

**United Nations**  
**Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) in collaboration with**  
**International Labour Organization (ILO)**  
**Joint United Nations Programmes on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS)**  
**United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)**  
**Expert Group Meeting on**  
**“The role of men and boys in achieving gender equality”**  
**21 to 24 October 2003**  
**Brasilia, Brazil**

## **Report of the Online Discussion\***

**Organized by the Division for the Advancement of Women**  
**30 June to 25 July 2003**

**Prepared by**

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\* The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and the participants at the online discussion and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations. Following a decision in 1995, the United Nations uses the term gender equality rather than gender equity.

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## **1. Organization of the report**

This report begins with an account of the context of the on-line conference (section 2). This includes the discussions that have occurred, in various UN agencies, concerning the role of men and boys, and the documents in which this issue is treated. The conduct of the on-line conference is described.

The next four sections (3-6) present a summary of the contributions made in each of the four weeks of the conference, distinguishing the major themes raised by participants. Extracts from a sample of postings are presented, intended to document the range of issues and perspectives explored in the discussion.

**Broad conclusions drawn from the discussion are presented (section 7), with proposals for good practices in this area.**

Appendices 1 and 2 reproduce the background statement and orienting questions that were provided to participants, and the opening statements by the moderator for weeks 1-3. A statistical summary of online discussion participation is presented in Appendix 3.

## **2. Background and context**

One of the thematic issues to be addressed by the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) at its session in March 2004 is the role of men and boys in achieving gender equality. As part of the preparations for the CSW session in 2004, the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW), in collaboration with the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), will organize an Expert Group Meeting on the role of men and boys in achieving gender equality, with particular emphasis on the world of work and the HIV/AIDS pandemic. The Expert Group Meeting will be held in Brasilia, Brazil, from 21 to 24 October 2003.

The United Nations has given attention, for almost a decade, to the role of men and boys in achieving gender equality. In the Beijing Declaration, adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, Governments expressed their determination to encourage men to participate fully in all actions towards gender equality. The Declaration emphasized that equal sharing of responsibilities and a harmonious partnership between women and men were critical to their well-being and that of their families as well as to the consolidation of democracy. The Platform for Action emphasized the principle of shared power and responsibility between women and men at home, in the workplace and in the wider national and international communities. It stressed that gender equality could only be achieved when men and women worked together in partnerships, and that the principle of equality of women and men had to be integral to the socialization process. Specific activities have been aimed, in particular, at promoting harmonization of work and family responsibilities for men and women; at encouraging men to share equally in child care and household work; and at promoting programmes to educate and enable men to assume their responsibilities to prevent HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).

The Outcome document of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, adopted in 2000, emphasized that policy-making processes required the partnership of women and men at all levels, and that men and boys had to be actively involved and encouraged in all efforts to achieve the goals of the Beijing Platform for Action and its implementation. In addition, the document identified a number of specific obstacles in relation to the implementation of various critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action. These included persistent gender stereotyping which had led to insufficient encouragement for men to reconcile professional and family responsibilities, and insufficient sharing of tasks and responsibilities by men for care giving within families, households and communities; unequal power relationships between women and men, in which women often did not have the power to insist on safe and responsible sex practices, and lack of communication and understanding between men and women on women's health needs.

The role of men and boys has also been addressed by other intergovernmental fora, including the World Summit on Social Development (1995) and its review session (2000), as well as the special session of the General Assembly on HIV/AIDS of 2001. The AIDS Campaign in 2000/2001 specifically addressed men's key role in reducing HIV/AIDS.

To support the preparations for the Expert Group Meeting on the Role of Men and Boys in Promoting Gender Equality, the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) conducted an online discussion on the theme from 30 June to 25 July 2003. The online discussion was designed to gather good practices and case studies on the role that men and boys could play in promoting gender equality.

Invitations to participate in the discussion were sent in advance to members of the academic community, national machineries for the advancement of women, non-governmental organizations, policy makers, activists, practitioners and others working in fields of gender equality research and practice. Participation was open to anyone who registered. A total of 314 people registered for the online discussion registration continuing after the discussion had begun.

The online discussion had one theme per week and ran for 4 weeks. Three substantive topics were addressed: (1) the world of work; (2) the HIV/AIDS pandemic; and (3) the value of gender equality to men and boys. The fourth week was treated as a "wrap-up" week, with a particular focus on methods. A set of questions to guide discussions was drawn up and supplied to all participants (Appendix 1). At the start of each week, an opening statement from the moderator was posted (Appendix 2). The moderator also supplied a summary of each week's discussion.

Over the course of the online discussion, more than 80 substantive postings were made by activists, practitioners and researchers, from 28 different countries (check). Contributions covered a range of interventions, including discussions on gender equality policy, reports of research concerning men and boys, descriptions of NGO activities in the field, accounts of personal experiences, and broad expressions of opinion. This will be seen in the summaries and extracts in the following sections of this report.

### 3. The world of work

The orienting questions for this topic, and the opening statement by the moderator, are reproduced in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2.

The postings on this topic raised a very wide range of issues. Contributors from different parts of the world described significantly different gender patterns. For instance in working-class families in the Caribbean, women are often heads of households, while among working-class families in an Indian city women have difficulty asserting even limited autonomy. A pattern of relative workplace equality in Nigeria appeared very different from marked gender inequality in low-pay workplaces in the USA.

Given this diversity, we cannot expect a single solution to gender equality in the world of work, or a simple strategy for men that will work the same way everywhere.

At the same time, common themes emerged from diverse backgrounds. Postings from different countries raised similar issues - about work/home relationships, economic inequalities, men's self-images, education, etc. Provided that we acknowledge local diversity, there are issues that can and should be taken up on an international basis.

*Extract, from Janet Brown (Jamaica):*

*Low marriage rates and high percentages of female-headed households suggest women are in fact more often household heads than men; women in the Caribbean have always worked to help support the family...as well as in the home. High levels of under- and unemployment for men as well as women mean that men often cannot play the breadwinner role sufficiently or at all. Many working class men do, in fact, share many of the domestic tasks at home, including childcare. However, masculinity remains very narrowly defined, and neither men nor women have yet redefined it to include the domestic sphere (beyond the bedroom!)... Fatherhood becomes the strongest force for gender equality - in practice if not yet in the rhetoric. To maintain children, ensure their education and health, has strong social meaning for men and women; both parents, whether married/living together or not, are expected and generally do sacrifice considerably for their children. Popular discourses are recognizing the increasing activity, particularly of young fathers, in carrying their children to the doctor, helping with shopping, and assisting with child care duties within the home.*

#### Types of workplace, and forms of gender inequality

The postings mentioned different types of workplaces, in which gender equality issues may take a different shape. The types mentioned are:

- The middle-class or professional workplace, where a trend towards equality follows the rising rate of higher education among women.
- Manual workplaces in the formal economy, where contracts and unions have some control and "family-friendly" policies are possible - though at present mainly used for women's child care.

- Manual workplaces in the informal economy, un-regulated and un-unionized, where women's wages are exceptionally low, though men are often unemployed or intermittently employed.
- The household as a workplace - (a) for paid domestic workers, both women and men, where issues of autonomy and violence arise; (b) for unpaid workers, overwhelmingly women, whose "caring" work supports the education of children and the paid employment of men.
- Outdoor primary industry, such as agriculture or the fishing industry, where gender segregation may be extreme.

Workplace gender inequality is multidimensional - it is not a single problem. The postings on this issue identified these different forms of workplace inequality:

- Differences in wage rates, security of employment, capacity to get alternative employment.
- The type of work - distinctions between "men's work" and "women's work", both paid and unpaid.
- Workplace conditions - physical conditions, overcrowding, oppressive supervision, hours of work.
- Violence, either directed against women, or tending to exclude them from public processes.
- Sexual exploitation, by employers or supervisors.

