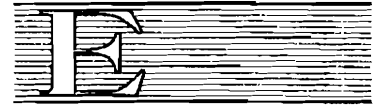


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Distr. : LIMITED  
E/ECA/ACGD/RC.VII/04/10  
August 2004



UNITED NATIONS  
ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

Original: English

**ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA**  
African Centre for Gender and Development

**Seventh African Regional Conference on Women**  
*Decade Review of the implementation of the Dakar and Beijing  
Platforms for Action(Beijing+10)*

6 – 14 October 2004  
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

## **Partnership with Men and Boys for Gender Equality in Africa**

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## **1. Introduction:**

### **The significance of partnership with men and boys in achieving gender equality**

*“Equality between women and men is a matter of human rights and a condition for social justice and is also a necessary and fundamental prerequisite for equality, development and peace. A transformed partnership based on equality between women and men is a condition for people-centered sustainable development” (para.1 of the Beijing Platform for Action.*

The significance of partnership with men and boys and women for gender equality and sustainable development cannot be over emphasized. The Beijing Platform for Action (BFA) recognized this and has emphasized the principle of shared power and responsibility between men and women at home, in the work place and in the wider national and international communities (para. 1). It stressed that gender equality could not be achieved unless men and women worked together in partnership and that the principle of equality of women and men had to be integral to the socializing process.

In the Beijing Declaration governments expressed their determination to encourage men to participate fully in all actions towards gender equality (para.25). The Declaration emphasized that equal sharing of responsibilities and a harmonious partnership between women and men were critical to their well-being and that of their families as well as to the consolidation of democracy (para.15).

Accordingly, the BFA recommendations focus on:

- Promoting harmonization of work and family responsibilities for men and women (para.179)
- Encouraging men to share equally in childcare and household work (para. 107c)
- Promoting programmes to educate and enable men to assume their responsibilities to prevent HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases (para. 108e)

This attention to men and boys was reinforced in subsequent sessions of the Commission on the Status of Women during which it was concluded that greater participation of men in family responsibilities, including domestic work and child and dependent care, would contribute to the welfare of children, women and men themselves.

The critical role of men and boys has also been addressed in inter-governmental forums. For example the International Conference on Population and Development adopted a Programme of Action in September 1994 which stated that *“ Special efforts should be made to emphasize men’s shared responsibilities and promote their active involvement in responsible parenthood, sexual and reproductive behavior, including family planning; prenatal, maternal and child health, prevention of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV; prevention of unwanted and high-risk pregnancies; shared control and contribution to family income, children’s education,*

*health and nutrition; and recognition and promotion of the equal value of children of both sexes. Male responsibilities in family life must be included in the education of children from the earliest ages. Special emphasis should be placed on the prevention of violence against women and children."*

The 21<sup>st</sup> Special Session of the UN General Assembly (ICPD+5) held in 1999 drew attention to the role of gender equality and equity as a key determinant of success in the fight against AIDS. In the Declaration of commitment, adopted at the General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS in 2001, one of the specific goals focuses on challenging gender stereotypes and attitudes as well as gender inequalities in relation to HIV/AIDS. The goal also calls for the active involvement of men and boys.

Additionally, it is now believed that attention to gender perspectives and equal participation will contribute to the achievement of all development goals. The Millennium Declaration, adopted by Member States of the United Nations in September 2000, highlighted that promotion of gender equality was essential for the eradication of poverty and hunger and the promotion of sustainable development. Gender equality is a Millennium Development Goal in its own right, but gender perspectives must also be included in the implementation of all other Millennium Development Goals, on poverty and hunger, education, child mortality, maternal health, HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, environmental sustainability and global partnerships for development.

## **2. Objective**

The objective of this theme group discussion is to identify practical ways in which men and boys can be involved in achieving gender equality. In particular, it focuses on socialization and education, the labor market and the workplace; the sharing of family responsibilities, including caring roles; and the prevention of HIV/AIDS. The outcome of this group discussion will contribute to further understanding of the topic and will influence the work of all stakeholders on the promotion of gender equality through partnership between the opposite sexes.

## **3. Who benefits from increased role of men and boys in gender equality?**

It is increasingly recognized that a focus on the role of men and boys in the achievement of gender equality will not only benefit women and girls as well as men and boys, but can contribute effectively to the achievement of human rights, the promotion of democracy, poverty eradication, economic justice and other development goals. Clearly, men and boys as members of the society are disadvantaged by women's unequal status. In the home, it has been proven that a woman who has got economic means can take care of her husband and family better than one who is not. Women are a critical resource in development, as they comprise 50 percent of the world's population. Sustainable development cannot be achieved without full participation of women. It is therefore, important that policy advocacy at the highest level of political leadership get men and boys, as well as women to see the symbiosis between

sustainable development and women's empowerment. The emphasis on women as a critical resource in the development process is often inarticulately presented. The old issue of women's liberation is seen as the "real" issue as opposed to the broader and higher goal of a more egalitarian and people centered development in general.

