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**Advancing Learning and
Innovation on Gender Norms**

Norm Change and Gender Transformation

Caroline Harper and Rachel Marcus

September 2021

Key questions

- How norms influence outcomes for women
- How norms interact with other barriers to gender equality
- How norms change



Welcome to

The Advancing Learning and Innovation on Gender Norms (ALIGN) platform

ALIGN specialises in research and knowledge sharing on gender and social norms, looking at the impact of discriminatory and harmful norms and how they change. We share knowledge from our own research and that of our ever-expanding community of practice.

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Gender norms and the 'period revolution'

Author: Yasmin Watling

Published by: ALIGN

Blog 16 August 2021

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Author: Meg Smith

Published by: ALIGN, Women Win

Blog 22 July 2021

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Published by: ALIGN

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What are gender norms?

**How do they influence outcomes
for women and girls?**

What are norms?

Gender norms are the **informal rules** of society that define how people of a particular gender are **expected to behave**.

They determine what people **think** and what they **do**, and they shape the **attitudes and behaviour** of both women and men in relation to each other.

Invisible gender norms

“ Norms are more like invisible "**guard rails**" that shape and narrow people's thinking, behaviours, and opportunities. So, norms often show up as a kind of negative power, as absence rather than presence: **doors that just didn't open**, choices that couldn't be made, opportunities that just seemed out of reach.

Riki Wilchins, TrueChild

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“ “

Just the way we do
things here.

” ”

Intersectional feminism

“ “ a prism for seeing the way in which various forms of **inequality often operate together** and exacerbate each other ... We tend to talk about race inequality as separate from inequality based on gender, class, sexuality or immigrant status. What's often missing is how some people are subject to all of these, and **the experience is not just the sum of its parts.** ” ”

Kimberle Crenshaw, lawyer and civil rights advocate

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Change the system to change the norm

Individuals create and maintain institutions and re-enact within them many of the same norms that shape their personal lives.

“ You cannot fit women into a structure that is already coded as male. **You have to change the structure.** That means thinking about power differently. It means decoupling it from public prestige. It means thinking collaboratively about **the power of followers, not just the leaders.** It means, above all, thinking about power as an attribute or a verb (“to power”) not as a possession.”

Mary Beard, Historian

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Different Interpretations



Broadly, the sociological tradition emphasises the role of norms in constituting society and governing social behaviour, whereas social psychological and game theoretical perspectives focus more on why people comply with social norms

Conceptualisation of Social and Gender norms (Cislaghi et al.)

Gender norms in gender literature	Social norms in social psychology and behavioural economics
Gender norms are everywhere in the world, embedded in institutions and reproduced by our actions.	Social norms are in our minds; our beliefs are shaped by our experiences of other people's actions and their manifestations of approval and disapproval.
Gender norms are produced and reproduced through our actions and enforced by power-holders who benefit from compliance with those norms.	Social norms maintain themselves, and do not necessarily benefit anyone.
Gender norms are often studied as shaping our individual attitudes.	Social norms are often studied as diverging from our individual attitudes (with a focus on identifying when we agree or disagree with the norm).
We follow the gender norms of our culture, society, or group, the boundaries of which are usually blurred.	We follow the social norms of our reference group (the people whose views matter most to us), which tends to be well-defined.
Changing gender norms requires changing institutions and power dynamics. This often happens through conflict and renegotiation of the power equilibrium.	Changing social norms (at its simplest) requires changing our misconceptions about what other people in our reference group do and approve of.
Changing gender norms is a political process that leads to equality between women and men.	Changing social norms can be a technically driven process to promote greater well-being for both women and men.

