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Gender equality needs men, men need gender equality

The title of this paper “Gender equality needs men, men need gender equality” was used as a slogan during the Finnish EU presidency’s work on men and gender equality in 2006. It also sums up the main line of thinking in this paper. This summarization in contrast to two common notions: that gender equality could be effectively achieved without thinking about and focusing on men and that increasing gender equality would mean that men will lose as women gain.

Today, in 2007, men and gender equality seems to be somewhat of a popular topic in European discussion on gender equality policy. The big picture and challenge with men and gender equality can be summarised as follows: it has become increasingly clear that more focus on the role and situations of men is needed in order to make efficient gender equality policy. The challenge is how to do this in a way that is supportive to the main goal, that of enhancing the status of women. In this article I discuss some of the background of the issue and some ways to deal with the challenge. The paper is based on my work as an expert responsible for developing the area of men and gender equality within the governmental gender equality machinery and draws heavily on a recent strategy document, available in English and titled “Men and gender equality policy in Finland” (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 2007).

I will start this paper with a historical account on men and gender equality policy that explains how the theme has emerged as an important topic in international gender equality policy. Followed by this will be an explanation of key ideas from the Finnish strategy document. The last section discusses on the most frequently asked question concerning men and gender equality: why would men participate?

Developments that led into focusing more on men

Gender equality has of course always concerned men as well as women. But the main interest in gender equality policy has been in women’s situations and actions. Men have rarely been in the centre of attention. In the early 2000s this has somewhat changed. It is no longer uncommon to see

conferences or special reports focusing on the relationship of men and gender equality. At least for some twenty years there has been a gradual process that has led to giving more attention to men in gender equality policy. The topic has been mentioned earlier, of course. For example, the very important CEDAW convention from 1979 mentions, that the traditional roles of men need to be changed. Three ideas within gender equality policy have had a strong impact on the change.¹ They are:

- 1) Actions and attitudes of men are crucial for improving the status of women.
- 2) Gender mainstreaming requires focusing more attention on men.
- 3) Men's problems and situations also need attention in gender equality policy.

For a long time, gender equality efforts at the UN (and to a somewhat lesser extent in Finland) focused almost solely on women; if men were ever mentioned, it was in relation to how men affected the status of women, usually as the instigator of a specific problem, as an obstacle to improving the status of women, or as a reference, i.e. those who receive the full salary. In the course of the 1980s, the notion gradually emerged that gender equality efforts focusing only on women are perhaps not the most efficient way of improving the status of women. It would be more productive to discuss men too in gender equality policy, particularly in view of how to involve men more in gender equality efforts, how to instigate equitable behaviour among men and how to get men to support improvements in the status of women (see Sternberg – Hubble 2004, 389-390.)

Approval of the Beijing Platform for Action was one of the global milestones in increasing awareness of the relationship between men and gender equality. The Platform has two entries specifically addressing men and gender equality at a general level. In the appended Declaration, the signatories state that they are determined to “encourage men to participate fully in all actions towards equality” (United Nations 1995, section 25), while in the Mission Statement of the Platform for Action itself we find that “[t]he Platform for Action emphasizes that women share common concerns that can be addressed only by working together and in partnership with men towards the common goal of gender equality around the world” (United Nations 1995, section 3). These quotes show that, in the Beijing instrument, paying attention to men is unambiguously linked to improvement in the status of women.

¹ For the sake of brevity and clarity I limit my account on gender equality policy only. Other changes in society, for instance women's mass entry into the labour force and the emergence in 1970s and the vast expansion after 1990s of the academic field of masculinity studies have naturally had an effect as well.

Support from men makes gender equality efforts stronger, while active or passive resistance erodes their effectiveness. This insight has been summarized in the maxim that men are the gatekeepers of gender equality and part of the solution, not part of the problem. Interesting practical examples of working with men have been collected in to a publication available in the internet (Ruxton 2004).

Another component that has lead to paying more attention to men and gender equality is moving towards the gender perspective from a women-centred perspective. This is also linked to gender mainstreaming. Mainstreaming was established as a front-line global gender equality promotion strategy with the approval of the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995. The essential concept in mainstreaming is to extend gender equality thinking beyond the sphere of the gender equality actors proper so as to introduce the gender aspect into all forms of decision-making. The Beijing Platform for Action urges that governments and other actors should promote an active and visible policy of mainstreaming a gender perspective into all policies and programmes, so that, before decisions are taken, an analysis is made of the effects on women and men, respectively. It is important to note that this clause specifies an evaluation of the effects on men, too. This is a verbalized rebuttal of the tacit and often unacknowledged assumption that the word 'gender' only means 'women'.

