

Thematic Brief 1

KEY PRINCIPLES AND CONCEPTS WHEN ADDRESSING CEFMU

In order to effectively tackle child early and forced marriage and unions (CEFMU), a gender-transformative approach is necessary, and it is important to ensure that interventions are holistic, multi-sectoral and diverse in nature and design. This is because the drivers and consequences of CEFMU are both multifaceted, and deeply rooted in gender inequality.

There are a number of key principles that are helpful in ensuring a strong, gender-transformative approach to CEFMU programming, as well as other considerations to bear in mind, particularly in relation to child and youth safeguarding, ‘doing no harm’ and girl-led youth activism. Find out more about such key principles and programming elements in this brief!



KEY PRINCIPLES

1. WOMEN’S AND GIRLS’ RIGHTS ARE HUMAN RIGHTS

The international community has repeatedly emphasised and agreed on the universality and indivisibility of human rights. Women’s and girls’ rights are integral to all human rights enshrined in regional and international human rights instruments. These include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and all other core human rights treaties and instruments. Women’s and girls’ rights are also integral to a rights-based approach to development, and CEFMU programme design and interventions must recognise this as an important and inherent outcome in itself.

2. AFFIRMATIVE ACTION IS REQUIRED TO REDRESS GENDER IMBALANCES

Affirmative action is an initiative (it could be a policy, law, scheme, or programme) that targets a specific group of people to provide them with opportunities. The idea behind affirmative action is to increase the opportunities available to underprivileged or underrepresented people. This is enshrined in the constitutions of many countries and is set out in Article 4 of CEDAW. It is also considered to be a legitimate short-term strategy for redressing and reducing gender imbalances. Affirmative action is one part of gender-transformative interventions – the token inclusion of women and girls should not be understood to be the end result. This principle highlights the importance of girl-led youth activism and engagement as part of any CEFMU intervention.



3. ADDRESSING INTERSECTIONALITY

Intersectionality in the context of gender inequality refers to a person falling under several other demographic categories that increases their exposure to inequalities of various kinds. For example, gender inequality can intersect with other inequalities such as caste, age, race, ethnicity, disability and sexuality to further marginalise certain groups of girls and women and increase their vulnerability. Intersecting identities contribute to unique experiences of oppression and varying access to justice, rights and opportunities, making women's experiences very different from one another. Programmes and projects should respond to different types of inequality so that they can meet the needs of women and girls placed in this kind of situations. Interventions must work at all levels to support the people and systems around the target beneficiaries, including families, peers, communities, service providers and government duty bearers. This is of particular importance for CEFMU prevention and elimination given its multiple and interlinked root-causes.



4. LISTEN TO WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' VOICES

Participatory research that includes the voices of girls and women must be used to understand what works to empower them, learning from girls' and women's experiences on the ground. What is applicable in one place will not necessarily work in another setting, as there is no universal approach. Women and girls, for whose development the programme intervention is designed, must be given the opportunity to transform their lives and become agents of their own empowerment. The programming must also make specific efforts to ensure members of the target groups can raise their voices and safely and meaningfully participate and lead in development.

5. CONTEXT MATTERS, THERE IS NO ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL APPROACH

Interventions should, of course, not be just the automatic application of a preconceived strategy. Although rights are universal, people's needs differ from place to place, and from one person to another. It is essential to design interventions based on different settings and contexts through consultative approaches addressing individuals' experiences and careful analysis of particular local contexts. For example, CEFMU could be a culturally induced practice in some places, and a form of religious practice in other places. Specific strategies should be used to address the issue in different contexts. Therefore, the Toolkit needs to be viewed through the lens of each practitioner's own specific context, as we shall see in the following sections.

6. PROTECTION OF TARGET BENEFICIARIES AGAINST BACKLASH: DO NO HARM

In some countries and cultures, the empowerment of women and girls is still in its early stages as societies and communities gradually open up to positive change. There is still a long way to go, since the possibility of empowered girls and women being exposed to risk of harm is not completely ruled out in certain contexts. Discrimination against women and girls is a feature of national legislatures in several countries. In such contexts, programming and interventions should identify potential risks for the girls and young women involved and take appropriate steps to eliminate and minimise such risks or mitigate them. Girls and women must not be put at additional risk, either in terms of their own personal safety or the well-being of their families.¹



