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## **The Role of Men and Boys in Achieving Gender Equality**

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\* The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations.

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## THE ROLE OF MEN AND BOYS IN ACHIEVING GENDER EQUALITY

This paper is intended as a broad guide to issues involving men and boys in the promotion of gender equality. It cites recent international research on masculinities, men and boys, and also cites useful discussions of the policy questions involved. In the light of these discussions the paper identifies current tasks for gender equality policy and suggest a policy framework for incorporating men and boys.

### 1. Introduction

#### 1.1. Why gender equality requires men's and boys' participation

Equality between women and men is recognized as a principle in international law, articulated in many United Nations documents from the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights onwards. The idea that men and boys might have a specific role in realizing this principle has only been articulated recently.

Issues about gender equality were placed on the public agenda by women mainly. The reason is clear – it is women who are disadvantaged by the main patterns of gender inequality, therefore it is women who should have a claim for redress. This logic is so strong that gender issues have been widely regarded as "women's business" and of no concern to men and boys. But this belief can no longer be held.

Men and boys are unavoidably involved in gender issues. There are pragmatic reasons for this. Any reform agenda requires resources. The existing pattern of gender inequality – men's predominant control of economic assets, political power, cultural authority, and armed force – means that men (often, specific groups of men) control most of the resources required to implement women's claims for justice.

There are also broader reasons to do with the nature of gender. Contemporary research has shown gender inequalities to be embedded in a complex system of relationships, which can be detected at every level of human experience – from individual emotion and inter-personal relationships to economic organization, culture and the state. The key points about gender systems include:

- Gender relations are an interactive system of connections and distinctions among people (and groups of people) – what happens to one group in this system affects the others, and is affected by them;
- Gender relations are not superficial, but are deeply embedded in organizational routines, in religious and legal concepts, and in the taken-for-granted arrangements of people's lives (such as the distinction between "home" and "work");
- Gender relations are multi-dimensional, interweaving relationships of power, economic arrangements, emotional relationships, systems of communication and meaning, etc.;

- Gender systems are diverse and changing – they arise from different cultural histories in different parts of the world, have changed in the past and are undergoing change now (Connell 2002; Ferree et al. 1999; Holter 1997; Walby 1996).

Moving towards a gender-equal society is therefore a complex task, involving profound institutional change as well as the small details of everyday life. Gender change brings to light issues that are normally unnoticed, and may be difficult to deal with – such as the way public policies (e.g. industrial regulation, police practices, development policies) often impact specifically on men without actually naming men or acknowledging the gendered character of their impact. It is not possible to move gender systems far towards equality without broad social consensus in favour of gender equality – and that consensus must include men and boys.

Men and boys are thus, in several ways, gatekeepers for gender equality. Whether they are willing gatekeepers who will support practical reforms, is an important question. The answer varies from one situation to another, and has to do with the ways men's beliefs and practices are shaped by the gender system just described. Research has repeatedly shown that patterns of gender inequality are interwoven with social definitions of masculinity and men's gender identities. To move towards a gender-equal society often requires men and boys to think and act in new ways, to reconsider traditional images of manhood, and to reshape their relationships with women and girls. Changes of this kind are already happening in many parts of the world, but not in all situations or with all men and boys.

Men and boys are most likely to support change towards gender equality when they can see positive benefits for themselves and the people in their lives (see section 4 below). Even when they cannot see personal benefits, however, men and boys have a responsibility in this area. As long as any systematic gender inequalities persist, delivering advantage to men over women and promising future advantage to boys, the advantaged have an ethical responsibility to use their resources to change the system.

## 1.2. The emergence of issues about men and boys

The role of men and boys in relation to gender equality has recently emerged as an issue in international discussions. This development crystallized at the Fourth World Conference on Women, held at Beijing in 1995. Paragraph 25 of the *Beijing Declaration* committed participating Governments to "encourage men to participate fully in all actions towards equality." The detailed *Platform for Action* that accompanied the *Declaration* prominently restated the principle of shared power and responsibility between men and women, and argued that women's concerns could only be addressed "in partnership with men" towards gender equality (paras 1 and 3). The *Platform for Action* went on to specify areas where action involving men and boys was needed and was possible: in education and the socialization of children, childcare and housework, sexual health, gender-based violence, and the balancing of work and family responsibilities (paras 40, 72, 83b, 107c, 108e, 120, 179).

A similar approach was followed in the twenty-third special session of the United Nations General Assembly (Beijing +5) held in the year 2000. The *Political Declaration* of this session made an even stronger statement on men's responsibility, [Governments] "Emphasize that men

must involve themselves and take joint responsibility with women for the promotion of gender equality" (para 6). The accompanying *Outcome Document* reaffirmed statements in the *Platform for Action* about specific areas of action (paras 60, 67d, 82b, 82j). The *Outcome Document* spelled out at some length the "obstacles" to the achievement of the strategic objectives of the *Platform*, and parts of this discussion identify problems about men, in relation to sex practices, violence, and men's participation in family life (paras 12, 14, 21).

The role of men and boys has also been addressed in other recent international meetings. These include the 1995 World Summit on Social Development and its review session in 2000, and the Twenty-sixth special session of the General Assembly on HIV/AIDS in 2001. UNESCO convened an expert group meeting in 1997 on "Male roles and masculinities in the perspective of a culture of peace." In 1997 the Nordic Council of Ministers adopted an "Action Plan for Men and Gender Equality." In the same year the Council of Europe conducted a seminar on equality as a common issue for men and women, and chose the role of men in promoting equality as a theme at a ministerial conference. The European Commission has recently funded a research network on men and masculinities. In 1998 the Latin American Federation of Social Science (FLACSO) initiated a series of conferences about masculinities, boys and men across Latin America and the Caribbean. The first conference in this series had the specific theme of gender equality.

These policy discussions have occurred against the background of an upsurge of societal concern with issues about men and boys, much broader than the policy focus on gender equality.

There are diverse social movements attempting either to reform or restore traditional masculinity (see section 7.4 below). There have been extensive media debates about the "new fatherhood" and supposed changes in men's involvement in families (McMahon 1999). In education there has been talk of boys' gender-specific "failure" in school and there are many proposals for special programmes for boys (Lingard 2003). Men's violence against women has been the subject of practical interventions, research, and extensive debate (Hearn 1998). There has been increasing debate about men's health and illness from a gender perspective (Hurrelmann & Kolip 2002). In developed countries, there is a popular therapeutic movement that addresses men's problems in relationships, sexuality and identity (Schwalbe 1996).

Accompanying these debates has been a remarkable growth of research about men's gender identities and practices, masculinities, boys' education, images of men, and related matters. Academic journals have been founded for specialized research on men and masculinities; there have been many research conferences; and there is a rapidly growing international literature on the area. (For a recent overview of this research field see Connell 2003a). Now there is a far more sophisticated and detailed scientific understanding of issues about men, masculinities and gender than ever before. This is an important resource for policy thinking on gender equality.

These concerns are worldwide. Debates on violence, patriarchy and ways of changing men's conduct have occurred in countries as diverse as Canada, Germany and South Africa (Hagemann-White 1992; Kaufman 1993; Morrell 2001). Issues about men, boys, sexuality and fatherhood have been debated and researched in Brazil, Mexico, and many other countries (Arihla et al. 1998, Lerner 1998). A men's centre with a reform agenda has been established in

Japan, where conferences have been held and media debates about traditional patterns of masculinity and family life continue (Menzu Senta 1997). A "travelling seminar" discussing issues about men, masculinities and gender equality has been touring India (Roy 2003). Debates about boys' education, men's identities and gender change are active from Denmark to New Zealand (Law et al. 1999; Reinicke 2002).

Gender equality policy implications: The task for gender equality policy is to take account of these societal concerns, and to use the growth of knowledge, in developing strategies concerning men and boys.

### 1.3. Men's and boys' capacity for equality

The public debates about men and boys have often been inconclusive. But they have gone a long way, together with the research, to shatter a widespread belief that has hindered gender reform. ["Gender reform" in this context refers to any systematic attempt to change gender relations in pursuit of a specific goal, e.g. gender equality.] This obstacle is the belief that men cannot change their ways, that "boys will be boys", that rape, war, sexism, domestic violence, aggression or self-centredness are "natural" to men. This belief (often expressed in pseudo-biological language) justifies gender inequality on the grounds of the fixed nature of the human male.

