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Gender norms and stereotypes
Expert Paper prepared by

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1. Policy statements. The need to change gender norms and stereotypes is discussed in a series of UN documents, including CEDAW and the Beijing PfA. These documents do not treat norms as isolated, but as part of the weave of social life; and they correctly assume that norms *can* be changed, they are not fixed.

2. Concepts. The terms in this discussion need careful thought and definition. Gender involves the biological division between women and men in the context of social life; gender involves a structure of social relations, including economic relations and institutions as well as personal life. Stereotypes are over-simplified representations of these complex realities. Gender norms, which are social prescriptions for the lives of women and men, have multiple layers, from concrete to abstract; sometimes refer to averages and sometimes to ideals; are often embedded in institutions rather than individual opinions; and in practice reveal diversity, contradiction and contestation as well as consensus. It is important to recognize gender-equality norms as well as gender-inequality norms.

3. Materialization. Norms and stereotypes do not float free in a realm of their own, they are materialized in specific domains of social life. The report assembles international research showing the materialization of gender norms in five domains: mass media; education; work and organizational life; agriculture and land; government and public realm. Among the lessons to be drawn from this research: women's *absence* from representation may be a powerful normative statement; institutional norms producing segregation, e.g. in education and workplaces, are widespread and contradict public norms of equality; gender norms are often subject to bargaining and contestation in local sites.

4. Persistence. The persistence of discriminatory norms and stereotypes cannot be explained by an automatic process of "socialization", for reasons now well-established in childhood research.

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[1] The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations.

Norms are engaged in a more active, and uneven, way by growing boys and girls. They also persist through the routine functioning of institutions; by conscious resistance to change on the part of conservative men (and sometimes women too); and through the organizational "dances" that follow changes such as the arrival of women in management. It is important to recognize that "tradition" also includes gender-equality norms and cultural practices that support gender democracy.

5. Change. Norms and stereotypes change in multiple ways, which are documented in international research. Some changes arise from the dynamics of gender relations themselves: "rounds" of restructuring in gender orders; or contradictions in gender norms that give scope for activism. Some arise from economic changes, such as rising labour force participation by women, men's and women's labour migrations, technological change in industry, and the reorganization of whole economies under neoliberalism - though the changes in this case are very contradictory. Some arise from broad sociocultural changes, such as mobilizations against authoritarianism, and the spread of literacy and schooling. Finally change may be triggered by social movements, which act across a spectrum of sites from schooling to public politics, and which may re-shape gender identities on a societal scale. Though normative change in gender relations is mainly accomplished by women's movements, there is also a gender-equality movement among men.

Three major strategies for normative change are identified: the "intervention" model, familiar among NGOs and aid programmes; the "untested feasibility" model more characteristic of social movements; and the "public sphere" model involving formal institutions on a societal scale.

6. Supporting material. An appendix discussing problems of method in research on norms and stereotypes is included. Reasons for caution in interpreting the findings of polls and surveys are explained. A strategy of critical analysis using multiple data-gathering methods is recommended. The report concludes with a bibliography of research cited in the text.

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