Norms resulting in detrimental outcomes for women and girls

It's our custom to marry girls and boys around the age of 14

early and perilous childbirth

Men make better politicians

Girls can't be mechanics

lack of political voice

low aspirations and limited opportunities

It's OK to beat a wife if she has not completed her domestic duties

Violence and ill-health

unfair distribution of domestic work

Men should manage all property

lack of female economic power and skills

Girls must help with domestic chores to learn homemaking skills; boys need to study so they can support their families

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**How norms intersect with other
barriers and change**

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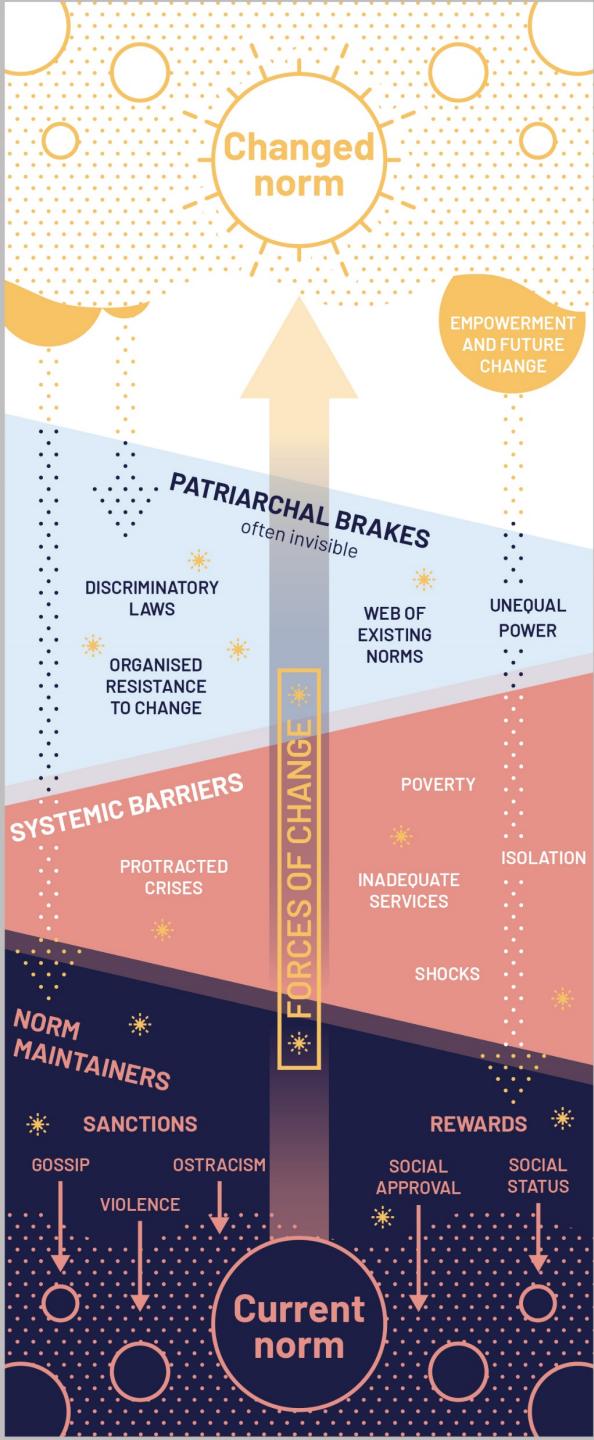


Evidence.
Ideas.
Change.