On the contrary, there are now many documented examples of the diversity of masculinities and of men's and boys' capacity for equality. Examples from the research literature include:

- Life-history research in Chile has shown that there is no unitary Chilean masculinity, despite the cultural homogeneity of the country. While a hegemonic model is widely diffused across social strata, there are many men who depart from it, and there is significant discontent with traditional roles (Valdés and Olavarría 1998).
- Though groups of boys in schools often have a dominant or hegemonic pattern of masculinity, there are usually also other patterns present, some of which involve more equal and respectful relations with girls. Research in British schools, for instance, shows how boys encounter alternative models of masculinity as they grow up (Mac an Ghail 1994).
- Changes have occurred in men's practices within certain families, where there has been a conscious shift towards more equal sharing of housework and childcare. The sociologist Risman (1998), who has documented such cases in one region of the United States, calls them "fair families." It is clear from her research that the change has required a challenge to traditional models of masculinity. It is not a simple change of schedule.
- In the Shanghai region of China there is a local cultural tradition of relative gender equality, and specifically of willingness by men to be involved in domestic work. Research by Da (2003) shows this tradition persisting among Shanghainese men even in circumstances of migration to another country.
- In the early stages of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, the need for new patterns of caregiving became apparent. A strong response emerged in gay communities which ranged from domestic services and counseling to home nursing and hospice care – extensively involving men, as well as women, as caregivers (Altman 1994).

Gender equality policy implications: The task for gender equality policy is to recognize and build on the known capacities of men and boys for developing a gender-equal way of life.

## **2. Men's and boys' support for gender equality**

If men and boys have a capacity for equality, are they likely to use it? Do they actually support equality with women and girls? The answer is that many do, though not all. Support for equality occurs in a variety of forms.

### 2.1. Patterns of men's support

Intellectual and public advocacy. There is a long tradition of advocacy for gender equality by male intellectuals as well as by women. In Europe, for instance, well before modern gender equality documents were written, the great British philosopher Mill published "The Subjection of Women", which established the presumption of equal rights, and the great Norwegian dramatist Ibsen made gender oppression an important cultural theme. In the following generation the pioneering Austrian psychoanalyst Adler established a powerful psychological argument for gender equality. A similar tradition of men's advocacy exists in the USA (Kimmel and Mosmiller 1992).

Organizational and political alliance. Many of the historic gains by women's advocates have been won in alliance with men who held organizational or political authority at the time. For instance, the introduction of Equal Employment Opportunity measures in NSW, Australia, occurred with the strong support of the Premier of the day and the head of a reforming enquiry into the public sector, though support from other men was variable (Eisenstein 1991). The Australian union movement, confronting a long history of sexism, has produced some senior men with a commitment to gender equality. For the first time in its history, this union confederation has now twice in succession elected women as its national president.

Campaigns among men. Sometimes men's support for gender equality takes the form of campaigning and organizing among men. The most prominent example is the US National Organization of Men Against Sexism (NOMAS), which now has a continuous history of more than 20 years. Men's groups concerned with reforming masculinity, publications advocating change, and campaigns among men in support of gender equality (for instance on violence against women), are found widely, for instance in Mexico, South Africa and the UK. These initiatives have usually been on a relatively small scale or for a limited period (Cohen 1991; Peacock 2003; Seidler 1991; Zingoni 1998).

Youth work and "menswork." Men have been active in creating educational programmes for boys and young men intended to combat sexism and allow youth to explore new ways of being men. Similar strategies have been developed for adult men, sometimes in a religious context and sometimes in a health or therapeutic context. There is a strong tradition of such work in Germany, with programmes that combine the search for self-knowledge with the

learning of anti-sexist behaviour. Work of the same general kind has developed in Brazil, the USA and other countries (Brandes & Bullinger 1996; Kupers 1993; Lyra and Medrado 2001).

## 2.2. Survey research on men's attitudes to gender equality.

Though there are many problems with measuring attitudes on gender issues, survey research can give useful indications of broad patterns. European research in particular has shown no consensus among men either for or against gender equality – rather, there exist substantial divisions of opinion. Sometimes a three-way pattern appears, with about one-third of men supporting change towards equality, about one-third opposing it, and one-third undecided or flexible. Broad examinations of the survey evidence from Germany, Japan and the United States have shown a long-term trend of growing support for change, i.e. a movement away from traditional gender roles, especially among the younger generation (Mohwald 2002; Thornton 1989; Zulehner & Volz 1998).

## 2.3. Case studies of change in gender relations involving men and boys

The research literature provides many analysed cases of men's and boys' involvement in changing gender relations and changing understandings of masculinity. Some examples:

- Historical research shows changing cultural definitions of masculinity. A pioneering study showed the interweaving of national identity with re-definitions of manhood over a century of New Zealand history. Similar research has traced the collapse of traditional "men's culture" with the rise of consumer culture in Japan, and the displacement of a conservative and patriarchal manhood by a more secular and globalized ideal of manhood in Ireland (Ferguson 2001; Ito 1992; Phillips 1987).
- Psychological and educational research shows personal flexibility in the face of cultural images of masculinity. Men and boys can negotiate, or strategically use, conventional definitions of masculinity rather than be controlled by them. It is even possible to teach boys (and girls) how to do this in school classrooms (Davies 1993; Wetherell and Edley 1999).
- Sociological research shows adolescents and young men responding creatively to changing socio-economic circumstances. These responses include the valorization of more egalitarian and less aggressive forms of masculinity, and attempts to create more involved models of young fatherhood (O'Donnell and Sharpe 2000; Olavarría 2001).
- Industrial research shows men's involvement in changing workplace relations. For instance an ethnography from Canada shows male steelworkers first resisting, then (with union endorsement) supporting, the arrival of women in heavy industrial employment (Corman et al. 1993).

Perhaps the most extensive social action on these issues, combining government and non-government initiatives, has occurred in Scandinavia. This includes provisions for paternity leave which have had high rates of take-up, among the most dramatic of all demonstrations of men's willingness to change gender practices. Holter (2003: pp. 126) sums up the research and practical experience: "The Nordic 'experiment' has shown that a majority of men can change



their practice when circumstances are favorable...When reforms or support policies are well-designed and targeted towards an ongoing cultural process of change, men's active support for gender-equal status increases."

Gender equality policy implications: The task for gender equality policy is to recognize and build on the existing bases of support for gender equality that are found among men and boys, and to find effective ways of using the experience that already exists among men for such work.

### **3. Obstacles and challenges**

#### 3.1. Men's and boys' resistance to gender equality

The survey research mentioned in section 2.2, while showing significant support for gender equality, also shows significant levels of doubt and opposition. These negative attitudes take various concrete forms:

- Research on workplaces and management has documented many cases where men holding power maintain an organizational culture, in corporate management and in many technical areas, that is heavily masculinized and unwelcoming of women. In some cases there is active opposition to gender equality measures, or quiet undermining of them (Cockburn 1991; Collinson & Hearn 1996).
- Research on schools and youth has found cases where boys assert control of informal social life, direct hostility against girls and boys perceived as being different from the norm, and undermine change. A micro-example: a high school literature lesson found a particular group of boys using misogynist language to resist study of a poem which questioned Australian gender stereotypes (Holland et al. 1998; Kenworthy 1994).
- Commercial sport, as circulated through mass media, is now a major cultural definer of masculinity. Attempts to widen women's participation, to increase media attention to women's sport, or to criticize aggressive images of masculinity, are often met with public ridicule from men who have a professional role as media sports commentators (Messner 2002).
- Some men accept change and women's rights in theory, but still engage in routine practices that sustain men's dominance of the public sphere, and still assign traditional domestic labour and childcare to women. In strongly gender-segregated societies it may be difficult for men to recognize alternatives or to understand women's experiences (Fuller 2001; Kandiyoti 1994; Meuser 2003).

There is some explicit opposition to gender equality measures. Campaigns have been mounted by certain groups who believe that men and boys are disadvantaged by existing institutions or policies. An example is "father's rights" groups, which combat a perceived bias towards women in divorce cases. These groups believe that judges in family courts are systematically biased against men, so men generally lose custody of children, bear unequal financial burdens, etc. Another example is the "What About the Boys?" campaign, mounted by people who believe boys, not girls, are the disadvantaged group in education, and that special programmes for boys are needed. These arguments have now been widely circulated in mass media and have gained

the attention of politicians and policymakers in some of the developed countries (Lingard 2003; Messner 1997).

Another type of opposition, more common among men in business and government, rejects gender equality measures because it rejects all government action in support of equality, in favour of the unfettered action of the market. In principle, gender equality is consistent with market ideologies under the rubric of the "level playing field." In practice, neo-liberalism has often weakened gender equality measures, de-funded women's groups, and removed social protection machinery that was particularly important to women. Men collectively are better positioned in the market economy than women are, so a shift of social resources into the market is likely to result in redistribution towards men.

