

IS GENDER RELATIONS CHANGING IN THE 21ST CENTURY? WHAT ARE THE AREAS OF CHANGE AND THE FACTORS DRIVING IT?

Well if you ask me, gender relations is changing in the 21st century because a more considerable amount of focus has been placed on women in businesses, education, even a mouth piece in the society. And lesser focus in men in some areas in the world like Europe, American continents such as U.S.A, some parts of Africa like Rwanda which is the only African nation in top 10 list of countries fighting for women's rights, South Africa, etc. As time pass things change and change has taken place in this issue because people are beginning to notice that women can play a major role in the society and sometimes do it better than men.

These changes have occurred in areas such as education because women around the world are given more opportunities to pursue their education. In terms of marriage, the cases of early marriage has reduced a lot because people now see that women can play a better role in the society, unlike the past were they saw little use for women. In business enterprises – women now can ascend to the top offices in an organization, not like the past were this wasn't possible e.g. in the U.S.A, women are chosen to be head of police departments because they believe women are less likely to accept bribes than men. Even the military has changed its recruitment strategies has more nations now recruitment women to join the military around the world, nations like China, U.S.A, South Korea, countries in Europe, Rwanda, etc. Political areas has also been noticed cause women are voted more now into political offices than the 20st century, like the Scandinavian nations in Europe have the first ever female president in the world, Hilary Clinton almost won the election but lost by a small margin, then the Vice Chancellor of Germany, Angela Merkel. And finally, the growing rate of women being the bread winner in the family.

The factors driving these changes are Economic development, legal, policy and programme drivers, political activism and change. **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**: 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. 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. Our research findings reflect the role that broad economic developments can play in changing gender norms. Among communities in northern Vietnam, 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. 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. 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 mobilising for change. Typically this has involved a combination of approaches: challenging people to reflect on and change their own behaviour and attitudes, while mobilising 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

LEGAL, POLICY AND PROGRAMME DRIVERS 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 programmes 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 Vietnam, 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 programmes that present an alternative vision of gender relations. For example, our research in Hmong communities in Vietnam found that mass media (particularly TV) programmes 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.