The third cause for men and gender equality is perhaps the most controversial. I will discuss this controversy from various angles throughout this paper. The heart of the third component is the acknowledgement, that gender equality policy can and should benefit men as well as women. This benefit can come from at least two directions: reducing problems faced by men and positive effects on men from actions targeted at improving the status of women.

Not enough clear and systematic gender-oriented data, or analyses of areas where the status of men is worse than that of women on average or where men encounter gender discrimination, have been produced. The information available indicates that the principal such areas are the same in several EU Member States and can be found outside working life (for instance, issues of parenthood, physical and mental health, and social exclusion have been discussed in several countries). This means that proper implementation of gender mainstreaming should lead to better understanding, and thus reduction of so called men's problems. Studies on men and submissions from citizens to the authorities indicate that gender discrimination encountered by men may be a more common phenomenon than is generally realized. In at least one European country, Austria, there has been

established a specific government unit dealing with problems more typical with men (Federal Ministry of Social Security, Generations and Consumer Affairs 2005).

The third idea is sometimes interpreted as being linked to a backlash against feminism and women's empowerment. This could be because in some popular media discussion the advantages of women and men are pitted against each other in a zero sum game fashion – as if women gain, men lose and vice versa. Some commentators have said that discussion about men's problems can be an attempt to seize the status of the victim of the current system to men. A recent example from Finland concerns a book of essays about men and gender equality that was titled "Men without equality". The media discussion following the publication concentrated on whether men and men's problems are given too little attention in gender equality discussion. However, the zero sum game is not the only possible way to look at men's benefit in gender equality policy. Mutual benefits and attempts to look at win-win situations and solutions to problems seem like a constructive way to approach the third idea.

A fourth reason to discuss men and gender equality in gender equality policy can also be distinguished. It is more related to current situation and the near future than historical developments. In many countries a populist discussion on men is resurfacing from time to time. Highly stereotypical rhetoric and wild assumptions seem to be typically linked to it. The participants in this discussion are often not experts on gender perspective. It is necessary to boost expert discussion based on actual research on men and gender equality to reduce the risk of the populist discourse coming to dictate future policy initiatives.

Institutionalization of central principles

Although the theme of men and gender equality is relatively new, internationally agreed guidelines and conclusions already exist. The most notable include conclusions by the UN's Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) and EU's EPSCO council from 2004 and 2006 respectively. These agreed conclusions are important, because they reduce the risk of losing sight of the big picture of gender equality while focusing on men and gender equality. The big picture is clear: the status of women and women's empowerment is of priority and this must be remembered also when focusing on men and gender equality.

In 1995 the Approval of the Beijing Platform for Action was one of the global milestones in increasing awareness of the relationship between men and gender equality. However, it was quickly understood, that more focus on men is needed. In 2001, the Secretary General of the UN wrote about the evaluation of the Beijing Platform for Action:

While it took a significant step forward in adopting a gender approach, the Platform for Action nevertheless does focus exclusively on women in much of its discussion. Greater attention to the role of men is critical since effective promotion of gender equality cannot be achieved unless men are brought along in the process of change. [...] Efforts to work with men must, however, always be put in the overall context of promoting gender equality. (United Nations 2001, 10)

In its 48th meeting in 2004, the UN's Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) agreed on conclusions on the role of men and boys in promoting gender equality. The conclusions include many useful suggestions for governments. For the purpose of this paper, it is necessary to highlight one of the central principles in the conclusions:

The Commission also recognizes that the participation of men and boys in achieving gender equality must be consistent with the empowerment of women and girls and acknowledges that efforts must be made to address the undervaluation of many types of work, abilities and roles associated with women. In this regard, it is important that resources for gender equality initiatives for men and boys do not compromise equal opportunities and resources for women and girls. (Commission on the Status of Women 2004)

During the Finnish EU Presidency in 2006 the Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council (EPSCO) also adopted conclusions on men and gender equality (EPSCO 2006). In their approach, they follow the same principle adopted by the CSW quoted above. Both the UN and EU conclusions thus take a clear stand on one of the controversies related to men and gender equality: whether policy action in this area should prioritise reducing problems faced mainly by women or problems faced by men.

