The New Gender Platforms And Fatherhood

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Around the world, men are organising to advance fatherhood by demanding ‘men’s rights’. These campaigns are often understood to be anti-feminist in their politics and obstructive in their attitude to mothers and motherhood. But attempts to promote fatherhood are not necessarily conservative. A variety of organisations have sprung up in the last decade to campaign for more active fathering and more responsible models of fatherhood. This chapter discusses the form that these organisations have taken, the issues that have been taken up and the impact that these campaigns have on constructions of fatherhood.

**HISTORICAL CONTEXT:**

In South Africa, like many parts of the world, gender inequality contains to impede human and social development in dramatic ways. The HIV/AIDS epidemic disproportionately affects women’s lives both in terms of rates of infection and the burden of care and support they carry for those with AIDS related illnesses. Indeed young women are much more likely to be infected than men. A recent report conducted by the University of the Witwatersrand in April 2004 indicates that women make up 77% of the 10% of South African youth between the ages of 15-24 who are infected with HIV/AIDS.

Women’s greater vulnerability to HIV/AIDS is in part explained by the very high levels of sexual and domestic violence reported across the country-some of the highest levels reported anywhere in the world. For instance, almost one-third of sexually experienced women (31%) reported that they did not want to have their first sexual encounter and that they were coerced into sex\(^3\). A recent study of over 1,500 women in South Africa also indicates that “women with violent or controlling male partners are at increased risk of HIV infection”\(^4\).

Women’s economic vulnerability, of course, exacerbates women’s vulnerability to violence and to HIV/AIDS and its associated impacts making it difficult for women to leave abusive and/or sexually coercive relationships. Despite the changes in government and the significant increases in the number of women represented in government, according to a 2003 report entitled “Inequality in South Africa: Nature, Causes and Responses” by Stephen Gelb of the Edge Institute, the gender gap in real wages nonetheless widened substantially between 1994 to 1995, such that women's hourly wage as a percentage of men's dropped from 77.9% to 65.6% in 1999\(^5\). The following figures reinforce just how precarious many South African women’s economic position is. According to Gelb “women’s participation in the labour force is much lower than that for men. In 1995, only 17% of African females were in wage employment, compared with 43% of African men. Forty-five percent of white women were in the labour force, compared with 63% of white men”.

Across the world, there is growing recognition that men’s full and active support is needed to achieve gender equality, end violence against women and mitigate against the impact of HIV/AIDS. Indeed, in many communities across the world men work creatively to end men’s violence, prevent HIV/AIDS and to foster gender equity. In Nicaragua, the Men’s Group of Managua recently launched a national campaign making the connection between Hurricane Mitch

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and increased male violence against women. Their theme: “Violence against women: A Disaster that men CAN do something about” (Peacock, 2000). In India, the Bhoruka AIDS Prevention Project has developed strategies to change attitudes and behaviors amongst truck drivers working on the routes between Calcutta and Katmandu (Rivers & Aggleton, 1999). In Kenya the Male Initiative of the Society for Women on AIDS in Kenya encourages men to support their partners full participation in prevention of mother to child transmission programs. And in Brasil, Instituto Promundo works with young men in the urban slums or “favelas” surrounding Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo to promote gender equitable values and practices. Following upon their 2002 International Campaign entitled “AIDS: Men Make a Difference”, one of the two themes for the 2004 United Nations Commission on the Status of Women was “The Role of Men and Boys in Achieving Gender Equality”.

Many of the initiatives mentioned above draw upon three interconnected principles, each related to an understanding of the many negative ways in which the unequal balance of power between men and women plays itself out. Firstly, contemporary gender roles are seen as conferring on men the ability to influence and/or determine the reproductive health choices made by women—whether these choices be about utilization of health care services, family planning, condom usage or sexual abstinence. Secondly, contemporary gender roles are viewed as also compromising men’s health by encouraging men to equate a range of risky behaviors—the use of violence, alcohol and substance use, the pursuit of multiple sexual partners, the domination of women—with being manly, while simultaneously encouraging men to view health-seeking behaviors as a sign of weakness. Such gender roles leave men especially vulnerable to HIV infection, decrease the likelihood that they will seek HIV testing, and increase the likelihood of contributing to actions and situations that could spread the virus. Thirdly, men are seen as having a personal investment in challenging the current gender order both because it is in their health interests to do so, and also because they often care deeply about women placed at risk of violence and ill-health by these gender roles.

The remainder of this paper seeks to answer the question: What efforts have been made in South Africa to involve men in promoting gender equality, ending violence against women and playing a more active role in reducing the spread and impact of HIV/AIDS?

