

Reflections on Inclusion of Men in Women's Rights Programmes

GEETANJALI MISRA, VRINDA MARWAH

There is growing consensus that the “crisis of masculinity” needs to be addressed and the focus of interventions on issues of gender and sexuality has to broaden beyond women to include men and other genders.

Interventions aimed at gender justice have traditionally been centred on women and girls. With the emergence of the Gender and Development paradigm over the last two decades, an increasing number of international commitments have been made to engage men and boys in gender equality, including at the International Conference on Population and Development (1994), the Programme of Action of the World Summit on Social Development (1995) and its review (2000), the Beijing Platform for Action (1995), the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (2004, 2009), and the UNAIDS Operational Plan for Action Framework (2009), amongst others (Peacock and Barker 2012). Simultaneously, the focus of some non-governmental development interventions has broadened beyond women, to also include men and other genders.

Many organisations and activists working towards social change and gender justice have increasingly acknowledged, in principle if not always in practice, that women-only approaches can be limited in their effectiveness. This is because gains from women-only programmes may be less sustainable, as men remain the holders and brokers of power in communities. Additionally, we have witnessed in recent years significant changes in the lives of men, such as greater material vulnerability and lesser social security under neo-liberal development regimes, leading to a crisis of masculinity.¹ It is said that this crisis needs to be addressed lest it generates more conflict with women. In fact, a lot of the crisis has to do with women. The direct and indirect challenges to the dominance of men within the household, market and public life are coming increasingly from women, and from activism and action on women's rights.

Men often find it hard to deal with this combined challenge to their traditional protector–breadwinner role. Even as women are less and less inclined to accept the automatic monopoly of men over resources and spaces simply by virtue of being male, men are not better conditioned to share; patriarchy in institutions and cultures remains strong, albeit sometimes in newer forms. The continuum of violence in the lives of women in the contemporary moment is at once pressing, broad-ranging and entrenched. Additionally, with increasing globalisation, fundamentalism and other challenges, women are facing backlash in different forms.

Against this backdrop, it is argued that if men's anxieties are not addressed, the interests of women and children could be further endangered. This could take the form of blockage and sabotage by men of women's interests, or it could result in more male violence and abuse towards women and children. Even when men do not actively interfere, their passivity and lack of involvement can add to women's burden—for instance, women often end up overloaded and exhausted from having to work both outside and inside the home. Furthermore, with respect to issues with sharply gendered causes and outcomes, from violence to health, it is argued that without the inclusion of men, the sole responsibility for change gets dumped on women.

It is also argued that while men as a group do exercise power over women, many men at an individual level may feel powerless in relation to many women, and other men. Like women, men too are not a homogeneous category. All men cannot be said to always be more powerful than all women. Depending on the context and the intersection of his many identities, such as class, religion, sexuality, caste, race, etc, a man may be at several points powerless relative to another woman. The notion of hegemonic masculinity is based on a theory of masculinity that argues that men experience social pressure to conform to dominant and

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Geetanjali Misra (gmisra@creaworld.org) is the executive director of CREA and Vrinda Marwah (vmarwah@creaworld.org) was programme coordinator at CREA from 2012 to 14.

socially valued ideas about manhood (Cornwall 1997). This hegemonic masculinity not only disadvantages women, but also individual men who refuse or fail to conform to its norms. This view sees both men and women as victims of patriarchy; and the logical corollary to this view is that both men and women are potential agents of and challengers to this patriarchy.

Dis/Engagement with Men and Boys

Founded in 2000, CREA is a feminist human rights organisation based in New Delhi, India. CREA works at the grass-roots, national, regional and international levels together with partners from a range of human rights movements and networks, to advance the rights of women and girls, and the sexual and reproductive freedoms of all.

