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Advancing Learning and Innovation on Gender Norms

BRIEFING

Historical lessons on gender norm change, with case studies from Uganda and Nepal

By Caroline Harper, with material from Carol Watson, Grace Bantebya Kyomuhendo, Anita Ghimire and Rachel George

Acknowledgements

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1 Introduction

There is no doubt: norms change. We see them shifting every day as people absorb more useful ways of behaving, or behaviour that they perceive as beneficial or acceptable.[1] But some norms are stubborn, and do not shift easily, often because they serve the interests of a powerful group. Gender norms can be particularly difficult to shift, as doing so entails trying to change rules that benefit the more powerful part of the population, who themselves set the rules. For them, maintaining the status quo is more advantageous and comfortable, and resistance to change can be strong. After all, why would the powerful willingly surrender their own privilege and advantage? Institutions, such as religious or political bodies, which enact and reinforce gender norms, can also be particularly resistant to change. All of this resistance means that changing accepted gender practices is extraordinarily difficult and can feel uncomfortable for women as well as men.

The term 'norm' has become more commonplace[2] in development, although its definition varies. In general, it refers to the underlying rules and cultures of societies, as well as the individual and institutional attitudes, behaviours and practices that reflect and enforce these rules. Norms are embedded in the institutions of society as well as in individual beliefs and practices, which means that shifts in norms need to be supported by changes in

both institutional and individual 'rules'. Rewards and sanctions help to maintain norms, with punishments for divergence from the normal and expected behaviours and practices. Nevertheless, norms change, and rules are broken all the time.

When norms compromise human well-being and rights or actively cause harm, efforts have been made to change them. These have tended to focus on legal and policy reforms; social movements and citizen action; and direct work with communities, involving group work and reflection and other mechanisms, including media action. Some of these efforts have been well documented and analysed (Marcus and Harper, 2015; Marcus et al., 2018 and 2017; Heymann et al., 2019). There is also a growing focus on efforts to address harmful masculinities as a way to tackle wider harmful practices, including violence against women and girls, and resistance to gender norm change.

Yet there is still considerable resistance to such change. Women and girls still face challenges in every domain and cultural stereotypes are often used to deny women their rights: to speak and be listened to, to get an education, to own property, to be equally paid, to control their bodies and sexuality alongside multiple other denials, restrictions and violations.

In 2020, the global gender equality community is sounding the alarm about a new and growing backlash against women's rights. Nevertheless, there has been some progress on shifting gender norms in recent years and it is important to understand how this progress has been achieved, as well as just how long it can take. Understanding the history of norm change can both enhance our knowledge of change processes as well as inspire future generations, as Harper (2020) describes in a companion think piece to this series.

It is because we face a backlash that we need to take this longer historical view. It reminds everyone engaged in the struggle for gender equality that their actions can make a difference, even if they don't live to see it; that courage and persistence are essential parts of successful change; that

> ## What are gender norms?
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> Gender norms, as used here, describe how people of a particular gender (and often age) are expected to behave in a given social context. They are the often unwritten 'rules' that determine attitudes and behaviours (practices). When both of these change, we see that a norm has, indeed, changed. The past decade has seen a growing interest in gender norms, reflecting real progress in naming the basis of gender discrimination: patriarchy and its underlying rules.

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1 Of course, norm change can be negative, as well as positive, and can involve moving towards, rather than away from, harmful behaviours. One example would be a rise in racist behaviours when they are deemed to be acceptable more widely, as has happened in many countries in recent years. (see, for example, reports of increases in black and Asian minorities reporting 'overt racism' post-brexit in the United Kingdom; https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/may/20/racism-on-the-rise-since-brexit-vote-nationwide-study-reveals).
2 Notably the 2020 country reports from the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) include a category on norm change.

dominant narratives about how we got to where we are often hide many crucial and untold histories of change. Ideally, of course, grassroots action coincides with gender-transformative political will and leadership and strong transformative policy reforms. But the long view shows us that even without committed leadership, people can take the lead, particularly through civil society organisations (CSOs) and social movements. The practical areas of focus are pivotal – legal and cross-sector policy reforms, education, the role of social movements, including their, and others', action to address harmful masculinities. All of these are bedrocks enabling further empowerment and are part of the wider picture of transformative change.

About this ALIGN briefing paper

Prompted by the global conversations of 'progress' around the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action, this ALIGN briefing paper reflects on the progress that has been achieved on shifting gender norms. To do so, it uses a long-view lens to draw on both global statistics and in-depth case studies in Uganda and Nepal undertaken with women, including professional women of all ages and some men, to reflect on progress for women over the past 50 years in these two countries. The 25th anniversary is an opportunity to consider the nature of that progress over time, to examine the history of change and to gather potential lessons. The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) country reports this year include a section on norm change. This is an important recognition of the underlying societal rules which maintain harmful beliefs and practices.

This briefing paper analyses this progress with a focus on gender norms and the entrenched patriarchal norms that resist change. We explore the experience of change through the voices of women to understand the value of taking a long view, and propose the common actions that are needed for progressive and transformative change.

2 Understanding the evidence of progress

In a 2015 review of 20 years of progress since Beijing 1995, the United Nations (UN) Secretary-General commented: '*Overall progress...has been unacceptably slow with stagnation and even regress in some contexts*'. Change towards gender equality '*has not been deep enough; nor has it been irreversible*' (United Nations, 2015: 9).

In 2019, UN Women's *Annual Report* commented on critical gaps in progress towards the goals set in Beijing. For example, despite lofty commitments in Beijing and in UN human rights conventions, '*around the world, over 2.5 billion women and girls suffer the consequences of discriminatory laws and gaps in legal protections*'. The Report also noted that women's lived experiences remain far from the goals set for 12 critical areas in Beijing UN Women, 2019: 2).[3]

A pattern seems to be emerging: the empowerment of women that enables them to make real choices, to be heard, to be free from violence and to have economic autonomy, is not keeping up with other advances in human development and welfare, which have, for example, addressed much-needed gains in maternal mortality and survival.

Between 2000 and 2017, the global maternal mortality rate dropped by about 38% (WHO, 2019). While low- and lower-middle-income countries still account for 94% of maternal deaths, the overall trend is one of improvement (ibid.). Life expectancy for both women and men has also dramatically improved (ibid.). Gender parity in primary education was largely achieved between 1990 and 2012 (though there are still inequalities in completion rates and in learning, especially in the poorest countries). Progress has also been made in secondary and tertiary education (United Nations, 2015).

