Session: Masculinities And Gender Justice
Is There A Role For The Development Sector?

Harnessing the Development Sector's Capability to Establish Gender Justice

* Navigate socio-cultural, religious, legal, and economic conditions to universalise gender justice in societies
* Work with men and boys to change their perceptions and practices on gender
* Reduce gender inequalities by placing people at the centre of development
* Ensure critical spaces for women’s political and economic empowerment
The session ‘Masculinities and Gender Justice: Is There a Role for the Development Sector?’ held during the 2nd MenEngage Global Symposium 2014 - Men and Boys for Gender Justice, organised in New Delhi from November 10-13, sought to appraise the efficacy of the development sector — or the lack of it — in attuning gender justice as a value in society. Moderator Arundhati Bhuru, a social activist from India who is part of several campaigns and also currently the advisor to the Supreme Court on the Food Security Programme, New Delhi, threw open the discussion by asking speakers to highlight the development sector’s ability to bring about new values of human justice in society around which gender issues crystallise.

**Mass Media Professionals: A Potent Support Group to Instill Gender Equity**

Rakhee Bakshee, Director, Women’s Feature Service, New Delhi, leaned on a 2014 study ‘Masculinity, Intimate Partner Violence and Son Preference in India’ by United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) to explain predictors of masculinities, and how varying forms of masculinity affect men’s perpetration of violence against their intimate partners and desire for sons.

This study that surveyed 9,205 men and 3,158 women in seven states, aged 18-49, revealed 52% women to have experienced violence. 60% men admitted to acting violently against their wife/partner, and also conceded to taking major decisions regarding family matters (66%), on family planning issues (75%), and adopting rigidly masculine manners on several issues.

It is against this context, Bakshee argued, that one must size up the ability of the development sector to navigate socio-cultural norms, as well as religious, legal and economic conditions to embed gender justice.

Talking about Women’s Feature Service’s role in diversifying images of women to counter their stereotyped images, depicting them to be active contributors to the public domain, and helping their priorities gain root, Bakshee elucidated on how the team is attempting to push women’s concerns and stories to the forefront as page one stories.

She brought up the fact that although there are many women working in the media, they are under-represented in decision-making positions, as well as the truth that female media professionals tend to be valued more for their looks.

**As the mass media penetrates every segment of society, there is great need for a framework to allow sensitive and informed gender reportage, frame public debate, accentuate political accountability, and measure women’s empowerment**

She also touched upon men’s struggles with their masculinities, and their having no role models to base altered behaviours on.

**Governments and Societies Need to Enable Men to Return Women’s Rights**

Preeti Sudan, Additional Secretary, Women and Child Department, Government of India, New Delhi, in a radical departure from current opinion, said that government is also ‘development sector’.

She followed up on Bakshee’s argument about men struggling with their masculinities. “While we concur with Gandhiji’s view that a feminine man is a better human being, we as a society are still to find alternate roles for men that are mindful of women’s dignity. We succumb to fetishes rather than engaging in dialogue,” she said. Pointing out that there are whole lot of activity based initiatives that the government has taken up like rural sector initiatives, labour initiatives etc but the government does not engage or ever dialogue with the people involved and specially the men and the boys. Now there is dialogue with self help groups so women come forward and share their livelihood concerns and other things close to their heart but this kind of engagement with men has not happened, said Sudan. As the programmes promoted by the government have so far been unable to allow men to integrate themselves into family life and roles of fatherhood, there is need to address this failing through active collaboration with people, and by changing of attitudes and perceptions, she added. “In this symposium I hope some ways will be highlighted on how a meaningful engagement of men can be done because I feel it’s very critical to the success of any programme. Whether it be ‘Swacch Bhaiyan’ or ‘Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao’, I think any scheme will be meaningless unless there is a dialogue, there is an interaction. The development sector in my view, it’s not only the civil
society and the NGOs, it is also the government. We together have to address the mindset that socialises our men and mindsets cannot be addressed in a single day, it has to be done together in an interactive manner by all of us in this sector,” Sudan emphasised.

“I think the stereotyping and socialising that we have done on boys has been such that we have denied men a lot. The father is a more central and acceptable aspect of masculinity but even there if you see very few men get involved in rearing and caring of their children. Studies have shown that fathers who have positively engaged in the lives of their children, are less likely to be depressed or commit suicide or be violent towards their wives.”