In summary of this chapter it can be said the topic of men and gender equality is a relatively new theme within gender equality policy. Nevertheless, there already exist recent internationally agreed basic principles, both on the UN and EU levels that guide how the topic should be approached.

Men and gender equality policy in Finland

After a brief overview of the international background of the issue it is time to discuss the Finnish situation. Gender equality work in the Nordic countries has focused somewhat more on men and gender equality than in other European countries. For instance, Sweden carried out a research on men's attitudes on gender equality already in the early 80s and there has been governmentally appointed task groups dealing with men and gender equality in the 80s. In this respect Finland seems to hold a world record: the longest continued official task group dealing with men and gender equality. Since 1988 there has continuously been eight Subcommittees on Men's Issues working under the Council for Gender Equality. The subcommittees have focused on various issues and themes during the years. Most attention has been given to the promoting of men's parenthood and men's violence against women (Council for Gender Equality 2006).

In 2003 the Finnish government stated in its programme for 2003 - 2007 that "gender equality issues will also be assessed from the male viewpoint". In order to fulfil this task I was given the responsibility to carry out the preparations for a strategy document on men and gender equality (available in English see, Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 2007). The document was later used as background material during the Finnish EU presidency conference "Men and gender equality – towards progressive policies" in 2006 (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 2006). It was decided that the main approach of the document would be a general one that looks at 'gender equality issues' as a singular entity instead of as several individual issues such as men's violence against women. Thus, the approach has more of a philosophical than a statistical nature. Next, a short account of how the topic was conceptualised is given. Also, I will highlight some challenges and strategically important perspectives for national gender equality policy.

While preparing the strategy document, four principles from the background work for the CSW 2004 meeting were adopted. They are:

- 1) Gender equality work with men should take into account the general situation between the genders.
- 2) Emphasize the active stake that men and boys have in gender equality, that is, the gains to men and boys.
- 3) Recognize the well-being of men and boys as a legitimate aim of gender equality measures.

4) Recognize the diversity of men's (and women's) situations and circumstances.

Throughout the process of creating the strategy document, these ideas were used and returned to.

The metaphor of looking at a coin

To discuss men and gender equality in Finland it is important to understand how the term 'men and gender equality' is conceptualised. In explaining this, I will use a simple visual metaphor, that of looking at a coin. The metaphor is useful for correcting two very common misunderstandings related to the theme.

The first part of the metaphor concerns looking. The question here is who is doing the looking – who are telling others what they are seeing. This is important because it dictates what issues are talked about and from which perspectives. Here the common misunderstanding is that 'men and gender equality' is all about what men think. This is a problematic thought within the gender equality context. First, since the vast majority of gender equality professionals are women, it positions the 'voice' on men and gender equality outside the gender equality machinery. This would render the machinery itself unable to form an expert opinion on the matter. Second, it begs the question of who can really speak for The Men. After all, men's perspectives and opinions vary greatly and there is no Men's Union or other organization that could legitimately claim to represent (all) men. Instead, it is more useful to see 'men and gender equality' as a normal area of expertise – something that can be talked about by women as well as men. The practical implication of this is not to say that it would be useless to conduct surveys and research about men's attitudes and thoughts. These are of course needed. It is to say that it is important not to allow only men or men's organizations or associations to define or dominate discussion about men and gender equality policy.

In summary, men and gender equality is not about 'who looks'. It is about 'what is being looked at'. The word 'men' in 'men and gender equality' is best understood as an object of attention, not as a subject of discourse.

With this, we come to the second part of the metaphor, the coin. Every coin has two faces. In the metaphor, the faces of the coin represent different kinds of problems, that is, problems which are more typical to men (i.e. dying at an early age) and problems which are more typical to women (i.e.

working in a profession that is undervalued in terms of pay)². Here the common misunderstanding is that 'men and gender equality' is all about men's problems. This is linked to a background idea of symmetry of the situations of women and men. This often shows in an idea that there is a women's list of problems (wage gap, violence, etc.) and a similar men's list (high death rate, low school performance, men's situation in divorce etc.). The reasoning in this line of thinking goes somewhat like: "If gender equality is about women talking about their problems then 'men and gender equality' must be about men talking about theirs." This is often linked to the first metaphor so that it is thought that 'men and gender equality' is all about men talking about men's problems.

