TECHNICAL NOTE ON PARTNERING WITH MEN AND BOYS TO END CHILD MARRIAGE IN THE GLOBAL PROGRAMME TO END CHILD MARRIAGE

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

The purpose of this technical note is:

1 To facilitate the exchange of knowledge and good practices on partnering with men and boys

2 To provide practical guidance on the application of key concepts and effective programming approaches

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Global Programme to End Child Marriage (the 'Global Programme') aims to achieve catalytic effects and works with many partners to advocate for and support practical actions to end child marriage and promote gender equality and the empowerment of adolescent girls.

Partnering with boys and men in gender equality is crucial to ending child marriage by adapting a gender-transformative approach that promotes both the empowerment of girls and women and positive masculinities in support of women and girls and in their own right, looking to build more just and equitable societies around the world.

This technical note builds on the technical note on gender-transformative approaches.[1] It promotes a common understanding of key concepts and provides practical guidance on how to partner with men and boys to end child marriage. This note is evidence based and informed by promising practices from the Global Programme and its partners and allies.

CONCEPT AND APPROACHES: MEN, BOYS, MASCULINITIES AND MARRIAGE

In all societies, norms around masculinity and femininity define marriage and relational practices, including sexuality and family formation.[2]

Men are generally socialized as the primary breadwinners and decision-makers and enjoy relative sexual freedom. Women are socialized as nurturers and carers and encouraged to be submissive and chaste.[3]

Masculinity is not innate or fixed, however. The formation of multiple masculinities starts in childhood, influenced by family and community environments, and, throughout life, men perform different types of masculinities.[4] For example, while they are expected to be tough in public situations, in private, men may be more emotional.

There is increasing recognition of the importance of working with men and boys to address harmful masculinities and the negative consequences for themselves and on girls' lives, including on perpetuating child marriage. The rationale for working with men and boys, without detracting from the focus on women and girls, is to ensure families, communities, institutions and policy-makers support and invest in adolescent girls to delay and mitigate the consequences of child marriage.
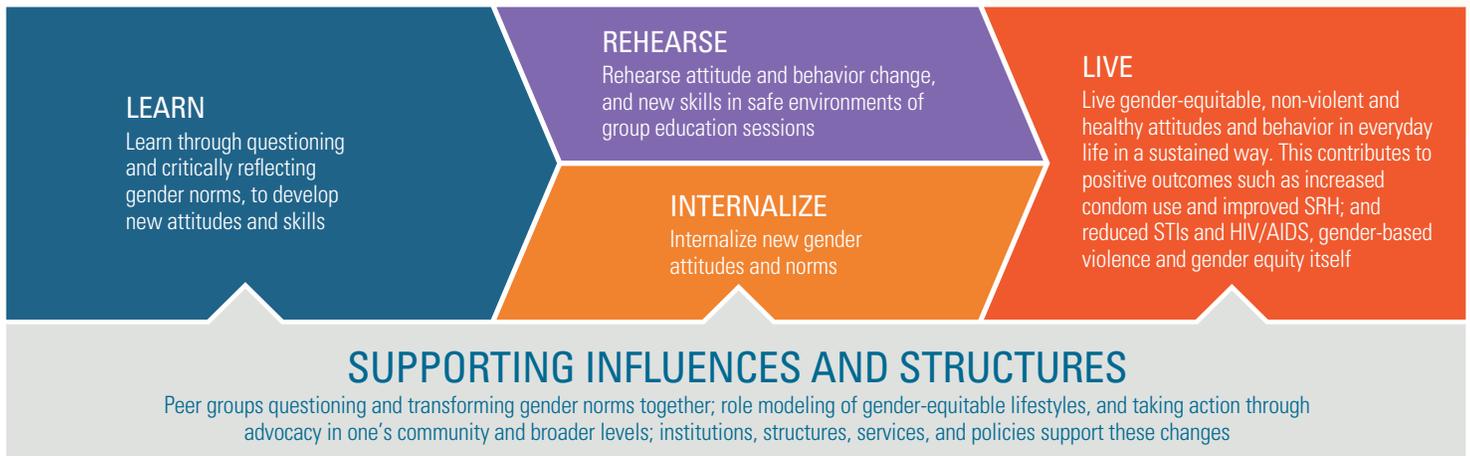
Central to male engagement is the concept of 'harmful masculinities', or sanctioned ideals around primary gender roles and socialization that uphold patriarchal codes and which require men to maintain dominant and aggressive behaviours.[5]

WHAT DOES THE EVIDENCE SAY ABOUT ENGAGING MEN AND BOYS?

