

Men and Boys in Sanitation

Discussions of gender in sanitation and hygiene (S&H) often focus on the roles, positions or impacts on women and girls, who bear the greatest burden of work related to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH). Efforts to improve S&H and change social norms do not always actively engage men and boys in the most effective or transformative way. We must learn more about the roles men and boys actually play now and – if necessary – how they can be modified to make efforts more successful. This Learning Brief outlines the findings of a review that focused on men and boys: the problems they cause and experience, how to engage them (or not), and how to mobilise them as allies in the transformation of sanitation and hygiene outcomes.

This Learning Brief aims to:

- Show how men and boys are currently engaged in S&H, and explore how they can be engaged to achieve sustainable behaviour change and new social norms;
- Identify the specific approaches and methods being used in different contexts to stop men and boys from practising open defecation (OD); and
- Provide a deeper understanding of how S&H can be a platform to shift gender norms, engage men and boys in dialogue about gender issues, and strengthen gender equality outcomes.

The brief is based on a scan of the published and grey literature and interviews with respected WASH and gender practitioners to assess the degree and effectiveness of the engagement of men and boys in sanitation programming. Results were distilled into findings, from which a set of recommendations were developed.

Men's and boys' as objects to change

The first set of findings concerned men's and boy's sanitation practices and behaviours together with the S&H campaigns aimed at men. Even in households with toilets, men defecate in the open more often than women – because they have more time, greater mobility and lack of shame about OD (Coffey et al 2014, Chambers and Myers, 2016). Male open urination is common worldwide, despite prohibitions and preventive campaigns. Men are also reported to be less likely to wash their hands with soap: Cambodia Rural Sanitation & Hygiene Improvement Programme targeted men for S&H with the slogan: *"Most men don't wash their hands after using the toilet. Do you?"*

There are some good examples, largely in India, of WASH programmes and campaigns

targeting men's behaviour change in S&H, but these are not transforming gender norms – instead, in many cases they reinforce gender stereotypes and roles. Unilever has created character profiles to target men for behaviour change in India. The 'good man' and the 'tough man' campaigns are intended to better target/market sanitation to these men.

Whilst justified and used for their instrumental 'appeal' to some men, trading on 'tough man' stereotypes has been critiqued for reinforcing unhelpful (and male supremacist) stereotypes. S&H campaigns often play on (and reinforce) existing gender norms to encourage men to wash hands or build household latrines. In Haryana, India, the *No Toilet, No Bride* campaign encouraged suitors to construct a toilet at the husband's family's house prior to marriage. The campaign increased men's investment in S&H



in Haryana, where there are more men than women, but not in Madhya Pradesh, where the male-female ratio is more equal and men can more easily find a wife (Satyavada, 2018). This highlights how S&H can be context specific – in this case influenced by the supply and demand for 'brides' and 'suitors'! Other campaigns suggest that a man's role is as protector of their household's health and women's privacy and dignity. For example, the Swachh Bharat Mission has been critiqued for systematically reinforcing the dominant power of men to provide a toilet.

Current experience reveals a tension between trading on gender norms and stereotypes that appeal to men for short term change in S&H practices rather than working more strategically toward gender transformative change. Currently, the sector is not good at challenging gender norms and more often than not the agencies are using techniques which reinforce power and gender inequality.

Men and boys as agents of change

The second set of findings concerned men as agents for change by advocating for or promoting improved S&H practices. This focus area covered men's engagement in S&H processes as well as strategies focused on roles and responsibilities in S&H. These themes are discussed below.

Men can drive institutional change, such as in Julius Nyerere's national latrine-building campaign in Tanzania in the 1970s, and male celebrities have acted as change agents in the Swachh Bharat (Clean India) Mission. Actor and former politician Amitabh Bachchan encourages behaviour change in men who have toilets but don't use them. Some men can promote change through their institutional or occupational positions. In India's Nuh district, imams announced in the mosques that they would not perform nikah (marriage ceremonies) in households that lacked toilets or practised OD. Similarly, a district in Cambodia became ODF after monks refused to bless houses that lacked a toilet. There are also examples where male champions are helping to break barriers and taboos about menstrual hygiene management (MHM) in partnership with women and women's groups. Plan International in Uganda has dedicated male and female staff working on MHM. Men are encouraged to become sellers of reusable sanitary pads (AFRIPads) and challenge social norms by discussing MHM in the community.

