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***Introduction***

Gender is a state of being a male or female. In most cases, it’s typically defined with reference to social and cultural differences rather than biological differences. Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) defines it as ‘relations between men and women, both perceptual and material’ It is not determined biologically as a result of sexual characteristics of either women or men but is constructed socially. It is a central organizing principle of societies and often governs the processes of production and reproduction, consumption and distribution’ (FAO, 1997). Despite all the above definitions, Gender is often misunderstood as being the promotion of women. It therefore implies in the above definitions that the relationship between men and women, their roles and responsibilities, control and access to resources, involvement in labour market, interests and needs. Looking at the history, gender was understood differently according to different cultures and societies by specific roles and responsibilities which are often conditioned by household structures through access to resources and control, traditional believes and norms. Society in many occasions have set standard for women that limit them from other roles and responsibilities. Their most common image is that they are very passive and always try to avoid conflicts despite provocative acts of men in any situation. History has it that men have been the dominant sex in roles and responsibilities at all levels, social, political, economic and religious. The dominance doesn’t mean that women have no influence or didn’t play an important role and responsibility in history. This depended on culture to culture in different ethnic groups. Given example of Christian religion where they derive their gender roles and responsibilities of man and women from Historical Bible (Ephesians 5:22-33); wives submit to your husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the Church, His body and is Himself its Saviour. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word. While in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35; the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission as the law also says. If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church. Again 1 Corinthians 11:3-10; But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God. Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered, dishonours his head, but every wife who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonours her head, since it is the same as if her head were shaven. For if a wife will not cover her head, and then she should cut her hair short. But since it is disgraceful for a wife to cut off her hair or shave her head, let her cover her head. For man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man. In Genesis 3:16; To the woman he said, “I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing, in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be for your husband and he shall rule over you.” The above Biblical quotes in Christian religion explain gender roles and responsibilities that recognise male gender as a head over a female.

The traditional definition of man would be sole provider and protector of the family while a woman has domestic duties and has been for years till recently that this concept has taken shape by involving a woman. Both perform the same duties. Therefore sex highlights biological determinants thus remain unchangeable difference between male and female. Their relations are the ways which culture or society recognises their roles, rights, responsibilities and identities in relation to one another.

***Gender in the 21st Century***

In the current generation of 21st Century, gender is often misunderstood as promotion of women who have taken more active role in different sectors and careers despite some traditions still hold women inferior in their society like numerous cases reported in Indian cultures women still come from traditional strict households, they have accepted their roles and feel comfortable in their decisions or lack thereof. Feminist movement gained momentum in the 1960’s and 70’s in the United States together with other Human Right groups that advocated for equal rights among all genders in recent centuries after observing women gender being domesticated by cultural norms, religious believes, traditional marginalisation yet for the few women who were out speaking role models showed great hope. Gender roles in communities changed lately whereby women now play equal role as men in owning lead large companies, very active in their families and communities, own personal businesses, manage big organisations, head political groups, earn higher academic degrees from all sectors equal to men, to mention but few as compared to early centuries. Both genders actively attend sporting events; go to bars and all other outdoor activities that were dominated by men alone. The 21st century demonstrates equal participation of both genders in different activities as compared to early centuries that kept women behind by being responsible for domestic chores. Gender being a central organising principle of society in social construction which governs the process of production, reproduction where consumption and distribution are elements in that setting, gender has remained a critical and major focus of society despite equal rights. Young genders both males and females are groomed up with knowledge of man being head of family. Religions across all denominations still hold believe of man being a superior being from woman gender. This naturally has left a gap between the two genders where by man still carries weight of being the head of the household though women headed families also perform equal roles but the family still remains incomplete without a man due to title, security, and other duties that women can’t perform.

***Factors and Areas of Change Driving the Gender Equality***

Economic development. Economic developments (either new opportunities opening up or existing opportunities ending) can lead to rapid change in gender roles, which can, in turn, lead to changes in gender norms. But there

is often a time lag between changes in a given norm and changes in the practices those norms lead to. For example, women are often accepted in workplaces before norms about labour equality change.

Broad economic changes can, in particular, contribute to changes in norms about gender roles and the value of education. This is the case whether economic opportunities close down or open up. For example, changing norms around investing in daughters’ education and young women working outside the home in India and Bangladesh have been largely driven by recognition of the economic benefits of these activities (Jensen, 2012; Hossain, 2011). Likewise, we know that child marriage is more common among poor households; economic development and poverty reduction can thus lead to an environment in which child marriage is less of an economic necessity,

and new norms about the value of education or delaying marriage can take hold (UNFPA, 2012).

Our research findings reflect the role that broad economic developments can play in changing gender norms. Among Hmong communities in northern Viet Nam, better road links to local markets have brought opportunities for girls to earn money – for example, by selling wine and vegetables at these markets. In Ethiopia and Uganda, we found young men aspiring to marry educated girls and young women who could bring more income into the household.

‘Educated girls bring a bigger “envelope” on marriage. Men like such a girl because she can get a job and work – she can contribute to the family income.’

49-year-old mother, Baitambogwe, Uganda (Kyomuhendo Bantebya et al., 2014)

Economic changes can also drive norm change in

more indirect ways. For example, in eastern Uganda, we found that more wage labour opportunities on sugar plantations for boys and young men were contributing

to changing gender norms in that young men had, for the first time, money with which to initiate relationships or to pay for sex. These economic opportunities are important factors contributing to the rise of informal cohabitation arrangements between young men and adolescent girls, who perceive these young men as offering better material security than their parents.

