TECHNICAL NOTE ON GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACHES IN THE GLOBAL PROGRAMME TO END CHILD MARRIAGE PHASE II: A SUMMARY FOR PRACTITIONERS

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

The purpose of this technical note is:

1. To promote a common understanding of gender-responsive and gender-transformative programming in the context of the Phase II Global Programme to End Child Marriage[1] ('the Global Programme').

2. To provide practical guidance, to countries participating in the Global Programme, on how to translate bold commitments to gender equality, women's and girls' empowerment and gender transformation into practical action.

Child marriage is both a symptom and a result of deep-seated gender inequalities and restrictive gender norms. Addressing child marriage therefore necessitates a gender-transformative approach, tackling harmful gender roles, norms and power relations (see Figure 1). This note articulates strategies for adopting a gender-transformative approach in designing, implementing and measuring programmes in the Global Programme, building on the experiences of Phase I of the Global Programme,[2] to reduce child marriage and contribute to the ultimate outcome of promoting gender equality over the long term.

Gender transformation actively examines, questions and changes rigid gender norms and imbalances of power that advantage boys and men over girls and women. It aspires to tackle the root causes of gender inequality and reshape unequal power relations; it moves beyond individual self-improvement among girls and women towards redressing the power dynamics and structures that serve to reinforce gendered inequalities. A gender-transformative approach[4] therefore attempts to promote gender equality as follows:

1. By fostering critical examination of inequalities and gender roles, norms and dynamics.

2. By recognizing and strengthening positive norms that support equality and an enabling environment.

3. By promoting the relative position of women, girls and marginalized groups and transforming the underlying social structures, policies and broadly held social norms that perpetuate and legitimize gender inequalities.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: WHY DO WE NEED A SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL APPROACH?

