



Advancing Positive Gender Norms and Socialization through UNICEF Programmes: Monitoring and Documenting Change

Executive Summary



December 2020

Background

Gender socialization is the process by which individuals internalize gender norms and roles as they interact with others. It underpins gender differential outcomes in health, education, child protection and other areas. This process, which starts at or before birth and continues through adolescence and beyond, tends to enhance the privilege and power of men and boys relative to women and girls and children of all genders. Gender socialization takes place both in the family and through social institutions, such as schools and other public services, the media and religious institutions. Positive gender socialization seeks to challenge and change negative gender norms, beliefs, policies and practices that lead to inequitable outcomes and reinforce those that lead to equitable outcomes (Table 1).

Table 1: Key definitions

Gender norms are the informal rules and shared beliefs that distinguish expected behaviour based on gender identities at particular points in time and in particular social contexts. They are usually internalized during childhood and adolescence and continue to shape gender stereotyping throughout the life course.
Gender roles are the expected roles, including behaviours, activities and responsibilities, associated with each sex.
Gender socialization refers to processes by which individuals (especially children and adolescents) internalize gender norms. Internalization refers to a process of learning what norms are, understanding why they are of value or make sense, and accepting norms as one's own.
Positive gender socialization refers to processes that challenge and change harmful norms in order to achieve gender-equitable outcomes.
Gender stereotypes are generalizations about the characteristics of a group of people based on gender.

Recognizing the impact of socialization on gender-discriminatory norms and values, UNICEF developed a body of work on positive gender socialization to enable achievement of equitable outcomes across all goal areas of its Strategic Plan. In 2019–2020 UNICEF's gender socialization work focused on two main objectives:

- Develop innovative ways of strengthening work on positive gender socialization within existing UNICEF initiatives
- Strengthen monitoring, evaluation and learning on the effectiveness of initiatives to promote positive gender socialization.

This report brings together lessons from nine initiatives supported through UNICEF's Gender Thematic Fund in 2019–2020 to develop targeted interventions on positive gender socialization. In addition to the nine focus initiatives, complementary insights from selected country and regional programmes (Table 2) are included to gain comprehensive understanding of 'what works' to shift gender-discriminatory attitudes, behaviours and practices in the short run.

Table 2: Overview of positive gender socialization initiatives discussed in this report

UNICEF offices	Initiative	Thematic area(s) of focus
Armenia	Communication for development (C4D) for empowering girls, changing gender stereotypes and reducing gender-biased sex selection (GBSS)	Harmful practices [GBSS, gender-based violence (GBV)]
Dominican Republic	Changing gender norms to prevent child marriage and early unions (CMEU) through video and dialogue in schools	Harmful practices (CMEU, GBV)
Egypt	Support for Egypt's National Girls' Empowerment Initiative (Dawwie)	Harmful practices [child marriage, female genital mutilation (FGM)]; adolescent girls' empowerment; gender-responsive parenting
Ghana	Integrating positive gender socialization into play-based preschool learning programmes	Social services workforce capacity, education, including early childhood education (ECE)
Kosovo¹	Mainstreaming positive gender socialization into the health system through training of home-visiting nurses	Gender-responsive parenting, education (ECE), social services workforce capacity
Nepal	Promoting gender-equitable early childhood development (ECD) through fathers' involvement in care and domestic work	Gender-responsive parenting, education (ECE)
Sri Lanka	Mainstreaming gender in draft National Preschool Education Policy; training health workers in gender-sensitive approaches	Education (ECE), social services workforce capacity
United Republic of Tanzania	Gender-responsive parenting; gender socialization in early childhood and adolescence	Gender-responsive parenting, marketing and media
Viet Nam	Gender-equitable ECE curriculum and policy framework	Education
Additional initiatives reviewed in the report		
South Sudan and Somalia	Communities Care: Preventing GBV in conflict-affected communities	Harmful practices
Latin America and the Caribbean	Gender competencies for social services workforce	Social services workforce
India	AdhaFULL: Multi-media initiative Jaagriti: Gender-equitable curriculum content Doordarshan (public services broadcaster): Support for the development of gender-sensitive programming	Adolescent girls' empowerment Education; adolescent girls' empowerment Marketing and media

¹ All references to Kosovo in this report should be understood to be in the context of United Nations Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

Promoting positive gender socialization: Lessons from targeted UNICEF initiatives

