



LEVERAGING UN COORDINATION TO IMPLEMENT GENDER NORMATIVE FRAMEWORKS IN AFRICA



INTRODUCTION

UN Women is mandated to lead, promote and coordinate efforts to advance the full realisation of women's rights and opportunities. It seeks to promote policy development and the implementation of global norms by supporting national stakeholders to review and revise legal frameworks, promote women's leadership and civic engagement, challenge harmful social norms and practices through community mobilization, and improve data collection and analysis on gender-related indicators and key policy issues. UN Women plays a leading role in supporting improvements in global norms and standards that accelerate the realisation of gender equality and the empowerment of women. The entity provides substantive expertise and policy analysis, works to strengthen the knowledge base on gender equality and incorporates good practices and lessons learned from regional and national experiences in its normative support work.

It also engages with Member States through awareness-raising and advocacy and facilitates alliance-building and partnerships. The normative work of UN Women has taken on additional importance at a time when several global intergovernmental processes provide unprecedented opportunities for an accelerated realization of gender equality and the empowerment of women.

In the UN Family, UN Women has played a critical role in supporting gender mainstreaming in UN Liaison Offices through the Regional Coordina-

tion Mechanism (RCM) Africa which is a platform of partnership between the UN-AU. Since 2016, the mechanism mandated UN Women, the AUC Gender and Development Directorate and the UNECA Africa Center for Gender to coordinate implementation of GEWE at the continental level including joint monitoring of the GEWE Agenda in the context of Agenda 2030 and Agenda 2063. The mechanism also resolved to establish Gender Equality, Women and Youth Empowerment as a stand-alone cluster hence providing an opportunity to UN Women to support UNS/AU-led initiatives for targeted results. With the adoption of the new generation collaborative platforms namely RCPs and OIBCs, UN Women Liaison Office is now well positioned to foster increased collaboration among UN agencies on continental GEWE priorities. Additionally, UN Women has actively participated and influenced coordination within the UN Liaison Team constituting the UN Liaison Offices supporting the AU to foster increased collaboration around key regional GEWE priority areas as well as the institutionalisation of gender mainstreaming in AU and UN agencies through targeted capacity building activities.

However, the linkage between on the one hand, this exemplary collaboration at continental level and, on the other hand, the programme work, as well as knowledge generation at country level, still remains a challenge.

Maxime Houinato - Regional Director,
UNW East and Southern Africa.

UN WOMEN REGIONAL EFFORTS ON KNOWLEDGE GENERATION

In December 2023, UN Women Regional Office for East and Southern Africa organised a Knowledge Fair which served as a platform to showcase the diverse knowledge products and interventions undertaken by the regional office and country offices. The Fair enhanced UN Women's visibility as a leader in gender knowledge and fostered dialogue, collaboration, and the creation of a strong regional network. The Fair featured knowledge dummies representing country and regional knowledge interventions. Thematic units had booths to exhibit their knowledge products, providing visibility and engaging participants with diverse content and tools on gender and development.

Country and regional-level storyboards with narratives of change from beneficiaries were prominently featured. These stories, collected from various countries, captivated attendees, fostering a deeper understanding of UN Women's impact. A Virtual Tour of UN Women Knowledge Interventions, complemented by QR codes on publication dummies, facilitated personalised and quick access to knowledge products.

The Fair addressed a spectrum of thematic focuses, including Knowledge Management, Women

Economic Empowerment (WEE), Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (EVAWG), Leadership and Governance, Women Peace and Security, Gender Statistics, Strategic Coordination, Humanitarian Action, and selected Country Office Knowledge Interventions.

A robust online presence was maintained through social media engagement, projecting key messages on gender equality to various target audiences in the region. Fact sheets and key messages accompanying publications expanded the options for outreach and dissemination.

The Knowledge Fair proved to be a dynamic and impactful initiative, creating a vibrant space for the exchange of ideas, collaboration, and the showcasing of UN Women's achievements in advancing Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment. The event's success was premised not only in its ability to disseminate knowledge but also in fostering partnerships, building a regional network, and positioning UN Women as a knowledge hub in the ongoing pursuit of transformative development, particularly in the normative sphere.





