ENGAGING MEN AND TRANSFORMING MASCULINITIES TO ACHIEVE GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

A STOCKTAKING OF INITIATIVES IN SOUTH ASIA

DECEMBER 2024

ASIAN DEVELOPMENT BANK

ADB

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ASIAN DEVELOPMENT BANK

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ABBREVIATIONS

ADB	Asian Development Bank
CSO	civil society organization
DMC	developing member country
GBV	gender-based violence
GESI	gender equality and social inclusion
GEWE	gender equality and women's empowerment
KII	key informant interview
LGBTQIA	lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex, and asexual/aromantic/agender
NGO	nongovernment organization
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SARD	South Asia Department
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SGBV	sexual and gender-based violence
SOGIESC	sexual orientation, gender identity and expressions, and sex characteristics
SRH	sexual and reproductive health
SRHR	sexual and reproductive health and rights
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
WASH	water, sanitation, and hygiene

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Overview of the Study and Objectives

This report presents the results of the stocktaking of initiatives to engage men and boys in achieving gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE) in seven sectors in South Asia. The seven sectors—i.e., agriculture; education; energy; finance; health; transport; and water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH)—are key priority sectors of the Asian Development Bank (ADB). The study covered ADB's six developing member countries (DMCs) in the subregion: Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, and Sri Lanka.

This study examined the ways in which opportunities and mechanisms have been created and sustained to engage different groups of boys and men, along with gender-diverse people, to transform masculinities as a strategy to promote gender equality. The objective is to identify strategies for engaging men and boys for gender equality and build knowledge around program approaches that are grounded in a long-term theory of change.

Background and Rationale of the Study

Results of an assessment on gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) in ADB's six DMCs in South Asia from 2020 to 2022 served as the impetus for this South Asia Department (SARD) study. The study seeks to provide a reference in expanding SARD's array of strategies on how to confront pervasive and persistent gender inequality in different sectors, and the compounding effects of its intersection with other dimensions of exclusion and vulnerability on the lives of disadvantaged individuals and groups. These other dimensions include age; disability; social identity; diverse sexual orientation, gender identity and expressions, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC); geographic location; income status; and migrant status.

An overview of the GESI situation in South Asia is presented below:

(i) **Gender inequality remains a pervasive issue in South Asia.** Women face significant disparities in education, employment, political representation, and health in the region. The Global Gender Gap Report of the World Economic Forum (2023) highlights that women in South Asia have lower literacy rates, are less likely to be enrolled in schools, participate in the labor force at much lower rates than men, and experience significant wage gaps. Political representation is limited, with women holding only a small fraction of parliamentary seats and leadership roles. Health outcomes are also concerning, with high maternal mortality ratios and limited access to health care, especially in rural areas. Additionally, violence against women, including domestic violence and child marriage, is prevalent across the region.

(ii) **Prevailing gender mainstreaming efforts have been inadequate to achieve gender equality.** The focus of these efforts has been on addressing the various socioeconomic barriers women and girls face because they are more disadvantaged by patriarchy, the root cause of gender inequality. Hence, gender-affirmative actions in favor of women and girls have been the primary strategy. However, the persistence of gender inequality despite decades of efforts points to the need to expand this strategy.

(iii) **Over the past decade, there has been a growing recognition of male engagement as a key strategy for achieving gender equality.** From being solely positioned as perpetrators or obstacles to women's empowerment, men and boys are now increasingly being engaged as change agents who can be partners, stakeholders, and co-beneficiaries in promoting women's empowerment and achieving gender equality and justice for all. Evidence suggests that the potential for individual change among men and boys can contribute to changing the patriarchal systems, which they comprise.

(iv) **While the acknowledgment of the need to involve men and boys in GEWE is increasing, initiatives are primarily confined to and led by civil society organizations.** Gender-transformative approaches challenging traditional norms, particularly patriarchal masculinities, are crucial. In South Asia, nongovernment organizations (NGOs) and research initiatives provide a robust foundation for these actions, with strong activism, community-based approaches, and impactful evaluations, though they are less integrated into the public sector work. However, further research on policy and programming for gender equality in traditionally male-dominated sectors like agriculture, energy, finance and transport is needed.

Considering ADB's strategic emphasis on GESI and the growing global acknowledgment of the importance of addressing masculinities by engaging men and boys in gender-transformative initiatives, assessing achievements and challenges was needed. Thus, SARD retained a consortium composed of the International Center for Research on Women, the MenEngage Alliance, and Equimundo to conduct the stocktaking.

Methodology of the Study

The study utilized a combination of primary and secondary research methods. It included a review of existing laws, policies, structures, processes, and programs; as well as key informant interviews with stakeholders from the government, civil society, bilateral and multilateral funders, private sector, and ADB.

Findings

Overall, the findings are as follows:

(i) **The underpinnings of "what it means to be a man or a woman" are rooted in belief systems common to the seven sectors covered in this study.** In accordance with traditional masculinity norms, men tend to perform the role of breadwinner in the household and, as a result, hold financial and decision-making power at home. Women, on the other hand, are expected to live out their traditional gender roles as homemakers and caregivers. Masculinity—the norms around being strong, risk-taking, the "earner," possessing "technical" skills, not showing vulnerability, avoiding care and housework, exercising control and power over women and people of other genders and disadvantaged groups, and engaging in violent behavior—is reflected across countries and sectors, and impacts the lives not only of women and girls, but also of men and boys and people with diverse sexual orientation and gender identities. These gender norms also intersect with hierarchies of caste, class, religion, age, location, and ability or inability to create systemic exclusion and discrimination.

(ii) **Across sectors, most institutions function as masculine spaces that reinforce traditional gender norms and maintain male dominance.** Key factors include organizational culture and norms, where traits like competitiveness and assertiveness are valued, and gendered language and behaviors that reinforce masculine norms are prevalent. Structural inequities also play a role, with men often overrepresented in leadership positions, and promotion and hiring practices favoring men due to

biases in job descriptions and remuneration. Policies and procedures can implicitly favor male employees, such as inadequate parental leave or lack of flexible working arrangements, and insufficient measures against sexual harassment and discrimination. Social networks and informal practices further entrench male dominance, with exclusionary networks and male-oriented social activities creating barriers for women. Historical and cultural legacies contribute to these dynamics, as many institutions were established in the past by and for men, embedding gender biases. Lastly, intersectionality and discrimination exacerbate these issues, with institutions often failing to address the intersecting identities of individuals, leading to compounded marginalization of women and gender minorities.

(iii) **The stocktaking of laws, policies, programs, and other initiatives across the seven priority sectors of ADB-SARD underscores a clear need to expand and strengthen work on GESI to approaches that engage men and boys and work toward transforming masculinities.** Access, affordability, utilization, employment, and leadership in the seven sectors are highly gendered. While sectors such as education and health have shown some progress on this front, other traditionally male-dominated sectors such as transport, energy, and financial management have largely remained outside the purview of gender mainstreaming efforts. These sectors require additional, concerted efforts to understand, acknowledge, and respond to the role of men and traditional notions of masculinities in shaping GESI-related processes and outcomes.

(iv) **There is evidence that gender-transformative programs, effectively designed to involve men and boys, can yield measurable impact.** This impact includes reductions in gender-based violence (GBV), enhanced male participation in the promotion of sexual and reproductive health and rights, shifting gender norms, increased male involvement in unpaid care responsibilities, and heightened support by men in women's economic empowerment. The evolving evidence indicates the effectiveness of these programs in inducing change at both individual and institutional levels—whether in schools, sports, the health sector, or within communities.

(v) **Learnings from initiatives spanning various sectors and contexts demonstrate the benefits of adopting "socioecological" and gender-synchronized approaches that allow for sustainable and effective gender-transformative changes to occur at multiple levels, engaging multiple stakeholders, and facilitating cross-learning.** For example, initiatives in the education and health sectors highlight that it is critical to develop partnerships with implementing organizations such as government agencies and civil society organizations to reach individuals directly, and promote transformation in gender-related attitudes, behaviors, and practices. Commonly identified and successful strategies include starting at a young age when gender socialization is in process, focusing on those who shape boyhood (teachers, coaches, parents, and others) to transform inequitable notions of gender and masculinities. Family and communities have a key role to play in setting expectations and enforcing gender norms; thus, they must be reached. Strategies like community-level social and behavioral change campaigns can be used to address critical, cross-cutting issues such as recognition and redistribution of unpaid care work. Male role models and peer leaders can help create safe spaces for reflection, discussion, and collective transformation. Working with institutions and stakeholders such as schools, health facilities, religious institutions, military, and informal spaces can be a way to create an enabling environment. Operating at the policy environment also can be instrumental in ensuring entitlements, access, and control over resources and opportunities, and can reinforce or challenge gender inequities and other forms of social exclusion. Evidence-based advocacy can be an important strategy to shape the institutional and policy and legal environment that governs various sectors and lay the foundation for more equitable institutions through workplace policies around parental leave, sexual harassment, and childcare.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends the following as ways forward:

(i) **Clarifying the conceptual underpinnings for the need to engage men and boys to achieve GEWE and GESI is critical.** This includes engaging men to support the empowerment of women and girls and people of other genders, as well as enabling men to reflect within themselves and challenge their own gendered power and vulnerabilities. It also entails challenging harmful norms of masculinities to create more equitable systems and structures such as laws, policies, cultures, and institutional processes. This requires bringing them on board not only as allies of women and other disadvantaged groups but also as change agents who can be partners, stakeholders, and co-beneficiaries in the transformative process. Understanding the intersectionality of gender with other axes of identities is also key as men (and women) are not a homogenous or monolithic group, and social inclusion requires paying attention to the various intersections that influence an individual's experience of power, privilege, disadvantage, and vulnerability.

(ii) **Research, evaluation, and evidence-building are crucial cliche in identifying and responding to gender and social inequities.** While conventional approaches that rely on quantitative methodologies have their strengths, it is critical to expand and reimagine research methods to understand the complex and multifaceted nature of inequality. Given that gender-transformative changes take place over a long period, focusing on processes as much as outcomes and measuring change through longitudinal methods can generate new learnings and inform the development of policies and programs.

(iii) **Finally, it is crucial to ensure that engaging men and boys for gender equality and women's empowerment aligns with the legacy and ongoing work of women's movements** and is based on fostering collaboration and shared responsibility.

The **key areas of action** (across the seven sectors) to engage men and boys and transform masculinities include the following:

(i) **Incorporate notions of masculinities in strategic documents.** ADB's strategic documents and plans, such as GESI diagnostics and guidance notes, must explicitly integrate perspectives on men and masculinities. This will provide a comprehensive understanding of how patriarchal norms impact vulnerabilities across sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC) identities.

(ii) **Develop robust monitoring and evaluation systems.** A shift toward transformative change requires an expanded set of indicators capturing changes in gender norms and masculinities. Monitoring and evaluation processes must measure not only project economic and physical impacts but also transformational change in attitudes, practices, and barriers.

(iii) **Invest in in-depth studies.** Investments in knowledge generation around men and masculinities are needed to inform and improve future projects. In-depth studies can explore various themes, such as the manifestations of masculinities in specific sectors and the effectiveness of behavioral change campaigns addressing masculinity-related attitudes.

(iv) **Improve legal and policy environment.** Technical assistance and policy-based loans offer opportunities to support legal and policy reforms. These reforms should explicitly integrate gender-transformative approaches with a focus on masculinities, within laws and policy frameworks governing respective sectors.

(v) **Build gender-transformative approaches into project design.** Poverty, social, and gender analyses must expand to capture dynamics and inequities arising from patriarchal masculinities. The analysis should not only assess women's vulnerabilities but also the vulnerabilities of men and people with diverse SOGIESC.

(vi) **Strengthen individual and institutional capacities.** ADB staff's perspective and capacity around gender, and men and masculinities must be enhanced. This involves developing a deeper understanding of gender as a plural and relational concept and fostering an inclusive work culture. Organizational structures, processes, and policies should align with these principles.

(vii) **Create strong partnerships and convergence of multistakeholder efforts.** Collaboration with government agencies, civil society organizations (including women's rights organizations), and the private sector is vital. Partnerships among them will lead to convergence of their efforts with potentially significant multiplier effects. Partnerships with civil society organizations, particularly those specializing in gender equity and men and masculinities, will also provide critical resources and knowledge to inform ADB's GESI efforts.

(viii) **Make concerted efforts to influence institutional gender cultures.** ADB can promote gender-equitable policies and procedures within its partner institutions, fostering equitable organizational cultures and encouraging the advancement of women, gender-nonconforming individuals, and minorities into leadership roles and traditionally male-dominated sectors. Furthermore, ADB can advocate for respectful, caring, and nonviolent masculinities within these institutions and support men in sharing caregiving and income-generating responsibilities within their families.

The adoption of gender-transformative approaches that include men and masculinities across all facets of ADB's work not only aligns with global recognition of the need for engaging men and boys for gender equality but also contributes to more holistic and inclusive development outcomes.

1 INTRODUCTION

Study Background and Objectives

1. In 2020–2022, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) South Asia Department (SARD) assessed the gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) situation in six developing member countries (DMCs) in South Asia—Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, and Sri Lanka—in consultation with government partners and civil society organizations (CSOs).[1] The objective was to provide SARD with an evidence-based reference in developing its strategy to deliver the commitments set out in the first two operational priorities (OPs) of Strategy 2030 in these six DMCs.[2] The results of the assessment informed SARD's Framework for Integrating Gender Equality and Social Inclusion in the Asian Development Bank's South Asia Operations (henceforth SARD GESI framework).[3]

2. Overall, the GESI assessment showed the pervasiveness of gender inequality and the compounding effects of its intersection with other dimensions of exclusion and vulnerability—e.g., age; disability; social identity; diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC); geographic location; income status; and migrant status—on the lives of disadvantaged individuals and groups. Thus, the SARD GESI framework highlights the importance of employing an integrated approach to addressing these issues thereby delivering OP1 and OP2. To expand its array of approaches and entry points to advance GESI in South Asia, SARD engaged the International Center for Research on Women, MenEngage Alliance, and Equimundo consortium to conduct a stocktaking of initiatives to engage men and boys in promoting GESI and gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE).

3. This stocktaking examined the ways in which opportunities and mechanisms have been created and sustained to engage different groups of boys and men, along with gender-diverse people, in transforming masculinities as a strategy to promote gender equality and social inclusion. The study looked at efforts to engage men in initiatives to achieve gender equality in seven sectors in ADB's six DMCs in South Asia. The seven sectors—agriculture; education; energy; finance; health; transport; and water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH)—are priority sectors of ADB.

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1 ADB. 2023. *Gender Equality and Social Inclusion: An Assessment for Action.* https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/942361/gender-equality-social-inclusion-south-asia.pdf.

2 ADB. 2018. *Strategy 2030: Achieving a Prosperous, Inclusive, Resilient, and Sustainable Asia and the Pacific.* p. 14. https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/institutional-document/435391/strategy-2030-main-document.pdf. OP1 ("addressing remaining poverty and reducing inequalities") increases ADB's emphasis on human development, social protection, and social inclusion to ensure "that all members of society can participate in and benefit from growth." OP2 ("accelerating progress in gender equality") requires at least 75% of ADB's committed sovereign and nonsovereign operations to contribute to gender equality.

3 ADB. 2023. *Framework for Integrating Gender Equality and Social Inclusion in the Asian Development Bank's South Asia Operations.* https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/900681/framework-integrating-gesi-adb-south-asia-operations.pdf.

Study Rationale: Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Situation and Initiatives

4. The key GESI issues, requirements, and related initiatives that underscored the need for this stocktaking are as follows:

(i) **Gender inequality is pervasive in South Asia.**[4] Ending gender inequality is a priority of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development for building a more sustainable and equitable world. The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific's analysis of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) found that the Asia and Pacific region needs to accelerate the current progress rates of SDG 5 (promote gender equality).[5] Although there has been some progress on gender equality in South Asia—primarily in policy changes, political representation, and in education and health—wide gender gaps persist. The implementation of the policy changes has been weak, women's labor force participation remains low, women still bear a disproportionate burden of household and care work, and gender-based violence (GBV) is on the rise.

(ii) **Gender-affirmative actions in favor of women and girls have been the primary strategy to address the various sociocultural and economic barriers women and girls face.** However, the persistence of gender inequality despite decades of efforts points to the need to expand this strategy. Gender-transformative approaches that question inequitable gender norms, including those related to patriarchal masculinities, have been shown to be particularly effective. These approaches require the involvement of not only women and girls and people of other marginalized gender groups but also men and boys as active supporters and agents for transforming unequal gender power relations.

(iii) **Engaging men and boys using gender-transformative approaches requires not only raising their awareness about gender but also creating a fundamental shift in attitudes and behaviors about being a man within a particular context, and at the organizational and ideological level.**[6] While men generally have more agency than women, their attitudes and behaviors are also profoundly shaped by rigid social norms and cultural expectations related to masculinity. Power and privilege are often invisible to those in positions of dominance, with men often not fully conscious of the privileges (and harm) they may experience through the patriarchal normative system,[7] as well as through intersections of their SOGIESC with other structures and hierarchies, such as class, caste, ethnicity, and ability, that further create hierarchies among men.

(iv) **Over the past decade, there has been a growing recognition of male engagement as a key strategy for achieving gender equality.** While male engagement programming started as a support to the prevention of violence against women and girls, promotion of sexual and

[4] J. Sachs et al. 2020. *Sustainable Development Report 2020: The Sustainable Development Goals and COVID-19*. Cambridge University Press.

[5] United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. 2020. *Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2020.* https://www.unescap.org/publications/asia-and-pacific-sdg-progress-report-2020.

[6] A. Greig. 2021. Doing Gender Differently; Transforming Masculinity. United Nations Development Programme. https://www.undp.org/blog/doing-gender-differently-transforming-masculinity.

[7] MenEngage Alliance. *Critical Dialogue on Engaging Men and Boys in Gender Justice—Summary Report.* https://menengage.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Critical-Dialogue-on-Engaging-Men-and-Boys-in-Gender-Justice-MenEngage-Alliance.pdf.

reproductive health and rights (SRHR), and containment of HIV prevalence in the 1980s and 1990s,[8] its scope has expanded in recent years to include other domains (e.g., education, health, unpaid care, SRHR, and peace and security).[9] At the same time, the rationale and approach for engaging men are also evolving. From being solely positioned as perpetrators or obstacles to women's empowerment, men are now increasingly being involved as change agents who can be partners, stakeholders, and co-beneficiaries to promote women's empowerment and achieve gender equality and justice for all. Evidence suggests that the potential for individual change among men and boys can contribute to changing the patriarchal systems, which they comprise. Evaluations of programs aimed at men and boys have shown positive impacts on the well-being of women and girls, of men and boys themselves and marked gender-equitable attitudinal and behavioral changes among boys and men.

(v) **It is also critical to recognize that the rationale for engaging men and boys may differ across initiatives, with men's roles variously conceived as gatekeepers, allies, partners, co-beneficiaries, and stakeholders.** While the field of engaging men and boys initially sought to address their role as perpetrators of GBV and gatekeepers of inequalities, the discourse has shifted, and recent efforts seek to engage men as allies or partners and as co-beneficiaries working alongside women for the promotion of gender equality. However, there have been concerns among feminist and women's rights advocates that the work with men and boys has become a goal in itself and that some interventions fail to adequately challenge patriarchy and power imbalances, and have a much narrow focus, specifically, on the harms experienced by men and boys.[10] Gender-transformative approaches toward working with men and boys are important as they lead men and boys to question the inequitable advantages they enjoy within patriarchal structures at the expense of women and girls, as well as the harmful impacts that notions of masculinities place on their own lives.[11]

(vi) **The need for "engaging men and boys" for gender equality was critically highlighted in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women in 1979, in the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995, and in the UN Commission on the Status of Women in 2004.** Over the past 25 years, there has been a substantial increase in programs aiming to engage men and boys in advocating gender equality. Despite their variety, these initiatives form a somewhat cohesive "field" due to their shared goal to work with men and boys toward the achievement of gender equality.[12]

(vii) **While the acknowledgment of the need to involve men and boys in gender equality and women's empowerment is increasing, initiatives are primarily confined to CSOs.**[13] Gender-transformative approaches challenging traditional norms, particularly patriarchal masculinities, are crucial. In South Asia, nongovernment organizations (NGOs) and research initiatives provide a robust foundation for this with grassroots activism, community-based

8 R. K. Verma et al. 2006. Challenging and Changing Gender Attitudes Among Young Men in Mumbai, India. *Reproductive Health Matters*. 14(28). pp. 135–143. https://doi.org/10.1016/s0968-8080(06)28261-2.

9 A. Glinky et al. 2018. Gender Equity and Male Engagement: It Only Works When Everyone Plays. International Center for Research on Women.

10 MenEngage Alliance. 2020. *Contexts and Challenges for Gender Transformative Work with Men and Boys: A Discussion Paper.* https://menengage.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Contexts-and-Challenges-for-Gender-Transformative-Work-with-Men-and-Boys-EN.pdf.

11 See footnote 9, p. 3.

12 See footnote 10, p. 39.

13 See footnote 9, p. 6.

approaches, and impactful evaluations. NGOs play a pivotal grassroots role, challenging gender norms, and researchers contribute to understanding masculinity for evidence-based policies. Limited public sector involvement is countered by community-based initiatives addressing gender inequalities with cultural sensitivity. Impact evaluations assess effective approaches involving men, offering insights for future interventions.[14]

(viii) **To expand the initiatives and strengthen the approaches to engaging men and boys for gender equality, additional research on policy and programming in traditionally male-dominated sectors in South Asia, such as agriculture, energy, financial management, and transport, is required.** These sectors are vast and complex and are regulated by formal (e.g., laws, policies) and informal (social and gender norms) mechanisms that operate across multiple levels—individual, family or household, community, and systemic or institutional. Women and those belonging to other gender identities face significant barriers to entry, progression, and retention within these sectors while at the same time remaining invisible as both workers and consumers. Men, including those belonging to disadvantaged groups, also contend with patriarchal gender norms and expectations related to appropriate masculine behavior and encounter various unrecognized and unaddressed vulnerabilities. However, the lack of sex-disaggregated data on various gendered vulnerabilities poses a serious obstacle to progress toward evidence-based policymaking and programming.

(ix) **Focus on male engagement for GEWE and GESI in SARD operations has been lacking.** This lack is despite calls from partners in the government and CSOs for ADB to more consistently involve men and boys to support GEWE across all sectors of its operations.

5. Given ADB's strategic priorities around GESI and the increased global recognition of male engagement and masculinities as key components of gender-transformative initiatives, there is a need to take stock. This involves recognizing successes and challenges and identifying entry points for addressing gaps in the strategies and approaches to engaging men and boys for gender equality and women's empowerment and for transforming masculinities. SARD recognizes its unique position to make a sustainable impact on GESI by conducting this stocktaking to strategically involve men and boys in endeavors to achieve GESI in sectors, such as agriculture; education; energy; finance; health; transport; and water, sanitation, and hygiene. This stocktaking report highlights the barriers and opportunities to engaging men and boys to achieve GESI and the strategies to overcome or tap them to effectively influence policies, practices, and systems.

[14] International Center for Research on Women and Promundo. 2017. *Engaging Men and Boys to Achieve Gender Equality: How Can We Build on What We Have Learned.*

II

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The Notion of Masculinity

6. The following conceptualizations of masculinity guided the focus, analysis, and conclusions of this study:

(i) **Masculinity is associated with a set of normative expectations and rules that delineate what it means to "be a man."** Masculinity can refer to identities and roles (e.g., breadwinner and head of household); traits and attributes (e.g., aggression and strength); as well as power dynamics (e.g., the exercise of power over women and gender-diverse people, as well as men who do not conform to masculine norms). Traits commonly linked with masculinity include courage, assertiveness, aggression, leadership, hyper-sexuality, and emotional stoicism, among others, with the expectation to act as patriarchs, providers, and protectors. Masculinity is often construed as a negation or rejection of the female or feminine and all associated traits, roles, and dynamics. As Dowd puts it, "If 'not being like women' is the negative definition of masculinity, that avoidance is also strongly linked to not being 'gay'," illustrating the critical linkage between homophobia and the performance of heteronormative masculinity.[15] Men are expected to embody or "perform"[16] these notions in a continuous journey to "prove" one's masculinity, often leading to societal pressure to suppress vulnerability or emotional expression, resulting in detrimental impacts on women and others around them, as well as on men themselves.

(ii) **Masculinity is not singular or fixed but is a social construct shaped by social, cultural, historical, economic, religious, and other beliefs and practices that maintain men's power.**[17] By extension, masculinity itself exists in varied forms and manifestations and thus is referred to in the plural "masculinities" throughout the report. The expression of the masculine traits highlighted above can vary as per different contexts and shape different kinds of masculinities. However, while multiple masculinities exist, they are not "equal," with men situated differently in their experience of power and privilege. Scholars often suggest that a dominant form, known as hegemonic masculinity,[18] holds the most power and influence. It sits atop a hierarchy below which there are subordinate and subversive masculinities. Subordinate masculinities are often shaped by factors like race and class, while subversive masculinities challenge hegemonic norms.

[15] N. E. Dowd. 2008. Masculinities and Feminist Legal Theory. *Wisconsin Journal of Law, Gender & Society.* p. 222.

[16] J. Butler. 1990. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity.* Routledge.

