

Fifty-first session of the Commission on the Status of Women

“Progress in the implementation of the agreed conclusions on the role of men and boys in achieving gender equality”

Interactive dialogue

Friday, 2 March 2007, 10.00 am-1.00 pm

ISSUES PAPER

I. Introduction

In accordance with its new working methods,¹ the Commission on the Status of Women, at its fifty-first session (26 February – 9 March 2007), will evaluate progress in the implementation of the agreed conclusions on “The role of men and boys in achieving gender equality”², adopted by the Commission at its forty-eighth session in 2004, through an interactive dialogue among all States and observers. This review represents an innovation in the work of the Commission, designed to strengthen the Commission’s role in following up on implementation at the national and regional level of actions agreed in respect of its priority themes and in identifying lessons learned, achievements, gaps and challenges encountered. It is expected that the dialogue will highlight good practices and strategies for an accelerated implementation of the agreed conclusions.

II. Background

Equality between women and men is a fundamental principle of international law established in the United Nations Charter. Achieving gender equality is a societal responsibility that must fully engage both men and women. The role of men and boys in promoting and realizing gender equality has, however, only been given significant attention during the past decade.

The Cairo Programme of Action (1994) and its 1999 review highlighted the need to encourage men to take responsibility with respect to child-rearing and housework, family life as well as parenthood and sexual and reproductive behaviour.³

The Programme of Action of the World Summit on Social Development (1995) and its 2000 review also addressed the role of men, in particular with regard to sharing family, household and employment responsibilities with women.⁴

The Beijing Platform for Action (1995) restated the principle of shared power and responsibility; and argued that women’s concerns could only be addressed “in partnership with men”. It also identified priority areas for action: education and socialization of children, sexual and reproductive health, gender-based violence, and balancing work and family responsibilities.⁵

The outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (2000) reaffirmed earlier commitments and noted obstacles to the implementation of critical

areas of concern, for example (i) persistent gender stereotyping and insufficient sharing of tasks and responsibilities within families, households and communities; ii) unequal power relationships between women and men which hindered women's ability to insist on safe and responsible sex practices; and iii) lack of communication and understanding between women and men on women's health needs.⁶

The role of men and boys was also addressed at the twenty-sixth special session of the General Assembly on HIV/AIDS (2001) which recognized the need to challenge gender stereotypes and attitudes and gender inequalities in relation to HIV/AIDS through the active involvement of men and boys.⁷

In 2003, the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW/DESA), in cooperation with ILO and UNAIDS, convened an Expert Group Meeting on "The role of men and boys in achieving gender equality" in Brasilia, Brazil. The meeting's recommendations informed the consideration of the topic by the Commission on the Status of Women at its forty-eight session.⁸

At its forty-eight session, the Commission adopted agreed conclusions on "The role of men and boys in achieving gender equality" which put forward a series of recommendations to ensure men's involvement in efforts towards gender equality and the advancement of women. The agreed conclusions called on Governments, entities of the United Nations system and other stakeholders to, inter alia:

- promote reconciliation of work and family responsibilities;
- encourage the active involvement of men and boys in eliminating gender stereotypes;
- encourage men to participate in programmes designed to prevent and treat all forms of HIV/AIDS transmission and other sexually transmitted diseases;
- design and implement programmes to enable men to adopt safe and responsible sexual and reproductive behaviour;
- support men and boys to take an active part in the prevention and elimination of gender-based violence; and
- implement programmes to accelerate socio-cultural change towards gender equality, especially through the upbringing and educational process.

The agreed conclusions also pointed to the need to:

- identify and fully utilize the contexts in which men could be reached, particularly in male-dominated institutions, industries and associations; and
- sensitize men on their roles and responsibilities in the promotion of gender equality and the full enjoyment of all human rights by women.

