Addressing Gender Norms and Barriers

unicef 🌐

for every child

©UNICEF/UN0276252/Boro

Negative gender norms and barriers prevail to varying degrees across the South Asia region. Girls of all ages in South Asia are the most vulnerable to many harmful practices, which constrain their equitable access to health care and nutrition, education, WASH and other resources and services. They curtail physical, emotional and mental safety, while limiting capabilities and human capital potential. Gender discriminatory norms and practices also perpetuate the cycle of poverty and under-development while hindering girls' rights and the advancement of gender equality.
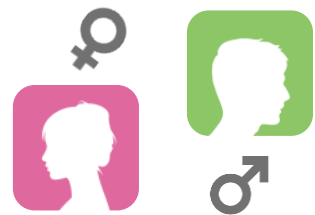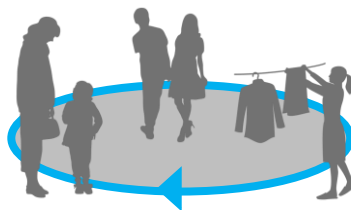
GENDER NORMS

1 Why important?
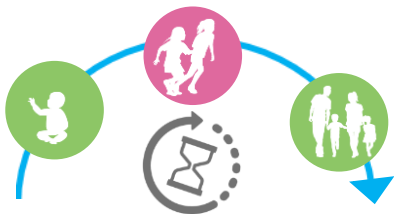
Gender norms are societal expectations for behaviors that are inculcated and internalized through socialization and informal rules for conduct from an early age

They are enforced by social rewards (when adhered to) and harsh sanctions (when not adhered to), reinforced via formal/informal institutions, and reproduced through social interaction

Gender norms impose constraints and barriers to realizing full human potential and entail a denial of human rights and social/gender justice
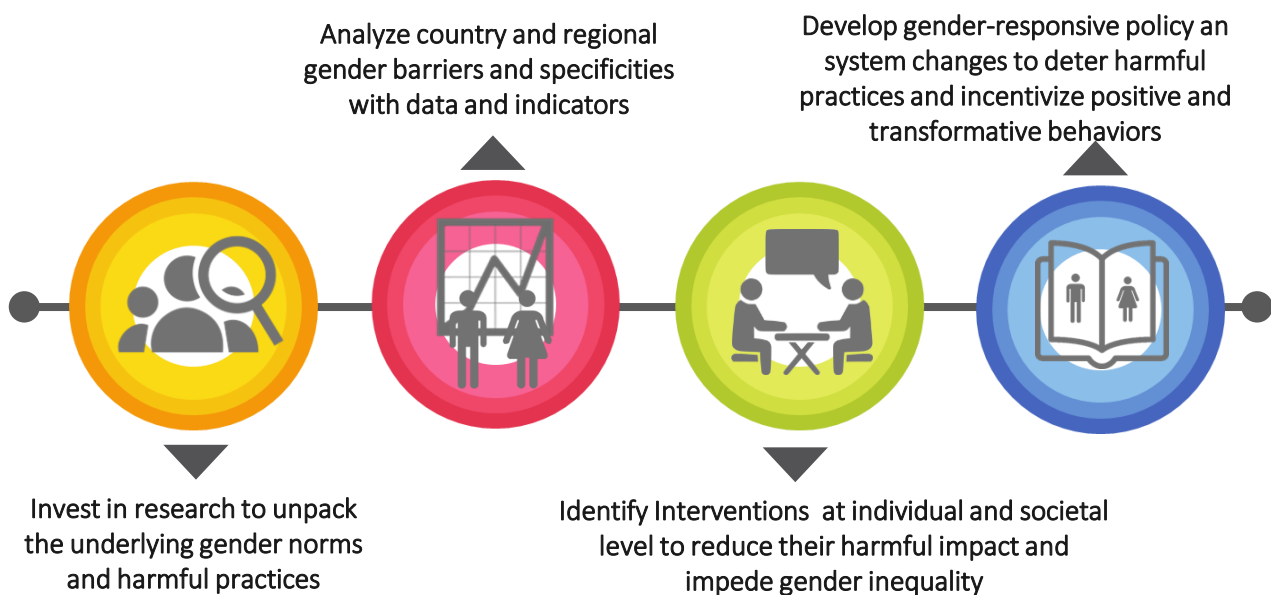
Gender norms are based on stereotypes, rooted in unequal power, dominance and subordination, leads to discrimination, reduces agency and voice, mobility and increases risk to GBV