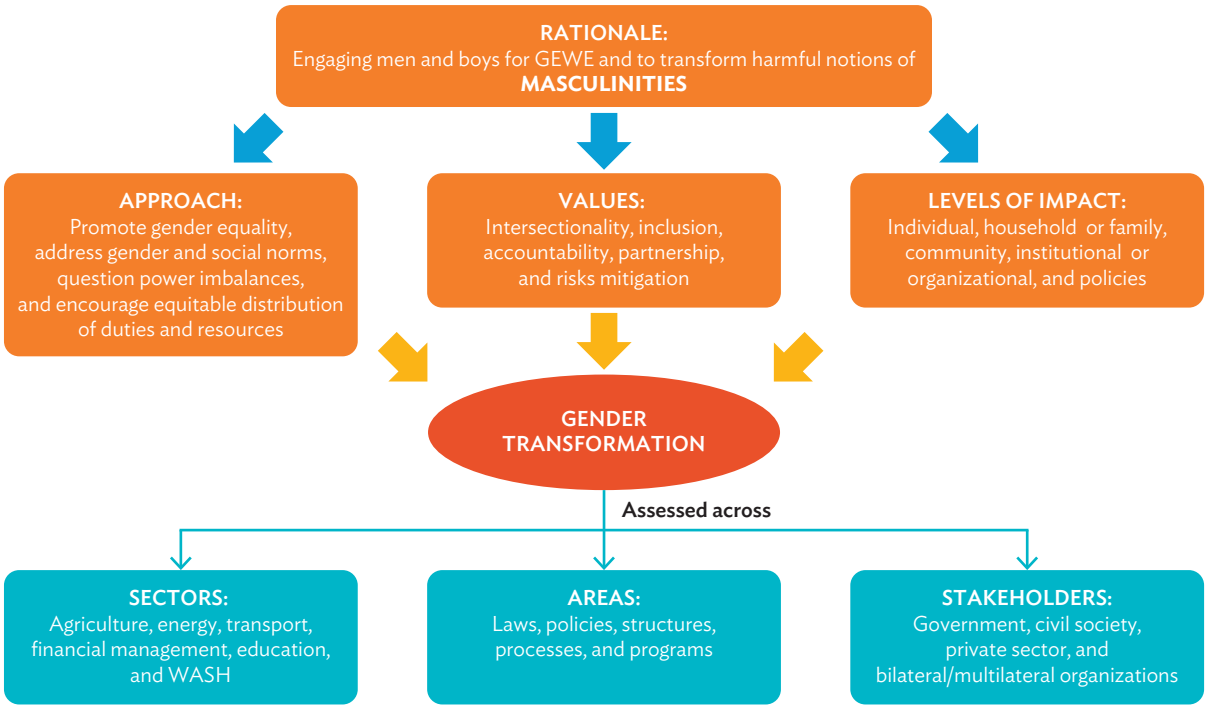
[17] C. Ramazanoglu. 1992. What Can You Do with a Man? *Women's Studies International Forum.* 15(3). pp. 339–350.

[18] R. W. Connell. 2005. *Masculinities.* Polity.

(iii) **While individual traits, roles, and interpersonal dynamics are key, masculinities and gender, more broadly, are not performed by individuals in a vacuum but are constructed through the interaction between people and gendered systems and institutions.**[19] Masculinities, thus, are not only embodied by men or individuals of any gender but can also be embedded within the fabric of communities, institutions, and wider structures and systems. At the same time, the fluid, contextual, socially constructed, and evolving nature of masculinities implies that masculinities—and crucially, oppressive power dynamics—can also be changed. This understanding is foundational to the project of engaging men and boys, along with wider communities, institutions, and systems, to transform masculinities and promote gender equality and equitable power relations.

7. Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual framework of this study. It involves precisely defining a gender transformative approach and connecting it with the concept of masculinities. It lays out the rationale, core values, and levels of impact associated with this approach. Subsequently, this framework was applied to examine laws, policies, structures, processes, and programs within the agriculture, education, energy, finance, health, transport, and WASH sectors, formulated and implemented by government bodies, civil society, private sector entities, and bilateral and multilateral organizations.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework



GEWE = gender equality and women's empowerment; WASH = water, sanitation, and hygiene.
Source: Asian Development Bank.

[19] M. Kimmel. 2011. *The Gendered Society*. 4th ed. Oxford University Press.

The Goal of Gender Transformation

8. The conceptual framework in Figure 1 was developed with the goal of gender transformation as the focal point. A barrier to global progress on gender equality is the narrow conceptualization and application of the concept of gender, often equated with "women" and women's issues. This not only leaves men and gender-diverse people out of the picture but fails to recognize that gender as a concept is relational, includes masculinities and femininities, and is grounded in structural contexts that create and reinforce inequitable power relations. To overcome this barrier, a gender-transformative approach that questions and aims to address the root causes of gender inequalities, including those related to patriarchal notions of masculinities, is placed at the foundation of this study and informs its methodology and analysis. Evidence shows that gender equality interventions that are integrated into a larger, holistic vision of change and use gender-transformative approaches can go much further than those that focus solely on women's empowerment and sidestep the role of men and boys in seeking gains on gender equality.

The Approach to Gender Transformation

9. A gender-transformative approach to the promotion of gender equality can be considered among the most progressive (Figure 2). The gender integration spectrum is a useful theoretical and methodological tool to examine and assess the approaches adopted by various laws, policies, and programs to integrate gender across various stages, including design, planning, implementation, and evaluation, and to develop clear and specific recommendations to move toward gender-transformative approaches. This is one of the most widely used framings of the gender integration spectrum. It starts with gender-reinforcing and then moves through gender-neutral, gender-sensitive, gender-transformative, and ultimately to gender-empowering.[20] Gender-reinforcing initiatives tend to actively promote the status quo of inequality and inequitable gender norms because gender-neutral initiatives do not recognize the effects of gender roles and norms. Conversely, gender-sensitive initiatives respond to the gendered needs and constraints of individuals but stop short of challenging inequitable gender norms and power relations. Gender-transformative approaches at the far end of the spectrum address and critically examine gender-related norms, behaviors, and power relations, including those associated with masculinities, seeking to transform them to become more gender-equitable.[21]

Figure 2: Gender Integration Spectrum

Source: International Center for Research on Women.

[20] G. R. Gupta. 2000. Gender, Sexuality, and HIV/AIDS: The What, the Why, and the How. *Can HIV AIDS Policy Law Rev.* 5(4). pp. 86–93.

[21] See footnote 9, p. 14.

10. In recent years, there has been growing evidence and consensus among varied stakeholders that gender-transformative approaches are critical for achieving more sustainable and comprehensive gains in gender equality. Critical examination of gender norms and inequitable power relations lies at the heart of the transformative process, with a broader objective to shift norms and behaviors and allocate duties and resources to become more gender-equitable.[22] This approach further recognizes that people of all genders—men, women, and gender-diverse people—shape and are shaped by harmful and inequitable gender norms, and thus all need to be engaged in the gender-transformative processes. This is often referred to as "gender synchronization." This is key to challenging harmful notions of masculinity (and femininity) that perpetuate gender inequalities and impede the well-being of all.[23]

Values That Inform a Gender-Transformative Approach

11. The values of intersectionality and inclusion are key to a gender-transformative approach. An intersectional approach acknowledges that individuals—whatever their sexual orientation, gender identity and expressions, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC)—have multiple identities shaped by different social factors, such as age, caste, class, ethnicity, ability, and disability, income, and geographic location, which impact their experiences of privilege and power, as well as disadvantages and constraints.[24] Oppressive institutions (e.g., sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, casteism, classism, etc.) are also interconnected and should be examined together.[25] Intersectionality as an approach can help to encourage men to expand their understanding of gender equality, and to reach those who are most marginalized through specific programs and policies that recognize their positionality. This study not only considers whether initiatives included in the review adopt the values of intersectionality, but also the extent to which those who are marginalized due to their identities are included in the initiatives, in line with the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) principle of "leave no one behind."

12. Promoting sustainable changes in gender norms is a complex, long-term endeavor, and requires consistent, multisectoral efforts across multiple socioecological spheres. Given that the field of engaging men and boys is relatively recent, with rapidly expanding interest and efforts, **partnerships** with diverse organizations including with women's movements, those working with men and boys and people with diverse SOGIESC, are a necessity for cross-learning and generating synergies that contribute to sustainable change.

13. Accountability to and complementarity with women's rights work and programming are essential to initiatives that engage men and boys, not only as outcomes but also as a process. In engaging men and boys, accountability refers to a responsibility; to feminist principles; to the long history of women's movements and organizations; and a commitment to ongoing work being done by women and for women as stakeholders, beneficiaries, and practitioners. Building transparent, collaborative, and respectful alliances and partnerships with women's rights organizations and activists is a key part of this, along with being cognizant of the power and privilege that men enjoy. This will benefit the larger project of gender equality.[26]

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22 See footnote 21.

23 M. E. Greene and A. Levack. 2010. *Synchronizing Gender Strategies: A Cooperative Model for Improving Reproductive Health and Transforming Gender Relations.* Population Reference Bureau. https://www.igwg.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/synchronizing-gender-strategies.pdf.

24 S. Shields. 2008. Gender: An Intersectionality Perspective. *Sex Roles.* 59. pp. 301–311.

25 MenEngage Alliance. 2019. *Transforming Masculinities: Towards a Shared Vision.*

26 Promundo and UNFPA. 2016. *Strengthening CSO-Government Partnerships to Scale Up Approaches Engaging Men and Boys for Gender Equality and SRHR: A Tool for Action.*

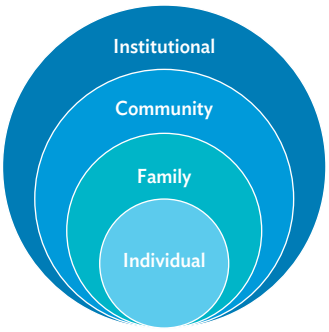
14. Engaging men and boys for gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE) is not a zero-sum game or a men vs. women issue. It is work that should be executed in the spirit of collaboration, toward the ultimate purpose of promoting gender equality. For this purpose, it is important to address **risks** and concerns regarding the diversion of resources and support from much-needed work with women and girls. There are also apprehensions around the risk of the "masculinization" of gender justice work, whereby efforts to engage men may distort the mission of gender justice. Further, work on masculinities runs the risk of reinforcing the notion of a heterogenous "man." In the context of South Asia, men and boys experience masculinities in different ways depending upon their age, physical ability, social identities, sexual orientation and gender identity, geography, and income. This study sought to understand how organizations working to engage men for gender equality are mitigating some of these risks and how their work complements existing work on gender equality and involves women and girls.

Levels of Impact of a Gender-Transformative Approach

15. Reviews of programming concerning men and masculinities have noted that efforts are largely focused on the personal and individual aspects of engaging with men and boys, to the detriment of more systemic work.[27] As argued by the Coalition of Feminists for Social Change, "the framing of much male involvement work focuses solely on the individual and relational aspects of masculinity rather than engaging in transformative work that challenges the fundamental assumptions upon which masculinities are constructed."[28] The conceptual framework adopted for this study emphasizes that while changing individual knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors is important, the transformative process is held back without addressing the broader structures and institutions within which individuals operate. It stresses that simultaneous efforts are required at institutional and policy levels to ensure that gender-transformative changes occur more systematically and are more likely to sustain in the long term.[29] In this report, we use the terms institutions and organizations interchangeably to refer to a culture of shared norms not only within physical entities but also beyond.

16. Drawing on Bronfenbrenner's seminal work, initiatives can benefit from adopting socioecological approaches that allow for gender-transformative change to occur at multiple levels, engaging multiple stakeholders (Figure 3).[30] The socioecological model positions the individual in relation to the social environment, including the immediate environment (e.g., family and peers); community (e.g., neighborhoods, schools, and workplace); and institutional contexts (e.g., norms, law, and policy). The review of initiatives seeks to understand the socioecological contexts at which interventions are designed and implemented, as well as the levels at which they influence impact and change.

Figure 3: Socioecological Framework



Source: U. Brofenbrenner. 1977. Toward an Experimental Ecology of Human Development. *American Psychologist.* 32: pp. 513–531.

[27] MenEngage Alliance. 2020. *Contexts and Challenges for Gender Transformative Work with Men and Boys: A Discussion Paper.*

[28] COFEM. 2017. How a Lack of Accountability Undermines Work to Address Violence against Women and Girls. *Feminist Perspectives on Addressing Violence Against Women and Girls.* Paper No. 1. Coalition of Feminists for Social Change.

[29] See footnote 9, p. 16.

[30] U. Brofenbrenner. 1977. Toward an Ecology of Human Development. *American Psychologist.* 32. pp. 513–531.

III

GENERAL FINDINGS ON MEN, MASCULINITIES, AND GENDER EQUALITY IN SOUTH ASIA

17. Gender statistics in South Asia illustrate the multifaceted challenges to achieving gender equality. Women face a significant disparity in labor force participation (25.6% for females versus 74.7% for males) and are often engaged in vulnerable employment without adequate social protection.[31] Education reveals persistent gaps, with adult literacy lower among women (15.7% difference), and early pregnancies impacting girls' education.[32] Maternal health has improved, but intimate partner violence affects a substantial number of women and girls.[33] Financially, men dominate in ownership of accounts held at a financial institution (74.8% compared to 64.1% for women), and property ownership, and decision-making power within households reflect gender imbalances.[34] Sexual violence remains a concern, with one in five countries in the region reporting high rates.[35] The digital gender gap is evident in internet and mobile payment usage.[36]

18. Pervasive masculine norms that are woven into the fabric of cultural, social, and historical contexts in South Asia are a key reason for these persistent gender-related inequities. Traditional norms and societal expectations often perpetuate stereotypical ideals of masculinity, emphasizing attributes such as dominance, toughness, and control. These norms reinforce hierarchical structures that affect men, women, and gender-diverse people. Men face pressures to conform to rigid expectations, limiting their emotional expression and contributing to mental health challenges. Additionally, traditional gender roles may lead to unequal power dynamics, contributing to issues such as gender-based violence.

[31] International Finance Corporation. https://www.ifc.org/en/where-we-work/south-asia/gender-south-asia (accessed 15 December 2023).

[32] UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS). UIS.Stat Bulk Data Download Service. https://apiportal.uis.unesco.org/bdds (accessed 15 December 2023).

[33] WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA, World Bank Group, and UNDESA/Population Division. 2023. Trends in Maternal Mortality 2000 to 2020. World Health Organization.

[34] Demirguc-Kunt et al. 2018. Global Financial Inclusion Database. World Bank. https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/entities/publication/fd0322b0-985c-5836-8396-9ee61c45716c (accessed 15 December 2023).

[35] WHO. 2021. Violence Against Women Prevalence Estimates, 2018: Global, Regional and National Prevalence Estimates for Intimate Partner Violence Against Women and Global and Regional Prevalence Estimates for Non-Partner Sexual Violence Against Women. Executive Summary. https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240022256 (accessed 15 December 2023).

[36] World Bank. Gender Data Portal. https://genderdata.worldbank.org/en/home (accessed 15 December 2023).

19. Masculine norms are generated and perpetuated through various channels, including families, communities, educational systems, health systems, economic systems, political systems, media, and policy and legal frameworks. These arenas influence men's attitudes and behaviors toward women, other men, and gender-diverse individuals and function as gendered spaces that typically privilege male experiences and perspectives, thereby perpetuating gender inequalities.

20. Furthermore, institutions often function as masculine spaces with work cultures and norms that typically value traits like competitiveness and assertiveness. Structural inequities are evident with men overrepresented in leadership roles and biased hiring and promotion practices favoring attributes typically associated with men. Both formal and informal human resources practices contribute to this, where job descriptions, performance evaluations, leave policies, mentorship opportunities, and networking often exclude women. Policies and procedures often implicitly favor male employees, and inadequate measures against sexual harassment further create unwelcoming environments. This is common across government organizations, civil society organizations (CSOs), funders, and multilateral and bilateral organizations.[37]

21. In contemporary society, social media is a significant platform for both reinforcing and challenging harmful notions of masculinities (toxic masculinities).[38] While it provides space for the contestation of traditional norms, it also becomes a battleground for toxic masculinities. Cyberbullying and misogynistic content contribute to an inhospitable online environment, mirroring the challenges present in the offline world. Empowered by the anonymity of social media, toxic masculinity manifests in harassment and the surveillance of women, marginalized men, and gender-diverse individuals.[39]

22. Recognizing and advancing gender equality in traditionally male-dominated sectors, including agriculture, transport, energy, finance, and WASH is crucial as there is limited evidence on effective strategies for ensuring gender equality. These sectors serve as key arenas for the expression of masculine norms. Beyond addressing historical disparities, promoting equal opportunities in these sectors fosters social justice, drives economic development, and contributes to sustainable progress.

[37] M. Lokot. 2021. From the Inside Out: Gender Mainstreaming and Organizational Culture Within the Aid Sector. *Frontiers in Sociology*.

[38] Toxic masculinity refers to cultural norms and behaviors that promote a harmful version of masculinity. It often emphasizes dominance, aggression, emotional suppression, and the devaluation of traits perceived as "feminine." These expectations can negatively impact both men and those around them, fostering unhealthy relationships, violence, and limiting emotional expression. In contrast, positive masculinity encourages emotional intelligence, empathy, and respect, fostering healthier connections and personal well-being. While toxic masculinity enforces rigid, damaging norms, positive masculinity embraces a balanced, inclusive, and respectful expression of manhood.

[39] J. Lee , Y. P. Hsieh, and R. Thornberg. 2020. An Introduction to the Special Issue on Cyberbullying in Asia and Pacific: Its Nature and Impact. *Asia Pacific Journal of Social Work and Development*.

IV SECTORAL FINDINGS

Agriculture

Gender and Masculinities in the Agriculture Sector

23. Entrenched gender norms, particularly around masculinities, wield a significant influence on the agriculture sector in South Asia, shaping the sector's dynamics and impacting women, as well as men and gender-diverse people. However, research and literature on the linkages between agriculture and masculinities in the region are negligible, and evidence around sexual orientation, gender identity and expressions, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC) and agriculture is entirely absent. At the most basic level, farming is primarily associated with men, with women's contributions largely unrecognized. Women work extensively across various facets of the agriculture sector, from land preparation; seed selection and seedling production; sowing; applying manure, fertilizers, and pesticides; weeding; transplanting; threshing; winnowing; and harvesting. Besides working as cultivators and in home gardening, women are also likely to work in animal husbandry and fisheries and perform labor that ranges from animal care to playing a role in the initial processing of milk and livestock products. Given the patriarchy-driven provider–homemaker dichotomy that is prevalent in all six countries, in addition to their farming tasks, women perform the arduous unpaid work of the household: caregiving labor for family members; fetching water for the household's consumption; and contributing to productive tasks, such as collection of fuel and fodder to supplement the income of the family. This type of gendered division of labor is common and prevalent and upheld by community norms reinforced by legal provisions, institutions, and individual gatekeepers, which continue to devalue women's participation and their critical role in the sector.

24. Masculine norms that prioritize men's physical strength, competitiveness, and mental toughness, are seen of value in the agriculture sector, thereby valuing men's contributions more as compared with those of women, positioning men not only as providers and protectors within the home but also as the primary decision-makers and stakeholders in the sector. As a result, women's ability to be economically involved in agricultural activities and decision-making is constrained. Despite the fact that women are employed at higher rates than men in the agriculture sector (e.g., in Bhutan[40] and Sri Lanka[41]), men hold the majority of the decision-making powers and top positions in any organized farmer organizations (e.g., Sri Lanka). In Sri Lanka, women are assigned mainly unskilled or semi-skilled roles and do not have many opportunities to benefit from extension services and, therefore, display low productivity in their work.[42]

[40] ADB. 2014. *Bhutan: Gender Equality Diagnostic of Selected Sectors.*

[41] ADB. 2023. *Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Diagnostic of Selected Sectors in Sri Lanka.*

[42] Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). 2018. *Country Gender Assessment of Agriculture and the Rural Sector in Sri Lanka.*

More than 60% of women work as unpaid family labor and only 10% of female farmers receive extension services in comparison to 90% of male farmers. Even when women engage in paid agriculture labor, gender disparities in pay are prevalent. Despite legal provisions in Nepal for equal pay between the sexes, women receive wages about 25% lower than men's in Nepal[43] and an estimated 23% in Bangladesh.[44] In India and Maldives for instance, women usually work on a smaller scale, using traditional tools and techniques to grow food for their families and the local market. This is also based on the norms that the public sphere is considered a masculine space.[45] Similarly in Maldives, the bulk of the income in the fishing sector comes from fish catch and marketing dominated by men.[46] A Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) Gender Assessment report from Nepal notes that despite women's contributions, there is an undervaluation of women's skills, knowledge, and labor in crop production resources.[47]

25. The societal expectations placed on men to fulfill the role of providers can put immense pressure on them, particularly given the economic uncertainties associated with the agriculture sector. This is particularly evident in the unpredictability stemming from climate-related crises that intensify financial insecurities among farmers. Compounding this pressure are patriarchal ideals of masculinity that dissuade men from seeking essential physical and mental health support, leaving them feeling inadequate in their roles as providers. Notably, in India, the Economic Survey identified bankruptcy and family problems as leading causes of male suicides, accounting for 20.6% and 20.1%, respectively, of total farmers' suicides in 2014.[48] Other notable factors include crop failure (16.8%), illness (13.2%), and drug abuse or alcoholic addiction (4.9%). These distressing circumstances, often resulting in the loss of life of the primary breadwinner, also have far-reaching implications on the well-being of women and children in agricultural communities.

26. Landownership in South Asia predominantly rests in the hands of men, consolidating their financial control and authority within the family, and reinforcing their role as primary breadwinners. In most traditional inheritance patterns in the region, land passes predominantly to sons rather than daughters. In Bangladesh, most farmers do not own land, but the scenario is worse for women farmers, as 70% of them do not have ownership.[49] In the case of agricultural land-owning households, only 13% of women solely or jointly own agricultural land.[50] In Bhutan, land tenure practices vary between patriarchal and matriarchal societies. For instance, in southern Bhutanese communities like Tsirang and Samtse, landownership practices predominantly favor men over women, with rates of 67% and 42%, respectively.

[43] FAO. 2019. *Country Gender Assessment of Agriculture and the Rural Sector in Nepal.* http://www.fao.org/3/CA3128EN/ca3128en.pdf.

[44] S. Shifa. 2018. Women in Bangladesh Agriculture: Scope, Determinants and Constraints. Bangbandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Agricultural University.

[45] International Labour Organization. 2018. Game Changers: Women and the Future of Work in Asia and the Pacific.

[46] Maldivian Gender Roles in Bio-Resource Management. https://www.fao.org/3/ac792e/AC792E04.htm.

[47] See footnote 43, p. 34.

[48] Centre for Agrarian Studies, National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj. *Agrarian Crisis and Farmers' Suicides – An Empirical Study of Endemic States – Issues and Concerns.* Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India. https://nhrc.nic.in/sites/default/files/Final%20Report%20of%20NIRDPR%20%281%29.pdf (accessed 15 December 2023).

[49] R. J. Moni. 2017. Women's Land Rights and Access to Commons in Bangladesh: A Case of Securing Commons (Kha land) from Northern Bangladesh. Paper presented at the IASC 2017 Conference.

[50] A. Kotikula and J. Solotaroff. 2019. To Gain Economic Empowerment, Bangladeshi Women Need Equal Property Rights. End Poverty in South Asia, World Bank Blogs.

Conversely, in central and western Bhutanese societies, particularly Zhemgang, the trend reverses, with 75% of land inheritance going to women.[51] However, even in cases where women inherit land or inheritance laws promote gender equity, control largely remains within men, stemming from the wider prevailing patriarchal capitalist market system.[52]

27. Migration within and among the six developing member countries (DMCs), stemming from structural inequalities such as poverty and lack of access to employment opportunities, is a gendered phenomenon with significant impacts on the agriculture sector. A substantial exodus of Nepali men migrating to India, the Middle East, and other regions has led to a rise in women's engagement and employment in agriculture. In Nepal, the agricultural workforce portrays a gender disparity, with 70% of women and 30% of men engaged in this sector, reaching over 80% representation of women farmers in Provinces 6 and 7.[53] In India, the allure of higher-paying urban jobs has prompted men from rural and farming communities to migrate, subsequently transferring the burden of farm labor and management onto women. The gender dynamics of migration and their linkages to men's roles as primary earners have significantly shaped the landscape of the agriculture sector in South Asia.

Overview of Initiatives and Challenges in the Agriculture Sector

28. Within the six DMCs, the concepts of men and masculinities and their linkages to the agriculture sector are largely unrecognized, with very few initiatives addressing these issues and SOGIESC linkages to agriculture remaining completely absent. At a policy level, gender is seen without the lens of masculinities, and the limited efforts toward gender mainstreaming tend to focus mainly on reducing gender gaps for women and empowering women farmers by asserting land rights, better access to extension and credit services, and support in terms of childcare services. While these efforts are critical for reducing gender disparities, the absence of a men and masculinities lens and inclusion of SOGIESC concerns limits the transformative potential of policies and programs. Some instances of policies that seek to promote gender equality are highlighted. For instance, the Fisheries Act of the Maldives (2019) uses the term *fishers* instead of gender-specific *fishermen* as a part of its principal objectives and attempts to promote the equal participation of men and women in the fisheries sector. In Sri Lanka, the National Agriculture Policy includes a policy to "empower youth and women in agriculture with support for mechanization, access to modern technologies, and productivity-based incentive systems."[54] To achieve this purpose, the policy focuses on supporting gender-based development in agriculture, including employment capacity building. Yet, implementation of this policy is limited. The capacity of policymakers to address the changing dynamics of the market, policy environment, and changes in climate remains in question.[55] Challenges persist in implementing gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) considerations and changing women's and marginalized groups' positions in the agricultural value chain.

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51 Royal Government of Bhutan. National Plan of Action for Gender, 2008–2013. Gross National Happiness Commission, National Commission for Women and Children.

52 ADB. 2014. *Bhutan: Gender Equality Diagnostic of Selected Sectors.*

53 ADB. 2020. Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Diagnostic of Selected Sectors in Nepal. https://www.adb.org/publications/nepal-gender-equality-social-inclusion-diagnostic.