Urbanization and migration. Research indicates that urbanization often brings with it more egalitarian gender norms (World Bank, 2011; Muñoz Boudet et al., 2012). This reflects new educational and economic opportunities for women and girls in urban areas, and reduced exposure to some of the structures that reinforce existing gender norms (such as traditional leaders). Migrants to urban areas are often exposed to people from other regions and cultural and ethnic groups, as well as the media, new ideas and lifestyles. Migration, whether in-country or across national borders, can have similar effects, giving men, women, boys and girls the chance to do things that go beyond the limits of accepted gender roles in their home communities. Alternatively, migration can reinforce conservative or discriminatory gender norms – for example, if diaspora communities cling to gender norms and practices of their former communities as a means of asserting their identity in their new environment.

***Political activism and change***

In many cases, changes in gender norms have been spurred by social and political activists mobilizing for change. Typically this has involved a combination of approaches: challenging people to reflect on and change their own behavior and attitudes, while mobilizing for legal or policy changes nationally or internationally. For example, social movements tackling gender-based violence often take a dual approach, challenging individuals to stop committing or condoning violence while mobilizing citizens to support law reform and other positive changes

(such as training police to deal sensitively and respectfully with victims of gender-based violence, or providing better support services for survivors).

Periods of conflict, or other significant political change or disruption, can also lead to change in gender norms. They can disrupt old beliefs and practices around masculinity and femininity, or lead people to do things that do not fit with traditional gender roles, simply in order to survive. Sometimes political or armed movements explicitly aim to remodel gender relations – in some cases towards a more egalitarian society (as with the Maoist movements in Nepal) and in others promoting more conservative social relations.

Legal, policy and programme drivers

Legal reforms, policies and programs can drive norm change by introducing or stimulating new norms and practices. They can also ‘license’ norm changes that were already occurring and, by changing how people behave, can change the way people think about new practices. For example, among Hmong communities in northern Viet Nam, a combination of school fee reductions and government campaigns to persuade families to educate girls has led to a situation where sending boys and girls to school up to grade 9 has become the norm. Legal and policy reforms typically have the greatest effect in driving norm change when people are confident that laws will be enforced and programs implemented.

Giving people new information that prompts different values and attitudes. Our field research found that a combination of factual information (for example, on health problems) and broader messaging on gender equality had contributed to changes in gender norms. In Ethiopia, for instance, health messaging that emphasized the risk of fistula had contributed to respondents changing their views about the best age to marry (with many now thinking of this as between 18 and 20, compared with 15 or younger, as people used to think). In Viet Nam, messages about the health risks of adolescent pregnancy and the economic advantages of completing school before starting a family had also inspired some young people to delay marriage and the age at which they had their first child.

A growing body of evidence highlights the potential of mass media to drive change in gender norms, both through factual and overt messaging about gender equality, and through popular entertainment programs that present an alternative vision of gender relations (Marcus and

Page, 2014; Sugg, 2014). For example, our research in Hmong communities in Viet Nam found that mass media (particularly TV) programs played an important role in raising girls’ hopes for a different future beyond marriage and farming, offering them alternative visions (whether realistic or not) of love-based marriage and more equal gender relations.

Increasing access to education for girls, boys, men and women. Rising levels of education across all age groups (including adults) are a critical driver of norm change. Through education, boys and girls are exposed to new knowledge and ideas, including gender equality, which is a formal part of the curriculum in many countries. Education (particularly secondary education) is associated with reduced support for a number of discriminatory or harmful practices, including child marriage and gender-based violence.

Girls’ own desire for education is an important driver of norm change. Increasingly, girls are aware that education opens up opportunities for a better life, for them and their families – one that goes beyond marriage, motherhood and (in rural areas) small-scale farming. This creates a virtuous circle, as educated girls are typically more accepting

and supportive of gender equality, develop greater self- confidence, and are more able to voice their opinions and influence decisions that affect them.

‘If you can go to the outside world, you can see many new things which you can only see in the outside world. If you spend all your time at home, you only follow the buffalo’s and cow’s asses and you can’t do anything.’

18-year-old Hmong girl, northern Viet Nam (Jones et al., 2015)

Education can give adolescent girls a place in which

to think and develop away from the constant demands

on their time in the household; it can expose them to

role models (such as women teachers or girls who have graduated from high schools and universities) and broaden their horizons. Education can also give adolescent girls a peer support network, offering emotional and practical support to deal with the problems they face, including challenging gender norms should they wish to do so. Interestingly, these positive outcomes seem to occur despite the fact that the quality of education is often very low and many schools actually reinforce gender stereotypes through assigning duties on the basis of gender (such as cleaning or chopping firewood), or by paying more attention to boys.

Education for boys can be an equally important driver of norm change. As with girls, education can give boys access to new knowledge and ideas about gender equality, encouraging respect for girls’ and women’s rights. It can enable them to see girls as competent and knowledgeable, challenging stereotypes about boys having greater innate abilities (Evans, 2014). The International Men and Gender Equality Study (IMAGES), which interviewed boys and young men in 10 countries, found that young men who have attended secondary school are much more likely to be supportive of gender equality than those who have only attended primary school (Kaufman et al., 2014). A case study from Viet Nam (see Box 1) shows how powerful educating boys can be as a driver for changing gender norms.

Figure 2 on the following page summaries how each of these drivers can either contribute to positive changes in gender norms or reinforce discriminatory norms.

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