



# The norms factor

Recent research on gender, social norms,  
and women's economic empowerment

Rachel Marcus





Photo: Scott Wallace / World Bank

# THE NORMS FACTOR: RECENT RESEARCH ON GENDER, SOCIAL NORMS, AND WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

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This paper was commissioned by IDRC through the GrOW program to review and put in context recently-supported research on social norms and the interaction with women's economic empowerment.

Opinions stated in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of IDRC or the GrOW funders.

## AUTHOR'S ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks to Gillian Dowie, Arjan de Haan, Caroline Harper, and Maria Stavropoulou for comments on previous versions, and to Georgia Plank and Ciara Remerscheid for research assistance.

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## ABOUT THE GROW PROGRAM

The **Growth and Economic Opportunities for Women (GrOW)** program is a multi-funder partnership between the United Kingdom's Department for International Development, the Hewlett Foundation, and the International Development Research Centre.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Gender discriminatory social norms are a widely recognized barrier to women's economic empowerment, affecting both their access to "decent work" and their experience in workplaces. Between 2013 and 2018, the Growth and Economic Opportunities for Women program (GrOW) funded 14 research projects on issues related to women's economic empowerment in more than 50 countries.

Although few GrOW studies focused on social and gender norms, they have generated a body of evidence about the ways in which discriminatory gender norms affect women's access to economic opportunities and their work experiences. These findings help explain stagnation in women's labour force participation in some contexts, the frequent concentration of women in relatively less lucrative sectors and occupations than men, and gendered barriers and challenges that disproportionately affect women.

Most studies were framed broadly within the discipline of economics. Five studies made use of extensive qualitative research along with quantitative analysis; these generated direct insights concerning gender norms, as did studies analyzing demographic and health survey (DHS) data. The other studies making use of large datasets helped illuminate the relationship between gender norms; the political, legal, policy and institutional environment; and women's economic empowerment.

## KEY FINDINGS: CONSTRAINING IMPACTS OF SOCIAL AND GENDER NORMS ON WOMEN'S ECONOMIC ACTIVITY

### **Ambivalence about women working outside the home, with some generational shifts.**

The studies from South Asia revealed considerable ambivalence about women's work outside the home, other than in high-skilled, high-status occupations or in work that can be undertaken at or near home. Studies of economic change (such as trade liberalization) found an increasing entry of women into paid labour in some contexts, indicating that growing opportunities can lead to shifts in behaviour, and possibly in gender norms. The studies from East Africa highlighted generational differences: young women with secondary education are increasingly motivated to work outside the home, even where this contravenes prevailing norms and the views of the older generation.

### **Norms concerning reputation and decorum.**

These norms contributed both to limiting women's work outside the home and to the concentration of women in less lucrative activities. Examples included prohibitions on women's involvement in underground mining in East, Central, and West Africa, and in roles requiring mixing with men or undertaking non-traditional work in South Asia. Job segregation was reinforced by gossip questioning the moral standing and reputations of women engaged in male-dominated work, or in work involving travel or residence away from home.

### **Norms assigning the bulk of domestic duties to women.**

These norms and related inequalities in workloads and leisure time emerged as the other main constraint to women's economic activity. Qualitative studies from East Africa found some relaxation of individual men's attitudes and younger men taking on a greater share of domestic work, although norms around ideal divisions of labour had shifted little. Critical comments about the quality of working women's domestic care and about the manliness of men undertaking domestic work contributed to reinforcing norms about gender labour divisions.

### **Norms around adolescent marriage and childbearing.**

Studies from East and West Africa highlighted the role of education as a route to higher quality work and the constraining effects of early marriage, childbearing, and child labour. The in-depth Uganda study showed how gender norms, both in wider society and among girls' peer groups, contribute to early marriage and childbearing and thus limit educational achievement and women's future economic opportunities. This is particularly so in rural areas.

### **Widespread work-related sexual violence constrains women's economic activity.**

Fear of sexual violence also deters women from entering the labour force and contributes to gendered job segregation. Three studies highlighted the pervasiveness of such violence, although they did not examine the nature of norms that enable sexual violence to persist. Another three studies probed the relationship between women's paid work and intimate partner violence. They found that, although there is a relationship in some regions (Latin America and East Africa), it varies by sector: women working in agriculture are most likely to experience greater intimate partner violence. Overall, these studies suggest that the common view that women's labour force participation leads to resistance, expressed through intimate partner violence, needs some qualification.

## **WHAT FACTORS LEAD TO CHANGE IN GENDER NORMS?**

### **Large-scale economic change.**

Economic change appears to contribute to changing gender norms in some contexts by increasing the availability of work perceived as suitable for women. Although few macro-focused studies examine norm change directly, there is some evidence that greater economic opportunities increase women's labour market participation in Indonesia. A study from Brazil suggests that the effects of economic shocks on marriage and childbearing are limited, partly because the norms encouraging couple formation and reproduction remain strong.

### **Economic empowerment programs.**

GrOW studies examined the impacts of three main types of initiatives: broad-based empowerment programs that aim to enhance women's voice and self-efficacy; cash and in-kind incentives to prevent early marriage and increase women's and girls' levels of education and training; and child care provision to ease domestic care constraints. Although there are few studies for each strategy, there are some clear findings. For example, families are generally willing to make use of day care for young children if they perceive it to be of good quality.

The GrOW studies suggest that policies and programs incentivizing secondary school attendance and completion may be contributing to extending girls' education and delaying marriage in East Africa and Bangladesh, but the extent to which this constitutes a change in norms is unclear. A study from rural Pakistan shows that incentives alone cannot overcome normative constraints on women's mobility where it is strongly curtailed. The study of a broad-based empowerment program (Mahila Samakya) showed its potential to contribute to norm change that underpins economic empowerment over a sustained period (15 to 20 years), but also highlighted the persistence of norms related to sexuality and gender-based violence.

### **Political, legal, and institutional environment.**

There is some evidence that women's representation in local and national decision-making is associated with a more supportive overall environment for gender equality and for women's economic empowerment, and less support for norms condoning intimate partner violence. GrOW studies also highlighted the persistence of discriminatory laws regarding asset ownership that undermine women's economic opportunities, and how progressive laws challenging gendered norms about land rights can be subverted during implementation.

### **GAPS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

Little is known about the impact of social norms on women's economic empowerment in the following areas:

- what norms facilitate women's economic empowerment;
- how norms of masculinity contribute to divisions of labour, norms about paid and unpaid work, and job segregation;
- the ways in which norms affect women's economic activity at different stages of life and among different social groups;
- the processes of gender norm change (or lack of change) associated with significant economic transformations (e.g. trade liberalization or GDP growth);
- the design of economic empowerment programs to support processes of change to egalitarian gender norms.



Photo: Dominic Chavez/World Bank

# 1. INTRODUCTION

The Growth and Women's Economic Opportunities (GrOW) program, funded by IDRC between 2013 and 2018, generated a wide set of insights on the barriers to and enablers of women's economic empowerment. This report synthesizes insights from the GrOW portfolio of studies concerning social and gender norms, focusing on:

- the role of social and gender norms in facilitating or constraining women's access to assets, employment, and entrepreneurship;
- the role of economic empowerment programs in shifting gender norms;
- the relationship between the policy and institutional environment, social/ gender norms, and women's economic empowerment.

Most of the evidence concerns the impact of social and gender norms on women's economic opportunities.

## 1.1 DEFINITIONS: SOCIAL AND GENDER NORMS

We understand social norms as "collective definitions of socially approved conduct, stating rules or ideals" (Pearse and Connell, 2015:31), and gender norms as "social norms that express the expected behaviour of people of a particular gender, and often age, in a given social context" (ALIGN, forthcoming). Social norms are embedded in formal and informal institutions and are produced and reproduced through social interaction. They are often implicit and invisible rather than clearly articulated: gender norms both embody and contribute to reproducing gendered power relations, and thus to gender-based inequalities across many spheres of economic, social, and political life.

Norms can be held in place by expected sanctions for violating norms and by social approval for conforming to them (Mackie et al., 2015). Sanctions can range from gossip to social shunning, to intimidation and violence. While sanctions are often highly effective in enforcing norms, social and gender norms are not all-determining. Individuals may choose not to comply with them for a number of reasons: for example, if they believe specific norms are wrong or out-dated or that others in their "reference group" (influential social group) do not comply with them; they cannot afford to do so; they are socially or economically insulated from social sanctions for non-compliance; or their personal sense of agency is particularly strong (Marcus and Harper, 2014). New norms can emerge when enough people do not support the old (Mackie et al., 2015; Vaitla et al., 2017).



**GENDER NORMS ARE NOT ALL-DETERMINING. INDIVIDUALS MAY CHOOSE NOT TO COMPLY WITH THEM FOR A NUMBER OF REASONS.**

Changes in norms can reflect the impacts of policies and programs or structural forces of change, such as economic growth or decline, the spread of education, or greater access to information and communications technology (Marcus and Harper, 2014). The GrOW studies highlight both change and continuity in social norms.



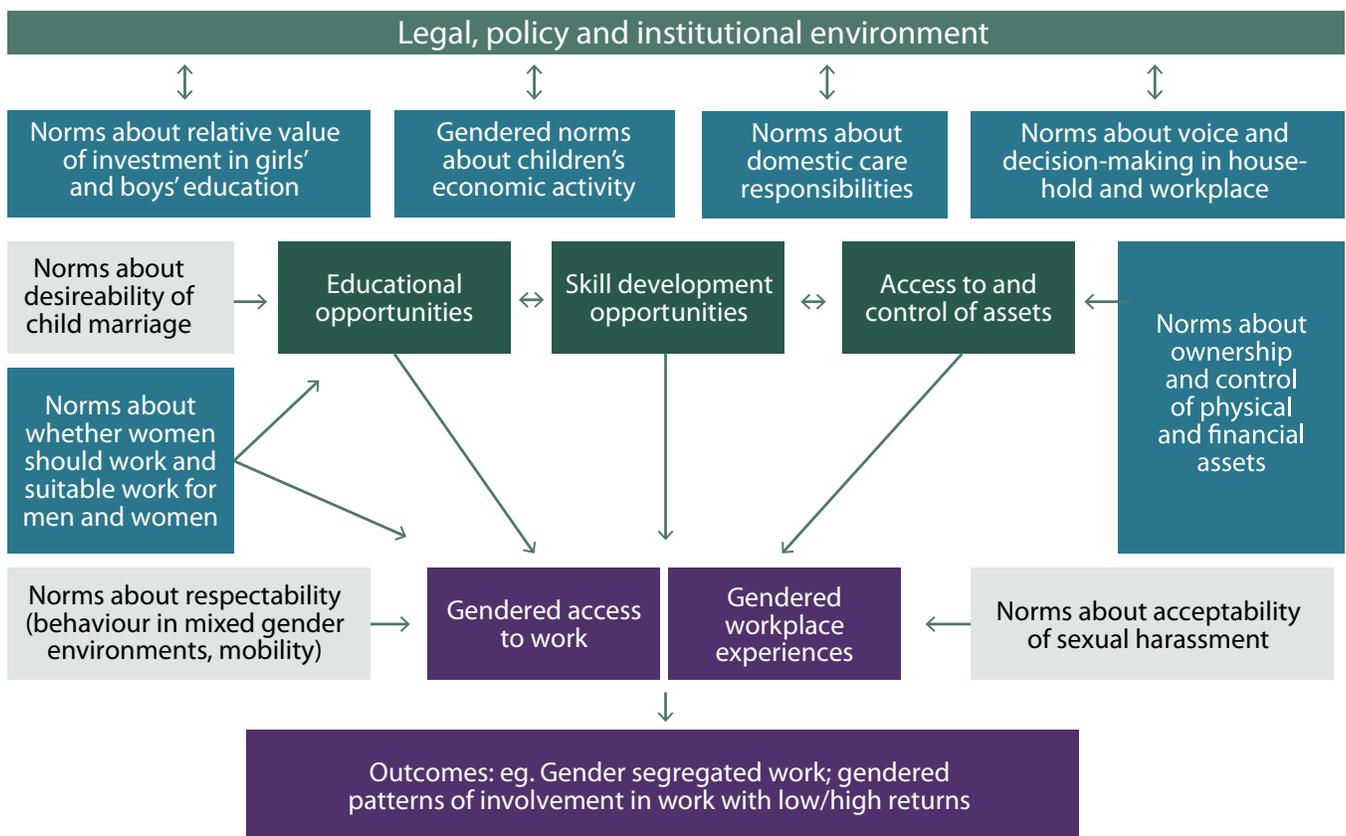
## 1.2 FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING GENDER NORMS AND WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