PROMOTING CONSTRUCTIVE MALE INVOLVEMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA

In the 1990’s South Africa experienced an unprecedented high level of violence against women and children. What made this type of violence peculiar was that women together with men were in the forefront for the democratization of this country. It shocked and paralysed South Africans from all walks of life. People asked themselves Why now?, What can be done?, Can our society afford to sit back and fold its arms in the face of this brutalisation? Can we watch the fruit of our democracy go to waste? There was consensus as to what needs to be done. There was a rallying cry that men’s involvement was crucial if we were to stop our society from sliding into anarchy.

Young babies were being raped at an alarming rate and in some instances they were brutally killed. Names such as Mamokgethi in Katlehong who was raped, killed and buried in a shallow grave comes to mind as one of the stories that shocked all and sundry. A man who raped her was known to the innocent girl and her family. It is the trust that this man betrayed which angered and mobilized the local community into doing something concrete about her death. Baby Tshepang a six month old from Kimberly was brutally raped by six men who were known in neighbourhood. It is such horrific inhuman incidents that were viewed as an indictments on all men especially those that were quiet, aloof and indifferent towards the cries of women and children. The irony of it all was that men and women mobilise and galvanised each other towards redefining what manhood, fatherhood and masculinity was all about in the face of this unexplained brutality.
Different strategies and approaches have been developed to involve men actively in ensuring that stereotypes that have guided and defined men are challenged and re-defined as a means towards archiving and egalitarian society. It is this effort by other men that have debunked the myth that all men are homogenous. These developments are testimony that not all men are violent by nature but they are victims of how they themselves were socialised by a system that encouraged and promoted violence and a way of life.

South Africa has seen some men taking the issue of gender equality as seriously as they took the struggle for the liberation of the oppressed masses. In an interview conducted in 2000 and excerpted in “Building on a Legacy of Social Justice Activism: Enlisting Men as Gender Justice Activists in South Africa,” Farid Esack, former Commissioner of the CGE in the Western Cape and a prominent Muslim theologian gave voice. He said that the comparisons between the anti-apartheid struggle and the struggle for gender equality clear saying, "There isn't a problem of women. In the apartheid years (people) spoke of a black problem and there wasn't a black problem. There was a white problem. And so there isn't a women's problem. Men are sitting with the problem. Of course it becomes a women's problem. Women are quite literally the victims of all of this in the multifarious, insidious, all pervasive forms of violence against women. So women do end up with problems. But women aren't the problem. If we do not address issues of men and men's violence against women, and machismo and male insecurity and the question of masculinities as opposed to a very oppressive, homogenous understanding of a man we will really be sitting with problems eternally."

Men’s involvement in efforts to promote gender equality, end violence against women and define healthier and more responsible models of masculinity have taken many forms. One of the earliest and most visible public manifestations of these were the various men’s launched since 1997 and which have drawn thousands of men out onto the streets in a public repudiation of male violence. Attended by men from all walks of life, these marches have represented the public face of dozens of other initiatives across South Africa that strive to bring about a major shift in the social norms that jeopardize the health and safety of women and men, girls and boys, and society in general.

Since the first men’s march organized by ADAPT, the South African NGO Coalition (SANGOCO) and the South African Men’s Forum in 1997, both government and civil society have demonstrated considerable commitment to increasing men’s involvement in efforts to promote gender equality, end gender based violence, promote responsible fatherhood and increase male involvement in HIV/AIDS related prevention, care and support activities.

The issue of fatherhood and paternal responsibility has more recently become the focus of considerable attention. Many young fathers are rejecting notions of fatherhood and manhood that have for many years put them in a box and decided how they should be “real men”. There is a groundswell of support among men regarding the breakdown of patriarchal practices that demean women. Most men have embraced the emancipation of women as part and parcel of their own emancipation from oppressive societal expectations of how “men” behave or should ideally be. There is support for men who propagate dogmatic abusive practices in the name of culture and some masculine practices. The tide has indeed turned against the meaning and interpretation of rigid fatherhood and manhood as understood by forebears.

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The following descriptions of initiatives currently underway across the country provide evidence of that commitment. The organizations and initiatives listed below were designed to address and interrogate men’s power, patriarchy, culture, religion and the violation of women’s human rights in a new democratic dispensation.

GOVERNMENT:

Government in South Africa, whether at the local, provincial and national level, has an important role to play in supporting constructive male involvement.

