

1 Introduction: Why (not) Men?

In our daily work we are still confronted by the idea of 'gender' being treated as a 'women's issue', and reserved as a female domain. Women still produce most of the research publications and other printed material concerning gender.² Women are also predominant in the Women in Development/Gender and Development (WID/ GAD) units within development organisations and agencies working in this field. We still see very few men in our organisations directly involved in mainstreaming activities, whether they are internally or externally targeted. Today there is a call for a broader view on gender relations, which addresses the inclusion of men in GAD. There are clear signs that this concern with men is being incorporated into policies and programmes of development agencies.

Sida is one of the few bilateral agencies that has a policy on gender equality that clearly emphasises the role and the importance of men's participation as 'active partners' to women in the promotion of gender equality. Sida's policy states:

An important principle of Sida's policy for working to promote equality between women and men is the need for a gender approach, i.e. a focus on both women and men and the relationships between them rather than an exclusive focus on women. This is necessary both to understand and tackle the structural causes of inequality rather than the symptoms, and to ensure that both women and men are engaged in, and take responsibility for, promoting equality. *It is important to emphasise that a gender approach often involves giving more attention to men since an adequate understanding of men's attitudes and behaviour is important for effective inputs of equality.* (Sida 1997:4, our emphasis)³

To what extent is this stated objective reflected in the attitudes and practices of Sida employees towards male participation in gender work? This was the question we sought to answer in the pilot study on which this article is based.⁴ With this study, we hoped to stimulate discussion on and begin to address the question of why gender equality is still only seen as a 'women's issue' and why we still see so few men working actively in this important field of development work.

Why Men?

A Pilot Study of Existing Attitudes among Sida's Staff towards Male Participation in the Promotion of Gender Equality in Development¹

**Ulf Färnsveden
and Anders Rönquist**

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Our starting point for the study was that male participation is much needed within GAD. As men, our personal and professional experience has served to emphasise to us the importance of gender equality, and the responsibilities of men to seek to change existing structures of inequality. Both of us have, through our work in Kvinnoforum (Foundation of Women's Fora) and Sida, worked on gender programmes. Our professional experience has given rise to our concerns about men's roles in the promotion of gender equality. Our personal experiences as sons and fathers have highlighted for us how vital it is that men and women work together in the same direction to bring about change. Although we believe that the threats and risks involved in having more men in GAD have to be taken into serious consideration, our findings suggest support among colleagues for our own belief that male participation in GAD is indeed positive for the strengthening of equal rights and opportunities.

2 Men in Gender and Development

Despite shifts in the language of gender policy, it is unlikely that much has changed when it comes to men's involvement and participation in GAD activities in development organisations. 'Gender' is still frequently interpreted as meaning 'women' by development organisations, and automatically becomes something that women *should* be concerned about (Cornwall 1998). Men are often looked upon as 'the problem' and stereotyped into one single category. MacDonald argues: 'If gender is about women and men, it is logical to assume that the gender-based balance of power cannot be changed by women alone' (1994:2). Yet men's engagement, or support to women, in their struggle for equal rights in society, is still rather a controversial and sensitive issue in many places and situations.

Sarah White (1994) was one of the first researchers claiming male involvement as a necessity in GAD. White emphasises that patriarchal systems result in disadvantages for both men and women, often in quite different ways. At the same time she argues that bringing in men could mean 'going soft on women's rights' (pers. comm.), which could lead to a tendency to lose any sense of structural differences between men and women, settling for a position where everyone has equivalent problems

when it comes to gender relations. White (1994) stresses the importance of not looking at gender issues as 'women's issues only' underlining the fact that men are often neglected and that their gender identities are taken for granted. If existing gender relations are to be changed, and if women are to be given equal opportunities in development, men have to give up some of their power and treat women as equal partners in all levels of development work. We don't think that this will happen to the full extent, however, unless women let men in through the 'gender-door' and encourage men to become active partners in activities aiming at promoting gender equality in development cooperation.

Cornwall (1998) points out that much of the resistance to introducing a gender perspective comes from men who feel that gender has nothing to do with them. Cornwall also stresses the need to recognise that the category 'men' does not exist as a clear-cut and homogenous group. As she points out, gender is obviously not the only difference existing between people. Ethnicity, religion, socio-economic background and many more aspects of identity determine the way people think and act. Cornwall warns us about making 'gross assumptions about commonality' looking at 'men-in-general', or at 'women-in-general' for that matter. This points to the need for more nuanced perspectives if we are to understand gender relations, as Alvesson and Due Billing (1997) contend:

To understand women calls for understanding men and, in particular, gender relations. An interest in gender relations includes taking men more seriously, not just as beneficiaries of patriarchy, stereotypical carriers of masculinities ... but also as a broad and divergent category whose members also experience mixed feelings, thoughts and orientations. (1997:182)

Increasingly voices are being raised that would like to see men playing a more active role in the promotion of gender equality in development work, as well as in other parts of our societies. There is no clear evidence that just by making men become active participants in GAD, organisations automatically become more gender sensitive, or more gender equal. But this much is clear: if gender analysis and the implementation of GAD remain without the active participation of men in the process of change,

'gender' will continue to be looked upon as 'a women's issue'.