Education: The gender socialization and broader initiatives show diverse possibilities for integrating gender sensitization into public education systems. Engagement with government-led reforms of early childhood education (ECE) curricula offer lessons on ways of integrating a gender equity focus from policies through to classroom-level practice. At the early childhood level, a common entry point is socio-emotional learning. Within broader efforts to promote gender-equitable education, targeted integration of gender-focused content into curricula is most common at the secondary level. Lessons from the Jaagriti programme in India merit wider dissemination, as the programme has been effective in changing adolescent girls' and boys' attitudes to gender equality issues and in engaging parents and the wider school community. A qualitative and quantitative impact evaluation of the Jaagriti programme found the following: 65 per cent of girls and 74 per cent of boys reported greater awareness of 'gender biases, stereotyping, discrimination and inequality'; and 76 per cent of parents reported that boys had started helping with domestic activities at home.² (No baseline data available).

Adolescent girls' empowerment: The most common initiatives to promote adolescent girls' empowerment reviewed in this report include direct education activities – face-to-face and online, formal and non-formal – and edutainment. A widely recognized, crucial point emerging from these initiatives is the importance of working with multiple stakeholders: at family and community levels and with adolescents. For example, in Egypt, Dawwie brings in parents as well as directly targets adolescents, as does Jaagriti in India. Where these interventions are school based, this may be through periodic meetings, as in the Jaagriti project. For all these initiatives, as well as for the AdhaFULL edutainment programme in India, there is evidence of gender-equitable change. The evaluation of AdhaFULL found evidence of positive shifts in various indicators of attitudes and practices. Among AdhaFULL viewers, compared to a control group, a significantly higher proportion of adolescents (boys and girls) believe that men and women are capable of the same roles (76 per cent among AdhaFULL viewers vs. 68 per cent in the control group); parents reported a substantially greater intention to treat daughters and sons equally (68 per cent vs. 50 per cent); and boys reported a greater willingness to act as allies for their sisters (50 per cent vs. 39 per cent).³

Harmful practices: Similar to adolescent girls' empowerment, the most common initiatives for addressing harmful practices utilized edutainment and education, for example through the development of a TV series on gender-based sex selection and GBV in Armenia. In the Dominican Republic, a pilot initiative focused on changing gender norms among adolescents in secondary schools through a video, 'Getting married before 18 is not for me', which seeks to change perceptions about the risks and consequences of early unions to 'de-normalize' them as a life trajectory for adolescent girls. The assessment of the initiative found positive impacts, including that adolescents' overall knowledge of child marriage increased 8 percentage points, with the greatest impact on adolescents' knowledge of how and where to seek help in the case of child marriage. Future work – as planned in the Dominican Republic's child marriage and early unions initiative – could more

² 1,012 students, 490 parents and 80 teachers were surveyed at baseline; 670 students, 696 parents and 80 teachers at endline. Source: UNICEF, Developing Gender Equitable Attitudes and Behaviour in Schools. A pilot project in 100 government schools, New Delhi, n.d.

³ These findings are all taken from UNICEF, AdhaFULL: Assessment of adolescence programme (PowerPoint presentation), October 2018.

strongly involve families in initiatives to build children's and adolescents' agency or could work directly with children and adolescents to protect them from harm.

Gender-responsive parenting: As these initiatives are still under development or implementation, learning to date is less clear; however, emerging findings show potential for positive gender norm change, including through social and behavioural change interventions. Compared with other parenting support programmes, the gender socialization initiatives on parenting show greater integration with national systems and thus potentially greater sustainability and scalability. The strong emphasis on engaging male caregivers in gender-responsive parenting shows great potential to offer insights to a wider community, as this is a recognized area of weakness in parenting programmes. Four of the five initiatives seek explicitly to change norms around fathers' limited involvement in the care of their young children and to promote gender-equal treatment of sons and daughters. This shared care between mothers and fathers and other caregivers can help improve children's development and learning outcomes as well as redistribute household responsibilities. These initiatives are integrating a stronger gender equity focus into ongoing work in early childhood development (ECD) promoting good nutrition. For example, the initiative in Kosovo seeks to promote gender-equitable breastfeeding in a context where historically boys have been fed for longer than girls, as well as promote fathers' involvement in children's care.