- In his inaugural speech this year, President Thabo Mbeki made his personal commitment to gender equality and to ending discrimination against women clear. He said, “as we engaged in struggle to end racist domination, we also said that we could not speak of genuine liberation without integrating within that the emancipation of women… No government in South Africa could ever claim to represent the will of the people if it failed to address the central task of the emancipation of women in all its elements, and that includes the government we are privileged to lead.” Days later President Mbeki added substance to his speech by appointing an unprecedented number of women to his cabinet and to four out of nine provincial Premiere’s offices. In making clear his commitment to gender equality, President Mbeki, as a man, set an important example to other men that men have a pivotal role to play in supporting gender equality and women’s political, economic and social empowerment.

- Across a wide range of government departments and structures, at the local, provincial and national level a number of initiatives are either already in place or planned within the next few months to encourage men to play a more constructive role in society.

The Office on the Status of Women:

- The National Office on the Status of Women has played an important role in drawing attention to the need for government to promote men’s active and constructive involvement. Prior to attending the Commission on the Status of Women at the United Nations, the National OSW convened and facilitated a consultative meeting with key leaders from organizations working to promote gender equality and to increase constructive male involvement. The proceedings of this meeting then informed the countries positions at the CSW.

- In addition, the National OSW invited key leaders from the field of constructive male involvement to present their work to the National Gender Machinery meeting in February of 2004 and, based on this input, encouraged the formation of a national task force on constructive male involvement.

- In late May of 2004, the OSW again convened a meeting of key stakeholders including senior representatives from National Departments and from civil society to discuss the formation and mandate of a National Task Force on Constructive Male Involvement. A working group was selected to develop a concept paper to be presented at an NGO meeting of the NGM in mid June. Few countries in the world can boast of the existence of a coordinating body of this sort.

- Each of the nine provincial Offices on the Status of Women have made commitments to promoting constructive male involvement. In Gauteng, for example, the provincial OSW will hold six dialogues across each of the regions of the province to which they will invite 150 men in key positions of leadership within government, the private sector and civil society to
discuss and make specific commitments to promoting constructive male involvement and, in so doing, supporting women’s rights.

The Commission on Gender Equality: is a constitutional body established by the commission on gender equality Act39 of 1996 to support democracy. Its constitutional mandate is to promote, protect and monitor gender equality in South Africa. The CGE is committed to creating a society free from gender discrimination and any other forms of oppression, a society were people shall have the opportunities and means to realise their potential regardless of gender, race, class religion, disability or geographic location. It also has as part of its mandate men’s program as part and parcel of bringing societal gender equality. Its men’s program is operated in all the 9 provinces. Together with the South African Men’s Forum, the Moral Regeneration Movement and the National Council of Churches, the CGE has recently launched a series of dialogues entitled “Unmasking Patriarchy” which explore men’s roles and responsibilities in achieving gender equality.

The Department of Health’s Men in Partnership Against AIDS (MIPAA)

In October 2002, under the slogan "South African Men Care Enough to Act", a National Men’s Imbizo was held bringing some 400 men together from around the country to bring awareness to the need for men’s involvement in HIV/AIDS. At this meeting, an Interim National Task Team was elected as a first organizational step towards the formation of a broad-based countrywide men’s forum. Coordinating the responses of the men’s sector is considered paramount to developing effective strategies in the four priority areas identified in the HIV/AIDS and STD Strategic Plan for South Africa (2000-2005):

- Prevention
- Treatment, care and support
- Human and legal rights
- Research, monitoring and evaluation.

Based on outcomes of the Imbizo (see South African Men Care Enough to Act: Report on the National Men’s Imbizo on HIV/AIDS, 2002) the decision was made to further engage the men’s sector through a series of consultative workshops at the provincial level. Through the establishment of provincially-coordinated men’s networks, MIPAA has mobilised men in each of the countries 9 provinces and, earlier this year, organised a series of regional men’s marches culminating in a national men’s march in Durban in late March. Provincial workshops are planned with the aim of providing men with an opportunity to develop coherent plans to guide their actions as individuals, as groups, and as partners with other sectors.

CIVIL SOCIETY

Civil society organizations in South Africa working to promote constructive male involvement are some of the most active and successful of any in the world. Indeed, South African civil society organizations are increasingly called upon to provide guidance to other initiatives emerging across the world. Representatives from civil society in South Africa have advised the The Commonwealth Secretariat Gender, HIV/AIDS & Human Rights Programme, were selected to participate in the Expert Group Meeting convened by the UN to develop global strategies on “reaching men and boys to achieve gender equality” and were well represented on a number of panels at this years United Nations Commission on the Status of Women.
At an organizational level, in communities across the country, in trade unions and faith based organizations, within houses of traditional leadership and within CBO’s and NGO’s, many innovative programs are working together to promote men’s involvement. Of these, some organizations like Men for Change, the Men as Partners Programme and the South African Men’s Forum have as their primary focus reaching men. Other’s like the trade union federations and affiliates or faith based organizations have only more recently begun to include a focus on men. Still others like the House of Traditional Leaders are relatively new to conversations about men and gender equality but are of vital significance given their positions of tremendous influence especially in rural communities.