For ourselves, being men involved in development work and active promoters of gender equality, we find the shift toward involving men in gender equality work to be positive. Still, there seem to be several distortions between the ideas and the strategies put forward in the literature and in some agencies' gender policies, as compared to the realities of most development organisations of today. 'Making gender everybody's issue' (Cornwall 1998) is, we suggest, a starting point for putting policies into practice.

3 Men and the Promotion of Gender Equality in Sweden⁵

Sweden has, in many international forums, brought forward the issue of men and gender equality and Sweden also hosted an international conference on 'Men and gender equality' in 1995, as part of the preparations for the Fourth UN Conference on Women in Beijing the same year. In the foreword to the book 'Men on Men', published as a contribution from the Swedish Government to the UN's World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, the former Prime Minister, Ingvar Carlsson, answered his own question: 'Why is Sweden devoting substantial efforts and money to an anthology on men?':

A mere change in the traditional roles and patterns of women means stopping half way. Merely breaking down the barriers faced by women on the labour market and in public life is not enough. The next breakthrough is men.

He finished by talking about the new roles of men, and of men as women's 'good partners' in the work for a more gender-equal society:

... distancing ourselves from the old patriarch macho image has had a liberating effect, perhaps particularly for men. It means being able to choose a personal attitude and relationship which is not pre-determined by tradition. I believe men have great stakes in equality between the sexes. But there is more work to be done, more examples to be set, ... before men at large become the good partners for modern feminism and before women become good

partners in men's search beyond the old traditional role.

These words capture much of the 'Swedish attitude' towards men's role and increasing participation in the promotion of gender equality, as well as the essence of Swedish gender equality policy. Since the mid-1980s, men and men's roles in gender-equality work have been issues for public and official discussions and debate in Sweden. Between 1983 and 1995 an official task group was working with information and public opinion in order to promote the idea of an active participation of men and to initiate discussions on men's different roles. This group was replaced by another working group, popularly known as 'The Daddies' Group', which emphasised issues like men, working life and parenthood – areas of great importance and tradition when it comes to Swedish priorities within the promotion of gender equality. There has been a clear focus on men's practical responsibilities as active fathers and their relationship to children, stressing the fact that a child has a right to spend time with both parents.

Gender equality has been an important issue for Swedish development cooperation since the 1960s, and as an objective itself it has remained unchanged over the years, clearly defined as 'the promotion of equality between women and men'. Strategies and methodologies have changed over the years, with an increasing knowledge and awareness of the need to integrate a gender perspective in all development activities. One important methodological shift in the 1980s was to move focus from separate and special activities directed towards women, to integrating gender equality in all strategies and policies of Swedish development cooperation – away from the exclusive focus on women, to focus on *both* men and women and the relationships between them.

Sida's official gender policy mentions little about gender equality within Sida itself.⁶ It is, however, stated that increased understanding of gender equality within Sida 'is a prerequisite for development of competence to promote equality in development cooperation. A greater emphasis will in the future be placed on the linkages between Sida's internal equality and efforts made in the development cooperation'. Within Sida, women represent more than 50% of the Steering Committee, which is composed of Sida's departmental directors, and

43% of all middle management positions. There are, however, still only three or four men working actively in Sida's internal gender-equality network, while all employees at Sida's Gender Unit (within the Policy Department) are women.

Daniel Andersson's (1998) study of Sida's organisational culture from a gender-equality perspective he claims that Sida does not have a gender-equal culture. According to Andersson, salaries differ in all categories for women and men, and there are almost no men working at administrative levels. The administrative personnel, of whom most are women, experience a 'glass ceiling' that prevents them advancing within the organisation. Among professional women, the barriers seem to be less apparent; there is a perception among men that there is a tendency actively to promote female applicants to managerial positions. A glance at the current gender balance at higher levels within the organisation would certainly suggest that women are fairly well represented. Yet describing the organisation as a whole, Andersson concludes that gender equality only exists at policy levels and not in the organisation's real culture. This certainly does not make the work with promoting gender equality easier within Sida.