Between 1990 and 2000, the use of contraception among women of reproductive age showed an 11% increase, it then slowed over the next 15 years to a 3% increase – but still an important overall positive trend. Between 1990 and 2014 adolescent childbearing dropped from 34 to 17 out of every 1,000 girls in developed countries and from 64 to 54 out of every 1,000 girls in developing countries (ibid.).

Of course, these global statistics mask important variations and challenges, such as the concentration of inequalities in the poorest countries. Overall, however, we do see important improvements in well-being. It would be wrong to assume that none of these are related to the greater empowerment of women and girls – some empowerment will have been part of these changes. However, reducing the risk and prevalence of childbearing, may be, but is not necessarily, socially transformative.

We can see that when social improvements mean a more direct challenge to change the status quo (when talking about redistribution of financial or political power, for example), the resistance to change may be stronger. For example, women's increasing educational attainment and rising participation in the labour market have not been matched with better employment conditions, prospects for advancement or equal pay. Indeed, at the current pace of progress it will take more than 75 years to achieve equal pay for work of equal value. Between 1992 and 2012 (20 years) the gender gap in labour market participation narrowed by just two percentage points from 28% to 26% (ibid.).

Worldwide, women's participation in the labour market still remains almost 27 percentage points lower than for men (ILO, 2020), and in regions where gender gaps in participation have been high, they have remained so. In Southern Asia and Eastern Asia, the gap has grown even wider (ILO, 2018). In 2018, the gender gap in the employment rate was 26.5 percentage points in men's favour, only 2 percentage points less than it was in 1990 (ibid.).

There has also been a marked lack of progress on violence against women, which is not declining and remains high, (although increases in reporting may explain trends in some cases). Global estimates suggest that 35% of women have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate-partner violence (IPV) or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime (WHO, 2017). However, the number of countries with laws that criminalise domestic violence rose from just 2 in 1984 to 155 as of September 2019 (World Bank, 2020), a significant improvement. That

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3   The 12 critical areas are 1) poverty, 2) education and training, 3) health, 4) violence, 5) armed conflict, 6) the economy, 7) power and decision-making, 8) mechanisms for the advancement of women, 9) human rights, 10) the media, 11) the environment, 12) the girl-child.

said, legislation is only part of the solution: its effective implementation and enforcement are also critical.

There have been some improvements in political participation. Women steadily increased their formal political participation worldwide, with the global average for their representation in national parliaments rising from 11.7% in 1997 (January) to 22.6% in 2015 (April) (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2015). Even so, women still account for less than one-quarter of members of parliament (MPs) worldwide and are estimated to be just 5% of mayors, though there is limited data on global trends at the local level.[4] The largest gender disparities in parliamentary representation are recorded in Arab countries and the Pacific.

In 2014, women held 17% of ministerial positions, up from 15% in 2000. However, women ministers tend to be responsible for social sectors. Of the 1,096 ministerial posts held by women in 2014, 187 were related to social affairs and family services compared to 45 in foreign affairs and 24 in budget/finance (UN Women, 2015).

Uganda and Nepal

Uganda

How do these global trends reflect the progress in Uganda and Nepal? As our companion paper by Watson et al. (2020) explains, Uganda has been a trail-blazer in the development of gender-sensitive national policies, processes and structures to empower women and girls, and offers many lessons on how to confront discriminatory gender norms and practices.

The country has made marked progress since 1986, which has been supported by: a deliberate national policy to expand educational opportunities for both girls and boys; the opening up of political spaces for women through electoral quotas to create seats for women, workers, youth and people with disabilities; and the creation of a specific ministry for gender justice and equality (the Ministry of Gender, Social Development and Labour), as well as the rise of a vibrant women's movement in civil society. The 1995 Constitution stands as a hallmark of gender-sensitive legislation, ushering in a mass of progressive national laws, policies and programmes. As a result, indicators of women's empowerment and well-being have, in general, improved significantly over time.

Nevertheless, progress has been uneven with obstacles in areas that are critical for gender equality. For example, while women's political participation has expanded, women continue to battle gendered stereotypes that favour male participation in political leadership. Obstacles to their exercise of power include sexual harassment and aggression, negative portrayals and a trivialisation of their needs and experiences in the media, as well as a lack of the resources and skills needed for their participation in politics and public life. They still suffer unequal access to economic resources and assets, and face discrimination in the workplace.

The fact is, that despite the institutional structures that are in place, commitment to gender equality is not prioritised in most sectors; public institutions suffer from poor public management, under-staffing and under-resourcing, resulting in weak implementation of policies. Meanwhile, the space for civil society activity appears to be shrinking.

All of these obstacles are reflected in the available statistics. There has been significant progress on poverty reduction overall, falling from 31.1% in 2006 to 19.7% in 2013 (World Bank, 2016), but women still lag behind in access to economic resources and assets. As with global figures there has been significant progress in education. Female literacy has increased from 45% in 1991 to 68% in 2014 (Hostetter, 2018), but the transition to secondary school is low for boys and girls alike, and drop outs among girls are high as a result of early marriage and teen pregnancy. There have been notable improvements in services for sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), but maternal mortality remains high as well as teenage pregnancy. There have also been improvements in laws against violence, but violence against women and girls (VAWG) is still reported to be widespread, and, according to Uganda's Bureau of Statistics (UBOS and ICF, 2018) lifetime physical and/or sexual IPV still stands at 50%.

Nepal

In Nepal, government commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment has strengthened in recent years, particularly since the advent of democracy. Women were active in the social movements of the 1990s and have gained political representation through a quota system at different levels of government. The current President, Bidhya Devi Bhandari, is female – elected in 2015, together with the first female Speaker. Educational levels

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4   There is no official global data on women in local governments, but the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) Association estimates that 20% of councillors and 5% of mayors worldwide are women, and calls for more accurate data collection and UN measures in this area (see discussion at 'Women mayors are ready to stand up and be counted' (UCLG) Available at https://www.uclg.org/en/media/news/women-mayors-are-ready-stand-and-be-counted).

have risen for both boys and girls, and SRHR and related services have expanded. Legal reform has been central to the promotion of gender equality and many laws have been enacted to protect women's rights in numerous domains (Watson et al., 2020).

The adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995 was a milestone, paving the way for Nepal to establish its first separate Ministry for Women, Children and Senior Citizens. Activist CSOs have also been created to promote and safeguard women's human rights, and a coalition has been formed to pursue a common platform. Most indicators of women's well-being demonstrate significant improvements in SRHR, education, economic empowerment and protection, with sectoral programmes in place to further these gains.