Gender norms, intertwined with stereotypes about the different capabilities of women and men, affect access to resources, opportunities to develop human capital, livelihood opportunities, and time use. This paper distinguishes two sets of gendered norms: norms specifically related to gender and economic activity — shown in gold in Figure 1 — and broader norms about appropriate activities and behaviour of men, women, boys, and girls, shown in green.<sup>1</sup> These norms combine to affect both access to work and women's experiences within formal and informal workplaces, and lead to patterns of work that disadvantage women, such as gendered work segregation and concentration of women in lower paid activities.



Photo: UN Photo/Kibae Park

**Figure 1: Relationship between gendered social norms and women's economic outcomes**



<sup>1</sup> Klein (2017) additionally distinguishes norms about the economy that disadvantage women, such as the devaluation of care work (disproportionately undertaken by women) or of the informal sector where women are often over-represented.

### 1.3 METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES AND LIMITATIONS

This report is based on an analysis of all available outputs of the GrOW program as at mid-June 2018. It draws on these reports (more than 50 in all) and on a rapid search and analysis of wider literature on social and gender norms and women's economic empowerment.

Most GrOW studies fall broadly within the discipline of economics and are based on analysis of large-scale datasets. These mostly provide indirect insights into social norms, often because they focus on outcome indicators of gender equality and their relationship to economic phenomena rather than on the social relations that contribute to the observed patterns. There are exceptions that outline broad trends in issues such as women's labour market participation and relate them to a range of factors, including social norms — the papers by Klasen and colleagues (Göttingen University), for example — and the studies of attitudes to intimate partner violence (Peters et al., nd; ref. for Mahila Samakya).

Five mixed methods studies provide clear and explicit insights into the relationship between gender norms and women's economic empowerment (International Centre for Ethnic Studies, Sri Lanka; Innovations for Poverty Action, Bangladesh; the University of Carleton's studies of artisanal mining; the University of Sussex's early labour market transitions; and the Institute of Development Studies' program on unpaid care work).<sup>2</sup> These studies generally sought to understand how gender norms constrain women's economic empowerment. Insights on social and gender norms arose through qualitative research.

Two projects undertook systematic reviews (Harper et al, 2017 and Field et al, 2016). Where systematic reviews included only RCT-based evidence, they tended to generate limited insights on social norms because they typically included only studies based on quantitative evidence (some use mixed methods). They thus missed

the qualitative insights on social processes that could help explain their findings (Kabeer, 2016; Pearse and Connell, 2015). For example, Field et al.'s (2016) systematic review of "what works" in stopping child marriage found economic interventions to be most effective. This reflects the fact that most evaluations of community-based social change processes, which involve critical reflection on social norms, are considered insufficiently rigorous and are excluded from the analysis.

Two of the mixed methods studies (Irving-Erikson et al., 2018; Rohrweder et al., 2017) observed that gendered social norms and desirability may affect responses to both questionnaires and focus groups discussions. For example, reflecting on research on gendered perceptions of safety on public transport in Lahore, Irving-Erikson et al. (2018) comment:

*Even data collected with thoughtfully designed measures can be made murky by social norms that impact how respondents report their feelings and experiences. Male respondents seem to be limited to a small range of responses on scales measuring how safe one feels, potentially due in part to socialized restriction of male expression of vulnerability, further compounding gender differences. (Irving-Erikson et al., 2018:27).*

Despite these limitations, the portfolio of projects has generated considerable insights about the relationship between gendered social norms and women's economic empowerment. Annex 1 provides an overview of these findings by project. We now discuss these insights in detail.



**EVEN DATA COLLECTED WITH THOUGHTFULLY DESIGNED MEASURES CAN BE MADE MURKY BY SOCIAL NORMS THAT IMPACT HOW RESPONDENTS REPORT THEIR FEELINGS AND EXPERIENCES.**

<sup>2</sup> Some other programs had mixed methods components with some insights on gender norms (e.g. the research on transport safety in Lahore undertaken as part of the Urban Institute program).

# 2. INSIGHTS

## into the role of social and gender norms in facilitating or constraining women's economic activity

### 2.1 A MACRO-LEVEL VIEW

Examining trends in gender gaps in various areas of social and economic life, Klasen (2017a) (Göttingen University project) shows that although gender gaps in educational participation and outcomes have narrowed considerably, those in labour force participation and time use shrank only slowly, and there has been almost no progress in reducing occupational and sectoral segregation, or unexplained gender pay gaps. He suggests that the rapid closure of gender gaps in education reflects a combination of favourable circumstances related to economic growth, a supportive policy environment, and relatively malleable norms. By contrast, he argues that structural changes in labour markets have had much more varied effects on employment opportunities in different places; reducing gender-based barriers to decent work has been less of a policy priority; and norms related to paid and unpaid work may be fundamentally more persistent as they relate to deeper-seated ideas about gender roles within and outside the home. GrOW studies of young women's education and labour market transitions in East Africa undertaken by Sussex University and partners support these conclusions.

Using data from Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda, Mariara et al. (2018) confirm that although levels of educational attendance and attainment have been rising faster among girls than boys, this has not translated into greater labour force participation in many countries.

Mariara et al.'s 2018 overview analysis reiterates that "attaining a high level of education is unsurprisingly critical for access to the best jobs and is associated with young women delaying marriage and childbearing." However, these studies also show that growth in white-

collar jobs has not kept pace with rising education levels and that there is a clear gender gap (male-dominance) in these jobs in three of the six countries. These studies suggest that women in white-collar jobs have higher literacy levels than men, perhaps indicating that they require higher skills or qualifications to obtain these jobs, or that discriminatory norms or stereotypes persist in recruitment.

Normative opposition to women's labour force participation may explain why a set of factors that normally lead to increased labour force participation (rising levels of education, reductions in fertility in most regions, and economic growth and rising income) have only done so in some regions, such as Latin America (Klasen, 2017b). Because the range of sectors considered appropriate for women to work in is relatively narrow, the supply of educated women has outstripped demand in regions such as South Asia and the Middle East, leading to stagnating labour force participation rates.

“**WOMEN IN WHITE-COLLAR JOBS HAVE HIGHER LITERACY LEVELS THAN MEN, PERHAPS INDICATING THAT THEY REQUIRE HIGHER SKILLS OR QUALIFICATIONS TO OBTAIN THESE JOBS, OR THAT DISCRIMINATORY NORMS OR STEREOTYPES PERSIST IN RECRUITMENT.**”

However, in some countries and regions, GrOW studies show that women — particularly younger women — are moving into the labour force, as in Indonesia following trade liberalization (Kis-Katos et al., 2017). And, as will be discussed in the following sections, there is evidence both of gendered social norms interacting to constrain women's access to "decent work" and of norms relaxing as people respond in different ways to economic opportunities and stresses in their particular context.



Photo: Arne Hoel / World Bank

## 2.2 NORMS ABOUT WHETHER WOMEN SHOULD UNDERTAKE PAID WORK

Five studies discuss norms around whether women should work at all, and if so, in what circumstances. Examining the stagnation and reduction in women's labour force participation in some regions, Klasen (2017a) suggests that gender norms tend to be "stickie" (more deeply entrenched) in areas that relate to regulating life in households and families, including issues such as women's work outside the home, and divisions of labour and responsibility within the home. This is perhaps because the trade-offs are clearer than in areas such as girls' education that are more easily interpreted as "win-win." To support this argument, he cites findings from the World Values Survey that show there has been little change in attitudes favouring men for jobs if they are scarce. However, the belief that boys and men should be prioritized for education has greatly weakened in situations of scarcity (Seguino, 2007 in World Bank, 2012).

Data from a 2016 study conducted by ILO and Gallup found that in almost all regions, most men and women support women undertaking paid work, either as a sole responsibility or, more commonly, combined with taking care of the home and family. The one exception was North Africa where more men (but not more women) preferred women to only take care of their families. This study found that family attitudes were a key influence in households that do not consider it acceptable for women to work outside the home: 61% of women said that they preferred to stay at home. Men and women with university-level education and people in families without children are most supportive of women's paid work (Gallup and ILO, 2017).

“ MEN AND WOMEN WITH UNIVERSITY-LEVEL EDUCATION AND PEOPLE IN FAMILIES WITHOUT CHILDREN ARE MOST SUPPORTIVE OF WOMEN'S PAID WORK.



Photo: Maria Fleischmann / World Bank

The IDS study of women's paid and unpaid work in India, Nepal, Rwanda, and Tanzania explored the tension between the behaviour demanded by norms of respectability and the economic pressures many households faced. The study concluded that, overall,

*... men across the research sites valued their wives' engagement in paid work for the contribution that this made to the household budget. However, most men considered this engagement as a symptom of their household's poverty, rather than an idealized situation, and preferred that this work was either in their own fields or closer to home. (Chopra and Zambelli, 2017: 28).*

They also found — consistent with a long-standing qualitative and quantitative literature — that norms about women's engagement in any paid work, or about acceptable work for women and men, were of necessity looser in households living in extreme poverty.

