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**The role of men and boys in achieving gender equality**

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# **Presentation for the Interactive Dialogue to Evaluate Progress in the Implementation of the Agreed Conclusions adopted by the Commission on the Status of Women in 2004**

## **Introduction**

1. Both the Programme of Action of the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), and the agreed conclusions from the 2004 Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) are revolutionary in what they suggest and propose on the role of men and boys in achieving equality. When we read between the lines, and we understand the discussions that happened to produce them, we can see that they present a plan for changing how societies, states and individuals view and socialize men and boys. They are not simply a collection of unconnected statements or a “to-do” list -- but a call for engaging men and boys in new, different and far-reaching ways to achieve gender equality, and for ending patriarchy and the unequal power relations behind it. And most importantly, perhaps, these statements do not make men and boys into the “bad guys”, or present men as inherently dominating or violent. They affirm that men, and masculinities, can change.

2. Furthermore, the delegates and the experts who contributed to these statements affirmed that men and boys must be allies in achieving change and that men and boys can understand and must be shown the benefits of change. Men and boys can – and some do already – see that gender equality is not always a zero-sum game. Relationships based on greater equality and cooperation, a more equal division of household and work activities outside the household, and equal pay to go with that equal division, are good for all of us – men and women.

3. At the same time, we must be realistic and face the difficult questions. Some of the changes that are being asked of us as men require giving up power and privilege.

4. And if there is evidence that men and masculinities change, there is also significant and well-founded skepticism about whether men and masculinities can change quickly enough and significantly enough to matter for this generation of women and girls. There are also questions about whether including men and boys is another way for men to derail gender equality -- to look “politically correct” without actually giving up power and privilege.

5. Others have asked whether engaging men and boys in gender equality will take away the already scarce resources for women’s and girls’ empowerment. These are all valid questions and serious considerations and must be taken into account. Engaging men and boys in gender equality cannot simply be a window dressing, nor should it be seen as the “easy” solution to achieving gender equality. Conflict is inevitable as we move ahead in this field. Giving up power and privilege is never easy and rarely done willingly – unless those who hold power and privilege come to see the extraordinarily high costs of unequal power relations. That is one key way to move forward.

6. Another key way forward is to hold men and boys accountable. Part of engaging men and boys in gender equality is simply affirming the obvious. We as men, whether in our households or relationships or as policymakers, have no choice but to accept gender equality. We as a community of nations have affirmed it as a central tenet of human

rights and social justice, and men and boys have no choice, or should have no choice, but to comply.

7. With this brief introduction, I will highlight some of the main areas of progress in engaging men and boys in achieving gender equality, based on the agreed conclusions from the Forty-eighth session of the Commission on the Status of Women. I will also highlight areas where little progress has been made, and what I see as some of the major changes and opportunities that lie ahead.

#### **Where are we now?**

8. Before reviewing actions since 2004, it is useful to start with a brief reality check. What is the situation of men and boys on some of the key issues defined both in the 2004 CSW agreed conclusions and in the ICPD Programme of Action? This list could fill pages but a few key statistics give us a sense of how far we have to go:

- **Family planning and sexual and reproductive health.** Seventy-four percent of contraceptive use worldwide is comprised of female-methods. While there have been advances in engaging men in using male methods or in supporting women in their contraceptive use, women continue to bear the responsibility for family planning worldwide.
- **Gender-based violence.** According to numerous household surveys, including the recent WHO-sponsored multi-country studies, some 30-50 percent of women worldwide have suffered physical violence at least once from a male partner.
- **Maternal mortality.** The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that there are approximately 600,000 maternal-related deaths each year, the majority preventable. Very little is being done to engage men, who often control women's access to health services, to reduce this number.
- **The Care and Raising of Children.** Women spend on average three to four times the amount of time caring for children than men do worldwide, even in countries where women have entered the workforce (outside the home) in numbers close to or equal to those of men.

9. This list could go on. Whether we talk about HIV/AIDS, conflict, sexual violence, or educational equality, there is some evidence of success but mainly, the evidence points to major challenges which remain in engaging men and boys and questioning rigid forms of socialization and power.

10. The global discourse for empowering girls – the focus of this year's CSW -- has generally centered on, among other things, girls' enrollment in public education, reducing or prohibiting early marriage, and economic empowerment. While all of these are key, even when they have been achieved (no small feat to be sure), girls and women are still too often vulnerable. In Latin America and Caribbean on the whole, for example, we see girls enrolled at nearly universal rates at the primary level (in some countries at rates higher than boys). But this enrollment does not leave girls immune to harassment and unwanted sexual advances. In a recent population-based survey in the Caribbean (where girls' rates of enrollment in primary school approach 100 percent, and are higher than those of boys), nearly 50 per cent of young women ages 10-18 reported that their first sexual experience was "forced" or "somewhat forced".