Like many women's rights organisations that have strong links with the autonomous women's movement in India, CREA considers women and girls its primary constituency. Our work with men and boys is usually indirect, or contextually determined. When we work with women and girls on gender justice, we do so with the conviction that they will reach out to the men and boys in their personal and professional lives. This may be seen as "indirect" work with men. Whether and how we reach men directly depends on the nature of the intervention. For instance, CREA conducts annual residential institutes on sexuality, gender and rights at the global level in English, and at the national level in English and Hindi. The SGRI (sexuality, gender and rights institutes), as these are called, focus on a conceptual study of sexuality, and its interlinkages with gender, rights, public health, development, media, etc. Men can apply to the SGRI Global and SGRI India-English, but at SGRI India-Hindi, we invite applications only from women and transwomen. This is because in our experience, the spaces and resources to discuss sexuality with women from grass-roots level organisations, in Hindi, are far rarer, and as such, an all-women institute is seen as safer, less inhibiting and more comfortable. This perception

directly and positively impacts the participation and learning at the institute. CREA members who organise the SGRI Hindi do not yet feel like we have reached a stage where the institute can be opened to men.

However, increasingly in our work with semi-urban and rural communities in North and Central Indian states—Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar²—we have been experiencing the need to directly engage men and boys.

In these relatively recent interventions, it has become clear to us that men and boys form a crucial stakeholder group that can either support or thwart our local efforts. Here, an approach that reaches out to only women and girls is likely to be limited in its impact, and more seriously, can be potentially counterproductive; this is especially true of conversations on SRHR, which, with their focus on consent, bodily autonomy, choice, pleasure and rights, are often perceived as "controversial." In such situations, it becomes incumbent on the intervening organisation to do everything possible to mitigate risk. This has been a significant learning, and has prompted us to think more deeply about how to engage men and boys.

This reflection at CREA is happening rather organically, and has coincided with an external environment where there is increasing conversation on engaging men for women's rights. The strong anti-rape protests in India following the gang rape and murder of a young physiotherapy student in December 2012 saw the participation of many men and boys, perhaps for the first time in so public a way. This was a heartening development, although it did not always take heartening forms. The protests echoed with the arguably masculine demand for the death penalty (in September 2013, the remaining four accused in the case—one hanged himself in prison and one received a reduced sentence as a juvenile—were sentenced to death by a South Delhi court). Furthermore, a lot of the conversation—including by the authorities—has been exhorting men to be "real men" by protecting women and defending their "honour." The radio jingle of the Delhi police women's helpline

that began to be advertised around this time uses this tagline: Real masculinity lies not in harassing women, but in protecting them (*Asli mardangi chhedne mein nahin, raksha karne mein hoti hai*).

Needless to say, aggressive masculinity that looks to valorise and defend women's honour—tied always to their sexual purity and conformity to normative gender roles—is part of the problem, not solution. The post 16 December protests also echoed with the more feminist slogan of "protect women's rights, not their bodies." The distinction between these two slogans, though completely unambiguous and obvious to some of us, signifies an important condition for the work with men, indeed with all work on gender justice, i.e. perspective is key. In the work with men, while there is agreement on the "why," there is less consensus on the "how." For us from a feminist perspective, the two are linked, so much so that we would rather not work with men from a perspective that is counterproductive to women's rights.

It is these considerations that have triggered our thinking around engaging men in SRHR. We have been reading about various interventions and approaches, and speaking with colleagues in CREA, as well as colleagues in other organisations that work on men and boys more directly in India, like the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) and the Centre for Health and Social Justice (CHSJ). While there are other groups that work with men, including some older networks and some newer youth groups, we chose to focus on ICRW and CHSJ because they have a long and close association with CREA organisationally, share our gender and rights perspective, and are well-recognised for their important and influential work with men and boys.

Our interest lies in exploring what a feminist approach to engaging men and boys might look like. This conversation is an ongoing one, and in this article we have flagged some of the themes that have emerged for us so far. We hope this will be the beginning of more conversation both internally and with external actors.

