying gender norms and unequal power relations that contribute to intimate partner violence at community, individual and relationship levels.

### **Gender synchronisation in Community Action Against Violence Against Women**

The CAAVAW project illustrates a gender-synchronised approach, intentionally intersecting work with women and men to address violence against women through related gender-specific interventions undertaken at the same time or sequentially in the same communities. Working in a coordinated way with both women and men was at the core of the project, and is an ongoing part of Banteay Srei's work:

“Banteay Srei has a particular focus on building women's capacity and solidarity, but in line with current thinking on gender it recognises the importance of also working directly with men to increase their understanding and capacity to advocate. The end result of the process is women and men who can find and analyse their most crucial community issues and advocate with the appropriate figures for significant and lasting change.”

“This approach of working with women and with men is [used] for all our projects. For example, for women's political empowerment work we work with male local authorities. We provide training to them on gender and coach them to support women's leadership.”<sup>8</sup>

Analysing the CAAVAW project through the lens of gender synchronisation highlights the following insights and learning about using a coordinated approach:

### **Women wanted initiatives to work with both women and men:**

“It was the women who said you should also talk to the men. The *Men's Talk Report* identified challenges for men in how to be a man. From this we realised that it is important to involve men in the project.”

**Intimate partner violence involves both women and men**, albeit often in profoundly different ways. Prevention efforts need to work with both men and women, and at different levels.

When Banteay Srei began working with men within its projects in 2005, the organisation decided it needed to have both women and men as volunteer Gender Peace Networkers and to recruit male staff.

“Before we focused more on working with women but the issue is not just with women. It was difficult for female Gender Peace Networkers and Banteay Srei staff to talk with men involved in family violence. We wanted role-model men to work with men.”

“Usually in Khmer culture, men have more power and authority than women. People know that clearly so that it is normal for them to use violence against their wives. But now there are organisations working to reduce the problems. There is still some violence, but there is less than before.”

**Working with only women may be counter-productive:** working with women in ways that challenge dominant gender roles or unequal gender relations may increase the risk of violence for women (Heise and Garcia-Moreno 2002). Proactively working with both women and men, separately or together, to explore gender roles and the potential and implications of change, can reduce risk by creating a more conducive environment.

<sup>7</sup> This raises the issue of a tension in resource-constrained settings where formal violence services are limited, between the value of having some community-based response capacity, and insights from professional settings that point to risks with couples counselling given the power differences that are manifested when one partner is abusive (Hegarty and Taft 2008).

<sup>8</sup> Sok Panha, Executive Director of Banteay Srei. Interview with Isadora Quay, 04/05/2012

👥 **When we started raising awareness [about intimate partner violence], then women started to challenge men, then it creates more violence. When we started involving men to learn and reflect about their situation, they started to talk to each other. It has been a great approach because men can now see how women contribute to community development.** 🗣️

**New spaces for gender dialogue** between women and men arose through the project's community-mobilisation components which exposed the community to awareness-raising messages that promoted non-violence.

👥 **It's important for both women and men to learn about each other and respect each other so that they can understand each other's roles.** 🗣️

### **Gender-specific strategies: vital but not sufficient?**

Intimate partner violence is a complex, persistent and widespread phenomenon. Publicly available information on what does work in violence against women prevention is improving but limited (Raab 2011: 12, citing Bott 2005 and Raab and Rocha 2010) and there is a 'dearth of high quality evaluations' (Morrison, Ellsberg and Bott 2007: 44). Changes in knowledge and awareness do not necessarily translate to shifts in deeply-rooted attitudes, behaviours and social norms.<sup>9</sup> Gender-specific strategies remain vitally important in providing safe spaces for discussion, strategising and support. Nevertheless, gender synchronisation encourages us to look for potential synergies between strategies working with men and women, to strengthen efforts to tackle the power inequalities at the heart of intimate partner violence. Working in a coordinated way with both women and men may also create opportunities for new dialogue spaces between men and women where both can be heard by the other.