There are varying reasons for men's resistance to gender equality:

- Material benefits – the "patriarchal dividend" to men from gender inequalities (Connell 2002). Men may have an expectation of informal benefits, such as receiving care and domestic service from women in the family. Godenzi (2000) has emphasized material inequalities of income and time: "Men's violence against women is both a means and an expression of the conditions of inequality between men and women."
- Identity problems about change – if social definitions of masculinity include being the breadwinner and being "strong", then men may be offended by women's professional progress because it makes men seem less worthy of respect. Similarly, caring for children, the elderly, or the sick may seem unmanly or feminizing. If fear of femininity is combined with homophobia, anxieties about change may be severe.
- Resentment against gender equality programmes, especially from those men who get little or none of the patriarchal dividend – programmes to benefit women and girls are seen by some angry men as undeserved advantages which are unavailable to men.
- Ideological defence of male supremacy – research on domestic violence suggests that male batterers often hold very conservative views of women's role in the family (Ptacek 1988). In many parts of the world there exist ideologies that justify men's supremacy on grounds of religion, biology, cultural tradition or organizational mission (e.g. in the military). It is a mistake to regard these ideas as simply outmoded, because they may be actively modernized and renewed.

Gender equality policy implications: The task for gender equality policy is to recognize the reasons for resistance to gender equality among men and boys, to find answers to the arguments advanced by opponents, and to find better solutions to the underlying social concerns that find expression through resistance to gender equality.

### 3.2. The structure of gender equality policy

In almost all current policy discussions, adopting a "gender perspective" substantially means addressing women's concerns. This is understandable, given the main pattern of gender inequality, and was the only way by which gender issues could come onto the public agenda. But it has some consequences which create challenges now.

In both national and international gender equality policy documents, women are constituted as the subjects of the policy discourse. The agencies or meetings which formulate, implement or monitor the policies usually have names referring to women, actual examples being "Department for Women", "Ministry of Women's Equality", "Prefectural Women's Centre", "Commission on the Status of Women." Such bodies have a clear mandate to act for women; they do not have equally clearly a mandate to act in respect of men.

Consequently, in documents such as the *Beijing Platform for Action* and the *Beijing+5 Outcome Document*, men are rarely explicitly named or concretely discussed. Men are implicitly present as background throughout these documents. In every statement about women and inequality there is an implied comparison with men as the privileged group; in the discussions of violence against women, men are implicitly present as the "perpetrators"; in discussions of gender and HIV/AIDS men were construed as "the problem"; in discussions of women's exclusion from power and decision-making men are implicitly present as the power holders.

When men are present only as a background category in a policy discourse about women, it is difficult to raise issues about men's and boys' interests, problems or differences except by falling into a backlash posture and affirming "men's rights", or by moving outside the gender framework altogether. It is difficult to attract men to partnership in such a policy realm.

If large numbers of men are to support and implement gender equality policy, it will be necessary for that policy to speak, in concrete and positive ways, to their concerns, interests, hopes and problems. The political task is to do this without weakening the drive for justice for women and girls that animates current gender equality policy.

Some policymakers have approached this problem by re-structuring gender equality policy in the form of parallel policies for women and men. For instance, some recent health policy initiatives in Australia have added a "men's health" document to a "women's health" document. Similarly, in some school systems a "boy's education" strategy has been added to a "girls' education" strategy.

This acknowledges the wider scope of gender issues, but this approach risks weakening the "equality" rationale of the original policy. It may redefine women and men, or girls and boys, simply as different market segments for some service, and forget about the relations between them. Ironically, the result may be to promote more gender segregation, not less. This has certainly happened in education, where some privileged segregated boys' schools have jumped on the "gender equality" bandwagon and now market themselves as experts in catering for the special needs of boys.

On the other hand, bringing men's problems within an existing framework of policies for women may weaken the authority that women have so far gathered in that policy area. In the field of gender and development, for instance, it is argued by some that "bringing men in" – given the larger context where men still control most of the wealth and institutional authority – may undermine, not help, the drive for gender equality (White 2000). In broad terms, the solution to the dilemma is to focus gender equality policy on the relations between groups rather than on the groups themselves. But in practice, this is hard to do.

Gender equality policy implications: The task for gender equality policy is to find ways of recognizing the legitimate interests and needs of men and boys within gender equality policy without weakening the policy's effectiveness in advancing the interests of women and girls. This difficult task needs careful and immediate consideration.

#### **4. Reasons for change from the perspective of men and boys**

Early statements often assumed that men had the same interest as women in escaping from restrictive sex roles (Palme 1972). Experience has shown that this picture is inadequate. Yet it contains an important truth, that men and boys often have substantial reasons to support change. These reasons fall into four main groups.

Relational interests. When "men" are considered statistically as an aggregate of individuals, they appear to have an unshakeable interest in defending inequality. But in reality, men are not isolated individuals. As the poet Donne said, "No man is an island, entire of itself." Men and boys live in social relationships, many with women and girls: wives, partners, mothers, aunts, daughters, nieces, friends, classmates, workmates, professional colleagues, neighbours, and so on. The quality of every man's life depends to a large extent on the quality of those relationships. Living in a system of gender inequality which limits or damages the lives of the women and girls concerned, inevitably degrades the lives of the men and boys too.

For instance, very large numbers of men are fathers, and about half of their children are girls. Some men are sole parents, and are then deeply involved in caregiving – an important demonstration of men's capacity for care (Risman 1986). Even in intact partnerships with women, many men have close relationships with their children, and psychological research shows the importance of these relationships (Kindler 2002). Many men make sacrifices for their children, and desire a more active fatherhood. To make sure that daughters grow up in a world that offers young women security, freedom, and opportunities to fulfill their talents, is a powerful reason for many men to support gender equality.

Personal well-being. Current unequal gender systems have damaging effects on the well-being of men as well as women, though the pattern of effects is different. A quarter-century ago, a classic paper argued "Warning: the male sex role may be dangerous to your health." Since then, health research has documented specific problems for men and boys, among them: premature death from accident, homicide and suicide; foci of occupational injury in industries such as mining, transport and heavy manufacturing (closely related to gender segregation in the workforce); higher levels of drug abuse, especially alcohol and tobacco; and in some countries at least, a relative unwillingness by men to seek medical help when it is needed. Some of these patterns arise from, or are sustained by, attempts by boys and men to assert a tough and dominant masculinity. A striking example is competitive sport, where the use of bodies as weapons and the denial of pain is associated with masculine prestige on the one hand, and injury and illness on the other (Harrison 1978; Hurrelmann & Kolip 2002; White et al. 1995).

The relative exclusion of women from paid employment is associated with a widespread model of the man as "breadwinner." Social and economic pressures on men to compete in the workplace, to increase their hours of paid work, and sometimes to take second jobs, are among the most powerful constraints on gender reform. Desire for a better work/life balance is widespread among employed men. On the other hand, where unemployment is high, the lack of a paid job can be a damaging pressure on men who have grown up in the expectation of being a breadwinner. This is, for instance, an important gender issue in post-apartheid South Africa. Opening alternative economic paths and moving towards what German discussions have called "multi-optional masculinities", may do much to improve men's well-being (Morrell 2001; Widersprüche 1998).

Collective interests. Men may also support gender equality because they see its relevance to the well-being of the community they live in. In situations of mass poverty and under-employment, for instance in cities in developing countries, flexibility in the gender division of labour may be crucial to a household which requires women's earnings as well as men's. In village communities, maximizing the total labour resources may be vital to prosperity or even survival. Men may recognize that they benefit in the long run from the growth in collective well-being that flows from the better education of women, from improvements in women's health, etc. (These points were emphasized in the online discussion on the Role of Men and Boys in Achieving Gender Equality, organized by the Division for the Advancement of Women, 30 June – 25 July 2003).

Men are likely to benefit from broad social and cultural changes associated with gender equality. Less rigidity and stereotyping of masculinity will increase options for men and is likely to yield benefits in mental health and psychological well-being. By removing an important source of prejudice and hostility, a move towards gender equality is likely to improve social inclusion generally.

It will also yield benefits in security. Civil and international violence is strongly associated with dominating patterns of masculinity and with marked gender inequality in the state. Movement towards gender equality makes it more possible for men to adopt historically "feminine" styles of nonviolent negotiation and conflict resolution, as illustrated by women's recent role in negotiating to overcome intractable civil conflicts. More moves towards the achievement of gender equality, and a reduction in violence and in pressures on men, is also likely to mitigate the social effects of coercive systems of social control, such as prisons. Many more men than women are currently imprisoned, with damaging consequences. Rates of imprisonment are especially high among the men of marginalized ethnic groups (Breines et al. 2000; Cockburn 2003; Sabo et al. 2001; Zalewski & Parpart 1998).

Principle. Many of the men who become active in gender reform do so because gender equality follows from political or ethical principles that are important to them. These include religious, socialist, or broad democratic beliefs.