Civil society organizations are engaged in a wide range of activities across many different sectors. These include:
- Media based advocacy work
- Community based workshops and community mobilizations
- HIV/AIDS education in high-risk communities and areas such as the transport industry, mining hostels, inner city communities
- Policy change within faith based organizations, trade unions, and the private sector
- Dialogues with key male leadership within the public sector and civil society
- Debates and door to door campaigns with school aged youth
- Popular Theatre in venues where men congregate
- Partnerships aimed at shifting social norms with representatives from the sports and entertainment industries.
- Policy change and awareness raising with institutions of tertiary education

Space constraints prevent a full description of all the constructive male involvement work currently being done across the country. A few examples of some of the better-established and more comprehensive programs illustrate the richness of these initiatives though.

**AGISANANG DOMESTIC ABUSE PREVENTION AND TRAINING**

was established in Alexander by MATSILO MOTSEI who argued that in order to stop violence against women, a man’s role was a must. Alexander like any other black township on South Africa is fazed by high rate of unemployment, homelessness, domestic violence and ADAPTS programs such as “ADOPT A FATHER”, “BEST FATHER COMPETITION”, “MENS PRISON PROGRAMME” all seeks to address the role that man can and should play in bringing about a violence free society. It men’s programs continues up to today of offering various and diverse services involving counseling and mentorship on what the modern man should be to his children and his entire family.

**The Five in Six Project and the Everyday Hero Campaign:**

The Cape Town based Five In Six project was named for the five men out of six who some calculations suggest are not violent with their partners. Consistent with their vision of engaging men as part of the solution by offering men both an opportunity to end the violence and to reconnect with their own humanity, the Five in Six Project launched a campaign in 1999 that attempted to enlist men as “everyday heroes” uniquely situated to end violence against women. In it’s Everyday Hero campaign, Five in Six attempted to educate men about the price all men pay when some are violent, and articulate their vision of men as vital and willing allies in the struggle to end violence against women. Five in Six attempted to saturate the popular media with posters that encouraged readers to nominate a man they viewed as an everyday hero. Their poster read ‘Five in six men want to stop domestic violence. That’s an overwhelming majority… We’re asking you to give [them] a decisive thumbs up in the form of a poem or letter, the most inspiring
to be published in the Cape Argus. Go on give that man in your life exactly what he deserves. Recognition”. From posters like these, some posted in supermarkets and corner stores, Five In Six received 50 000 “everyday hero” nominations. Most often written by women, by girlfriends, wives, daughters and sisters, but also by sons and brothers, and usually handwritten on notebook paper, these thousands of pages bore testimony to men who in their everyday lives are seen as allies in the struggle to create a non-violent South Africa. Five in Six staff and volunteers then wrote letters congratulating each “everyday hero”, and visited those nominees who lived in or near Cape Town. There they encouraged men to organize neighborhood based groups to whom they provided training with the hope that each of these groups would engage in activism to create communities that guarantee safety and justice for women and girls

The Gender, Education and Training Network (GETNET):
GETNET was one of the first training organisation in the voluntary sector to initiate men's gender training. GETNET’s men's training programme aims to enable men to play a positive role in organisational and institutional change. GETNET’s perspective emphasises that transformation of the power relations between women and men flow from partnerships between women and men. Currently GETNET continues to play a critical role in promoting dialogue about constructive male involvement through the convening of conferences and workshops.

Men for Change was conceptualized by Thulani Nkosi initially operating from Alexander. Its programmes include the “Pheza” campaign which takes the form of Marches, training workshops, to highlight the brutalisation of women by men and how men can be brought on board to stop this scourge. Men for Change has spread its activities in Mpumalanga Province. It also offers counseling services to both men who were either perpetrators or victims of violence.