As in Uganda, however, significant challenges remain. Progressive laws and policies suffer from weak implementation, and progress has been uneven across the country's geographic and social groupings, with patterns of exclusion and inclusion often linked to demographic, socio-economic and cultural background. Girls' education is still limited in some areas by the unequal division of household labour, as well as early marriages that cause girls to drop out of school and restrict girls' mobility. And although women have 33% representation in parliament, none of the political parties show high percentages of women in senior positions.

While many harmful and discriminatory practices have been outlawed, some persist in different pockets, such as *chhaupadi* (the isolation of menstruating girls and women), accusations of witchcraft and discrimination against widows. Women's economic empowerment is also hindered by, for example, their dual responsibilities within the household; gender disparities in access to land and other resources (despite recent laws on equal inheritance); and restrictions on mobility that stop them benefiting from economic opportunities. Their political participation and leadership, though safeguarded by law, continues to be challenged by strong norms that define the public space as 'male'. Women and girls also continue to suffer from different forms of gender-based violence (GBV), while their access to justice is limited by a variety of constraints (ibid.).

Again, these obstacles can be seen in the available data. Nepal has seen a large drop in poverty, from 40% in 1991 to 25.2% in 2011, but disparities persist, and fewer than 20% of households report ownership of land or property in a woman's name (Mishra and Aboul, 2016; ADB, 2017). Women now account for one-third of MPs,

but party leadership remains male dominated. Women's literacy rates have increased over the last decade, but rates still remain low, and there are significant gaps between urban settings, with higher literacy, and rural settings. Most girls attend poorer quality government schools while more boys are sent to private schools. What's more, girls face the persistent problem of early marriage. There have been important improvements in SRHR and related services, but they are much weaker in areas where taboos and cultural barriers have the greatest negative impact on women's lives. The median age at first marriage is rising, but is still just 17.9 years for women, and Nepal still holds one of the highest early marriage rates in Asia (Unicef, 2017; Watson et al., 2020).

Impressive progress in both countries, but reforms have to be made real in practice

Both Uganda and Nepal have mounted impressive and progressive legal protections for women and girls through their constitutions and national policies. However, enforcement often lags behind, and progressive policies have not always been translated into consistent practice to protect and empower women. In both countries, women's access to economic resources, education and some health outcomes is still below global averages and is shaped by the particular contexts of poverty and patriarchy that they face in both countries. What the data seems to show is that delivering improved conditions for the well-being of women and girls (such as providing concrete services to reduce maternal mortality and expand basic education) progresses at a more consistent rate than areas where power has to be yielded in the economic and personal realms. Progress in terms of women controlling the means of production, for example, remains really slow.

Globally women's and girls' economic contributions have led to economic growth (World Bank, 2012) but this does not mean that their engagement in the labour force has led to greater gender equality. Often women and girls are unable to control the means of production, are concentrated in poor-quality work, paid less than men, continue to carry the majority of domestic care, are denied the education they need for better jobs or miss out on those jobs despite their education. Many of these problems of control over resources have intersectional characteristics and apply to poor men as well as women, but women carry the extra burden of care, which adds significantly to their workloads and restricts their opportunities. Despite these limitations, however, the increasing presence of women in the labour market has contributed to some shifts in norms, particularly in families that recognise women's legitimacy as income earners.

3 Lessons from history and social change in Uganda and Nepal

The companion paper by Watson et al. (2020) details the voices of women in multiple contexts and their experiences of change over 50 years. This section includes just a few of their extraordinary stories and reflects on the lessons they pose for all of us.

To a large extent, the personal experiences of these women chime with the examples and challenges outlined in the previous section. Our focus here is on significant processes and drivers of change, as well as areas of strong resistance to change and push-back. Watson et al. (2020) also relate stories of change across multiple sectors including in health and education, in bodily autonomy and violence and in political voice. This rich set of narratives spans multiple aspects, from restrictive labour markets and inheritance rights, to early marriage and GBV, social activism and acts of courage. What runs through these accounts is the underlying strength of restrictive masculinities and related patriarchal structures, which suggests that a focus on addressing restrictive masculinities is needed (we will return to this below). Taken together, they demonstrate that norms change over long time frames, especially without necessarily gender-transformative policies in place. Our narratives illustrate some slow weakening of norms, alongside their incredible persistence, and importantly they recount the significance of women's individual and collective agency.

They confirm that gender norms are learned through the reinforced association of roles and status with different genders: '*from infancy onwards children learn these associations and [they] become cognitively automatic which is the foundation of stereotype and implicit bias. Deviations from the norm are sanctioned*' 2019: 2452). It takes real effort to weaken their grip. For example, almost all of our older respondents reported strong restrictions on behaviour and movement from childhood, which grew even tighter in their teens.

Over time the nature of these restrictions had, however, changed. For older women in both countries, menstruation triggered early marriage. For younger women, early marriage had declined, but menstruation still signalled more limited mobility and autonomy. As a young Nepali student in her 20s commented: '*It is culture and tradition that is making… parents behave that way, and this is deeply rooted.*'

Many stories of change and resistance crisscross these accounts, and it is clear that changing norms involves a cross-sectoral approach in multiple areas. Norms are not 'stand-alone': they are enforced and reproduced through all institutions, including government, legal systems, schools and health services, as well as the informal 'institutions' of society such as family and community structures.

In this section, we reflect on:
- resistance to norm change
- the roots of this resistance, and
- action to change resistant norms as evidenced from the historical narratives of women.

We look first at two key areas of resistance: enabling women's political voice and addressing GBV. The roots of this resistance lie in patriarchal systems and related expressions of masculinity. Turning to action to address discriminatory and harmful norms we reflect on women's courage and voices in education and social activism.

Gender-based violence and resistance to norm change

One recurring theme over the years, and voiced by women of all ages, is the persistent violence that pervades their lives. As noted earlier, globally the level of violence against women and girls has changed only very slowly.

Women in both Uganda and Nepal suggested that deep-rooted norms and attitudes around their bodies and sexuality are highly resistant to change and that this contributes to an overall devaluation of women as well as denial of their full human rights. They also fuel ongoing GBV.

