

POLICY BRIEF

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QUICK FACTS

- In the Beijing Declaration adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women (1995), governments expressed their support for encouraging men to participate fully in all actions towards gender equality.
- The Southern African Gender Protocol Alliance Network has recently incorporated a men's cluster into its work.
- For ten years Gender Links has been committed to a region in which women and men are able to participate equally in all aspects of public and private life in accordance with the provisions of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Protocol on Gender and Development.

Men and masculinities

Many of the targets in the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development mention both women and men. Whether about gender equality in government, access to treatment for HIV and AIDS or representation in regional media, men continue to play a key role in the advancement and empowerment of women. This policy brief will highlight the role of men in gender discourse at the global level before looking at the SADC region and the work of Gender Links in particular. It will then examine the ongoing debate about the role of men in the fight for gender equality, both within women's movements and civil society. Finally, some key themes around masculinity and its impact in relevant sectors of work will be analysed.

Introduction

Two questions form the basis for this policy brief:

To what extent has the shift from a Women in Development (WID) to a Gender and Development (GAD) approach helped unravel the complexities of gender and identity and their implications for implementing gender-aware development policy?

How, then, should men and masculinities be addressed by Gender Links in attempting to mainstream gender in research, planning, policy and practice?

Men should be involved in efforts to better women's health, economic and social status. Some men's behaviour and attitudes limit women's lives. But societal structures and expectations that lead men to their actions must also be addressed alongside helping men understand how they can benefit from changing their behaviour. Ultimately, to achieve more equitable relationships, men's and women's beliefs about their roles in society need to be questioned and analysed.

Global context

For more than 18 years the United Nations has called for the need to engage men and boys in attempts to achieve gender equality. In 1994, the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD, Cairo) affirmed the importance of involving men in improving sexual and reproductive health, and emphasised the need to increase men's involvement in the care of children. The ICPD Programme of Action calls for leaders to "promote the full involvement of men in family life and the full integration of women in community life," ensuring that "men and women are equal partners."

Similarly, the 48th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in 2004 affirmed the ICPD and went further, recognising that men and boys can and do make contributions to achieve gender equality. CSW urged governments to adopt and implement policies to close the gap between women and men in terms of occupational segregation, parental leave, and working arrangements to encourage men to fully participate in the care and support of others, particularly children.



Trevor Davies, Director of the African Fathers Initiative, discusses the role of Chiefs and Headmen in caring for orphans and vulnerable children with Chief Chiveso from Bindura District, Zimbabwe

In the Beijing Declaration adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women (1995), governments expressed their support for encouraging men to participate fully in all actions towards gender equality. The Declaration emphasised that equal sharing of responsibilities and a harmonious partnership between women and men were critical to their well-being and that of their families.

The Beijing Platform for Action (1995) also emphasises the role of men and boys in achieving gender equality, including the principle of shared power and responsibility between women and men at home, in the workplace and in the wider national and international communities. It identifies gender stereotypes as a major obstacle to the attainment of gender equality and contains several strategies specifically targeting men and boys, including policies and programmes on changing stereotypical attitudes and political will and commitment at all levels.

Many of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), adopted by world leaders in the year 2000 and set to be achieved by 2015, for achieving key health and development indicators, focus on achieving gender equality and improving women's lives. An analysis using 12 indicators to measure progress on the MDG priorities (ICRW, 2008) shows that clear advances have been made in empowering women, especially in education and increasing women's political representation in national parliaments and local governments. But progress in other areas that require engaging men – reducing violence against women, increasing women's income relative to men's, and reducing gender inequalities related to the care burden – has lagged.

Regional context

Gender relations are historically dynamic. Present tensions around issues such as globalisation, economic crises, poverty and the political challenges of accountable, responsive and clean governance are all highly gendered.

This is especially true in the SADC region, where women have often been told to “defer” their own goals in struggles for gender transformation in times of great revolutionary change (mainly by male revolutionaries and subsequent Heads of State). Gender has been portrayed as a “side-issue” – to be dealt with later – when of course gender equity is highly central to the resolution of all the above issues.