Harmful gender norms can be transformed at individual and societal level through equitable, inclusive, empowering practices, interventions, and policies

2 Approach

Analyze country and regional gender barriers and specificities with data and indicators

Develop gender-responsive policy an system changes to deter harmful practices and incentivize positive and transformative behaviors

Invest in research to unpack the underlying gender norms and harmful practices

Identify Interventions at individual and societal level to reduce their harmful impact and impede gender inequality

3 Programme strategies

Raise awareness about the human and economic costs of harmful gender norms, practices, and barriers

Enhance the value of the girl child through advocacy, recognition, visibility, and social protection campaigns

Launch social-behavioral change campaigns (SBCC) to eliminate harmful norms and practices

Engage men and boys and adolescents as change agents for gender equality

Address institutional barriers to gender equity through targeted interventions, and the associated gender stereotypes that diminish gender equitable results

Develop interventions to **advance supportive parenting approaches** and **positive socialization** from early childhood

Harness the drivers of change at individual and societal level to prompt **positive gender norm shifts**

4 Essentials

Gender responsive policy reform

Gender-disaggregated data to support evidence-informed and equitable policy

Gender-transformative operational strategies

Gender-informed monitoring and evaluation

Documentation of lessons learned and good practices on effective strategies for gender equitable results

Promote sectoral collaboration, share successes, upscale good results, reward achievements and give visibility to the positive outcomes

unicef

for every child

Empowering and Investing in Women and Girls

unicef for every child

Empowering and investing in women and girls reaps social benefits beyond a single woman or girl, resulting in improved wellbeing within her family, community and society at large. For example, investments in girls' education is determined as bringing about the highest returns in developing countries: contributes to better health, higher labor force participation and earnings, reduction in cycle of household poverty, and the ability to provide better health care and education for their children. Women and girls must be provided with opportunities to have a key role in the process of their empowerment to be sustainable.

INVEST IN GIRLS

1 Why important?

1) Pervasive discriminatory perceptions and practices against girls and women persist across the South Asia region, despite country variations in degree and magnitude

2) Such perceptions and practices curtail their agency, restrict attainment of their rights, and are a source of disempowerment

3) Women and girls fare poorly in economic participation, educational attainment, wage work, fertility, female to male sex ratio at birth, gender violence, access to justice, and political and public participation

4) Recent projections indicate that harnessing the full potential of girls and women through targeted investments and empowerment efforts would increase GNP by over 50%

5) Targeted efforts to invest in the empowerment of girls and women can reverse the long-term trends in gender gaps and disparities

6) Low expenditure in the social sectors coupled with gender barriers and discriminatory norms result in low human development, social and gender indicators

7) Gender disparities based on social, cultural and in some cases legal constructs and practices override the biological advantages of being born female

2 Approach

Analyze, address and remove gender barriers, social/location specific structural and systemic constraints and institutional bias

Build capacity and technical expertise to strengthen gender responsive policy and interventions to facilitate women and girls' empowerment
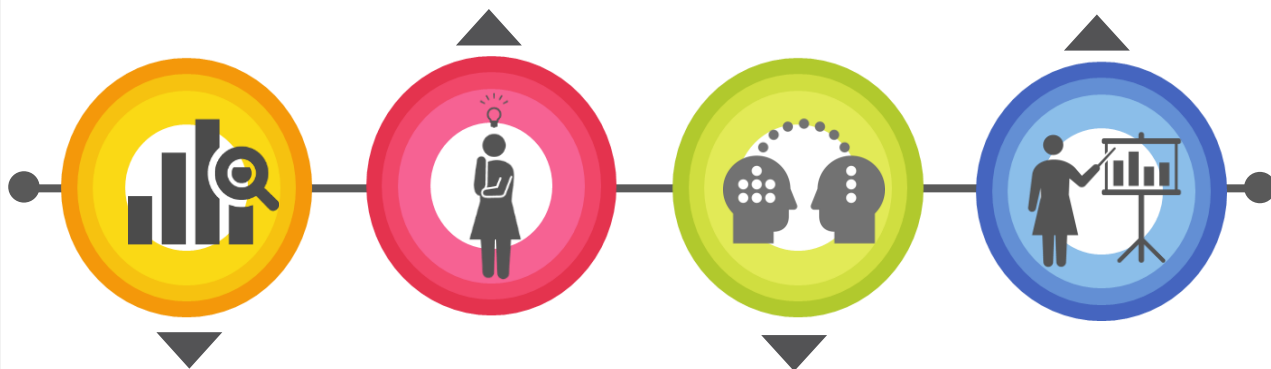
Identify entry points for strategic and sustained investments and targeted, costed efforts and resources to empower women and girls

