

Equatorial Guinea

Update on the context and situation of children

Equatorial Guinea's oil-dependent economy is slowly emerging from the damage caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2021 Bata explosions. However, important challenges remain. Following a contraction of 3.2 percent in 2021, real GDP was projected to grow by 5.8 percent in 2022.

The impact of Russia's war in Ukraine on Equatorial Guinea has mostly been indirect. On one hand, higher hydrocarbon prices, have resulted in higher export earnings and higher government revenues, providing resources for priority spending that were delayed on account of the pandemic and the Bata explosions. On the other hand, the war has caused a surge in food prices and higher inflation in the country (average of 4.9% in 2022 compared with -0.1% in 2021). With Equatorial Guinea importing most of its food, this is likely negatively impacting the poorer segments of the population.

Equatorial Guinea has a Human Development Index of 0.596, achieving a ranking in 2021 of 145 among the 191 countries, which is low compared to countries with the same per capita income.

While the COVID-19 containment measures relaxed during 2022, there has been slow progress with COVID vaccination: only 35,236 doses were administered in 2022 likely due to COVID fatigue and the perceived decreased risk since no deaths were reported during that period. UNICEF has continued to support the COVID response and strategically used emergency funds to strengthen the health system and routine vaccination. Learning from the pandemic, the government is developing a public health emergency preparedness plan which will be finalized in 2023.

Overall, the country has managed to maintain or increase vaccination coverage of children. The government is implementing the Health District Operationalization Plan to decentralize the health system and UNICEF is currently supporting the first stage of the process of collecting health information at local level. This process will provide relevant information to expand access and improve the quality of vaccination, maternal and child health and nutrition services.

Equatorial Guinea was the host of the African Union Humanitarian Conference and UNICEF was engaged in several of the sessions including in a side-event on nutrition organized by the Regional Office (RO). This sparked interest and the Ministry of Health (MoH) has indicated its willingness to develop a nutrition plan in 2023. The country is also working to develop a public health emergency strategy and hopes to be the host of the African Humanitarian Agency.

Equatorial Guinea has the highest prevalence of HIV in Central Africa and women are more affected. After intense advocacy by the UN agencies, the Global Fund approved ~USD 6 million for HIV/AIDS and malaria, recognizing the government's contribution to fight against the diseases.

Fortunately, schools were all re-opened at the beginning of 2022 and UNICEF continued to support the distance learning programme "La escuela en mi casa". The Transforming Education Summit (TES) provided a platform to identify national education priorities following national consultations with multi-sectoral stakeholders. The government approved the Learning Passport as a national digital learning platform.

After being implemented in two districts in 2021, through UNICEF support and advocacy, learning assessments were scaled nationwide in 2022. Preliminary results show significant differences between public and private schools and between urban and rural areas.

Some progress was made in birth registration. A three-month national campaign took place so all children under 17 years old could get their certificates free of charge. Advocacy continues to advance health and justice information system interoperability.

One persistent challenge is the lack of actualized and disaggregated data. However, the World Bank-supported household income economic survey started, and results are expected in 2023 while preparations for the long-awaited DHS will start in 2023. After several years of advocacy, Equatorial Guinea became the 91st country to join U-Report, opening the way to engage with adolescents and youth.

The country held peaceful presidential, municipal, and legislative elections. In the months preceding the elections, control on young people in conflict with the law and on undocumented migrants was intensified. Several programme activities were therefore on hold during that period. Nevertheless, the Parliament passed new penal and adoption laws and ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; it will approve the law that creates the social protection system in early 2023. The support provided by UNICEF to strengthen civil registration and vital statistics, and the Unified Social Registry (RUS) will be an important contribution to the social protection system. The country submitted its first Voluntary National Review on SDGs and the Universal Periodic Review third mid-term report. The report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child is yet to be submitted.

Gender equality still faces challenges. Gaps in the labor market between men and women persist and this may be because 47.1% of economically active women have not reached high school, compared to 29.5% of men. The gender-based violence legislation is still in draft. On the positive side, the national plan on gender and disabilities was approved and the new elected government is committed to increase the female candidates (30% of the total). For the first time, a woman was appointed as Prime Minister.

