

"The role of men and boys in achieving gender equality"

1. Do women's groups believe this is an important issue that requires greater attention and action?

Generally this wasn't an issue that caught the imagination of many of the organisations involved in the WomenSpeak Network. Most of the organisations in the WomenSpeak Network are autonomous women's organisations, that either do not have men as members or volunteers or allow men to only be associate or non-voting members.¹ Many women's organisations also operate on very limited resources and it is only reasonable that they focus their work on girls and women.

The revolution of gender equality will only ever be won with the support of men and boys, which makes this by definition an important issue. But is it an issue that women's organisations and the Commission on the Status of Women should put front and centre and divert their resources and activities towards?

The question of roles of men and boys is often conceptualised in terms of their moving over to let women share their dominance. This involves some assumptions that need to be questioned. The first is that women want to become 'men' i.e. share the world in current male terms; the second is that men should share the female roles, as currently prescribed. Both these standpoints limit the debate to a role based/role swapping model and could account for the limited enthusiasms for the framing of such a limited debate. It also extends the dichotomy of women as victim, man as victor, which leads to some male groups pushing their claims for male victim-hood. What may be a more fertile approach to this issue is to start talking about removing gender stereotypes from the discussions of workplaces, communities and households and explore ways of redefining tasks and roles in ways which move outside the gender dichotomy.

Work in this area needs to recognised that men, albeit often to their advantage, are also stereotypes and many have the potential for gains from working together on changing these. Women's groups are sometimes blamed for the woes of men by men, and that can make us wary of their involvement in gender issues. So strategies need to work on how to activate men to work on their issues and on joint issues in ways which can be collaborative.

The briefing papers provided by the United Nations for the meeting of the expert group contain within them a tension about what the aim of including men and boys in gender equality should be. On one hand the papers speak of some men's inherent commitment to gender equality because of an ethical, religious or ideological commitment to those principles; a

¹ A notable exception to this position is that of the Australian Bahá'í Community Office of Equality. It is a fundamental tenet of the Bahá'í faith that men and women are equal and as a result many men in the Bahá'í community play an active role in working towards gender equality. The Australian Bahá'í Community Office of Equality has submitted a separate paper on this topic to the Office of the Status of Women.

relational commitment in terms of wanting gender justice for ‘wives, sisters, aunts’ or in wanting a better outcome for men and boys².

The women’s movement apart from separatist groups has often worked in collaboration with those who support equality for women for ethical, religious or ideological reasons, particularly across social justice campaigns. It is also common to see men providing support to organisations because of their relationship to the organisation or cause through a female friend or relative.

The third category suggested by the UN background papers of men motivated to improve their own lives is, however, far more problematic. Do women’s organisations believe that they or CSW should be spending energy and resources on promoting men and boy’s role in gender equality when the outcome is to improve the lives of men and boys? Unlikely! That is after all why we are women’s organisations. Our focus is on women and while we may collaborate where there is a pragmatic gain to be made, if men and boys want to bring down the patriarchy for their own benefit then they should make use of the ‘master’s tools’ they have inherited and bring it down.

2. Do you know of any men’s groups that are involved in promoting gender equality in Australia? If so, what work are they doing?

In preparing this paper we sent the original OSW background paper to a number of organisations involved with men and boys and in some cases organisations that were traditionally boys only but have expanded to include girls such as: Scouts; Boys Brigade; Surf Life Saving; the YMCA; and the Police Citizen’s Youth Club; as well as a number of non-gender specific organisations that work with young people: the Foundation for Young Australian’s; the Red Cross and the Duke of Edinburgh Awards Scheme we asked them “whether the question of gender equality something that concerns you and your organisations? Is it something you are working on? And if so what have you done?”

The most comprehensive response we received was from Surf Lifesaving who is hosting work to progress the issues of equity and diversity in International Life Saving. However, largely the response was no response.

It may also be important for OSW in preparing for CSW to consult with both men and boys organisations and organisations that appear gender blind to ask what contribution they are making, rather than just asking women’s organisations.

² R. W. Connell, “The Role of Men & Boys in Achieving Gender Equality”, United Nations, 2003a, www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/men-boys2003/Connell-bp.pdf.

R. W. Connell, “The Role of Men & Boys in Achieving Gender Equality. Report on the Online Discussion”, United Nations, 2003b, www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/men-boys2003/reports/egm-od-report.pdf.

In looking at organisations working for gender equality it would also be important for OSW to be in contact with transgender and other queer groups. Many of these organisations are involved in work to breakdown gender stereotypes.

