Working with men and boys for gender justice: How do we generate change?

Key insights from discussion workshop
Stockholm Gender Forum, 16 April 2018

Organized by MenEngage Alliance members and partners

The Stockholm Forum on Gender Equality, which was initiated by the Swedish Government and took place from 15-17 April 2018, brought together civil society, activists, governments, private sector and academia from all over the world to foster collaboration and intensify efforts for a gender equal future.

MenEngage Alliance hosted a session entitled, ‘Working with men and boys for gender justice: How do we generate change?’. This interactive session opened with a diverse spectrum of contributions from MenEngage Alliance members - including Abhijit Das (CHSJ India, MenEngage Global Co-Chair); Marina Pisklakova-Parker (Center ANNA, Russia); Pamela Saavedra (Fundacion Cultura Salud/EME, Chile); Vidar Vetterfalk (MÅN – Men for Gender Equality Sweden) was a forum for exchange and debate on how work in this area can be transformative, and avoid the risk of reinforcing gender injustices.

The following notes aim to capture the points were shared by many of the 50 delegates who attended the workshop at the Stockholm Gender Forum 2018. They are summarized below (anonymously) in the order they were raised during the event.

Key points of the opening panel speakers:

• By using an intersectional lens in working with men - including class, caste and religion - it can help men understand how privilege and subordination work in their own experiences, which then build the ground for them to understand gender-based subordinations.

• We have to engage men from small acts in the home, to public actions. Men who report improved relationships after having been part of an intervention targeting them, put these improved relationships to work for public action – for example holding other men or institutions to account in case of sexual harassment or abuse.

• Meet (young) men where they are, in spaces where masculinities are shaped: schools, sports-clubs, health-centers. Fatherhood is also a relevant entry point to talk with men about rights, empowerment and gender equality.
• Work together with women’s rights organizations and feminist groups to shape the interventions with men, as well as in the implementation.
• Do not take away the space, visibility, voice and recognition of women and women’s rights groups: expand their space through the entry points we have.
• Men have to speak to and work with other men. Peer-peer learning is a powerful tool. (Reminder from panel this morning: women do not need men to save us, we need solidarity!)
• There is opportunity in current increased interest in feminism, including among young men. There is also a risk that this becomes shallow or a hollow phrase, and men may not act in line with feminist principles in all aspects of their lives (for example: public activism vs. private abuser).
• It is crucial to work with men on deeply understanding the workings of power, privilege and patriarchy, and internalize women’s rights/gender equality/feminist values. Understanding needs to be developed that the personal is political and vice-versa. Do regular value clarifications with men and boys, on an ongoing basis, to make sure they have internalized the messages.
• Data collection, monitoring and evaluation are valuable tools to assess pre- and post-intervention attitudes and behaviors. These have shown some promising results in working with young men and boys.
• Partnerships are crucial, in this and all our work: with women’s rights organizations and feminist groups, with governments /states to fulfill their obligations to meet their citizen’s needs, partnerships with private sector can be meaningful to reach people at large scale with new messages (transforming masculinities through public campaigns) but they can be tricky if they stay superficial (reminder of this morning: the economy needs to work for the people).
• Masculinities are culturally constructed, and countries are very diverse. Work with men (and all work) should be contextualized, relevant to each socio-cultural context. We cannot copy-paste what works in one context and assume it works in another. Need to work with local organizations to shape the local interventions.
• We need spaces where we can learn from each other (such as this) but also opportunities to shape the work in our own contexts.
• Important to invest in prevention, child-care, education: train professionals in sectors such as health-care.
• Create safe spaces for men, where they can listen to each other, and listen to women’s experiences too. Listening helps create understanding. Should always be gender-synchronized, bringing women and men together.
• Funding and support for engaging men and boys shouldn’t be siloed on its own, but seen as part of advancing women’s rights and gender justice work.
• How to make men in business gender-aware. But we also to work beyond reform, to revolution. More men need to step-up speaking on issues.
• Start with male allies, then men who are on the fence. After that we can reach out to men who are on the defense or hostile.
• Deal with men who are in resistance, where does it come from, understand it?
• Feminism should not become a hollow phrase. By making it personal, it can help people understand what it’s about.
• Need to challenge power structures at every level: family, community, state.
• Missing in this Forum is discussion on neo-liberalism. The actors here are champions on gender equality, but at other levels such as in economic matters they are some of the actors with most power and using that in ways that is reinforcing patriarchy: exploitations of people
through growth-based economic model feeding the economy rather than peoples well-being, militarisms (military-industrial complex), climate change (extraction of resources), migration.

What do we want to recommend to governments and/or donors?

Considering Sweden’s Global Strategy on Gender Equality will be launched tomorrow, and it will include engaging men and boys:

- In a *global* strategy on gender equality, we should address white men in power, the power in the North. It is a global strategy, so we have to look at our own contexts too. For Sweden specifically, Sweden sells the most weapons to non-democratic countries: that has to be addressed
- When engaging men and boys, it is not about developing men’s movements and marginalizing the women’s movement. Do not support the build-up of parallel men’s rights movements.
- Who is going to lead this work, where will the resources be put? Allocations of resources need to be done very carefully.
- Majority of funds should go directly to women’s rights organizations and feminist groups. Rather than to big organizations and UN agencies.
- Organizations should never be forced to work with men and boys by donors.
- Has it been described what *differences* the engagement of men and boys is going to make? The objectives need to be clear and the pathways to reach there. It cannot become stand-alone work.