Synthesis of Discussions at the 2nd MenEngage Global Symposium 2014

Session: Twenty Years since Cairo and Beijing: To What Extent have Men and Boys been Engaged?

Activists demonstrating at the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing 1995

The Journey of Engaging Men and Boys

* Where to, 20 years since ICPD and Beijing +20
* Gaps and challenges in engaging men and boys in gender equality programmes and recommendations for future frameworks
* SDGs twice in a lifetime opportunity to right the wrongs - engage men and boys - the right way
The plenary session “Twenty Years since Cairo and Beijing: To what extent have men and boys been engaged?” held during the 2nd MenEngage Global Symposium 2014 — Men and Boys for Gender Justice, organised in New Delhi from November 10-13, explored the possibilities of building upon current achievements of involvement of men and boys in gender equality work.

The issue was discussed in the backdrop of 20 years since the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo in 1994 and the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 where the need to constructively work with men and boys in promoting women’s empowerment and gender equality first emerged, and amidst the envisioning of a new post-2015 development agenda. Heads of international organisations and leaders who have been at the forefront of the women’s movement around the world brought to bear their years of experience in this discussion moderated by Todd Minerson, executive director, White Ribbon Campaign, Canada. Minerson said the session was devoted to understanding what the road till now had been like, “There is a need to reflect on what happened along the way. And to look ahead to where the journey goes from here. What does engaging men and boys look like in the post-2015 framework? Are we all sharing the same car? Or, as men, are we worried about chrome and horsepower and things like that? Is there enough room for everybody on this journey moving ahead?”

**The Twenty Year Journey of Engaging Men since Beijing**

Joni van de Sand, Global Co-coordinator, MenEngage Alliance began by stating uncompromisingly, “We’ve seen incredible advances over the last 20 years in women’s empowerment and rights but it’s not nearly good enough. There are persisting gender inequalities and especially women’s rights violations that continue in the world today.” Pointing out that the transformative agenda set in 1995 by the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action was still relevant, she said that

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**Reframe the message:**
- Shift our normative understanding of men’s roles within the broader agenda for gender equality.
- Women’s empowerment is essential, but simultaneously, engage men and boys to redistribute power because men also have responsibility
- Frame gender equality as something men have a stake in
- Need for more research on what kind of strategies are actually working. A lot of men are working on gender equal behavior in their daily lives – what makes them do that?

**Alliance building**
- Build shared understanding and alliances between men’s work for gender equality and the women’s rights field as well as social justice movement
- Intersecting issues need to be addressed, such as gender, class, caste, age, social orientation, and gender identities

**Up-scaling programs to policies**
- Work with men from the program and project level needs to be taken into policies and institutions
  - To accelerate change, the personal change has to be made structural change
  - Systems and institutions need to change: schools, in the health sector, in the work place are the spaces where gender norms are created

**Implementation**
- Develop, implement and monitor policies to engage men in gender equality and to build state capacity to implement them
  - Push forward, advocate, and lobby with institutions and governments
  - Reform policies as well as legal institutions
  - Train staff to implement
  - Do public awareness raising campaign to change perceptions of gender roles

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What we’re calling for in the next phase is to engage men and boys as a critical phase for advancing the gender equality agenda because it’s necessary to challenge the structures, the beliefs, the practices and the institutions that sustains men’s aggravated privileges to address inequalities between women and men and also among women and among men.
Beijing +20 addressed the underlying causes of gender injustice. Van de Sand highlighted there’s increasingly widespread agreement that working with men and boys is a necessary part of achieving gender equality. So, in allaying the work between men and boys vis-a-vis women’s movements and efforts towards gender equality it has to be ensured that women’s leadership and voices remain the backbone of the feminist discourse in these shared spaces, but in cooperation with men and boys. There has to be reflection on the part of men and boys who are working with these feminist movements on their own uses of gender based power, even within those movements. She felt that the framing of gender equality needs to be done in a way that emphasises men have a stake in it, that they can actually benefit from it, they are not only the ones to blame, but that they have something to gain as well.

**Change Has been Slow and Men’s Engagement Limited**

Bandana Rana, executive director, Saathi, Nepal, voiced concern that, “Though projects have engaged men and boys these have however, been very nominal and with extremely limited outreach. The progress has therefore been very uneven and change has been extremely slow.”

Recollecting her personal journey from attending the Women Empowering Conference, Bangkok, 1994, a preparatory meeting for Beijing, to the ICPD in Cairo in 1994 and the Beijing Conference in 1995, Rana traced the evolution of the involvement with men. In Beijing, Rana recalled, “Though there was clear recognition amongst the negotiating women of the need to engage men, there were also apprehensions. Would it mean the women’s space would be shrinking? Would it mean men would actually take over the women’s movement and that little domain of the women would also have to be forsaken? These were some of the questions which troubled feminists.”

In spite of these apprehensions, for the first time formal recognition was given to the potential of tapping into or engaging men and boys actively as part of the solutions. The broadened framework of the Beijing Platform for Action came up with men not just as problems. Cairo’s ICPD had also addressed the issue a little earlier, but it was more focussed on engaging men and boys to change the lives of communities and societies particularly in relation to health and especially through sexual and reproductive health education. The Beijing Platform for Action broadened this.

