Launch event of
Gender, power and progress: How norms change

9 December 2020
Caroline Harper, Rachel Marcus, Anita Ghimire and Grace Kyomuhendo Bantebya
When it comes to silencing women, western culture has had thousands of years of practice.

Mary Beard, Historian
Key questions

• How have gender norms changed over the past quarter-century?

• What has supported and blocked changes to gender norms in four key areas?

• How can change happen faster and become robust enough to resist backlash and withstand crises?
Gender norms are the informal rules of society that define how people of a particular gender are expected to behave.

They determine what people think and what they do, and they shape the attitudes and behaviour of women and men and all other genders in relation to each other.
Invisible gender norms

Norms are more like invisible "guard rails" that shape and narrow people's thinking, behaviours, and opportunities. So, norms often show up as a kind of negative power, as absence rather than presence: doors that just didn’t open, choices that couldn’t be made, opportunities that just seemed out of reach.

Riki Wilchins, TrueChild
Just the way we do things here.
Intersectional feminism

"a prism for seeing the way in which various forms of inequality often operate together and exacerbate each other ... We tend to talk about race inequality as separate from inequality based on gender, class, sexuality or immigrant status. What’s often missing is how some people are subject to all of these, and the experience is not just the sum of its parts."

Kimberle Crenshaw, lawyer and civil rights advocate
Change the system to change the norm

Individuals create and maintain institutions and re-enact within them many of the same norms that shape their personal lives.

You cannot fit women into a structure that is already coded as male. **You have to change the structure.** That means thinking about power differently. It means decoupling it from public prestige. It means thinking collaboratively about **the power of followers, not just the leaders.** It means, above all, thinking about power as an attribute or a verb (“to power”) not as a possession.

*Mary Beard, Historian*
Sequence of change

Action on norms at different levels

- Policy enabling environment
- Community, organisational
- Interpersonal
- Individual

- Political voice, civic action and rights protection
- Workplace and economic engagement
- Family and sexual and reproductive health and rights
- Education

Source: The authors, adapted from Bronfenbrenner (1979).
alignplatform.org/gender-power-progress
A conceptual framework: a path from a current norm to a changed norm

- Current norm
- Norm maintainers
- Systemic barriers
- Patriarchal brakes
- Forces of change
- Changed norm
Prominent barriers against gender norm change

**Prominent barriers to change**

- **Control over women’s and girls’ bodies and sexuality**
- **Violence:** Verbal, sexual and physical

*Source: Author analysis*
Compiling the data - sources

- Quantitative data going back 25 years – World Values Survey, DHS and World Development Indicators (using proxies of behaviour and attitudes as quant norms measurement is new)

- Qualitative research in Uganda and Nepal - part of ALiGN History and Change series – with middle aged and older women looking back at norm change over their lifetimes

- Extensive literature review
Key insights from trend data
How have norms changed?

- Attitudes to university education have become more gender-equal in 40 of 48 countries.
- The proportion of women who considered wife-beating ever to be acceptable fell in 41 out of 46 countries.
- The proportion of people who agree that if jobs are scarce, men should have priority has fallen in 38 of 50 countries and rose in 12.
- The share of people worldwide who believe men make better political leaders has fallen from 50% to 35% since 1995.

Since 1995

ALIGN Advancing Learning and Innovation on Gender Norms
## Some comparative insights

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Huge geographical variation between and within regions</th>
<th>E.g. norms around gender roles, women in leadership roles, and acceptability of wife-beating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>But some consistency within countries</td>
<td>E.g. Japan, Pakistan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differences by age groups – often small and sometimes defied expectations</td>
<td>E.g. attitudes to university education, mothers working and being a housewife is as fulfilling as working for pay</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Varied relationship between attitudes and outcomes     | E.g. attitudes to mothers of pre-schoolers working and women’s labour force participation (strong)  
Attitudes to women leaders and women’s political representation (moderate)  
Attitudes to mothers of pre-schoolers working and men’s time spent on unpaid care (weak) |
Drivers of change

- Economic opportunities
- Legal rights
- Social & political mobilisation
- Broadcast & social media
- Role models
- Accessible services

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ALiGN - Advancing Learning and Innovation on Gender Norms
‘A woman’s reputation is like water in a yam’s leaves – even a small slip and it will fall off.’

Patriarchal brakes: reputation

‘A woman has to guard her reputation … colleagues will offer you a drink as a test and if you accept, as a woman, you are not respected. They will say you are cheap.’
Patriarchal brakes: unequal domestic roles

In 2018, 606 million women and 41 million men of working age were unavailable for employment because of care responsibilities (ILO)

‘The psyches of men have not changed with the changing realities – they still expect to be waited on …. They cannot stop you from working /earning, but they can leave all of the household responsibilities and expenditures to you!’
Gender-based violence: reflecting and reinforcing gender norms

High levels across all 4 areas the report focuses on:

- 50-75% of LGBT young people in 7 Latin American countries experienced verbal abuse, 20-40% physical violence at school
- 10-25% women in ILO/ Gallup 2017 study of 142 countries said abuse or discrimination at work was significant problem
- 1 in 3 women worldwide have experienced physical or sexual violence
- 82% of female politicians in 39 countries had experienced psychological violence; 44% had received violent threats
Implications for action
Action at different levels/with different actors

Examples:
- Law reforms, quotas/reservations
- Education sector reforms, workplace anti-GBV programmes
- Community dialogues; work with ‘reference groups’ eg religious leaders
- Broadcast and social media

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ALiGN: Advancing Learning and Innovation on Gender Norms
<table>
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<th>Driver</th>
<th>Implications</th>
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<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Huge potential – more likely to be realised if gender equality mainstreamed in education systems, curricula and at school level. Crucial impact for people of all genders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality, accessible services (health care, infrastructure)</td>
<td>Investment in accessible SRHR services underpins norms around contraceptive use; gender-equitable sexuality education helps drive change in norms. Safe transport infrastructure helps remove barriers to women’s work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic opportunities</td>
<td>Make substantial difference in all areas – the unthinkable can quickly become normal if it’s financially rewarding. Support women’s increased access to work and control of income</td>
</tr>
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</table>
# How to support norm change drivers

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<th>Implications</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Legal rights</td>
<td>Play important symbolic role as well as practical driver of change; publicise change and ensuring access to justice for poorest a neglected element of norm change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social and political mobilisation</td>
<td>Space for civic action matters; women’s and other pro-equality organisations driving change at different levels need support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broadcast and social media</td>
<td>Boosting representation and visibility of (different groups of) women and girls matters; regulation to prevent cyber-violence and ‘fake news’ critical.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Role models</td>
<td>Important for normalising women’s presence in all spheres, aspiration and empowerment; school-based exposure, anti-discrimination policies; political empowerment programmes, mass media</td>
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What are the challenges and gaps?

• Need for change in both hearts and minds and institutions/systems
• Think and work multi-sectorally – actions in one area can be much more than the sum of their parts
• Focus on actions with potential at scale
• Be persistent - progress often stalls before moving on (related to patriarchal brakes, systemic barriers and crises)
• Unequal impacts of change processes among different groups – need for stronger focus on those left behind or adversely affected
Thank you for listening.

Any questions?

View the report:

alignplatform.org/gender-power-progress