In recent years, there has been an increase in interventions aimed at changing gender norms around harmful masculinities and promoting men's and boys' engagement in gender equality.[6] Most interventions address men and boys in the private sphere as perpetrators of violence and harmful practices, as bystanders who could do more to intervene, or as potential allies in ending violence and gender inequalities.[7]

Despite this emerging body of evidence, few evaluations of interventions, including at scale, have been conducted, and no programme to date examines the relationships between harmful masculinities and engagement in child marriage. A Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) review of 34 programmes working with men and boys in 24 low- and middle-income countries and addressing gender-based violence, sexual and reproductive health and girls'

FIGURE 1: Promundo Manhood 2.0 model[10] *on challenging gender role prescriptions*

LEARN
Learn through questioning and critically reflecting gender norms, to develop new attitudes and skills

REHEARSE
Rehearse attitude and behavior change, and new skills in safe environments of group education sessions

INTERNALIZE
Internalize new gender attitudes and norms

LIVE
Live gender-equitable, non-violent and healthy attitudes and behavior in everyday life in a sustained way. This contributes to positive outcomes such as increased condom use and improved SRH; and reduced STIs and HIV/AIDS, gender-based violence and gender equity itself

SUPPORTING INFLUENCES AND STRUCTURES
Peer groups questioning and transforming gender norms together; role modeling of gender-equitable lifestyles, and taking action through advocacy in one's community and broader levels; institutions, structures, services, and policies support these changes

empowerment found that programming contributed to change in attitudes towards gender equality. However, resistance to change was observed as being "reflected [in] very sticky patriarchal norms or a strong sense that prevailing gender relations were natural or mandated by religion and culture".[8] To achieve sustained change, men and boys should actively "learn, rehearse, internalise and live gender-equitable, non-violent and healthy attitudes and behaviours in everyday life in a sustained way".[9] Figure 1 captures Promundo's approach to critical reflection and internalizing experiences of gender inequality that helps create the conditions to challenge and change gender role prescription.

HOW TO ENGAGE MEN AND BOYS

Existing evidence shows that a comprehensive approach to engaging men and boys at all levels of the socio-ecological model is the approach most likely to succeed. This approach should: target men and boys as well as women and girls (separately and together), and synchronize interventions for both; focus on girls' empowerment; engage communities and crucial male gatekeepers; provide access to services; and use advocacy and communications activities.[11]

Ultimately, boys' and men's engagement is needed to address the barriers and discriminatory gender norms that sustain girls' child marriage. Programming should support men and boys in recognising and using their power and privilege to further the interests of women and girls, while simultaneously transforming masculinities and practising accountability towards women and girls.[12] Attention should also be exercised to avoid replicating the injustice and imbalances that programmes seek to challenge, for example by giving disproportionate space to men's and boys' voices, opinions and leadership while sidelining those of women and girls.[13]

GOOD-PRACTICE EXAMPLES FOR PROGRAMMING WITH MEN AND BOYS WITHIN THE SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL MODEL

1 At the individual level

Men and boys are required to take responsibility to enhance the status of women and girls. This entails promoting spaces for boys and men to reflect on and re-examine the current harmful models of masculinity and manhood and how they affect intimate relations, without detracting from efforts and resources to support girls, and along with empowering girls and improving the status of women.[14]

Evidence-based education activities for groups of men or boys, such as role-playing and discussion of important issues, help them change their attitudes and adjust their coping mechanisms, and give them exposure to healthier ways to deal with conflict. Effective programmes combine mass-media and youth-led campaigns that encourage supportive peer groups, engage young people as mentors, and reinforce specific social changes in a community or family.[15]

Promundo's Programme H[16] engages young men (aged 15–24) to critically reflect about stereotypical norms of manhood and gender roles, using a curriculum-based approach and participatory group education sessions combined with youth-led campaigns and activism. The Gender-Equitable Men (GEM) Scale is used for 'before and after' evaluations to assess the effectiveness of the interventions and campaigns.

The results of several studies on Programme H implemented in 34 countries show evidence of positive changes – from more gender-equitable attitudes and behaviours among men and boys, to improved couple communication, reduced gender-based violence, and improved attitudes around caregiving.