Additionally, the emerging challenges including the fight against HIV/AIDS will not be resolved without an effective partnership between men and women, boys and girls. It is acknowledged and recognized that attention to men and boys can make a major contribution to the fight against HIV/AIDS; indeed without the involvement of men and boys it will be difficult, if not impossible, to achieve the international goals on HIV/AIDS.

#### **4. Obstacles to Effective Partnership with Men and Boys for Gender Equality**

However, the achievement of gender equality is still to a large extent considered a women's issue. Few men, including those at the top of policy-making machinery, have realized the benefits of gender equality. The concept itself is poorly understood. Men see gender equality as tantamount to women dis-empowering them in the home, at work and in the public arena generally. They do not see their role or how they will benefit from gender equality. It is only recently that attention has emerged regarding the role men and boys can play in the achievement of gender equality (UN-DAW, 2003). The shift from a focus on women to the perspective on gender relations created the opportunity to give increased attention to men and boys. Despite this shift in focus, a number of obstacles still prevent the effective implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action including:

- Persistent gender stereo-typing which has led to insufficient encouragement for men to reconcile professional and family responsibilities.
- Insufficient sharing of tasks and responsibilities by men for care giving within families, households and communities.
- Unequal power relationship between men and women, in which women often did not have the power to insist on safe and responsible sex practices.
- Lack of communication and understanding between men and women on women's health needs.
- Policies that make it difficult for workers to combine work and family responsibilities and better share paid employment and unpaid caring tasks between men and women through the enhanced availability of facilities such as childcare and flexible working conditions.
- Persistent gender stereotypes and attitudes and gender inequality in relation to HIV/AIDS (where women are seen as transmitters).

- Lack of positive male role models that facilitate boys to become gender-sensitive adults and enable men to support, promote and respect women's sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights.
- Limited research on men's sexuality, their masculinity and their reproductive behavior (UN-DAW 2003)

**5. The major issues for consideration are<sup>1</sup>:**

For the purpose of this session, it is recommended that discussions focus upon the following issues relating to areas in which partnership with men and boys for gender equality should be promoted. It is in these areas that interactions between men and boys, girls and women do take place.

**5.1 Partnership through Socialization and Education**

- a. The role of boys and men in sharing domestic responsibilities
- b. Gender equality in the workplace: is work environment gender sensitive?
- c. Promotion of women's participation in the competitive labour market
- d. What do men and boys gain from increased gender equality?
- e. What constraints do men face as men under the current definitions of masculinity in different contexts? There is a need to recognize the diversity of men's situation and assess the specific situations, interests, identities, and privileges of different groups of men and boys and address their specific needs.

**5.2 Partnership in the Workplace and Economy**

- a. Development of gender policies rather than separate and parallel policies for men and women ensuring that when a "gender perspective" is adopted in policies, attention is given to relations between women and men rather than to women and men separately
- b. Frame "family-friendly" employment policies in such a way as to encourage men, as well as women, to use employment flexibility, and to design promotion policies so as to create incentives for male employees to share domestic work. This may include the provision of work-based day-care centers in all enterprises taking into account the needs of both men and women, as well as encouraging men to take paternal leave. Other measures include recognition of worker's child-care obligations in setting

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<sup>1</sup> These were recommendations made during the Expert Group Meeting on "The role of men and boys in achieving gender equality" 21 to 24 October 2003 in Brasilia, Brazil by the UN Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) in collaboration with the ILO, UNAIDS, and UNDP.

terms of employment and schedules of work, and creation of incentives for childcare contributions in recruitment and promotion policies.

- c. The use of legislation, organizational structuring and industrial bargaining to reduce gender segmentation in the workplace, both in public sector employment and in the private sector
- d. How can men and boys be involved in addressing gender inequities what specific roles for men and boys in developing and implementing policies and programmes for gender equality?
- e. What strategies (approaches for working with men) are in place for involving men and boys in gender equality issues?

### **5.3 Partnership over Sexuality, Health and HIV/AIDS**

Gender inequalities in sexual relations have a pervasive influence on women's well-being and on both women's and men's vulnerability to HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections. This is recognized in the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS adopted by the 2001 General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS. The Declaration stresses that gender equality and empowerment of women are fundamental elements in the reduction of the vulnerability of women and girls to HIV/AIDS. The fight against the scourge requires a strong partnership between the opposite sexes. Men and women must agree on the ways to avoiding infection with HIV/AIDS.