In Uganda, professional women reported that '*there is little breakthrough around women's bodies. You can see this issue in the dress code policy in the public sector where women must dress decently, and in attitudes that the way you dress makes you responsible for rape. Another example is the anti-pornography bill. Everyone is up in arms about women's body – restricting what she can do or not do, how she can move or not move.*'

A human rights lawyer pointed to the crystallisation of such attitudes in law: *'It is obvious how the law is keeping women in a subordinate status, particularly around sexuality – abortion, sex work, etc. – where there are blatant double standards on men and women's sexuality.'*

Similar concerns were raised in relation to GBV, which remains widespread throughout society – among the rural poor as well as the urban elite. Some respondents questioned whether attitudes have really changed or whether the continued violence *'is also part of the backlash... The egotism and machismo of men who are threatened...'*

A professional woman argued that: *'Now people know that gender-based violence is considered an abomination, but they don't really think it is. The man still thinks he has the right to slap, but fears being reported. It is not about feeling that she doesn't deserve beating, but the fear of the law.'*

Provisions against marital rape in the proposed Ugandan family law reform – the Marriage and Divorce Bill – were cited as turning men against the bill – including male local councillors and MPs – because, according to one professional woman, *'they feel that marriage confers the obligation of the woman to give sex and the entitlement of the man to have sex.'*

In Nepal, postgraduate students felt that one key obstacle to progress was a *'woman's lack of rights over her body'*. This, a civil society activist explained, is because *'virginity is still a strong social norm'* and *'in Nepali cultures, morality and goodness are all linked up into sexual activities – for women, not for men.'*

This leads to continued social strictures on women's movements and behaviour as, according to a Nepali saying, *'A woman's reputation is like water in a yam's leaves – even a small slip and it will fall off'*. Such views contribute to continuing parental desires to see their daughters married as early as possible (so they are not 'spoiled' before marrying) and, at the same time, to control the behaviour of their daughters-in-law, to ensure that they do not 'tarnish the family name'.

Laws and their enforcement have been seen to bring some change as in Uganda: *'No one wants to be known as a wife beater'*. An older professional woman in Uganda noted that *'Men used to be proud to beat their wives, and the women themselves would say that if the man doesn't beat you, it means he doesn't love you. A man who didn't beat his wife would be ridiculed, so he would go out to get drunk to gather courage to beat her and later apologise. Now with the change of generations, men who beat women do it in secrecy.*

Some say "[President] Museveni has made our women rebels, we cannot even beat them".'

There are many other accounts of this nature in Watson et al. (2020), including the idea that a woman's body still becomes her husband's property, and that even if she is widowed, she will sully her deceased husband's name if she ever re-marries. As one Nepali government official explained: *'Society feels that women should save themselves – if they were good women, they would not suffer abuse. They don't see the need to change male behaviour. So women are facing problems with their biology.'*

Political voice and resistance to norm change

Both Uganda and Nepal experienced forceful changes in political voice during the 1990s. In Uganda, women's participation in public affairs was stimulated by the coming to power of President Museveni and his National Resistance Movement. This toppled the existing regime in 1986 and instituted a new political order, expanding political space and voice for women. As one senior female leader put it: *'When the NRM came in, it came with the women's question high on the agenda. It was like opening a cage where the dog is caged all this time. When I got out I was unstoppable. I wanted to climb up a mountain and shout out to women to refuse. If not for Museveni in 1986, we would not have been able to move forward. He called for women to join: "Women, where are you? Women, come sit.".'*

Women engaged in politics at all levels: in the early resistance councils (later the local council system) and from village, to parish, to sub-county and finally to the national level in parliament. An affirmative action quota system was established for their political representation and they participated in the Constitutive Assembly that drafted the new Uganda Constitution of 1995, which was seen to be gender-sensitive.

In Nepal, a number of women recalled their involvement in the social and political movements of the 1990s, mobilising first for social change in the countryside and later moving up through party structures at central level as democratic institutions of government were created and a new Constitution established in 2015. They reported being inspired by the Marxist revolutionary writings circulating at the time, with their ideals of inclusive society and equitable social relations that positioned gender equality within a wider framework of social justice.

In both countries, however, women had to fight hard for their political rights. A woman in the Ugandan Constituent Assembly reported: *'It was a real fight – when they refused to pass the things that I wanted, I would threaten to stand on the table until they were passed. One provision that we put in was removed when the women representatives were absent from the room – that was the time I insisted that I wouldn't move forward without this.'*

Similarly, in Nepal, women leaders would block the door with their legs, which in Nepali culture is offensive for men, and not let male politicians out of the room until they amended some gender discriminatory decisions.

Political conditions in Uganda remained resistant to women in power, even though women helped to forge new programmes of community development to empower women at the grassroots and developed national policies to promote gender equality, developed gender budgeting through the Ministry of Finance and worked on enforcement of legislation around GBV. Exercising political voice and assuming leadership positions demanded real courage as it meant challenging gender norms that worked against women's assertiveness and visibility in the public domain.

One senior leader recalled that *'I was called many names, including "This English- influenced lady"'* but rather than letting this stop her, it made her even more determined to have women treated as equal human beings. There were also accounts of being 'booted out' for raising voices on democratic processes and as one civil society activist noted, *'For women today – once you start criticising the structure, you are put out'.*

There was also resistance in Nepal to the idea of women having political voice. Women working on grassroots mobilisation for village women reported that villagers would point and say, *'Look, this daughter-in-law is stirring up our daughters-in-law and taking them out of the house'.* Some women were too scared to join publicly, as their husbands would not allow them to go out, but they would offer support from the side-lines. One political leader explained, *'At the time the women were not aware of their rights and could not speak. They were scared and had no place to present their problems and no people who would listen to them.'*

At the national level, women in Nepal described contributing to the work of the Constituent Assembly and working across parties with other women to ensure that the Constitution was favourable for women. As one political leader explained, *'We were afraid that men with their patriarchal mind set would not put in women's rights, so we formed a women's caucus to work on this. We did not always agree on everything, but we did agree on women's rights. We were worried that men were leaving women out and that gave us energy to overcome our differences.'* An Inter-Party Women's Alliance formed to unite women of different political persuasions around a common platform, and this Alliance continues to work across party lines.

