WHAT WE KNOW (AND DO NOT KNOW) ABOUT PERSISTENT SOCIAL NORMS THAT SERVE AS BARRIERS TO GIRLS' **ACCESS**, **PARTICIPATION** AND **ACHIEVEMENT** IN **EDUCATION** IN EIGHT SUB-SAHARAN AFRICAN COUNTRIES

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INTRODUCTION

Despite progress in the establishment of national and international policies and conventions that aim to reduce gender disparities in education, the UNDP Gender Inequality Index (GII) shows that gender equality has been slowing in recent years (UNDP, 2020). The persistence of limiting and harmful social norms that have not been adequately addressed to date in girls' education programmes are thought to be at the heart of this phenomenon (UNDP, 2020).

Across sub-Saharan Africa, entrenched social norms curtail the expectations for girls, boys, women and men in terms of their education attainment and professional ambitions. These norms continue to drive disparities in investments in education for girls, particularly after primary school, and perpetuate discriminatory practices in schools and across the education system. If the gender gap in education is to be bridged, there is an urgent need to better understand the social norms that serve as barriers in access to quality education for girls and the reasons for their persistence (Osadan and Barrage, 2014). From there, there is another urgent need to ensure that messages are rooted in the culture and meaningfully include grassroots actors to create an irreplaceable understanding of the context, giving these actions the true potential, if adequately resourced, to influence change (Gordon et al., 2019).

In research that addresses gendered disparities in access to and quality of education, social norms are nearly always cited as a reason for barriers. Subsequently, in programmes and education strategies, interventions are devised to address these barriers, but they are often structural responses that include, for example, scholarships, cash transfers, teacher training, life-skills curricula, separate latrines or interventions attempting to address safety concerns (Kalamar et al., 2016). These are often coupled with awareness raising campaigns targeting parents and school communities. While structural programmes aimed at access are critical interventions that have demonstrated promise in closing the gap between girls' and boys' access to and quality of education, many countries have still observed slow progress (GEMR and UNGEI, 2015).

Evidence demonstrates that ensuring access to quality education for girls can slowly change social norms over time, but to ensure the initial access to education, methods to transcend limiting and harmful social norms are necessary.

Brown (2012) underlines how early marriage serves as a barrier to education for many girls and that the longer a girl stays in school tends to reduce the likelihood of early marriage and increase the age of first marriage for girls (see also Unterhalter et al., 2015; Walker, 2013; Winter and Macina, 1999). Education sector strategies also often cite phenomena like early marriage as major challenges, but do not link these with direct interventions to combat these practices that are driven by social norms, and which often fall out of the purview of the Ministry of Education's mandate (Walker, 2013). Yet, scholars like Walker (2013) argue that, given the important role early marriage plays in gender parity in education, ending early marriage should be an explicitly stated education goal.

Perhaps the last frontier of closing the gender education gap is finding ways to understand the reasons why some social norms persist, including early marriage, and at times seem

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to intensify over time. There is also a need to devise concrete plans to expand the perceived mandate of actors like ministries of education, in collaboration with civil society organizations and ministries of gender, to work together in combatting limiting and harmful social norms. In doing this, new strategies to improve awareness raising and find other methods to change and replace such social norms may be possible.

Launched in July 2019, the Gender at the Centre Initiative (GCI) was developed by the G7 Ministers of Education and Development in collaboration with multilateral and civil society organizations committed to advancing gender equality in education. The initiative is rooted in gender-responsive education sector planning (GRESP), an approach which has been developed and implemented by the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI) in partnership with the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) and with support from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP-UNESCO) and civil society partners. An initial eight countries in sub-Saharan Africa—Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria and Sierra Leone—have been invited to join the initiative and help further elaborate its initial design. UNGEI, which has been responsible for delivering the GRESP workshops, serves as the coordinator for the GCI Alliance and facilitates the approach in GCI partner countries and beyond.

A key part of the GCI design is to find appropriate strategies that can shift the gender landscape through the transformation of key social norms and related practices that create barriers to girls' education.

This paper is a literature review of existing studies on gendered social norms that serve as barriers to girls' education. The paper: 1) explores and documents social norms that impede girls' education access, participation and achievement in the eight partner countries; 2) identifies gaps in understanding the multi-level factors that serve to keep these social norms in place; and 3) proposes a research agenda and methodology to bolster practitioner understanding and to effectively inform the piloting of new ways in which multi-level factors can be disrupted so that communities and societies can transform in positive ways that will help them achieve gender equality in and through education.

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METHODOLOGY

A rich repertoire of research on social norms permeates the fields of sociology, anthropology, psychology and public health, among other disciplines (Vaitlan et al., 2017). Broadly speaking, social norms are contextually meaningful and influence behaviour by shaping what a group of people deem to be normal and acceptable. The need to conform to a social norm is contingent on a person's privilege, access to various forms of capital and is often linked with power and status and the rewards or punishments linked with complying or breaking the norm (Vaitlan et al., 2017). For the purposes of this paper, social norms are defined as ideals that create shared expectations and dictate informal rules among a group of people that influence how people should behave. Norms are reinforced via social approval and good standing in a community for the people in the group who adhere to them and ostracization and punishments for the persons who go against them (ODI, 2015).

While the term "norm" is often interchanged with practices, including early marriage, following the Overseas Development Institute's (2015) definition of social norms, norms should be distinguished from practices. Norms are the rules originating from social values governing overall behaviour, while practices, like early marriage, stem from these norms. For example, a social norm may be that sexual harassment is an acceptable way to communicate with young women and the resulting practice is that being catcalled in public is a common experience for women and girls and something they expect when they venture outside of their welcome spaces. In another example, the social values of men's superiority and woman's place being in the home creates a norm that it is acceptable for men to seek young girls for marriage; a resulting practice may be that girls abandon school to get married and have children at early ages. Understanding the differences between values, social norms and practices emphasizes how important it is to not only focus on practices, but to also tackle the underlying values that keep social norms in place and, crucially, to pay attention to who these norms benefit. This allows practitioners to tailor strategies for changing social norms that address all the converging factors and players, allowing those who are affected as well as those who are benefitting to embrace change.

In this paper, a review of existing literature on gendered social norms, the underlying values that keep them in place and the ways in which they affect access to quality education for girls was conducted by reviewing recent reports from international organizations, including the World Bank, non-governmental organizations and the UNDP's Gender and Social Norms Index reports, and a range of quantitative, mixed-method and qualitative studies mostly from the eight focus countries. Furthermore, the case studies in this review include an examination of each country's education and gender strategies, when available, to explore to what extent gender is prioritized and social norms are addressed in these documents.

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BROAD FINDINGS

Social norms that underpin gender biases are extremely prevalent globally. These social norms are reinforced from a young age and are deeply internalized by community members, including women and girls. They are deeply rooted in values that serve to endow power to men and boys and that perpetuate ideologies around femininity as being subordinate and submissive. Gender biases are taught across a wide range of societal structures, from homes to places of work and worship to schools. Why does this matter? Because biases manifest into various forms of discrimination against women and girls and fuel and justify many forms of violence against women and girls, including at schools. These social norms serve as major barriers to girls' education.

Multi-country studies demonstrate strong preferences toward sons in educational investments, among other male privileges globally (ODI, 2015). This results in 28.8 per cent of women versus 39.8 per cent of men possessing at least some secondary education in sub-Saharan Africa. Long-term repercussions of the lack of gender parity in education correlate to 63.5 per cent labour force participation among women versus 72.9 per cent among men (UNDP, 2020).

Women represent most of the unpaid workforce and son bias combined with the lack of belief (and subsequent investment) in girls' capabilities results in women's under-representation in higher remunerated fields, like science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). Furthermore, social norms that dictate that the appropriate positions for women are caregivers and homemakers and for men is breadwinner result in women's marginalization from decision-making at multiple levels. Being locked out of decision-making roles effectively limits women's opportunities and ability to make their own choices from the household level to the highest political levels, curbing their potential (UNDP, 2020).

In programmes that aim to understand and modify social norms, attention should be paid to concepts of post-colonial realities to avoid further marginalizing groups or creating resistance to new ideas that may be seen as something superimposed from the outside to replace norms and practices deemed as inferior (Vaitlan et al., 2017).

Given the deeply entrenched nature of social norms, Murphy-Graham and Lloyd (2016) argue that any education programme that wants to be successful must ensure certain "necessary conditions" to reach its objectives. To meet the conditions, programmes must pay attention to both structural and socio-cultural issues impeding access to education. The necessary conditions are:

a. the physical and socio-cultural environment needs to foster learning;

b. messaging and activities related to girls empowerment must underline their equal worth to that of their male peers; and

c. c) more than messaging is necessary and should include empowerment activities; these activities need to be practical and allow for girls and boys, as well as teachers, parents and community members, to practice and experience other ways of being and doing that differ from the traditional ways that hold girls back.

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To achieve the above, a solid understanding of the types of ideas the programme intends to change is required. To quantify social norms, a starting point is understanding their composition and on what to focus efforts that address them. The UNDP Gender Social Norms Index (GSNI)[1] examines seven indicators that correlate to political, educational, economic and physical integrity aspects of gender inequality (UNDP, 2020). The 2020 GSNI global stocktaking of these indicators, using data from 75 countries and covering over 80 per cent of the world's population, found that gendered bias is increasing. Qualitative research demonstrates that the gendered social norms that drive inequality are crucially reinforced through parenting and during the adolescent years. Schools are a key institution where these norms are produced and reproduced, often strengthening damaging stereotypes (Oviedo and Spurzem, 2019). To address gender disparities in education, it is necessary to look beyond schools alone and pay attention to the main practices that impede girls' access to quality education and then examine how and where the wider community perpetuates these norms. It is also necessary to determine if positive role models exist and if forums can be put in place to engage in dialogue in a safe and effective way to challenge and change the practices that stem from prejudicial social norms (Garforth, 2017).

