



**ENGENDERHEALTH**  
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**Mobilizing Men for Gender Equality: Supporting Women's Health and Rights.**  
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**(Remarks offered on the occasion of International Women's Day, March 8, 2004 at  
the United Nations, New York, NY)**

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It is an enormous honor to have this opportunity to speak to you today on International Women's Day. I would like to thank both UNIFEM and the Division for the Advancement of Women for having invited me. For all that we've learned about working with men to promote constructive male involvement, I would also like to thank our partners in South Africa-Hope Worldwide, PPASA, the Women's Health Project, the Solidarity Center and their trade union partners, the AIDS Consortium, the South African National Defence Force, the University of the Western Cape, the Population Council and the South African National Office on the Status of Women.

Last year, on International Women's Day, U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan emphasized the importance of working with men, saying, "We must encourage men to replace risk-taking with taking responsibility." Today, I'd like to renew that call for men to take action in support of gender equality. In addition, I'd like to draw upon the Men as Partners work that EngenderHealth has been implementing in South Africa over the last 6 years to make a few suggestions about how we might best encourage men to take a stand against violence against women and to become more involved in HIV/AIDS related prevention, care and support.

Why should we work with men? Why, when women across the world still suffer devastating violence at the hands of men and when women both represent the majority of new HIV infections and carry a disproportionate burden of care and support for those ill with HIV/AIDS, is it imperative that we work with men? Quite simply, it is imperative that we work with men because contemporary gender roles often encourage men to act in ways that compromise women's health, increase women's vulnerability to HIV/AIDS infection and exacerbate the impact of the HIV/AIDS epidemic on women's lives.

EngenderHealth's experience implementing the Men as Partners (MAP) program in South Africa -- whether with men in the South African National Defence Force or within Trade Union Federations and their affiliates, whether in Faith Based Organizations or within the NGO sector - - has given us reason to believe that working with men can make an enormous difference. We have seen that men can and do change their attitudes and practices and, in fact, are often eager to take a stand against violence and for gender equality. What's more, I want to suggest to you that it is in men's own interests to do this. Indeed, one of the key strategies we use in our program in South Africa is to help men see how it is in their own interest to do so.

Why is it in men's interests to change? I want to mention four reasons why it is in men's interest to change. First, it is in men's interest to change because the same gender roles that leave women vulnerable to HIV/AIDS also put men's own health at risk. Too often, men are encouraged to equate masculinity with risk taking behaviour-such as the use of violence, dominance over women, the pursuit of multiple sexual partners, use of alcohol and the rejection of health seeking behaviours. Consider for a moment the consequences of defining masculinity in these ways-- in South Africa the lifetime risk of dying of AIDS-related illness for a 15-year-old boy is currently 70 percent!

Second, it is in men's interest to change because men often care deeply about the women in their lives -- whether their mothers, sisters, neighbors, co-workers or fellow congregants --- and are frequently devastated by violence perpetrated against them. Third, it is in men's interest to change because pervasive domestic and sexual violence casts all men as potential perpetrators and infuses fear and distrust into men's daily interactions with women. Finally, it is in men's interest to change because relationships based on equality and mutual respect are far more satisfying than those based on fear and domination.

Change is never simple though. Men who attempt to live more gender equitable lives often face resistance from other men and sometimes from women. A participant in an EngenderHealth Men as Partners workshop described his process of transformation in words that made clear both the advantages and the challenges. He said: "I come from a violent family, a violent society that has impacted my life. Being involved in gender related work has helped me to understand what it is that is human and allowed me to see the beauty of life. It's not easy though. When, as a man, you are trying to be different people see you with different spectacles and ask: "What kind of man is behaving in this fashion? Is there something missing unto you as a person?"

How then can we support men to take courageous stands in the service of gender equality?" First, to be effective, we need to reach out to men as part of the solution rather than as potential problems. Second, we need to highlight and celebrate the stories of those men who defy destructive stereotypes and demonstrate their commitment to gender equality. Third, we need to develop programs and strategies that are rooted in local communities and that build upon cultural strengths. Fourth, we need to forge strong partnerships between women's advocacy organizations and programs working with men so that these efforts are informed by men's and women's needs. And finally, we need to promote a big tent approach based on alliances with organizations and institutions that influence the attitudes and practices of large numbers of men. These will need to include ministries of government, trade unions and the private sector, faith-based organizations, the military, sporting and entertainment industries, schools and the media, and community-based organizations. Work with men across the world has shown us that these are some of the strategies that are essential to democratizing gender relations.

In closing, I'd like to offer a quote from another MAP workshop participant in the hope that his comments leave you with the optimism needed for the task at hand. He said: "The moment I decided to get married, I told myself I wanted to be an example of change in my community. As a result, some people are saying horrible things about my wife and me. But I have to take a stand so that society can see that change is inevitable." It is my firm belief that by working together to promote new and egalitarian models of masculinity, we can build families and communities in which women are less vulnerable to HIV/AIDS and violence, more in control of their sexual and reproductive lives, and in which men, women and children enjoy healthier and happier lives.