

SOUTH AFRICA

Men inspiring one another to be stronger fathers

In a partnership between South African Sonke Gender Justice and the Swedish organisation Men for Gender Equality, South African and Swedish fathers are becoming more present and involved in their children's lives. In the long term, they see that this contributes to a more equal society and decreased violence against women.

“I’m very optimistic that things will change. If you’re talking about issues of gender equality, men are changing,” says Patrick Godana at the South African organisation Sonke Gender Justice.

Half of all children in South Africa grow up without their biological fathers. Gender roles are stereotypical and pervaded by old traditions. Taking care of children and the home is considered a woman’s duty. Violence against women is also extensive in South Africa – one woman in nine has been exposed to rape.

For Patrick Godana, equality work is prerequisite to the South African struggle for a free, democratic and non-sexist society.

“As long as women and girls of our country

cannot walk safely on their own in the streets of Cape Town – can you tell me that we are free as a country? No,” he says emphatically.

Sonke Gender Justice engages boys and men in the cause of equality. The organisation has for a long time been in contact with Men for Gender Equality in Sweden and the two organisations gained the opportunity to deepen their partnership by developing fathers’ groups in South Africa.

“We have been able to share our experience of practical work with men in fathers’ groups at paediatric and prenatal centres,” explains Vidar Vetterfalk at Men for Gender Equality.

Prenatal centres are an important place for recruiting participants for fathers’ groups,



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PHOTO: CARL MYRÉN

particularly in South Africa. Thulani Velebayi from Sonke Gender Justice meets very few future fathers here – prenatal centres are women’s territory. However, most pregnant women want the fathers of their children to participate in a group, so Thulani gets the fathers’ telephone numbers to be able to get in touch.

The fathers’ group in Cape Town meets at Fik’s Place, a temporarily closed bar in Mfuleni township where the participants feel comfortable. Fathers attend four times before the birth of their child and four times after. Each meeting addresses a particular question regarding pregnancy, the role of the father and his relationship to his partner.

“If you create a safe place for fathers, where they can discuss what it means to have children, many opportunities open up. The men choose to step up and become fathers even during the pregnancy,” says Vidar Vetterfalk.

One of the participants, Sisa Njoloza, explains that the support he received from the fathers’ group made him want to be present at the birth of his second child.

“It was a very amazing experience seeing your child for the first time. I was the first one to hold him and I had to undress on the top and put him on my chest so that he can get that warmth. That’s the bond that I think is the most important one. It was amazing. I kept on smiling the whole day that day,” he says.

He is convinced that his son will now have a present and committed father, who accepts



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responsibility for his children and home, and who also sees women as equals. And his son will carry these values into adulthood, raising his own children the same way.

The Swedes contribute suggestions as to how things can be made sustainable for the long term, and how they can continue after the projects end. The exchange between the partners will continue in the following ways: Men for Gender Equality is now the coordinator for MenCare in Europe and both organisations cooperate closely with the leadership of the global umbrella organisation MenEngage. They are taking new steps together in Europe, Africa and globally.

THE FACTS

PARTNERS

Sonke Gender Justice Network (South Africa) and Men for Gender Equality (Sweden), Sub-partners: Stepping Stones International (Botswana), Lifeline/ChildLine (Namibia) and FAMSA (South Africa).

COST

7,800,000 SEK

SIDA CONTRIBUTION

1,864,126 SEK

PARTNER CONTRIBUTION

5,935,874 SEK

TIMEFRAME

2012–2013

RESULTS

Sonke, Men for Gender Equality and partners have:

- Trained more than 50 potential facilitators.
- Initiated more than 25 expectant fathers’ groups.
- Introduced more than 500 fathers to the groups.
- Developed and distributed 18 new MenCare poster designs to 31 organisations.
- Developed six conversation guides for fathers’ groups.
- Appeared on at least 30 radio shows.