*Extract, from Carolyne Odhiambo (Kenya):*

*Belief that power is associated first and foremost with physical prowess... This belief has inhibited economic development among the women fisherfolk, because they are simply not allowed to fish in the deep waters, because fishing for economic purposes is a man's job. Women who own boats are thus exploited by the male fishermen, who in most cases sell off most of the catch before landing at the shore. The fishermen then usually claim that the day's catch was low, and the woman is therefore at his mercy. In the public realm this has manifested itself in the electoral event. Women are usually told that politics is for men or for women who behave as men. The elections are many times marred by physical violence and calls for physical aggression...Many women in my society are still scared of vying for seats because of some of these factors.*

#### Difficulties of change for men and boys

Men and boys have a number of reasons for not wanting change in gender arrangements, and sometimes face difficulties if they do want, or support, change. Those identified in our discussion were:

- Socialized expectations of being cared for, lack of skills in domestic work or practice in caring work.
- Public policies, or employer practices, that make it cheaper or easier for families to maintain old breadwinner/housewife patterns, e.g. "family friendly" measures available only to mothers.

- Conceptions of masculinity which make it difficult for men to accept equality - ideas of physical strength, being the breadwinner, rejecting activities such as caring as "unmanly".
- Fear of social stigma, or loss of dignity, if men allow women of the family to work outside the home, or if they depend on women's earnings.

*Extract, from Rahul Roy (India):*

*Men within families are fully aware of the critical nature of women's earnings, and I have rarely come across instances where the nature of work has been downplayed by men. However patriarchal controls, duties and power are being re-negotiated under these unpredictable times, and families are being re-organized along lines which are still not clear to the participants. In one family I observed closely, the woman is on the threshold of stepping out, and the man is constantly told that his inability to remain employed leaves her with little option but to work outside. However, the man has been resisting it with arguments about how he would feel insulted if his wife earns and he has to eat off her earnings. Given these tensions which already exist in this family, if the woman does take the plunge into the labour market it would obviously lead to a major re-negotiation of power flows within the family.*

#### Reasons for men to act in support of equality

The discussion identified a number of reasons why men and boys might want to move towards equality:

- The negative impact on men's life and health of the "breadwinner" model and the "long hours" syndrome; men's desire for a better work/life balance.
- Men's commitment to social justice or human rights principles, applied to gender issues.
- Survival needs, in conditions of poverty where more flexibility in gender arrangements gives better economic chances.
- Desire for more active fatherhood, or to follow through on commitments to fatherhood already made.
- Pressures on working men that arise from the gender system and limit the quality of their working life or their economic flexibility.

*Extract, from James Lang (USA):*

*More abstractly, these issues are framed as social justice and rights. Those concepts also may be motivational for some men, especially when gender inequalities are understood as being part of broader systems of oppression and power. For others, however, there is the simple reality of sustaining a livelihood and remaining above poverty lines. Men and women living with poverty have fewer choices - including the choice of sustaining gender norms around "formal" and "informal" economic activities. Within a traditional household comprised of women and men, more flexibility in gender distributions of labor can keep a household sustainable, whereas perpetuating limited gender roles perpetuates poverty.*

### Actions open to men

What can men and boys do, to realize these positive desires or principles? Our discussion has identified a variety of moves that men can make, including:

- Using men's existing power or authority, to change the culture in a more equal direction, for instance changing gender stereotypes in educational materials, and changing workplace cultures.
- Relating to women in the workplace as persons, rather than as members of a gender category.
- Picking up "women's work", especially caring work in the home.
- Strengthening workers' organizations, especially in the informal economy, and integrating gender equality into union principles.
- Modelling gender equality, e.g. by recruiting women to organizations, where they are underrepresented.
- Changing public policies and employer practices to support more equal sharing of domestic work, and equality and safety in the workplace.

*Extract, from Mark Justad (USA):*

*Gender equity in the US workplace will be held at bay until the labor of child-rearing and family care is addressed head on. This will necessitate further rethinking of men's roles in the child- and family-care arenas as many groups and individuals are doing at present. Second, and related, is the challenge of altering the culture of the workplace to embrace child and family issues without reservation. The US workplace, both in reality and in our cultural imagination, remains a male-identified environment... And bending the workplace towards these issues not only challenges workers' gender-related expectations, it can also risk a company's viability by making it vulnerable to competitors maintaining a male-identified stance... Until a truly "family friendly" world of work emerges there seems little hope that gender equity can be accomplished in the US.*

#### **4. The HIV/AIDS pandemic**

The orienting questions for this topic, and the opening statement by the moderator, are reproduced in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2.

The postings on this topic raised issues about differences among men, about the role of men in the epidemic, and about strategy and practices of change.

## Differences among men

Men are differently positioned in relation to the HIV/AIDS pandemic, and we need to recognize these differences when shaping strategy. There are, first, differences in men's sexuality and sexual identity, between men who have sex with women, i.e. men in heterosexual relationships, and men who have sex with men, i.e. men in homosexual relationships. (There are also men who have sexual partners of both sexes, and different patterns of sexuality through the life course.) Among men who have sex with men there is significant difference between those who are affiliated with a gay community and those who are not.

Men also differ in their cultural background, and in their ethnic or racial identity and situation. Contributors mentioned the cultural specificity of their own context, the local patterns and traditions of gender relations, and the influence of differences in racial situation.

Men's response to the pandemic is also shaped by their economic and class situation. Masculine identity includes the idea that a wife should never outshine a husband, in middle and upper class Bangladesh. Unemployment and poverty are significant in disrupting family commitments and producing a context for HIV transmission in southern Africa.

There are also differences of generation that need to be attended to. Contributors discussed the different situations of children, of youth, at the stage of forming sexual relationships, and of older men, married and with children of their own.

*Extract, from Tanya Shahriar (Bangladesh):*

*My husband and I are both young urban professionals, educated and reasonably well-off, and may be described as well-to-do in Dhaka society today. But in spite of coming from families where both parents have been educated and where higher education of the girls in the family has been encouraged, I can see that my success and being outgoing often becomes a source of worry for my partner... It seems whatever I do, I must always be subdued and never outshine him... If we are talking about gender equality there are subtle nuances that we need to address in the so-called upper class of societies, let alone the poorer ones, where of course gender equality and violence are more obvious.*

## What shapes the role of men in the pandemic

Men's actions in relation to the pandemic are shaped by gender patterns in culture. Where there is an ideology of male supremacy, or male privilege, men may ignore women's interests and safety in sexual encounters, to focus on their own pleasure or prestige.

The specific customs and ideas current about sexuality are also relevant. Asymmetrical ideas of men's and women's sexuality encourage unsafe sex among young Australians. Similarly, there is evidence of a strong belief in men's sexual initiative among Nigerian youth. The way sexual relationships are constructed may be important. "Throwing out the condom" as a sign of trust in a relationship is humanly understandable - but still dangerous.

The economic and cultural circumstances in which men find themselves are not prominent in medical research on the pandemic, but they can be very important. Economic restructuring and disruption may make it impossible for many men to perform traditional masculine social obligations, resulting in cultural disruption, personal desperation, high levels of violence, and rapid spread of HIV. However HIV transmission can occur when men DO carry out traditional obligations, in this case, e.g. marrying widowed sisters-in-law who have been infected by their husbands, resulting in whole kinship networks being devastated by AIDS.

*Extract, from Puleng Letsie (Lesotho):*

*Men in Lesotho are highly responsible for fuelling the spread of HIV, as extra-marital affairs are rife in Lesotho, and are slowly being accepted as normal practice. Some women would even indicate their approval of the "other woman" as opposed to their men having to go to commercial sex workers. Condom use is also not very popular, especially in rural areas where levels of awareness on HIV/AIDS and related issues are still very low. Women's minority status is clearly depicted in sexual/reproductive health issues, as men are the ones who determine which family planning methods are to be used by the couple. And in most instances a Mosotho man would not want to use condoms and not allow the wife to use any other family planning/birth control methods, as child-bearing is sometimes seen as a sign of power and "special ability".*

#### What men and boys can do

Many of the contributors mention education - the general need for educational action towards gender equality, and the specific need for HIV and safe sex education directed towards heterosexual men. Generalized campaigns directed towards men have not met with a good response. Clearly, new thought is necessary. An example was given of the effectiveness of testimony in a youth camp, including testimony from an HIV-positive participant. Body care practices may be a key site for action.

To the extent men control sexuality, they have the capacity to change sexual practices. Men can take a more active role in reproductive health generally, and we need research and policy support for this. The "choreography" of sexual encounters need attention. Safer sex can be integrated into sexual arousal and pleasure - a point already familiar in gay communities but not yet widely accepted in heterosexual populations.

Several contributors suggested changes in patterns of care-giving, such as the need for men to care for HIV-infected women. African traditions of care-giving were mentioned, which can be consciously fostered, for instance involving boys in "care clubs". We should not ignore the caring capacity of children, both boys and girls.