**“ THEY MAY ENGAGE IN SEXUAL LIAISONS OR MAY BE SEXUALLY EXPLOITED BY BOSSES, AS WELL AS THE POSSIBILITY THAT WOMEN EARNING THEIR OWN MONEY WOULD BE LESS SUBSERVIENT.**

Focus group participants in Uganda interviewed as part of the Sussex early labour market transitions study also reported strong male reservations about women working outside the home. These reflect fears that they may engage in sexual liaisons or may be sexually exploited by bosses, as well as the possibility that women earning their own money would be less subservient. They also express an underlying norm of married men's entitlement to their wives' time and labour:

*Men feel very insecure. It takes some years in marriage for a man to trust you to work. (Female focus group participant, Masaka)*

*How do you donate your wife to another man to work for him? (Male focus group participant, Namayingo)*

*Economically empowered women are big-headed, they often divorce. (Male focus group participant, Namayingo)(all cited in Ahaibwe et al., 2017:26-27).*

Nazneen and Glennerster's (2017) study in Bangladesh, part of the project undertaken by Innovations for Poverty Action, delved into the perceived acceptability of different forms of work in more detail. Their study of young married women's economic activity found that, in about half the households studied, husbands and in-laws preferred young women not to work for pay at all, or to undertake work they could do from home such as tailoring or tutoring. These findings are consistent with those of Heintz et al. (2017) and Asadullah and Wahhaj (2016). Heintz et al. (2017) found that women's work preferences in Bangladesh were strongly influenced by perceived community norms about the desirability of home-based work and a desire to avoid negative comments from other community members. Likewise, Asadullah and Wahhaj (2016) found that purdah norms explained half of the male/female difference in labour force participation in Bangladesh.

Nazneen and Glennerster found that families perceived work in garment factories as the most likely to bring shame on them. This reflected fears about damage to their reputations because such work implies women living away from familial control, in unsupervised environments. It also recognized that, as women develop new skills and knowledge through garment work, they are subsequently not always content to behave as docile, home-based wives and daughters-in-laws. In a related study, Field et al. (2017) showed how working women living in this constraining environment made strategic use of their agency to show that they were still acting within the broader normative framework:

*Many women report reaching their goal of income generation by taking every opportunity to show in-laws and husbands respect, give them gifts, and respond to their needs. Given their lack of power, women must prove that they will not neglect household duties when earning income. (Field et al., 2017:3)*

The baseline survey for the Punjab Economic Opportunities Programme (PEOP) in Pakistan, conducted by Harvard University, explored households' willingness to send members for training. To the researchers' surprise, they found an openness to women taking part in training, so long as they were able to access it in or near their villages. Similarly, half the unemployed

women (31% of all women in their sample) reported that they were looking for work, as were 9% of women who were already working. Again, this indicates that norms prohibiting women from working may not be as strong as assumed, particularly if the work can be done close to home (i.e. not violating norms about women's mobility) (Cheema et al., 2017).

Qualitative research in Kagera region, Tanzania, undertaken as part of the Sussex early labour markets transition study, showed that norms about paid work were changing rapidly among young women, reflecting generational change:

*Those days where our mothers were to ask for money from our fathers, even for simple things like underwear, are gone: we need our own money, and this means that we should work.*

*Now like me who has gone to school, why did I go there? To stay at home and do what? Then why did I go there? Do you need to go to school to remain at home? Why don't you stay there from the word go? (Kamanzi et al., 2018:15-16)*

However, parallel focus groups with young men expressed more unease about women's work outside the home, particularly in terms of impact on family life.

Although conflict-related disruption can lead to women adopting new roles and norms changing to reflect common patterns of behaviour (Petesch et al., 2013), the one study that probed barriers to women's economic empowerment in a post-conflict environment in northern Sri Lanka studies indicated little normative change (see Box 1).

Norms about the overall acceptability of women engaging in paid work are strongly related to three other related sets of norms: the acceptability of work in specific sectors and activities; mobility and respectability (particularly, but not exclusively, in South Asia and the Middle East); and norms concerning care responsibilities and domestic divisions of labour.

We discuss each of these in turn.

## 2.3 NORMS ABOUT SUITABLE WORK FOR MEN AND WOMEN

Klasen's (2017a) overview study of progress toward gender equality indicates that job segregation (clustering of women and men into certain occupations) has little changed over the last 40-50 years. It also bears little relationship to economic development or the level of women's labour force participation: as countries have become richer, gendered job segregation has not notably reduced. Policymakers should be concerned by gendered job segregation, whereby women (or men) are disproportionately concentrated in lower paid, more dangerous, or more precarious work (Klasen, 2017b), or are prevented from fulfilling their potential.

Norms about suitable remunerated economic activities for women and men are intimately tied to norms about unpaid work (explored in Section 2.3) and broader norms about mobility, modesty, and decorum (explored in Section 2.4). We discuss the implications of insights on these issues for women's economic activity and on occupational segregation in their respective sections.

**GROW STUDIES FOUND EXAMPLES OF WOMEN WHO HAVE BEEN ABLE TO CHALLENGE PREVAILING NORMS AND BREAK INTO MALE-DOMINATED ACTIVITIES.**

These norms interact with gendered inequalities related to access to assets, disparities in education — including about appropriate study subjects for boys and girls— and family responsibilities, all of which reflect prevailing gender norms. Typically, these lead to women being concentrated in less lucrative economic activities, although the GrOW studies found examples of women who have been able to challenge prevailing norms and break into male-dominated activities.

The four studies with the clearest in-depth insights about norms upholding gendered job segregation are the two of artisanal mining, ICES's study of women's economic opportunities in post-conflict Sri Lanka, and IPA's study of young women's economic opportunities in Bangladesh. These studies discuss:

### **Box 1: Perceptions of the constraining role of gender norms in northern Sri Lanka**

- 89% of women interviewed in ICES's study in northern Sri Lanka said that gendered socio-cultural barriers related to family responsibilities, fear of violence, and constraints on their mobility all impede their economic development.
- 82% of women in male-headed households said that household responsibilities were a barrier to wage work and 42% reported family attitudes as a barrier.
- In female-headed households, 63% of women reported domestic responsibilities and 21% reported family attitudes as barriers to employment, indicating that they were less constrained by family attitudes, potentially because their need for income was evident. For both groups, 10-11% reported community-level disapproval of women working as a barrier.

*Sources: Jeyaseker and Ganeda (2018); ICES (2017).*

- how religious or cosmological beliefs influence gendered norms about suitable economic activities;
- how practices shift without significant normative change;
- how gossip and intimidation maintain symbolic boundaries and enforce prevailing norms;
- how supportive family and social networks enable women to break new ground;
- how normative restrictions on suitable work for women affect their economic opportunities and wellbeing.

### **Social construction of certain work as suitable for men or women.**

The sociology of work has long identified gender-typing of certain occupations in ways that reflect stereotypes about male and female capabilities and about suitable work for each gender. The GrOW studies found that some occupations, such as mining, were gendered.

For example, focus groups in Ghana highlighted men's perceptions that strength, endurance, and an ability to withstand tedious work in difficult and dangerous conditions were required in mining. Because these attributes are associated with idealized masculinity (Baah-Boateng et al., nd), they can deter women from entering certain kinds of work and can be mobilized to exclude women.

In both mining studies, norms deeming underground mining to be a male activity were related to beliefs about menstruating women bringing bad luck on miners, such as making gold harder to find or the ore harder to extract. This led to women's exclusion from pits and contributed to their concentration in less lucrative activities, such as crushing, washing, and sifting sand and rock after extraction, or in ancillary services such as food provision and sexual services (Baah-Boateng et al., n.d.; Buss et al., 2017a). In Uganda, where most tin miners worked in male-only "gangs," women were typically included only if they were related to a gang member who could vouch for them. As a result — and indicating women's agency in the face of constraining norms — some women had formed their own gangs (Buss et al., 2017a).

“**NORMS DEEMING UNDERGROUND MINING TO BE A MALE ACTIVITY WERE RELATED TO BELIEFS ABOUT MENSTRUATING WOMEN BRINGING BAD LUCK ON MINERS.**”

Gender norms can also influence aspirations. The PEOP baseline found that 77% of women wanted to learn skills related to garment manufacture and textiles, which can be done at home: 6% chose the next-most popular option, make-up and jewellery. Men's training aspirations were much less concentrated in one sector — agriculture, livestock-rearing, engineering, driving, and computer skills were prioritized by 10 to 15% of male respondents (Cheema et al., 2017).

Where the economic context changes (e.g. men migrate, a new industry starts, etc.), the work that women and men undertake can either change or not. Consistent with insights from wider scholarship (e.g. Ridgeway, 2009), GrOW studies indicate that, as new opportunities emerge, pre-existing norms and ideologies are often

incorporated into a symbolic order related to specific work areas. For example, Nazneen and Glennerster (2017) found that tutoring is considered prestigious work in rural Bangladesh. Because it is thought to contribute to society, girls undertaking tutoring generally do not meet family resistance. However, families consider garment factory work to be “disgraceful” because girls and young women are outside the home, working with boys and men, moving and speaking freely, and learning to negotiate and assert themselves. Indeed, some families tried to hide that their daughters work in the garment industry from potential in-laws for fear that an engagement would be annulled.

“ 77% OF WOMEN WANTED TO LEARN SKILLS RELATED TO GARMENT MANUFACTURE AND TEXTILES, WHICH CAN BE DONE AT HOME.

In sites of high male out-migration in rural Nepal, the IDS study of paid and unpaid work found that women undertook ploughing, traditionally a male-dominated activity (Chopra and Zambelli, 2017). This reflected difficulties in securing male labour (Ghosh et al., 2017) rather than shifts in norms about desirable activities for men and women. In this case, and in the case of the Bangladesh garment industry where new patterns of work are emerging, norms about acceptable work appear to lag: women’s involvement in these activities is seen to require explanation (and may even need to be hidden) rather than normalized.

“ FAMILIES CONSIDER GARMENT FACTORY WORK TO BE “DISGRACEFUL” BECAUSE GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN ARE OUTSIDE THE HOME, WORKING WITH BOYS AND MEN, MOVING AND SPEAKING FREELY, AND LEARNING TO NEGOTIATE AND ASSERT THEMSELVES.

### **Women in non-traditional occupations.**

Studies of women in male-dominated occupations show that while gender norms often constrain women’s economic opportunities, they are not all-determining (Marcus and Harper, 2014). Qualitative insights from the GroW studies indicate the possible start of a process of normative change, whereby a few determined women

— often with strong familial support or support from an external organization — have managed to break into relatively lucrative, male-dominated work sectors. In both cases, reactions to women in these occupations were varied, ranging from respect to hostility.

In the Ugandan gold mine studied by Buss et al. (2017) some women excavated mine shafts, others owned or rented processing machines, and a few were establishing themselves as “big persons” in the mining zone. Similarly, at the Ugandan tin mine, a few excavation teams were composed entirely of women, defying norms that preclude women from digging. Some of these women saw themselves as trailblazers, paving the way for others to occupy lucrative jobs traditionally held by men (Blair et al., 2017).

“ SOME OF THESE WOMEN SAW THEMSELVES AS TRAILBLAZERS, PAVING THE WAY FOR OTHERS TO OCCUPY LUCRATIVE JOBS TRADITIONALLY HELD BY MEN.

Gunatilaka and Vithanagama’s 2018 study of livelihoods in northern Sri Lanka found that women in male-headed households were more likely to start businesses than women in female-headed households, perhaps because of greater financial and social support from their husbands. Although the idea of women running their own business contradicts traditional gender norms, it is relatively common, particularly in areas such as selling cooked food and tailoring that challenge gender norms less than do male-dominated sectors. Kodikara (2018) highlights resistance to efforts to promote non-traditional occupations for women. Although there have been some successful examples of NGO initiatives to support north-east Sri Lankan women in non-traditional livelihoods such as carpentry, masonry, and mechanics, efforts to help them become drivers and run a fishing fleet were opposed by both men and women, as well as from local politicians.