In the past, many men who believed in a principle of social equality did not see it as applying to the relations between women and men. They supposed gender relations to be governed by natural difference, or assumed they would be reformed some time in the future after another

principle of equality (e.g. class equality, national independence) was achieved. For men to act now for gender equality has often required a specific stimulus, such as living or working with women who have a consciousness of gender issues. There is, it seems, a broad awareness among young men of old patterns of manhood being under challenge. This awareness, as shown in research with young men in Germany and Japan, leads in varied directions, sometimes to support for equality ( Meuser 2003; Taga 2001).

Gender equality policy implications: The task for gender equality policy is to articulate the reasons for men and boys to support gender equality, in forms appropriate to each country or context, and find effective ways of disseminating these reasons.

## **5. Major contemporary issues**

### 5.1. Globalization and development

The vast economic changes of recent generations have impacted on the lives of men as well as women, though in varying ways. It is only recently however that there has been a focussed discussion of globalization's impact on men and masculinities (Pease and Pringle 2001).

There is evidence from many parts of the world of upheaval in the lives of men and in cultural images of manhood. To give an example, a recent examination of popular culture in Arab countries by Ghousoub (2000) finds many signs of rapid change. Those men whose identities are still grounded in traditional gender concepts face dilemmas because of the increased status of women in Arab societies, while other men are engaged in a search that the author calls "a chaotic quest for a definition of modern masculinity." The same point could be made of most other regions of the world.

The transformation of subsistence economies, the spread of the market economy and the introduction of agricultural machinery and new crops, have destabilized traditional gender divisions of labour in rural society. Those men who enter the cash economy from village society must create new gender arrangements; if they become migrant labourers, for instance, they may be separated from wives and children for long periods. Generally, men more than women have been the beneficiaries of rural development – but not all men. Poverty has developed on a mass scale, one of its effects being migration to cities, often pioneered by men in search of jobs.

In the course of global development, new polarizations have opened among men, with some becoming rich and powerful to an unprecedented degree while many remain poor and marginalized. Many families have become dependent on women's earnings and men have to adjust to changed power balances within their families. For young men growing up in dislocated rural or urban-fringe communities there are few economic prospects, and violence against women may develop as a means of masculine assertion (Nurse 2002; Wood & Jewkes 2001).

However gender relations in poor communities are not necessarily oppressive or even antagonistic; there is enormous diversity in situations around the world. Indigenous knowledge, the subject of considerable recent discussion in Africa, may see gender differently from Western

models, and this may be an asset in resisting globalization pressures and sustaining egalitarian alternatives. As research in Latin America shows, men in urban working-class communities are very much aware of the impact of economic crisis and restructuring, engage in ongoing political debate and are often sharply critical of antidemocratic trends. This continuing community discussion provides an important context for gender equality politics. There are features of men's lives in urban settings that may motivate a concern with gender equality issues, for instance a tension between a definition of masculinity focussed on family relations, and a definition around freedom and independence (Gutmann 2002; Morrell and Swart 2003; Viveros Vigoya 2001).

Gender equality policy implications: The task for gender equality policy is to build on men's growing concern with gender change, and find ways of including issues about men and boys in gender and development policies, without weakening the effectiveness of those policies for the advancement of women and girls.

## 5.2. Work/life balances.

In many parts of the world men have been defined as "breadwinners", responsible for paid work, while women have been defined as "housewives" – but many people now see this sharp division as untenable. The question of work/life balance arises in many forms, because of the diversity of workplaces and economic situations, as well as different cultural traditions and processes of change. Labour migration provides extreme examples of work/life imbalances resulting from economic change. For instance, South African men recruited to provide the labour force for gold mining were often separated from their families for months or years at a time, housed in bare barracks at the mines, where practically a new way of life had to be constructed in an all-male environment (Moodie 1994).

It is not only working-class men who experience imbalances. Economic development in Japan, for instance, created life paths for middle-class men that required long hours in the workplace and resulted in a very high level of gender segregation in the family as well as the office. Sharp debate has now arisen about this "salaryman" model, with criticism of gender dichotomies and attempts to define other life patterns for men – though gender division remains common (Roberson & Suzuki 2003).

Where masculinity is centrally defined through paid work, and femininity is strongly associated with childcare and domestic work, the result can be a marginalization of men from family life. Norwegian family research has shown the profound emotional and cultural consequences of this peripheral position for men (Borchgrevink & Holter 1995). It is not easy to overcome, even though in the same country, there have been very progressive policies to encourage fathers' participation in infant care and women's integration into paid workplaces.

The emergence of "family friendly" or "flexible" employment policies and practices marks the recognition by employers and governments of the importance of work/home relationships. This recognition is important, but these policies are immediately paradoxical. Flexibility in employment conditions has mainly been applied to women. In some cases parental leave is only available to women (and is called "maternal leave"). In some countries, Australia for instance,

employment statistics show that it is mainly women who have part-time and casual employment, while time-budget studies show most men have done little to increase their contribution to domestic labour. Thus "family friendly" policies may actually reinforce the gender division of labour. This can only be changed by men decreasing their hours in the workplace and increasing their domestic commitments and their use of part-time work, parental leave, etc. Yet the current trend in developed economies – given growing economic insecurity – is for a rise, not a fall, in employed men's average hours of work. Public policy may redress this, for instance by making overtime work more expensive for employers, or by linking promotion to caregiving (Holter 2003; McMahon 1999).

The growth of the global economy creates new issues. The careers of business executives involve frequent international travel and relocations to different countries. The transnational corporation – the dominant economic institution of our time – thus becomes the site of an extreme work/home division in the lives of its most influential employees, who are, overwhelmingly, men. New technologies such as e-mail have become a way of extending work hours, not reducing them. Though research on this issue is still at an early stage, a global, business masculinity seems to be emerging, in forms which do not offer good solutions to work/life imbalances (Connell and Wood 2003; Hooper 2000).

Gender equality policy implications: The task for gender equality policy is to find ways of motivating men to make equal use of employment flexibility provisions, and to steer workplace change towards, rather than away from, work/life balance.

### 5.3. HIV/AIDS, sexuality and reproductive health.

Sexual and reproductive health is another field where issues about men have been difficult to formulate. Population policies and demographic research have often had a focus on women as the unit of reproduction and as the target of contraception and sexual health interventions, leaving men aside. Early discussions of HIV/AIDS did focus on one group of men, the gay men of developed countries, but ignored other men. Initial discussions of gender in the world epidemic focussed on women's vulnerability and treated men abstractly as the problem. Gradually, however, a more differentiated and practice-oriented approach to men has emerged. This was signalled by the 2000-01 World AIDS Campaign which proclaimed "Men Make a Difference." An understanding of masculinities is now informing discussions of AIDS prevention strategies (Figueroa Perea 1998; Mane & Aggleton 2001).

The spread of HIV and progression to AIDS are significantly related to the position of men in gender relations. In most gender systems men have predominant control, or predominant initiative, in sexuality. Men who hold gender ideologies which prioritize men's pleasure over women's, or assume men have rights to women's bodies, increase women's vulnerability, and so do specific sexual practices that custom may allow or encourage. Yet men's safety may also be compromised by the same forces. The position of power is often associated with a hegemonic masculinity that values risk-taking, or sees "virility" as the measure of a man's worth. Models of masculinity that emphasize toughness and an appearance of competence and control may make youth believe in their own invulnerability, be deceived by social myths and misinformation, fail to get necessary knowledge (especially in absence of adequate/appropriate sex education).



Masculine ideologies also seem to be involved in some men's and youth's failure to get medical care even when it is available (Campbell 2001; Flood 2003).

The social impact of AIDS is also related to the different positioning of men and women in gender relations. The gender division of labour not only shapes the spread of the virus, but also the economic survival consequences when specific groups of people fall ill or die – for instance, younger men as an agricultural workforce. If gender ideology makes men unused to caregiving, or even defines caregiving as unmanly, there may be a social deficit in needed support. Gender ideologies that include homophobic contempt for men and misogynist contempt for sexually active women, reinforce the stigmatization of people living with AIDS (Rao Gupta 2000).

These issues are related to the changing situations of men and boys discussed throughout this report. Economic changes that disrupt established patterns of men's employment may provoke reactions of anger and despair that increase infection risks for both men and women. In sexuality research responding to the HIV/AIDS pandemic, the diversity of men's sexual behaviour and identities is apparent, including fluidity and change within the categories of "heterosexual" and "homosexual." In a context of Western-dominated globalization, certain sexual/gender identities for men have been given worldwide circulation. These identities interact with local sexual and gender cultures, creating complex mixtures, hybrids, and systems of alternatives. New possibilities for men's self-understanding and behaviour are constantly being created (Altman 2001; Dowsett 2003; Olavarría and Moletto 2002).

Among these changes are positive responses by groups of men to the HIV/AIDS epidemic and to issues of reproductive health. They include caregiving in AIDS-affected communities (noted above, section 1.3), education programmes directed to youth, community leadership directed to both prevention and care, and many of the responses to the pandemic by professional men as well as professional women.