54 Ministry of Agriculture. 2021. *National Agriculture Policy*. https://faolex.fao.org/docs/pdf/SRL226805.pdf.

55 D. Gauchan. 2018. Agricultural Development in Nepal: Emerging Challenges and Opportunities. In K. Suman and M. Khatri, eds. *Discourses on Nepal's Development.* Volume I. Nepal Policy Research Centre.

29. In almost all DMCs, gender inclusion has been recognized in a number of policies that influence the agriculture sector. However, they do not explicitly consider the engagement of men and boys toward gender equity or understand and address masculinities and their linkages to other intersecting identities, including SOGIESC. In Bhutan, most agriculture-related laws and policies do not explicitly recognize gender norms as a driving factor for inequitable gender outcomes. In Bangladesh, the National Agriculture Policy and the New Agricultural Extension Policy do not recognize women's triple burden in agriculture and, to a great extent, fail to recognize the contributions of women farmers, and redistribute their unpaid agricultural work. Other key national policies, including the National Jute Policy, National Rural Development Policy, National Food Policy, and National Land Use Policy, also stop short of recognizing and addressing gendered challenges in the sector. In Sri Lanka, the Overarching Agriculture Policy, 2020–2025 has identified mainstreaming gender in policies, implementation strategies, and action plans; and increasing women and youth participation in the agriculture sector as priorities, but the potential of working with men and boys toward achieving these objectives is unexplored. In Nepal, the national Agriculture Development Strategy[56] for the period 2015–2035 seeks to promote the inclusion of marginalized groups and equal distribution of benefits along the value chain for women, youth, Dalits, and other marginalized groups. The strategy also aims to reduce gender gaps and plans to expand GESI-friendly agricultural research and extension programs. However, the role of masculinities and male farmers in redistributing benefits to these vulnerable groups is neglected. In India, the Farm Acts 2020 has also led to extensive discourse around the impacts on poor farmers, including women farmers, yet there are no provisions for gender-transformative approaches that acknowledge and address the role of gender norms and masculinities.[57]

30. Among civil society organizations (CSOs), initiatives in Maldives and India have primarily focused on women's economic empowerment. In India, organizations like Kudumbashree in Kerala and Deccan Development Society in Andhra Pradesh have utilized resources, such as joint liability groups, to bring about significant changes in the rural economy. Joint liability groups enable collective farming, providing women with a collective voice and fostering social and economic inclusion. Similarly, the Tarayana Foundation in Bhutan stands out for its efforts in engaging men and boys as allies in gender equality, adopting a gender-synchronized approach (Box 1).

31. There is little information on the extent to which the private sector directly works with boys and men to advance gender equality in the agriculture sector. The key informant interviews (KIIs) conducted for this study suggest that the Bhutan Chamber of Commerce and Industry has recently started gender mainstreaming in the private sector under the gender equality, diversity, and inclusion program supported by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and National Commission for Women and Children. In India, Tetra Tech supports 40 start-ups across Asia and helps them scale their innovations so that more small farmers can access new-age technologies like solar, irrigation systems, biogas digester, and organic fertilizer, engaging men and families of women entrepreneurs in an organic manner. These initiatives can represent key entry points for further integration of gender-transformative interventions that adopt a men and masculinities lens.

[56] Government of Nepal. 2015. Nepal Agriculture Development Strategy (ADS) 2015 to 2035.

[57] A. Premkumar. 2020. How Farm Acts Affect Women In Agriculture. 2020. https://behanbox.com/2020/11/01/how-the-new-farm-acts-will-impact-womens-work-in-agriculture/.

Box 1

The Work of Tarayana Foundation in Bhutan

The Tarayana Foundation in Bhutan is actively engaging boys and young men in initiatives that promote positive masculinity and gender equality, recognizing the crucial role they play in shaping a more equitable society. Through a combination of educational workshops, community dialogues, and mentorship programs, the foundation works to dismantle harmful gender stereotypes and encourage boys to develop a more inclusive and respectful attitude toward women and girls. These programs focus on educating boys about the importance of gender equity, consent, and shared responsibilities, while also providing them with positive role models who exemplify equitable behavior. By involving boys in these efforts, the Tarayana Foundation aims to prevent gender-based violence, challenge traditional notions of masculinity, and empower boys to become advocates for gender equality in their communities. Their work is geared toward fostering a cultural shift that values both men and women equally.

Source: Tarayana Foundation.

32. Though there are growing efforts to promote gender equality in the sector, without greater conceptual clarity and operational evidence on how men and their notions of masculinities perpetuate differences and inequalities in agriculture, initiatives will continue to stop short of achieving their gender-transformative potential. The lack of research and evidence around the linkages between men, masculinities, and agriculture leads to blind spots that further impede the ability of governments, CSOs, private sector organizations, and multilateral organizations to design and implement programs to address the existing challenges. In Maldives, the agriculture sector is the weakest sector in terms of data availability on market information.[58] KIIs with representatives from Land and Sea Maldives also highlighted the lack of technical knowledge on gender analysis despite decades of gender training and sensitization and the limited knowledge of gender-responsive law and policymaking, which are barriers to gender mainstreaming and gender-transformative programming.

33. Overall, we found that policy and program initiatives to promote gender equality within the agriculture sector do not use a men and masculinities lens. There is a lack of research and evidence around the linkages between men, masculinities, and gender inequity in agriculture. Further, the idea of transforming harmful notions of masculinities within the sector remains unexplored. The participants and intended beneficiaries in gender equality initiatives in the sector are largely women, and the impact is limited to the individual and, in some instances, the household level.

[58] National Bureau of Statistics. 2014. *Supply and Use Tables 2014: Methodology and Results.* http://statisticsmaldives.gov.mv/nbs/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/SUT2014.pdf.

Recommendations and Entry Points in the Agriculture Sector

34. Given the above findings, this stocktaking recommends the following for the agriculture sector:

(i) **Research and Evidence Base**

(a) **Invest in research on gender, agriculture, and masculinities.** The aim is to identify and understand the linkages between gender and agriculture, with a particular focus not only on neglected areas such as norms related to masculinities and SOGIESC and their impacts on women, but also on men themselves and gender-diverse people. These linkages and norms need to be understood at the individual, family or household, community, and broader institution and policy levels. Robust evidence on how gender and masculinities operate across different facets of the agriculture sector (e.g., value chains, management and supply of seeds, access to finance and credit, land ownership, decision-making around crops, etc.) will enable evidence-based policymaking and program design to promote gender equality and social inclusion in the sector. Data disaggregated by sex, gender, and other social categories (e.g., class, location, caste, and ability) are required to develop comprehensive and intersectional evidence on key areas of inquiry in the sector and to identify the most marginalized and at-risk groups for intervention.

(b) **Ensure multi-stakeholder inputs in the research process.** Opportunities need to be created for those engaged in agriculture at various levels to participate and provide inputs throughout the research process, including men whose contributions are most often recognized, and women and gender-diverse people engaged in agriculture who tend to be marginalized from key decision-making.

(c) **Conduct in-depth studies on specific understudied concerns.** These studies may be on the linkages between gender, masculinities, and phenomena, such as the mental health and well-being of farmers, linking to critical concerns such as economic insecurity and farmer suicides. The relationship between gender, masculinities, and migration in agriculture can also be explored further to address specific issues faced by migrants themselves, and the impacts on families and communities left behind.

(d) **Develop robust tools and resources.** These are critical for advancing research and evidence on gender, masculinities, and SOGIESC in the agriculture sector, with opportunities for cross-learning across stakeholder groups including governments, CSOs, private sector organizations, and bilateral and/or multilateral organizations among others.

(e) **Develop monitoring and evaluation systems.** It is crucial to understand and document the impacts of interventions and ensure that learnings are widely circulated for shared learning and feedback.

(ii) **Law and Policies**

(a) **Reassess laws and policies from a gender-transformative lens.** Laws and policies within the agriculture sector (e.g., land ownership, access to credit, etc.) require thorough reassessment and operationalization with a gender-transformative lens that incorporates gender norms related to men and masculinities to more effectively address gaps and promote gender equality and social inclusion. Reassessment and reformulation processes must be guided by robust research and evidence that lays out concerns and identifies effective approaches for redressal.

(b) **Identify biases within laws.** Gender gaps and biases embedded within laws and policies need to be identified and eliminated. For example, changes in language should ensure that women and gender-diverse people are also recognized as farmers and can fully and freely access legal and policy provisions.

(c) **Gender-sensitize lawyers and policymakers.** Lawyers and policymakers should undergo comprehensive gender training, which includes concepts of masculinities and gender norms and their linkages to agriculture. Gender experts can be engaged to support and design training modules for this purpose.

(d) **Engender technology.** Investments must be made to engender technology to unburden the drudgery of farmers, particularly women farmers who shoulder the double burden of farm work and domestic unpaid care work. At the same time, laws and policies must encourage and create provisions for men to take up responsibility and participate in care work.

(e) **Promote gender-equitable leadership within agriculture-related institutions.** Engaging men for gender equality should also include actively promoting the presence and leadership of women, gender-nonconforming individuals, and minorities in political settings, e.g., in farmer and producer groups and cooperatives, and advocating for gender equitable policies and procedures within these settings. This could be done in collaboration with divisional units of the Ministry of Women and Child Development and nongovernment organizations (NGOs) or CSOs such as the Foundation for Innovative Social Development in Sri Lanka.

(iii) **Programmatic Approaches**

(a) **Undertake perspective-building of key stakeholders in the agriculture sector.** All key stakeholders involved in the agriculture sector should be provided with extensive perspective- and capacity-building around gender, masculinities, and SOGIESC issues.

(b) **Promote cross-learning on effective interventions.** Evidence gathered through research, monitoring, and evaluation of existing policies and programs should be disseminated through capacity-building modules and other such platforms to ensure cross-learning and the development of effective interventions to promote gender equality in the agriculture sector.

(c) **Engage subject matter experts on gender.** Gender and agriculture subject matter experts should be engaged in delivering capacity- and perspective-building sessions, and involved at all stages of developing interventions that seek to promote gender equality in agriculture, particularly through adopting gender-transformative approaches that explicitly identify and implement approaches to work with men and boys and transform masculinities.

(d) **Use participatory processes for decision-making.** The intended participants and beneficiaries of programs related to gender and agriculture must be engaged in participatory processes to contribute to larger discourses and decision-making in the sector.

(e) **Address the mental health and gender dynamics of farmers.** Research and evidence on understudied and unaddressed areas, such as the mental health concerns of farmers, should be leveraged to develop specific interventions that examine the privileges and pressures of patriarchal masculinity and enable men to question the provider role while at the same time supporting them to participate in care work. Such approaches can also enable men to recognize and support women's engagement in agricultural work and greater voice and say in decision-making in agriculture.

(f) **Adopt an ecosystem-based approach.** A multipronged approach, which includes engaging closely with schools and households to target behavioral shifts in boys and girls in the agriculture sector, is urgently needed. For instance, interventions can include awareness campaigns and behavior change programs based on analysis and impact of division of labor, decision-making, and access to resources along the value chain.

Education

Gender and Masculinities in the Education Sector

35. Across South Asia, gender disparities in access and quality of education continue to persist. These disparities are rooted in unequal gender norms, preference for boys' education, reinforcement of gender stereotypes in textbooks, gendered division of labor in schools, and violence in schools and colleges. Preprimary and secondary enrollment rates for girls in this region are lagging that of boys. Boys have a slightly higher rate of enrollment at primary and secondary levels than girls in most countries in South Asia (except Sri Lanka).[59] For instance, a Young Lives study in India (2002–2013)[60] showed that approximately 10% more boys completed secondary school compared to girls in 2002–2013 when they followed the same cohort. At the higher education level, where gender norms are reinforced, gender gaps are greater in technical and vocational education and training enrollment (e.g., Bhutan and Maldives). In Bhutan, the overall technical and vocational education and training enrollment dropped between 2010 and 2015 but this was more so for girls than boys.[61] These disparities are also reflected in the choice of subjects for higher education by different genders.

36. In the region, especially in rural areas, young men often drop out of school and migrate in search of employment. This is due to dominant norms of masculinities that require young men to be breadwinners for their families and start working from an early age. Research shows that in Sri Lanka, society believes that education is less important for boys than for girls, in terms of its link to their prospects in the labor workforce. Students, teachers, and parents were confident of boys' earning abilities or employment opportunities, regardless of educational achievement.[62]

37. Educational institutes become key socialization sites for men and boys to learn and imbibe harmful gender stereotypes and norms around masculinities. A running theme emerging from this stocktaking is that in India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka, boys (and girls) are experiencing a school climate that is often characterized by different types of violence such as peer-to-peer bullying and physical fights; or teachers or other related authority figures using corporal punishment, sexual violence and harassment, and psychological violence. The belief that boys can withstand violence is often rooted in harmful masculine ideas that boys and men are physically strong and can be shaped positively by corporal punishment. A driving factor that has been consistently linked to adult men's violence against women and girls is their witnessing and experiencing

[59] UNICEF. 2022. Gender and Education Data.

[60] Z. Domingo. 2021. Keeping Girls in School: Contributing to Equality in India through Education. GVI Planet. https://www.gvi.co.uk/blog/keeping-girls-in-school-contributing-to-gender-equality-in-india-through-education/.

[61] Ministry of Education. 2014. Bhutan Education Blueprint, 2014–2024.

[62] H. Aturupane, M. Shojo, and R. Ebenezer. 2018. Gender Dimensions of Education Access and Achievement in Sri Lanka. 10.1596/30624.

violence as children.[63] The perpetuation of harmful notions of masculinity, characterized by aggression and dominance, is reinforced within the education system, and contribute to actions that affect the family and social lives of men and boys (Box 2).[64]

Box 2

Challenges in Addressing Gender-Based Violence Within Sri Lanka's Education System

Academic institutions worldwide face significant challenges in addressing sexual and gender-based violence (GBV). A study of 250 medical students who spent three or more continuous years at the same institution found that 55.6% (25.2% males and 72.2% females) experienced GBV. Nearly half (48.2%) identified academic staff (faculty and extended faculty) as responsible. Fewer than 10% reported it, possibly due to fears of perceived and actual consequences. Although published in 2006, the study highlights issues of GBV, the complexities of reporting, and the urgent need to address these issues. It also underscores the necessity of updated evidence on violence within tertiary education settings.

Sources: K. Wijewardene, et al. 2022. *Prevalence of Ragging and Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in Sri Lankan State Universities.* Centre for Gender Equity and Equality of the University Grants Commission (UGC), UNICEF, Sri Lanka; J. Perera, N. Gunawardane, and V. Jayasuriya. 2011. *Review of Research Evidence on Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in Sri Lanka.* Second Edition. Sri Lanka Medical Association.

38. Organizations responsible for formulating and implementing education-related policies and programs are most often led by men and operate as spaces for producing and reproducing gender inequality—including dominant forms of masculinity. Heteronormative norms also create multiple layers of challenges for gender-diverse individuals to continue their education and impacts their experience of education.[65] Educational institutes are sites of prejudice and discrimination for transgender and gender-diverse people. They may be subject to violence, bullying, and harassment by teachers, nonteaching staff, and other students. Very often, schools and colleges are sites of exclusion and result in transgender and gender-diverse people dropping out.[66]

39. Common to all countries is a lack of focus on gender-transformative approaches both in terms of the content of the curriculum and the perspective of people in charge of developing the curriculum. School curriculum textbooks continue to further gender biases and inequality. Most textbooks in the region continue to highlight the role of men and boys as breadwinners, reinforcing the masculine expectations for boys as they grow into members of society. Women are depicted as making limited contributions

[63] A. Gibbs et al. 2020. New Learnings on Drivers of Men's Physical and/or Sexual Violence against Their Female Partners, and Women's Experiences of This, and the Implications for Prevention Interventions. Global Health Action.

[64] J. Perera, S. D. Abeynayake, and D. P. Galabada. 2006. Gender-Based Harassment among Medical Students. In Proceedings of the 10th National Convention on Women's Studies. 2–6 April.

[65] UNICEF and UNESCO. 2013. The World We Want—Making Education a Priority in the Post-2015 Development Agenda. Report of the Global Thematic Consultation on Education in the Post-2015 Development Agenda.

[66] A. Sharma. Creating Gender Inclusive Education: An Exploratory Study to Eradicate Homophobia and Stigma through the Introduction of Non-Binary Genders in Mainstream Curriculum. *International Journal of Policy Sciences and Law*.

to countries' social, economic, political, and historical development, and their representation is only in supportive and subordinate roles. Additionally, in Maldives, gender stereotyping in the school curriculum and gendered practices in the classroom, reinforce and reproduce specific masculinities both in the classroom and in daily lives. For example, the Islamic rulings on marriage[67] and the obligation upon the husband to discipline the wife were found in the Grade 9 Islam textbook. Further, across the regions, there is little acknowledgment of trans youth and gender-diverse people in school curricula and daily education. This is reflective of the biases of those that are in charge of making curricula. Further, key informants note that a lack of male teachers at the primary school level is contributing to having little to no male role models for boys (as identified in Maldives and Sri Lanka). Instead, they pointed out, it is common to see negative role models, i.e., boys who drop out of school early to pursue jobs in Colombo. Male role models who reject stereotypical norms of masculinity would help boys feel confident to live out alternative masculinities.

40. Intersecting identities and vulnerability factors (e.g., gender, social class, urbanicity, disability status, casteism, and religious affiliation) contribute to gaps in learning outcomes as seen in all six countries. In Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka, students in urban areas perform better than those in rural areas, and gender differences exist both in academic attainment and choice of study. The intersection of gender and socioeconomic status is noted in several countries. For example, in Sri Lanka, the gender gap is the highest among the wealthiest segment of the population at every level of the education system.[68] Females in the wealthiest quintile have a higher advantage over their male counterparts than females in the poorest quintile. In Maldives, despite improvement in gathering sex-disaggregated data and the engendering of Census 2014, there is no sex-disaggregated data on children with disabilities or for out-of-school girls, with or without disabilities.[69]

Overview of Initiatives and Challenges in the Education Sector

41. Across all six countries, there is a desire to make education accessible, equitable, and inclusive. For instance, in Nepal, The *Education for All* (2004–2009) initiative and the *School Sector Reform Plan* (2009–16) prioritized equal participation for girls at all levels of education, and this was further emphasized in the School Sector Development Plan (SSDP) (2016/17–2022/23). Similarly, in India, the new National Education Policy 2020 provides progressive provisions such as a Gender Inclusion Fund toward equitable education for girls and transgender students, as well as an increase in public education spending to 6% of the gross domestic product. In Bangladesh, the National Education Policy of 2010 has been the most inclusive education policy to date. Additionally, for the first time, the National Education Policy in Bangladesh made information, communication, and technology teaching compulsory in schools to align with the Digital Bangladesh goal; it also introduced creative writing methodologies for evaluating students against the traditional rote learning-based evaluation system. The importance of early childcare and development for all children aged up to 5 years is also noted in Bhutan[70] and Bangladesh, where both countries emphasize the inclusion of children with special needs.

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67 Maldivian Democracy Network. 2015. Preliminary Assessment of Radicalization in the Maldives. https://mvdemocracy.org/wp-content/plugins/pdfjs-viewer-shortcode/pdfjs/web/viewer.php?file=https://mvdemocracy.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Preliminary-Assessment-on-Radicalisation-in-the-Maldives-2015.pdf&download=true&print=true&openfile=false.

68 H. Aturupane, M. Shojo, and R. M. Ebenezer. 2018. Gender Dimensions of Education Access and Achievement in Sri Lanka (English). *South Asia Region Education Global Practice Discussion Paper.* No. 90. World Bank Group.

69 UNICEF. 2021. *Disability Inclusive Education Practices in the Maldives.* https://www.unicef.org/rosa/media/17001/file/Country%20Profile%20-%20Maldives.pdf.

70 Ministry of Education. 2018. Bhutan Draft National Education Policy, 2018. p. 23.

42. Despite such progress, efforts to address gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE) by engaging men and boys and addressing harmful masculinities remain nominal, and the impacts are yet to become visible in almost any of the countries. A major challenge identified in this stocktaking is the reluctance among policymakers to address GEWE and male engagement and masculinity by initiating gender-transformative policy and action to address existing norms, beliefs, and attitudes and eliminate gender stereotypes. In the strategies for combating gender-based inequality and harmful practices, men are almost invariably missing as active agents for transformative change. In India, strategies are, at best, gender-responsive and have not touched upon the transformative role that education can play. The Maldives Education Sector Analysis (February 2019) identifies existing gender disparities, but the Education Sector Plan (2019–2023) does not explicitly address gender, men, and masculinities. Moreover, there is no emphasis on engaging boys in transforming harmful masculine norms. However, some government initiatives are worth mentioning such as the Gender Equality Action Plan (2022–2026)[71] led by the Ministry of Gender, Family and Social Services in Maldives (Box 3).

Box 3

Maldives Gender Equality Action Plan (2022–2026)

The Gender Equality Action Plan (2022–2026), promotes nonstereotypical roles and career paths for girls and boys; encourages higher education programs to increase male participation in occupations where they are underrepresented such as nursing, teaching selected subjects (subjects not identified in plan) and social work; and reviewing and restructuring technical and vocational education and training programs to provide nontraditional options for girls and boys.

Source: Ministry of Gender and Family. 2022. *National Gender Equality Action Plan, 2022–2026.* http://gender.gov.mv/en/wp-content/uploads/sites/1/2022/03/GEAPFinal.pdf.

43. Many KII participants in the stocktaking indicated the need for greater focus on boys and men in the sector. They suggested addressing gender-based division of labor in schools, for example, by encouraging boys' participation in cultural activities like dramatics, singing etc., which girls are usually encouraged to participate in and by conducting gender-based training sessions on issues of masculinities, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), etc. with boys. The KII participants also suggested that there should be perspective-building of male teachers and male government officials in the education departments.

44. Additionally, the need to transform mindsets from a young age onward was frequently reiterated. The stocktaking reveals that the few initiatives that are engaging boys and men are predominantly characterized by partnerships between governments, CSOs, bilateral and multilateral organizations, with gender synchronicity in their approach. Initiatives are most often aimed at reducing and/or preventing violence against women and girls and promoting sexual and reproductive health for boys and girls.

[71] Ministry of Gender and Family. 2022. *National Gender Equality Action Plan, 2022–2026.* http://gender.gov.mv/en/wp-content/uploads/sites/1/2022/03/GEAPFinal.pdf.

Box 4

Good Practice Examples of Working with Boys and Men in Bangladesh and India

The Brave Men Campaign (BMC), a creation of the Center for Men and Masculinities Studies in Bangladesh, has been a unique learning process starting at an early age, helping young and adolescent boys to question harmful notions of masculinities and mobilizing girls to overcome the negative impact of stereotypical and discriminatory norms on femininity. Redefining the idea of bravery, as an act of protesting discrimination and violence instead of committing those, BMC celebrates role models of gender-based violence prevention and involves men and boys without demonizing them. Since 2012, BMC has been involved in 108 schools and 3,000+ students from different districts of Bangladesh.[a]

In India, an example of creating transformational changes through education can be found with the Study Hall Educational Foundation. The foundation runs schools for girls and boys in low-income environments. The students in these schools participate in group dialogues around gender, poverty, caste, domestic violence, alcoholism, sexual harassment, and other topics both inside and outside of formal classrooms. In contexts where social and gender norms are particularly conservative and promote inequity, working in sex-segregated groups prevents conversations from becoming competitive and accusatory. Since all students are marginalized in such contexts, discussions focus on different axes of marginalization and learning from similar experiences.

[a] "Brave Men Campaign"—Center for Men and Masculinity Studies (CMMS). https://www.share-netbangladesh.org/bravemen-diary-by-cmms/.

Source: Study Hall Educational Foundation. http://www.studyhallfoundation.org/.

Good practice examples from Bangladesh and India are highlighted in Box 4 while the following are some initiatives from Bhutan, Maldives, and Sri Lanka:

(i) In Bhutan, the Ministry of Education works with boys and men as part of the emerging gender-based violence (GBV) program in collaboration with national and multilateral NGOs like the National Commission for Women and Children; Respect, Educate, Nurture, and Empower Women; UNDP; United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA); and United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women). KIIs highlighted that UNFPA Bhutan also supports monastic institutions on GEWE, GBV, and capacity building in collaboration with the Ministry of Health, and that it advocated for the UN Women-led "HeforShe" campaigns and prevention of sexual harassment in colleges, owing to the incidence of sexual harassment of students.

(ii) In Maldives, UNFPA works with the government, including the Ministry of Education, and partners with educational institutions such as Villa College and CSOs such as the Maldivian Red Crescent Society on youth or adolescent sexual and reproductive health (SRH) issues. As part of the MenEngage Alliance in Nepal, CSOs have also oriented boys on issues such as violence against women, with the realization that the active engagement of boys and men can facilitate change in society and working through schools and colleges can help initiate questioning of existing norms and practices.

(iii) In Sri Lanka, the Education Sector Plan of the Policy Framework and National Plan of Action to address Sexual and Gender-based Violence recommends actions to create sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV)-free education from primary to tertiary school level as well as in vocational and technical education. The World Bank has also developed a project that seeks to increase male enrollment in secondary education by working mainly with boys to address harmful masculine norms, and increase mental health service provision and guidance on SRH for boys. However, this work is still at a nascent stage.