The Advancing Learning and Innovation on Gender Norms (ALIGN) digital platform, led and curated by the Overseas Development Institute with support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, is increasing the understanding of what is effective in combatting harmful gender norms. Evidence from the ALIGN platform underlines the need to understand and engage aspirations of both girls and boys, as well as men and women, to challenge and disrupt the specific barriers that thwart the achievement of these aspirations by girls. Approaches that appear to be most effective in challenging harmful gender norms are those that work to transform underlying contexts, focusing on changing perceptions of what is condoned or disapproved and what is acceptable and promoted in a social group (through dialogue, media and other interactive methods). This involves identifying ways to replace a harmful or restrictive practice with a new one and ensuring there is adequate support and an enabling environment to effectuate change. It may also require advocating for new or revised laws and policies that can institutionalize change. A crucial component of successful programming is identifying and engaging persons with influence over children's and adolescents' lives, such as parents, community leaders, religious leaders and politicians (ALIGN, 2019).

Findings from a variety of ALIGN projects (in 2019) emphasize that change in social norms happens through reaching multiple players in a community, including those who serve to reinforce and benefit from harmful gendered social norms. ALIGN identified several prevalent practices and attitudes that stem from gendered social norms that serve as barriers to girls' education. These are:

- perceptions of girls' education as inappropriate or irrelevant;

- early marriage and pregnancy;

- housework commitments;

- the need for girls to work outside the home;

- girls' lack of aspirations and motivation linked with a lack of appropriate role models;

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- corporal punishment;

- religious and traditional concerns;

- gender-based violence and harassment;

- teacher bias against girls; and

- rites of passage.

Four groups were identified as powerful in the perpetuation of these deep-seated social norms and should therefore be targeted in any intervention aiming to address them—communities, households, schools and peers (both girls and boys) (ALIGN, 2019). Particularly promising approaches at the school level for recognizing and providing support to girls in the context of these social norms included: 1) creating 'safe spaces' for girls to receive one-to-one learning support from mentors and female teachers as a way to reinforce role models; 2) aiming activities at changing the behaviour of teachers in the classroom (particularly regarding forms of punishment, recognizing implicit bias and not perpetuating stereotypes); and 3) making schools more inclusive environments for girls (ALIGN, 2019).

However, it is critical to think beyond the school level when considering how to tackle social norms (Garforth, 2017; Jewkes et al., 2020). Community activism is one promising community-wide approach that can shift gendered social norms. For example, SASA![2] is an intervention that originated in Uganda to train and work with community activists over a long period of time to conduct culturally appropriate and contextually situated awareness-raising on gender inequality and violence (Michau, 2008). Another example is OXFAM Novib (2015), which trained activists in Mozambique, including teachers, and subsequently engaged community leaders to start broader discussions about gender norms, initiation rites and the place of girls in society and school.

Vaitlan et al. (2017) stressed the importance of understanding girls' aspirations when theorizing and subsequently formulating interventions that address barriers to access and quality of girls' education. They note that girls around the world continue to strive to realize various educational, personal and professional aspirations despite the social norms that often lead to discrimination and which may limit their opportunities and increase their exposure to various social and physical harms (Vaitlan et al., 2017). While centrally important, finding ways to ensure that girls' maintain and can continue to act on their aspirations remains an enigma for many programmes. The Taron ki Toli (Gang of Stars) project in India, for instance, conducted a randomized control trial of their robust programme to engage schools and communities in gender norms around adolescence and found that their interventions led to improvement in attitudes and behaviours regarding girls' education, but no significant changes came about in girls' aspirations which remained low in line of the broader lower expectations of girls dictated by gendered social norms. Yet, aspirations are the very things that often drive girls' performance at school.

Barriers to girls' education need to be conceptualized at the intersection of where their aspirations meet the obstacles erected by practices stemming from social norms, while also identifying the driving forces that keep these social norms in place. Additionally, Vaitlan et al. (2017) argue that safe spaces need to be created for community members that both perpetuate and are affected by these norms (including men and boys), so that they can come together and question the norms, hear about alternative visions that women and girls have for the future and understand the aspirations of those whom the norms are affecting. Community members then can

2   Sasa means "now" in Kiswahili.

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reflect on what can be changed. Interventions that do not include broader social networks, such as programmes that focus on awareness-raising or life skills for girls and that do not work to disrupt the systems that continue negative social norms, may help increase girls' awareness and resistance to social norms but are unlikely to achieve long-term change and can even inadvertently create backlash that materializes in the form of rejection of the programmes or even violence (Vaitlan et al., 2017).

Vaitlan et al. (2017) further find it useful to distinguish between types of social norms. There are norms that exist based on long traditions, those that exist based on a common concept that things have "always been done this way" (i.e. the case of female genital mutilation in most contexts) and norms that persist because some members of the group reap benefits from them (e.g., positions of power and those that give access to decision-making). Vaitlan et al. (2017) demonstrate through case studies of female genital mutilation in Senegal and child marriage in Guatemala the importance of identifying the type of social norm before adopting an approach to addressing it: is the intervention aiming to redistribute and disrupt power imbalances, or is it simply providing information and finding a compromise on how a norm can be revised so that it can still serve its societal need without marginalizing girls? The researchers identified four key processes that can effectively change harmful social norms. These are: 1) creating new relationships or altering existing relationships; 2) holding long-term and inclusive discussions that reframe what is considered appropriate and acceptable; 3) mutually exchanging information between groups that benefit from and are harmed by a social norm; and 4) promoting the possibility of alternative norms as a way to shift thinking.

It is also important to identify all the different groups that may be negatively affected by, and those that are less able to resist, social norms that serve as barriers to access to quality education. Another programmatic consideration, according to Kiellend et al. (2017), is the need to distinguish between structural and social factors that impede access to quality education. For example, many interventions to increase access to quality education for children with disabilities pay heavy attention to physical barriers on the way to and in schools, without taking adequate consideration of the social norms that may even question the worth of investing in sending child with disabilities to school (Humanity & Inclusion, 2021). Similarly, researchers have found it important to pay attention to variations in context, such as differences between rural and urban communities, when analysing social norms and the way they are understood and applied.

Programme strategies that can change or challenge social norms that affect gendered parity in education must incorporate three important concepts. The first is the need for capability development, which means expanding the repertoire of things people can do through learning and skills training (Nussbaum, 2003), thereby altering the aspirations of the learner by opening new possibilities (Marcus, 2018). Secondly, in order for learners to exercise these new skills and act the way one wishes, there is a need to foster individual agency. Marcus (2018) argues that capability development itself fosters agency by having a profound impact on aspirations, skills, abilities and self-confidence. Finally, empowerment is required to ensure that persons can exercise their agency, act toward their aspirations and gain more control over their life decisions (Marcus, 2018). All three components—capacity building, fostering agency and supporting empowerment—must be explicitly addressed to successfully shift gender norms.

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According to a World Bank study (2020), gendered social norms at the community and societal level are the main factors in either creating an enabling environment or creating impediments to girls' access to schooling. Marcus (2018) argues that opposing forces and opinions need to be explicitly addressed, including openly responding to concerns that the community may have, such as how an educated girl might affect her family's reputation or how education could reduce a girl's value on the marriage market.

As central venues of the community, school environments can both be affected by and promoters of social norms. School-related gender-based violence (SRGBV), for example, is a direct manifestation of the power imbalance between men and women in society. In another example, the acceptability of corporal punishment in schools both demonstrates and further promotes the acceptability of using violence to solve conflicts and reinforces the use of violence to establish who has power over others (Heslop, 2016). Key actors within school communities, such as teachers' unions, can be leveraged through engaging members to challenge gender stereotypes and promote a better understanding of the links between social norms and SRGBV. For instance, the UNGEI-supported Education Unions Take Action programme worked closely for four years with teachers' unions in sub-Saharan to increase their understanding of SRGBV and gender equality. Given their influential leadership positions, individuals reached by this programme were able to edify many teachers and school support staff through their regular union activities and communications with members.

Micro-level approaches focused on multiple layers have also proven effective. The Visionaria for Schools initiative in Cusco, Peru, worked through schools to understand and promote new aspirations as a way to try and shift gender norms and attitudes of teachers and students and to affect their subsequent behaviours and decisions (Oviedo and Spurzem, 2019). This initiative conducted building capability, promoted reflections around new aspirations and challenged the norm with those who had power. It underlined the mutual benefits of shifting toward investments in girls.

The GAGE programme adopted a multi-country mixed methods approach to better understand change pathways that could be leveraged within different contexts to promote alternative paths for adolescent girls (Jones et al., 2018). GAGE highlighted the importance of promoting women role models and of offering men and boys the opportunity to explore new masculinities. This programme worked with parents' groups, held community conversations and launched media campaigns to reinforce the societal value of girls (Jones et al., 2018). GAGE encouraged schools to become spaces that allow adolescent girls to practice leadership skills through the creation of school councils. Finally, the GAGE model found that if schools are transformed into equitable spaces with zero tolerance for sexual and gender-based violence and act as models for more egalitarian relationships, schools could nurture change in large numbers of children at once and, through effective linkages with parents, drive real change in social norms (Jones et al., 2018; Vaughan, 2016).

The studies referenced above provided a broad overview of what social norms are and show how social norms intersect with girls' access to and quality of education. Most of these studies emphasized that qualitative tools are essential for digging deep into understanding these norms, including their purpose and utility, what glues them in place and what could possibly (and sometimes does) disrupt them (Jones et al., 2019).

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COUNTRY SPECIFIC LITERATURE REVIEWS

This section provides examples of research into social norms that drive gendered disparities in access to quality education in the context of individual countries. These country examples shed light on what is known and which strategies have demonstrated promise in overcoming barriers. While statistics on disparities and policy contexts are touched on briefly, more thorough analyses are available elsewhere. This review primarily focuses on existing policies from the perspective of how they recognize and address (or not) social norms within different strategies to promote girls' access to quality education.