3. How can male decision-makers better contribute to the achievement of gender equality in Australia?

By recognising that while gains have been made much work remains to be done. One woman achieving is not the end of the women's movement. As a collective movement we are working for improvement for women as a group, across divisions of class, ethnicity or ability. Male decision makers seeing that their wives, daughters and sisters get a fair go is not enough. The achievement of gender equality must be measured by the status of women from those groups often not seen amongst male decision-makers either.

Our predominantly male parliaments could address the issues that hold women back, both as women but also as people from various backgrounds. Issues such as the:

- affordability of childcare and the low pay of childcare workers;
- restricted access to paid maternity or paternity leave;
- absence of a single woman from the high court;
- poor health outcomes of Australia's Indigenous people;
- insisting on properly gender disaggregated data cross-tabbed by other target groups so that we have a clear picture on where women stand;
- recognising the specialist skills of the women's sector and acknowledging that we often are the best placed to provide women with the confidence and skills to take on active decision making roles.

Our predominantly male boards of directors and CEOs could address the issues that hold women back, both as women but also as people from various backgrounds. Issues such as the:

- low levels of representation of women, people with disabilities, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and Indigenous people on boards and in senior management;
- family friendly employment issues that are more than just flexibility practices that make it easier for management and include actively rewarding women and men who take advantage of family friendly measures;
- addressing the growth in casualised and precarious employment;
- addressing the growing gender wage gap.

Our predominantly male decision makers wherever they are could recognise that working towards gender equality means more than announcing that you've undertaken gender mainstreaming and then never doing anything more. Gender mainstreaming still requires that you:

“assess[ing] the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and

*evaluation of policies and programme in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated*³

and implicit in this is that you fund the research, programmes and advocacy that underpin knowing what the different implications for women and men are and how they can best be addressed.

4. How can the Government engage more men in activities to achieve gender equality?

By reminding people that gender does not just mean women. Gender is relational and places burdens and benefits on both sexes and that work to break down biologically determinist and social stereotypes of the roles of various genders will free all people to be the best human beings that they can be, reflecting their own strengths and interests.

Governments should also play a role in ensuring that gender mainstreaming has been properly implemented within their own practices and policies. For example tenders should ensure that they ask organisations tendering to identify how they will acknowledge gender differences within their work.

Pressure to remove all references to gender or the abolition of women's policy machinery should be resisted. Connell (2003:11) seems to be suggesting that by naming women in policy documents and policy machinery that we are limiting their legitimacy in speaking to men about the role they should take. This is a position that cannot be supported, women's organisations have learnt through bitter experience that were women are not explicitly mentioned in policy or policy machinery they are often silenced in the process and considerations.

In order to achieve attitudinal and behavioural change Government can also implement structural changes that encourage men to adopt more equitable ways of living with women. For example, Government can provide paid parental leave, and can implement or endorse workplace reforms designed to encourage men to make use of family friendly policies.

Recognising that gender inequalities are connected to inequalities of class, ethnicity and sexuality, Government should work to address intersecting inequalities between men as well as between men and women, from a community development perspective in local communities.

5. What do you see as working well to engage men and boys in gender equality in Australia and overseas? Please specify and provide detail.

Gender mainstreaming has been implemented through man donors into developing nations. The UNDP is recognised as a leader in this area. Interaction in the USA and Oxfam are two ngos that are also well recognised for their work in promoting gender equality in developing nations, particularly as a basis for sustainable development and democratisation.

³ ECOSOC resolution 1997/2 cited in *Gender Mainstreaming An Overview*, United Nations Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues, New York, 2002, p1. www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/pdf/e65237.pdf

As service providers many of the YWCAs in Australia work regularly with men and boys through child care and youth services and consider that work to make a contribution to enhancing the safety and security of women. Many YWCAs also expect men in their employ to work in a consciously feminist framework.

- The YWCA of Sydney's "Abuse Prevention Program" operating in Nowra provides high school aged boys and girls with an opportunity to explore issues such as bullying, communication, relationships and domestic violence at age appropriate stages of the young people developments. It aims to prevent gender inequality in all spheres of life.
- Most YWCA of Canberra services across youth services; community development; housing and family support and childcare work with both men and women. All services are conducted within a feminist framework and therefore with a view to empowering women within a community context.

The Australian Bahá'í Community Office of Equality and the Bahá'í Community internationally has undertaken extensive work to engage men and boys in gender equality; they have detailed this work in their submission to the Office of the Status of Women.