Gender equality policy implications: The task for gender equality policy is to build on recent sexual and reproductive health initiatives involving men, to deploy the new knowledge of men's sexuality and the construction of masculinities to engage men in reducing risks and in equalizing power with women in sexual relationships, and to increase men's contribution to community and family care in response to the epidemic.

#### 5.4. Gender-based violence

Violence is an important means by which gender inequalities are maintained. A culture of violence subordinates and injures women, and also subordinates and injures many men. Violence against women, homophobic violence, and racist violence have common roots in violent men's beliefs in hierarchy, narrow conceptions of masculinity, and anxieties about their own status (Hearn 1998, Tillner 2000; Tomsen 2003).

A good deal is now known about the conditions of men's domestic violence particularly. It may be instrumental, a way of maintaining control over a woman, or it may be intended as punishment, when a woman's claim for autonomy is seen as a violation of the man's (husband's) entitlements (Ptacek 1988). These attitudes may now be gaining a global dimension through the

international sex trade and Internet "mail order bride" business (Cunneen and Stubbs 2003). Men's movements to end men's violence against women, using information from research on violent men, have now arisen in many countries (see section 7.4 below).

In recent discussions the gendered character of violence in civil conflict, terrorism and military interventions have come into focus, especially as an issue in the prevention of war. Research and policy discussions have begun to concern themselves closely with the masculine character of crime, international relations, armed conflict and political violence (Breines et al. 2000; Cockburn 1999; Zalewski and Parpart 1998).

Important insights have emerged from criminological research. Criminal violence is not just the consequence of a pre-existing "masculinity", i.e. an expression of the gendered character of men. In many situations, crime is a resource for constructing masculinity – it is a way by which men can achieve status, acquire resources and assert their dominance. Public violence can arise from situations of masculine challenge, where a conflict has arisen and each participant feels manhood is at stake in not backing down. In some cultural settings the possession of weapons is an important symbol of masculinity, and where guns are easily available this contributes to a high level of violence within the community (Cock 2001; Messerschmidt 1993; Tomsen 1997).

Modern states do not rely on individual motivation to sustain their military capabilities. Research on armed forces has repeatedly shown institutionalized masculinities of a particular kind, embedded in training, organizational culture, specific organizational practices, etc. These institutionalized gender patterns have the function of sustaining group loyalty and willingness to participate in the organizational violence which is the *raison d'être* of armed forces. They may have severe consequences for women recruited into the armed forces but treated as outsiders, or for civilian women who come within the scope of military operations and suffer collateral damage (Barrett 1996; Breines et al. 2000; Seifert 1993).

These points also seem to apply to the irregular forces involved in insurrections and civil violence. They are mainly composed of men (often very young men), and as research on the Palestinian *intifada* and the South African anti-apartheid struggle shows, may put these young men through a vehement if informal training that emphasizes aggressiveness, physical bravery, distrust of authority, and loyalty to the immediate group. At the same time, civil conflict severely disrupts regular education and many of the ties that would have given young men a secure place in families and communities. The result may be a continuing problem in the aftermath of civil conflict, with men who were once regarded as heroes now marginalized and impoverished, possibly very angry, and well trained in violence (Petee 2000; Xaba 2001).

Whether current world struggles involving "terrorism" involve significantly new gender patterns has yet to be established. The groups involved in the best-known attacks (e.g. in Moscow, New York and Oklahoma City) resemble regular armed forces and insurrectionary forces in being mainly composed of men, and it seems likely that they are groups with little concern for gender equality. Something new is more strongly suggested by the responses of powerful states to these events. Action by professional military forces using high levels of technology (e.g. intensive aerial bombing) produces conflicts with very lopsided casualty figures in which the risk to the intervening forces is low while damage to the targets of intervention is severe. Stiehm (2000)

observes that "if one uses force on others from a position in which one is unassailable, one is, in essence, an executioner." If this perception becomes widespread, it could change the cultural meaning of military masculinity profoundly.

Gender equality policy implications: The task for gender equality policy is to contribute to anti-violence programmes, peacemaking and security strategies a concern with the constructions of masculinity that sustain violence, and to develop interventions that engage men specifically in non-violent methods of conflict resolution.

## **6. The education of boys**

### 6.1. Educational strategy for gender equality

In its discussion of the "education and training of women" the *Beijing Platform for Action* (Section B) mentioned several points about boys, such as the need to provide adequate sexual and reproductive health education, the importance of non-discriminatory curriculum content, and the need to give boys the skills for housework and care work. These points, however, are only beginnings for an educational strategy.

The education of boys and young men is certainly an important issue for gender equality. It is rightly regarded as a key to stopping the HIV pandemic; it is important to the prevention of violence against women; it is important in breaking down gender segregation in the workforce; and it is crucial to improving the health and well-being of boys and men themselves. Long-term changes in the gender order, if not to be achieved by compulsion, must to a large extent be achieved through education. Yet education is not a panacea for gender problems. Gender equality advocates sometimes assume that if boys were socialized differently, they would automatically behave better towards women when they are men – and this is far too simple a view of how education works.

To be realistic, it must be acknowledged that there are considerable difficulties in formulating a gender equality strategy for the education of boys. Many boys have troubled relationships with schools. In the developed countries (though not always in developing countries) boys learn to read later than girls, on average; have more conflict with schools; have a higher rate of drop-out from secondary schooling, and proceed to higher education in smaller numbers. In public debates about gender and education, girls and young women have increasingly been perceived as the "winners" in education and boys as the "losers." Gender equality measures intended to benefit girls are now often polemically represented, in public debates, as being attacks on boys. Attempts are being made to make schools and curricula more "boy-friendly", in opposition to a supposed feminization of education, and to recruit more men into elementary school teaching to provide "role models" for boys (the "backlash" debate about boys is well analysed by Lingard 2003).

There is some value in these ideas but also much misunderstanding. A better gender balance in teaching would help, though this should apply to all levels of the teaching workforce. Changing rates of progression are complex products of social expectations, changing labour market

conditions, changing technologies, etc. Boys from privileged social backgrounds, who benefit from class and ethnic advantage, do extremely well in schools and universities. Boys' difficulties in schools are markedly concentrated among boys from social backgrounds marked by poverty, ethnic or racial inequality, or social disruption. (Arnot et al. 1999; Teese et al. 1997).

Gender equality measures in relation to boys will only have credibility, in contemporary education systems, if they form part of a wider approach that addresses educational problems concerning boys. The problems of boys' alienation and disrupted education will only be solved by strategies that address the general problem of social justice in education, strategies that move education systems from a focus on competition and exclusion to a focus on inclusion and common learnings. In turn, a social justice approach in education requires a "gender-oriented pedagogy" (Wölfl 2001) that will speak to the concerns and needs of boys as well as girls.

It is essential, then, to place gender equality goals in education in the context of an understanding of boys' gender development, and in the context of the practical methods available in education systems. These tasks will be attempted in the following sections.

Gender equality policy implications: The task for gender equality policy is to link gender equality initiatives with wider issues in boys' education, in ways that emphasize social inclusion and gender awareness, rather than conflict between boys' and girls' interests.

## 6.2. Boys' gender development

Polemical positions on boys' education often rest on oversimplified models of boys' gender development. The "backlash" position usually rests on some version of biological essentialism, i.e. the model where masculine aggressiveness, dominance and other characteristics are supposed to be fixed by the genes, emerging "naturally" in the course of growth. Biological essentialism is very unsatisfactory as an account of gender. It is based on speculation, it lacks credible mechanisms of development, and it is contradicted by evidence of social diversity in gender systems. "Socialization" is often seen as the only alternative. But this too is unsatisfactory as a theory of gender development. The socialization model generally assumes that the learner is passive, that learning of social norms is a linear process, and that the norms themselves are unitary. All these assumptions are wrong, in the light of what is known about both human learning and gender systems (Connell 2002; Fausto-Sterling 2000).

There is now extensive research on gender in child development and education, especially in schools. While more is known about the gender development of girls, enough research on boys has been done to provide a broad picture of the process, at least in developed countries. Key conclusions are:

- Gender learning is a highly active process, in which both boys and girls search out cultural material about gender and process it. They do not wait to have gender norms imposed on them. When they do learn gender images, they incorporate them actively into their fantasy, games and interactions. Boys as well as girls practice, use and reflect on gender, sometimes dividing along gender lines and sometimes crossing gender boundaries. An active negotiation about gender, its meanings, and hierarchies

of masculinity, begins early and continues through adolescence. This activity and interest can be used in gender equality education, as a strong motive for exploring new possibilities. (Jordan 1995; Mac an Ghail 1994; Thorne 1993).