In the ten-year review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action at the national level, Member States reported, inter alia, the following actions carried out to enhance the role of men and boys in achieving gender equality:

- public campaigns and education programmes to sensitize men and boys on gender equality;

- awareness-raising campaigns on men's roles in the elimination of violence against women and girls;
- parental leave schemes to provide better opportunities for both women and men to reconcile work and family responsibilities; and
- measures to increase male participation in protecting women's reproductive health and addressing the HIV/AIDS pandemic.⁹

Member States also highlighted the challenges in engaging men in the promotion of gender equality including:

- traditional beliefs concerning sexual values, roles and relationships among family members;
- insufficient measures to reconcile family and work responsibilities; and
- inadequate involvement of men in reducing the spread of HIV/AIDS.¹⁰

The review emphasized that making progress on gender equality involved not only legislative and policy reform and implementation of programmes, but also changing attitudes and deeply engrained behaviours. The educational system and media were considered to be important in changing gender stereotypes, as were partnerships with NGOs, the private sector and leaders from all segments of society, including religious leaders. The review noted that country and context-specific actions were essential. It also highlighted that significant gains could be made through sharing experiences and good practices across regions.¹¹

III. Format of the interactive dialogue

The interactive dialogue will be introduced by two keynote speakers who will make presentations of 15 minutes. Member States, entities of the United Nations system and non-governmental organizations will participate in the ensuing dialogue, and will be encouraged to share their experiences in implementing the agreed conclusions on "The role of men and boys in achieving gender equality" highlighting achievements as well as continued gaps and challenges, and/or respond to the keynote presentations. Interventions from the floor will be limited to 3 minutes. A Chairperson's summary of the interactive dialogue will be prepared.

IV. Issues for consideration

The dialogue will focus on the areas identified in the agreed conclusions where men and boys can function as agents for change, for example in: i) preventing HIV/AIDS; ii) promoting responsible sexual behavior; iii) combating violence against women and girls; and iv) promoting the equal share of responsibilities between women and men at the family and community levels.

The following questions may serve as a non-exhaustive discussion guide:

- What specific steps have been taken to raise awareness on men's and boys' roles in promoting gender equality since the adoption of the agreed conclusions?
- What types of legislation and policies have led to increased participation of men and boys in achieving gender equality?
- What, if any, examples exist of successful programmes to build the capacity of men and boys in fostering gender equality?
- Can examples be provided of collaboration with other actors in efforts to implement the agreed conclusions? Do good practices exist?
- What role does the private sector play? What steps have been taken to contribute to gender equality and to engage men and boys in such efforts?
- What are the major challenges at the national level to effectively involve men and boys in efforts to achieve gender equality?
- Can concrete examples be provided of opposition to women's empowerment and men's involvement in promoting gender equality, and if so, how can such opposition be overcome?

¹ The future organization and methods of work of the Commission on the Status of Women were adopted by the Economic and Social Council on 25 July 2006 in resolution 2006/9.

² Economic and Social Council, Official Records, Supplement No. 7 (E/2004/27 – E/CN.6/2004/14), pp. 8-12.

³ See paragraphs 4.11, 4.24, 4.25, 4.26, 4.27, 4.28, 4.29, 5.4, 7.8, 7.37, 7.41, 8.22, 11.16, 12.10, 12.13 and 12.14 of the Cairo Programme of Action, and paragraphs 47, 50, 52, and 62 of the outcome of the twenty-first special session of the General Assembly on Population and Development.

⁴ See paragraphs 7, 47 and 56 of the Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development, and paragraphs 15, 49, 56 and 80 of the outcome of the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly on Further Initiatives for Social Development.

⁵ See paragraphs 1, 3, 40, 72, 83b, 107c, 108e, 120 and 179 of the Beijing Platform for Action.

⁶ See paragraphs 12 and 21 of the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly on Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the Twenty-first Century.

⁷ See paragraph 47 of the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS: "Global Crisis – Global Action".

⁸ Report of the Expert Group Meeting on "The role of men and boys in achieving gender equality", Brasilia, Brazil, 21-24 October 2003, <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/men-boys2003/reports/Finalreport.PDF>

⁹ Report of the Secretary-General, *Review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century"*, E/CN.6/2005/2, paragraphs 656-663.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, paragraphs 664-667.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, paragraph 669.