There are many potential costs for men who conform to dominant ideas of masculinity. The rigid societal expectation that men will be financially, physically and sexually in control is not achievable for all men at all times (Harris 2004). The adverse effects of hegemonic masculinity on men are clear and demonstrable; men often feel the need to be “real men” by indulging in risk-taking behaviour; the principal cause of death for young men is violence and traffic accidents, both directly related to how boys are socialised (Barker 2005). In relation to SRHR, men have particular needs and concerns, which merit due consideration and a response appropriate to their situation. For instance, men feel the need to have unsafe sex, and to appear tough and resist seeking healthcare. In the context of HIV/AIDS, the need to work with men and boys on adopting healthy and responsible sexual behaviour is especially urgent. Men also have a role to play in women’s health. They have the power to influence the reproductive health choices of women around condom use, family planning and so on (Peacock 2002). It has been argued that it is in men’s interest to change, not only because they too suffer when other men are violent to their female loved ones, but also because relationships based on equality and mutual respect are more fulfilling rather than those characterised by fear and violence (Peacock and Barker 2012).

Instrumental Approach

For these and other reasons, the “intrinsic” approach to working with men engages men and boys as full participants, for their own sake. Women and girls may form part of this equation, but they are not the end of it. On the other hand, in an “instrumental” approach, men and boys are involved in development interventions for the benefit of women and girls. However, assessing and comparing the merits of each of these approaches is challenging, because relatively few programmes like these have been evaluated. There is not much documentation of when, why, how and to what success programme implementers have brought women and men, and girls and boys together.³ A meeting of experts

organised by ICRW and other partners in October 2010 discussed how best to involve boys in efforts to achieve gender equality. They concluded that even though concerted efforts to engage men and boys have been underway for some time now, approaches that work effectively across multiple contexts, are well evaluated, and can be implemented on a large scale, are yet to be identified (ICRW 2013).

Those working with men and boys point out that the answer to the intrinsic versus instrumental question is not an “either-or,” and lies instead somewhere in the middle of these two approaches. The work of both ICRW and CHSJ with men and boys began with a view to furthering women’s rights. ICRW’s work with men and boys began when they started more ground-level interventions for women and girls. Soon the need to also involve men and boys came in as a reflection from partners, and thus the organisation began to adopt a more complementary approach. As Ravi Verma of ICRW put it in a personal communication to the authors in September 2013:

If you work with men and boys only for the sake of women and girls, you run the risk of alienating them. You will be asked by them—what about us? We are beaten up. We have to prove ourselves at every turn. The process of becoming a man is loaded with fear and violence. Once you see these connections— it is not about one or the other— you start converging the work and the messages.

CHSJ similarly locates the beginnings of its work with men to a campaign by women’s groups against domestic violence in Uttar Pradesh in 2001, and acknowledges how fundamental the engagement with women’s rights activists has been to their strategy and learning process. Reflecting back on their journey today, they remain convinced that their work with men must necessarily remain complementary to work with women, and that its objective must include a focus on women’s empowerment. Amongst the benefits of this approach they count the sharing of domestic responsibilities by men, prevention of early marriage, making women joint owners of property, increased contraceptive use, and the development of more trusting relationships for both men and women (Das and Singh 2014).

CREA’s efforts to engage men and boys stem from a felt need to make the environment of our community interventions more enabling for women and girls, who remain our primary audience. Towards this, we are keen to involve as many players as possible (parents, teachers, community leaders, etc), who influence the lives of women and girls. In communities where programmes are being implemented, boys have begun to ask “What about us?” Sanjana Gaind, of CREA told us (October 2013):

With the use of sports in the community, girls have begun to share the playground with boys. The response to this has been encouraging in some places, while in some other places, the boys have made their disapproval plain. There have been instances of the boys giving the girls a smaller and dirtier field, or deflating the football. So the reaction is mixed, and it is usually the younger boys who are reacting strongly.

This has prompted Gaind and her team to begin including men and boys in their programme, through more regular meetings, as a start. As an organisation, we are trying to be strategic about when to work with men and boys, and women and girls, separately, and when to bring them together. We acknowledge the need for both approaches, depending on the context and content of the intervention, as do many others. The programme manager, Shalini Singh, received feedback about the resistance that EWRS were facing from the male members of the Panchayat in Jharkhand. In light of this, CREA collaborated with CHSJ to organise a training workshop on gender and masculinities with the male members of the Panchayat, who were colleagues of the EWRS in our programme. This workshop has been a positive experience, and more are likely to follow.