One area relevant to most of the countries discussed below is the existence and, in many countries, the revival of religious schools. The Education Quality Improvement Consortium underlines that these schools are influential in promoting often rigid social norms and should not be overlooked in programmes that work through schools to affect and promote new social norms (ALIGN, 2019). It should be noted that while typical discourse tends to link religious education with negative effects on gendered equity, the basis for this assertion is limited, except that it does appear religious education is often correlated with early marriage for girls (Kielland et al., 2007). In some West African contexts, religious education adheres more with traditional values or is seen to distance societies from post-colonial structures, making this type of education attractive to parents for both their girls and boys (Kielland et al., 2007). These institutions are often highly influential community structures. Yet, there is a paucity of research and practice focused on religious schools that informs how to effectively engage them in transformation of gendered social norms.

Burkina Faso

According to the Gender Social Norms Index 2, 85.85 per cent of persons surveyed in Burkina Faso hold at least two gender biases, with 33.20 per cent affirming the belief that university education is more important for men than women (UNDP, 2020). The various forms of social norms that dictate investments and attitudes toward girls create enormous barriers to completing education in Burkina Faso, with the primary barriers being early marriage, SRGBV and domestic work. Poverty also remains a key obstacle to girls' education, with preference for school-related expenditures reported as traditionally given to boys rather than girls (Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale, 2020). Ten percent of girls aged 20 to 24 are married by the age of 15 and 52 per cent of this population are married by the age of 18. Linked with early marriage, the national early pregnancy rate is 27 per cent. Female teachers constitute 47 per cent in primary school but only 17 per cent in secondary school.

These disparities are exacerbated by poverty and geographic location. Enrollment rates for all levels of education are significantly lower in rural compared to urban regions. In 2010, out-of-school rates in the Sahel region and the Eastern region were nearly three times as high as in the Central region, with poor children far more likely to not attend school (RESEN, 2017). Travelling long distances to and from school increases girls' risk of physical, psychological and sexual violence (Terlecki, 2019). In addition, girls who live in rural areas and girls who are poor are more likely to marry at a younger age. Girls living in areas of the country with mining activity experience higher drop-out rates. While the

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legal minimum age of marriage is 17 for girls and 20 for boys in Burkina Faso, the practice of early marriage in Burkina Faso is linked to traditional customs. Girls who marry young are more likely to drop out of school. On the other hand, every additional year of schooling reduces the risk of marriage before 18 by six percentage points (G7 Gender at the Centre Initiative, 2019).

Recognizing that gender is one of the central causes of disparity in access to education in the country, Burkina Faso developed the 2011-2020 National Education Strategy for Girls. Following this, in 2012, the government adopted the National Strategy for Acceleration of Girls' Education (SNAEF). The 2017-2030 Education Sector Plan further aims to continue improving education access and quality, particularly in remote and unsafe areas, and includes a specific objective to "eliminate gender disparities at all levels of the education system by 2025" (GPE 2020 Country Level Summative Evaluation, May 2018).

Werthmann (2009) underlined the importance of understanding the ways in which context intersects with gender norms, using the example of a gold mining boom town with income generating prospects which tended to attract girls and women from rural areas. Werthmann noted that this phenomena as a case study allowed practitioners to learn about ways in which women and girls negotiate their social norms, even sometimes risking ostracization and exposing themselves to high levels of exploitation and abuse. The stakes for women and girls negotiating their identity in a context in which they are expected to be hardworking, unselfish and to not express themselves or their desires comes with great risks, while boys, on the other hand, are expected to do anything they like without reproach.

A Population Council study on adolescence in Burkina Faso lent insight into the restrictions that social norms (particularly early marriage and expectations for pregnancy soon after marriage) place on girls in the country and the ways in which girls must work hard and risk much if they negotiate alternatives to what is expected of them (Brady et al., 2007). Brady et al. (2007) found great differences, however, in the ways these social norms manifest and affect girls' lives based on age, ethnicity, schooling status, urban or rural residence and if they were married or not. Because it is critical to understand the different realities of girls, their study emphasized the need to ensure that a diverse sample is used in research to inform tailored strategies and to be able to plan appropriate and meaningful interventions for all subcategories of girls. In terms of promising practices to respectfully challenge social norms while still upholding the important social reasons that they persist, Brady et al. (2007) underlined that the introduction of alternative rites of passage to adulthood hold great potential to reduce harmful practices (including female circumcision and early marriage), while still recognizing the cultural importance that these practices hold for women and girls, as well as men and boys, in communities.

Research in the economic and livelihoods sectors in Burkina Faso shed light on how and why social norms persist and offer promising approaches to disrupt these norms in ways that can improve girls' access to quality education. Researchers Kazianga and Wahhaj (2013) recognized that the head of household in Burkina Faso is most often male, thus men need to be engaged in making norm shifts as they hold enormous power and influence in the persistence of social norms, as well as control of overall resources. In fact, evidence suggests that in Burkina Faso, a mother's literacy has a positive effect on boys' education but has no effect on girls' education, while

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a father's literacy increases girls' education outcomes (Kazianga, 2009). This points to potential flaws in the theory of change and logic behind many interventions aimed at increasing women's literacy to improve girls' education rates; such interventions need to embrace men's engagement in girls' education for these to be wholly effective (Kazianga, 2009).

Kazianga et al. (2012) conducted an evaluation of the BRIGHT programme funded by the Millennium Challenge Corporation to see how this programme helped change underlying household decision-making related to investing in girls' human capital through sending them to primary school. The BRIGHT programme operated on the theory of change that infrastructure posed an enormous obstacle to girls' education and aimed to make schools more accessible, while also addressing the notion that formal schooling in Burkina Faso is often perceived to better meet the needs of boys than girls, based on the assumption that later in life girls will not participate in the broader economic sector outside the home to the extent that boys will. While Kazianga et al. (2012) found the BRIGHT programme addressed important barriers on the supply side, ensuring a more conducive physical environment for girls, few to no programme interventions addressed the underlying social norms, potentially jeopardizing the long-term success and impact of the programme.

Kazianga (2009) discussed the intersection of conflict and volatility with gendered social norms and how this intersection further exacerbates gendered disparities in education. He argued that as households faced more precarious income streams, they need to find ways to build buffers to deal with shocks. Using data from rural Burkina Faso, income uncertainty in households with few tangible assets, such as land and livestock (which are often owned by men with few precedents of women owning land or livestock without accessing it through a male relationship), equated to lower education expenditures per child, with a greater negative affect on girls in the household (Kevane and Gray, 1999).

Important links exist between situations of conflict and volatility and incidence of SRGBV. Spear (2019) conducted an innovative study using quantitative surveys to explore the role of teachers in allowing SRGBV to continue, including understanding their knowledge of SRGBV, their attitudes related to it and the barriers to reporting SRGBV in schools in Burkina Faso. The study found that many teachers were unaware of SRGBV, and an even lower number reported it to the authorities when they did become aware of it. Yet, the majority did not condone it, although some questions arose regarding if it were possible for a love relationship to develop between a student and a teacher and it appeared that women teachers tended to blame girl students more often than male teachers in such instances. Promisingly, most teachers did report that they felt they could be change agents to alter the culture of silence and acceptability around SRGBV, but they felt they lacked the tools and knowledge to do this. They also felt enormous pressure not to betray their fellow teachers (particularly challenging given the grey area around the acceptability of love relationships between students and teachers). This was identified as an opportunity for further training and support to teachers to change norms and attitudes in and around schools (Spear, 2019).

Hagberg (2002) put forward the important link between female role models as precedents toward aspirations and the links between the pathways that education creates in Burkina Faso, arguing that education is often linked with a pathway of becoming a civil servant. If this pathway is not deemed feasible,

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valuable or appropriate for girls, investments may not be made in enrolling girls in school. Furthermore, formal schooling is equated by some groups within Burkina Faso with moral decline and a disregard of indigenous knowledge. These can be discouraging factors for some families, causing them to not invest in girls' education, side by side with the social norm that a girl should be obedient. Parents may fear that a girl will break away from her expected role, become independent, and perhaps no longer listen to her parents or follow traditions (Hagberg, 2002). These fears need to be given due consideration in any effort to address social norms that serve as barriers toward girls' education in Burkina Faso.

Chad

Chad ranks 158th out of 160 countries in the UNDP Gender Inequality Index, a clear indication that Chadian women face many challenges. Linked with years of conflict, over a third of the population of Chad is undernourished and primary school completion rates are low, especially for girls. Forty-nine percent of primary school-aged children are out of school, with 52 per cent of girls and 45 per cent of boys out of primary school. Nearly 57 per cent of girls of secondary school age are out of school compared to 39 per cent of boys. Out of school rates are higher in rural areas. For example, less than 5 per cent of girls living in urban areas completed upper secondary school, compared to less than 2 per cent of girls in rural areas and less than 1 per cent of girls from low-income households. In 12 of the 20 regions in Chad, only 1 in 10 females could read, while in the rural Lac and Wadi Fira regions, female literacy rates were as low as 1 in 100 (UNESCO, 2020).

Thirty per cent of Chadian girls aged 20 to 24 are married by the age of 15 and 67 per cent of this population are married by the age of 18. The national early pregnancy rate is 11 per cent. In 2015, the president of Chad increased the legal minimum age of marriage to 18 for girls, but customary law marriages of girls starting at age 13 are still legal. Female teachers constitute a mere 20 per cent of primary school educators and only 11 per cent of secondary level educators. According to a 2018 Ministry of Education school survey, 8 out of 10 adolescent girls do not have adequate facilities and/or knowledge to effectively manage their menstruation (UNICEF, 2019). Early marriage, child labour (particularly in the agricultural sector) and regional instability and insecurity which equate to high levels of SRGBV present leading challenges for girls in accessing and staying in school (G7 Gender at the Centre Initiative, 2019).