Again and again, women talked about having to fight to have their voices heard. Within Nepal's political system, there were comments on their clothes and appearance. They noted that decisions were often made when they were absent and that they had to protect their personal reputations at all times, particularly when mixing with male staff, such as drivers or bodyguards. Ultimately it appears they were given space to speak, but only reluctantly, and this did not mean that they were heard, as this Nepali minority women's representative recalls: *'Even when we have women representatives, we always have to fight for things – men might not say no to us outright, but they will go around and around and in the end their voice prevails. Also, within the party [when we raise these issues] we are made to feel that we are going against the family.'*

Finally, women in both Uganda and Nepal noted a retrenchment in women's voice in recent years. One woman said that in Uganda: *'All of the women in the movement were young and now they have gone back to their household roles – busy with families and children'.* And now, when it is about elections and state power, women have been side-lined: *'We have no muscle, no money (no relations with big contributors) so it is difficult to compete in elections'.*

And in Nepal, reflecting how patriarchy is embedded in the institutions of society: *'There is a general feeling that things are easier for women during times of Peace. But actually, for example, women were more represented among the Maoists – 40% – and everything was tolerated. But now after the Peace process, they have barely 15%, so it seems that the forest is a good place for women, but not society. When women are linked back into society it becomes more difficult for them.'*

Roots of resistance: masculinities in patriarchal systems

Stories from Uganda and Nepal on both violence and political voice illustrate norms of masculinity that appear resistant to change. This is not to say that individual men do not deviate from this norm. They can and often do play critical roles, as the accounts of Museveni's leadership in

Uganda demonstrate, and as confirmed by the numerous fathers, brothers and uncles of girls who fight for their education and wider rights in both countries.

Yet many of the masculinities that repress women are enforced by the wider institutions of society and, for many men, this makes change even harder. As well as disadvantaging and harming women, gender norms also harm men. For example, men carry a disproportionate share of the overall disease burden (Verma and Kedia, 2018), much of which stems from health problems linked to the gender socialisation of boys and men around tobacco and alcohol use, road traffic injuries and violence: behaviours that are also associated with being 'manly'. Of course, men do not have a homogeneous experience of male privilege, and intersectional identities cut across privilege. At all levels, however, men often have power over the women and children in their households.

Hegemonic masculinity[5] is seen to legitimise the global subordination of women to men, although Connell, who coined this interpretation, also adapted it to acknowledge the agency of subordinated groups, including women (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). Masculinities are socially constructed and are, therefore, amenable to change. Holding masculinities in place are patriarchal social systems, in which men hold primary power. This is enforced by social rules that may vary according to context and institution (such as in religious institutions, organisations, businesses, government, etc.), but all maintain the supremacy of male power, often implicitly, in uncodified rules of behaviour. For men and women to change, the institutions of society also have to change, although change in societies and institutions can be prompted from the bottom up as well as from the top down.

Harmful norms of masculinity include the need to: appear tough and not show emotions; react with violence and aggression; engage in risk-taking behaviour; be the head of family and make all major family decisions; own and control assets; control women's and girls' bodies and opportunities; be sexually dominant; exercise violence against women to demonstrate and command authority and control; and to be the main breadwinner. However, these norms can be damaging to men as well, as the pressure to be 'manly' according to all these norms can result in stress, drug-taking and sometimes suicide (Heilman et al., 2017).

These norms translate into many of the masculinities discussed in Uganda and Nepal, including resistance to the notions of allowing women to influence decisions in parliament; of being seen as equal to men in political capability; and of challenging male authority in institutions; as well as being reflected in control over women's bodies and sexuality and GBV.

For several years, programmes and policies in various countries have been introduced to change these harmful masculinities. In addressing violence, for example, gender-based education and reflection aims to prevent male perpetration of violence, with MenEngage Alliance, Promundo and Sonke Gender Justice[6] all working in this area.

Programmes with adolescent boys and young men have also been introduced to change norms with the hope of achieving generational shifts in masculinities (Marcus et al., 2018). With some exceptions, however, these programmes are notably small-scale, often short-term and experimental and, as a result, rarely engage at the systems level with the social institutions that uphold rules of male behaviour. Evidence of their effectiveness is mixed, but some changes have been observed in young mens' attitudes and behaviours as a result of interventions. The mass media have also played a significant role in illustrating the potential damage of harmful masculinities, not least through TV drama.

Our narratives from Uganda and Nepal do not show any evidence of specific programmes aimed at changing harmful masculinities and were not a focus for the research. Instead, they show a process of change through law, education and activism. They also illustrate the active involvement of men in changing norms themselves: fathers, uncles and husbands who are supportive of girls' education and women's work; men who take on some household responsibilities; and men who provide political leadership in norm change.

Educational settings clearly provide important spaces where masculinities can change, and where the rules of patriarchy can be contested by girls and boys alike. And it was educational settings that featured most prominently in stories about men challenging gender stereotypes. Very often, these narratives showed men encouraging their female relatives to continue in education, or male students coming to appreciate the validity of gender equality concerns in relation to masculinities.

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5   Based on the Gramscian concept of hegemony, defined as a 'form of masculinity that is dominant in a given setting signifying authority and leadership' (Connell, 1996).
6   See http://menengage.org/; https://promundoglobal.org; https://genderjustice.org.za

Some action against restrictive norms also dates back more than 70 years. One 80-year-old woman in Uganda described family resistance to negotiating bride price when she was young because, she said: '*sometimes men would beat their wives because "they had paid for them" – they would treat you like a donkey. So everybody from my clan came and said they did not want anything in terms of marriage payment because they did not want anybody to disturb me in my marriage. Many people in the village were like this – they would actually say that they could not sell their children (daughters) like goats.*'

What motivates men to pursue changes in gender norms is not always clear. It may be self-interest, such as recognising improved health or wanting less stress; it may be concern for relationships or for their daughters' welfare; it may be linked to a sense of human rights and social justice, or it may be simply 'moving with the times'. But these motivations are not well documented. Knowing what has motivated men over the past 50 or more years to support change in gender norms and the related incentives that drive change would be very useful for supporting norm change more widely.

Action: education to encourage change in gender norms

An important driver of change, as shown in both Uganda and Nepal, is education. We know that education can inform norm change in multiple ways. As well as imparting knowledge and skills, education gives girls peer groups and experiences outside the home, can inspire girls to reach their full potential and, depending on the context, challenge discrimination. Co-education for boys through secondary and tertiary education can encourage more gender-equitable norms as they become young men (Evans, 2014). In some cases, formal or informal settings can provide comprehensive sexuality education. Education also underpins access to 'white-collar' work, with pay and conditions that help shift norms about appropriate work for women (ALIGN guide to women's economic empowerment and gender norms, forthcoming).

