**Promoting GED with youth - A Summary of GED Working Group discussion**

**April 2013**

During March and April 2013, the GED Institutional Working Group had a discussion about how we promote gender equity and diversity with young people and children around us. In total there were 18 contributions and 14 contributors. The discussion was very interesting because it showed how broadly the respondents interpreted the question; many of them contributed thoughts more broadly on how we manage our work life balance. It was also inspiring that many contributors shared blogs, articles and stories with us.

The original questions were:

***What is it that we do or can do to influence positive attitudes towards (gender) equality through our families, through our roles outside of CARE and through our communities particularly with young people? What type of things are you doing now?  Is it easy?  What works?  What are the challenges you face?***

A number of people talked about the challenge of influencing attitudes towards gender equality whether at work, in our families or in our communities. Sometimes it is easy to talk about equity at a surface level – most people agree on issues of rights and equality – but it is harder when action and decision making is involved. This is particularly the case outside of work because at CARE we have a commitment and accountability to GED and women’s empowerment and having senior management support can make all the difference.

In the community and family however, it can feel tough to swim against the current. Society creates images of women and girls, so for example in Bangladesh women and girls cannot inherit land (which is also the case in another contributors home country), live alone, stay single, take a job outside their home town; a man cannot chose to be a homemaker, he cannot choose to live with his in-laws, he cannot be afraid because this is not considered manly. One thing that is helping change attitudes is education and economic need, women increasingly are becoming income earners (particularly in the garment sector) and so their roles and life styles are changing. But there is still a long way to go.

In terms of what to do about these norms, one contributor pointed to the need for conversation, dialogue and debate to influence change. Also setting examples can be effective, one person committed to ensuring that all her children will inherit her land and she will ensure that she writes a will to make this happen. Another person talked about setting an example in the home at least (because beyond that it can be seen as interfering). She gave the example of trying to help a cousin who was seeking to separate from her husband because he was violent. In helping her, the contributor was accused of home breaking. She brought in a lawyer to talk with the family and this convinced them. It takes courage, as this contributor put it, “One has to be ready to be blamed, gossiped about, isolated” when one goes against the norms and traditions.

Three fathers shared about their families. One talked about taking on equal family responsibilities – playing with the children, cooking and ensuring that his career does not take precedence over his wife’s. This shows the children a more balanced model of male and female roles, it enables them to discuss and imagine more balanced relationships that are less reflective of the sexist, objectifying and limiting cultures we all live in. This father worked part time (because he had an understanding manager) when his children were born. Since going back to full time it has been harder; he tries to leave work at 5pm to be with the children before they sleep and he tries to attend big school events. But still often the work takes over (50% of the time) and limits his ability to do this. This has consequences, he has had to say no to travel and trainings, he has had to take jobs with no more than 25% travel while the children grow up and this is both as a result of his own commitment as a father, but also a negotiated agreement with his wife. As he put it, “these consequences are fine with men, and just part of the inevitable messiness of real life.”

Another dad shared the story of his son who is one amongst many daughters. In his case, he does all he can to model the value of gender equality. He believes that what he does matters more than what he says. He encourages his son through dialogue to stay calm, patient and positive and to avoid becoming defensive. He realized how hard this was for his son when he was suspended from school for physically retaliating to abuse by a girl in school. The contributor discussed with him about how to handle difficult situations and to always be on the right side of the law, ethics and values. His son has questioned him as to whether this is the case all the time. So the conversation continues. This father pointed out that we should also work with girls to ensure that they do not contribute to hurting their peers with unkindness.

A third father shared the story of doing the household chores particularly early on in his marriage, he would collect water, make the bed, put the clothes away and help with the cooking and cleaning. Since having children they have employed help at home and the situation has changed, now he spends more time looking after the baby while his wife does other things. This story underscores the importance of negotiation, in this case the father and mother talk about their work and ideas. Both are tasked with promoting gender equality (the father with CARE and the mother in local government) so these discussions help both of them improve their work. This contributor also spoke of how he models gender equality through sharing the activity of coffee making (in Ethiopia) – he publicly pours the coffee and this models change.