In Egypt, Nepal and the United Republic of Tanzania, radio and TV dramas show fathers engaging in childcare and domestic work and displaying positive parenting practices with girls and boys. These include supporting mothers during pregnancy, taking care of babies and young children (e.g., feeding and washing them) and stimulating young children through play and storytelling. The radio series in Nepal integrates practical advice for fathers on how to care for their children and carry out household chores, such as cooking. By encouraging an equitable sharing of domestic work, the initiative also aims to reduce stress levels among mothers of young children and thus lessen the likelihood of their using violent discipline methods. The use of mass media such as the edutainment programmes in Nepal, Egypt and the United Republic of Tanzania has the potential for large-scale impact. For example, the parenting radio programme in Nepal runs across the country via a network of local radio stations, broadcasting in three languages: Bhojpuri, Maithili and Nepali.

Social services workforce development: There is currently a clear knowledge gap around the impact of initiatives to increase the gender sensitivity of the social services workforce. Documentation of findings from UNICEF's work could help bolster this under-documented field, particularly with respect to public health workers (Kosovo and Sri Lanka). The use of e-learning in Sri Lanka also stands to offer very relevant lessons. In Latin America and the Caribbean, UNICEF's initiative to define gender competencies across all fields of the public-sector workforce (including teachers and police) has the potential for substantial long-term impact.

Media and Marketing: Work with the private sector to dismantle gender stereotypes and unconscious bias in advertising, marketing and media is an innovative area for UNICEF and an

important one given the volume of advertising directed at children and the stereotypes that often predominate, e.g., men portrayed in active, dominant roles outside the household and women portrayed as passive and in domestic roles, or sexualized. UNICEF is supporting the development of gender-sensitive guidelines with content producers in the United Republic of Tanzania and with the national Doordarshan broadcaster in India. These initiatives aim to support companies in developing and embedding self-regulating guidelines to ensure sustained impact. Learning from these initiatives has the potential to inform work in this area of growing importance.

Figure 1 summarizes key learning to date and expected insights



Gender-transformative approaches to positive gender socialization

UNICEF is currently developing overarching guidance and policy on gender-transformative approaches. Key elements of this approach, as developed by the Global Programme on Child Marriage, have been adapted to resonate across the wider range of issues covered by gender socialization initiatives (Table 3). This report uses this classification of “transformative approaches” as a framework for identifying programme elements with the potential to contribute to shifts in gender norms, values and stereotypes.

Table 3: Key principles for positive gender socialization programming

Principle	Example
<p>Take an intersectional feminist approach:*</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure initiatives respond to and seek to transform gender inequalities and other intersecting inequalities • Involve girls, women and gender non-conforming people from different backgrounds in the co-creation, implementation and monitoring of initiatives • Consult with feminist organizations and activists to enhance the transformative impact of programming • Build in learning and adaptation throughout programming and respond to any emerging biases • Employ diverse methodologies to capture the complexity of change, for example, through mixed methods approaches 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In Egypt, the Dawwie TV series includes characters from a range of socio-economic backgrounds and refugee families. • Nepal parenting handbook promotes full equality of children with disabilities as well as gender-responsive parenting. • Adolescent girls and boys took part in validating and fine-tuning the messaging in the Dominican Republic educational video and the AdhaFULL TV series in India.
<p>Increase understanding of gender norms among children of all genders and build their skills and agency to challenge gender norms from early years. Ensure that all work to strengthen children’s and adolescents’ agency responds to the particular disempowerment of girls</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School-based programmes in the Dominican Republic, Egypt and India • Non-formal education in Egypt accessed by girls, boys and children of other genders • Mass-media programmes, e.g., AdhaFULL in India
<p>Engage men, including fathers, and boys for gender equality</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parenting initiatives focused on engagement of fathers and male caregivers in Egypt, Kosovo, Nepal and the United Republic of Tanzania • Programmes engaging adolescent boys in the Dominican Republic, Egypt and India
<p>Develop activities and approaches with potential for impact at scale</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mass media and social media, e.g., TV series in Armenia and radio broadcasts in Nepal • Health worker training in Kosovo and Sri Lanka

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dialogue with broadcasters, media houses and marketing bodies around gender-sensitive advertising, India and the United Republic of Tanzania • Engagement with policy and curriculum reform processes in Ghana, Sri Lanka and Viet Nam
<p>Work at multiple levels – child, family, community, system/service and policy – to reinforce the impacts of programming and benefit from synergies a multi-level approach will generate.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ghana initiative working with parents, preschool teachers and district education officials

* A *feminist approach* to programming and monitoring, discussed in the report, recognizes gender and power relations throughout programme design, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and learning. The aim is to empower participants to produce social change and to generate new forms of co-constructed knowledge. UNICEF's gender socialization programmes support these aims by working specifically and positive gender socialization and norm change. UNICEF programmes could further expand a feminist approach, based on the following principles adapted from Oxfam's feminist principles for Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL). Feminist initiatives:

- Are **co-designed** with participants of all genders; programmes incorporate processes to collectively review and interpret the available evidence, and to make evidence-based decisions
- Are **flexible, adaptable and responsive to context**, because results and related indicators may be revised as people and organizations respond to change
- Use **participatory tools and methods** to explore processes that lead to normative change and encourage broad participation among population groups, in particular, by removing barriers to participation
- Employ **diverse methodologies** to capture the complexity of change, for example, through mixed-method approaches
- **Build trust and understanding** about how knowledge is used.