Learning from gender norms[5] change and preventing violence against women and girls[6] approaches show need for multi-sectoral interventions and work across the socio-ecological model[7] for shifts in unequal power relations. For example, successful gender-transformative approaches work from the individual level of girls who are not empowered to advocate for their rights through to the level of communities where girls' choices are limited, and through systems such as education where gender-unequal pedagogies flourish. Using a socio-ecological model helps us to understand and track changes in social expectations of boys, girls, and male and female roles, and in gender-based values, beliefs and practices.
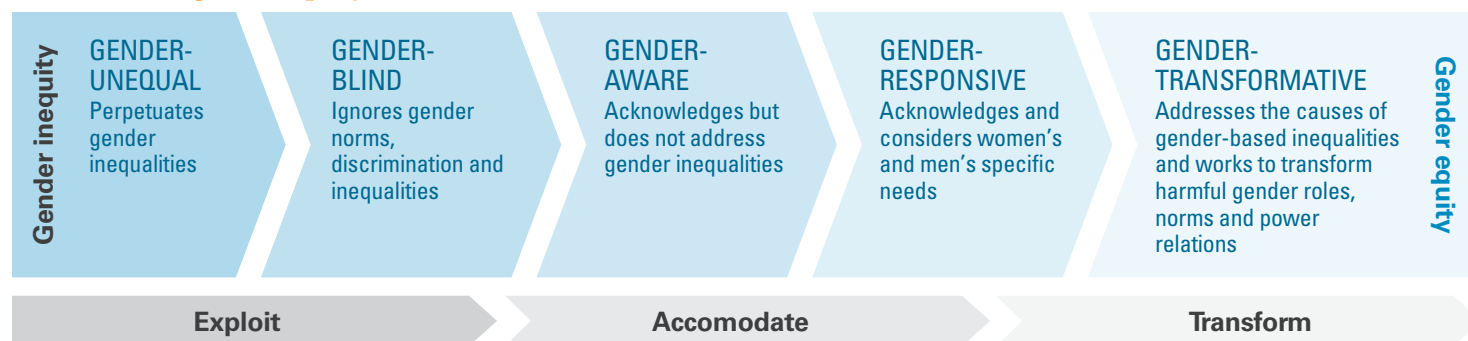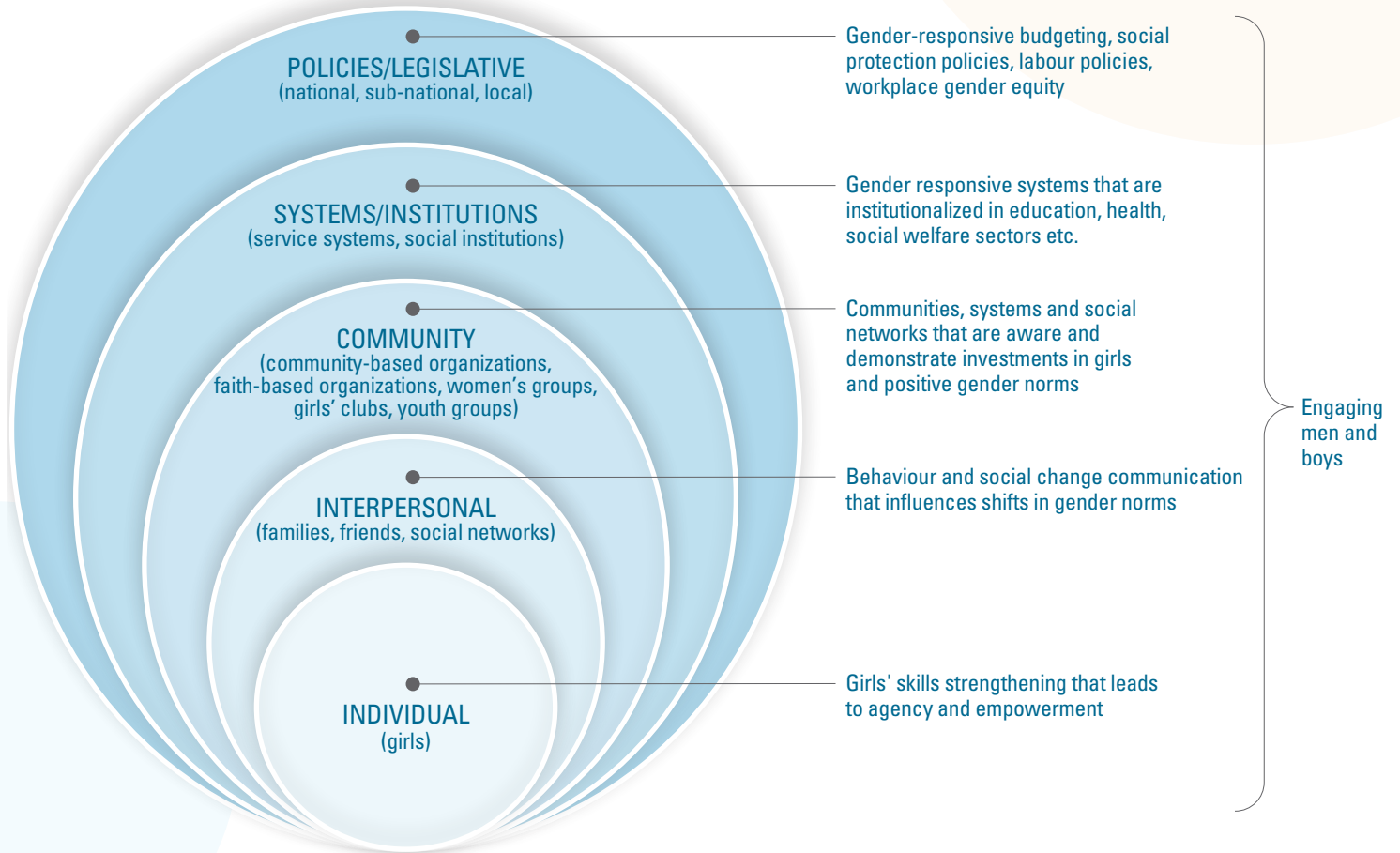
FIGURE 1: **The gender equity continuum**[3]

| Gender inequity | GENDER-UNEQUAL Perpetuates gender inequalities | GENDER-BLIND Ignores gender norms, discrimination and inequalities | GENDER-AWARE Acknowledges but does not address gender inequalities | GENDER-RESPONSIVE Acknowledges and considers women's and men's specific needs | GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE Addresses the causes of gender-based inequalities and works to transform harmful gender roles, norms and power relations | Gender equity |

| Exploit | | Accomodate | | Transform |

FIGURE 2: The socio-ecological model and opportunities for gender-transformative programming

POLICIES/LEGISLATIVE
(national, sub-national, local)
— Gender-responsive budgeting, social protection policies, labour policies, workplace gender equity

SYSTEMS/INSTITUTIONS
(service systems, social institutions)
— Gender responsive systems that are institutionalized in education, health, social welfare sectors etc.