In Chad, there is no specific policy related to gender equality in education, although Chad's Interim Education Sector Plan (2018-2020) discussed the need to address gender disparities in education access and achievement and aimed to lower literacy rates by strengthening literacy centres and introducing incentives for girls' school attendance. The National Gender Policy under the Ministry of Women, Early Childhood Care and National Solidarity makes specific mention of incorporating gender dimensions in school programmes and eliminating gaps in education. To tackle the issue of Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) in schools, the 2018-2030 Stratégie nationale de l'eau, de l'assainissement et de l'hygiène en milieu scolaire aims for more inclusive water, sanitation and hygiene programmes (WASH) in schools. This strategy includes the creation of separate sanitation facilities for girls and boys, the supply of feminine hygiene products for girls and other gender-responsive components.

Perhaps due in part to conflict and fragility in the region, there exists a gap in research on girls' access to education in

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Chad that goes beyond descriptive statistical studies. Yet there is a critical need to better understand the ways in which social norms place pressure on men and women to make life decisions and how the norms create barriers to the ability of women and girls to make their own choices. Vaz et al. (2015) underlined how, in Chad, social norms are deeply internalized by women and that measures to understand women's agency and decision-making need to take into consideration what women value and want. They argue that one must start by understanding values and aspirations and recognizing that these domains can change over time. In their findings, women hold little desire for autonomous decision-making in many domains, perhaps because they are socialized from an early age that this is not desirable or appropriate for them in the Chadian context (Vaz et al., 2015).

Watson et al.'s (2018) larger study on a range of social factors and conditions of refugees and host communities in areas of Chad with large numbers of refugees found that both refugees and villagers tended to favour boys education over girls because of social norms that devalued the importance of education for girls. Factors that linked with the choice to invest in boys (son preference) were poverty and limited means, girls' participation in household chores leaving little time for school, early marriage, early pregnancy and learning environments not adapted to girls' education, including those presenting high risks of SRGBV. Their study noted that awareness raising needs to be conducted in a culturally sensitive manner and is more effective if accompanied by community dialogue around stemming early marriage for girls and the promotion of successful women role models to challenge and transform deeply seated social norms of what a girl is capable of and what her role should be in the community.

Mali

In Mali, 93.36 per cent of the population hold at least two gender biases according to the Gender Social Norms Index 2, with 47.61 per cent of persons affirming the belief that university education is more important for a man than a woman (UNDP, 2020). Among reasons listed in the 2017 education sector analysis for why children had dropped out of school, 16 per cent of parents stated disinterest in education. While this reason ranked high for both genders, it was more significant for girls (19 per cent) compared to boys (12 per cent). This social norm is further observed through the disparities evident in Mali's education system. Nearly 61 per cent of girls of secondary school age are out of school compared to 50 per cent of boys in the same age category. Institutional and infrastructural issues, such as the lack of latrines separated by gender, further hamper girls' access. In Mali, 75 per cent of primary schools and 65 per cent of lower secondary schools do not have separate latrines for boys and girls, which can serve as a significant barrier for menstruating girls (République du Mali, 2017). Child labour, early marriage and insecurity drive Mali's high drop-out and out-of-school rates for girls. In Mali, 75 per cent of children between the ages of 5 and 17 work and many girls are sent away to do domestic work to support their families. These girls are often at high risk for economic exploitation, sexual abuse and violence, on top of having to abandon school. Furthermore, 52 per cent of Malian girls enter into early marriage and the national early pregnancy rate is 38 per cent. Further exacerbating these gendered inequalities, role models in the education sector are few, with female teachers making up only 31 per cent of primary school teachers and 14 per cent of secondary school teachers (G7 Gender at the Centre Initiative, 2019; GPE, 2020).

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Poverty, rural residence and residence in northern areas where conflict is prevalent in Mali also intersect to create barriers for girls' access to quality education. These barriers intersect with a range of social factors which are both driven by and continue to drive poverty and strained access to education for girls (GPE, 2020). The 2017 Education Sector Analysis showed that 11 per cent of parents of girls listed cost as a reason for their child dropping out of school, compared with 4 per cent of parents of boys. Children in rural areas have to travel longer distances to school, which can raise safety concerns for girls in particular. Eight per cent of parents of girls listed distance as a key reason for their child leaving school, compared to just 2 per cent for boys (République du Mali, 2017).

There is no current policy on gender and education in Mali, but the Ministry of Education is in the process of renewing a National Policy on Schooling for Girls from 2007. Mali's current education sector plan (ESP) is the Programme décennal de développement de l'éducation et de la formation professionnelle deuxième génération (PRODEC II 2019-2028). The country has a COVID-19 response strategy for schools entitled the Stratégie de lutte contre la pandémie du COVID-19 en milieu scolaire (2020).The Malian Interim Education Sector Plan (2015-2016) entitled Plan Intérimaire de relance du secteur de l'éducation et de la formation professionnelle (PIRSEF) was unofficially extended until 2018, after being developed as a transitional plan following a military coup in 2012. The plan focused on improving education access and quality for girls and ensuring retention, and the government took a stance to prioritize efforts to reduce gender disparities. However, despite these efforts, a need still exists to reinforce the capacity of key decisionmakers to better understand not only gender, but the social norms that drive gender disparities in order to adequately propose solutions to these challenges (GPE, 2020).

Aikman and Unterhalter (2005) found through their qualitative research that in Mali, similar to other countries covered in this literature review, there is a widely perceived low return on investment related to girl's education and a wide practice of son preference related to material investments in education. Two specific factors which further drive this is the expectation of early marriage and the perception that schools are high risk environments for different forms of exploitation and abuse of girls. Aikman and Unterhalter's research underlined the importance of including gender advocates in any strategy to address social norms to ensure that awareness raising is truly effective, noting failed interventions that relied on top-down policies (similar to the analysis of Cetorelli et al., 2020, in their analysis of the effectiveness of national policy or top-down approaches to drive change of social norms).

Pearce et al. (2009) observed that in Mali, like in many other contexts, the social and cultural barriers to girls' education were barely addressed, with priority placed first on the enormous structural deficits in the education system, including teacher training, distance to schools and infrastructure. Some of these structural deficits, particularly related to water, sanitation and hygiene infrastructure, are directly linked with impediments to girls' access to education. Trinies et al. (2015) conducted qualitative research in eight urban and rural schools including in-depth interviews with 26 girls and 14 teachers and school directors to determine the challenges facing girls' in Mali. They found that management of menstrual hygiene posed a significant challenge. Cultural beliefs in Mali oblige the proper disposal of menstrual hygiene materials, as it is widely believed that they can be used in the context of witchcraft. Linked with this social norm, girls emphasized the need for privacy as well as water and soap so that they can discreetly manage menstrual hygiene without being

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"discovered." When this is not available, girls' absenteeism may increase, further eroding the quality of their education and exacerbating existing disparities, particularly in the transition to secondary school as girls reach adolescence.

Further fueling a lack of perceived return on investment, many schools are perceived as "poor quality" or conflicting with traditional and religious (mainly Koranic) education. Pearce et al. (2009) suggested, similar to Aikman and Unterhalter (2005), that civil society organizations including NGOs, women's movements and parent associations, should be engaged as partners, promoters and eyes on the ground to provide feedback on perceptions of and confidence in the education system. This confidence is a critical ingredient to ensuring that parents invest in sending their children to secular schools. Rugh (2002) reiterated that programmes that address social norms that serve as barriers to education need to engage culturally appropriate and locally based partners (such as local media outlets) that can influence girls' access to education. One example from Rugh's (2002) evaluation indicated that engaging the media is an effective strategy to reverse harmful social norms by testing culturally appropriate messaging and ensuring widespread dissemination of these messages about girls' education.

Ahouissoussi et al. (2016), based on their evaluation of an OXFAM project to promote girls' transition from primary to secondary school in Mali, noted the need to directly identify and address power dynamics in social mobilization and awareness-raising strategies. They found this step was often overlooked in activities to empower women and girls and that inadequate attention was paid to the existing power imbalances that perpetuated social norms in the broader communities. While mothers' associations, girls clubs, training and awareness-raising for school staff and the identification of female role models are critical activities, by themselves they are incomplete and insufficient to address and change social norms, in the same way as Cetorelli et al. (2020) and Aikman and Unterhalter (2005) underlined that top-down strategies in isolation are insufficient. In the same vein, Lees et al. (2020) found that women's empowerment activities, notably cash transfers, were largely ineffective if power dynamics were not addressed. In a series of in-depth interviews with men and women in both monogamous and polygamous households it was found that decision-making regarding household-level decisions, including children's education, was undertaken by men with limited influence by women. Consequently, as noted above, social norms are unlikely to change if those holding power and decision-making (i.e. men and boys) are not meaningfully engaged.

Mauritania

In Mauritania, early marriage, lack of school infrastructure to accommodate girls, poverty and distance to school present the greatest challenges for girls to access and stay in school. Female teachers are rare, constituting only 38 per cent at the primary level and a lower 11 per cent at the secondary level. It is documented that 18 per cent of girls between the ages of 20 and 24 were married by the age of 15 and 37 per cent of this group were married by the age of 18. While the legal minimum age of marriage in Mauritania is 18, official law clashes with traditional customs. Furthermore, poverty and fear of out of wedlock pregnancy—as pregnancy outside of marriage is a crime in Mauritania— creates conditions that drive the social norm of early marriage to persist. Girls from poor households are nearly two times more likely to marry young than those living in wealthier households. Early marriage and lack of access to quality education are an interconnected, often double-edged sword. Women with no

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education were significantly more likely to be married as children (43 per cent as opposed to 22 per cent of women who had completed at least some secondary education) (G7 Gender at the Centre Initiative, 2019).