Staying within the metaphor of the coin, we can call this kind of approach one-sided or perhaps one-faceted. In light of the UN and EU declarations mentioned earlier it is easy to see, that this understanding does not capture the whole picture. 'Men and gender equality' is very much about women's problems as well and about men's role in solving (and worsening) these problems. It is about both faces of the coin. For example, (some) men play a crucial role in both causing the demand for trafficking for sexual purposes but also in finding ways to reduce that demand. The issue of prostitution is a very good example. It is almost never considered a problem for men and would thus not be included in work that is only about men's problems. Yet it is a gender equality theme that has very much to do with men. Men make up the vast majority of the demand that is necessary for prostitution to exist. Obviously, prostitution is something that should also be discussed when discussing men and gender equality. Furthermore, the UN and EU declarations as well as other documentation about gender equality shows us that this particular coin is weighed: empowering women and improving women's situation must be given priority over men's problems, even when talking about men and gender equality policy.

In summary, the metaphor of looking at a coin helps to explain that men and gender equality is about looking at men's role to and relationships with women's and men's problems. This approach is broader than the typical layman's understanding and has an additional benefit of highlighting the links and connections between women's problems and men's problems.

The metaphor of the coin and the related misunderstandings help to understand why 'men and gender equality' is sometimes approached with cautiousness or even hostility by some gender equality experts. It looks like something that would divert attention and resources away from

² It is important to note, that what we think of as men's problems are faced by many women as well and vice versa. Some women die at a young age and some men work in underpaid jobs, such as kindergarten teachers.

women's empowerment. The likelihood for this can be reduced with correct strategic decisions and indeed, the issue is mentioned in both the UN and EU conclusions on men and gender equality. Also, as was explained above, it has become clear that focusing on men and gender equality is crucial if we want to improve women's situation efficiently.

Three challenges for gender equality work

In the process of making the strategy document, three challenges were identified. These are:

- 1) to increase male participation in the gender equality policy debate
- 2) to find a balance in prioritizing action focusing on men
- 3) many issues related to men and gender equality lie outside the thematic core of gender equality policy, that is, labour market issues

An important objective, mentioned in many contexts regarding men and gender equality, is to increase men's participation. Surprisingly often it is left unexplained what is meant by this.

'Participation of men in gender equality work' can be understood in many ways.

'Participation' can be passive, following the path laid down by others. But it can also be active, involving assessment of the objectives, methods and underlying motivations of gender equality policy. Similarly, 'gender equality work' can be understood broadly to cover any and all actions whose result is to promote equality between women and men, even if promoting gender equality is not the principal aim of the action (for example, the taking of family leave by men). A narrower interpretation limits 'gender equality work' to actions which are specifically aimed at promoting gender equality (for example, working in an official gender equality organization) and whose other impacts are incidental. It was evaluated, that the most important form of men's participation in the present situation is to contribute to the gender equality debate, which is an active and relatively broad type of participation. Debate was singled out because it forms the basis of future action.

Men's involvement in the gender equality debate is important not because their gender would automatically give them some kind of male viewpoint that women cannot have but because gender equality affects men, and because men can contribute constructive new angles and themes to the gender equality debate. An equally important reason for more participation by men is that it commits men to promoting gender equality and adds credence to the idea that promoting gender equality is a matter for both men and women. Regarding participation, it is important to support

participation by men in different kinds of situations and reduce the risk of a single organization claiming to participate for and represent all men.

The second challenge comes up because not all issues related to men and gender equality can be resolved immediately. Therefore, prioritization must be undertaken to identify primary and secondary objectives. This is mostly a matter of allocating resources. In the case of men and gender equality, there is a tension between two approaches concerning what should be done first and what can be left until later. One approach insists that the most important thing is to concentrate on action aimed primarily at supporting the role of men in improving the status of women. Such projects could include action to reduce the clientele of prostitutes. The other approach stresses that the main concern is to work to reduce problems specifically affecting men. Primary tasks in this approach would include setting up services to help men in various crisis situations. It is important to note that with some issues, problems face both men and women, albeit often different problems. For example, men are usually less satisfied with the results of a marital divorce than women, whereas for women there is a risk of increased intimate violence.

This tension usually comes up relatively quickly when a discussion on men and gender equality is underway. An interesting example can be found from the EU presidency conference “Men and gender equality – towards progressive policies” that was held in Helsinki in 4th and 5th of October 2006. The conference focused on several issues related to men and gender equality and was deliberately constructed to include both approaches of the mentioned tension. Afterwards we heard that some participants felt that only men’s problems were discussed, whereas other participants had felt that only women’s problems were discussed in the same conference.