In direct implementation of community-level programmes involving men and boys who are important actors in the lives of girls and women, comprises an “ecological” approach for us. This is important for the efficacy, sustainability, and relevance of programmes of this nature.⁴ However, we are also very clear that as feminists we do not want to work with men so they can “save” women. And while it can be argued that most civil society interventions are

instrumentalist insofar as they are outcome-oriented, from a feminist rights-based perspective, an instrumental approach is problematic; a totalising focus on the outcomes, without regard to the politics of the work, should not be acceptable. In fact, when you divorce the “means” from the “ends,” or the politics from the process, it can be counterproductive.

Satish Singh of CHSJ said (personal communication, November 2013),

When you work with men to end VAW, it is important to work on the root cause rather than take an instrumentalist approach. Otherwise, patriarchal norms confer men with the role of the protector, and so men will easily take up the responsibility to protect women from violence. But the root cause, the reason the violence is happening in the first place, is discriminatory power relations. That needs to be highlighted. On the other hand, sometimes even in a seemingly ‘instrumentalist’ intervention, like working with men to improve women’s SRHR, the space can be created to raise the issue of power relations.

This is what makes the “how” of working with men so critical, and brings us to the next question—that of the P word: politics.

Political Perspective of Work with Men

It is not unusual for men to “champion” women’s rights within a framework of a benevolent and protectionist patriarchy. This is not an approach that challenges patriarchy and heteronormativity as much as channels it. It uses patriarchal ideas of women-as-victims to bring in the men-as-saviours. It uses men’s own masculinity for change, by appealing to their role as heads of households responsible for the well-being of the household.

From a feminist perspective, no meaningful conversation on gender is possible without a discussion of power. Recognising men as victims of patriarchy does not mean that men, as individuals or as a class, can now be “let off the hook.” While gender identity is socially constructed, it is also embodied and experienced in the lived reality of individuals and their life choices. We cannot be absolved of complicity in and responsibility for the oppressive ways in which we deploy, consciously or not, our power and privilege along multiple axes. As

Singh points out (personal communication, November 2013):

Men are not poor helpless victims. They have agency and they negotiate their privileges according to their interests. Young men I have worked with do not ask their fathers for permission to have a girlfriend, but when they have to take dowry during their weddings they say they cannot oppose their fathers!

Others have emphasised that notions of men and women being equally vulnerable to patriarchy, and portrayals of men as being worse off than women, are problematic and need to be challenged. Gender inequality must be recognised, first of all, as a system which privileges men and subordinates women (Meer 2011). The work with men needs to recognise how patriarchy implicates them, and make them accountable for it. This kind of accountability is critical, because it confronts the danger of men simply excusing their behaviour as a product of gender norms, rather than examining it in the light of gender norms (Greig 2005). This is truly challenging for any group in power, but without it, no real transformation is possible. How can we systematise the problem in a way that it makes men aware of their role in patriarchy, while also realising that patriarchy is more than the sum of its parts? How do we positively engage men without making them feel either alienated and angry, or guilty and paralysed? ICRW’s Ravi Verma offers a way forward (personal communication, September 2013):

The answer lies in making visible the gains from gender justice, especially for men. Men need to be sensitised to the power in equality and diversity, so they can begin to dismantle the disproportionate power that they hold without feeling a sense of loss, alienation and resentment.

CHSJ in its work uses an intersectional understanding of how power operates, and locates gender justice within a larger social justice agenda. In their trainings with male workers of community-based organisations in Uttar Pradesh, Das and Singh (2014) use exercises and analyses that enable participants to introspect on the role of class, gender, age, caste, levels of education, etc, in determining a person’s autonomy at different points in life. Such an approach visibilises power

flows, and locates power in a continuum of political, economic and social relations and structures, rather than in the isolated and extrapolated instance of the intervention. In the experience of CHSJ, such an approach also helps men become sensitive to communal and caste-based violence, as well as to sexual diversities and rights. Singh explains, in his personal communication (November 2013),

If you do not see the connection between gender and patriarchy, and patriarchy and social justice, you will not see communal violence or sex workers’ rights as important issues... You may end up with a man who has transformed into a caring husband and father, but blames all of society’s ills on Muslims, or the poor. And we do not want that.

