

**FEMINIST COLLABORATIVE EVALUATION OF UN WOMEN'S  
APPROACH TO SOCIAL NORMS CHANGE**



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The evaluation team was comprised of Sabrina Evangelista as the Regional Evaluation Specialist and Team Leader, Sonal Zaveri as Evaluation and Social Norms Consultant, Arushi Pankaj Dubey as Regional Evaluation Analyst, Mahesh Ramesh Krishnan as Research and Evaluation Intern, and Ayca Atabey, consultant also supported key analyses. Case studies were also carried out in various UN Women offices. In Mexico, Barbados, and Grenada, the case studies were led by Michael Francis Craft, Regional Evaluation Specialist, with support from the National Evaluation Consultant, Veronica Martinez and Evaluation Consultant, Erin Stern. For Nepal and Samoa, the case studies were led by Sabrina Evangelista, Regional Evaluation Specialist, with support from National Evaluation Consultants, Rita Khatiwada and Lemau Palaamo. In Serbia and Kyrgyzstan, the case studies were led by Isabel Suarez Garcia, Regional Evaluation Specialist, with contributions from Evaluation Research Consultant Ayca Atabey, and support from Evaluation Consultants, Marija Babovic and National evaluation Consultant, Toigonbai Bakirov.

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## **INDEPENDENT EVALUATION, AUDIT AND INVESTIGATION SERVICE (IEAIS)**

Independent Evaluation Service (IES)

UN Women

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# ACRONYMS

CSO	Civil Society Organization
EVAW	Ending Violence Against Women
GALS	Gender Action Learning System
GEA	Gender Equality Accelerator
IEAS	Independent Evaluation and Audit Services
IES	Independent Evaluation Service
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
LGBTIQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, and Queer/Questioning +
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PAPDU	Political Analysis and Programme Development Unit
PPID	Policy Programme and Intergovernmental Division
RMS	Results Management System
SAA	Social Analysis and Action
SASA	Start, Awareness, Support and Action
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

# FOREWORD

The global community has recognized the importance of challenging and transforming harmful social norms as a core strategy in advancing gender equality and women's empowerment. This recognition is reflected in various international frameworks, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and UN Women's Strategic Plan 2022-2025. Achieving the goals outlined in these frameworks relies on our collective ability to address and shift the social norms that underpin gender-based inequality.

This formative evaluation synthesis report consolidates key findings from multiple sources of evidence collected across diverse regions and contexts, providing a comprehensive overview of UN Women's approach to social norms change with a view to how it can move this fundamental area of work forward from an organizational perspective. As a Feminist Collaborative Evaluation, the perspectives and experiences of women and marginalized groups were prioritized as central to the evaluation process. In practical terms, this meant empowering rights holders engaged through UN Women's efforts by listening to their stories about what social norms means to them within their unique context and undertaking collective analysis of who holds power to change harmful social norms within their own communities. As a central aspect of this collaborative evaluation, the evaluation team also worked closely with UN Women personnel to ensure that

the very process of the evaluation was a tool for learning and advancing thinking on how to approach social norms change within UN Women's work, providing real-time use and inputs into the ongoing development of the area of work.

This evaluation report comes at a critical time as the organization reached the mid-point of the Strategic Plan. I am confident that the evaluation will inspire action given the fundamental importance of social norms for advancing gender equality and the empowerment of women in all their diversity. The evaluation recognizes UN Women's value added is its collaboration with women's civil society and grassroots organizations and feminist approaches that are framed appropriately within each context. The evaluation also recognizes that real action will entail rallying the support of key funding partners and starting from within UN Women to change the way things are done. Responding to the recommendations of the evaluation will require bold leadership and decision-making that recognizes that we must hold ourselves accountable and build capacities if we are to foster change globally and truly advance gender equality and women's empowerment through an intersectional lens.



**Lisa Sutton**

*Director, Independent Evaluation, Audit and Investigation Service (IEAIS)*



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# FEMINIST COLLABORATIVE EVALUATION OF UN WOMEN'S APPROACH TO SOCIAL NORMS CHANGE

Photo: © Stephan Gladieu / World Bank

This report presents the findings, conclusions and recommendations of the Feminist Collaborative Evaluation on UN Women's approach to social norms change. The evaluation was conducted by UN Women's Independent Evaluation Service (IES) of the Independent Evaluation, Audit and Investigation Service (IEAIS) which, in line with the UN Women Evaluation Policy,<sup>1</sup> conducts independent evaluations with the aim of enhancing accountability, informing decision-making and contributing to learning. The evaluation was initiated April 2023, with a focus on insights on social norms efforts implemented globally across UN Women

## BACKGROUND

The Beijing Platform for Action recognized discriminatory social norms as a fundamental barrier to women's ability to enjoy their human and socioeconomic rights. Data from the Social Institutions and Gender Index<sup>2</sup> note that "the inequalities observed and experienced by women and girls are just the tip of the iceberg: discriminatory norms and social institutions rest below the surface, reinforcing the status quo."<sup>3</sup> Social norm change plays a pivotal role in advancing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by empowering women to actively contribute to, and benefit from, progress across all Sustainable Development Goals.

UN agencies, including UN Women, are increasingly acknowledging that addressing social norms will pave the way for addressing gender inequality through transformative norm change. The UN Women Strategic Plan 2022–2025 adopted an explicit outcome dedicated to social norms, Outcome 3: "Positive social norms, including through engaging men and boys."

While the inclusion of social norms as a specific UN Women Strategic Plan outcome has been a recent development, UN Women programming has addressed social norms change as a strategy directly or indirectly in both its broader advocacy on gender equality and in its programmatic work.

The Independent Evaluation Service undertook a formative evaluation of UN Women's approach to social norms change to support the production of real-time insights to feed into the development of the social norms outcome area and facilitate learning about approaches aimed at changing social norms to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment. A Feminist Collaborative Approach was employed entailing systematically identifying opportunities for collaboration with stakeholders in the planning and implementation of the evaluation, while applying the feminist principles shared by the Policy Programme and Intergovernmental Division (PPID) on social norms and adapted by the Independent Evaluation Service.

<sup>1</sup> UN Women (2020). Evaluation Policy of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women available at <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/08/evaluation-policy-of-the-united-nations-entity-for-gender-equality-and-the-empowerment-of-women>

<sup>2</sup> The Social Institutions and Gender Index, conducted by OECD Development Centre, is a cross-country measure of discriminatory social institutions, covering 160 countries.

<sup>3</sup> Social Institutions and Gender Index 2023 Global Report: Gender Equality in Times of Crisis. Available at: [https://oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/4607b7c7-en/1/3/1/index.html?itemId=/content/publication/4607b7c7-en&csp\\_ =a6be4df33c99961512705b97977ea566&itemGO=oecd&itemContentType=book](https://oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/4607b7c7-en/1/3/1/index.html?itemId=/content/publication/4607b7c7-en&csp_ =a6be4df33c99961512705b97977ea566&itemGO=oecd&itemContentType=book)

HOW THE EVALUATION WAS CONDUCTED: SOURCES AND METHODOLOGIES FOR DATA COLLECTION



**COLLABORATIVE EVALUATION**

Collaborative Evaluation is an evaluation in which there is a significant degree of collaboration between the evaluator and stakeholders in the evaluation process (Rodriguez-Campos, L., 2005). A Collaborative Evaluation stance requires evaluators to enhance evaluation activities by creating environments that invite and allow stakeholder involvement. The Feminist Collaborative Evaluation identified opportunities for collaboration with key stakeholders:



**Country level:** Co-creation with UN Women Country Office staff and engagement of women's rights activists as an advisory group



**Regional level:** Co-creation workshops including social norms focal points



**Headquarters level:** Points of collaboration identified throughout the process including approach, Experts Group Meeting and sharing of information



**MIXED METHODS DATA**

Mixed methods and participatory data collection : qualitative and quantitative data collected and triangulated.



**7 SURVEYS CONDUCTED**

Personnel survey for case study countries.  
Male: 11 | Female: 71  
Response Rate: 46.3 % (N=82/177)



**200+ DOCUMENTS REVIEWED**

Desk review, meta-synthesis of evaluations, portfolio analysis, reports, strategic documents, external mapping on social norms efforts etc.

**432**

STAKEHOLDERS ENGAGED THROUGH KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS AND FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS



**CASE STUDY COUNTRIES ACROSS 4 REGIONS**

**311 INDIVIDUALS CONSULTED THROUGH THE CASE STUDIES:**



185 members of the community



101 stakeholders from the UN Women case study offices



98 external partners (UN, Implementing Partners, CSOs, Government)



28 members of the advisory groups

**CASE STUDY COUNTRIES AND THEMATIC FOCUS OF SOCIAL NORMS EFFORTS**



Ending violence against women



Women's economic empowerment



Leadership/Governance



Campaign



HIV



## KEY FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The UN Women Strategic Plan 2022–2025 was not accompanied by a clear organizational plan on how to support implementation of the new social norms systemic outcome area, and work to articulate a coherent approach across the organization was ongoing during this evaluation. Widely acknowledged internally is the need to build internal coherence and competencies around the approaches applied to address social norms given the disconnect that persists between organizational units on conceptual approaches for social norms programming. The evaluation concluded that there is clear rationale for UN Women to clarify and strengthen its approach to social norms work given its centrality to UN Women's efforts. However, progress against the outcome may be limited without significant investment in strengthening institutional capacity and organizational buy-in on a common approach, language and principles for social norms programming.

Experience based on the roll-out of the social norms systemic outcome area highlights broader organizational challenges in bridging silos that the Strategic Plan 2022–2025 set out to address through the establishment of the systemic outcomes and the evaluation concluded that bridging of these silos needs to be prioritized. The need for formal mechanisms that facilitate outreach and accountability between units with respect to the systemic outcomes was identified. Social norms programming also highlighted a broader organizational challenge related to fragmented and ad hoc approaches, and lack of accountability for integrating key cross-cutting topics, including LGBTIQ+ rights, transforming patriarchal masculinities, racial justice and disability inclusion.

The evaluation case studies highlight that social norms must be understood within the local context and that there is no “one-size-fits-all” approach. Methodologies must be tailored and contextualized, and better still, built from the bottom up in a participatory and collaborative manner. While sometimes implicit, several social norm change approaches that action feminist principles and were rooted in paradigms from the global south were identified. These approaches value and prioritize collective and participatory processes rather than application of pre-determined frameworks not owned or developed locally. The evaluation identified the potential for UN Women to provide a menu of methodologies

rooted in feminist principles and global south paradigms with respect to the process for identifying social norms and pathways of change. Existing practices within UN Women that embed feminist approaches for social norms programming were highlighted, such as an internal exploration of social norms at the Country Office level as a first step in unpacking common social norms experienced by personnel and exploring their own unconscious bias and undertaking power brokers and institutional analysis.

It is well documented that social norms are difficult to measure.<sup>4</sup> The evaluation identifies that at UN Women these challenges are compounded by several factors identified through the evidence gathered. Evidence of contributions to addressing discriminatory social norms at both community and institutional levels were largely missing due to lack of targeting in programme design and tools to systematically collect data related to social norms change. Challenges include perceived short-term and donor-linked nature of programming efforts. There is a need to both measure change through small-scale initiatives and through longer-term and broader-scale measurement of social norms. Equally important are ongoing measurement approaches, where the constant ebb and flow of social norms change are necessary to track, including where there is backsliding on commitments or actions, backlash or unintended consequences so that it can inform programming adjustments.<sup>5</sup> Attention will be needed to ensure consistency in measurement and reporting against the Strategic Plan. There are several notable measurement approaches which UN Women can learn from, leverage and use to inform guidance for supporting measurement of social norms at various levels of the organization. For example, the Gender Equality Attitudes Survey,<sup>6</sup> the Nepal Country Office Storytelling Initiative,<sup>7</sup> and the Joint Partners for Prevention Programme UN multi-country study on men and violence in 2013 across six countries in Asia and the Pacific<sup>8</sup>. Partnerships with UN sister organizations that have invested in social norms measurement, such as the UNDP Gender Social Norms Index,<sup>9</sup> and programming also present an opportunity for UN Women to broaden the scope and scale of measurement.

<sup>4</sup> UN Women Social Norms Discussion Paper, Transforming Patriarchal Masculinities Position Paper, meta-analysis of evaluations, country case studies, etc.

<sup>5</sup> UN Women Discussion Paper: [Social Norms, Gender and Development: A Review of Research and Practice](#), November 2023

<sup>6</sup> The survey was initiated in 2018 with partners including private sector companies: AT&T, Johnson and Johnson, Kantar, Procter & Gamble, and Unilever; and Kantar—a data, insights, and consulting company—was hired to develop and conduct the fieldwork.

<sup>7</sup> Hamro Sakakarya: Our Collective Action. The storytelling initiative by UN Women Nepal aims to understand pathways for social norm change and promote gender equality through storytelling. For more details refer to: <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/np-The-Storytelling-Initiative.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Partners for Prevention was a regional joint programme of UNDP, UNFPA, UN Women and UNV for Asia and the Pacific, which ran from 2013 to 2018.

<sup>9</sup> UNDP. (2023). [Gender Social Norms Index \(GSNI\)](#). The GSNI consists of four dimensions: political, educational, economic and physical integrity. It is developed using responses to seven questions from the World Values Survey, which are utilized to formulate seven indicators.

The evaluation concluded that for UN Women’s social norms programming to be fit for purpose, there is a need for the organization to leverage its added value in application of feminist principles, because communities themselves must define social norms within their diverse settings and co-create pathways of change to realize sustainable and transformative change. Integrating these principles and tools into the organization’s programme cycle (for both Strategic Notes and projects) can support better articulation of social norms and a more integrated approach across the thematic areas.

The evaluation identifies that UN Women can add value to the social norms space through its reach to the diverse women and communities it serves, which can facilitate meaningfully engaging communities to unpack social norms and power dynamics and co-create pathways for change. Guidance and capacity-building could be provided on how to conduct collaborative research and co-design processes to meaningfully engage partners in understanding and defining the key social norms that are underlying progress against the Strategic Note. The evaluation identifies opportunities for more systematic engagement with women’s organizations across UN Women programming. Civil society is not only critical as partners but also as co-creators in the process of understanding and changing social norms aimed at gender equality and women’s empowerment. Working with partners as co-analysers and co-creators will work to shift power dynamics towards prioritizing the voices and knowledge of the communities with which UN Women works. Parts of UN Women have recognized that in

addition to identifying “backlash” as a programmatic risk, strategies to plan for and counter backlash are necessary. In November 2023, UN Women’s Civil Society Division shared a “Push Forward Strategy” aimed at establishing a corporate strategy for addressing backlash against women’s rights and advocates, yet it has only recently been internally socialized.

The evaluation concludes that UN Women’s ability to reach and amplify the voices and knowledge of the women, women’s rights defenders, and civil society organizations with which the organization works is also its added value in the social norms space and thus it should prioritize investing in these partners and explicitly strategizing how to mitigate and deal with backlash, especially as it affects the most marginalized groups.

The evaluation noted that coordination with United Nations partners related to social norms is occurring in different ways i.e. through joint programmes, joint guidance and joint advocacy. However, such work is largely ad hoc, project specific and implicitly addressing social norms, which limits the ability to leverage each other’s capacities to collectively advance social norms for gender equality at scale. The evaluation recognizes the significant efforts and investments focused on social norms change within the UN system, primarily from the social-behavioural change approach and concludes that UN Women will need to proactively engage, ensure clear messaging on its value added within this space and build its capacities at all levels to be able to meaningfully contribute and complement existing approaches.

## RECOMMENDATIONS



### RECOMMENDATION 1

UN Women should clarify the level of investment the organization seeks for strengthening UN Women’s approach to social norms, and in line with this decision adopt a corporate strategy for strengthening related institutional capacity.



### RECOMMENDATION 2

Establish clear governance and accountability for action for the systemic outcome for social norms including its implementation from an intersectional perspective.



### RECOMMENDATION 3

At the corporate level UN Women should commit to social norms as a central tenet for programming, leveraging UN Women’s added value in the social norms space and prioritizing Global South knowledge and equalizing power dynamics with UN Women’s key women’s rights partners.



### RECOMMENDATION 4

Prioritize investing in meaningful collaboration and participatory approaches with women-led organizations and civil society organizations aligned with local needs and explicitly strategizing how to mitigate and deal with backlash, especially as it affects the most marginalized groups.



### RECOMMENDATION 5

UN Women should proactively position itself as a key player in UN coordination related to social norms by articulating its unique role and contributions in this area, building relevant capacities to influence dominant approaches to social norms change from a gender perspective and actively seek opportunities to amplify its influence within the UN system and beyond.



Photo: Oceania Rugby and the Samoa Rugby Union

# 1. BACKGROUND

## 1.1 Purpose, objectives and scope

### Purpose

The purpose of this Feminist Collaborative Evaluation was to support the production of real-time insights to (a) feed into development of the social norms outcome area; and (b) facilitate learning about approaches aimed at changing social norms to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment.

### Intended users

The primary intended users of the evaluation are UN Women's PPID team dedicated to the social norms outcome area, senior management and programmatic staff at Regional and Country Offices. The evaluation is also intended to be useful for other actors working in social norms, including civil society, UN agencies, international and national non-governmental organizations, and national partners, as well as international and regional development partners. IES may utilize the evaluation to feed into evaluation tools and guidance for evaluating UN Women's social norms efforts.

### Objectives

The key objectives addressed by the Feminist Collaborative Evaluation include:

- **Contribute to building an understanding of the social norms efforts implemented by UN Women** and the implicit/explicit theories of change being applied through programmatic efforts across different regions and thematic areas.
- **Feed into headquarters-led programmatic development of the social norms area** with evaluative evidence.
- **Contribute to building a repository** (including internal and external information) of approaches to measuring social norms, which could be used by UN Women Country Offices to support programming on social norms.

- **Contribute to the understanding of UN Women's niche/potential role** with respect to social norms programming in the UN system and beyond, considering the efforts of civil society at both country and global levels.
- **Identify lessons learned and recommendations related to future programming and the corporate-level requirements** or systems necessary to support and measure progress in this area of work.

### Scope

The Feminist Collaborative Evaluation included efforts primarily between 2019 and the present day, with the understanding that the UN Women Strategic Plan 2022–2025 introduced a systemic outcome on social norms. The regions that expressed interest in an evaluation or case study included: Asia and the Pacific, Europe and Central Asia, Eastern and Southern Africa, and Latin America and the Caribbean regions, and therefore were the focus of the analyses and case studies. Evaluation questions within the scope of this evaluation are detailed in Table 1 and aligned with OECD-Development Assistance Committee evaluation criteria.

**TABLE 1: Evaluation questions**

Evaluation criteria	Question
Relevance, effectiveness	What have we learned about the social norms programmatic work implemented by UN Women?
Organizational effectiveness	What are the opportunities at the organizational level for supporting UN Women personnel in planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating social norms work?
Coherence	What are the opportunities and niche for UN Women to contribute externally to the social norms programmatic space?

**FIGURE 1: Adapted version of feminist principles proposed by the PPID Social Norms Outcome**

#### Learn from the grassroots.



Engage with scholars, scholarship, practitioners from the global south on theories and practices.

Engage women, in their diversity, and their representatives, including women's organizations.

#### Participatory within UN Women.



Norms cut across all thematic areas of UN Women's work.

Engagement of UN Women personnel is critical in ensuring a collaborative approach that recognizes the experience within the organization.

#### Look at norms from the lens of gender power hierarchies.



Recognizing there is a power hierarchy inherent in norms related to gender.

Norms are embedded across the socio-econolocial model recognizing they exist at different levels and the interactions between these levels.

#### Intersectional feminist inquiry and elaboration.



Explicitly recognizing the power dynamics of those leading the work and facilitating co-creation and mutual benefits.

Embedding a leave no one behind lens by looking across diverse identities and how these affect social norms.

## 1.2 Evaluation approach and methodology

The methodology was defined in collaboration with key stakeholders. Collaborative evaluation is defined as “an approach that actively engages program stakeholders as members of the evaluation team to the extent that they are able and willing”.<sup>10</sup> This feminist collaborative approach entailed systematically identifying opportunities for collaboration with stakeholders in the planning and implementation of the evaluation – applying the feminist principles outlined below – while at the same time the evaluation team maintained the professional integrity and independence of the final evaluation products. This Feminist Collaborative Evaluation employed an adapted version of the feminist principles proposed by the PPID Social Norms Outcome leads<sup>11</sup> (see Figure 1). In practice, the Feminist Collaborative Evaluation promoted collaboration throughout the evaluation process, which included a collaborative design process through consultations with both the Social Norms Outcome leads and the selected case study country personnel; an advisory group of feminist leaders for each country case study was established; sharing analyses in real time as they became available, in some cases engaging personnel in focus group discussions where the pathways of change were co-created; co-creation workshops with Country Office personnel to make sense of and validate the information; and participatory cross-regional workshops to co-create recommendations for the case studies.