Identify good practice and ensure knowledge exchange for replication and scale up of best strategies for empowering women and girls

3 Programme strategies

Build the agency of women and girls to assert their rights and autonomy through strengthened social capital and leadership

Collaboration with women's rights organizations/networks to advance systemic/structural changes through advocacy and promotion of universal gender rights standards

Promote and institute budgeted gender-responsive legislative and policy reform measures with implementation plans to close gender disparities and gaps

Register the voice of women and girls for self efficacy and collective empowerment through participatory and inclusive programming

4 Essentials

Gender responsive, evidence-informed policy reform based on sex-disaggregated data

Share lessons learned and give visibility to strong outcomes and demonstrated successes to incentivize replication and scale up

Promote collaboration to enhance joint and common approaches, to scale up effective strategies, and to promote and advocate for empowering women and girls

unicef 🌐

for every child

Engaging Men and Boys for Gender Equality

unicef for every child

©UNICEF/UN046707/Haque

Across the world, engaging men and boys has been recognized as a necessary part of, and an effective strategy in transforming the gender order/relations, and in bringing about gender equality. Men and boys , together with other key influencers are gatekeepers in the gender order of the society, and positively shifting their perceptions, attitudes and practices is critical to the gender justice process. UNICEF works through gender transformative approaches to engage men and boys and shift unequal power relations to achieve gender equality.

MEN + BOYS

1 Why important?

Harmful social/gender norms are internalized at an early age through socialization processes and entail gender biased perceptions and discriminatory practices.
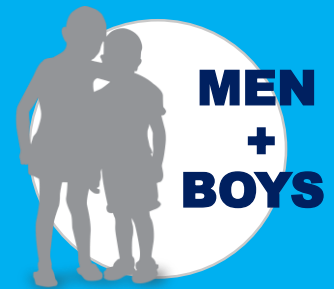
Engaging men and boys is a crucial approach in achieving gender equality, given that they exercise power, control, and privilege in gender relations.

Such gender role expectations and behaviors undermine the wellbeing of girls and women, while they also operate in insidious ways to the detriment of men and boys.
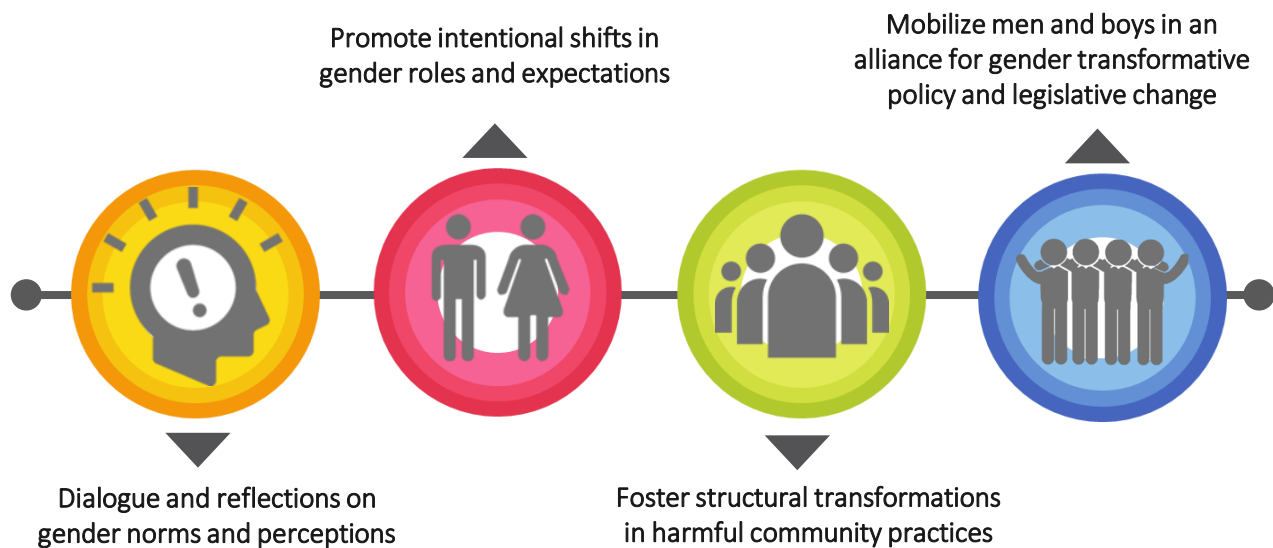
Assertions of power and privilege often entail violence directed at women and girls with grave consequences, and diminish optimal family/household functioning and wellbeing.

