

**51st session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women
26 February to 9 March 2007**

**Interactive dialogue to evaluate progress in the implementation of
the agreed conclusions on
The role of men and boys in achieving gender equality**

2 March 2007

Moderator's Summary

1. At its 9th meeting, on 2 March 2007, the Commission on the Status of Women held an interactive dialogue to evaluate progress in the implementation of the agreed conclusions on “The role of men and boys in achieving gender equality”, adopted by the Commission at its forty-eighth session in 2004. The interactive dialogue represented an innovation in the work of the Commission, designed to strengthen its role in following up on the implementation, at the national and regional levels, of agreed actions in respect of priority themes. The dialogue opened with two keynote speakers: Gary Barker, Executive Director, Instituto Promundo (Brazil), and Aminata Toure, Officer in Charge of the Gender, Culture and Human Rights Branch, United Nations Population's Fund. Dicky Komar (Indonesia), Vice Chairperson of the Commission, moderated the meeting. An issues paper prepared by the Division for the Advancement of Women provided the framework for the discussion.
2. Participants noted that progress had been made in implementing the agreed conclusions on “The role of men and boys in achieving gender equality”. Some countries had incorporated attention to men and boys in their policies and programmes on gender equality and ensured their active participation in implementing activities. A group of researchers located in different countries had started a three-year project of comparative research and policy analysis to identify good practices. In one country, the national machinery for the advancement of women had trained government officials, policy-makers and the general public on ways to engage men in promoting gender equality, and fostered closer coordination within and between civil society and governmental efforts in these efforts.
3. Since gender inequalities originated in the home and continued within the school system and in the community, efforts had been made to sensitize men and boys on gender equality and the rights of women and girls in those settings. The need to educate boys in their early childhood – their formative years - was stressed. Among initiatives reported, school curricula had been revised to eliminate stereotypes associated with traditional gender roles that were seen as a root cause of violence against women and girls and their unequal access to education, the labour market, and political and public life.

4. Creative public information campaigns with positive messages targeting men and boys on attitudinal and behavioural change had been carried out, often involving men in positions of influence, such as fathers, religious and traditional leaders, heads of media companies, politicians, sport coaches, and other public figures and celebrities. Some awareness-raising activities targeted men in the police, the army and the judiciary and many campaigns had been successfully carried out through commercials, soap operas, TV and radio dramas. Education through peer groups—mixed-sex groups and single-sex groups—had proven effective in several countries, particularly at the local community level. In one country, a network of religious leaders had been created to address sexuality, family planning and reproductive health.

5. Many participants reported on legislative measures, policies and programmes that supported a reconciliation of family and work life for women and encouraged men's involvement in family responsibilities. Legal measures included the right to paternity leave, shared custody and care of sick children. While in several countries parental leave schemes had led to an increase in the number of men taking leave, in others only limited progress had been noted. A number of countries had made parental leave for men mandatory to ensure that fathers would play a more active role in child-rearing. One strategy to increase men's utilization of parental leave, which had had some success, involved the provision that a certain period of leave would be lost if not taken by fathers. Other initiatives discussed to increase men's involvement the development of disaggregated time-use surveys on household work and training on gender-sensitive parenting.

6. Participants noted that many countries had carried out specific activities to engage men and boys in combating violence against women and girls. Some countries carried out campaigns within the context of the "16 Days of Activism against Gender Violence Campaign", including activities that highlighted gender-based violence as a violation of the human rights of women. Efforts had been made to enhance the capacity of legislators, law enforcement agents and health practitioners in dealing with cases of violence against women and girls in a gender sensitive manner. It was reported that specific counseling services set up for male offenders had led to behavioural change. Initiatives reported on combating gender-based violence included theatre group performances in schools as a form of peer education engaging both boys and girls. It was noted that traditional gender stereotypes – which sometimes led men and boys to resort to violence as a way to demonstrate their manliness – were not static and could be changed through programmes promoting alternative forms of masculinity.

7. In combating human trafficking and the sexual exploitation of women and girls, efforts had been made to address the objectification of women and girls and the demand side of sexual exploitation, through awareness raising campaigns and peer-to-peer programmes focused on men and boys. Much more work needed to be done in this regard and it was noted that internet companies, advertisers and the media should be involved in these efforts.