Another contributor shared a blog which focused on what mothers can do for their sons! The respondent noted that it was a shame that the blog focused only on ‘mothers’ since perhaps it was relevant for fathers and other care givers too. The blog highlighted the following:

* Teach our boys to be kind
* Teach our boys what it means to be brave – “courage is being afraid and doing it anyway”
* Do not shy away from telling our sons the truth about sex
* Give our sons the tools they need to protect themselves and each other – be there to help at any time, be open to hearing the truth from them, listen and dialogue with them; tell them about who to call if they need help.

Mothers also shared their stories, one mum told of her fourteen year old daughter saying, “Mum, just step away from the blackberry”! So in this case her daughter plays her part in ensuring quality time with her. Another told of how she advises her children and encourages them to do all the household chores together, whether boys or girls. Her husband also helps her, if she is doing other work, or simply wants to watch a film, he will help out with the cleaning. Another respondent who hasn’t yet had children spoke of her intention to teach her children that everyone is equal irrespective of sex, race, creed, social status, etc. Another respondent echoed her thoughts encouraging us all to play a role in teaching our children, nephews, nieces and others around us to build a more human, just and equal world.

A further stream of the discussion was about the joy we have in our work. A number of people chimed in to say that part of the challenge in achieving a work life balance, is that our work is so meaningful. An article entitled “is there life after work?” highlighted how one woman (who worked as a Chief Financial Officer at Lehman Brothers) was a priority – the spouse, family and friends got ‘what was left over’. She found it hard to define the boundaries and now looks back on her life and realizes that she didn’t have children. Her life has now changed and she devotes more time to her home. She reflects that perhaps should would never have reached the CFO position if she had not worked in the way she had. But looking back she realizes that she was too extreme in her work life in the past. Now she seeks more harmony. The story of Rose in DRC – who works as a project manager there also showed how choices can be hard; her daughter worried about her mother working in an IDP camp, she was concerned about her safety. It was only through dialogue with her daughter that her daughter came to understand the importance of her mothers work. Still Rose faced many challenges, including threats to her safety during distributions of non food items. She also faced rewards and she built up strong equal relationships with members of the Village Savings and Loans groups. Her daughter noticed this and together they came to the realization that ‘there was no feeling of hierarchy between the women’, this inspired both Rose and her daughter Cathy. Another respondent chimed in that, “one of CARE’s biggest problems about work life balance is that CARE’s work is so inspiring and motivating that we want to be involved in it”. This is not the case in other organizations and perhaps this is something to be grateful for.

Sharing the family work was also the subject of another article called “How shared diaper duty could help the economy” by Catherine Rampell. This article highlighted that while many of the social norms have not changed in the US and while fairness and feminism urges us to find better ways to balance life and work (as evidenced in the much covered work of Sheryl Sandberg and Anne-Marie Slaughter), perhaps the strongest argument (for the author) is the economic one. She speaks of countries that have made systemic change to keep women in the labor force through shared parental leave and free nursery care for infants. Companies have also made efforts such as through encouraging work from home arrangements. She explains that studies show however that in these countries, women are less likely to take up managerial roles than they are in the US. One conclusion she makes, is that while law makers make efforts to keep women in the work force, efforts should also be made to enable men to do more at home, in Quebec where men and women share parental leave after the birth of a baby, studies show that several years afterwards, fathers spend more time in child care and domestic work. The contributor of this article hopes that one day more male voices will engage in the public discussion on such issues.

The facilitator shared a story, she tries to do some teaching in schools wherever she is. Usually on themes related to development and always with some focus on gender equality and diversity. This takes up only 6-10 hours a year and is always an interesting experience. Her motivation for doing this work came from a strong influence in her own life: a visiting speaker in her school who inspired her to think about working in development. There are lots of web sites (including Save the Children and Development Education sites) that offer lesson guides and ideas of what to do. The CARE GED 101 series is also a source of inspiration when planning these sessions which another contributor attested to, she had recently done a training in Georgia with CARE staff and partners and it had been a great success – fun, engaging and challenging for the participants. Another great resource in French and English is <http://safeatschool.ca/?q=en/home> and <http://infocopa.com/>.

And finally, one contributor shared a Dilbert cartoon with us!