In some countries, it is difficult to engage men in triggering sessions or even ensure they are physically present (e.g. men from pastoralist groups, such as the Maasai, are often away looking for water and pasture for their animals). CLTS facilitators require innovative approaches to engage men in CLTS recruitment and triggering activities to avoid reinforcing gender stereotypes. Some initiatives incentivise men to participate in S&H processes, such as men being offered goat meat to participate in triggering sessions in Kenya; inequalities can be reinforced if women are not offered the same incentives. Tried and tested participatory tools are available to assist project teams to learn about gender roles and responsibilities in the target communities before the project commences

(e.g. who cleans the toilet, who supports children or others to use the toilet, etc.). Tools such as the 24-hour clock and the floating coconut illustrate visible and invisible work in the household. The tools can reveal the different WASH-related workloads of women and men in the family and community and identify what they can do to share the workload. Approaches such as participatory hygiene and sanitation transformation (PHAST) and learning circles enable engagement of men and transformation of gender roles. Both approaches have been used in Fiji and Vanuatu (Halcrow et al. 2010).

In the Global Scaling Up Handwashing Project (WSP, 2010) in Senegal, women were the initial target audience because of their central role in caring for the family. However, men were subsequently included in handwashing promotion discussions after recognition that men provide and control their household's access to soap, and can enable, reinforce, and sustain behaviour change by washing their hands with soap while encouraging others to do the same.

Yet, casting men as agents of change in S&H programmes can (unintentionally) reinforce negative gender norms, roles and stereotypes. Men are typically the 'technical experts' in latrine design, financing and construction, and fill most of the formal income-generating roles in the sanitation sector. In contrast, women generally face discrimination and lack opportunities to participate. A UNICEF programme in Malawi used participatory approaches for masons in sanitation design, marketing and business modelling (UNICEF, 2015). Masons were asked to develop messages to communicate the key features of a long-lasting, affordable toilet; the tagline for the latrine became 'let the real men rest', alluding to the fact that men decide about investing in and constructing sanitation facilities.

Men and boys as partners for change

The final set of findings concerned men as partners for change. There are only a few examples of men acting as partners for change to help deliver gender balance in responsibility for S&H, supporting women to be leaders in WASH or advancing consideration of gender in WASH movements. The WASH sector can better facilitate men to use their power, status and resources to support women's leadership, decision-making and technical skill-building in WASH as partners in change. Experience in Timor-Leste highlights the need to build women's confidence, and for men to encourage women to speak up in meetings so that decision-making is not reinforced as the men's domain. Self-confidence is a key issue in promoting women's leadership. In Timor-Leste facilitators reported higher representation of women on water management groups as a result of inclusive processes, and anecdotal reports from many communities of men taking on more household chores to enable their wives' participation. It is critical that male champions do not speak for women but are partners for change in a transformative way.

Women shoulder most of the care and domestic burden in all cultures, including responsibility for household, school and public toilets. Unequal distribution of S&H work can reinforce gender roles and time-poverty for women, and limit their options

within and outside the home. Sanitation and hygiene can be an entry point to promote more gender-equitable identities, relationships and practices among men and boys. International campaigns such as [MenCare](#), [He-for-She](#), [We Can](#), and [Promundo](#) work with men and their peer groups to transform gender norms. This includes supporting men doing 50 per cent of the caregiving work, including S&H within the household. The literature contains examples of programmes that:

- Involve men, alongside women, in the creation, implementation, and evaluation of S&H programmes;
- Reflect the importance of men's and boys' participation in unpaid WASH work, that is, developing their understanding that their participation in this area benefits themselves, their families and communities;
- Ensure men and boys have the necessary S&H knowledge and skills; and
- De-stigmatise and defeminise S&H for men and provide support to boys and men to overcome fear of ridicule for adopting these attitudes and behaviours.