Taken together, these studies reflect some movement among small numbers of women into areas of work currently or formerly cast as “male,” but do not reveal any significant shift in what is considered suitable work for men and women.

### Use of sanctions to enforce norms.

Social norms theory highlights the use of social sanctions — including labeling, gossip, avoidance, intimidation, and violence — as ways of enforcing norms (Mackie et al., 2015; Cislighi et al., 2018). The mining studies revealed that sexual harassment and intimidation are relatively common, particularly where women are engaged in male-dominated activities such as machine operation or are working underground (Baah-Boateng et al., and; Buss et al., 2017a). These studies also found that gossip about women working outside the home is common, particularly in male-dominated sectors, and is often framed in terms of women’s violation of norms of respectable sexuality or the care they provide to their families, both attributes of idealized womanhood.

“ WIDOWS OR SEPARATED WOMEN WHO HIRED MEN TO WORK FOR THEM, EVEN FOR ONE-OFF CASUAL JOBS, WERE SUBJECT TO CONSIDERABLE GOSSIP.

In Rwanda, Buss et al. (2017) found negative, moralistic stereotypes of women working in mining. These labeled young women working at the mines as liable to take drugs, become pregnant outside of marriage, and disobey their parents. Married women were portrayed as being in constant disputes with their husbands. Widows were presented as unable to “control themselves.” These women were compared to those working in respectable (but usually less lucrative) occupations, such as agriculture. In part this reflected the need to wear trousers to work underground, which was interpreted as a sign of “loose” behaviour. Similarly, Kodikara’s (2018) study of livelihoods among female-headed households in north-east Sri Lanka found that widows or separated women who hired men to work for them, even for one-off casual jobs, were subject to considerable gossip, hinting that their economic relationship masked a sexual one. Driving an auto-rickshaw was considered “indecent” (Jeyaseker and Ganeda, 2018).



Photo: Carsten ten Brink

In Uganda and Rwanda, women involved in mining were also subjected to negative gossip about their domestic skills. For example, women wolframite miners reported “community members saying that their houses are a mess, no one looks after their children, and their crops are not being properly looked after” (Buss et al., 2017a:33). Lakshman’s (2017) study of women’s livelihoods in war-affected Sri Lanka likewise highlighted examples of women working in “male spaces” being subject to gossip. When women perceived this to be personally shameful or detrimental to their children’s — particularly daughters’ — reputations, they felt obliged to stop working.

As well as inviting gossip, engaging in non-traditional work can also affect individuals’ identities, which are fundamentally constituted in relation to gender norms. As a woman tin miner interviewed in Uganda said:

*When I go to do the tin mining, I cannot provide that care to my own children and I think that is where I have deviated from one of the key makers of a real woman. A real woman is that one who digs and grows food crops and feeds the family but for me, I buy food using tin money which is also abnormal for a real traditional woman. (Buss et al., 2017a:32).*

## 2.4 NORMS ABOUT RESPECTABILITY, DECORUM, AND MOBILITY

Norms about respectability and decorum influence whether women participate in work outside the home and contribute to workplace segregation. Respectability is closely related to chastity within heterosexual marriage in many of the social contexts in which GrOW studies were carried out: safeguarding personal and family honour by behaving in gendered respectable ways is fundamental to social wellbeing and economic success.

For example, the artisanal mining studies in East and Central Africa highlighted how norms of decorum, modesty, and the limits to appropriate contact between men and women — held by both men and women — feed into gendered job segregation. For example, a

female focus group respondent in Uganda stated that in “the digging area, men dress badly! It is not good to see the body of a man who is not your husband! We are African!” (Buss et al., 2017a:29). Similarly, a male miner from Rwanda articulated both norms about dress and appropriate topics for discussion in mixed company:

*It is not good if someone else’s wife finds you shirtless or only with a loincloth working in the shafts. . . . And then us, the miners, we talk about everything while working! Sex-related nonsense. (Buss et al., 2017a: 29).*

In South Asia, the imperative of safeguarding women’s and girls’ reputations often translates into norms constraining women’s mobility. As an ICES studies in northern Sri Lanka concluded:

*. . . constrained by the narrow rules put in place by society, a majority of the women interviewed did not even consider such choices as feasible solutions to their problems. Driving a lorry or hiring a three-wheeler alone is not perceived as suitable solutions to the difficulties of walking under the blazing sun by a woman (once) married. . . . The gender norms and practices prevalent in the region were a main disempowering force which restricted women to the house. These norms were not conducive for widowed or separated women to engage in livelihoods in the absence of a male figure in the family. (Lakshman, 2017:19)*



### GENDER NORMS PRECLUDED WOMEN USING BICYCLES OR MOTORBIKES TO GET TO WORK.

Similarly, as will be discussed in more detail in 3.2, concerns about girls’ safety emerged as a significant constraint to pursuing secondary education in rural Uganda where families considered bicycles a suitable form of transportation for boys but not for girls as they did not afford enough protection from sexual violence (Ahaibwe et al., 2018). Irving-Eriksen et al.’s (2017) study in Lahore, Pakistan also found that gender norms precluded women using bicycles or motorbikes to get to work, and that only 5% of driving licences and 1% of vehicles registered in Punjab in 2017 were registered to women.

“ FEAR OF GOSSIP AND DAMAGE TO ONE'S OWN — OR DAUGHTERS' — REPUTATIONS LIMIT WOMEN'S MOBILITY AND ECONOMIC OPTIONS.

IDS's study in Nepal found that women in two research sites traveled to local markets to sell produce. However, the idea of women regularly working away from home or migrating for work like men was inconceivable for both women and men (Ghosh et al., 2017). Fear of gossip and damage to one's own — or daughters' — reputations limit women's mobility and economic options. The ICES study in Sri Lanka found that some women avoided employment outside the home to prevent such gossip. As others pointed out, however, widows had no choice but to move around their communities:

*A widowed woman has to go to Samurthi, DS office and everywhere all by herself, but all that people say is she is seeing a man. I am not exaggerating; this is what happens in the society. It's always a problem when there is no male travel companion with you. (Lakshman, 2017).*

However, some women interviewed by Jayaseker and Ganweda (2018) were able to defy local gender norms to drive an auto rickshaw to do business further afield and access more lucrative opportunities.

Likewise, some of the young women Nazneen and Glennerster (2017) interviewed in Bangladesh who were prevented from going to market by their husbands, in-laws, or their own internalization of gender-based restrictions on mobility, attempted to overcome these restrictions by communicating with customers by mobile phone. While a partial solution, this isolation nevertheless impeded their businesses because they lacked knowledge of changing fashion and design and thus of the changing needs of their customers.

Consistent with other studies from South Asia about the impact of male migration on gender norms, the Nepal study found no clear loosening of norms about women's paid work. Indeed, the authors found some evidence that restrictions on women's mobility and participation in paid work had tightened because of the norms associated with women's chastity and sexuality. The

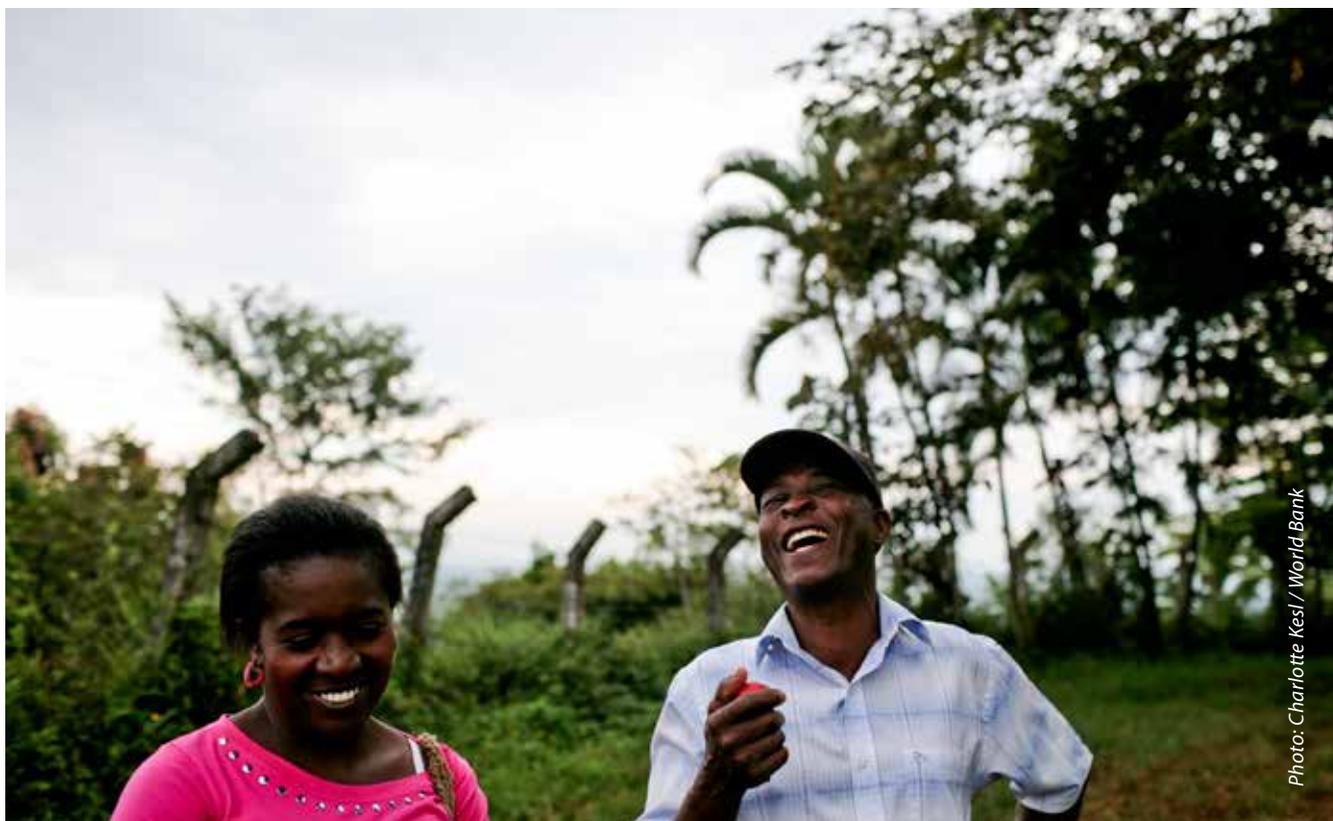


Photo: Charlotte Kesi / World Bank

study quotes women with husbands working in India who did not want them to work because they feared that they would meet other men through work, and/or because of their own pride in being able to live up to prescribed norms of masculinity. They aspired to be breadwinners whose wives were not required to work outside the home (Ghosh et al., 2017).

“ THEY ASPIRED TO BE BREADWINNERS WHOSE WIVES WERE NOT REQUIRED TO WORK OUTSIDE THE HOME.

## 2.5 NORMS ABOUT CARE/DOMESTIC WORK AND TIME USE

Norms about whether, or in what circumstances, women should undertake paid work are deeply linked to norms about women’s responsibility for unpaid household work: cooking; cleaning; care of children, elderly, and sick people; and care of household assets. In this section we discuss changes and continuity in gender norms about unpaid care responsibilities; contexts or sets of factors that support greater flexibility in gender divisions of labour; and the impacts of care responsibilities on women’s economic opportunities.