The Feminist Collaborative Evaluation emphasized the following principles of evaluation at UN Women:<sup>12</sup> innovation, quality and credibility, independence and impartiality, fair power relations and empowerment, participation and inclusion.

Given the nascent state of corporate-level thinking on the social norms area of work, the focus was on unearthing bespoke pathways of change at country level through the case studies; therefore, a corporate level theory of change was not developed. The evaluation identified that no one tool or framework would be adequate to explore approaches applied to address discriminatory social norms because they must be unique or adapted as appropriate to the context. A menu of options was available, and the Feminist Collaborative Evaluation adopted an iterative and participatory approach to allow for flexibility

and co-creation. The evaluation made use of mixed qualitative and quantitative methods, with a combination of secondary data, including desk-based analyses of existing information; and primary data collection, including surveys, workshops, focus group discussions, storytelling and key informant interviews.

There were five key streams of work:

1. **Meta-synthesis of evaluations:** To identify trends in findings, conclusions and recommendations related to UN Women’s social norms work based on evaluative evidence. The criteria for selecting the evaluation universe were UN Women evaluations produced from 2019 to 2022, rated as “good” or “very good.” Among 136 evaluations meeting these criteria, a sample of approximately 32 per cent, i.e. 45 evaluations, was chosen for review based on explicit or implicit references to social norms in project/programme outcomes. Additionally, at least one Country Portfolio Evaluation per region were included and project evaluations was selected in a manner that ensured regional and thematic diversity (see Annex 11).
2. **Portfolio review:** To provide an understanding of the breadth and depth of UN Women’s work and investment in social norms across the organization, including prior to the introduction of the systemic outcome area, UN Women’s ATLAS and Results Management System (RMS) beta dashboards were reviewed. See Section 3.1 and 3.2 for details.
3. **Country case studies:** To explore the pathways of change and inform implicit/explicit theories of change that can provide inspiration and lessons learned for social norms programming efforts at UN Women (the methodology for capturing pathways of change related to social norms is presented in Figure 2). The seven case studies reviewed efforts from 2019 to date, covering approximately four years. The criteria for the countries selected (see Figure 3b)<sup>13</sup> ensured inclusion of the four regions that expressed interest in participating in the Feminist Collaborative Evaluation and were based on the desk review and consultations with

<sup>10</sup> O’Sullivan, R. G. (2012). Collaborative evaluation within a framework of stakeholder-oriented evaluation approaches. Evaluation, Assessment, & Policy Connections, School of Education, University of North Carolina.

<sup>11</sup> As shared in a presentation on 17 April 2023.

<sup>12</sup> UN Women. (2022). How to manage gender responsive evaluation: Evaluation Handbook. Available at: [UN-Women-Evaluation-Handbook-2022-en.pdf \(unwomen.org\)](https://unwomen.org/2022-en.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> The selection of country case studies is based on various criteria in consultation with UN Women personnel at regional and country levels.

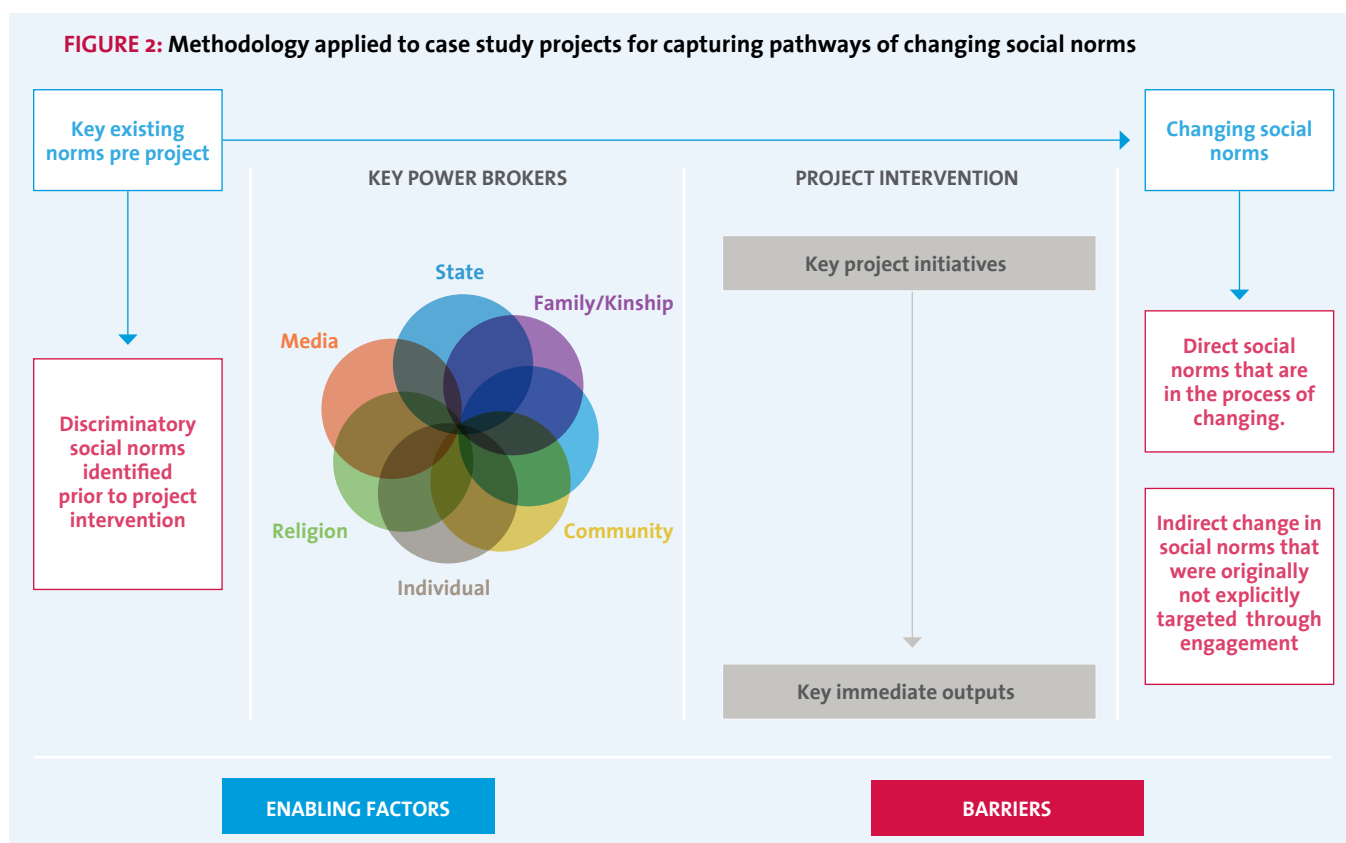
UN Women personnel at regional and country levels. Multiple methods were used – both quantitative and qualitative, primary and secondary data collection – including feminist enquiry that supports co-learning, reflection and participation. A personnel survey was conducted with Country Offices in the case study countries with a response rate of 46 per cent (N=82/177). The participatory approach was overarching to ensure that all voices were heard and included a feminist leaders' advisory group.<sup>14</sup> Care was taken to ensure co-creation of the methodology, data gathering, analysis and co-validation of information gathered, as described above. See Annex 10 for more details.

4. **Light review of UN agency social norms efforts:** To understand the work of other UN entities in the social norms space as input to defining a potential

niche for UN Women. A PPID-led mapping exercise (2022) was explored as a starting point and an additional desk review was completed, key informant interviews were conducted primarily at the country level to inform the analysis of potential gaps and role for UN Women.

5. **Review of UN Women internal systems:** To review internal systems and identify what type of support is available for UN Women personnel to plan, implement, monitor and evaluate programmatic efforts on social norms. UN Women's Policy, Procedures and Guidance and RMS were reviewed. Key informant interviews informed the analysis to identify opportunities for supporting UN Women's social norms work.

**FIGURE 2: Methodology applied to case study projects for capturing pathways of changing social norms**



<sup>14</sup> A feminist leader's advisory group was set up for each case study country, consisting of up to five members who were thought leaders in gender and social norms in their respective countries. The advisory group helped to:

- Define social and gender norms and changes as understood by them and generally in the country.
- Share progress in changing social norms, including good practices and challenges.
- Provide insights regarding what they expected, liked and loved to see concerning social change in their context.
- Provide an understanding of the way forward.
- Describe the perceived role of UN Women in the area of social norm change.

Consultation with the advisory group took place twice during the data collection phase: once prior to the country visit to review the Method Note and tools used by the UN Women team during the field data visit, and again at the end of the visit to share and build ownership of the findings.

### 1.3 Ethics, gender equality and no one left behind

UN Women evaluations follow mechanisms to ensure high-quality evaluation processes and products in accordance with the UN Women Evaluation Policy and Handbook, and with the United Nations Evaluation Group's established norms and standards. All products are subject to quality review by the Director, IEAIS; the Chief of Evaluation; and a peer reviewer.

The Feminist Collaborative Evaluation ensured that evaluators have personal and professional integrity and abide by the [UN Evaluation Group Ethical Guidelines](#) for evaluation and the [UN Evaluation Group's Pledge of Commitment to Ethical Conduct in Evaluation](#) in the UN system to ensure that the rights of individuals involved in an evaluation are respected. Evaluators have acted with cultural sensitivity and paid particular attention to protocols, codes and recommendations that may be relevant to their interactions with women. UN Women has developed a [UN Women Evaluation Consultants Agreement Form](#) for evaluators that was signed as part of the contracting process.

The evaluation's value added is its impartial and systematic assessment of the programme or intervention.

Although the Feminist Collaborative Evaluation was a collaborative process, the involvement of stakeholders did not interfere with the impartiality of the evaluation. The evaluator(s) had the final judgment on the findings, conclusions and recommendations of the evaluation report, and while the evaluator(s) were responsive to feedback from all stakeholders, they operated with professional integrity to avoid undue pressure to change information in the report. Additionally, it was ensured that if the evaluator(s) identified issues of wrongdoing, fraud or other unethical conduct, UN Women procedures were followed and confidentiality was maintained.

Data collected through interviews and group discussions ensured the consent of participants, confidentiality and avoidance of harm considerations by following UN Women's protocol for data collection related to violence against women and its data management plan (see Annex 7 on data collection tools and Annex 8 on ethical guidelines, data collection protocol and the data management plan). A national consultant, well-versed in the local language, was recruited for each case study to ensure participation of a full range of stakeholders.

### 1.4 Evaluation limitations

One of the key limitations is that there was no existing common definition, principles or framework for social norms work at UN Women. The evaluation therefore sought to prioritize understanding stakeholders' perspectives through the data collection efforts and sought to apply these varied interpretations to the common frameworks in use. Case study findings may not be representative of the Country Office's complete work in social norms given that the pathways of change and case study discussions largely focused on specific projects/programmes. The participating Country Offices may also have made more efforts in this area of work compared with other UN Women offices given their interest in participating as a case study on social norms; and therefore may not be representative of UN Women social norms efforts at large. The portfolio review and meta-synthesis provided information to triangulate evidence for a broader understanding of UN Women's efforts. In some cases, personnel from UN Women participated in discussions with stakeholders. While this allowed for a collaborative approach and experiential learning as part of the process of unpacking an understanding of social norms, it may also have presented bias. As this is not a summative evaluation, the collaboration and participatory nature of the evaluation was prioritized.

For the meta-synthesis, analysis and findings are limited to the level and depth of insights provided in the evaluation reports conducted between 2019 and 2022, prior to introduction of the systemic outcome on social norms. The evaluation team made efforts to ensure thematic diversity in the evaluation sample, yet some thematic areas may be overrepresented because of the social norms related information they capture. Further, due to the geographic variation in the evaluation sample, some regions may also be covered to a greater degree. To mitigate this issue, illustrative highlights were drawn in a geographically representative manner.

With respect to the portfolio review, two UN Women information systems were accessed: ATLAS and RMS, both with key limitations.<sup>15</sup> Information from ATLAS provided a retrospective perspective as the information predated the introduction of the social norms outcome. While the team undertook a process of identifying and validating which projects could be considered related to social norms, given the lack of definition or framework of the term within UN Women, it was largely left to personnel to interpret what is considered to be a social norms project, which varied greatly across offices.

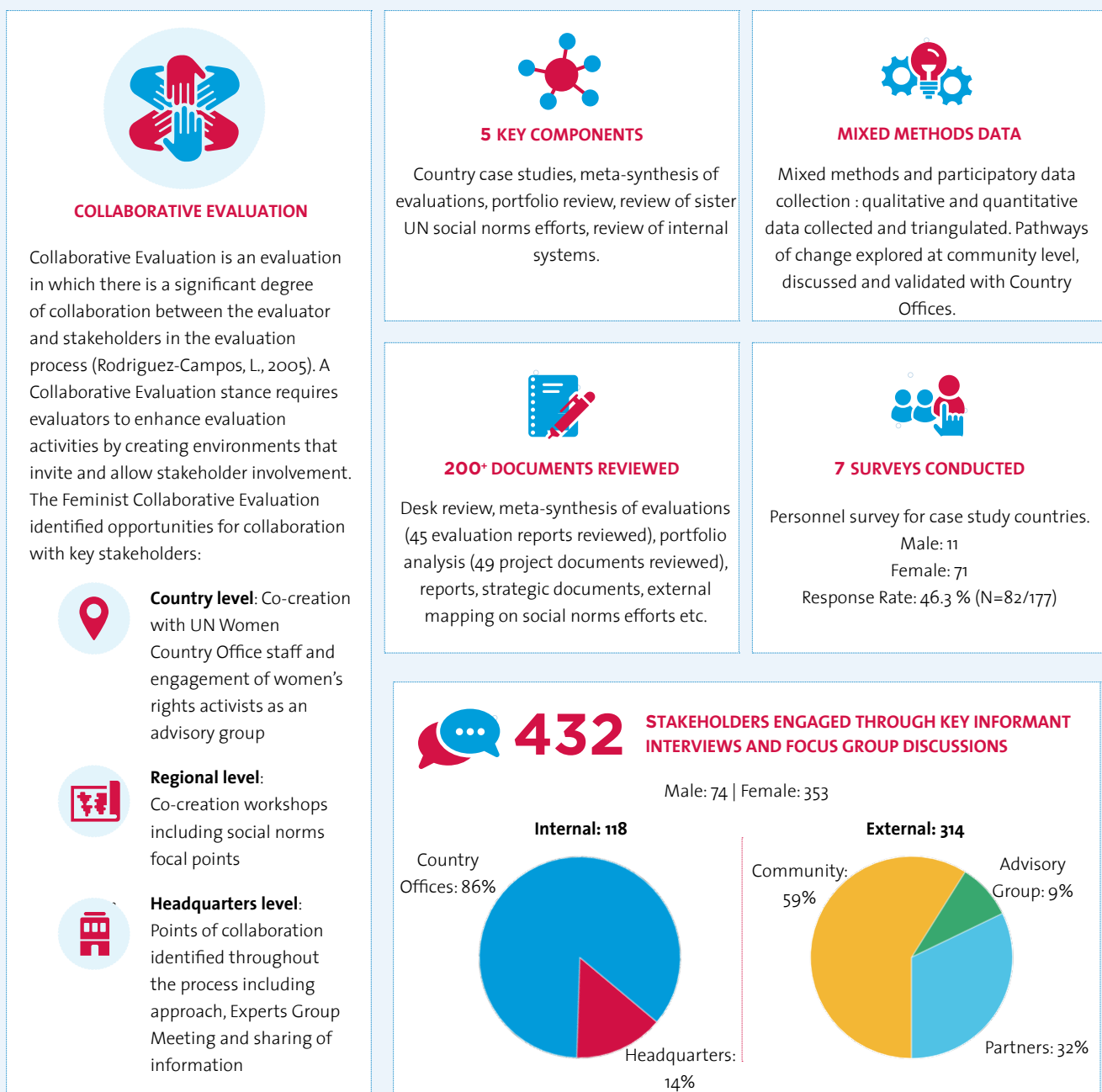
<sup>15</sup> UN Women has developed and implemented internal information systems to facilitate the capture, storage and dissemination of information on processes and results, including ATLAS and RMS. ATLAS was UN Women's main Enterprise Resource Planning system. It was replaced by Quantum in 2023. Results Management System (RMS) is the UN Women corporate system for all field offices and HQ units to plan, monitor and report against Work-plans.

To strengthen the robustness of the ATLAS portfolio review, the evaluation team took a sample of around 30 per cent of these projects for more in-depth analysis on the extent to which they were integrating social norms into the project.

With respect to RMS, the system does not systematically capture social norms initiatives because UN Women Country Offices must use fixed indicators in their four-year plans (Strategic Notes), which later prevented some

offices from reporting on suggested global UN Women Strategic Plan indicators on social norms because they were not included in their original plans. Also, the beta RMS was released in early 2024 and there were discrepancies between the dashboard figures and other sources, such as the transparency portal. Further investigation by UN Women will be required to ensure consistency across reporting systems.





**FIGURE 3a. How the evaluation was conducted: sources and methodologies for data collection**








**FIGURE 3b. Description of country case studies**

**311 INDIVIDUALS CONSULTED THROUGH THE CASE STUDIES:**

-  185 members of the community
-  101 stakeholders from the UN Women case study offices
-  98 external partners (UN, Implementing Partners, CSOs, Government)
-  28 members of the advisory groups

**THEMATIC AREAS**

-  Ending violence against women
-  Women's economic empowerment
-  Leadership/Governance
-  Campaign
-  HIV



## 2. EVALUATION CONTEXT

Social norms are implicit, informal rules that often one assumes most people accept and abide by, which are embedded in formal and informal institutions and produced and reproduced through social interactions.<sup>16</sup>

Gender norms fall within the broader category of social norms. Gender norms can be defined simply as “the informal rules and shared social expectations that distinguish expected behaviour on the basis of gender.”<sup>17</sup> Historical evidence indicates that social norms are subject to transformation. Those engaged in the pursuit of gender equality, including researchers, practitioners and activists concur that social norms, particularly gender norms, play a pivotal role in the evolution of women’s societal status witnessed globally over the last two centuries.<sup>18</sup>

The [Beijing Platform for Action](#) notes that “throughout their entire life cycle, women’s daily existence and long-term aspirations are restricted by discriminatory attitudes, unjust social and economic structures, and a lack of resources in most countries that prevent their full and equal participation.” Data from the Social Institutions and Gender Index<sup>19</sup> confirm the message that “the inequalities observed and experienced by women and girls are just the tip of the iceberg: discriminatory norms and social institutions rest below the surface, reinforcing the status quo.”<sup>20</sup>

UN Women’s Social Norms Discussion Paper<sup>21</sup> notes that “in the past decade, backlash against the progress women have made has been on the rise in countries around the world, threatening to undo hard-won gains...social norms are widely accepted as influencing – and being influenced by – progress and pushback on gender equality.”

At the time of the finalization of this evaluation, while UN Women works to develop its conceptual framework and definition of social norms, a working definition has been adopted from the ALIGN platform<sup>22</sup>(see Box 1). The Feminist Collaborative Evaluation sought to unpack how social norms were being defined under various UN Women initiatives and how they were conceptually understood among UN Women personnel.

### BOX 1

#### Definition of Social Norms\*

Social norms are the implicit and informal rules that most people accept and follow. They are influenced by our beliefs, economic circumstances and sometimes by the rewards and sanctions we might expect for either adhering to or disobeying them. Norms are embedded in formal and informal institutions and produced and reproduced through our social interactions. They only change when enough members of a community choose to act (or are compelled to act) in a different way, creating a new norm.

\*Source: This definition was presented by PPID as part of the UN Women internal Community of Practice on Social Norms. It has been adopted from the ALIGN platform.

<sup>16</sup> Adopted from ALIGN platform. The Advancing Learning and Innovation on Gender Norms (ALIGN) is a platform that conducts research and knowledge sharing on gender and social norms. ALIGN is led by ODI and funded by various international donors including Global Affairs Canada, Irish Aid, and the Ford Foundation. The platform can be accessed from: <https://www.alignplatform.org/>

<sup>17</sup> Marcus and Harper 2015.

<sup>18</sup> UN Women. (2023). Social norms, gender and development: A review of research and practice. Available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2023/10/discussion-paper-social-norms-gender-and-development-a-review-of-research-and-practice>

<sup>19</sup> The Social Institutions and Gender Index, conducted by the OECD Development Centre, is a cross-country measure of discriminatory social institutions, covering 160 countries.

<sup>20</sup> Social Institutions and Gender Index 2023 Global Report: Gender Equality in Times of Crisis. Available at: [https://oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/4607b7c7-en/1/3/1/index.html?itemId=/content/publication/4607b7c7-en&\\_csp\\_a6be4df33c99961512705b97977ea566&itemI=oeecd&itemContentype=book](https://oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/4607b7c7-en/1/3/1/index.html?itemId=/content/publication/4607b7c7-en&_csp_a6be4df33c99961512705b97977ea566&itemI=oeecd&itemContentype=book)

<sup>21</sup> UN Women. (2023). Discussion Paper: Social Norms, Gender and Development: A Review of Research and Practice. Available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2023/10/discussion-paper-social-norms-gender-and-development-a-review-of-research-and-practice>

<sup>22</sup> Refer to footnote 16 for more details.

