Addressing Social Norms in the Pursuit of Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment:

Learning from Knowledge and Practices from the Global South

UN WOMEN

FOR ALL WOMEN AND GIRLS

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OVERVIEW

On 25–26 October 2023, 23 expert practitioner-scholars from the Global South or with experience and expertise in the region convened remotely over two half-day sessions to deliberate on the knowledge and evidence generated from their work in order to provide inputs for UN-Women's approach to social/gender norms. This report summarises the proceedings of the meeting.

Adoption of gender egalitarian social norms has been identified as one of seven cross-cutting strategic outcomes in the current Strategic Plan of UN-Women 2022–2025. The first two years of the strategic plan period have been dedicated to deepening the organisation's understanding of social norms and pathways for change so that a considered and explicit approach might be developed. UN-Women's analysis suggests that the current discourse on social norms in international organisations based in the Global North are centred around theories, research and experiments carried out by the Global North in the Global South and that social norm change interventions are largely understood as interventions to change individual attitudes, perceptions and behaviours, thereby ignoring structural embeddedness of norms and a feminist-informed systemic approach to shift norms.

Recognising that the bulk of the work of challenging and changing social norms impinging on gender equality and mobilisation for change has been carried out by women's organisations, civil society organisations and movements across the world across the past century, UN-Women believes that based on their practice and experience, they are best placed to describe *how change happens* in their specific contexts, structural realities and histories. Understanding the knowledge and evidence generated from practice is at the heart of UN-Women's quest for articulating an approach on social norms that will be most effective. Acknowledging that expertise and scholarship from the Global South is marginalised in the dominant discourses, UN-Women commissioned a series of papers from scholar-practitioners across five regions – Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa, Arab States, Asia and the Pacific. The objectives of the commissioned papers are to:

- Present a narrative on how change towards gender equality and women's empowerment has happened based on practices (interventions) in/on specific contexts, countries or issues and an analysis of how social/gender norms feature in the pathways to change;
- Discuss the conceptual framework on social/gender norms and their transformation emerging from practices and drawing from scholarship, including feminist scholarship on the subject from particular contexts/countries;
- Suggest what role international organisations, notably UN-Women can play in supporting this work on social norms, in light of scholar-activists' experiences and conceptualisation.

An additional paper was commissioned to review current research and methodologies being applied to measure social norms and social norms change in gender and development. (See Annex 1 for a list of the commissioned papers.)

With these papers as background material, UN-Women convened a two (half)-day virtual Expert Group Meeting (EGM) on 25–26 October 2023. The EGM sought to explore how we might locate norms and rules in institutions (and upheld by power centres within institutions) as causal mechanisms for persisting gender inequality and therefore as the logical and appropriate site for change. Such an approach would be consistent with evidence on how change happens that suggests a 'systems' approach to understanding and transforming social norms implicated in gender equality and women's empowerment (henceforth: social norms or gender norms). Engaging critically with the increasing emphasis on isolating and problematising 'individuals' and treating aggregates of individuals as 'community', the EGM explored what it has meant for grassroots/feminist organisations to engage

with people – a heterogeneous entity comprising those who are privileged or marginalised by norms and whose interests are served by norms and with institutions – and how such engagement has lent itself to investigating, addressing and transforming social/gender norms.

Based on consultations with various scholar-practitioners, UN-Women identified the following four sets of questions for the EGM:

- How are institutions (the state, market, community and family) implicated in social/ gender norms and what kinds of strategies are required for changing gender norms in institutions?
- What strategies and approaches have been applied for working with the common person who may be privileged or marginalised by these norms? How have these strategies helped change social norms?
- What is the relationship between empowerment, collective action and social norms change?
- How are norms being measured? How is evidence produced by such measurements influencing policy and how should we actually be thinking about measurements?

Twenty-three experts from across the Global South and North participated in the deliberations. They were joined by colleagues from across UN-Women country, regional and head offices as observers. (See Annex 2 for the EGM Agenda and Annex 3 for a list of participants.)

This EGM report is organised into summaries of presentations and responses, followed by key takeaways from the plenary discussions.

The EGM provided three conceptual insights on social norms implicated in gender equality and women's empowerment. The first was that power analysis must be central to understanding and addressing social norms. Second, that norms are constructed, reinforced and contested at multiple institutional sites, including the institutions of the family, community, market, religion and state. Their institutional embeddedness means that interventions must centre on transforming power relations in these institutions. And third, context is critical. Although gender norms are everywhere, they manifest differently. As such, social norm work must be context-specific and reject one-size-fits-all approaches.

Along with the key insights, the following four pathways to social norm change emerged from the discussions:

1. developing counter-narratives and consensus-building;
2. changing the material realities of women and girls;
3. feminist empowerment; and
4. movement building, collective actions and coalition building.

Taken together, the papers and EGM deliberations provided the following building blocks for UN-Women's approach to social norms:
- Understand norms as rules about power and privilege;
- Centre contextual and intersectional under-standings of norms;
- Recognise norms as historically contested;
- Engage with both informal and formal rules; and
- Take an institutional approach rather than an individual-focused one.

In light of its institutional credibility and convening power, UN-Women was broadly urged to challenge the dominant discourse on and approach to social norms through a multiplicity of strategies, including by continuing to privilege voices from the Global South in addressing social norms implicated in gender equality and women's empowerment.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

DAWN	Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era
EGM	Expert Group Meeting
EVAW	Ending Violence Against Women
GEWE	Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment
GSNI	Gender Social Norms Index
GUG!	Growing Up GREAT!
LGBTIQ+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer people, and people who use other terms or none to describe their sexual orientations, gender identities, gender expressions and sex characteristics (SOGIESC)
LSE	London School of Economics
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MVF	Mamidipudi Venkatarangaiya Foundation
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
WIEGO	Women in Informal Employment Globalizing and Organizing
SGBV	Sexual and gender-based violence
SIGI	Social Institutions and Gender Index
SNAP	Social Norms, Attitudes and Practices

OPENING SESSION

'It is our ambition to be very intentional about the work that we do on social norm change.' – Shoko Ishikawa, UN-Women

CHAIR: **Shoko Ishikawa, Deputy Director, Policy, Programme and Intergovernmental Division, UN-Women, New York**

Jennifer Cooper (Political Analysis and Programme Development Unit, UN-Women, New York) opened the meeting by expressing the excitement across the organisation regarding the opportunity to benefit from the wisdom of the leading practitioners and scholars gathered for the EGM. While addressing social norms has been part of UN-Women's work for a long time, it has been positioned for the first time as an explicit result area for the organisation in its current strategic plan. Jennifer concluded by emphasising UN-Women's commitment to centring the expertise of women's movements on the ground and by characterising the EGM as an opportunity for UN-Women to listen to the experience, knowledge and evidence generated by experts to inform UN-Women's approach to social norms.

Paro Chaujar (Social Norms Specialist, UN-Women, New York) provided a brief overview of UN-Women's work over the last two years to deepen its understanding of social norms and develop a considered approach for addressing social norms. This work includes a literature review, internal mapping of understanding of the organisation's work on social norms and a review of the annual report on the social norms results area from across the organisation. The literature review suggests that Global North organisations tend to base their approach on scholarship emerging from the Global North and that there is an increasing tendency to focus on individual behaviour change interventions as solutions, even as feminist scholars have been

calling for a more systems-focused approach to social norms. [1] The mapping exercise concluded that there is wide variation across the organization in both the understanding of social norms and the approaches being taken to engage with them. Similarly, the review of reporting on the social norms results area revealed underreporting on social norms-related work primarily due to misunderstanding of what constitute social norms and norm change results.

Based on the finding of insufficient engagement with knowledge and literature from the Global South, UN-Women commissioned scholars-practitioners working on the ground to write a set of papers about how change towards gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE) has happened and where norms fall in these pathways. In addition to commissioning papers from the Pacific, African Great Lakes Region, Egypt, India and Brazil, UN-Women also commissioned a review of various initiatives to measure social norms. These papers provide the basis for deliberations at the EGM. (See Annex 1 for list of all papers.)

Consequently, Paro indicated that the EGM was organised in response to: heightened interest in social norms among Global North organisations who characterise social norms as the root cause of persisting gender inequality; the trend of grouping together social norms, attitudes, behaviours and perceptions into what a many feminists are calling

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1   Cookson, T.P., L. Fuentes, M.K. Kuss and J. Bitterly. 2023. "Social Norms, Gender and Development: A Review of Research and Practice." UN-Women Discussion Paper No. 42. New York: UN-Women.

the 'black box' of social norms; and the trend of looking at social norms in isolation and focusing on fixing bad behaviours and attitudes through behavioural approaches that are at odds with the kind of approach that women's movements, grassroots organisations and UN-Women have taken. In this context UN-Women found it important to take a step back and examine the evidence from the ground about how change happens.

Sabrina Evangelista (Regional Evaluation Specialist, Regional Office for Asia-Pacific, UN-Women) presented initial findings from an ongoing formative evaluation of UN-Women's work on social norms. This evaluation includes seven country case studies across four regions and a meta-synthesis of 45 evaluations of UN-Women programmes that had explicit or implicit emphasis on social norms.

The meta evaluation suggests that the three most common recurrent themes in UN-Women's work on social norms include capacity development, amplifying voice and leadership of women and changing attitudes and engagement of marginalised/vulnerable groups. The evaluation points towards the need to: (i) ensure long-term interventions and strategies for countering backlash; (ii) capture evidence and measure the progress, and (iii) move away from reinforcing traditional stereotypes or hierarchies. The findings also suggest that programmes have focused on changes at the individual level by raising awareness, changing attitudes and behaviours, and some efforts to engage communities in spreading messages.

