



Synthesis of Discussions
at the 2nd MenEngage Global Symposium 2014

SESSION:
STATE OF THE MEN
FOR GENDER EQUALITY
FIELD

The Global Condition of Men and Masculinities

Why it is
necessary to
involve men

What are the
barriers to
engaging men

What needs
to be done
to engage men

The need
to understand
gender and sexualities

The challenges
the men's movement
faces

Men and Boys for Gender Justice
2nd MenEngage
Global Symposium 2014

For Private Circulation

'HOMEWORK FOR MEN'

- Positive parental involvement
- Taking responsibility for ending practices harmful to women and girls and ending violence against women in all forms
 - Redistributing unpaid care work equitably between males and females
 - Withdrawing from decision making bodies where women not represented
 - Removing discriminatory laws and bringing legislation supporting women
 - Employers to ensure economic empowerment for women

The opening plenary of the 2nd MenEngage Global Symposium, 'State of the Men for Gender Equality Field', comprised an overview by eminent speakers from around the world on where we are on the road to engaging men in driving gender equality. The session laid the course for the symposium held in New Delhi from November 10-13, 2014 with 1,200 participants from 95 countries. "In my book this counts as a game changing event," said UN Women's Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka "because of the numbers of people who are here, the countries they represent and the seeds I hope for planting all over the world."

BRINGING MEN TO THE TABLE: GAINS & CHALLENGES

Placing in the foreground the global context in which the engagement with men was being undertaken, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, executive director, UN Women, pointed out gender equality was the main building block for improving health, education, peace and economic welfare, as envisaged in the post-2015 development agenda. All over the world gender equality has been a precondition for achieving better development indices, leaving little room for doubt on the benefits of bringing men and boys to the table for breaking gender stereotypes that limited everyone. Even so, violence against women was widely prevalent and tolerated, making it a challenge to conquer this most dehumanising form of discrimination.



Suggesting that social and cultural norms could be used as positive influences, Mlambo-Ngcuka exhorted, **"Gender equality is a transformative enterprise requiring men give up privileges of patriarchy and question power dynamics."** She gave tasks to men who wanted to start engaging. (See cover page 'Homework for Men').

A REALITY CHECK

Celebrating the successes of the men for gender equality field by reflecting on the amount of interest the field had generated and the policy and programme approaches it had developed, Gary Barker of Promundo and MenEngage Alliance tempered these achievements with a sobering reality check.

He held a mirror to the current state of patriarchy, sharing the results of a multi-country study on men's gender equitable

attitudes which showed the long road ahead. Though there had been of late a normative shift in men's attitudes with some types of men consistently seen to be acknowledging the notion of gender equality, there was still no reduction in violence against women. The most significant influencing factor was that men who perpetrated gender based violence had themselves experienced violence in multiple forms. Said Barker, **"We're not making excuses for men and boys. But violence on the bodies of boys comes around as violence on the bodies of women and girls."**



LOOKING AT MEN'S LIVES

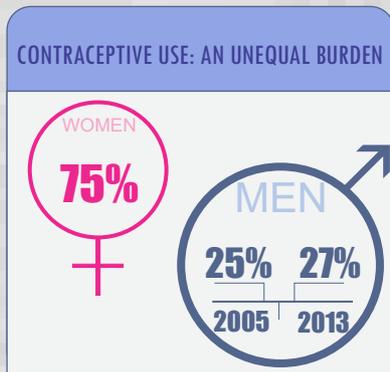
The good news however, he said, was that there were a lot of ideas on what worked to bring about positive change. For instance, to advance on equality it was necessary to examine men's vulnerabilities like their very high rates of deaths due to conflict including homicides, and suicide. A big challenge for men was poverty and unemployment due to economic instability. Countries with low homicide rates of men were seen to have low social inequality overall. So, joining the dots, Barker opined that a welfare state with good programmes of health, justice and social services would drive the changes required to bring about gender equality.

He particularly cautioned activists against thinking- *are we working for men or for women?* **"Winning the revolution requires not counting programmes for men over here and women over there but finding the humanity that will drive us all towards a greater equality,"** stated Barker.

TWO "STICKY ISSUES"

Barker pushed for a post-2015 development goal that would drive men to do their share of care work at home so that women could step out for equal employment and pay.

Another issue of concern he highlighted was the lack of involvement by men in sexual and reproductive health (See Box-Contraceptive Use: An Unequal Burden). The world's biggest family planning initiative FP 20-20 had dramatic contraceptive goals for women – and zero goals for men. "That is short-changing women and men," disapproved Barker.