11. Similarly, in parts of sub-Saharan Africa and much of South Asia, girls studying in mixed sex schools report harassment and sexual violence at the hands of male students and male teachers. Thus, even if empowered to be in public spaces (such as workplaces, schools or universities), girls and women are too often subject to harassment and abuse and little is being done to engage men and boys to change these situations.

**What have we achieved? *A Report Card***

12. What progress have we seen in engaging men and boys in achieving gender equality? There is some good news to report. The 2004 CSW agreed conclusions on the role of men and boys in achieving gender equality called for action inter alia in the following areas:

- Gender equitable education;
- Engaging men as fathers in gender equitable socialization of children and in care giving;
- Institutionalizing the inclusion of men and boys in gender equality and gender mainstreaming policies;
- Public information campaigns and engaging the media, including internet, in questioning inequitable and sexist views;
- Engaging men and boys in HIV/AIDS treatment and prevention, and in sexual and reproductive health; and
- Engaging men and boys to reduce gender-based violence.

13. Each of these areas deserves a thorough analysis, but the following is a synopsis and assessment of each:

14. ***Gender equitable education.*** We have a growing body of research on how gender inequalities are constructed in the school system, and more research on how boys and men are part of that – and what they think about gender and gender equality. Studies suggest that boys in school in much of the world are aware that the “rules” related to gender are changing, and that space must be made for girls. But the research also confirms that many school-going boys and male teachers resist change, and that girls continue to face subtle and not-so-subtle forms of discrimination, harassment and physical and sexual violence in schools. Many ministries of education have called for engaging men and boys in changing this situation, but evidence of concrete action – reprimanding teachers and boys who discriminate against or abuse girls, reaching boys in school with messages about gender equality and reducing violence and harassment and sensitizing of teachers (particularly male teachers) about gender equality – is limited. There are a few examples, but the issue has not on a whole been taken seriously yet. There are, as will be discussed below, numerous educational methodologies and curricula for sensitizing boys in gender equality that could be integrated in formal education, but so far, apart from a few limited examples, this has not happened.

15. ***Engaging men as fathers in gender equitable socialization of children and in care giving.*** Following examples from some European countries, many countries have introduced legislation that offers fathers some leave or time off at the birth of a child. The World Health Organization (WHO) drew up guidelines, which some countries are implementing, to make it possible for women to opt to have fathers present during childbirth. A 2003 International Summit on Fatherhood, albeit rather small, called additional attention to the issue and identified a small but growing array of strategies to engage men as fathers – for the well-being of children, women and men themselves. The

United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) in its efforts in early childhood development has supported and encouraged activities by NGOs and countries in this area, and evaluated positive impact in the case of a large-scale project in Turkey. But overall, the burden of child care and the raising of children continues to fall on women. Nonetheless, some examples confirm that engaging men as fathers may be one of the most compelling areas where men perceive an immediate interest in participating and see benefits to themselves.

**16. Institutionalizing the inclusion of men and boys in gender equality and gender mainstreaming policies.** As we will highlight later on, the area of policy – which encompasses all of the issues here – is highly underdeveloped when it comes to including boys and men in achieving gender equality. Most policy statements, and gender mainstreaming mechanisms, still consider “gender” to mean women and girls and make little or no mention of boys and men. There are nonetheless, interesting examples, including South Africa’s “Gender Machinery”, a policy and monitoring structure which has the goal of implementing and reviewing South Africa’s compliance with United Nations (UN) conventions related to gender, to propose national laws, and to promote gender equality within the national, provincial and municipal governments. Included within this national “apparatus” is a “men and gender equality programme”, which includes some efforts to train staff and policymakers in engaging men in gender equality and to achieve more coordination within existing civil society and governmental efforts to engage men (e.g. examining ways to engage men in care and support through existing HIV prevention and support services, engaging men in existing wellness and community social services).

17. Similarly, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) gender focal points and other UN agencies, including the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), have made efforts to include men and boys as part of gender mainstreaming in some countries. But overall, we have yet to take the issue seriously into the realm of public policies. Led by Promundo and the International Center for Research on Women, a group of researchers from South Africa, India, Brazil, the US, Canada, Norway and Mexico, enjoined by the 2004 CSW agreed conclusions, are starting a three-year comparative research and policy analysis project to “scan” existing policies related to men and gender equality and identify and suggest relevant policies to engage men and boys in gender equality.