Measuring progress towards positive gender socialization

UNICEF recognizes that positive gender socialization is a long-term progress, and that a year-long project, or indeed any project, cannot be expected to fully change discriminatory norms, stereotypes or values. These beliefs are embedded in cultures, uphold power relations and are always contested. Nonetheless, it is possible to influence and monitor change in these beliefs and introduce building blocks of change. Shifts include increases in knowledge or understanding, a greater prevalence of gender-equitable attitudes or norms, and changes of practices or behaviours. Table 4 gives some examples of monitoring indicators used by gender socialization initiatives to examine changes in activities, outputs, outcomes and impacts and to inform a results-based management approach to programming.

Table 4: Sample indicators to measure progress towards positive gender socialization

Type of change	Child	Family and community	Services and systems
Activities	# of adolescents who participated in CMEU video/discussion interventions (by sex and age group) (Dominican Republic)	# of parents, caregivers and family members who participated in the activities of <i>Rope Guna Fal</i> radio series (Nepal) # of workshops held on the adoption and integration of responsible parenting and family care (RPFC) (sector officials, parliamentarians, CSOs, faith-based organizations, media) (United Republic of Tanzania)	# of Ministry of Health family health centre nurses trained in gender socialization (Kosovo)
Outputs			
Increased knowledge or understanding	% of girls and boys who agree that if an adult man enters into a union with an adolescent girl (at least 5 years his junior), the man is committing a crime punishable by law (Dominican Republic)	% of adult community members who report exposure to mass media and social media messages about ending corporal punishment and/or positive parenting (Egypt)	% of home visiting nurses who demonstrate awareness of gender inequality in parenting and its effects on young children (Kosovo)
Outcomes			
Gender-equitable attitudes or norms	% of girls and boys who think the majority of people in their communities expect girls to marry before 18 (Egypt)	% of adults who think a good man should bear a son (Armenia)	% of kindergarten teachers who disagree with the statement that certain toys and games are better suited to girls or boys
Gender-equitable practices and behaviours	% of girls and boys who have helped prevent a female friend or relative from entering a union with or marrying an older man (Dominican Republic)	% of male parents/caregivers who play with or tell stories to children (Nepal) % of communities reporting community-level actions to address GBV (South Sudan)	Actions home-visiting nurses or public health workers would take if they suspected GBV (Kosovo, Sri Lanka)
Impact			
Population-level change	% of girls under 19 years old expected to be circumcised (Egypt)	% of children aged 36–59 months old with whom an adult has engaged in four or more activities to promote learning and school readiness in the last three days (Kosovo)	% of women aged 20–29 who were married before age 18 (Egypt)

The [report](#) provides a comprehensive set of indicators for each of these types of changes across the six programming areas discussed: (1) gender-responsive parenting, (2) education, (3) adolescent girls’ empowerment, (4) eliminating harmful practices, (5) social services workforce development, and (6) marketing and media.

Lessons from measuring gender socialization interventions

The [report](#) identifies several common challenges to monitoring the impact of positive gender socialization initiatives. These are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5: Common challenges and potential solutions