A Shangaan father is presented to his daughter in a traditional ceremony. Many cultures celebrate fatherhood positively and we need to build on good practice and indigenous knowledge in parenting.

The adoption of the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development means gender equality is no longer being deferred. However, it is imperative that Southern African women and men continue to work together to pressure SADC governments to meet the 28 binding targets of the Protocol.

Gender Links policy and practice

In Gender Links, the incorporation of men and masculinities in past and present work is reflected in several ways:

- **GL's founding analytical framework** is based on the recognition that women and men have different and overlapping gender roles, and access to, and control over, resources and needs. Women and men may experience different inequalities (based also on age, class, ethnicity, race, religion, ability etc.) and hold different views of femininities/masculinities. Most of these are conditioned historically by male privilege.

- **GL's activities** in research, policy, training and advocacy at all levels do not focus on men or women separately but on the relationships between them and how gender roles and relations are experienced and valued differently by both men and women. This includes women's and men's views on aspects of masculinities and femininities. It also means helping both men and women to build their capacities to transform unequal power relations and other human rights deficiencies.
- **Involving men** (at many different levels in GL's work) is crucial to changing gender relations and improving women's lives. GL's strategic decisions as to whether, and how, to address women and/or men in transformative gender and development policy and practice is constantly under review and discussion.

Gender Links has pioneered and participated in the leadership of numerous initiatives on gender-related themes, specifically in the African context. Its advocacy and lobbying has helped generate powerful policies and legally-binding instruments such as the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development.

In all its work Gender Links has benefited from the insights and involvement of both women and men. Important programming initiatives undertaken by Gender Links have seen men play significant leadership and consultancy roles. Areas of work such as HIV and AIDS, creating media policies and regional networking can only succeed with the strongest commitment of both sexes to gendered change. GL's internal recruitment, promotion, and staff well-being policies have been deliberately crafted to be non-discriminatory.



The Minister of Women's Affairs and Gender in Zimbabwe, Olivia Muchena, welcomes the involvement of Padare/Enkhundleni Men's Forum on Gender at the launch of the 16 Days of Activism Against GBV in Rusape, Zimbabwe.

GL recognises the importance of incorporating an examination of "men" and "masculinities" into its work because transformative analysis of negative gender norms still remains largely invisible, unexamined and under-theorised by many involved in work on gender equity.

Debate in the women's movement

There is increasing realisation by many feminist scholars and activists that gender mainstreaming cannot be addressed by female development professionals only – as was largely the case under WID.

However, one of the consistent challenges for politicising masculinities positively within the GAD framework is to find new ways of engaging men with feminist and women's movements across a divide that is felt quite keenly in many vital contexts. There are explicit tensions over funding, values and civil society territory coming to

the forefront of important strategic and tactical decisions about how to keep the concerns of women in the front line of work within a GAD framework.

Women's organisations say they feel the pressure from donors to accept more male involvement in their work on gender-based thematic areas. Many resent this and feel it to be a donor-led, top-down imposition. Donors, for their part, point to an increasing global evidence base that in some important areas of work – particularly around GBV, sexual health, reproductive rights, and HIV and AIDS – there are important signs that male engagement can demonstrate impact in reducing "toxic" male behaviours.

Many women activists feel that hard-fought-for, valuable "gendered" spaces that increase women's voices are in danger of contracting and being overwhelmed by the increasing presence of men in gender work.

There is much confusion about what are "women's spaces" – which of course must be strenuously defended – and what constitute "gendered spaces". Some men feel an obligation and a right to also share these gendered spaces, engaged in debates and action on gender.

The "men as problem, women as victim" discourse also continues to hold singular sway in gender and development work. This is often without much textured analysis of patriarchy, masculinities and, in particular, the domination/subordination of men by other men and its manifestations in the many forms of violence (war, genocide, familial violence, homophobia and crime) and the HIV and AIDS pandemic.



J. Nkai from Legal Resources Foundation (LRF) in Zimbabwe helps a woman at a legal clinic in Gweru

This is the conflicting and contradictory policy arena which Gender Links inhabits – one driven by fears about the dilution of the feminist and women's agenda and anxieties over the diversion of limited resources away from women's empowerment initiatives and back into the hands of men.