¹ Refer to the following publications for further details on these key principles: DFID PPA Learning Partnership Gender Group. (2015). What works to achieve gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment? ActionAid UK; Christian Aid. <http://hdl.handle.net/11283/565113> UNICEF ROSA. (2018). Regional Office for South Asia gender toolkit 2018: Integrating gender in programming for every child in South Asia. UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia. <https://www.unicef.org/rosa/reports/regional-office-south-asia-gender-toolkit-2018>

KEY ELEMENTS OF A GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACH

When designing a project to address CEFMU, a gender-transformative programming and influencing approach requires you to go beyond merely addressing 'symptoms' and explicitly tackle the root causes of gender inequality, exclusion and discrimination. A gender-transformative approach addresses unequal power relations between genders, advances the position and value of women and girls in society, and advocates for informed decision-making rights and the allocation of more national resources to gender issues.²

A strong gender-transformative programming and influencing approach would typically include the following elements, bearing in mind, of course, that there is no one-size-fits-all approach:

1. ADDRESSING GENDER NORMS THROUGHOUT THE LIFE-COURSE.

How could this element be translated from theory to practice? In Section 2 of the Toolkit, you will be encouraged to carry out a needs assessment and situation analysis to understand the needs of the girls and women and the communities they are a part of. Investing in formative research and data mapping is critical for developing an understanding of specific contexts, including beliefs and social norms, existing legal and policy frameworks, other organisations working in the area, and stakeholder interests. This is needed for designing effective interventions. The needs assessment will either confirm the suitability of the initial project idea or point to adjustments that should be made. Intervention cluster B of the Toolkit demonstrates how awareness raising helps to transform negative behaviours and social and gender norms. This will help you to design and implement appropriate and much-needed interventions.

2. STRENGTHENING GIRLS' AND YOUNG WOMEN'S AGENCY

Wondering how this could be translated from theory to practice? In Section 2 of the Toolkit, you will find tips for girls to lead youth engagement. You will be encouraged to include girls and the youth in your work, as it will result in effective project strategies that will bring transformational change.

3. IT IS A CHANCE TO DEVELOP WELL INFORMED AND CAREFULLY DESIGNED PROJECTS

You are encouraged to use media and social media platforms to implement leadership programmes, enabling girls and women to make their own decisions. Engaging and sensitising men and boys is also a way to allow women and girls to make their decisions, as discussed in more detail below. Interventions that target educating and economically empowering girls will also give them agency over their lives and decisions. Empowerment will include skills development and training.

² Plan International. (2020). *Living up to our commitment: Gender transformative programming and influencing during COVID-19*. <https://plan-international.org/publications/living-our-commitment>





4. ADVANCING BOTH THE CONDITION AND POSITION OF GIRLS, YOUNG WOMEN, AND WOMEN

To show you how this can be translated from theory into practice, the Toolkit encourages interventions to understand social systems, norms, values and behaviours, to change them. To enable change on a day-to-day basis, interventions should aim to provide safe spaces in schools, sexual and reproductive health and rights education related education, and access to opportunities. Interventions focused on developing skills are also to be pursued at the community level to demonstrate the capability of girls, displaying actual behavioural changes towards girls and women. This will subsequently change community behaviour and gender norms, leading to changes in the status and position of women and girls.

5. WORKING WITH BOYS, YOUNG MEN, AND MEN SO THAT THEY EMBRACE GENDER EQUALITY, AND EXERCISE POSITIVE AND DIVERSE MASCULINITIES

In Section 2.6, the Toolkit emphasises the need to engage and involve men and boys as part of a gender transformative approach. An effective gender transformative approach will not be achieved if only women and girls are involved in discussing and addressing gender inequality. Mobilising men and boys will help mobilise peers and develop positive and diverse masculinity. Interventions can also consider engaging fathers to promote gender equality in the households to prevent early and child marriages. Campaigns and curriculum to educate men and boys on gender equality and positive masculinity must also be considered.

6. RESPONDING TO THE DIFFERENT NEEDS AND INTERESTS OF YOUNG GIRLS AND BOYS IN ALL THEIR DIVERSITY

To show how this can be translated from theory to practice, the Toolkit time and again iterates the need for involving all relevant actors right from design through to implementation of projects. The Toolkit presents interventions that are inclusive, and that address the needs and interests of different groups, such as men and boys, and girls and women of different age groups and marital status, rural and tribal girls, girls in urban settings, girls in school and out of school, the most marginalised, and so on.