2 At the school/peer level

Initiatives designed to promote men's and boys' engagement in gender-equal, respectful, non-violent relationships in and out of school settings in support of women and girls include life-skills education programmes aimed at influencing psycho-social and attitudinal outcomes, health and relationships, as well as comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) which promotes positive masculinities and healthy sexuality and relationships based on consent and free of violence. CSE has been found to be more effective in achieving health-related outcomes when it incorporates an exploration of gender and power relations.[17]

At the same time, girls' empowerment should be pursued through life-skills interventions. Partnering with boys and men is important, as positive masculinities foster males' own well-being and that of adolescent girls and women, and benefits society as a whole.

> In four districts of Bangladesh, UNFPA is implementing **Generation Breakthrough**,[18] using the Gender Equity Movement in Schools (GEMS) curriculum, a two-year gender equity and violence-prevention curriculum for adolescent girl and boys aged 12–14 years old, through adolescent clubs, and state and Islamic schools (madrasas). Generation Breakthrough supports adolescents to build healthy relationships by developing gender-equitable attitudes, through GEMS sessions, adolescent sexual and reproductive health and rights interventions, and other campaign programmes.
>
> **An evaluation found that the comprehensive intervention, which includes education groups, health counselling, communication campaigns and advocacy, was more effective than the GEMS curriculum alone.**

3 At the community level

Community outreach and mobilization can encompass a range of interventions, including working with men and boys in group education, girl- and boy-led community outreach,

> **MenCare**[20] is a global fatherhood campaign active in more than 50 countries on five continents, promoting men's involvement as equitable, non-violent fathers and caregivers, in order to achieve family well-being, gender equality, and better health for mothers, fathers and children.
>
> Engaging men as involved fathers can lead to improved maternal and child health, stronger and more equitable partner relations, a reduction in violence against women and children, and lifelong benefits for daughters and sons. Research has shown that men's involvement as caregivers also has benefits for them: it makes them better fathers, improves their intimate relationships, and enhances their quality of life.
>
> The Global Programme can build upon the MenCare strategy, engaging parents in caregiving and more equitable gender relations.

engaging religious and community leaders and the community as a whole in conversations, theatre, sensitization activities, media campaigns to challenge gender norms and educate on sexual and reproductive health and child marriage, and increasing access to maternal health, HIV testing, etc.[19]

4 At national and policy levels

Various reviews identify the importance of addressing the engagement of boys and men at the policy level in order to boost gender-responsive national policies and programmes. Activities include, for example, advocacy and political dialogue with and technical assistance to relevant line ministries to implement gender-sensitive multi-sectoral interventions and gender-responsive budgeting, and engagement of key parliamentarians and public figures as role models to champion efforts to address gender-based violence and child marriage.

Few examples exist at the policy level of the successful engagement of men and boys, however, and more data and evaluations are needed.

> Since 2009, the **Brazilian National Policy of Integral Health Attention to Men (PNAISH)**[21] has integrated a strong gender-transformative analysis of health systems in order to address men's health and gender issues such as the negotiation of safe sex, fertility, choice of contraceptives, etc. The analysis of missed opportunities to engage men in health has been foundational to create linkages with other sectors to tackle fatherhood and caregiving, prenatal care, sexual and reproductive health, and prevention of violence, among others.

MEASURING MEN AND BOYS' ENGAGEMENT

Some examples of effective monitoring and evaluation of male engagement programming exist that devised specific indicators to measure changes in men's and boys' attitudes and behaviours towards gender norms, masculinities and empowerment of women and girls. In particular, existing gender-based violence and sexual and reproductive health programmes include useful measures and indicators around:[22]

1 Shifts in attitudes and behaviours around harmful practices and violence

2 Shifts in attitudes and behaviours around sexuality and sexual relationships

3 Shifts in the acceptance of dominant masculinities and gender norms around women's role in public and private spheres

4 Joint decision-making in family planning

5 Decreasing sexual risk-taking

DEALING WITH BACKLASH

Challenging traditional gender roles and engaging men and boys to end child marriage may be met with different degrees of backlash or resistance by those who view the advancement of women and girls as threatening.

Backlash or resistance often comes from those who are most marginalized or excluded. Acts of resistance may include refusal to share parental responsibilities, creating obstacles to the enforcement of rights, blocking opportunities for women's political participation and employment, restricting reproductive autonomy, and violence.[23] As a result, those in weaker positions may be required to comply in order simply to survive.[24]

Patriarchal forces may also play out in the wider national sphere – for example by preventing or reversing the enactment of funding for progressive gender policies.[25]

Strategizing to address backlash is important to foreground the challenges when undertaking this work.

ENDNOTES

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