Men and boys can assume a vital role in transforming acceptable harmful social/gender norms and practices in order to bring about gender-based empowerment and equality.

2 Approach

Promote intentional shifts in gender roles and expectations

Mobilize men and boys in an alliance for gender transformative policy and legislative change

Dialogue and reflections on gender norms and perceptions

Foster structural transformations in harmful community practices

3 Programme strategies

Long-term, consistent and in-depth engagement with men and boys supported by **social incentives** such as recognition of positive and nurturing behaviors and actions

Establish social and legal mechanisms for disrupting harmful practices and violence against women and girls, for promoting protective behaviors and early interventions to impede abusive acts

Institute **legal mechanisms** to protect abused individuals, to remove perpetrators from the situation, and procedures to ensure justice

Instill a **culture of community** and **institutional accountability** for positive gender relations, norms and practices

Introduce a **systemic strategy to institute men and boys as change agents** to model and champion positive gender norms, roles and practices as allies of women and girls

4 Essentials

Engage men and boys as stakeholders and partners

Disavow the culture of dominance and subordination in the societal gender order

Set in place mechanisms that enable men and boys to confront, prevent and intervene in situations of gender violence

Mobilize men and boys to inculcate the tenets of gender justice in personal domain and community

Facilitate the sustainability of gender equity efforts by men and boys through peer reinforcement of caring and nurturing roles

Promote alternative and positive masculinities that men and boys can adhere to

unicef
for every child

Mobilizing Communities for Change

unicef 🅤

for every child

Community participation is critical for changing gender inequity. Mobilizing communities is beneficial for many reasons: creating "buy in" and local ownership, which leads to sustainable results; ensuring the credibility and viability of interventions by tapping in to community knowledge of what works and does not; and raising awareness of gaps and providing rooms for improvements. Since gender norms are formed and enforced at the community level, mobilizing communities to reflect on and reconsider customary practices and perceptions is a proven and effective strategy.

**COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION**

1 Why important?

The power of harnessing the collective will and energies of a society for achieving positive development outcomes by mobilizing communities has been amply demonstrated

Mobilizing communities to shift away from harmful gender norms and practices is possible through participatory approaches that build awareness and encourage inclusive and collective action
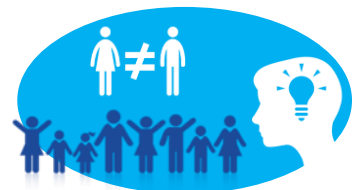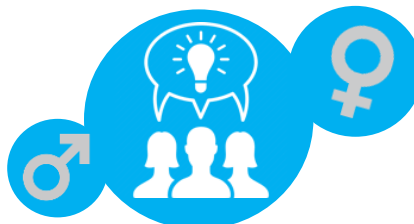
Communities can be impelled to consider how harmful gender norms and practices not only diminish the level of wellbeing of women and girls, but also collective wellbeing

To generate a commitment to gender transformative change, communities need to be mobilized to recognize and reckon with the harmful impact of gender discriminatory perceptions and practices for women and girls as a denial of their human rights

Shifting community norms and practices toward gender equitable values and behaviors is essential in the South Asia region, where pervasive gender gaps and disparities persist

2 Approach

Use the socio-ecological model to build consensus around the kinds of change necessary in individuals (i.e. attitudes and practices), structures (barriers that prevent equitable access to resources and services), and across society

Community dialogue, social inclusion and collective actions are the cornerstones of community mobilization

Identify community-based organizations (CBOs) and form community action teams (CATs) with women's participation to launch collective action through community-wide engagement and participatory strategies for gender transformative change