GENDER, POWER AND PROGRESS

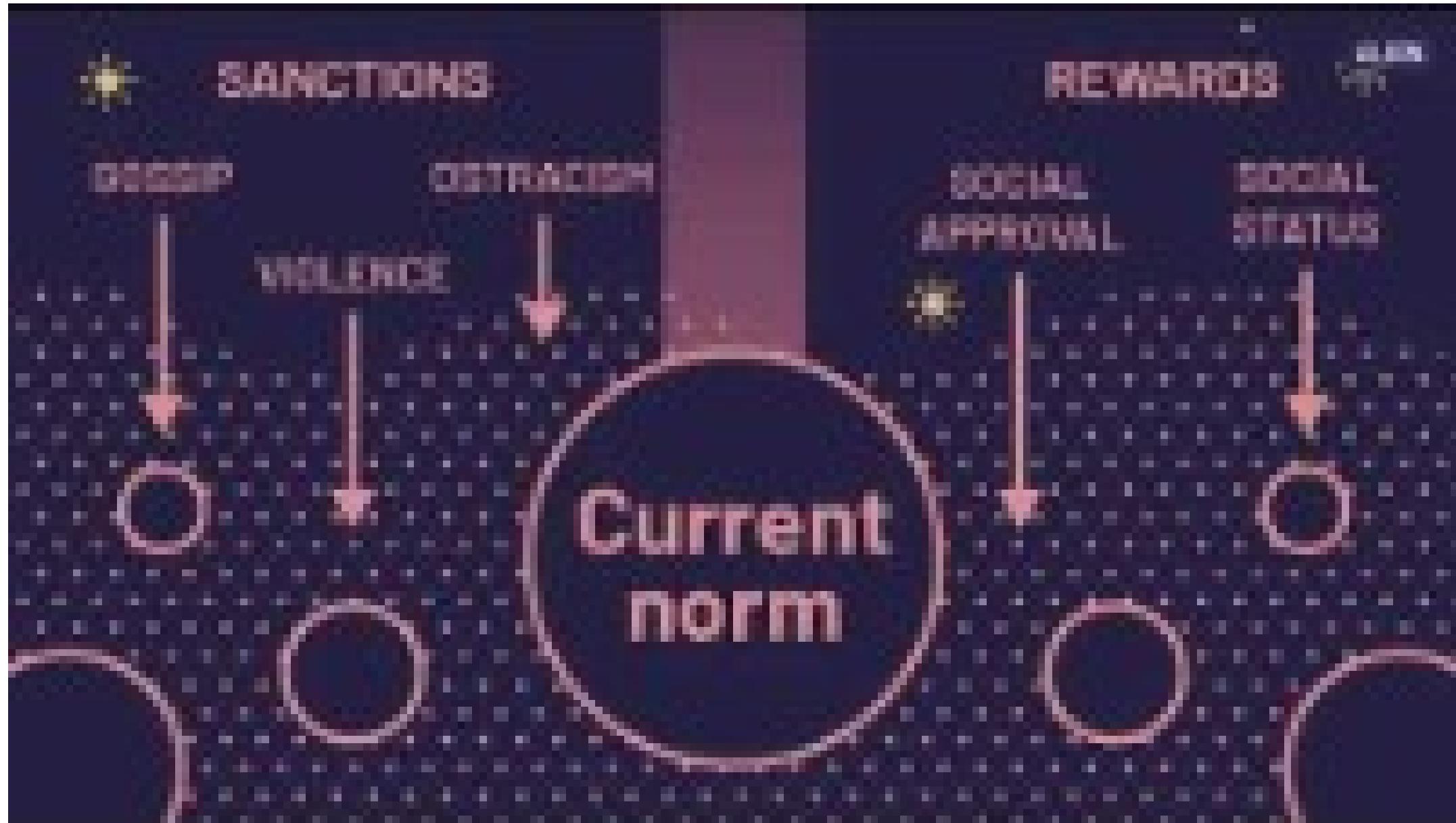
HOW NORMS CHANGE

Caroline Harper
Rachel Marcus
Rachel George
Sophia D'Angelo
Emma Samman



A conceptual framework: a path from a current norm to a changed norm

- Current norm
- Norm maintainers
- Systemic barriers
- Patriarchal brakes
- Forces of change
- Changed norm