Photo: UN Photo/Ky Chung

## Changes and continuity in gender norms about unpaid care.

The IDS country studies found that, in all four countries, most household work was normatively a female responsibility: women did more than twice the amount of unpaid care work than men. Girls were socialized into this work from an early age (Chopra and Zambelli, 2017). However, there was some evidence of a divergence between people's private attitudes, actions, and what they perceived to be the cultural norm, particularly in Tanzania and Rwanda.

For example, one male interviewee in Rwanda observed:

*... according to the culture, women have to handle the home activities. However, that is about the culture, but to me I feel well when everyone gets involved in the doing care work at home. This indicates that everyone has something to contribute to the family. (Rohrweder et al., 2017:22)*

Other men also said they felt it important to support their wives with some care tasks when they returned from work, although women in some focus groups indicated that this was relatively rare (Rohrweder et al., 2017). Similarly, the Tanzania country study found a disjuncture between the norms and values that men adhered to in public (for example, in a focus group discussion with other men) and their private attitudes. In focus group discussions, men agreed that if "you help your wife with [care] activities, she will think you're under her control." In individual interviews, however, they recounted undertaking a variety of unpaid care work activities.

**“ THE TANZANIA COUNTRY STUDY FOUND A DISJUNCTURE BETWEEN THE NORMS AND VALUES THAT MEN ADHERED TO IN PUBLIC AND THEIR PRIVATE ATTITUDES.**

In some cases, this was because their wives were away from home and they had no choice; in others it was recognition that "I can see that she is doing a lot for the family and I would not want her to be exhausted." (Zambelli et al., 2017: 29). Unusually, the Tanzania study found greater flexibility in the work children undertake

as they get older: in most other contexts, norms about gender roles become more rigid during adolescence.

The IDS study also found some shared child care and animal care, and some sharing of tasks in specific circumstances, such as during pregnancy, after childbirth, or when women were menstruating (in Nepal), as well as more task sharing among younger couples. Despite greater flexibility in the two African countries, men's involvement in all four countries was generally framed as "helping" women rather than viewing these tasks as an area of shared responsibility (Rohrweder et al., 2017; Chopra and Zambelli, 2017). As the IDS study concluded:

*... where women felt overburdened or unable to undertake tasks normatively framed as theirs, their first recourse was to daughters and older women, though in some interviews they expressed a desire for a more equal division of labour with their spouses. (Chopra and Zambelli, 2017:39)*

While many women wished for more equal divisions of labour, they felt this was impossible in the context of poverty and need for men (and often women) to work long hours, even migrate, to make ends meet (Chopra and Zambelli 2017; Ghosh et al., 2017).

**“ WHILE MANY WOMEN WISHED FOR MORE EQUAL DIVISIONS OF LABOUR, THEY FELT THIS WAS IMPOSSIBLE IN THE CONTEXT OF POVERTY AND NEED FOR MEN (AND OFTEN WOMEN) TO WORK LONG HOURS.**

The IDS study also revealed how social disapproval dissuaded people from challenging norms about gender labour divisions. For example, a young woman in Nepal observed:

*If my husband helps me with my work by washing the dishes, even my mother-in-law teases him for doing so. Also, the other people look down upon me for the same. . . . The people who want to help hesitate to do so due to the fear of being ridiculed by the village. (Gyanu Giri, Chandannath, May 2016, in Ghosh et al., 2017:25)*

As a result, most of the men in the IDS study “remained normatively attached to a gendered division of work,” even where poverty made it untenable for women to engage in unpaid work only (Chopra and Zambelli, 2017). For example, many men in Tanzania preferred that their wives remain at home and in charge of care work, reducing the risk of these responsibilities being neglected or transferred to men (Zambelli et al., 2017).

Kamanzi et al.’s 2018 study from a different part of Tanzania — part of the Sussex project on young women’s labour market transitions — found similar patterns of change and tensions. The young women interviewed generally expressed egalitarian views about child care and gender divisions of labour. However, both young men and women reported that the older men held reservations:

*I think that there is no big problem with working mothers. Of course, older people like my father would not like to hear the story because they think women must be goalkeepers [sic] and therefore they should not work. (young woman)*

*I do not care what they think. I just care what I think that it is a very good thing that a mother works. There are so many ways one can take care of children. (young woman)*

*I know that some people think that such mothers are hopeless because they have left their families. For example, my father always complains about Mr X’s wife because she goes to work and comes back in the evening. He always says that she is the one who married the husband and not the husband who married her. (young man) (cited in Kamanzi et al., 2018:16).*



## Box 2: Shifts in the valuation of care work

The IDS study of unpaid care confirmed the general undervaluing of work commonly undertaken by women and girls. For example, in a focus group in Tanzania, a boy reported that “[b]oys can do all activities that girls do, only they do not want to do some like cooking, washing plates.” (Zambelli et al., 2017; 28). The implication was that they would rather undertake work seen as more valuable such as animal care, chopping wood, or fixing household items. However, the Tanzania study also found some emerging evidence that, where people were taking on work normally associated with the other gender, norms allocating social value to different types of work had shifted slightly (Zambelli et al., 2017).

### Impact of norms about responsibility for care work on women’s economic opportunities.

Five studies discussed the impact of gendered norms about care responsibilities to women on their economic opportunities.

The Sussex studies of young women’s transition to the labour market found that, in all six sub-Saharan African countries they studied (Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda), the presence of young children in households reduced the likelihood of a young woman receiving a good education and thus obtaining a high quality job, irrespective of whether the children were her own or those of another female household member (McKay et al., 2018). This may reflect demands on young women and older girls to care for these children, although girls who have dropped out of school or live in places with few economic opportunities may also start families earlier (Mariara et al. 2018). These findings are consistent with Longwe’s (2013) study that found that African women work less than they wish to because of care-giving responsibilities. Having children under six years of age — particularly if they are closely spaced — is negatively associated with women’s non-farm employment (cited in Ahaibwe et al., 2016).

CBPS (2018) found that the need to care for children was the single most commonly reported reason for not working outside the home in Karnataka. However, this did not imply that the women concerned were not involved in economic activity: the need to work in a family business was the second most commonly given reason. The study of artisanal mining in Central Africa found that 33% of women recorded family obligations as a major factor reducing their work hours, compared with 14% of men. These reduced hours limit their earnings and their ability to network and build livelihood connections. The expectation that women’s first duty is to the family and husband also tended to discourage married women from working in the mining sector: nearly 35% of women working in artisanal mining were divorced, separated, widowed, or never married, compared with only 23% of men. Poverty appears to be a chief motivator for these women to seek work in mining (Buss et al., 2017b). Norms about domestic responsibilities and mobility, as well as more limited access to transport, meant that women tended to sell minerals near extraction zone where they received a lower price than men who were able to travel further afield.

### “ SAFETY CONCERNS WERE PARAMOUNT FOR SINGLE MOTHERS WITH DAUGHTERS.

The research undertaken by ICES in Sri Lanka also highlighted the impact of childcare responsibilities on women’s access to economic opportunities. Jeyaseker and Ganeda (2018) observed that many women — particularly those in female-headed households with little family support — mentioned that care work prevented them from engaging in certain livelihood activities or limited their engagement. Safety concerns were paramount for single mothers with daughters. One of the respondents highlighted ambivalence toward women working outside the home, citing her sisters’ reluctance to take care of her children: “If I ask them to do so, they come up with comments like, ‘You are going to work and all’” (Lakshman, 2017:22). As a result, 56% of respondents in Jeyaseker and Ganeda’s study engaged only in livelihood activities that could be conducted from home.

The PEOB baseline study focused on barriers to skills development: it found that family constraints were the single largest barrier for women (reported by 18% of women and 10% of men), particularly if attending training would require traveling outside their village. The study also found these normative constraints to be more significant for women in low-skilled work (32% of women and 15% of men cited family constraints as a barrier to getting a low-skilled job). For high-skilled jobs, lack of knowledge (cited by 48% of women and 41% of men) was reported to be a constraint rather than family barriers (cited by 1% of women and 8% of men). Similarly, women prioritized family support and encouragement as the most important factor in helping them get a (low-skilled) job: men prioritized social connections (Cheema et al., 2017).



## 2.6 NORMS AROUND EDUCATION, ADOLESCENT MARRIAGE, AND CHILDBEARING

Two macro-level studies that explored, respectively, how economic growth and economic decline affected age at marriage and childbearing. Kis-Katos et al. (2017) found that trade liberalization in Indonesia had increased women's labour force participation and

contributed to a rising median age at marriage (early- to mid-20s). Braga (2017) found that economic decline had had little effect on marriage and childbearing in regions of Brazil, suggesting that norms about broader life trajectories persist and provide meaning in economically challenging contexts.

“ **WOMEN WHO MARRIED OR GAVE BIRTH BEFORE 20 YEARS OF AGE WERE LESS LIKELY TO BE IN PROFESSIONAL/ TECHNICAL AND MANAGERIAL POSITIONS AND WERE MORE LIKELY TO WORK IN SUBSISTENCE AGRICULTURE.** ”

Overall, the GrOW studies highlighted the negative impact of early marriage on women's economic outcomes and the malleability of norms around early marriage where economic or educational opportunities are expanding. The Sussex project on young women's transitions to the labour market confirmed the importance of education for obtaining high quality work and highlighted the impact of discriminatory social norms on girls' educational and work outcomes. For example, the Kenya analysis found a strong negative correlation between marrying or having a child before age 18 and the level of education attained (Machio et al., 2017). The Uganda study found that women who married or gave birth before 20 years of age were less likely to be in professional/ technical and managerial positions and were more likely to work in subsistence agriculture (55% as compared to 40% of women who married later) (Ahaibwe et al., 2017). The Ghana study highlighted the connections between early work (before age 15), early marriage and childbearing, lost educational opportunity, and reduced labour market participation (Boakye-Iyidom and Owoo, nd). This and the Uganda study (Ssewanyana et al., 2018) found that having parents with secondary education greatly reduced young women's risk of early marriage, childbearing, and labour market entry.

Of the six studies, the one in Uganda best shows the role of social norms in early marriage. For example, Ahaibwe et al. (2017) found that traditional norms persisted about the relative value to households of a girl's education compared to obtaining bride price:

*It's better to marry off the girls early and get cows early so that they start reproducing rather than waiting for a girl to go through education with the hope of getting a job and provide for the family thereafter. By this time the cow would have reproduced and brought in more wealth and income. (male FGD participant, Yumbe)*

## “ “ **HAVING PARENTS WITH SECONDARY EDUCATION GREATLY REDUCED YOUNG WOMEN'S RISK OF EARLY MARRIAGE, CHILDBEARING, AND LABOUR MARKET ENTRY.**

More commonly, discriminatory norms intersected with limited educational availability. Having a primary school in one's village was associated with lower rates of marriage before age 18 (Ssewanyana et al., 2018). Focus groups indicated that where there was no secondary school nearby, families were willing for boys to travel by bicycle. Out of concerns about girls' safety, they felt that girls would have to board or rent a room near the school, both of which were prohibitively expensive. Furthermore, parents feared that girls living independently would get pregnant. Concerns about girls' safety also led parents to enrol them late, increasing the likelihood of dropping out before completing their schooling. Norms around girls returning to school after giving birth were generally negative. As focus group participants reported:

*Going back to school after giving birth is completely unheard of. Parents think it is a wastage of money, teachers think teenage mothers will spoil other pupils in school, and there is generally a lot of stigma around teenage mothers from fellow students and teachers. (Ahaibwe et al., 2017:27)*

Ssewanyana et al. (2018) found that the prevalence of marriage among girls under 18 years of age influences others to also marry. This likely reflects peer pressure that normalizes early marriage, supported by social norms. As one participant in Ahaibwe et al.'s 2017 rural focus groups put it: "almost every girl gets married at around 15 or 16 years, so it's the order of the day." These focus groups also highlighted the lack of examples of young people who had been able to escape poverty after completing their education.