Preliminary findings from country case studies also suggest that the organisation's programmes that explicitly focus on norm change primarily include awareness raising, focus on changing attitudes of individuals and stimulate community action groups to influence the wider community. Only a few initiatives among evaluated programmes explicitly work at the institutional level. Understanding of social norms varies considerably within UN-Women and among external stakeholders. Consequently, different types of approaches and pathways dictated by more widely documented and available methodologies have been prioritised, over identifying indigenous pathways to change.

Paro concluded the presentation by sharing the principles UN-Women has adopted for developing their approach to social norms. The first principle is to learn from the grassroots, that is, from practitioners and scholars directly engaging with the subject on the ground. The second is to look at norms on gender equality from the lens of gender power hierarchy, patriarchy and the institutional embeddedness of norms. The third is to make this process participatory within UN-Women, as a cross-cutting issue. The final principle is that the inquiry on social norms and the elaboration of the approach will be intersectional, feminist and not extractive.

Shoko closed the plenary by indicating that as part of UN-Women's mandate to influence the UN system to do better on gender equality and women's empowerment, the approach that UN-Women will develop on social norms will be shared with other UN agencies, for considering a joint UN approach to social change. Consequently, she emphasised the importance of the conversations at the EGM.

KEY DISCUSSION TAKEAWAYS
- An intersectional approach will be crucial, and gender and patriarchy serve as helpful entry points for exploring the layered inequalities that result from nationalism, tribalism, capitalism, authoritarianism and other systems of dominance and oppression.

Panel 1: Institutions as location for norm change: How can feminist vision of egalitarian gender norms be realized through shifts in institutions?

*'When we talk about social norms affecting women in the Muslim context we have to inevitably talk about religion because social norms find their root in religion. A **layered institutional approach is required to address gender norms** and laws in the region; this includes engaging with Islamic jurisprudence, international human rights framework, women and men's lived realities in the region and constitutional and legal framework in any country.' – Marwa Sharafeldin, Musawah, Egypt*

*'An **empowerment process informed by feminist pedagogies influences social norms embedded in institutions** – including the family …, community structures, state programs and policies, technical assistance services, financial decision-making bodies and markets as well. The process of 'problematising' what is seen to be 'given' or 'naturalised' through dialogue is fundamental for effectuating social transformation and changing mentalities and social norms.' – Rodica Weitzman, Federal Rural University of Rio de Janeiro and Women's Working Group - National Agroecology Movement, Brazil*

KEY QUESTIONS:
- What does evidence and the experience of changing social norms on gender equality and women's empowerment tell us about the role of institutions in the persistence of and change in these norms?
- What is the relationship between the different institutions in reproducing gender norms? Is there a hierarchy among institutions and how do shifts in one institution affect shifts in others?
- What strategies are required for bringing feminist vision and knowledge of egalitarian gender norms to influence institutions? How does norm change in institutions make it more possible for people's beliefs and behaviours to change?

CHAIR: **Ana Carolina Querino, Deputy Representative, UN-Women Brazil**

INTERVENTIONS BY PANELISTS:

Marwa Sharafeldin (Egypt; Musawah and Harvard Law School) began by drawing attention to the inexcusable atrocities being committed against civilians in Palestine. Her presentation centred on social norms, religion and family laws in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.[2]

- Religion is the 'elephant in the room', permeating the fabric of many countries, both socially and legally. Nowhere is it more apparent than in the norms and laws governing family and gender relations today. Religion shapes gender-related norms and laws in the Muslim world and the MENA region.

- Due to the institutionalisation of religion within state structures, religion not only shapes women and girls' lives within the private sphere of the family, as often acknowledged, but it also affects their status in the public sphere.

- Avoiding discussion on the role of religion in gender equality may stem from fears of fuelling Islamophobia and racism, but not engaging with religion benefits patriarchy. "We should refuse being forced to 'choose' between local religious

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2   Sharafeldin, M. Forthcoming. "How Does Change Happen? Social Norms, Religion and Family Laws in the Middle East and North Africa Region." UN-Women Discussion Paper Series. New York: UN-Women.

heritage or feminist consciousness – what Leila Ahmed calls 'betrayal or betrayal'."

- Musawah's work to promote an egalitarian reading of religious texts demonstrates how feminists can engage with religion. Because gender-related social norms are rooted in a particular religious understanding, they must be addressed '*through* religion' in order to advance gender equality and gender justice.

- In order to understand the relationship between Muslim family laws and gender norms an institutional analysis that unpacks complex 'interacting and overlapping layers' is required. These layers include the dominant patriarchal religious discourse; the state, which mobilizes this discourse and family law for political and economic ends; the broader international context characterised by colonialism, neoliberalism, Islamophobia, as well as human rights and other contradictory forces; and the change occurring in the lived realities of women and men in Muslim contexts.

- As the work by Naila Kabeer and Ramya Subrahmanian[3] suggests, changing social norms involves disrupting power structures that benefit certain groups within a society. Different organisational actors not only vary in their capacity to define and interpret the rules, but they also have different stakes in defending them.

- Musawah has found that positive developments in Muslim family laws across the world reflect a keen understanding of the notion of substantive equality found in international law. This has happened because a certain power arrangement (i.e., one resulting from the interaction of religion, state, international context and lived reality) has resulted in choosing one religious discourse over another.

- The framework emerging from Musawah's work is a layered institutional approach to gender norms and laws that involves engaging with:
  (i)   Islamic jurisprudence and legal tradition;
  (ii)   the international human rights framework;
  (iii) women and men's lived realities and experiences in the region; and
  (iv)   the constitutional and legal framework in a given country.

- Democratising religious knowledge production with people affected by the norms and women's movements challenging power relations are important parts of the framework.

Rodica Weitzman (Brazil; Federal Rural University of Rio de Janeiro and Women's Working Group – National Agroecology Network) presented her research on how feminist engagement in the agroecology movement in Brazil transformed gender norms.[4]

- The agroecology movement in Brazil grew in response to the critique of the Green Revolution, focusing on creating an alternative model for knowledge exchange, valuing localised and situated forms of knowledge and promoting farmer to farmer exchange, instead of a top-down approach.

- The feminist engagement in this agroecology movement has brought gender-transformative feminist pedagogies for the social, political and economic empowerment of women farmers. These approaches have transformed social and gender norms that are embedded in institutions including the family, community structures, state programs and policies, technical assistance services, financial decision-making and markets.

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3   Referring to Kabeer, N. 1999: "From Feminist Insights to an Analytical Framework: An Institutional Perspective on gender Inequality," in Kabeer, N and R Subrahmanian, 1999: *Institutional, Relations and Outcomes: A Framework for Gender-aware Planning*. Kali for Women, India.

4   Weitzman, R. Forthcoming. "Transforming Social and Gender Norms Through Feminist Methodological Approaches Within the Agroecology Movement in Brazil." UN-Women Discussion Paper Series. New York: UN-Women.

- The conceptual framework of feminist agroecologists is based not only on the recognition of Brazil's natural biodiversity but its social diversity as well. Women are understood in terms of their multiple identities and the diversity in their expression of agency and resistance.
- The Brazilian feminist agroecological movement has long centred the idea of women's 'collectivity' and the role of women as protagonists of horizontal knowledge construction, challenging neo-classical economic models and its attendant false dualisms, for instance between the public and private sphere, production and social reproduction.
- Their model is informed by Paulo Freire's methodology of 'popular education' and feminist pedagogies of creating 'circles of dialogues' or 'consciousness-raising groups' which have now been mainstreamed into the agroecology movement to varying degrees depending on the success with political negotiations.
- Women's invisibility in agriculture in the national census and economic research was challenged through the Agroecological Logbook, a methodology first developed by a non-governmental organisation (NGO) (CTA-ZM) in Zona da Mata, Brazil in 2013. The methodology has since been adapted by many member organisations of the National Agroecology Network's Women's Working Group. It has a clear mission to validate the role of women in a variety of ecological practices and production, sales, consumption, donation, exchange; to confirm the identity of women as farmers; and challenge the dichotomy between production and social reproduction.
- Women document their daily work in the logbook. The data is then synthesised and analysed with help from technical experts and supplemented with a visual mapping of the sexual division of labour within each area of work and a questionnaire on women's daily socio-economic conditions. The process is carried out through the creation of women's autonomous groups and a feminist education programme in which technical experts facilitate reflection and discussions around the data that is collected.
- The agroecological logbook methodology has led to a paradigm shift in women and agriculture among all social institutions, including banks, public institutions, public officials and agriculture technical assistance services. Women's collectives used the logbooks to politically negotiate their rights to access public services. By demonstrating production in backyard gardens, the logbooks shifted the paradigm of technical assistance agents who had previously ignored these spaces within the agricultural system.
- The logbooks also showed the value of 'reciprocity practices' or non-monetary socioeconomic relationships which were happening daily among women and with other members of the community. During the pandemic, technical agents became aware of how valuable these practices were in combating food insecurity.
- The myth reinforced by the Green Revolution – that agricultural production is not part of women's world and that women's lives are restricted to the domestic sphere – was dismantled.

Concluding the panel, **Ana-Carolina** validated the key findings from both presentations about the importance of systematizing knowledge and practices of women's and feminist organisations towards changing narratives, and the importance of understanding alliance of institutions in reinforcing patriarchal social norms.

