



MenEngage

boys and men for gender equality

XVII International AIDS Conference
August 2008
Mexico City

MenEngage hosted a satellite session on the 7 August 2008 entitled '**MenEngage: Developing a Global Movement to work with boys and men for gender equality**' at the International AIDS Conference.

Panellists

Chair:

Andrew Levack (EngenderHealth)

Interviewer:

Benno de Keijzer (Salud y Genero)

Speakers:

Ravi Verma (International Center for Research on Women)

Bafana Khumalo (Sonke Gender Justice Network)

Raul Morales (Salud y Genero)

Additional commentators:

Gary Barker (Promundo)

Jerker Edström (The Institute of Development Studies)

MenEngage: What's it all about?

MenEngage came about through a realisation that small scale projects working for gender equity are not enough. What we need to make a real impact is a global movement of men who are committed to women's rights and to:

- End violence and to challenge violent men
- Work towards equitable roles for men in the domestic and caring spheres
- Ensure that sexual diversity is respected and sexual and reproductive health and rights are respected and upheld
- Foster a positive cultures of masculinities
- Enforce international and national laws and policies to improve gender equality

MenEngage is not an NGO or one off project. Nor is it a competitor to women's organisations and networks or their existing work in this area. It is a leadership network that shares resources and conducts policy and advocacy work.

THEMES COVERED IN THE SATELLITE

Overcoming hierarchies in justice struggles

Speakers reflected on the fact that political struggles have often neglected gender equality. For example in South Africa women's liberation was an issue that was relegated to something that would happen after the end of apartheid and other structural changes. This is troubling as it creates hierarchies of discrimination.

Key learning: Struggles for social justice need to be inclusive of women's rights and take a gender sensitive approach.

Working with the women's movement

There are fears that work with men, such as that promoted by partners in MenEngage, will divert efforts and resources from the work of women's movements and take over the feminist discourse. Speakers felt there were no

contradictions between the two areas of work and in fact that they should be mutually supportive. In South Africa, work with men and women has helped men to analyse their 'dangerous masculinities' to the benefit of all. In India a study at community level supported a women's organisation that wanted to work with men. An exclusive men's project was merged with one working with women and the results were evaluated. There was some resistance from the men involved to the process as they didn't want to lose their exclusive forum.

Key learning: Men and women need to work together for gender equality but this is very context specific and efforts need to be evaluated. Empowering men can have unintended negative consequences and this needs to be monitored and addressed.

Tackling homophobia

Tackling homophobia has a central role in work with men. In Brazil work young people in schools allowed the issue of homosexuality to be raised and discussed. This led to a deeper analysis of the problem of homophobia and how negative attitudes are central to the systems of socialising men and boys. In South Africa, despite a protective legislative framework, there are unprecedented levels of hate crime against sexual minorities, particularly in the black community. Projects there have included awareness of homophobia in training materials and worked with the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community for better implementation of existing legislation by the criminal justice system.

Key learning: Tackling homophobia is central to the work of the men's movement and LGBT organisations are key allies.

Work to challenge gender norms

Speakers reflected on strategies for altering gender norms that have worked in their context. In South Africa, the concept of Ubuntu provided a useful entry point to challenge negative norms that lead to women being treated as less than human. Similarly using positive elements of culture, such as the idea that Zulus are

supposed to protect women, provided opportunities to engage critically and reflect on culture. In India work has been developed to support gender-subversive voices and give them legitimacy and space. These 'positive voices' can assist others in analysing their own conceptions of gender.

Key learning: Culture is dynamic and changes over time. Because of this it can provide a useful starting point for challenging negative norms. Men who provide positive dissident views and models need to be supported to work with others within their community.

In his **summary** of the session Jerker Edström of the Institute of Development Studies, reflected on a recent symposium on 'Politicising Masculinities' and, quoting one participant, spoke of a 'feeling of ascendant possibilities against phenomenal odds'. Although we have an uphill struggle to take this work forwards, the session provided positive lessons on what has worked well in terms of men working for gender justice in various settings, posed key challenges for future areas for action and identified new allies. As we move forward this work needs to be evidence based and taken to scale from the personal level to the political.

Areas identified by audience members for future action

- Defining what we mean by positive models of masculinity. Do we need a prescriptive model? What are the alternatives?
- Exploring the links between machismo and negative behaviour against women
- Challenging the movements of men that are being established to fight feminism
- Holding the UN to account regarding violence against women
- Campaigning for the rights of fathers to be involved equally in parenting and the care of children (along with the right of women to have their support in the home)
- Working with men in prison, particularly the perpetrators and victims of sexual assault
- Consolidating the evidence that already exists on the positive benefits of gender equality for men
- Understanding the role of military and criminal justice systems in shaping negative masculinities

For more information please see our website <http://www.menengage.org/>

This summary was written by Kate Hawkins of the Institute of Development Studies with funding from the Realising Rights Research Programme Consortium.