Once married, girls and women can face significant work restrictions, as outlined in Section 2.1. As a 17-year-old focus group participant said:

*My husband dictates the kind of work I can engage in, he even restricts me on the number of hours I can work. (Ahaibwe et al., 2017:27).*

In a very different context, the IPA Bangladesh study found tentative evidence that the increased returns to completing secondary education offset the greater marriage payment demands for older girls and young women, particularly when they work in jobs considered prestigious, or that can be done from home, such as tutoring and tailoring. The qualitative interviews found stronger social support for women continuing education after marriage if they had already completed secondary school (i.e. they were attending tertiary-level education) than if they were still to complete high school (Field et al., nd).



## **2.7 NORMS ABOUT SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE**

*It's common for men to make fun of us, whether we are married or not, when we go to work we have to face those problems. We cannot say there are no issues. (Subrahmaniam, 2017: 23, Sri Lanka).*

Three studies reported that sexual and gender-based violence deter women's economic activity. While they

did not discuss norms about such violence directly, its prevalence and reactions to it indicate that it is widespread and unacceptable to women and some men.

The ICES studies in northern Sri Lanka found workplace sexual harassment to be common. Both women's own fear of violence and fear of violence against daughters left at home deterred them from working outside the home (Subrahmaniam, 2017). Buss et al.'s (2017) study of artisanal mining found that night work was considered unsuitable for women in Uganda because of the risk of sexual violence, thus reinforcing job segregation. This study also found that, in some mines, bosses were willing to act to counter harassment, including threatening to take the foremen of tunnels where it occurred to court. This shows that while a practice may be common, it is not necessarily accepted. Finally, also in Uganda, Buss et al. found examples of all-women digging teams formed to avoid sexual harassment or negative comments from men.

“ BOTH WOMEN'S OWN FEAR OF VIOLENCE AND FEAR OF VIOLENCE AGAINST DAUGHTERS LEFT AT HOME DETERRED THEM FROM WORKING OUTSIDE THE HOME.



The Urban Institute's study of transport safety in Lahore, Pakistan cites data showing that 82% of women bus riders have experienced sexual harassment at a bus stop and 90% have experienced it on buses (UN Women, 2017; Irving-Erikson, 2018). As a result, 87% of men surveyed would recommend their female relatives use a women-only van. However, Irving-Erikson et al.'s (2018) interviews indicated limited support for women-only transport. Instead they favoured educating men to "behave" — change norms and behaviour around sexual harassment. They also found that, although they were taking shorter journeys, women spent considerably more per journey on transport, usually because they used more expensive services perceived to be safer than public transport, such as ride-sharing or Uber. Irving-Erikson et al. (2018) found that women were extremely reluctant to report harassment because of norms against reporting, because they feared retribution, and because they had little confidence that reporting would lead to change.

Two quantitative studies explored whether women's economic empowerment was associated with increased intimate partner violence (IPV) as a form of backlash against loss of male control over women's time, labour, and mobility. Using DHS data from 35 countries, Khan and Klasen's (2018) conclusions differ from most others: they found no evidence that women's employment was associated with IPV when endogeneity is controlled for, except in Latin America and East Africa and among women working in agriculture. They speculated that women working in agriculture did not earn enough to offset the loss of control men experience when their wives are wage earners.

“ 82% OF WOMEN BUS RIDERS HAVE EXPERIENCED SEXUAL HARASSMENT AT A BUS STOP AND 90% HAVE EXPERIENCED IT ON BUSES.

Focusing on Jordan, Lenze and Klasen used similar methodology and reached similar conclusions, except that they found that work outside the home had a weak protective effect against sexual violence. Also examining DHS data, Peters et al. (2016) found that attitudes toward violence change indirectly over time as economic development leads to rising education levels,

urbanization, and media exposure. They found less decline in IPV with economic development, although greater wealth, older age at marriage, and lower fertility levels were associated with reduced rates of IPV. Peters et al. concluded that relying on economic development to weaken norms supporting violence was likely to be ineffective and that more focused policy attention was needed to change attitudes and practices.



## 2.8 NORMS AROUND OWNERSHIP AND CONTROL OF ASSETS

### Physical assets.

Norms related to ownership and control of physical assets, such as land, livestock, machinery, and financial assets were explored in the Carleton and Sussex studies. The most direct evidence that ownership of physical and financial assets affected gender norms came from a qualitative study undertaken in Uganda as part of the Sussex project on young women's labour market transitions. Focus group participants in two parts of Uganda expressed overtly discriminatory views:

*Men are hesitant to have joint investment with their wives; once a woman has money, she becomes uncontrollable and disobedient. (Male focus group participant, Namayingo) (Ahaibwe et al., 2017:27)*

*Apart from working on the family farm, women are not allowed to engage in other economic activities or control assets. (Male focus group participant, Yumbe) (Ahaibwe et al., 2017:27)*

These discriminatory norms and attitudes reduce young women's already limited access to productive assets and their potential for productive livelihoods (Ahaibwe et al., 2017).

“OWNERSHIP, ACCESS TO ASSETS AND FINANCES, AND AUTHORITY ARE ALREADY HIGHLY GENDERED AND GENERALLY PRIVILEGE MEN.

The study of artisanal mining in East and Central Africa also found that norms about ownership of mining concessions, linked to wider norms about women's roles and asset ownership, limit women's opportunities to engage in some of the more lucrative aspects of mining. This study found that in DRC, “ownership, access to assets and finances, and authority are already highly gendered and generally privilege men. People who want to mine need the approval of the concession owner.” (Buss et al., 2017a).

With generally greater access to finance, mobility, and negotiation skills, men are more likely to become pit or shaft owners. Indeed, in Rwandan artisanal mines, married women stated that becoming a mining subcontractor would require permission from their husbands, which was by no means always forthcoming because many were concerned with the risk involved. Without this permission, they could not obtain finance because a married woman cannot get credit from the bank without her husband's signature. Nor can she sell a plot of land without his approval (Buss et al., 2017a).

“A MARRIED WOMAN CANNOT GET CREDIT FROM THE BANK WITHOUT HER HUSBAND'S SIGNATURE.

## Norms, the legal environment, and women's rights to assets.

The legal environment for women's economic empowerment reflects the interaction between human rights-based international commitments; customary, often religion-derived law; social norms about who can own or control specific resources; what ownership means within marriage; and who has what rights to property on divorce (Jones et al., 2010). Legal reforms can increase and secure women's access to assets, for example by formalizing inheritance rights or the right to register land ownership. In some cases, however, egalitarian laws — such as Namibia's land rights law — have been subverted by local leaders who have discouraged younger women from applying for land rights (Peters et al., 2016).

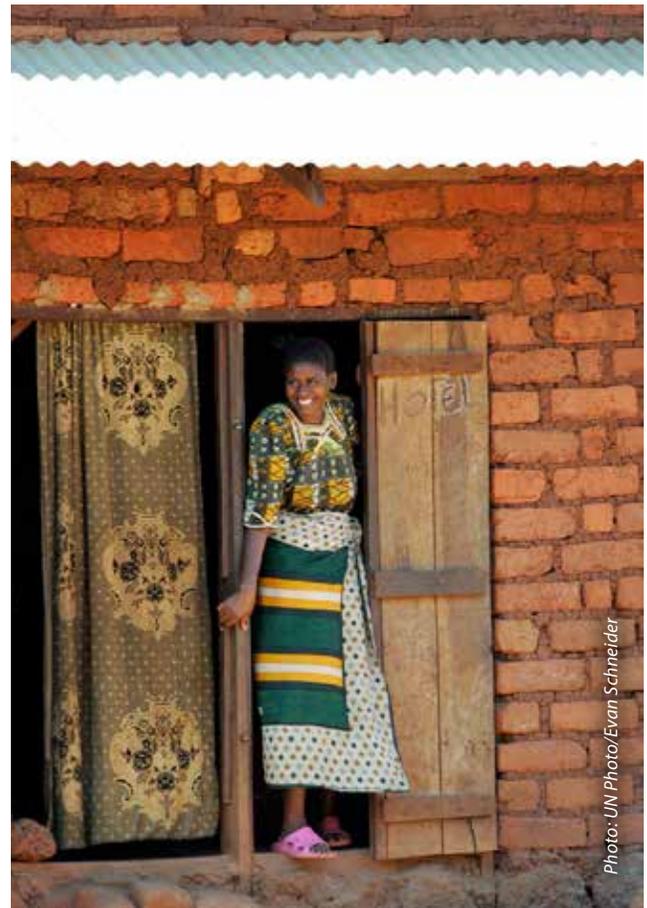
Women can be disadvantaged when the legal framework concerning rights to assets is complex, unclear, or subject to interpretation by local power-holders. Sebina-Zziwa and Kibombo's (nd) study of a Ugandan gold mine found that the web of rights to surface land, which were complex, poorly documented, and subject to considerable speculation, were mostly held by men. Surface rights holders levied charges on various activities, which disproportionately affected women as entrepreneurs selling goods and services at the mining site. These surface rights holders wielded more power than the association holding the location licence and were able to evict people who refused or were unable to pay levies.

This situation reflects a disconnect between the formal legal framework and local practices: on the one hand, the Ugandan Constitution protects women's property rights, while the Mining Act and Mining Regulations require mineral prospectors on private land to provide evidence of prior and sound agreements as well as spouses' consent for the land to be prospected and/or exploited for artisanal mining. The law states that any loss or damage to stock or crops that arises out of such exploration or mining activities must be borne by the surface rights claimants and not the mineral license or lease holder. This disproportionately affects women who are key food producers and are more likely to have surface than mining rights. The fact that the gender-egalitarian Constitutional provisions are not translated

into sector-specific regulations or on-the-ground practice suggests that they have not, so far, contributed significantly to normative change.

“ THIS SITUATION REFLECTS A DISCONNECT BETWEEN THE FORMAL LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND LOCAL PRACTICES.

Two other studies highlight the legal or policy basis for women's lack of access to independent assets without directly discussing their relationship to prevailing norms. Lenze and Klasen (2017) mention that women's limited property rights in the event of divorce in Jordan could underpin intimate partner violence. The Thesawalamai Law in vigour in Tamil communities in northern Sri Lanka prevents married women from selling or managing property without their husband's consent. This means that women whose husbands are presumed dead but who don't have a death certificate cannot mobilize or improve these assets (Kodikara, 2018).





