THE AIM FRAMEWORK:
ADDRESSING AND INVOLVING MEN AND BOYS TO PROMOTE GENDER EQUITY AND END GENDER DISCRIMINATION AND VIOLENCE

Michael Kaufman, March, 31, 2003

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This paper outlines the "AIM" framework for working with men to engage in the work to promote gender justice. The author is the one of the founders of the White Ribbon Campaign in Toronto, Canada – one of the most effective grassroots campaigns to mobilize men to get involved in the world.

Kaufman begins by examining the path to ending discrimination against women and girls. He suggests that the best efforts are not necessarily directing resources *towards* women and girls as it is addressing "*the needs* of women and girls and their empowerment." It is under this frame that working with men can be effective – the goal of partnering with men to address the empowerment needs of women and girls. Kaufman describes the historical ways that work to empower women and girls has focused on women and girls and, while this has been appropriate, has also meant that there hasn't been attention to men and boys. He goes on to state that "leaving men and boys out of the gender equation and outside a gender and development approach is a recipe to failure:" (p. #3)

- Not working with men misses the roll that men play as gatekeepers of the current gender order and their rolls as potential resistors to change.
- By maintaining the notion that gender = women, men are removed from the discussion with, in turn, marginalized women and women's struggles.
- Leaving out men and boys fails to address the role of power between the sexist and among different groups of women and men that is also part of the gender equation.

Kaufman then lists some possible positive outcome of addressing and involving men in addressing gender justice:

- Create a large-scale social consensus on social issues have previously been marginalized as "women's issues" but which are, in fact issues for both women and men;
- Mobilize resources controlled by men and the social and economic institutions controlled by men;
- Develop partnerships not only between women and men but also between institutions serving women and institutions serving men;
- Isolate and marginalize those men who work to preserve men's power and privilege;
- Raise the next generation of boys and girls within a framework of gender equity;
- Improve the lives of women and girls by changing men's and boy's attitudes and behaviors;
- Gain increased and unexpected insight into the complex forces that promote gender discrimination and prevent gender equity;

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- Gain additional insights into other social, cultural and political issues.

From this theoretical frame, Kaufman this develop "seven conceptual tools to better allow a strategic approach to involve men and boys" (p. #5).

1) <u>Shift from "Women in Development" (WID) model to the "Gender and Development" (GAD) framework.</u> This shift allows the efforts that flow from this to address the degree to which gender is also a social relationship. As such, it brings the issues of discrimination against women into the mainstream of organizational efforts. There is a danger that this shift to a "gender" framework may be used again to "disappear" women and women's issues, so efforts need to be taken to ensure this doesn't happen. The focus on the gender approach brings men into core of the planning and engagement.

2) <u>Focus on socially constructed gender vs. biological sex.</u> Gender is understood as the culturally defined notions of manhood and womanhood. Sex is our biological construction. This has implications for the work with men, for it is not challenging who men or boys are biologically (as males) but rather the negative and oppressive gendered behavior, relationships, power and privilege.

3) <u>Gender work, the family and early childhood development.</u> Gender is not static and fixed, but is rather a process and a relationship. By working with youth as they are beginning to develop their gender identity, and thus "the building block for their personalities," opportunities for change are created. This effort is referred to as "gender work" and includes recognizing that one's gender identify is a complex convergence of other axes of identity – sexual, racial, class, sexual orientation, ethnic, religious, family particularities, etc. For boys, their self worth is largely "measured against he yard stick of gender" (p. #8) – manhood. How well does he measure up to the standards of masculinity within the dominant culture, his culture, and within his family? The notion of gender work suggests an active process amongst these dynamics that create and recreate gender. It is in this mix that the work to engage and mobilize men can be most effective.

4) <u>Diverse relationships suggest diverse relationships to patriarchy.</u> Men have different degrees of social power in general, although all men have social power and privilege in relation to the women in their same social class or grouping. Men from some groups have social and economic; policy and social power over other men, and some definitions of manhood have power over others. "Some are valorized, while others are ridiculed and diminished" (p. #9). Masculinity is not fixed or timeless, and working with men requires working not only with these diverse definitions and understandings of masculinity, but also men's practices of masculinity (See Jeff Hearn "Is Masculinity Dead? A critique of the concept of Masculinity/Masculinities" in M. Mac an Ghail (ed) *Understanding Masculinities,* Open University Press, 1996). This means a way to better understand the uneven rewards men receive from patriarchy.