Mauritania has nonetheless made progress in recent years. Gender parity has been achieved at the primary level, but girls' enrolment in secondary education lags at only 45.9 per cent, particularly in rural and poor areas. The Mauritania Education Sector Plan (ESP) for 2011-2020 included a strategy to reduce the gender gap and improve the transition rates to secondary education for girls through demand- and supply-side interventions, including addressing the significant structural challenges facing the education sector in regard to school infrastructure and the availability of trained teachers. The ESP also articulated the aim to reduce gendered, geographic and socio-economic disparities. According to the ESP, it is estimated that deeply ingrained and widely accepted social norms drive 41-47 per cent of cases of out-of-school girls. School distance and risks of exposure to violence are specifically mentioned, in addition to early marriage, as significant barriers for girls (G7 Gender at the Centre Initiative, 2019; Mauritania Education Sector Plan, 2011-2020).

Mauritania's ESP (2011-2020) posits that parents and communities are not adequately engaged in their children's education. In an effort to engage communities to rally behind girls education, the plan specified the following activities: (i) awareness-raising campaigns to promote girls' schooling; (ii) organizing girls' graduation ceremonies and distribution of awards; (iii) awareness-raising training for teachers, inspectors and school directors in rural collèges regarding girls' rights to education; and (iv) distributing school material kits to girls enrolled in collèges de proximité. These activities were an opportunity to explore and instigate a discussion around social norms using some of the techniques mentioned in the initial section of this literature review.

However, a need exists to explore more deeply some of the questions related to why these social norms persist, who they benefit and how they can be modified with buy-in from those who benefit from their persistence in the Mauritanian context. Very few studies have been conducted in Mauritania exploring these questions. The World Bank (2015) explored gender and land tenure in Mauritania and found that women in Mauritania aspire to access land. While laws have improved in recent years to facilitate women's access to land, women still face many barriers because of social norms. The study found that in rural areas customary law trumps official law and patriarchal systems maintain women's subordination. The study also reiterated the vicious cycle between poverty, women's low status and education. Low levels of education serve as a barrier to accessing land, creating a reality in which because few women own land, a precedent is set that it is not possible, subsequently dampening women's aspirations. This can in turn lead to lower social expectations of girls and reduced motivation to educate them.

Cetorelli et al. (2020) selected Mauritania as a case study to explore the effectiveness of national policy to address social norms, using the example of the practice of female genital mutilation or cutting (FGM/C). They employed a quasi-experimental research design to compare the cases of Mali and Mauritania, two countries with similar practices of FGM/C, except that Mauritanian law banned the practice in 2005, while Mali has no legal framework discouraging the practice. Using nationally representative survey data between 1997-2011, the researchers found that in Mauritania FGM/C began to decline several years before the law, indicating that some shift in the acceptance of this social norm was

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already occurring, with a slight acceleration after the law was instituted in 2005. However, they found a similar pattern in Mali, indicating that the national legal framework was not the only factor in this declining trend (Cetorelli et al., 2020). The social mobilization strategies that led to the shift in these practices in both Mauritania and Mali are worth exploring as promising approaches to also address some of the barriers to education, such as early marriage.

Mozambique

Mozambique ranks 138th out of 160 countries in the UNDP Gender Inequality Index. Following a 15-year civil war that ended in 1992, Mozambique made great progress in rebuilding, including a notable commitment to education for all. However, three decades later, while 94 per cent of girls in Mozambique enroll in primary school, more than half drop out by the fifth grade and only 11 per cent continue to study at the secondary level. While Mozambique is doing well in some areas of gender equality, women still face many challenges.

Impressively, Mozambique has the thirteenth highest level of women's participation in parliament in the world, and yet a third of women report experiencing violence. Forty-eight per cent of girls enter into early marriage and the national early pregnancy rate is 46 per cent. According to a 2008 report compiled by the Mozambique Ministry of Education and Culture, many of these pregnancies are not consensual and girls are impregnated by teachers who ask for sexual favours in exchange for passing grades. The report, entitled "Mechanism to stop and report cases of sexual abuse of girls," found that 70 per cent of female students said a teacher had asked them for sexual favours in order to pass.

In a study conducted in 2013, 29 per cent of girls in Mozambique reported being caned, whipped or made to kneel for extended periods of time, and many of these incidents occurred in schools. The Ministry of Education has acknowledged the problem of gender-based violence and sexual abuse in schools and its consequences, including high drop-out rates among girls (Van Deijk, 2007). In 2018, the Mozambican government fired 124 teachers for suspected sexual harassment.

Female teachers constitute 45 per cent in primary schools but only 31 per cent in secondary schools. Like other case study countries, gender inequities intersect with geographic disparities, with higher rates of female literacy in Southern provinces compared to their Central and Northern counterparts. Girls in rural areas, particularly those from low-income households, are at a comparatively higher risk for underperforming, failing and dropping out of school entirely (G7 Gender at the Centre Initiative, 2019). The impact of natural disasters has further exacerbated this situation in Mozambique. Cyclones in 2018 destroyed thousands of classrooms and schools (UNICEF, 2019) and increased droughts have forced girls to walk longer distances in search of water and food, reducing opportunities for studying and education.

The Mozambique 2012-2016 Education Sector Plan included a Gender Integration Action Plan. This action plan promoted earlier school enrollment, building schools to decrease distance to schools and increasing the number of female teachers. Mozambique's current education sector plan (ESP) is the Plano Estratégico da Educação (PEE) 2020-2029. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic and for post-cyclone recovery, the country issued an emergency response plan for the education sector in 2020 called the Programa

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de Educação em Emergência (EeE) 2020-2021. Mozambique also developed a gender in education strategy for 2016-2020, the Estratégia de Género do Sector da Educação e Desenvolvimiento Humano Para o Período 2016-2020, outlining the main medium-term actions to foster gender equality in education. Furthermore, the Ministry of Education in Mozambique has recognized the need to focus on gender in curricular reform, and work to integrate gender across education policies and plans is ongoing (GPE 2020 Country Level Summative Evaluation, July 2019).

Gender inequality is deeply rooted in the Mozambican context. Arora (2014) used time-use data from a primary household survey to examine the extent of and difference in 'time poverty' experienced by men and women in subsistence agricultural households in rural Mozambique. They found that gender roles shaped by social norms rooted in patriarchal values placed heavy work obligations on women. While their labour allocation from outside economic activities was comparable, like in many parts of the world, woman bore a heavy burden of domestic labour. Furthermore, their study found that higher levels of education for women did not seem to affect this reality (Arora, 2014). Evident in adulthood, this trickles down to the responsibilities and expectations of girls in these households.

Given the high levels of SRGBV cited as a barrier to girls' education in Mozambique, Parkes et al. (2013) employed a mixed methods baseline study for a multi-country project that included Mozambique to analyse how social norms and acceptance of violence at the individual, community and institutional level, and the interactions between these levels, is critical to understand and address this barrier. The research team argued that it is important to identify the economic, socio-cultural, political and educational structures that create conditions conducive to the production of violence against girls in the education sector, using a quasi-ecological model. At the centre of the model, they argued for identification of the everyday interactions in girls lives in which they experience and resist violence. Exploring SRGBV in this way helped to identify the ways in which social norms around gender and the acceptability of violence influence girls' propensity to report violence, as well as their families' interpretations of this violence. Because violence was so widely accepted, similar to Reilly's (2014) findings, many families blamed the girl for provoking it. Furthermore, girls reported fears of reporting violence for shame or reprisal from their teachers (Parkes et al., 2013). Looking at this social norm in its broader context revealed the depth of acceptability of violence as a part of the education landscape and highlighted the need to ensure multi-level approaches to challenge and change these perspectives.

Parkes et al. (2016) argued in a later study that programmes that address SRGBV can be enriched through understanding the ways that girls experience flagrant barriers to school, like sexual violence in their world and contexts. They underscored that in the context of formal schooling, girls' worlds and contexts need to be understood as realities that include features of both "modernization" and "tradition." One example they provided was the way in which transactional sex was perceived by some girls as a modern replacement of the bride price and the transactional aspects of traditional marriage, and a replacement that seemed to work better in contexts in which fathers migrated for long periods of time resulting in girls needing to find other ways to continue schooling. This also served as a way of re-negotiating the idea that girls' primary role should be to conduct domestic work for adolescent girls who actively sought alternative futures

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through transactional sex. Further examining the effects of the ActionAid Stop Violence Against Girls project in this context, Parkes et al. (2016) found that traditional chaste values were being promoted by the project at the same time that it was pushing society toward modernity and away from harmful cultural practices through an emphasis on girls' rights to education, safety and autonomy. This inadvertently led to confusing and conflictual messaging, subsequently pushing girls to two opposite sides of the tradition-modernity poles that they were already actively trying to renegotiate in their contexts. It was felt that the project could have benefitted greatly from building on and continuing dialogue from the existing negotiations that adolescent girls were undergoing (Parkes et al., 2016).

Figueroa et al. (2016) further examined the perspectives of schoolgirls in Mozambique to situate the contexts that serve to solidify the persistence of widespread acceptability of sexual exploitation and abuse. The toxic combination of patriarchal norms and the need for material support was found to push young women to seek men to provide support for them and created challenges also with negotiating condom use (Figueroa et al., 2016). This is complicated by the idea that women should not question male authority and be subservient. These behaviours have direct effects on girls' education, as men often provide the material support needed to continue education, however, this simultaneously increases the girls' risks for sexually transmitted infections and pregnancies that hamper girls' access to education. Any intervention to effectively support adolescent girls to remain in school needs to understand the social norms and economic circumstances that push them to engage in risky behaviour if these norms and behaviours are to be effectively challenged or replaced with alternative means to meet girls' needs (Figueroa et al., 2016).

In the context of limited gendered expectations linked with patriarchal social norms and high risks of SRGBV at schools, many parents and caregivers in Mozambique express skepticism about the benefits of their children's education (Roby et al., 2009). Sending girls to school runs the risk of going against public opinion and ostracizing both the girl and the family. Similar studies to Roby et al.'s (2009) survey in Mozambique demonstrated similar manifestations of the ways in which gendered disparities in education were socio-culturally enforced (Lind, 1992; Stromquist, 1991).