Only through dialogue can these negative binaries of "men versus women" be discarded in favour of more nuanced approaches to ensuring the goal of gender equality. Harnessing its historical experience in

working with men at the personal, organisational and the political level, Gender Links is helping to bridge this divide.

It is imperative, therefore, to mobilise to strengthen women's rights and agency and strive to include gender in the agenda of wider social movements. This can be done through forging alliances between different groups working for human rights, gender equality and social justice. The struggle for gender equity and transformation is not a diversion from other struggles, but is complementary and indivisible. This will involve both men and women sharing their objectives and respecting each other's aspirations and priorities.

Different masculinities

In most African societies men enjoy the benefits of male privilege but they also share with women experiences of disenfranchisement, indignity and subordination as a result of diverse and persistent political, social and economic oppressions. Because of this many men may not see themselves represented in the "gender and development" discourse's image of the all-powerful male. Power relations cannot be categorised easily in a rapidly changing world.

Dismantling patriarchy is no longer seen by all men as a win-lose proposition. They look to the history and experience of the feminist and women's movement to inspire them in their own struggles.

Gender analysis of African masculinities exposes the myth of a singular African masculinity. African men are represented in all their diversity – straight and gay, white and black, urban and rural. Deeply embedded stereotypes can also be broken down and men can be viewed as caring husbands and fathers.

Africa's colonial past, patriarchal cultural structures and a variety of religious and knowledge systems has created fragile masculine identities and sexualities that may seem strong but can also be paradoxically imprisoning for many men today.

Some emerging themes in work on men and masculinities

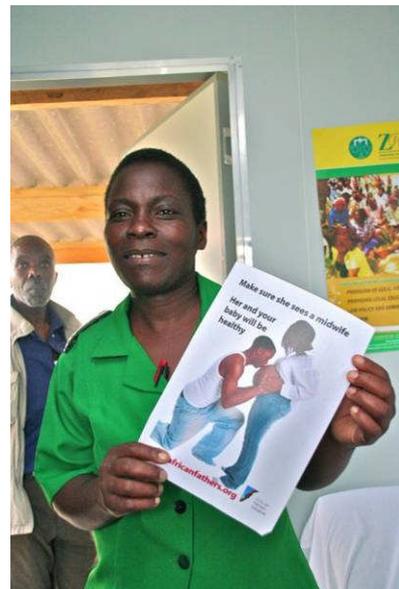
Sexual and reproductive health rights

Addressing the sexual and reproductive behaviour and health of men is imperative: The more informed and effective men become in living safer sexual and reproductive lives, the better it will be for their partners and children.

Men need and often want reliable and accessible information and services to help them lead healthy sexual and reproductive lives, but they are short-changed in this regard, especially in developing countries.

Broadening primary health care services and providing more information to meet men's needs for medical and counselling services would demonstrate responsiveness to the vital interdependence that exists between men's wellbeing and that of their partners, children and societies.

For example, infertility problems are often blamed on the woman in a relationship but evidence shows that up to 40% of problems can be traced to the man. Most are treatable but advice and support services to men are rare. Conflicts over infertility can lead to increases in GBV and relationship breakdown.



A nurse in Rusape Hospital, Zimbabwe holds a poster produced by the African Fathers Initiative (AFI) as part of its efforts in the Campaign for Accelerated Reduction in Maternal Mortality in Africa (CARMMA).

A recent study by Family Health International (FHI) on family planning services in Malawi showed that out of all other factors, good communication between couples was what ensured most women sought family planning.

Gender Based Violence

Boys and men are the main perpetrators of violence—against women, other men, and themselves. New research is indicating the importance of understanding how men and boys are socialised and what they need in terms of healthy development.

In the past few years there has also been increased recognition of how men and boys are negatively impacted because of rigid constructions of masculinity. This includes higher death rates for men: from traffic accidents, suicide, and violence, as well as higher rates of alcohol and substance use.