The core theme in Finnish gender equality policy has been to improve the labour market standing of women. This weighting is evident in section 1 of the Equality Act: “The objectives of this Act are to prevent discrimination based on gender, to promote equality between women and men, and thus to improve the status of women, particularly in working life” (law 609/1986 section 1).

Most key issues related to men and gender equality are not closely related to working life. Five well-known topics related to the theme of men and gender equality have prompted the most discussion in Finland and in other Western countries, too. These are:

- men’s reconciliation of work and family life, and male parenthood
- violence against women by men (particularly violence in intimate relationships)

- men and health
- men and divorce
- boys and schooling (weighted towards the school system, on the one hand, or towards boys and masculinity on the other, depending on the country)

Only one of the five topics listed above, reconciliation work and family life is obviously connected to the labour market status of women. Extensive participation by men in childcare and housework is assumed to improve the labour market status of women by enabling women to make a bigger contribution to working life and by reducing discrimination against women at the workplace. Indeed, this topic has received the most prominent focus in gender equality policy not only in Finland but in other EU Member States and at the EU level, too.

The fact that many issues especially related to men lie outside the thematic core of gender equality policy raises the question of how gender equality policy should address these issues. The expertise of the personnel in the gender equality machinery is naturally focused on issues related to the thematic core and there is a lack of tradition on how to tackle for example health, from a gender equality perspective.

At the general, strategic level, the delineation of issues related to men and gender equality is in the purview of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, which is responsible for outlining gender equality policy. However, for any given specific issue, the best expertise can be found where that issue is being addressed. What this means is that gender mainstreaming is an important method for addressing issues which concern men and fall outside labour market questions. It is important to note that gender mainstreaming does not refer exclusively to the women's viewpoint. It also involves studying how a topic affects men, what the status of men with regard to the topic is on average, what kinds of situations men find themselves in with regard to the topic, and how common such situations are.

The strategic goal: incorporate men

The Finnish strategy paper names a generic overall strategic goal and five sub-goals that are important. These are on a general level and not connected to individual issues or statistical indicators. On the most generic level, the objective is to incorporate men into gender equality policy. This can be explained with two pairs of ideas. First, men must be incorporated both as active

participants and as an object of attention, a focus area. Second, this needs to be done with dedicated initiatives as well as mainstreamed into the ordinary gender equality policy. It is crucial to stress the word 'incorporate' here. 'Men' should be a part of the whole, not something apart from it. This concerns setting up official machinery and offices, recruiting and placement of experts and actual policy initiatives.

The goal of incorporating men into gender equality policy can be approached in five different ways:

- 1) Increasing gender equality policy action aimed at and affecting men.
- 2) Ensuring more male participation in the gender equality policy debate.
- 3) Paying attention to men in gender equality policy rhetoric.
- 4) Gaining more profound expertise on men.
- 5) Supporting gender mainstreaming and stressing that mainstreaming must involve men as well as women.

The most important means for incorporating men into gender equality policy is to increase gender equality policy action aimed at and affecting men. So far this has been done especially in supporting men's use of parental leave and reconciliation of work and family life. However, there is no real reason why measures aimed specifically at men should not exist in other thematic areas. In fact in every issue we may ask "How does this issue relate to men?" Therefore it is recommended, that whatever each government decides to prioritise in its gender equality policy, it includes a consideration of the role of men in each issue. It is important to stress, that gender equality policy measures aimed at men must not detract from the status of women. It is also important to remember what was written earlier, that focusing on men does not mean looking only at men's problems. Reducing violence against women needs a focus on men, for example. A third thing to note here is that action focusing on men must not mean that it focuses **only** on men. In many issues it is better to look at both women and men at the same time.

A good example is a study conducted by the Equal Opportunities Commission in Britain (Equal Opportunities Commission 2005), which examines professional segregation and seeks means for dismantling it in four male majority sectors and one female majority sector. This project is particularly recommendable in that it addresses women and men both, not just one gender. In such an approach, neither gender dominates over the other, and many of the recommendations offered for women are applicable to men too. This example is an interesting one in another respect as well. Traditionally, the vast majority of work to dismantle segregation has tried to help and support

women to choose non-traditional occupations. Comparatively very little has been done to support men similarly. Therefore, the economic principle of diminishing returns hints that starting one more project to persuade women to enter male majority fields will reduce segregation less than starting one of the first to persuade men to enter a female majority field.