7. FOSTERING AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR GENDER EQUALITY AND GIRLS' RIGHTS

The Toolkit encourages interventions where different stakeholders work together to support achieving gender equality. For example, in the Preparatory and Design phase, the Toolkit encourages assessing the relevance of potential ideas through consultations with relevant stakeholders. It also suggests carrying out a validation process with key stakeholders, and considers how one can engage them at different levels and stages of the project cycle. Before going into explaining interventions, each section to the Toolkit includes key stakeholders to be considered in any intervention.

Take a look at the positive outcomes that a gender-transformative approach can bring about as reflected in the following results witnessed by Plan International:

➤ **Girls and young women are increasingly making decisions about their bodies, lives and futures** after receiving knowledge and information about their sexual and reproductive health and rights.

➤ **Girls and young women are becoming agents of change** in their communities, with many joining – and some leading – local CEFMU-focused campaigning initiatives and activities.

➤ **Adolescent boys are increasingly taking responsibility for how their decisions affect others**, in particular after they receive education on gender equality and sexual and reproductive health and rights.

➤ **Boys and young men are actively engaged in campaigns** against CEFMU.

➤ **Girls and young women have greater economic opportunities** after attending vocational training and workshops on entrepreneurship.

➤ **Gender norms in communities are challenged in a constructive manner**, in particular when engaging with traditional, religious and community leaders, and undertaking campaigns with young people to provide alternative narratives challenging traditional and customary attitudes to child marriage.

THE 'DO NO HARM' PRINCIPLE

The 'Do No Harm' principle is a basic ethical principle, which means that in the implementation of any programme activity, the implementer will not, intentionally or otherwise, harm the communities in which the work is being implemented. It means that your actions should not cause injury or injustice to people, and in its strictest sense, it can also be applied to inactions.

As part of your CEFMU interventions, you must, therefore, ensure adopting strategies to identify, minimise and overcome harm – potential or actual – and ensure that there are consequences for anyone who does not comply with the standards or related codes of conduct.



CHILD AND YOUTH SAFEGUARDING



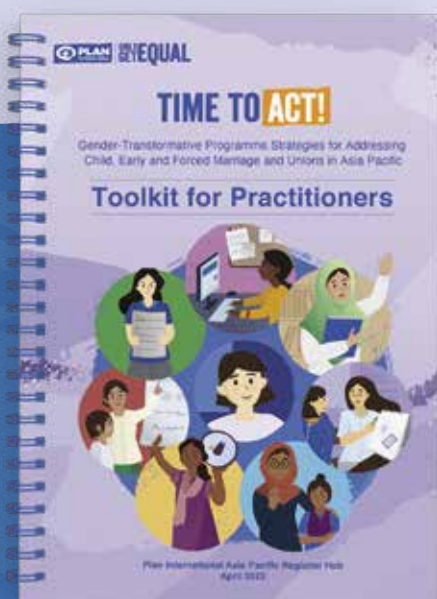
When working with children and youth, it is crucial to conduct a very careful risk assessment, and have a child and youth safeguarding and 'Do No Harm' framework in place. We need to place the protection and safeguarding of the communities you are working with at the heart of any intervention.

Plan International's Child and Youth Safeguarding Policy provides you with some useful ideas and tips about what to include in your organisation's own policy, if you do not yet have one in place.

GIRL-LED YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

To bring about lasting and transformational change, it is very important that girls and young people are involved in your work from the start – and that this continues throughout all stages of your project or programme intervention. If we fail to involve girls and young people, we risk ending up with ineffective project strategies where resources are not spent wisely in ways that will bring about impact. Failing to involve girls and young people can also lead to the implementation of unsafe or inadequate types of activities. When we do engage girls and young people, we have a better chance of developing well informed and carefully designed projects.

By involving girls and youth from the very beginning, you offer them an opportunity to be part of the positive changes taking place in their communities – they can act as active change agents who generate positive changes in their own lives. Youth engagement also contributes to girls' personal development and can contribute to their skills, empowerment and motivation to stand up for their rights and speak out. In the Toolkit, you'll find lots of top tips for successful and safe engagement of young people in girl-led youth engagement activities and interventions – make sure to take a look!



READY TO TAKE ACTION TO ADDRESS CEFMU? LET'S GO! DOWNLOAD AND CHECK THE TOOLKIT OUT TODAY!

<https://plan-international.org/asia-pacific/publications/time-to-act-toolkit-for-practitioners/>