COMMUNITY
(community-based organizations, faith-based organizations, women's groups, girls' clubs, youth groups)
— Communities, systems and social networks that are aware and demonstrate investments in girls and positive gender norms

INTERPERSONAL
(families, friends, social networks)
— Behaviour and social change communication that influences shifts in gender norms

INDIVIDUAL
(girls)
— Girls' skills strengthening that leads to agency and empowerment

Engaging men and boys

The socio-ecological model also helps us to programme more effectively, by combining interventions that effect change at different levels. For example, in Nicaragua, the prevalence of gender-based violence showed significant declines for the age group 15–24 years over a 20-year period. This decline in gender-based violence highlighted a generational shift in the perceived acceptability of violence against women, resulting from a combination of legal reforms, improved availability of services, and increased understanding by women of their rights.[8]

GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE STRATEGIES TO END CHILD MARRIAGE: STARTING WITH A STRONG GENDER ANALYSIS

Effective gender-transformative approaches are grounded in strong gender analysis and an understanding of local contexts. Many countries in Phase I of the Global Programme carried out studies of the drivers of child marriage, to ground their programmes in local realities; these have helped to inform priority interventions.

> **Evidence shows that gender transformation is possible, but can also be long term, is often generational, and needs sustained investments over time.**

A study in Brazil which examined the drivers of child marriage in Brazil, emphasises the importance of engaging fathers of adolescent girls in programmes to prevent child marriage and promote girls' education and protection.[9]

A multi-country study from South Asia on the causes and consequences of child marriage recommends greater macro-economic investment in girls' education and overall poverty-reduction programmes to address the prevalence of child marriage at scale, thus reinforcing the need to implement approaches at various levels in the socio-ecology.[10]

Promising strategies to achieve gender transformation in Phase II include, but are not limited to, the following.

1

Placing girls at the centre of programming efforts; building their skills and agency to open alternative life choices beyond child marriage

Programmes that help girls to develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills, that build their sense of personal worth and agency, and that teach them to interact with others constructively and effectively, have transformative potential.[11]

Empowerment is a personal journey through which adolescent girls and boys develop a clear and evolving understanding of themselves in the world, accompanied by increasing agency and assets.[12] Empowered adolescents recognize their inherent worth and the fundamental equality of men and women and of boys and girls, are able to critically examine their lives and the inequities in their societies, and are able to effectively negotiate in order to aspire to and achieve their goals.

Efforts to support adolescent girls' empowerment may include supporting girls to collectively advocate about their rights and needs with policymakers, designing targeted life skills programmes and comprehensive sexuality education that respond to girls' feedback about their preferred learning choices, and helping girls access peer-support networks as well as mentorship opportunities.[13] The *Rupantaran* life skills programme in Nepal, for example, helps girls increase their social and financial skills through providing support to adolescent girls' groups and peer networks.[14] Fundamental to life skills for girls' empowerment is for the design of the programmes that are intentionally transformative, to both challenge existing gender inequities and empower girls with skills that will help them benefit from the programme and to navigate the world in their own interest.[15]

2

Gender-responsive information and services, including education and about sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Interventions that institute gender-responsive policies/ guidelines to overcome barriers girls face in accessing education, health, protection and other services, with a trained workforce including young women who act as mentors, can be particularly transformative as girls' transition to adulthood.

In Mozambique, Uganda and Niger, government, United Nations and civil society partners are working closely together to link adolescents' sexual and reproductive health and rights services with the education system for both girls and boys. In several countries, BRAC's 'Empowerment and Livelihood for Adolescents' approach is helping to reduce child marriage by linking adolescent girls with mentors and skills opportunities, including financial literacy training.[16]

Recruiting more women into the workforce and training frontline workers (teachers, health workers, social workers and others) to be gender-responsive and respectful, to reach girls and boys where they are often found, and to communicate in sensitive and responsive ways is critical.

3

Engaging men and boys for gender equality.