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Sequence of change

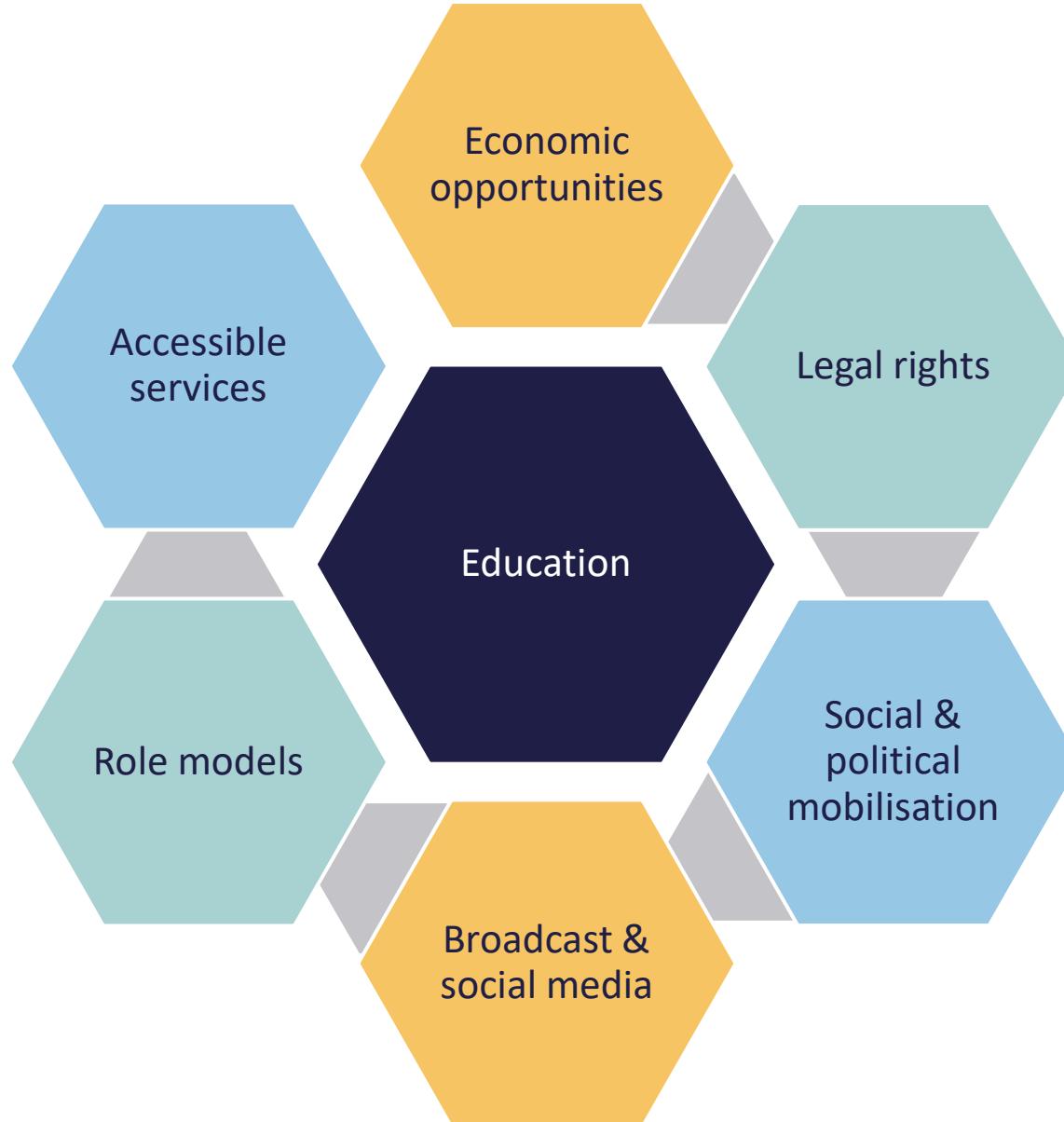
Action on norms at different levels

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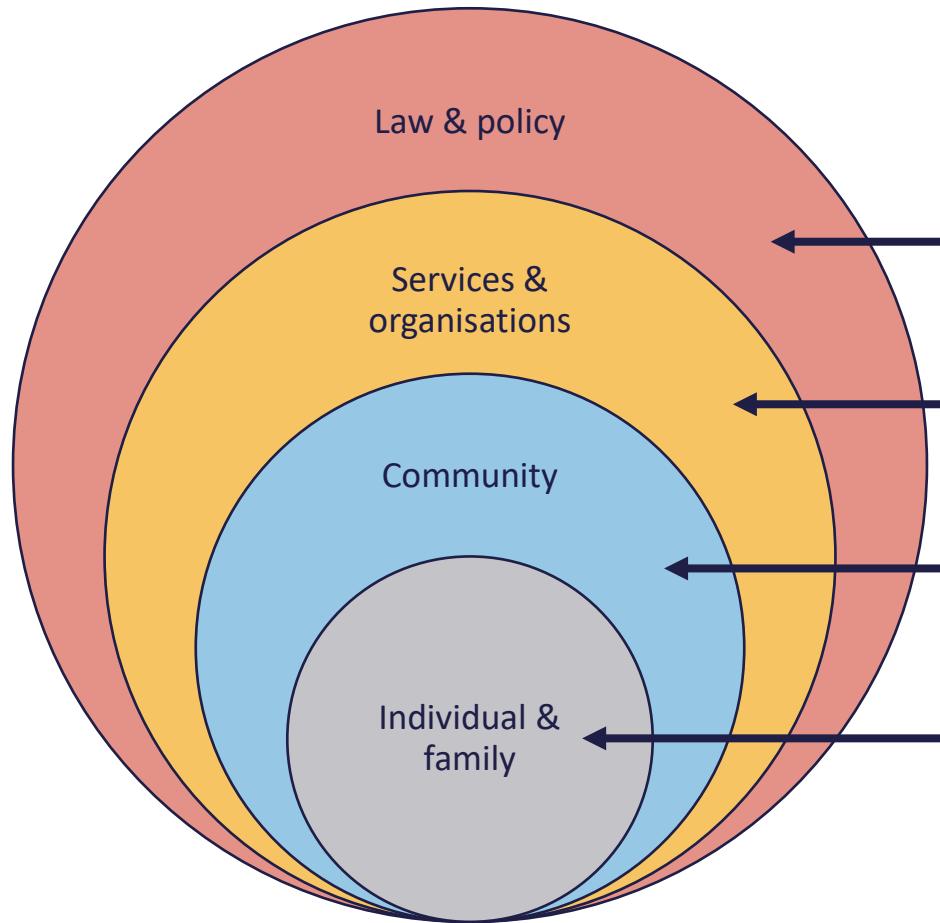


Source: The authors, adapted from Bronfenbrenner (1979).
alignplatform.org/gender-power-progress



Drivers of change

Action at different levels/with different actors



Examples:

- Law reforms, quotas/ reservations
- Education sector reforms, workplace anti-GBV programmes
- Community dialogues; work with 'reference groups' eg religious leaders
- Broadcast and social media