Finally there are larger cultural changes in which men's role may be crucial. Men and boys can play a role in the education of children to develop respectful attitudes towards women. There is a case for revalidating the role of the community, and the concern of elders, in relation to young people's sexuality. This goes against a powerful modern trend towards individualism, but it may be vital in building community responses to HIV/AIDS.

*Extract, from Radhika Chopra (India):*

*I think of going to a street corner barber and having a shave, a new style of beard or a crew cut. If he nicks me, what will he do with the blade? Change it? Throw it? Reuse it? Will I - do I - ask him?... Young men and women in India have very articulate cultures of beauty and body care. I think it's a good idea to tap into these practices with a specific purpose - AIDS awareness. Beauty care provides a context, a space and diverse audiences of youngsters already "tuned into" body care. AIDS prevention as a body-care practice can well be part of programmes of awareness... It's entirely possible that no one wants to think AIDS when they are in the happy state of deciding a hairstyle. On the other hand, I think that young men and women are actually very responsive to the telescoping of different ideas - beauty and AIDS as part of body care.*

### On strategy for change

The interweaving of sexuality with gender inequality creates patterns that are complex and not easy to change. Some of the strategic problems emerged in our discussion.

When we recognize the importance of addressing men about reproductive health, we may think that a focus on men's actions, and an address to men only, is sufficient. But this is mistaken. Gender relations are involved, and integrated programmes involving both women and men are necessary.

It is important to address heterosexual men - but not by picturing them as "a problem". HIV/AIDS messages need to gain cooperation, and should be designed in the light of the larger issues of gender relations and strategies of change among men.

*Extract, from Robert Morrell (South Africa):*

*We need to know a lot more about courtship - the traditional, socially endorsed mechanism of monitoring sexuality and giving parents and elders influence. This will undoubtedly not be popular in a time when the age of sexual debut is between 12 and 15 years, and young people are used to making their own decisions regarding their bodies. But it may be necessary to support community initiatives of this kind. While poverty is implicated in HIV transmission (and needs to be addressed as part of a strategy to reduce infections) it is not simply a cause. Botswana and South Africa are, in African terms, rich countries, and yet they have very high infection rates. We need to know a lot more about how heterosexual men who daily confront poverty, understand themselves, how they try and realize their masculinity, and how they develop supportive and caring relationships with those around them. Much AIDS research identifies African men as "a problem" or "the cause" of the pandemic. While it is true that young girls are at very high risk of heterosexual infection, messages that constantly identify African men as high risk, will not help to gain their cooperation in efforts to reduce transmission, and will not help in the larger project of working for more respectful masculinities on the continent.*

## 5. The value of gender equality for men and boys

The orienting questions for this topic, and the opening statement by the moderator, are reproduced in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2.

### Benefits for men and boys

The discussion identified a number of ways in which gender equality is valuable for men and boys as well as women and girls. They include:

- Better work/life balance.
- Accord with concepts of justice, and with religious principles.
- Personal emancipation.
- Better human relations, especially with wives and with children.
- More complete human personhood, broader masculinity.
- Better mental health, psychological well-being.
- Social inclusion of all groups of men and boys - less marginalization.
- Better prospects of overcoming poverty.
- More flexible employment arrangements.
- Higher levels of education & resources in the local community.

*Extract, from Puspa Dhakal (Nepal):*

*Gender equality would do wonders for our society. Simply [women] being able to receive an education, status, property ownership and leadership will help reduce and eventually eliminate the grave conditions that exist. Both men and women will benefit from gender equality and advancement of women. Educated, advanced and working women will add to a family's income, productivity, increasing nations' monetary and professional value, help reduce poverty, and eliminate those social taboos and caste based discriminations.*

*Extract, from Kathleen Lynch (Ireland):*

*A more gender equal society would be one that would leave boys and men with more options in terms of careers, life styles and general ways of being. This could not but be good for their emotional, physical and mental health. At the individual level, they would not have to "prove" their masculinity by dominating other men or women, by adopting a hyper-masculine facade (and in consequence engaging in life-threatening life-style activities, from wars to speeding, from alcohol abuse to disengagement from their emotional self). At the collective level, the more men adopted what have been traditionally defined as feminine, collegial styles for resolving conflicts and differences, the less waste there would be globally in producing arms and weapons whose sole purpose is the killing of others, and, very often, the destruction of the environment.*

### Costs to men and boys

At the same time, contributors were aware of things that men and boys might lose as society moves towards gender equality, and therefore the reluctance of many men to adopt egalitarian practices. Men and boys may lose:

- Services from women (e.g. domestic service).
- Power over women - including indirect pressures on women to make themselves desirable to men.
- Cultural traditions that give priority to men.

*Extract, from Michael Meuser (Germany):*

*Research on attitudes toward gender roles and gender equality reveals that the majority of men, especially of young men, support gender equality. Most egalitarian attitudes are found among men from the educated middle classes... But there is a huge gap between egalitarian attitudes and social praxis. For example, more and more men express the wish to be involved actively in parenthood, not limiting fatherhood to being the economic provider. But only two percent of fathers make use of the possibilities of parental leave. More detailed qualitative research shows that especially the men from the educated classes, who strictly vote for gender equality and for wife-husband relations that are freed from a typical gender division of labour, live in quite traditional gender arrangements.*

### Support for gender equality among men and boys

Contributors mentioned a number of groups of men and boys, and institutions traditionally controlled by men, who might recognize the value of gender equality for men and boys, or might be sources of support for gender reform:

- Governments
- NGOs with responsibilities that connect to gender equality.
- Company managers, as employers.
- Religious groups with an ethic of equality.
- Middle-class and well-educated men.
- Younger generation.
- Urban men.
- Men's movements concerned with gender issues.

*Extract, from Sixtus Kennedy (Kenya):*

*Young men (40 downwards) support gender equality more than older men. While young men are open and willing to hear and debate the issues involved, the older men are wary, suspicious and downright against the whole process. They see it as a move by women to subjugate men. Young men here may support gender equality because of a combination of factors - education, modernization, less influence of culture and traditional practices, westernization, the influence of female family members, a commitment to some cause affecting women, etc.*

## Resistance to gender equality among men and boys

Contributors also recognized the reality of resistance to gender equality, and mentioned some specific sources of this:

- Middle class men (in terms of family practice).
- Older generation.
- Men embedded in patriarchal cultures.
- Backlash movements among men.

*Extract, from Wayne Martino (Australia):*

*Men as a whole do not appear to be taking up necessary and crucial critical interrogation of masculinities in schools which is conducive to supporting gender equality. The kind of work in which many men do engage and are willing to embrace in schools is that driven by a recuperative masculinity politics, committed to reinscribing dominant masculinity, not challenging it... I have found that men who are committed to interrogating hegemonic masculinity have experienced the costs of it at the hands of other men.*

## Strategic issues

To understand gender issues in practice we must look at the specifics of issues and particular situations. Complex changes in gender relations occur when women in India enter the labour market or get small credits that enable them to run household-based businesses - a local readjustment of gender relations follows, especially involving the younger men. If it is widely true, as some contributors suggested, that urban men are more likely to support gender equality, then we need to think very carefully about the specific situation of rural men and the reasons they might find to support change. These include the benefits to village society of higher levels of education and health among women; they may also include concerns about justice in local cultural traditions. Though patriarchal culture is a reality, cultures are rarely monolithic, and strongly egalitarian ideas may co-exist with appallingly sexist stereotypes.

Egalitarian attitudes, however, do not necessarily mean egalitarian practice - nor does egalitarian practice always mean commitment to gender equality principles. Programmes concerned with an issue such as boys' education may be the vehicle of "backlash" ideas that actually operate against gender equality, while purporting to be concerned with fairness.

Nevertheless we must include men and boys in the search for gender equality. Reasons were given by many participants.