Link to the website:

[UN Women East and Southern Africa Knowledge Fair 2023 | UN Women – Africa](#)

Link to opening remarks:

[Opening Remarks-Regional Director-Knowledge Fair 2023 | UN Women – Africa](#)

Link to DG UNON remarks:

[DG UNON Remarks UN WOMEN KNOWLEDGE FAIR 2023 | UN Women – Africa](#)

Link to virtual tour:

[Virtual Tour - UN Women East and Southern Africa Knowledge Fair 2023 \(youtube.com\)](#)

Link to knowledge Fair photos:

[Knowledge Fair-UNON Complex, Nairobi-Kenya 4th to 8th December 2023 | Flickr](#)

The recommendation of all participants was to promote inter-agency engagement and gathering of good practices in development of positive gender norms across countries and regions.

HIGH LEVEL MEETING ON UNITED NATIONS INTER-AGENCY PARTNERSHIP ON GENDER NORMATIVE WORK

Following the recommendation by participants in the 2023 Knowledge Fair to promote inter-agency engagement and gather good practices in developing positive gender norms across countries and regions, UN Women East and Southern Africa regional office organised a high-level United Nations Inter-Agency Partnership meeting on Gender Normative Work in February 2024. The overall objective of the meeting was to develop & improve regional partnerships for a more effective

implementation of the United Nations' Normative commitments on Gender Equality in Africa. Specific objectives included discussion with key UN Agencies, broader understanding of, as well as experience or progress addressing gender vulnerability in the region, review the outcome of UN Women Regional 2023 Knowledge Fair and agree on follow up actions and to identify potential entry points for collaboration at country level among relevant agencies on gender norms.



Agency Remarks: UNESCO, UNICEF, OHCHR, UNFPA



Maxime Houinato
Regional Director, UN Women ESARO

“Within UN Women's triple mandate, the normative guides the operational and coordination elements, although we know normative aspects are not straightforward. As such, it is key to have coherence and interagency collaboration around upholding the agreed norms and standards”.



Marcel Akpovo
Regional Director, OHCHR EARO

“The message of human rights as both a stand-alone and mainstreamed mandate needs to be reinforced”.



Lieke Van De Wiel
Deputy Regional Director, UNICEF

“Agencies need to be bolder to back up the gender normative framework at country level in the UNSDCF. The social norms and behaviour change needs to happen at individual, institutional and societal level. UNICEF has a focus on institutional transformation and is learning from its Gender Action Plans, toward placing women as agents of change and how to bring transformative change with services rather women as beneficiaries of services. Focus areas around supporting young girls and boys agents of change around issues of family, parenting, policies (care work) and adolescent girls and education as an area of collaboration”.



Alexandros Makarigakis
Regional Director a.i., UNESCO

“UNESCO priorities are around Africa and gender. So, there is space to explore entry points for collaboration related to laws, policies, strategies on GEWE - education, gender-transformative, science, technology and information communications (noting digital gender divide)”.



Michael Ebele
Regional Emergency Advisor, UNFPA ESARO

“Normative work cuts across UNFPA's triple transformative areas (maternal death, unwanted pregnancies, and ending GBV) and need to also look how to leverage the existence of knowledge generation and promote its use”.

DISCUSSIONS

Legal framework for Gender Norms



- There is need to build a shared understanding and use of the full landscape of the normative framework around gender equality which captures international, regional, gender-specific and broader human rights frameworks which mainstream gender equality, as well as the breadth of binding and non-binding normative frameworks. Without this shared understanding of the entry points for advancing gender equality, we are unable to leverage the efforts made across the system.
- As we work to promote gender equitable norms as part of advancing the implementation of normative frameworks for gender equality, we need to take stock of the diverse approaches to social norms change, and there is an opportunity for UN Women, leveraging our coordination mandate, to convene the UN System to exchange perspectives and approaches to social norms change, and sharing UN Women's learning and approach to feminist social norms change. One avenue for consideration would be the social norms could be included in the CCA and the UNSCDFs to guide UN System programming.
- There is a need to keep attention on how our respective efforts are dismantling 'patriarchal power structures, who is being held to account, whose values are being amplified as the point of departure for norm-setting and how to work strategically as the UN system to bring about transformative change for gender equality using our respective mandate areas.
- UN Women, in our role convening the Regional Gender Working Group and through our engagement in the regional OIBC's, can convene follow-up discussions with interested agencies to take forward the conversations with concrete steps and timelines for action.