Sida, as an organisation, emphasises the importance of giving more attention to men and male involvement in gender and development. Does this mean that Sida is actually promoting further male participation in gender or are the reasons for having men included in Sida's gender policy merely political? What kind of activities are aimed at promoting male participation? These are questions that could, and perhaps should, be asked. Sida, as one of the leading development agencies in the field of gender equality, and an official promoter of 'men in GAD', might perhaps just look like most other development organisations, when it comes to the actual culture of gender equality that is being promoted.

4 Men in Gender Work: Attitudes within Sida

Our pilot study involved a small sample of Sida employees from different levels within the organisation.⁷ Emergent themes are summarised here, drawing on results from survey analysis, focus group discussions and individual interviews.

There was a broad consensus on the importance of gender equality. Yet for almost half of the total group (42%), it became clear that gender equality does not have the same status as other Swedish official development objectives. It would seem, then, that for many gender is important – but not *that* important. An important contrast between men and women of all ages emerged in perceptions of men's knowledge about gender issues, where there was disagreement on the extent to which men actually know enough about gender to integrate it effectively into their work, or take on the promotion of gender equality.

It was commonly felt that the chances for increasing gender equality would be higher if men participate and that men can and ought become involved. Yet there was some ambivalence about the nature of that involvement. Both men and women felt that men can be active promoters of gender equality and that male participation and visibility is important to inspire other men within and outside Sida. Some suggested that increased visibility of men in gender work might increase its credibility and status. Many pointed to actual or perceived resistance amongst women in Sida to 'letting men in', and one in five women spoke of fears that men might 'take over' and dominate debates or discussions if they were to be given more space.

Some striking differences emerged between men and women. Men did not appear to perceive increased male participation in promoting gender equality as a potential threat, although several noted that women might feel a certain discomfort about it. The majority of men did not consider gender issues as having high status in development cooperation, in stark contrast to women, for whom this was an area they felt to be valued highly. This may account for the differences in attitude about the threat of 'taking over' that men are seen to pose. The comments of many of the men tended to reinforce the idea that gender equality is a women's issue within Sida, which might explain why so few men are directly involved.

For many women, Sida was not seen as a gender-equal organisation. Imbalances in organisational norms and values, salaries and promotions mean that, while Sida is generally gender-aware, it still has a long way to go in achieving internal gender

equality (see also Andersson 1998). Institutional issues arose in group discussions, including encouragement and incentives given the gender-equality promotion by Sida's senior staff, which many felt was currently lacking. As several women pointed out, gender is simply not prioritised highly enough within the organisation. Several people drew attention to workloads and the pressure to produce policy documents, rather than engage more actively in 'doing the actual work'. The majority of men, however, disagreed with the idea that Sida was not gender-equal as an organisation. A number were of the view that since gender equality is one of a number of cross-cutting issues, there is a risk that it is given less priority for that reason. Some of the younger men spoke of how it is difficult for men to see and experience gender inequalities within Sida, and how men might find it hard to see how women actually experience gender imbalances 'below the surface'.

Interesting generational differences emerged from the study. Younger people saw fewer obstacles and were more positive; their concerns were mainly with the attitudes of the older group to male participation in gender equality initiatives. It was, however, significant that a majority of the younger people admitted that they were not familiar with Sida's gender policy, although they consider Sida to be an organisation that promotes male participation in the promotion of gender equality. For the older group, however, almost all expressed familiarity with the policy. One revealing finding was that younger men saw their involvement in gender as a professional opportunity, while older men spoke more of their personal commitment, related to changes in their attitudes that had come about through spending more time with their children. Younger men certainly seemed, however, to be more interested in and committed to gender equality than their older colleagues.

One of the concerns highlighted by some of the younger participants was that there is still no clear definition of what gender equality really means and what the real objectives are for Sida in terms of implementation. Younger participants were, generally speaking, more critical than their older colleagues of Sida's perceived success in implementing and mainstreaming gender equality, stating that this is in part a myth and that Sida has a long way

to go in this respect. They questioned genuine interest amongst managers, especially male ones, in promoting gender equality.

5 Making Space For Men

According to most respondents participating in our study, Sida's work with promoting gender equality will be further reinforced by active male participation, giving gender equality a higher status within Sida, as well as giving Sida's efforts within GAD more credibility within the Swedish development cooperation. Many participants felt that if more men are made visible as supporters of gender equality initiatives, this will probably inspire other men to do the same. In personal interviews, a number of people expressed the view that women do not have a preferential right to interpret gender equality and that there are a number of particular 'male issues' that need to be further discussed. These include, for example, issues like men's responsibility for domestic work and childcare, as well as a desire to challenge notions of what a 'real man' is and to look for new roles and values connected to being male. In doing so, many people emphasised the need to move beyond a perception of gender as a 'women's issue' and as something in which only women are engaged or committed. Many felt that one of the current obstacles that needed to be addressed was the formulation of gender equality and its ultimate objectives within development, arguing that there was a need for greater clarity and a clearer sense about how men might become involved and work alongside women.