Strengthening men's motivation and capacity to be allies and linking with men's and women's non-government organisations (NGOs) are effective strategies for strengthening work in WASH. However, efforts to change the role of men and boys in S&H (in and outside the household) can threaten male norms of entitlement and power. Male community leaders are vital in promoting men's acceptance of their and women's new roles and the positive effects of transformational change.

Understanding differences in class, ethnicity, disability, sexuality and income levels enables better

targeting of groups of men and boys for WASH. Gender intersectional approaches are needed. More engagement should occur with women's and men's NGOs. More transformative approaches to involving men and boys in programmes make it necessary to think about our (as development professionals) own values, biases, blind spots and fears surrounding gender, power and sexuality. Training for WASH professionals can promote self-reflection on these biases and support staff to learn about gender-transformative WASH.

Conclusion

The active and positive engagement of men and boys means improving sanitation and hygiene outcomes, as well as redistribution of unequal domestic and care responsibilities from women to men. The end result envisaged is an enabling environment for women to have a stronger voice in decision-making processes, and for men to better support women to participate in these processes. It also aims to make these processes more equitable and less discriminating and subordinating of women, which also means less male privileging. Questioning gender roles (including in the context of S&H programmes) is part of the process of challenging gender inequities and building more equal, inclusive and sustainable societies. The literature highlights both challenges of constraining definitions of masculinity in relation to S&H as well as positive examples of men as champions for change and allies for gender equity through participation in sanitation and other 'household care responsibilities'. Based on the findings of this review, the following broad recommendations are made for how better to engage men and boys in sanitation and hygiene interventions.

Recommendations

Area	Recommendation	Possible strategies
Objects of change	Create campaigns aimed at men for transformational change in WASH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a supportive environment for men to publicly assume a more active role in S&H in the household, work-place and community. • Collaborate and learn from gender specialists and campaigns like Promundo and MenCare who have successfully promoted gender-transformative change.
	Improve men's and boys' sanitation practices and behaviours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support male change agents in S&H to understand and apply gender-transformative approaches – such as supporting women's voices and participation, not speaking on behalf of women, etc. • Monitor changes in social norms on gender relating to S&H, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ behaviour – what women and men do; ○ attitudes – what women and men believe they should do; ○ empirical expectations – what women and men believe others do; ○ normative expectations – what women and men believe others think they should do.
Agents of change	Create strategies focused on roles and responsibilities in WASH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid reinforcing traditional gender roles and harmful gender stereotypes in S&H behaviour change campaigns. • Engage open-minded men in partnering with women's groups; getting advice from gender specialists would be a good starting point.
	Maximise men's engagement in sanitation and hygiene processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use participatory processes to change men's and women's expectations for each other with respect to S&H (i.e. that men act as technical experts and women maintain the toilets). This could enhance the impact and sustainability of men's involvement in S&H.

Partners for change	Develop strategies for men as partners for change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify and engage men (especially fathers and fathers-to-be) and boys who want to be positive role models to promote S&H in the household and community. Engage community leaders and thought leaders to influence boys' and men's attitudes. Engage with men's groups (e.g. sports clubs, professional associations, army, etc.) for S&H purposes. Doing so could reach men who are hard to reach or marginalised.
	Address gender power issues affecting sanitation and hygiene	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Name and analyse men's power and avoid falling back on strategies that reinforce male protectionism or men's sense of entitlement over women. Encourage personal learning and change in relation to gender and sexuality to enhance organizational effectiveness and the potential for gender transformative S&H. Deepen and invest further in encouraging men to support women's leadership, decision-making and technical skill in the WASH sector.

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See <http://www.communityledtotalsanitation.org/sites/communityledtotalsanitation.org/files/Men%20and%20boys%20Frontiers%20FINAL.pdf> for an issue of *Frontiers of CLTS* on the subject.

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