Given the urgency of curbing HIV rates, activities with a focus on men and boys need to be scaled up dramatically. Far greater attention must be given to the needs of the millions of men now living with HIV/AIDS, including support in preventing transmission to others. Men need also to be encouraged and helped to play a much greater role in caring for orphans and sick family members. Also, it is important to challenge harmful concepts of masculinity, including the way adult men look on risk and sexuality and how boys are socialized to become men.

There are five main reasons for focusing elements of the response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic on men and boys: men's health is important but receives inadequate attention; men's behaviour puts women at risk of HIV; men's behaviour puts them at risk of HIV; unprotected sex between men endangers both men and women; and men need greater consideration to AIDS as it affects the family<sup>2</sup>.

In order to achieve gender equality in the area of health, the following measures are recommended:

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<sup>2</sup> Bertil Lindblad "Men and Boys Can Make a Difference in the Response to the HIV/AIDS Epidemic", UNAIDS, October 2003

### **5.3.1 Promote responsible sexual behaviour of men and boys**

- a. Support responsible sexual behaviour by youth and men through Government educational policies, and allow youth to explore alternatives to those social norms which promote risky behaviour, the sexual double standard regarding women's and men's behaviour, and association between men's sexual experience and sexual status
- b. Promote the use of condom and make condoms widely available to men and boys, as well as women and girls, in secondary schools, from retail centers and elsewhere
- c. Engage men with leadership positions in Government and community life to publicly encourage men and boys to play an active role in supporting both their own sexual and reproductive health and that of women and girls
- d. Remove any organizational and programme obstacles that prevent men from supporting their own and women's sexual and reproductive health
- e. Endorse and enforce codes of conduct in uniformed institutions and services prohibiting the use of sexual violence within institutions and against communities
- f. Improve gender relationships in relation to HIV/AIDS, in particular:
  - i. Curbing gender-based violence and in promoting safe reproductive health practices, including the use of condoms to provide dual protection against both pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases?
  - ii. Developing tools that can be used to involve men in ways that promote gender equity and improve the health of women and children as well as men
  - iii. Addressing role of male dominance in the spread of HIV/AIDS among women and girls

### **5.3.2 Address health care needs of men and boys**

- a. Promote men's participation in and responsibility for contraception, including through increased use and acceptance of existing and effective male methods of contraception and take steps to increase the social acceptability of such methods



- b. Ensure that funding for men's health programmes complements and supports, and does not compete with or undermine the provision of health care for women
- c. Guarantee the right to diverse sexual expression. Work to remove the stigma, prejudice and discrimination which hinders men's ability to disclose particular sexual practices and orientations and thus compromises the health of their female partners
- d. Address men's involvement in sexual exploitation in their roles as clients, organizers and traffickers in commercial sex work/prostitution
- e. Adopt and ensure strict enforcement of laws prohibiting trafficking of women and girls.

### **5.3.3 Promote involvement of men and boys in care and support**

- 5.4 Develop training curricula for teacher training colleges, social work programmes and nursing programmes to encourage men's involvement in HIV/AIDS care and support activities in both the formal and informal sector
- 5.5 Development campaigns to increase involvement in HIV/AIDS care and support activities, fostering relationships with media and with well-recognized male celebrities
- c. Research men's health-related attitudes and practices that promote men's involvement in care and support; men's roles in facilitating or adversely affecting women's reproductive and sexual health, access to health services, and involvement in HIV/AIDS care and prevention; and the identification of local practices and traditions which can be drawn upon to promote men's involvement in efforts to achieve gender inequality in the fields of sexuality and health

### **5.3.4 Family life, domestic work/life balance**

Many gender inequalities have their bases in imbalances in domestic work and in the relationship between paid work and family life. The negative consequences of this imbalance affects both men and women equally. There is wide recognition of a need to increase the participation of men in domestic work, to adopt family support policies, and to encourage reconciliation of family and working life for both men and women.

It is important to consider the extent to which men are already involved in care and domestic work, and identify what men actually do in the domestic domain. To the extent that men are not already involved, it is necessary to consider how

their move into care work can be enabled, and what gains and benefits flow from men's roles in domestic life for women, for children and for men themselves.

Some of the measures needed to involve men more into family life are:

- Use of financial and social policy to improve the balance between work and family life, and encourage men to make an equal contribution to domestic work
- Develop aspects of family law that enable men to be active partners in the lives of their children while continuing their education and training, including designing of training programmes and schedules that facilitate casework by teenage and young fathers without breaks in study
- Create education programmes that give boys and men skills and knowledge to take on new roles in households, families and the domestic sphere such as school-based life skills courses, adult education programmes directed at men and boys at community level, and teacher education programmes to increase capacity for gender education of boys and youth

#### **5.4 Gender-based violence**

Violence against women was identified as one of the twelve critical areas of action in the Beijing Platform for Action. The Fourth World Conference on Women recognized that gender-based violence is a major obstacle to the achievement of the goals of equality, development and peace. Programmes to address this issue have closely examined the causes of violence and concluded that it is founded in unequal gender power relations.