*Extract, from Michael Kaufman (Canada):*

*Such efforts might: (i) create a large-scale and broad social consensus on a range of issues that previously have been marginalized as issues only of importance to women when in fact they are often also issues for men; (ii) mobilize resources controlled by men and mobilize the social and economic institutions controlled by men... (iii) develop effective partnerships not only between women and men, but between a range of institutions and organizations... (iv) increasingly and patiently isolate and*

*marginalize those men working to preserve men's power and privilege; (v) raise the next generation of boys and girls in a framework of gender equity and equality; (vi) by changing the attitudes and behaviour of men and boys, improve the lives of women and girls in the home, workplace and community; (vii) gain unexpected insights into current gender relations and the complex forces that promote discrimination against women and prevent gender equality; (viii) gain unexpected insights into other social, cultural, political issues.*

## **6. Wrap-up discussion**

### Methods

In the wrap-up discussion, many participants made observations on ways of encouraging men and boys to contribute to gender equality. The methods discussed include:

- Informal educational work in intimate settings, such as the family
- Awareness raising and strategic discussions within institutions, such as the UN itself
- Specific programmes for men & boys within public sector institutions such as health and education, including reproductive health
- Public policy settings that support equal participation in the workplace, sharing of domestic work & childcare
- Community education programmes by NGOs focussing on issues about men's practices
- Gender equality movements among men, such as anti-violence movements

These methods are not sharply distinct. It is likely that progress with any one of them will support other forms of action.

*Extract, from Rachna Singh (India):*

*My experience with the "sensitization" of my male family members, especially my husband, is like a life long project for me. Not that women members are ready for the gender based change, but they understand more easily than the men. The men also behave differently towards different women. While they may be willing to hear about equality for their daughters, they mostly do not want to hear about the same issue for their wife (more so the older generation). Therefore, I propose one-to-one learning... Personal relationships, with friends and family and co-workers, are a most important area to initiate this sensitivity.*

*Extract, from Jorge Lyra (Brazil):*

*In hospitals and public health units in Recife, Papai [NGO] conducts weekly meetings with young fathers and/or partners of pregnant teenage girls, as they accompany their partners through prenatal care or infant care and outpatient departments. These meetings take place in the form of workshops in the style of waiting rooms, and focus on subjects related to pregnancy, infant care, and fatherhood. In the neighbourhood of Varzea, Papai conducts a program in Sexual and Gender Education, directed towards elementary and high school students from the public school system... The program includes (1) workshops with students (men and women); (2) weekly workshops directed exclusively towards boys; (3) interactive*

*activities on school playgrounds; (4) meetings with teachers, focusing on the integration of issues of gender and sexuality in the classroom curriculum; (5) informal visits in the neighbourhoods where students live; (6) training for young community health workers.*

### Strategic problems

The discussion also identified a number of important problems that confront any attempts to change men's and boys' gender practices in the direction of gender equality.

These include limited societal support for gender equality, and lack of concern for issues about men and boys in many public sector institutions and programmes. Men may have a divided consciousness: for instance, supporting emancipation for some women but not others, or in some fields of life only.

Both popular and professional frames of thought about gender can make it difficult to imagine or practice change. It is common to think categorically about gender, "women are (all) like this" and "men are (all) like that". An example from Brazil is young men's belief that the male body is simpler than the female body and that physical frailty means femininity - beliefs which lead to under-use of health services and difficulties with health education.

There are also problems about the process of organizing about gender equality among men and boys. In some countries there is a predominance of boys among school dropouts - this removes boys from the institutions where gender education can most easily occur. In the developed countries there is a tendency for men's work to be socially polarized, with those interventions most concerned with gender equality tending to be interventions targeted on working-class and marginalized men. The minority of men working for gender equality are likely to be stereotyped as effeminate and liable to be intimidated. There are political ambiguities about men contesting men's benefits in a patriarchal society, and it is easy for mistrust and conflict to arise.

Strategies concerning men intersect, as a number of contributors to the online discussion noted, with other issues of inequality - class and race for instance. There is an interplay with global inequality and privilege, differences in gender politics between the developed and the developing world. New arenas of gender inequality emerge under "globalization", e.g. in the workforce of transnational corporations and the operation of global media and markets. The men who hold power in such arenas are not easily influenced by local interventions.

*Extract, from Rumana Hashem (Bangladesh):*

*The group of men who are working in the alliances for gender equity, equal health care, and education, equity at work or in decision-making is too small in number. Furthermore they are marginalized in their own community and often intimidated as though they are separators and feminine in kind, who have no right to step forward with ordinary men at all. These sorts of intimidation result in a kind of silence among the sophisticated males, that lets the access of gender discrimination in a subtle way.*

## Strategic opportunities

A gradual shift of opinion towards gender equality, especially among younger men, has been mentioned several times in the online discussion . This sometimes arises from a broad commitment to social justice and human rights, which are readily acknowledged by men and boys. Though men continue to hold power around the world, this is not a monolithic patriarchy. There are elements in most men's consciousness that a program for equality can address.

"Men" are not a homogeneous group, any more than "women" are. There are divisions of interest among men which align some groups of men, on some issues, with women or specific groups of women. For many men, the gain from patriarchy is more symbolic than material, may even be illusory. Trying to live up to an imaginary image of masculinity leads to many damaging consequences. A more gender-equal society will not be to the advantage of all men compared with the world we now live in, but it may be to the advantage of a majority of men. There is potential for alliances and joint action on a range of issues.

*Extract, from Mike Messner (USA):*

*Too often, it seems that boys learn early on that their interests are opposed to those of girls and women. This is based partly on a defensive insecurity; but it's also based on the fact that material relations (access to resources, etc.) actually have been structured in a way that benefits men and harms women. So, when women organize for equality, often men react defensively. However, when we disaggregate the category "men" into various groups of men (say, men of different social classes or sexual orientations, men of different nations, etc.), it seems that some men's interests, some of the time, are materially aligned with those of women. We do see some alliances between women and men - fighting for health care, government support for families, equal access to education or sport for daughters, etc. - but too often... it seems that men don't see this.*

## Proposals

Our task in this online discussion was to explore issues rather than come up with a plan of action; even so, some concrete proposals emerged. They include:

- Expanding research on men's and boys' beliefs about gender equality and support for gender equality
- Changed public policy regimes to support employment equality and create pressure against gendered violence
- Developing partnership and cooperation between men's and women's groups and movements
- Improving childcare support for low-income families.

It would be easy to extend this short list.

The discussion also led to a more general proposal. A vital principle recognized in the discussion is that men are shaped by patriarchy but are not entirely limited by it. We have a capacity to imagine a world beyond patriarchy, and it is important not only to take practical actions towards equality, but also to

exercise that imagination. Men cannot build or develop a world alone; men need ways of imagining how to do it in equality with women.

Though the developed world often prides itself on achieving gender equality, there is more gender inequality than most people believe, and the gains of the past are not secure for the future. To take just one example: much of the content of mass media in the developed world still presents to young people exploitative images of women, violent images of men, and reactionary ideas about gender equality. There is still a tremendous struggle to be conducted, as the UNESCO charter famously put it, "in the minds of men".

*Extract, from Sonja Uher (Germany):*

*The role and image of men sharing the parent's part and retiring in part from work has to improve. An impulse could be a financial reason initiated by the government: full financial support in parental leave (as exists e.g. in Germany for the first months) will only be given to a family if both parents take a certain time off their job for caring for the children. Moreover, there are too few possibilities and guarantees for child care in kindergartens or after-school institutions. Especially for average- or lower-earning women (those families mostly need the extra money) they are a basic necessity.*

*Extract, from Michael Flood (Australia):*

*Men's partnerships with anti-violence women's groups are critical. They enable men to learn from existing efforts and scholarship rather than "reinventing the wheel". They lessen the risk that men will collude in, or be complicit with, dominant and oppressive forms of masculinity. They are a powerful and practical demonstration of men's and women's shared interest in stopping violence. Men's partnerships with women are an inspiring example of cross-gender collaboration, a form of activism which reaches across and transforms gender inequalities.*

## **7. Conclusions, including proposals for good practices**

The online conference proved to be an excellent modality to reach a broad audience of a diverse background and expertise, and to share experiences, good practices and views among a wide range of experts and interested persons from different countries and regions of the world.

Some technical difficulties with the website were encountered. On some occasions it was difficult for participants to make postings, and for part of the time the postings were not circulated by email. By the later stages of the online discussion these problems had been overcome. Perhaps because of this, perhaps because of interest in the discussion, the number of postings increased in the last week of the online discussion.

The online discussion demonstrated great diversity in the situations of men and boys, in the patterns of their relations with women and girls, and in cultural definitions of masculinity. This diversity is now a familiar conclusion of social research on men and masculinity. It is important to bear in mind, in thinking about policy for gender equality. Policy must be designed in a way that recognizes diversity as well as

inequality. A solution that works in one part of the world cannot automatically be translated to another region.