### **Financial assets.**

Studies about the extent of women’s involvement in decisions about household expenditures and the use of their earned income also provide some indirect insights into norms about financial asset use. For example, Mahendiran et al. (2017) found that more than 80% of women interviewed in Bihar, India participated in decisions about household expenditures. However, a similar study in Karnataka showed that just over half of interviewees were involved in decision-making about the use of household income.

The wider gender norms and economic empowerment literature suggests that discriminatory norms about asset ownership are often stickier than norms about

working outside the home (e.g. Muñoz Boudet et al., 2012). This may be because the income benefits of work are evident and may require less ceding of control than independent land and property rights, which more deeply challenge patriarchal privilege and entitlement to resources (Baruah, 2018). Peters et al.’s (2016) review of enablers and barriers to women’s economic empowerment highlights the positive impact of legal reforms that give women equal access to assets (e.g. through inheritance) or through land rights in their own names. However, this study also points out that, in some cases, egalitarian laws such as Namibia’s land rights law have been subverted by local leaders who have discouraged younger women from applying for land rights.



# 3. WHAT FACILITATES CHANGE IN GENDER NORMS?

## 3.1 SUPPORTIVE POLICY AND INSTITUTIONAL ENVIRONMENT FOR WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

Gender norms and the legal, policy, and institutional environment are often discussed as separate “high level factors” influencing women’s economic empowerment. However, gender norms do not operate only at household, community, and workplace level, but shape and are shaped by the legal and policy framework and how it is implemented. This section presents evidence from the GrOW studies of the interactions between gender norms and the broader legal and institutional environment.

“GENDER NORMS DO NOT OPERATE ONLY AT HOUSEHOLD, COMMUNITY, AND WORKPLACE LEVEL, BUT SHAPE AND ARE SHAPED BY THE LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORK AND HOW IT IS IMPLEMENTED.”

Three papers produced by a collaboration between Chicago and Stellenbosch universities explored the types

of political arrangements that foster gender egalitarian societies and a normative environment relatively supportive of women’s economic empowerment. These papers, all of which focus on sub-Saharan Africa, probe the extent of women’s voice in kinship groups (e.g. lineages), traditional political structures (e.g. chiefships), and local government representation.

They find that whether a lineage allows space for female voice and representation or not has little impact. However, where traditional political structures allow for female political representation, women are significantly more educated than those in similar regions where only men occupy traditional political structures. They are also more likely to have some ownership rights over their home and some land and have significantly higher household decision-making power. There is no relationship with labour force participation, however (Anderson et al., 2018a). Anderson et al. (2018b) also found a positive relationship between women’s local political representation, better education and health outcomes, and household decision-making. Where women’s representation is strong, women are also significantly less supportive of domestic violence than those in areas with lower levels of representation. These

studies are broadly consistent with findings about women's political representation in India (Marcus et al., 2017).

“ WHERE TRADITIONAL POLITICAL STRUCTURES ALLOW FOR FEMALE POLITICAL REPRESENTATION, WOMEN ARE SIGNIFICANTLY MORE EDUCATED.

The study of artisanal mining in DRC, Rwanda, and Uganda also considered the intersection of gender norms with governance arrangements and their influence on women's economic opportunities: it found varied governance arrangements across the three countries (Buss et al, 2017). The formal company structures in Rwanda potentially provided more routes for women to challenge some forms of discrimination and barriers than less formal arrangements. However, they provided fewer accumulation opportunities for women than in “gold rush” sites in Uganda. The governance arrangements in the other mines differed: in one DRC site, would-be miners had to negotiate for access and pay fees to the licensee; in another, such payments were made to the concessionaire who, in turn, had to pay the local chief. In one Uganda site, work was organized through representatives selected by the diggers). Buss et al. concluded that, in all three cases, patriarchal norms infuse the relationships of governance and authority, limiting women's representation among locally powerful players. In some cases, it affected the royalties and other payments expected of them.

“ PATRIARCHAL NORMS INFUSE THE RELATIONSHIPS OF GOVERNANCE AND AUTHORITY.

In the Ugandan gold mining site, the association formed to acquire a prospecting and mining licence for local landholders had no women directors although women made up about 10% of its members. The researchers were unable to identify whether women, as co-owners of the land, had participated in the process of surrendering the land for acquiring the licence, fully understanding the implications and giving their consent as required by the land law. They speculated that, if all the directors

were male, it is likely that women would have been left out of the process and deprived of their rights to surface claims and a share of royalties, or to compensation for the loss of their crops. Furthermore, the ongoing lack of women's representation means they lack voice on issues related to the impacts of mining on environmental quality and health, for example. It also undermines their ability to negotiate on fair terms regarding issues affecting them, particularly the constantly changing levies and taxes (Sebina-Zziwa and Kibombo, nd).

Insights from the GrOW studies on the intersection of legal frameworks with prevailing gender norms, and their implications for women's ownership and use of assets have been discussed in Section 2.7.

### 3.2 ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT PROGRAMS

Only five studies discussed the impacts of economic empowerment programs on gender norms, with most focusing on various indicators of empowerment. There are only a few studies for each type of approach, however, which do not constitute a strong body of evidence.

#### **Building individual and collective voice.**

The set of studies of the Mahila Samakya women's empowerment program in India, undertaken by the Centre for Budget and Policy Studies (CBPS), provides interesting insights into the differences between empowerment and changes in norms. The core elements of the Mahila Samakya program included self-organization into small groups (*sanghas*) for training, critical discussion, and reflection, and linkage to government services. Commonly observed changes included greater understanding of one's situation and the factors that underlie it; self-confidence and voice to express one's opinion; increased agency to make decisions and act on them individually and collectively. Although this is not directly articulated in these papers, the process of “education of the mind” (Menon, 2017) involves making visible and challenging taken-for-granted norms about the expected behaviour of men, women, boys, and girls, and the gender order more

generally. The Mahila Samakya studies show change in relation to the acceptability of girls' education, decision-making authority, and intimate partner violence. Arguably, these aspects of empowerment are among the building blocks of norm change.

### **Impacts on education.**

A study by the IIMB, cited in CBPS (2016), found that women's average education level and age at marriage were higher where Mahila Samakya was operational than in districts without the program. The increase was greatest in the most disadvantaged districts and social groups, such as scheduled tribes and castes. While this study does not discuss changes in social norms directly, district-level shifts in women's education level and in the age at marriage imply that shifts in collective perceptions of gender roles and the value of girls' education are likely to have occurred. Indeed Menon (2017) observes that when Mahila Samakya started in 1992, literacy levels were very low among both women and men, and men were strongly resistant to women becoming literate.

### **Decision-making power.**

The studies report greater increase in women's decision-making power among Mahila Samakya participants than non-participants, in engagement in economic activities outside the home, and in political participation (CBPS, 2018, 2016; Mahendiran et al., 2017). However, they do not directly discuss the process of change in gender norms that these shifts involved.



### **Intimate partner violence.**

Changes in attitudes toward IPV among Mahila Samakya participants may reflect changing norms resulting from the broader empowerment process. For example, Mahendiran et al. (2017) found that fewer Mahila Samakya participants than non-participants in Bihar considered violence to be acceptable in the following scenarios: if a wife does not care for children or cook properly, is disrespectful to in-laws, has an abortion without telling her husband, gets a job, or joins a collective without her husband's permission. Of these scenarios, violence was least commonly justified as a response to women engaging in economic activities. Even so, acceptance of IPV was still high — in the districts where Mahila Samakya had been operating for 10 years or less, 60% of participants still considered violence acceptable if a woman engaged in economic activities without her husband's permission, compared to 40% in areas where the program had been operating for 20 years.

Their study also indicates that programs can affect aspects of empowerment while leading to limited changes in more fundamental norms. For example, in one focus group discussion conducted by CBPS in Karnataka, women were supportive of girls' education and women's political participation and did not believe that gender-based violence was justified. However, they still considered it a girls' responsibility to maintain norms about family honour (Menon, 2017).

### **Incentives for education, training, and delaying marriage.**

The Sussex studies indicate that the overall positive policy environment for girls' education (which has included fee waivers and incentives in some countries), likely contributed to girls staying in school longer and a rising age of marriage or first birth among younger women (Mariara et al., 2018). They do not explicitly comment on how far these trends reflect normative change, however.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> With boys' secondary school drop-out rates overtaking girls' in some contexts, the Uganda and Kenya study points out that policies to support marginalized boys in school are now needed (Ahaibwe et al., 2017; Kabubo-Mariara et al., 2016).

Two studies directly examined the impact of incentives on norms about education, training, and the desirable age of marriage.

Field et al. (2017) and Buchmann et al. (2018) explore the impact of both incentive payments and a community-based life skills and empowerment program (Kishoree Kontha) in delaying age of marriage and promoting girls' education in Bangladesh. They illustrate the interplay of program impacts with granular qualitative evidence about gender norms. The studies found that receiving an incentive (cooking oil worth a total of \$16 per year) to remain unmarried until age 18 contributed to delaying marriage and childbearing and to girls remaining in school. Among girls eligible for the incentive for at least two years, the incentive reduced the likelihood of marriage under the age of 18 by 25% and marriage under 16 by 27%. They had also completed 2.2 months of additional schooling than their counterparts by age 22-25.

By comparison, girls eligible for a community-based empowerment program had completed 2.4 months of additional schooling. The impact on their likelihood of being in school was less than for girls receiving the incentive, however, but still 10% higher than the control group. Furthermore, there was no evidence that the girls who received the incentive married shortly after turning 18, as did other programs, such as Apni Beti Apna Dhan in India (Nanda et al., 2017). Marriage rates among recipients and non-recipients only converged by age 22. The authors suggest that these shifts may indicate a shift in norms about the desirable age of marriage, in part justified by the offer of an incentive. They may also indicate that parents are waiting to find the right match for their daughters, or that girls negotiate to delay their marriages, both of which could reflect broader normative change. The extent to which incentives contribute to broader normative change around child marriage, both in this program and others, remains controversial (e.g. White, 2015; Chae and Ngo, 2017; Kalamar et al, 2017) and is a subject for broader empirical investigation.