- "Equal Wings" - An empowerment program, developed in Malaysia and tested widely in Asia, the Pacific and Africa, was piloted in a major metropolitan city. Using drama, small group consultations, interactive exercises and humour, "Equal Wings" involves men and women, couples and singles. In the initial workshops, women and men are separated and work through similar worksheets but often with very different results. Once the issues have been brought up and the concepts clarified, men and women join in the same workshops. The pilot proved that with minor modification, "Equal Wings" is suitable in a developed urban environment and those men and women who complete the workshops become more aware and more inspired to work towards building positive relationships between the sexes. The Office intends to make the program available on a national basis.
- Equality Leads to Unity Workshops - Workshops encouraging the participation of both women and men were held in three states to increase awareness, knowledge and understanding of issues around equality, to develop tools and strategies for increasing equality in local communities and to provide opportunities for networking. Presentations were made on topics such as "Equality from a Multicultural Perspective" and "Equality from a Youth Perspective". A key component of the workshops was a cause and effect exercise, which addressed the question - "What are the barriers that prevent us from achieving greater equality"? This exercise assisted participants to identify the main causes of inequality in local communities and the effects this has on the development of the human family and society.
- Leadership Program - The Office identified a need for a leadership program for women that develops competencies in leadership. In the process of developing the program, it has become apparent that it would be more valuable to develop a

generic leadership program that could be adapted for a women's only group if needed. As well as providing for specific skill development, the program will give men and women a greater understanding of service-oriented leadership and of the qualities and capacities that both sexes can bring to leadership. The program will be piloted in November 2003.

- Arts - The Office has worked with youth in central Australia to prepare an arts based workshop on equality for the indigenous community. Art has also been used as a means of raising awareness of equality among children and youth.
- “Happy Hippo Show” – The Office is currently developing a pilot of the “Happy Hippo Show” as a way of building awareness of equality among men and women in Australian communities, particularly among youth. The “Happy Hippo Show” concept was created by Shamil Fattakhov, in the USSR. It uses drama, in which characters are taken to the threshold of an important moral decision, to engage the audience in a discussion of what step the actors should take next. The emphasis is on achieving a positive moral outcome through consultation, based on the following principles: 1) understanding that positive solutions are indeed possible; 2) defining the highest moral principle involved; 3) focusing on practical ways to solve problems; and 4) leading the audience through a shared experience of different cultures and points of view. The Office is optimistic about its applicability to the advancement of gender equality in Australian communities.

The International Women's Development Agency supports a range of programs throughout the Asia-Pacific that encourage men and boys to play an active role in gender equality:

- IWDA in partnership with Leitana Nehan Women's Development Agency (Bougainville, Papua New Guinea) implements a Strengthening Capacity for Peace program funded by AusAID. The program undertakes awareness raising on alcohol abuse, women's rights, conflict and disarmament in communities of Bougainville. 91 male and female volunteers have been trained to work in 65 villages (13 districts) as educators and advocates. The primary objective of the program was to reduce violence against women in the community and to offer ex-combatants alternative roles in the community. Given the high unemployment and limited role options for men and women in communities, the program has resulted in
 - a) creating a cadre of skilled men and women who work and train together to promote community change
 - b) raising self-esteem of the men and women advocates who have found their voluntary community service has given them an added status in the communities they live and work in.
 - c) promoting effective role-models to the younger men and women in the larger community where men are generally not involved in community service and prefer to wield a gun.

- IWDA partner, Kam Pussem Hed (KPH) Centre in Portvila, Vanuatu, provides reproductive health information on AIDS, STD etc and limited clinical services that are appropriate to the age, beliefs and customs of young men and women in the peri-urban areas. The primary objective of the program (funded by AusAID), is to attract young people to access services from a community-based health facility, however, KPH is well-known among young and older persons as a place where they can easily access reproductive health care services. Four men and four women volunteers have been trained as peer walkabout educators. Other men and women volunteers organise bus trips/information sessions for men and women separately at the centre, hold community workshops and implement a special program for “men as partners”. The program has been able to create spaces for men and women to take up issues of sexual health and relationships, a topic which is taboo in the local culture.

The program offers men and women alternative roles in community service and enhances advocacy. The local government is looking at formal recognition of the skills of the educator/advocates. For IWDA and KPH, however, the success of the program lies in the collaboration of men and women in monitoring community reproductive health.