TURNING A ZERO SUM GAME INTO A WIN-WIN GAME

So, how to bring men into the feminist conversation? Michael Kimmel, professor at the State University of New York, first identified the obstacles and then spoke of ways in which men might engage. The primary barrier he pinpointed was the word 'men' itself - because it was women who made gender visible. **"When I say 'gender', you think of women. Most men don't know gender is as important to us as women understand it is for them,"** said Kimmel. **"Most men don't know gender matters. Most men don't even know they have a gender. Gender remains invisible to men and this is political."** The first strategy then is making gender visible to men.



The next obstacle is the word 'equality'. Giving up power fails to resonate with men as they essentially believe they are on a level playing field with women. Even a little tilt evokes the response - 'It's reverse discrimination!' Men's sense of entitlement leads them to believe gender equality is a zero sum game in which

if women win, men lose. The second task then, according to Kimmel, is to make a different case.

HOW TO START THE CONVERSATION

Men can be brought into the conversation by showing them equality is in their interest. Kimmel revealed that research proved gender equality was not a zero sum game but a win-win situation. When men shared housework and child care, not only were their children and wives happier and healthier but men themselves were happier and healthier and to top the motivation – they also had more sex! "I believe we can engage men by letting them know this conversation is about them too," he opined.

However, he warned, men sometimes burst into the feminist space appearing to say, "Thank you, ladies, we'll take it from here." Instead of entering in the protector-provider mode, men must be there for the right reasons, said Kimmel.

INTERSECTION OF GENDER AND SEXUAL RIGHTS

Human rights lawyer Vivek Diwan emphasised the need for policy makers and others to be imbued with an understanding of sexual diversity and its intersection with class, culture, religion and the body politic, all of which he hoped would be articulated at the symposium. Despite the distressing legitimization of the majoritarian view of sexuality through upholding of India's anti-sodomy law, Diwan saw hope in the statement made by the Supreme Court recently when it confirmed the fundamental rights of transgender people:

"Our moral failure lies in society's unwillingness to contain different gender identities and expressions, a mindset we have to change. The true measure of the development of a nation is not economic growth, it is human dignity...the full development of a person includes expressing oneself in diverse forms. Recognition of one's gender identity is at the heart of the fundamental right to dignity."





BROADBASING THE ARGUMENT

In response to the point raised by session moderator Shereen El Feki, a Promundo fellow and writer, that religious fundamentalism was shaping ideas about masculinities and the role of men in society as much as it was deciding the place of women, Mlambo-Ngcuka said it was important to bring out how

religion was being used to further the interests of oppressors. Influential progressive voices in society must be encouraged, she stressed, so that the argument for gender equality was embedded in the ground.

This synthesis paper is also available in **Urdu, Bangla, Hindi, Portuguese, Spanish and French.**

CONVERSATIONS ON 'LOSS OF MY PIE' AND 'COOKED UP IDEAS'

The plenary panel discussed issues ranging from the resistance by some women's groups towards involving men, to the propaganda for equality being viewed as an 'outside' concept.

El Feki: Some women's rights organizations see men's engagement as a loss of onus and privilege within their field.

Barker: But this is not a new field of work. Feminism was always about working with men, whether we knew it or not.

Kimmel: This fear of the 'loss of my pie' is recycled with every new generation of feminist women or men angry at the loss of their 'privileges.' It must be taken seriously.

Mlambo-Ngcuka: We must also look if we are engaging with men in ways that follow gender justice principles. Are we accountable to the women's rights field that made this work possible?

Kimmel: It is a problem if men are going to jump in without accountability to the work women have been doing for decades. Developing collective structures of accountability is important.

El Feki: There is a push back in the global South from those who argue that gender equality including homosexuality rights is a Western construct. How do you indigenize the argument to show it's not an outside intervention but coming from the ground?

Barker: Yes, in several countries we hear from people that these are outside ideas cooked up in UN rooms.

Kimmel: Local voices must generate the larger conceptual framework of the movement.

Diwan: In India for instance the women's movement championed gender identity issues, building bridges between groups and communities.

Mlambo-Ngcuka: I agree on the importance of using local voices in dealing with issues deemed as a foreign imposition. Having said that, it is equally important to champion the universality of rights so that we don't abdicate from supporting people in difficult situations by saying the issue is local. The word here is 'solidarity'.



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