If you look at our own Indian concept we have this concept of Ardhaanareshvar which means that we have the man and woman in us, there is a balance

NGOS SHOULD WORK WITH BOYS AND MEN TO CHANGE NORMS AROUND MASCULINITY

Sheepa Hafiza, Director, Gender Justice and Diversity, Building Resources Across Communities (BRAC), Bangladesh, continued the discourse of attitudinal change. She said that her organisation laid emphasis on working with men and boys, and changing their perceptions and practices on gender so that the next generation of young men grow up in a society where mutual respect, support, and a shared sense of responsibility is the norm.

She used three success stories to prove how working directly with boys and men can change harmful gender norms.

Under BRAC’s Gender Equality and Action Learning Programme, the effort to involve 40,000 households, 1,60,000 students and 1,00,000 change agents has resulted in visible transformations in men’s attitudes with regard to women, their positive contributions to home life, and a stronger role for women in decision-making.

BRAC’s shining of the spotlight on gender violence and involving men to be active mediators has led to violence-free lives for many women.

In her final remarks, Hafiza stressed the need for both men and women to work together as allies; dialogue and co-opt with the community on issues that affect their lives; build the skills of the professional cadre of workers who work on the field; establish links with concurrent social movements for social justice; and involve legislators, policy planners and the media to take the attitudinal change approach forward, and make it impactful on a large scale.

ADDRESS UNRESOLVED DILEMMAS OF WORKING WITH BOYS AND MEN AT THE GRASSROOTS

Mamta Kohli, Social Development Adviser, Department for International Development (DFID) India, drew attention to the challenges of working with men and boys on the field. While it has been established by several developmental interventions that working with men as allies can cause dramatic turnarounds in existing power equations, social development practitioners must be aware of existing challenges. This is key to overcoming programmatic hurdles, and also important for a more meaningful engagement with them.

Working to overcome gender hurdles in the private sector has been difficult as the glass ceilings for women are real and hard to break. DFID has also faced roadblocks while working in the field of education. Its attempt to reserve scholarships for tribal girls backfired because many of these girls (like boys) dropped out of schools at the higher secondary levels.

The picture is, however, not all discouraging. Remarkable success has come through its interventions with men and boys in Bihar and Madhya Pradesh to shift attitudes towards violence against women, particularly domestic violence. DFID hence views working with men and

Take the case of DFID’s work in Bihar and Rajasthan where 60% women suffer violence within the society and homes. While in-house studies have shown that there is a real possibility of working with 40% men to address this, finding these men has proved to be a problem. Many migrate, others are resistant to change. In some instances finding role models within the community for men to relate to and emulate has proved problematic.
boys as 'huge opportunities' and is currently looking to its vibrant programmes on tax reforms and governance to reach out to wider constituencies of men and boys to affect behavioural change.

NEW STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS FOR WOMEN’S ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT

Sarada Muraleedharan, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Government of India, tackled the issue of finding critical spaces for women to exercise their rights and choices, and seek political and economic empowerment.

While gram sabhas offer such spaces at the village level, as it is constitutionally mandated, they are not really effective in allowing elected women representatives to demand or fulfil the needs of women. This is because men are not ready to part with powers and privileges (viewing it as their sole prerogative) and are loath to give the elected women a chance at governance. In Maharashtra, the men even quietly shifted the place of their meetings to preclude the elected women from attending. It is also well known that in many cases the powers of women panchayats are appropriated by their husbands.

Kudumashree in Kerala, comprising a clutch of women’s self-help groups that work with the local government, on the contrary, has circumvented this space barrier by enabling women to actively negotiate for their social, cultural, economic, and political rights and even having a say in governance. This is a huge movement that touches almost 70% families in Kerala.

It too faced the fierce resistance of men. Muraleedharan explained how lobbying with higher levels of policy makers, and gaining credibility for these women gave them political viability. As this message filtered down, the men at the level of the local government began accepting women in positions of power. Men involved as functionaries in the cash-rich NREGA programme are now similarly keen to push the development agenda for women. As there is almost a 90% slant on women, they feel their contributions will draw in personal kudos and credit.

In the long run, what is perhaps needed is a shift in the development lens to afford spaces for women. It is not self-interest alone that drives men. If they are sensitised and made to understand how progress of women uplift children and entire communities, they do work alongside women to instill gender equality at the ground level.

This synthesis paper is also available in other languages.

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