## **Case study 2: Gender synchronisation in water, hygiene and sanitation**

This case study shows how linking work with women and men to explore gender norms can create productive spaces for change, even when 'gender equality' is not an explicit focus. The research on gender outcomes from two NGO water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) projects in Melanesia found unanticipated space for, and change in, gender roles and relations at individual, household and community levels. The case study also highlights different approaches to gender synchronisation, from aligning gender-specific interventions to creating new spaces for dialogue. In a context such as Melanesia where there is significant gender-segregation of roles and responsibilities, spaces for building greater understanding between women and men are important.

### **Promoting gender equality by working with women and men on water, sanitation and hygiene**

From 2009 to 2011, the Institute for Sustainable Futures at the University of Technology Sydney and IWDA undertook action research with two NGOs, Live and Learn Environmental Education in Fiji and World Vision Vanuatu. The research explored how gender equality can

be supported and evaluated in WASH programs in the Pacific. It incorporated two case studies of communities engaged with programs that emphasised community engagement strategies and inclusion.

The research contexts were characterised by limited formal literacy, especially among women, and males in dominant positions as leaders, chiefs and decision makers. A participatory, strengths-based approach was used to define and identify successes related to the situation of women and men and enabling factors that might be replicated.

Although the two NGO projects were not focused on gender equality, they in fact enabled many positive gender outcomes. The research showed how working in an intentional and coordinated way with men and women to create opportunities to try new roles, observe each other and contribute to decision making in areas close to women's traditional responsibilities made it possible for women to take on leadership roles for the first time and for this to be overwhelmingly supported by both women and men.

<sup>9</sup> For example, the external evaluation of Oxfam Great Britain's 'We Can' regional campaign in South Asia (2004-2011), Oxfam GB's largest scale intervention on violence against women, found that while there was demonstrable impact in terms of transforming attitudes, the change in social norms was confined to participating organisations, other institutions and localised groups (Raab 2011: 7).

### Hearing each other: combining single-sex and mixed-sex spaces to enable gender dialogue

The research process intentionally created single-sex spaces for men and women to explore aspects of their gender roles and relationships that were valued and changes that had occurred in association with the projects. Each group's perspective was then shared with the other with 'rules' that required being listened to respectfully. Structured shared spaces enabled women and men to discuss what is possible now that was new and why this mattered, and their hopes for what might be possible in the future. This put the focus on concrete possibilities and identifying where men's and women's interests overlapped. The quotes below illustrate some of the changes that were particularly valued:

👂👂 **The response to women has changed, they are more listened to, there is more trust of women. Whatever project women take a lead in, it is a success. For example in health issues, drainage, compost. Women have gained respect.** 👂👂

Woman, Senikau village<sup>10</sup>



Photo: Gabrielle Halcrow, IWDA

### GENDER OUTCOMES IN VANUATU

1. Positive changes in gender relations at the family and/or household level
  - Increased respect given to women by husbands and other men in the household
  - Changes in gender division of labour with men taking on an increasing role in hygiene in their home to support their wives
2. Reduction in violence at the household level
3. Positive changes in gender relations at the community level
  - Recognition of women's hard work in the community
  - Increased trust in women
4. Women's inclusion in decision making processes in their community
  - Women taking on leadership roles for the first time in their community
  - Women's inclusion in committees and decision making processes
  - Increased space and support for women's voices to be heard at community level
5. Women's labour in collecting water reduced and their practical need for water, hygiene and sanitation facilities satisfied

👂👂 **I was elected to the committee and am very proud, it is unusual to have a woman on a committee and contribute to decisions e.g. about payment for water etc. I feel more respected by my husband ... and I am taking more of a leadership role also in the religious group I am a part of. In my family the relationship is improved and I am happier.** 👂👂

Female water committee member,  
Puluan village

<sup>10</sup> The names of villages were changed to protect the privacy of communities. Puluan and Nanen villages are in Vanuatu, Senitola and Senikau villages are in Fiji. More information about the research, case studies and resource materials can be found at [www.genderinpacificwash.info](http://www.genderinpacificwash.info).