Bandali (2011) suggested that on top of understanding the ways that social norms affect the lived experience of girls, research can also identify ways in which those with power, namely men, are reconstructing gender norms. Research can highlight how good examples can be leveraged to change the narrative and link these reconstructed gender norms with maintaining a good social standing by emphasizing how men are providing better for their families by doing so. Enguiz and Groenbaek (2020) presented a project that seemed to be effective in changing gender biases and social norms around expectations of women and labour in urban Mozambique. This project trained and supported women to enter the labour market, effectively allowing the men they worked alongside and the persons who observed their successful construction projects to change their perceptions of what women can and cannot do. Before the intervention, 50 per cent of the young women in the group believed that men were better than women at doing manual labour. After the project 83 per cent of men and women surveyed disagreed with this statement. This demonstrates the power of setting precedents with positive deviants and female role models, especially in situations that allow collaboration with men.

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Finally, in terms of strategies to reach different populations by working with non-traditional actors rather than just NGOs, similar to the GAGE programme, Riley (2017) found that in Mozambique the entertainment-education industry can be highly influential in changing social norms in culturally appropriate, contextualized ways with wide diffusion possibilities. This strategy was particularly effective with adolescent girls. The entertainment-education industry produced television shows that engaged girls in contextually appropriate dialogue. These television shows also created alternative scenarios to be presented and discussed by a broader audience to ascertain their feasibility to pilot. However, this approach requires significant time and financial investment (Riley, 2017).

Niger

In Niger, only 54 per cent of girls in primary school reach sixth grade, and almost 81 percent of secondary school-aged girls are out of school compared to 70 per cent of boys the same age. Child marriage, early pregnancy, inadequate school infrastructure, school distance, scarcity of teachers and societal perceptions of girls' and women's roles contribute to stark gender inequalities in education in Niger (G7 Gender at the Centre Initiative, 2019).

With a majority of the population living in rural areas and a significant nomadic or semi-nomadic population, many children in Niger must travel long distances to school. This can be a barrier to education for girls in particular, as girls are more susceptible to violence and abuse while travelling these distances to and from school. A lack of sanitation at schools has implications for the management of menstrual hygiene and 40 per cent of girls surveyed in a study of four regions in Niger reported having missed school at least once due to their periods (UN Women and WSSC, 2017). As in many countries across the region, discrimination against women and harmful stereotypes are pervasive at all levels of Nigerien society. This translates to 76 per cent of girls entering early marriage in Niger and an early pregnancy rate of 40 per cent. Females constitute 53 per cent of teachers in primary school but only 22 per cent in secondary school (G7 Gender at the Centre Initiative, 2019).

Leadership at higher levels to transform social norms has in the past been unforthcoming. The government of Niger expresses reservations on Article 5 of the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)[3] which challenges gender stereotypes, particularly those based on broad acceptance of women's subordination. Niger also has reservations on Article 16 of CEDAW prohibiting forced child marriage.[4] The Government declares that such provisions cannot be applied immediately as they are contrary to existing customs and practices which, by their nature, can be modified only with the passage of time and the evolution of society and cannot, therefore, be abolished by an act of authority (UN Treaty Collection, 2021).

Niger has no specific policy focusing on gender equality in education, however the Niger Education Sector Plan (2014-2024) and national gender policies account for and acknowledge the importance of addressing gender parity in education, with the ESP

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3 Article 5, paragraph (a). The Government of the Republic of the Niger expresses reservations with regard to the modification of social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women.

4 Article 16, paragraph 1 (c), (e) and (g). The Government of the Republic of the Niger expresses reservations concerning the above-referenced provisions of article 16, particularly those concerning the same rights and responsibilities during marriage and at its dissolution, the same rights to decide freely and responsibly on the number and spacing of their children and the right to choose a family name.

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prioritizing access and retention as well as increasing social demand and broader acceptance for educating girls. Furthermore, in 2018 the President of Niger announced to the African Union that some specific programmes to address gender inequality would be developed, including making school mandatory and more accessible for girls up to age 16. The potential national strategy to accelerate girls' education announced in 2019 aims to make access, quality, governance and education and training in emergencies fundamental pillars of national policies on girls' education. It also considers the problem of child marriage, social norms, the difficulty of keeping girls in school and the inadequacy of educational provisions for out-of-school girls and those in emergency situations.

While observations of social norms and discrimination against women and girls and the harmful practices that result from these are well documented in Niger, more information that explores these in depth, such as the following studies, would be useful. Greany (2008) conducted four months of qualitative fieldwork in Niger to understand the ways in which universal rights-based discourses on girls' education are understood and how they influenced attitudes and behaviour in Niger. Greany (2008) astutely pointed out that international goal setting and relatively vague goals alone are not going to instigate enormous change in the country when the underlying social norms and structures that serve as barriers to school remain unaddressed. Furthermore, she found that important stakeholders in the programmes evaluated interpreted notions of rights, gender and education in vastly different ways, and that the interpretation of what universal education means and how it pertains to girls is wide-ranging and dynamic. Even two programme staff from the girls' education programme articulated and understood girls' rights in the Nigerien context in different ways. Greany (2008)

argued that for any awareness raising or social mobilization action to address social norms to be effective, stakeholder understanding of the rights to be addressed needs to be examined.

Hartman-Mahmud (2011) explored the ways in which the importance (or lack thereof) of different kinds of education manifested in the Nigerien context. Using in-depth interviews with Nigerien women, the author found that Nigerien women valued formal schooling for their girls in principle, but in practice they were often discouraged by a perceived incompatibility between formal education with tarbiyya (education in the home) and mahamadiya (Islamic education). Hartman-Mahmud (2011) argued that recognizing these tensions and the post-colonial context they are rooted within is essential to adapting programmes that allow Nigeriens to encourage formal education for their daughters without compromising their traditional values. Echoing Greany (2008), Hartman-Mahmud (2011) argued that universal girls' rights and education programmes can inadvertently sideline and seemingly push aside as unimportant other traditional values, which in a post-colonial context evidently can lead to lack of buy-in. Furthermore, doing this disregards the opinions of what constitutes a quality education to different Nigerien communities. Thus, programmes need to understand how education can be adapted in a culturally appropriate manner to be more appealing to families through integrating important aspects of the religious, cultural and material context in which schools are embedded. If education programmes are not adapted to local socio-cultural contexts, the result can be the impression that formal education is in opposition to values learned at home, and girls and communities can end up confused by these seemingly competing values (Hartman-Mahmud, 2011).

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Perlman et al. (2018) explored girls' education through a mixed methods study employing quantitative surveys and qualitative in-depth interviews to understand why girls drop out of school at adolescence. They found that adolescence was a critical time period during which pressure increased for girls to contribute to economic activities in their households, but also during which adolescent drop out and child marriage increased in an attempt to marry girls off before they became pregnant. Marriage and childbearing are emphasized as important rites of passage to achieving status for adolescent girls in Nigerien society, and there are few female role models that demonstrate alternate paths to status, particularly in rural areas.

Linked with early marriage, early pregnancy is a main practice driven by social norms and expectations for girls that hampers access to education in Niger. Samandari et al. (2019) conducted a qualitative study with adolescent girls, husbands of adolescent girls, influential adults, community leaders, healthcare providers and positive deviants in the Zinder region of Niger, examining barriers to delaying first births and imagining different futures among married adolescent girls. This study explored the social, individual and structural factors that influenced early first births or their delay to continue to pursue education and other economic pursuits. They found that knowledge building and awareness raising efforts alone were largely insufficient to address this practice. In fact, many of the research participants recognized the health benefits of delaying first birth, but the stigma around infertility and the devaluation that can place on a woman, the stigma around contraceptive use and a fatalistic idea linked with religion that the timing of a child was "God's will" interfered with the actual ability to delay first births. Thus, the study pointed to the importance of engaging religious leaders and further exploring alternatives to

early childbirth among married adolescent girls in Niger.

Like many countries, the importance placed on marriage for girls and women in Nigerien society, and the related concerns about avoiding becoming pregnant out of wedlock, create anxiety and pressure for Nigerien parents to marry off their girls before they begin sexual relations. Because formal schooling is seen as an environment with risks of sexual exploitation and the teaching of "different" values, the result can be the impression that marriage (critically important in the Nigerien context) and education are in a conflictual relationship (Hartman-Mahmud, 2011). However, several of the women interviewed in Hartman-Mahmud's (2011) study indicated that married girls could continue to go to school, and several informants suggested that school should also not keep girls from getting married. These ideas merit further exploration, particularly if there is the possibility for girls over aged 18 who get married to continue to go to school as a solution that may be more palatable to many Nigeriens than having to choose one or the other.

Nigeria

According to the Gender Social Norms Index 2, 94.99 per cent of people surveyed in Nigeria reported at least two gender biases. While the percentage was lower for education-related biases, a stark 46.8 per cent of persons surveyed suggested that university is more important for a man than a woman—a key indicator used for detecting gender bias in the education domain (UNDP, 2020). These biases translate into enormous gendered disparities in the education sector and society, including a large gendered pay gap which may further discourage families from investing in girls' education as they see a limited return on investment (Kainuwa and Mohammad Yusuf, 2013).

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The situation of girls' access to education varies across states and between rural and urban areas in Nigeria, which is a large, diverse and decentralized country. For example, Osadan and Barrage (2014) astutely underlined that a poor Hausa girl living in a rural area only averages 0.3 years of education for every nine years of education for an urban Nigerian girl. While throughout the country, the education of boys is often favoured and girls are responsible for a disproportional number of domestic chores (Kainuwa and Mohammed Yusuf, 2013; Ajala and Alonge, 2013), this is more prevalent in rural areas where early marriage of girls may be a way of alleviating the resource burden for poor families (GPE 2020 Country Level Prospective Evaluations, April 2019). Finally, inadequate water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities in schools constitute key barriers to education for girls, particularly with regard to menstrual hygiene (UNICEF, 2015). In addition, many girls lack basic knowledge about puberty and menstruation, the consequences of which include poor concentration, school absenteeism, self-exclusion, self-restrictions and discomfort around peers, as well as early pregnancy and school dropout. Consequently, strategies to address access to and quality of education for girls need to be tailored, focused and culturally appropriate even within the same country, avoiding a national one-size fits all approach.