**18. Public information campaigns and engaging the media, including internet, in questioning inequitable and sexist views.** In the last few years there have been a growing number of creative public information and behavior change campaigns with messages specifically targeting men and boys about gender equality. Soul City in South Africa, Sexto Sentido in Nicaragua, the “Together for a Happy Family” campaign in Jordan, the Suami Siaga (or “I’m an Alert Husband”) campaign in Indonesia, and the Coaching Boys to Men in the US are just a few examples. Impact evaluations confirmed changes in attitudes and behavior intentions as a result of the campaigns. In some cases, when combined with community-based messages and activities as well, such campaigns have led to behavior change.

19. Many effective campaigns and community outreach report extensive, and sometimes costly formative research to test messages, develop characters or storylines and determine in consultation with members of the target group, the most effective and relevant media. Many effective campaigns and community outreach interventions often identify groups of

men or individual men who influence the behavior of other men, including coaches, fathers, and religious leaders. Others actively recruited and involved men from the community settings (or men in positions of power or celebrities) who already supported gender-equitable attitudes. Several, but not all, effective mass media campaigns have involved high-cost and high-quality media, including commercials, soap operas or TV and radio dramas produced by commercial studios with professional actors and technicians. Such campaigns are generally among the most expensive, but have also been those that have reached the highest numbers of men and boys (and women and girls). Overall, the evidence suggests that such campaigns – when well-designed – can lead to attitude and behavior change on the part of men.

20. At the grassroots level, there are also notable advances including the White Ribbon Campaign, a global initiative of men working to end men's violence against women. Originated in Canada in the early 1990s, the campaign is now active – sometimes at a very small scale, other times with a national presence – in more than 50 countries. In Canada, the campaign has the slogan “Our future has no violence against women.” In the Asia-Pacific region, UNDP has recently become a partner and is looking at taking the campaign regionally. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), UNIFEM, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and other UN offices have also collaborated or supported the campaign in some countries. Other similar campaigns have been implemented around the global 16 Days of Activism to End Violence Against Women. In India, UNIFEM supported a campaign called “What kind of man are you?” with public service announcements related to HIV/AIDS and gender-based violence, among other themes.

21. But the issue of the objectification of women and girls, and the “demand” side of sexual exploitation has scarcely been addressed. Multi-billion dollar industries of pornography, hidden industries of sex tourism (local and international) and the objectification of women and girls in the media are scarcely being discussed. Exceptions include an International Labour Organization (ILO)-supported study, the first of its kind, on men's demand for and attitudes about under-age girls and sexual exploitation in general in Latin America. But apart from some small but key actions like this, we have yet to engage the internet, advertisers and mass media on such questions.

**22. *Engaging men and boys in HIV/AIDS treatment and prevention, and in sexual and reproductive health.*** While much remains to be done, this is perhaps the area where the most progress has been made. A 2003 global conference on men and reproductive health featured presentations of evaluation data from more than 65 initiatives worldwide with demonstrated results in engaging men and boys – results measured by higher condom rates, reduce STI rates, greater take-up by men of voluntary counseling and testing (VCT), and increased collaboration between couples related to reproductive health issues. At the UN level, UNFPA has been especially active in this area, testing important models in reaching men, in the military and elsewhere. The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) has also contributed in this area and is currently working alongside WHO to identify opportunities to include a strong educational component for young men who voluntarily undergo male circumcision, as is happening in some parts of Eastern and Southern Africa.

**23. *Engaging men and boys to reduce gender-based violence.*** As mentioned in the examples above, there have been numerous efforts in the last few years to engage men and

boys in reducing gender-based violence. As the recent multi-country WHO study on violence against women made clear, such violence is not the activity of a few men against women. It is instead part of deeply held social norms in most if not all settings; in some cases it is tolerated or simply ignored in national laws and policies. Thus, engaging men and boys to reduce gender-based violence (GBV) must be widespread, integrated, large-scale and well-designed. We have cited examples earlier of campaigns engaging men and boys in preventing GBV, some that have shown evidence of leading to attitude change. In addition, there are several examples of community-based or school-based group sensitization or education activities that have also shown evidence of effectiveness, including Stepping Stones and Men as Partners in South Africa and Program H in India and Brazil. But again, the scale has been modest. Engaging men and boys to question and end violence against women and girls must be scaled up, must include policymakers and must be sustained.

24. But we should keep in mind the limitations of these program initiatives. The research we have confirms that such interventions can work – men and boys can be reached with information about HIV and sexual and reproductive health, and GBV, and that when information is combined with action-inducing messages and/or group education or counseling, that they can and do change behavior. However, the scale and sustainability of this work has been lacking. Most of these interventions have lasted a year or two and then ended. We have still largely failed to integrate them in meaningful, large-scale and sustainable ways within ministries of health.