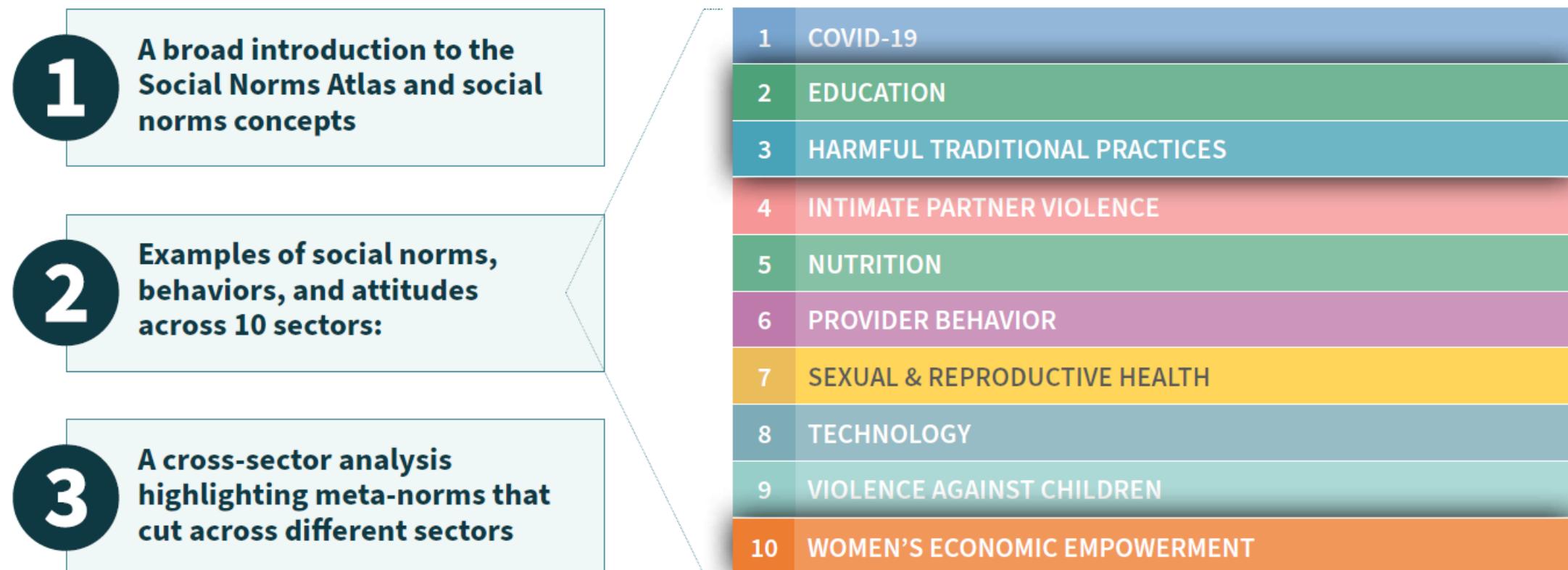
How to support norm change drivers

Driver	Implications
Education	Huge potential – more likely to be realised if gender equality mainstreamed in education systems, curricula and at school level. Crucial impact for people of all genders
Quality, accessible services (health care, infrastructure)	Investment in accessible SRHR services underpins norms around contraceptive use; gender-equitable sexuality education helps drive change in norms. Safe transport infrastructure helps remove barriers to women's work.
Broadcast and social media	Boosting representation and visibility of (different groups of) women and girls matters; regulation to prevent cyber-violence and 'fake news' critical.

How to support norm change drivers

Driver	Implications
Economic opportunities	Make substantial difference in all areas – the unthinkable can quickly become normal if it's financially rewarding. Support women's increased access to work and control of income
Legal rights	Play important symbolic role as well as practical driver of change; publicise change and ensuring access to justice for poorest a neglected element of norm change.
Social and political mobilisation	Space for civic action matters; women's and other pro-equality organisations driving change at different levels need support
Role models	Important for normalising women's presence in all spheres, aspiration and empowerment; school-based exposure, anti-discrimination policies; political empowerment programmes

The Social Norms Atlas Contains Three Main Sections



A 'deeper' dive: education

Education

What's changed?

- Substantial increase in girls' enrolment at primary and secondary level
- Reduction in gender disparities at all levels
- Convergence in learning outcomes by gender
- Increased evidence of male disadvantage in some regions
- Girls facing intersecting disadvantages still have the lowest enrolment rates
- More widespread acceptance of the value of education for girls and boys

What hasn't?