- IWDA partner, GAD Cambodia and Banteay Serei (Phnom Penh, Cambodia), collaborate on a program to promote women’s understanding of marriage and land rights and laws. The program disseminates information through volunteer village core-groups in three provinces. Members of the core-groups include local leaders, farmers, members of the women’s credit groups and community workers.
- IWDA partner MAP Foundation (Chiang Mai, Thailand) has organised monthly exchange meetings for 35-40 women from ethnic communities in Chiang Mai over the past four years. The meetings have given many ethnic women on the Thai Burma border, an opportunity to reflect on personal experiences and join in solidarity with others with similar experiences. The women learn new skills and gain information through structured workshops and lectures organised by MAP. Several women recently decided to meet together to play football and over the past several months they have practiced weekly in a public field and even challenged a men’s team (a spontaneously organised group of husbands, brothers, friends and relatives) to a match.

Men and women have a stronger sense of ownership of outcomes if they are involved together in design, planning, implementation and management of development activities. The process of working together and of coming to agreement on various issues at field and NGO level itself is a learning process enabling men and women to test out new ways of relating to each other.

Women-only projects are generally successful in raising women’s skills and knowledge, levels of articulation and advocacy, but unless they impact on formal and informal leadership in the community, the gains are not sustainable. In most cases, engaging men and boys in the community on secondary activities enable women and men to trial new roles and behaviours and to reflect and learn from the responses.

Women still need separate women-only programs and spaces to reflect on their experience and learn new skills and to acquire the behaviour skills for initiating positive, assertive and confident relationships with men and boys. All development programs need to incorporate both women-only and joint men and women activities as necessary components for development programs.

There is need to address men and men's behaviour directly as perpetrators of violence and discrimination against women. It is imperative to encourage positive male role models in the community to lead discussion on increasing gender-sensitive work and breaking down gender inequality.

6. What do you think are the most important strategies / issues that Australia should focus on during negotiations at CSW?

It will be important to recognise that gender equality is still some way off and that the mechanisms that Australia has pioneered such as women's policy machinery should be promoted, protected and strengthened.

In acknowledging the gains that have been made by women it will be important to resist any panic that this creates about the relative achievements of men and boys such as the boys' education debate in Australia.

A debate should be had and is welcomed that recognises occasions on which stereotypes of men are prejudicial to the development of boys and men, as it may add impetus to men's commitment to act in their own best interest. The Australian Government should resist attempts to construct this debate as women and girls taking from men and boys.

- Education and awareness raising;
- Legislation can influence attitudinal and behavioural change e.g. the inclusion of parents rooms in public spaces supports men who are taking care of young children.
- Media accountability/guidelines regarding the depiction of violence.

7. What do you think are the most important issues relating to the men and boys theme?

Men and boys should be welcomed to the debate, and to regard gender equity as an issue that not only has implications for them but as a process that requires tangible, practical efforts on their part. Pragmatic decisions need to be made about on what basis we are prepared to work with them. Whether it is sufficient that they want to join the struggle for their own benefit, or whether they need to believe in gender equality because it is right!

It needs to be made clear to men and boys that gender equity is not just a "women's issue" in so far as men's attitudes and behaviours remain one of the significant challenges to the advancement of women. There is a role for government to play in encouraging attitudinal change on the part of men and boys, as well as a role for interested women's organisations in advocating the whole-of-community benefits of gender equity.

However, it is not clear that men's organisations are ready or willing to actively pursue gender equality. While feminist organisations may wish to invite men's groups to be involved in or to support some of our work, men's groups also have a responsibility to engage in this debate. There may be a role for government in encouraging men's groups to adopt this work.

There is also an opportunity for feminist organisations to consider how, and when, the involvement of men and boys in work for gender equality is appropriate, and to provide structured opportunities for their involvement. It is important that the women's sector lead this debate.

- Violence against women - men are the main perpetrators, mainly towards women they know - how can men teach men how to manage/control their anger/frustration without taking it out on the women in their lives, i.e.: a greater focus on prevention targeted at the perpetrators of crime.
- Communication strategies for the engagement of men and boys
- Bullying in schools & workplaces: working on instilling respectful attitudes, especially to reduce harassment of girls/women and men perceived to be homosexual
- Parenting
- Addressing stereotyping: From a service perspective the *Big Sister Big Brother* that the YWCA of Sydney operates has experiences difficulties in recruiting adult male role models into the program. Feedback from male volunteers suggests a hesitancy to apply stemming from the stereotypes associated with male adults and young people. It could be suggested that these stereotypes could be compared with those associated with equality where ignorance plays an important part in the discrimination of others. It appears that society is changing at a much faster rate than people's ability to adapt to change. Only when society starts accepting people for their ability rather than their gender, culture, sexuality or age will we live as equals.
- To ensure that the common goals for the equality for women eg. Pay, positions in decision-making, supporting care givers, are not marginalised as we are still not equal in these and many other areas of civic and political life.