45. Across governments, CSOs, and donors, there is a common realization that in education the pace of GESI and GEWE transformation remains slow. This has led to a need for different approaches; hence, the engagement of men and boys in their education-related interventions. However, conceptual clarity on the rationale for engaging men and boys remains inadequate. This is well acknowledged by KII respondents from CSOs, development partners, and government bodies. Except for a couple of CSOs (e.g., Hami Daju Bhai in Nepal and Foundation for Innovative Social Development in Sri Lanka) that are initiating dialogues, the purpose of engaging men and boys is not clarified from the onset, and with evidence. Several initiatives that seek to engage with men and boys are often gender-neutral in their approach and do not provide space for reflection and change in harmful masculine attitudes and behaviors. Initiatives that engage men and boys have not been adapted to respond to intersectionality, do not address the challenges and needs of transgender and other gender-diverse people, and rarely welcome opportunities for feedback from women's organizations.

Recommendations and Entry Points in the Education Sector

46. Based on the above findings, this stocktaking recommends the following for the education sector:

(i) **Research and Evidence Base**

(a) **Research effective strategies to engage men and boys in gender equality in schools and colleges.** Undertake research on successful strategies to engage men and boys for gender equality in schools and colleges revolving around (i) a gender-inclusive curriculum, teaching pedagogies, training of teachers and nonteaching staff, and gender-sensitive decision-making; and (ii) violence prevention and response.

(b) **Research the ways in which educational institutions encourage gender inequity.** Undertake research on how educational institutions encourage harmful norms of masculinities and how these impact gender-diverse people.

(ii) **Laws and Policies**

(a) **Review national educational frameworks from a gender lens.** Policies and strategies surrounding education can create the space to work across all levels—individual, household, and community—to create safer and gender-equitable educational environments from primary to tertiary and technical or vocational levels. For this purpose, advocacy to review national education frameworks from a gender-transformative lens is crucial. Central to these efforts should be a focus on engaging men and boys for gender equality and on addressing harmful notions of masculinities in education.

(b) **Create gender-transformative curriculum and teaching pedagogy.** As an entry point, ADB can work with ministries to create gender-transformative national curricula, teaching methods, and teachers' training modules. This can be done by adapting,

refining, and revising national school curricula by integrating gender equality from a feminist lens (for girls and women, boys and men, and gender-diverse people). However, exploring opportunities and implementing such initiatives require agencies that can champion such work, develop action plans, and provide technical support and capacity development toward implementation.

(c) **Encourage gender equitable leadership in educational institutions.** ADB can work with its partners in the education sector across the six DMCs to actively promote women, gender-nonconforming individuals, and minorities to leadership positions, and influence organizational cultures by encouraging human resources policies and procedures around gender equity and inclusion.

(iii) **Programmatic Approaches**

(a) **Conduct mentoring programs to question harmful gender stereotypes in educational spaces.** Conduct peer group and mentoring programs for youth and train teachers to break through gender-inequitable beliefs and behaviors, harmful gender norms, and unhealthy peer pressure; and to encourage better and equitable educational outcomes across secondary, tertiary, and informal education spheres. Successful evidence-based programs such as "Program H" could be adapted for this purpose.[72]

(b) **Aim for gender balance in hiring and training of teachers across all educational levels.** Encourage gender-balanced teaching staff—from early childcare and development and crèche facilitators to teachers at all levels of education—with necessary diverse teaching skills development in both urban and rural areas.

(c) **Pursue the capacity-building of teachers.** Enhance the capacity of female and male teachers, school management committees, and teachers from primary to university levels through dialogues, discussions, and training.

(d) **Engage private sector educational institutes.** Collaborate with private schools and college teachers' associations to understand their perspectives through dialogues and advocate for men's and boys' engagement in promoting GEWE and GESI.

(e) **Launch national campaigns on engaging men and boys for gender equality** in partnership with governments, CSOs, and other multilateral and bilateral organizations that focus on engaging men and boys for gender equality within schools and colleges.

Energy

Gender and Masculinities in the Energy Sector

47. Improved access to energy and enhanced energy security are critical drivers of economic progress and elevating overall quality of life. However, the energy sector in South Asia is largely male-dominated and exhibits a significant gender imbalance, which impacts not only outcomes related to gender equality and social inclusion, but also has repercussions for economic security, health and well-being, and climate justice. Inequitable gender dynamics in the sector are reflected across various spheres including leadership

[72] Equimundo. Program H: Working with Young Men. https://www.equimundo.org/resources/program-h-working-with-young-men/.

and decision-making, workforce composition, work culture, roles and responsibilities, access and usage patterns, etc. The focus of existing research and literature has been on understanding and developing strategies that enable women to bridge gender gaps in terms of representation, advancement, and access to resources within the industry. The role of gender norms related to masculinities has largely been neglected. To foster a more inclusive and sustainable energy sector, it is key to examine the role of gender through the lens of men and masculinities in shaping the sector's operational dynamics, decision-making processes, and priority setting. The wider lens of SOGIESC is also missing in the literature related to the energy sector and represents an important gap to be bridged for furthering social inclusion.

48. Gender and social norms strongly influence energy-related needs, demands, and usage, particularly in South Asia where traditional gender roles are widespread. While women bear a disproportionate burden of energy-related responsibilities within the home, men largely control decision-making on energy use and investment both within and outside the home. Women's energy demands significantly diverge from those of men due to their responsibility for tasks such as cooking, heating, obtaining water, and caregiving. This gendered allocation of labor was evident in ADB's GESI assessment of the energy sector in Nepal,[73] which found that while women carried a heavier burden of household work requiring the use of energy (for cooking, etc.) in activities outside the home (working in the fields, processing of crops, etc.), both men and women shared the work equally. This is exacerbated in rural settings where women remain reliant on biomass and fuelwood for cooking. Despite women's greater role in household energy usage, men largely control access and decision-making regarding energy resources, investments, and adoption of technologies, which further reinforces traditional gender dynamics that disempower women. While women tend to prioritize technologies that reduce their drudgery related to household work and improve safety and well-being, men often prioritize potential economic opportunities that may be derived from energy sources, often adding to women's burden of work.[74]

49. The energy sector is heavily male-dominated in terms of the workforce composition and leadership, role division, values, and work culture. Although data specific to the South Asia region is limited, globally and historically, the workforce of the energy sector has been composed mainly of men.[75] According to 2018 International Energy Agency data from 29 countries, there are 76% fewer women than men employed in the energy sector, which is a significant contrast to the average 8% gender gap in the overall workforce.[76] At a global level, in the fossil energy sector, women have occupied merely 1% of top management positions and 6% of technical staff.[77] Though there has been increasing representation of women in the renewable energy sector, technical, managerial, and policymaking positions are still dominated by men.[78]

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[73] ADB. 2018. *Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Assessment of the Energy Sector: Enhancing Social Sustainability of Energy Development in Nepal.* https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/401781/gender-equality-social-inclusion-assessment-energy-nepal.pdf.

[74] See footnote 73, p. 46.

[75] IRENA. 2019. Renewable Energy: A Gender Perspective. https://www.irena.org/publications/2019/Jan/Renewable-Energy-A-Gender-Perspective.

[76] International Energy Agency. 2018. Energy and Gender. https://www.iea.org/topics/energy-and-gender.

[77] B. Baruah. 2017. Renewable Inequity? Women's Employment in Clean Energy in Industrialized, Emerging and Developing Countries. *Natural Resources Forum.* 41. pp. 18–29. https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/1477-8947.12105; S. Vangchuay and A. Niklaus. 2021. Employment Gender Gap in the Renewable Energy Sector. In P. Aerni, M. Stavridou, and I. Schluep, eds. *Transitioning to Decent Work and Economic Growth.* www.mdpi.com/books/pdfdownload/edition/3919#page=188.

[78] S. Vangchuay and A. Niklaus. 2021. Employment Gender Gap in the Renewable Energy Sector. In P. Aerni, M. Stavridou, and I. Schluep, eds. *Transitioning To Decent Work and Economic Growth.* www.mdpi.com/books/pdfdownload/edition/3919#page=188.

The low representation of women in the sector can be linked to sociocultural and institutional factors, including gender inequality in education (particularly in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics fields) as well as discrimination and barriers in the labor market and hiring practices.[79] Women who are employed in the sector tend to be relegated to "soft" tasks such as administrative roles, while "hard" roles related to technical and managerial positions are more commonly occupied by men, further entrenching a male-dominated culture that limits women's access to higher-paying and influential roles in the sector. As a result, processes, policies, and structures within the sector continue to remain deeply masculinized and largely reflect men's interests and priorities. At the same time, men—particularly those belonging to "lower" socioeconomic groups—occupy "field" roles that often require them to perform physically demanding labor, risky tasks, and work for long hours, in roles such as power plant operation or in emergency response.

50. Norms related to masculinities further shape decision-making, prioritization, and investment related to energy sources and technologies, particularly in the context of climate change and increasing calls for the expansion of renewable and sustainable energy. Masculine norms that prioritize competition, risk-taking, and assertiveness influence decision-making within the industry, potentially shaping the focus on certain conventional energy sources or technologies associated with power and control and thus considered masculine, thereby neglecting the "feminized" renewable and sustainable energy solutions that challenge exploitative and extractive approaches and prioritize caring for the environment and planet. For example, the emphasis on fossil fuel extraction and large-scale infrastructure projects may align with traditional notions of masculinity associated with power and control.[80] While research on this area is limited in the South Asian context, literature from other contexts explores notions such as "petro-masculinity," referring to the way in which fossil fuel dependence and the narrative around it can reinforce certain forms of masculinity.[81] The reliance on fossil fuels disproportionately affects women's health, particularly those in marginalized communities, and has led to adverse consequences for both the climate and public health. The entrenched patriarchal norms within the energy sector have hindered the adoption of alternative, sustainable energy solutions that prioritize social and environmental well-being over notions of dominance and control. Addressing these issues requires dismantling patriarchal masculinities within the sector and ensuring that energy policies and projects are designed with a gender-transformative lens to foster equitable energy access, usage, and sustainable development.

Overview of Initiatives and Challenges in the Energy Sector

51. The research revealed that there are a growing number of laws, policies, and programs in the energy sector seeking to bring about positive changes in the lives of women. As noted in a review of gender and energy in Asia, initiatives in the sector have largely been designed on the assumption that energy-related challenges impact people of different genders similarly. Thus, gender-blind or gender-neutral approaches have commonly been used, neglecting gendered patterns of energy demand, production, and use.[82] In recent years, there has been an expansion in gender-sensitive approaches

[79] ADB. 2012. *Gender Tool Kit: Energy Going Beyond the Meter.* http://www.adb.org/documents/gender-tool-kit-energy-going-beyond-meter?ref=themes/gender/publications.

[80] R. W. Connell. 2014. Rethinking Masculinities in Energy Transitions. *Energy Research & Social Science.* 1(1). pp. 198–207.

[81] C. Daggett. 2018. Petro-masculinity: Fossil Fuels and Authoritarian Desire. *Millennium.* 47(1). pp. 25–44. https://doi.org/10.1177/0305829818775817

[82] Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung. 2021. Energy and Gender in Asia: A Regional Review. https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/vietnam/18478-20211109.pdf.

that seek to acknowledge women's gendered experiences around energy and develop interventions to address women's specific needs and priorities. In view of women's responsibilities within the home, there has been a range of interventions across South Asia that have sought to enable women's access to safe energy resources that ease their drudgery of work and do not have adverse health impacts as compared to traditional methods. For example, renewable energy development programs in Bhutan combining electricity with solar and biogas have managed to reduce women's time spent on housework and childcare and increase the use of rice cookers and water boilers.[83] Several governments, civil society, multilateral, and partnerships-based initiatives in India have sought to improve women's access to clean and safe energy sources. For instance, the Self-Employed Women's Association Bank and the International Finance Corporation, through the Hariyali project, have provided women with loans to acquire clean energy technologies.[84] Similarly, the Energy and Resources Institute's Lighting a Billion Lives initiative sought to replace inefficient and harmful lighting and cooking methods with efficient, affordable, and reliable clean energy alternatives.[85] The Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana, launched by India's Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, is another flagship scheme that seeks to provide clean cooking fuel such as liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) to replace traditional methods harmful to women's health and well-being, with 96 million connections provided under the scheme.[86]

52. While many of the abovementioned initiatives have succeeded in reducing women's drudgery to some extent and have helped improve their access to safe energy sources, the approaches adopted tend to stop short of being gender-transformative and neglect the role of men and masculinities. In view of women's disproportionately high burden of work, particularly domestic and care work, it is critical to expand initiatives that can successfully ease their burden and improve their health. At the same time, there is some evidence to suggest that these initiatives have been transformative in nature, particularly in contexts with entrenched gender inequities and patriarchal norms. For example, studies related to the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana have found that many beneficiaries opted out of subsequent refills of cooking gas cylinders due to traditional gender dynamics and the easy availability of traditional alternatives, and recommend changing "prevalent patriarchal power dynamics" to facilitate the transition from "smoky kitchen to smokeless."[87] As existing literature has suggested, enhancing women's access to energy resources is primarily a "welfare function,"[88] which "aims to lighten women's daily problems, but not structurally to change their roles."[89] Similarly, studies in Sri Lanka and Bangladesh on the impacts of household electrification found limited evidence related to changes in the household division of labor, and suggested that "access to modern energy appears to enable women to fulfill their traditional roles (to their satisfaction and well-being) rather than bringing significant transformation in gender roles."[90]

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83 K. Zam, M. K. Gupta, and S. M. N. Uddin. 2021. The Residential Energy Futures of Bhutan. Energy Efficiency.

84 International Finance Corporation. 2011. IFC, SEWA Promote Energy-Efficient Cook Stoves, Solar Lanterns for Rural Women in India. https://pressroom.ifc.org/all/pages/PressDetail.aspx?ID=23670.

85 The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI). Lighting a Billion Lives. http://labl.teriin.org/about.php.

86 Government of India. Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana. Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas. https://www.pmuy.gov.in/about.html.

87 A. Mohan. 2023. Study Links Ujjwala Limits to Gender Dynamics, Not Inflation. *Business Standard.* www.business-standard.com/india-news/govt-authored-study-links-ujjwala-limits-to-gender-dynamics-not-inflation-123082100849_1.html.

88 R. Mohideen. 2018. Energy Technology Innovation in South Asia: Implications for Gender Equality and Social Inclusion. *ADB South Asia Working Paper Series.* No. 61. Asian Development Bank.

89 M. Skutsch. 1998. The Gender Issue in Energy Project Planning: Welfare, Empowerment or Efficiency? *Energy Policy*. 26(12). pp. 945–955.

90 J. Clancy et al. 2011. Social Influences on Gender Equity in Access to and Benefit from Energy. *World Development Report 2012: Gender Equality and Development Background Paper.* pp. 12–21.

These findings underscore the need to adopt gender-transformative methodologies, particularly those that focus on the role of men and masculinities in contributing to gender inequalities. This is critical not only to address the vulnerabilities faced by women and girls, but also to recognize and address men's energy-related concerns and needs—with the overall objective of promoting and equitable distribution of roles, responsibilities, and joint decision-making around energy within and outside the household. The transition to renewable energy intersects with gender equality, impacting access to clean energy, employment opportunities, decision-making, and energy poverty. Women often face barriers to accessing renewable energy and participating in related sectors, highlighting the need for gender-responsive approaches to ensure equitable outcomes in energy transition initiatives.

53. Across all stakeholder groups, the study highlights a critical gap in understanding the interconnectedness among energy, gender, and masculinities in the sector. Approaches to GESI tend to remain focused on technology deployment and access for women, neglecting the role of men and masculinities, and failing to investigate linked social vulnerabilities and intersectional identities, particularly those related to SOGIESC. The survey of initiatives and KIIs with stakeholders revealed that in most cases, GESI tends to be equated with women, and in the context of the energy sector, remains limited to removing barriers and enabling women's access to renewable and cleaner energy sources. Thus, addressing GESI is often perceived as increasing the number of women in committees or organizations, or providing specific training for women. A more nuanced understanding of the interconnectedness of gender and energy, and approaches to create gender and social transformation—ranging from strengthening women and other excluded group members' agency to balancing power relations within households, communities, and systems for the creation of a more equitable ecosystem—were notably absent. This gap hinders the realization of transformation, which includes not only the empowerment of women and excluded groups but also redefining masculine ideals to support more equitable relationships within the overall ecosystem, i.e., households, communities, and systems. Integrating masculinities perspectives also requires addressing the societal expectations placed on men, and exploring how traditional notions of masculinity can contribute to shaping decisions, roles, and power dynamics within the sector.

Recommendations and Entry Points in the Energy Sector

54. Based on the above findings, this stocktaking recommends the following for the energy sector:

(i) **Research and Evidence Base**

(a) **Conduct a gender and social mapping of the energy sector.** To close the critical gaps in evidence on the linkages between energy and gender, a detailed gender and social mapping of the sector is required, with key indicators, such as workforce composition, representation at various levels, including leadership positions, and the availability of gender-related policies and safeguards.

(b) **Research gender dynamics in the energy sector.** As a critical next step, undertake research around the ways in which gender—not limited to "women's issues"—shapes various facets of the sector, including sectoral operations and supply as well as demand, access, and use of energy resources including renewables. Build evidence on the role of masculinities-related norms in shaping the structures, processes, operational dynamics, work culture, decision-making, and priority setting in the energy sector. Encourage the integration of research findings into energy-related projects and partnerships to support the use of gender-transformative approaches inclusive of perspectives and analysis on masculinities.

(c) **Engage subject matter experts on gender.** Across all stages of the research process, it is critical to mainstream a gender and masculinities perspective, leveraging the expertise of gender specialists and subject matter experts. Additionally, create platforms and opportunities for the participation of energy providers and users at different stages of the research process and incorporate their feedback and priorities into the way that research is conducted, and the findings are utilized.

(d) **Collect gender and sex-disaggregated data.** Ensure that data collected through research is disaggregated by sex and gender, as well as other key categories such as economic status, caste, ability, etc. This is critical for a comprehensive understanding of vulnerabilities and identifying specific points of intervention. SOGIESC is a particularly neglected area in the energy sector and requires further research to understand linkages and develop appropriate interventions that can address intersectional risks and marginalization.

(ii) **Laws and Policies**

(a) **Review laws and policies from a gender lens.** Laws and policies linked to the energy sector require review and operationalization based on gender-transformative principles, that not only seek to address barriers faced by women, but to also transform underlying gender dynamics through engaging with men and boys and transforming masculinities.

(b) **Address male dominance in the energy sector.** The masculinized or male-dominated nature of the energy sector needs to be addressed through laws and policies, with the objective of creating inclusive workplaces for women and gender-diverse people. This includes combating and changing male-dominated work culture; modifying hiring, retention, and promotion processes; organizing sensitization activities for staff; and putting in place supporting policies and processes related to issues such as childcare and parental leave, and flexible working schedules.

(c) **Develop capacity-building materials on gender and energy.** Training modules and resources can be developed to support policymakers in expanding their work on gender and energy to include a lens that considers men, masculinities, and SOGIESC and incorporating this analytical lens across all areas in the sector. This entails expanding understanding of the role of gender norms in informing not only energy demand and use but also the operational dynamics within the energy sector itself—including the workforce, processes and policies, work culture, etc. The expertise of gender specialists can be leveraged to build these capacities and skill sets and to develop gender-transformative tools and frameworks that can be used by policymakers and other stakeholders engaged in the design and implementation of laws and policies.

(iii) **Programmatic Approaches**

(a) **Sensitize energy sector decision-makers, particularly men.** Workshops and training modules can challenge harmful notions of masculinity and stereotypes about women's capabilities.

(b) **Implement interventions at the institutional level.** Transform male-dominated structures and ensure safe and inclusive workplaces for women workers in the sector.

(c) **Support women's training and employment in nontraditional roles.** Increase representation and dismantle gender norms.

(d) **Engage men as advocates and allies.** This can be done through awareness campaigns and encouragement to support women's inclusion and advocate for gender diversity.

(e) **Link efforts to transform the energy sector culture.** Divest from fossil fuels and invest in clean energy, prioritizing care for people and planet.

(f) **Ensure the safety and well-being of the largely male workforce.** This can be pursued through specialized safety protocols, equipment standards, regulated working hours, and other provisions.

(g) **Expand investments and programs to ease women's drudgery.** Include men in gender-transformative interventions to challenge inequitable norms around gendered division of work and promote gender-equitable redistribution of household unpaid care work.

Finance

Gender and Masculinities in the Finance Sector

55. Gender influences and is influenced by financial systems, practices, and institutions.[91] Gender significantly impacts local and global institutions, workplaces, families, and financial flows. This is reflected in economic disparities between different genders in financial decision-making, access to resources, and representation of people of different genders in leadership. For purposes of this study, we limit our understanding of the finance sector to include financial inclusion and public sector management.

56. The influence of men in the finance sector perpetuates gender disparities and affords them a significant level of authority. Men have historically attained positions of control in finance due to patriarchal societal norms, cultural stereotypes associating financial acumen with masculinity, and systemic barriers like workplace discrimination and unequal access to education. Their possession of financial information and resources positions men as more knowledgeable, a perception that justifies their control over financial decisions both within and beyond family domains. Men often play the role of a gatekeeper in women's economic and financial lives resulting in economic gender-based violence–financial abuse, forced dependency, discrimination in employment, unequal property rights, and exploitative labor practices.[92] This not only shapes the dynamics within families but extends its influence on broader economic structures, reinforcing a systemic pattern of gender-related disparities and unequal power distribution.

57. The finance sector is a vehicle for the expression of masculinity and a driving force in shaping it. The finance sector, guided by its priorities of profit, growth, competition, control, and risk-taking, acts as a stage that strengthens and sustains norms linked to masculinity.[93] As a result, men are expected to and frequently do undertake financial risks that impact both themselves and their families. However, the pressures inherent in operating in the finance sector affect men's health and well-being.[94]

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91 H. Longlands. 2014. Men, masculinities and fatherhood in global finance: a study of hegemonic practices in London (doctoral thesis). Institute of Education, University College London. University of London.

92 S. R. Meyer et al. 2024. Explaining Intimate Partner Violence through Economic Theories: A Systematic Review and Narrative Synthesis. *Aggression and Violent Behavior.* 77. 101929.

93 S. Radhakrishnan. 2022. Extractive Masculinities: Bringing Gender Back into Microfinance, Economic Sociology. Perspectives and Conversation. Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies.

94 D. Talamonti, J. Schneider, B. Gibson, and M. Forshaw. 2023. The Impact of National and International Financial Crises on Mental Health and Well-being: A Systematic Review. *Journal of Mental Health.* 33(4). 522–559. https://doi.org/10.1080/09638237.2023.2278104.

Due to masculine norms, men working in this sector are often unable to share with their family members the struggles and pressures they experience. When men go into debt and are unable to pay back, their family members remain unaware. Men are also pressured to have a clear understanding of finance and to take care of financial matters on their own. This often leads to a sense of alienation among men.

58. Cultural norms that reinforce the idea of men as primary providers and financial decision-makers, with women primarily responsible for unpaid childcare and household duties, act as constraints on women's financial independence. In many societies, women manage daily expenses like groceries and bills, while men control major financial decisions such as investments and property purchases. This division reflects entrenched gender norms, limiting women's influence in broader financial matters and their ability to participate in paid work actively and meaningfully, and perpetuating unequal power dynamics within households and communities. When a woman takes an active role in family financial decisions, pursues business growth, or attains success, she may face resistance as her actions challenge established male authority.

59. Within the South Asian finance sector, women significantly trail their male counterparts in achieving inclusion in the finance sector. Despite playing an increasing role in bringing products to market and managing household finances, women encounter restricted access to formal financial services. Their ability to utilize a diverse array of financial products, encompassing savings, insurance, pensions, and credit, remains constrained. While group-based lending and microfinance have increased women's access to credit, these amounts remain small and often do not cover women's needs. In India, data from the Reserve Bank of India reveals that women held less than one-third of commercial bank deposit accounts in 2010.[95] Barriers such as inadequate identity documents, limited land, and asset ownership as collaterals further impede women's engagement and growth in financial investments. In Maldives, there is a mere 16% female ownership of private land.[96] This also contributes to the underrepresentation of women in nonfarm employment, due to limited access to capital, education, and financial services essential for pursuing opportunities in sectors outside of agriculture.[97]

60. Men have greater access to online banking and digital financial services as compared to women in South Asia.[98] Women encounter multifaceted challenges in embracing online banking and financial services. A substantial digital literacy gap impedes the effective navigation of online platforms. Deep-rooted cultural norms and societal constraints act as deterrents, creating hesitancy among women to adopt digital financial services, driven by concerns about privacy and security. Disparities in access to smartphones, internet connectivity, and digital devices further restrict participation, particularly in rural areas with underdeveloped infrastructure. Gender-based violence (GBV), encompassing online harassment and financial control, poses serious risks during digital financial transactions, emphasizing the paramount importance of secure online platforms. The absence of gender-responsive financial products compounds challenges, as existing offerings may not adequately address the distinct needs and financial goals of women.

95 ADB. 2013. *Gender Equality Diagnostic of Select Sector in India.*

96 ADB. 2014. *Gender Equality Diagnostic of Select Sector in Maldives.*

97 FAO. 2019. *Country Gender Assessment of Agriculture and the Rural Sector in Maldives.*

98 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). 2018. *Bridging the Digital Gender Divide–Include, Upskill, Innovate.*

61. Women entrepreneurs often encounter hurdles when seeking capital to initiate or expand their businesses. The challenge of accessing updated market information is pervasive among all micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises, but women face even greater obstacles. Disparities in information accessibility exist between rural and urban areas and between women and men. Some women are not only uninformed about the potential benefits of financial services, but they are also reluctant to engage in negotiations with banks due to unclear processes, limited mobility, fear of judgment, concerns about backlash from men at home, and the threat of being deceived. Women often find themselves situated at the bottom of the value chain, participating primarily in peripheral economic activities that are manageable within household settings. For instance, while women entrepreneurs are present across various stages of the value chain in Maldives and elsewhere, a significant number occupy positions at the lower end.[99] This is evident in their involvement in informal and small-scale manufacturing activities, such as food processing. Additionally, inadequate infrastructure and expensive services, such as electricity, water supply, and transport, disproportionately impact women entrepreneurs who often operate their small businesses from home, juggling multiple responsibilities of housework, caregiving, management, and production work.