Preparations have started for the new Country Programme and various consultations have taken place with government counterparts, private sector, civil society, and UN agencies to develop the situation analysis of children and adolescents in Equatorial Guinea and build capacity on Rights and Results-based Management (RRBM). The Strategic Moment of Reflection (SMR) helped recalibrate priorities for the new country programme and building human capital for the most disadvantaged children and women will be the main strategic objective.

Major contributions and drivers of results

Every child survives and thrives

The health system in Equatorial Guinea is highly centralized and faces significant challenges in providing equitable and quality services. The office maintains its focus on the regional priorities related to immunization and the priority results of the Annual Management Plan (AMP), achieving positive results in the respective indicators.

Building on the recommendations of the 2021 Mid-Term Review, UNICEF is adapting its engagement to be more tailored to the country's upper-middle income profile by reinforcing capacities and resilience of the health system which is also an UNDAF's priority. The CO continued collaborating with the MoH to implement the health district approach. The MoH established a health partners' committee and a results framework allowing improved coordination and accountability. UNICEF's contributions to improve health system performance, build capacities, procure supplies and equipment, and prioritize the most disadvantaged districts are well reflected in the joint plan. Thanks to these efforts, DPT coverage in children under one year old increased from 68% to 70% between 2021 and 2022, whereas 56% of the districts reached at least 80% of DPT3 coverage, compared to 44% in 2021.

The country did not experience vaccine stock-outs and maintained its maternal-neonatal tetanus elimination and polio eradication status.

Results from the evaluation of the immunization plus strategy covering 2018- 2020, showed that the pandemic did not affect vaccination coverage. However, significant disparities were found according to the place of residence: 35% of children from families living far from health centers were vaccinated compared to 48% for those living nearby. The need for integrated child services using vaccination posts as entry points for other services was highlighted. The evaluation findings and the health system equity focus will inform the new country programme.

UNICEF prioritized supporting district micro-plans based on equity analysis to identify children with zero dose or incomplete vaccination, quarterly formative supervision for vaccinators, and training health technicians in vaccine management. UNICEF invested significantly to strengthen the cold chain including installation and maintenance of solar-powered cold chain equipment. A national inventory conducted in 2022 identified that 22% of the equipment was not WHO pre-qualified. In response, the CO procured a batch of 53 cold chain equipment whose installation is underway.

UNICEF continued to support the implementation of the Point of Care Roadmap and the plan for the elimination of vertical transmission of HIV, syphilis, and hepatitis-B. Building on the first phase of early HIV diagnosis initiative in 2020, UNICEF installed GenXpert machines in five centers and continued collecting evidence on the effectiveness of ARV treatment to reduce vertical transmission. For the first time, the MoH applied viral load tests to 66 HIV-positive pregnant women and 38 tests for the early diagnosis of HIV in newborns of HIV-positive mothers. As of December 31, no child had tested HIV-positive. UNICEF also trained 97 health workers in all districts to manage HIV-positive children and pregnant women in an integrated manner.

The country lacks a comprehensive nutrition strategy and while advocacy is ongoing, UNICEF is promoting implementation of cost-effective interventions. With UNICEF's and WHO's support, the MoH sensitized 380 social welfare counselors to promote social and behavioral change favorable to breastfeeding and conducted awareness-raising sessions for 180 mothers during World Breastfeeding Week. In addition, the MoH distributed 12,644 vitamin A capsules procured by UNICEF. However, the coverage remained low compared to the planned targets (28% for children aged 6-11 months old and only 2.5 for those aged 12-59 months old). Strengthening the interoperability between ministries of health and education to reach a larger number of children in communities and preschools is planned for 2023.

Every child learns

The absence of robust and updated data, including the Education Yearbook, continues to be a critical obstacle to address significant education challenges, among them, the situation of out-of-school children.

Improving quality and equitable access to education is a global, regional, and UNDAF's priority. After the learning assessment in 2021, UNICEF continued advocating for a sustained and expanded implementation, as recommended by the RO. In 2022, the Ministry of Education (MoE) entrusted UNICEF's technical and financial support to scale up assessments nationwide, in 19 districts, surpassing the AMP target of 5 districts. Due to limited resources and capacities, the work has focused on primary education so far. The CO will aim to address early learning outcomes in the new country programme.