Post-Beijing, what did we women who are in activism do to engage men and boys, asked Rana, replying, “We have been engaging men more as beneficiaries or partners. We have looked at men as gatekeepers sometimes, which actually reaffirms the notion of patriarchy.”

That’s the transformative change we need to make in the coming days. We must not limit the engagement of men and boys to just partners and allies or limit them to projects and programmes. Instead, the need of the hour is that we must take their engagement up to the level of policy and institutional change.

**Women’s Rights are Human Rights**

The perspective of Greta Gunnarsdottir, Permanent Representative of Iceland to the UN was from the point of view of the state. “That women’s rights are an issue

**Iceland Involves Men in Gender Parity**

With Iceland continuing to top the rankings in The World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Index Report 2014 for the sixth consecutive year, Gunnarsdottir touched upon the country’s adoption of national measures to ensure gender parity. “The main reasons for us being on the top of this index is high level of political participation of both women and men, high level of education, equal access to healthcare and women’s participation in the labour market being above 80%.”

To have over 80% of women in the labour force, many changes were brought about that include having changed the school days into continuous days. “There are no breaks like those that exist in a lot of countries where you see the wife staying at home to receive the kids during lunch time. We have continuous school days. We also have universal pre-care programme, now available for children as early as 12 months. So 95% of Icelandic children between 2 and 5 years are in pre-school. It helps to remove stereotypes on the role of men and women when it comes to the caretaking role. One of the biggest step that we’ve taken in Iceland and I know it would be a challenge for a lot of other countries to do that, is parental leave where we allot three months to the mother and three months to the father. Then there is an additional three months that the parents decide among themselves who’s going to take. The three months each for the mother and the father are non-transferable. So it’s either use it or lose it as we say.”

Almost 90% of fathers in Iceland actually use this opportunity to go on paternal leave. This has led to building a closer relationship with their children and women and men are at an equal footing at the work place because of this important measure. On a personal level it has led to visible commitment on behalf of fathers towards their children and for other caretaking issues.
of human rights is something we remind ourselves of again and again at the UN - that human rights are women’s rights and women’s rights are human rights. It changes the discussion because especially when it comes to government, it’s not a choice but an obligation to implement human rights. Most countries are state parties to a number of human rights treaties and they all have non-discrimination clauses including where sex is concerned. When we go further, into CEDAW, there we have mention of the engagement of men and boys. Almost all member states are party to CEDAW and there again we are talking about legal obligations, we’re not talking about political commitments. If we were talking about racism, I think we would all agree that everybody should be working on eliminating racism and that is an obligation, of both governments and all of us. And the same goes for eliminating discrimination on the basis of sex, it’s an obligation and we should all of us look at it as our responsibility to participate. I would like to see that more as a part of the conversation.”

Taking the Measure of Men’s Role in Gender Parity
A transformed partnership based on equality between men and women is a condition for people-centered sustainable development, according to Lakshmi Puri, Deputy Executive Director, UN Women. She felt it must be the rallying cry to eliminate discrimination against women and girls in policies and laws. In addition, as a related measure to support the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) discriminatory laws need to be repealed and new laws adopted. Sexual and reproductive health and rights, whether in economic opportunities and in other areas must be supported, affirmed and accounted for at the end of the journey – the 2030 deadline of the SDGs.

Kate Gilmore, Deputy Executive Director, UNFPA, spoke about how far we have come in terms of engaging men and boys in the past two decades and reflected on the challenges and opportunities ahead.

“Five key dates are so essential to understanding the journey that we need to still take with regards to engagement with Men and Boys”, she said (See Box). Gilmore held that human rights are not just the end-point of development, but that they were the very means of development and solidarity of men and boys remained an untapped resource (See box ‘Example of Men and Boys Engaging’). She ended with that in her view the real challenge was to bring alive the normative discourse “so that it is relevant and upheld and addressing that powerful movement of men and boys”.

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**THE TRAJECTORY TO ENGAGING WITH MEN AND BOYS**

- **1993** Vienna Conference on Human Rights “Indivisibility is essential to human rights, and this conference challenged the idea that civil and political rights were separate from economic, social and cultural rights”

- **1994** The Cairo Conference on Population and Development "Here was developed the idea, human rights belong in the bedroom too; that human rights are inherently about choice, personal autonomy and they are about dignity, including in the most intimate of spaces”

- **1995** The Beijing Conference "This said very powerfully — human rights belong to women and women’s rights are human rights”

- **2000** MDGs developed

- **2015** onwards “The opportunity to take advantage of all that learning, now is the time”

  - Kate Gilmore

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**What the Beijing platform said then is just as relevant today and it must be our rallying cry as we move forward**

Engaging in THE RIGHT WAY:
- 7,000 communities have abandoned Female Genital Mutilation under the life course of the Millenium Development Goals (MDGs), because men and boys were engaged
- 11,000 husbands in Niger have stood up and said we can be better men in our relationship

Example of Men and Boys Engaging in NOT THE RIGHT WAY:
“’We’ve probably seen as much mobilisation of men and boys to armed conflict as we’ve seen during the period of the Great War. However, let us be very clear that it’s men and boys’ engagement for the wrong reasons and the wrong way, with an awful result.

This synthesis paper is also available in other languages

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