**BOX 2****The Social Institutions and Gender Index 2023**

The Social Institutions and Gender Index 2023 Global report<sup>23</sup> notes the following key findings with respect to social norms:

1. Changes in social norms have resulted in both progress and setbacks, but they reveal that the biases against women's economic empowerment worsened between 2014 and 2022.
2. Sexual and reproductive health and rights are human rights, global health imperatives and a necessity for inclusive development. Discriminatory laws and social norms are depriving millions of women and adolescents of these rights, with dire health consequences. Crises, conflicts and the political backlash against gender equality in several countries further limit access and deepen inequalities.
3. Although disproportionately affected by climate change, women and girls are denied a proper role in fighting it: discriminatory laws, social norms and practices hinder their engagement in climate-resilient agriculture, disaster risk reduction and the transition to renewable energy. These not only impede women's own climate resilience but also have long-lasting consequences on entire communities. Empowering women as agents of change is crucial for enhancing our collective capacity to tackle the climate emergency, for the benefit of all.

The UN Women discussion paper on social norms notes that, "Global development actors across a variety of fields are increasingly turning to social norms as a new programmatic area of investment because they recognize them as a lever for change in contexts where progress on gender equality is slow, has stalled or is backsliding. Yet, for many actors new to this area of work, questions about where and how best to intervene remain open." Additionally, "feminist scholars and practitioners have expressed concern with how some development organizations are defining social norms and establishing theories of change around them."

Social norm change plays a pivotal role in advancing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by empowering women to actively contribute to, and benefit from, progress across all Sustainable Development Goals. There is a growing recognition that discriminatory social norms are fundamental drivers of inequalities and a pressing area requiring immediate attention. With the increasing backlash on women's rights, UN agencies, including UN Women, are increasingly acknowledging that a more focused approach to addressing social norms, in both the private and public spheres, may help to accelerate the achievement of gender equality and women's empowerment.

<sup>23</sup> Available at: <https://www.oecd.org/en/data/dashboards/social-institutions-gender-index.html>



Photo: Adobe Stock

## 3. PORTFOLIO ANALYSIS

The UN Women Strategic Plan 2022–2025 adopted an explicit outcome dedicated to social norms, Outcome 3: “Positive social norms, including through engaging men and boys” with the output and indicators listed in Table 2 below. While the inclusion of social norms as a specific UN Women Strategic Plan outcome has been a recent development, UN Women’s programming has addressed social norms change as a strategy directly or indirectly in its broader advocacy on gender equality and in its programmatic work within thematic areas. Social norms work is also relevant in cross-cutting areas such as education, health, sports, peacebuilding, humanitarian action and disaster risk reduction.

In February 2023, under the leadership of the Research and Data, and Political Analysis and Programme Development units of PPID, work began to define the social norms outcome area of work with the aim of informing future programming directions. One of the first steps was the establishment of an Internal Advisory Group. Two literature reviews, one on theories and practices in social norms work promoted by international organizations and an internal mapping of the social norms work by UN Women Country, Regional and global offices were completed in 2022 and published in 2023.<sup>24</sup> The “Social Norms Discussion Paper”<sup>25</sup> was a first dive into understanding how social norms are understood in the broader development field, what works to change discriminatory norms and how UN Women could take this work forward.

The Social Norms Discussion Paper posits that there are two primary views in the development discourse around social norms, “that social norms largely exist in the hearts and minds of individuals or that social norms are diffused throughout the systems and structures of society.”<sup>26</sup> This largely translates into adoption of either the social-ecological<sup>27</sup> or social and behavioural change approaches<sup>28</sup> or the institutional analysis of the social relations framework.<sup>29</sup> The paper indicates that this dichotomy has translated into very different approaches and has driven development financing of social norms efforts. The paper also notes that this has manifested into an “arbitrary division” between “grassroots” and “policy” work where efforts are implemented in one area or the other rather than in a systemic approach.

The team leading the UN Women social norms outcome has also highlighted<sup>30</sup> that the discourse on social norms has been largely driven by the global north, yet the frameworks put forth by global north scholars, practitioners and donors do not align with the global south’s interpretation of how social norms fit in the pathway of change for gender equality. Naila Kabeer and Sara Longwe, leading global south scholars and practitioners, along with several others have inspired the current approach which recognizes the role that institutions play in setting and perpetuating unequal gender norms and that frameworks must consider the key role that power dynamics and privilege plays within these institutions. For social norm change to occur, a key strategy is an empowerment approach based on collectivization, conscientization, mobilization and action.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>24</sup> UN Women. (2023). Discussion Paper: Social Norms, Gender and Development: A Review of Research and Practice. Available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2023/10/discussion-paper-social-norms-gender-and-development-a-review-of-research-and-practice>

<sup>25</sup> UN Women. (2023). Discussion Paper: Social Norms, Gender and Development: A Review of Research and Practice. Available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2023/10/discussion-paper-social-norms-gender-and-development-a-review-of-research-and-practice>

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Social and behaviour change aims to lower structural barriers that hinder people from adopting positive practices, and hinder societies from becoming more equitable, cohesive and peaceful. Drawing on various disciplines – from sociology and psychology to communication and behavioural economics – social and behaviour change encompasses any set of strategies and interventions that influences drivers of change and supports local action towards better societies. For more details refer to: <https://www.unicef.org/social-and-behaviour-change>

<sup>29</sup> The social relations framework offers a way of understanding how various institutions inter-relate. Therefore, it provides an insight into the roots of powerlessness, poverty and women’s subordination and also shows that institutions can bring about change. Each level of analysis is seen as linked to the others, such that what happens in the household impacts the community and so on. It provides a snapshot of gender roles at a particular point of time.

<sup>30</sup> UN Women Expert Group Meeting Social Norms, October 2023, Concept Note (unpublished): The Expert Group Meeting will convene expert practitioner-scholars from the global south and those with experience and expertise in the global south to deliberate on the knowledge and evidence generated from their work to provide inputs for UN Women’s approach to social/gender norms.

<sup>31</sup> UN Women Expert Group Meeting Concept Note, “Developing UN Women’s approach to addressing social norms in the pursuit of gender equality and women’s empowerment: Learning from knowledge and practices from the Global South”, October 25-26, 2023

Guidance for reporting against the social norms outcome area was introduced only in December 2023. Consequently, for the period between the introduction of the outcome/reporting requirements in 2022 and the introduction of the guidance in 2023, the evaluation team observed inconsistent approaches in reporting against the indicators, as confirmed by the Social Norms Outcome leads. PPID reported that the Strategic Plan Outcome 3 indicator reporting guidance was under development between 2022 and 2023, and that in the interim, reporting units were advised they could interpret how to report on the indicators as they saw fit until the guidance was issued. Challenges in capturing and tracking results

are presented in Finding 8 of this report. Consequently, the evaluation team faced limitations in capturing the full breadth and depth of initiatives in terms of mapping efforts that fall within the domain of social norms. Therefore, the portfolio review analysed two streams of information (as noted under the Methodology section): a scan of projects for 2019–2022 (see Section 3.1) and a scan of the RMS dashboard for 2022 and 2023 (see Section 3.2). The descriptive statistics are reported under this section while the Findings section provides findings related to an in-depth analysis of the sample of 49 projects. The key limitations outlined under Section 1.4 should be observed when interpreting findings.

**TABLE 2: Strategic Plan (2022-2025) outcome, outputs and indicators for social norms**

STRATEGIC PLAN OUTCOME/ OUTPUT STATEMENT	INDICATOR
<b>Outcome 3: More men and boys and women and girls adopt attitudes, norms and practices that advance gender equality and women’s empowerment, including those that promote positive social norms”</b>	3.1 Extent of bias in gender equality attitudes and/or gender social norms among individuals
	3.2 Number of institutions putting in place policies and practices to address gender-based discrimination and/or combat gender stereotypes
	3.3 Number of countries and/or other actors with comprehensive and coordinated violence against women prevention strategy
<b>Output: Changes attributed to UN Women in skills or abilities and capacities of individuals or institutions and/or the availability of new products and services contributing to positive social norms, including through engaging men and boys.</b>	3.a Number of research and/or practice-based initiatives undertaken to advance data, evidence and knowledge, including standardized methods to assess, monitor, measure and/or achieve behaviour and/or social/gender norms change
	3.b Number of community or organizational level UN Women programmes that address behaviour and/or social/gender norms using evidence/practice-based methodologies
	3.c Number of data collection initiatives, conducted or supported by UN Women that include behaviour and/or social/gender norms dimensions
	3.d Number of organizations/institutions with increased capacities to identify and/or address discriminatory behaviour and/or social/gender norms change
	3.e Number of draft policies with monitoring/reporting mechanisms developed by partners to address gender-based discrimination and/or combat gender stereotypes
	3.f Number of countries with a process to design and implement violence against women prevention strategies, or with prevention interventions based on global norms and standards

### 3.1 Scan of social norms projects

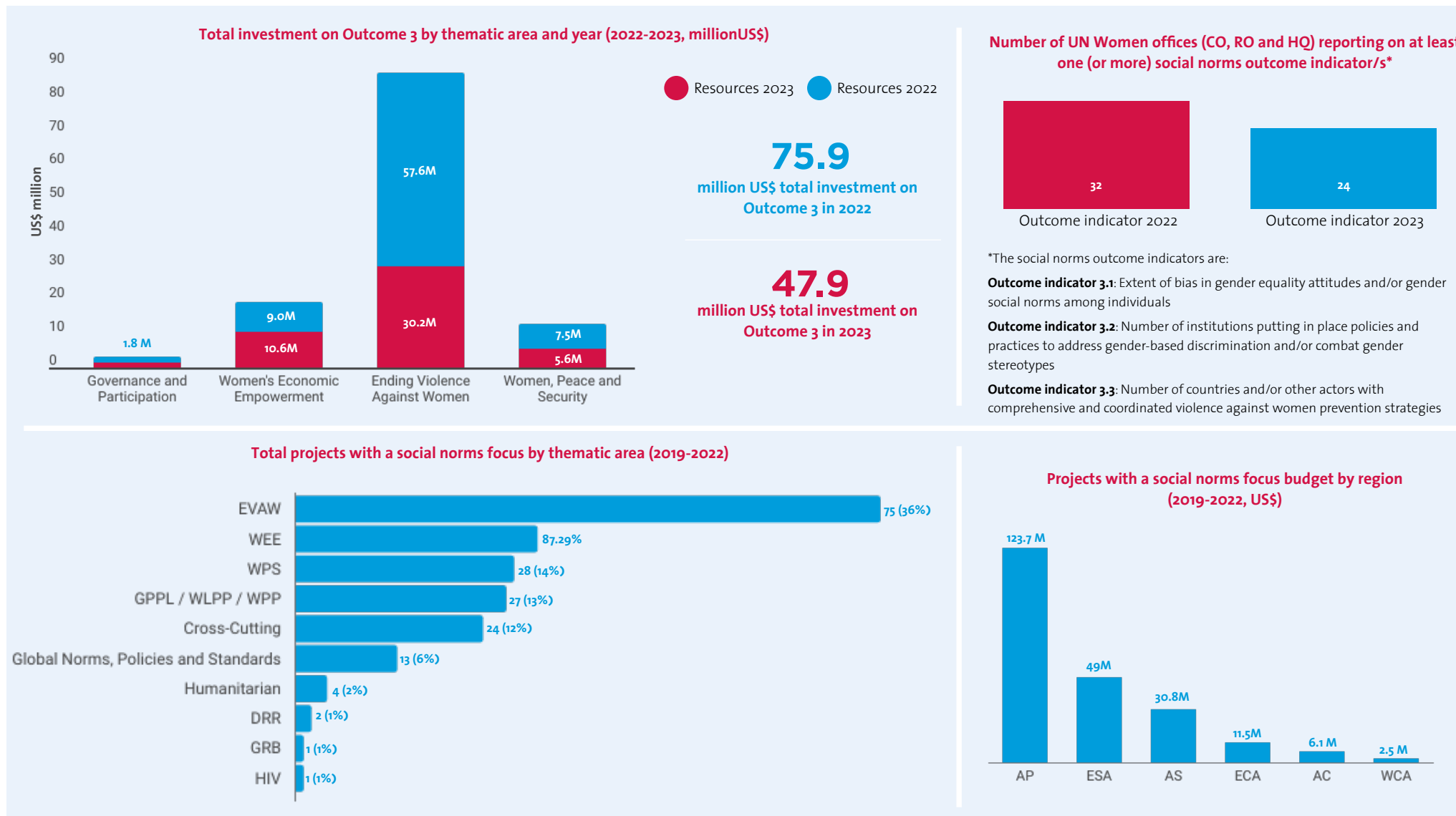
(referred to as the portfolio review in the Methodology section)

A complete list of projects from 2019 to 2022 was extracted from the UN Women ATLAS system, containing details on office, project title, duration, budget and donor. Project titles were scanned for relevant keywords based on a taxonomy developed by the evaluation team to identify those projects potentially explicitly related to social norms. This list was categorized by region and sent to Regional Office focal points and corresponding Country Offices for validation and inputs. The analysis identified 206 projects with social norms components between 2019 and 2022 and a total of US\$ 223.8 million budgeted overall for these projects. As Figure 4 identifies, the majority of social norms projects fall under the thematic area of ending violence against women and girls (EVAW) (36 per cent; N=75/206), followed by women's economic empowerment (15 per cent; N=31/206). The Asia and the Pacific region received 55 per cent of the total budget, representing the largest portion, followed by the East and Southern Africa region, which accounted for 22 per cent of the budget. The European Union featured as the highest donor, followed by the Multi-Partner Trust Fund, the Government of Japan and the Government of Canada.

### 3.2 Scan of the RMS dashboard

The organizational migration from ATLAS to Quantum was undertaken in 2023, which also affected RMS and financial and reporting data could not be extracted for 2022 and 2023 until February 2024. The PowerBI tool (in beta form) was utilized to extract data from RMS, conducting several queries. The results of this analysis were compared with the results of the project scan in Section 3.1. The analysis revealed that EVAW received the largest investment, with US \$57.6 million in 2022 and US\$ 30.2 million in 2023, followed by women's economic empowerment with US\$ 9 million in 2022 and US\$ 10.6 million in 2023. These findings were consistent with the findings from the scan of social norms projects, with the Asia Pacific region having the highest number of offices reporting on social norms outcome indicators for both 2022 and 2023, followed by the Latin America and Caribbean region.

**FIGURE 4: Social Norms Portfolio of UN Women**



Source: evaluation team based on ATLAS and RMS beta dashboard.





Photo: UN Women/Urjasi Rudra

## 4. FINDINGS

The findings in this section synthesize evidence derived from the analysis of literature, cases studies, portfolio reviews, interviews, focus group discussions and surveys with internal and external stakeholders.

**4.1 Evaluation question 1. What have we learned about the social norms programmatic work implemented by UN Women? (relevance, effectiveness)**

## FINDING 1

**The establishment of social norms as a systemic outcome area in the UN Women Strategic Plan 2022–2025 marked a shift in organizational emphasis in this area of work, which was expected to contribute to cross-cutting results in addressing discriminatory social norms; however, the Strategic Plan was not accompanied by a clear organizational plan on how to support implementation of this new outcome, and work to articulate a coherent approach across the organization was ongoing during this evaluation.**

UN Women has consistently recognized discriminatory social norms as an underlying barrier to progress for gender equality and women's empowerment in its Strategic Plans. For example, the Strategic Plan 2017–2021 thematic priority theories of change<sup>32</sup> identified discriminatory social norms as a barrier to progress and positive social norms an assumption for achieving goals across all thematic priority areas. The EVAWG thematic priority included social norms as an outcome. Figure 5 indicates the key events, initiatives and publications related to social norms that have been undertaken by UN Women.

The Strategic Plan 2022–2025 presented an opportunity to move towards systemic outcomes as a strategy for bridging thematic silos. Outcome 3 of the plan highlighted positive social norms as key for attaining results across all thematic impact areas. Aside from being acknowledged as a distinct outcome, the narrative on women's economic empowerment and EAW specifies that key interventions will involve addressing discriminatory social norms and promoting positive social norms. Although programmatic efforts on social norms have been prevalent in UN Women's efforts at the global, regional and country level prior to the 2022–2025 Strategic Plan, an explicit

recognition of this area of work allows it to be embedded more concretely in programming efforts and aims to facilitate the tracking of progress in advancing social norms work across the four thematic impact areas.<sup>33</sup>

The high importance placed on social norms work by UN Women and funding partners is illustrated by the [UN Women transparency portal](#): US\$ 33.48 million of non-core resources were categorized as expenditure on Outcome 3 in 2022, and US\$ 29.5 million in 2023, making it the fourth highest expenditure among the six systemic outcomes in both years. Personnel consulted at country, regional and headquarters levels (through both surveys and interviews) also indicated high support for more prominent integration of social norms in the Strategic Plan and interest in programming for social norms more effectively. UN Women personnel see this as highly relevant to UN Women's mandate and strategy for realizing and accelerating gender equality. UN Women's partners consulted through the case studies echoed that a focus on social norms (as defined within their own context) is essential for UN Women to deepen its contributions to gender equality and women's empowerment.

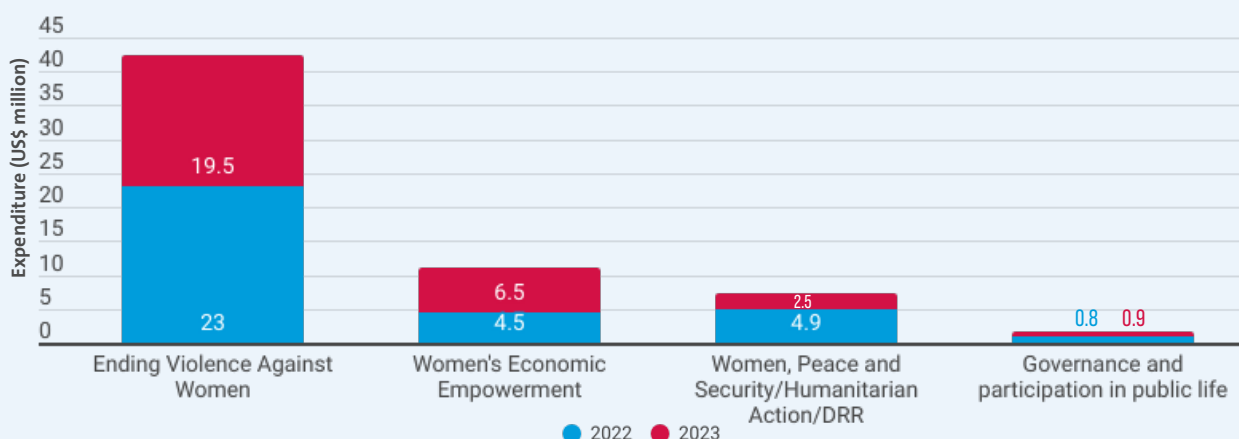
<sup>32</sup> Theories of Change for UN Women's Thematic Priorities: Achieving Transformative Results for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, UN Women Strategic Plan 2017-2021, <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Executive%20Board/2017/Second%20regular%20session%202017/Theories-of-change-for-UN-Womens-thematic-priorities-en.pdf>

<sup>33</sup> (i) governance and participation in public life; (ii) women's economic empowerment; (iii) ending violence against women and girls; and (iv) women, peace and security, humanitarian action and disaster risk reduction.

**FIGURE 5: Key events, initiatives and publications on social norms**



Source: developed by the evaluation team based on inputs from stakeholders and the evaluation desk review

**FIGURE 6: Financial flows in 2022–2023 towards Outcome 3 on social norms**

Prior to implementation of the Strategic Plan 2022–2025, there was no clear organizational plan communicated for supporting the roll-out of the new systemic outcome areas. With respect to systemic outcome 3 dedicated to social norms, PPID reported to the evaluation team that a deliberate decision was made to take a learning posture during the first two years of the Strategic Plan (2022–2023), which would inform the articulation of an approach.<sup>34</sup> This evaluation was envisioned as one key input to feed into the development of the approach, along with other analytical work and the establishment of a Community of Practice. As of writing this evaluation report, UN Women has not communicated concrete plans for resourcing, supporting or rolling out a corporate approach for the social norms outcome (or systemic outcomes more broadly).

An evaluation on UNICEF's investments in institutional strengthening of its social and behavioural change approach was published in early 2024.<sup>35</sup> These lessons are relevant and applicable for UN Women and should inform its corporate approach (see Box 3). The evaluation demonstrated that through a significant investment in institutional capacity (US\$ 13.4 million), UNICEF was able to effectively strengthen its social norms work as a cross-cutting topic. Yet several key lessons emerged, such as the need for social and behaviour change technical specialists in Country Offices to have decision-making power to influence and effectively mainstream social and behaviour change in country-level programming.