KEY DISCUSSION TAKEAWAYS

- **Engaging with religion**: Religion is a key institution shaping gender norms around the world and this includes all religions, not just Islam. It is important to understand religion as a complex system of interests and power. Some feminist movements, including secular feminists, have opted to engage with religion, while others opt not to engage with religion. As long as the goal is gender justice, both routes could be valid under different contexts.
- **Link between legal reforms and social norms**: The relationship between legal reforms and social norms is not straightforward. Legal reforms need to be accompanied with changes in the norms embedded in law enforcement agencies (police and judiciary) and require not only engaging with religious discourse but also strategic mobilisation of political will. The impact of legal reform on social norms can also be discerned by how women use the law to bargain for better treatment.
- **Participatory education for shifting norms within institutions**: Participatory education methodologies can transform gender norms within institutions, as demonstrated by the account from Brazil where 'visibilising' women's work through logbooks challenged myths in the family and agriculture extension service about the value of women's work.
- **Expanding the list of institutions**: There is need to broaden the understanding of the different institutions that influence norms in any context, including those that tend not to be on our radar such as armies, informal civil society and secret societies.
- **The role of women's movement**: Both presentations (Egypt and Brazil) illustrated that women's movements played an integral role by pushing for the new discourse informed by their lived realities. Participatory methodologies, feminist consciousness-raising and looking at one's lived reality in a different light were crucial for women's collectives to push changes in law and institutions.

Panel 2: Engaging with the general population: moving away from fixing individual 'bad behaviour' to collective change in discriminatory norms

"The programme of changing social norms is a programme of resolving conflicts and disturbing power relations with strong moral and ethical considerations. In the process of resolution of conflicts, new norms actually emerge. Every instance of discrimination or harassment is an instance of conflict where Mamidipudi Venkatarangaiya Foundation mobilisers intervene to resolve. Deeply entrenched norms change only when there is a rise in awareness at the bottom of the pyramid which triggers off a protest of contestation and the instalment of new norms to which the entire community and our society agrees." – Shantha Sinha, MV Foundation India

KEY QUESTIONS:
- What are some of the blind spots in social norm change agenda at global and national levels when it comes to focusing on individual-level solutions to changing social norms?
- What does evidence tell us about the need for different approaches for norm shifting with people privileged by the inegalitarian norms and those marginalized by the norms?
- What makes individuals, families and communities change (i.e., go against the social/gender norms and set off new egalitarian norms)? What needs to click into place?

CHAIR: **Sunita Caminha, Regional Specialist EVAW, Regional Office for East and Southern Africa, UN-Women**

INTERVENTIONS BY PANELISTS:

Rekha Wazir and Shantha Sinha (India; Mamidipudi Venkatarangaiya Foundation [MVF]) shared experiences and lessons learned from the work of the MVF on changing societal norms on child labour, education, early marriage of girls, mobility and the gender division of labour at home.[5]

- MVF experience of over three decades suggests that social norms are not cast in stone. Changing them is doable and must be done for justice and equality. This requires confronting institutional and structural dimensions as well as engaging with the community and stakeholders who perpetuate the production and reproduction of these norms. MVF's approach has been multi-faceted, working simultaneously with communities and institutions.
- The 'social norms approach' promoted by behavioural scientists, psychologists and philosophers who claim that key constraints to

social change lie in the mindsets of the oppressed provides a simplistic account of social norms. The proponents argue that changing individual mindsets is sufficient to bring about changes in society and suggests that development efforts have not led to social change in all these years, because they do not have a 'social norms approach'. In reality, no such 'magic bullet' exists.

- Five philosophical principles for addressing social norms on child labour, girls education and child marriage emerge from MVF's work:
  (i)   universality – social norms change happens only when the entire community is in agreement with the new norm;
  (ii) engagement through dialogue – dialogues and discussions are conducted with every person in the

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5   Wazir, R. and S. Sinha. 2024. "Recasting Social Norms to Universalize Education for Adolescent Girls: The Mamidipudi Venkatarangaiya Foundation Experience." UN-Women Discussion Paper No. 44. New York: UN-Women.

community until every person has been won over;

(iii) approaching duty bearers as elected representatives of the people or service providers – this makes them conscious of their responsibilities;

(iv) appeal to the values of freedom, equality, rights and social justice granted in India's Constitution or, alternatively, to moral and ethical values of justice and fairness (where no relevant provisions exist) in dialogues and discussions with all;

(v) girls' participation, without which no social norms could change.

- The last principle is the most important because only when girls are empowered, exercise their agency and demand their rights do they push their parents, the community and the society around them to respond.
- MVF trains girls on leadership, providing them information on laws and policies and builds skills for critical thinking and questioning (norms, for e.g.). Girls learn with whom and how to advocate for their concerns, including when to escalate their appeals at higher levels (of governance, for instance).
- Grassroots mobilisers from within the communities are the soul of the social norms change work and the community is the protagonist of change—this ensures in-built sustainability of the programme. MVF trains mobilisers in the principles outlined above, instead of through standardised manuals or toolkits Mobilisers then consciously choose different entry points based on the situation—sometimes starting with the school and then moving to the communities and at other times in reverse order. Their aim is to work with the community to ensure that every child attends school and every child marriage is prevented.

- The non-sequential model allows for flexibility and adaptation, which does not lend itself to linear quarterly or monthly reporting models.
- Changing social norms is a programme of using strong moral and ethical considerations to resolve conflicts and disturb power relations. Every instance of discrimination or harassment is an instance of conflict where MVF intervenes – from conflicts at the family level where girls face all kinds of discrimination, to schools where they are not allowed to play sports, to public places where they are harassed.
- New norms emerge from the conflict resolution process. As such, resolving conflict is a way to build consensus with people.

Aziza Aziz-Suleyman (Democratic Republic of Congo; Suisse Cooperation and Consulate in Burundi) shared insights from a community-based psychosocial approach to healing adopted in a regional programme on gender-based violence (GBV) in the African Great Lakes Region –a region that has endured multi-episode conflicts since the 1990s.[6]

- The programme focuses on community-based prevention; holistic treatment for survivors (i.e., medical, psychological and legal); and reintegration (including survivors' economic rehabilitation).
- In the region, women's bodies have been 'used as a battleground' as they have been subjected to systematic rape, sexual slavery, early pregnancies and other violence. Men, meanwhile, faced targeted killings and societal pressure to 'man up' to protect women. Yet, many returning male combatants had violent behaviours towards women in their own families and communities.
- Unmindful of this context, international interventions narrowly focused on rape and failed to address familial and communal relationships that were affected by the crisis.

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6 Aziz-Suleyman, A. and S. Gasibirege. Forthcoming. "Transforming Social Norms for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: Insights from the Community-Based Psychosocial Approach 'Healing Together' in the Democratic Republic of Congo." Expert paper prepared for UN-Women Expert Group Meeting on Social Norms, 25–26 October 2023.

- Recognising the need for a new approach focused on healing relationships rather than only on services for individual survivors of sexual violence, two strategies emerged: a women-led response and a whole-of-community healing approach.
- With support and solidarity from women activists and a feminist NGO, women survivors of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) organised support groups and Peace Alert Committees – a 'for us, by us' strategy. The women also participated in a women's literacy programme run by a women's NGO.
- As they collectively built awareness about women's subordination, they began denouncing violence – including witchcraft accusations levelled upon them – reporting cases of violence and decrying women's marginalisation in public decision making. Despite this, men's behaviour in their homes remained violent, convincing women that the trauma from conflict was affecting mental health and peace in the community.
- In response to these challenges, Professor Gasibirege conceptualised 'Healing from Life Wounds[7]', a non-pathological model whose core premise is that every person has been wounded by life and that these wounds or suffering affect others because each person exists within a dynamic social system made of relationships between people. The model therefore focuses on community healing and collective survival instead of on individual 'victims' and 'perpetrators'.
- Healing is seen as a process involving the following:
    (i) openly sharing one's life wounds,
    (ii) understanding their emotional and relational impact, and then
    (iii) changing behaviours and underlying attitudes.
- This journey is facilitated through a series of five workshops undertaken in the following order: (i)

becoming aware of personal wounds and each other's wounds; (ii) grieving together; (iii) managing feelings associated with suffering and grief; (iv) forgiveness and reconciliation; (v) and creating plans for the future.
- The workshops are initially conducted with homogenous groups (i.e., only women survivors, survivors and families, men, etc.) and are expanded to mixed groups when participants are ready. These groups collectively redefine core and new values. The participants also develop their 'life plan' for socio-economic improvement of themselves, their family and the community. Community members are mentored to serve as workshop resource persons and, subsequently, facilitate workshops with others.
- Programme evaluations revealed a five-stage transformation process in which both material and psychological changes progressed in tandem in this manner: (i) personal change; (ii) relational changes; (iii) economic changes; (iv) changes within the neighbourhood; and (v) commitment to being a change catalyst.
- Regular monitoring showed a reduction in prevalence of GBV, more men seeking help and considering their role in stopping the cycle of violence, greater social cohesion, adoption of the healing together approach in other crises (i.e., earthquakes, floods and displacement) and other positive changes.
- It took about five to six years before changes were seen in the first communities where the approach was piloted and refined. In subsequent applications of the approach, changes could be seen within two years.

Naila Kabeer (London School of Economics [LSE]) in her response began with echoing Rekha's critique of the simplistic 'new social norms approach'.

- Challenging social norms is complex because norms and practices are embedded in institutions and have gained weight and

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7   Also translated as 'wounds of life'.

historical durability through reproduction over time. One-off interventions focused on individuals cannot change norms.

- Talking, discourse, dialogue and deliberation are powerful tools. MVF's non-adversarial approach entailed not trying to convert people to their viewpoint, but to get people to challenge the 'taken-for-grantedness' of their own views. People's ability to name injustice and engage officials (i.e., duty bearers) based on their responsibilities are important parts of this process.

