

**“Men as Partners in Promoting Gender Equality and Good Governance”**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper is on the topic: "Men as Partners in Promoting Gender Equality and Good Governance". The information is based on years of experience in working and promoting gender equality as a man. It is to share the experiences, frustrations and challenges that one had to go through because of certain perceptions and stands, adopted discreetly by female counterparts and colleagues working in the same field. The main thesis is that men can work on gender equality issues, once they do not take lead initiatives or become leaders in the cause of work. That it is the prerogative of women to lead the gender equality "struggle", because it is a space reserved exclusively for them; any man coming near is regarded as intruding. The above attitude is debunked as being very dangerous and discriminatory because it excludes fifty (50%) percent of the human race taking initiatives and providing committed and dedicated leadership to solve a global menace. Arguments will be put forward as to why women and men should work together equally for the betterment of society; that it is totally unacceptable to put a lid on what men can do; how far they should get involved in the gender equality movement and to what extent they can provide leadership in the process. Evidence is given of the complex social relationships and mixtures of interest between women and men should be taken into account. The paper ends by stressing the fact that in the final analysis, it is how far work had been done to counteract and negativity in society, as relates to gender equality and not individual or organizational ego. There should be conscious efforts to promote men and women working as individuals or in partnership to overcome the harms of gender inequality, while at the same time, being conscious of risks this may entail. All the above is to ensure that in the long run, gender equality will promote good governance.

## INTRODUCTION

In many countries, there is growing interest in the question of men's role in fostering gender equality. The gender dimension of development is about what men and women do. The United Nations Conventions and Declarations such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA) and its subsequent declaration, the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, and World Summit on Social Development are some efforts to look at the impact of development on both women and men. It seeks participation of and benefit-sharing of both men and women in and from development. Involving men in promoting Gender Equality is therefore considered as an indispensable element of Good Governance. This is due to the reason that most of the gender injustices against women are largely committed by men's practices, attitudes and perceptions and as a result it is appropriate that they are actively involved in the solution. Notwithstanding this effort, there are some growing concerns among women of the risks posed by men and their participation in gender related works.

According to a UNIFEM Report (2008), good governance must inevitably lead to a more equitable world, where men and women have choices and their rights are realized. It cannot be effective if there is no understanding of the differing needs of men and women in public spending, policies, legislation and treaties. Nor can it be effective if women and men cannot exercise their right to participate equally in the decisions that affect their lives. In essence, good governance cannot be effective unless it is gender-sensitive (UNIFEM 2008).

Gender issues inevitably also involve men. Although men are mostly considered as perpetrators of gender injustices, there is still good reasons to engage them in policies and programs aimed at building gender equality. In recent times, there are programs carried out to engage men in areas of sexual and reproductive health, violence prevention, parenting, education among others. (Flood: 2008).

It is within this content that this paper discusses the issue of male marginalization as negative to gender equality and good governance and argues out the reasons for the engagement of men in gender issues. It also identifies some shortcomings, limitations and challenges in gender equality and good governance with regard to the current state of female dominance. The paper concludes by providing avenues, possibilities and potentials for the way forward.

### **What is Governance?**

Civic engagement has long been of interest to scholars who study how citizens participate in civic and political processes. People all over the world no longer want to be mute spectators or silent partners in today's Public Administration. They want to be a part of decision-making and resource-sharing processes in public governance right from policy formulation to programme implementation (Rattan, 2009). To this end, civic engagement is identified as a critical tool for achieving gender equality and good governance. This is because all issues of gender equality and good governance have to do with people, and these people, on the ground and involved in advocacy work, can be found in civil society. So without civil society engagement, efforts at gender equality and good governance at

whatever level will be lopsided. Undoubtedly, civic engagement involves people and has to be done by both men and women working together.

Governance has been given diverse interpretations by various scholars. According to the UNDP, it is the 'exercise of political, economic, and administrative authority in the management of a country's affairs at all levels.' The World Bank also defines governance as the 'traditions and institutions by which authority in a country is exercised for the common good and this includes the respect of citizens and the state for the institutions that govern economic and social interactions among them.' (McCawley, 2002; Malena, 2006)

Yet, governance often refers to decision-making by a range of interested people, including those in positions of "power" and "ordinary citizens" (Brody, 2009). These decisions have a huge impact on the ways in which women and men lead their lives, on the rules they are expected to abide by, and on the structures that determine when and how they work and live. It is important to focus on gender and governance as civil society strives for social harmony. Women have often been excluded from decision making, starting from the household to the highest levels of government. Women's equal participation in governance is therefore an important end in itself. This encompasses the recognition of their right to speak and be heard. This phenomenon, viewed within a broader social context, is a means to social transformation. Governance institutions shape perceptions of the roles that women and men play in society, as well as determining their access to rights and resources (Brody, 2009). The involvement of women in defining these policies and processes is critical to the overall goal of gender parity within society.