The importance of the second sub-goal was already mentioned in the section on challenges. The most available form of participation that can be supported by gender equality machinery is participation in expert discussion. This can be furthered with at least the following means: When requests for opinions are sent out, it is important to ask not only for the views of women's organizations but also for views from bodies pondering matters from the perspective of how they affect men. When events dealing with gender equality are arranged, special attention should be given to inviting organizations that will send a male representative. A possibility is to invite male specialists into expert groups looking at gender equality. Last but not least, expert influence is also exercised through unofficial channels, and in unofficial interaction on gender equality it is important to set up networks that include male specialists.

The most important observation regarding rhetoric is that men are an essential part of the audience whenever gender equality is talked about. At the very least, any talk about gender equality aimed at the public at large should be constructed so that it addresses men as well as women. Speaking about men in a highly stereotyped or biased manner ignores this. Taking the complexity of men's situations into account means men have more possible ways of looking at any given issue and thus more access channels to the gender equality debate. It is essential to underline the benefits to men of action designed to promote gender equality and a good idea to approach men as partners in solving gender equality problems, especially issues in which the problematic behaviour of certain men plays a key role (e.g. violence against women). Paying attention to rhetoric serves as an important tool to combat against misinterpretations that gender equality policy is for women only or is against men.

The issue of rhetoric can seem minor, but if ignored, it can have a big irritating effect on (un)intended audience and consequently hinder policy initiatives. An example from Finland illustrates how small the changes needed often are. I was involved in revising a report explaining Finnish gender equality. One part of the report contained a list of important milestones (such as paternal leave for men in 1978). The title of the list was: "To improve the status of women". This gives off a wrong signal and the title was changed to: "Steps on the road to equality".

Any work for gender equality requires expert knowledge in its disposal. A problem related to this in Finland (and most probably in other European countries too) is that the gender-sensitive expertise on men is shallow and dispersed. This is a risky situation, as it gives more room for populism and badly thought out ideas and initiatives. For long-term work on men and gender equality to be pursued some degree of further institutionalization within the gender equality machinery is needed.

There are three possible models for such institutionalization, ranging from weak to strong. Firstly, a special unit could be set up for men and gender equality. Secondly, the policy established during the term of this Government could be continued, with work on men and gender equality as a whole being entrusted to one civil servant, while employing special advisers for individual issues. The third and weakest option is to incorporate the 'male angle' on gender equality into the duties of all civil servants working on gender equality policy, which would be tantamount to mainstreaming. The best way would be the middle road. A special unit dedicated to men and gender equality would risk competition between the mainstream work for gender equality on the one hand and men and gender equality on the other. Such a unit might also be marginalized in the work for gender equality and its contributions lost from the perspective of national and international work. However, merely mainstreaming the perspective is not sufficient, because the theme still needs development, which requires dedication.

Expertise is of course needed also outside the governmental machinery. One important way of promoting deeper and broader expertise concerning men in Finland is to provide financial support both for studies on men and for gender studies that also deal with men. In addition, we must ponder ways of financially subsidizing men's organizations that work for gender equality as part of overall support for non-governmental organizations promoting gender equality.

Finally but very importantly, gender mainstreaming needs to be strengthened. Strengthening gender mainstreaming will play an important role in responding to challenges related to men and gender equality in various component areas of policy. Mainstreaming means that men can be integrated into the gender perspective: when we look at things from the female angle, we also see them from the male angle. Another important reason for strengthening mainstreaming is that as a result, many issues related specifically to men come to the fore. In some countries, mainstreaming has in practice meant only looking at the situation of women. From the 'men and gender equality' angle, however, it is vital to stress that mainstreaming should not concern merely women, but women and men. In such mainstreaming, an important role is played by statistics that distinguish between the genders.

Without such statistics, it is impossible to know how any given phenomenon affects women in particular and men in particular.

An important reason for strengthening gender mainstreaming is related to criticism aimed towards the gender equality machinery. This criticism says that the machinery does not adequately tackle problems faced by men. Due to reasons explained earlier, a good reaction to this criticism is to stress the importance of gender mainstreaming.