- How and where we use our voice matters. Sometimes voice is used in a democratic and participatory way – listening to each other, being respectful and recognising collective hurts. Other times, one speaks loudly to be heard, protesting, demanding rights and not just respectfully arguing.

- The examples from MVF and the psychosocial programme demonstrate that different contexts and different types of violence require very different kinds of approaches. The development sector's emphasis on 'replicability', is problematic because it suggests that there is a one-size-fits-all formula, which does not really work.

- Addressing social norms needs to extend beyond people who are direct victims of the norms to allies and the broader community.

- The journeys of change at the heart of the presentations are journeys of developing an identity which gives a sense of value, equality and belonging. For instance, the move from an identity of child labourers and 'illiterate' people to an identity of people with an education and with a right to go to school (MVF) or the move from an identity of victim to a player and agent (in the Great Lakes).

Concluding the plenary, **Sunita** shared that the presentations and discussions demonstrated how: (i) we can engage with structures of power, inequalities, accountability and governance systems, (ii) the importance of recognising individuals as part of a broader ecosystem, and (iii) the significance of recognising the evolutionary and dynamic nature of change.

KEY DISCUSSION TAKEAWAYS

- **Mobilising norm-breakers**: In mobilising those who subvert or break the norms, the concept of 'allyship' is preferable to 'positive deviance' because the latter is not only very individualistic, but assumes a high level of agency without factoring in backlash.

- **Methodologies for work with 'individuals'**: Psychosocial work with people in collective settings is critical to popular education because it facilitates interrogation of 'lived reality' and renegotiation of values and norms. Such educational efforts need to be combined with creating collectives and networks.

- **UN-Women's new approach to work with individuals**: UN-Women's framework needs to (i) unpack the interplay between structures and individual behaviours and action; (ii) not isolate the individual from the experience of the community; and (iii) centre empowering methodologies that focus on both, individual power and collective power.

- **Dialogue as tool for transformation**: The process of 'problematising' what is seen to be 'given'/ 'naturalised', through dialogue is fundamental for social transformation, changing mentalities and social norms.

- **Beware of smokescreen:** Framing poverty as a 'structural cause' by politicians, bureaucracy, policy makers and even the wider community often serves as a smokescreen to justify discriminatory norms (such as on child labour). The work of MVF has shown that even the most economically disadvantaged

communities can be free of child labour and all children from the poorest communities can be in schools.

- **Norm change in crisis contexts**: Although crises (e.g., war, conflict, economic crises, pandemics, etc.) carry the risk of reinforcing inegalitarian social norms, they can also facilitate moments of rupture if certain groundwork has been done within the community.

Panel 3: Putting the power back in empowerment: collective action and empowerment as pathways to changing norms on gender

"The work of women's and feminist movements has certainly contributed to transforming belief systems and attitudes of social actors within the State system, the judiciary and legal fraternity, the police forces, churches and other religious bodies, the education system in trade unions and the media." – Claire Slatter, Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN), Fiji

"Building and sustaining coalition building across diverse sectors of the society is key to bringing about systemic change […]. Interventions included shifting attitudes by building a critical mass of activists and supporters who could no longer be ignored […]. Transforming social and cultural conversations […] are key to institutional change." – Barbara Sutton, University at Albany and Nayla Luz Vacarezza, CONICET; Argentina

"UN-Women needs to clarify and, most importantly, to cohere what it already is doing to change social norms, so that it can then focus on honing and deepening its effectiveness with an intentionality that compels. This is an opportunity for internal reflection across the organization on how staff are handling their own attitudes. This internal work is a requisite and ultimately it enhances one's credibility for externally directed work. There is no self-exemption in this." – Wenny Kusuma, formerly UN-Women

KEY QUESTIONS:
- How has social, political and economic empowerment of women contributed to transformation of belief systems and attitudes of different social actors in different institutions?
- What can we learn from feminist and grassroots methodologies on empowerment of women, girls and other marginalised groups or communities in bringing about change in social/gender norms?
- What are the key lessons learned about how citizens' engagement, collectivisation and mobilisation have brought about systemic change (institutional change)?

CHAIR: **Jebbeh Forster, formerly UN-Women**

OVERVIEW:
Before the panel deliberations, **Rodrigo Montero (Regional Office Arab States, UN-Women)** provided key take aways for Day 1.

- Changing social norms should not be treated as a goal per se, it must be in the service of women and girls empowerment.
- Applying feminist methodologies of consciousness building through dialogues and conversations with the whole-of-community is required.
- Historical experiences of people and their communities must be addressed.

INTERVENTIONS BY PANELISTS:
Claire Slatter (Fiji; DAWN) began by drawing attention to how the original radical feminist concept and use of the term 'women's empowerment' was appropriated and depoliticised by development organisations in the 1990s.[8]

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8   Slatter, C., R. Kant and Y. Underhill-Sem. 2023. "Feminist-led Structural Change in the Pacific." Paper presented at UN-Women Expert Group Meeting on Social Norms, 25–26 October 2023. Claire also referred to Srilata Batliwala's 2007

- By focusing narrowly on women's empowerment through the promotion of entrepreneurship and political quotas in national and local governance, the appropriated version of empowerment fails to address socio-cultural and political subordination.
- Pacific feminists are opposed to the global generalisation of the 'Pacific cultures' being historically oppressive of women. They contend that while the Pacific people share distinct commonalities they are also culturally diverse with both patrilineal and matrilineal systems existing in Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Fiji, Marshall Islands and Palau.
- However, in several instances, women's central roles in matrilineal societies were eroded by 'modern day' interventions of missionary colonists, male dominated state systems and subsequently by law.
- The challenges in more recent times of living with political uncertainties and turmoil, such as periodic military coups, or with actual or threatened socially and environmentally destructive extractive industries have posed barriers to women's collective efforts to recover their earlier central role and secure gender equality.
- The prevalent notion about Pacific women being economically empowered needs to be challenged. Women in the Pacific are underrepresented in formal employment across the region. Although more women graduate from universities than men, this does not translate into them attaining a commensurate share of jobs at the appropriate level. Women predominate amongst those working in the informal economy, with unregulated wages and working conditions as well as little job security. A substantial proportion of rural and outer island dwelling women are mostly engaged in unpaid subsistence agriculture and fisheries.

- Progress in achieving gender equality continues to be hampered in the region by social, cultural and economic barriers, and the government contends that these barriers include 'harmful social norms' and exclusionary and discriminatory practices.
- Like their global counterparts, Pacific women's and particularly feminist movements have contributed to socially and politically empowering women. More specifically, the movements have conducted public education, advocated for systemic changes, produced critical research exposing gender discrimination and human rights violations, named patriarchal systems as the root of the problem and mobilised women and allies in challenging discrimination and oppression.
- Among the cutting-edge work by feminist organisations to challenge discrimination are DIVA's pioneering construction training program for gender-nonconforming women conducted in partnership with Habitat for Humanity and the support to women's rugby in Fiji that transformed initial male resistance into celebration of the women athletes' achievements.
- The adoption of gender policies and strategies – including gender-inclusive disability policies and women's protection laws and the passage of the Gender Equity Act in the Marshall Islands in 2019 can, in large part, be attributed to the waves created across the Pacific by brilliant advocacy, training, public education and mobilisation by feminist groups at regional and national levels.
- In addition to leading to changes in law and policies, these actions have led women and girls to understand that violence against women is an offense and can be reported to the police.

Barbara Sutton (Argentina; University at Albany, State University of New York) and Nayla Luz Vacarezza (Argentina; CONICET) presented from their paper on "Feminist Activism, Legal Reform and

article entitled 'Taking the power out of empowerment – an experiential account'.

the 'Social Decriminalisation of Abortion': Argentina as a Case Study".[9]

- While Argentina is not the first country in the region to legalise abortion, it offers a good case study for how a powerful social movement on abortion rights, the Green Tide movement – named for its distinctive green kerchief symbol – gained international attention and inspired mobilisations across the Americas.

- A key factor for the success of the broad-based coalition of organisations and movements that led to legalisation of abortion in Argentina in 2021 is what activists have called the 'social decriminalisation' of abortion. This strategy emerged from activists recognising that legal change was necessary but insufficient unless accompanied by a shift in public perceptions and attitudes towards abortion. In their view, social decriminalisation would remove stigma and cultivate societal consensus that would help support legal reforms.

- Women's empowerment in Argentina went hand in hand with the demands and achievements of the feminist and wider women's movement.

- Argentina's democratisation enabled women to more freely mobilise for legal reform and to initiate conversations around gender and sexuality in the public sphere. Societal debates accompanied demands for change, in turn moving public opinion and legislators to adapt or transform their views.

- Over the years, organising and mobilising by activists helped secure legislative changes including recognition of rights to divorce, marriage equality and one's own gender identity, as well as, sexual and reproductive health legislation and protection against GBV.

- Autonomous spaces, such as the annual National Women's *Encuentro* (Meetings) held since 1986, have been vital to the strengthening of the women's movement, and the seeds of the

abortion rights campaign were sown at one such annual *Encuentro*.

- Feminist and women's movements took a multi-situated and multi-strategic approach which involved coalition building across diverse groups. Collective actions by these groups included women and trans men sharing personal experiences of abortion, actresses using their media presence to advocate for decriminalisation, artists increasing consciousness through their work, educators discussing comprehensive sex education with students, activists lobbying lawmakers, healthcare professionals speaking out about abortion and establishing networks, feminist lawyers using strategic litigation and activists participating in widespread street demonstrations.

- Studies showed that public support for abortion rose since the launch of the campaign. This attitude shift cannot be understood apart from the campaign's continuous work over the years to mobilise public opinion. The gradual but massive adoption of the green kerchief by individuals from diverse backgrounds indicates that activists have effectively influenced the perceptions of many, despite the persistent presence of obstacles and deeply ingrained ideologies.