**BOX 3****UNICEF's evaluation on investing in social and behavioural change capacity and programming**

UNICEF received an investment of US\$ 13.4 million with contributions from Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and UNICEF between 2017 and 2022. An evaluation of these efforts concluded that the investment provided critical building blocks for the establishment of institutional capacity for social and behaviour change within UNICEF. Key elements that contributed to this were increased regional capacity in five of seven regional offices; the development and dissemination of global public goods; the establishment of dedicated partnerships; and the development of standardized indicators for social and behaviour change including the establishment of C4D and quality benchmarks. The evaluation also identified that the adoption of social and behaviour change both as a medium-term result and as a core change strategy within UNICEF's Strategic Plan for 2022–2025 increased policy guidance, technical support and resource mobilization from the global level; a more institutionalized adoption of social and behavioural sciences, community engagement and participatory design; and the democratization of lessons learned through systematized capacity-building efforts and partnerships were all critical elements that contributed to institutional capacity. One of the key issues identified was the dependency on individual leadership at country level on the issue and the lack of voice for social and behaviour change personnel to participate in decision-making spaces.

Source: Evaluation of UNICEF's Investment Towards Institutional Strengthening for Social and Behaviour Change, November 2023

<sup>34</sup> [UN Women Jobs - 109266- UN Women: Research Specialist on Social Norms \(undp.org\)](https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2023/10/un-women-jobs-109266)

<sup>35</sup> UNICEF, Independent Evaluation Office, Evaluation of the impact of investments in UNICEF's Social and Behavioural Change approach, 2024.

## FINDING 2

### Widely acknowledged internally is the need to build internal coherence and competencies around the approaches applied to address social norms given the disconnect that persists between organizational units on conceptual approaches for social norms programming.

UN Women efforts tagged under the social norms outcome during 2022–2023 at the country level have focused primarily on the EAWG area of work (see Figure 6). The evaluation's portfolio review of projects with a focus on social norms implemented between 2019 and 2022 (prior to the introduction of the social norms outcome) identified similar results: 36 per cent, N=75/206 of the projects focused on EAW and 15 per cent (N=31/206) focused on women's economic empowerment.

In line with this overall investment in social norms from the EAWG lens, there is a wide body of UN Women published EAWG research, programme guidance and tools that integrate social norms,<sup>36</sup> most other thematic areas do not have specific publications on the topic, and existing guidance is generally tied to specific programmes.

Evaluation evidence indicates that UN Women efforts in the social norms space have been largely implicit and at a project level. Although case study projects were selected due to their focus on social norms, 47 per cent (10/21) of projects lacked analyses or frameworks that articulated the social norms targeted in relation to their theory of change. Most of the country case study projects referred to social norms generically and descriptively, such as "gender stereotypes" and "gender roles", without explicit power analysis of how power was distributed unequally and, in doing so, usually did not challenge the institutions or root causes that perpetuated discriminatory social norms.

Good practices were identified in several project documents which included a more detailed analysis of the social norms that underpinned the area targeted, i.e. gender based violence. For example, the Spotlight Initiative Prodoc for Grenada identified the power asymmetries that underpin violence against women to include

religious views about the right of men to be leaders; male entitlement to women's bodies; inferiority of women; and domestic violence as a private matter.<sup>37</sup>

The evaluation evidence also confirms that where social norms frameworks were employed, they represent a variety of conceptual approaches. These include the social-ecological<sup>38</sup> or social and behavioural change approaches or the institutional analysis of the social relations framework. The evaluation also identified that some of the social norms change innovations or adaptations were rooted in paradigms from the global south (see Box 7 for further examples), embedding a systems approach and were locally driven and contextualized.

Paradigms were rooted in the global north in at least one third (N=7/21) of the projects from the case study countries. For example, identifying champions or positive deviants is individual-based and comes from a global north paradigm of individual behaviour change often expressed as behaviour change communication. In contrast, a global south paradigm usually pays greater attention to context and relationships. Limitations were identified in identifying champions or focal points due to fear of backlash. While utilizing positive deviance or champions to drive norm change seems promising in theory, in some contexts rights holders reported reluctance to stand out due to fear of being socially ostracized. The paradigm used significantly influences programme design for social norm change and could have a bearing on its effectiveness.

The evaluation survey of personnel found that 46 per cent (38/82) rated their understanding of feminist enquiry and social norms as 3 or below (out of 5); and discussions with personnel confirmed varied levels of understanding related to programming for social norms change. Survey respondents were asked to type key words they would use to describe social norms, which also demonstrated the

<sup>36</sup> Including but not limited to, [EVAW Busy Managers' Guide](#): It is a practical guide for UN Women EVAW programme managers and specialists in envisioning, designing, implementing and evaluating a violence against women prevention programme; [Voices against Violence](#): This curriculum provides interactive, child and youth-centred ways for young people to talk about relationships, gender equality and abuse, within a safe and supportive environment; [Connect With Respect](#): Teacher guide for early secondary education on preventing gender-based violence and promoting respectful relationships.

<sup>37</sup> UN Women, Spotlight Initiative Country Programme Document.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

association with social-behavioural approaches or institutional approaches. Around 54 per cent (N=44/82) used words meaning “Behaviour” and 13 per cent “Attitude” (N=11/82) to describe their understanding of social norms; 67 per cent (N=55/82) mentioned a word which is closely associated to rules. There were no mentions of the terms “power”, “institutions” or “systems”, which are the root cause for inequalities and asymmetries in relationships.

UN Women headquarters efforts, such as the HeforShe<sup>39</sup> campaign and work on engaging the private sector to challenge discriminatory norms (such as the Unstereotype Alliance)<sup>40</sup> are areas of work that could be better understood and leveraged in terms of their potential for influencing social norms change at scale. However, internally, there remains some divide regarding whether the campaigns and private sector engagement work were aligned with a systems approach to social norms change.

The evaluation scanned UN Women Policies, Procedures and Guidance and identified that the [Private Sector Engagement Policy](#) is the only organizational policy that explicitly mentions its role with respect to social norms. It notes that, “per UN Women’s strategy for engaging with the Private Sector, engagements are designed to contribute: To change the Private Sector internally, through proactive change to institutional social norms, behaviours, policies and practices to achieve gender equality and women’s, empowerment within the Private Sector.”

#### BOX 4

##### UN Women’s HeforShe Campaign

The UN Women HeforShe campaign was launched in 2014 and is still ongoing. It was envisaged as an awareness-raising and behaviour change campaign. The current website reads: “HeForShe is an invitation for men and people of all genders to stand in solidarity with women to create a bold, visible and united force for gender equality.” An internal audit service report<sup>41</sup> from 2020 identified one of the key successes of the campaign was the ability to stimulate financial commitments to gender equality externally and mobilize resources for the organization, as of 31 December 2019, US\$ 14.1 million had been received, with US\$ 10.3 million earmarked for field initiatives. The audit also noted that campaigns should have a longer-term shared vision and results framework, which could provide a platform for greater scale-up and integration as an advocacy and resource mobilization tool, particularly for field offices.

Recognizing that work in support of the Strategic Plan social norms outcome is in year three, stakeholders consulted across headquarters, regional and country levels indicated that they expect to be engaged equally in the development of the approaches applied to address social norms. Personnel also indicated that in addition to the Community of Practice, commenting on papers, and participating as observers in meetings, they expect open communications, inclusion and co-creation of this area of work.

<sup>39</sup> HeForShe is a global campaign for men and people of all genders to stand in solidarity with women to create a bold, visible and united force for gender equality. <https://www.heforshe.org/en>

<sup>40</sup> An industry-led initiative convened by UN Women unites advertising industry leaders, decision makers and creatives to end harmful stereotypes in advertising. The alliance reached 237 members with 12 national chapters on five continents by the end of 2022 and requires its members to track progress against the Unstereotype Metric, which monitors the extent to which consumers identify biases in advertising content.

<sup>41</sup> UN Women, Internal Audit Services, Annual Report to the Executive Board 2021, Annex I, Limited Scope Review of the HeForShe Campaign, 2021. <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n21/o95/37/pdf/n21o9537.pdf>

### FINDING 3

## Social norms programming highlighted a broader organizational challenge related to fragmented and ad hoc approaches, and lack of accountability for integrating key cross-cutting topics, including LGBTIQ+ rights, transforming patriarchal masculinities, racial justice and disability inclusion.

Despite UN Women recognizing that an intersectional approach is necessary for implementation of Strategic Plan 2022–2025,<sup>42</sup> the UN Women Social Norms Discussion Paper<sup>43</sup> published in 2023 does not refer to linkages between social norms and priority populations, i.e. LGBTIQ+ persons, persons with disabilities, racial and ethnic minorities, or other marginalized groups.

More than 60 per cent (N=52/82) of respondents to the personnel survey reported that they worked with excluded groups, such as LGBTIQ+ persons, ethnic minorities, indigenous people and persons with disabilities. However, the case studies illustrated that deeper engagement with LGBTIQ+ people and persons with disabilities were less visible. In certain countries or contexts, discussing LGBTIQ+ rights were considered contextually inappropriate due to conservative community mindsets. Ethnic minorities and indigenous people were more visibly included due to the selection of project areas with low social indicators, where a greater proportion of such groups resided (e.g. Nepal, Serbia, Ethiopia). The evidence from country case studies and evaluations identified that UN Women programmatic approaches related to the intersection of social norms and integration of LGBTIQ+ rights, transforming patriarchal masculinities, racial justice and disability inclusion are for the most part fragmented, without concrete strategies for engagement at the country or programme level. Evaluations consistently identified the need for practical and context-specific tools, disaggregated data and strengthened analysis of the structures and systems of power.<sup>44</sup>

Although not always integrated as an explicit strategy, there were some positive examples of a “leave no one behind” approach identified in the case studies.

One such example was from the Women in Leadership Samoa project that engaged with a disability advocacy organization, Nuanua O le Alofa (NOLA), to train women with disabilities to act as the data collectors themselves to collect data from programme participants with disabilities. This was demanded by NOLA as a way for the UN to “walk the talk” by ensuring persons with disabilities were both empowered and benefitting from building capacities in data collection; and because persons with disabilities can better understand and identify with the data being collected related to their own rights and challenges to realizing them.

Men and boys feature prominently in the systemic Outcome 3 statement, providing some insight into the emphasis UN Women placed on this topic when the Strategic Plan was conceptualized. Similarly, the UN Women Social Norms Discussion Paper<sup>45</sup> focuses on a growing body of evidence that supports engaging with men and boys as necessary for sustainable change to discriminatory norms, while also cautioning that the work must move beyond a focus on shifting minds towards shifting power structures, laws and policies. The evaluation personnel survey identified that less than half of the respondents (43.2 per cent [N=35/81]) stated that they worked with men and boys or addressed toxic masculinities. Even when there was work with men and boys, the country case studies identified that the discourse on gender discrimination often focuses on patriarchy and male entitlement in Country Office programmes, yet social norms were not defined in these terms and most Country Offices struggled to involve men and boys programmatically. In the case of a large programme in the Arab States region, with explicit focus on engaging

<sup>42</sup> UN Women Strategic Plan 2022-2025, UNW/2021/6; Section IV A: Leave No One Behind.

<sup>43</sup> UN Women. (2023). Discussion Paper: Social Norms, Gender and Development: A Review of Research and Practice. Available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2023/10/discussion-paper-social-norms-gender-and-development-a-review-of-research-and-practice>.

<sup>44</sup> UN Women Independent Evaluation Service: Corporate Evaluation of Climate Change (2023); Corporate Evaluation Women’s Economic Empowerment Policy Work (2023); Country Portfolio Evaluation – Indonesia (2023) and Nepal (2022); Evaluation of Regional Office Support To Women’s Economic Empowerment Through Private Sector Engagement (2022); and others.

<sup>45</sup> UN Women. (2023). Discussion Paper: Social Norms, Gender and Development: A Review of Research and Practice. Available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2023/10/discussion-paper-social-norms-gender-and-development-a-review-of-research-and-practice>.

men, the Men and Women for Gender Equality Phase II Programme [Evaluation](#) notes that strategies for engagement with feminist groups, transforming patriarchal masculinities and developing linkages between individual change and wider social and legal change were not yet fully articulated. This aligns with findings from the review that was completed to inform the UN Women Transforming Patriarchal Masculinities position paper,<sup>46</sup> which identified the need for conceptual clarity and dedicated support in this area within UN Women.<sup>47</sup> In 2023, a dedicated working group on transforming patriarchal masculinities was established to support the Entity's work.

**BOX 5**

### Feminist Collaborative Evaluation Country Case Study examples of engaging men in gender equality initiatives

- **Mexico** -- HeforShe campaigns (2014 to 2022): engaged men to make commitments for greater male responsibility in changing gender norms. The project reported encouraging individual actions and mobilizing 32 state and federal government institutions, 7 universities, 6 companies and international organizations, among others, to eliminate stereotypes.
- **MCO Caribbean** (British Virgin Islands, Barbados, Jamaica, Grenada, Trinidad and Tobago, St. Lucia and Belize) -- Partnerships for Peace: uses a 16-session psycho-social court mandated curriculum for perpetrators of violence, who are all male. UN Women project reports identified reduced intimate partner violence and more fluid gender roles, along with men engaged in gender equality issues.
- **Ethiopia** - Community dialogue on women's leadership and political participation: Community dialogue groups included 15 men and 15 women selected by the community to work on priority issues.<sup>48</sup>
- **Samoa** - The Transformational Leadership Development Initiative of the Women In Leadership Samoa project actively involved men in community discussions about values that should be upheld, particularly focusing on respecting women. By engaging with multiple community-level groups/committees (men, women and youth), the project adopted an ecosystem approach, fostering awareness on women's representation in village governance, including values, gender roles in leadership and the role of daughters-in-law in their husbands' villages.

In recent years, UN Women has strengthened its ability to support an intersectional approach to gender equality through the establishment of specialist positions covering "Leave No One Behind" topics, strategies and/or resource guides. These documents (See Box 6) refer to social norms in varied ways. The Women and Girls With Disabilities Strategy refers to discriminatory attitudes and "cultural norms" which impede progress for women with disabilities. While the LGBTIQ+ Internal Resource Guide highlights the opportunity presented by the UN Women Strategic Plan 2022–2025 and its systemic outcomes as "promising entry points" for addressing the compounded discrimination faced by LGBTIQ+ people "who do not comply with predominant social norms on gender and sexuality due to systemic gender-based power imbalances and patriarchal social norms."<sup>49</sup> The guide puts forward a framework for UN Women to take action to challenge these discriminatory norms based on four key principles: inclusivity, intersectionality, specificity and evidence-based.

**BOX 6**

### List of UN Women leave no one behind strategies

- [the Empowerment of Women and Girls With Disabilities: Towards Full and Effective Participation and Gender Equality](#), 2018.
- Transforming Patriarchal Masculinities Organizational Approach to UN Women's Gender Equality Work with Men and Boys, internal document, 2021.
- [LGBTIQ+ Equality and Rights Internal Resource Guide, UN Women](#), May 2022.
- [UN Women's Approach to Disability Inclusion and Intersectionality](#), 2023.
- [UN Women Discussion Paper: Social Norms, Gender and Development: A Review of Research and Practice](#), November 2023.

<sup>46</sup> Internal document issued in 2021.

<sup>47</sup> UN Women position paper Transforming Patriarchal Masculinities Organizational Approach to UN Women's Gender Equality Work with Men and Boys, p. 8.

<sup>48</sup> Further analysis is needed to understand whether the inclusion of men in terms of equal representation or addition is enough, or more is needed to ensure that they use their positions of power to challenge male entitlement and patriarchy in their spheres of influence and in the wider community.

<sup>49</sup> UN Women, LGBTIQ+ Equality and Rights Internal Resource Guide, May 2022



Lack of clear accountability for action was identified as one of the key challenges to progress in this area. The Strategic Plan Integrated Results and Resources Framework<sup>50</sup> encourages disaggregation of data and UN Women guidance on reporting<sup>51</sup> includes a narrative question about planned or unintended results achieved during the reporting year under the principle of Leave No One Behind, including as related to persons with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics.<sup>52</sup> Nevertheless, key UN Women guidance documents do not explicitly require integration of key cross-cutting “leave no one behind” topics in planning, monitoring and reporting. This includes the Country Office Strategic Notes Guidance,<sup>53</sup> Programme Formulation Policy,<sup>54</sup> Planning, Monitoring and Reporting

Policy<sup>55</sup> and Country Office Strategic Notes and Workplans Monitoring Guidance. The 2019 UN system-wide Disability Inclusion Strategy<sup>56</sup> is helping to move forward accountability with respect to recognizing the rights of persons with disabilities in UN system efforts; and in May 2024 the UN Secretary-General endorsed a draft United Nations Secretariat Strategy on protection from violence and discrimination of LGBTIQ+ persons, which is aimed at strengthening internal accountability with respect to the fundamental human rights of the LGBTIQ+ community. However, within UN Women, efforts to elevate inclusion and intersectionality are not underpinned with clear lines of organizational accountability in this area (who is held accountable if no action is taken).

## FINDING 4

### UN Women has employed diverse approaches and methodologies for social norms programming. Many of which leverage local strategies for understanding social norms, others are adopted or adapted from partner organizations’ tested methodologies.

There was wide recognition across country case studies, and the literature review,<sup>57</sup> that social norms must be understood within the local context and that there is no “one-size-fits-all” approach. Methodologies must be tailored and contextualized, and better still, built from the bottom up in a participatory and collaborative manner. While sometimes implicit, several social norm change approaches were identified through the country case studies. These approaches action feminist principles and were rooted in paradigms from the global south that value and prioritize collective and participatory processes rather than application of pre-determined frameworks not owned or developed locally.

The case study Country Offices are employing various methodologies developed and/or promoted by other organizations. One third (N=7/21) of the case study projects utilized guidance, tools and frameworks either developed entirely by external partners or in partnership with

UN Women. These methodologies were evidence-based frameworks that primarily focus on a behavioural change approach. These include: [Gender Action Learning System](#) (GALS), which is promoted by the [International Fund for Agricultural Development](#) (IFAD), [Social Analysis and Action](#) (SAA) the signature approach to gender-norm transformation from [CARE](#), which is promoted in joint programmes by the Rome-Based Agencies (the Food and Agricultural Organization, IFAD and the World Food Programme), and [Start, Awareness, Support and Action](#) (SASA) a violence prevention methodology originating from Raising Voices and promoted by [UN Women](#). The evaluation team noted that these methodologies are easy to “sell” as they come as a branded package; with evidence to back the methodology; and with toolboxes and catchy acronyms.

<sup>50</sup> UN Women, [Strategic Plan 2022-2025 Integrated Results and Resources Framework](#) : “encourages disaggregation of data when possible, by the following factors and characteristics: sex, age, geographical location, disability status and HIV status; and other factors such as migratory status, race/ethnicity, etc.”

<sup>51</sup> UN Women. (2023). Country Office and Regional Office Annual Reporting Guidance (Internal document).

<sup>52</sup> The narrative questions also describe diversity, where used, as “Diversity of beneficiaries may include the poorest & most excluded women, women facing marginalization and intersecting forms of discrimination, persons with disabilities, minorities, displaced persons, etc”

<sup>53</sup> UN Women. (2022). Country Office Strategic Notes Guidance (internal document).

<sup>54</sup> UN Women. Programme Formulation Policy effective 3 February 2017 (Internal Document).

<sup>55</sup> UN Women. Effective date: 10 October 2023. Planning, Monitoring and Reporting Policy (Internal document)

<sup>56</sup> UN System Disability Inclusion Strategy.( 2019) High-level Committee on Management (HLCM) adopted the strategy on behalf of the Chief Executives Board <https://unsceb.org/united-nations-disability-inclusion-strategy#:~:text=Through%20the%20Strategy%2C%20the%20organizations,human%20rights%20and%20of%20fundamental%20freedoms>.

<sup>57</sup> UN Women. (2023). Discussion Paper: Social Norms, Gender and Development: A Review of Research and Practice. Available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2023/10/discussion-paper-social-norms-gender-and-development-a-review-of-research-and-practice>.

On closer examination, while these are important tools, there may be opportunity for ensuring approaches equally focus on the institutional change required and appropriately applying feminist principles. Moreover, the evidence generated from these initiatives was not comprehensively capturing social norms change, mainly due to difficulties collecting robust baseline data and implementing the programme according to the established approach, thus affecting programme fidelity. Discussions with personnel engaged in these initiatives revealed that the challenges may be due to implementing agencies or partners' limited capacity in the related methodology.

The case studies identified several common strategies to shift social norms through women's empowerment included: learning new skills (power to do something or take a lead or contribute); increasing their motivation and confidence (power within); working collaboratively and collectively in small or large groups to change something (power with); and, in some cases, overcoming resource and social constraints to take control of one's life and decisions (power over).

During co-creation sessions, country case study participants pointed to the potential for UN Women to provide a menu of methodologies rooted in feminist principles and global south paradigms with respect to the process for identifying social norms and pathways of change.