## GENDER OUTCOMES IN FIJI

1. Increased sense of community unity, through men and women working together
  - Women and men valued working together
  - Increased cooperation and collaboration
2. Women's efforts to promote community sanitation and health are recognised
  - Recognition of their role contributed to increased voice at community level
3. Women are working together and supporting each other
  - Concerted action to improve WASH
  - Improved relations between women and sense of collective potential
4. Women are more respected by men and feel more valued
  - At household and community level
  - Increased recognition of the roles women play and their labour
5. Women have an increased voice at community level
  - Women have increased confidence to speak
  - Women being given specific opportunities to contribute their ideas
6. Communication between husband and wife has improved
  - Including in relation to how issues were resolved, how household decisions were made and how work is valued
7. Men are participating more in household sanitation and water management

“Men acknowledge the amount of work the women have done and their role. Men always talk. Women always do the work and are more committed to get things done. They take more responsibility. The change is the recognition and that the men see they need to share the labour and recognise the work and contribution.”

Man, Senikau village

“Water has solved family conflicts, especially violence in homes, because most violence happens just because of laziness to fetch water by men. And now we can see happiness in the home, just because of availability of water. Most of the fighting is only about water.”

Man, Puluau village

### Seeing each other: creating space for women and men to work together

Meeting men's and women's practical WASH needs while creating new opportunities for women and actively working to shift gender attitudes and roles, created space for incremental change. Strategies that enabled women to explore new roles and take on leadership positions intersected with strategies to demonstrate to men the value of women's contribution. Creating opportunities for women to take on leadership roles in committees alongside men was central to the process of change. Men and women observed and learned about each other's work, ideas and contributions in practice. Many of the gender outcomes identified by women and men involved shifts in traditional roles and access to decision making, and these changes were overwhelmingly viewed as positive by both women and men. Gender synchronisation highlights the importance of linking work with women and with men, and of creating spaces for dialogue. Enabling women and men to identify the aspects of their relationships that they value and to articulate what they would value even more created constructive space to discuss change and identify gender priorities.



Photo: Naomi Carard, UTS

### Case study 3: challenging harmful constructions of masculinity: 'rapping against risk'

Between 2006 and 2010, IWDA partnered with World Vision Australia and Cambodia to provide gender analysis, mainstreaming advice and programming for the AusAID-funded *Community Strengthening and Gender Mainstreaming for Integrated Mine Action* program in rural Cambodia. The program combined de-mining with community development so individuals and communities could benefit from land that mining had rendered inaccessible. As the effects of land contamination and poverty are experienced differently by women and men, IWDA's role was to ensure that the voices of women and men, boys and girls were included in determining priorities for land clearance, de-mining, and development planning, and that messages about the risk of mines were gender-sensitive.

An evaluation of Cambodian mine risk education programs had recommended more targeted campaigns. Teenage boys were identified as at high risk of casualties. While poverty leaves some people with little choice but to risk entering mine affected areas to sustain their livelihood, a smaller group, particularly young men and boys, tamper with mines/unexploded ordinance (UXO) in spite of the risks – and even after receiving mine risk education – to prove they are 'tough'. IWDA piloted an innovative peer-to-peer mine risk education initiative to engage this hard-to-reach group.

Landmine Monitor Report for Cambodia, 2008  
323 casualties, comprising

Men	156
Women	121
Boys	27
Girls	19

83% of casualties had received mine risk education

Recognising the importance of performance and music for young men and women, the pilot engaged them in writing and performing rap with messages discouraging tampering with UXO. Groups of males and females in their teens and early 20s in three villages were trained in rap composition and performance by professional entertainers. Their messages were presented via a concert and contest to an audience of hundreds including school children, local authorities, UNDP's Equity TV, donors and mine action organisations. The lyrics of all three groups poked fun at common beliefs about tampering and associated gender norms.

Some of the boys doing the rap songs had admitted involvement in tampering, so they were ideal peer role models to reach out to other young people and discourage risk taking. A radio commercial was produced using the winning song and spots were purchased on local radio for a month after the concert. A CD and ten-minute film were also developed.



The program linked work with young men to challenge harmful constructions of masculinity and work with young women to affirm that they did not consider tampering 'cool' and were not interested in men who put themselves at risk in this way. Young women's full involvement in writing and performing the rap items also challenged traditional expectations of Cambodian women. Youth, men and women alike, reported feeling like 'leaders' in their communities. The focus on teenage boys also helped to challenge the prevailing view that gender is only about 'women's empowerment' and demonstrated how gender analysis can help to address the specific needs and vulnerabilities of men and women, boys and girls.