A scene from the play *Rituals* about how rape and sexual violence is deliberately used in political repression

Many men's behaviours—whether negotiating with partners about abstinence or condom use, caring for the children they father, or using violence against a partner—are rooted in the way they were raised. In many settings, men and boys may learn that being a "real man" means being strong and aggressive and having multiple sexual partners. They may also be conditioned not to express their emotions and to use violence to resolve conflicts

and maintain their "honour." Changing how we raise and view men and boys is not easy, but it is a necessary part of promoting healthier and more equitable communities.

Fatherhood

Responsible, committed and involved fatherhood is an essential component of any attempt to transform families and societies into new norms that better reflect gender equity, child rights and shared parenting responsibilities and enjoyment.

Gender inequality is at its most powerful in the home, where it can also be hidden. Therefore positive fatherhood plays an important part in challenging the intergenerational transmission of damaging stereotypes and power relations.

HIV and AIDS

Worldwide, the behaviour of many adult and adolescent men puts them and their partners at risk for HIV. On average, men have more sexual partners than women. HIV is more easily transmitted sexually from man to woman than from woman to man. Engaging men more extensively in HIV prevention has a tremendous potential to reduce women's risk for HIV.

For many men worldwide, sexual experience is frequently associated with initiation into manhood. Men may experience peer pressure to be sexually active and have multiple partners in order to prove that they are manly, which increases their risk of exposure to HIV.

In many settings, only a small number of men participate in HIV services (voluntary, counselling and testing, anti-retroviral treatment or preventing parent to child transmission). This is due to a variety of reasons, including limited access to health services and the common perceptions among men that clinics are “female” spaces and that “real men” do not get sick or do not participate in health care.

Gender norms also place a disproportionate burden of HIV and AIDS-related care on women. Men generally do not participate as fully as women do in caring for children or for family members with AIDS.

Way forward

Gender Links seeks to contribute to current understandings of masculinities and, more broadly, their role in transformative work on gender and the advancement of women in Africa. It strives to address the need for a regional, comparative, and interdisciplinary dialogue about gender across Africa.

Gender Links notes that the institutional landscape around masculinities is at last changing to one in which it can find valuable partners to dialogue with. Sonke Gender Justice, for example, was only formed in 2006. A Memorandum of Understanding between Men Engage and UNIFEM on jointly tackling work to reduce GBV was only signed in 2008 and the first Men Engage Africa network has only been

formed since 2009. In 2008, the African Fathers Initiative was formed (with help from the Gender and Media Diversity Centre (GMDC) – a flagship project of Gender Links). In 2011, Gender Links helped incorporate a men’s sector cluster into the work of the Southern African Gender Protocol Alliance Network.



Fathers can do much to stop the intergenerational transfer of negative stereotypes in their relationships with their daughters and sons

These organisations have elevated the work around individual men’s behaviour change through workshops, trainings and community education programmes. This work has given a much deeper recognition of, and commitment to, societal campaigning and advocacy for

gender justice in our societies. Mobilising men to engage in broader struggles for gender justice is now firmly on the agenda.

A series of questions can now be explored by gender-based and also explicitly women and men’s organisations.

Next steps

One logical starting point for Gender Links is to evaluate how existing government and donor policies affecting its work implicitly or explicitly talk about men.

- What policies have already tried to engage men in achieving gender equality?
- What exists and where are the gaps?
- Are men changing their attitudes and behaviour as a result of these policies?
- What are the practical strategies needed to promote men's greater mobilisation around gendered structural inequities and injustices?

A clear imperative may emerge from this questioning: the need to promote, re-orient and politicise existing work with men on gender from workshops and trainings to organising men for gender-inclusive social change.

This would entail:

- consciousness-raising on structural issues around gender inequality;
- mobilising men to campaign for changes in government policy, the legal justice system, and corporate practice to deal with gender inequity;
- capacity-building and gender sensitivity awareness for men as activists, and
- training, including on partnership building between gender partners and on the functioning of social movements.

Gender Links will continue to work with men in existing social and gender movements, and encourage men in the private and the government sectors to take on concerns and actions around gender equality and social justice in their work.