Contributions to the online discussion showed that inequalities between women and men are often embedded in cultural definitions of masculinity and of the proper gender division of labour. People's beliefs about gender have power in shaping their behaviour. Yet "culture" does not float free from the material aspects of social life. Contributors also noted various ways in which the subordination of women delivers benefits to men - including economic resources, prestige and esteem, and political authority. Men and boys often have something to gain from maintaining gender inequality. For both cultural and material reasons, it is easy for men in authority to remain indifferent to the question of gender equality. It is also a matter of experience that men (as well as women) attempting to change gender relations and definitions of masculinity can be subject to ridicule, harassment or intimidation from other men defending the status quo.

Yet differences among men (and boys) are such that the benefits from gender inequality are unequally distributed, and are often mingled with costs. Men differ in terms of wealth, sexuality, age, marital status, ethnicity, religion and culture, and each of these differences may be a contour of costs/benefits from gender inequalities. For instance, different groups of men are differently vulnerable to the HIV/AIDS pandemic, while the growth of the epidemic shows the huge collective cost of specific masculine behaviours that provide important pathways of transmission. For large numbers of men in poverty, the "gains" from the subordination of women may be mostly symbolic, while the "costs" (in terms of family income, health, etc.) are very material.

Despite the difficulties of action in this field, the online discussion demonstrated that there are many possible sites of action, many possible strategies for action, and a range of possible benefits for men and boys. Sites and methods discussed in the online discussion are listed below. The benefits were discussed mainly in Week 3, where details will be found.

It should be noted that possible benefits to men and boys are not necessarily at the expense of women and girls. (The belief that what one gender gains, the other must necessarily lose, is both damaging and false.) To achieve equality there must be a redistribution of income and prestige, certainly, in which men's relative advantage will decline. But there are also ways in which men specifically stand to gain, including better work/life balances, better diet and health, and less vulnerability to occupational stress and injury. Further, many of the benefits of gender equality mentioned in the online discussion are shared benefits between men and women. These include a better quality of human relations, better child care, health benefits at a community level, greater survivability for families in poverty, and reductions in the societal level of violence.

### Good practices

It was not the purpose of the online discussion to arrive at agreement on policies or practices, so the following suggestions should not be regarded as formal recommendations. But it was the purpose to collect a variety of proposals and experiences about good practices, as a basis for future thinking. A considerable range of sites of action were mentioned, as well as both broad strategies and specific experiences. The following is a summary of proposals, classified by the site of action.

## Public policy

Governmental actions in a number of policy areas can assist or encourage men's support for gender equality, by changing the conditions in which individuals or groups shape their gender practices, e.g.:

- "family friendly" employment policies which encourage equal economic participation by women and men, e.g. by lowering relative costs of such arrangements;
- creating public pressure against men's violence towards women;
- providing affordable child care, especially for low income families.

## Workplaces

The diversity of workplaces mentioned in the online discussion suggests a diversity of possible actions. The online discussion mainly discussed broad principles and strategies:

- building gender equality into workplace culture, so the workplace ceases to be regarded as a men's realm;
- addressing the child care needs of the workforce, as a normal part of employment policy and practice;
- strengthening the representation of women in unions, and integrating gender equality issues into the normal work of unions;
- modelling gender equality in NGO employment.

## Educational institutions

Formal education is widely seen as one of the most important agencies in gender reform, but the specific ways in which education can operate in relation to men and boys needs careful thought. The online discussion raised the following possibilities:

- developing curricula and pedagogies which allow boys and youth to interrogate masculinities and gender relations;
- building gender equality perspectives into mainstream educational programmes;
- youth work activities, e.g. camps and workshops, both for young men separately and for young men and women together, in which issues such as sexuality can be explored;
- teacher education programmes that equip teachers better to deal with gender equality issues.

## Services to men

Agencies which provide services to men and boys are an important venue for work around gender equality principles and practice, including:

- sexual and reproductive health services and programmes, especially those that deal with issues about sexuality (including HIV) and fatherhood;
- general health services;
- community education programmes by NGOs which address men, for instance around issues of child care and fatherhood;

- training for professionals involved in such work, e.g. community health workers (compare note on teacher education above).

### Social movements

Social movements of many kinds exist among men, some of which address gender issues. Not all of them support gender equality. But those which do, and those which may come to support gender equality, are a significant site for action:

- disseminating gender equality models and principles among men, e.g. on questions of violence against women;
- finding resources for action in support of gender equality;
- providing support for men and boys who work towards gender equality, and who are liable to face stress and opposition;
- working in partnership with women's groups concerned with issues such as violence against women.

### Families

Since many vitally important transactions between men and women occur in the family, the family itself is an important site of action for gender equality. Dimensions of such action include:

- increasing fathers' active involvement in child care, especially the care of young children;
- increasing the flexibility of family divisions of labour, e.g. men's acceptance of women's employment, especially in contexts of poverty and/or widespread HIV transmission;
- informal education about gender equality by other family members, especially conveying women's experience to men.

### Sexuality

Since gender identities and understandings of relationships between women and men are very closely linked to sexual practices and understandings, sexuality is necessarily an arena of action for gender equality:

- customary sexual practices by men, or by couples, can be re-defined to increase women's safety (in relation to sexually transmitted infections), and women's initiative in relationships;
- young people's body care interests and practices can become an arena for sexuality education;
- the community's interest in young people's sexual practices can be re-asserted, against complete individualism.

### Culture

Changes in cultural definitions of masculinity and of gender relations were implicit in much of the online discussion 's discussion of change towards gender equality. Specific actions are harder to define, but those suggested include:

- fostering collegial rather than confrontational approaches to conflict resolution, with the aim of widening men's repertoire and reducing the propensity to violence;
- creating forums for discussion and debate on gender issues among young men;
- increasing our knowledge base, by conducting research on men's and boys' beliefs about gender and support for gender equality.

This list is not intended as an exhaustive survey of possible actions by men and boys; indeed it is far short of that. However it is hopefully enough to indicate the range and diversity of possible practices. The list may also give concrete meaning to the principle that, as gender is always relational, the thorough solution of gender problems (such as continuing gender inequality) necessarily involves action by all groups involved in the gender system. Men and boys have both responsibilities and opportunities in the move towards gender equality.

## **APPENDIX 1: BACKGROUND STATEMENT AND ORIENTING QUESTIONS**

Over the last decade, there has been a growing interest in the role of men in promoting gender equality, in particular as the achievement of gender equality is now clearly seen as a societal responsibility that concerns and should fully engage men as well as women. The global commitment to gender equality in the Beijing Platform for Action and other major international conferences and summits, and in the existing international legal framework, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and ILO Conventions, have encouraged and accelerated efforts in this regard. To further develop efforts in this area, the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) will consider the role of men and boys in achieving gender equality at its forty-eighth session in March 2004.

To support these efforts, the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW), in collaboration with the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), is organizing an Expert Group Meeting on the role of men and boys in achieving gender equality, which will take place in late September/early October 2003 (venue to be determined).

As part of this dialogue on the role of men and boys, an online discussion focused on the role of men and boys in achieving gender equality will highlight the positive role that men and boys play or could play in the world of work (paid and unpaid labour, formal and informal sectors) and in the context of the HIV/AIDS pandemic (including prevention, treatment, care and support, and social stigma). In both areas, the role of men and boys in sharing family and community responsibilities will be emphasized. We intend the discussion to demonstrate good practices and case studies of how men and boys could promote gender equality.

### **Orienting questions**

#### **The world of work**

1. What current features of gender relations (in families, in the public realm, etc.), masculine identities, and beliefs about gender, are likely to hinder economic gender equality in your society? (That is to say, what needs to be changed to promote gender equality in workplace and economy, and how could men contribute in this regard?)

2. What actions by men AS EMPLOYERS are effective in promoting gender equality? What actions by men AS FELLOW WORKERS are effective in promoting gender equality? What actions, on the contrary, have negative effects on gender equality?

3. What differences among men affect their support for economic equality between women and men? Are there specific groups of men who support gender equality more strongly than others? - if so, please describe them, and why they are supporters of gender equality.

