

WORKING WITH MEN AND BOYS TO ADVANCE GENDER EQUALITY

IWDA POSITION PAPER ON WORKING WITH MEN AND BOYS TO ADVANCE GENDER EQUALITY

This paper outlines IWDA's position on working with men and boys to advance gender equality. IWDA exists to defend and advance the rights of diverse women and girls and achieve gender equality for all.

IWDA recognises that working with men and boys is an important strategy to achieve sustainable, transformational change towards gender equality and to challenge restrictive and rigid gender roles and identities for people of all genders. IWDA supports women's rights organisations in the Pacific and Asia taking rights-based, intersectional feminist approaches to working with men and boys across diverse geographic contexts and thematic areas. Women's rights and empowerment remain central to this engagement of men and boys for gender equality. This paper looks at why working with men and boys to advance sustainable, transformational change towards gender equality is important and provides key considerations and recommendations for this approach.

WORKING WITH MEN AND BOYS IS AN IMPERATIVE FOR GENDER EQUALITY

Gender equality is necessary to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Over the last two decades, it has been increasingly recognised that it is important to work with men and boys to achieve the targets set out within these goals to advance gender equality^{1 2 3}. Many countries have also ratified international commitments, such as the Beijing Platform for Action (1995) to work with men for gender equality, providing an international mandate for this work to take place^{4 5}.

It is important to work with men and boys to advance gender equality because they are uniquely advantaged by the patriarchal system that shapes the unequal distribution of power and resources between men and women. In its most egregious form, this power within the patriarchal system is expressed through gender-based violence (GBV). Whilst not all men and boys enact their power through GBV, men's behaviours, their relations with women, and their interactions with others exist within a system of patriarchal norms and can perpetuate gender inequalities. To achieve full

gender equality, male privilege and inequitable norms and the beliefs and structures that sustain these need to be transformed^{7 8}.

IWDA supports rights-based, feminist approaches to work that actively involves men and boys. This means that programs with men and boys do not divert attention, funding or power away from women, women's rights organisations and networks or women-focused programming. IWDA and our partners' work with men and boys also takes an intersectional approach, recognising that women and girls are not a homogenous group and experience the impact of gender inequality differently. Factors, such as age, religion, ethnic background, socio-economic status, ability, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex-characteristics impact on women's experiences and the realisation of their rights⁹. Similarly, we recognise that men are not all the same, and recognising their diversity and varying levels of privilege is important when encouraging men to act in solidarity with women to support gender equality¹⁰.

BACKGROUND

Since the early 1990's, significant attention and resources have been devoted to engaging men and boys in work towards gender equality and understanding how this can be done effectively¹¹. The different roles that men can take to support gender equality, and understanding of the effectiveness of these roles has also evolved. For example, men often play the role of gatekeepers, who facilitate women's participation and access to opportunities, or allies and partners. However, engaging men in these roles doesn't necessarily facilitate tangible shifts of power from men to women¹² and women's rights organisations claim that these roles don't fully capture men's responsibility or stake in gender equality^{13 14}. Increasingly, men are being considered as stakeholders and co-beneficiaries, as these roles reflect that whilst men should work to advance gender equality, it is also in their best interests to do so¹⁵.

Work with men and boys to advance gender equality also happens across a spectrum of programming approaches, outlined below. Some of these approaches are known to be more effective than others¹⁶:

- gender-reinforcing approaches, which actively promote the status quo of inequality;
- gender-neutral approaches, which do not engage with or consider gender norms and roles and inadvertently perpetuate the status quo;
- gender-sensitive approaches, which recognise gender norms and roles but do not seek to address them; and
- gender-transformative approaches, which do seek to address gender norms and subject these to critical examination.

Whilst the benefits of working with men and boys to advance gender equality have been widely promoted, progress towards realising the benefits has been uneven with varying degrees of success. In many countries this is an emerging approach and feminist approaches to this work are particularly new. There is also a need for greater evidence about how and why working with men and boys contributes towards improved outcomes for women and changes to the policies and structures that disempower women, beyond the changes to individual men's behaviours and attitudes¹⁸.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Recommendation 1: Governments, donors and development actors should prioritise the inclusion of diverse men from different demographic backgrounds with varying experiences of power and privilege in male engagement work.

Recommendation 2: Governments and donors should ensure that work with men and boys is taken from the project and program level into policy and institutional levels – achieving change requires larger numbers of men and boys to be engaged and changes to the systems and structures that disempower women.