Challenging rather than upholding gender stereotypes is an effective way to break out of the patriarchal mould when working with men and boys. There are examples of this approach in the work of rights groups in India and internationally.⁵ Both ICRW and CREA use sports to reach adolescents and promote gender equity. However, doing sports with boys, which is ICRW’s approach, and doing sports with girls, which is CREA’s approach, can have very different implications given how sports and public space is traditionally understood in relation to gender. According to Ravi Verma (personal communication, September 2013),

A sports-based platform for boys I am much less convinced about. It provides a platform, but we have seen how quickly it dissipates. There is a conflict between the sports ideology and the gender ideology, which becomes very difficult to reconcile at every moment. For girls, sports creates a new social space but for boys, they have always used that public space and sports.

It is in these intersections and interactions that power resides as gender. This needs to be effectively highlighted and challenged in our work with men. Verma also highlights how ICRW’s intervention with boys in schools has been far more fruitful. In ICRW’s experience, an institutional approach if well-implemented has the potential to reveal and challenge the operation of power through hierarchies within an institution (even seemingly simple conversations around “why do we stand up when a teacher walks in” can, if skilfully executed, demonstrate

this effectively). Further, institutions can create a conducive environment to support the role models and positive deviants created by such an intervention, as well as sustain the changes in attitudes and behaviours that have been effected. Singh (personal communication, November 2013) also points out that we cannot use the same strategy to work with adolescent boys that we are using with adolescent girls, since their issues are different:

With girls, SRHR, mobility, nutrition, early marriage, education, political participation are issues. We want girls to come out of their homes and claim their rights. We want boys to give up some of their claim to public spaces, and get involved in the home and help with the housework. So the strategy cannot be the same.

Which Men?

An important question to ask in the work with men is who do we include in the category of men? Even the most well-thought through interventions will generate their own exclusions, and while one programme cannot work on everything, it is useful to be aware of the limitations of our work. For instance, family planning interventions—when they are

aimed at men at all—are mainly for married men with children, and then for married men without children. Disabled men may feature as a somewhat distant third-ranked category in this hierarchy. But there are also men who are systematically marginalised from the health system as a whole, such as tribal men or even male sex workers. In fact, given the hold of normative notions, seldom do we imagine the category of men to also include single men, or gay or trans or men with intersex conditions. Gender justice has usually meant one gender—women. This has consequences for our research and programme efforts; for instance, the research on violence against men by other men remains under-addressed (Cornwall and Jolly 2006).

Some exclusions are more difficult to tease out. For instance, one approach to working with men that is considered effective is to use fatherhood as an entry point, and emphasise men's role as fathers (Barker and Ricardo 2005). On the one hand, it is plain to see why this is useful, and is also constructive in the way that emphasising women's roles as mothers would not be—it reverses

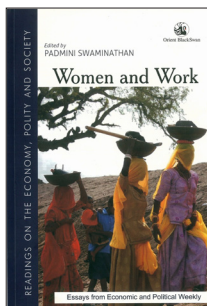
prevailing gender norms of women-as-carers that are usually oppressive, and may benefit women by encouraging men to share care-giving and other domestic responsibilities. According to Das and Singh (2014), men have traditionally controlled the public sphere and allied resources, and have been cut off from nurturing relationships within the home. Therefore, they argue that the work with men for gender justice should emphasise the value of family relationships, even though the women's movement has traditionally called for a reduced emphasis on family and has seen family relationships as essentially constraining.

Further, they also reflect on the recent emergence of some significant themes around their work with men as fathers; CHSJ's community-based intervention as part of the global MenCare campaign aims to build on men's role as fathers to support children's rights. Though this intervention is only a year old, it has already thrown up two important issues around which more conversation and consensus is required—the issue of age of consent (whether, and how much, sexual autonomy is a young person's right), as well as the issue of women's

Women and Work

Edited by

PADMINI SWAMINATHAN



The notion of 'work and employment' for women is complex. In India, fewer women participate in employment compared to men. While economic factors determine men's participation in employment, women's participation depends on diverse reasons and is often rooted in a complex interplay of economic, cultural, social and personal factors.