8. Initiatives had been undertaken to engage men and boys in eliminating harmful traditional practices, such as female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C), early marriage, and dowry-related violence. Programmes on FGM/C addressing parliamentarians, community leaders and the general public had led to positive change, including the adoption of laws banning FGM/C and the introduction of alternative rites of passage. Peer group education projects had been carried out to raise awareness on the risks of early marriage for girls.

Awareness raising programmes had been conducted to gather support for the abolishment of dowry.

9. Interventions to increase the responsibility of men and boys for sexual and reproductive health included the provision of sex education in both formal and informal settings, family planning services, promotion of condom use, and diagnosis and treatment of sexually transmitted infections, such as HIV/AIDS. An innovative project involved collaboration with barbers who distributed condoms and information material about HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases to their clients and conducted basic condom training courses. Participants noted, however, that many men were still reluctant to take greater responsibility for reproductive health – often because their own specific needs were not met in reproductive health centres. Ensuring that sexual and reproductive health services became more ‘male-friendly’, including by changing attitudes of health care providers and hiring male staff, was critical to progress in this area.

10. In many countries, governments worked closely with civil society organizations to eliminate violence against women and girls and prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS, including men’s organizations, such as ‘Men for Change’, ‘AIDS stops with me’. Some participants noted government efforts to engage the private sector in promoting the involvement of men and boys in promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment in the workplace, including by providing budget incentives to employers who supported the balancing of family and work life.

11. While stressing the positive results that had been achieved through interventions carried out to involve men and boys in achieving gender equality, participants noted that most of the initiatives had been small-scale efforts, reaching only a small number of men and boys, and had been implemented by/with non-governmental organizations, often without the engagement of other important stakeholders. The need to scale up initiatives to achieve broad-based change was highlighted. Political will was also identified as crucial in creating an enabling environment for men’s and boys’ involvement in achieving gender equality. Multi-stakeholder partnerships, involving policy makers, the business sector, non-governmental organizations, media, and universities, had to be fostered.

12. Increased attention should be paid to sensitizing men and boys in schools and universities where girls were often subject to harassment and abuse by male students and teachers. Creating safe spaces at school was critical to ensuring girls’ equal access to education and high levels of achievement. Education modules on gender equality and the human rights of women and girls for both students and teachers, and establishment of severe punishment for teachers and students who discriminated against or abused girls, were raised as essential in a comprehensive approach to address the problem.

13. The need to find appropriate and effective ways to relay messages to male youth, for instance through public figures and celebrities, was highlighted. Participants, however, cautioned against the selection of ‘mentors’ or ‘role models’ whose attitudes and actions could be interpreted as perpetuating stereotypes.

14. Participants noted that activities involving men and boys in achieving gender equality had rarely been evaluated. It was crucial to monitor and evaluate such initiatives for their impact, as well as to identify the potential for replicating them and a wider scale or in other contexts.

15. Skepticism about engaging men and boys in programmes aimed at promoting gender equality still existed in many quarters. To alleviate the concerns on the part of women's movements, it was noted that any increase in focus on men and boys and their role in achieving gender equality should not be at the expense of efforts targeted to women and girls by detracting attention from or diverting resources away from such initiatives. Resistance from men was often due to the existence of a patriarchal system, stereotypes, the desire to maintain power over women, the perception of gender equality as "women's business", and the belief that gender equality issues were not important to economic development.

16. Participants noted, however, the high costs associated with unequal power relations, and the benefits that men would derive from a more gender-equal society. It was highlighted that developing alternative forms of masculinity, which included responsibilities for the care of children and the possibility of choosing non-traditional studies and careers, would benefit men as well as women. Alternative forms of masculinity would also contribute to creating a less violent society. It was therefore crucial to build on successful initiatives aimed at changing gender norms, clearly articulating the potential benefits that both men and women would gain from gender equality.

17. Participants also stressed that adequate resources should be allocated for all gender equality programmes, those specifically targeting men and boys as well as those targeted to women and girls, including those carried out by women's groups and organizations.

18. Participants expressed appreciation for the opportunity to review implementation of the agreed conclusions on "The role of men and boys in achieving gender equality" through the interactive dialogue, as part of the new working methods of the Commission, and thanked the keynote speakers for their insightful introductions and contributions to the discussion.