5) <u>Manhood equals power.</u> There are some common elements of masculinity that cross cultural differences. Manhood tends to be equated with power ("power over," "power to

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control"). Recognizing this allows a way to make some cross cultural generalizations while also being aware of unique gender relations and features of different cultures.

6) Men's contradictory experiences of power. Although men do experience power, entitlement and privilege (especially vis-à-vis women and girls); they experience this power and privilege through systems of pain and isolation. While not providing an excuse for men's behaviors, a compassionate outreach for men can provide a process for change even while being highly critical of men's actions and beliefs.

7) Crisis of masculinity and the globalization of feminist discourse. Men's power has been and is being challenged throughout the world by feminists at the same time that globalizing economic and development dynamics of eroded some of the entitlements that men have previously been able to take for granted. The combination of globalization and feminist discourses creates real risks for the movement for gender justice (ongoing and spreading backlash, religious fundamentalism, displacement of the crisis into ethnic hatred and war mongering, etc.) there are also real opportunities:

- Efforts to redress gender discrimination are increasingly part of social and cultural mainstream;
- Men and boys are increasingly looking for creative answers to the problems that confront them;
- Different approaches to addressing men and masculinity are spreading around the in a parallel process to the women's movement and themes are spreading (one of the benefits of globalization).

Based on these seven principles, Kaufman then begins examining the AIM Framework.

The beginning of the AIM Framework is that men need to not only be addressed, but need to be involved in the struggle and must help define the nature of their participation.   Based on this notion, the AIM Framework provides a strategic approach to reach men and boys. The design is not to work with men per se, but to launch programs to mobilize men to work on their own in partnership with women. The following principles and strategies provide the foundation for the AIM Framework:

A. The Primacy of Women's Oppression and Struggles for Equality and Equity

B. Navigate through Men's Fear Since power is equated with manhood, loss of power equals loss of manhood. AS a result, challenging men can create irrational responses based on their fear. Challenging men by relating to men's own contradictory experiences of power may be more useful as a mobilizing tactic.

C. Use the Language of Responsibility rather than the Language of Blame Blame not only keeps the focus on individual actions (and thus away from structural change) but it is not a useful tactic to motivate people to become engaged.

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D. <u>Create and Nurture Groups of Men</u> Men working with other men to address sexism provides a lens through with they can examine their own contradictory relationships to men's power, as well as a way to overcome the homophobic fear that is one of the barriers to men speaking out and challenging sexism.

E. <u>The Importance of Men's and Boys' Voices</u> Because men's voices, in patriarchy, are granted more authority and because men and boys tend to listen to other men; we need to involve men in the messages (both creating the messages and in stating them).

F. <u>Create a Politics of Compassion</u> Avoid language of generalized guilt and blame and using the language of personal responsibility to promote change.

G. <u>Finding Entry Points for Specific Age Groups</u> Using a life-cycle approach and recognizing that boys and men at different developmental stages have a different experiences and opportunities to address gender and masculinity.

H. <u>Avoid Generalizations and Stereotypes</u> There is more to men who perpetrate violence than their perpetration of that violence. The factors that lead individual men to commit acts of violence are not about personal pathology but are rather expressions (albeit extreme) of normal masculinity. Describing "men who batter" (or similar phrasing) places the responsibility for the abusiveness on the man himself, while also holding society (including men) responsible for the underlying causes of men's attitudes and actions.

I. <u>Work with men and boys to Develop their Emotional Life and Language of Emotions</u> Teach boys to feel and to talk about what they feel.

J. <u>Measure men's Attitudinal and Behavioral Changes</u> the GEM scale (gender equitable norms and behavior in men) is being developed as a tool to measure *how* men's attitudes and behaviors change with regards to gender equity.

From here, Kaufman offers a conceptual model and a variety of locally based exampled from around the world or programs that employ aspects of the AIM Framework. These models suggest that a variety of ways to use this model for different kind of issues (reproductive health, fathering, ending men's violence, and AIDS and STI's).

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