



Engaging Men and Boys to Transform Discriminatory Social Norms

Synthesis of the online discussion

Wikigender is a global Web 2.0 platform created by the OECD Development Centre in 2008. It is the OECD Development Centre's interactive tool to engage with different audiences and engage in a dialogue on gender equality. It currently has on average 40 000 visits per month and a database of over 1 500 articles on gender equality topics maintained by more than 2 000 registered users. Since January 2012 Wikigender regularly organises online discussions.

While policy makers and civil society have rightly focussed on the need to empower women as a core strategy to achieve gender equality, there is now growing recognition that engaging men and boys is fundamental for reaching full equality. Indeed, the 2013 theme for the 57th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) will be on the Elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls, and the review theme will focus on the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including care giving in the context of HIV/AIDS.

The OECD Development Centre's 2012 Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) found that while there has been progress in some areas, discriminatory social norms which undermine gender equality remain persistent and pervasive. For example, while countries are increasingly introducing laws to address domestic violence, female genital mutilation or women's land rights, this has not translated to a shift in attitudes or practice. Can these discriminatory attitudes and norms be transformed without the buy-in and support of men and boys?

The purpose of this online discussion was to bring together a diverse range of perspectives and 'on the ground' experience of working with men and boys to promote gender equality. The discussion ran from 22-31 October and it is the 4th online discussion that Wikigender has hosted in 2012. Organised by Wikigender, Sonke Gender Justice Network, Men for Gender Equality Sweden (Män för Jämställdhet) and the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, the discussion allowed a rich exchange of views, examples and

recommendations on how men and boys can be better engaged in transforming discriminatory social norms. A total of 56 insightful and expert comments were posted and are summarised in this overview. The findings were presented at the seminar "Measuring progress towards gender equality: Where do we stand?" on 13 November 2012 in Stockholm, an event co-organised by the OECD Development Centre and the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

The discussion brought together perspectives from all corners of the world, including: Nepal, Tanzania, Indonesia, Botswana, South Africa, Latvia, Mozambique, Somalia, Sweden, Burundi, Rwanda, Kyrgyzstan, Honduras and many more. Participants included international organisations, research institutes, economists, policy analysts, academics, gender experts, international and local NGOs, civil society activists and other individuals.

The comments answered the following questions:

- ◆ **Key issues:** What are the opportunities and challenges for engaging men and boys in promoting gender equality? How can men and boys be persuaded that gender equality also benefits them? What are some examples of new thinking or evidence in this area?
- ◆ **Examples:** In your area/region, what are examples of successful programmes for engaging men and boys in transforming discriminatory social norms? (e.g. socio-cultural practices, caring responsibilities, employment rights, gender-based violence; other key issues highlighted in the SIGI). Are there approaches that are more effective than others? How can we harness the power of new technologies and the media? What role does men's leadership play?
- ◆ **Action required:** What actions should governments, donors, UN bodies and civil society take to support the engagement of men and boys in achieving gender equality?

Key issues

This online discussion benefited from a truly rich exchange and perspectives that showed that while we often talk in terms of “what about including women, the other half of the planet?”, we should rebalance the way in which we frame our gender equality discourse and seek to include men as “the other half of the planet that counts too” – if we are to achieve concrete results in improving the well-being of our societies and eliminating gender inequalities.

There are certainly obstacles to overcome...

It was recognised that the discussion around involving men is still in its very initial stages. Much remains to be done at community, national and international levels. At the macro level, gender stereotypes (gender roles in the family and in the community, for example) and discriminatory social norms (such as chaupadi, early marriage or kutchinga) persist and constitute the biggest barrier to overcoming gender inequality across many countries. At the micro level, the lack of good quality education and training for young boys and girls about gender roles, expectations and women’s autonomy is another obstacle. Many participants emphasised the fact that society (both women and men) should be educated about gender equality and its benefits. More specifically, it was recognised that men and boys should be educated from an early age, they should be engaged in preventing or ending violence against women and girls, they should participate more equally to household responsibilities and more attention should be paid to how gender relations are affected by conflict.