Programming that creatively engages boys and men with methodologies that support them to question and recognise issues of masculinity, that are harmful for themselves and their relationships as well as their privilege and the power they wield in society, helps to create male engagement to become change agents for gender equality.

Ending patriarchy and challenging restrictive gender norms is not the sole responsibility of girls and women. Engaging boys and men in holistic, comprehensive and coordinated responses requires that recognition is fostered of harmful masculinities, and solutions identified and implemented to redress them. While effective programmes to influence men's behaviours and attitudes combine group education with community outreach and mobilization and with mass-media campaigns, getting men's and boys' support for sustained gender equality requires progressive policies that influence norms, behaviours and attitudes at multiple levels.[20]

Promundo's Program H[21] is an extensive global programme that has successfully resulted in more gender-equitable attitudes and behaviours among male participants, improved couple communication, reduced gender-based violence, and improved attitudes around caregiving.

Structural change, especially at the institutional level, requires bold partnerships to review processes that can exclude the rights of girls and women. Examples of effective partnerships include collaboration with governments to analyse budget allocations from a gender equality perspective.

4

Mobilizing communities, systems and social networks, including through effective communication strategies to demonstrate positive attitudes towards and investment in adolescent girls.

Community dialogues that are rights-based, inclusive and participatory build trust, clarify perceptions and foster change towards investing in girls and promoting positive gender norms.

Social behaviour change programming is a core component of the Global Programme, with most interventions being directed at individual- and community-level change using interpersonal engagement, the media, community engagement/ participation, and social mobilization.

SASA! is an example of a rigorously evaluated programme intervention, led by grassroots organizations, tackling restrictive gender norms[17] (see Figure 3). The intervention resulted in declines in violence towards girls and women and improved gender relations. SASA! has been adapted and tested in several contexts. A key to the success of SASA! is using a combination of community-focused approaches that evolve in direct response to community priorities, needs and characteristics.[18]

Effective strategies combine mixed approaches and aim for long-term change.[19] Behavioural change is not limited to communities and families but also needs to be considered within institutions and systems, which often perpetuate gender inequalities.

5

Building strong institutional partnerships with government, civil society and the private sector.

Partnerships that foster national laws and well-resourced policies to protect and promote the rights of adolescent girls contribute to sustained shifts in gender norms.

Structural change, especially at the institutional level, requires bold partnerships to review processes that can exclude the rights of girls and women. Examples of effective partnerships include collaboration with governments to analyse budget allocations from a gender equality perspective. For instance, in Bangladesh, the Government undertook a budget-scoping study to identify and analyse budget commitments and releases relevant to child marriage, with the aim of generating discussions among line ministries for increased investments to support child-marriage prevention and mitigation objectives.

Partnerships across sectors of society – academia, the private sector and non-profit-making organizations, among others – can also help to promote innovative solutions for gender equality. For these partnerships to work effectively, it is important that within our own organizations, we ensure that our staff and contractors are committed to principles of gender equality and have the relevant expertise to promote women's and girls' empowerment and gender equality through programmes and their measurement.

FIGURE 3: **The SASA! approach**

The *SASA!* Approach: How it works

Start	**Awareness**	**Support**	**Action**
Learning about the community	Helping activists gain confidence	Strengthening skills and connections between community members	Trying new behaviors, celebrating change
Selecting Community Activists	Informal activities	Joining 'power with' others to support change	Fostering the 'power to' make positive change
Fostering 'power within' staff and community activists	Encouraging critical thinking about men's 'power over' women		

involving community members, leaders and institutions to build critical mass

SASA!, <http://raisingvoices.org/sasa>.

HOW DO WE KNOW OUR GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACHES ARE WORKING?

Evidence shows that gender transformation is possible, but can also be long term, is often generational, and needs sustained investments over time. It is important to capture change at all stages, including through monitoring and evaluation as well as research. Innovative community-based feedback mechanisms need to be in place to capture ideas and recommendations about programme effectiveness from girls, boys, parents and communities directly. Measurements of success go beyond measuring prevalence and should include changes in girls' individual agency (for example, changes in girls' self-esteem, aspirations and self-efficacy), interventions to change gender relations (for example, tracking community perception and beliefs around the acceptability of gender-based violence), and interventions that transform structures (such as gender-transformative legislative and systems and institutional change).[22]

ENDNOTES

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