Beyond the 'Rapping Against Risk' pilot, the wider program reflected a gender-synchronised approach in the deployment of mixed-sex and single-sex de-mining teams. Quantitative and qualitative research found that mixed-sex and single-sex de-mining teams were equally

effective at manual mine clearance, and that enabling women to participate in de-mining work provided valuable opportunities for women to earn income, positive role models for rural women, and helped to shift men's views about what work was possible for women. Involving women alongside men enabled reflection on prevailing gender norms.

🗣️ **We never thought women could do it, but when we saw them in their uniforms, carrying equipment and doing the work skillfully, we understood that they can... I thought they must be scared and that it is very dangerous for them, but now I realise that they have the same training as the men and that the risks are the same too.** 🗣️

Interview with male villager, Pia Wallgren

🗣️ **I AM A GANGSTER LEADER. I AM NOT AFRAID OF MINES BECAUSE MY BODY IS TATTOOED, AND I HAVE KHMER MAGIC, SO MINES WILL NOT EXPLODE ON ME.** 🗣️



Mine risk education concert Photos: Vinh Dao, Blind Eye Productions

# 4 Conclusion

**Gender synchronisation proposes that gender inequalities can be most effectively addressed by strategically linking work with men and women towards gender equality. It is not an argument for abandoning gender-specific spaces or initiatives but for building on these by identifying synergies and, when appropriate, creating spaces that bring women and men together.** Initially proposed in a public health context, this paper argues its wider applicability in development.

Gender synchronisation is consistent with Gender and Development's fundamental concern with transforming unequal social relations between women and men. It focuses our attention on the socially-constructed roles and responsibilities of women and men, on the relationships between them and on the institutions, structures and cultures that reproduce these over time.

**Transforming gender inequality will require change at many levels. Some of the changes required for more equal gender roles and relations are complementary and interdependent.** In contexts where there is significant gender-segregation of roles and responsibilities, creating new spaces for dialogue between women and men can help in identifying areas of shared interest in change. A focus on synchronising gender strategies also underlines that renegotiating gender roles and relations involves relational work and challenging unequal power structures. While a mix of incentives and disincentives will be needed to encourage and support change, change will involve women and men, as individuals, in their relationships, in their families, and in communities. Social constructions of both femininity and masculinity need to broaden and loosen to enable and reproduce such changes over time.

**A focus on coordinating gender strategies with women and men has potential to support a stronger focus on gender equality in 'mainstream' development initiatives.** While these may involve both men and women, it is less common (indeed, rare) for such work to be informed by detailed gender analysis and incorporate specific objectives and strategies to advance gender equality. Gender synchronisation may encourage organisations already working with both men and women to work in more *intentional and gender-informed ways*, by highlighting the value of associating such work for promoting gender equality.

**The concept of gender synchronisation also has potential to help address two key challenges with gender mainstreaming:** (i) the loss of specific accountabilities for progressing gender equality (gender is 'everywhere but nowhere'<sup>11</sup>); and (ii) the reality that the dual approach of integrating gender considerations into all development initiatives, and addressing the legacy of past disadvantage through targeted programs, is often reduced in practice to the inclusion of specific women-focused initiatives.

We have some concern that the *language* of gender synchronisation, as with 'gender' more broadly, may be a barrier to effective work with women and men in some contexts. While this may itself reflect entrenched and unequal gender norms, it is nonetheless real and an important issue for organisations working to address gender inequality. The language of 'synchronisation' may exacerbate this issue, and suggest a technocratic response to what is fundamentally an issue of power. Nonetheless, we think the *idea* of strategically linking gender strategies with women and men can strengthen gender equality work.

This paper aims to encourage further thinking and discussion about the benefits, limits and requirements of coordinating or synchronising work with women and men towards gender equality. In presenting case studies through the lens of gender synchronisation, it seeks to add to the examples of this approach in practice. **Coordinating work with women and men also brings challenges and risks, including that existing inequalities will constrain voice and make respectful and open dialogue difficult.** These sit alongside potential to reinforce current efforts and support dialogue about more equal gender roles, responsibilities and relations.

