

Real men dont cook?

By Otto Kapuka

I grew up in an environment where a man is seen as the head of the house-hold. This was more than just a privilege, it is an accepted norm within the society and it's one that really made me re-think my position in life. At the village, gender roles are defined quite early on, as a young boy or girl you're introduced to what is expected of you from the society and one grows into those expectations without questioning them. I grew up watching women perform all household duties from cooking, cleaning, cultivating, sowing, looking after animals, looking after kids and so forth. While the men's responsibilities included for looking after cattle, cultivating and cutting down trees. I realized that women generally had much more to do and it didn't seem quite right to me.

It's this background that had me thinking that men actually play a very important role in gender equality, or at least they should, because neither men nor women exist in isolation. All institutions across the country feature both men and women, be it in the church, school or the work place. Therefore, there's a serious need for men and woman to partner in the fight for gender equality. I feel men can play a bigger role in many ways; first, by changing their mindsets towards the whole issue of gender equality and giving a helping hand where they can.

There are a lot of challenges as far as achieving gender equality is concerned. Culture remains the biggest and dominating challenge for both women and men in that it keeps pulling us back to the way our forefathers did things. For example, it's not culturally accepted for a man to cook and if he's found cooking, he is met with a lot of name calling and looked down upon. If these cultural norms are not addressed, then all efforts to have equal rights for men and women are in vain. Another challenge is the lack of spaces where men can provide a support system for women without (the fear of) being judged. Women themselves don't give the opportunity to men to cook, look after the baby, and clean the house, even though they know we are simply helping them and some women will even question his "manhood." Both men and women need to accept and understand that it is not unusual for a man to help around the house or for a woman to have as much say in decision-making as a man.



Men's attitude towards women need to change altogether, because the majority of men see women as nothing more than sex objects which also contributes to the rampant mistreating and abuse of women.

My journey in the fight for gender equality started at the University of Namibia, when I joined the peer education group. It gave me a different mindset about people in general particularly women and helped me learn to appreciate them. I gained an interest in women's health, careers, studies, their interests

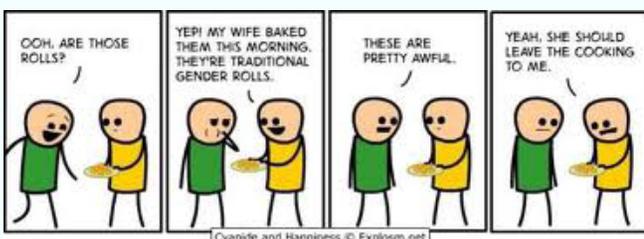


in life with the aim of helping them and understand what they go through in life and how their needs can be met, because consequently, women's issues affect men too. I made a conscience decision to help out more with household chores at home like cooking, cleaning and doing the dishes because I realized that it does not make me any less of a man. Nor does being caring or being faithful to my partner and learning how love them unconditionally. There have been many challenges: My peers have called me names, I have been reminded of my traditional "duties" as a man and I've had a hard time getting the people at home to understand and accept that this "new me" wasn't going anywhere.

Our young boys and men need to realize that manhood is not determined by how many six packs you have, how much alcohol you can take, how many girls you're sleeping with, the clothes you wear but rather the amount of energy you put in to love, care, understand and help those around you. Cleaning the house, looking after the baby while she is resting, cooking for her or the family, being faithful to them wont and will never take away your manhood, if anything, it makes you a man of character. Let's all put our hands together to bring about equality and fight gender stereotypes. It starts from your heart, than at home only than you can take it the community.

- Before you do something bad to the next person, think what if it was my sister or my brother?
- Violence doesn't pay
- Culture can be challenged
- Value someone's feelings just as much as you value your own
- Love unconditionally and leave the conditions to those who're dealing with business and money
- Tears of joy are greater than tears of sorrow
- Respect as much as you would want to be respected and be faithful as much as you would want the next person to be faithful
- Lastly, learn how to express your feelings in non-violent ways

Lastly, I would just like to say that it's a good feeling when the women around you can trust you and know that you are their partner and ally, because in essence, men and women are the same!



sister

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