Recommendation 3: Donors should fund longer-term and innovative evaluations of male engagement programs to better understand how these programs contribute to transformational change to advance gender equality (beyond measuring changes to individual men's attitudes and behaviours).

KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR WORK WITH MEN AND BOYS TO ADVANCE GENDER EQUALITY

Whilst work with men and boys is an important strategy for advancing gender equality, there are risks, complexities and challenges associated with this work. These need to be considered to maximise the effectiveness of this approach and to ensure that male engagement programs 'do no harm' to women and girls and efforts to advance gender equality.

1

MEN'S VIEWS ON GENDER EQUALITY

What men think about gender equality, and their role in advancing gender equality, is highly contextual. There is also tremendous variation when it comes to men's ideas of gender equality, highlighting the importance of working with experienced local partners when undertaking this work¹⁹.

For some men, gender equality is an externally imposed agenda that is hostile to men²⁰. Others may view gender equality as a 'women's issue', or lack understanding of the different forms of control male privilege affords them. Others may be reluctant to be involved due to perceived and/or actual male peer pressure. Others may be supportive of the idea, but feel they lack the awareness or tools to advance gender equality. This highlights that training and support must be provided to men to unpack these issues and build their capacity to respond.

Considering the many different ways that men may think about gender equality, and their role in supporting this, one strategy to facilitate their involvement in this work is to incorporate gender equality training into other programs and activities. At the WAVE Male Engagement Workshop in late 2019 IWDA partners in four countries described how including training sessions about women's rights in other workshops that might be more appealing such as leadership, or peacebuilding, was a successful strategy for getting men to attend these sessions. In women's economic empowerment (WEE) programming, changing how men view gender equality and their role in gender equality has proven effective.

Women's participation in economic empowerment activities often changes household dynamics between men and women. This can lead to increased tensions and acts of gender-based violence (GBV) perpetrated by men within couples²¹. However, the IWDA research project, 'Do No Harm' found that actively involving men in WEE programming that aims to shift ideas about gender norms and responsibilities, can change men's ideas about the importance of gender equality and lead to better outcomes for women²².

Men's preconceptions about gender equality and women's rights can affect their willingness to act towards advancing gender equality.

Changing men's ideas about gender equality and their own stake in gender equality can lead to better outcomes for women.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Recommendation 4: Governments and donors should prioritise the central involvement of local organisations and individuals in work with men and boys for gender equality, considering the highly contextual nature of how men's role in gender equality is perceived, and how this can influence the effectiveness of this approach.

2

NOTIONS OF MASCULINITY

Dominant ideas about masculinity and how men should think and behave shaped by the patriarchal system can undermine men's willingness to act in support of gender equality.

A key factor that undermines gender equality is gender-based violence against women and girls (VAWG). Men are the main perpetrators of this type of violence and dominant constructions of masculinity, femininity and power relations shape VAWG at individual, community and societal levels^{23 24}.

However, challenging existing ideas about masculinity can be difficult, as this can be viewed by men as challenging their own sense of self²⁵. Programs that promote positive ideas of masculinity are also not often inclusive of sexuality, transgender and gender non-conforming identities, and continue to employ a heteronormative model of gender relations that can be counterproductive²⁶. Programs which are gender-transformative, promote positive masculinities that are relevant to different cultural contexts and social settings, and which engage boys and young men from a young age have proven to be more effective than other types of programs that aim to prevent VAWG^{27 28 29 30}.

IWDA supports partners in working with men and boys as allies and stakeholders to prevent VAWG where women and girls remain the primary focus of the initiative. We recognise the importance of engaging men, particularly young men, to challenge harmful attitudes, behaviours and gender norms.

This work prioritises the safety of women and girls; explicitly holds men accountable for their violence; is monitored and evaluated to ensure a do no harm approach; and aims to contribute to the emerging evidence base in this sector.

Dominant concepts of masculinity undermine men's willingness to act towards gender equality.

A patriarchal society frames gendered power relations that drive violence against women and girls (VAWG).

Changing concepts of masculinity to include sexuality, transgender and gender non-confirming identities can help to reduce VAWG.

IWDA partner example: The Nazareth Centre for Rehabilitation (NCfR) in Papua New Guinea, through the From Gender Based Violence to Gender Justice and Healing project, successfully built the capacity of male advocates to work with women human rights defenders (WHRDs) on awareness raising initiatives to promote gender equality and prevent VAWG. Male advocates supported the Bougainville WHRDs to lead responses to and prevention of VAWG through working with government and communities to promote shared power and decision-making between women and men. To date, 937 male advocates have been trained over phases 1 & 2 of the project.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Recommendation 5: Promoting positive and healthy notions of masculinity will help to address the rigid gender norms that affect power relations between men and women as well as among men and among women.

