



Gender with Men

Thinking about Men and Gender

When one hears the word *gender*, a common response is to think *women*. This is not only true across many societies but also in the field of international development cooperation. In a sense, men are the *norm* of social analysis and as such their gender is not often examined or well understood. As a result, men are not active in gender work, including projects, planning and policy. However, gender equality cannot be achieved solely through the promotion of women and girls, because such efforts have a limited effect on changing the social institutions and structures.

Recognizing and understanding men's gender – their expected roles, relations and positions as men – can help engage them more naturally in efforts to achieve equality and reduce poverty. In most societies there are dominant definitions of masculinity that dictate the position of men vis-à-vis women and other men. On the other hand, men are very different from one another. Like *women*, the term

men refers to a heterogeneous group comprised of individuals positioned within diverse and ever-changing contexts around the world that have different values, motivations and relations.

Working with men and boys as change agents

Fortunately, over the past decade, many local and international organizations have started to work with men and boys around gender issues. Working with boys, whose identity and range of behavior is just developing, represents a particularly promising approach towards changing traditional stereotype roles. In addition, it is imperative to win over open-minded, reform-oriented men, especially those in key social positions such as religious authorities, members of parliament or business representatives as allies and multipliers who can push forward equal rights policies. Men have been involved in many different ways in the work towards gender equality. Through specific programs, young men have been educated on sexual health and HIV/AIDS as well as their roles and responsibilities in sexual relationships. Male journalists, religious leaders and human rights activists have been functioning as change agents in the promotion of women's rights such as lobbying for a legal reform of specific family laws. Working with men as partners for gender equality can be categorized into three main areas:

1. Working with men as decision makers and service providers:

male policy makers, police and community leaders against gender based violence; collaborating with male staff in development organizations to engage them in gender mainstreaming activities.

2. Integrating men into the development process with a "gendered lens":

including project design, implementation and evaluation. *Gender* projects that focus on the empowerment of women may be strengthened by the inclusion of men by taking into account their relations and positions within families and communities.

International Agreements, which support gender equitable work with men include:

- The International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo (1994)
- The Programme of Action of the World Summit on Social Development (1995)
- The Beijing Platform for Action (1995)
- The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms against Discrimination of Women (1995)
- The Millennium Development Goals (2000)
- The 26th special session of the General Assembly on HIV/AIDS (2001)
- The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) – 48th Session "The role of men and boys in achieving gender equality" (2004)

3. Targeting groups of men and boys when and where they are vulnerable:

the lack of a gendered analysis of men and boys causes some important problems that are specific to men to be overlooked by development organizations. These include, for example, young men in conflict situations, or men and boys dealing with unemployment.

Lessons learned

Work towards gender equality is a long-term agenda that requires a change in attitudes and behaviors by both men and women. The benefits of more equality – economic, social and legal – are a driving force behind these changes. Men and women change when they realize the increased opportunity and efficiency of more flexible gender roles. Some additional lessons for engaging men include:

- Messages about gender and behavioral change are most effective when emphasizing the positive outcomes for men and their partners.
- It is important to have men talk to other men about gender issues, in addition to having men and women discuss gender issues together. Also, identifying role models who have an influence on men and boys – peers, mothers, fathers, grandparents, community members and celebrities – is a good strategy to send positive messages.
- Creating comfortable environments to engage men is important. Both men and women need their own spaces to discuss what can be intimate and difficult issues.

Experiences of the sector programme 'Promoting Gender Equality and Women's Rights'

Winning over religious leaders as partners.

Recently, efforts to improve the legal status of women in some countries of the Arab world had the greatest chance of success when based on religious arguments. To spread awareness on those legal entitlements enshrined in the Quran and Sunnah, the Yemeni NGO Women's Forum for Research and Training (WFRT) organized roundtables and trainings with influential men. Through these activities, male reform-oriented university scholars, religious scholars and leaders, preachers in mosques (Imams), journalists and human rights activists were won over as allies for this cause. This resulted in the male partners addressing women's rights aspects in their work: male journalists published positive articles about women's rights; several preachers in mosques addressed the subject positively in their Friday sermons and held lectures in mosques, in political party forums, on TV and radio or within private homes.

Men against male violence in southern Africa.

As an effective means of recruiting more men for the fight against gender-based violence, FEMNET (an Africa wide network for gender equality) initiated *The African Network of Men*. On the occasion of an international campaign for the fight against gender-based violence, the network of men organized a *travelling conference*, where they travelled across eastern and southern Africa. Over 100 men from Zambia, Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Malawi and South Africa came by bus to Lilongwe in Malawi. Along the way, they spoke to thousands of people about gender-based violence and HIV/AIDS. The men attracted people's attention through music, dance and participatory street theatre, triggering animated discussions in the towns where they stopped. The buses were decorated with flags proclaiming *Peace in Africa Begins At Home: Men Fight GBV* and *Men Working to Stop the Spread of HIV/AIDS* accompanied by drums and megaphones, which helped to get the message across.



Literature & links

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