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right to abortion in the context of a declining child sex ratio (Das and Singh 2014). We see again how a rights-affirming perspective is critical to a conversation on gender justice. Singh also reflects on other challenges of working with men in families, particularly the uptake of vasectomy for men, practising gender equitable behaviour in joint family settings, and standing up against sexual abuse when it implicates a member of the family (personal communication, November 2013).

There is a further question that must be asked here—does this approach involving men-as-fathers have the potential to exclude men who, for whatever reason, are not fathers, thus perpetuating the norm of the heteronormative family? This question is linked to a larger issue; like with women, heterosexual men in families with children are usually the de facto subjects of our imagination and interventions. We may thus end up inadvertently excluding men who are not in positions of power and privilege—who are not fathers, brothers or community leaders, such as sexually marginalised men.

Methodology: Some Additional Questions

Decisions about which men and boys to include in a particular programme—age group, urban/rural, in-school or out-of-school, etc, depend on the goal of the programme, the methodology, the capacity of the organisation, and other such factors. These are important questions, and have a huge impact on the implementation and outcomes of a programme. ICRW believes, for instance, that adolescence holds particular promise for interventions designed to encourage more gender-equitable views and behaviours (ICRW 2013). ICRW's work with boys in schools in India has been planned for an age group (12–16 years) at which boys are seen to be the most receptive. Verma points out that targeting this age bracket makes sense from the perspective of getting boys to question traditional masculinity and adopt more gender-equitable behaviour. For an SRHR-oriented programme, working with a slightly older age group right before marriage would be

more useful. Before marriage, the potential to broaden men's understanding of marriage, and to improve outcomes like contraceptive use, delaying age at first birth, and spacing between births, is high (Ravi Verma, personal communication, September 2013).

Additionally, the question of what kind of indicators to use while evaluating the work with men and boys also remains important to address. The Millennium Development Goals have played a powerful role in shaping the global development agenda, including an outcome-driven approach to evaluations. Within this context, Singh recommends assessing shifts in understanding rather than behaviour, and gives an example (personal communication, November 2013):

To expect a drop in rates of violence against women, after just two to three years of an intervention, is very difficult. In fact in our experience the violence increases. Because pre-intervention when you ask men if they are being violent, they say no. Even the women say there is no violence. So the reported rate of violence is low. But after an intervention of about two years, when you ask the same question again, men say yes. Their understanding of violence, the definition of violence has broadened. It is not just about hitting their wives. They realise that telling the wife to shut up because she doesn't know anything, ignoring her, or chucking food back at her, all this is also violence. The denial of violence is over. So your data will show that there is an increase in violence. But if you go into this more qualitatively, you will find something else. That is why we say the indicator of our success should not be that violence has reduced, but that people have started making violence visible and taking action against it.

Challenges and Thoughts for a Way Forward

The inclusion of men in GAD was not received with enthusiasm from all women's groups. Issues raised by the sceptics have been well summarised by Chant and Gutmann (2000: 270):

... the concern to ring-fence for women the relatively small amount of resources dedicated to gender within the development field, worries about male hi-jacking of a terrain that women have had to work very hard at to stake out, lack of acknowledgement and understanding regarding men as

gendered beings, the pragmatic difficulties of incorporating men in projects that have long been aimed primarily or exclusively at women, and last, but not least, an apparent lack of interest on the part of men in gender and development in general and working with men on gender issues in particular.

Even today, many such concerns have not gone away. We know that as an approach, intersectionality is easier to champion in theory than in practice. As Verma (personal communication, September 2013) puts it,

We want a gender equitable world for everyone, but the fight over resources is very real. Funds are seldom dedicated to men only. Organizations and programs expanding to include men and boys are able to leverage resources for women's empowerment and rights.