25. This list of examples and themes could go on. We see progress in some areas, and less in others. We also see evidence of change happening in spite of our program and policy efforts. As women enter the workforce outside the home, and fertility has declined in many countries, families are reorganizing roles and responsibilities. Advertisers and the media perceive these changes, and sometimes contribute to them. But there is also evidence that some non-equitable and even violent versions of manhood are still far too alive and well. Whether through the glorification of male violence in media and the internet, the lingering acceptance of men’s violence against women in some settings, and the ongoing and unequal burden of child care on women, we can only conclude that we still have far to go.

### **Where should we go from here?**

26. *We have the “social technology”, but we lack the political will to take on the big questions and go to scale.* An ongoing review by WHO and Promundo of 59 programs engaging men and boys in health and gender equality has confirmed that nearly two-thirds of the programs reviewed have showed measurable changes in the attitudes of men and boys reached. These include programs in gender-based violence prevention, HIV/AIDS treatment and prevention, engaging men as fathers, maternal health interventions, and others. The conclusion emerging from this review is that while we need more evaluation data, the existing evidence confirms that we know what works – that we have the “social technology” – for engaging men and boys in interventions to achieve gender equality and that men can and do change as a result of these interventions. However, we must keep in mind that these are mostly small-scale efforts, reaching from several hundred to at most several thousand men and boys. To go to scale, and to create a policy environment that makes such change lasting, we must engage policymakers, the business sector (particularly advertisers), universities, the military and other sectors. Indeed, 59 mostly

NGO efforts – however important they are – cannot by themselves achieve the kind of large-scale change necessary.

**27. *NGOs have taken the lead in engaging men and boys in many settings, but can't do it alone and often lack the means to scale up.*** Many of the most promising and sustainable (and evaluated) interventions to engage men and boys in gender equality have been NGO-led, and the number of NGOs working in or interested in the issue continues to grow. As one example, supported by UN partners and by some policymakers, a group of national and international NGOs have formed a global network called MenEngage – A Global Alliance to Engage Boys and Men in Gender Equality. Founding members include EngenderHealth (US and South Africa), Instituto Promundo (Brazil), Save the Children-Sweden, Sahoyog (India), the International Planned Parenthood Federation, UNDP, WHO, the Family Violence Prevention Fund (US) and the White Ribbon Campaign (Canada). This alliance held consultations with NGOs in Eastern and Southern Africa, in which 75 NGOs participated; in South Asia, in which 65 participated; and one in India in which more than 80 NGOs participated. Forthcoming meetings will be held in Southeast Asia and Latin America. There are likely hundreds of more NGOs, interested in or working on engaging men and boys, whose experiences could provide platforms for taking interventions with men and boys to scale. What is clear from these first consultations is that creative work is happening, and that these NGOs are partnering with NGOs who work with women and girls (or in many cases the same NGOs that have been working with women and girls are beginning to work with men and boys). But a common refrain from the NGOs has been the challenge of sustaining their work and scaling up.

**28. *A few vocal and visible leaders have signed on to the cause but we will need to engage the “big” men and women.*** Boys and girls coming of age look to elders, celebrities, religious leaders, sports figures and the like for their cues about what it means to be men and women. We unfortunately still have seen too few visible leaders, men and women, who are taking a stand publicly, urging boys and young men to act in more gender equitable ways. Sometimes, even when leaders or celebrities have spoken out about such issues, their personal lives do not always reflect what they preach. We urgently need credible leaders – men in particular -- who live and practice gender equality and hold other men accountable to do the same.

29. In sum, looking back since 2004, there has been progress, among UN partners and agencies, and among NGOs, but less among governments. And we still have not tackled the big questions:

- How to scale up?
- How to pay for scaling up?
- How to insure that these efforts will not undo any gains made in women's rights in the past 20 years?
- How to reach younger boys and girls when they are just starting to internalize views about gender?
- How to integrate work with men and boys in achieving gender equality within existing NGOs and initiatives to empower women and girls?

30. And the biggest question that remains is: What kinds of structural changes and policies have or could lead to large scale change in terms of men and masculinities? It would be useful to review, for example, existing policies related to fatherhood (father



leave, for example), family policy, and laws against gender-based violence to measure or assess the impact of such policies. Similarly, what do we know about naturally or spontaneously occurring change, or long-term trends in terms of men's behaviors and attitudes related to sexual and reproductive health, gender-based violence, and participation in child and maternal health and well-being? It could also be useful to review what we might call "natural experiments" or naturally occurring differences, such as factors that seem to explain higher rates of men's use of GBV in one setting versus another as a way to understand pathways or factors that lead to change.

31. There is, understandably, skepticism about whether men and boys, and masculinities, can change, precisely because change on the part of men and boys means giving up power and privilege. But there is evidence of men and boys changing in meaningful ways in some settings as a result of program interventions. We have a good idea about what works. The challenge is how to scale up and imbed this work in public institutions and practices that go from reaching a few dozen men and boys to reaching millions.