21,729 students from grades 3 and 6 participated in the national assessments. Preliminary results show that 70% of students passed the assessments but with a considerable difference in students' performance between public and private schools and between urban and rural areas. The difference

was particularly striking in grade 6 where only 38% of students from public schools passed compared to 62% from private schools and between urban (89% passed) and rural (11%).

UNICEF continued supporting the distance learning programme "La Escuela en Mi Casa." More than 130,000 preschool and primary students were reached through radio and TV, including those from areas with limited electricity coverage.

UNICEF continued advocating for a digital transformation to improve the education system, although this may take time due to country's low internet coverage. Meanwhile, digital education can be an entry point to reach the most vulnerable, especially pregnant adolescent girls, currently prevented from attending schools, and those with disabilities. The implementation of the Learning Passport will begin in 2023 and will provide both online and offline versions offering access to a quality learning content that is inclusive and adapted to each learner's level.

The Transforming Education Summit (TES) provided a significant platform for multi-sectoral advocacy with 13 sectoral ministries, UN agencies, NGOs, teachers, students, parents, and youth. The TES national consultations helped to identify gaps and investments needed to improve the education system. The process resulted in the government committing to four priority areas (digital education, inclusive education, curriculum development, content and teaching, and school infrastructure). There was a commitment to conduct an education budget sector review for the first time in 2023.

The TES National Declaration of Commitments is aligned with regional priorities and provides a platform to monitor the country's progress to improve learning outcomes.

Every child is protected

The CO continued working on birth registration coverage and interoperability of information systems to improve civil registration and vital statistics management, aligned with UNICEF priorities and the AMP targets.

UNICEF is building on the evidence generated by the evaluation of the immunization plus programme, which highlighted the importance of delivering integrated services, including birth registration, during vaccination services. The desk review on birth registration identified economic, administrative, cultural and gender-based barriers preventing access to universal and timely birth registration. The electoral context prevented strategic discussions with high-level counterparts about the results of both studies and the need for interoperability of information systems. Therefore, the AMP target to have one interoperable service delivery with the MoH in the model district of Baney has been postponed to 2023.

UNICEF joined efforts with the Ministry of Justice and the African Union Campaign on legal identity to develop a national campaign focusing on the continental region, where birth registration coverage is low. 30,000 children aged 0-17 years old got their birth certificates free of charge. Two-thirds of them were under five years old. The CO trained 112 official registrars in 37 municipal registry centers and conducted 14 sensibilization workshops with 350 local authorities and community leaders in the continental region, surpassing the AMP target of 35 civil registry personnel trained. In parallel, with UNICEF's support, the National Birth Registration System (SIREC) improved the interconnection between the subnational and the central administration digital system to collect vital statistics.

Regarding prevention of violence against children, UNICEF developed participatory activities with children and adolescents in the communities. UNICEF also partnered with the Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA), UNFPA and other partners in generating evidence and drafting protocols to address gender-based violence, including technical support and monitoring of the Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) internal protocols of the 10 signatory NGOs.

Every child has access to WASH

Aligned with the Strategic Plan priority related to WASH and the AMP targets about prevention of COVID-19, UNICEF included a WASH component in the COVID-19 response project. It consisted in providing hygiene products for 31 schools and health facilities, accompanied by training sessions for health and education workers and communication materials on infection prevention and control (IPC) and WASH. 65,000 patients and students benefitted from the IPC/WASH protocols in place. Moreover, UNICEF conducted a survey on knowledge, attitudes, and practices (KAP) regarding COVID-19 that inquired about hand-washing and other preventive measures.

The WASH in schools study conducted in 2021 helped identify participating schools in the USAID-funded project and inform discussions on schools' infrastructure in the national TES consultations. The study highlighted significant WASH challenges faced by adolescent girls that could prevent them from staying in school, such as the lack of menstrual hygiene kits (available only in 9% of the schools nationwide). The CO foresees addressing this challenge in the following cooperation cycle.

Every child has access to inclusive social protection

UNICEF is positioned as a technical trusted partner to promote the social protection agenda, aligned with the global priorities. Building on the experience gained in 2021 with the cash-based intervention after the explosions in Bata (which was highlighted in the 2022 International Monetary Fund (IMF) country report), the CO followed up the legislative process of the social protection law, whose final approval is expected in early 2023 by the Parliament. UNICEF identified opportunities for joint advocacy and technical assistance with the WB, IMF and the International Labour Organization in designing the social protection system once the law is approved.

