

Together we must win: men and women working
together for our greater humanity.

Barry Chevannes

Reaching Men to Improve Reproductive Health for All
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After the Beijing Conference, the UNICEF Representative hosted a lunch for all the women who had assisted and contributed in the preparatory work leading up the dispatch of the representatives and participants from Jamaica. I was the only male present. In the course of the discussion, I ventured that the women's movement had reached a kind of apogee, that it was not going to move to any higher levels of equity and realization of rights unless men became involved as equal partners. A frosty silence descended on the atmosphere but was dispelled as swiftly as it came by the scorching dismissal from a number of the women.

But I had a revenge of sorts several weeks later at another function—a dinner to honour the former Assistant U.N. Secretary General for Women's Affairs, Lucille Mair, with a presentation of the Report on the Beijing Conference. In her reply, this grande dame of the women's movement and architect of the Nairobi Conference stated that without men playing critical roles alongside and sometimes behind women, the women's movement would not have reached where it had. And she singled out Michael Manley, the late Prime Minister of Jamaica, at the national, local level, a former Vice Chancellor of the University of the West Indies, at the regional level, and at the international level a former head of UNICEF.

The truth is we are in this thing together. In the same way that Emancipation freed not only the slaves from the control and arbitrary abuse of the slave owners and masters, indeed, but also the same slave owners and masters from themselves, offering them the possibility of realizing their humanity, in the same way the liberation of women from the cruelty and abuse of inferior status will also liberate men from their antisocial instincts and offer us the possibility of fulfilling our humanity.

If we are human because we are social, then to be antisocial is to be antihuman. Every act that undermines our ability to live together undermines the realization of our humanity. The aggressive masculinity that cynically fabricated an excuse to war, terror and conquest on another country is no less antihuman than the suicidal hijacking that hurled hundreds of terrified travelers to innocent deaths, consuming thousands of others in the conflagration and collapse of the Twin Towers. Margaret Greene must be commended for the courage to bring, even fleetingly, to our attention the link between the aggressive masculinity that inspires the life-taking rituals of war and the masculinity that dehumanizes itself by dehumanizing the other life-giving half of its own species. As other

speakers at the conference have emphasized, in their own way, and as the organizers have structured the conference, the issues of male reproductive health are not separate and apart from the social issues of socialization, aggression, violence, culture, education. The liberation of women, their acquisition of social status on equal terms with men is as inherently humanistic a task as it is inherently just.

We are all in this together, indeed. This conference is about the role of Men in Reproductive Health for all, but from the looks of it the participants include as many women as men, if not slightly more women. Were this a conference on the role of Women in Reproductive Health for all, with so many men present I am sure there would have been objections from some quarters about men not letting go of the patriarchal power they hold. So, the presence here of so many men and women involved in the search for ways and means to involve men in their own reproductive health may well speak to a greater maturity among both men and women, since we are working towards the same goal of realizing the fullness of our humanity in the vulnerability of our dependence on each other.

However, make no mistake about it, we men are here because you women were first there; because of the courageous struggle begun a hundred years ago for the right to be treated as equal. By leading the struggle for their own liberation women have also brought men into the struggle for our common humanity. In the spirit of Abhijit Das, who brought to the conference the mirror of self-reflection, I confess that the causality of my presence here could be classified as a matter of pure accident. For had I not been unemployed, I would not have been looking a job; had I not been looking a job, the Jamaica National Family Planning Board, having heard women report that men were obstacles to women's reproductive health, would not have hired me to produce a national survey on men's attitudes to contraception; and if I had not authored the survey, nobody would have asked me to speak on what men think; and if I had not spoken on what men thought, Janet Brown would not have invited me to chair a break out session for Fathers Only at the Parenting Conference she organized in 1991; and if I had not chaired that break out session, I would not have seen and felt the quiet resentment of those seventeen fathers against the male stereotyping by the society; and had I not felt their resentment I would not have inspired to propose the continuation of the discussion outside the framework of the conference, which led to the formation of Fathers Incorporated, which led to my being invited to this conference. A woman, Janet Brown, is as much the founder of Fathers Incorporated as I am.

My involvement may have been accidental the way it began, but hearing Michael Kaufman on Monday night recount the origins of the white ribbon campaign against violence against women, no one could ever remain in doubt that many if not most of us have been drawn to the struggle by the sheer power of our conscience. But whether by accident or necessity, the driving force of our presence here, as well as the purposefulness we leave with are matters of pure choice: the choice of commitment over indifference, of lighting candles over cursing darkness.

And there is a lot of darkness—on both sides. The resentment that greeted my observation at that UNICEF luncheon is an area of darkness retained by too many women who cannot forget or forgive, though it is hardly a question of forgiveness. For if, as common sense tells us, in a common struggle to survive, erstwhile enemies have no choice but to become allies and even friends, how much more must women and men facing the common challenge of anti-humanism work if not together, certainly alongside each other, for the sake of our species? The darkness also of the stereotype that too many women hold about men—men’s only interest is sex; they run from paternity; they have no love for children.

And on the side of men, the darkness of ignorance and fear. The fear of the unknown, as Alphansus Ekah put it in a session yesterday, in that voice-cut from Corinne Whitaker’s fascinating report on the anti-sexist programme among Nigerian adolescent males. It is the patriarchy-old fear of the reproductive power of women; the fear that forces them into ritual confinement during the menstrual flow; the fear of their libidinous power behind the genital mutilation. Is it not paradoxical that it is the sexual, and therefore creative, powers of women that form the hub around which are generated the many and varied taboos that inform the cultures of most of the world’s peoples? In Jamaica the most offensive and hurtful of that country’s many curse words is the one referring to the female genitals.

Dispelling the many areas of darkness cannot be achieved by the initiative of only one partner. Both have to be involved. In panel after panel we hear repeated a truism known for at least twenty years, namely that further advances in female reproductive health requires the involvement of men. Now the rich and varied experience from all over the world is telling us that such involvement must move and is moving beyond the requirements of two decades ago to the embrace of men in their own right, as equal partners.

The critical question, then, is how to engage them, how to elicit the co-operation and participation of men in what we now understand to be a common “dyadic” function, as Stephen Schensul calls it, how to elicit their faith in the promise of rising to richer realizations of their own humanity by understanding and accepting women as equal partners. All the stories presented at this conference from all over the world, from India to the United States, Bangladesh to Zimbabwe, Brazil to Kenya, tell of successes, some modest, many dramatic, in dispelling darkness and transforming men into becoming more human. I cannot claim to have attended all the panels, but I have yet to hear of any that was a failure. Difficulties, yes; failure after surmounting the difficulties, no.

Among the difficulties we have heard is that of getting men to reproductive counseling. Perhaps because counseling is a private and not a public affair, getting the participation of men through the persuasion of their partners has proven a rich possibility, even in societies that rigidly uphold the public separation of men and women. However, men’s public participation, on the promptings of women, may not come as easily, if the experienced of Fathers Incorporated is anything to go by. In all of our twelve year history, not one father among the two hundred or so that have passed through our ranks

has shown an interest in our group, let alone joined, on the initiative of his wife or partner. Members come out of their own conviction of the need to join in promoting a responsible fatherhood, or more typically because they were recruited by individual members, and not from the apparently implied criticism in being sent by their spouses. Which suggests that men, as Michael Kaufman said, have to talk to men. The white ribbon campaign is a movement of men taking a stand against male violence against women, not a movement of women enlisting the support of men. Men have to talk to men, in both words and action.

But secondly men have to be engaged by allowing them to set their own agenda. Over the course of our conference we have heard tell of efforts to focus on, say, reproductive issues, while the men want to focus on, say, issues of sexual performance. They must be allowed the space and time to shape their own discourse. When Fathers Incorporated was formed and even up to the present, many women and women's organizations sought to use the group as an ally in accomplishing their own agenda. And indeed, Fathers Inc. is an ally, but only in a general and strategic sense, which oftentimes translates into co-operation and participation in tackling common goals. Thus the group participates in the Coalition for Better Parenting, or on the Prime Minister's gender equity task force to draft a policy document. But the group has had to define and shape its own identity as an organ of men talking to men about the concerns of men as they relate to women and children. One of these concerns we have taken and made into a national cause, namely the Model Father of the Year.

It's really quite simple. Every year from about February children are invited to write essays nominating their fathers as models, based on the criteria of them being faithful providers, respectful to and supportive of their spouses, their nurturing roles in the family, and their profiles as respectable role models and members of their communities. Once an external panel of judges adjudicates and selects a winner and two runners-up, members of Fathers Inc. triangulate the information contained in the essays by visits and interviews. The winner and runners-up become the focus of the celebration of Fathers Day in June, at which time they are showered with trophies and prizes contributed by corporate Jamaica.

Now many women and some women's groups would have been much happier had Fathers Inc. directed its efforts towards denouncing and bringing up those too many men who have become delinquent in their responsibilities towards their children. They would much prefer if we were to add a baritone section to the chorus of sopranos wailing necessary songs of lamentation and distress, instead of singing paeans of praise. But the conviction that brought the group together in the first place being the need to counter the stereotype of delinquency, the Model Father of the Year Award celebrates Jamaican fatherhood rather than bashes male paternal delinquency. It is informed by a perspective that insists that there are more positive than negative examples in the society—(how could it be otherwise?), and by a philosophy that projection of the very best may help to make the bad good and the good better. The point is that this is a men's agendum set by men, though in the end women and their families benefit.

But the women's movement itself also needs to be concerned with the broader issues and particularly those that affect men. It is worthwhile to mention two. The first is violence. I know that the issue as it has been posed and discussed here is violence against women. But we would be narrowly myopic if we fail to see the significance for all of us of the violence of men against men. In Jamaica where two years ago the country ranked third in the world for its rate of homicides, and where it has been among the leading countries for over a decade, women's groups began to speak out only when the barrier of immunity from the deadly retributive violence that women, children and the elders once enjoyed was broken and women were becoming victims in increasing numbers. But what sort of family life is possible in a country in which there must be very few of its citizens who have never been touched by the murder of a personal relative, friend or acquaintance, or the relative, friend or acquaintance of someone close? What kind of life can children have when the overwhelming majority of them have either witnessed or been the victims of violence? How do we rank violence against women in the face of a ten year-old schoolboy telling Pauline Pennant that if somebody thumps or kicks him, his solution is to kill him? Half the class agreed with him. The same aggressive masculinity that cruelly uses violence to intimidate and violate women is of the same scale, order, and classification that put two bullets through the heads of an aged, defenseless couple, that transmogrified young men into the death-eaters of a teenaged mother and her infant child in their swift and merciless feast.

Such violence of men against men is harmful to women. It deprives them of spousal support and their children of paternal embrace. It traumatizes the children, filling them with resentment and the spirit of revenge. With chilling pathos, one of the murderous gangs fighting for the control of Bob Marley's Trench Town called itself "The Fatherless Crew"—sons whose fathers are but phantom memories, even as they make phantom memories of the fathers of their enemies. We are all in this thing together, women and men.

A second issue is the so-called marginalization of men. Now when University of the West Indies Professor of Teacher Education Errol Miller first coined the expression in 1987 to argue that beginning in post-Emancipation Jamaica the white male establishment used black women as a buffer to prevent black men from challenging their hold on power, he was roundly criticized for seeming to imply that the upward movement of women through the education system in increasingly greater proportion was due not so much to women's own struggles as to the contriving of other men. But more than any other part of the world, the Anglophone Caribbean has been witnessing increasingly lower levels of male participation in the education system, and in some parts of it lower levels of performance as well.

In Jamaica, more boys than girls enter primary school, but by Grade 4 there are more girls than boys registered. By the time these students achieve matriculating status the sex ratio among University students is one male to three females. Unfortunately for Professor Miller, his argument about the male struggle for power is forgotten when such statistics are cited by others to prove that men are being marginalized. Then, righteously angry feminists retort that when the ratio was in the reverse, no one complained about female

marginalization; that it becomes a male problem now that women are achieving in greater numbers than men.

Of course there is no marginalization of men in the board rooms, on the stock exchange, or in the Parliament and Cabinet, which together remain the loci of national power; nor is there marginalization of males in the communities or in civil society; and certainly no marginalization in the criminal gangs wielding the power over life and death. But it should be of concern to Jamaican men and women alike that males are three times more likely than females to be illiterate, or to function at lower levels of intellectual activity. The problem is not localized to Jamaica. At this past Wimbledon tournament, after losing his semi-final that had been interrupted by intermittent rain, Tim Henman was being interviewed. He was asked how he spent the hours in his dressing room waiting for play to resume. "Did you read?", asked the reporter. "Read?", replied England's hopeful, incredulously, "that's boring!" This is the countryman of Shakespeare and Milton. Thus, while the Anglophone Caribbean might be unique in the world as far as the under-participation of men in education is concerned, I suspect that it will not be for long. I believe it should be of concern to the movement of women that the other half it needs to achieve women's full humanity is intellectually, culturally and even morally deficient. We are both in this thing together.

Over the past three days we have shared many experiences of small successes, have dissected and drawn lessons from them. Two things have struck me. The first is how miniscule each of our efforts is in countries whose populations range from two million to a thousand million. A few hundred here, a few hundred there, but in populations of tens and even hundreds of millions. All successful projects, as I have said. The question is where are we going with these projects. Can they replicate themselves in such ways that like tiny rivulets they become the big rivers that define the character of an entire country? It is the challenge identified by Nancy Yinger this morning in her summary of yesterday's proceedings: how to transform projects of tens, or hundreds, into activities that can change the lives of entire populations.

There are two dimensions to this challenge: one of funding, one of impact on policy. It is hard to believe, let alone accept, that in the heart of the richest country on our planet a demonstrably successful peer counseling project should find itself lacking funds to keep its activities alive, as Pat Mosen told us in that first plenary on Monday. And I say to myself, if that is the American experience, what about the rest of us from societies with per capita incomes as lower than the price of a one-course dinner at the Dulles Marriott. As Pat said, "if we want the change, we'll have to invest time and resources." Do we the bilateral and multilateral funding agencies really want the change? I remember, Pat, a similarly wonderful and promising peer counseling project that captured the enthusiasm of young people in Jamaica. Derived from and reinserted after their training into the network of the hundreds of sports and community-based youth clubs across the country, the peer counselors were beginning to make a difference to tens of thousands of young people in knowledge and behaviours. I know, because I was privileged to evaluate it. Funding agency priorities changed, the funds ceased, the Government proved unable to take up the load, and the programme died. The peer counseling idea is alive as a

voluntary initiative among some schools and in other quarters, but that ever-expanding army of volunteers whose influence once reached deep into the alleyways and street corners of the urban inner-city ghettos was demobilized. Who knows what role they might have played in arresting the spread of HIV-AIDS, the spread of cocaine addiction and trafficking, and the maniacal violence? Do we really want change?

Funding agencies desperately need to rethink their funding strategies. There are no quick and easy solutions to problems almost as old as civilization. And it is not that there is no money. There is plenty of money in the world—the personal wealth of four men exceeds the national wealth of the world’s poorest fifty countries.

The other dimension is policy. To get rivulets to become streams to become tributaries to become great rivers will require for many if not most of us changes at the policy level to give national sanction to the work we do. Some projects, like Fathers Inc., or the white ribbon movement do not need official endorsement to succeed, and, as a matter of fact will do better precisely because they lack official sanction. But clearly others like ROZAN in Pakistan, on which Maria Rashid reported, and the Anti-Sexist and Rights-Based programme in Nigeria, that Corinne Whitaker told us about, stand little chance of ultimately changing the ideas and norms of society unless they become institutionalized as a matter of policy.

So, we all shall have to learn how to influence policy change and innovation. Once a project has proved itself successful, once we have clearly established how change can be effected, an important step is what to do next to get the wielders of power to introduce the necessary measures to facilitate replication. And even then, that is not the end of the matter, for often times, the sanction of government is the sanction of death, the surest way to kill an idea. But all these issues will be, I imagine, the topic of the next conference.

That there has to be another conference should be evident to all of us. This brings me to the second thing that has struck me about this conference: the spirit of faith in what we do. Gary Barker started it off when he mentioned faith as one of the “f” words. And at first it might have seemed curious to be speaking in terms we come to associate with religion. But the truth is that as human beings we cannot live without faith, without the simple trust in the other, and without the confidence and the optimism that what we do can make a difference, even if only in the lives of the ten or twenty or the hundreds out of those millions touched by us. So even as I ponder the enormity of the challenge of reaching and influencing those millions, I also wonder at the indomitable human spirit to believe. For if we did not believe, then we would not be involved in the things we are involved in, neither would we be here to find confirmation in the approbation of others and strength in the exposure to the faith of others. And that is why we have to express our profound thanks to the organizers for the fertility of their imagination, their industry in getting us here, and cleverness in holding us prisoners here at Dulles. The deepening of faith which these three days have given us enables us to leave convinced like Anthony Chaima whose last slide read, “together we will win”. We might not know how, or where

the funds will come from, but one thing we are certain of, that together, we—men and women, together we **must** win.