The Men as Partners (MAP) Network:
Developed and coordinated by EngenderHealth and PPASA, the Men as Partners Network comprises of nearly 30 member organizations working in most of South Africa’s nine provinces. These organizations vary in size and scope. At one end of the spectrum, MAP Network partners include large national organizations such as the AIDS Consortium, Hope Worldwide, PPASA, the South African Men’s Forum, the Solidarity Centre and their trade union partners COSATU, FEDUSA and NACTU. At the other end of the spectrum, MAP partners include small, local CBO’s and NGO’s reaching men, women and youth in communities across Gauteng such as Youth Channel Group in Tembisa, Sabelani Life Skills in Thokoza, HIVSA based at Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital in Soweto and the Township AIDS Project also based in Soweto.

Using a variety of different strategies, all MAP collaborating organizations are involved in reducing the spread and impact of HIV/AIDS by encouraging men to take a stand against violence against women and to become more involved in HIV/AIDS related prevention, care and support activities. Across the country, thousands of men participate in weeklong MAP workshops every month usually expressing a passionate commitment to gender equality and to reducing risk behaviours by the end of the week. To ensure that this commitment endures organizations within the MAP Network provide men with ongoing support and a menu of possible activities for community based constructive male involvement. Currently the MAP Network is developing an Action Kit to be used by men in local communities and is exploring a range of sustainable livelihood strategies to keep men involved.

An interview conducted with MAP educators in 2001 captures the commitment and struggles of many men involved in promoting gender equality. Boitshepo Lesetedi, MAP Coordinator at PPASA, puts it this way: “I realized it was impossible to work around issues of gender when you haven't started with yourself, because I was carrying my own baggage, and own myths and
stereotypes. So it became more of a way of life than work, realizing how much freer I could be when I don't have to be doing what has supposedly been men’s role”. MAP educator Patrick Godana describes his involvement in the following way: “I am a casualty of the past. I come from a violent family, a violent society that has impacted my life. Being involved in MAP work has helped me to understand what is it that is human (and allowed me) to see the beauty of life, I must say. And it has helped me with my family and my extended family as well- to challenge my grandparents, to challenge my brothers and sisters so they understand the fullness of life.” Steven Ngobeni captures the tensions inherent in the work but speaks to the commitment he brings to it. He says, “My challenge is, you know I am a Christian, and I am known to be a Christian in my area. So when I stand up and challenge these things, being a man, I’m seen to be a rebel and I am no longer respected as a Christian. People look at me and say: if he is a Christian how can he talk like this ... how can he do things like this. So, it is a challenge, but I think at the same time it is an achievement because I remember last year we had a workshop in Pietersburg and we invited one of the pastors who we knew was holding onto those old traditional and cultural values and we tried to show him both sides of the coin. The other day in church he stood up and spoke openly about these things and even invited us to come to address the church. I realized that there is room for change, but we need to stand up and talk even when people criticize us. At some time we are going to see some fruits”.

The South African Men’s Forum
Dr Bongani Khumalo in 1997 made a clarion call to all men in South Africa to “restore the soul of the nation”. As a consequence of this the South African men’s forum was born. During its launch he said this “the prevailing negative trends in our society, the status of men as a common denominator in crime and violence, and the moral slideaway which is threatening the soul of our nation makes it imperative for all of us to get involve as men to be agents of change”. Its purpose since its inception is to mobilise, galvanise men and boys regarding mindset change and bringing about equality. It has the following programs:

- **The Youth Mentorship Project** encourages young boys to challenge destructive gender related stereotypes and addresses boy’s emotional and value systems.
- **The Religious Men’s Guilds Project** in various churches seeks to challenge religious stereotypes in their defining the role and place of women in religious contexts. The program engages religious leader’s commitment and their understanding of patriarchy and its negative consequences on women and their development in the christian family.
- **The Sheebeen Project** hosts men’s conversations in shebeens and taverns focusing on a monthly basis on various topics such as Rape, alcohol and violence in the context of gender based violence.
- **The Schools Projects** by the Men’s Forum is geared forward engaging boys on what it means to be a father and a men, and also what are challenges in parenting and the role that fathers can play in creating “The new boy” and the “new men’ who will be caring and compassionate as opposed to extolling and promoting virtues of violence and abuse.
- **Men’s Marches**: The men’s forum has since its inception conceptualised and organised men’s marches throughout the country which was symbolic in making the point that: Abuse of women is as much a man’s problem and therefore it can only stop if men become active advocates in opposing it. The marches have highlighted and put into sharp focus, the critical

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role that men and fathers should and can play in effectively dealing with violence against women and children.

- **The Media Project** in the men’s forum which is run in collaboration with GenderLinks is geared towards addressing gender stereotypes in the media by writing letters to the editor, as well as columns intended to promote debate about issues relating to men and power and the general gender imbalance. The media has shown its preparedness to partner with civil society in mobilising men.