Photo: UN Photo/W. Wild

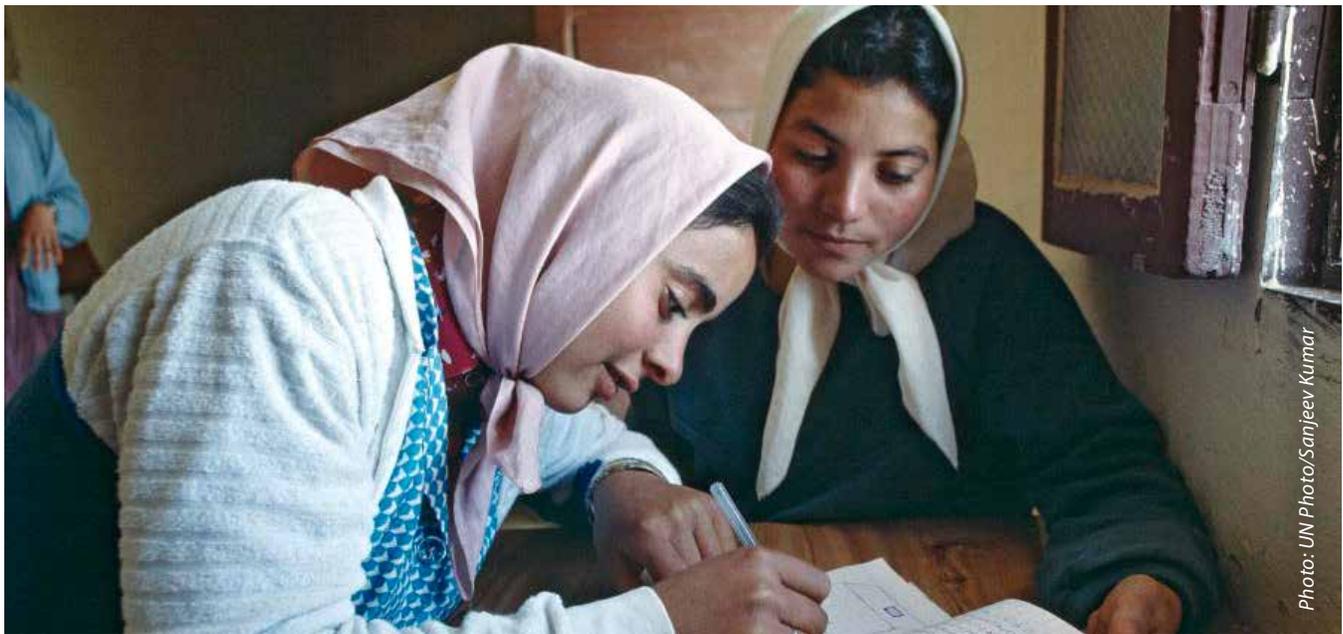


Photo: UN Photo/Sanjeev Kumar

By contrast, Harvard’s PEOP study found that incentives to facilitate women’s training were not enough to change deep-seated gender norms. However, having training opportunities within the village increased women’s uptake by 35%. Providing safe transport to training opportunities outside the village also increased uptake by some 17-18%.<sup>4</sup> Overall, women themselves and their families found this form of engagement in paid work acceptable if women could work from their villages (Javed et al., 2017).

### **Providing child care to facilitate paid work.**

The two studies of child care provision — from Kenya (Clarke and Lazlo, 2017) and India (Nandi et al., 2017) — found that day care was taken up where it was available, implying that norms about women looking after their own children are not binding. In the Kenya study, undertaken in a Nairobi slum, Clarke and Lazlo found that having access to an early childcare centre increased the likelihood of women being employed by 17%, rising to 20% among women who used these centres. In rural Rajasthan, Nandi et al. (2017) found that 41% of mothers in hamlets with an NGO childcare centre used them to

some extent. However, these centres only reduced time spent on child care by an average of 10.6 minutes per day and increased the probability of working year-round, rather than seasonally, by 2.2 percentage points. This relatively small increase in labour force participation may reflect limited employment opportunities in rural Rajasthan. These results are broadly consistent with the findings of Harper et al.’s (2017) systematic review, which found moderate positive impacts of child care on women’s labour force participation, mostly in Latin America. However, it did not examine impacts on norms about child care or divisions of labour.

Only the IDS study of paid work and unpaid care explored the impact of child care provision on norms about labour divisions. It found that women who participated in economic empowerment programs did not report a difference in the sharing of care tasks between men and women, compared to women who did not participate in these programs. Chopra and Zambelli (2017:20) conclude that “there have been little or no changes to social norms achieved by WEE [women’s economic empowerment] programs as yet that would herald a change in the social organization of care.”

<sup>4</sup>This finding has some resonance with Lei et al. (2017) who found that the positive impact of transportation infrastructure on women’s non-farm employment in India is stronger in communities with more egalitarian gender norms (measured by proportion of women practicing purdah). Where purdah is widely practiced, improved transport infrastructure has little effect as women are constrained by seclusion norms from taking up work outside the home.



Photo: Simone D. McCourtie / World Bank

# 4. CONCLUSIONS

Although few of the GrOW studies were designed to examine the implications of social and gender norms for women's economic empowerment, they have generated many important insights. These studies indicate both persistence of, and change in, norms about women's economic activity and in wider norms that shape choices about that activity. Consistent with the wider literature, they suggest that increasing levels of education, widespread economic stress, and emerging economic opportunities in some contexts have contributed to "relaxing" gender norms (Munoz Boudet, 2012), if not changing them. Elsewhere, however, norm-based constraints appear more binding and continue to limit women's economic options. The GrOW studies provide some evidence of emerging generational differences, with younger people adopting more flexible gender norms, particularly in East Africa.

## **Norms about women working.**

The GrOW studies found that the strength of norms about work outside the home varies considerably by social and economic context: in many of the study contexts, norms idealizing women's roles as homemakers are strong. However, as is recognized in the wider literature, low-income women are more likely to contravene prevailing gender norms to make ends meet, while economic opportunities for more highly educated women often lead to more flexibility among higher income groups. Studies of economic change (such as trade liberalization) find an increasing entry of women into paid labour in some contexts, indicating that growing opportunities can lead to shifts in gender norms.

## **Norms about suitable work for women and men.**

Consistent with the wider literature, the GrOW studies highlighted the role of gender norms in maintaining gendered work segregation: this was often enforced via

gossip or intimidation, as well as outright prohibitions on women engaging in certain kinds of work (particularly in mining). These norms were closely tied to those governing propriety, women's mobility, contact between unrelated men and women, and responsibility for domestic care work. Women's unequal access to assets also contributed to work segregation: they were typically concentrated in self-employment activities that could be undertaken with limited capital.

## **Norms about mobility and respectability.**

Norms about whether women should work, and in which occupations, are also strongly tied to cultural values about decorum and respectability. The South Asian studies found a preference for women working from home; working in prestigious female-dominated activities, such as tutoring; or not engaging in paid work. In all cases, with family support, some determined women were able to defy these norms. Studies from Central and East Africa also found that norms of decorum, appropriate dress, and contact between men and women restricted women's involvement in underground mining.

## **Norms about unpaid care work.**

Norms assigning most of unpaid household work to women emerged as a major constraint to their paid economic activity and affected their mobility. These norms were linked to idealized notions of womanhood and were partially enforced through fear of gossip and criticism from other community members. The IDS studies found that norms about unpaid care were stickier in South Asia than in sub-Saharan Africa where some change in younger women's and men's attitudes and practices is evident. Prevailing norms support traditional gender divisions of labour, however.

### **Norms about asset ownership.**

The studies that probed asset ownership found that both informal norms and, in some cases, laws related to asset ownership, undermined women's access to assets. Consistent with the wider literature showing that egalitarian inheritance and land rights laws have often been subverted locally, the mining studies found that legal frameworks tended to favour holders of mining rights over land holders, and that women's formal legal rights were often not understood or were ignored. The GrOW studies also found discriminatory norms limiting women's access to property on divorce. Norms about women's control of income varied depending on contexts.

### **Sexual and gender-based violence.**

Fear of sexual and gender-based violence significantly constrained women's economic activity. The prevalence of such violence and harassment indicates that it may be a descriptive norm in some research contexts, although none of the studies probed the norms that uphold such behaviour. The two quantitative studies that used DHS data to examine whether women's increased labour force activity is associated with increased intimate partner violence found a clear relationship only in Latin America and East Africa, and for women working in agriculture. This suggests that the hypothesis that intimate partner violence is rising in backlash against gender norm change needs some qualification.



Photo: Curt Carnemark / World Bank



Photo: Andrea Moroni

### **Norms about education, adolescent marriage, and childbearing.**

Studies of the relationship between education, child marriage, and labour market outcomes in East and West Africa highlight the central role of education in facilitating women's access to higher quality (better paid, more stable, formal sector) jobs. Child labour and adolescent marriage and childbearing are associated with lower levels of education and lower likelihood of quality work: these are supported by societal norms in some contexts. There is some evidence of a trend toward later marriage (early- to mid-20s) where economic opportunities are expanding, or where educational incentive programs are effective.

### **Economic empowerment programs and norm change.**

There were only one or two studies for each of the economic empowerment strategies examined: insights about impacts on norms are thus suggestive rather than clearly established.

The childcare studies found that if good quality day care is available, families are generally willing to use it, indicating that norms about family-based care are not binding. The studies of incentives indicate that in-kind incentives are helping girls stay in school and delay marriage in Bangladesh, which may lead to new norms about the appropriate age of marriage. Evidence from Pakistan suggests that incentives for vocational training were most widely taken up in activities and locations

consistent with prevailing norms (they required little mobility and involved gender-segregated work). The studies of Mahila Samakya (a broad-based women's empowerment program) also show some positive impacts on discriminatory gender norms in contexts of entrenched inequalities.

## 4.1 GAPS

Despite the wide-ranging insights about the relationship between women's economic empowerment and social and gender norms emerging from the GrOW portfolio, there are inevitably some gaps. Future research could focus on:

### **Norms that support or facilitate women's economic empowerment.**

No studies identified norms or beliefs that facilitate women's economic empowerment, such as norms of respectful behaviour toward women as colleagues or customers. Buss et al. (2017) found that women sometimes benefited from stereotypes of women as more honest than men, although norms that limited women's economic opportunities were much more common. Further probing of supportive norms could help identify values and processes that could be strengthened to promote women's economic empowerment.

### **Men's attitudes and norms of masculinity.**

These are little discussed in this set of studies (the exceptions being the IDS care studies, and Irving-Erikson et al., 2018). This may reflect the focus of primary studies on women and constraints to their economic activity, or methodological issues such as lack of relevant data in the secondary data sets used. Further probing might reveal both relatively malleable and resistant norms and enable a stronger focus on more deeply entrenched norms in change campaigns.

### **More disaggregation between different groups of women.**

Apart from geographical differences, there was relatively little insight into the ways that social and gender norms affecting women's economic empowerment differed between different social groups. The relatively broad-brush picture in this synthesis may therefore gloss over important differences in prevailing norms among different socio-economic groups, by life stage, or by caste (in South Asia), religion, or ethnicity.

### **Norms around asset ownership, control, and use.**

Control of assets is particularly important for self-employment. Greater clarity about the stickiness of norms around different assets in different contexts could reveal barriers to women's entrepreneurship and tensions related to economic empowerment programs. A first step would involve a closer reading of the extensive literature on women's access to land and financial inclusion from a norms' perspective.

### **The relationship between structural economic change and change in gender norms.**

Many of the quantitative studies indicated links between structural economic change (e.g. GDP growth, trade liberalization) and social trends (e.g. trends in marriage and childbearing), without discussing their relationship with gender norms. Qualitative studies exploring norm changes or lack of change associated with these trends would help understand the patterns observed.

### **The role of policies and programs in challenging norms that constrain women's economic activity.**

Several GrOW studies provide quantitative evidence of the positive impact of policies (e.g. child care provision; incentive payments to avoid marriage). Qualitative exploration of the ways in which such programs do or do not lead to changes in norms would help clarify the reasons for, and impact of, particular approaches. Similarly, future research could focus on understanding how gender norms affect the implementation and impact of economic empowerment initiatives (Duflo, 2012).



Photo: M. Yousuf Tushar

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