

<http://wilpf.org/feminist-spaces-of-men-and-women/>

FEMINIST SPACES OF MEN – AND WOMEN

Women's International League for Peace and Freedom

By Maria Butler

What makes a feminist space? How it looks? How it feels? Maria Butler, WILPF Director of Global Programmes, asks this question in her blog from the recent consultation and global board meeting of the MenEngage Alliance.

What makes a feminist space? What does a feminist space feel like to you? For me it invokes a mixture of feelings – inclusivity, rebellion, respect, liberation, participation. There is that feminist curiosity and that spark of feminist electricity.

I was in one such feminist space in June when I participated in meetings of MenEngage Alliance on behalf of WILPF in Vårdinge (a school in rural Sweden focusing on arts and organic farming).

29 participants from 23 organisations, 19 countries were gathered for the 4-day long meeting which included a Stakeholder Consultation on the State of the Field [70+ CSO representatives, activists, academics and policy makers], a Global Board meeting and a Strategic Planning meeting.

WILPF, as a member of Global Board, joined other members and partners of the Alliance to discuss how best to work together to transform negative masculinities, to challenge power, privilege and patriarchy, and to work collaboratively for gender equality. The spark of feminist electricity was present and active!

Participants explicitly addressed critiques from women's organisations and unpacked the risks of engaging men as individuals while missing systemic discriminations. There was recognition that women and women's groups lead the way in the struggle for gender equality and the alliances of men join that women-led movement.

"We (MenEngage Alliance) build on the precious heritage of feminist women's rights organisations: we owe our understandings of power, privilege and patriarchy, and our efforts to promote equality and justice, to the pioneering courage and vision of these activists and their organisations," said Joni van de Sand, Global Coordinator of the Alliance.

At the consultation (day one), I co-hosted (with a colleague Anthony Keedi from WILPF partner Abaad) conversations, on 'Peacebuilding and engaging

<http://wilpf.org/feminist-spaces-of-men-and-women/>

boys and men in non-violent conflict resolution.’ Participants from Russia to India, from South Africa to Nicaragua shared their perspectives on peace and security. We debated and discussed nonviolence as an active and political principle and the critical need for awareness on community models of non-violence, prevention and peace-building. The regional network in Africa (MenEngage Africa) which consists of 17 country networks across the continent has many lessons to share of research work (many referred to The International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES) as one of the most comprehensive household studies ever carried out on men’s attitudes and practices – along with women’s opinions and reports of men’s practices – on a wide variety of topics related to gender equality.)

Participants continuously asked: “how does the MenEngage Alliance meaningfully establish intersectionality in the work including LGBTQI representations, indigenous peoples, youth, faith communities, class?” African Men for Sexual Health and Rights (AMSHeR), another member of the Board, shared their work and underlined the importance of future inclusive cross-movement work.

CHANGING THE GAME, NOT JUST THE PLAYERS

As the WILPF Manifesto includes “One aspect of WILPF’s pursuit of peace, therefore, will be working to transform gender from a power relation to one of partnership. This can only come about if men wish for it as women do, and co-operate with us to achieve it.”

At WILPF’s Women’s Power to Stop War Conference in The Hague one year ago, which MenEngage Alliance was part of (with a panel on Engaging Men and Boys for Gender Equality, Peace and Social Justice: Rationale, Strategies, Accountabilities and other activities), WILPF unpacked gendered power in our world and highlighted its systemic links to causes of inequalities, injustices and conflict. It is never about adding women and stirring! To have transformative change, it is not about changing the players (adding women or indeed adding feminist men), it must be about changing the systems of power and the game itself.

The violent realities of the world today – from forced militarisation of societies to backlash on rights and democracy, from climate chaos to increasing attacks on rights defenders – make our activism, our values, our collective work essential! This means moving away from any normal modes of operation. It demands urgent action, innovation, reorganisation and not at least, it demands that we mobilise across movements.

<http://wilpf.org/feminist-spaces-of-men-and-women/>

Cross-movement mobilisation is essential if we want to change fundamental structures and fight the root causes of violence, armed conflict and inequality among people. WILPF will continue this conversation at the upcoming AWID Forum with many partners at our special Cross Movement Session 'Feminist Playbook for Peace.'

Many meetings I participate in do not have the feeling of feminism that I experienced at the MenEngage meeting. I learned in Vårdinge that feminist spaces are not about who is there or how they look but about the feelings they invoke! Inclusivity, rebellion, respect, liberation, participation with that feminist curiosity and spark of feminist electricity! Let's foster more of these spaces and these feelings.

WHAT TO READ MORE ABOUT MENENGAGE?

Then we highly recommend these essential readings:

MENENGAGE ALLIANCE BROCHURE: this is the latest brochure about MenEngage Global Alliance.

DELHI DECLARATION AND CALL TO ACTION: this shared commitment and call to action is an outcome of the Alliance's 2nd Global Symposium, which took place in New Delhi, India, in November 2014.

MEN, MASCULINITIES & CHANGING POWER: in this discussion paper, the Alliance seeks to start a dialogue on how to actively engage men and boys in challenging power dynamics in their own lives as well as in their communities and societies.

E-DIALOGUE REPORT: this report summarises and shares key discussion points, trends and recommendations on a range of strategic and practical questions relating to accountability and partnerships, while engaging men and boys and transforming masculinities in the women's rights and gender justice field.

<http://wilpf.org/feminist-spaces-of-men-and-women/>