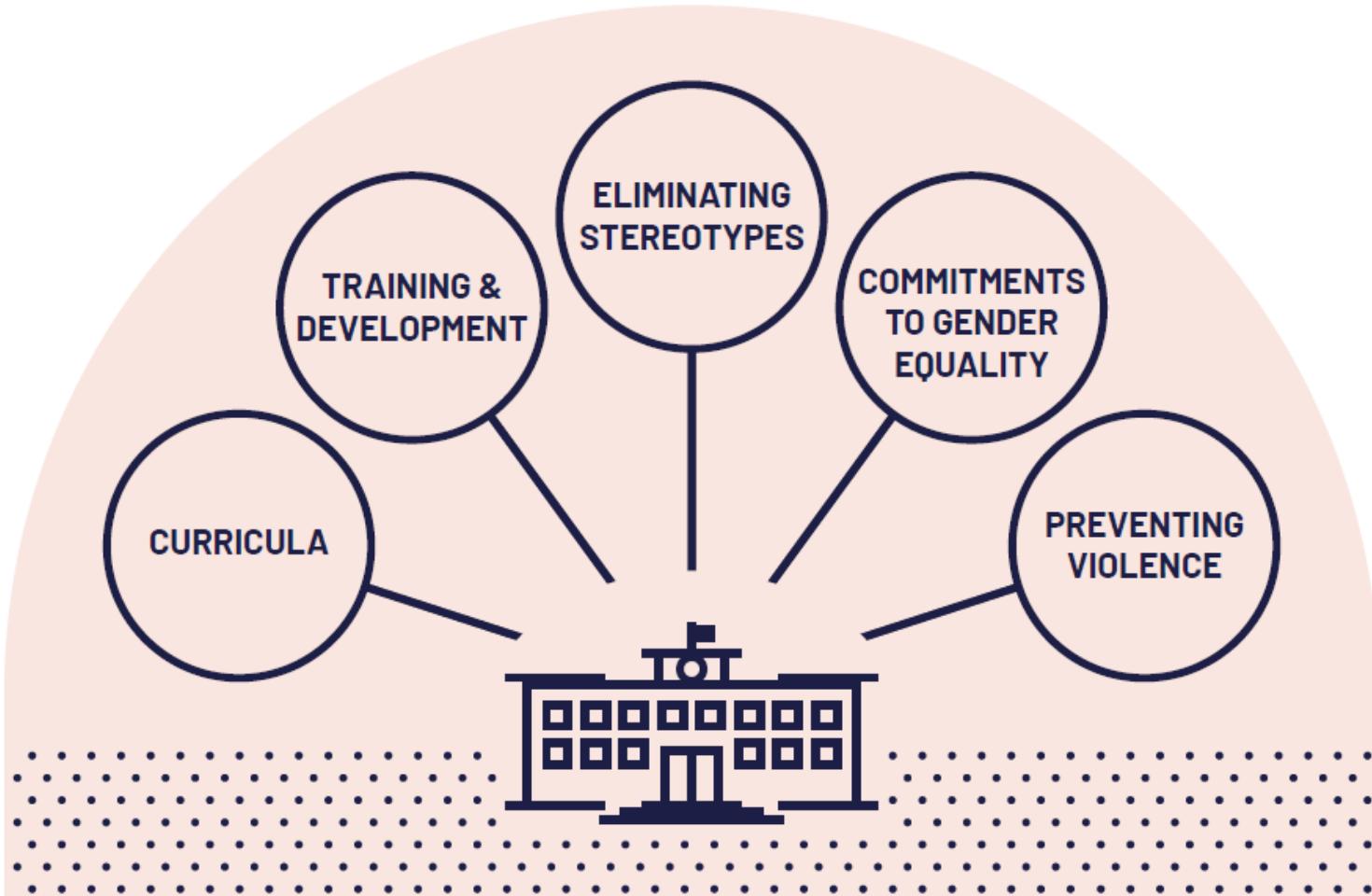
- In crisis, girls' education is still often deprioritised
- Concerns about chastity, reputation and early marriage pressures are continued barriers to girls' secondary and tertiary education
- Norms around domestic responsibilities continue to limit girls' study time and learning
- Male breadwinner norms contribute to high drop-out levels among poor adolescent boys
- In some contexts, bulk of families' education expenditure goes to boys (private schooling, tutoring etc) while girls attend govt schools



Education: What's driven norm shifts?

- Increased investment in and accessibility of schooling
- Normalisation of girls' attendance
- Rising economic opportunities – change calculations about gains from education BUT also converse...
- Determined girls and families supportive of education
- Specific laws and policies (e.g. on child labour, child marriage)
- Female role models