Challenges	Solutions
One-year project timeframe limits the extent of change that can be achieved or measured.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embed MEAL from beginning; plan the monitoring framework and data collection instruments alongside the intervention itself. • Keep the metrics as simple as possible. • Use indicators of building blocks of norm change, i.e., knowledge, attitudes and intended practices.
Reliance on data collection only among intervention participants means that the impact of UNICEF programme activity (rather than other changes) must be inferred rather than proved.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look at ways of introducing a counterfactual (e.g., through a control group or baseline information gathered before phased roll-out). • Think about possible objections to validity of findings and consider gathering additional information. • Feedback findings to participants for validation. • Make use of light-touch qualitative methods to explore the impact of UNICEF’s programming and other factors.
Reliance on qualitative data collected from small groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider scope to broaden range of methods to validate findings, e.g., expanding beyond focus groups to include individual interviews with or diary data collection among focus group participants.
Social desirability bias: Directly asking respondents about their attitudes or intended behaviours may lead to answers respondents think the interviewer or other interviewees will favour.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indirect questioning. Pose indirect questions about the past or the behaviour of others. Vignettes (stories about a hypothetical character or situation) are a common way to do this. • Provide assurances. Ask participants to speak freely. Explain confidentiality and anonymity procedures thoroughly and offer reminders, especially before sensitive questions. • Probe for more information/request stories or examples to illustrate responses. (<i>Can you explain more about why you feel this way? Can you tell me about a time that you experienced this?</i>)
Perceived complexity of norms measurement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on perceptions of anticipated sanctions for individuals who do not comply with a community’s accepted norms. • Use vignettes and hypothetical examples (as above).
Deepening a feminist perspective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide opportunities for project participants to input into monitoring frameworks and instruments • Ensure that indicators collected are meaningful to stakeholders • Build in feedback mechanisms to communicate findings to participants and solicit their inputs and reactions • Consider scope to devote additional resources to monitoring, potentially through integration with programming

Recommendations

- 1. Deepen a feminist approach to gender socialization and norms work.** An explicit feminist approach has both intrinsic and instrumental value. It aims to empower participants to produce social change and to generate new forms of co-constructed knowledge. This approach emphasizes participatory, collaborative and non-exploitative programming, monitoring and evaluation. It implies the need to strengthen engagement with feminist organizations and movements (especially youth-led ones) to foster feminist approaches in UNICEF's work; and to assess resource implications of engaging participants at all phases in the process.
- 2. Ensure programming is tailored to address the ways gender intersects with other aspects of identity and experience, and the diverse challenge that different groups of children face.** This requires attention to the specific norms that affect particular groups and the broader factors that sustain gendered and other forms of inequality. Some ways to achieve this include formative research with explicit attention to intersecting differences and co-creating initiatives with marginalized girls and women, who should also be involved in review and evaluation processes.
- 3. Develop longer-term gender norm change and socialization programmes.** One-year projects, even when tightly focused, are often too short to achieve substantial change. UNICEF should seek longer-term funding sources that are prepared to support longer-lasting, larger-scale initiatives.
- 4. Build work with families** – including mothers, fathers and grandparents who have influence on household decisions – more strongly into initiatives that aim to build children's and adolescents' agency, and to combat harmful practices. This is vital to shift constraining norms at the household level. Where community-level norms are a significant constraint, increase efforts to change norms at the community level, through face-to-face dialogue (as in Communities Care) or mass media and social media.
- 5. Engage men and boys** in gender socialization programming. This is both an area of substantial gender socialization portfolio activity and an area with relatively little evidence globally. This information can increase programme effectiveness and would be an important contribution to global evidence on changing harmful masculinities and promoting positive role models to advance gender equality.
- 6. Greater investments to influence gender socialization in middle childhood.** Ways to do this could include focusing more on gender sensitization of primary school teachers, embedding gender equality in primary education curricula and changing pedagogy.
- 7. Continue innovative work on gender socialization in media, marketing and systems/workforce.** Despite their potential for large-scale impact, these levels of the socio-ecological model are relatively neglected in work on gender norm change. However, there are a few promising examples from UNICEF ongoing work in Armenia, India, the United Republic of Tanzania and Latin America and the Caribbean. It is recommended to synthesize lessons from these initiatives, continue to develop strategic partnerships for new work in these areas, and advocate with private-sector partners for adequate funding for impact assessment.

- 8. Embed monitoring of gender socialization work in ongoing government data collection.** Examples include work with the Ghana Education Service (regular classroom observation of gendered practices), the National Health Information System in Kosovo (gender-responsive parenting), and the Sri Lanka public health bureau (impact of public health worker training on gender sensitization).
- 9. Integrate programming and monitoring, where feasible,** e.g. through simple participatory activities that can be integrated into programming and used for data collection, as with the Communities Care initiative in Somalia and South Sudan and the online feedback on the *Rope Guna Fal* radio programme in Nepal. This can help address constraints related to limited monitoring budgets.
- 10. Document learning about effective online gender socialization programming and monitoring.** This should probe the potential advantages (e.g. greater anonymity and more inclusivity for people facing mobility constraints) as well as the challenges (e.g. potential difficulties spurring discussion, limitations on the types of activities that can be conducted). It should include practical aspects (e.g. reimbursing participants in remote training for data costs).