...yet there are examples of many successes

Some very powerful ideas came out of the discussion in various areas. Through a variety of examples the message that men have the power to change came out very strongly. Also, participants put emphasis on the need to listen to and rethink ideas of masculinity through positive testimonies and leadership models. Other enablers brought to the table during the online discussion covered areas such as reproductive health, gender-based violence and discriminatory practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM) or chaupadi, among others. Participants highlighted the importance of using gender-transformative approaches and peer education among young men, either in the form of workshops or non-formal learning methods and using technology and social media tools to raise awareness. Most importantly, the discussion showed a real consensus on the importance of engaging in a dialogue with men and boys about issues that also concern them, and for programmes targeting women to also consider the role of men and boys in addressing inequalities.

“The field of engaging men and boys in gender equality has maybe left its earliest phases but I still see it as fairly embryonic. I think it is important that governments and donors systematically and strategically fund initiatives based on an understanding of where the field is.”

Klas Hyllander
(Men for Gender Equality Sweden)

Examples:

- ◆ The “**Brothers for Life**” campaign in South Africa seeks to establish a male identity that relates to healthy, non-violent and more gender equitable behaviour. The campaign draws on the notion of brotherhood to convince men to adhere to new norms and hold each other accountable, which is a particularly effective way of promoting change.
- ◆ A **WHO report** in 2010 described some key elements of successful gender-transformative programmes, such as positive messaging, recognition of consequences of hegemonic masculinity, or acknowledgement that men are not homogeneous. As put by one participant, it is both necessary to transform unhealthy norms and document/publicise underestimated healthy norms among men, as confronting the negative and emphasising the positive can be a lot more effective.
- ◆ One participant shared the results of the “**International Men and Gender Equality Survey**” that was carried out in June 2012 in Goma, North Kivu in the **Democratic Republic of Congo** and targeted over 700 men and 700 women to examine the impact of disempowerment on men and how gender relations are affected by conflict. The findings of the survey were quite alarming as they highlight the normalisation of rape and even rape-supportive attitudes by the interviewed men, as well as high levels of economic stress. The results call for social development, humanitarian and human rights responses.
- ◆ **Save the Children** Sweden has been working on engaging boys and young men since 1997 using lifecycle and socio-ecological based strategies. They adopt a child rights based approach in projects to empower boys and girls so they become agents of change in their communities. In 2008, Save the Children implemented a project with Safer Society, a youth (girl) led organisation, to initiate social behaviour change. The project was extremely successful as the reported levels of violence among boys decreased, the police enforced laws and policies in the community following better reporting and boys and young men volunteered to empower their peers on the various issues discussed.

Examples

Participants gave many examples of how men and boys could be better engaged through training and education, community dialogue, using technology and media, or via movements initiated and led by men themselves.

"I believe men are half of the puzzle and solution to addressing gender inequality".

Salema Gulbahar

"The best way to lead is by example... as a father, friend, husband, boyfriend, uncle, brother, cousin and son".

Paul Watson

Action required

Participants recommended several actions for governments, donors, UN bodies and civil society to take to support the engagement of men and boys in achieving gender equality:

- ◆ Co-ordinating all actions between the different stakeholders to optimise the complementarities and comparative advantages
- ◆ Reinforcing gender equality in a positive light in various settings including the media, schools and the justice system
- ◆ Using the "gender and development" approach, where projects should target both women and men
- ◆ For states to ratify the "Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence"
- ◆ That policy makers and practitioners change the lens through which they view men and women and challenge gender stereotypes and norms
- ◆ That actions from governments, UN bodies and civil society organisations be targeted at encouraging men to support women's autonomy
- ◆ Targeting out of school youths and male teachers in projects

Examples:

- ◆ There is a two-year pilot project with young men implemented by **PLAN International** in Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala, the Dominican Republic and Germany on gender justice. Young men are trained through a series of workshops reflecting on concepts of masculinity, violence and sexuality to become peer educators for other young people. In July 2013 they will all meet together to share their experiences and reflect on how they can engage with other young people on topics related to **gender justice**. This will lead to the creation of a toolkit for the **peer educators**.
- ◆ Another example is **HOPEM in Mozambique** that **challenges social gender norms** through a variety of programmes: "Men in the Kitchen" challenges the stereotype that men do not do any care work; "Art without violence" fights against gender-based violence through artistic expression; "Star Man" aims to eliminate gender-based violence through the testimonies and training of perpetrators of violence. All of these programmes have proved successful, as the participants started to question their perception of gender norms and some deeply entrenched customs were being challenged.
- ◆ Another successful example was given from Burundi: Abatangamuco, a movement of rural men that decided to challenge the traditional expectations of gender roles by undergoing personal change, sharing their personal experiences and doing local outreach activities through collaborating with CARE Burundi. These men started by questioning their way of life, and noticing how domestic abuse, useless spending of family resources or not participating in their spouses' domestic work was unproductive and detrimental to economic development and well-being. They looked at how particular aspects of traditional ideals of masculinity are counterproductive for efforts to achieve other ideals.
- ◆ Another way of engaging men and boys is through technology. One participant talked about a mobile phone and internet game developed by "Half the Sky Movement". As mobile phones and technologies are becoming increasingly available in developing countries, such an educational game is a good way to reach the hardest to reach on sensitive and diverse issues, including the differences between girls and boys, the importance of education or safe health behaviour during pregnancy. Combining technology with games has proven to be very successful in this case, as demonstrated by the positive reactions of the boys and girls who played the game, as they found that they learnt a lot while being entertained.
- ◆ Some examples of promising approaches initiated by partners of Partner for Prevention (P4P) in the area of gender-based violence include: the use of social media to raise awareness and develop capacities on gender-based violence prevention, in combination of on ground activities; the use of mass media in combination with theatre; school-based programmes; film production and discussion creation; the transformation of masculinities through awareness-raising; working with religious, cultural or political male leaders to change their perspectives; and male counselling with perpetrators.

“The promotion of paternity leave is essential to reducing gender inequalities inasmuch as, amongst other things, it strives to reduce rigid masculinities”.

Maria Zammit

“When men change behaviour, there is an improved daily life, greater income, higher status in their local communities and an overall increased sense of well-being”.

Jean Nimumbona

“Until proponents of gender equality are able to push the agenda in a truly transformative way (...), addressing the underlying gender norms which impede progress and view the concept of gender to not only mean ‘women’, we will continue to address the symptoms and not the cause.”

Leyla Sharafi

“The work of our training and community mobilisation unit is premised on the notion that men have a personal stake in change and that their change is most likely to endure if they become advocates for change themselves”.

Dean Peacock
(Sonke Gender Justice Network)

Wikigender partners in this discussion

Sonke Gender Justice Network

has shared their work through the video “Can’t Just Fold Your Arms”, a documentary film about their quest to transform men in post-Apartheid South Africa. An important aspect of Sonke’s work is community education and mobilisation work: workshops are the starting point for many men who follow them, and who subsequently join a Sonke Community Action Team or CAT and start to develop and implement action plans. This approach is also successful as the presence of men advocating for gender equality influences other men to change. On top of this, Sonke works on strengthening citizen activism and improving rights literacy. Sonke’s work reaches 25 000 men and women every year through its workshops and face-to-face interactions.

Men for Gender Equality

Sweden (Män för Jämställdhet) shared their work and perspective on engaging men and boys more to transform discriminatory social norms. Their contribution highlighted the need for a holistic approach when thinking about engaging men and boys. Another point made by Men for Gender Equality Sweden is that governments should start to understand better how dominant masculinities are generated and shaped and how they relate to gender inequities and can be reformed – as the expertise in this field is still housed primarily among civil society organisations and academia. For this, more long-term and sustainable funding is needed for gender-transformative programmes and initiatives.

For more details on any of these examples and to read all contributions to the online discussion, please see the online discussion page on Wikigender: <http://bit.ly/RHO281>

For past Wikigender online discussions please visit: http://wikigender.org/index.php/Online_Discussions

Any questions? Email us at contact@wikigender.org