Gender synchronisation is new terminology but the approach has been in use for some time, including at the behest of communities themselves. **However, there remain important issues to be addressed in elaborating the rationale for gender synchronisation, and evidence to be collected about the difference a coordinated approach makes, how, and in what contexts.**

11 Tiessen, R (2007), *Everywhere/Nowhere: Gender Mainstreaming in Development Agencies*, Kumarian Press, 2007.



# 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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## **Dr Patrick Kilby**

This paper is important as it reinforces, and demonstrates through good practice case studies, what has been known at a conceptual level for a long time: that changing gender relations in some dimensions will require working with both men and women. This has been the case in HIV programs since the 1980s but such practice tended to stay in these narrow confines until the 2000s when engaging men on domestic violence issues was highlighted as an important strategy. Andrea Cornwall in 2000 (and others) called for 'more men in women's projects' (p.19). This call was not taken up as broadly as it should have or could have been. This is in part because to do this effectively would involve challenging prevailing norms and patriarchy, and so it is only in certain circumstances that addressing both men and women around an issue is seen to work.

This is the challenge in working in a coordinated way on gender issues, as such issues involve, at their core, addressing fundamental power imbalances. To some extent this may be intractable; even in liberal Scandinavia, men are not doing housework or looking after children as much as they should be. But in small spaces, prevailing gender norms can be challenged, particularly where there is benefit to both men and women, and the family as a whole. Working with men and women, however, won't address the patriarchy – nobody wants to willingly give up power – so there will always be a need for women's own programs that address issues of rights and access, and for a legislative stick to enforce the many egregious cases of gender injustice.

Care also has to be taken as working with men and women can be counterproductive, for example in gender-based violence (GBV) programs. If men are perpetrators, they can hide their role and take it out on the family later. Challenging the overt physical exercise of power that is GBV has to be handled very carefully and not naively as some programs are doing. Likewise, the all too common (these days) argument that 'men are missing out' has to be challenged, and not let lie as an easy assertion and argument for having men's programs for the sake of having men's programs. Working with men on gender equality has to be in the context of addressing the rights of women.

Overall this paper is an important contribution to moving development agencies to thinking about working with men and women in an 'intentional association', and that programs are constructed carefully to do this. There needs to be some caution that gender coordinated approaches are not seen as a 'silver bullet', replacing existing women's rights programs and other programs dealing with gender injustice. But such approaches should be thought about in any gender analysis of a particular situation. The question should always be asked: is there any way that working with men (as well as women) in this context can improve the program?

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## **About IWDA**

International Women's Development Agency (IWDA) is the only Australian development organisation entirely focused on women's rights and gender equality.

IWDA's vision is for a just, equitable and sustainable world where women have a powerful voice in economic, cultural, civil and political life.

It is secular, not-for-profit and works in partnership to create positive change.

IWDA works within a Gender and Development framework, seeking to promote respectful relationships between men and women at all levels of society, and to transform the structures and behaviours that perpetuate gender inequality.

While IWDA has focused on women's empowerment and addressing women's inequality since establishment in 1985, it does not work solely with women. However, as a feminist development organisation, IWDA's work with men has been in the context of and emerged from initiatives focused on women. In many countries in which IWDA works, men who support greater equality are important allies. Whether as community members or staff of partner organisations, they can play a key role in challenging unequal systems of power through demonstrating and enabling more respectful relationships and more inclusive decision making.

## **About *Gender Matters***

*Gender Matters* is a new publication series intended to inform and support the Australian international development community's work towards women's empowerment and gender equality. It will document issues and links emerging across IWDA's development and research programs with partners, focus on innovative theory and practice, encourage dialogue and research about uncertainties and gaps, and share learning that can inform future development initiatives. The series will be informed by and link to academic thinking and debates but does not aim to be formally academic in approach or tone.

## **Disclaimer**

*Gender Matters* explores issues that IWDA believes are important for the development sector to consider and discuss. The authors take responsibility for any errors and gaps.

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