UN Agencies' experience in the normative field & relevance to UN Women's mandate



- How to package messages for different parts of the populations- including policy makers, especially around norms transformations is important. Communication is targeted to young and older people to transform norms.
- When working on issues of CRSV/SGBV, it is critical to engage OHCHR to assist the complex web and process.
- If you have evidence of what a positive role women and girls play in society then this would work towards shifting the social norms. Efforts should look at the individual, community, and institution level.

Six areas to explore jointly:

- Coordinated action - how to enhance across agencies.
- Strategies to employ at national level (e.g. as part of UNSDCF)
- Addressing backlash to gender equality and women's empowerment
- Investing in inclusive processes
- Leverage existing platforms (Liaison Offices, UNDCO)
- Capacity of stakeholders for implementation of normative frameworks

Role of knowledge generation in social norms

UN Women Knowledge Management presentation listed some key studies including ending child marriage, access to justice for women during C-19, Country Gender Profiles among others and highlighted UN Women as a go to agency on gender knowledge. Based on the presentation the following were discussed:

- Knowledge is POWER and therefore critical for transforming negative gender social norms.
- Need for better coordination and joint studies with sister UN agencies as well as Women led organisations etc.
- Knowledge products to lead to policy discussions, inform programming, resource mobilisation and advocacy around key issues.
- The importance of summarised versions e.g., fact sheets, policy briefs for the products to be usable/palatable.
- Data and knowledge products should be shared and disseminated to key stakeholders including academia, women and women led organisations at community level.
- To change and challenge social norms- there is need for data and evidence.
- Recommendation to use SIGI survey tool.
- There are different approaches and understanding of social gender norms amongst different agencies. Hence importance of finding convergence.
- Knowledge management should not be accidental or reactive. It should be planned for, complimentary and address gaps identified in previous research.
- There is need to engage with youth for innovation around knowledge generation.
- Knowledge can support the women movement through evidence provision.
- Knowledge generation is sometimes to provide evidence for common sense or to produce data that is different from the common belief.
- Research and knowledge should tell us what we did not know.
- Need to partner with private sector, WB, AFDB etc. on knowledge generation.
- Research and knowledge should add value to what we do.
- Need for credibility in the production of knowledge.

Lessons by UN Agencies on knowledge generation and dissemination on gender normative issues

UNESCO

- Uses knowledge management in their biodiversity programmes to identify designated areas.
- Knowledge generations involves comprehensive baseline data collection that includes age, gender, disability etc., which is published including in local languages.
- Have established clear methodologies for data collection that can be shared.
- Review of impacts done after every 10 years- which is too long.

UNFPA

- Knowledge is derived from expertise, research and lessons learned.
- Established committee that reviews the knowledge products.
- There are four critical areas when it comes to knowledge generation.
 - a. The need to identify the knowledge gaps and ensure that generation of knowledge is complimentary and addresses specific gaps.

b. Be intentional in terms of dissemination e.g., to inform HRPs. Timing and relevance are critical.

c. Engagement with WLOs is critical.

d. Documentation of success. How knowledge is being used and change it is making

UNICEF

- Knowledge generation is first for internal purposes to inform programmes and policy, resource mobilisation, among others.
- Key objective is to achieve results for children and adolescents, advocacy to government, WLOs and other stakeholders.
- The need to ensure usability of the products and fit for purpose in generating knowledge.
- Dissemination includes webinars, print outs, monthly gender scope, posters etc.
- The use of knowledge has achieved success including in mobilisation of resources.

Key points from knowledge management session

- Efforts be made to have joint knowledge generation with sister agencies, women led organisations etc.
- Strengthen partnership with research institution, academia, youth on innovation e.g., use AI and private sector in generating knowledge on social norms and other areas.
- Knowledge generation should be purpose driven and fit for purpose – identification of gaps, be complimentary, known target audience, address a particular challenge, dissemination, and use.
- Timeliness, credibility, and relevance – e.g., gender profiles should inform CCA and UNSDCFs
- Knowledge generation should be planned for and not accidental. Be accessible, usable/palatable.





Knowledge is POWER and therefore critical for transforming negative gender social norms. UN Women should be the go-to agency for gender knowledge.

By Dr. Maxime Houinato



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