To achieve the AMP target of improving the RUS, the CO technically assisted the MoSA through an in-depth analysis of the criteria to identify families and better define levels of vulnerability. The CO continued advocating for the RUS as an inter-sectoral tool potentially helpful for different sectors to identify and target interventions to vulnerable populations. The CO assisted the MoSA in developing new modules within the RUS dedicated to childcare and protection, gender, and inclusion of people with disabilities. UNICEF conducted advocacy meetings with these sectors, the National Development Agency (ANDEGE), and the Deputy Prime Minister in charge of Human Rights, to ensure the collection of harmonized administrative data for the RUS and promote its multiple use (socioeconomic characterization of households, targeting interventions, and data management for social policy decision making at the inter-sectoral level).

After Equatorial Guinea ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, UNICEF supported the MoSA in organizing participatory sessions to draft a national agenda to raise awareness and address the challenges faced by people with disabilities to fulfill their rights. The following steps are yet to be defined.

The CO received technical advice and resources from the RO to re-launch its work on public finance for children in 2023. Increased availability of budget analysis and transparency, recognized as a potentially impactful change strategy in UNICEF's Strategic Plan, will be critical to develop evidence-based advocacy, advance social policy design, and address inequality gaps in the following cooperation cycle.

CROSS-CUTTING AREAS

Emergency response

The CO focused on responding to the COVID-19 pandemic through two projects: a COVID-19 response project funded by USAID and a joint Multi-Partner Trust Fund (MPTF) programme with WHO and UNDP to accelerate immunization.

Fortunately, the number of new cases declined considerably: from 9,515 in 2021 to 3,379 in 2022. The positivity rate was 0 in the last weeks of 2022, and no other wave was recorded after Omicron. The number of cases among health workers also decreased from 197 to 67. Nevertheless, there are still potential risks of COVID-19 flare-ups as only 17% of the total population is vaccinated with two doses of Sinopharm vaccine. The country is expecting additional doses of Johnson&Johnson at the beginning of 2023 as part of the MPTF programme. There was considerable delay in securing the vaccine for reasons beyond UNICEF and WHO's control.

Following the explosions in Bata in 2021, UNICEF has not supported further activities while the reconstruction of the city is ongoing.

Social and Behavior Change Communication

Findings from the KAP survey related to COVID-19 show persistent misconceptions about the pandemic, including 24% of the surveyed students and 31% of patients denying the existence of COVID-19. The survey also identified spread rumors undermining the trust in vaccines. Although the surveyed population reported practicing preventive measures, "pandemic fatigue" leads to relaxation. UNICEF will conduct a deeper analysis of the results and coordinate with the COVID-19 steering committee to inform preparedness and response strategies. Meanwhile, the CO used the preliminary findings to design and implement a Risk Communication and Community Engagement strategy reaching 761,891 people.

UNICEF is producing a series of five videos to raise awareness on children's rights. Three are already finalized on the right to identity, social inclusion, and protection against violence. They will be disseminated in 2023 through various channels and used to stimulate discussion in schools. This effort complements ongoing activities to elevate the human rights agenda with the RCO.

After intensive advocacy, Equatorial Guinea became the 91st country to launch U-Report. Prevention of HIV/AIDS is one of the themes identified given the high prevalence in adolescents and youth.

Risk Management and Control

Most of the risk and mitigation measures are in place and well-tailored to each of the results highlighted in the AMP. The Annual Risk Assessment record is duly updated. The CO is planning a training session to update the eGRC platform, with support from the RO. The internal control scheme is also in place and updated. Risk management is regularly monitored through the Key Performance Indicators within the office dashboard.

Resource Mobilization

The CO received RO's support to improve its capacities for building partnerships and engaging with the private sector. Seventeen staff members concluded the Business for Results course in Spanish. The private sector mapping was completed and helped initiate exploratory conversations with prioritized sectors (banks, oil, and telecommunications). An appealing investment case on digital education was developed and will be instrumental for future engagements.