3 Programme strategies

Identify/select communities that need to be mobilized to embark on a process of gender transformative change

Enlist local CBOs and informal CATs to play a catalytic role throughout the process of community mobilization

Support CBOs and CATs to **undertake participatory action research** to identify and guide appropriate interventions for prevailing gender inequities and harmful practices

Support communities to **map action plans** for gender transformative change

Involve youth to lead, champion and **actively engage** in changing harmful gender practices, and to model positive behaviors

Strengthen community structures and institutions to work on gender equity, diffuse resistance to change, and sustain gender transformative norms and practices

Engage gatekeepers in order to sustain gender transformative changes in norms, values, perceptions and practices

Establish and strengthen formal and informal partnerships and linkages for gender equity

4 Essentials

Engage across the community for social and gender equity and inclusion

Rely on participatory approaches that build collaboration and generates consensus

Address points of resistance, fears, apprehension and possible reprisal, and build the influence of gatekeepers

Build alliances, partnerships and linkages to advocate for and champion gender equity

unicef ✿

for every child

Addressing at System, Legal and Policy Level

unicef for every child

©UNICEF/UN0300728/Zaidi

Gender inequality is deeply entrenched across social structures and systems in South Asia. Therefore, achieving gender equality in a sustainable way requires deeper systemic change, which is possible only through multi-pronged approaches at the individual, household, community and society-wide levels. One key approach is to launch legislative and policy reforms that are gender responsive and transformative, which tend to be gender blind and results in denying progress for half the population (girls and women) from equity and justice

LAW POLICY

1 Why important?

Achieving gender transformative change calls for fundamental changes in social systems, legislation, policies and structures at a deeper level than partial interventions

Systemic change includes deep rooted transformations in social structures and institutions, including in the gender norms, perceptions and practices that are embedded in social structures and basic institutions of society
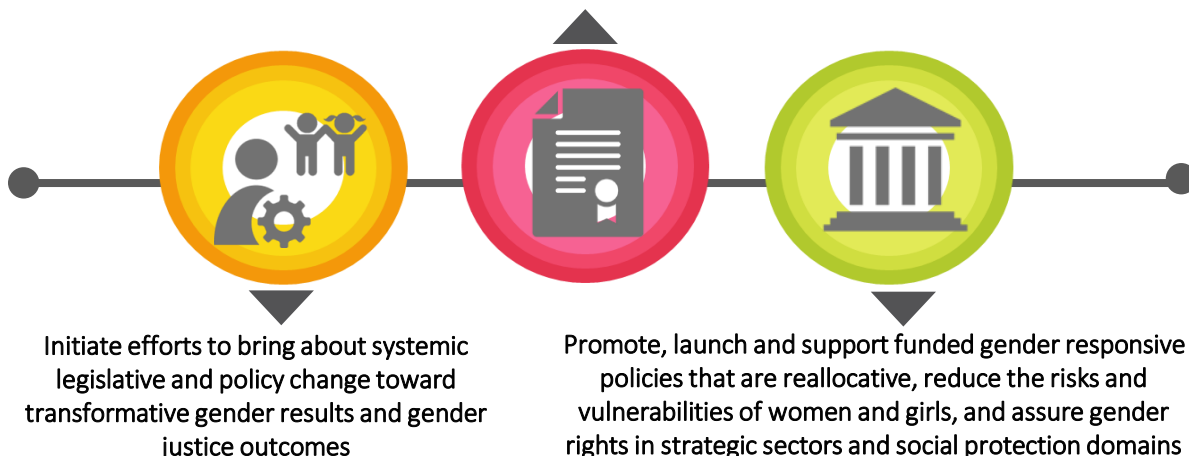
Legislative and policy change are critical instruments in ushering gender justice, and can also play a significant role in shifting practices because they offer incentives that can shift harmful gender norms and detrimental consequences to deter discriminatory practices that hold back progress

Systemic change is essential to bring about sustainable gender transformative change

2 Approach

Enact gender-responsive legal frameworks and institutional mechanisms that stipulate women and girls' safety and protection, equitable access to resources and services, and equal opportunities across domains with deterrence and prevention measures, social support, and implementation provisions

Initiate efforts to bring about systemic legislative and policy change toward transformative gender results and gender justice outcomes

Promote, launch and support funded gender responsive policies that are reallocative, reduce the risks and vulnerabilities of women and girls, and assure gender rights in strategic sectors and social protection domains