- Gender development passes through different stages, given the changing intellectual and social capacities of the child, and the changing social setting. The gender issues in early childhood, for instance, are different from those in adolescence – though there is an active process of gender construction going on at both times. There does not seem to be any one "critical period" in which the direction of development is decisively fixed. All periods of growth are appropriate for gender education; while patterns of gender identity and conduct established at one period are subject to revision and change later on. It follows that gender equality initiatives for boys must be age-appropriate and must be continuing (Alloway 1995; Frosh et al. 2002).
- Gender development is multi-dimensional. It involves cognitive and emotional learning, physical development, the learning of social skills, and the development of personal identities. An imbalance often develops in secondary and tertiary education, when boys and young men emphasize technical and intellectual training, or sports, and are under-represented in humanities courses that explore issues of emotion and relationship. This may reflect boys' own stereotyped views of gender difference; it is a major problem about the curriculum in boys' education. Gender equality strategy for boys must address curriculum issues and consider the spectrum of development (Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli 2003).
- Bodily activities such as sport, fighting and sexuality are very important in young people's thinking about masculinities, especially in defining hierarchies between hegemonic and subordinated masculinities. Nevertheless, the specific meanings of bodily activities such as football vary from one culture to another. Gendered training of the body begins as early as pre-school. Physical events such as puberty may change self-perceptions and trigger changed responses from other people. Difficulties in this area may be crucial in the turn to violence by young male offenders. Gender equality initiatives for boys must address issues about male bodies and their meanings (Light 2003; Martin 1998; Messerschmidt 2000).
- Gender learning occurs in multiple sites, from the family to schools, peer groups, and workplaces. These settings have different gender regimes. Because men in most societies are relatively absent from early childcare, boys' development often begins in a setting controlled by women; some theories suggest this creates emotional pressure, later, for boys to mark themselves off sharply from women and the feminine. Some institutions designed for boys, such as sporting clubs and boys' schools, define a strongly-marked, even exaggerated, masculinity in their organizational culture. But there is considerable diversity in the gender regimes of schools. Most boys will experience a range of gender relations in the course of growing up. Gender equality initiatives can make good use of this diversity of experience. Gender equality policy should discourage segregated education and encourage inclusiveness. (Connell 1996; Morrell 2001b).

- Boys' gender learning is affected by the wider social context. The ethnic composition of a school, or the social class background of its students, may strongly affect hierarchies among boys, and the definition of the most honoured or hegemonic form of masculinity. Gender equality curricula for boys should not reflect only one culture or social background, but should explore difference and plurality (Foley 1990; Lynch and Lodge 2002).
- In the course of gender development, boys encounter many conflicts and contradictory demands, and they meet conflicting responses from adults and other children. Over time, most successfully resolve the conflicts and develop a trajectory through life as a gendered person, create a specific identity, and develop their characteristic style of conduct. The resolutions and the trajectories are varied. This important fact is already visible in elementary school and secondary school contexts, leading on to the multiple masculinities in adult groups. The complexities of growth also produce internal complexities of character. Adult masculinities often involve compromises between contradictory emotions, or allow flexibility where the same person can produce different gender practices at different times. Gender equality initiatives can make an important contribution by allowing boys and youth to explore the complexity of identities and relationships (Chodorow 1994; Connell 1995; Warren 1997; Wedgwood 2003).

Most research on boys' gender development and education has been done in developed countries. Though many of the principles outlined above will apply more widely, there is every reason to expect that the cultural and economic circumstances of developing countries will shape gender learning for boys in specific ways.

Gender equality policy implications: The task for gender equality policy is to build contemporary knowledge about boys' developmental paths and possibilities into educational programme concerned with gender; and to stimulate research and policy discussion about boys' gender education in developing countries.

### 6.3. Models of educational action

Education systems have strong organizational constraints, which tend to cast gender equality initiatives in specific practical forms. There is, nevertheless, a range of models to draw on, involving different methods and different groups of men and boys.

Specific-purpose programmes for boys. Within a school or college, a targeted programme concerned with gender issues may be set up. Many such programmes exist, with titles such as "Boys Talk", covering issues of masculine identity, personal problems, friendship, relationships with girls, families, sexuality, and violence. The quality of these programmes varies greatly, and there has been little evaluation of their effectiveness. They are popular with school administrators and with parents, as a way for schools to "do something for boys." Specific-purpose programmes can transcend institutional formality to make effective informal links between adults and youth. Such programmes can address difficult issues. One of the most

sophisticated is the "Step by Step" programme created by Denborough (1996), which addresses the problem of male violence, and uses ideas from research on multiple masculinities to introduce participants to alternative narratives for their lives.

Whole-school agendas. Research on schools has shown that gender inequalities are embedded in the whole organizational pattern of a school, the gender regime which includes the division of labour among its staff, the hierarchies in its curriculum, its physical education programme, its dress codes, its library, etc. To change the gender education of boys (and girls) a school may need to reassess, and change, its gender regime as a whole; and some schools have undertaken this task. If a school fails to consider whole-school issues, a smaller specific-purpose programme within it may be ineffective (Gilbert & Gilbert 1998).

Mainstream curriculum and pedagogy. Some gender effects are little noticed because they are embedded in the routine curriculum (what is taught) and pedagogy (how it is taught) of a school or college. For instance, strong gender divisions are often embedded in the way technical education courses are arranged. Youth in schools are highly sensitive to the opportunities that schools offer to address gender issues, and mainstream classes provide the main opportunities for doing so. What is required is a "gender-oriented pedagogy" within the existing structures (Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli 2003; Wöflfl 2001).

Youth work and informal education. Programmes outside schools and colleges are familiar venues for educational work with boys (e.g. sports teams and youth clubs). They often highlight the role of men as gender educators, not just as targets of gender education. These venues can be used for re-consideration of masculinity, providing an attractive setting for boys and youth to discuss bodies, careers, relationships, sexuality, etc. Motives for participating include the desire for exchange with other youth, personal growth, need for expressing non-traditional masculinities, and commitment to reform gender relations (Kindler 1993). Informal educational possibilities exist in peer group networks (an important strategy for community-based HIV/AIDS education), and also in families, where a great deal of gender education actually occurs.

Mass marketing. Gender equality issues including domestic violence, rape, and HIV/AIDS prevention have been addressed by mass media campaigns. Such campaigns generally resemble advertising more than education, and tend to simplify and stereotype issues. In HIV/AIDS education they have not achieved a good response from men. Media campaigns often try to appeal to boys and male youth by the use of "role models" such as celebrity sporting figures. The paradox of using footballers in an attempt to reduce violence, or to get boys to re-think masculinity, is evident. Since commercial mass media are also a major source of sexism and images of violence, other types of media for youth may be more fruitful (Miedzian 1992).

Gender equality policy implications: The task for gender equality policy is to evaluate the effectiveness of different forms of educational action with boys and men, and include the full range of effective methods in gender equality strategies for education systems.

## 7. Institutions and means of action

### 7.1. Government and public policy

Government has a powerful influence on the gender practices of men. The state constitutes gender relations in a variety of ways, from the laws defining marriage to the symbolic meanings attached to nationhood. The state deals with the gender relations in society through many policies and interventions, from employment and development policy to the whole apparatus of the "welfare state" including social security, health and education. Though named gender policies mainly address women, in virtually every policy area where government action affects women, it also affects men. Further, "mainstream" policies (e.g. in economic affairs, security) are often substantially about men without acknowledging the fact, and may also have important effects on gender relations. Governments therefore have many opportunities for action in relation to men in pursuing gender equality (Connell 2003b; Nagel 1998; O'Connor et al. 1999).

One of the most important arenas of action concerns government as employer. Public sector agencies employ very large numbers of men and women, and put them to work in organizations that have internal gender divisions of labour, and organizational cultures that define gender in specific ways. These internal gender arrangements affect the way public organizations work and the way they change. In many parts of the world, governments have moved strongly towards equal opportunity principles and practices, often ahead of the private sector. One result is that the public sector has a relatively high proportion of women, and women are more likely to be promoted to very senior positions than in the corporate sector. Government can thus provide a socially-important model of fair employment. How this should be done is still under discussion, with an active debate about "mainstreaming" equal opportunity policy in recent years (Jensen 1998; Mackay and Bilton 2000).

Still, the great majority of public sector policy-making positions, worldwide, are held by men. Therefore the way men act in government is vital for gender equality outcomes. Research on gender in bureaucracies shows considerable diversity in outlooks and practices among men. There are some traditionalist men who use their organizational power to maintain the status quo and hinder the advancement of women. There are also men in bureaucracies with strong commitments to fairness and gender equality, who support the necessary reforms. Their experience is the best source of "best practice" models for men in organizational life. Indeed some men work alongside women in gender equality units. Often it is the younger men in bureaucracies who more readily accept gender equality (Collinson and Hearn 1996; Eisenstein 1996; Gierycz 1999).