Given the economic status of the country, it remains challenging to mobilize funding for development activities. In this context, the CO submitted 12 proposals (below the ambitious AMP target of 18) on various themes to potential donors including USAID, private sector, bilateral donors, and Embassies

(China, Spain, Turkey, USA) and through UNICEF France and Spain. One successfully mobilized funding for a Spanish UNV Education Specialist; four were rejected and six remain under review. The CO will reinforce its capacities to leverage resources. While some donors and partners may not fund UNICEF's activities directly, their support can be leveraged to advance social development.

The COVID-19 USAID Advisor came for a field visit and the CO received very positive feedback. The visit provided an opportunity to explore additional funding for 2023 with very good prospect.

The CO was successful in mobilizing thematic funds through the RO for child protection, education, immunization, nutrition, HIV, and public finance for children. UNDAF funds for the current country programme are yet to come.

UN Collaboration and Other Partnerships

UNICEF is contributing substantively to the Common Country Assessment, UNDAF Evaluation, and the next UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework. UNICEF chairs the UNDAF working group on Human Capital, the UN Operations Management Team and the UN Communication Group and participated actively in the other working groups. The UNCT participated in the moment of reflection organized by UNICEF for its new country programme.

The UNCG members did a joint mission to the continental region to develop audiovisual materials including success stories on the post-Bata explosions and document the Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission (PMTCT) of HIV. Materials are currently being edited for dissemination.

On gender-related issues, UNICEF has collaborated closely with UNFPA and UNDP during the 16 days of activism campaign as well as for activities on youth engagement.

To increase UN visibility among the international donor community in Equatorial Guinea, UNICEF participated actively in two key events including a photo exhibit. UNICEF has also launched a quarterly e-bulletin highlighting key achievements and noteworthy news.

UNICEF continues to participate in UN joint programmes including the MPTF on COVID-19 response and on HIV. Following strong advocacy from UNAIDS on behalf of the UN, the Global Fund agreed to fund ~US 6 M for Equatorial Guinea.

There is promising opportunity to work more closely with the WB and IMF on social protection. The CO and the regional public finance specialist held meetings with counterparts including the Ministry of Finance, the Treasury and the US Embassy to re-open the dialogue on public finance for children.

UNICEF continues to develop linkages with local NGOs such as ASAMA, BiriElat, Bocamandja, MOSART, Bioko Sport, ASEM and SOS Children's Villages to reach the most vulnerable and engage with adolescents and youth. To strengthen civil society capacities, UNICEF participated in training workshops organized by the French Cooperation and organized workshops on the HACT framework and RRBM.

UNICEF signed MOU with the Fundación de Religiosos para la Salud (FRS) for the strengthening of the health system and on domestic violence; and with the National Telecommunication Infrastructure Provider (GITGE) on digital learning. Another one with the FCSAI Foundation is underway for nutrition and HIV. The CO maintained close collaboration with MCD for the procurement of the HPV vaccine,

UNICEF collaborated with Fundación IDENTIC, the centre for innovation and technological entrepreneurship powered by GITGE, to participate in the regional TEG-Campus event targeting adolescents and youth to present two UNICEF initiatives: the Learning Passport and the Accessible Digital Textbook (ADT). The CO reached out to the UNICEF Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean to present on ADT.

Lessons Learned and Innovations

Integrated response to COVID-19

The CO strategically identified the USAID and the MPTF COVID-19 emergency funds as an opportunity to enhance the emergency-development nexus by strengthening the health system,

particularly the vaccination programme, while improving emergency responsiveness. Using MPTF funds to address deficiencies identified in the cold chain equipment and staff capacity in logistics and maintenance will contribute to improving both routine and COVID-19 vaccination. Likewise, the IPC/WASH and RCCE interventions to prevent COVID-19 in targeted health facilities and schools will help prevent a broader range of infections.

Both emergency projects required intersectoral implementation within UNICEF and with external counterparts. This meant strong coordination between various UNICEF sections (Health, Education, Monitoring and Evaluation, Communication, and the field office) as well as between the Ministries of Health and Education national and subnational authorities, which was at time challenging given they mostly work in silos.