4. It is helpful to circulate positive models of successful action. Can you describe specific episodes of action by men (as individuals or as groups) that made a strong contribution to gender equality in the

workplace or in balancing family/community and work responsibilities? What role do gender stereotypes and peer pressure play in this regard? Please give a short description of the events, and their context.

5. What legislation, regulatory measures, policies and awareness raising activities, on the part of governments or large corporations, are likely to encourage men/boys to support gender equality in the economy? What actions, on the other hand, are likely to worsen the situation?

### **The HIV/AIDS Pandemic**

1. What actions taken by men and boys specifically are important in HIV transmission in your society? What are the reasons (some) men and boys act this way? What do men and boys believe about these actions (e.g. do they see them as risk-free, as their right, as uniquely pleasurable)?

2. More broadly, what features of gender relations (e.g. in families, in sexual life, in the economy), or what features of masculine identities, are currently important in allowing HIV transmission?

3. What differences among men and boys affect their role in HIV transmission, or their commitment to AIDS prevention? Are there specific groups of men and boys who have played a significant role in prevention? - if so, please describe them and why they have played this role.

4. What role do men and boys in your society play in caring for people with HIV infection or with AIDS? If there are examples of positive action that would be useful models, please describe them and their context.

5. Can you describe specific episodes of action by men/boys (as individuals or as groups) that made a strong contribution to HIV/AIDS prevention, treatment, care and support? Alternatively, can you describe an HIV/AIDS educational programme for men or boys that seemed to be effective? Please give a short description of the events, and their context.

6. What legislation, regulatory measures, policies and awareness raising activities on the part of governments or health systems are likely to encourage men to practice AIDS prevention and to become involved in care and support? What actions, on the other hand, are likely to worsen the situation?

### **The value of gender equality for men and boys**

1. What benefits do men and boys in your society see flowing from gender equality, or from the advancement of women? Alternatively, what benefits do you see for men and boys from greater gender equality?

2. What differences among men affect their support for equality between women and men? Are there specific groups of men who support gender equality more strongly than others? - if so, please describe them, and why they are supporters of gender equality.

3. What costs do men and boys in your society fear they will have to pay for greater equality? What do they see as the downside or disadvantage of the advancement of women?

4. What differences of interest exist among men/boys, in relation to gender equality and the advancement of women and how do these change in the course of the life cycle (i.e. boys, adolescent boys, men and older men)?.? Do you see some groups of men/boys as having to bear more of the cost, and other groups of men/boys as likely to benefit? How do factors, such as poverty/welfare and rural/urban areas, i.e. men's and boys' environment/sphere have an impact on gender relations.

5. What changes in men's lives, beliefs or identities are feasible AND would shift contemporary societies towards gender equality? What movements among men are helpful in this regard? On the other hand, what negative developments among men do we need to combat?

Week Four (21-25 July 2003): Wrap-up week

## **APPENDIX 2: OPENING STATEMENTS BY MODERATOR, WEEKS 1-3.**

### **The World of Work**

The economy and the workplace are important sites for action towards gender equality, because they are key sites of current inequalities. Differences in the economic position of women and men include different rates of workforce participation, segregated occupations, unequal opportunities for promotion, differences in average income, and differences in employment security. These differences, in turn, have effects on other dimensions of gender inequality - sexual and domestic violence, political representation, cultural respect.

Around the world, men predominate in management, in well-paid professions, in "heavy" manufacturing and mining, and in technology. Women predominate in part-time and casual employment, in many "service" occupations, and in many industries (e.g. clothing trades) with low rates of pay and little security. The details vary from country to country, but the fact of economic inequality between women and men is found almost everywhere.

Men must play a role in any move towards economic equality - if only because it is men who control most of the levers of economic power. Men predominate in corporate management, economic policy-making, and union leadership. When we speak of "markets", such as international capital or commodity markets, we are mainly speaking of transactions among men. Yet they are transactions with enormous implications for women, and for children whether girls or boys.

Men already do play a role in the struggle for economic gender equality. In Australia, for instance, the historic struggle for "equal pay" was launched by women, yet the principle became accepted only when the union movement as a whole, including its male leadership, came to support it. Research on gender in organizations points to the importance of local support for equality policies, and the role of middle management in making gender equality a normal part of organizational culture. Men are vitally involved, alongside women, in both processes.

Yet men often resist gender reforms. And for good reason - men are, broadly speaking, the beneficiaries of gender inequalities. Boys often grow up believing that they have special entitlements, and that women will be (and ought to be) economically dependent on them. To be realistic, we must recognize that many men have a vested interest in maintaining gender inequality, even think of it as a moral necessity. This is the basis of the image of men as the "breadwinners" - which persists as an ideal even where the whole economy depends on women's work.

Not all men, however, benefit from gender inequality. In thinking about the roles men play in change, we need to pay attention to differences among men. "Men" are no more a homogeneous bloc than women are. There are important differences in their economic interests, their economic beliefs, their constructions of masculinity and their experiences of change. There are many bases here for common interest and joint action between groups of men and groups of women.

Many men who do benefit from gender inequality nevertheless pay a price. There are important costs to men from the current gender system, including occupational health damage from workplace injury,

pollution etc. Another important cost is the narrowed education many boys and young men receive, emphasising technical knowledge but often lacking in humanities and social studies.

Men's work commitments in pursuit of the "breadwinner" model of life, at any economic level, may result in heavy stress, in narrowed cultural life, and insufficient time with families and children. Where "family-friendly" work arrangements are available, it is at present mainly women who use them. Many men, if it were economically or culturally possible, would value a better-balanced life. This, in turn, would benefit children and ease the burden of domestic work on women.

In discussing the role of men in achieving economic gender equality, I suggest we pay close attention to:

1. the concrete situations of men, and the opportunities that specific workplaces and economic circumstances create for action towards equality;
2. diversity among men and boys, in economic situations and patterns of masculinity, and the opportunities for local action this diversity creates;
3. the divided interests that exist among men, and the possibilities they create for men's support for equality and joint action by men and women.

### **The HIV/AIDS Pandemic**

AIDS is an equal-opportunity killer, as the prevention slogan says. Both men and women die of AIDS - people of all sexual orientations, all social classes, all national and ethnic origins.

At the same time, there are strong social contours in the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Gender is one of them. The epidemic takes a different shape in different parts of the world, and in different communities. This shape is affected by the pattern of gender relations, by the specific roles, identities, and practices of women and men.

The transmission of the human immunodeficiency virus occurs through human practices - mainly, though not only, sexual practices. What from the point of view of medicine is a vector or a pathway of infection is from a societal point of view a relationship, a social transaction.

For instance, where family relationships are patriarchal, where there are marked power inequalities between men and women, husbands are more likely to have more sexual freedoms and are thus more likely to become infected than their wives are. In the same context, sexual relations in marriage are likely to be controlled by the husband. In such a situation it may be very difficult for a wife to insist on "safer sex", to protect herself from potential infection.

Where there are marked economic inequalities between women and men, significant numbers of women may depend on earnings from heterosexual prostitution. Especially in poor communities, it may be impossible for such women to protect themselves from infection. There may also be gender differences in vulnerability to HIV (or progression to AIDS) as a result of inequalities in nutrition, health services, literacy, health education, etc.

Where masculine identities are bound up with ideas of bravery, risk-taking, sexual prowess, or control over women, a situation is created where "safer sex" measures are likely to be disregarded by the men. I think this is particularly common among young men and adolescent boys. At this time of life sexual interest is high, peer group pressures often lead to displays of masculinity, and youth may feel invulnerable.

In some settings, men's homosexual pleasures and identities are closely connected with anal sexual practices, which create a well-known pathway for HIV infection. Though gay communities have been at the forefront of prevention, there are many circumstances where unprotected sex occurs. Even the search for intimacy and love in couple relationships may lead to unprotected sex as an expression of trust.

After HIV infection has occurred, gender patterns again appear. If men who are the main wage earners for families become ill, the economic harm flows on to women and children. In communities where there is a marked gender division in "caring" work (e.g. care of the sick), much of the unpaid caring for AIDS patients will fall to women - who may at the same time be caring for children and the elderly, and trying to pick up the economic burden.

Concern with masculine toughness may mean that men do not go to the doctor when they fall ill, so fail to get necessary treatment. Those who do fall ill may be stigmatised because they fail to match gendered norms. Where societal prejudice exists against gay men, as a result of gender-related homophobia, the difficulty of getting adequate care is increased and the burden on gay communities too will rise.

