

The Role of African Men in the Fight against HIV/AIDS

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Introduction

The current work with men and boys for gender equality is part of a paradigm shift which came in the decade of the mid-eighties in the continued struggle to seek more effective strategies to achieve the goals of equality, development and peace, which the world has pursued the last three decades. For those who have followed the evolution of the global movement for gender equality since the First World Conference on Women in Mexico City in 1975, it has been a decade after decade review, with the same general agreement that while some progress had been made, there were still major obstacles. It has also been a continuous acceptance, decade after decade, that overall, the situation of the majority of women was getting worse. So, the question has always been, what are we not doing right, what else could be done or done differently?

The shift from the women in development approach to the gender and development approach was proposed after the Nairobi Conference (1985). This approach was embraced with enthusiasm because it seemed to offer yet another hope for the achievement of deeply valued and yet ever elusive goals. The initial stage of embracing and understanding the approach was controversial within the women's movement. Many women felt that it was a dilution or selling out of the women's struggle, while others felt that the new approach was a sound strategy for advancing the women's empowerment and gender equality goal. The gender approach entailed the shift from meeting women's basic needs to the focus on power relations between females and males in society.

There are many women to-day who feel strongly that working with men and boys is diluting, diverting and even trivialising our struggle. Many hold the view that because men and boys are the beneficiaries of male privilege and the discrimination against women and girls, they can never fully understand the women's struggle. Many doubt that men and boys can be fully committed to a change that would mean them losing a lot of the privileges they now enjoy. As the understanding of gender dynamics, their social construction, masculinities, femininity and their impact on all groups in society deepens, it becomes clearer that males have many reasons to want to change, and that gender equality would have benefits for them, and for all the groups in society.

Working with men and boys

The work with men and boys for gender equality is only one of the many strategies and approaches that must be combined to tackle the ever growing problem of inequality, injustice and oppression. The problem is so large, threatening and daunting, that different strategies must be devised to tackle it. The strategies must include women's empowerment, promoting gender equality, gender mainstreaming, the transformation of men and boys. This must be done using integrated, people oriented approaches, ensuring sustainable livelihoods and a diversity of other approaches tried and tested in decades of the struggle towards a more equal and just society. It is not one or the other, but often the combination of what is most appropriate, relevant or effective in given circumstances. For example, in the struggle to combat the spread of HIV/AIDS in Africa, working with men and boys presents one possible approach, given the dominance of patriarchal ideologies and systems and the relationship between the low status of women and the spread of HIV/AIDS. Working with men and boys is a new approach and experiences with it are recent, sketchy and much less tested. But the need for finding solutions is urgent and therefore all possible solutions must be employed to combat this life threatening situation. This is not the only way to go, but it is a definite way of getting some solutions.

There are many compelling reasons for involving men and boys in the struggle for gender equality. For a start, (whether or not, justly, legally legitimately, fairly or appropriately) most men hold the power, authority, control and privileges that are the contention for the gender equality struggle. They must be engaged as they will have to give (up, in, to, away, etc) something for the struggle to be won. Whether this is to be achieved

through persuasion, coercion, political struggle, divine intervention, legislation, socialisation, policy, social revolution or whatever means, they have to be involved.

Gender sensitive men as partners, fathers, sons, brothers, judges, magistrates, police officers, permanent secretaries, ministers and heads of state make significant difference because they believe in women and in their empowerment. The men for gender equality approach is a way of recognising and deliberately mobilising such men to be part of the solution. They are there in their thousands, and will actively participate in the struggle once the strategy to involve them is explicit and deliberate.

My father was a strong believer in equal opportunities for girls and boys. I am therefore a product of a man's determination to achieve social justice because he believed that as a Christian to do so was divine command. My late father fought female circumcision with every weapon including physical confrontation, gave us girls every opportunity he gave our brothers including inheritance, refused dowry, defied society and patriarchy in all ways and left a legacy that laid a foundation for the women and girls in our family to claim equality. He also became a model which society could ridicule, envy, question, emulate or oppose, but which could not be ignored.

The work with men is a strategy to multiply the number of men who will defy, confront and transform society and move society out of cultural, social and economic bondage. In the struggle against gender based violence and the spread of HIV/AIDS, which now pose a threat of a magnitude that is unprecedented in the history of our world, women have been and continue to be the greater victims relative to men. Many programmes target women with messages, advocacy, counsel and support services. Still the problems continue to escalate unabated, causing the continuous and almost desperate search for solutions and answers.

Gender relations and HIV/AIDS

Gender analysis became a key tool for the unearthing of the unequal gender and power relations as the root cause of many of the social and economic ills facing society. The unequal impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic on females relative to males is a crucial revelation from gender analysis. The powerlessness of women and girls to change their own situations is one of the obstacles that must be addressed. The power dynamics demand that men and boys must become key agents of change and transformation. With this shift of thinking, attention is gradually being turned to men and boys as partners to women and girls, as part of the solution to combating the scourge. Although this approach is still in its infancy, compared to other approaches, indications are that it holds a promise.

There is now evidence that in Africa more females are affected and infected by HIV/AIDS. However, most interventions have not addressed critical gender issues, for example, gendered and unfair division of labour, unequal access to resources including health care and services, women's powerlessness, low social worth and inability to make decisions even about their bodies. The HIV/AIDS has added burdens to an already over-burdened, powerless, victimised, oppressed and under-valued group. African villages are now overflowing with women victims of HIV/AIDS who contracted the virus in their bedrooms or because they were victims of rape, marital rape, polygamous relationships, incest, economic hardship and despair that drove them to commercial sex work, exploitation by relatives and a myriad of other factors whose root cause is gender inequality.

Women can and are already doing a lot to cope with the pandemic, but men hold the remaining part of the solution. The predominant patriarchal society insists on control, subordination and the under valuing females, stereotyping males as stronger, better, higher value and leaders of women and society. It creates major problems for females and males of all ages, and nowhere has this been as evident as in the current situation where HIV/AIDS has ravaged humanity, especially in some countries of Africa. On the positive side, increasingly, some male visionaries have become aware that men are beneficiaries of an unfair and untenable system in which everybody eventually becomes a loser. The impact of over thirty years of the global campaign for the rights of women and gender equality is slowly transforming even the most patriarchal societies. The Beijing Conference particularly had such a profound impact on the lives of women

and men that even in remote villages and communities, it is not uncommon to hear the name Beijing, correctly associated with the empowerment of women.

Building partnerships between women and men

The world will never be the same again after Beijing, and more and more men are beginning to realise that the acceptance of equality as a reality is a pre-requisite for the inevitable social transformation. This has motivated the budding movement of men for gender equality. In Africa, the most active groups of men for gender equality have been formed by men who have felt left behind by women in organising for change. They have been formed to fill the gap that men felt as they witnessed women gaining empowerment and providing support to other women in ways that men could never match. The post-Beijing focus on the girl child compared to the boy child proved to be a wake-up call to men, as they started comparing the girl and the boy child, thus recognising many areas of disparity in the socialisation of the boy child. The need for creating new masculinities has become popular as more men seek to understand how to transform male behaviour.

The pursuit by gender responsive men to transform masculinities is the result of many years of study, analysis and experience. In many countries these male gender activists have observed that while patriarchy confers all the power to the male in society, there is a cost to pay for the things patriarchy has taught and allowed them. For example, male domination over women in matters of sexuality and the abuse of such power is a primary factor behind the HIV/AIDS pandemic. It is not a coincidence that the most patriarchal societies are the same societies where the pandemic is ravaging humanity with the greatest impact. The cost of patriarchal excesses manifests in the presence of more men in prisons, mental hospitals, victims of drug and alcohol abuse, and in gangs; and these conditions are also in turn impacting the spread of the HIV/AIDS and the inevitable end in graves.

This fact has not escaped the notice of the visionary men in societies, in developing and developed countries. Attitudes are gradually changing as more men recognise the value and benefits of societies built on principles of gender equality, justice and freedom. Men who are concerned about the future generation of men are beginning to appreciate the need for constructing new and alternative masculinities, which will among other things inculcate gender equality as a social norm. More men are joining in activities to sensitise men on issues of gender and the dangers posed by such evils as gender based violence and the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Through these interventions men have started rethinking their roles and status regarding other issues such as reproductive health, family responsibility, including the nurturing and care of children. The role of men in socialising boys to develop new masculinities is one of the areas where programmes for the empowerment of the girl child have motivated men to act to empower the boy child.

Masculinity, Men and HIV/AIDS

The concept of masculinity differs from one society to the other, depending on the socio-cultural situation. It is defined as a set of attributes, values, functions and behaviours that are considered normal conditions of men in a given culture. In most societies masculinity is culturally constructed as essentially into a dominant person who discriminates against and subordinates women and other men, especially those who do not conform to similar behaviour. Boys are socialised and modelled along this pattern from birth and through the life cycle. Social systems ensure compliance to this behaviour. Men who deviate from the defined behaviour are ostracised and assumed to take the side of women. The fear of being labeled as women keeps many men and boys from supporting gender equality and defending the rights of women.

The socialisation of boys and men regarding sexuality is one of the areas of masculinities that are of major concern to day, in face of the HIV/AIDS, especially in Africa. Most men and boys are socialised to believe that they are entitled to have sex and that it is natural to have many partners. Boys and men are socialised to believe that sex is their right and that they are entitled to it whenever they want it. Girls are socialised to be submissive, service oriented and self-sacrificial. They grow up believing it is their duty to serve and satisfy men. Some women believe the lie that it is natural for men to have many partners or to exercise power over them. Even when they know their partners are involved in risky behaviour, they lack the power to negotiate safe sex and to say no to irresponsible men. Polygamy is an accepted norm by both women and men in many

societies; and multiple partners are justified as a form of informal polygamy. The informal polygamy is seen as a right to have sex with many women without obligations of fidelity or responsibility to the women or the children conceived in these relations. Widow inheritance, abduction, early marriage, female genital cutting and other cultural practices where men are the beneficiaries have increased the threat of HIV/AIDS for themselves and the women.

Men, women and children are at risk of HIV/AIDS. Men's vulnerability is made higher by their patterns of behaviour, modes of socialisation, peer pressure, prevailing concepts of masculinity, alcohol and drug abuse, violence, hostile environments, cultural practices and norms. Men have significant control over women's sexual lives. Many use violence, psychological, economic or social pressure to insist on sex with their partners. Further they use the same advantages to have many sex partners. Even when aware of their own vulnerability, most women have little opportunity or power to protect themselves from HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Men are placed at risk by masculine values, which discourage them from protecting themselves. In a recent consultation with some men in Nairobi, they traced the risky behaviour many of them indulge in to the way they were socialised and brought up to show masculine prowess and power over women and girls.

Culture plays an important role in the spread of HIV/AIDS. Practices such as widow inheritance, polygamy, female genital cutting, early sexuality and dry sex affect the individual's risk of contracting or transmitting HIV. Some men use violence to make their partners have sex with them. Sex coercion happens in and outside the home. Children may encounter violence from parents, older members, close relatives, older friends, youth gangs, domestic workers or teachers. Younger girls are forced or enticed into sex relations with older men because these men believe that young girls are free of the virus. In the recent past cases of violation of baby girls by adults have greatly increased, and as the pandemic ravages communities there is no end to the atrocities being committed by many in situations of despair, and who are looking for cure even in the most unlikely places.

Rape among men in prisons is a common occurrence, which may be through consent, rape or other forms of exploitation. Wars and political instability create refugees persons who are particularly vulnerable to HIV/AIDS because of a multiplicity of factors including inadequate protection, poverty, poor nutrition, inaccessibility to health services, the use of rape as a war weapon and forced transactional sex. Drug and alcohol abuse have a direct relationship with HIV transmission because of contaminated syringes. Drug and alcohol use impairs the judgement of users and could lead to risky behaviour such as sharing of partners and sex rituals.

Men's Involvement in Care and Support

The gender division of labour in most societies puts the burden of looking after the sick on women. Often women will care for the men in their families, but if women get infected, they depend on their children or relatives to look after them. Involving men in the prevention, care and support of those living with the epidemic is one of the ways of bringing change. Men are the key decision-makers in all aspects of the transmission and the power to protect themselves and their partners. Engaging men in giving care brings them face to face with the realities of HIV/AIDS, and the need for change. Men's participation in dialogue, giving personal testimonies and analysis of things that are happening to men and boys in families and in society is one of the effective strategies that has been used to help those men living with HIV/AIDS and for helping others to change their behaviour. In most societies, women have support groups and more openly share information and concerns than men. Men and boys have been socialised to believe they know more than women, and therefore feel threatened when women know more. Creating forums for men to share, discuss and agree on action is an effective way of mobilising their support and changing their attitudes and behaviour.

The Men as Partners (MAP) is a multi-faceted intervention designed to engage men in reducing gender based violence and to promote men's constructive role in sexual and reproductive health, including HIV/AIDS initiative in South African. The programme is carried out through a partnership of civil society

organisations collaborating with Government and academic organisations, to transform the behaviour of men and the norms of masculinity.

The MAP was founded in 1998 to respond to the need for involving men in the escalating and related problems of HIV/AIDS and violence against women. The MAP is an initiative of the Engender Health and the Planned Parenthood Association of South Africa (PPASA). The programme aims to challenge the attitudes, values and behaviour of men that compromise their own health and safety as well as the health and safety of women and children; and to encourage men to become actively involved in preventing gender based violence as well as in HIV/AIDS related prevention, care and support activities.

The HIV/AIDS pandemic has jolted many societies into action, particularly challenging them to examine how boys have in the past been socialised into manhood and the masculinity values that have been passed or not passed on to them. In this connection targeting boys is fast gaining prominence as a medium-term strategy for changing male behaviour and developing new masculinities. Activities include developing new rites of passage, which take into consideration the changing roles of men in society, and particularly recognising the principles of gender equality that are gradually being accepted as a social norm. Boys camps are another common activity where they learn under the guidance of men and older youth new values.

In several African countries faith based organisations have taken a lead in these initiatives, particularly responding to the growing threat of HIV/AIDS, gender based violence, drug and substance abuse and indiscipline in learning institutions at all levels. Media programmes, production of educational materials, drama and theatre groups are some of the other activities that are gaining popularity. In Kenya, an annual event known as the national drama and music festival is playing a crucial role in mobilising the creativity of young people in schools through-out the nation in composing songs and drama on the theme of HIV/AIDS. Both boys and girls schools have been involved and this has greatly contributed to the awareness creation among youth of the dangers posed by the pandemic.

The Men for Gender Equality Initiative in Africa

The men for gender equality initiative is one of the budding initiatives to mobilise men to support gender equality in Africa. The long term goal is to create a movement of men in Africa who support gender equality. It builds on existing efforts to mobilise men to support gender based programmes such as the elimination of gender based violence, men in reproductive health, men in the churches and men in the fight against HIV/AIDS pandemic.

The Regional network organised a men's travelling conference covering a number of countries as part of the campaign of the sixteen days of activism against violence on women in Nov-Dec 2003. The travelling conference involved about one hundred men travelling in Kenya, Tanzania, Malawi and Zambia and reaching thousands of men, women, youth and children through song, drama, music, posters and personal interaction, to give messages on the role of men in combating gender based violence and the spread of HIV/AIDS.

The initiative is based on the recognition of the vital role men play in leadership in private and public spheres; and the impact they could have in transforming gender relations, if they had the knowledge and commitment to do so. Further, the initiative is based on the knowledge that in many countries there are some already existing efforts by individual men or small groups of men, who are willing to take action in support of women's empowerment and gender equality. The initiative aims at mobilising such men, bringing them together; and involving them in programmes to reach, mobilise and influence other men to join the movement of men in support of gender equality and in the fight against the spread of HIV/AIDS.

Strategies for the future

Transforming gender relations

Building partnerships between women and men and transforming socialisation processes is the key strategy for addressing one of the root causes of the spread of the pandemic, the unequal gender power relations. The

fight against the HIV/AIDS pandemic requires the efforts of everybody in society, especially men who hold the power of decision-making at every level of, from the bedroom to the Statehouses and other power bases of policy, politics and resources. Innovative, bold and rigorous approaches to HIV/AIDS prevention and care of those affected are urgently required and men are critical players at all these levels. Countries like Uganda that have made remarkable strides in halting the spread of the pandemic offer useful lessons, especially on how to mobilise and involve critical male players, including children both boys and girls in schools, young women and men in their peer groups, men in faith based groups, trade union groups, work places and communities. Male political leaders have a particularly important role to play in spreading the message, and as the President of Kenya Hon. Mwai Kibaki tells his fellow men in a continuing advocacy programme against HIV/AIDS, the choice is between life and death and they must choose life.

Promoting gender equality as a social innovation

The involvement of men in the campaign for gender equality is a social innovation. Like all innovations, it has the different characters who cause change, and those who will resist it to the very end. Men who support gender equality and those mobilising other men to fight HIV/AIDS are the innovators and early adopters, who know when it is time to change and will take the risk to do so, regardless of what the majority think or do. These men come in many profiles and understanding their motivation to change gives us insight into what needs to be done to maintain their support, to bring more of their kind into the movement.

The Kenya Men for Gender Equality Now is a member of the Africa Regional Network of Men Against Gender Based Violence. It has a programme for conducting community seminars to educate women and men about the dangers of GBV and the threat of HIV/AIDS. In these seminars community members are involved in analysing the problems in their areas and determining what needs to be done. The community seminars have popularised the Network bringing many men to join and encouraging survivors of violence to speak out and seek help. The encounters with the communities lead to the creation of a group known as the “rapid response team” within the network. This team is at hand to support survivors of GBV, most of them young girls and occasionally boys. The team responds by taking survivors to the hospital, getting police and other legal support, counselling survivors and their families and following up on cases in courts to ensure justice is done. The team works in close collaboration with the Coalition Against Violence on Women (COVAW), the Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA), local leaders, the police, hospitals, media houses and the government administration services to ensure provision of comprehensive services to survivors.

The Kenya Men’s Network has added a new dimension in the fight against gender based violence just by the fact of them being men. In the communities they send the message that perpetrators of violence against women and girls are not fighting against helpless victims but a force comprising women, men and organisations, which will stop at nothing until justice is done. In the courts they stand with the survivors and their families to provide legal counsel, moral support and show much needed solidarity, in situations where too often perpetrators are allowed to get away with such lenient sentences that they make mockery of justice. With law enforcement officers, community leaders and service providers, they use their skills, clout and knowledge to persuade them to act effectively and urgently.

Visionary men who have recognised that gender equality is the answer to many of the ills that have bedevilled society are to be found even in the most patriarchal societies. These include village elders who have seen generations of women and men play different roles in society and recognised the equal value of contributions of women and men; also recognising the complementary nature of such roles. These men of vision also see the dangers of oppressing and subordinating one group of people in society and are the voice of reason in discussions with peers, in counselling younger people, in fighting for the rights of the oppressed and marginalised and in calling society to order. In the fight against HIV/AIDS and gender based violence these men have included prominent men in society as well as men living with HIV/AIDS.

Increasing numbers of men support gender equality and such campaigns as those for combating gender based violence and the spread of HIV/AIDS because they have witnessed or perceived the impact of such threats to the whole society. They are also in the forefront in fighting against other threats such as food insecurity, war and political insecurity. These men see where others do not necessarily see, the connections

between gender inequality and these threats to the future of their societies. They therefore fight for issues like female education, elimination of gender based violence, female inheritance and the involvement of women in decision-making because what is good for women is also good for society.

Human rights activists are among the most common campaigners for gender rights because of their belief in the principles of equality, justice and fairness as fundamental to the enjoyment of human rights. The women's rights campaign has attracted the participation of many men and as the human rights agenda has evolved to encompass more and more areas of human relations, more men have been moved to join in action. Human rights organisations have now mushroomed in many countries, dealing with a diversity of issues including issues of governance, democracy, transparency, economic rights, land rights, children's rights, reproductive health rights etc. The fight against HIV/AIDS now includes the human rights dimension and calls for the use of the human rights approach to prevention and protection of those living with HIV/AIDS.

Fathers who love and honour their daughters constitute a large group of men who support gender equality. These are found in every society and can become key advocates for gender equality, given the skills and knowledge of the issues, and the platform. Many of the men in the women's rights movement are there because of the love of their daughters, mothers and occasionally wives. The impact of fathers who support gender equality in influencing other men in such matters as female education, eradication of negative and harmful practices such as dowry, female genital cutting, early marriages and inheritance is enormous. These groups of men can also be mobilised to support the campaign of men against the spread of HIV/AIDS including the protection of women and girls.

Young men who have been brought up in environments where equality is a norm are less likely to be threatened by gender equality. Many young men are now joining campaigns on equal rights for women, human rights, HIV/AIDS, against gender based violence and democracy. Gender sensitisation courses with university groups, public debates, media programmes and community peer groups are some of the activities that have attracted young men who support gender equality.

Men in support of other men

Men who consider themselves the advocates for the oppressed men and especially those who feel that men are endangered by the gender equality movement have joined programmes for gender equality to represent the views of the perceived "oppressed men". The reproductive rights of women have particularly caused bitterness among some sections of men who feel that the whole approach empowers women at the expense of men, especially regarding their rights as fathers. Male grievances include some provisions in the legislation on domestic violence, father's rights, the rights of the abused man, the marginalisation of the boy child, the welfare of the aging males and the increasing plight of the unemployed men. Men's support groups with the objectives of shielding men from oppression are some of the structures that have come up in response to the needs of men who are threatened by gender equality and the empowerment of women. These groups are useful forums for addressing issues of HIV/AIDS and of changing men's attitudes.

Men living with HIV/AIDS are among the men who have learned the hard way, and have resolved to join the campaign to help other men avoid the pitfalls. Others include men who have reformed from drugs, crime and other risky behaviour. These also include ex-prisoners who served terms in prison for femicide, rape or other forms of violence for which they regretted. A founder of one of the men for change groups in Africa, was motivated to start a programme for the rehabilitation of men after he served a sentence for violence against a woman who was very close to him. The programme now reaches boys in schools to teach them new masculinities and gender equality principles.

The fight against HIV/AIDS pandemic must adopt an approach that emphasizes the collective responsibility of individuals, community groups, different levels of government and other agencies; particularly emphasizing the role of men in combating the pandemic. Men must be in the forefront of the prevention of HIV/AIDS, mitigation of the impact of the epidemic on individuals and communities and provision of health care and compassion, just like they have taken leadership in other sectors. Orphan support programmes have

placed a heavy burden on women and men must be mobilised to support and contribute to these programmes at family and community levels.

Increasing male care givers

Home based care and support has traditionally been the responsibility of women. Many men have found it convenient to stick to this division of labour, especially when it comes to the difficult and heart breaking responsibility of caring for HIV/AIDS sufferers. Women and girls nurse the males in their families, but when it is their turn to need care, this is sought from the extended family, community or friends. While the pandemic is wreaking havoc on families and communities, few men have changed their behaviour or taken on new responsibilities. Even in situations that are culturally taboo, for example a mother nursing her adult son, women are taking on such responsibilities because men are not willing to get involved. The traditional roles played by men of providing for families have also shifted to women and girls, since they are conditioned to think of the needs of others, even when they are the more needy. Most women will struggle to the very end of their energies to cater for their families, and especially children. When mothers are too ill to care for themselves and others, it is girls who have to drop out of school to take over. Surely this situation has to change, and men are the missing part in seeking solutions.

Reaching men and boys at all levels of society

Programs should be implemented at the grassroots level, communicating with people in familiar ways that are consistent with the local culture, and include all members of society, as opposed to targeting certain high-risk groups. This will mean that everyone in a community is exposed to the consequences of HIV/AIDS. Openness in discussing HIV/AIDS and its effect, thereby reducing the stigma associated with the infection has contributed greatly to the decline in the disease in such countries as Uganda, where men, including those living with HIV/AIDS, political leaders, community and faith leaders, musicians and football stars have lead the way in speaking out about the pandemic. There is new debate in several countries on whether political leaders should go for voluntary testing and also whether in view of the important roles they play they should publicly disclose their status. Men should be encouraged to open such issues for discussion among themselves and influence others to test.

Men should be specifically targeted as members of communities, leaders, workers, parents and spouses and be involved in learning through educational programmes, and in designing interventions to reach other men. This strategy ensures that interventions are designed by those who are most knowledgeable about how HIV/AIDS affects them as individuals, their families, and the community at large, and also about what issues need to be addressed. For example, the involvement of people living with AIDS will enable them to influence policy debate, reduce discrimination and stigma, and enhance advocacy for review of the policy framework and legal system in order to eliminate practices that discriminate against those people living with HIV/AIDS. Peer education in schools and work places is an effective strategy in maintaining and encouraging behavioral change. Sex education in school, out of school, peer clubs, community groups, games club, universities, colleges and work places can attract large audiences of men and boys.

More men must be involved in programs that are geared towards prevention, which is important in curbing the spread of the disease. In addition there should be more programmes for helping people who already have HIV/AIDS and their families to cope with it. Provision of medication, access to cheaper drugs, and social support to such families is vital. Reaching men is one of the innovative ways of dealing with the HIV/AIDS pandemic, particularly aiming at capacity building in technical and management skills, information gathering and sharing, monitoring the pandemic and adapting programs to meet the most critical needs, especially researching and establishing how men's behavior, attitudes and practices change.

The men's initiative should particularly target male political, private sector, faith based organisations and policy level male leadership. Political commitment and local ownership of the initiative are important, and so is the involvement from the top, recognizing that men at every level are instrumental to the success of prevention and support programs. Experiences with the HIV/AIDS have shown more than any other crisis in human history that while it is relatively easy to provide health services and train people in how to cope with epidemics, as was done in the elimination of smallpox and polio, the more serious and challenging issue

regarding HIV/AIDS is how to change gender power relations, transform male attitudes and sexual behaviour. This requires the mobilisation and involvement of men and boys from the cradle to the grave in order to comprehensively deal with the pandemic now and into the future.

Conclusion

The hope for winning the fight with HIV/AIDS pandemic lies in changing the attitudes and behaviour of the boys of to-day, the men of to-morrow, who will not be afraid of equality with women and who are willing to change their behaviour and attitudes. This should include developing new masculine and feminine ideologies especially among the youth. The involvement of men in programmes for gender equality and especially the fight against the spread of the HIV/AIDS pandemic borrows a leaf from the struggle to end apartheid. The struggle made great gains when some white campaigners joined the struggle and campaigned against the evil. The perpetrators of the evil listened to their own; and created a new voice. Men who support equality with women are powerful and effective advocates for change. Men must take the lead in dismantling the patriarchal systems and must refuse to continue to be beneficiaries of the evil system that dehumanises and subordinates more than half of every patriarchal society. Our task is to show that the gains for them to do so far outweigh the losses.