3 Programme strategies

Identify institutional leverage points for reforming formal structures, instituted practices and gender norms to facilitate gender transformative change

Support the enactment of gender-responsive legal frameworks and legislative reforms in critical areas/issues in order to redress gender-based imbalances of power, distribution of resources, and access/use differentials

Promote and build broad consensus on the need for transformative, gender-responsive policy reform by mobilizing key stakeholders/ enforcers, engaging men and boys as champions and building collaborative networks

4 Essentials

Build-in sufficient time for systemic change in gender norms and practices

Address the social structures in which gender norms and practices are embedded and how they operate through the rules and expectations about gender-relations

Engage men and boys and across the society to explore alternatives to rigidly demarcated gender roles, perceptions and attitudes to initiate room for flexibility

Support and promote legislative measures that enable the next level of shifts in discriminatory gender practices as the route to transformative gender change

Ensure gender-responsive policy reform across key sectors, as well as macro-economic policy, relying on gender disaggregated data and evidence to ensure evidence-driven policy reform/formulations
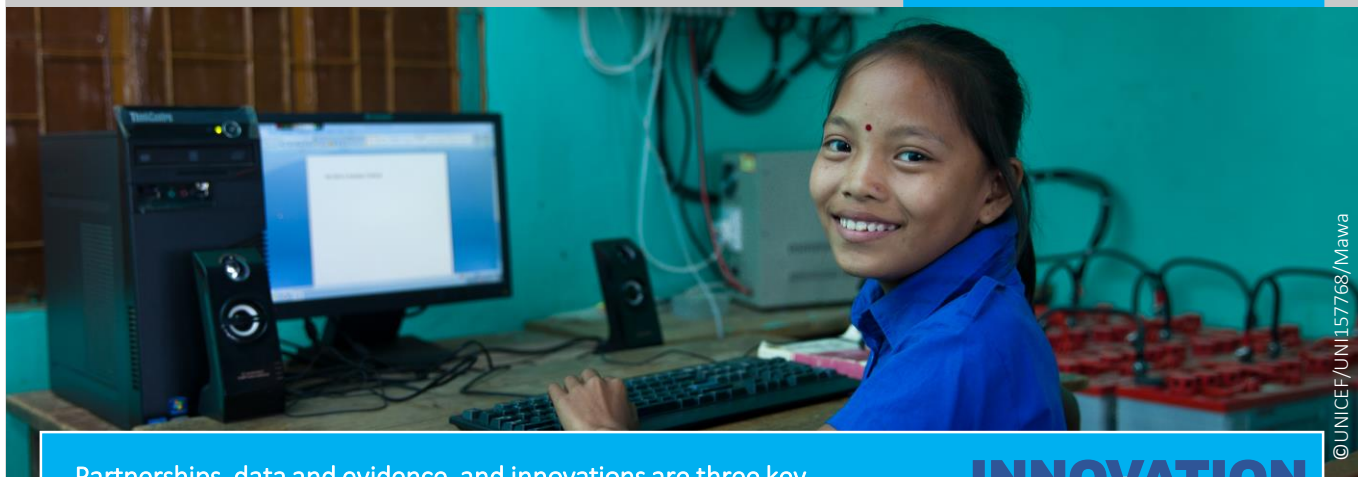
unicef ✿

for every child

Partnerships and Systems for Innovation, Data and Evidence

unicef ❁
for every child

©UNICEF/UNI157768/Mawa

Partnerships, data and evidence, and innovations are three key ingredients needed to accelerate gender equality in South Asia. Across the region, the general lack of gender disaggregated data and information gaps on access to resources and services by women and girls impede an understanding of the magnitude of gender disparities, as well as where to target solutions and what strategies would be most effective. Gender discrimination that results in gender gaps are not just harmful to women and girls, but result in major economic and social consequences.

INNOVATION
EVIDENCE
DATA

1 Why important?

Partnerships are the lynchpin in advancing gender equality and achieving the SDGs, helpful in generating and analyzing disaggregated data and evidence, and in promoting innovative approaches to redressing gender inequities.

Gender data is critical for monitoring progress on gender equality and ensuring successful implementation of the entire SDG agenda.