62. In the financel sector, men dominate decision-making positions, particularly at the executive leadership level, where women are notably absent. The gender pay gap persists, with women earning lower salaries and limited access to bonus payments.[100] Challenges in reentering high-status employment after motherhood stem from societal expectations, limited flexible work arrangements, and unfavorable perceptions of part-time schedules. Microfinance, aimed at serving low-income individuals, also reflects a gendered power dynamic, with women comprising the majority of borrowers but being underrepresented among microfinance staff.[101] In India, influential women in banking who contributed to microfinance programs are excluded from decision-making, and women's financial knowledge is often questioned, reflecting gender biases within the sector.[102]

63. Gender-diverse individuals encounter distinct challenges within the realm of financial inclusion. Traditional financial products often fail to meet their diverse needs, lacking gender-inclusive options. Identity documentation barriers arise as government-issued IDs may not accurately reflect their gender identity, hindering access to banking services. Discrimination and bias persist in financial interactions, leading to disrespectful treatment and service denial.[103] Financial education programs often overlook the unique financial challenges faced by gender-diverse individuals, necessitating inclusive resources. Employment discrimination can limit income opportunities, while health care costs related to gender-affirming procedures pose financial stress. Family and legal issues, including inheritance and parental rights, may not be adequately recognized within legal frameworks. Underrepresentation in the finance sector affects the development of inclusive policies. Privacy concerns arise in online banking, with cybersecurity risks impacting transgender individuals.

99 OECD. 2012. *Closing the Gender Gap: Act Now*.

100 See footnote 99, p. 204.

101 Sa-Dhan: The Association for Community Development Finance Institutions. 2021. The Bharat Microfinance Report.

102 A. Khursheed. 2022. Exploring the Role of Microfinance in Women's Empowerment and Entrepreneurial Development: A Qualitative Study. *Future Business Journal.*

103 S. Gammage et al. 2017. *Gender and Digital Financial Inclusion: What Do We Know and What Do We Need to Know?* International Center for Research on Women.

Overview of Initiatives and Challenges in the Finance Sector

64. Initiatives in the finance sector are marked by a limited understanding of how to involve men in addressing gender-related issues. Currently, there is a notable absence of programs and policies explicitly integrating efforts to engage men and boys or transform patriarchal masculinities that hinder the economic empowerment of women and gender-diverse individuals. These initiatives neglect considerations for the vulnerabilities of men and do not address shared care work, access and control of services, information, resources and assets, mobility, and other pertinent issues. While the Gender Equality Action Plan of Maldives recognizes the necessity of conducting programs to encourage men to advocate for gender equality in the workplace, the specific strategies for implementing this plan remain unclear.[104]

65. All six DMCs' efforts to address gender norms that affect women and gender-diverse people's financial empowerment remain tokenistic. While initiatives like Bangladesh's National Women Development Policy 2011, Bhutan's[105] and India's[106] financial inclusion strategies, Gender Equality Action Plan in Maldives, and Gender Equality and Empowerment Project (2004–2013) in Nepal[107] acknowledge the importance of gender equality to promote financial inclusion, they do not provide for strategies to address gender-related barriers. As per a KII participant, "Policies often prioritize quantitative metrics and adopt a one-size-fits-all approach." Programs such as India's National Rural Livelihoods Mission expand women's access to finance but fail to address deep-seated gender inequalities and tend to reinforce traditional roles.[108] Moreover, welfare-oriented approaches in the micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises sector overlook women entrepreneurs' potential contributions to the economy and disregard the entrepreneurial aspirations of gender-diverse individuals.

66. While CSOs in South Asia have expanded access to financial services, entrepreneurship, and skill development as part of their women's economic empowerment, persistent challenges, such as entrenched gender norms and limited access to education, remain. Some programs like Grameen Bank in Bangladesh and Self-Employed Women's Association Bank in India have economically empowered women while addressing societal issues. Recognizing the importance of involving men in women's economic empowerment and women's entrepreneurship development, initiatives like Equimundo's Journeys of Transformation engage men in group education sessions to challenge gender norms (Box 5).[109] In India, the Azad Foundation works with men to support women in nontraditional livelihoods like driving. These initiatives reflect a useful gender synchronicity approach, yet these efforts remain rare and have a limited focus on gender-diverse individuals. Bridging the link between women's economic empowerment and the finance sector is crucial for ensuring women's full participation and equitable opportunities in economic development.

[104] Government of the Republic of Maldives. *National Gender Equality Action Plan (2022–2026).* Ministry of Gender, Family and Social Services. https://gender.gov.mv/en/wp-content/uploads/sites/1/2022/03/GEAPFinal.pdf.

[105] Royal Monetary Authority Bhutan. National Financial Inclusion Strategy, 2018–2023.

[106] Reserve Bank of India. National Strategy for Financial Inclusion, 2019–2024.

[107] ADB. 2016. *Gender Equality Results Case Study.* Nepal Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women Project.

[108] P. Khera. 2018. *Closing Gender Gaps in India: Does Increasing Women's Access to Finance Help?* International Monetary Fund.

[109] Equimondo. Journeys of Transformation. Engaging Men as Allies in Women's Economic Empowerment. https://www.equimundo.org/programs/journeys-of-transformation/#:~:text=The%20curriculum%20offers%2017%20group,laws%20and%20policies%20related%20to.

Box 5

Equimundo's "Journeys of Transformation"

The "Journeys of Transformation" program is designed to engage men in gender equality efforts by addressing the root causes of gender-based violence and promoting positive masculinity. The initiative focuses on transforming attitudes and behaviors by guiding men through a reflective process that challenges traditional notions of masculinity. It provides participants with tools and support to understand and question their own gender biases, enabling them to adopt more equitable attitudes and behaviors. The program incorporates a variety of approaches, including workshops, storytelling, and peer learning, to foster meaningful dialogue and self-awareness. By engaging men in this transformative journey, Equimundo aims to create a supportive environment where men actively contribute to gender equality, advocate for women's rights, and work to prevent violence. This comprehensive approach not only addresses individual behaviors but also seeks to shift cultural norms toward greater inclusivity and respect.

Source: Equimundo. Journeys of Transformation. Engaging Men as Allies in Women's Economic Empowerment. https://www.equimundo.org/programs/journeys-of-transformation/.

Recommendations and Entry Points in the Finance Sector

67. Based on the above findings, this stocktaking recommends the following for the finance sector:

(i) **Research and Evidence Base**

(a) **Undertake research to understand how men can be engaged to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in the finance sector and its organizations.** Capture lessons learned from initiatives to engage men for promoting women's economic empowerment and entrepreneurship development.

(b) **Undertake research on how the finance sector promotes harmful notions of masculinities.** Identify practices that aid in addressing this issue.

(c) **Incorporate the feedback of those involved in delivering financial services and the users of these services in all stages of research.** This includes input not only from women and girls but also from men, boys, gender-diverse individuals, and those from marginalized and disadvantaged groups.

(d) **Incorporate both quantifiable, immediate output-level indicators and qualitative indicators of transformative change.** This includes the number of accounts opened and changes in attitudes toward gender roles and financial decision-making in routine project monitoring and evaluation. Ensure these indicators adopt an intersectional approach and consider other dimensions such as class.

(e) **Develop clear plans for how research findings will be used in programs, policies, and initiatives within the finance sector.** Early planning should also include advocacy strategies to address identified gaps, incorporating discussions around gender and engaging men within the existing discourse and policy development.

(f) **Identify and cultivate partnerships with organizations adopting gender-transformative approaches in the finance sector.** Collaborate on monitoring, evaluation, and understanding the impacts of initiatives that address gender-related issues and engage men for GEWE in the financial domain.

(ii) **Laws and Policies**

(a) **Conduct a comprehensive review of laws and policies within the finance sector through a gender lens.** Examine whether they address underlying causes for gender inequalities. Explicitly acknowledge the role of men and masculinities in gender inequities within the finance sector and provide guidelines for implementing gender-transformative programming within financial institutions.

(b) **Clearly articulate and protect the rights of transgender and gender-diverse individuals within financial laws and policies.** Establish provisions that ensure their safe, equitable, and gender-affirming access to financial services.

(c) **Ensure that financial laws and policies are evidence-based.** Draw insights from data and lessons from different contexts. Incorporate findings related to the impacts of engaging men and boys and adopting gender-transformative approaches within the finance sector.

(d) **Mandate the development of accessible, and inclusive infrastructure within the finance sector.** Ensure that financial institutions create facilities that cater to people of all genders, with particular attention to the needs of marginalized groups. Promote more women, gender nonconforming people, and minorities into leadership positions. Provide clear guidelines for implementation and reporting to track progress in achieving inclusivity.

(iii) **Programmatic Approaches**

(a) **Conduct extensive perspective-building and capacity-building programs.** These should be built around gender; gender-transformative approaches; masculinities; engaging men; and issues of LGBTQIA+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, intersex, and asexual, aromantic, agender) people within the finance sector. Target key stakeholders, including in-country personnel, implementing organizations, technical experts, and field staff.

(b) **Involve gender subject matter experts in the design and implementation of financial inclusion programs.** This includes incorporating gender-transformative components and addressing men, masculinities, and nonbinary or nonheteronormative issues within financial inclusion initiatives.

(c) **Engage key stakeholders in the finance sector through participatory processes at all stages of program development and implementation.** This includes involving men and boys, particularly those from marginalized communities engaged in financial activities, alongside women and girls who may bear specific financial burdens.

(d) **In the short and medium term, enhance financial infrastructure, facilities, and services with a focus on gendered needs.** This includes innovative solutions to address specific financial challenges faced by women, men, boys, and gender-diverse individuals.

(e) **Prioritize medium- and long-term efforts for gender norm transformation within the finance sector.** Engage men and boys as key stakeholders and beneficiaries, positioning them as agents of and partners for change.

(f) **Implement social and behavioral change campaigns targeting inequitable gender attitudes and norms within the finance sector and its linkages to economic GBV.** Ensure that men are key targets of these programs, providing safe spaces for reflection and expression of their concerns around finance. Address the needs of transgender and gender-diverse individuals.

(g) **Eliminate gendered barriers to entry in finance-related jobs.** Provide appropriate perspective and capacity-building for both women and men to challenge gendered divisions of labor and stereotypes. Support men in diversifying their engagement in finance and undertaking tasks traditionally assigned to women. Ensure safe and inclusive work environments for transgender and gender-diverse individuals in finance jobs at all levels and develop strategies for addressing pay gaps and gender inequities in leadership positions within the finance sector.

(h) **Engage with public and private communication and information technology (IT) partners.** Work toward the inclusion of women and gender-diverse people in using digital and online financial services.

(i) **Integrate a men and masculinities' lens during financial analysis.** This is to address GEWE in financial analyses done by banks and other financial institutions.

(j) **Garner the support of financial institutions for women and gender-diverse people's access to market spaces, associations, networks, and banking facilities.** This could include recommending women to different people in positions of power, and supporting them in building connections and networks.

(k) **Build capacities of men in a way that they push for inheritance and land rights of female members of the household.** Enable women to have ownership of assets (security) to give them easier access to credit.

Health

Gender and Masculinities in the Health Sector

68. Health outcomes are intrinsically linked to a person's sex and gender identity. However, health systems fail to respond to these linkages. Sex can affect disease risk, progression, access, and health outcomes through genetic, cellular, and physiological (e.g., hormonal) pathways and can vary over the life course. Gender norms (about man, woman, nonbinary, or other gender identities) related to socialization and roles, differences in power relations, and access to and control over resources can also result in varying access to the affordability and availability of health services and have a differential impact on health outcomes.[110] Universal health coverage entails ensuring all people, irrespective of their sex and gender identity, have access to quality health services—including prevention, promotion, treatment, and rehabilitation—without incurring financial hardship.[111] This includes key elements of access, quality, and financial protection. However, this remains a persistent challenge across all six countries.

[110] C. Vlassoff. 2007. Gender Differences in Determinants and Consequences of Health and Illness. *Journal of Health, Population, and Nutrition.*

[111] World Health Organization (WHO). Universal Health Coverage. https://www.who.int/data/gho/data/major-themes/universal-health-coverage-major.

Control and decision-making authority of women and girls and gender-diverse people over their health needs remain inadequate and are reinforced by power imbalances, discriminatory norms, delays and/or lack of decision-making, lack of knowledge, lack of financial resources, lack of access to transport, exposure to violence, and so on. Health services and systems do not respond to these realities and fail to take into account how age, sex, gender, caste, class, religion, physical ability, location, etc., interact to create a systemic exclusion from the health system.

69. Notions of masculinities play a significant role in shaping men's burden of disease, influencing health behaviors, health care utilization, and risk factors. Traditional notions of masculinity often promote behaviors that increase the risk of certain health conditions, such as "being tough" that discourages men from seeking medical help promptly or engaging in risky behaviors like smoking, excessive alcohol consumption, and reluctance to seek help for mental health issues. These behaviors contribute to the higher prevalence of conditions like cardiovascular diseases, injuries, and mental health disorders among men. Boys worldwide have higher rates of mortality and morbidity from violence, accidents, and suicide, whereas adolescent girls generally have higher rates of morbidity and mortality related to the reproductive tract and pregnancy-related causes.[112]

70. Suicide rates among men are higher than those of women across the six countries and their mental health concerns remain unaddressed. Economic pressures resulting from inadequate income, lack of economic assets, and high financial responsibilities are key reasons for stress among men. In Nepal, a 2015 study on suicide in police case reports (n = 302) over 24 months in one urban and one rural area, indicates 57% of deaths were male.[113] The study found few descriptions of mental disorders among men, though the deceased individuals were commonly described as "impulsive," "aggressive," and showed difficulties in controlling their emotions—reflecting the pressure on men to hide their emotions. This underlines the lack of safe spaces for men and boys to discuss feelings and emotions, which can lead to abusive behaviors and extremes such as drug abuse and suicides. In Sri Lanka, suicide mortality rates show consistently that men take their own lives significantly more than women. Between 2015 and 2018, the gap was roughly 17%.[114] Despite development in mental health services, mental health problems are still a stigma, particularly for men who cannot be seen to be weak. According to KII participants, men are socialized to believe they are strong, and thus they do not have openness and the skills and language to share their feelings. KII interviews also highlighted the relationship between mental health and violence noting that "through the workshops for men, we know when stress is not dealt with, there is a tendency for violence to occur as they take the stress out on others. So, the impact is not [only] on the self but on the wider community and within the family."

71. Substance abuse is higher among men across the six countries. For instance, in Bangladesh, data reveals that nearly 85% of the drug users in Bangladesh are male, where women only constitute a mere 15%, clearly indicating that it is a men's health problem.[115] The NCD Risk Factor Survey in Bangladesh observed 26.2% overall smoking prevalence—54.8% for men and 1.3% for women. A study estimates a total

[112] V. Patwardhan, L. Flor, and E. Gakidou. 2023. Gender Differences in Global Disability-Adjusted Life Years (DALYs): A Descriptive Analysis of the Global Burden of Disease Study 2021. *Population Medicine.* No. 5 (Supplement).

[113] A. K. Hagaman et al. 2017. Suicide in Nepal: A Modified Psychological Autopsy Investigation from Randomly Selected Police Cases between 2013 and 2015. *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*.

[114] Macrotrends. Sri Lanka Suicide Rate, 2000–2023. https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/LKA/sri-lanka/suicide-rate.

[115] A. Islam and M. F. Hossain. 2017. Drug Abuse and its Impact on Bangladesh. *International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology*. 9. 143–156. 10.5897/IJSA2016.0736.

of 130,424 drug users in Nepal, among whom 121,692 (93.3 %) are male and 8,732 (6.7 %) are female.[116] Substance abuse is associated with men's risk-taking behavior, economic pressures, inability to reach out for support, lack of support and counseling, and disregard for one's health and well-being.

72. Men are reluctant to access health services. For instance, in Maldives, data on overall admissions in 2020 to hospitals and other medical facilities show that 60% of all patients were female, compared to 40% male.[117] The study, Sexual Reproductive Health-Seeking Behaviour among Maldivian youth aged 18–25 years (2019), also found that girls are more likely to seek professional health services than boys.[118]

73. Health services and systems give limited focus to men's needs around sexual and reproductive health (SRH). The health system has limited interaction with men, which reinforces the gender norms around SRH being a woman's responsibility and encourages men's continued neglect of the needs of their partners', families', and their own SRH needs. Sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) services are limited to antenatal care, postnatal care, pregnancy, delivery, family planning, and immunization, and focus on women and girls. Health service providers often ignore men's and boys' needs and are ill-equipped to respond to their concerns. In contraception use, mostly female-centered methods are pushed by the health systems, while there is still limited focus on working with men to increase their uptake of family planning methods and the use of condoms. Masculinity is often associated with sexuality and the ability to have sons, which is one key reason why male sterilization occupies only 12% of the contraceptive method mix among all current users as compared with much higher female sterilization (41%) in Nepal.[119] Limited focus on men's health needs, coupled with societal stigma and traditional gender norms, often results in men being underserved in terms of HIV and sexually transmitted infection (STI) prevention, testing, and treatment services.[120]

74. Despite the focus of the public health system on reproductive and maternal health, many women, girls, and gender-diverse people have limited access to SRH services. Services in the public health system of these countries target mostly married couples, leaving out many unmarried people who may require SRH services. The quality of these services is also inequitable and women and gender-diverse people often report the lack of privacy and dignity in the treatment process. The absence of sufficient SRH services, along with limited access to information, contributes to the high rates of teenage pregnancies in these countries, exacerbated by early marriage customs, cultural norms, and poverty. According to the data from the UNFPA, approximately 20% of girls in South Asia give birth before the age of 18, with significant variations between countries. For example, in Bangladesh and Nepal, around 1 in 5 girls aged 15–19 have already given birth or are pregnant with their first child, while in India, the rates are slightly lower but still considerable.[121] Young people report being anxious about bodily changes and show poor health and hygiene.

[116] R. Pandey. 2008. Effects of Drug Abuse on the Adolescents of Nepal. Setidobhan-Kathmandu Linkage Forum (FOSKAL).

[117] Ministry of Health. 2022. Maldives Health Statistics 2020. Version 2. https://health.gov.mv/storage/uploads/BkoMELod/utbdxbkp.pdf.

[118] SHE and ARROW. 2019. Sexual Reproductive Health Seeking Behaviour among Maldivian Youth Aged 18–25. https://she.org.mv/assets/source/reports/final_health-seeking-behavior-report.pdf.

[119] Government of Nepal. 2021. *Annual Report 2019–2020.* Department of Health Services, Ministry of Health and Population.

[120] Sama Resource Group for Women and Health and Partners for Law in Development. 2018. Country Assessment on Human Rights in the Context of Sexual Health and Reproductive Health Rights: A Study Undertaken for the National Human Rights Commission.

[121] E. Loaiza and S. Wong. 2012. *Marrying Too Young: End Child Marriage.* United Nations Population Fund.

75. The violence and harassment that women and girls face in public spaces and within their homes impact their physical, emotional, and mental health and well-being. In all six countries, data show a high prevalence of violence against women and girls.[122] The rise in violence against women and girls during the pandemic and its impact shows how gender and health are intrinsically linked in complex ways.[123] Women and girls also report facing violence in health systems in the process of accessing health services. This ranges from physical to emotional violence. There are instances of women being implanted with family planning methods such as intrauterine device post-delivery without their consent.[124]

76. Women have limited access to decision-making positions within the health sector, while they form the majority of grassroot-level workers delivering health services. Women comprise 67% of all health workers but 90% of nurses in the 132 countries report sex-disaggregated workforce data.[125] Women's participation in spaces of decision-making within global health, however, is much lower. For example, only 32% of Chief Delegates to the World Health Assembly in 2023 were women, and 33% of a sample of 200 global health organizations have not had a woman board chair or chief executive officer in the past 5 years.[126] The health workforce in South Asia follows this global pattern of occupational segregation and underrepresentation of women in leadership. In India, women make up 29% of medical doctors, 80% of nurses, and nearly 100% of unpaid government accredited social health activists, according to the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) 2017–2018 estimates.[127] Nursing staff and community health workers are given limited access to decision-making and formal leadership positions throughout the course of their careers. The absence of women and gender-diverse people in leadership positions in the health sector often makes health policies, systems, and services unresponsive to their needs. Coupled with this, women health providers often face bias and discrimination, as well as sexual harassment.

Overview of Initiatives and Challenges in the Health Sector

77. Across all six countries, national health policies and programs acknowledge the gendered nature of access, use, and health service provision; however, policies are often not implemented in this spirit. They reinforce stereotypical gender roles and focus on women's reproductive roles; they often stigmatize women's and girls' sexuality and that of people of other genders and are often exclusionary. Despite constitutional guarantees, physical access to health care centers, poor quality of care, violence and harassment, high cost of transport, shortage of trained and specialized professionals, long waiting time, poor infrastructure and shortage of medical equipment and medicines, inequities between rural and urban areas, and inadequate public spending on health plague health systems across all six countries.

78. National health policies across all six countries address issues of SRHR and GBV. Strategies for engaging men and boys for gender equality in health focus largely on GBV, though in recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of men's SRH and their involvement in family planning.

[122] World Bank. 2022. *Violence Against Women and Girls—What the Data Tell Us.*

[123] WHO. 2020. *COVID-19 and Violence Against Women: What the Health Sector/System Can Do.*

[124] *Times of India.* 2022. At Government Hospitals, Women Being Given IUDS Without Consent.

[125] WHO. 2021. *World Health Statistics 2021: Monitoring Health for the SDGs.*

[126] Global Health 50/50. *Report 2023: Power, Privilege and Priorities.*

[127] A. Karan et al. 2021. *Size, Composition and Health Workforce in India: Why, and Where to Invest?* Human Resources for Health.

The Maldives Health Masterplan, 2016–2025 mentions gender issues only as being of particular importance in adolescent and young people's health, specifically in relation to GBV. The Population and Reproductive Health Policy of Sri Lanka (1998) encourages the full participation and partnership of both women and men in reproductive life, including shared responsibility for childcare by providing all men and women information, education, counseling, and access to safe and effective reproductive health care; improving communication between men and women on issues of sexuality and reproductive health; and promoting equal participation of women and men in all areas of family and household responsibilities. While the policy is progressive, its implementation needs to be monitored. Government-run initiatives like Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram and Ayushmaan Bharat in India emphasize the need to engage with adolescents, including men and boys.

79. Health institutions in South Asia are gradually integrating GBV prevention programs into their services like the Dilaasa centers in India,[128] offering educational sessions to men and boys on topics such as gender equality and healthy relationships. Health care providers are also being trained to recognize signs of GBV and provide support to survivors. Collaborations with community organizations enable outreach activities, such as workshops and awareness campaigns, to reach men and boys beyond clinical settings. Moreover, initiatives are fostering men and boys as advocates for gender equality, highlighting their role as key agents of change in creating safer communities.

80. Country policies show a mixed response to the health needs of marginalized groups. Nepal's National HIV Strategic Plan, 2021–2026 seeks to cover female, transgender, and male sex workers, clients of sex workers, transgender people, gay men, other men who have sex with men, people who inject drugs, prison population, and migrants. In Sri Lanka, transgender persons are provided support in sex change operations. As a significant step forward to support the health rights of the transgender community in Sri Lanka, through a circular adopted in 2016, the Ministry of Health, Nutrition and Indigenous Medicine established services for transgender communities in every institution to support the issuing of a Gender Recognition Certificate, along with specialist psychiatric care to facilitate the process. However, there is a gap in actual implementation, and measuring of progress and impact. Further, the law in Sri Lanka criminalizes sexual relations with the same gender, which along with the Vagrants ordinance, provides law enforcement agencies with a weapon to abuse the rights of transgender people and others with diverse sexual orientation and gender identity, subjecting them to cruel and degrading treatment that has been documented by LGBTI rights organizations. In Maldives, the Sexual Offences Act 2014 criminalizes nonheteronormative relationships and sex outside marriage.

81. Interventions and programs to address GEWE and engage men for gender equality in the health sector are more prevalent among CSOs. The level of effort of CSOs in this regard varies, with some identifying male participation alone as men engagement, while others are strategically engaging men and boys to realize transformation. Efforts in this direction began with addressing HIV and STI prevalence among men and men who have sex with men. For instance, community-based education programs targeted men and boys to challenge gender norms and promote safe sexual practices, including condom use and regular testing. While there have been many attempts to engage men in family planning programs, they have not been systematic, sustained, or rights-based. Research indicates that engaging men in family planning programs can enhance program effectiveness and promote greater gender equality,[129]

[128] P. Bhate-Deosthali et al. 2018. *Role of the Health Sector in Addressing Intimate Partner Violence in India: A Synthesis Report.* International Center for Research on Women.

[129] MenEngage Alliance. Increasing Men's Engagement to Improve Family Planning Programs in South Asia.

yet family planning programs and services are still typically targeted toward women only because it is seen as a women's issue. Further, there is limited acceptance and uptake of male contraceptive methods due to myths and misconceptions and lack of a basket of choices for male contraception apart from condoms.

82. Civil society organizations (CSOs) in South Asia work on GBV as a focus area within the health sector. The approaches and activities of CSOs vary depending on their own organizational backgrounds and type of work. These strategies vary from community interventions to policy advocacy; establishment of youth networks, with representation from diverse groups; research on online abuse; and conducting sessions on male engagement to minimize violence in SRHR and against people with disabilities.

(i) In Nepal, in the work of SAATHI, specific focus is placed on boys as partners with the aim of behavioral changes where GBV is highlighted and men's and boys' role in addressing and changing patriarchal norms and values is underscored. In Maldives, the Society for Health Education extends one-on-one counseling in terms of gender-related issues and conducts awareness sessions specifically for men and men's groups.

(ii) In Bhutan, engaging with men and boys forms an integral part of its Respect, Educate, Nurture and Empower Women initiatives, and involves men and boys in sensitization programs and campaigns to question gender norms and practices, men's biases, and harmful masculinities.

(iii) The Foundation for Innovative Social Development has been working with men and boys within communities to change their attitudes and behaviors toward SGBV through awareness and transformational change in Sri Lanka. Shanthi Maargam is working with male youth to address mental health, violence against children, and gender attitudes to reduce harmful gender norms and break the intergenerational transmission of GBV.

(iv) In India, SAMA, a resource group for women and health; Anjali, Centre for Enquiry into Health and Allied Themes; and the YP Foundation, through their programs work with men to promote gender equality and address challenges related to women's health. EngenderHealth runs a flagship program, globally acclaimed and called "Men as Partners," which addresses health and development vulnerabilities of both men and women. It has two goals: gender equity and gender specificity, i.e., responding to specific needs of different genders. The MenEngage Alliance in South Asia brings together actors working on engaging men and boys and emphasizes the need to challenge masculine norms. The aim of the network is to primarily ensure that most members are equipped with the required technical knowledge to implement gender-transformative programs that are accountable to women's voices and advocate for male engagement work from the national to community level. These approaches speak to the socioecological model and the values of partnership and accountability highlighted in the conceptual framework.

83. Multilateral organizations do emphasize engaging men and addressing masculinities in their health sector strategies and programs; however, clear strategies are missing. KII participants shared that organizations like UN Women, UNFPA, and UNDP work through governance (legal, policy-level changes, gender-responsive changes, and even national action plans) and leadership development interventions and provide support to organizations working on violence against women, strengthening women's voice and agency, promoting access to justice for diverse groups of women. The gender action plans and social inclusion strategies of these organizations are a step in the right direction; however, their implementation is limited. Further, specific strategies related to engaging men and masculinities are limited and efforts remain largely centered around violence prevention and family planning.

84. Despite considerable laws, policies, plans, and strategies on health, discriminatory social norms and practices continue to hinder progress. The health sector remains constrained by power dynamics within and outside the household, with power and privileges remaining largely with men. Challenges such as retaining men's interest in GESI and GEWE issues during training due to a perception that these are women's issues, the ability to create an enabling environment to facilitate the process, and difficulty in engaging men and boys through reflective processes continue to affect male engagement in the health sector.

85. The lack of human and financial resource allocation to address men and masculinities in the health sector, along with the absence of data on successes and challenges, also presents hurdles. Further, though CSOs are doing some promising work, their projects are mostly pilots and run on a small scale. These projects end within a couple of years.

Recommendations and Entry Points in the Health Sector

86. To engage men for GEWE and to transform masculinities, it is crucial to root the health sector work in a rights-based perspective, committed to the goal of gender transformation. Engagement of men must account for not just their roles as partners in relationships, but also as individuals. Some key recommendations to do so include the following:

(i) **Research and Evidence-Building**

(a) **Collect sex- and gender-disaggregated data.** Also, collect data disaggregated by other social factors (e.g., class, caste, location, etc.) around access to, affordability of, quality of services, and leadership in the health sector; and outline clear mechanisms for tracking and reporting on these indicators.

(b) **Conduct research on approaches in transforming men's mindsets.** The approaches will enable them to question how harmful masculine norms shape their health-seeking behavior and impact their physical and mental health, and the health of women, men from excluded groups, and gender-diverse people.

(c) **Invest in long-term studies on the impact of male engagement on men's and boys' and other people's health.** For this, use a gender-transformative lens. This is critical for shaping future work on male engagement.

(ii) **Laws and Policies**

(a) **Review government health laws and policies from a gender perspective.** The objective is to assess how they address and respond to gendered barriers, including and how they may be reinforcing gender discrimination and inequitable norms.

(b) **Influence health laws and policies to go beyond reproductive health.** Emphasize overall well-being, including that of men and boys.

(c) **Advocate with governments to end the exclusion of people from marginalized genders.** Treat marginalized people with dignity and respect.

(d) **Work with governments to operationalize progressive gender-transformative elements of health policies.**

(e) **Review health service providers' curriculum from a gender perspective.** This is to make them more sensitive to the needs of all genders and treat their patients in a sensitive, inclusive, and respectable manner.

(f) **Promote more women, gender-nonconforming people, and minorities into leadership positions within the health sector.** Influence organizational cultures by encouraging gender-equitable human resources policies and procedures.

(iii) **Programmatic Approaches**

(a) **Leverage health systems in each country.** From the national to the state (provincial), block, and district levels, implement gender-transformative health programs through regular capacity building, conducting need assessments, and gathering feedback. Engagement of men on issues of harmful masculinities can be a crucial component in this. The local governance institutions in these countries can also be leveraged for this purpose.

(b) **Train the staff on available infrastructure to adopt a gender-sensitive and queer-affirmative approach.** This includes one-stop centers and working with survivors of violence to address the impact on their health.

(c) **Ensure that health programs have components on engaging men and boys.** These programs should address the needs and vulnerabilities of men, respond to their SRH needs, and provide a platform to promote their physical and mental well-being.

(d) **Support staff capacity-building programs.** These include sessions on gender-transformative approaches, masculinities, and male engagement in the health sector. This should be done for all staff and personnel who are involved in health sector policy design, implementation, and service delivery.

Establish partnerships with gender experts, women's rights organizations, and CSOs to engage men for GEWE by transforming masculine norms in the health sector. These partnerships are crucial for the capacity-building efforts, gathering feedback from communities, and monitoring impact.

Transport

Gender and Masculinities in the Transport Sector

87. Transport is not gender-neutral. Women, men, and gender-diverse individuals do not interact and benefit from transport systems in the same way. They have differential access to transport facilities, employment within the transport sector, and use transport services in different ways. Gendered division of work, norms around men's control of women's mobility, and the lack of safety in public spaces act as significant deterrents to women, girls, and gender-diverse people's access to transport. Across the region, due to rigid norms that designate the role of "breadwinners" on men and undervalue women's work and responsibilities, men are accorded greater freedom of mobility and thus access to more transport facilities. This often results in transport policy deprioritizing the needs of women. Similarly, responsibilities such as taking children to school or going to the health post often involve women using peripheral roads, rather than major transport corridors. These routes are the least prioritized in transport planning. This affects women's decision to work for pay and increases the time and energy they spend on their unpaid household chores. Additionally, women's restricted financial resources and decision-making power affect their ability to afford public transport, discouraging service providers from meeting their needs. Women often rely on walking due to lack of access to private vehicles and face biases against learning to drive.

88. Harmful masculinities are evident in transport systems and services, which impact women and girls, gender-diverse people, and men and boys themselves. Death and higher injuries from motor vehicle accidents affect more men and boys compared to women and girls.[130] In most cases, the reasons behind these accidents are reckless driving, speeding, overloading, overtaking, illegal and dangerous competition, continuous driving without a break, use of drugs and alcohol, and hazardous roads. These behaviors are rooted in norms that require men to be strong, powerful, fearless, fast, and first, and provide for their families at any cost. Further, men's notions of "what it means to be a man" and the resultant insecurities around seeing women and girls in nontraditional places and livelihoods result in men engaging in violence against women and girls, men from excluded groups, and gender-diverse people in public transport. Across the six countries, there are high instances of men catcalling women, stalking them, engaging in sexual harassment, and violence in stands and stations including inside buses, trains, and other vehicles. For instance, in Bangladesh, 35% of women using public transport said they faced sexual harassment from males belonging to the age group of 19–35 years and 59% faced such harassment from males 26–40 years old.[131] In Sri Lanka, a study conducted by the UNFPA at the national level states that at least 90% of women have been subjected to sexual harassment when using public transport.[132] Experiences of sexual harassment create an environment of insecurity, limiting women's full participation in public life, employment, and education, especially for women from lower socioeconomic strata who depend more on public transport. This experience leads women and gender-diverse individuals to either drop out from the labor force or resort to use of private transport as an alternative. In some instances, women change their residence to avoid sexual harassment. Studies reflect very low rates of women seeking support from law enforcement that were available to report sexual harassment experienced in public transport.

89. Employment within the transport and construction sector reinforces the gendered division of labor, with roads and infrastructure being identified as "male-dominated" and a "heavy sector." Decision-making positions in the transport industry, from drivers to policymakers, are dominated by men. The planning, design, construction, operation, and maintenance of transport infrastructure and services are carried out mostly by men in a top-down manner. This makes it harder for women as users and even as employees in the sector because policies and practices do not respond to their needs. The systemic exclusion of women and girls from science, technology, engineering, and mathematics education, due to gender stereotypes of men as being better at engineering and the perceived "difficult" nature of work, has resulted in men forming the core of the transport sector. They occupy key decision-making positions in the sector across countries, as transport ministers, heads of transport departments, heads of transport companies, and so on, thereby leading to the exclusion of women.[133] For instance, in Sri Lanka, 9.2% of employed men work in "transportation and storage," with only 0.62% women in this sector. Within provincial road authorities, women comprise 39% of contractual labor against men's at 61%.[134]

90. Working conditions in the transport sector reinforce gender inequalities and are based on men's performance of their "masculine" roles. Men comprise most of the skilled and unskilled labor in the transport and construction sector. Driven by masculine norms around risk-taking and superior physical and mental strength, men in the transport sector work many shifts, often drive heavy transport resulting

[130] WHO. 2018. *Global Status Report on Road Safety 2018.*

[131] T. Khan and T. Chakma. 2015. Woes of Women Commuters. *The Daily Star.* https://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/woes-women-commuters-184099.

[132] UNFPA. 2015. Sexual Harassment on Public Trains and Buses. Unpublished.

[133] Sustainable Mobility for All. 2023. *Gender Imbalance in the Transport Sector: A Toolkit for Change.*

[134] Department of Census and Statistics. 2019. *Sri Lanka Labour Force Survey Annual Report.*

in physical and mental exhaustion, and work without adequate safety equipment during construction and maintenance work. This results in men incurring casualties and fatalities. It is very rare to see women driving public buses. This is due to the lack of facilities (safe toilets, and rest houses) and fear of harassment by male drivers or members of the public. Women are typically assigned stereotypical roles, such as in road maintenance and cleaning, or engaged as unskilled laborers; the latter is true for men of excluded groups. Gender discrimination and sexism in recruitment, gender wage gaps, lack of maternity benefits and day care centers, poor working conditions, job insecurity, no formal appointment letter, GBV, and other concerns in the transport sector contribute to the gendered division of labor.

91. The design of transport infrastructure, such as stations, bus stops, buses, and metros, is not gender-sensitive. Key informant interview (KII) participants across countries highlighted these issues through various examples: seat belts in vehicles do not consider women's body structure, often the handgrips in buses are way too high for women to hold them comfortably, and steps in public vehicles are often too high for women to climb them conveniently. Bus stands are not equipped with adequate toilets, which is a big challenge particularly for women who menstruate, and are not equipped with enough seating and lighting. Further, staff of transport services can often be sexist toward women and gender-diverse people, commenting on their dresses, the way they walk, speak, and sit. These barriers disproportionately affect women and gender-diverse people, often resulting in them traveling with a sense of fear.

Overview of Initiatives and Challenges in the Transport Sector

92. There is limited focus on engaging men and boys for gender equality in the policies, programs, and initiatives in the transport sector across the six countries. While the focus on gender issues is gradually increasing, the emphasis is primarily on the prevention of sexual harassment against women, without addressing the harmful norms of masculinities. For instance, initiatives often include installing CCTV cameras or increasing police presence in public transport to prevent harassment. However, these efforts typically fail to address the root causes of gender inequality in the transport sector. There are limited efforts to encourage men to speak out against harassment or to actively participate in creating safer and more inclusive transport environments. By overlooking the role of men and boys both in perpetuating and challenging gender norms, the potential for transformative change within the transport sector remains largely untapped.

93. All six countries have national transport policies that aim to provide safe, seamless, user-friendly, and reliable transport facilities and systems to people. India's National Urban Transport Policy, 2014, emphasizes the need to put people at the center. Some of these policies stress the need to respond to women's and vulnerable groups' requirements. For instance, Sri Lanka and Bhutan's National Transport Policy, and Bangladesh's Urban Transport Policy recognize that the country's transport systems should be designed in a way that provides "a safe environment" for women, children, and people with disabilities. However, the mechanisms of making transport systems responsive to the needs of women and girls and vulnerable populations have not been outlined clearly. Further, there is no emphasis on engaging men and boys in this process. The needs of gender-diverse people are also not addressed in these policies.

94. Within the countries, there is policy emphasis on addressing sexual harassment in public transport. The Policy Framework and National Plan of Action to deal with SGBV in Sri Lanka (2016–2020) under the "Empowerment and Prevention Sector Plan" proposes a strategy to address sexual harassment in public transport and ensure quality transport services, through a policy dialogue with the Ministry of Transport to develop guidelines and create awareness among vehicle owners and operators on the guidelines.

The guidelines would include the engagement of males, as they are mostly in these roles. Bangladesh's National Plan of Action to Prevent Violence Against Women and Children, 2013–2025 and National Women Development Policy 2011 also highlight the importance of safe transport facilities for women. However, in Bangladesh, these policies do not include a strategy to engage men and boys in the process, which would be critical, given that the majority of sexual harassment in public transport is carried out by men and boys based on harmful notions of masculinities and control over women's mobility and bodies.

95. Programs by CSOs and multilateral organizations to promote male engagement in the transport sector mostly focus on addressing sexual harassment in public transport (Box 6).

Box 6

Initiatives of Civil Society Organizations in the Transport Sector

- The civil society organization (CSO) Forum Against GBV conducted several campaigns during the "16 days of activism against gender-based violence" in Sri Lanka to encourage male bystander interventions to reduce sexual harassment in public transport. These were through media and social media messaging as well as training conductors and drivers on how to prevent and respond to incidents on buses.
- The Foundation for Innovative Social Development conducted train-the-trainer programs and developed a training manual to engage with men in the transport sector to address sexual harassment and gender-based violence.
- In India, the work of a few CSOs has been promising. The Manas Foundation has been giving gender-sensitivity training to drivers of various modes of transport. Azad Foundation's "women on wheels" program that trains and hires women as professional drivers, enables socially excluded women to move from the margins to the mainstream economy. Through this process, they attempt to alter public perceptions about women's participation in the transport sector and the role and status of women in society.
- Another important work is by Safetipin, a social organization working toward safe cities for women. Through its various apps, it collects information from citizens and important urban stakeholders on their experiences of accessing the urban space. This data is further used for advocating for infrastructural and policy-level changes to various stakeholders including the state. They collect data that are gender-disaggregated. This approach resonates with the socioecological framework outlined in the conceptual framework for this stocktaking.

Sources: Foundation for Innovative Social Development. www.fisd.lk; Manas Foundation India. www.manas.org.in; Azad Foundation. www.azadfoundation.com; and Cities for Youth. www.safetipin.com.

96. Multilateral organizations have been working to make transport inclusive and women friendly. However, these approaches do not aim at addressing harmful notions of masculinities. In India, ADB has been financing transport sector-related work and designing toolkits that promote equitable transport policy and planning. A KII participant from the ADB transport unit in India shared that ADB has been training road development authorities on gender-responsive planning and design of road infrastructure.

The Rural Connectivity Improvement Project in Nepal promotes 33% women participation across interventions and ensures all employees are required to take GESI training.[135] Under the project, the issue of equal wages is addressed by asking all contractors to meet certain criteria, monitoring through review of salary sheets, and provision for separate changing rooms and toilets for women. However, the project does not include components on male engagement. As per a KII participant, in Sri Lanka, the World Bank, through one of its projects, is seeking to develop a multisectoral prevention and response mechanism to reduce sexual harassment in public transport, which will specifically integrate male engagement strategies to prevent sexual harassment. However, this project is still in the early stages of implementation. In India, the Safe Cities program by UN Women (2017–2020) involved working with transport departments, drivers, and bus conductors to promote women's safety. These initiatives lack the component of engaging men and boys in making transport inclusive for women and girls and gender-diverse people by addressing the masculine norms, the root of inequities in the transport sector.

97. Across the six countries, apart from a few CSOs, interventions that aim at challenging gender norms, policies, and programs lack a gender-transformative lens. The engagement of men in the transport sector is very limited and does not focus on transforming harmful notions of masculinities. Interviews with government functionaries, staff of multilateral organizations, CSOs, and, in some cases, private sector employees reflect a limited understanding of ways to engage men and boys. The issue of "transforming masculinities and men's patriarchal mindset" remains completely ignored. Gender equality in the transport sector is viewed primarily through the lens of it being a "women's issue" and ignores the intersectionality that impacts women, men from excluded groups, and gender-diverse people.

98. While policies and programs on paper seek to encourage women's participation in the transport sector and make it responsive to their needs, the involvement of women and gender-diverse people in the design, planning, implementation, and monitoring of these programs and policies remains limited. Overcoming this weakness would require a better understanding of how gender and power operates and how it curtails women from participating in these processes. This would also involve working with men to question their notions of power and control. Unfortunately, current policies and schemes adopt a very protectionist approach, where gender-equitable transport equals ensuring women's safety from harm and violence while using transport services. While this is critical, it is only one aspect of promoting gender equality in the transport sector. Encouraging women's participation in all aspects of the creation and running of transport services, making such services accessible and responsive to women's needs, and promoting employment and leadership of women in the sector remain unaddressed. Thus, there is a lack of an ecosystem-based approach to the problem of gender inequality in the transport sector. Even when efforts are made to break male domination in the sector, gender bias and sexism persist. In Nepal, while female engineers are being hired in the ADB Rural Connectivity Improvement Project, they are not treated equitably by their peers and are subject to pay inequities. An interview participant shared that "*if a male and female engineer are on the same mission, female engineers are asked to look into hotel and food matters for the team, while the male engineers look into 'work' related efforts*."

[135] ADB. 2023. *Nepal: Rural Connectivity Improvement Project—Additional Financing.*

Recommendations and Entry Points in the Transport Sector

99. Conversations with KII participants highlighted the need for conceptual clarity on the importance and ways of engaging men and boys in promoting GEWE and, more so, in transforming masculinities in the transport sector. There is a need to talk to men as both service providers and users of transport facilities about how masculine norms impact their access, use, and behavior in the public sphere and how gender discrimination leads to the exclusion of women and gender-diverse people from contributing to and benefiting from transport. The key recommendations that have emerged from this stocktaking are the following:

(i) **Research and Evidence-Building**

(a) **Collect sex- and gender-disaggregated data, along with data disaggregated by other social factors (e.g., class, caste, location, etc.) around access, use, and provision of and leadership in transport services.**

(b) **Conduct research on approaches to transform men's mindsets.** These approaches will enable them to question how masculine norms impact their interactions with the transport system as service providers and users and develop clear plans to uptake the findings from this research into programs and policies.

(c) **Develop qualitative indicators, such as sense of comfort and safety, ease of access, affordability, etc., for the transport sector and use them to track and report progress in gender action plans.**

(ii) **Laws and Policies**

(a) **ADB can begin a process of reviewing transport policies in the region.** This is to check that they incorporate a gender equality perspective, address the causes of exclusion and discrimination that women, men from excluded groups and gender-diverse people face, and recognize the role of masculinities in these dynamics.

(b) **ADB could collaborate with governments to develop comprehensive strategies for male engagement to make transport systems more gender-equitable in terms of accessibility, affordability, and safety.** This could involve promoting awareness among men and boys about the importance of gender equality and respectful behavior, as well as providing training and support for male allies to actively participate in creating safer and more gender-inclusive transport environments.

(c) **Advocacy plans could be developed based on research findings to encourage policymakers to design gender-transformative transport policies and programs that actively engage men and boys.** These plans could include targeted outreach and education campaigns aimed at male stakeholders to foster understanding and support for gender equality initiatives. For example, workshops and seminars could be organized to educate male transport workers about the necessity of respectful behavior toward all passengers and the benefits of promoting gender equality in transport.

(d) **Promote the advancement of women, gender-nonconforming individuals, and minorities into leadership positions within the transport sector.** Influence organizational cultures by encouraging the implementation of gender-equitable human resources policies and procedures.

(iii) **Programmatic Approaches**

(a) **Consider the needs and barriers faced by people of all genders in designing and implementing transport programs.** This can be done through the participatory engagement of women and girls and gender-diverse people, particularly those from marginalized groups.

(b) **Integrate gender-transformative approaches and male engagement in capacity-building programs.** This should be done for all staff and personnel involved in transport program design, planning, implementation, monitoring, and maintenance. Training modules should include aspects of access, affordability, sexual harassment, employment, and leadership.

(c) **Ensure gender equality in employment, especially among marginalized groups in the transport sector.** To do this, their specific infrastructural needs—toilets, creches, and safety equipment—must be addressed. As far as possible, roles must not be based on a stereotypical gendered division of labor.

(d) **Create partnerships with gender experts and institutions to ensure that interventions are gender-transformative.** Include components on male engagement for gender equality.

(e) **Improve transport infrastructure and services and make them accessible for people of all genders,** including those with disabilities; those living in distant and hard-to-reach areas; and those belonging to vulnerable caste, ethnic, and religious groups, etc. This can include mapping of excluded areas that need to be connected, ensuring adequate lighting, sensitization and training on road safety, sensitization to and prevention of sexual harassment and violence in public transport and waiting areas, and introduction of special transport services for women and girls and other excluded groups.

(f) **Support social and behavioral change campaigns.** These campaigns should focus on challenging and changing inequitable gender attitudes, norms, and behaviors. This needs to be done with people involved at all levels in the transport sector—drivers, conductors, contractors, labor, regional transport offices, driving schools, engineers, technical, and decision-making teams.

(g) **Utilize technology-aided solutions like apps to enhance transport safety.**

(h) **Establish a GESI cell within transport ministries.** The cell could ensure the longevity of the positive changes that project interventions attempt to make for GESI strengthening.

Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene

Gender and Masculinities in the WASH Sector

100. Improving water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) is critical to achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6,[136] which calls for the availability and sustainable management of water for all, with an emphasis on the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situations. WASH is a highly gendered sector, with stark differentiations and inequalities in access, roles, participation, and decision-making as experienced by women, men, and gender-diverse people. Issues include availability and access to critical amenities such as clean and affordable drinking water, and safe and functional toilets and sanitation facilities accessible to all.

[136] United Nations. Sustainable Development Goals, Goal 6: Ensure Access to Sanitation for All.

Lack of access to affordable, quality WASH amenities and services has far-reaching social implications, including limiting opportunities for education and employment, increasing the risk of violence and harassment, and undermining overall health and well-being. Progress in these areas can contribute to the achievement of SDG 6, including its target to empower and promote the inclusion of all women and girls, and as those with other intersecting identities in the WASH sector.

101. Patriarchal gender and social norms prescribe a gendered division of work within and outside the home, due to which men are largely absent from WASH-related household tasks and the burden is disproportionately borne by women. Household and caregiving tasks are seen as "feminine" or "women's work," and thus contrary to traditional notions of masculinity. In South Asia, as in many other parts of the world, women tend to be responsible for WASH-related tasks including household water sourcing and management, food preparation, hygiene of children, cleanliness of clothing, bedding and household, disposal of waste, etc. All of these place heavy time burdens on women and limit their ability to engage in education, employment, social and civil participation, and leisure. The physical drudgery and labor of fetching water and carrying heavy loads for long distances also contributes to health issues. If there is unsafe water or difficulties in accessing water and sanitation, the burden is largely borne by women and increases their vulnerability. Lack of access to adequate WASH facilities and services is also a contributing factor to GBV, particularly against women and girls. Women and girls' WASH-related vulnerabilities are further exacerbated during emergencies such as disasters triggered by natural hazards, conflicts, pandemics, and climate change events.

102. While women play a significant role in undertaking WASH-related work within the household, men are largely the decision-makers around WASH at home, particularly regarding type and cost of technology and facility. Gender and masculinity-related norms tend to position men as key earners, thus they exert control over earnings and key decision-making for the household. When decision-making becomes linked to purchasing power, it is skewed toward the needs and priorities that men have. Even though women are much more likely to want household latrines than men, they lack the power to make that decision for the household. In many cultures, many WASH-related behaviors and practices such as the use of latrines by men is considered to be emasculating and contrary to the expectations set by masculine norms.[137]

103. Existing literature, evidence, and programming around gender and WASH are largely structured around the gender binary, and neglects the unique needs, challenges, and enablers for people with gender identities and expressions and/or sexual orientations outside this heteronormative structure.[138] Transgender and other gender-diverse people face unique barriers in accessing WASH facilities, reflecting the wider, everyday experiences of stigma and marginalization that they face. Studies from South Asia indicate that access to public toilets remains a critical concern for transgender and gender-diverse people, often putting them at risk of verbal, physical, and sexual harassment and abuse, expulsion and/or denial of access to toilets, and in certain cases, arrest.[139] While there is growing recognition of the need to build inclusive toilets, access, public awareness, and legal recognition remain key challenges.

[137] Sanitation and Water for All (SWA). Strengthening Gender Equality in Access to Water, Sanitation and Hygiene. *Briefing Paper.* https://www.sanitationandwaterforall.org/sites/default/files/2021-04/SWA%20Briefing%20Paper%20-%20WASH%20and%20gender_FINAL.pdf.

[138] P. Boyce et al. 2018. Transgender-Inclusive Sanitation: Insights from South Asia. *Waterlines*. 37(2). pp. 102–117. https://doi.org/10.3362/1756-3488.18-00004.

[139] See footnote 138.

Also, "male" toilets by design may be challenging to use for transmen, and lack menstrual hygiene management facilities.[140] Research, literature, and programming around the experiences of others on the LGBTQIA+ spectrum is also negligible, with limited evidence about lesbian, gay, bisexual, intersex, queer, and asexual people's experiences of WASH.

104. The highly male-dominated and masculinized culture of the WASH sector further perpetuates gender inequalities, with leadership and decision-making positions occupied by men. Men predominantly occupy decision-making roles, such as chief engineers, with very few women pursuing careers in civil and water engineering. The low representation of women in decision-making positions is striking, with women often relegated to "desk work" and administrative roles, where their technical skills are underutilized.[141] Gender-based discrimination, inequitable social and cultural norms, and barriers to education and training all contribute to the underrepresentation of women in decision-making. Masculinized work practices further distance women from senior positions and growth opportunities. For example, crucial decisions are frequently made outside of official hours and in informal settings, where women are conspicuously absent. This is compounded by inadequate gender-sensitive work infrastructure, including lack of clean and separate functioning toilets, limited access to transport and related facilities, concerns about safety and security, insufficient maternity leave, and limited childcare facilities—all of which combine to reinforce existing gender hierarchies within the sector.[142]

105. Gender norms and sociocultural expectations around masculinity can shape men's attitudes and behaviors in relation to hygiene practices, toilet use, and other WASH-related activities. Given the disproportionate burden borne by women around WASH, as their exclusion from planning, implementation, and monitoring of WASH-related activities, the concerns of the WASH sector rightly focus on women and girls' gendered vulnerabilities. At the same time, it is important to recognize that men, too, are gendered beings and have a gendered relationship with WASH. For example, some men may view many hygiene practices as "feminine" and therefore not prioritize them. Men are less likely than women to wash their hands regularly, which can contribute to the spread of infectious diseases with implications for their own well-being as well as that of their families and communities. Men are also less likely to be regular users of toilets, even when available. The practice of public urination and open defecation persists in many countries, and men make up a significant proportion of open defecators. Such practices can be influenced by various factors, including time availability, greater mobility, lack of toilets, acceptability of the practice, and avoiding pit fill-up.[143] Masculinity-related notions can also influence men's preference for open defecation, as the use of toilets may be seen as a weakness and contrary to masculine self-sufficiency. Gender norms around toilet usage and sharing of facilities by women and men in the household may also play a role. Men may not want to share toilets with women, or they may prioritize their use of toilets over that of women.

[140] C. Benjamin and A. Hueso. 2017. *LGBTI and Sanitation: What We Know and What the Gaps Are.* Paper presented at the 40th WEDC International Conference, Loughborough. https://wedc-knowledge.lboro.ac.uk/resources/conference/40/Benjamin-2649.pdf.

[141] Society for Promoting Participative Ecosystem Management (SOPPECOM). 2009. *Situational Analysis of Women Water Professionals in South Asia.* https://www.soppecom.org/pdf/SituationalAnalysisofWomenFULL7.pdf.

[142] S. Cavill et al. 2018. Men and Boys in Sanitation and Hygiene: A Desk-Based Review. *CLTS Knowledge Paper Hub Learning Paper.* No. 8. IDS.

[143] See footnote 142, p. 38.

106. While men may be less vulnerable to physical and sexual violence than women and girls, they may still be at risk, especially in and around WASH facilities. Young men and boys may be at risk of physical and sexual violence near school latrines or public latrines, especially after dark. Men may also be at risk of psychological and sociocultural violence, such as shaming or coercion, if they refuse to use toilets or engage in open defecation. In India, for example, the shaming of men who refuse to use toilets has been reported,[144] including confiscation of the *lungis* (a sarong-like garment) of men caught defecating in the open to shame them.

107. Despite the linkage between patriarchal masculinity norms and men's WASH practices, men can play an important role in transforming their own WASH practices as well as supporting the WASH needs of women and girls and gender-diverse people. Alongside increasing participation and decision-making of women in the WASH sector, men's participation and engagement is critical for achieving gender equality and improving the WASH outcomes for people of all genders. Men can act as allies and advocates for women's and gender-diverse people's WASH needs, supporting their access to toilets, water, and hygiene facilities, and working to break down the gendered division of labor that tends to assign specific WASH-related tasks to women.

Overview of Initiatives and Challenges in the WASH Sector

108. Gender initiatives for WASH have primarily sought to address the multiple barriers faced by women, particularly in relation to their access to safe and quality WASH amenities, and reducing the burden of WASH-related unpaid care work borne by them. However, there is a glaring gap in the existence of policies, processes, and programming addressing issues of WASH in relation to men and masculinity, and to nonbinary and nonheteronormative gender identities and sexual orientation. Laws, programs, and policies of the WASH sector in South Asia have made several strides in promoting the inclusion of women and girls and responding to some of their gendered needs and vulnerabilities. Some key policies and programs that address these concerns are highlighted below. At the same time, the research reveals wide gaps in understanding and action around WASH in the context of men, with "gender" being equated with women's issues.

109. Across the six countries, WASH-related policies acknowledge women's distinct roles and needs to various extents through their objective statements and strategic priorities. WASH-related policies and programs in the region are also increasingly focusing on strengthening menstrual hygiene management-related infrastructure and facilities.

(i) The Bhutan National Sanitation and Hygiene Policy[145] highlights the need for special attention to the needs of women and girls and other vulnerable groups, while the National Human Settlement Policy of Bhutan 2019[146] calls for mainstreaming of cross-cutting issues including gender and special needs.

[144] *The Wire.* 2017. Ranchi Civic Body Resorts to Public Shaming, Fining Open Defecators. https://thewire.in/government/ranchi-civic-body-resorts-public-shaming-fining-open-defecators; *Daily.* Public Shaming is No Way to Go about Swachh Bharat. https://www.dailyo.in/variety/swachh-bharat-ranchi-open-defecation-toilets-humiliation-19740.

[145] Royal Government of Bhutan. 2020. *National Sanitation and Hygiene Policy Document.* Ministry of Health. https://www.moh.gov.bt/national-sanitation-and-hygiene-policy-document/.

[146] Royal Government of Bhutan. 2019. *National Human Settlement Policy.* Ministry of Works and Human Settlement. https://policy.thinkbluedata.com/sites/default/files/National%20Human%20Settlement%20Policy%20of%20Bhutan%202019.pdf.

(ii) The Bangladesh National Water Policy of 1999 requires taking into account the particular needs of women and children, acknowledging the "hardship for women who have to carry water over long distances" and emphasizing the importance of safe water supply in rural areas.[147]

(iii) India's National Rural Drinking Water Programme, through the Jal Jeevan Mission,[148] aims to provide water from tap to every household by 2024, which would contribute to reducing women's time and physical burden. Various government policies and schemes across the region, such as India's Swacch Bharat Abhiyan,[149] seek to expand the available infrastructure to improve access to toilets and other sanitation facilities, often in partnership with the private sector and CSOs.

(iv) The National Policy on Sanitation in Sri Lanka lists providing "adequate attention to school children, women, differently-abled and less privileged segments of the population" as one of its five objectives, and identifies incorporating the menstrual hygiene management needs of girls as important improvements of school sanitation services. The World Bank in Sri Lanka is implementing a project that seeks to enhance menstrual, health, and hygiene management at school level through improvement of infrastructure and education on menstrual, health, and hygiene management for staff and students.[150]

(v) In India, CSOs like WaterAid are also working with the Department of Education to develop hygiene curricula in schools, and to build the capacity of teachers, thus, strengthening School Management Committees and WASH planning processes.[151]

110. In addition to addressing women and girls' gendered vulnerabilities, policies and programs in the region seek to increase women's participation in WASH-related forums, platforms, and decision-making spheres.

(i) Bhutan's National Sanitation and Hygiene Policy calls for the relevant agencies to promote strategic partnerships with the National Commission for Women and Children, CSOs, and development partners for increased participation and influence of women, children, people with disabilities, older people, and people with temporary mobility restrictions in the planning and management of sanitation and hygiene programs to ensure that their particular needs are met.[152]

(ii) Live and Learn Maldives is an implementing partner to the project management unit at the Ministry of Environment, Climate Change, and Technology in the ADB-supported Greater Malé Environmental Improvement and Waste Management Project. Through this project, Live and Learn Maldives is liaising with Women Development Committees as a key partner in the islands to mobilize women groups and has provided training and guidance to engage Women's Development Committees in formulating island waste management plans.

147 Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh. *National Water Policy*. Ministry of Water Resources. https://faolex.fao.org/docs/pdf/bgd146075.pdf.

148 Government of India. National Rural Drinking Water Mission. Jal Jeevan Mission, Ministry of Jal Shakti. https://ejalshakti.gov.in/IMISReports/NRDWP_MIS_NationalRuralDrinkingWaterProgramme.html.

149 Government of India. Swachh Bharat Mission, Ministry of Jal Shakti. https://swachhbharatmission.gov.in/sbmcms/index.htm.

150 World Bank. 2021. Water Supply and Sanitation Improvement Project.

151 WaterAid. WASH in Institutions. https://www.wateraid.org/in/wash-in-institutions.

152 Government of Bhutan. 2017. National Sanitation and Hygiene Policy Royal.

As highlighted in this study's conceptual framework, partnership and mutual accountability are key elements of a transformational approach.

(iii) The Government of Nepal's Department of Water Supply and Sewerage Management, alongside ADB, seeks to address women's gendered needs and ensure 33% women's participation through the Urban Water Supply and Sanitation Project.

(iv) India's National Rural Drinking Water Programme, through the Jal Jeevan Mission, also mandates the formation of village water and sanitation committees, under which women are required to constitute 50% of the members. India's Atal Bhujal Yojana on sustainable groundwater management also requires the presence of 33% female members in water user associations at the *Gram Panchayat* level to allow the participation of women in water budgeting, water security planning, and monitoring implementation progress. [153] Women members of self-help groups are also required to constitute a substantial number of water management committees.

(v) Bangladesh's National Water Policy of 1999 also includes a specific objective to bring institutional changes that will decentralize the management of water resources and enhance the role of women.[154]

111. While there is a gradual progression of WASH initiatives from "gender neutral" to "gender-sensitive" approaches, they largely continue to work within existing gender norms and structures and are lacking in transformative potential. As described above, WASH initiatives in the region are increasingly acknowledging and responding to some gender inequities, for example through efforts to ease women's burdens. However, WASH initiatives largely fall short of questioning and transforming the underlying gender norms and inequities—for example, by also challenging the norms responsible for women's burden and promoting the gender-equitable redistribution of unpaid care work. Similarly, initiatives promoting and mandating increased participation of women in WASH-related platforms and forums are important; at the same time, the lack of adequate capacity-building and an enabling environment may render women's participation simply instrumental. In many sanitation and hygiene schemes such as India's Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, women are the ones bearing the burden of creating change at the village level, as frontline workers and self-help group members responsible for implementation and outreach. Gendered division of labor persists across WASH projects, with examples from Bhutan indicating that women masons continue to face barriers due to gender stereotypes around masonry as men's work. Men are involved in the construction of water tanks, pipe fitting, and laying out pipelines while women are engaged in operation and maintenance.

112. The WASH sector's lack of engagement with men and masculinities emerges as a critical gap that severely limits the transformative potential of policies, programs, and other initiatives across the region. The equation of "gender" with "women" results in the erasure of men as gendered subjects and a lack of recognition of masculinity-related norms as closely linked with WASH. Men are largely included as participants in programs and trainings, occasionally to help facilitate women's participation in WASH. While this is a critical role, it leaves unexamined men's relationship with masculinities and the impact on their own gendered WASH practices around handwashing, public urination, open defecation, etc.

[153] Atal Bhujal Yojana. Ministry of Water Resources. https://ataljal.mowr.gov.in/.

[154] Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh. National Water Policy. Ministry of Water Resources.

Many behavior change campaigns that seek to alter men's practices tend to reinforce, rather than challenge, masculinity-related gender norms and expectations. India's Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, for example, has been criticized for messaging in campaigns against open defecation that emphasize men's role in protecting the dignity and shame of women and securing their own masculinity. Similarly, while there are efforts to promote women's participation in WASH decision-making, and their engagement in traditionally male-dominated WASH roles, there is no mention of initiatives or campaigns to promote diversification in men's roles, such as their participation in including redistribution of unpaid care work at home as well as engagement in paid work traditionally associated with women or femininity. As a result, men as a gendered group are largely disengaged from WASH initiatives seeking to promote gender equality, and their role as catalysts of change remains untapped.

113. While many WASH policies specifically mention the need to reach vulnerable and marginalized groups as a part of their objective statements and strategic priorities, the existing approaches largely do not recognize and address intersectionality. In India, Dalit communities are at high risk of marginalization and vulnerability in relation to water and sanitation. Most Dalit households lack provision of drinking water supply and sources in the vicinity and are dependent on common water resources provided by the government or others owned largely by people belonging to dominant castes, often putting them at risk of experiencing discriminatory practices and exclusions. Men from these communities also tend to be concentrated in the often unsafe, unhygienic, and physically demanding jobs of cleaning sewers and septic tanks. The dynamics of caste and stigma play a strong role, and despite the hazardous working conditions, there is limited acknowledgment and efforts to improve and modernize sanitation processes and infrastructure to safeguard their health, well-being, and overall safety and dignity. The approach to the design and development of infrastructure also increases the risks and vulnerabilities of transgender people as mentioned above. Similarly, much of the WASH infrastructure is not built to accommodate the varying needs of people with disabilities, leading to further exclusions that have longer-term implications for physical and mental health and well-being. These challenges underscore the need for WASH policies and programs to address the needs and vulnerabilities not only of women and girls more comprehensively but also of people belonging to different gender identities and facing exclusions due to factors, such as disability, caste, class, and location. Also, to promote male engagement in improving WASH systems, we need clear guidelines for infrastructure development and utilization.

Recommendations and Entry Points in the WASH Sector

114. The review of policies, programs, and initiatives in the WASH sector in South Asia indicates a clear and pressing need for gender-transformative approaches that seek to engage men and boys in transforming masculinities and promoting gender equity. Addressing this need requires research and evidence-building around gendered gaps and vulnerabilities related to social inclusion, strengthening of laws and policies for clear acknowledgment, priority setting, and planning around the integration of gender into the sector and expansion of programmatic approaches that adopt transformative approaches to engage with men and boys and challenge underlying inequities for a more equitable and just WASH sector.

(i) **Research and Evidence-Building**

(a) **Collect sex and gender-disaggregated data.** Also, collect data disaggregated by other social factors (e.g., class, caste, location, etc.) around supply, access, and use of WASH facilities and services. This is critical for identifying key gaps and vulnerabilities, particularly related to masculinities and engagement of men and boys, and for "reaching the last first," particularly those on the LGBTQIA+ spectrum.

(b) **Engage gender experts in all stages of the research process.** This includes conceptualization, strategy, tool development, data collection, and analysis, to ensure that gender concerns in the WASH sector are integrated from the very beginning rather than being included as "add-ons."

(c) **Engage and incorporate the feedback of those who are delivering WASH services.** Also, include beneficiaries of the services at all stages of the research process. This includes not only women and girls but also men and boys, gender-diverse people, and those belonging to various marginalized and disadvantaged groups, etc.

(d) **Measure not only quantifiable but also qualitative indicators.** Output-level indicators (number of toilets built) and more in-depth, qualitative, and transformative indicators of change (e.g., men's attitudes toward open defecation and use of toilets, women and transgender people's comfort levels and sense of safety and dignity in accessing public toilets, etc.) should be included in gender action plans and project monitoring and evaluation. Gender-related indicators must be complemented with those related to other relevant dimensions including caste, class, etc.

(e) **Develop clear plans for data uptake at the early stages of the research.** This is to identify and plan how the findings from the research will feed into the programs, policies, and initiatives of ADB and its partners. Furthermore, develop plans for advocacy around gaps identified in mainstreaming gender and incorporating masculinities and male engagement into the existing discourse and policy development around gender and WASH.

(f) **Identify and cultivate partnerships with organizations adopting gender-transformative approaches in the WASH sector.** This is to monitor, evaluate, and understand their impacts.

(ii) **Laws and Policies**

(a) **Review and operationalize laws and policies using a gender lens.** The gender lens must acknowledge women and girls' gendered vulnerabilities in the WASH sector and seek to address the underlying causes. Policies must explicitly recognize the role of men and masculinities in WASH, and create guidelines for implementing agencies to undertake gender-transformative programming.

(b) **Promote and support laws and policies that clearly articulate and protect the rights of transgender and gender-diverse people.** These laws and policies must establish provisions for their safe, equitable, and gender-affirming access to toilets and other WASH services.

(c) **Promote and support evidence-based laws and policies that consider available data from different contexts.** In particular, lessons on the impacts of engaging men and boys and gender-transformative approaches in WASH should be imparted.

(d) **Strengthen data-driven convergence across different ministries, departments, and portfolios.** Recognize and respond to the intersections of WASH with not only gender but also key linkages to physical, mental, sexual, and reproductive health, nutrition, skills, and employment, etc.

(e) **Promote and support policies that mandate the development of safe, accessible, and inclusive infrastructure and facilities for people of all genders.** Special attention must be given to the needs of marginalized groups, with clear guidelines for implementation and reporting.

(f) **Promote the advancement of women, gender-nonconforming individuals, and minorities into leadership positions within the WASH sector.** Influence organizational cultures within WASH-related institutions by encouraging the implementation of gender-equitable human resources policies and procedures.

(iii) **Programmatic Approaches**

(a) **Conduct extensive perspective-building and capacity-building activities.** This would be around gender, gender-transformative approaches, masculinities, engaging men and boys, and LGBTQIA+ issues in WASH for all key stakeholders in the WASH sector. This includes in-country personnel, implementing organizations and field staff, technical experts, etc.

(b) **Engage gender subject matter experts in the design and implementation of WASH programs.** This would include gender-transformative components and the inclusion of men and masculinities and nonbinary and nonheteronormative issues.

(c) **Engage stakeholders in the WASH sector.** At all stages of development and implementation of programs, include men and boys, particularly those from marginalized communities who are largely engaged in sanitation work, through participatory processes. Also include women and girls who bear the burden of water and sanitation work particularly at the household level.

(d) **Improve WASH infrastructure, facilities, and services as means to create innovative solutions toward gender equality.** In the short and medium term, it is essential to improve infrastructure, facilities, and services available for WASH, focusing on the gendered needs of not only women and girls, but also men and boys and gender-diverse people. This may include innovative solutions to ease women's drudgery; improved access to WASH in schools, workplaces, and other institutions; education around sanitation and hygiene including menstrual hygiene management; and creation of climate-friendly and disaster-resilient facilities that address women's particular vulnerabilities. Special attention is also required to ensure the ability of marginalized groups to access the available infrastructure and facilities, including those with disabilities; those living in distant and hard-to-reach areas; and those belonging to vulnerable caste, ethnic, and religious groups, etc.

(e) **Engage men and boys in WASH delivery.** Medium- and long-term gender norm transformation in the WASH sector has emerged as a critical need, particularly in the context of male engagement and masculinities. Men and boys, as both stakeholders in WASH delivery and beneficiaries, need to be engaged as agents of and partners for change.

(f) **Support social and behavioral change campaigns.** These are critical tools for changing inequitable gender attitudes, norms, and behaviors around WASH. Alongside women, men must be targets of these programs, and need to be provided with safe spaces for reflection and expressing their concerns and issues around WASH. Social and behavioral change initiatives must also develop messaging and actions to build awareness on the needs of transgender and gender-diverse people, and combat stigma, for safe and inclusive access to WASH.

(g) **Support programs that aim to promote redistribution of work and transformation of gendered norms and expectations on unpaid and paid work.** The inequitable distribution of unpaid care work, particularly in relation to WASH, needs to be actively challenged, with programmatic efforts at redistribution of work and transformation of gendered norms and expectations on unpaid and paid work.

(h) **Develop and deliver gender-integrated WASH and menstrual hygiene management curricula in schools.** The objective is to reach children of all genders, as well as with teachers and school staff. Linkages need to be formed with community-level stakeholders and platforms for reinforcement of messages and ensuring reach to those who are out-of-school.

(i) **Support the removal of gendered barriers to entry in male-dominated WASH jobs.** This requires appropriate perspective and capacity building of not only women but also men, to challenge the gendered division of labor and stereotypes. Just as women are supported to participate in traditionally male-dominated spheres, men too must be supported to diversify and engage in tasks traditionally assigned to women. Work culture and workspaces in the WASH sector need to provide safe and inclusive environments for the participation and inclusion of transgender and gender-diverse people in WASH jobs across all levels.

V

RECOMMENDATIONS AND ENTRY POINTS

115. The stocktaking of laws, policies, programs, and other initiatives across the seven priority sectors of ADB underscores a clear need to expand and strengthen work on gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) to include gender-transformative approaches that engage with men and boys and work toward transforming masculinities. While sectors such as education and health showed some progress on this front, led by the civil society organizations (CSO), more male-dominated sectors such as transport, energy, and financial management that have largely remained outside the purview of gender programming require additional, concerted efforts to understand and respond to the role of men and masculinities in shaping GESI-related processes and outcomes. This applies to the water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) sector as well.

116. The South Asia Department's (SARD) GESI framework and the associated guidance notes are a critical tool and entry point for integrating the approach of transforming masculinities and engaging men and boys for GESI. At the same time, the SARD GESI framework and related tools need to be expanded and revised to include a stronger focus on men and masculinities and deepen engagement with gender-transformative processes that are attentive and responsive to the intersecting nature of social inequalities and vulnerabilities. A shift is required to acknowledge the gendered subjectivity—including both powers and pressures—of men and manhood. This is a critical first step for developing strategies and interventions that challenge gender and social inequities and promote an inclusive vision for equality.

117. Gender-transformative approaches challenge unequal power relations and their patriarchal manifestations based on the recognition that men and boys disproportionately enjoy privileges within the prevailing patriarchal structure, while women and gender-diverse people face disproportionate inequalities and disadvantages. These approaches seek to engage men and boys in a reflective journey to recognize, acknowledge, and challenge the gendered and unjust benefits and advantages they receive due to the prevailing patriarchal systems of society—at the expense of women and gender-diverse people. These approaches also encourage men to recognize the adverse effects and expectations that patriarchal structures and traditional notions of masculinities have on their own lives. It is also critical to carefully and thoughtfully implement such approaches when working with men and boys, and mitigate the potential risks of reinforcing men's privileges and power rather than actively challenging and dismantling inequality.

118. Thus, it is critical to develop conceptual clarity around the rationale and objective of engaging men and boys. Keeping in view the relational and mutually reinforcing nature of gender and related inequities, men and boys must be engaged in achieving gender equality as a whole. This includes engaging men in supporting the empowerment of women and girls and people of other genders, as well as enabling men to reflect and challenge their own gendered power and vulnerabilities. This requires bringing men and boys on board as partners, stakeholders, and co-beneficiaries in the transformative process.

At the same time, engaging men and boys is not limited to working with them as individuals but also includes challenging patriarchal masculinities and norms to create more equitable systems and structures. The intersectionality of gender with other axes of identity is a key as men and boys (or women and girls or gender-diverse people) are not a homogenous group, and social inclusion requires paying attention to various intersections of power and hierarchies that influence individuals' experience of privilege and vulnerability.

119. Learnings from initiatives spanning various sectors and contexts demonstrate the benefits of adopting "socioecological" approaches that allow for gender-transformative changes to occur within institutions and at multiple levels, engaging multiple stakeholders. For example, it is critical to develop partnerships with implementing organizations, such as government agencies and CSOs, to reach individuals directly and promote transformation in gender-related attitudes, behaviors, and practices. Commonly identified and successful strategies can include starting at a young age, when gender socialization is in process, to work with boys and transform inequitable notions of gender and masculinities. Family and communities form the immediate proximate environment and can play a role in setting expectations and enforcing gender norms, and must be reached. Strategies like community-level social and behavioral change campaigns can be used to address critical, cross-cutting issues such as gender-equitable redistribution of unpaid care work. Male role models and peer leaders can be leveraged to create safe spaces for reflection, discussion, and collective transformation. Working with institutions and stakeholders such as schools, health facilities, and other service delivery points at the community level can also be a key entry point for creating an inclusive and enabling environment. The broader structural and policy environment is also important in ensuring rights and entitlements, access to resources and opportunities, etc. and can reinforce or challenge gender inequities and other forms of social exclusion. Data-driven advocacy can be an important strategy to shape the broader institutional and policy or legal environment that governs various sectors, and can also lay the foundation for more equitable institutions through mechanisms such as workplace policies around parental leave, sexual harassment, childcare, etc.

120. Research, evaluation, and evidence-building are critical for deepening knowledge, and identifying and responding to gender and social inequities. Conventional approaches tend to rely on Eurocentric, one-size-fits-all quantitative methodologies to measure fixed, quantifiable outputs. While these approaches have their strengths, it is also critical to expand and reimagine research methods to more deeply understand the complex, multifaceted, and contextualized nature of inequality. Qualitative methods, in combination with quantitative approaches, can provide unique insights and explanations. Given that gender-transformative changes take place over a longer period, focusing on processes as much as outcomes and measuring change through longitudinal methods can generate new learnings and inform the development of policies and programs.

121. Building on the abovementioned learnings, the following key thematic priority areas outline incorporating masculinities, engaging men and boys, and strengthening work around gender equity and social inclusion. These are entry points to promoting the engagement of men and boys in gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE) and transforming masculinities within ADB sectoral operations in South Asia. Each priority area builds on and is associated with corresponding "Key Areas of Action" outlined in the SARD GESI framework, with respective recommendations provided for strengthening masculinities and engaging men and boys in ADB's work.

