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
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 as drivers of institutional change, such as in Julius Nyerere’s Swachh Bharat campaign in Tanzania in the 1970s, and male celebrities have acted as change agents in the Swachh Bharat (India) Mission. Actor and former politician Amitabh Bachchan encourages behaviour change in men who have toilets but don’t use them. Strategies to promote change can take place in the workplace, in educational institutions or within the community.

In some countries, it is difficult to engage men in triggering sessions or even ensure they are physically present (e.g. in pastoralist groups such as the Maasai, who are often away looking for water and pasture for their animals). CLTS facilitators require innovative approaches to engage men, such as involving celebrities or other male role models who can help change men’s ideas about sharing the workload. For example, in Malawi used participatory approaches for masons in sanitation design, marketing and business modelling (UNICEF, 2010) to encourage greater male engagement in WASH interventions.

The active and positive engagement of men and boys in sanitation and hygiene interventions can be an entry point to promote more gender-equitable identities, relationships and practices among men and boys. International campaigns such as MenCare, HeForShe, 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 partners and their children;
- Ensure men and boys have the necessary S&H knowledge and skills; and
- De-stigmatise and de-normalise S&H for men and women and promote support for women 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 crucial as role models, opinion leaders, and they can help to break down barriers to men’s participation, not speaking on behalf of women, etc.

Understanding differences in class, ethnicity, disability, sexuality and income levels enables better targeting of groups of men and boys for WASH. Gender intersectonal approaches are needed. More engagement and support should occur with women’s NGOs. More transformative approaches to involving men and boys in programmes make it necessary to think about the idea of masculinity as an individual’s own values, biases, blind spots and fears surrounding gender, power and sexuality. Training for WASH professionals is important to challenge these biases and support staff to learn about gender-transformative WASH.

Recommendations

**Objects of change**

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<th>Area</th>
<th>Recommendation</th>
<th>Possible strategies</th>
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<td>Objects of change</td>
<td>Create campaigns aimed at men</td>
<td>Create supportive environment for men to publicly assume a more active role in S&amp;H in the household, workplace and community. Collaborate and learn from gender specialists and campaigns like HeForShe and MenCare who have successfully promoted gender-equitable identities, relationships and practices among men and boys.</td>
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| Men and boys | Improve men’s and boys’ sanitation practices and behaviours | Support male change agents in S&H to understand and apply gender-transformative approaches – such as supporting women’s voices and participation, respecting their needs and wishes, etc. Monitor changes in social norms on gender relating to S&H, including:
  - 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 expect them to do. |
| Participatory tools | Maximise men’s engagement in sanitation and hygiene processes | 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. |
### Acknowledgements

This Learning Brief is based on the work of Sue Cavill, Joanna Mott, Matthew Bond and Paul Tyndale-Biscoe (FH Designs), in collaboration with Chelsea Huggett (WaterAid), Elizabeth Wamera (WSSCC) and Jerker Edström (IDS).

See [http://www.communityledtotalsanitation.org/sites/communityledtotalsanitation.org/files/Men%20and%20boys%20Frontiers%20FINAL.pdf](http://www.communityledtotalsanitation.org/sites/communityledtotalsanitation.org/files/Men%20and%20boys%20Frontiers%20FINAL.pdf) for an issue of Frontiers of CLTS on the subject.

### References


