

United Nations
Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) in collaboration with
International Labour Organization (ILO)
Joint United Nations Programmes on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS)
United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
Expert Group Meeting on
“The role of men and boys in achieving gender equality”
21 to 24 October 2003
Brasilia, Brazil

Aide Mémoire

I. Introduction

encouraged in all efforts to achieve the goals of the Beijing Platform for Action and its implementation (para 58), the outcome document of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, adopted in 2000, identified a number of specific obstacles in relation to the implementation of various critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action. These included persistent gender stereotyping which had led to insufficient encouragement for men to reconcile professional and family responsibilities, and insufficient sharing of tasks and responsibilities by men for care giving within families, households and communities (para 21); unequal power relationships between women and men, in which women often did not have the power to insist on safe and responsible sex practices, and lack of communication and understanding between men and women on women's health needs (para 12).

The role of men and boys has also been addressed by other intergovernmental fora, including the World Summit on Social Development (1995) and its review session (2000), as well as the special session of the General Assembly on HIV/AIDS of 2001.

II. Background

Over the last decade, there has been a growing interest in the role of men in promoting gender equality, in particular as the achievement of gender equality is now clearly seen as a societal responsibility that concerns and should fully engage men as well as women. At the global level, Governments have committed themselves to gender equality in the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome document of the 23rd special session of the General Assembly. This commitment has been reaffirmed in the outcomes of other major international conferences and summits, including the Millennium Declaration. The existing international legal framework, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and ILO Conventions, have encouraged and accelerated efforts in this regard.

The growing interest in the role of men and boys also occurred with the shift in the work for gender equality from a focus on advancing women's status to a focus on gender relations, i.e. the relations between women and men. The gender approach allows for clarification of the roles commonly associated with being male or female in public and in private life, and provides a basis for identifying differences and inequalities between women and men in responsibilities assigned, activities undertaken, access to and control over resources as well as decision-making opportunities. A better understanding of gender roles and related structural inequalities increases opportunities for policy measures and other actions aimed at overcoming such inequalities.

Changing patterns of production and reproduction are also indicative of changes in gender relations which challenge traditional images and expectations associated with men's – as well as women's – roles, such as those of breadwinner, care giver, or head of household. These developments increasingly call for a re-assessment of the roles and responsibilities of women and men, of stereotypical and traditional gender roles, and of existing power relations between women and men. Increased emphasis is also placed on men and women working together towards gender equality.

continue to affect opportunities for women's equal participation in decision-making in many spheres, and at different levels. Gender stereotypes continue to affect boys' and girls' educational opportunities and achievement, as well as expectations with regard to their working lives, thus perpetuating inequalities.

Consideration of this topic in March 2004 will be the first time that the Commission on the Status of Women will focus specifically on the role of men and boys in achieving gender equality. The session will therefore be an opportunity to build on the foundation established in the Platform for Action and the outcome document of the 23rd special session of the General Assembly, as well as in other intergovernmental processes, and to consider in a comprehensive manner the challenges and opportunities men and boys face in all parts of the world in contributing to the achievement of gender equality.

- relation to the world of work (paid and unpaid labour, formal and informal sectors);
- Propose means for overcoming obstacles men and boys face in contributing more actively towards achieving gender equality. This will include assessment of the role of Governments at different levels and their use of various means such as legislation, incentives, policy and regulatory measures, and awareness raising means;
 - Elaborate the roles of actors of civil society, including the private sector, in overcoming challenges and obstacles men face in actively contributing towards gender equality.

IV. Expected outcome

The outcome of the expert group meeting will be a report containing a summary of the discussion and recommendations addressed to different actors at different levels on the role of men and boys in achieving gender equality. The report will be widely distributed, including through the DAW Website. The findings and conclusions of the expert group meeting will also provide the basis for a report of the Secretary-General on this theme to the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in 2004.

V. Methods of work

The expert group meeting will work in plenary session and in smaller working groups, based on the major issues identified.

VI. Profile of participants

The expert group meeting will be attended by 12 experts appointed by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, as well as observers from Governments, entities of the United Nations system, intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations.