This brief looks at what works in gender transformative change, with a special focus on a) social norms, and b) men and boys, and masculinities. Based on a literature review of impact evaluations and analysis of good practices, it aims at giving an evidence-based overview of interventions that have the potential to lead to transformative and sustainable changes in gender relations and social norms that are relevant to Sida and its partners.

INTRODUCTION

Sweden has a longstanding commitment to gender equality[1] and women's and girls' empowerment in development cooperation and humanitarian assistance. With less than a decade left to meet the SDGs, the sobering current global trajectory is one in which it will take 135.6 years to close the gender gap worldwide.[2] The Covid-19 pandemic has both made gender inequalities more visible and worsened them. Therefore, for gender equality to become a reality, we need to adopt innovative, gender transformative approaches (GTA) in designing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating programmes.

While there is no standard definition of GTA, at the core of the approach is the need to address the root causes of gender inequality by moving beyond the individual to the structural. Two descriptions of GTA by the MenEngage Alliance[3] (box 1) and Plan International[4] (box 2) are featured below.

Box 1: GTAs refer to policies, processes and strategies that seek to critically reflect on and transform social norms and institutional practices that create and reinforce gender inequalities. GTA do not view the engagement of men and boys as an end in itself, rather as a means to transform social norms and gender power relations at their roots. GTA with men and boys are those that go beyond merely 'engaging men and boys' or educating or raising awareness of men and boys on a particular issue, and seek to create a fundamental shift in attitudes and behaviors related to masculinity and what it means to be a man within a particular society or context.

Box 2: Our **GTA** encourages critical reflection, questioning and challenging of gender norms. It also challenges the distribution of resources and roles based on a person's gender. It aims to foster an enabling policy, budgetary and institutional framework for gender equality, that adequately protects girls' and women's rights, tackles the barriers they face and meets their particular needs. It requires working at all levels (as individual, within family and relationships, as communities, institutions and societies) and across a person's life course. On top of that, it involves active listening and continuous engagement with power holders, with girls, boys, women, and men, and people of other gender identities. Of course, such a process is complex, highly context-specific and time consuming, but gender equality cannot be achieved by just one intervention, project or programme alone. Gender transformation can help us to accelerate change and tackle the root causes of gender inequality.

The first section of this Brief focuses on social norms, defined as shared social expectations among a set of people as to how people should behave. Gender norms are shared social expectations on which roles men, women, boys and girls have. This affects the roles of women and men and the relations between them. Men and women of other gender identities are also under pressure to conform to these norms. Social and gender norms vary from culture to culture and change over time.[5] The Brief highlights that to reach transformative and sustainable change it is necessary to address social norms and unequal power relations such as patriarchal structures. This change can only be brought about if development cooperation incorporates an intersectional perspective in its decision-making, strategies and programs.

1   See definitions for gender equality and related terms in the Sida publication linked below and the gender toolbox. When referring to women and men, girls and boys, it also includes non-binary people as an umbrella term for people who experience a gender identify that is neither exclusively male nor female, or is in between, or beyond both. Find out more about Sida´s work for gender equality here: Sida (2020), Gender toolbox:, Sidas work for gender equality, November.

2   World Economic Forum (2021), Global Gender Gap Report 2021, Insight Report, March.

3   MenEngage Global Alliance, Strategic Plan 2017-2020. Sida has been a key supporter of the MenEngage Alliance, an international social change network with over 1100 member organisations, including civil society organizations, academics, researchers, and advocates, and working closely with a number of UN Agencies. Find out more about their work here: https://menengage.org

4   https://plan-international.org/eu/blog/2019/01/24/blog-alex-munive-gender-transformative-approach/
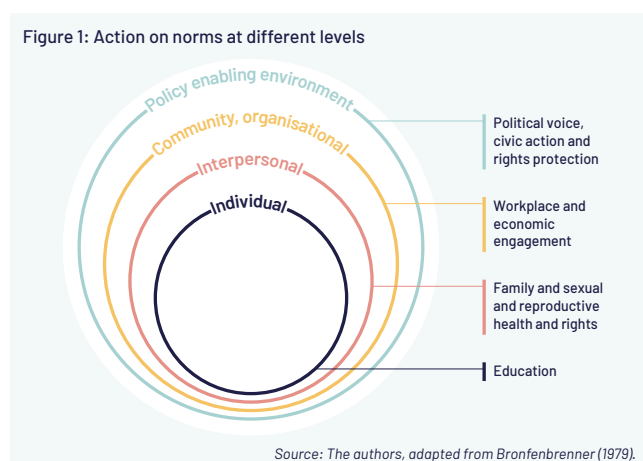
5   Definition used by SIDA´s Sida (2020), Gender toolbox:, Sidas work for gender equality, November.

The second section focuses on the work on transforming masculinities and working with men and boys, and it highlights how GTA should aim to better understand the political, economic, social and technological forces and factors that are shaping and confronting the work with men and boys on transforming patriarchal structures. It is important to note here that negative or detrimental gender norms are often maintained by both women and men.

WHAT WORKS

A. FOCUS ON SOCIAL NORMS

The ALIGN report[6] *Gender, power and progress: How norms change* examines how (and how far) gender norms have changed in the 25 years since the United Nations Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action on women´s rights was laid down in 1995. [7] It identifies four key areas where it is crucial to shift norms to achieve lasting change. (see figure 1):

Figure 1: Action on norms at different levels

Source: The authors, adapted from Bronfenbrenner (1979).

- First, at the individual level, education, which is critical for every other outcome, and has the potential to drive changes in norms across all other areas.
- Second, at the interpersonal level, sexual and reproductive health and rights along the life-cycle, enabling girls and women in particular, and diverse families as a whole, to make their own choices by controlling

fertility and limiting family size, which further enables shared responsibilities within families and an environment for women to enter paid employment.
- Third, at the community/organisational level, economies of care (consisting of the paid and unpaid labor and services that support caregiving in all its forms)[8], which can be a stepping stone for the wider economic empowerment of women and helps to give them autonomy for their own life choices.
- And finally, at the policy enabling environment, women's and people with diverse gender identities' political voice and representation. Without these, they cannot vocalise their need for equality. They cannot fight for it, achieve it or sustain it.

The Knowledge, Evidence and Learning for Development (K4D) Helpdesk report[9] *Changing gender and social norms, attitudes and behaviours* also follows the key areas above, from interventions focusing on the individual and inter-relational levels (e.g. workshops) to the community level (e.g. community dialogue, community mobilisation and youth initiatives) and the wider societal and cultural level (mass media and edutainment). It highlights the effects of such interventions, focusing on rigorous evaluations, and concludes the following:
- Changing individual attitudes may be insufficient to change behaviours; greater efforts are often needed to engage the larger community in initiatives designed to change social norms.
- Community-level interventions often have components aimed at mobilising specific people (change agents) within a community to encourage others to change by fostering dialogue and diffusing messages to people beyond direct participants. There is some evidence that community-wide mobilisation approaches are effective and can have a wide reach. See the SASA![10] example below.

Example:
SASA!, a programme designed by Raising Voices and first implemented in Uganda, targets traditional social norms that perpetuate violence against women. The SASA! Study found for example that SASA! decreased women's risk of experiencing physical violence from their male partners by 52 percent, and that SASA! increased women's sexual decision-making power (In SASA! communities, 94 percent of women agreed it is

6   ALIGN is a digital platform and programme of work that was created by a global community of researchers, practitioners and thought leaders, all committed to gender justice and equality. ALIGN provides new research, insights from practice, and grants for initiatives that increase our understanding of – and work to change – discriminatory gender norms. ALIGN is funded by Global Affairs Canada and the Ford Foundation, and is led by the Overseas Development Institute. Align and ODI (2020), Gender, Power and Progress. How Norms Change, December.
7   There are no comparative global trend data on gender and social norms, but the report draws on two main quantitative datasets: the World Values Survey and the Demographic and Health Survey. The gender social norms index, introduced by UNDP in the report: UNDP (2019), Human Development Report 2019. Beyond income, beyond averages, beyond today: Inequalities in human development in the 21st century, January and discussed in the report: UNDP, 2020 Gender Social Norms Index (GSNI). Tackling Social Norms: A game changer for gender inequalities, January. The reports comprises four dimensions—political, educational, economic and physical integrity—and is constructed based on responses to seven questions from the World Values Survey.

8   See here the ILO report Care at work concluding with a call for action to invest in a transformative package of care policies as a crucial element of the investing in the care economy agenda, the breakthrough pathway for building a better and equal world of work: ILO (2022). Care at Work. Investing in care leave and services for a more gender equal world of work.
9   Helpdesk reports are commissioned by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and other Government departments and are intended to provide an introduction to the most important evidence related to a research question. They draw on a rapid desk-based review of published literature and consultation with subject specialists. K4D, Knowledge, evidence and learning for development (2017). Changing gender and social norms, attitudes and behaviours, April.
10 Raising Voices, LSHTM and CEDOVIP (2015). Is Violence Against Women Preventable? Findings from the SASA! Study summarized for general audiences. Kampala, Uganda: Raising Voices

OK for women to refuse sex with their partner, compared to 81 percent in control communities). Essential drivers of change pointed to working with both women and men together, supporting community activists to lead the work and encouraging everyone to take action to prevent violence. SASA! is an example of how community-based interventions by sharing their new knowledge and understandings systematically with others in their networks can eventually facilitate social norms change.

- Interventions that involve group education with boys and men (sometimes in combination with women and girls) and adopt a GTA and intense community mobilisation are considered promising because of the potential for challenging learned attitudes and behaviours.
- The use of mass media and marketing approaches, as well as cultural and artistic initiatives, is an efficient way of reaching large numbers of people at relatively low cost. It is well-suited to: modelling and promoting new (non-violent) norms; promoting the benefits of new norms; changing attitudes towards harmful behaviours and norms at scale; and promoting stories of change. See the Voices for Change[11] example below.

Example:
Voices for Change (V4C) was DFID's flagship programme (2012–2017) challenging social norms that discriminate against women and girls in Nigeria. At the heart of the programme was V4C's media and communications approach. The programme recognised that changing gender norms required clear and consistent messaging over a long period, delivered from a strong brand that connected with young people. A key target of the programme were adolescent girls and boys (aged 16-25), who are the adults of tomorrow, whose attitudes and behaviour are still being formed, and who will help create the clamour for change.

B. FOCUS ON MEN and BOYS and MASCULINITIES
As the need to engage men and boys in gender equality has become more accepted, the conversation has shifted from the 'Why' to the 'How'. Despite international commitments and growing indications that there can be positive impacts of engaging men and boys and transforming masculinities to advance women's rights and gender justice, most initiatives with men and boys continue to be small-scale and short-term. Furthermore, there is risk involved when initiatives that do work with men and boys are neither feminist-informed nor gender transformative. Such initiatives have yet to increase in uptake and reach significant numbers of men and boys. Furthermore, global commitments to engaging men and boys have not yet fully translated to

national and local level policies, which generally continue to limit the understanding of "gender" as solely addressing the roles and responsibilities of women and girls.

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) guidance note on Engaging with Men and Masculinities in Fragile and Conflict-affected Settings[12], examines some of the promising practices related to working on violence reduction – especially in terms of reducing or preventing male violence against women, domestic violence, intimate partner violence and other forms of gender-based violence (GBV), as summarised below.[13]

An important source for new and emerging, rigorously evaluated research on GBV levels and the efficacy of different types of GBV prevention interventions particularly in fragile and conflict-affected situations is the UK Department for International Development (DFID)-funded 'What works to Prevent Violence against Women and Girls' consortium[14]. GBV prevention work with men in practice is a combination of the local and the international, in which internationally tested approaches are adapted to the local context. Examples include the South African Stepping Stones/Creating Futures[15] approach, the Ugandan Role Model Men[16], the Burundian 'Abatangamuco'[17] models and the Program H[18] curriculum further detailed in the example below:

Example:
Program H is designed to engage young men in changing gender norms related to masculinities that perpetuate gender inequality. The Program H curriculum was first developed by Instituto Promundo (Brazil), ECOS (Brazil), Instituto Papair (Brazil), and Salud y Género (Mexico), and it has since been adapted in at least 36 countries and named a "best practice" by the World Bank and the World Health Organization. A recent review consisting of an in depth overview of 14 impact evaluations of Program H adaptations from
12 countries concludes:
- Findings on violence perpetration were mixed, but several studies found reductions in men's perpetration

11 https://www.itad.com/project/voices-for-change/

12 OECD (2019). Engaging with men and masculinities in fragile and conflict affected states. OECD Development Policy Papers, No.17, OECD Publishing, Paris.
13 Although not referred here, the note also includes work on reintegrating former male combatants, and male victims of sexual violence. The types of violence prevention interventions vary greatly in size, scope, duration and focus, from short term awareness-raising campaigns and use of prominent men as 'gender champions' to long-term and in depth engagement with men and boys for individual and communal change. Unfortunately, measuring longer-term impacts is challenging for many of these interventions due to a lack of comprehensive pre- and post-intervention data and the fact that only in very rare cases are the impacts of interventions revisited after the end of a project.
14 https://www.whatworks.co.za
15 https://www.whatworks.co.za/global-programme-projects/stepping-stones-and-creating-futures-south-africa
16 Care International in Uganda (2019), Role Model Men and Boys of Uganda.
17 Care International. Prio Policy Brief 05/2012. The abatangamucu engaging men for women's empowerment in Burundi.
18 Doyle, K., & Kato-Wallace, J. (2021). Program H: A review of the evidence: Nearly two decades of engaging young men and boys in gender equality. Washington, DC: Promundo-US.

of partner violence or reduced acceptance of violence against women.
- Program H has contributed to positive changes in young men's knowledge, attitudes, and behavior on sexual and reproductive health and rights in several settings.
- Program H, when implemented well and culturally adapted, can lead to self-reported changes in attitudes and behaviors related to SRH and intimate partner violence.

There are other examples, like Program P[19], which provide concrete strategies to engage men globally in active fatherhood from their partner's pregnancies through their children's early years. Literature shows that fatherhood is an important entry point for engaging men[20], although an evaluation of UN Women (see description below) concludes that interventions that engaged both men and women were found to be more successful than men-only interventions in sustaining fathers' participation and shifting their behaviours in the household.

The evaluation of UN WOMEN's regional programme in the Middle East and North Africa region focusing on transforming patriarchal masculinities[21] provides a comparator study of emerging best practices for taking the work from the individual to the structural, including:
- to promote local ownership;
- to seek early engagement of government in order to ensure institutionalisation and possibility to scale up;
- to not work in isolation but rather seek to address a wider range of societal issues faced by men (such as mental health issues economic hardships and food insecurity);
- to create spaces for men to discuss their experiences and vulnerabilities, but also
- to facilitate peer networks, so that they feel support outside the programmes to deal with resistance and backlash from the community.

LESSONS LEARNED
Current knowledge-generation shows it is essential that work with men and boys is done critically, and tackles holistically the issue of male power and privilege as part of the process of transformation. There is a need to ensure that equity, rights and justice remain central in the development agenda, and that the

agenda fully challenges unequal power structures. All efforts to transform masculinities and engage men and boys are firmly rooted in feminist-informed, gender-transformative and human rights-based approaches that are fully accountable to feminist, women's rights, activists, organizations and movements.

Furthermore, there is a need to dismantle patriarchy and its intersecting systems of oppression, and to increase the uptake of gender transformative work with men and boys and take it into public policies and institutions. This work should also include women and girls as both genders upholds harmful social norms.

Within the transforming masculinities field, there are concerns that programmes tend to focus too heavily on the individual as the site and agent of change. While the individual level has a part to play, the overemphasis at this level is perceived to have led to a gap in programming working at the institutional and ideological levels that are key to achieving sustainable change. In summary:
- Interventions that engaged both men and women were found to be more successful than men-only interventions in sustaining fathers' participation and shifting their behaviours in the household.
- Reviews of transforming patriarchal masculinities programming also found that public acknowledgement of the change in behaviour of both women and men, and positive publicity in general surrounding a programme, helped to ensure sustainability of results.
- For sustained change it is essential that community leaders, in their roles as gatekeepers and agents of culture and religion, are engaged and on board with gender transformative work.

The evidence provided in this Brief shows the need to re-orient evidence and evidence-based practice to social change, as pointed out by UN Women in their Discussion Paper on Working with Men and Boys for Gender Equality[22]: 'Our practice must be guided by evidence, but we require a more politically informed, structurally minded evidence base. This means we must "count change" not merely at the level of individuals, but also communities, institutions and social systems.'

19 https://men-care.org/what-we-do/programming/program-p/
20 See more on work on fatherhood as transformative change here: https://men-care.org/
21 UN Women (2022), Final Evaluation of UN Women's " Men and Women for Gender Equality" Programme. (draft report)

22 UNWOMEN (2020), Discussion Paper number 37, Work with men and boys for gender equality: a review of field formation, the evidence base and future directions, November.