Building a toolbox and embedding these practices as part of the organizational approach to programming and evaluation could serve as an important starting point for integrating social norms and contribute to building a coherent approach towards social norms while at the same time building capacities. These practices are highlighted in Box 8 and explained in more detail in the country case studies synthesis in Annex 10.

#### BOX 7

##### Common strategies employed across the case studies:

- Research and analysis
- Collectivization and dialogue
- Training/Training of Trainers on rights/gender roles
- Economic empowerment through skills building and livelihoods support
- Media support and campaigns
- Mobilizing allies, including women's movement
- Creating safe spaces for women in areas of conflict
- Advocacy and technical support on laws and policies to eliminate discrimination and address structural inequalities.

**FIGURE 7. Common approach to changing and tracking social norms**



Source: developed by the evaluation team based on evidence from case studies

**BOX 8.****Leveraging existing practices that embed feminist approaches for social norms programming**

Beginning with internal reflection: The Nepal case study and previous evaluations<sup>58</sup> of the Country Office efforts highlight the benefits of beginning with an internal exploration of social norms at the Country Office level as a first step in unpacking common social norms experienced by personnel and exploring their own unconscious bias. This has helped to build capacities and helped personnel understand how to internalize feminist principles required for transformative change that addresses underlying social norms.

Extending participatory and inclusive reflection with partners, including at community level, programme design stage and as part of ongoing reflection: Reflective dialogue,<sup>59</sup> inter-generational dialogues, or traditional rituals (such as consultative transformative dialogue [talanoa] or a coffee ceremony from Ethiopia which brings people together).

Power brokers and institutional analysis: In Samoa, culturally sensitive programme design (e.g. Fa'a Samoa) recognizes differences in power between individual status and villages, private and public sectors, i.e. an individual's status can shift depending on the context within which they are operating. UN Women collaborated closely with religious leaders, imams and community members in Kyrgyzstan to develop a brochure to disseminate knowledge on gender-based norms which was well-received by the communities as it reflected women's rights through the lens of Islamic principles. In many of the case study countries, the focus group discussions at community level identified complex social networks and relationships contribute to kyriarchy<sup>60</sup> – a type of power asymmetries that impact gender norms and therefore the pathways of change. The country case studies identified the need for analytical tools that explicitly analyse and address complex formal and informal power dynamics.

Analysis of incentives for change: The country case studies identified that stepping-stones are often required for a pathway to social norm change. In rural Nepal, the economic incentives influenced changes in norms around women's mobility. In Serbia, free legal aid to women was provided along with notary services to raise awareness of the long-term consequences of renouncing property rights, including loss of right to social benefits for the time span that reflects the value of the renounced property. Tools for analysing with communities what these incentives are to address the barriers is an important step in identifying pathways of change. The Feminist Collaborative Evaluation process has provided an opportunity for strengthening capacities and approaches for applying feminist evaluation principles. The methodology included a collaborative, exploratory, participatory and co-creation process, allowing for the principles to be actioned. This Feminist Collaborative Evaluation also demonstrated that through co-creation processes, the typical evaluator/evaluand relationship is transformed into one of mutual accountability. The evaluation involved Country Offices in collecting data, analysing and developing recommendations. This embeds a process of learning and unlearning evaluation methodologies and approaches to ensure the evaluation is community-driven, attempting to balance the power dynamics involved.

Source: Feminist Collaborative Evaluation country case studies

<sup>58</sup> UN Women. 2022. Country Portfolio Evaluation; Nepal Country Office. Available at: <https://gate.unwomen.org/Evaluation/Details?EvaluationId=11554>

<sup>59</sup> A general description of reflective practice as part of participatory methods can be found here: <https://www.participatorymethods.org/method/reflective-practice>

<sup>60</sup> Kyriarchy describes a system of 'interlocking structures of domination' (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1992:8). For a discussion on intersectionality and kyriarchy, see Osborne, Natalie. (2015). Intersectionality and Kyriarchy: a framework for approaching power and social justice in planning and climate change adaptation. *Planning Theory*, 14. 130-151. 10.1177/1473095213516443. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/269576541\\_Intersectionality\\_and\\_Kyriarchy\\_a\\_framework\\_for\\_approaching\\_power\\_and\\_social\\_justice\\_in\\_planning\\_and\\_climate\\_change\\_adaptation](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/269576541_Intersectionality_and_Kyriarchy_a_framework_for_approaching_power_and_social_justice_in_planning_and_climate_change_adaptation) (accessed, 12/02/2023)

## FINDING 5

**UN Women’s results are primarily reported at the individual level and are focused on increased knowledge, awareness, voice and agency. Evidence of contributions to addressing discriminatory social norms at both community and institutional levels were largely missing due to lack of targeting in programme design and tools to systematically collect data related to social norms change.**

The focus of initiatives revealed in the country case study was wide-ranging and linked with three thematic areas: ending violence against women and girls (11 projects); women’s economic empowerment (4 projects); and women in leadership (4 projects). As noted under Finding 2, social norms that underly the programme (i.e. women’s economic empowerment) were not always explicitly analysed and targeted clearly, making it difficult to track progress or contributions towards change. Only 4 of 19 projects included indicators which captured either changing social norms or attitudes/mindsets (further discussed under Finding 8). The common approach to changing social norms, based on evidence from the case studies, is illustrated in Figure 7.

Community dialogues during the seven case study visits explored the prevalent discriminatory norms that were more explicitly targeted through programmes and revealed the presence of other more implicitly targeted discriminatory norms that influenced women’s rights in that specific context. The discussions also identified what changes have derived from the programme contributions, taking into consideration power dynamics at various levels; key power brokers that influenced change; and external factors such as other key initiatives. Pathways of change were developed for each of the initiatives included in the case studies (as also noted in the evaluation methodology. All case study decks can be found in Annex 12).





The case studies and meta-synthesis of evaluations identified that the results reported pertained primarily to individual-level women’s self-awareness of rights, confidence to participate equally, and the empowerment of women to realize their rights. Through the process of unpacking which social norms were targeted, recurrent themes in the case studies included empowering individuals and communities and challenging patriarchal structures. Participants also identified shifts in attitudes

of family and community members around gender roles in the household, and women’s capacity to be leaders and engage in economic activities, yet the sustainability of these changes are unknown due to lack of longitudinal data.

In some cases, programmes had to be responsive to dynamics within communities and adapt or change which social norm they targeted due to uptake, backlash or resistance. For instance, in Nepal, a grassroots women’s organization made strides in combating norms related to gender-based violence and menstrual isolation. However, attempts to address caste discrimination met significant backlash, resulting in the grassroots women’s organization retracting its efforts to ensure continuity in other norm-changing initiatives (menstrual isolation, gender-based violence, equal opportunities for girls).

Indirectly addressed social norms were also identified through the case study dialogues – these social norms were not necessarily targeted, but through the reflection process were identified as having been influenced through programme efforts. These included mobility restrictions at night or for going out of town; promoting perpetrator accountability; combating child marriage and dowry practices; promoting inclusion and participation of diverse groups; power dynamics with mothers-in-law; and the discrimination of women entrepreneurs in the use of public transport (harassment by male conductors, drivers and male passengers during transport). Such discriminatory norms and practices discovered through community dialogue adversely impacted the empowerment of women for productive and advocacy purposes, but as these were implicit, they were not monitored or tracked. Directly and indirectly targeted social norms which were observed from the case studies are presented in Figure 8.

FIGURE 8. Directly and indirectly targeted social norms observed from the case studies

	 <b>Directly targeted social norms</b>	 <b>Indirectly targeted social norms</b>
 <p><b>Violence against women</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gender-based violence recognized as a <b>public health concern</b>, with increased socialization of the term "violence."</li> <li>• Condemnation and reduction of <b>intimate partner violence</b> and <b>violence against children</b>.</li> <li>• Male leaders and local councils <b>reject violence</b> as acceptable.</li> <li>• Building a broad understanding of <b>gender power imbalance</b>, with a focus on domestic violence, FGM, child marriage and positive masculinity.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promoting <b>zero tolerance for violence against women</b> and encouraging male engagement as positive influencers on gender-based violence.</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Gender roles</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Respectful interactions in the community</b> between genders are promoted as the norm.</li> <li>• Increased <b>male participation in household work</b> and a more fluid concept of gender roles and partnership.</li> <li>• Increased self-awareness regarding <b>masculinities</b>.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Addressing <b>patriarchy in religious institutions</b> through increased women's representation.</li> <li>• Changing <b>household gender norms</b>, including child marriage, dowry practices and son preference.</li> <li>• Shifting important <b>financial decisions</b> from mother-in-law and husband to include women.</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Agency and support</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women can attend training outside the home, increasing their <b>mobility</b>.</li> <li>• Increase in <b>support groups for women</b>, advocating for women's rights to property and economic contribution.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Boosting <b>self-confidence</b> among girls.</li> <li>• Enhancing <b>'power to,' 'power within' and 'power with'</b> among communities.</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Inclusivity</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decreased <b>self-stigma and discrimination</b> against key populations and people living with HIV by the community.</li> <li>• Encouraging critical thinking about gender norms <b>among youth</b>.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Embracing disability, age and ethnic diversity.</li> <li>• Advocating for <b>children's rights</b> and equity in gender roles within families.</li> <li>• <b>Mentoring youth</b> to change mindsets and coping strategies.</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Leadership</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greater acceptance and engagement of women in <b>leadership roles</b>.</li> <li>• Challenging <b>political gender bias</b>.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promoting <b>politically correct language</b> to shift perceptions of women's roles in institutions (educational and political).</li> <li>• Encouraging <b>collective student action</b> and leadership.</li> </ul>

Source: evaluation team

Only a couple of the case study initiatives addressed institutional power structures, albeit sometimes implicitly, such as religious institutions or family hierarchies. In these cases, individuals were targeted based on their influential roles and decision-making capacities (see Box 9)<sup>61</sup> while at the same time deliberate efforts were made to address power relationships, both formal and informal, within institutions. This meant that norm change did not need to depend on ‘champions’ or ‘positive deviants’ or ‘influencers’ (individual based) but by addressing the power asymmetries within each institution, it was likely to address many structures within institutions impacting more people and with a greater chance of ownership and sustainability. Change initiatives were kickstarted through reflective dialogues and technical support was provided on policy frameworks to address structural barriers.

Some examples of institutional change efforts were also identified through the meta-synthesis of evaluations (see Annex 11).<sup>62</sup> For example, an initiative in Vietnam piloted work with the government to integrate a gender-awareness raising curriculum in the national secondary school curriculum along with teacher training. In Lebanon, an evaluation<sup>63</sup> identified interventions related to anti-sexual harassment focused on both policy change and supporting policy implementation through training sessions. In Malawi, a project evaluation noted that the capacity of local institutions to gather and utilize evidence to promote positive social norms, attitudes and behaviours was strengthened.

#### BOX 9

##### Examples of two projects being implemented in Nepal and Ethiopia with unique pathways of change.

- For the Access to Justice project in Nepal, the implementing partners targeted local mediators and local justice groups fully aware that targeting positions of power was important. They also addressed formal and informal power structures (women’s groups, local mediators, youth groups, religious groups, user groups, mothers groups, etc. and local village-level formal structures) recognizing that these often communicate to each other. For example, the local mediator (usually male) for gender-based violence is likely to informally meet the official in charge at the District Court (usually male) to discuss the case.
- In Ethiopia a religious institution and its structures took ownership and responsibility for developing the technical resources for EAW, capacity-building the clergy and community institutions as well as strategizing the use of media for awareness building. This included engaging men who were in positions of power as clergy and men and boys in the community. The implementing partner facilitated the process and built ‘trust’ with faith-based organizations to facilitate difficult conversations related to intimate partner violence and gender-based violence.

<sup>61</sup> The Access2Justice Project in Nepal was an EAW project with an outcome focused on transforming harmful social norms and addressing deep-rooted patriarchy through training on gender-responsive justice for frontline justice actors, such as mediators, ward members, judicial committees and bhalmansas, and government service providers. The Preventing Violence Against Women and Girls and Delivering Essential Services to Survivors in Ethiopia implemented an evidence-based community mobilization approach, SASA (among other approaches) to prevent VAWG by targeting behaviour change on gender equality and women’s rights and to raise community awareness of VAWG.

<sup>62</sup> UN Women. Stepping Up Solutions to Eliminate Violence Against Women and Girls in Asia and the Pacific. Available at: <https://gate.unwomen.org/Evaluation/Details?evaluationId=11540>

<sup>63</sup> UN Women. Final Evaluation of Men and Women for Gender Equality-Phase II programme. Available at: <https://gate.unwomen.org/Evaluation/Details?evaluationId=11636>

**4.2 Evaluation question 2. What are the opportunities at the organizational level for supporting UN Women personnel in planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating social norms work? (Organizational effectiveness)**

## FINDING 6

### Experience based on the roll-out of the social norms systemic outcome area highlights broader organizational challenges in bridging silos that the Strategic Plan 2022–2025 set out to address through the establishment of the systemic outcomes.

The current UN Women Strategic Plan 2022–2025 aims to stimulate the organization to do things differently. By focusing on systemic outcomes, the hope is to stimulate an integrated approach to implementation across thematic areas, breaking out of silos.<sup>64</sup>

Several sources of evidence<sup>65</sup> point to key challenges with implementing the social norms outcome as cross-cutting across other thematic areas and ensuring linkages with campaigns and private sector efforts. The draft mid-term review of the Strategic Plan 2022–2025 also highlighted lack of coordination across all systemic outcomes as a key challenge.<sup>66</sup> Some personnel consulted noted that there have been limited interactions between key units that consider themselves to be engaged and responsible for social norms work. The social norms outcome leads reported that efforts have been made to engage personnel across the organization through various means, such as through the Community of Practice, participation in an Expert Group Meeting, reviewing research papers commissioned and through the provision of technical advice at regional and country level. Personnel consulted also reported, as of December 2023, that exchange of lessons learned between the systemic outcome leads had not yet occurred.

Several personnel pointed to the need for formal mechanisms that facilitate outreach and accountability between units with respect to the systemic outcomes. Reflecting on the mid-term review of the Strategic Plan 2022–2025, the annual report to the UN Women Executive Board

issued in 2024 recognized these challenges and dedicated to “increasing institutional support for ‘new ways of working’ and developing a comprehensive set of structures and mechanisms at all levels (global, regional and country) that help break thematic silos and bolster the delivery of synergistic results.”<sup>67</sup>

Considering the broader organizational challenge with implementation of the systemic outcomes, the evaluation considered lessons from the current organizational structure for supporting the social norms outcome area. Based on the Political Analysis and Programme Development Unit’s (PAPDU) internal website<sup>68</sup> its role is: “bridging field level initiatives to UN Women Headquarters, and is a key driver for cross-divisional, cross-regional coordination to inform strategic and programme-policy deliberations...”<sup>69</sup> PAPDU has also become the unit where key cross-cutting topics have been placed and a “leave no one behind” hub is planned to better integrate cross-cutting areas into UN Women’s work. Dedicated posts (one each) have been established for LGBTIQ+ rights, racial justice and transforming patriarchal masculinities, with the most recent being the temporary post dedicated to social norms (which is currently shared with the Research and Data Division),<sup>70</sup> which are all placed under PAPDU. The resourcing of positions has led to the establishment of strategies or resource guides for each of these areas (see Finding 3), but according to these specialists, while the establishment of one post is a good step, it is insufficient to adequately mobilize an organization to take action, and resources for supporting the roll-out of strategies internally, and

<sup>64</sup> UN Women Strategic Plan 2022-2025. Brochure available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/un-women-strategic-plan-2022-2025>

<sup>65</sup> The Social Norms Outcome team undertook a review of reporting results from the first year of Strategic Plan implementation (2022), country case studies, key informant interviews and corporate evaluations.

<sup>66</sup> IMAGO, Draft Mid-term Review UN Women Strategic Plan 2022-2025, unpublished as of 17 April 2024.

<sup>67</sup> UN Women Executive Board, Report of the Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women on the implementation of the Strategic Plan 2022–2025, including the midterm review of the Strategic Plan; April 2024, UNW/2024/2; <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2024/04/executive-directors-annual-report-2024>

<sup>68</sup> PAPDU sharepoint: <https://unwomen.sharepoint.com/Policy-Programming/ProgrammeDivision/PAPDU/SitePages/Home.aspx>

<sup>69</sup> PAPDU sharepoint: <https://unwomen.sharepoint.com/Policy-Programming/ProgrammeDivision/PAPDU/SitePages/Home.aspx>

<sup>70</sup> The Research Specialist on Social Norms: [https://jobs.undp.org/cj\\_view\\_job.cfm?cur\\_job\\_id=109266](https://jobs.undp.org/cj_view_job.cfm?cur_job_id=109266); applications closed in October 2022 and the individual started in early 2023.

programming resources have had to be mobilized for each area on its own. Insights from these specialists and other personnel familiar with the topic, and validated by several recent corporate evaluations,<sup>71</sup> noted that with relation to leave no one behind, an approach driven by personal interest and commitment is contributing to ad hoc and fragmented work and the inability to adequately track and clearly understand results. These lessons should be integrated in UN Women's approach to rolling out the Social Norms Outcome area. Similarly, the mid-term review of the Strategic Plan 2022–2025 also identified the need to “clearly articulate corporate theories of change and approaches to drive consistent and optimal uptake of cross-cutting themes... and greater organizational investment and attention...”<sup>72</sup> including with respect to leaving no one behind and social norms change.

To explore with an appreciative lens what the organization can do within existing resources to “bridge the silos” and stimulate both interest and accountability for mainstreaming cross-cutting topics, the evaluation team reviewed UN Women internal reviews and evaluations,<sup>73</sup> and several external evaluations<sup>74</sup> focused on gender mainstreaming to identify lessons learned. Recurrent recommendations are listed below:

- Institutional and programmatic guidance are necessary.
- Establishing clear leadership and messaging from the top.
- Establishing a corporate coordinating structure.

- Clear lines of accountability and expectations, including by integrating into performance appraisal, and potentially matrix management.
- Clarity on expectations for mainstreaming across all thematic and topical areas.
- Inter-divisional task force or network, facilitating team-based collaboration.
- Focal points at all levels of the organization, but with clarity on accountability (i.e. including in performance assessment).
- Regular strengthening of skills/capacity.
- Intentional practices to facilitate mainstreaming must be embedded in the programme cycle.
- Development and socialization of tools to support mainstreaming and socialization.
- Engage donors in securing longer-term predictable funding required for gender equality and the empowerment of women.
- Awards or incentives for good practice (against criteria, i.e. Gender Equality SEAL).<sup>75</sup>

<sup>71</sup> Evaluations include: UN Women, “Corporate Evaluation of UN Women’s Support for Women’s Economic Empowerment by Advancing Gender-Responsive Laws, Frameworks, Policies, and Partnerships”, 2023, Available at <https://gate.unwomen.org/Evaluation/Details?evaluationId=11653>; UN Women, “Corporate Formative Evaluation of UN Women’s Approach to Innovation”, 2021, Available at <https://gate.unwomen.org/Evaluation/Details?evaluationId=11543>; UN Women, “Corporate Evaluation of UN Women’s UN System Coordination and Broader Convening Role in Ending Violence Against Women”, 2021, Available at <https://unw-gate.azurewebsites.net/EvaluationDocument/Download?evaluationDocumentID=9603>; UN Women, “Corporate Formative Evaluation of UN Women’s Work in the Area of Climate Change”, 2023, Available at <https://gate.unwomen.org/Evaluation/Details?evaluationId=11683>. Draft Evaluation on UN Women’s support to Gender Statistics 2019–2022, publication forthcoming.

<sup>72</sup> UN Women Executive Board, Report of the Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women on the implementation of the Strategic Plan 2022–2025, including the midterm review of the Strategic Plan; April 2024, UNW/2024/2; <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2024/04/executive-directors-annual-report-2024>

<sup>73</sup> Refer to Annex 5, meta-synthesis of evaluations.

<sup>74</sup> UNFPA. 2021. Evaluation of UNFPA support to gender equality and women’s empowerment. Available at: [https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/admin-resource/GEWE\\_Evaluation\\_Report\\_May2021.pdf](https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/admin-resource/GEWE_Evaluation_Report_May2021.pdf); UNDP. 2015. Evaluation of the UNDP contribution to gender equality. Available at: <https://www.un-ilibrary.org/content/books/9789210567565>; ILO. 2021. High-level independent evaluation of ILO’s gender equality and mainstreaming efforts, 2016–21; UNICEF. 2019. Realizing potential: Evaluation of UNICEF’s Gender Action Plans. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/media/65591/file/Realizing%20potential:%20Evaluation%20of%20UNICEF's%20Gender%20Action%20Plans,%20December%202019.pdf>

<sup>75</sup> The UNDP Gender Equality Seal for Development is UNDP’s certification programme that serves as a learning platform for development organizations to integrate gender equality and address deeply rooted gender inequalities. The programme incentivizes and recognizes the success of gender equality initiatives globally to transform lives. Access the following link for further information: <https://www.undp.org/gender-seal-development/what-gender-seal>



## FINDING 7

## Current programming and funding approaches may not be fit for purpose with respect to requirements for social norms programming, such as long-term, flexible funding.