Importantly, however, while education can provide an essential bedrock for norm change, it does not always do so, and delivering a quality education remains a challenge in many contexts. Nevertheless, our respondents in both Uganda and Nepal noted the importance of its role in their lives. Predictably, their biggest initial challenge was not the quality of schooling on offer, or school-to-work transitions. It was simply obtaining permission and approval to attend school at all. These stories of education,

therefore, combine narratives of marriage, bride-price and resistance, as well as educational opportunities.

The changes in opportunities are well documented. A Ugandan woman in her 60s lamented her lost opportunities as her father favoured her brothers. But, she says: '*These injustices and hardships make you sharp. I heard about scholarships for orphans and vulnerable children and at age 14 went to the district educational officer and within two or three days I had the scholarship, finished and went on to senior secondary school.*' She was accepted into law school in Kampala, but again faced opposition from her father, who saw nursing or teaching as proper subjects for girls. '*I said no…and told him that since I had already been accepted, he would have to go there himself and tell the chancellor why I was not enrolling. He who had never even been to Kampala!*' So she went to law school. '*Do you see resistance? I defied him!*'

Similarly, a Nepali lawyer in her 50s from a traditional Hill Brahmin family in Terai was determined to go to college, which was about an hour away from her village home. At first, her parents refused to send her, so she went on a 'pretend' hunger strike (eating in secret) and crying every day until they relented. She was one of the few girls in her circle who felt outrage at gender discrimination – most of her other friends simply accepted it as 'normal' and got married between the ages of 18 and 20. She herself went to Kathmandu for her undergraduate degree, planning to stay with her elder brother, but he was posted elsewhere just as she arrived. Her parents were upset at her being alone without a male guardian, but by that time it was too late to stop her, and she gained her law degree.

Now a new generation of girls is benefiting from the struggles of their parents. Women in Uganda recount that '*Before it was thought that the girl child should not go to school because girls will just get married, so this was a waste of time – but no longer*'. Professional women reported that '*Higher education is also possible – at university the student body is now 50% female*'. They also noted that '*More girls are also turning to subjects once considered the province of boys: which builds trust in capacities*'.

And in Nepal, women noted that: '*Women are educated now and can get jobs and go out – even working outside of the country*', contrasting that to the past when they had limited educational or work opportunities and early marriage was the norm. '*The work of girls was not seen as studying*' explained a political leader, '*but of staying home. Studying was only for the big jobs that were the ones requiring going out – and those were for men.*' One grandmother said that '*I didn't even know how to speak – just making carpets,*

brewing alcohol for sale [which was traditional in her Gurung family], grinding paddy and selling rice'.

Nevertheless, there are still many young women who have not seen such freedoms. And the pressures for girls to marry still persist. This is illustrated through accounts by women in their 20s, 50s and 80s, from both Uganda and Nepal, who all describe similar challenges. One 50-year-old Ugandan woman, now a professor, explained that *'I did not want to be sold – I didn't think it right that my worth was being calculated in cows'*. Another, a civil society activist, reported that *'I refused to be the object of negotiation'*. Later, widowed at the time, her own daughter was ready to marry, she insisted that her daughter's marriage would not entail a bride price, countering arguments from the groom's family that this went against culture with the explanation that *'I have created my own culture'*. She walked her own daughters down the aisle, usurping the traditional role reserved for the uncle. In contrast, a 20-year-old was able to set out her own agenda: *'I think it is crap because you can't put a price on someone when you get down to it'*. So she intends to marry without bride price. She and a colleague her age echo the common view that when a bride price is paid – particularly in the rural areas – the girl becomes property – *'They own you. They bought you so you owe them – children, submission, etc. It's like buying a servant.'*

Education weaves through all of these stories of marriage, as education is known to delay early marriage, and is often resisted precisely because of fears that girls in education will not marry. It is sometimes presented as an alternative to marriage, as well as a route out of poverty and into employment.

Opportunities for education have expanded enormously in both Uganda and Nepal over the past 50 years. Even so, it was often a battle for girls to access education and pursue higher-level courses of their own choosing as they had to fend off parental and societal fears, expectations and attitudes. Some struggled to stay in school as they advanced to higher levels or chose courses that ran against parental or societal expectations for girls – just as older women had also struggled to access lower levels of education (or any schooling at all). For earlier generations, in particular, just going to school had required great tenacity. These struggles are not over, and younger women still experience resistance from fathers and the norms they cling to.

A young Nepali civil society activist in her 30s, the eldest of seven children in a rural family, described the struggle she faced to continue in education after completing O-levels because her father insisted that she become a primary school teacher. Relatives told her parents *'These are just girls – let them stop at Senior 4, do a teaching degree, and start teaching, since girls are just going to get married'*. She wanted to get her A-levels for university and – at an impasse – sat at home for a year until her uncle, an educated man who had sent all his sons and daughters to school, told her father that *'If you don't educate your children, they will never sit at the same table as my children when they get together, as what would they discuss?'* Her mother supported her, as she had been forced to leave school at Senior 4 to become a teacher. With their help, she went to university, paving the way for her sisters to follow in her footsteps. Now her father is a champion of education for girls, saying: *'For me, I have four degrees at home and they are all girls'*.

These accounts reveal not only the struggle of women to claim their rights to an education, and the often tenacious and risky strategies they have employed, but the continuity of norms over 50 or more years. Nevertheless, they also reveal norm change, even though it may have taken one or two generations: a length of time that is rarely reflected or acknowledged in policy or development planning.

Action: social movements, courage and activism

The tenacity of girls in their struggle for education is also reflected in wider women's movements and attempts to claim political voice. One strong theme emerging from both Uganda and Nepal is the social activism that can be seen across multiple issues to both assert women's rights in law and then claim those rights in practice. As a result, civil society institutions, which blossomed in both countries with the advent of democracy, have been central to the struggle for women's rights and gender equality, paving the way for law reform and awareness-raising on gender inequalities in particular. Alongside the formal organisations pushing for change, there are multiple actors working to accelerate gender norm change in universities, government and other professions, as well as grassroots activists in local government, villages and towns.