- Through this campaign, the Argentinian activists learned three important lessons about how citizens' engagement, collectivisation and mobilisation can bring about systemic change
  (i) Building and sustaining coalitions across diverse sectors of the society is key.
  (ii) Frameworks must be inclusive, and demands must resonate with diverse groups extending beyond those with social privilege.
  (iii) Transforming social and cultural conversations on abortion is critical to institutional change.

9 Sutton, Barbara and N.L. Vacarezza. 2023. "Feminist Activism, Legal Reform and the 'Social Decriminalisation of Abortion': Argentina as a Case Study". Paper presented at UN-Women Expert Group Meeting on Social Norms, 25–26 October 2023.

- Activists in Argentina and other Latin American countries have developed a range of political strategies for legalising and ensuring access to abortion. They challenge the authority of the law, while striving to change it; they challenge prevailing medical norms on abortion while drawing on medical knowledge.
- They aim to reshape narratives, interpretations and emotions associated with abortion, while they simultaneously view abortion as one of multiple interconnected social justice demands.
- Despite the victories, the far-right backlash, economic, social and political crises threaten progress and, therefore, institutional and social norm changes need to continue to be defended.

Wenny Kasuma (formerly Representative of UN-Women in Nepal) delivered a statement in response to the presentations and the EGM more broadly.
- Despite UN-Women's terminological shift from 'social change' to 'social norms change', the organisation's ultimate goal of advancing women's rights and dismantling patriarchy remains unchanged.
- Democracy is the best-known delivery system for human rights. Even in its imperfect manifestations, women's movements (and others) have used 'processes of democratised engagement' – including dialogues, popular education, community mobilisation, coalition building, public policy advocacy, etc. – as described in the presentations, to promote women's empowerment and change.
- Recognising the centrality of governance, in 2016 and 2017, the UN-Women Office in Nepal consolidated all of its work under one country programme on governance. UN-Women's role was to strengthen peoples' capacity to demand

and enact change whether informally or formally, in the family or in government institutions and processes.
- The experts at the EGM have confirmed that one-size-does-not-fit all; that you cannot simply replicate; that you need context to inform text; that insiders outperform outsiders as change agents; that initiatives cannot be extractive and that they should be, instead, by and for the people most affected; that a focus on institutions requires the connecting of people (movements) with political decision makers (in institutions) in processes of democratized engagement; that a holistic, inclusive and ideally a whole-of-society approach is key; and that change, especially for it to be tested as real, takes time – ten to fifteen years, and multi-year funding.
- UN-Women does not need to 'reinvent the wheel' based on emergence and popularity of a new and yet unproven social norms methodology in the development arena. Rather, UN-Women should develop a guidance note on programming for social norms change and, more broadly, organise its work into a clear and coherent framework in order to make it more effective. UN-Women's Storytelling Initiative in Nepal is one example of how a bottom-up approach to measurement was imagined and implemented.

Jebbeh concluded the plenary by summarising her key takeaways, namely, that: (i) UN-Women must be more deliberate in its work on social norms and step up its support of feminist and women's organisations; and (ii) there is need for indicators that actually measure changes in social norms, beyond legislative change.

KEY DISCUSSION TAKEAWAYS
- **Engaging with state-religion nexus**: There is a need for strategically engaging progressive religious actors while demanding a secular state. However, in some contexts where there is fusion between ultra-

conservative political and religious forces within the institutions, calling for separation of state and church presents significant challenges for feminist movements fighting for gender transformations.

- **Challenge depoliticising of empowerment**: The radical feminist concept of women's empowerment has been diluted within international development to a point where it no longer challenges the underlying structures of women's subordination. This depoliticization is also featured in the 'social norms approach' which ignores power dynamics and makes social change an individual responsibility.
- **Centre communities in defining metrics**: Shifts in social norms should be measured using locally-grounded metrics that capture how communities themselves define meaningful change.
- **Be daring and question militarised patriarchy:** Patriarchy and militarism, both share the same values, such as hierarchy, violence, obedience, exclusion, control and domination. This alignment explains why during an armed conflict women's bodies are controlled and seen as both weapons and a battlefield.
- **Support to feminist movements**: UN-Women should bolster its support for women's and feminist organisations and movements so that they can carry out *and* sustain the work to transform social norms.
- **Explore entry points with autocratic regimes**: In contexts of eroding democracy, UN-Women should identify entry points to engage with governments in addition to supporting feminist organisations and movement building.

Panel 4: Measuring social/gender norms and change in social/gender norms: interpretation of evidence matters

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"It is important to engage critically with the question of measurement and methodologies […]. Methodologies can be instruments to disempower or enact cosmetic or extractive forms of participation." – Kate Bedford, University of Birmingham, United Kingdom

"How do we challenge these dominant metrics and dismantle the white gaze that often accompanies them, seen in how restrictive social norms are equated with tradition, deeming local traditions as necessarily backwards." – Anam Parvez Butt, Oxfam

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KEY QUESTIONS:
- What indicators lend themselves well to a meaningful inquiry of social norms?
- How are multi-country surveys measuring norms and norm change? What theories of change underlie these initiatives and what policy recommendations emerge from these initiatives?
- What can we learn from methodologies applied by feminist scholars-practitioners to understand and measure change in social/gender norms?

CHAIR: **Papa Alioune Seck, Chief, Research and Data, UN-Women, New York**

INTERVENTIONS BY PANELISTS:

Magalí Brosio (Argentina; University of Birmingham) and Kate Bedford (United Kingdom; University of Birmingham) presented findings and reflections from their critical assessment[10] of seven influential measures of gender norms:

- The assessment examined each initiative's conceptual foundations, methodological approach, ensuing recommendations, coverage of institutional domains and limitations.
- Different initiatives for measuring social norms have varying understanding on social norms and the geographic scope, thematic focus and data sources are also varied.
- Not only are they poised at different levels (i.e. country, regional, multi-county and global), but they cover diverse topics (e.g., political participation, economic empowerment, education and health) and rely on different sources of data including the World Values Survey, Facebook survey or their own data.
- Most focus on quantitative data but some, like the Storytelling Initiative, also incorporate qualitative methods.
- Law and the private sector were two prominent domains in the examples. However, law is typically understood in a formalistic and state-centric way, with little engagement with customary law and with strategies required for effective legal reform. Corporations are identified as allies and tend not to be identified as agents with a causal role in discriminatory norms. For example, while current approaches to social norm change rely heavily on mass media and social media campaigns as they promote the use of social marketing to shift

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10 Bedford, K. and M. Brosio. 2024. "Measuring Social Norms for Gender and Development: Lessons and Priorities." UN-Women Discussion Paper No. 43. New York: UN-Women. The seven initiatives that were reviewed include: (i) the OECD's Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI); (ii) UNDP's Gender Social Norms Index (GSNI); (iii) World Bank's Reshaping Norms: A new way forward report; (iv) UN-Women's Gender Equality Attitudes Survey; (v) Yougov/Investing in Women and Australian Aid's Social Norms, Attitudes and Practices (SNAP) methodology, applied in Vietnam, Philippines and Indonesia; (vi) Story Kitchen, Gender at Work and UN-Women Storytelling Initiative in Nepal; and (vii) Global Early Adolescent Study and the Growing Up GREAT! (GUG!) initiative in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

gender norms, they do not address the need to regulate globalised media conglomerates.

- Five key lessons emerged from the review:

(i) Social norms are not always defined or measured consistently within the initiatives they studied. There is heavy reliance on personal beliefs and attitudes as proxy indicators for social norms.

(ii) Social norms are generally framed as traditional and lagging behind changes in society, despite evidence in some of these same studies that conservative gender social norms might be newly insurgent, or that distinctive practices harming women might be emerging. The framing also overlooks work on how traditions can be mobilised positively for gender equality.

(iii) There is a common tendency to position social norms as the explanation for why the promise of mainstream development has not been fulfilled for women.

(iv) The initiatives lack a robust approach to examining norms at the level of institutions. Notable exceptions to this were the initiatives by the World Bank and UN-Women's Storytelling Initiative which provide a more detailed account of institutional levers. In particular, the Storytelling Initiative, was characterised by more nuanced engagement with institutional dynamics. For example, it looked at how policy interventions like land reform can shift discriminatory norms related to caste.

(v) In thinking about measuring social norms, more deliberation is required on: what indicators or existing indicators lend themselves well to meaningful study of gender norms; what we can learn from methodology supplied by feminist scholar-practitioners; and what promising practices can and should be highlighted.

Laurel Weldon (Canada; Simon Fraser University) in her response endorsed the call for greater conceptual and theoretical clarity in the measurement of social norms.

- While individual-level work and World Values Survey have limitations, it is important to understand what individuals think, say, or value as part of the effort to understand social norms.

- The challenge of measurement stems in part from the lack of a detailed account of how a practice relates to an individual's thinking and to norms. If everybody does something, it is obviously a norm, or it seems like a norm. What people actually do seem to be a recurring theme in measuring social norms, but norms aren't necessarily about what everybody does. Some norms are about what people think they should be doing.

- Context is critical and there is a need to examine why and how norms vary across contexts and domains, as well as how practice relates to personal beliefs.

- There is a need for better understanding of the distinction between norms that may operate within the family, for example, and those that govern other behaviour, like driving. This also raises questions about the relationship between norms and law.

- The idea of a 'tipping point', is mistakenly critiqued for its focus on the changes at the individual level. The tipping point actually measures percentage of a population that adopts certain norms. The methodological challenge lies, however, in determining how to consider what is happening at an individual level while also identifying the critical juncture at which norms are transformed.