DATA

Gender-disaggregated data serve as **evidence** that is indispensable for a problem solving on how to address gender inequities

INNOVATION

EVIDENCE

Utilization of **innovations** may be hampered by gender-related obstacles, such as harmful norms, power hierarchies, unconscious biases, institutional structures and social arrangements.

Harnessing the power of **innovations** to bring gender transformative change is possible by embedding gender equality in innovative efforts.
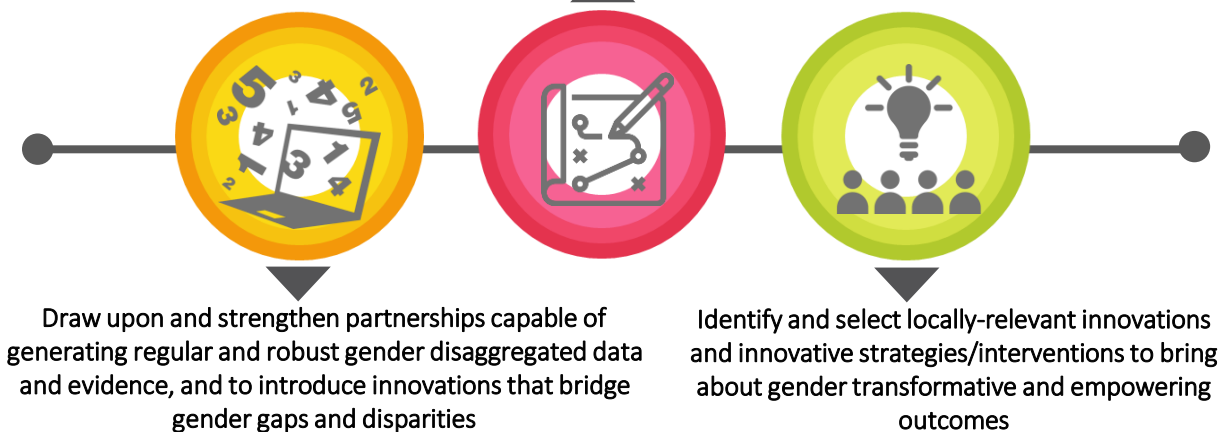
Focusing on this **triage in tandem** is essential because data and evidence enables an assessment of the uptake and outcomes of innovations that address gender inequities in access and use of resources and services.
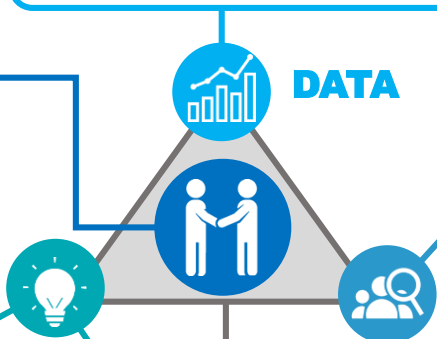
2 Approach

Ensure the collection and analysis of gender disaggregated data and evidence to feed in to evidence-informed strategies, interventions and policy reform tailored to the context-specific gender disparities and inequities in each country and local setting

Draw upon and strengthen partnerships capable of generating regular and robust gender disaggregated data and evidence, and to introduce innovations that bridge gender gaps and disparities

Identify and select locally-relevant innovations and innovative strategies/interventions to bring about gender transformative and empowering outcomes

3 Programme strategies

Identify and establish strategic, high-impact partnerships toward the goal of generating sustainable, gender transformative change through **collaborations, innovative strategies**, and by **mobilizing across communities and national institutions.**

Ensure that common efforts to bridge gender gaps and disparities are grounded in **sound gender analyses**, informed by **comprehensive, valid and systematic gender disaggregated data and evidence**.

Explore and support **innovative solutions** that are inclusive, adaptable, gender/locally relevant; **actively engage women and girls** at the design, testing, diffusion, and scaling up stages; **meet the needs, concerns, and priorities** of girls and women; **foster an innovation culture among** girls and women; and have strong potential for gender transformative change

4 Essentials

Ensure multi-sectoral partnerships with complementary skills, resources, and the ability to mobilize diverse constituencies for gender transformative change

Engage women and girls as active participants in identifying, designing, testing and disseminating innovative solutions as a source of recognition, value and empowerment for them

Rely on gender disaggregated data to assess the gender-specific effects/ impacts of critical issues, to tailor evidence-informed, gender-responsive strategies and policy reform, as well as innovative solutions.

unicef 🙵
for every child