Currently, in 2007 we are working to find ways how to implement the strategy into concrete action. Several projects are underway. An important part of bringing the strategy to reality is the practice we employ from time to time at our Gender Equality Unit. Papers dealing with whatever issue are looked also from the perspective of how men are related to the issue and the insights gained from this are then included in the paper.

The most frequently asked question

In this final section I discuss the most frequently asked question about men and gender equality: “why would men participate?” The participation that is in question here refers participation into work for gender equality or more precisely women’s empowerment. Below I will examine the typical answer to this question as it is found in the literature dealing with the topic. As can be seen, the answer is really an answer to “what will men gain?” After examining the typical answer I will expand it from the perspective of gender equality policy. Typically the reasons for men’s interest are divided into four groups:

- 1) ethical value of gender equality;
- 2) benefits of gender equality to the overall society;
- 3) benefits of gender equality to women close to men;
- 4) benefits of gender equality to men themselves.

The four categories of the answer range from very abstract to relatively concrete. Naturally, men in different situations would benefit in different ways: a long-distance lorry driver living alone with no family would probably benefit quite a bit less than a married father of three daughters employed as a kindergarten teacher. Men in different situations are interested in different kinds of benefits. Individuals are interested in the more concrete and personal benefits, whereas the prime minister

wants to know if gender equality increases the GDP and competitiveness. The answer seems to be: “yes”.

The literature refers generally to the benefit of living in a society with higher ethical values. This is the most abstract of the benefits listed above and can mostly be seen as a question of principle.

The second category is very interesting for a civil servant (and a politician). It states that gender equality pays off for the society. This is a big claim but fortunately it can be substantiated with many examples. The idea is that equality makes a society more efficient, just and smoothly running and that this benefits all members of society, women and men alike. A society where women can fulfil their potential just as easily as men is a society which uses its human resources much better than one in which certain functions are in practice the exclusive province of men.

I will give some interesting examples. First, the Nordic countries are on the top of UN’s benchmarks for gender equality. They are also on the top of various competitiveness measures. The link is not arbitrary: in 2006 the UNDP evaluated, that the most important thing hindering the development of the Arab countries is the poor status of women. Another example comes from Finland, where in September 2007 a report showed that having women in top management in companies had a statistical link with profit. Finally, there are some hints, that the stronger entry of women into municipal decision making has made the decision making processes more transparent – again benefiting everybody. These examples show that a high status for women is not only a women’s issue – it is also very much a men’s issue.

In the third benefit, the phrase “women close to men” refers to all the women whom a man cares for and who are part of his life. They can be wives, daughters, sisters, mothers or friends. Equitable and just treatment of such women benefits men. For example, most fathers in Europe want to live in a society where their daughters can live without gender-based discrimination and violence.

The last category listed — personal benefits — refers to the multitude of ways in which a loosening of traditional conceptions and expectations governing the lives of men and women can help men. This goal is at the centre of gender equality policy. It is mentioned in the CEDAW convention from 1979 as well as in the EU’s Roadmap for gender equality 2006-2010. The violence and discrimination perpetrated by men against other men is often due to the victim not fulfilling a particular norm of manhood, such as heterosexuality. Also, it is maintained that looking after one’s

wellbeing is at odds with traditional masculinity. As a third example, we might note that a man who enjoys working with children has an easier time being employed as a kindergarten teacher in an environment where conceptions of suitable pursuits for men are not so rigid. Fourthly, many men feel pressured by other men towards inequitable behaviour, particularly towards women. In a society that values gender equality, peer groups will not exert as much pressure towards inequitable behaviour.

I expand the last category with four thoughts. First, gender equality policy measures that mainly target women's empowerment will also benefit numerous men. Second, action to improve women's situation also bring into light problems that men face that have been in the dark. Third, the lives and thus problems of men and women are often interlinked in a win-win or lose-lose fashion. Finally, the participation of men will itself transform that which is participated in.

Gender equality policy initiatives, which have as their main goal to improve women's situation, benefit men as well. The clearest and most powerful example is the law on gender equality. It was originally made to reduce gender discrimination against women. Yet, a significant and growing minority of those who contact the ombudsman supervising the law are men. Other examples can be found from looking at improvements in parental leave and possibilities to reconcile work and family life. These improvements are often made to help women but naturally give similar possibilities for men too.