- A clear definition of gender is required for discerning the relationship between social norms and gender. Laurel and Mala Htun have defined it as 'a constellation of institutions'.

In closing the plenary, **Papa** shared the following takeaways: (i) The question is not whether we need to measure, but being clear about why we measure, what we measure, and for such measurements to be useful; (ii) Context really matters, and specific institutions matter in specific contexts, therefore the need to contextualise measurement; and (iii) Moving from a measurement-centric approach to one of learning together is important and is linked to the point about the importance of using both qualitative and quantitative methods.

KEY DISCUSSION TAKEAWAYS
- **Learning approach to measurement**: The quest for 'global' measurement mechanisms and false dualism created between quantitative and qualitative approaches, prevents meaningful measurement of norms. There is need to move from measurement-centric approach to context specific and 'learning together' approach with mixed methodologies.
- **Engage with the politics of measurement**: Measurement is not a neutral process and can reinforce power imbalances. Fundamental questions include: why do we measure? For whom is measurement useful? Most importantly, is the process truly serving the community in which social norm work is happening?
- **Explicit intersectional, feminist and decolonial approach to measurement**: Recognise the inherent power inequalities between NGOs, researchers, donors and communities. Amplify the knowledge of affected communities and co-create indicators with the communities.
- **Measure institutional change**: Norm change is structural and not just behavioural. As such, measuring it requires finding ways to understand and capture changes taking place at deep levels within institutions which manifest in beliefs and practices.
- **Track shift in discourse**: Discourse analysis across religion, politics, public and private sectors as well as in the narratives and stories among women and affected the communities can be useful for measuring norm change.
- **Measure how change happened**: Measurement should consider not only changes in social norms, but also the *process* of bringing about change. Have interventions amplified the voices of marginalised people? Have they democratised knowledge production? Did they open public debate on a taboo issue?

Panel 5: Towards a UN-Women approach to social norms: what strategies should UN-Women be prioritising?

"As long as UN-Women continues to represent a very progressive interpretation of what social change should look like, it is enormously important because of its outreach to feminists and feminist movements across the world." – Naila Kabeer, LSE

"UN-Women should keep privileging the voices from the South that belong to the communities that they are working in and if we do this, we can make some major shifts. We also need to change and make a bigger, more roomy understanding of what research is, one that moves the discourse away from the quantum measurements to the narrative." – Yvonne Underhill-Sem, University of Auckland, New Zealand

"It is important for UN-Women to support women's groups, waste pickers and also in other sectors, through substantive capacity development for broader engagement for transformative change." – Sonia Diaz, Women in Informal Employment Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO), Brazil

"UN-Women needs to invest in some studies that show how a different more nuanced approach to social norm change are better in actually achieving the desired change which supposedly these donor organisations seek. Some internal lobbying with some of the key organizations will need to be done to sway the tide towards this other approach we are talking about here. Take this EGM for example and having a whole public facing conference around the findings etcetera, publicising it – making a fuss basically." – Marwa Sharafeldin, Musawah

KEY QUESTIONS:
- What role should UN-Women take in the international discourse and practice on social norms and social norms change for GEWE? What could be our niche?
- How can the work on transforming discriminatory norms be harnessed to address organized backlash against gender equality and women's rights?
- What kinds of alliances need to be built for sustaining changes in discriminatory norms?
- How do we bust the myth that institutional transformation is unachievable?

MODERATOR: **Laura Turquet, Deputy Chief, Research and Data, UN-Women, New York**

OVERVIEW:
Before the panel deliberations, **Paro** made a brief presentation of the key takeaways from the EGM discussions thus far.

- The analysis of power and alliance of various institutions is central to discussions on social norms on gender equality and women's empowerment. Addressing social norms essentially requires changing power relations between people, and between people and the institution of family, community, market and state.

- Context matters. Gender norms are everywhere but they manifest differently and so one-size does not fit all. While we can learn from the principles and approaches applied in different contexts, we should not seek formulaic replicability.

- Four pathways to social norms change emerge from the presentations:

(i) Development of counter-narratives and consensus building. This has been achieved through strategic, intentional approaches that recognise ongoing norm contestations; appeal to existing egalitarian frameworks; co-create new narratives using feminist praxis; and engage with the whole-of-community.

(ii) Changing the lived realities of women and marginalised groups. Such changes have been brought about through, for e.g., material gains from jobs, provision of reproductive health care and 'visibilisation' of women's work.

(iii) Empowerment which fosters identity development and promotes self-organising. This has been achieved through shifting identities from victims to protagonists and leaders.

(iv) Movement building, collective actions and coalition building. This has included building women's movements and collaborating with other social movements and collectives.

- Based on the papers and deliberations, following building blocks emerge for UN-Women's approach to social norms:

  o Social norms on gender are norms about how society is structured around and in the service of a gender hierarchy. Norms should be regarded as rules about power and privilege.

  o Work with a conscious understanding that social norms are being described and experienced differently in different languages, contexts and philosophies, including based on multiple other identities and life realities.

  o Understand norms as embedded in and reproduced through institutions (i.e., family, community, market, state and religion).

  o Understand that gender norms have always been contested by women, LGBTIQ+ persons, men, girls and boys both individually and collectively across cultures and time.

  o While norms are considered informal rules, they are also formalised into written texts of religion and secular law. Consequently, UN-Women must engage with both informal and formal rules.

  o Look at people from within an institutional framework. UN-Women needs to work with institutions, holding them accountable for shifting norms that are embedded in their structures.

With these take aways, **Laura** turned to the four expert panellists to deliberate on the final set of questions for the EGM, asking them to share their thoughts on what UN-Women's niche should be in this area of work, given that there are many organisations working on social norms; and their insights on how UN-Women can best support and strengthen the work that is already happening. In the context of threats to democracy to which many speakers alluded, she also asked the panellists to share their reflections on how the work to transform discriminatory norms can be harnessed to address backlash. Finally, acknowledging that while UN-Women wants to focus on the institutional level, there is also a sense that changing institutions is difficult. Thus, she asked the panellists to unpack how institutional transformation can be achieved.

INTERVENTIONS BY PANELISTS:

Sonia Dias (Brazil; WIEGO) shared how WIEGO's work with waste pickers' organisations in Brazil over the last 15 years has changed discriminatory social norms and brought about institutional transformation.

- Grounded in cooperative movement principles of mutual help, solidarity and democracy, WIEGO confronted a paradox: although the majority of cooperative members were women, the national movement of waste pickers cooperative systematically marginalised their views and contributions. The issue of gender was invisible in the waste pickers movement, in data and in the work done by NGOs. Apart from a few exceptions, the process of organising waste pickers overshadowed gender issues.

- WIEGO sought to address gender inequality within the movement and deepen internal democracy by enabling women's full participation and leadership.

- WIEGO raised awareness of the gender issues, conducted action research to map women waste pickers' practical and strategic needs, identified

primary-level cooperatives as a strategic entry point for transformation, organised regional workshops engaging women in the co-production of popular education kits and developed a gender strategic plan. These discussions were then taken to important cooperative events and to the national movement. Ultimately, the women members confronted male leadership on the issues of women's representation at the local, sub-national and national levels.

- WIEGO's approach has been to create structures that are conducive to women, that respect their role in representation and that provide some options for women not only be leaders of their local unit – the primary cooperative – but also represent waste pickers as a group at higher levels.

- Speaking specifically to how UN-Women can support WIEGO's work, Sonia indicated that support for substantive capacity development, including for the institutional development of the movement would be crucial.

Naila (LSE, UK) emphasised that UN-Women will continue to play an important role, even in the context of backlash, as long as it continues to represent a very progressive interpretation of what social change should look like.

- The organisation should use its convening power to support alliance building between feminists and feminist movements on the one hand and media, social media and other actors on the other. Although feminists can build their own alliances within a limited context, they do not have the power to amplify dissident voices including those of people in different contexts such as Iran or Gaza.

- At the same time, additional reflection is needed on where norms fit within a theory of change. The theory should go beyond abstract 'mindset change' to actual shifts in people's practices. Instead of focusing on possible distinctions

between injunctive and descriptive norms, we must unpack the issue of what people believe (or the values they hold) from what they are being asked to believe and what they have come to believe over time because of the changes that have occurred.

- Even in contexts where women's movements are unable to operate freely, Marwa's presentation demonstrated that they can take a relatively non-confrontational pathway to change, identifying and using the 'weak points, arguments and platforms that will appeal in the name of justice'.

Tara Cookson (Canada; University of British Columbia) based her insights on her UN-Women commissioned literature review.[11]

- Donors and large international organisations are adopting an understanding of social norms that is not reflective of the understandings developed by feminist and women's rights organisations over decades and centuries. There is a chasm, and the understanding being adopted by donors is very much grounded in behavioural economics and social psychology. Social norm change is understood in a very technical and surgical way, as attitudes and beliefs. Political economy or institutions beyond the family are pushed out of view. This matters for theories of change and also for measurement.

- UN-Women has an interesting role to play in the discourse. Despite its marginalisation within the UN system, it is positioned to assert that this work on social norms 'isn't a magic bullet, a new silver bullet that we need to have a surgical intervention on', but has been undertaken both by UN-Women and by diverse organisations and movements that it has supported over decades. UN-Women must think strategically about how to communicate this and how to bring donors into the conversation.

- UN-Women can use its existing the tools and techniques such as the *Progress of the World's*

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11 Cookson, T.P., L. Fuentes, M.K. Kuss and J. Bitterly. 2023. "Social Norms, Gender and Development: A Review of Research and Practice." UN-Women Discussion Paper No. 42. New York: UN-Women.