For good gender equality outcomes, it is vital to have support from men in the top organizational levels of government. This seems to be true both in central and local government. Having a pro-active CEO leads to support for gender equality from other men in the organization. It is important not only that men in power support equality measures, but also that they support the women involved in gender equality processes (Schofield & Goodwin 2003).

Two background features of public sector organizations affect men's orientation to gender equality processes. One is the commitment of many public sector workers to an ideology of



public service. Many believe that the state exists to serve the common good, and see their work as defined by the public interest. These beliefs may be a powerful support for men to act in the cause of gender equality.

There is, however, a strong contemporary trend towards re-structuring public sector agencies on the corporate model, often involving privatization and outsourcing, and emphasizing market mechanisms in place of bureaucracy. This trend is changing the character of public sector employment and may replace conceptions of the public interest with market ideas. The consequences for gender equality are mixed; they need careful scrutiny.

Gender equality policy implications: The task for gender equality policy is to consider the position of men in the full range of governmental actions related to gender, to circulate models of good practice for men, and to reinforce principles that encourage men in government, including men in senior positions, to support gender equality.

## 7.2. Businesses, non-governmental organizations and unions

Organizations in civil society and the private sector have their own internal gender regimes that affect the social positions of women and men. Corporations may function as exemplary employers in terms of gender equality, introducing fair employment practices, anti-discrimination measures and gender-inclusive decision-making. Regrettably they often do not function this way. Here, as in the public sector, the men who hold predominant organizational power are vital in the process of change. (Collinson & Hearn 1996; Hearn and Parkin 2001).

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have played a pioneering role in some issues about men and gender. They have been important in providing the educational programmes to boys and young men discussed in section 6.2 above. They have also played a pioneering role in the field of men's health, including initiatives in reproductive health and HIV/AIDS prevention and care discussed in section 5.3 above. This has resulted in a degree of credibility that may be important in gender equality issues. Among the problems of NGO action are small-scale and uncertain funding. This creates the problem of promising initiatives, for instance in the education of boys, not being followed up. The relative vulnerability of NGOs may make it difficult for them to risk initiatives which might alienate powerful community groups – and gender reform is a risky area.

Unions have a capacity to affect consciousness as well as practice; they have wide credibility in working-class communities, though their reach does not extend into the informal economy. They have often, in the past, defended male workers' interests exclusively, and it has taken long and difficult struggles to change the masculinized culture of old-style unionism (Franzway 2001). Change is occurring, as more unionists see that solidarity extends across genders (as it extends across races and nationalities); indeed, the survival of unionism in the modern workforce depends on the participation of women. Women workers, in turn, are generally benefited by being unionized. Men in the union movement now commonly accept the principle of gender equality. Some men turn this into positive action, such as programmes against sexual harassment in the workplace, and against domestic violence in workers' homes (Wagner & Peacock n.d).. Shortage of resources among unions hampers follow-up of initiatives among male workers.

Union action is likely to be crucial in extending "equal opportunity" benefits from the professional and managerial class to the working class. Union meetings and processes may also be a particularly important venue for debating and resolving the practical problems of men's support for gender equality.

Gender equality policy implications: The task for gender equality policy is to persuade men, both in management and the wider workforce, to turn gender equality principle into practice; to circulate models of good practice, and to find ways of sustaining positive initiatives by NGOs and unions.

### 7.3. Alliances with women

Many people find it hard to imagine an alliance of men and women for gender equality, and there are real difficulties in the way of such alliances. Since the growth of an autonomous women's movement, the main impetus for reform has been located in women's groups, not mixed groups. Some currents in the women's movement, especially those concerned with men's violence, are reluctant to work with men, and many women are sceptical of men's willingness to change. On their side, many men regard women's groups with disdain, or consider that gender reform is only a "women's issue" and not the business of men. Men who interest themselves in gender issues are often regarded with suspicion.

Nevertheless, some feminists argue that alliances for change between women and men are possible, even crucial for achieving gender equality. In some social movements, for instance environmentalism, there is a strong ideology of gender equality. The men in these movements encounter women's strength and often make conscious attempts to overcome sexism and re-organize their lives as men. Masculinity politics is a complex field, and though some men are hostile to gender equality, some men's movements are pro-equality and are oriented towards cooperation with women (Connell 1995; Messner 1997; Segal 1997).

In local government, practical alliances between women concerned with gender equality, and men from anti-racist and working-class movements, have been effective in a variety of countries. The same is true in the arena of state policy-making. Alliances within government between gender equality activists, mostly women, and reform-minded bureaucrats and politicians, mostly men, have underpinned many advances in gender equality policy. Even in the field of men's violence against women, there has been cooperation between women's groups and men's groups, for instance in prevention work. This cooperation can be an inspiration to grass-roots workers, and a powerful demonstration of women's and men's common interest in a peaceful and equal society (Pease 1997; Schofield & Goodwin 2003).

The concept of "alliance" is itself important, in preserving autonomy for women's groups, in preempting a tendency for any one group to speak for others, and in defining a credible role for men. In some early attempts to formulate a gender equality strategy for men, the role defined was that of dependent auxiliaries to the women's movement. This was not a position that attracted many men as supporters, while it downplayed the distinctive experiences and resources that men might bring to the struggle for gender equality. An "alliance" approach allows these

resources to be used, and helps in defining a position of dignity for the men as well as the women involved in gender reform.

Gender equality policy implications: The task for gender equality policy is to define forms of alliance between women and men that are effective in achieving change, while preserving respect for all the groups involved.

#### 7.4. Men's movements

The diversity of masculinities documented in recent research is reflected in the diversity of "men's movements." A study in the United States found at least eight different tendencies, each with a different agenda for the making or remaking of masculinity (Messner 1997). Similar diversity can be found in other countries. It follows that there is no unified political position for men in relation to gender equality, and no authoritative representative of "men's interests."

Men's movements have generally had a marginal position in public policy-making concerned with gender equality (see section 2.2 above). Those men's movements that seek to enter the policy-making process are not necessarily pursuing gender equality – indeed, this has sometimes been a vehicle of "backlash" politics.

The experience of men's movements specifically concerned with gender equality therefore needs to be examined closely. A well-known example is the "White Ribbon Campaign" which mobilized public opinion and educated men and boys for the prevention of men's violence against women. Originating in Canada, in response to the massacre of women in Montreal in 1989, the White Ribbon Campaign achieved very high visibility in that country, with support from political and community leaders and considerable outreach in schools and mass media. More recently it has spread to other countries. Groups concerned with violence prevention have appeared in other countries, such as Men Against Sexual Assault in Australia and MOVE in the United States. While they have not achieved the visibility of the White Ribbon Campaign they have built up a valuable body of knowledge about the successes and difficulties of organizing among men (Kaufman 1999; Lichterman 1989; Pease 1997).

The most extensive experience of men organizing around issues of gender and sexual politics is that of homosexual men in anti-discrimination campaigns, the gay liberation movement, and community responses to the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Many heterosexual men see no lessons here for themselves – but homosexual masculinities and heterosexual masculinities are not so different as stereotypes would suggest. Gay men have pioneered in areas such as community care for the sick, community education for responsible sexual practices, representation in the public sector, and overcoming social exclusion, which are important for all groups of men concerned with gender equality (Altman 1994; Kippax et al. 1993).

The struggle for gender equality must engage the energy and passion of men, as it already has with women. Men have specific obstacles to overcome, especially the fact that for many, a move towards gender equality is against their short-term interests. These obstacles can be overcome by a passion for equality or a vision of the general benefits to humanity. At this point, when a historic change in consciousness is required of men, men's movements are important in

articulating the issues, engaging men and youth in the process, and providing support for people working for change.

All social movements experience human wear and tear, sometimes "burnout" among those committed to the work. The women's movement has been in the forefront of social change movements in recognizing the need for personal support for their activists. The same need arises among men (though conventional masculinity encourages men to deny such needs). Engaging men more deeply in gender equality struggles will create a need for support – which women's groups can hardly be expected to meet! Pro-equality men's movements are therefore an important resource in sustaining the human capacity to continue gender change in the long run.

Gender equality policy implications: The task for gender equality policy is to engage men's movements in public policy-making processes, to circulate positive models of mobilization for gender equality among men, and to support men's movements engaged in gender equality work.

## **8. The way forward**

### 8.1. General observations

Inviting men to end men's privileges and remaking masculinities to sustain gender equality, will strike many people as a strange or utopian project. Yet it is already under way. Many men around the world are engaged in gender reforms, for the reasons discussed in section 4 above. The diversity of masculinities, of men's identities and practices, complicates the process but is also an important asset. As this diversity becomes better known, men and boys can more easily see a range of possibilities for their own lives, and both men and women are less likely to think of gender inequality as unchangeable. It becomes possible to identify specific groups of men who might engage in alliances for change.