The second amendment can be illustrated with the following example: The Rape Crisis Centre Tukinainen ('Women's Support') in Finland has for some years offered support for victims of rape. The popular thinking is, of course, that the victims are all women. However, in its work the crisis centre has found out that also men can be victims and now has applied for money to expand its services to meet the needs of men who have been raped. Thus, even in a problem that is usually thought of concerning women only there are men who also are in a similar situation. It is telling, that a women's organization has brought this up and not a men's organization. Other examples can be found from many areas, such as work for victims of intimate violence.

Finally, the third addition can perhaps best be explained with an example. The example also shows, how input from men can help to reframe a problem concerning women in a way that posits the solution in a favourable light for everybody. One of the most common personal reasons, if not the most common, for men in Western countries to become interested in gender equality is divorce and

loss of child custody. It has been posited that in a divorce, child custody is awarded to the mother more frequently than should objectively be the case. A possible reason for this is gender discrimination against men in the custody proceedings. It has therefore been demanded that the possible occurrence of such discrimination should be investigated (e.g. by the Employment and Equality Committee of the Parliament in its memo in 2005) and discrimination of this kind eliminated. It seems obvious that the problem is the possible occurrence of discrimination and that the recommendation for action is to eliminate it.

However, the problem and the solution can be framed in different terms so as to be more advantageous to men while not being any less advantageous to women. Firstly, the problem itself can be broken down into three component problems: 1) divorce in itself is in the majority of cases not what the parties wanted to happen; 2) any discrimination which does occur is in violation of the Equality Act; 3) potential distancing from one's children as a result of divorce is a problem in itself, and can occur even if there is no discrimination involved. If the approach is to eliminate discrimination in custody proceedings, this would affect only component problem no. 2 and, to some extent, component problem no. 3. In the short term, it seems likely that regardless of whether men are subject to gender discrimination in custody decisions or not, the majority of those awarded custody would continue to be women, because women on average bear the greater responsibility for child care (Melkas 2005). In other words, it would continue to be the case that most divorced men would be separated from their children for most of the time.

An alternative approach might be to prevent divorce through support for couples and by promoting participatory fatherhood. This approach would reduce the incidence of divorces, make discrimination more difficult in the future and reduce the risk of distancing from the children in the case of divorce. Participatory fatherhood would also increase the likelihood of child custody being awarded to the father in a divorce. One of the most important reasons for divorce is the uneven division of responsibilities in childcare and housework (Paajanen 2003), which is particularly troublesome for women (Melkas 2005). Accordingly, an important way of preventing divorces and improving the status of men would be to get men to participate more in childcare and housework. The positive impact on the lives of women, men and children alike would probably be much greater than any benefits that might be achieved by addressing potential discrimination against men in custody proceedings.

Finally, men's participation will probably transform work for gender equality in many ways. The changes include what is done, how it is done and why it is done. Some of these changes will benefit men in general. However, there are also risks in taking men into account and in men's participation. Possible risks include:

- blurring of the big picture in gender equality
- emergence of competition between action to tackle problems of men and action to tackle the problems of women
- seeing the relationship between men and gender equality from a narrow and one-sided viewpoint

Concluding words

In concluding this paper I want to summarise some of the key points discussed above. It is now time to start focusing more on men in gender equality policy. An important verb in this work is 'incorporate'. A focus on men should be a part of the whole of gender equality policy, not something that is set apart from it, either organizationally or in terms of content, actions or principles that it rests upon. Some thought should be given to the role of men when preparing action on any given issue, be it reducing the wage gap or increasing the number of women in leadership positions.

In a recent barometer, available in English (Melkas 2005), over 80 percent of both men and women in Finland agreed with the statement: "Men benefit from increased gender equality too". Men do benefit from gender equality and women's empowerment. Thus, gender equality, and women's empowerment are not women's issues but concern everybody. Gender equality policy should strive to make this issue known.

More focus on men in gender equality policy will doubtless transform the policy itself in ways that we cannot yet see. New topics, such as health, and gender equality can gain prominence. Probably the tension around the issue whether priority should be given to women's or men's problems will get more attention. In discussing the issue, it is possible to use the agreed conclusions from the CSW 2004 meeting as well as EU's council conclusions from December 2006 that both maintain the priority of women's empowerment.

For the purpose of organizational effectiveness, focusing on men should support the main actions of gender equality machinery and help do it better. In this regards, the notion that gender mainstreaming is important for solving many issues especially related to men is interesting. Could this insight be used to motivate those social movements that are mainly interested in men's well-being to demand more and better gender mainstreaming, thus helping the goals of gender equality machinery?

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