Quality data in Nigeria is hard to come by, and the education statistics that are available are rarely broken down by state. When using data that is available, it is important to remember and watch for hidden disparities. In Nigeria, 44 per cent of girls are married before they turn age 18, 18 per cent are married before the age of 15 and the national early pregnancy rate is 32 per cent, with low contraceptive use nationwide. The legal age for marriage is unclear, ranging from 12 to 21 years old and conflicting across several official and traditional laws. Nigerian law protects the right of pregnant girls to remain in and return to school, but there are no clear policies to guide this, so in practice this law is not always enforced. Although female teachers are widely recognized as crucial to ensuring access to quality education for girls, only 48 per cent of primary and secondary teachers are women. Furthermore, insecurity across Nigeria, particularly in the North which hosts large numbers of refugees and internally displaced persons, has further limited access to education as many parents and children fear for their safety at schools (G7 Gender at the Centre Initiative, 2019; GPE 2020 Country Level Prospective Evaluations, April 2019). School-related physical and/or sexual violence impacts many students in Nigeria. In 2014, an estimated 44 percent of female students and 35 per cent of male students experienced one or more forms of physical and sexual violence perpetrated by teachers and/or classmates. Female students experience higher rates of both physical and sexual violence at the hands of teachers and are more likely to subsequently miss school (Together for Girls, 2021).

Even though data overall is limited and unreliable, the Government of Nigeria is aware of and actively trying to address gendered disparities in the education sector. Nigeria has a federal-level Ministerial Strategic Plan (MSP 2018-2022) for the education sector. However, sector planning is largely driven at the state level, typically through the formulation of ten-year state strategic sector plans. Nigeria also issued two response plans for its education sector in 2020 to address the COVID-19 pandemic: (i) the Education Sector COVID-19 Contingency Plan (ESCCP); and (ii) the Nigeria Education Sector COVID-19 Response Strategy in North-East (NESCRSN) covering Adamawa, Borno and Yobo states. The most recent national policy related to

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gender in education is the National Gender Policy in Basic Education published in 2006, which is currently in the process of being reviewed.

In 2020, IIEP-UNESCO, in partnership with the World Bank, supported the federal government and three (decentralized level) states to analyze the education sector from a gender perspective. The gender analysis was integrated into the forthcoming Education Sector Analysis (ESA) at federal and state levels, with a chapter dedicated to gender equality (G7 Gender at the Centre Initiative, 2021).

It is unclear to what extent Nigeria's education policies apply to the large number of students attending unregistered private and Koranic schools (enrollment information is not available for these schools). Recent data place the number of out-of-school children nationally at 13.5 million, making Nigeria home to the world's largest population of out-of-school children (GPE 2020 Country Level Prospective Evaluations, April 2019).

While statistical data from large surveys and national programmes helps paint a broad picture of gendered disparities in education, case studies and research from mostly qualitative studies shed further light on which social norms in particular may contribute to these disparities and the reasons for the persistence of these norms. Kainuwa and Mohammad Yusuf (2013), for instance, revealed that girls' value is often perceived as caregivers of children, potential marriage material and economic burdens on the family until getting married despite girls' work doing domestic chores. The heavy emphasis on marriage discourages families from investing in girls' education as the return on investment is considered low as girls will eventually become part of someone else's household. Okakwu's (2007) extensive research on gender and education in Nigeria

corroborates this, and she notes a proverb in many parts of Nigeria that says, "educating a daughter is like watering another man's garden."

Ogakwu (2007) dives further into the emphasis on marriage, finding that one reason for the persistence of early marriage as a social norm in many parts of Nigeria is the stigma around early pregnancy (many girls lack access to contraception). Families may therefore try to marry off a daughter before she gets pregnant to ensure a good bride price. Ogakwu (2007) reports that not only are girls' aspirations hampered, but they are not accustomed to being asked about their aspirations or encouraged to pursue anything other than fulfilling their place as a future wife.

Okoli (2007) further underlines that research itself has marginalized the voices and aspirations of women in Nigeria, as they are rarely asked about their experiences accessing or being denied education. Okoli (2007) led a phenomenological qualitative study in Nigeria with 24 (12 educated and 12 nonliterate) Nigerian women purposefully selected to be representative of the three major ethnic groups and geopolitical sub-contexts in the country. She found overlapping and diverging themes related to the ways gendered social norms were experienced to access or deny education for these women. The nonliterate participants said their parents lacked information on the value of education, that men were generally more valued in their communities and that from an early age their role was reinforced as a wife, so they all entered early marriage. These factors accounted for their lack of access to education. The other 12 women said they received an education, but that it was always a struggle. In particular, they reported that even in middle-class families men often perceive educated women as a threat and

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women often lacked emotional support from their family and significant others while pursuing educational goals. They recounted that many friends and other women they know abandoned pursuing further education for these reasons.

Based on her analysis from years of research in the sector, Ogakwu (2007) suggested that not only is a long-term and concerted effort to reframe household attitudes and ideas about girls' potential needed, but these efforts should be accompanied by high-level political campaigns with buy-in from influential local leaders as a way to reinforce the value of education for girls and to restrict early marriage. Yet, she notes that political commitment at most levels of government in Nigeria has been lacking, demonstrated by the fact that the persons sanctioned or punished in the education system are not those who violate laws related to marriage, but are often the girls who are pushed out of school because of early pregnancy.

The Voices for Change (V4C) (2017) programme is an example of a promising approach in line with Ogakwu's (2007) guidance. V4C engaged multiple layers of society to promote young women's empowerment in Nigeria. V4C targeted young men and women (aged 16-25) through a range of activities that challenged deep-seated gender biases and established in person and digital platforms to engage youth in debate and to diffuse alternative thinking around these biases. V4C allowed those affected by these biases (positively and negatively) to create and brand their own strategies to change social norms using culturally and contextually appropriate concepts and language. The branded messages with alternative gendered realities created by these key societal constituents were widely diffused by engaging influencers, such as religious and traditional leaders, radio stations and their hosts and men and boys.

Sierra Leone

The Government of Sierra Leone has made conscious efforts to improve the situation of women and girls across the country, including the launch and adoption of a Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Policy, the implementation of the Free Quality School Education Program and the Girls Access to Education Program, as well as an Education Sector Plan for 2018-2020 which includes strategic efforts to increase access to and quality of equity for girls, particularly parity in enrollment and retention, infrastructure, tuition support, scholarship programmes, re-entry for teenage mothers and safety. In 2020, the country put forward its COVID-19 Education Emergency Response Plan (CEERP), which includes efforts to address the specific vulnerabilities and needs of girls. In 2020, the Government of Sierra Leone published its Education Sector Analysis (ESA) which, for the first time, included a chapter devoted specifically to gender analysis (Republic of Sierra Leone ESA, 2020).

Yet, girls still fall behind in access to quality education in Sierra Leone. In fact, 39 per cent of girls enter into early marriage and the national early pregnancy rate is 35 per cent. Females constitute only 27 per cent of the teachers at the primary level and even less at secondary level, at 14 per cent (G7 Gender at the Centre Initiative, 2019).

Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2017 data shows 39.6 per cent of boys and 38.4 per cent of girls aged 5-17 are involved in some form of child labour, with boys more likely to be involved in economic activities and girls more likely to be responsible for household chores. Data also indicates that intersectionality between gender, poverty, disability and location significantly exacerbates inequalities. For example, in poor rural areas, girls achieve less in terms of education (almost by half) than boys (Republic of Sierra Leone ESA, 2020).

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Despite these challenges, Sierra Leone has made substantial progress in gender equality of schooling, with a Gender Parity Index (GPI) of one at the primary school level, though the GPI declines after primary school with the starkest disparities observed at the Senior Secondary School level. Related to quality, girls tend to be adversely affected by repetition and in remote rural areas it has been observed that some girls begin schooling at age 8 instead of the official starting age of 6. School-based learning assessments reveal that boys outperform girls in both English and Math, and the gap in their performance appears to widen as they advance in grade levels (Republic of Sierra Leone ESP 2018-2020).

Many of Sierra Leone's national initiatives, as well as the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affair's twin policies – the National Policy on the Advancement of Women and the National Policy on Gender Mainstreaming - primarily focus on addressing economic structural barriers related to costs to encourage parents to enroll their daughters in school. While the patriarchal nature of Sierra Leonean society is often cited in these policies, few to no interventions explicitly focus on how this will be addressed despite being cited as an impediment. Recognizing this, the European Union is working with the Government of Sierra Leone to develop a National Gender Strategic Plan in which they aim to support the education sector and promote some activities to address gender bias in curriculum as well as SRGBV.

Further hampering access to and quality of education, SRGBV, in particular sexual exploitation in the form of exchanges of sex for grades at school, remains widespread across the country. Reilly (2014) examined girls' perceptions of sexual exploitation and other forms of SRGBV in Sierra Leone and explored why this phenomenon is so hard to

change. Like in contexts around the world, the causes of SRGBV are entrenched in deeply rooted social norms around gender. Reilly underlined that not only were violence, abuse and corporal punishment widely accepted realities of the school environment in Sierra Leone, but also that these gendered social norms led to more subtle forms of psychological violence reinforcing girls submission and inferiority in the classroom and wider society. For these reasons, Reilly (2014) also found instances where the blame for sexual exploitation and other forms of SRGBV is often turned on the girl with the excuse that she provoked it and portraying the male teacher as a victim who could not control himself because of that provocation. Reilly (2014) emphasizes the need for any intervention addressing girls' education to address harmful gendered social norms head on, including finding ways to reduce SRGBV because of its wide acceptance inextricably linked with the socio-cultural context, poverty and a broader context of violence.