In a variety of ways, then, men's involvement in the HIV/AIDS epidemic is shaped by the pattern of gender relations and identities in their societies. What can men do, and how can they be helped, to make things different?

In my view, there are interconnected issues about equality, risk, masculine identity and care, on all of which change is possible.

Firstly, anything men do towards overall gender equality will improve women's capacity to protect themselves, and will thus help control the epidemic. Part of the vulnerability of women is a simple expression of economic and power inequalities. In the long run, men and women share an interest in both groups becoming better protected, and this requires a movement towards equality.

This is not a question of men "giving" rights to women. It involves men supporting, rather than opposing or undermining, women's claims to rights, dignity, and self-determination. There are many men who support these claims already. It is important that such men should become a majority in contemporary societies.

Secondly, men may work to change community definitions of masculinity that are connected with risk-taking and what we might call risk-giving, i.e. behaviours that create risk for others. This involves reconsidering the ways we bring up boys, the cultural ideals we create for them, the images of admired masculinity we mainly present to them.

It is important to know that cultural definitions of masculinity are hardly ever monolithic. Research shows that multiple definitions of masculinity co-exist in society. So alongside images of risk-taking and

control over women, there are also societal ideals of men's responsibility, cooperation and sharing. The task of cultural change is not one of inventing a "new man" out of nothing. It is more a question of reinforcing positive models of masculinity that already exist.

In this context, we can re-examine the specific practices of men that create pathways of HIV transmission, and the reasons those practices continue. Where risk-giving practices are connected with sexual identities and gender relations, AIDS prevention and reform of the gender order go hand in hand. We can think of men's actions not just in terms of individual protection, but also in terms of building up community resistance to HIV.

This issue also relates to treatment. It is important that society's concepts of manhood should be consistent with seeking treatment, admitting weakness, and being dependent - i.e. receiving help, as well as giving it.

Finally, we can do much to expand men's involvement in the enormous task of care-giving created by the epidemic. Men have a great capacity for caregiving. This can be difficult to notice, given the barrage of "warrior" images coming from Hollywood and the emphasis on "toughness" in contemporary world politics. Yet in the early days of the epidemic it was predominantly men who created the pioneering models of community care for people living with AIDS, models of self-help and mutuality. Men continue to be deeply involved in care, at all levels from the medical profession to informal neighbourhood action.

So men do have the capacity for care. Yet given the overall gender order, this capacity is tremendously under-used. How can we make better use of it? I don't have a clear strategy, but I know there are many possibilities.

### **The Value of Gender Equality for Men and Boys**

About thirty years ago, in several of the rich countries, a small "men's liberation" movement arose, which took the language of women's liberation and applied it directly to men. They argued that men were oppressed by the "male sex role" and should struggle to free themselves from it - just as women needed to free themselves from the "female sex role". Men would lose the burdens of rigid conformity to masculine stereotypes, and would be free to live their lives in new ways.

This pioneering view of the issues was too simple, but it was tremendously helpful as an alternative to the usual view that men are always the losers from gender reform. A debate on the positive value of gender change for men and boys has continued ever since. Among the main benefits that have been identified are:

#### Reduction of men's costs

The current gender order, though it delivers many advantages to men, also requires them to pay significant costs - and sometimes concentrates the costs on particular groups of men. For instance there are important health disadvantages to men, including worse occupational health and safety records (men predominate in very dangerous industries such as mining), and greater average exposure to alcoholism, sexually transmitted infections, imprisonment and homicidal violence.

In the formal economy, there is heavy pressure on men to spend longer hours in the workplace. In some middle-class occupational groups this results in a life practically consumed by "work" - the "salaryman" in Japan is a famous example. (There is now public debate in Japan about ending this pattern.) The other side of a bad "work/life balance" is shortage of time to spend with partners and children, and the difficulty of being a good father in any way except being the economic provider.

Maintaining an unequal gender order has oppressive consequences not only for women, but also for groups of men who do not conform to dominant patterns of masculinity. In my country Australia, for instance, gay men are sometimes murdered, with great brutality, by young men anxious to punish deviants and to prove that they themselves are real men. Soft or effeminate boys are subject to ridicule in school, immigrant men from the Muslim world are targets of ethnic and political prejudice, and Aboriginal men are frequently stereotyped and have very high rates of arrest and imprisonment. All of these patterns can be changed.

### Enrichment of men's lives

Dominant patterns of masculinity in "Western" culture, and in the global commercial culture derived from it, prescribe a narrow range of emotions and relationships for men. In business and bureaucracy, if you lose self-control, you expose yourself; and if you express dependence or affection, you are regarded as weak. I have heard it said that the only emotion a "real man" can freely express is anger. In a world of gender equality, there will be less risk for men in experiencing, and expressing, the complete range of human emotions.

There will also be a wider range of possible relationships. Most important, men will have more opportunity for sharing the care, and contributing to the growth, of young children - both as fathers and as professionals. The possibility of a richer personal life, a fuller humanity, is an important benefit to men from gender reform.

Conventional gender divisions also narrow men's cultural experience. In education, for instance, boys and men predominate as students in "technical" courses and natural sciences, but are under-represented in humanities, creative arts, social sciences and human services. Power-oriented masculinities are often associated with ethnocentrism, the maintenance of borders and barriers, and rejection of other cultures. As we move towards gender equality, men as a group will be able to share a broader spectrum of cultural experience.

### Creating a better world to live in

Abraham Lincoln famously argued that the United States could not endure permanently, half slave and half free. The principle is good, and applies to gender as well as race, and to countries beyond the USA. If we believe in democracy as a principle, then democracy applies to gender relations. If full citizenship is denied to women, it will also be restricted among men. A key benefit for men from gender equality is to live in a world where arbitrary inequalities of all kinds are rejected.

Research on violence, both personal and collective, has shown a persisting connection with men as a group and specifically with dominance-oriented masculinities, in hierarchical gender systems. Achieving gender equality will not totally end violence, which has many roots. But moving towards gender equality

is certainly an important step towards reducing violence. Men, who are victims of many forms of personal and institutional violence, have a great deal to gain from a more peaceful world.

The same point applies to our relations with the environment. Environmental degradation mainly occurs through the agency of men, and is promoted by narrow patterns of consciousness and feeling within dominant masculinities. A gender-equal society will be a more sustainable society.

### Men's interests and change

To be realistic, we must also acknowledge the strength of resistance to change among men. Though there are great variations in the benefits and costs to men, collectively men receive important dividends from gender inequality. Men have markedly higher incomes than women, on average. They get other material benefits, including, in some situations of poverty, better nutrition. Men hold predominant power, in almost all regions of the world, in business, in government, in mass media, and in most religious institutions. In private life, men and boys receive a great deal of service, care and emotional support from women, which is too often not reciprocated. In most of the world's cultures, men are more respected, are regarded as more central, are given more public attention - as we see in news media and in language.

To realize men's interests in change, then, we must persuade a majority of men and boys that these current benefits are less valuable than many now think - or that they come at too high a cost. Moving towards gender equality requires a basic shift from a gender consciousness built on dichotomy and privilege to a gender consciousness built on diversity and reciprocity. There are many trends in this direction, and many men who support them. We need to build on these beginnings, and I hope the discussion that follows will yield many ideas about how to do so.