3

FRAMING MALE ENGAGEMENT

How the role and purpose of working with men and boys to advance gender equality is framed can influence the success of this work.

For example, when men's engagement is viewed as the primary approach to achieve gender equality, this could reinforce a view that women are vulnerable and in need of men to 'save' them³¹. If men view gender equality work as antagonistic towards them, or feel blamed for other men's actions, they may be less willing to support this work³².

Whilst this can be addressed by framing men as partners in solving a problem, rather than perpetrators, this 'tiptoeing' approach may reinforce male privilege, which ultimately contributes to gender inequality³³.

Similarly, whilst making gender equality messages accessible to men by using language and ideas men are familiar with is important, this can reinforce harmful stereotypes and norms of masculinity and male privilege³⁴. For example, advertising that tells men to 'step up and be a real man' to protect women from violence and harassment reinforces the idea that men are inherently more powerful and capable than women, supporting negative, dominant notions of masculinity³⁵.

Work with men and boys that adopts a feminist approach, where the contribution of men and boys is intentionally framed around supporting and enabling women, can enhance the success of work of men and boys towards gender equality.

How the purpose of men's involvement in gender equality is framed can influence the effectiveness of this approach to contribute towards advancing gender equality.

Framing the work of men and boys towards gender equality with a feminist lens, as work that aims to support and enable women, can enhance the effectiveness of this work.

IWDA partner example: Male engagement in the WAVE program

The Women's Action for Voice and Empowerment (WAVE) program is a women's leadership program supporting feminist movement building in Asia and the Pacific region. In 2019, five IWDA partner organisations in four countries, PNG (VfC), Cambodia (GADC and Banteay Srei), Timor Leste (Alola) and Myanmar (TWO) implemented male engagement projects.

Through these projects, 128 men were formally trained as male advocates who worked with over 3,000 community members to advance gender equality and to advocate for women's leadership and prevention of violence against women and girls.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Recommendation 6: Governments, donors and development actors should ensure that women are involved as active and equal partners in programs that work with men and boys to advance gender equality.

4

ALLOCATION OF RESOURCES AND POWER

It is essential that work with men and boys to advance gender equality does not take resources and power away from women and instead intentionally aims to shift power to women from men. When men speak for gender equality and to other men about gender equality male dominance can be perpetuated³⁶. Men currently dominate leadership positions at all levels of society in most countries³⁷ so engaging them in efforts to advance gender equality in leadership and civil and political participation in particular is necessary. Whilst men in leadership positions can facilitate women's access to opportunities and information, this approach rarely results in tangible shifts of power from men to women³⁸. Furthermore, it can result in men being seen as taking a lead in, and credit for, this work, at the expense of recognising the work led by women towards gender equality.

It is also important that funding allocated to men's support of gender equality does not detract funds from women and women's rights organisations^{39 40}. Work with men and boys to advance gender equality should always be funded separately from, and in addition to, gender equality work led by women^{41 42}.

Aligning the work of men and boys with the leadership and efforts of the women's movement can help reduce the risk that men's voices will dominate and undermine women's voices and power^{43 44}. Evidence confirms that building alliances between work with men and boys and work led by women towards female empowerment can improve the impact and effectiveness of male engagement in this work⁴⁵.

This includes ensuring that efforts to engage men and boys in gender equality are developed and implemented in ongoing consultation with women's rights organisations and groups working to protect women's rights⁴⁶.

Work with men and boys towards gender equality should never take resources, funding, or power away from women.

Men's work to advance gender equality should be funded separately, and in addition to, gender equality work led by women.

Making the work of men and boys towards gender equality accountable to women, women's rights organisations and the women's movement can enhance women's voices.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Recommendation 7: Governments, donors and development actors should ensure that work with men and boys to advance gender equality does not elevate their position at the expense of women, but aims to advance women's empowerment and gender equality outcomes.

Recommendation 8: Governments, donors and development actors should ensure that work with men and boys to advance gender equality does not take resources, funding or power away from women and is funded separately from, and in addition to, work led by women and WRO's.

Recommendation 9: Governments, donors and development actors should seek to build and maintain alliances between men's work for gender equality and the women's rights movements and other social justice movements: the engagement of men and boys in gender equality should be accountable to women and feminist movements.

ENDNOTES:

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