Across all country case studies, one major barrier to social norms programming identified was the perceived short-term and donor-linked nature of programming efforts. This was validated through a time-frame analysis of both the 49 projects that were part of the portfolio review sample and the initiatives that were part of the country case studies (see Figure 9).

However, a project's duration can be deceiving, as although in some cases a project may have spanned a long time frame, it is not necessarily reflective of the time allocated to implementation or the intensity of activities due to various factors, including no cost extensions. Nevertheless, as acknowledged by the Social Norms Discussion Paper,<sup>76</sup> it is well recognized that social norms change programming requires long timeframes with sufficient resources that support the complexity and dynamics of social norms change, which requires participatory approaches, ensuring it is led and owned by communities.

Country case studies identified that generally social norms efforts were “projectized”; that a systemic approach linking efforts within offices was weak in most cases; with project activities often running independently or in parallel within interventions. However, efforts are being made – around 30 per cent (N=24/78) of respondents to the personnel survey identified that a high level of integration between programme and operations has helped to adapt social norms programmes as per need and 48 per cent (N=39/80) of respondents indicated that they regularly learn from their evidence and adapt programmes.

In Nepal, the Country Office was able to engage in a strategic and deeper dive on social norms due to securing Strategic Note funding from its key donor, the Government of Finland. As the IES-led Country Portfolio Evaluation<sup>77</sup> of the Nepal Country Office identified, this allowed for the office, in partnership with Finland, to invest in key areas more flexibly and employ adaptive management in response to key contextual changes. These efforts included investing in personnel capacities through internal reflective dialogue, leadership coaching and investing in measuring social norms change more broadly through the storytelling initiative.<sup>78</sup> The Swedish

**FIGURE 9: Average durations of projects from the portfolio review sample and case study countries**



Source: developed by the evaluation team

<sup>76</sup> UN Women. (2023). Discussion Paper: Social Norms, Gender and Development: A Review of Research and Practice. Available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2023/10/discussion-paper-social-norms-gender-and-development-a-review-of-research-and-practice>

<sup>77</sup> UN Women. (2022). Country Portfolio Evaluation; Nepal Country Office. Available at: <https://gate.unwomen.org/Evaluation/Details?EvaluationId=11554>

<sup>78</sup> Stories help people understand their environment and experiences, uncover hidden themes and explore difficult topics, including social norms. Storytelling empowers women and girls by allowing them to share their experiences, opinions and suggestions, strengthening their voices and agency. The storytelling initiative by UN Women Nepal aims to understand pathways for social norm change and promote gender equality through storytelling. For more details refer to: <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/np-The-Storytelling-Initiative.pdf>

International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) commissioned an evaluation of this same type of support (unearmarked and multi-year funding) that revealed it has allowed UNFPA, UN Women and UNICEF to programme for longer-term outcomes and more flexibly adapt to contextual changes.<sup>79</sup>

Several headquarters-based UN Women personnel and corporate evaluations pointed to the Gender Equality Accelerators (GEAs) – internally launched in June 2023<sup>80</sup> – as an opportunity to drive a coherent programmatic approach as potential key platforms for sharing knowledge, data and evidence.<sup>81,82</sup> Evaluations also refer to key lessons learned for effective implementation of the GEAs (see Box 10).<sup>83</sup> The evaluation team systematically reviewed the GEAs<sup>84</sup> and identified that the majority refer to social norms as a key barrier to progress,<sup>85</sup> yet none selected Outcome 3 Strategic Plan indicators to report against.<sup>86</sup> However, at country level and among personnel consulted at headquarters there seems to be a low level of awareness of the GEAs: several personnel noted they were unfamiliar with GEAs or did not point to them as a potential tool for leveraging. Moving forward, clarity on GEA coordination and oversight, and socialization of the potential alignment of GEAs with the long-term and flexible funding requirements required for social norms programming will be important. IES is undertaking a corporate formative assessment of the GEAs in 2024.

## BOX 10

### Gender Equality Accelerators

Important lessons from the IES-led assessment of the Flagship Programme Initiatives should inform GEA implementation. The evaluation identified that strong headquarters and regional policy support in the design and cross-fertilization of knowledge and good practices supported the success of the Flagship Programme Initiatives. The evaluation recommended that UN Women ensure that a next generation of Flagship Programme Initiatives led by PPID should be driven by UN Women senior leadership and ensure supportive business processes with clear oversight and supervisory responsibilities.

- Flagship Programme Initiative elements that delivered well: organization-wide mindset shifts towards programmatic approaches; unifying theories of change; and global and regional policy support mechanisms.
- Flagship Programme Initiative elements that were less satisfactory: pooled funding and resource mobilization; inadequate systematic higher-level review and guidance mechanisms to ensure some standardization and use of good practices and processes; monitoring of operational efficiencies; and results from economies of scale.

Source: UN Women, Independent Evaluation Service, Corporate Evaluation, Effectiveness and efficiency assessment of UN Women Flagship Programme Initiatives and Thematic Priorities of the Strategic Plan 2018-2021

<sup>79</sup> Ljungman, C. M., Connal, C., Zivanovic, A., & Alemayehu, Y. K. (2022). Evaluation of Country Programme Support to UNFPA, UNICEF and UN Women. Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), Department for International Organisation and Thematic Support. Available at: [https://cdn.sida.se/app/uploads/2022/11/17142835/EVA2022\\_4\\_62585en.pdf](https://cdn.sida.se/app/uploads/2022/11/17142835/EVA2022_4_62585en.pdf)

<sup>80</sup> Email from UN Women Deputy Executive Director A.I., Director of Policy, Programme and Intergovernmental Division.

<sup>81</sup> UN Women, Independent Evaluation Service, Corporate Evaluation of UN Women's Contributions to Gender Statistics 2019-2022. Available at <https://unw-gate.azurewebsites.net/EvaluationDocument/Download?evaluationDocumentID=10240>

<sup>82</sup> UN Women, Independent Evaluation Service, Corporate Formative Evaluation of UN Women's work in the area of Climate Change, 2023; [Evaluation Details-Global Accountability and Tracking of Evaluation Use - GATE System \(unwomen.org\)](https://unw-gate.azurewebsites.net/EvaluationDocument/Download?evaluationDocumentID=9523)

<sup>83</sup> UN Women, Independent Evaluation Service, Corporate Evaluation, Effectiveness and efficiency assessment of UN Women Flagship Programme Initiatives and Thematic Priorities of the Strategic Plan 2018-2021; <https://unw-gate.azurewebsites.net/EvaluationDocument/Download?evaluationDocumentID=9523>

<sup>84</sup> UN Women, Gender Equality Accelerators – Draft Booklet (June 2023). <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2024/07/gender-equality-accelerators-brochure>

<sup>85</sup> UN Women Gender Equality Accelerators, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2024/07/gender-equality-accelerators-brochure>

<sup>86</sup> UN Women Gender Equality Accelerators – Indicators, [Policy, Programme & Intergovernmental Division - Gender Equality Accelerators Indicators\\_SP \(1\).pdf - All Documents \(sharepoint.com\)](https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2024/07/gender-equality-accelerators-brochure)

## FINDING 8

**Absence of a suitable set of measurement indices for social norms has resulted in gaps in collecting evidence of progress related to changes in social norms limiting UN Women's ability to adequately capture, track and learn from gender transformative changes. Attention will be needed to ensure consistency in measurement and reporting against the Strategic Plan.**

It is well documented that social norms are difficult to measure.<sup>87</sup> At UN Women these challenges are compounded by several factors identified through the evidence gathered, including lack of articulation of social norms within programming, short programming timeframes, a focus on immediate (output) results, weak causal change linkages (between indicators, outputs, outcomes and impacts), weak baseline and inception research, monitoring systems, lack of qualitative and participatory methods for monitoring, and lack of dedicated capacity and resources to undertake longitudinal and broader societal tracking of social norms.

The country case studies identified that 14 of 21 projects had outcomes or outputs that explicitly or implicitly targeted social norms change, while only six projects had indicators that measured any type of social norms change (explicitly mentioned or implied). The indicators include the number of community leaders or men targeted or mobilized, and the number of people reached, with only one indicator focused on changing public or individual mindsets.<sup>88</sup>

Given that efforts related to updating and refining the Strategic Plan Social Norms Outcome 3 indicators were in progress during the conduct of this evaluation (updated in December 2023), it is understandable that the evaluation found a lack of understanding and confusion around how to report against the indicators. Only 30 per cent (N=23/77) of respondents felt confident in tracking social norms within RMS, and 25 per cent (N=19/76) indicated to a high degree that they have adapted or developed new indicators to track changes in social norms. In

2022, 32 UN Women offices reported against the social norms outcome indicator, this decreased in 2023 to only 24 offices.<sup>89</sup> The evaluation team reviewed the reports and identified inconsistency in indicator reporting for Outcome 3. For instance, reporting on Outcome Indicator 3.1<sup>90</sup> included some offices reporting progress in binary terms (yes/no), others in numerical figures, percentages, high/low categorizations, or qualitative descriptions. This limits both the usability and comparability of the information reported.

Several UN agencies (UN Women, UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA) have attempted to align their strategic plan indicators. The evaluation team reviewed the UNFPA strategic plan<sup>91</sup> and identified that UN Women is noted throughout the indicators; however, several did not align with UN Women's existing indicators. Headquarters outcome leads noted there has been no engagement with UN agencies regarding alignment on methodology or reporting against the indicators.

There are several notable measurement approaches which UN Women can learn from, leverage and use to inform guidance for supporting measurement of social norms at various levels of the organization. The UN Women Expert Group Meeting on Social Norms<sup>92</sup> (October 2023) commissioned a paper which explores approaches for measuring social norms. It reviewed the Gender Equality Attitudes Survey (led by the UN Women Private Sector Partnership Division and the Unstereotype Alliance,<sup>93</sup> it is a bi-annual 20-country-wide survey that tracks perceptions across key categories), the Nepal Country Office Storytelling Initiative and the UNDP Gender Social Norms

<sup>87</sup> UN Women Social Norms Discussion Paper, Transforming Patriarchal Masculinities Position Paper, meta-analysis of evaluations, country case studies, etc.

<sup>88</sup> The Women in Leadership project implemented in Kyrgyzstan includes the indicator: number of initiatives for promoting/fostering/pushing for changes in public/individual mindsets concerning women's role in elections.

<sup>89</sup> Including Country Offices, Regional Offices and headquarters units.

<sup>90</sup> Extent of bias in gender equality attitudes and/or gender social norms among individuals.

<sup>91</sup> UNFPA Integrated results and resources framework, Strategic plan, 2022-2025, [https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/board-documents/main-document/Annex%206%20-%20Integrated%20results%20and%20resources%20of%20framework%20-%20UNFPA%20strategic%20plan%2C%202022-2025\\_May16.docx\\_.pdf](https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/board-documents/main-document/Annex%206%20-%20Integrated%20results%20and%20resources%20of%20framework%20-%20UNFPA%20strategic%20plan%2C%202022-2025_May16.docx_.pdf)

<sup>92</sup> Expert Group Meeting on Social Norms, October 2023: Kate Bedford and Magalí Brosio, Measuring social norms for gender and development (advanced draft)

<sup>93</sup> The survey was initiated in 2018 with partners including private sector companies: AT&T, Johnson and Johnson, Kantar, Procter & Gamble, and Unilever; and Kantar—a data, insights, and consulting company—was hired to develop and conduct the fieldwork.

Index,<sup>94</sup> among others. The draft paper identified several weaknesses across these approaches, both in terms of the methodologies employed and interpretation of results. Personnel familiar with these measurement approaches also noted that, regardless of the weaknesses, they are important contributions and can provide key information for advocacy purposes. Partnerships with UN sister organizations that have invested in social norms measurement and programming also present an opportunity for UN Women to broaden the scope and scale of measurement.

At regional level, UN Women has deployed multi-country studies to inform programming efforts. For example, the UN Women Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific was engaged in the Joint Partners for Prevention Programme,<sup>95</sup> which launched the first ever UN multi-country study on men and violence in 2013, reaching approximately 10,000 men across six countries in Asia and the Pacific to explore drivers of violence, including social norms. In the Arab States region, UN Women engaged in the Gender Equitable Men Scale to the International Men and Gender Equality survey,<sup>96</sup> and used the results for developing its Men and Women for Gender Equality programme.<sup>97</sup>

At country level, the case studies focused on project-level measurement (except for the Nepal Country Office storytelling initiative) and linkages with the Country Office Strategic Notes and UN Women corporate Strategic Plan were challenging. The storytelling initiative implemented by the Nepal Country Office holds potential, but the evaluation team and previous evaluations<sup>98</sup> have identified the need to strengthen linkages between storytelling and UN Women programming efforts for it to benefit measurement of social norms change related to UN Women's efforts.

Personnel across case study countries noted that they have limited understanding about how to effectively monitor and evaluate social norms, and the partners they rely on for monitoring have equally limited understanding and generally weak monitoring capacity. This was also evidenced by the meta-synthesis of evaluations.<sup>99,100,101</sup> The country case studies identified that in instances where methodologies such as GALs, SASA or SAA are applied, monitoring and evaluation processes are embedded within these methodologies, often in the form of attitude change surveys, and personnel noted difficulties in employing them in the correct way. Approaches often lacked qualitative and participatory methods for measuring change, which is critical for assessing social norms change.

As the Social Norms Discussion Paper points out, there is a need to both measure change through small-scale initiatives and through longer-term and broader-scale measurement of social norms. Equally important are ongoing measurement approaches, as validated through the case studies and meta-synthesis of evaluations, where the constant ebb and flow of social norms change are necessary to track, including where there is backsliding on commitments or actions, backlash or unintended consequences so that it can inform programming adjustments.<sup>102</sup> The evidence also points to the need to embed measurement approaches in the design phase to ensure that sufficient time and resources are allocated to the process of understanding social norms; identifying how to track these over time; and increasing the capacity of partners and rights holders to undertake this jointly in line with ethical standards.<sup>103</sup>

<sup>94</sup> UNDP. (2023). Gender Social Norms Index (GSNI). Available at: <https://hdr.undp.org/content/2023-gender-social-norms-index-gsni#/indicies/GSNI>

The GSNI consists of four dimensions: political, educational, economic and physical integrity. It is developed using responses to seven questions from the World Values Survey, which are utilized to formulate seven indicators.

<sup>95</sup> Partners for Prevention was a regional joint programme of UNDP, UNFPA, UN Women and UNV for Asia and the Pacific, which ran from 2013 – 2018.

<sup>96</sup> International Centre for Research on Women and Instituto Promundo. (2010). International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES). Available at: <https://www.icrw.org/publications/international-men-and-gender-equality-survey-images/>

<sup>97</sup> Funded by the [Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency \(Sida\)](https://www.sida.se/), the Men and Women for Gender Equality programme seeks to improve understanding of the root causes of gender inequalities in the Arab States, and address these through a bottom-up approach, including through the engagement of men and boys for gender equality. Phase I (2015-2018), and Phase II (2019-2022) include Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, Jordan and Tunisia. <https://arabstates.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/men-and-women-for-gender-equality>

<sup>98</sup> UN Women. (2022). Independent Evaluation Service, Country Portfolio Evaluation Nepal Country Office. <https://gate.unwomen.org/EvaluationDocument/Download?evaluationDocumentID=9903>

<sup>99</sup> Based on 12/45 evaluations

<sup>100</sup> UN Women. (2022). Final Evaluation of Men and Women for Gender Equality-Phase II programme. Available at: <https://gate.unwomen.org/Evaluation/Details?evaluationId=11636>

<sup>101</sup> Evaluation currently in-progress

<sup>102</sup> UN Women Discussion Paper: Social Norms, Gender and Development: A Review of Research and Practice, November 2023. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2023/10/discussion-paper-social-norms-gender-and-development-a-review-of-research-and-practice>

<sup>103</sup> UN Women & Prevention Collaborative. (2023). Practice Brief: Doing Violence Prevention Well – Matching Aspirations with Funding Timeframes. Available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-07/doing-violence-prevention-well-en.pdf>

### 4.3 Evaluation question 3. What are the opportunities and niche for UN Women to contribute externally to the social norms programmatic space? (coherence)

## FINDING 9

### Navigating the contextual challenges, including backlash against women's rights, and the compounded backlash against LGBTIQ+ persons, persons with disabilities, persons of marginalized racial and ethnic groups, and others emerged as a key challenge for social norms efforts.

Although backlash is nothing new for the feminist and gender movements, in 2018, the United Nations Human Rights Council raised concerns and warnings about the increasing backlash against women's rights and the Human Rights Council working group recommended that the UN system strategize and act proactively against the "nuclei" of resistance, noting that if it fails to do so the impact of its efforts to promote the rights of women in all their diversity will remain insufficient.<sup>104</sup> Unfortunately, these concerns remain today and perhaps have even intensified. In its Gender Snapshot 2022, UN Women reported on the progress of the Sustainable Development Goals that, "the backlash against women's sexual and reproductive rights are worsening the outlook for gender equality"<sup>105</sup> and the January 2024 opening session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women noted that, "the world continued to witness a backlash on women's rights across the globe".<sup>106</sup>

The meta-analysis of evaluations<sup>107</sup> and country case studies identified that challenges persist in navigating conversations on social norms, gender equality and addressing backlash. For example, in the EU4GenderEquality programme, a cross-regional programme spanning multiple countries in the Europe and Central Asia region, the evaluation noted that the term "gender" was avoided due to potential uncomfortable connotations in certain countries. In some places, this drew criticism from partners who felt the deeper

social norms had not been adequately challenged.<sup>108</sup> The country case studies for this evaluation noted that in some conservative communities, rather than using the term "gender" or "social norms" or "feminist", programmes referred to social norms models more generally or methodologies (i.e. *GALS*, *SAA*, *SASA*), which was reported to be useful in avoiding scrutiny and backlash. For instance, in Kyrgyzstan, civil society navigating religious conservatism found it more acceptable to frame their work as methodological (e.g. *GALS*) rather than explicitly addressing gender due to religious sensitivities.

Gender equality itself has been threatened by conservative forces in several case study countries. Community champions were reluctant to be identified as they feared backlash. In some cases, it was reported that community members who no longer practiced discriminatory social norms did not wish to share with the rest of the community, fearing social ostracism, which highlighted a key challenge in tracking social norm change. Change efforts perceived to be coming from outside the community rather than from within the community were also seen to potentially increase the risk of backlash in some cases (e.g. Samoa and Men and Women for Gender Equality evaluation).<sup>109</sup>

UN Women evaluations have pointed to the need to integrate more intentional strategies for mitigating or addressing backlash.<sup>110</sup> An IES-led evaluation of

<sup>104</sup> United Nations Human Rights Council, Report of the Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and in practice, July 2018; A/HRC/38/46; para's 44 and 48. <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G18/132/85/PDF/G1813285.pdf?OpenElement>

<sup>105</sup> UN Women & United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. (2022). Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals – The Gender Snapshot 2022. Available at: [https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-09/Progress-on-the-sustainable-development-goals-the-gender-snapshot-2022-en\\_o.pdf](https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-09/Progress-on-the-sustainable-development-goals-the-gender-snapshot-2022-en_o.pdf)

<sup>106</sup> CEDAW opens the 87th session, Statement from Andrea Ori, Chief of the Groups in Focus Section, Human Rights Treaties Branch, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 29 January, 2024; <https://www.ohchr.org/en/news/2024/01/committee-elimination-discrimination-against-women-opens-eighty-seventh-session-geneva>

<sup>107</sup> Based on 6/45 evaluations

<sup>108</sup> UN Women. Europe and Central Asia (ECA) regional evaluation. EU4GenderEquality.Evaluation in progress.

<sup>109</sup> UN Women, Regional Office for Arab States, Final Evaluation of the UN Women's regional MENA programme: 'Men and Women for Gender Equality', 2023.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

UN Women’s engagement with civil society in Latin America and the Caribbean identified that an area of “strong demand” is support in responding to the anti-rights movement.<sup>111</sup>

Parts of UN Women have also recognized that in addition to identifying “backlash” as a programmatic risk, strategies to plan for and counter backlash are necessary. Only recently, in November 2023, UN Women’s Civil Society Division shared a “Push Forward Strategy” aimed at establishing a corporate strategy for addressing backlash against women’s rights and advocates. However, this is a new strategy and has not yet been internally socialized. It was publicly launched at the Commission on the Status of Women alongside key women’s rights organizations<sup>112</sup> but there have been no related internal messages or dissemination. Common approaches UN Women recommends for planning for and counteracting backlash include: analysing power dynamics and norms; measurement of ongoing changes, including a comprehensive power analysis in interventions; risk mitigation, including resistance; partnerships with civil society organizations (CSOs) to leverage complementarity; creating spaces for dialogue and sharing with other CSOs; adopting inclusive and intersectional approaches; and engaging with the meta-politics of misogyny and anti-gender movements.