There is a spectrum of masculinity politics in the contemporary world – some groups and movements supporting gender equality and some opposing it. It is not reasonable to expect a worldwide consensus for gender equality. What is possible is that those forms of masculinity politics which support gender equality might become hegemonic among men. It is possible that groups supporting equality provide the agenda for public discussion about men's lives and patterns of masculinity. There is already a broad cultural shift in masculinity politics towards a historical consciousness about gender, an awareness that gender customs came into existence at specific moments in time and can always be transformed by social action. What is needed now is a widespread sense of agency among men, a sense that this transformation is something they can share in, as a practical proposition. This is, indeed, no more than the cultural presupposition of the "joint responsibility" of men invoked by the General Assembly declaration of the year 2000 (Twenty-third special session of the United Nations General Assembly, *Political Declaration*, paragraph 6).

For gender equality politics to become hegemonic among men does not require that other political views should vanish. It does require effective responses to the resistance that comes from men still committed to gender privilege, or from men who accept gender equality in

principle but do little about it in practice. An active process of debate, persuasion, and contestation is required. Masculinity politics should be thought of as a dialectic, not an expression of fixed identities or positions. There are many forums in which this dialectic can occur, from family homes to mass media, workplaces and voluntary organizations as well as parliaments and international bodies.

Is a revolution in masculinity required, before gender equality can be achieved? Some men have already undertaken profound transformations of personal character and relationships in pursuit of a vision of equality. This is a difficult undertaking, sometimes with high human costs, and its outcome is by no means certain. All honour and respect to those who attempt it. However it is not practical to ask all men to engage in revolutionary personal change. Nor is it necessary, before a dynamic of social change can begin. The core of gender reform is setting up processes of change that will transform unequal gender relations. Men can become partners in such processes by taking specific steps in workplaces and families to equalize resources, share power, end violence and harassment, share childcare, etc. "Step by step", as Denborough (1996) put it in his work on violence with male youth, can achieve major change, provided the change process keeps going. Given the diversity of masculinities, and the diversity of social situations, change will happen at different paces in different men's lives.

Since men are collectively the beneficiaries of most gender inequalities, and are the agents of most gender-based violence, it is not surprising that men are for the most part defined negatively in gender policy discourse (see section 2.2 above). It is therefore very important to see gender equality as a positive project for men. Gender equality is an undertaking for men that can be creative and joyful. It realizes high principles of social justice, it produces better lives for the women that men care about, and it will produce better lives for the majority of men in the long run. This can and should be a project that generates energy, that finds expression in creative arts as well as formal politics, and that can illuminate all aspects of men's lives.

The international dimension of this issue is important. As noted above (section 1.1), issues concerning men and boys are now debated and researched worldwide. This research has documented great diversity in constructions of masculinity and in men's situations. It should not be assumed that methods suitable for one context will work in all others. Women involved in gender equality work have come to recognize the importance of cultural difference and diversity (Bulbeck 1998); the same lesson should be applied with men.

At the same time, it is one world, and cultures inevitably interact with each other. The creation of world society, and contemporary globalization, are real processes. Global-level forums with their own gender regimes have been created. A world politics of gender equality now exists and men must find places in it. At the very least, it is important to learn from each other, and to pool ideas and experiences. More positively, international exchanges can be important in providing support, stimulating creativity and imagination about men's lives, and sustaining the vision of a gender-equal world.

Gender equality policy implications: The task for gender equality policy is to encourage an active dialectic about change among men, to present gender equality as a positive project for

men, and to create means for continuing international exchange of ideas, knowledge, experience and methods in this work.

## 8.2. A suggested policy framework

This section outlines a framework, at national level, for incorporating men and boys more systematically into gender equality policies and processes. While specific measures are mentioned, it is assumed that policy details will vary from country to country. As this is a new policy field, there are few discussions of how to address it. The recent discussion of Nordic experience by Holter (2003, chapter 7) is recommended.

8.2.1. Principles of change. It is important that there should be some agreement, among the different groups active in gender equality issues, on the principles governing change in this area. Principles that might be adopted are:

- Reaffirm the gender equality rationale of the policy area, while defining gender equality as men's concern as well as women's. Define the "gender perspective" as centering on gender relations rather than on gender groups separately. Develop integrated gender policies rather than separate and parallel policies.
- Name men and boys in gender equality policies, rather than leaving their presence implicit. Recognize the well-being of men and boys as a legitimate goal of gender equality measures. Address the specific needs of men and boys, where they differ from the needs of women and girls. Define specific roles for men and boys in gender reform processes.
- Acknowledge the diverse situations, interests and outlooks of different groups of men and boys, and the different patterns and definitions of masculinity among them.
- Connect gender equality measures involving men and boys with a general framework of social justice and the public interest.

8.2.2. Policy processes and settings. Public policies in a number of areas impinge on men and boys in specific ways and affect their contribution to gender equality. Suggested measures are:

- Undertake a review of existing mainstream policies for the ways they define men and boys (often implicitly) and influence their situation. The methods of women's audits of government policy can be adapted for this.
- Use financial and social policy to improve work/life balances for men, and encourage men to make an equal contribution to domestic work. Such measures include career incentives for childcare contribution; disincentives for employers to demand overtime work; a legal structure for permanent part-time work and incentives for men to use it.
- Strengthen workforce gender equality measures in ways that engage men. Such measures include expanded parental leave provisions; requirements for employers to recognize workers' child care obligations; restructuring labour processes to eliminate occupational gender segregation and teach men broader skills; requirements for work-based education around gender equality issues.

- Sustain public pressure against gendered violence, including sexual harassment and organizational violence, in ways that define men as partners in change and co-beneficiaries of change (e.g. through the reduction of public risk, reduction of homophobic abuse, and the value to men of improved safety and quality of life for women).
- Use the taxation system to create incentives for caring work by men (for the sick, for elders, for children), and incentives for equality in family life and in divorce and separation.

8.2.3. Specific programmes. Some, though not all, goals in this area can be addressed by specific purpose programmes addressed to men and boys. It is important for overall gender equality outcomes that new programmes of this kind should not compete for funding with programmes addressed to women and girls, but should be funded from existing programmes that implicitly address men and boys. A well-planned suite of programmes might include:

- Fatherhood education programmes, especially addressed to younger men, combining health, child development and relationship issues.
- Anti-violence programmes among men and boys, including initiatives against sexual harassment in workplaces, and training in non-violent methods of conflict resolution.
- Sexual and reproductive health programmes, both separate and integrated, including initiatives concerning men's responsibility and techniques for safer sex and contraception.
- Reviewing school curricula and materials (e.g. textbooks) to replace stereotyped and narrow presentations of men's interests, pathways and activities.
- Boys' gender education programmes in schools, addressing issues about relationships, family, sexuality, identity, violence, and conceptions of masculinity.
- Funding for community-based programmes that involve men in gender equality issues (e.g. union-based programmes on harassment and domestic violence).
- Research initiatives, including community investigations of local gender problems, and broader studies relevant to men's and boys' support for gender equality.

8.2.4. Public sector agencies. The institutions of government are themselves the bearers of gender patterns, and their organizational processes are a strategic part of the move towards a gender-equal society. Policy makers with responsibility for public sector agencies should address at least these issues:

- Use re-structuring of public sector agencies as occasions for removing embedded gender hierarchies, re-organizing labour processes where necessary for this purpose, and developing positive alliances between women and men in achieving gender reform.
- Provide adequate training and resources for public sector workers who deal with gender equality issues in their everyday work, with specific provision for teachers, and for senior administrators in all agencies.
- Achieve a gender balance in policy-making processes and bodies, not only to guarantee the representation of women's interests but also to accustom men in bureaucracies to working with women at all levels.

- Provide active support "from the top" for gender equality measures in public sector organizations, making visible senior men's commitment in this area. Encourage an ethos of equality and public service.
- Strengthen the gender equality perspective in all agencies that provide gender-specific programmes to men and boys, including health and recreation services.
- Review the operation of enforcement agencies (police, courts, prisons, military, etc.) in terms of their impact on men and boys and their gender practices; foster non-confrontational methods of conflict resolution and train men in these methods.

8.2.5. Means of change. Government initiatives can have broad social effects both by example and by supporting wider processes of change. Positive influence can be exerted by these means:

- Create forums for continuing discussion of gender equality and gender relations in society that systematically include men and boys.
- Circulate information about successful programmes and policies; publicize examples of change among men and boys, including active fatherhood and men's and boys' involvement in caregiving.
- Create policy and research positions concerned with men's and boys' contributions to gender equality, locating them in gender equality units rather than separately.
- Support community-based and NGO work such as outreach programmes with male youth, and men's movements concerned with gender equality. Design this support so as to encourage partnerships with women's groups.
- Provide means for the international exchange of knowledge and experience in this area, including educational materials, policy texts and descriptions of successful programmes.



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