In its work in the field for the past fifteen years, the Gender Development Institute, Ghana has that men play a “huge” and dominant role in the processes that lead to gender inequality. Some of the activities which perpetuate this notion are not far-fetched. Some examples include:

- Most sexual and domestic violence in the home and work places are caused by men
- Men end up grabbing all available leadership positions by all means possible without recourse to fairness and equitable distribution.
- Men are used to asserting chauvinistic tendencies in a bullying and defiant way within society.
- Men refusing to accept equality within societal institutions and providing some space for others. (Flood, 2008)

Given all the above and in many situations, where men have taken the lead role resulting in discrimination and oppression, one would assume that by natural extension, men would be equally involved in looking at possible solutions. But unfortunately, they are not. Why this is so, is a big question, and should this remain so?

I believe strongly that the situation should not be so, and men should get much more involved in issues of gender equality leading to good governance. This is because without gender equality, the tenets of good governance, such as reduced poverty, more equal, democratic and corruption-free societies cannot be realized. Governance should promote social justice and gender equality, and further the realization of the rights of all citizens.

Gender sensitive governance is important if governance is to be effective at all levels, and in all situations. This raises compelling questions.

- How can governance be effective if it does not lead to a more equal society where women have choices and their rights are respected?
- How can governance be effective if it does not take account of and respond to the differing needs and priorities of women and men in public spending, policies, legislations and treaties?
- How can governance be effective if women are unable to exercise their right to participate in the decisions that affect their lives?

Due to the persistence of widespread gender inequalities that disadvantage women, and the limited availability of resources for gender-related work, the tendency for women leaders to monopolize the space for gender work may have good reason. Again, the quest to achieve good results quickly, by focusing on women alone, rather than also incorporating men in gender policies and programming may be understandable, but rather a dangerous move. This is because the gender inequality issue is a **SYSTEMIC ONE**. It is not the work of any individual man or woman, but the cultural and societal **SYSTEM**, which through a process of socialisation over time has worked and still works for the benefit of some men and some women. It is a power-game and we should look at it from that angle. From a historical perspective, it has been noted that no oppressive system has been truly defeated without the involvement of the oppressors - example during Apartheid and the Slave Trade. So in order to fight this **system** of gender inequality, it is my conviction and assertion that men should be very much involved in the work of promoting gender equality. Including men will be critical to the successful realization of

gender equality. There is compelling rationale for engaging men positively to transform gender relations. What are some of the rationale for this engagement?

## **REASONS TO ENGAGE MEN IN GENDER ISSUES**

Michael Flood (2008) gives four reasons for engaging men in gender issues.

### **Men are Gendered, not Generic, Citizens**

The impetus for male inclusion in gender-related work is associated with an important shift in how gender issues are conceived and addressed. Men have always been part of the policies and practices of development work, for example, but they have traditionally been treated as generic and ungendered representatives of all humanity. When we assume that men speak for all members of their communities, we perpetuate masculine norms and gender inequalities. It addresses men as gendered beings who participate in gender relations.

A “women in development “ approach – characterized by a focus on women in both analysis and practice, the creation of separate organizational structures for dealing with women, and the development of women-specific policies and projects- dominated development works in the 1970s and 1980s. The subsequent shift to a “gender and development” approach over the last two decades embodies a shift toward a more overt focus on gender relations and an aim of creating structural changes in male-female power relations. While this approach continues (ideally) to address women’s experiences and societal situations, it also situates these in the context of the social and power relations between men and women (Chant and Guttman, 2000)

Men are unavoidably involved in gender issues (Connel, 2003). Most immediately, men (or more accurately, specific groups of men) control the resources required to implement women's claims for justice. But, more broadly, gender inequalities occur; in the complex webs of relationships that exist at every level of human experience. Men are as implicated in gender issues as women, and addressing men's attitudes and roles is a crucial element in reconstructing gender relations and equality.