<sup>113</sup>, <sup>114</sup>, <sup>115</sup>, <sup>116</sup>, <sup>117</sup>

The UNDP Gender Equality Strategy 2022–2025 may also provide inspiration, as it has committed to strengthen its efforts around understanding and measuring backlash against women’s rights, including through artificial intelligence.

#### BOX 11

### UNDP Gender Equality Strategy 2022–2025: steps to counter backlash

UNDP has outlined several concrete plans to strategize against backlash:

- Establish early-warning systems to detect and monitor backlash against gender equality and women’s rights, especially the erosion of public policies.
- Help protect and expand space for women-led CSOs and networks.
- Develop a complementary long-term strategy to transform violent masculinities through community interventions and the modelling of positive behaviours and masculinity.
- Deepen the understanding of technology and its impact on women’s rights and its links to governance.

<sup>111</sup> UN Women, Independent Evaluation Service led evaluation of UN Women’s engagement with Civil Society in Latin America, 2024. <https://gate.unwomen.org/Evaluation/Details?EvaluationId=11723>

<sup>112</sup> Pushing forward for gender equality: CSW68 event showcases strategies for countering pushback and advancing women’s rights around the world. 26 March 2024. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/news/2024/03/pushing-forward-for-gender-equality-csw68-event-showcases-strategies-for-countering-pushback-and-advancing-womens-rights-around-the-world>

<sup>113</sup> UN Women, LGBTQ+ Internal Resource Guide. (2021). <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-07/lgbtqi-equality-and-rights-internal-resource-guide-en.pdf>

<sup>114</sup> United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women, Learning from Practice: Resistance and Backlash to Preventing Violence Against Women and Girls. (2021). [https://untf.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Field%20Office%20UNTF/Publications/2021/Prevention%20briefs/Resistance%20and%20backlash/Synthesis%20Review%207%20-%20resistance%20and%20backlash\\_v2\\_compressed.pdf](https://untf.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Field%20Office%20UNTF/Publications/2021/Prevention%20briefs/Resistance%20and%20backlash/Synthesis%20Review%207%20-%20resistance%20and%20backlash_v2_compressed.pdf)

<sup>115</sup> UN Guidance Note Protection and Promotion of Civic Space. (2020). [https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/CivicSpace/UN\\_Guidance\\_Note.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/CivicSpace/UN_Guidance_Note.pdf)

<sup>116</sup> UN Women. (2023). Discussion Paper: Social Norms, Gender and Development: A Review of Research and Practice. Available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2023/10/discussion-paper-social-norms-gender-and-development-a-review-of-research-and-practice>

<sup>117</sup> UN Women, Position paper: transforming patriarchal masculinities – Organizational approach to UN Women’s work on gender equality with men and boys”, 2021.

## FINDING 10

### UN Women's work with women-led and women's rights focused organizations, and with the women's movement is well documented as a strength, yet meaningful engagement of civil society in understanding social norms and defining strategies for tackling discriminatory social norms could be strengthened.

Across different sources of evidence, UN Women's unique niche is identified as its relationship with grassroots, women-led and women's rights focused CSOs and their role as key allies in shifting power relations, both at community and national levels. Approximately 62 per cent (N=49/78) of respondents to the personnel survey indicated that they work with feminist leaders and networks in the areas of social norms to inform approaches to a high (N=28/78) or very high degree (N=21/78). Collaboration and partnership with grassroots women's organizations, associations, networks and movements are recognized as part of UN Women's "way of working". These collaborations with women's organizations encompassed programmatic, capacity-building and advocacy roles. For instance, the Country Office in Ethiopia has worked extensively at the normative level with different ministries and convening platforms for exchange with a variety of CSOs, religious bodies and women's networks. In the face of rising conservatism, personnel consulted find it increasingly important to engage with women journalists, feminists, academia and women's movements.

The country case studies identified two common challenges. First, some stakeholders noted that the power dynamics in their relationship with UN Women has sometimes felt more transactional (client-based) rather than mutual partnership with meaningful engagement on implementation plans. Some UN Women personnel consulted noted that while they often have consultations, they do not see opportunities for truly co-creating within UN Women's procedures or guidance on programme or project development. UN Women personnel also noted that they felt it can be difficult to engage grassroots organizations as they require support to meet all UN Women requirements. Some offices have identified ways of

engaging with grassroots-level organizations through establishment of a consortium or umbrella model approach, which allows several groups to work together, providing more opportunity for meeting UN Women's partner requirements and tapping into local knowledge, interests and methods.<sup>118,119,120</sup>

The evaluation team reviewed UN Women Policies, Procedures and Guidance regarding partner engagement (see Annex 10) and noted that while fundamental guidance is provided in terms of managing risks, there is limited information on where and how meaningful engagement and co-creation with partners can take place within the programme cycle while following the rules and regulations that ensure competitive partner selection. For example, the current guidance on the Country Office Strategic Note<sup>121</sup> process encourages its development in a "consultative and a participatory manner" with key partners. However, no guidance exists on how to realize this and there are no clear requirements or related accountability. Therefore, the extent to which there is meaningful engagement of civil society partners by Country Offices is not reported systematically. Guidance and capacity-building could be provided on how to conduct collaborative research and co-design processes to meaningfully engage partners in understanding and defining the key social norms that are underlying progress against the Strategic Note. Similarly, during the project inception phase, partners should be engaged in meaningfully articulating social norms and pathways of change to avoid just ticking the box for feasibility.<sup>122</sup>

Second, in several countries visited, despite a robust women's civil society in the past, some stakeholders noted that in recent years this unity has fragmented due to various reasons, including the emergence of an

<sup>118</sup> UN Women. (2024). Independent Evaluation Service-led evaluation of UN Women's Engagement with Civil Society in Latin America.

<sup>119</sup> UN Women. 2022. Country Portfolio Evaluation; Nepal Country Office. Available at: <https://unw-gate.azurewebsites.net/Evaluation/Details?evaluationId=11554>

<sup>120</sup> UN Women. 2022. Final Evaluation PBF Women's and Youth Political Participation. Available at: <https://gate.unwomen.org/Evaluation/Details?evaluationId=11583>

<sup>121</sup> UN Women Country Office Strategic Note Guidance (2022); [Strategic Note \(SN\) Guidance \(sharepoint.com\)](#)

<sup>122</sup> Current UN Women guidance provides 15 days for the partner to certify that the project can be feasibly implemented within the existing design. UN Women, Initiate Programme Partners Procedure (issued in 2023): [Initiate Programme Partner Project Procedure.pdf \(sharepoint.com\)](#)

intergenerational divergence of views about feminism. This has resulted in a lack of solidarity, coordination and effective collective action within women's civil society. CSOs look to UN Women to be a convener – facilitating dialogue even among women's rights groups.

The above challenges are echoed through the meta-synthesis of evaluations. While evaluations identify UN Women's strong partnerships with CSOs, they also highlight opportunities for more systematic engagement

with women's organizations across UN Women programming;<sup>123</sup> and the need to strengthen its support to local CSOs/community-based organizations and other women's rights associations/groups to create an enabling environment at community/grassroots ward and district levels, to address root causes for gender inequality (including harmful social norms, myths, attitudes and cultural/traditional practices).

## FINDING 11

**Coordination with United Nations partners related to social norms is occurring in different ways – joint programmes, joint guidance and through joint advocacy. However, such work is largely ad hoc, project specific and implicitly addressing social norms, which limits the ability to leverage each other's capacities to collectively advance social norms for gender equality at scale.**

The country case studies conducted for this evaluation also identified key entry points for working with the UN system including joint advocacy, which takes place through dedicated campaigns such as International Women's Day, 16 Days of Activism Against Violence, and others. However, these campaigns are implicitly addressing social norms and not measuring the impact at scale. Seven of the 19 projects implemented by the case study countries were joint projects. The joint UNDP Women and Leadership initiative in Samoa included research on social norms as a key step in project implementation. In Nepal, the joint Rural Women's Economic Empowerment project with IFAD, the Food and Agricultural Organization and the World Food Programme, allowed UN Women to enter a highly technical space in agriculture, ensuring complementarities between agencies. The meta-synthesis of evaluations identified that joint programmes have been able to leverage economies of scale, such as through regionally tailored training sessions on evidence-based approaches and frameworks that could be delivered efficiently to participants from multiple countries. Activities conducted jointly with other UN organizations were also identified as bolstering and advocating further coherence across traditionally more siloed systems.

Personnel pointed to joint programmes offering important means for addressing social norms, but also noted that it requires a common understanding of social norms in the specific context. A few personnel consulted pointed to the importance of engaging the UN Country Team in reflecting on social norms as it relates to the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework, and using coordination working groups (e.g. Gender in Humanitarian Action, Gender Theme Groups) as entry points. At global level, limited actions were identified with respect to coordination efforts on social norms, but they may be embedded in implicit ways.

As noted under Finding 8, several UN agencies (UN Women, UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA) have attempted to align Strategic Plan indicators related to social norms. These agencies also recognize transforming social norms as a key aspect of their gender strategies and have undertaken several individual or joint initiatives related to social norms (e.g. UNICEF-UNFPA Ending Female Genital Mutilation and Ending Child Marriage); publications dedicated to social norms (e.g. RESPECT framework for preventing violence against women); and approaches for measuring social norms (e.g. UNDP Social Norms Index). In line with the launch of the UNFPA Strategic Plan 2022–2025 where social norms was included as a dedicated

<sup>123</sup> For instance, the [Evaluation of Civil Society Engagement in the Americas and Caribbean](#) notes that “the strength of UN Women's partnerships with feminist and women's organizations in the Americas and Caribbean region has been and will continue to be the bedrock for effectively achieving its mission of gender equality and women's empowerment. Strategic prioritization has helped the Entity to consolidate its engagement with CSOs, although contextual shifts have posed important challenges to the effectiveness and sustainability of such partnerships.”



output area, UNFPA re-launched a “Manual on social norms” originally developed for its joint UNFPA/UNICEF Female Genital Mutilation programme.<sup>124</sup> The approach outlined in the “Social Norms manual” focuses on attitudinal and collective behavioural change. Through the joint programme the agencies have developed multiple resources, including a Participatory Research Toolkit for Social Norms Measurement.<sup>125</sup> In the case of UNICEF, the Strategic Plan 2021–2025 positions a social-behavioural approach as a fundamental cross-cutting approach for all programming as a means to create a supportive environment that encourages positive behaviours and abandoning harmful practices.

More broadly, the United Nations Secretary-General, António Guterres, has identified behavioural science as a priority for United Nations, issued a guidance note<sup>126</sup> and embedded it as a key aspect<sup>127</sup> of the Summit for the Future<sup>128</sup> planned for September 2024. The Secretary-General’s Guidance Note states that, “Issues related to gender can be enhanced through behavioural science in many areas, including changing social norms, reducing gender inequalities in the workforce, and preventing intimate partner violence.” The Secretary-General further states, “UN Entities are strongly encouraged to invest in behavioural science and work in a connected and collaborative interagency community to realise its tremendous potential for impact.”<sup>129</sup> The [UN Innovation Network](#) has established a community of practice on behavioural science, and UN Women is listed as a member. Artificial intelligence and its potential impacts on development is another area of attention identified by the Secretary-General for discussion at the Summit of the Future, which will be led by the Artificial Intelligence Advisory Group.<sup>130</sup> A UNDP 2024 trends report identified that the

digital world is amplifying misogynistic voices, which will make shifting social norms more difficult.<sup>131</sup> UN Women has initiated some work in these areas<sup>132</sup> and the 2022 report on UN Behavioural Science initiatives noted that while “behaviour change is at the core of UN Women’s work,” UN Women has not yet developed a comprehensive approach.<sup>133</sup> While this evaluation identified that some UN Women initiatives are employing a behavioural perspective, the evidence from evaluations<sup>134</sup> shows that tangible behavioural change was unlikely to be achieved given the relatively short duration of project interventions and identified opportunities for stronger linkages with social norms efforts (also see Finding 7).

Based on the evaluation evidence, two common areas have emerged around UN Women’s added value in the broader coordination space:

- **Convening power** – ability to bring diverse actors together around common priorities for gender equality and women’s empowerment and providing platforms for knowledge exchange.
- **Expertise in gender equality and feminist approaches** – stakeholders see potential for UN Women to become a thought leader and contributor to social norms efforts through continued partnerships on advocacy, research and guidance grounded in feminist principles.

<sup>124</sup> UNFPA. (2022). Manual on Social Norms and Change. <https://www.unfpa.org/publications/manual-social-norms-and-change-2022>

<sup>125</sup> UNFPA, UNICEF and Drexel University School of Public Health, Participatory Research Toolkit for Social Norms Measurement. (Dec. 2020). <https://www.unfpa.org/resources/participatory-research-toolkit-social-norms-measurement>

<sup>126</sup> United Nations, Secretary-General Guidance Note on Behavioral Science. <https://www.un.org/en/content/behaviouralscience/assets/pdf/UN%20Secretary-General's%20Guidance%20on%20Behavioural%20Science.pdf>

<sup>127</sup> United Nations, UN 2.0: Reimagining our global organization for a world in flux. <https://www.un.org/en/desa-en/un-20-reimagining-our-global-organization-world-flux>

<sup>128</sup> United Nations, Summit of the Future 2024 <https://www.un.org/en/common-agenda/summit-of-the-future>

<sup>129</sup> United Nations, Secretary-General Guidance Note on Behavioral Science. <https://www.un.org/en/content/behaviouralscience/>

<sup>130</sup> United Nations, AI Advisory Body, <https://www.un.org/en/ai-advisory-body>

<sup>131</sup> UNDP, Strategy and Futures Team, 2024 UNDP Trends Report: The landscape of development. (January 31 2024). <https://www.undp.org/future-development/publications/2024-undp-trends-report-landscape-development>

<sup>132</sup> UN Women, Pushing forward: Preventing violence against women in online spaces. (18 November 2022). <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/feature-story/2022/11/pushing-forward-preventing-violence-against-women-in-online-spaces>

<sup>133</sup> UN Innovation network. (2023). United Nations Behavioural Science Report; Page 49 profile on UN Women: <https://www.uninnovation.network/un-groups-featured-publication/un-behavioural-science-report>

<sup>134</sup> Strengthening Qinghai women farmer’s income security and resilience in a changing climate, Preventing Forced Migration and Trafficking in Women and Girls in Nigeria and Evaluation of UN Women Caribbean MCO’s Social Mobilization Programme to End Gender-Based Violence in the Caribbean.

## 5. LESSONS LEARNED AND PROMISING PRACTICES

1

Long-term partnerships that foster trust and co-creation of strategies with flexibility to adjust approaches as needed are necessary to challenge discriminatory social norms; in particular, grassroots partners are critical for driving and sustaining social norms change.

2

Given the potentially sensitive nature of addressing discriminatory social norms, it is critical to strategize with partners about how to plan for and address potential or actual backlash against women's rights, including the compounded backlash against LGBTIQ+ persons, persons with disabilities, and persons of marginalized racial or ethnic groups.

3

Recognizing the pivotal role of key institutions, influencers and power brokers, including men and boys, in promoting women's empowerment and challenging discriminatory social norms is necessary for the success and sustainability of initiatives that target social norms change. This requires intentional power analysis to identify and strategize how to engage these diverse groups.

4

Explicit analysis and targeting of social norms in programming will ensure that these efforts are tracked and that lessons can inform programming efforts around what is working or not towards social norms change.

5

Measuring social norms change requires organizational commitment and investment in long-term tracking and adaptation of measurement approaches at different levels of the organization to ensure they are reflective of contextual realities at grassroots level.

6

Strategic partnerships at global, regional and country levels may enable the organization to enhance its efforts in population-based social norms efforts and measurement.

7

Breaking organizational siloes requires investing time and establishing accountability and mechanisms on "how" to bridge across teams in a meaningful way.

**The meta-synthesis of evaluations identified key lessons learned with respect to social norms programming efforts, some of which are highlighted here (for further details see Annex 11):**

- Planning for potential deleterious effects is necessary to avoid increasing the burden on women:** Some evaluations cautioned reinforcing certain stereotypes and ensuring a holistic view of how efforts can be supportive of the shifting norms. For example, some efforts were reinforcing "acceptable" types of work for women (e.g. tailoring, embroidery, beauty, handicrafts, etc.). Further, while efforts contributed to transformed social perceptions on women's roles and their increased participation in economic activities and decision-making at various levels, some efforts did not address the necessity to shift care work by male household and community members that would be required for women to sustain this increased engagement. Therefore, while women increased participation in public arenas, this also added to the burden on women.
- Careful identification of who and how key community influencers, and men and boys, are engaged can foster potential for scale:** The engagement of positive influencers and men and boys has fostered some attitudinal change on social norms, yet evaluations highlight the need for caution on who is engaged and how they are engaged in these efforts. While excluding men and boys from project design can hinder project support, leading to potential backlash and reduced engagement from key stakeholders, in some cases this group or individuals may face potential stigmatization for their involvement, potentially leading to concealment of their efforts, which works against broader social norms change efforts.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

### CONCLUSION 1:

**There is clear rationale for UN Women to clarify and strengthen its approach to social norms work given its centrality to UN Women's efforts. However, progress against the outcome may be limited without significant investment in strengthening institutional capacity and organizational buy-in on a common approach, language and principles for social norms programming.**

Based on findings: 1,2, 4

Social norms are a critical driver for advancing gender equality and women's empowerment and there is recognition from across stakeholder types that more intentional efforts to target social norms are required for UN Women to make lasting change that contributes to gender equality and women's empowerment. The Strategic Plan has positioned social norms as an organizational priority which provides potential for consolidating and amplifying UN Women's efforts to influence social norms through a cross-cutting and intersectional approach.

A common approach, language and principles for social norms programming at UN Women will contribute to enhancing coherence and the organization's ability to effectively communicate, strategize and track social norms change. However, UN Women will need to invest in strengthening institutional capacity if it wants to see real progress. Without investment in institutional capacity, UN Women risks perpetuating ad hoc and fragmented efforts, limiting the ability of the organization to articulate results and scale efforts.

UN Women's approach to social norms programming should both recognize the diverse strategies and interpretations of social norms across the organization while ensuring overall agreement on the principles. There is evidence that UN Women should advocate and move social norms efforts towards a systemic approach which will have more potential for sustained and transformative change that addresses underlying causes of inequalities and discrimination. UN Women should continue to establish its intellectual capital in the social norms space by focusing on its added value, which includes its reach to grassroots levels and engagement with women's rights organizations.

Organizational buy-in for the approach to social norms needs to be built in an inclusive manner by recognizing the diverse strategies and interpretations of social norms from across the organization (headquarters, regional and country level units; and thematic areas, cross-cutting topics, communications and the private sector) and unifying around how to best tap into these and work collectively. If consensus on an approach is not established, there is a risk that social norms work will continue to be implicit or siloed within a limited number of thematic areas.

### CONCLUSION 2:

**As UN Women is at the mid-point of the 2022–2025 Strategic Plan, action to bridge organizational silos and to ensure clear lines of accountability for realizing the vision of the Strategic Plan systemic outcome on social norms and the intersectional approach to its implementation should be prioritized.**

Based on findings: 3,6

Experience in rolling out the systemic outcome on social norms has shed light on a broader organizational challenge related to bridging the silos that the Strategic Plan 2022–2025 set out to address through the establishment of the systemic outcomes and adherence to an intersectional approach to implementation.

There is a need for clear governance of the systemic outcomes, emphasizing accountability for action which may have catalytic results, including for the social norms outcome. This will entail strengthening clarity on institutional structures and mechanisms that support integrated planning, implementation, monitoring and reporting across systemic outcomes, thematic and cross-cutting areas (LGBTIQ+ rights, disability inclusion, racial justice, transforming patriarchal masculinities). Internalizing Transformative Leadership for Gender Equality can be a critical pathway to bridging silos. As Michele Bachelet, the first Executive Director of UN Women, said, "Leading with feminist principles means redefining value and success, sharing power and credit, building community and relationships, and, ultimately, tackling the roots of oppressive structures and social norms that hold back progress for all people, including women and girls."<sup>135</sup> Feminist approaches to management include working horizontally rather than vertically.

<sup>135</sup> Michele Bachelet, 2021; <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2021/3/compilation-women-leaders-we-admire#:~:text=Leading%20with%20feminist%20principles%20means,people%2C%20including%20women%20and%20girls.>

With respect to the social norms outcome, clarity regarding the strategy for resourcing and carrying forward implementation of the proposed approach for social norms is critical. The current organizational set-up for support and leadership on social norms lies with PAPDU and the Research and Data Division. While PAPDU may be the appropriate placement internally within the current organizational structure, review of PAPDU's strategies for operationalizing the approaches and guidance it has put forward related to leave no one behind would be beneficial with a view to how it will support the approach on social norms. The unit should be empowered to realize the cross-cutting role it was expected to play with respect to bridging organizational silos. If PAPDU is not empowered to do so, another unit that can lead this process will need to be identified.