In Uganda, for example, the women's movement and the rise of new CSOs for women was inspired by connections with the global movement for women, which exposed them to new forms of thinking about gender equality and new ways of organising to achieve it. One senior leader reported that *'There was a lot of excitement in the air. This was one of the first times in Uganda's history that there were organised women's groups, with a lot of caucuses*

formed around women's rights, children's rights, disability...' Another concurred: '*This is when we really took off. There had been no single organisation bringing women of all kinds together, with the only criteria for membership being a woman. We came up with fire!'*

Women in Uganda talked about '*the common purpose of freeing themselves from bondage and discrimination'* and noted that women were '*spitting fire'*. Senior women leaders said: '*the passion and commitment were really there – you could feel it and the women's movement was very vibrant; there was a new conversation and re-politicisation in feminist terms...We did not have the advantage of social media so it was just networking among women's groups that gave a sense of solidarity and solidity. Energy was high with hope for real changes happening'.*

Women lawyers worked within CSOs to promote law reform and protect the rights of women to equal opportunities, education, health and protection from violence, among other themes. For one, '*It was my first inkling of using law to help those less fortunate to access it through education or litigation, and that has broadened out to social justice, constitutional rights'.* Many engaged on policy development with the women's ministry.

Others expanded social mobilisation efforts and, through networks established at grassroots level, consulted with women throughout the country to come up with successive versions of a 'Women's Manifesto'. The most recent, covering the period 2016–2021, sets out demands from a cross-section of women in both rural and urban areas on improved health, land and property rights, education, economic empowerment and decision-making in politics.

At the outset, participants reported, there was close collaboration between women in CSOs and women in government. But the recent closing off of political space has made such collaboration more difficult and there is less tolerance for women who speak out. One active professional woman explained that CSOs '*who are empowering women to speak out'* are increasingly viewed by the government as '*the opposition: It is like you are the enemy.'* Funding is also a problem, with many organisations dependent on donors, which leads to fragmented programmes and competition for resources.

As in Uganda – but a decade later – Nepal's drive toward democracy in the 1990s witnessed a burgeoning of CSOs established to promote social justice and fight inequity. A number of participants focused on law reform, as well as advocacy through the influential human rights organisations that they helped to establish.

One CSO leader filed her first public-interest litigation case for girls' inheritance in 1993 and won, arguing that the existing law, which imposed conditions based on age and marital status, violated the Constitution and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which was ratified by Nepal in 1991. It took eight years and the going was tough: it was not easily accepted by the 'patriarchal mind-set'. MPs (mostly male) voiced loud objections, and people would ask her: '*Why are you trying to destroy the fabric of society and our social structure? The door of your maternal home will be closed to you.'* This, she explained, is because the 'ideal daughter' is seen as one who leaves the property to her brothers, who will care for her as a guardian if she faces later problems in marriage. '*If you argue to retain this property for girls as well, you are seen as disruptive.'*

She persevered, however, firm in a conviction that was rooted in her deep sense of injustice. The age requirement was lifted in 2002/2003; and the marriage proviso in 2015. The Supreme Court ordered that this become a bill as part of equal rights legislation. From beginning to end, this particular challenge took more than 25 years, and involved multiple actors.

Other cases have revolved around outlawing the practice of *chhaupaudi* (the isolation of menstruating girls and women) and the reframing of marital rape as a sexual offence. CSO activists have also taken up transitional justice issues following social uprisings to deal with the social exclusion of women who either took part in the rebellion (and are suspected of having engaged in sexual relations while '*in the jungle'*) or women who were raped during that period (and who are afraid to come forward now). Work on these issues is still ongoing.

Two participants were devoting their professional energies to a CSO that promotes and defends the rights of widows. Their focus was on strengthening the rights and well-being of widows through law reform and advocacy (particularly around the right to spousal property); capacity-building and leadership training (to empower widows to claim their rights); enhanced access to resources (through a monthly government stipend and a single-women's savings and loans scheme); and changing discriminatory practices (such as the obligation to wear white, and the exclusion of widows from ceremonial rituals). One of the CSO workers, a widow in her 60s, praises her organisation for giving her the moral support she needed to fight for and obtain her own rights as a widow: '*Before there were no groups for widows to join to share problems and experiences or learn new things or find support – this is the pioneering organisation for this'.*

These accounts of claiming rights indicate the vital importance of women's activism and the immense courage required to stand up and be seen. Given the support, opportunities and space, this has involved women of all ages. The resistance has demanded significant courage. One woman activist in Uganda who raised her voice against the patriarchal directions of religious interpretations had a fatwa issued against her at one point and reported that pastors are '*obsessed*' with her and her '*satanic ways*'. She observed that she was once voted the '*worst woman of the year*' in a national newspaper, taking her place alongside Joseph Kony (of the Lord's Resistance Army) as the worst man. But she states that she wears this as '*a badge of honour*' because it means they are taking her seriously: '*I am a threat to their ideologies...If you are rocking the boat, of course you will be attacked. I would be disappointed if not.*'

Teachers and researchers as social activists

One element of the struggle for change in both Uganda and Nepal resonates strongly in today's world where, increasingly, facts and scientific evidence are deliberately obscured or dismissed and replaced with ideological sentiments for political gain. This, alongside new media and technology, has conversely made fact finding and sharing more widely available.

Women play important roles in social movements as teachers and researchers, educating activists, documenting and understanding gender inequality and contributing sound arguments and evidence to high-profile debates. One professor in Uganda noted that '*Women in academia thought of themselves as the academic wing of the women's movement...I see myself as a mentor/counsellor – also opening up the eyes of my students to the situation, breaking stereotypes, etc. I challenge them to re-examine things. And I then see them moving forward and see that I am having an influence.*'

Another professor reported that by teaching law with a critical gender lens, she tries to make her students aware that '*law is one of the formidable tools that the patriarchal state relies on to create and maintain its power and inequality*'. She was very conscious of her role as a teacher, influencing others and influencing transformation '*much more from the four walls of the lecture hall than as an MP... When I am in front of the lecture hall, I am doing politics – working to shift conversations, give a new lens to analyse the law.*' She had seen the impact on students she had

influenced, with many now working in government or with non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

University graduates – men and women – also noted that they had been inspired to understand how '*social norms are obstructing women from achieving their dreams*' (young man) and had come to realise that '*women can be above men – in education, knowledge, skills*' (young woman). They had also reinterpreted their own understanding of gender, including that '*even men can be victims of gender inequality and are affected by masculinity*' (young man).

One Ugandan researcher who had carried their learning into policy spoke of how the national census of civil servants demonstrated that women were employed mostly at the lower levels: '*The report of findings was very influential and was at the genesis of affirmative action in education – the 1.5 point advantage[7] given to women at university, since women who were not educated [to an appropriate level] could not take up these positions*'.

In Nepal, one school teacher went on to teach at university and then established gender studies as a discipline at university level. She noted that few students had an inkling of the key concepts involved, but an emerging critical mass of graduates have gone on to make wider changes in the world.