Women to document women's stories and capture how change is achieved; its quantitative and qualitative data; and even knowledge generated through this EGM. Stories and data collected in conjunction with organisations and movements with decades of experience in social norms work are powerful tools that have changed the thinking about research, data collection and measurement.

- UN-Women needs to identify and cultivate alliances with like-minded actors within international organisations and boldly declare that alliances, relationships, norms, practices and processes within the development industry – including the donors – need to shift.

Yvonne Underhill-Sem (New Zealand; University of Auckland) made three points regarding how UN-Women might ensure that its work to address social norms is targeted at different levels, especially at the structural level.

- From an Oceanic context, there is need for more discussion of climate change. Climate change discussions have been captured by a particular kind of science that has de-democratised our understanding of weather and climate, a re-imagination of the climate change issue is required.
- There is a need for further engagement in relation to global trading arrangements. The consumption and waste in relation to international trade must be considered because they make a difference in how we live.
- Oceanic metaphor of an Octopus 'having eight arms that move independently of each other', is useful guidance for this work. 'Octopuses move, they grasp, they challenge, they mimic.' Just like an octopus, despite its multiplicity, our work must be coordinated, adaptive, firm and context-aware while strategically provoking change to advance toward a shared goal.

KEY DISCUSSION TAKEAWAYS

- **Discourse on social norms as a site for change**: The dominance of the behavioural approach to social norms despite a lack of clear evidence of its effectiveness may reflect disciplinary differences and worldviews within international and donor organisations. These organisations and discourses are also sites for change and contestation of power and resources.
- **Explore role of contentious approach to norm change**: There is a need for deeper discussion to appreciate the effectiveness of contentious politics/protest in changing norms, and not just focus on consensus-based approaches for social norms change.
- **Alliance building, including in authoritarian regimes**: Broad-based alliances, including those between like-minded organisations in the Global North and South, are important. At the same time, there are pragmatic, political and other moral considerations, such as working with or through authoritarian regimes.
- Recommendations for UN-Women:
  - **Articulate intersectional, feminist and decolonial approach** on social norms, and link the work on social norms with broader structural issues including climate change and international trade.
  - **Privilege voices from the Global South** in its social norms work; amplify findings from these presentations and the EGM in international discourse; and continue documenting, synthesising and disseminating lessons on how change happens. Emphasise UN-Women and feminist partners' long-standing work in the area of social norms.
  - **Invest in feminist research** and evaluation methods to understand and capture shifts in social norms that value feminist epistemologies and methodological approaches that validate other

forms of expression by women at the grassroots level (i.e., not just verbal, but audio-visual, etc.). Mobilise UN-Women's research and data work to call for change in thinking about social change research, data collection and measurement.

- o **Support women's and feminist movements**, including through more direct, long-term core funding and amplify voices of women that are silenced.

Closing session

In closing the meeting on behalf of UN-Women, **Paro** thanked all the experts for generously sharing their time and wisdom with UN-Women and laid out the next steps:

- Circulation of a report of the EGM proceedings to all experts for their feedback;
- Finalisation and publication of the various papers written by the experts; and
- Drafting of a UN-Women approach to social norms based on the papers, EGM report and the findings of the internal evaluation.

Following the meeting several experts shared positive feedback via email particularly appreciating the rich and inspiring presentations and discussions with fellow experts, especially from across the Global South. Participants valued the EGM for creating a space for an important interaction and modelling respectful engagement, offering a platform for differing opinions and their expressions

ANNEX 1: LIST OF PAPERS PRESENTED AT THE EGM

Commissioned by UN-Women (in order of presentations)

Egypt: *How Does Change Happen? Social Norms, Religion and Family Laws in the Middle East and North Africa Region.*[12] This paper is based on the work of an Egyptian civil society coalition and Musawah, a global movement for equality and justice in the Muslim family, whose work is supported by UN-Women. Author Marwa Sharafeldin demonstrates how constructive engagement with religion, democratising the production of religious knowledge on gender with a feminist lens, and astute activist and political engagement through civil society coalitions led to important changes in family law and arguably, norms governing the family in Egypt.

Brazil: *Transforming Social and Gender Norms Through Feminist Methodological Approaches Within the Agroecology Movement in Brazil.*[13] This paper is based on the work of feminist agroecologists and NGOs in Brazil, supported by IFAD. Author Rodica Weitzman provides an in-depth analysis of the impact of agroecological logbooks implemented in Brazil between 2013 and 2020, focusing on women's empowerment, gender norms transformation and the recognition of women's economic contributions in agriculture.

India: *Recasting Social Norms to Universalize Education for Adolescent Girls: The Mamidipudi Venkatarangaiya Foundation Experience.*[14] This paper is based on the work of MV Foundation in eliminating child labour and universalising education in India. Authors Rekha Wazir and Shantha Sinha provide insights into what is involved in changing social norms on gender, caste and poverty in their programme for adolescent girls. Their community-led approach is presented as a sharp contrast to the behaviour change strategies increasingly being used in international development.

Democratic Republic of Congo: *Transforming Social Norms for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: Insights from the Community-Based Psychosocial Approach 'Healing Together'.*[15] This paper is based on the work of feminist women's rights organisation Réseau des Femmes pour les Droits et la Paix (RFDP) and the African Institute for Integral Psychology, supported by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. Authors Aziza Aziz-Suleyman and Simon Gasibirege describe how collective grieving and healing practices were utilised to address conflict-related trauma and served as an entry point for transforming norms on intimate partnerships, violence against women and women's place in the community.

Fiji: *Feminist-led structural change in the Pacific.*[16]This paper is based on the work of feminist organisation DIVA for Equality and Habitat for Humanity in promoting employment of women and gender diverse individuals in the male-dominated construction industry in Fiji. Authors Claire Slatter, Romitesh Kant and Yvonne Underhill-Sem

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12 Sharafeldin, M. Forthcoming. "How Does Change Happen? Social Norms, Religion and Family Laws in the Middle East and North Africa Region." UN-Women Discussion Paper Series. New York: UN-Women.

13 Weitzman, R. Forthcoming. "Transforming Social and Gender Norms Through Feminist Methodological Approaches Within the Agroecology Movement in Brazil." UN-Women Discussion Paper Series. New York: UN-Women.

14 Wazir, R. and S. Sinha. 2024. "Recasting Social Norms to Universalize Education for Adolescent Girls: The Mamidipudi Venkatarangaiya Foundation Experience." UN-Women Discussion Paper No. 44. New York: UN-Women.

15 Aziz-Suleyman, A. and S. Gasibirege. Forthcoming. "Transforming Social Norms for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: Insights from the Community-Based Psychosocial Approach 'Healing Together' in the Democratic Republic of Congo." Expert paper prepared for UN-Women Expert Group Meeting on Social Norms, 25–26 October 2023.

16 Slatter, C., R. Kant and Y. Underhill-Sem. 2023. "Feminist-led Structural Change in the Pacific." Paper presented at UN-Women Expert Group Meeting on Social Norms, 25–26 October 2023.

describe how the programme built upon the Pacific concept of relationality emphasizing the interconnectedness among members of the community to challenge societal norms.

Measurement: ***Measuring Social Norms for Gender and Development: Lessons and Priorities.***[17] Authors Kate Bedford and Magali Brosio review seven initiatives on measuring social norms, including by the OECD, UNDP, World Bank and UN-Women. They identify emerging lessons, assess gaps, particularly in measuring institutional dimensions of social norms, and propose three priorities for engaging with the question of measuring social norms.

Invited papers

Argentina: ***Feminist Activism, Legal Reform and the 'Social Decriminalisation of Abortion': Argentina as a Case Study.***[18] This paper is based on research by authors Barbara Sutton and Nayla Luz Vacarezza on abortion rights activism in Argentina, which has had profound impacts on shifting norms in that country and the wider region on women's bodily autonomy and reproductive rights.

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17 Bedford, K. and M. Brosio. 2024. "Measuring Social Norms for Gender and Development: Lessons and Priorities." UN-Women Discussion Paper No. 43. New York: UN-Women.

18 Sutton, Barbara and N.L. Vacarezza. 2023. "Feminist Activism, Legal Reform and the 'Social Decriminalisation of Abortion': Argentina as a Case Study". Paper presented at UN-Women Expert Group Meeting on Social Norms, 25–26 October 2023.

ANNEX 2: AGENDA

Day 1: 25 October 2023

Time (EST)	Session	Key questions
06.00 – 06.15	Introduction Presentation by: • Jennifer Cooper, UN-Women	• Brief overview of social norms work at UN-Women and introduction by participants. • What do we want to get out of this meeting?
06.15 – 06.50	**Developing an UN-Women approach to social norms** Presentations by: • Paro Chaujar, UN-Women • Sabrina Evangelista, UN-Women Discussion Chair: Shoko Ishikawa, UN-Women	• Overview of work done so far • Developing the UN-Women way
06.50 – 08.15	**Panel 1: Institutions as location for norm change: how can feminist vision of egalitarian gender norms be realized through shifts in institutions?** Presentation by: • Marwa Sharafeldin, Musawah Egypt and Harvard University, USA • Rodica Weitzman, Federal Rural University of Rio de Janeiro and Women's Working Group - National Agroecology Network, Brazil Response by: • Noelene Nabulivou, Founder - Diverse Voices and Action for Equality (DIVA) Fiji (regret) Discussion Chair: Ana Carolina Querino, UN-Women	• What does evidence and the experience of changing social norms on gender equality and women's empowerment tell us about the role of institutions in the persistence of and change in these norms? • What is the relationship between the different institutions in reproducing gender norms? Is there a hierarchy among institutions and how do shifts in one institution affect shifts in others? • What strategies are required for bringing feminist vision and knowledge of egalitarian gender norms to influence institutions? How does norm change in institutions make it more possible for people's beliefs and behaviours to change?
08.15 – 08.25	BREAK	
08.25 – 09.50	**Panel 2: Engaging with the general population: moving away from fixing individual 'bad behaviour' to collective change in discriminatory norms**	• What are some of the blind spots in social norm change agenda at global and national levels when it comes to focusing

| | Presentations by:
• Aziza Aziz-Suleyman, Regional Psychosocial Programme, Great Lakes, Africa

• Rekha Wazir and Shantha Sinha, MV Foundation, India

Response by:
• Naila Kabeer, London School of Economics, UK

Discussion

Chair: Sunita Caminha, UN-Women | on individual-level solutions to changing social norms?