### **Many Men Maintain Gender Inequality**

Engaging men is necessary though for a more direct reason: to achieve gender equality, many men's attitudes and behaviors must change. Men often play a crucial role as "gatekeepers" of the current gender order through their responsibilities as decision-makers and leaders within their families and communities. They may participate in sexist practices and maintain unjust gender relations by perpetrating violence against women, controlling women's reproductive and familial decision-making, limiting women's access to community resources and political power, or espousing patriarchal beliefs and norms that allow other men to engage in such actions. More broadly, patterns of gender injustice are tied to societal constructions of masculinity and male identity. In some parts of Ghana, as elsewhere, notions of male strength and authority, and female weakness and untrustworthiness are prevalent; "real" men are expected to exercise control over their wives. Including men in gender work is necessary because gender inequality is intimately tied to men's practices, identities, discourses, and culture. Fostering gender equality requires change in these same areas.

Conflict and post-conflict societies provide a blunt example of the need to challenge men's perpetuation of gender inequalities. Perhaps the most brutal instance of this is some men's use of violence against women. Men's rape and sexual exploitation of women in war and conflict are widespread and well documented (Greenberg and Zuckerman, 2006). Armed conflicts and political upheavals often entrench gender inequalities and create new ones. Indeed, policies adopted as part of post-conflict reconstruction may exacerbate these. Post-conflict policies and programs must encourage men's adoption of gender-equitable identities, behaviours, and relations. For example, in post war Democratic Republic of Congo, there had to be special programs to get men involved in post war rehabilitation and better gender relations.

### **Men have a Stake in Fostering Gender Equality**

Gender work with men has also been fueled by the more hopeful insight that men have a positive role to play in fostering gender equality. There is growing recognition that gender inequality is an issue of concern to women and men alike and that men have a stake in ending gender inequality.

Some men are already living in gender-just ways: they respect and care for the women and girls in their lives, and they reject traditional, sexist norms of manhood. And some men already are playing a role in fostering gender equality. Individual men in trade unions and government organizations have been important advocates for women's rights. Small numbers of men are engaged in public efforts in support of gender equality, in such fields as violence prevention, HIV/AIDS prevention, and education.

Some men are capable of recognizing that they and their communities will benefit from reducing the civil and international violence associated with aggressive constructions of masculinity and patriarchal nation states. Indeed, there is evidence that gender inequality does more than merely harm women's status and livelihoods; it increases the likelihood that a nation state will experience internal conflict in the first place.

### **Excluding Men is Detrimental to positive Change**

Given that women already interact with men on a daily basis in their households and public lives, involving men in the renegotiation of gender relations can make interventions more relevant and workable as well as create lasting change. Male inclusion increases men's responsibility for change and their belief that they too will gain from gender equality, and can address many men's sense of anxiety and fear as traditional masculinities are undermined.

Many men receive formal and informal benefits from gender inequalities, including material rewards and interpersonal power. At the same time, men also pay significant costs, particularly to their emotional and physical health. More widely, men can be and are motivated by interests other than those associated with maintaining gender privilege. The following are some of the reasons men may support change toward gender equality:

### **Personal Well-being**

Men suffer heavy personal costs for conforming to dominant definitions of masculinity. For example, current gender roles in South Africa compromise men's health by

encouraging them to engage in risky sexual behaviours as part of being “manly” and to see health-seeking behaviours as a sign of weakness.

### **Better Relationships with Women**

Men live in societal relationships with women and girls- their wives and girlfriends, sisters, daughters, mothers, aunts, friends, colleagues and neighbours. and “the quality of every man’s life depends to a large extent on the quality of those relationships.” Many men hold high hopes for their daughters’ futures, care for their sisters, value their mothers, and disapprove-(at least privately) of male peers’ abusive treatment of their wives and girlfriends. Therefore it is in their interest to teach their males to treat women better.

### **Community Well-Being**

Gender reforms benefits the well-being of the communities in which men live. For example, both men and their communities benefit from flexible divisions of labour that maximizes labour resources, improvements in women’s health and well-being, and diminishing interpersonal and collective violence. Therefore having men work to better gender relations in the community will be the benefit of all.

### **Principles of Life**

Men may support gender equality because of their ethical, political, or spiritual commitments. Male human rights activists have advocated for gender equality because of their commitment to ideals of liberation and societal justice, while male religious leaders

have promoted faith-based beliefs in ideals of compassion and justice for women. Thus, some men have embraced a moral imperative that men share their rights and responsibilities with women.

