

THE STOCKHOLM FORUM ON GENDER EQUALITY

WORKING WITH MEN AND BOYS FOR GENDER JUSTICE: HOW DO WE GENERATE CHANGE?

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OVERVIEW

Organisations and initiatives that engage boys and men as active partners and allies in women's rights and gender justice efforts are proliferating. With the increasing attention to engaging men and boys, the conversation has shifted from the 'why' to the 'how'. How do we ensure that this work contributes to realising women's rights and feminist agendas? How can it be transformative and not reinforce gender injustices that we ultimately aim to eradicate? How do we generate participatory, meaningful, and sustainable change? In this interactive workshop, worldwide members from MenEngage Alliance shared the approaches they have adopted to involve men and boys in the transformation of social norms to achieve gender equality.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Where are we?

- Feminist activists are engaging men and boys into the women's rights agenda.
- To become feminist activists, men need to break many internal blocks they have from culture and stereotypes that are still strong. Patriarchy is often embedded in traditions and languages.
- It's painful and difficult for men to realise their own privileges.
- There is an increasing attention from donors and organisations regarding this issue.
- Some women's organisations are sceptical about the alliance between men and women fighting together against gender inequality.

What are we doing?

- We are engaging men and boys to be a part of the feminist movement and we are making sure that this doesn't lead to confrontation within the community. We are using the strategy of working together with women organisations to limit competition.
- We go where young men go, for example to healthcare centres. We also work with men who are going to become fathers and with student communities.
- We are working against sexual violence.
- We are transforming patriarchal systems.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Where do we go from here?

- We need to create safe spaces for men where they can exchange experiences with both men and women. It's important for women's organisations to work with men rather than risk losing men to organisations with similar ideas but without a gender equality agenda. We also need to engage men and boys but not empower 'men's movements'. Women's organisations should, however, never be forced to work with men and boys.
- Working with countering patriarchy as a structure, we need to go beyond merely engaging individual men and boys. We need to challenge power structures and discuss economic issues behind the problem. It needs to be a revolution and not only reforms. More men need to step up and talk about gender equality issues.
- When it becomes 'cool' for men to be feminists, we need to make sure that those men are really feminists, not just trend followers. We also need to use value qualification and educate what feminism really means.
- We need to work with men in resistance, tracing and indicating the reasons for this resistance.
- If we can't work on the level of policy making, we need to work in the field of awareness and information. We also need to use community change to make changes on a policy level. There needs to be more investments into childcare, prevention and education.
- The allocation of resources should be done carefully. Because of the shrinking space for women's movements, we need to ensure that there is core funding for women's rights groups, and seed funds for new ideas. We need to prioritise this to be accountable.
- We shouldn't assume that the situation regarding gender inequality is the same in all countries.
- Sweden launches a global strategy on gender equality that includes engaging men and boys.
- Gender-mainstreaming problem: Sida only supports gender mainstreaming at operational levels, but not in the content of the work, which then doesn't challenge the gender unequal norms and cultures that are prevailing in the organisations it supports. If you put engaged men and boys as a 'mainstreaming' strategy, there is a big risk that this work will not be done well, as long as capacities are not strengthened on why and how to do this meaningfully so that it contributes to women's rights, feminist struggles, gender justice and ultimately to transforming patriarchy. ■

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