The university graduates consulted for this study included professional women in Nepal, some of whom have distinguished themselves in the private sector, demonstrating how individual trajectories in particular fields can have wider ramifications for the breaking of barriers to women's professional engagement. One businesswoman who ran for Vice President of her organisation noted that '*it's difficult as a woman to... compete...Women are under many more restrictions then men*'. However, she became Vice President, and subsequently President, of her organisation. Other researchers also noted how their work in gender studies had informed their wider worldviews and activism and had influenced their parenting of their own daughters and sons, as well as their interpretation of wider research studies along gender lines.

Investment in tertiary education and research is rarely acknowledged for the vital role it plays in generating and sustaining social activism. Teachers themselves are often inspirational and courageous activists. Women academics participated in political processes for women's advancement and civic representation: joining politics;

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7   A score to qualify for university.

contributing to the development of Nepal's new, progressive and gender-sensitive Constitution; undertaking vital evidence gathering; articulating a case for change; and helping to change national laws and enact both policies and legislation to counter harmful norms and practices.

They developed mechanisms to redirect and 'engender' national sectoral budgets to ensure that women's priorities were addressed, and created new institutional organisations to work for women's rights and gender justice. They also developed linkages with women at the grassroots level and helped to promote women's economic empowerment, while making women's work more visible.

4 Conclusions and actions

Development practice rarely looks back to look forward. It is difficult, if not impossible, to trace causation of policy and practice initiatives beyond a short time frame, and this favours time-limited programmes of work and impact evaluations. Because long-term reflection on processes and drivers of change can't be measured, and given that today's development sector is driven very largely by measurement and impact, lessons from a very long view tend to be neglected and long-term processes receive short shrift when it comes to most support for social change.

Furthermore, the political cycle often ties policies to three-to-five-year time frames. As a result, policy and practice perspectives tend to be overwhelmingly short-term. This is reflected in project evaluations that rarely assess the ongoing impact more than a year after the project comes to an end (Marcus et al., 2017 and 2018). The fact is that historians do not favour prediction and for good reasons – both methodological and political – given that ex-post rationalisation is often used to justify the status quo. In development, such narratives can skim over the very real exploitation of resources that contributed to the development of rich nations to the detriment of less powerful countries. They can suggest instead that innovation, skills, behaviour changes and institutional reforms are all that we need to achieve real progress. It could be argued, therefore, that it is just easier and more convenient to ignore the historical perspective and get on with interventions that are based on short-term learning.

However, as discussed in a companion think piece for this series (Harper, 2020), the long view holds much value. It can inject realism into planning for development; it can help predict the direction of travel; it can unravel arguments that defend the status quo; it can challenge rigid and dominant narratives; and, by revealing the true nature of leadership and action, it can inspire current and future generations, particularly in times of backlash and apparent defeat.

The historical narratives from women in Uganda and Nepal show how all of this can, and has, been achieved, and offer many lessons for action from these accounts, not all of which are detailed here. The validity of political quotas in these two countries, for example, is revealed through powerful testimony on how hard it is for women to be heard (lending weight to the need for quotas)[8]

(Watson et al., 2020). Women's stories over time also demonstrate the importance of a voice that, once released, echoes over the long term, not only setting gender-aware processes into action, but also inspiring new generations of activists.

The stories that have informed this briefing paper reveal seven key lessons for action:

1. **This long view illustrates the endurance of harmful and discriminatory norms that are rooted in masculinities**. This endurance indicates that long-term change strategies need to address harmful and discriminatory masculinities as demonstrated in male behaviours and attitudes, while also targeting the gatekeepers of patriarchy and the wider institutions that uphold these norms. One major gap in our knowledge is what has motivated men to try to change masculinities. Action by men over more than 50 years has featured in many of the accounts shared with us by women, with men stepping in to support them. Understanding their motivations would enable wider transformative processes.

2. **Social movements and activists are critical across all sectors to enable laws to be made and implemented and for women and girls to claim their rights**. But these movements form a complex web: a network of people, linked together through a common cause. Any support for social movements must invest responsibly in their diversity, not only in the most high-profile and visible parts of single organisations, but also in the less visible actors within social movements to benefit the entire and interlinked fabric of people who support and push for social justice.

3. **Education has enormous potential to challenge and change harmful norms, but many countries still struggle to deliver an equitable service, let alone an education that is socially transformative.** Nevertheless, the potential is there for teaching and demonstrating gender equality as a way to change norms. But we must do more to keep boys in school as well as girls, given the transformative impact this can have on their appreciation of gender relations.

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8 There remains, however, some mixed evidence on the impact of quotas elsewhere, including prompting backlash or hiding inequality.

4. **Education that changes norms includes tertiary education**. In a world where backlash is often based on a deliberate manipulation of facts or the derision of hard evidence, we would do well to support the tertiary sector. As the narratives from Uganda and Nepal have demonstrated, teachers and professors are a fundamental part of social activism and progressive social change.

5. **It is vital to ensure that a variety of women's voices are heard, including those of professional women.** We live in an increasingly youth-focused world, and with good reason. But our efforts to ensure that young people are rightly given space must not mean the exclusion and neglect of the voices of older women and men (and the wealth of historical experience and knowledge they hold) or deny them a place in decision-making forums.

6. **Social change of this nature takes a long time**. This is not the case for all change: some change can happen when the incentives are right and barriers have already been weakened. But most change requires long-term planning, support and commitment from development actors who need to remove themselves from short-termism and funding cycles of less than five years.

7. **Finally, activists need to use historical evidence to challenge dominant narratives.** Women's lives and struggles rarely feature in accounts of national success. Their accounts can challenge popular perceptions of how change happens, and it is crucial to feature women as role models who can inspire generations to continue the fight for gender equality.

Gender norm change is a struggle. But recognising the efforts that have already been made, and the successes and failures of the past, can offer direction, lessons, inspiration and courage to a current and emerging generation of actors and activists. As one Nepali academic commented: '*This is about the little space that you create – the little change that you make and the new awareness you have built and then, as in a relay race, you pass the baton on to others*'.

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ALiGN

Advancing Learning and Innovation on Gender Norms

About ALIGN

ALIGN is a digital platform and programme of work that is creating a global community of researchers and thought leaders, all committed to gender justice and equality. It provides new research, insights from practice, and grants for initiatives that increase our understanding of – and what works to change – discriminatory gender norms.

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Find out more about the series on the ALIGN platform – https://www.alignplatform.org/historyandchange

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