• What does evidence tell us about the need for different approaches for norm shifting with people privileged by the inegalitarian norms and those marginalized by the norms?

• What makes individuals, families and communities change (i.e., go against the social/gender norms and set off new egalitarian norms)? What needs to click into place? |
| 09.50 – 10.00 | Wrap up of Day 1
• Olga Osaulenko, UN-Women | |

Day 2: 26 October 2023

Time (EST)	Session	Key questions
06.00 – 06.15	Introduction to Day 2 Welcome and recap • Rodrigo Montero, UN-Women	
06.15 – 07.35	**Panel 3: Putting the power back in empowerment: collective action and empowerment as pathways to changing norms on gender** Presentations by: • Claire Slatter, Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era – DAWN, Fiji • Barbara Sutton, University at Albany and Nayla Luz Vacarezza, CONICET Argentina Response by: • Wenny Kusuma, formerly UN-Women's Representative in Nepal Discussion Chair: Jebbeh Forster, formerly UN-Women	• How has social, political and economic empowerment of women contributed to transformation of belief systems and attitudes of different social actors in different institutions? • What can we learn from feminist and grassroots methodologies on empowerment of women, girls and other marginalised groups or communities in bringing about change in social/gender norms? • What are the key lessons learned about how citizens' engagement, collectivisation and mobilisation have brought about systemic change (institutional change)?
07.35 – 07.45	BREAK	

07.45 – 08.45	**Panel 4: Measuring social/ gender norms and change in social/ gender norms: interpretation of evidence matters** Presentation by: • Kate Bedford, University of Birmingham and Magali Brosio, University of Birmingham, UK Response by: • Laurel Weldon, Simon Fraser University, Canada Discussion Chair: Papa Alioune Seck, UN-Women	• What indicators lend themselves well to a meaningful inquiry of social norms? • How are multi-country surveys measuring norms and norm change? What theories of change underlie these initiatives and what policy recommendations emerge from these initiatives? • What can we learn from methodologies applied by feminist scholars-practitioners to understand and measure change in social/gender norms?
08.45 – 09.50	**Panel 5: Towards a UNW approach to Social Norms: what strategies should UNW be prioritising?** Presentation by: • Paro Chaujar, UN-Women Panellists • Naila Kabeer, London School of Economics • Yvonne Underhill-Sem, University of Auckland • Tara Cookson, University of British Columbia, Canada • Sonia Dias, WIEGO, Brazil Discussion Moderator: Laura Turquet, UN-Women	• What role should UN-Women take in the international discourse and practice on social norms and social norms change for GEWE? What could be our niche? • How can the work on transforming discriminatory norms be harnessed to address organized backlash against gender equality and women's rights? • What kinds of alliances need to be built for sustaining changes in discriminatory norms? • How do we bust the myth that institutional transformation is unachievable?
09.50 – 10.00	**Closing Remarks** Paro Chaujar, UN-Women	

ANNEX 3: LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

External experts

1. Anam Parvez Butt, Oxfam, UK
2. Aziza Aziz-Suleyman, Suisse Cooperation and Consulate, Burundi
3. Barbara Sutton, University at Albany, USA
4. Claire Slatter, Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era, Fiji
5. Duncan Green, Oxfam, UK
6. Ibtesam Al-Atiyat, St. Olaf College, USA
7. Jebbeh Forster, formerly with UN-Women
8. Kate Bedford, University of Birmingham, UK
9. Laurel Weldon, Simon Fraser University, Canada
10. Magalí Brosio, University of Birmingham, UK
11. Marwa Sharafeldin, Musawah, Egypt
12. Miriam Nobre, Sempreviva Organização Feminista, Brazil
13. Naila Kabeer, London School of Economics, UK
14. Nayla Luz Vacarezza, National Council for Scientific and Technical Research, Argentina
15. Rekha Wazir, MV Foundation, India
16. Rodica Weitzman, Federal Rural University of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
17. Romitesh Kant, Australian National University
18. Shantha Sinha, MV Foundation, India
19. Simon Gasibirege, National University of Rwanda
20. Sonia Maria Dias, WIEGO, Brazil
21. Tara Patricia Cookson, University of British Columbia, Canada
22. Wenny Kusuma, formerly with UN-Women
23. Yvonne Te Ruki Rangi o Tangaroa Underhill-Sem, University of Auckland, New Zealan

UN-Women colleagues

- Ana Carolina Querino, Deputy Country Representative, Brazil
- Abigail Erikson, Chief, UN Trust Fund
- Amber Parkes, Women's Economic Justice Policy Specialist, New York
- Brianna Howell, Research Analyst, New York
- Clara Mah Anyangwe, Representative to Burundi
- Constanza Tabbush, Research Specialist, New York
- Elisa Acevedo Hernández, Publications Coordinator, New York
- Edward Wageni, Head, HeForShe Initiative, New York
- Gitanjali Singh, Representative to Bangladesh
- Giulia Bortolotti, Advisor, Governance and Political Participation, Regional Office for the Americas and the Caribbean
- Hanan Kamar, Rule of Law and Protection Specialist, Palestine Country Office
- Hildur Sigurdardottir, Policy Specialist-Masculinities, New York
- Jennifer Cooper, Regional Specialist-Latin America and the Caribbean, New York
- Julie Ballington, Global Policy Advisor on Political Participation, New York
- Juncal Plazaola-Castaño, Policy Specialist, Ending Violence against Women, New York
- Kanta Singh, Deputy Country Representative, India
- Laura Capobianco, Advisor, Ending Violence Against Women, New York
- Laura Turquet, Deputy Chief, Research and Data, New York
- Leah Tandeter, Policy Specialist, Ending Violence against Women, Regional Office for the Americas and the Caribbean
- Loui Williams, Research Assistant, New York
- Louise Nylin, Chief, Political Analysis and Programme Development Unit, New York
- Maria Karadenizli, Programme Specialist, Humanitarian Action, New York
- Marie-Elena John, Racial Justice Specialist, New York
- Nancy Khweiss, Programme Manager, Afghanistan Country Office
- Nazneen Damji, Policy Advisor, Gender equality, Health and HIV, New York

- Olga Osaulenko, Regional Project Manager, Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia
- Papa Alioune Seck, Chief, Research and Data, New York
- Paro Chaujar, Social Norms Specialist, New York
- Rodrigo Montero Cano, Programme Manager, Regional Office for the Arab States
- Sabrina Evangelista, Evaluation Specialist, Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific
- Sara Denby, Head of the Unstereotype Alliance Secretariat, New York
- Shabina Khan, Programme Coordinator, Ending Violence Against Women and Girls, Fiji Multi-Country Office

- Shoko Ishikawa, Deputy Director, Policy, Programme and Intergovernmental Division, New York
- Silke Staab, Research Specialist, New York
- Sonal Zaveri, Evaluation Consultant
- Soomaya Enayat Khan, Programme Analyst, Afghanistan Country Office
- Sophie Browne, Global LGBTIQ+ Rights Specialist, New York
- Sunita Caminha, Regional Specialist, Ending Violence against Women, Regional Office for East and Southern Africa

UN-WOMEN EXISTS TO ADVANCE WOMEN'S RIGHTS, GENDER EQUALITY AND THE EMPOWERMENT OF ALL WOMEN AND GIRLS.

As the lead UN entity on gender equality and secretariat of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, we shift laws, institutions, social behaviors and services to close the gender gap and build an equal world for all women and girls. Our partnerships with governments, women's movements and the private sector coupled with our coordination of the broader United Nations translate progress into lasting changes. We make strides forward for women and girls in four areas: leadership, economic empowerment, freedom from violence, and women, peace and security as well as humanitarian action.

UN-Women keeps the rights of women and girls at the centre of global progress – always, everywhere. Because gender equality is not just what we do. It is who we are.

This report summarises proceedings of and key takeaways from a Global South-led expert group meeting convened by UN-Women to inform its strategic approach to addressing discriminatory social norms in the pursuit of gender equality and women's empowerment. The report includes findings and recommendations emerging from research on social norms, including original research commissioned by UN-Women on 'how change happens' in Brazil, Egypt, Fiji, India and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Experts from across the world deliberated on four key questions:

– How are the social institutions of the state, market, community and family implicated in social norms on gender and what kinds of strategies are required for changing gender norms in institutions?
– What strategies and approaches have been applied for working with those privileged or marginalised by these norms? How have these strategies helped change social norms?
– What is the relationship between empowerment, collective action and social norms change?
– How are norms being measured and how is evidence produced by such approaches influencing policy? What are alternative ways of thinking about the measurement of social norms change?

The expert group recommended that UN-Women develop an institutional, intersectional, feminist and decolonial approach to social norms. Discussions among the group, as well as findings from UN-Women's commissioned research, point to three key pathways for inclusion in UN-Women's framework on addressing discriminatory social norms: (i) Developing counter-narratives and building consensus; (ii) Changing the material realities of women and girls; (iii) Movement building, collective actions and coalition building.