Research and Evidence-Building

122. Incorporate a gender-transformative lens that includes men and masculinities as a part of all research and data-gathering through the following means:

(i) **Include a masculinities and engaging men and boys' perspective within "gender" in ADB's strategic documents and plans (e.g., GESI diagnostic and guidance notes, safeguarding, SOGIESC, etc.).** This will provide a clear direction for research and evidence-building on the ways in which patriarchal gender norms around men and masculinities contribute to the gendered vulnerabilities of not only women and girls, but also of men and boys themselves, as well as gender-diverse and LGBTQIA+ people facing intersecting forms of social exclusion.

(ii) **Incorporate the engagement of men and boys, and masculinities as a critical part of such strategies.** This will contribute to a more nuanced and holistic understanding of issues and priorities in the selected sectors, and to inform and strengthen ADB country partnership strategies and GESI-relevant loans, grants, and technical assistance programs and projects.

(iii) **Expand and strengthen data collection and analysis on gender.** This should include not only quantitative indicators of the surface-level manifestations of gender inequality but also capture the underlying gender norms, attitudes, and behaviors that contribute to inequality.

123. Develop robust monitoring and evaluation systems to capture not just project impact but also transformational change in gender norms and power dynamics within different institutions and in society at large, particularly through the engagement of men and boys and transformation of masculinities.

(i) Following the expansion of GESI targets in project gender action plans, it is critical that monitoring and impact evaluation of projects capture an expanded set of outputs and outcomes related to transformative change, e.g., changes in underlying norms around gender and masculinities. This includes quantifiable, immediate output-level indicators (e.g., number of skilling centers built, number of women participating in water user groups, etc.); as well as more in-depth, qualitative, long-term, and transformative indicators that capture changes at the level of knowledge, attitudes, practices, and related barriers and enablers. Indicators must capture changes among women, men, and gender-diverse people through gender- and sex-disaggregated data. These must be complemented by indicators disaggregated by and related to other relevant dimensions, including caste, class, ability, etc. to better capture their intersectionality and identify groups at risk of being left behind, particularly those who are marginalized in various ways due to their sexual orientation, gender identity and expressions, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC)-related identities.

(ii) The assessment of gender mainstreaming and development impact must be expanded to cover all ADB projects (not only gender equity theme and effective gender mainstreaming). The categorization of projects into gender equity theme and effective gender mainstreaming must require that gender is not equated with solely women and girls, and that there are specific elements related to men and masculinities included as a part of the broader gender equality and equity objectives, activities, and impact evaluation of the project. This must also cover the guidelines for the At-Exit Assessment of Gender Equality Results.

(iii) Gender experts can be engaged to support the development of robust and inclusive GESI-related monitoring and evaluation frameworks, plans, and indicators that seek to measure gender-transformative change and include a men and masculinities lens.

Experts can be consulted at all stages of the research process to ensure that gender concerns in each respective sector are integrated from the very beginning rather than being included as "add-ons." Cultivating partnerships with organizations adopting gender-transformative approaches to monitor, evaluate, and understand their impacts can also provide opportunities for cross-learning and collaboration.

124. Participatory and inclusive processes must be implemented to seek and incorporate the inputs and feedback of those involved in delivering sectoral programs, policies, and services, as well as service beneficiaries, at all stages of the research process. This includes inputs from women and girls, men and boys, gender-diverse people, and those belonging to various marginalized and disadvantaged groups, etc.

(i) Invest in in-depth, need-based studies for expanding conceptual and operational understanding of gender and masculinities across different sectors.

(ii) Invest in knowledge and evidence-generation studies around men and masculinities to build on the learnings emerging from projects, i.e., identify success factors, challenges, and barriers, and undertake in-depth research to inform and improve the next generation of work. Research studies on men and masculinities are needed for enhancing knowledge and building the capacity of ADB to respond to gender-related needs and strengthen projects in specific sectors and contexts. These can cover diverse themes, such as the role and implications of masculinities in a particular sector or priority subtheme; the intersections of factors such as ability or ethnicity with masculinity and inclusion of marginalized men; and the effectiveness of behavioral change campaigns on masculinity-related attitudes, norms, and behaviors of women and men, etc.

(iii) Clear plans for the uptake of learnings must be developed at the early stages of all research studies, to identify and plan how findings will feed into the programs, policies, and initiatives of ADB and the strategic relationships with different partners and stakeholder groups. Advocacy plans can be created to build on the learnings and collaborate with partners to respond to key gaps identified in mainstreaming gender, and incorporating masculinities and male engagement into the existing discourse and policy development.

Laws and Policies

125. Support improvements in the legal and policy environment to mainstream gender-transformative approaches that are inclusive of men and masculinities and SOGIESC issues.

(i) Technical assistance and policy-based loans provide a critical entry point for supporting improvements in the legal and policy environment of developing member countries (DMCs) to expand their approach to GESI in priority sectors. Proposed law and policy reforms can support the mainstreaming of gender-transformative approaches that include masculinities and engagement of men and boys within laws and policy frameworks that govern the respective sectors, and within the associated strategic priority areas and guidelines for the implementing agencies and partners. The guidance note on engaging in GESI policy dialogue and reform can be further strengthened to include guidelines around advocacy for inclusion of men and masculinities.

(ii) Legal and policy reforms must be rooted in evidence and informed by available data and lessons from different contexts, particularly those around the impacts of gender-transformative approaches that engage men and boys and seek to transform masculinities.

ADB's research at the project and sector levels (e.g., gender and social analyses, gender diagnostics, and impact evaluations) as well as strategic GESI research and knowledge products around gender, masculinities, and engagement of men and boys can provide an evidence base to inform recommendations for strengthening legal and policy provisions in different sectors.

(iii) Institutions often function as gendered and masculine spaces, where traditional gender norms and power dynamics are deeply entrenched. To address this, it is essential to challenge and transform the structural and cultural foundations of these institutions. Through its partnerships across sectors, ADB can support the implementation of gender-equitable policies and practices, the creation of an inclusive organizational culture that values diversity, and actively promotes women, gender nonconforming individuals, and minorities into leadership roles within sectors traditionally dominated by men. Fostering a culture that encourages respectful, caring, and nonviolent masculinities is also crucial.

Programmatic Approaches

126. Build gender-transformative approaches into project design and action plans to include a men and masculinities lens and inclusion of other SOGIESC identities from the very beginning of the project cycle.

(i) The poverty, social, and gender analysis that informs ADB project design and gender action plans must be expanded to capture key gendered social dynamics, power relations, and inequities that arise due to the wide-ranging impacts of patriarchal masculinities on gender relations. This is critical for a more holistic and comprehensive identification of those who are excluded and vulnerable in a particular context and the underlying norms, structures, and barriers that contribute to their vulnerabilities, particularly those arising from prevailing notions of masculinities in patriarchal societies.

(ii) This analysis must not only identify and assess women's vulnerabilities but must also assess men and masculinity and their impact on people of all genders—including men—as well as gender-diverse people and those belonging to other SOGIESC identities. Assessment of sectoral responses will be critical for highlighting gaps and identifying entry points for strengthening components related to masculinities and engagement of men and boys in the gender action plan developed for each project.

(iii) Data-driven convergence across different government ministries, departments, and portfolios and ADB's own internal structures must be strengthened to recognize and respond to the intersections of each sectoral thematic area with not only gender and masculinities but also key linkages to other issue areas and sectors.

127. Strengthen perspective and capacity related to GESI at the individual and institutional level, with a focus on building skills and competencies to incorporate masculinities and engagement of men and boys across all GESI-related work.

(i) Perspective- and capacity-building of ADB and partner agencies' staff around gender—with a focus on developing a deeper understanding of men and masculinities—is a first step for strengthening GESI integration using gender-transformative approaches institutionally, as well as at the level of project design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.

In addition to developing the capacity to recognize and respond to issues experienced by women, gender should be understood as a plural and relational concept and ensure recognition of men as gendered subjects and masculinities as an underlying set of normative expectations that shapes men's attitudes and behaviors. The conceptualization of gender must also move beyond the binary and be inclusive of people with other SOGIESC identities, including transgender, intersex, and nonbinary-identifying people, as well as nonheteronormative identities.

(ii) The technical support of external experts can be enlisted to develop staff capacities and perspectives around gender, men and masculinities, and other intersecting identities. This can be undertaken through diverse methodologies including learning courses, workshops, and other participatory methods.

(iii) Gender equality and social inclusion must also be strengthened at the institutional level by incorporating a gender-transformative lens to update formal arrangements such as policies and processes; and by developing an inclusive, safe, and responsive work culture. Sexual harassment policies, for example, must recognize women's vulnerabilities, and must also expand to address and respond to the experiences of men and gender-diverse people who may experience and report harassment. Parental leave policies must be expanded to enable fathers to obtain leave and to accommodate the requirements of those in nonheterosexual relationships. Similarly, an inclusive work culture must be cultivated for women and people of other genders, as well as those belonging to marginalized or disadvantaged groups. Gender stereotypes and differences in formal and informal roles and tasks division need to be challenged, and equity in access to opportunities ensured.

(iv) Gender experts and organizational development professionals can be enlisted to strengthen organizational systems, structures, processes, and work culture to meaningfully engage with an expanded understanding and application of GESI that includes men and masculinities and intersectionality.

128. Create, leverage, and strengthen partnerships with different social development actors to expand gender-transformative approaches that include masculinities and engagement of men and boys, as well as other SOGIESC issues.

(i) Collaboration with external stakeholders, including government agencies, CSOs, and the private sector, also provides an entry point for ADB to expand its own influence and leadership on GESI issues, as well as to learn from, collaborate with, and leverage the strengths of various other stakeholders that work on GESI, particularly those who have been developing, testing, and evaluating gender-transformative approaches that engage men and boys and seek to transform masculinities. Such partnerships are critical for expanding and institutionalizing GESI in laws, policies, and programs, and ensuring a wider reach to create community-level impacts.

(ii) CSOs have been at the forefront of developing gender-transformative, equitable approaches to address gender inequities and various other forms of social exclusion, and have paved the way for greater engagement of men and boys and transformation of masculinities in these processes. These include organizations specializing in research, programming, and advocacy around gender equity and male engagement, as well as larger forums, networks, and alliances that seek to build collective action and advocacy around these issues—such as feminist and women's rights movements and organizations.

(iii) Collaboration with stakeholders and departments within ADB also provides an important opportunity to expand knowledge, inclusion, and action around GESI issues through convergent approaches that break silos and ensure that critical steps for engaging with men and boys and transforming masculinities are a priority across the institution. The expansion of capacity-building activities across various departments and divisions is critical for ensuring that GESI is comprehensive in scope and includes masculinities and engagement of men through gender-transformative approaches. This is also key for leveraging the unique roles, capacities, and functions of each department and unit for ensuring GESI across internal institutional policies, processes, and work culture, as well as for the ADB's external work and strategic partnerships. At the same time, it is also important that resources allocated toward efforts for engaging men and boys and transforming masculinities expand and strengthen the work on gender equality, rather than diverting existing resources allocated to promoting women's rights and empowerment.

GLOSSARY

Gender and Social Analyses	The study of how gender and other social factors such as age, race, ethnicity, and class influence individual roles, responsibilities, opportunities, and access to resources in a given society. Source: USAID Gender Toolkit.
Gender Diagnostics	A tool or process used to assess gender-related issues, inequalities, and dynamics within organizations, communities, or sectors to inform program design or interventions aimed at improving gender outcomes. Source: International Labour Organization.
Gender-Empowering	Strategies or policies designed to empower individuals of all genders, especially women and marginalized groups, by increasing their access to resources, opportunities, and decision-making power. Source: OECD Gender Empowerment Index.
Gender Integration Spectrum	A framework that categorizes how gender considerations are incorporated into programs, ranging from gender-blind (ignoring gender differences) to gender-transformative (addressing and challenging unequal gender norms). Source: CARE Gender Integration Framework.
Gender-Neutral	Refers to policies, language, and behavior that avoid distinguishing between genders, aiming to create an environment free of gender bias or assumptions. Source: Gender Neutrality in Language and Policy Research.
Gender-Sensitive	Recognizes and takes into account gender differences and inequalities in policies, programs, or actions, ensuring that they are responsive to the distinct needs of different genders. Source: UN Women Gender Equality Glossary.
Gender Synchronization	An approach that engages both men and women in efforts to promote gender equality by encouraging collaboration and shared responsibility in challenging harmful norms and practices. Source: Interagency Gender Working Group.
Gender-Transformative	Refers to approaches that actively seek to challenge and change harmful gender norms and power imbalances, promoting equality and empowerment for all genders. Source: Promundo's Gender-Transformative Approach.

GESI	Gender equality and social inclusion is a framework for addressing inequalities and social exclusion related to gender, poverty, ethnicity, disability, and other factors to ensure inclusive development. Source: World Bank.
GEWE	Gender equality and women's empowerment refers to initiatives and policies aimed at promoting equal rights, opportunities, and participation for women in social, economic, and political spheres. Source: UN Women.
Hegemonic Masculinity	A concept that refers to the dominant form of masculinity in a given society, which often promotes male dominance, power, and control over others, and marginalizes alternative forms of gender expression. Source: R. Connell. 1995. *Masculinities.* Polity Press.
Intersex	A term for individuals born with biological sex characteristics (such as chromosomes, hormones, or anatomy) that do not fit typical definitions of male or female. Intersex traits can be present at birth or become apparent later in life. Source: Intersex Society of North America.
LGBTQAI+	Refers to lesbian; gay; bisexual; transgender; queer or questioning; asexual, aromantic, or agender; intersex, and others. The "+" includes additional sexual orientations and gender identities not explicitly mentioned. Source: Human Rights Campaign.
Nonbinary-Identifying People	Individuals whose gender identity does not fit within the traditional binary of male and female. Nonbinary people may identify as a mix of both genders, neither, or as a different gender entirely. Source: GLAAD Media Reference Guide.
Nonheteronormative	Refers to identities, sexual orientations, and gender expressions that deviate from the dominant societal expectation of heterosexuality and traditional gender roles. Source: Queer Studies in Education Handbook.
SOGIESC	Refers to sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics—an umbrella term that encompasses the diverse aspects of individuals' sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and biological sex characteristics, recognizing the spectrum of human diversity. Source: UN Free & Equal Campaign.
Transgender	Refers to people whose gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. Transgender individuals may identify as male, female, or beyond the traditional gender binary. Source: American Psychological Association.

APPENDIX 1

METHODOLOGY

Coverage of the Study

1. The stocktaking covered the following:

   (i) Government, civil society, bilateral and multilateral funders, and private sector initiatives to engage men and boys and transform notions of masculinities for gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE) within the priority sectors of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) in six developing member countries (DMCs). For each country, the sectors and priority areas differ, subject to ADB's focus areas.

   (ii) Sectors' supply side (e.g., gender-equitable policies, structures, processes, and mechanisms) and demand side (e.g., availability, quality, and accessibility of resources and services for beneficiaries/target groups).

   (iii) Analysis of the lessons learned from successes, challenges, and gaps to identify the following:

      (a) key recommendations for promoting male engagement for GEWE within ADB sectoral operations across the six DMCs, and

      (b) entry points and associated recommendations in line with key areas of action identified in the Framework for Integrating Gender Equality and Social Inclusion in the Asian Development Bank's South Asia Operations of ADB's South Asia Department (SARD).

2. Initial conversations with ADB SARD representatives at ADB headquarters and resident missions guided the selection of initiatives for stocktaking. The list was expanded and modified based on the emerging findings through an iterative process. The focus was to identify initiatives that address gender equality in the study sectors, and directly or indirectly work with and impact men and boys. Efforts were made to capture innovative and flagship initiatives across sectors and stakeholder types that could shed light on key learnings relevant to the study.

3. A research protocol and the associated tools were submitted to the International Center for Research on Women, Institutional Review Board (IRB), and approval was sought and obtained prior to the commencement of the research.

Data Sources

4. The study utilized a combination of primary and secondary research methods to take stock of initiatives around gender equality and engagement of men and boys within seven ADB priority sectors—agriculture; education; energy; finance; health; transport; and water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH)—in the six DMCs covered by SARD. The stocktaking includes a review of existing laws, policies, structures, processes, and programs and key informant interviews with stakeholders from government, civil society, bilateral and multilateral funders, and the private sector. Primary and secondary research was undertaken at the country level by national consultants, and findings were analyzed at sectoral and regional levels.

Secondary Data Collection

5. A review of available literature was conducted to gather information on the following themes:

   (i) A broad profile of the status of men and boys within the six DMCs: education, employment, health, violence, gender norms attitudes and behaviors, masculinities, vulnerable groups, political representation, and leadership representation.

   (ii) Country-level and sector-specific initiatives (including laws, policies, and programs) by government, civil society, bilateral and multilateral funders, and private sector: identification and recognition of GEWE issues across different sectors and responses, approaches to gender integration, inclusion of male engagement, and masculinities-related components.

6. Data and information sources for the literature review included the following:

   (i) Existing data sets and analysis for the six DMCs:

      (a) Government surveys in the public domain (e.g., demographic and health surveys)

      (b) Academic peer-reviewed papers

      (c) Legal and policy documents

      (d) Reports and gray literature developed by think tanks, nongovernment organizations, research agencies, and other relevant stakeholders

   (ii) ADB documents, including Strategy 2030, country gender equality diagnostic reports, and the SARD GESI framework.

Primary Data Collection

7. The primary research consisted of key informant interviews (KIIs) with relevant representatives from various types of stakeholder groups: government, civil society, donors, bilateral and multilateral organizations, the private sector, and ADB. The roles of key informants across organizations were diverse and included those engaged in research, project design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. A total of 143 KIIs were conducted across the six countries (see Appendix 1 for the list of interviews). The KIIs sought to gather data on the following themes:

   (i) status of men and boys within the six DMCs and key issues and priorities related to GEWE;

   (ii) country-level general and sector-specific initiatives (including laws, policies, and programs) around GEWE, male engagement, and masculinities by the government, civil society, bilateral/multilateral funders, and private sector organizations;

   (iii) successes, barriers, and challenges in addressing GEWE needs and incorporating masculinities and male engagement approaches in initiatives; and

   (iv) entry points for expanding ADB's work on GEWE, masculinity, and male engagement across its priority sectors in the six DMCs.

8. Due to travel restrictions imposed by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic during the span of the study, most of the primary research was conducted online or by phone. In-person interviews were possible only in countries and contexts where relevant government guidelines permitted. Interviews were conducted using semistructured guides developed for different stakeholder groups, and lasted between 60 and 90 minutes per interview.

Data Analysis

9. A qualitative, rapid analysis of data from the KIIs was conducted, focusing on themes of interest stated in the objectives and methodology of the study and guided by the conceptual framework. From this analysis, learnings at the sectoral level for the South Asia region were drawn, with recommendations for each sector and entry points for strengthening ADB's work around GESI in South Asia.

Limitations

10. The review of literature and documents across the seven sectors in six countries revealed a significant gap in research and programming on male engagement for gender equality, in traditionally male-dominated sectors, such as energy, financial management, and transport. This gap impacted the ability to undertake a deeper analysis of success and challenges for these sectors.

11. The stocktaking sought to include initiatives covered by four stakeholder groups (government, civil society, private sector, and donors and bilateral organizations). Due to various factors, including challenges in accessing documentation and resources, the review largely focused on government and civil society initiatives, with a limited number of private sector and donor/bilateral initiatives reviewed. The study also sought to interview key representatives of multiple stakeholder groups across the six countries. Due to interruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and difficulties in scheduling interviews, there is variation in the number of interviews conducted across the six countries, particularly with government stakeholders.

APPENDIX 2

LIST OF KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

Bangladesh
1. Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives
2. Roads and Highways Department
3. Ministry of Power, Energy and Mineral Resources and Ministry of Agriculture
4. Ministry of Labour and Employment
5. Ministry of Education
6. Ministry of Women and Children Affairs
7. Dhaka North City Corporation and Dhaka South City Corporation
8. Manusher Jonno Foundation
9. Awaj Foundation
10. United Nations Population Fund
11. United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
Bhutan
1. Women Division, National Commission for Women and Children
2. Ministry of Education
3. Ministry of Agriculture and Forests – Directorate
4. Policy and Planning Division, Ministry of Works and Human Settlement
5. Department of Engineering, Ministry of Works and Human Settlement
6. Department of Roads, Ministry of Works and Human Settlement
7. Water and Sanitation Division, Ministry of Works and Human Settlement
8. Policy and Planning Division, Ministry of Health
9. Health Sector Development Program, Ministry of Health
10. Department of Hydropower & Power Systems, Ministry of Economic Affairs
11. Department of Renewable Energy, Ministry of Economic Affairs
12. Human Resource Division, Druk Green Power Corporation Limited
13. Department of National Budget, Ministry of Finance
14. Royal Monetary Authority – Financial Inclusion Secretariat
15. Water and Sanitation Division, Thimphu Thromde
16. Policy and Planning Division, Ministry of Labour and Human Resources

17. Skills Training Enhancement Project, Ministry of Labour and Human Resources
18. Policy and Planning Division, Ministry of Information and Communications
19. Bhutan Development Bank Limited, Ministry of Finance
20. Bhutan Association of Women Entrepreneurs
21. Respect, Educate, Nurture, and Empower Women
22. Community-Based Support System
23. Tarayana Foundation
24. Bhutan Youth Development Centre
25. Bhutan Network for Empowering Women
26. Bhutan Chamber of Commerce and Industry
27. Mawangpa Water Solutions
28. Hotel and Restaurant Association of Bhutan
29. United Nations Development Programme, UN Women
30. United Nations Population Fund
31. Social Sustainability and Inclusion Unit, South Asia, The World Bank Group, Washington, DC
32. SNV Netherlands Development Organisation
33. HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation
34. Bhutan Resident Mission, Asian Development Bank
India
1. Tetra Tech
2. Ashoka University
3. Tata Institute of Social Sciences (Mumbai)
4. United Nations Development Programme
5. Centre for Financial Accountability
6. PricewaterhouseCoopers
7. EngenderHealth
8. UN Women
9. Asian Development Bank
10. Ex-International Development Research Centre
11. Azad Foundation
12. Masum
13. International Center for Research on Women

Maldives
1. Gender Empowerment and Development Department, Ministry of Gender, Family and Social Services
2. Educational Supervision and Quality Improvement Division, Ministry of Education
3. Communicable Disease Section, Health Protection Agency
4. Land and Sea Maldives
5. Society for Health Education
6. Live and Learn Environmental Education
7. Maldives Authentic Crafts Cooperative Society
8. Hope for Women
9. Family Legal Clinic
10. United Nations Population Fund
11. United Nations Resident Coordinator's Office
12. Asian Development Bank – Maldives
13. Project Management Unit, ADB and Ministry of Environment, Climate Change and Technology
Nepal
1. Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development
2. Ministry of Finance; Sana Kisan Bikas Laghubitta Bittiya Sanstha Limited
3. Ministry of Urban Development; District Urban Development Cell
4. Nepal Electricity Authority
5. Department of Water Supply and Sewerage Management
6. Ministry of Energy, Water Resources and Irrigation
7. Regional Urban Development Project, Ministry of Urban Development
8. ADB Project Directorate
9. Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizens
10. Saathi (nongovernment organization)
11. Haami Daju Bhai (nongovernment organization)
12. Feminist Dalit Organization
13. Child Workers in Nepal/MenEngage Alliance Nepal
14. National Association of Physical Disability
15. Federation of Sexual and Gender Minorities Nepal
16. Federation of Contractors Association of Nepal
17. Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry – Women Entrepreneurs Development Committee
18. The Story Kitchen (nongovernment organization)
19. Fatima Foundation (nongovernment organization)

20. Nabil Bank Limited
21. Equal Access International
22. CARE International
23. Voluntary Service Overseas
24. Millennium Challenge Account Nepal
25. The World Bank
26. UN Women
Sri Lanka
1. Ministry of Highways, Integrated Road Investment Program (iRoad)
2. Women's Bureau, Ministry of Women and Child Development
3. State Ministry of Skills Development, Vocational Education, Research & Innovations
4. Ceylon Electricity Board – Distribution Division 3
5. Lanka Electricity Company
6. Greater Colombo Water and Wastewater Management Project – Tranche 1 and Tranche 2
7. Regional Development Bank
8. Foundation for Innovative Social Development, MenEngage Alliance Sri Lanka
9. Department of Community and Family Medicine, Faculty of Medicine, University of Jaffna
10. Asian Development Bank
11. Ministry of Agriculture, Smallholder Agribusiness Partnership Program – Gender Consultant
12. The World Bank and Shanthi Maargam (nongovernment organization)
13. United Nations Development Programme
14. United Nations Population Fund
15. Chrysalis (formerly Care International)
16. Hashtag Generation (nongovernment organization)
17. Women and Media Collective
18. Youth Advocacy Network Sri Lanka
19. SEVANATHA Urban Resource Centre
20. Gender Consultant
21. Department of Development Finance, Ministry of Finance

Engaging Men and Transforming Masculinities to Achieve Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

A Stocktaking of Initiatives in South Asia

The study conducted a gender equality and social inclusion analysis to provide a reference in expanding the array of strategies for the Asian Development Bank on how to confront pervasive and persistent gender inequality in different sectors. It examines the ways in which opportunities and mechanisms have been created and sustained to engage different groups of boys and men, along with gender-diverse people, to transform masculinities as a strategy to promote gender equality. The study identifies strategies on how to engage men and boys to achieve gender equality and build knowledge around program approaches grounded in a long-term theory of change.

About the Asian Development Bank

ADB is committed to achieving a prosperous, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable Asia and the Pacific, while sustaining its efforts to eradicate extreme poverty. Established in 1966, it is owned by 69 members —49 from the region. Its main instruments for helping its developing member countries are policy dialogue, loans, equity investments, guarantees, grants, and technical assistance.

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