Session: Change Begins Within

Practices and processes of accountability within the men for gender equality field

* Socialisation of men not to be answerable to women creates difficulties
* Preventing confrontations between men’s groups and women’s groups are a challenge in Fiji
* Men’s groups in Nicaragua studied feminist writings 20 years ago but the situation is very different today
* UNFPA now acknowledges the importance of working with men and boys to improve gender justice
The session 'Change Begins Within: Practices and processes of accountability within the men for gender equality (M4GE) field', held during the 2nd MenEngage Global Symposium 2014 — Men and Boys for Gender Justice, organised in New Delhi from November 10-13, discussed what accountability means for individuals, organisations and states. The session also assessed the accountability initiatives in the field of M4GE, their challenges and achievements, and highlighted how they can be strengthened. One of the threads of the gender justice movement, as moderator James Lang from the Joint UN Program, Partners for Prevention, said, is that “we have to be accountable to those who cannot speak loudly for justice for many different reasons,” such as sexual orientation, race and ethnicity. Lang said accountability issues are central to ensuring that as men "we adhere to and stay focussed on the larger movements for gender justice.

‘ACCOUNTABILITY PRACTICE LIMITED, MEN SOCIALISED AGAINST IT’

Michael Flood, Sociologist, University of Wollongong, Australia, said the ideal of accountability was widespread in work with men. "Male accountability is a key strategy to lessen the unintended consequences of men’s involvement, of men reinforcing sexism." In actual practice, however, he felt that men's accountability is limited. Men are socialised away from being accountable and towards male bonding and collusion and alignment with other men. He added that definitions of accountability are absent, diverse or unclear. One possible definition of accountability that he identified was – "Working in ways that build gender equality."

Speaking about the three dimensions of accountability, Flood identified the first as personal accountability — the pro-feminist men’s movement behaving in ways that can produce gender equality.

The second, he said, is relational accountability — how men and women relate, men and men relate, women and women relate and so on. Relational accountability is about minimising patriarchal and sexist forms of interaction in which men dominate and women are not listened to or men get credit for women’s opinions.

Flood said that though the rhetorical emphasis on accountability is widespread, when it comes to looking at engaging men in building gender justice and ending men’s violence against women, people have diverse understandings of accountability. Accountability comes out of the politics of knowledge and the politics of oppression, out of the recognition that we have systems of inequality and oppression, he said. “This is a disadvantage to the marginalised people because they don’t know more about the system than people who are privileged and reaping the benefits of the system,” Flood said, adding that “an inside understanding has to start with the experiences and voices of those who are oppressed, marginalised and disadvantaged and not with people like me who are privileged.”

Summing up the notions of accountability over the decades, Flood said that in the 1970s the notion of the offender’s accountability was how the perpetrator was responsible for his behaviour.

👀 We are in a movement to hold men accountable to women but men are socialised not to be accountable to women.👀

In the 1980s the emphasis was on institutional accountability — the need for place, law and criminal justice system to be held accountable for the ways in which they responded to the victims and perpetrators.

In the 1990s and the 21st century it was an emphasis on the need for allies and advocates to be accountable and that comes from a particular recognition of the danger of the reproduction of sexism in the ways of getting involved in this work. Accountability has been a key strategy to minimise it, he said. “But the actual practice of accountability is limited. Men are socialised to bond with other men and take other men’s opinions more seriously than those of a woman.”

‘MEN ALSO ANSWERABLE TO FAMILIES, NOT JUST WOMEN’S GROUPS’

Tura Lewai, UN Secretary-General’s Network of Men Leaders, Fiji, spoke about accountability being personal and political for men working for gender justice. "We are to be held accountable not only by the women’s groups but also by our families, our mothers, sisters and often our friends and to see whether we are talking the principles of gender equality even when we are at home and making jokes," he said.

Focusing on the challenges, Lewai said there are many men setting up groups to address violence against women in Fiji but they often run into confrontations with women’s groups. Monitoring males working with such groups is an issue, he
Evidence from Fiji that Holding Men Accountable Reduces Violence

- The Fiji Women’s Crisis Centre’s (FWCC) Male Advocacy Programme was started in 2002 to train and educate men to become male advocates in their communities to promote women’s human rights and prevent all forms of violence against them.
- It has successfully trained about 100 male advocates in PNG, Tonga, Vanuatu, Cook Islands and Fiji. It defines: Male advocates work to improve and support gender equality within the spheres of their personal life, their work life and in their communities (eg church meetings, kava bowl, sporting events, festivals etc).
- A recent ICRW study stated the Male Advocacy Programme in the Pacific island countries which have some of the highest rates of violence against women in the world, “offers promising results and has great potential to inform future work to end violence against women in the region.”