Gender based violence should be tackled as a violation of basic human rights, and a manifestation of gender inequality. Gender-based violence should be identified and dealt with in all development and human rights interventions.

To address this problem at the policy level, it is recommended that:

- a. There should be reviews and implementation of international commitments related to prevention, protection, and service provision regarding gender based violence
- b. Involve men and boys in all gender-based violence programmes as agents for change (as allies and targets)
- c. Formulate programmes to combat gender-based violence at different levels (national, regional, and international) reinforcing the involvement of boys and men in programme planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.
- d. Awareness raising and education campaigns
- e. Network and alliance building on gender based violence

- f. Capacity building on gender based violence
- g. Service provision and integration
- h. Advocacy and lobbying.

## **6. Suggested Strategies for partnering with men and boys for gender Equality**

A number of countries have realized the fact that sustainable development cannot be achieved without active involvement of men and boys and have devised approaches to effectively promote men's engagement and to change their attitudes with regard to gender equity. This includes the following major strategies:

### **6.1 Awareness raising for boys and men to promote gender equality**

Working with men and boys as recipients for awareness- raising, have focused upon the following:

- The welfare of family, which is highly appreciated rather than female as a separate entity; humanity and respect for women; men's support for girl education and participation in public life, socialization in schools and at the community/society level.
- Awareness raising could take place in youth forums; media and use language acceptable to men and boys, and should aim at building on positive attitudes as supporters to women and girls.
- It should also focus on how gender equality and justice will promote the welfare of the whole family.
- It should also reflect on gains at all levels (family, community), and establish common goals through dialogues between boys and girls and the role of boys in supporting gender equality.
- Focus should also be on the vulnerability of boys' needs that restrict them from playing an effective role in promoting gender equity (boys and men have their own gender needs that focus on women have oversight).
- Establish opportunities for counseling and support for boys and men who experience violence from other men or society at large because of their gendered role.
- Complement direct work with boys with working with parents and influential members in the family (elderly).
- Work with men as allies to combat violence against women in particular key government officials and key actors in society

### **6.2. Understanding the socialization process at different levels (household, society) and relate to external factors**

The following approaches can be adopted to implement this strategy:

- Dialogues between women and men, boys and girls among different social groups on how socialization is produced and by whom
- Explore positive characters of men to support gender equity and understand the threat they face and how to overcome it.

### **6.3. Understanding the dynamics of gender power relations at macro level and among different social groups**

This involves the following measures:

- In-depth gender analysis and mapping to different forms and magnitudes of gender power relations
- Consideration of external factors that affect the map of gender power relations and impact resulted from changes in external environment

### **6.4 Building partnership between women organizations and key policy makers**

- Establish dialogues with women's groups and organizations to generate their understanding and acceptance to men as being significant in achieving gender equity
- Women organizations could use discourses that are acceptable by policy makers and key male actors and avoiding discourses that challenge men's identity, which may put them under threat
- Using trained men to change the attitudes of other men and influence change using appropriate and accepted dialogue
- Women's organizations could be involved in all levels of partnership and accept to go along the process of partnership with men
- Women's organizations can promote trust building and influence laws, regulations, media, and school curriculums to be gender sensitive and challenges gender stereotypes.

### **6.5 Recommended research needs**

Since the focus on men and boys as partners in achieving gender equality is new, it is necessary for research to be carried out that focuses on this issue. It is suggested that such research includes the following:

- The documentation of the role of men and boys in care and domestic activities, and identification of areas where action should be taken;
- Time use surveys documenting patterns of domestic work by women and men;
- Monitoring of men's use of parental leave and flexible employment provisions;
- The extent to which men working in international and transnational organizations and as decision-makers and role models involve themselves in family affairs
- Documentation of "fair families" which have adopted more equal models of family responsibilities, to understand what leads to success in terms of gender equality; and
- The study of diversity in participation in family responsibilities between different cultures, both inside countries and between countries.

## 7. Conclusion

This paper has examined the significance of partnering with men and boys for gender equality in Africa. It is clear that although the Beijing Platform for Action called upon all stakeholders to develop this partnership, very little has been done so far. There are many obstacles that prevent men and boys from engaging themselves in initiatives geared towards gender equality. However, there are ample opportunities for effective partnership, and this includes the fact that men, women, boys and girls interact with each other on a daily basis at home, work and the public arena. These places should be the focus for gender empowering. There are also many measures that can be taken to create this partnership.

## 8. Expected outcomes

The discussions will contribute to furthering understanding of the topic and will create a better understanding of the problems associated with being men in a patriarchal society. It is also expected that there will be some influence on the work of all stakeholders on the promotion of gender equality through the creation of effective partnerships with men and boys.

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