### CONCLUSION 3:

**For UN Women's social norms programming to be fit for purpose at UN Women, there is a need to leverage its added value in application of feminist principles, because communities themselves must define social norms within their diverse settings and co-create pathways of change to realize sustainable and transformative change. Integrating these principles and tools into the organization's programme cycle (for both Strategic Notes and projects) can support better articulation of social norms and a more integrated approach across the thematic areas.**

Based on findings: 2,4,5,7,8

Committing to social norms as a central tenet for programming at UN Women will entail embedding strategies for analysing social norms and power dynamics at programme design stage for all UN Women efforts. Requiring this type of analysis for all UN Women programmes will support a cross-cutting approach that is not dependent on the thematic or topic area. Approaches applied to address social norms risk being sidelined or reinforcing a siloed approach if not integrated clearly at the overall programme and project level.

As demonstrated through the case studies, context matters: locally developed solutions help to promote sustainable change. Applying feminist principles will require prioritizing approaches and tools identified through UN Women efforts on the ground. It also requires thinking horizontally across the various thematic areas and cross-cutting topics (e.g. LGBTIQ+ rights, disability inclusion, etc.). This entails prioritizing global south knowledge and equalizing power dynamics with UN Women's key partners.

The process of understanding how social norms manifest in different contexts will facilitate clearer targeting of social norms in programme design and identification of relevant tools to systematically collect data, including through participatory and indigenous ways, to measure social norms change over the long term. It will also enhance the organizations' ability to clearly position and communicate its approach to address social norms and advocate for resources to support long-term programmes.

As the case studies identified, the process of unpacking social norms must start internally within UN Women – reflective dialogue among team members to demystify concepts, openly question and discuss social norms as they apply within our own lives and within our own families can help UN Women personnel to build capacities and confidence to analyse these concepts within programmes. Indigenous approaches to dialogue, analysis and measurement exist and should be leveraged to ensure approaches are owned and driven by communities themselves. This evaluation also identified examples of indigenous approaches, such as in Samoa through the Fa'a'Samoa and Talanoa approach, and several feminist frameworks and tools have been employed (e.g. Kyrgyzstan, Nepal, Ethiopia). There is an opportunity for UN Women to consolidate these approaches into guidance and a corresponding toolbox to build personnel capacity.

It is widely recognized that social norms programming requires long-term commitment. This will require advocacy for Strategic Note funding and longer-term programming timeframes. Recognizing the external funding constraints, these risks need to be factored into the design through scenario-based planning for how these constraints will affect programming and measurement approaches. Ideally, seed money and core resources for building capacities to ensure robust programme cycle planning, monitoring and measurement approaches will be mobilized. Lessons learned from UN partners' approaches for institutional strengthening of social norms change efforts will be important to internalize (e.g. UNICEF).

Mainstreaming social norms in addition to targeted interventions may be mutually beneficial for thematic areas and cross-cutting topics and enhance overall results in line with commitments to leave no one behind, as the systemic outcome envisioned. Given that strengthening social norms as a central tenet in UN Women programming will be a long-term effort, in the more immediate term, the role of GEAs as a corporate framework for social norms should be explored. The GEAs could provide a way to mobilize targeted resources for social norms programming efforts and facilitate piloting of social norms approaches.

**CONCLUSION 4:**

**UN Women’s ability to reach and amplify the voices and knowledge of the women, women’s rights defenders, and civil society organizations with which the organization works is also its added value in the social norms space and thus it should prioritize investing in these partners and explicitly strategizing how to mitigate and deal with backlash, especially as it affects the most marginalized groups.**

Based on findings: 9,10

UN Women can add value to the social norms space through its reach to the diverse women and communities it serves, which can facilitate meaningfully engaging communities to unpack social norms and power dynamics and co-create pathways for change. UN Women’s strong relationship with women’s rights organizations is well-recognized as its strength. Civil society is not only critical as partners but also as co-creators in the process of understanding and changing social norms aimed at gender equality and women’s empowerment. UN Women’s partners are fundamental in the process of unpacking social norms as they relate to the varied local and institutional contexts within which UN Women operates. Recognizing that social norms programming must be contextualized, working with partners as co-analysers and co-creators will work to shift power dynamics towards prioritizing the voices and knowledge of the communities with which UN Women works. Capacity for social norms programming is built through this experiential learning and engagement directly with the stakeholders that are meant to benefit. UN Women should clarify that co-creation processes are possible at key points of the programming cycle and socialize this throughout the organization and build the capacity of personnel to carry this forward.

Now, more than ever, women’s rights organizations need UN Women’s support given the increasing backlash against women’s rights – in all their diversity - and targeted action against women’s rights defenders. It is not enough to include backlash as a risk in the programme plan, it must be part of an overall strategy for changing social norms; mitigating harm against UN Women’s key partners; and ensuring that backlash experienced is tracked and lessons learned integrated into programmes.

**CONCLUSION 5:**

**There are significant efforts and investments focused on social norms change within the UN system, primarily from the social-behavioural change approach. UN Women will need to proactively engage, ensure clear messaging on its value added within this space and build its capacities at all levels to be able to meaningfully contribute and complement existing approaches.**

Based on finding: 11

UN Women can leverage its coordination mandate to support collective action for broadening social norms change efforts aimed at gender equality and women’s empowerment at global, regional and country levels. UN Women will need to proactively engage with and learn from the significant efforts focused on social norms change within the UN system and build on these to ensure complementary approaches for tackling discriminatory social norms. Leveraging partnerships with UN system entities at country, regional and global levels are critical for the organization as they may support a deepening and scaling up of efforts related to social norms aimed at gender equality and women’s empowerment. Partnerships could be sought in more challenging areas, such as population-based measurement of social norms, and how to influence and leverage areas such as behavioural science and artificial intelligence as they relate to social norms change. These tools are being used to amplify discriminatory practices and norms and must be countered through concerted and coordinated action.<sup>136</sup> If UN Women does not accelerate joint action related to social norms change, particularly with respect to key and emerging areas such as artificial intelligence, the ramifications for women and girls in all their diversity could be devastating. There is an opportunity, at all organizational levels (global, regional, and country), to explore how to strengthen work together as One UN towards influencing social norms for gender equality.

<sup>136</sup> Centre for International Governance Innovation. (January 2023). Generative AI Tools are perpetuating harmful gender stereotypes. <https://www.cigionline.org/articles/generative-ai-tools-are-perpetuating-harmful-gender-stereotypes/>



Photo: Vidura Jang Bahadur

## 7. RECOMMENDATIONS

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The following recommendations were developed from the findings and conclusions emerging from this evaluation. The Feminist Collaborative Evaluation embedded a participatory approach through extensive consultation to ensure full ownership by PPID, Regional and Country Offices. The recommendations were developed in consultation with key evaluation stakeholders, including the PPID at UN Women. To ensure the proposed actions are carried out, each recommendation is accompanied by priority status, timelines, responsible actors, impact, difficulty and a description of what could happen if the recommendation is not implemented. In response to a suggestion from a senior manager at UN Women to present graduated recommendations, this evaluation proposes a scale which illustrates the progression of results based on the implementation of key actions listed under each recommendation.

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**RECOMMENDATION 1:**



**UN Women should clarify the level of investment the organization seeks for strengthening UN Women’s approach to social norms, and in line with this decision adopt a corporate strategy for strengthening related institutional capacity.**

	KEY ACTIONS	RESULTS
<b>INITIATE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Co-create an approach for social norms articulating how UN Women will leverage its triple mandate and value-add.</li> <li>• Clearly identify linkages between the social norms outcome area and UN Women’s approach on key cross-cutting topics related to leave no one behind (LGBTIQ+ rights, racial justice and disability inclusion), transforming patriarchal masculinities, thematic areas and other key topics such as private sector approaches and campaigns. Propose theories of change that can be adapted.</li> <li>• Undertake comprehensive and inclusive consultations and workshops across units, including through the social norms community of practice, to inform the approach and ensure buy-in.</li> <li>• Continue with the current resourcing (one post) to facilitate knowledge exchange and technical guidance.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>The corporate approach paper for social norms provides a common language for UN Women that unites around the diverse strategies and interpretations of social norms.</b></li> <li>• <b>Dedicated knowledge exchange and technical guidance to offices is continued at small-scale</b></li> </ul>
<b>DEEPEN</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adopt an accompanying strategy for strengthening institutional capacity for social norms programming based on different resourcing scenarios.</li> <li>• Identify the necessary financial and human resources and map key funding partners.</li> <li>• Ensure the strategy on strengthening institutional capacity for social norms work includes guidance on how to engage key funding partners.</li> <li>• Elaborate a plan for monitoring and evaluating the strategy.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>An accompanying strategy for strengthening institutional capacity is issued along with the corporate approach paper.</b></li> <li>• <b>Increased human and financial resources allow for more targeted support primarily from headquarters and the regions.</b></li> </ul>
<b>SCALE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scale up support for social norms programming in line with the resources strategy, including prioritizing institutional resources for social norms.</li> <li>• Engage and communicate UN Women’s approach to social norms and the strategy for strengthening institutional capacity on social norms programming.</li> <li>• Provide comprehensive support for social norms programming.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>The organization has strengthened institutional capacity for social norms programming and support structures at all levels of the organization.</b></li> </ul>

Priority  
**HIGH**

Timeline  
**MEDIUM-TERM**

**TO BE LED BY:** Policy Programme and Intergovernmental Division in consultation with UN System Coordination Division, Civil Society Division and Strategic Partnerships Division and the Global Management Team.

**IMPACT:** Senior management ownership combined with a participatory approach will foster global and country level commitment on social norms and provide UN Women an opportunity for increased emphasis on and significant organizational alignment on social norms.

**DIFFICULTY:** Buy-in and commitment from both top UN Women leadership and field offices will require significant organizational culture shifts, capacitation, and mobilization of personnel to prioritize social norms.

**IF NOT IMPLEMENTED:** There is a risk of ad-hoc and fragmented social norms programming efforts aimed at gender equality and women’s empowerment and potential missed opportunities for transformative change.

**RECOMMENDATION 2:**



**Establish clear governance and accountability for action for the systemic outcome for social norms including its implementation from an intersectional perspective.**

	KEY ACTIONS	RESULTS
<b>INITIATE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review PAPDU’s strategies for operationalizing cross-cutting approaches and its role related to the leave no one behind principle. If it is determined that PAPDU is not the appropriate unit then another unit that can lead this process will need to be identified.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>The corporate governance structure for systemic outcomes and leave no one behind principles is in place.</b></li> <li><b>A dedicated capacity to oversee social norms work moving forward has been assigned.</b></li> </ul>
<b>DEEPEN</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clarify the roles and responsibilities for operationalizing the principle of leave no one behind with respect to social norms, underpinning an intersectional approach.</li> <li>Consider establishing new mechanisms for coordination and/or leveraging existing mechanisms with clear accountability lines.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Clear roles and responsibilities and accountability mechanisms to operationalize the systemic outcome on social norms across all levels of the organization and its intersection with leave no one behind.</b></li> <li><b>Mechanisms for coordination across units with clear accountability lines have been activated.</b></li> </ul>
<b>SCALE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Integrate Key Performance Indicators into the PMDs of senior managers related to the decisions made on the above.</li> <li>Consider establishing an inter-divisional task force to facilitate collaboration and/or focal points at all levels of the organization with clarity on accountability,</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>UN Women personnel proactively leverage mechanisms to work across units to bridge silos.</b></li> <li><b>Personnel are held accountable for working horizontally and integrating leave no one behind principles.</b></li> </ul>

Priority  
**HIGH**

Timeline  
**SHORT-TERM**

**TO BE LED BY:** Policy Programme and Intergovernmental Division in consultation with Strategy, Planning, Resources and Effectiveness Division (SPRED.)

**IMPACT:** Increased organizational coherence and collaboration will facilitate the realization of the Strategic Plan’s vision on systemic outcome for social norms and operationalization of the LNOB principle.

**DIFFICULTY:** This is within UN Women’s control and will necessitate changes to existing ways of working and holding units accountable for action.

**IF NOT IMPLEMENTED:** Missed opportunities for synergies can risk the organization’s ability to influence action at all levels and mainstream core concepts across its work globally.



**RECOMMENDATION 3:**



**At the corporate level UN Women should commit to social norms as a central tenet for programming, leveraging UN Women’s added value in the social norms space and prioritizing Global South knowledge and equalizing power dynamics with UN Women’s key women’s rights partners.**

	KEY ACTIONS	RESULTS
<b>INITIATE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide guidance and tools on how to prioritize and explicitly target social norms work across thematic areas in UN Women programmes.</li> <li>• Build internal capacities related to social norms programming. This should start with internal reflection on social norms and unconscious biases.</li> <li>• Explore the role of the Gender Equality Accelerators for targeted interventions on social norms.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>UN Women provides guidance on social norms approaches.</b></li> <li>• <b>UN Women builds credibility and capacity to work in social norms.</b></li> </ul>
<b>DEEPEN</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relevant policies and procedures are reviewed and updated to ensure alignment with the social norms approach and strategy.</li> <li>• Integrate the social norms approach and corresponding tools, including leveraging tools and methods developed by grassroots women-led organizations, into the organization’s programme cycle guidance (Strategic Notes and projects).                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Programme design:</b> Conduct research and participatory strategies for analysing social norms and power dynamics and use this to prioritize and clearly target social norms in programmes. Support the integration of social norms-related analyses by UN Women, such as the Country Gender Equality Profile and Common Country Analysis, etc.</li> <li>• In <b>implementation</b>, prioritize global south knowledge, approaches and participatory methodologies and co-creation tools identified by UN Women and work with partners to ensure coherence.</li> <li>• <b>Monitoring:</b> Employ relevant tools to systematically collect data, including through participatory and indigenous means that engage target groups.</li> <li>• Plan for <b>evaluative exercises</b>, including in humanitarian settings, that allow for learning from the dynamic nature of change over the long-term; and, where appropriate, impact evaluations that embed longitudinal approaches to measuring social norms change over the long term.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Relevant policies, procedures and guidance at UN Women are updated to facilitate implementation of social norms programming in line with the approach and strategy.</b></li> </ul>
<b>SCALE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide support with resource mobilization strategies.</li> <li>• Advocate for Strategic Note funding and longer-term programming time frames through scenario-based planning for how it will affect programming and measurement approaches.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Social norms is integrated as a central tenet of programming at UN Women through an approach that effectively prioritizes participatory and global south informed approaches to social norms.</b></li> </ul>

*Priority*  
**HIGH**

*Timeline*  
**MEDIUM-TERM**

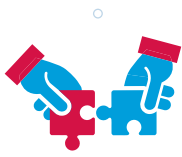
**TO BE LED BY:** Policy Programme and Intergovernmental Division in consultation with Strategic Planning, Resources and Effectiveness Division, Coordination Division and Strategic Partnerships Division.

**IMPACT:** This will strengthen UN Women’s ability to provide tailored guidance for integrating social norms, facilitating cohesive action and securing evidence-based donor funding.

**DIFFICULTY:** Implementation challenges may arise resource limitations stemming from a limited grasp of social norms change, which lies partially beyond the organization’s control. Internal resistance to change may also emerge as it necessitates adopting new operational approaches and ways of working.

**IF NOT IMPLEMENTED:** There will be missed opportunities in effectively integrating social norms into UN Women’s programs and potential for scale-up.

**RECOMMENDATION 4:**



**Prioritize investing in meaningful collaboration and participatory approaches with women-led organizations and civil society organizations aligned with local needs and explicitly strategizing how to mitigate and deal with backlash, especially as it affects the most marginalized groups.**

	KEY ACTIONS	RESULTS
<b>INITIATE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clarify and provide guidance to systematize meaningful collaboration processes at key points of the programming cycle and in line with UN Women’s partner procedures and socialize this throughout the organization.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Clarification on where meaningful collaboration processes are possible in existing programme cycle procedures.</b></li> </ul>
<b>DEEPEN</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Update procedures that enable greater risk appetite to enable meaningful engagement with women-led organizations.</li> <li>Ensure strategies for meaningful collaboration, mitigating or dealing with backlash are explicitly included in UN Women programming efforts, track and measure these experiences and integrate lessons learned into programmes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>There is guidance on how to actively engage in the process of meaningful collaboration with partners related to social norms analysis while building their capacity, and collaboratively plan how to mitigate and address potential backlash.</b></li> <li><b>Relevant policies, procedures and guidance at UN Women are updated accordingly.</b></li> </ul>
<b>SCALE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Build personnel capacity on how to actively engage with communities, women’s rights defenders, grassroots and civil society organizations, in all their diversity, to co-create strategies for social norms, build capacities and explicitly plan how to mitigate or address backlash.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>UN Women personnel and partners have capacities to undertake social norms analyses and co-create pathways of change ensuring their knowledge and expertise are prioritized and that they can effectively mitigate and address backlash.</b></li> <li><b>Strategies for tracking, measuring and learning from the above strategies support reflective learning on what works.</b></li> </ul>

Priority  
**MEDIUM**

Timeline  
**LONG-TERM**

**TO BE LED BY:** Policy Programme and Intergovernmental Division in consultation with Strategic Planning, Resources and Effectiveness Division (SPRED) and Civil Society Division.

**IMPACT:** Enhancing collaboration with grassroots and civil society organizations will lead to more well informed and contextual strategies for addressing social norms while ensuring backlash is both monitored and collectively addressed.

**DIFFICULTY:** While some aspects are under UN Women’s control, backlash is a broader challenge that will require sustained commitment to building collaborative partnership and would need to be done very sensitively in certain contexts.

**IF NOT IMPLEMENTED:** It could compromise UN Women’s ability to influence social norms within different contexts.

**RECOMMENDATION 5:**



**UN Women should proactively position itself as a key player in UN coordination related to social norms by articulating its unique role and contributions in this area, building relevant capacities to influence dominant approaches to social norms change from a gender perspective and actively seek opportunities to amplify its influence within the UN system and beyond.**

	KEY ACTIONS	RESULTS
<b>INITIATE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify key entry points on social norms and within this communicate UN Women’s added value with respect to partnerships with UN system entities at country, regional and global levels and articulate clear and measurable results related to coordination.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>UN Women’s added value to the UN system with respect to social norms efforts is clearly communicated.</b></li> <li><b>There is a continuation of ad hoc, joint efforts.</b></li> </ul>
<b>DEEPEN</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Propose and socialize an approach that articulates concrete opportunities for collaboration through inter-agency mechanisms, partnership and joint programmes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>A plan for strengthening collaboration and exchange at global, regional and country level particularly through influencing Common Country Analyses, Country Gender Equality Profiles, etc. has been established</b></li> </ul>
<b>SCALE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create an action plan on how to enhance key relevant UN Women personnel capacities to strategically influence emerging areas and areas where significant investment is headed and will have profound impacts on social norms change.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>UN Women effectively influences UN system efforts related to social norms, facilitating broader scale and impact.</b></li> <li><b>Personnel capacities to influence existing and emerging areas of high investment by partners on social norms change (artificial intelligence, behavioral science, etc.) are enhanced.</b></li> </ul>

Priority  
**MEDIUM**

Timeline  
**MEDIUM-TERM**

**TO BE LED BY:** Policy Programme and Intergovernmental Division in consultation with Strategic Partnerships Division and Coordination Division.

**IMPACT:** Strengthened partnerships will lead to more concerted and coordinated efforts towards influencing social norms at a larger scale for gender equality and women’s empowerment.

**DIFFICULTY:** Actively pursuing opportunities with UN agencies necessitates their engagement and willingness to participate.

**IF NOT IMPLEMENTED:** It could lead to fragmented efforts, duplication of resources, and limited impact on addressing discriminatory social norms. Additionally, it could risk diminishing UN Women’s visibility and influence within the UN system and beyond on this topic.

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The UN Women Independent Evaluation Service is co-located with the Internal Audit and Investigation Service under the Independent Evaluation, Audit and Investigation Service (IEAIS). The UN Women Independent Evaluation Service's main purpose is to enhance accountability, inform decision-making, and contribute to learning about the best ways to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment through the organization's mandate, including its normative, operational, and coordination work. The Independent Evaluation Service also works to strengthen capacities for gender-responsive evaluation within UN entities, governments, and civil society organizations.

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**UN WOMEN IS THE UN ORGANIZATION  
DEDICATED TO GENDER EQUALITY  
AND THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN. A  
GLOBAL CHAMPION FOR WOMEN AND  
GIRLS, UN WOMEN WAS ESTABLISHED  
TO ACCELERATE PROGRESS ON  
MEETING THEIR NEEDS WORLDWIDE.**

UN Women supports UN Member States as they set global standards for achieving gender equality, and works with governments and civil society to design laws, policies, programmes and services needed to implement these standards. It stands behind women's equal participation in all aspects of life, focusing on five priority areas: increasing women's leadership and participation; ending violence against women; engaging women in all aspects of peace and security processes; enhancing women's economic empowerment; and making gender equality central to national development planning and budgeting. UN Women also coordinates and promotes the UN system's work in advancing gender equality.



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