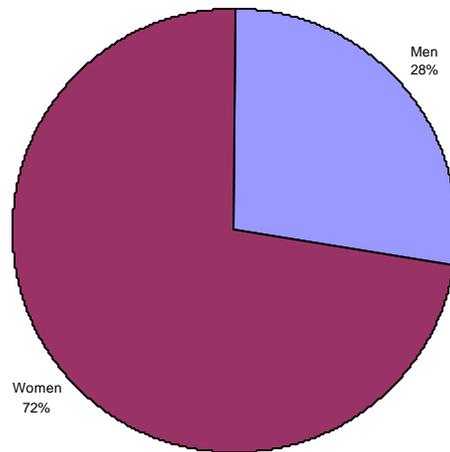
### APPENDIX 3: ONLINE DISCUSSION IN FIGURES

*Table 1: Number of registered participants (total and by sex and region) and Contributions made (total and by sex and region)*

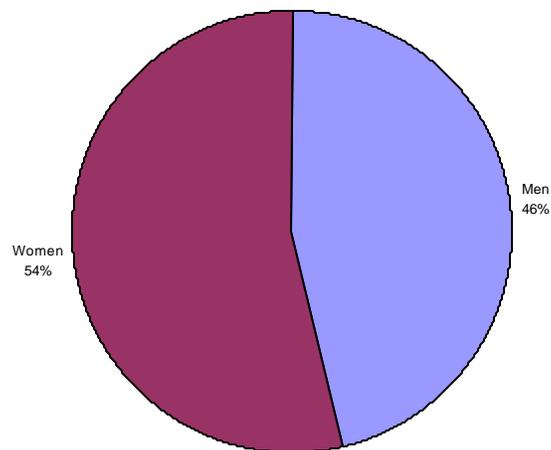
<b>Region</b>	<b>No of reg. part.</b>	<b>No of reg. men</b>	<b>No of reg women</b>	<b>Unidentified</b>	<b>Contrib. Made *</b>	<b>Contrib. made by men</b>	<b>Contrib. made by women</b>
Europe	63	17	46	0	7	3	4
North America	60	19	39	2	6	5	1
Latin America	10	4	5	1	2	2	0
Caribbean	5	0	5	0	2	0	2
Asia	55	17	34	4	7	1	6
Africa	39	11	28	0	10	5	5
Oceania	25	11	13	1	4	3	1
Eastern Europe & Russia	9	2	7	0	2	0	2
Western Asia /Middle East	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
UN system	39	2	37	0	1	0	1
Unknown	9	1	6	2	0	0	0
	<b>314</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>220</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>22</b>

\*Several experts submitted contributions more than once. This is however not reflected in the above table

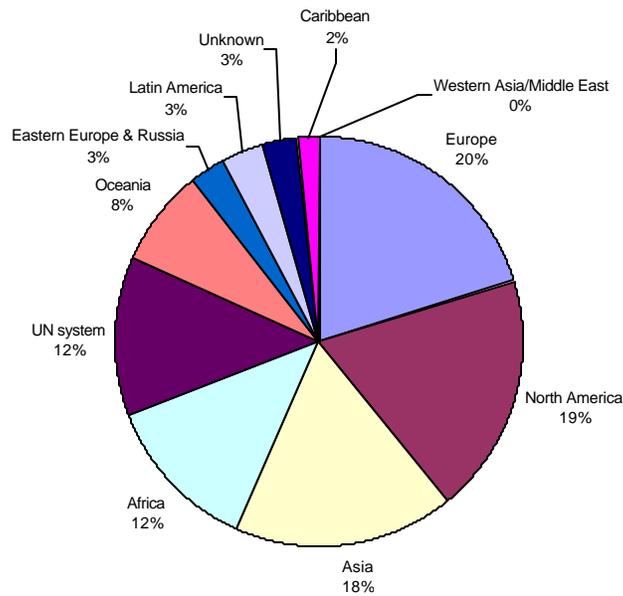
**Graph 1: Men and women registered for the online discussion (in percent of total number of registered participants)**



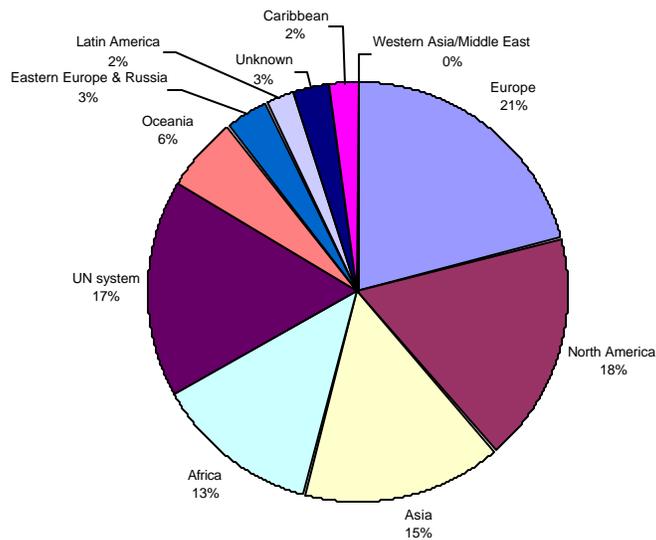
**Graph 2: Men and women contributing to the online discussion (in percent of total number of contributing participants)**



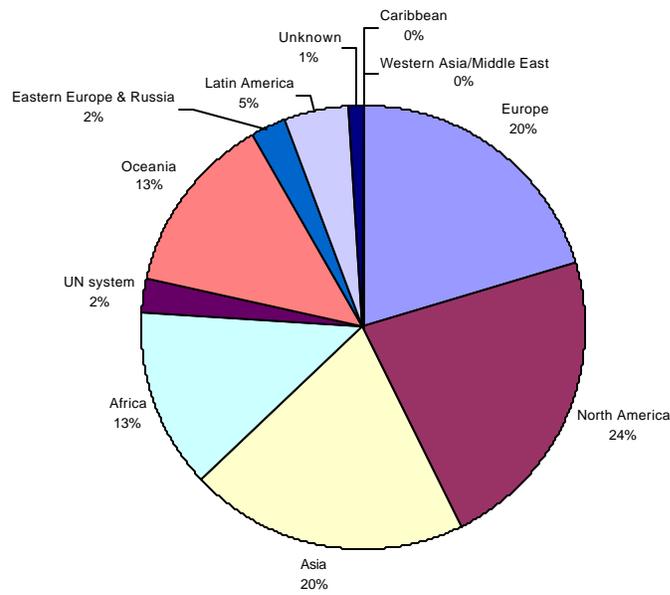
**Graph 3: Registered participants for the online discussion, by region (in percent)**



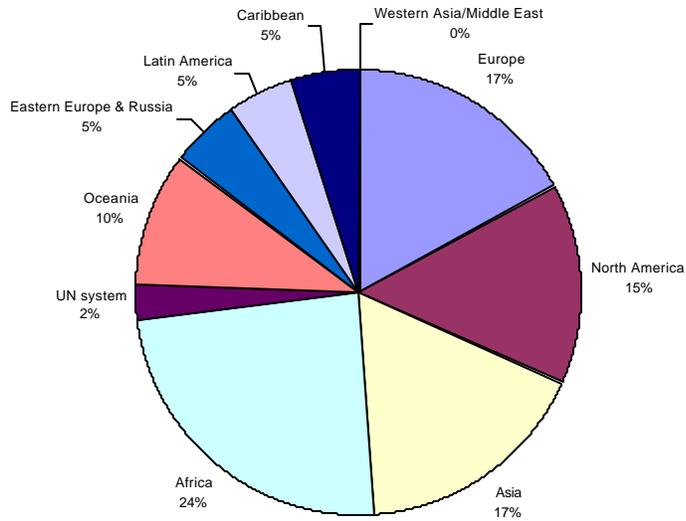
**Graph 4: Women registered for the online discussion by region (in percent of total number of female registered participants)**



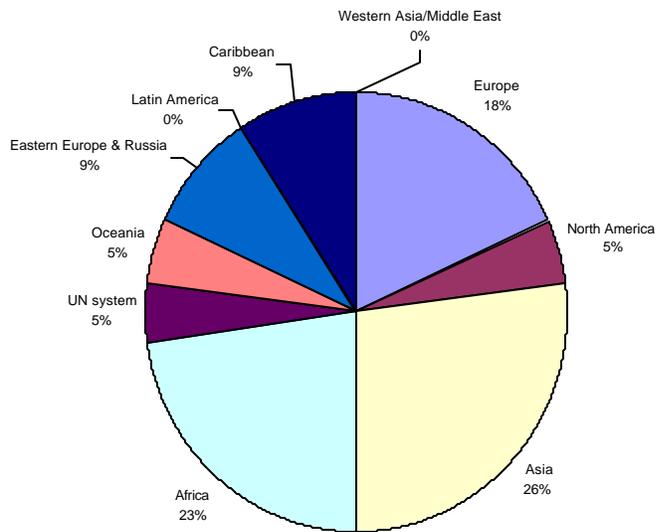
**Graph 5: Men registered for the online discussion by region (in percent of total number of male registered participants)**



**Graph 6: Contributions to the online discussion, by region**



**Graph 7: Percentage of women contributing to the online discussion by region (in percent of total number of female contributing to the discussion)**



**Graph 8: Percentage of men contributing to the online discussion by region (in percent of total number of male contributing to the discussion)**