Increasing gender equity in education systems



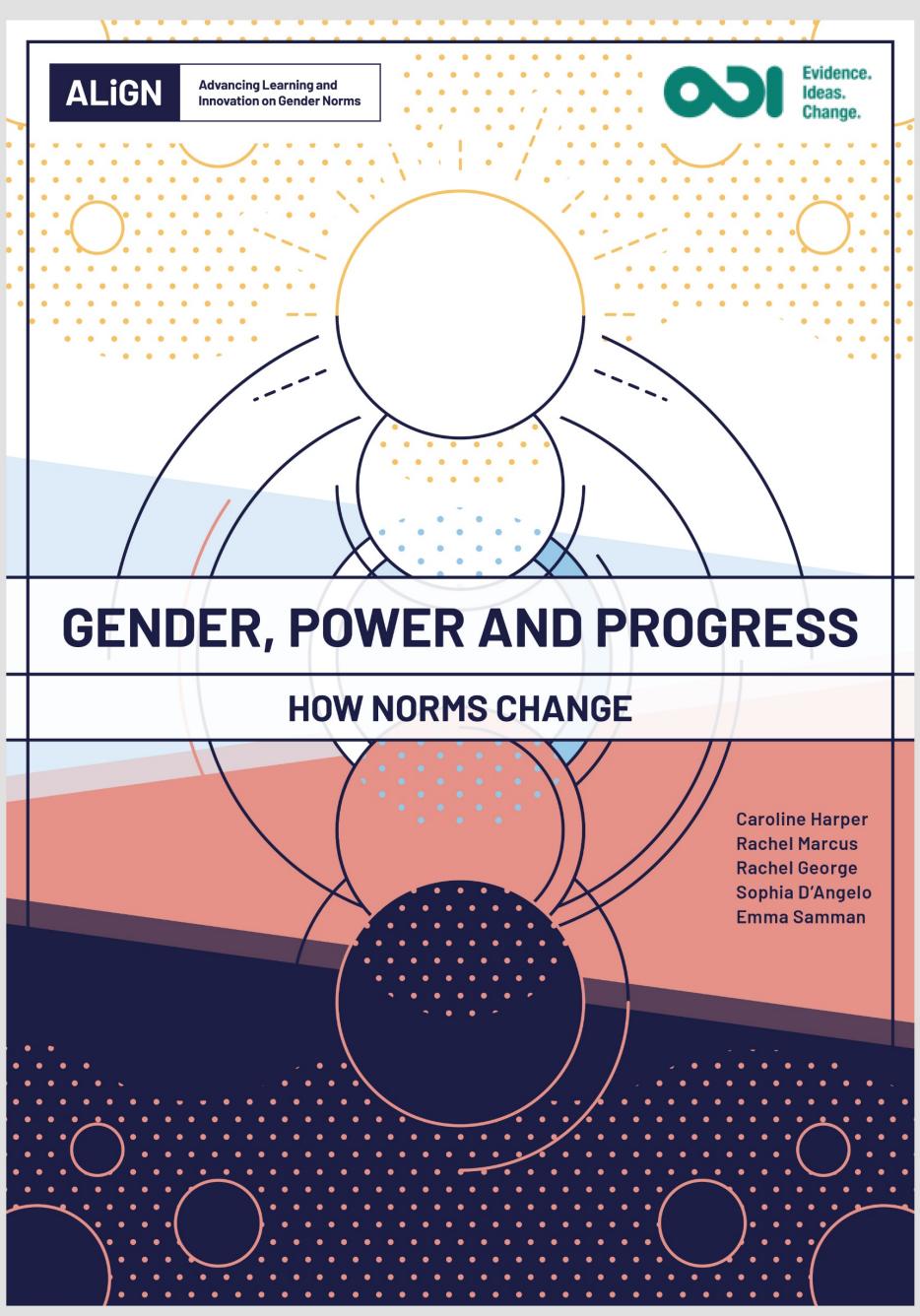
|Source: Author analysis

Education: How can it contribute more to gender norm change?

- Continue addressing access barriers
- Increase the overall quality of education
- Promote gender equitable schools and education systems

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Resources



Useful resources

- ALIGN Flagship report: <https://www.alignplatform.org/gender-power-progress> (full and summary report)
- Forthcoming report on social movements and gender norm change (November)
- ALIGN masculinities pages (S Asia focus)
- ALIGN webinar on media and gender norm change in South Asia (October)
- Learning Collaborative Social norms Atlas

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Thank you for listening.

Any questions?