Similarly Meer (2011) emphasises the need to be mindful of the ways in which concepts that travel into international development and national bureaucracies become co-opted and are given different meanings (Batliwala 2008). She reminds us that the last few decades have seen women's practical needs (Molyneux 1985), arising from their current gender roles, addressed more than their strategic interests, which entail transforming unequal power relations. She states (Meer 2011: 13):

Gender as a concept was depoliticised—stripped of notions of power, privilege and subordination—and taken to mean 'women and men,' as though these groups were equally affected and had the same relation to the system of gender inequality. That men have a different relation to the gender system from women, that men are privileged by the gender system while women are subordinated, and that men's gender interests may tend in the direction of maintaining their male privilege, were ignored as 'gender' translated into simply 'men and women.'

As men became the new "silver bullet," UN agencies and bilateral donors began to work with men and men's organisations to promote gender equality within development. As a result, not only did donor support shift away from women's movement building, even the safe spaces women had created were under threat as women were pressurised to bring men into their organisations (Meer 2011).

In the context of India today, pro-women laws against dowry and domestic

violence, and more recently against sexual harassment at the workplace and sexual assault, have spurred a sentiment of “men under siege.” These have also created another kind of men’s organising, one that smacks of a backlash against the loss of male privileges. Perhaps this is why, as Messner (2000) says, any kind of “men’s movement” is fraught with danger and contradictions—after all, white people opposed to racism and heterosexuals against homophobia do not form “white people’s movements” and “straight people’s movements!”

This is not to suggest that we advocate a solely identity-driven fragmentation of development work where no one has the right to represent anyone else. Needless to say, that is counterproductive to solidarity and a social justice agenda. However, it is also true that building movements of the affected is a key strategy to achieve social change; as such, women being the subordinated group must lead the struggle for gender equality (Meer 2011). Progressive men’s groups that identify as feminist cannot replace women’s groups, but they certainly can, and must, support each other. As processes for the setting of the post-2015 development agenda are set in motion, donors and governments need to take the politics of men’s organising into account. We need to advance more thinking around the “how” rather than “why” of the work with men.

NOTES

- 1 Declining economic and educational opportunities that prevent men from fulfilling their traditional role of “breadwinners” (especially amongst young, lower income males), and women’s absorption into the labour force in rising numbers that has enabled them to take more control of the household, together create the contemporary context for “men in crisis,” “troubled masculinities,” and “men at risk.” Simultaneously, rising emphasis in social policy on female household heads and the intensification of social problems such as crime and violence have been important corollaries to these trends (Chant and Gutmann 2002).
- 2 These are states marked by low female literacy, increasing poverty, underdevelopment, and high prevalence of violence against women.
- 3 In particular, the appropriateness of combining women and men, or girls and boys in programme activities is mediated by local and cultural contexts. We know that many programmes have found that single-sex groups are a safer and easier space in which to question gender norms without being ridiculed by peers. However, programme evidence also suggests that bringing men and women together at key points is effective (ICRW 2013).

- 4 This is arguably different from a capacity building initiative with civil society actors, or a research, or international/legal advocacy.
- 5 Mexico-based Salud y Genero works to highlight the health consequences of rigid gender norms, and to generate alternatives to hegemonic masculinity. Through workshops and awareness generation, Salud y Genero develops men’s understanding of the relationship between traditional, dominant norms of masculinity—such as risk-taking, lack of involvement in childcare, denial of vulnerability—and men’s shorter life expectancy, failure to form intimate relationships with children and partners, and their negligence of their own mental and physical health (IGWG 2003). Programme H by Promundo, a consortium of NGOs working in Brazil and Mexico, uses messaging in their campaigns that promotes gender-equitable lifestyles, and draws on locally accepted language and idioms to challenge violence against women. In Brazil, their campaign “Hora H” or “In the Heat of the Moment,” uses the common idea that men may hit their girlfriends in the heat of the moment, and turns it around to say “In the heat of the moment, a real man cares, listens, accepts.” The campaign seeks to promote an idea of masculinity that is sensitive to the needs and rights of women (Barker 2005).

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