From the discussions, it has been established that civic engagement involves men and women working in close partnership to achieve a common goal. This effort implies that there should not be any dichotomy between the roles of men and women at any point in time. It is this close partnership that is needed to enable men and women co-exist and work towards attaining equality. As a result, this partnership or close working relationships are considered as fundamental and a good precursor for building gender equality at all spheres of life.

## **ANY RISKS IN MEN GETTING INVOLVED IN GENDER WORK?**

Nevertheless, male inclusion in gender-related work also involves some risks. Involving men in gender policies and programming can threaten funding and resources for programs and services directed at women. There is also a danger that in speaking to men's concerns, interests, and problems, the impetus for justice for women may be weakened. Emphasizing men's roles can also communicate a false sense of symmetry between women's and men's social positions.

However it may be, it should be noted that at any point in time for action, a gender analysis will bring out the focus of action and who is disadvantaged at what point in time. It is never the desire or wish of men who are involved in gender issues to neither superimpose their civic advantage over women nor relegate women to the background. On the contrary, the involvement of men in gender issues is an added force to bring about rapid gender equality.

It is also not an issue that men will replace women and 'speak on their behalf'. This will be defeating all the principles purported to support women's empowerment and raising the dignity of women and their right to speak. In any case, doing work for gender equality should not negate the value of sometimes concentrating on 'women only issues'. This is because there are times, periods and circumstances that this will be necessary. Even here, the collective support and active participation of men in solving these specific problems are vital and critical to the overall solution of the problem because of men's diverse power

and position in society. These have to be harnessed to speed up the process of gender equality and good governance.

There are risks in any human endeavour. Our greatest gift of success will be how we manage these risks. It is not because of these “risks” that we should throw away all the positive things that go with involving men in gender equality issues. It has also been said that men may hi-jack this special “gender space” reserved for women. Well, there are all kinds of men with all kinds of motives, just as there are all kinds of women with diverse motives. We should accept the general principal and then deal with individual special cases as they occur - “We should not throw away the baby with the dirty water!” as pointed out in a famous Ghanaian proverb.

## WHAT IS THE WAY FORWARD?

- It is imperative and critical that as many men as possible should join the gender equality train. For this to happen, there should be a change of attitude and mentality from the few women activists to accept and appreciate the fact that there are committed and serious men who can and want to play a meaningful role in the quest for gender equality and good governance.
- The blame-game should stop, (that men are the cause of the woes of women) because it demoralizes even the few men who want to come forward and actively participate in the process, as the environment and reception they receive are very negative.
- There should be more openness on the part of donors and development partners to support male initiated gender equality programmes. The case now where there is little recognition or support to gender programmes instituted by men is not good enough.
- Whether women or men, there are different kinds. It is not all women who will want to champion the cause of gender equality; the same applies to men. So that those men and women who have come out through their developmental or other commitments to do something concrete, should put their energies together and work for a just cause.
- It is important to commit energy and resources to try to work on men at all levels to change their attitudes. What better way to go about it than gender-committed

men talk to their peers and colleagues. The chances of success are far greater than if women try the same. Why not go for more likely successful strategies.

One may ask; how can men be practically brought on board to promote gender equality? There are many ways to do it but the most effective may be to involve men in practical actions and campaigns on specific issues affecting gender inequalities. There may be also a continuous dialogue between men who are pro-gender equality and their peers in order to convince them to change their attitude. Because in the final analysis it is a change of attitude, that can bring more men on board.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I dare say that some men who have a commitment and sense of purpose have suffered painful discriminations and near rejection just because they are men taking initiative and leadership in their gender-work. This state of affairs is very untenable and most unfortunate. The work of fighting for gender equality leading to good governance is a difficult, strenuous, stressful and frustrating one for those committed to it. So it is important not to add more pain to the process, by exhibiting habits and taking actions that will become conflictive within the rank and file of gender activists. It will be a wasteful endeavor and society and the gender equality cause will be the losers. It is important to forge a sense of purpose and unity. Let all bring their thoughts together and share in a common perspective. In the final analysis, it is not our individual egos that will count, nor organizational pride of honour that will matter. It is our determined collective efforts as women and men to have a transformed society that will stand the test of time that matter. We want a more just society; we want a more harmonious society. None of us can stand alone, whether as men's group or women advocates. But together, as committed women and men with a common vision, with inspired action, can achieve something worthwhile and beautiful. Let us give it a try - men and women working together side by side to promote the course of gender equality and good governance.

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