The MPTF-funded joint project for COVID-19 vaccination generated other lessons learned. The communication campaign to promote vaccination with donated Moderna vaccines could not occur because an incident happened during the African Immunization Week when adolescent girls in 10 schools in Bata reported various symptoms after being immunized against neo-natal tetanus and diphtheria (Td) with doses procured by UNICEF. Despite the scientific evidence obtained through the collective work of international and national experts proving that this situation was unrelated to the effects of the Td vaccine, the Government decided to suspend all vaccination campaigns, potentially damaging overall vaccination efforts.

Nevertheless, working with WHO, having the RC's support, conducting high-level dialogue with the MoH, and providing timely and sound technical evidence of the rigorous vaccine management by UNICEF to different audiences were instrumental to revert a potential reputational risk and reorient the COVID-19 vaccination efforts.

U-Report Advocacy

UNICEF started developing high-level advocacy for the implementation of U-Report in 2019. It took intensive dialogue with stakeholders from different ministries to gain ownership and finally launch U-Report in December 2022. The main challenges were to avoid the perception of the potential misuse of U-Report for political or partisan purposes and to convince the government counterparts about the advantages of adolescents and young people's participation in the country's development.

Several advocacy meetings were held with high-level ministers and meetings with technical teams in line ministries. A multi-sectoral steering committee for implementing U-Report, was finally established in November 2022. Likewise, the alliance with strategic partners in the digital communication sector, such as GITGE, facilitated this process and made it possible to launch U-Report in December 2022, during the TEG-Campus, a major annual technological innovation event for youth.

The CO mobilized resources to recruit an experienced international consultant to lead the U-Report initiative onsite. This consultancy helped to streamline the process and strengthen the confidence of the Government towards the initiative. The existence of U-Report in neighboring Central African countries was a great motivation for the Government to adopt it.

The CO plans to prioritize adolescent integrated development and engagement in the new cooperation cycle and U-Report will be a critical tool to achieve results.

Strategic use of limited evidence

Besides its continued advocacy and support to address data gaps, UNICEF generated pieces of evidence on different subjects (learning outcomes, immunization, birth registration, distance learning,

WASH in schools, and the Situation Analysis on children and adolescents). The validation process by the Government of the evidence generated for its use in advocacy and decision-making is complex and time-consuming. For instance, the results of the WASH in schools' study and of the first learning assessments study conducted in 2021 have not yet been validated. The excessive delay in validating represents an opportunity cost the country cannot afford. The preliminary results of the learning assessments conducted at national level in 2022 are consistent with the ones from the previous year and reaffirm the necessity to conduct a profound analysis of the learning gaps and their drivers. A deep dive into the results will allow more robust evidence-based advocacy to promote government ownership and progressive investment to institutionalize the learning assessment for the following years.

UNICEF is adapting its strategy with the MoE by involving technical and decision-making teams right from the start in new evidence-generation initiatives, such as the Teachers for All study. Besides, the MoE signed a formal agreement with clear deliverables and a solid commitment to use the evidence.

Although it is still early to assess the effectiveness of this approach, the CO has learned the importance of initial buy-in from the Government, its active involvement across all the stages of the evidence-generation process, and a formal commitment to disseminate and use it strategically. This approach should be applied with greater emphasis when it comes to national surveys, like the upcoming DHS. Lastly, this experience will guide UNICEF's strategic decisions on evaluation to be conducted for the following cooperation cycle, with support from the multi-country evaluation specialist.

Looking Ahead

The CO is currently developing the new Country Programme 2024-2028. It organized internal and external workshops on RRBM in which preliminary deprivation and bottleneck analysis and theories of change were developed. With the RO's support and participation of UN agencies, the CO held a SMR. Key takeaways are the need to implement cross-sectoral approaches and deliberated strategies to reduce historical inequalities (mainly gender, geographically and urban/rural based), support the Government to advance in social development, and adopt cross-cutting accelerators of results by working in social protection systems, public finance for children, and social and behavioral change strategies.

The CO is currently producing a new Situation Analysis, which will allow a deeper equity analysis to inform decision-making on geographical focus and UNICEF's field presence for the following cooperation cycle, considering possible synergies and convergence with other UN agencies, as well as Government's priorities. The CO plans to evaluate the experience of the Child-Friendly Districts Initiative in Akurenam, the only district that implemented it. The ongoing Gender Programmatic Review will also provide valuable analysis and guidance for the CO to reinforce and better address severe and persistent gender inequalities.