Save the Children's School Me! Project in Sierra Leone worked at the household, community and school level to address SRGBV. The project adapted the Gender Equity Movement in Schools (GEMS) approach to explore the relationship between gender attitudes, contexts and learning outcomes. The project's robust monitoring and evaluation approach identified the following factors as associated with adherence to unequal gender norms: child gender (males), physical violence against women in the household and unequal peer gender norms.

The project identified the ways in which SRGBV and gender attitudes are associated with learning outcomes, noting that greater female participation in household decision-making is associated with a greater likelihood of girls being able to read and that physical violence against women in the household is

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negatively associated with self-concept, even when controlled for socio-economic factors. The project also conducted a two-level evaluation of teachers' attitudes. Through direct classroom observations, the evaluation team noticed no differences in girls' motivation and ability as compared to boys, yet in individual interviews with teachers, the teachers perceived stark differences in these factors between boys and girls.

Brock and Cammish (1997) conducted an earlier multi-country study which included Sierra Leone during which they interviewed key school personnel, consulted local archives and undertook two surveys to explore the views of gender and education held by primary school students and women training to become primary school teachers. Through their research they identified nine principal factors that affected girls' participation in education across multiple countries, with socio-cultural barriers being identified as one of these factors. Specifically, they found a nearly ubiquitous socio-cultural bias in favour of boys and a clear perceived return on investment when supporting boys' education. Strong correlations were also found with the status, power and attitudes of fathers as the key gatekeepers to schooling of their daughters. The researchers emphasized that men, in particular fathers, need to be engaged if social norms are to effectively change, but this means that the cultural costs of change (such as sanctions on families that defy norms) need to be discussed openly

with solutions sought. Importantly, Brock and Cammish (1997) underlined that women role models are in short supply because of these deep-seated social norms that serve as barriers to girls' education. While there are now more women role models that can be capitalized on, there is still a long way to go in this regard.

Brock and Cammish's (1997) emphasis on the need to engage men still rings true today across many girl's empowerment programmes globally. Mocan and Cannonier (2012) found that a programme that aimed to increase access to education by improving women's attitudes toward reproductive health and violence against women decreased the number of children born to the women and increased their likelihood of using contraception. However, they also found that while education levels tended to make women generally more intolerant of social norms that impede girls' access to education and overall well-being, these programmes often had little to no impact on men's attitudes toward girls' education and women and girls' well-being. While it is important to empower women to not accept negative social norms and to link this agency and choice with the creation of a new cadre of role models, it is imperative to consider men if this change is going to be sustainable and not lead to inadvertent increases in violence or backlash against women and such initiatives (Mocan and Cannonier, 2012).

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SETTING A RESEARCH AGENDA

Education can be a driver of change for social norms. Accessing education is an opportunity to form and present alternative visions and possibilities for what a girl can aspire to be. But accessing education and ensuring that the school and broader environment are conducive to the transformative potential of education are not a given. "Necessary conditions" need to be met to ensure that both structural and socio-cultural barriers are understood and actively addressed in a way that goes beyond passive sensitization and into approaches that allow new ways of being to be imagined and tried (Murphy-Graham and Lloyd, 2016).

Ongoing efforts to find ways to quantify social norms are important inasmuch as they demonstrate the sheer magnitude of gender biases and the harmful effects they pose for women and girls globally (UNDP, 2020). But these efforts need to be accompanied by a deeper dive beyond the identification of gendered social norms to achieve a concrete understanding of their persistence and the possible transformations and disruptions that can lead to lasting change.

The evidence base on the intersections of social norms and gendered access to education is scant but growing. The existing research and literature paints a picture of the ways in which girls and their families negotiate their decisions related to school. Shaped by often rigid patriarchal social norms in which girls are not asked about their aspirations but are more often handed society's expectations of what they should be, with dire consequences if norms are broken, girls either succumb to their prescribed destiny or work extra hard to negotiate an alternative for themselves. Sometimes these negotiations are accompanied by potential harm. In other words, programmes focusing only on life skills and agency building for girls are less likely to have a longer-term and wider impact than programmes that identify and address the multiple layers at which social norms are imposed on girls' lives. It is imperative to identify those persons in society that have the power to change norms, what they perceive to be the benefits or potential losses in changing norms, and how to negotiate alternative ways to uphold and respect culture while promoting equal opportunities for boys and girls to an education.

With this in mind, several pieces of evidence are needed to understand the ways in which programmes can effectively build capacities and promote the ability for girls not only to aspire, but to achieve equal rights in education. A research protocol should be developed separately with proposed ways to gather this evidence, but broadly, valuable data to be collected (and important concepts to consider when formulating initiatives) are suggested below.

- Examine what other factors are interfering and interacting with social norms to keep them in place. Pay special attention to significant life cycle events that occur during adolescence, including early marriage, menstruation and SRGBV.

- Think about who should be engaged. Investigate who holds social norms in place and which powerholders have the potential to be sympathetic and open to discussion, leading to eventual shifts in social behaviour. Specifically, ask:

  - What role could the teachers' union play as a cadre of persons that hold influence in the community and particularly in the education sector,

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and how can they provide continuous voices and promote change?

- How can religious leaders be engaged, considering their importance in influencing ideas around social norms (Samandari et al., 2019)?

- How can the media and other non-traditional actors be engaged (Heslop, 2016)?

- Calculate where and how to engage key stakeholders, including powerholders and women and girls affected by social norms.

  - Go beyond noting what the gendered social norms are and listing their negative effects, but also learn from positive deviants and how gender norms are actively contested and changed by girls, boys, teachers, caregivers, etc. This can help identify ways to create spaces to discuss these changes, but also can point to barriers and the negotiations that need to happen as a way of identifying obstacles to focus on and strategies to alleviate the burden of negotiations that girls and women face. Such an approach allows research and programmes to move beyond binary, victimization constructs.

  - Analyse how spaces can be created that allow reflection by a broad range of stakeholders on how to challenge and change rigid social norms.

- Gather data on which specific sacrifices and changes would be necessary to generate social norm changes in both social and institutional spheres.

  - How can negative and harmful social norms be disrupted or influenced at schools?

- What are effective strategies to engage and empower parents to make changes?

- What specific strategies would need to happen around adolescence to bolster girls' ability to imagine, express and actively work toward aspirations that do not limit them?

- Examine methods that can be used to effectively engage men and boys in changing societal norms, including looking at activist and grassroots approaches like SASA! (Michau, 2008).

- Per Save the Children's suggestion from pilots in Sierra Leone, among other places, rather than addressing all social norms, identify three or four social norms and practices stemming from these social norms that are critical for driving poor education outcomes for girls, and focus on those.

- As many ministries operate as line ministries, determine who else in government needs to be engaged.

  - Figure out whose mandate it is to address the different aspects that are interfering and interacting to keep social norms in place and look at how a broader coalition or working group could be built to address the issues at inter-ministerial and civil society levels.

  - Can gender units within these ministries be adequately equipped and empowered to lead research on social norms, mobilizing the actors necessary and forging a way forward together? In other words, can gender units serve as an effective and practical bridge toward addressing social norms which fall under the

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mandate of several ministries, civil society agencies, activists and other societal actors?

In collecting the above types of evidence, important questions to ask at all junctures are: What does equal access to education look like in these contexts and what will it take in terms of programmes and policies to get there?

This paper thus calls for moving beyond citing in a quasi-fatalistic way that social norms are problematic to considering how stakeholders can concretely go further than past awareness-raising and girls' skills building approaches, that often took place in silos, toward new tactics that can be truly gender transformative. This starts with exploring the ways in which new social norms can emerge and by understanding and identifying those who may be making changes already and seeing how such "positive deviant" action can help breed new social norms (Figuero et al., 2016; Kincaid, 2004). One research topic that could be further explored is the case of FGM/C in Mali and Mauritania to examine what kind of social mobilization and approaches helped push this practice into decline in the early 2000s, including who was engaged, how they were engaged and how these strategies could be leveraged to address other social norms in other situations (Cetorelli et al., 2020). Questions to ask are:

- What does it take for new social norms to gain popularity?

- What kind of dialogue is necessary?

- How can efforts be started, who should facilitate it and who should be involved in these discussions?

Reflecting on Vaitlan et al.'s (2017) research, successful approaches will rest on an understanding of what keeps social norms in place: this implies figuring out who directly benefits from it (resulting in the need for engagement of various parties to redress power dynamics), or if it stays in place because of tradition, i.e. "it has always been done this way" (meaning that it may be necessary to demonstrate different ways of upholding tradition), or is it a combination of both.

The review of the literature also underlined important aspects that should not be overlooked, such as the importance of religious education in many countries and regions and the importance of engaging religious institutions rather than blaming them for upholding negative social norms. Remembering diversity when exploring social norms is another critical factor, for instance paying attention to the different ways children with disabilities and girls living in urban versus rural communities may experience different barriers and opportunities in negotiating their future aspirations (Kielland et al., 2007).

Taking all this into consideration may deliver more promising strategic approaches to interventions and better implementation of programmes, including such traditional activities as adaptation of lesson plans, teacher training and awareness raising. Identifying new approaches and actors to address those social norms that prevent girls' access to education necessarily must involve understanding the links between social norms and the ways in which they shape aspirations, behaviours and the negotiation process that happens for children and youth—and how this is different for boys and girls and between children of different ages and why. This will help practitioners to identify the influential places in society where these norms are currently being shaped and how they can be re-shaped so that girls have equal access to education and can imagine different futures for themselves and live out their life aspirations without constant negotiation and potential harm (Oviedo and Spurzem, 2019).

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