The findings from this study suggest an important role for managers in encouraging and promoting gender equality in general, to make it 'everybody's issue'. If management stresses the importance of male participation in gender actively in deeds and in policy papers by offering institutional incentives, necessary signals might be sent out to staff members. But without the management's commitment, little will happen in terms of increased male participation in Sida's gender work and without this it will be difficult to achieve further gender equality. Attitudes and behaviour are extremely important for the promotion of gender equality, according to our respondents. If Sida is to increase its promotion of gender equality, then increasing the organisation's gender awareness, especially at management levels,

should be part of Sida's gender policy and action plan.

There are still no men working in the gender unit in Sida, which might be explained by some of the reasons mentioned previously. If gender is to become 'everybody's issue' and not a 'women's issue only', clearly there is a need to bring men into the active promotion of gender equality by showing that men can also be role models in GAD. The fact that women, in general, are positively disposed towards an increased male participation in gender should be used to recruit more men into gender activities. Since the men expressed a genuine interest in participating in the promotion of gender equality, they should be seen as a resource in the promotion of gender equality.

Gender equality must be further prioritised within Sida. The fact that many men see gender as a low-status field is indeed worrying and highlights the need to increase the status given to Sida's work on gender. If this is to happen, the status of Sida's gender unit needs to be raised. One suggestion might be to include the head of this unit in Sida's board of directors. There is a clearly felt need to connect Sida's internal gender-equality promotion to Sida's external gender-related activities in the partner countries. One reason for this is that Sida's credibility will be higher, another is that gender awareness may increase within the organisation. Within Sida, the gender unit must be more visible in its work within the organisation and increase its interaction with the staff at the different departments. We have heard from respondents that Sida is lacking sufficient gender support. One concrete suggestion would be to install a 'gender help desk', preferably in close relation to the existing gender unit.

Lastly, our findings point to a need for more interchange and learning about gender within Sida. New meeting places, or a 'gender forum', could create spaces where issues related to gender equality, internally as well as externally, can be discussed in order

to increase mutual understanding. There is a need to increase general knowledge about gender and development, not least of Sida's own gender work and policy, since most respondents claimed that they had little knowledge of Sida's policy. Further and repeated gender training of Sida's staff would be a natural step to take in order to combat the lack of knowledge within this field.

6 Conclusion

The recent focus on men and masculinities opens up possibilities for an increased male interest in participation in GAD, since – all of a sudden – men's interest and positions are at stake when discussing gender issues. As this study suggests, however, men still need to be encouraged to become involved in GAD and gender work, since women still have an epistemological privilege when discussing, and working with, gender issues. Here lies a great challenge for both men and women. If gender remains a 'women's issue' and gender units a 'women's place', important opportunities for the active promotion of gender equality will have been lost. Yet it is equally important to acknowledge that in order to make space for men, work needs to be done with men to increase their self-awareness and their knowledge about gender issues. Rather than posing a threat, seeing men's participation as an opportunity is a step towards turning Sida's policy on gender equality into a commitment that men as well as women can play an active part in supporting. As Jahan suggests, a new strategy is needed:

Advocacy of gender issues has been conceived as a win/lose scenario. Women's gains have been seen as men's losses. In the future, the message should be communicated as a win/win scenario: changing gender roles and relations are good not simply for the women, they also benefit men, families and communities, and would create significant inter-generational benefits. (1995:128)

Notes

- 1 This article is a shortened version of a longer report (Färnsveden and Rönquist 1999).
- 2 A clear example of this was when we were looking for literature at Dillons book store in London, where we found an entire wall of books on 'gender and development'; less than 5 % of the books were written by men.
- 3 Sida's Action Programme for promoting equality between women and men in partner countries, 1997.
- 4 This study was conducted as part of a Master's Programme at the Peace and Development Research Institute, Goteborg University and submitted as a joint thesis (Färnsveden and Rönquist 1999).
- 5 Most of the information in this chapter is derived from a report commissioned by Sida (1997).
- 6 We have only found this mentioned briefly in five lines (p.5) in Sida's gender policy document.
- 7 The study involved 58 people from three administrative levels. We used a short didactic survey, focus group discussions with groups of older and younger men and women, and individual interviews. See Färnsveden and Rönquist (1999) for a detailed account of our methodology.

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