

# **Men's Involvement and Responsibility**

## **Why do this activity?**

### **Addressing Gender Inequality**

During the 1990s addressing gender inequality became central to the activities of many governments, development agencies and NGOs. There were two broad approaches. Firstly, in some cases agencies were motivated by the desire to ensure that an initiative was effective – ignoring women might limit the impact of the initiative. For example, an initiative in agriculture would not succeed in a specific community if it did not take account of the fact that women were responsible for planting, weeding, etc. Therefore, women needed to participate in any decision-making and skills training around these activities.

### **Women's Participate in Activities**

This approach argued that all activities should ensure women's equal participation. However, this approach did not question women's overall position in society. It did not attempt to change policies and programmes in order to challenge gender norms – that is, women's equal status and lesser access to and control resources.

### **Women's Benefit Equally from Activities**

Secondly, another more recent approach has been to say one cannot ignore women since social justice must be central to any development initiative. Social justice demands that any initiative aims to improve women's overall position in society – how society values women and access to and control over resources. For an example, within this approach an agricultural project would involve both men and women in changing inheritance and land ownership rules so that women could also own land. It would also work to ensure that women controlled any profits made their agricultural work, rather than all profits being taken by men.

### **Implication for Men**

These two positions have different implications regarding men. The first position means that both women and men should be involved in activities. The second position focuses more on outcome or impact – did any initiative improve women's position in society? In some cases this may mean working with men and women; in some cases with women alone. Whoever the target of the activity, this perspective implies challenging men's power and control over resources.

To do this requires that men have access to information and services. However, this is not enough. Since it is women's life's which are most at risk in relation to socio-economic status even politically, the men's involvement approach requires men to take actions to ensure that women are able to exercise their labour rights and protect their position. This activity aims to help participants understand the expectations of the gender equity in relation to men, and consider to what extent men in their own communities and workplaces are barriers to women's rights and development or actually foster women's rights.

**Timing: 45 minutes to an hour**

## Case Study

A union was struggling to deal with privatization. The leaders were working to keep the members unified and knowledgeable about their rights as they entered into negotiations with the management of companies being privatized in their sector. Management was offering an early retirement (ER) package as a way to downsize the labor force. Many of the women members, struggling with the multiple demands of home and work, leapt at the chance to take early retirement as a means to make their lives easier. The male union leaders, unaware of the needs and perspectives of the union's women members, hadn't counted on this mass exodus. This lack of awareness weakened the union's bargaining position, preventing it from improving both the ER package and working conditions for those members who wanted to stay. Members were left angry and demoralized.

### Discuss the following Questions

- In this case, to what extent should men be responsible for ensuring women's access into negotiations?
- What are implications for women if men do not encourage them to take up positions within the union? And or your union?
- Should the labour federations take action against unions who fail to carry out gender equity programmes?
- Are there situations in your union where men's failure to take responsibility disadvantages the women engagement within the trade union movement? If so, what are they?