‘Young men today not so appreciative of feminist work’

Speaking of the successful male advocacy programme in the Pacific (See Box), he said they allow men to be introspective and critical of the status quo.

Oswaldo Montoya, Global Coordinator, MenEngage Alliance, described accountability within the main field for gender equality as a notional challenge now compared to 20-25 years ago. Citing the example of his home country Nicaragua, Montoya said that in 1992 men activists were very clear they were accountable to feminist women because they were involved with their movement and had the leadership. The men had to practice and follow. “We supported women’s rights activists for instance for the passing of the 5th law against domestic violence in Nicaragua. Women’s rights groups in different localities invited us to their communities to speak to other men and women, literally opening their doors to let us into meetings in their spaces.

But now it’s very different. Nowadays men are founders of organisations and experts on gender issues. The new men who join this work can’t be guided and interviewed. We studied feminist writings directly from women. Nowadays, you can learn feminism without reading the radical feminist women.”

Speaking about how the MenEngage Alliance views accountability, Montoya said MenEngage was formed by men and women and that 20 percent of its alliances across the world are with women’s groups. The mixed composition of the network facilitates accountability of individual men and men’s groups to the women’s movement, he said. “We follow the principle of gender equality in both professional and personal life.” (See Box)

Men joining (gender equality work) nowadays might feel less committed to accountability, to the women’s movement and find it harder to understand feminist women’s perspectives.

UNFPA admits to importance of working with men

Luis Mora, Chief, Gender, Human Rights and Culture, UNFPA, New York, as a representative of a UN agency which
Promoting Accountability Awareness and Practices Within the MenEngage Alliance

• Speaking of the context in which the Alliance was formed in 2004, Montoya said, "At that time many initiatives to engage men and boys in gender equality emerged across the globe. There was the need to ensure that the organisations and people involved in these initiatives worked in partnership amongst themselves and with women's rights organisations. By working in networks we can support and hold each accountable."

• The four important instruments in the Alliance for ensuring that mechanisms of gender equality are followed in members' personal and professional lives are - Memorandum of Understanding that starts with the Alliance's core principles; Global Code of Conduct; Accountability standards and guidelines; and Accountability training toolkit.

• The MOU describes the Alliance's work which is informed by a pro-feminist approach: “The Alliance affirms that its work with men and boys stems from and honors the pioneering work and ongoing leadership of women's rights organizations and movements. The Alliance stands in solidarity with the ongoing struggles for women's empowerment and rights. By working in collaboration with the women's rights field, Alliance members aim to change individual men's attitudes and practices, and transform the imbalance of power between men and women in relationships, families, communities, institutions and nations.”

funds substantial amount of work for gender equality and supports activities for transforming masculinities and engaging men, spoke about mechanisms to ensure the work UNFPA is supporting with men adheres to the principles of gender equality, human rights and enhancement of women and there is accountability of the funds it allocates in programming.

Mora said we tend to forget that our foundational text is the charter of the United Nations. And taking that as the basis, the UNFPA in particular has been accountable for implementation of the ICPD (International Conference on Population and Development) Program of Action. Referring to the statement of Kate Gilmore, UNFPA deputy executive director, describing the Program of Action as a landmark event, landmark agreement and landmark document, Mora said his organisation has been touching on the most important spaces related to human rights, sexuality and reproduction. "The UNFPA is quite critical in terms of how men's voices are reflected in the Program of Action but we have also been able to start looking at men not only in their capacity or ability to improve women's status but also their own sexuality and reproductive life," he said.

Mora said this is the main accountability in the UNFPA that has enabled it to move forward. “Right now we have more that 65 percent of our program engaging with men and boys through research, capacity development, south-south cooperation, etc. More than 80 countries are working with men and boys. Of course we have a long way to go. For the first time we have acknowledged the importance of working with men and boys to improve gender justice, gender equality and women's lives," he said.

This synthesis paper is also available in other languages

For further details please contact:
CENTRE FOR HEALTH AND SOCIAL JUSTICE
Basement of Young Women's Hostel No. 2, Avenue 21, G Block, Saket, New Delhi – 110017