Motivation

Gender equality with a deadline. This is the vision contained in the sustainable development goals (SDGs): by 2030 there should be equality between women and men across outcomes and levels of empowerment. Things are not on track, however. Recent estimates by the World Economic Forum show that — based on recent trends — it would take 202 years to close the gender pay gap; female participation in the labour market has stagnated and women in leadership positions have increased but slowly and with reversals, such as in the case of women serving as “head of government” (WEF, 2018).

Progress in gender inequality has been remarkable in several areas in comparison to the situation of, say 100 years ago when women were severely excluded from political participation, access to education, to the labour market, etc. Legal barriers have been removed in most countries, women can vote and be elected, women can access to education, women can participate in the economy without formal restrictions. Consequently, women have consistently occupied more and more spaces in society. However, this progress has been uneven, improving rapidly in some areas (particularly in terms of basic access to voting, to primary education, to some segments of the labour market), but very slowly in others as they approach the glass ceiling.

The overall picture is nevertheless worrisome: improvements are slowing down or even coming to a halt. HDRO’s gender inequality index (GII) — a measure of empowerment of women in economic, health and education areas — shows a consistent picture: overall progress in gender inequality has been slow. It can also be said that has reached a plateau. (Graph 1)
Recently, another piece of evidence appeared. Legal protections were not able to prevent continued sexual abuse even of highly accomplished, famous, wealthy women. This happened in the United States — a developed country, institutionally strong; moreover, within cosmopolitan cities with predominantly liberal values and a rich tradition of women movements. At the same time the #MeToo movement uncovered a normalized context of abuse and vulnerability for women, not fully captured by available statistics.

If legal norms and institutions are in place, there are two other plausible explanations for generalized obstacles to parity. The first is inequality in individual capabilities. Interestingly, traditional outcome indicators such as access to education at all levels and access to health increasingly show convergence to parity (World Economic Forum, 2017). The other explanation is based on barriers posed by social norms or inequalities in social opportunities, which is the focus of this paper.

The role of social norms has been for long acknowledged as crucial in defining gender inequalities (Dugarova, 2015; UNRISD, 2015; United Nations System, 2017; UN Women, 2015). Discriminatory social norms and stereotypes reinforce gendered identities and determine power relations that constrain the expected behavior of women and men in ways that lead to inequality. We investigate the extent of social norms in today’s societies looking at different dimensions. These dimensions are indicative of the limits to the policy interventions that have been undertaken that have provided unremarkable results or transformative change.

The novelty of this paper is the measurement of intensity of multidimensional gender biases experienced at the individual level, analyzing data from the World Values Survey wave 5 (2005-2008) and wave 6 (2011-2014). We can measure attitudes towards gender equality and women empowerment (GEWE) in different dimensions, characterizing extension and overlap of discriminatory social norms. Our first main result is that most people in the world show a significant bias against gender equality, but with different degrees. Our second main result is that barriers in social norms towards gender equality are not showing a clear improvement on average; we document cases of progress and of reversals.
Gender Inequality and Social Norms

Gender inequality has long been associated with the persistence of discriminatory social norms that prescribe social roles and determine power relations between males and females in society (Sen et al., 2007). Social norms are those values, beliefs, attitudes and practices that are held by individuals and their reference groups, which assert preferred power dynamics for interactive relationships between individuals, and institutions (Heise, 2013). Tackling these structural and systemic drivers of inequality can benefit both women and men: individuals and groups have attempted to do so across the ages and societies through reform movements and social resistance. Social norms form the backdrop of social transformations – some of them being particularly resilient while adaptive to structural changes, while others become the key features that these changes constitute.

However, there is no consensus on a single definition of what social norms are. The most important aspect when referring to social norms is to be able to recognize the subtle differences between descriptive and injunctive norms. Where descriptive norms refer to those beliefs regarding what is considered as a normal practice in a social group or an area. While injunctive norms state what people in a community should do. This distinction is important for practice, as it can help us understand why some aspects of gender norms and relations may shift more rapidly than others. (Ball Cooper, 2012; Marcus, 2014; Cislaghi, 2018)

As many other aspects of development, gender social norms are multidimensional, and they have been prevailing thanks to diverse factors that act simultaneously and hold them in place. Among the social psychology field there are three main theories of dynamics that hold gender norms, socialization, social convention and pluralistic ignorance. Socialization refers on how the experiences from childhood influence creating unconscious learned biases regarding the gender differences (Bandura, 2009; Mackie et al., 2012; Munoz Boudet et al. (2012); Paluck and Ball, 2010; Sood et al., 2009).

In the case of social convention, the compliance with gender social norms is internalized on individuals’ values because there are encouraged either by a reward or to avoid sanctions. The rewards dynamics are based on social or psychological approvals, while sanctions can range from exclusion from the community to violence or legal action. Stigma can be employed to define what is considered ‘normal’ or ‘acceptable’ and used to enforce stereotypes and social norms about ‘appropriate’ behaviors. The importance of this theory is that it can determine the likeliness of a social norm to stick, a social norm will be stickiest when individuals have most to gain from compliance and most to lose from challenging the norm. (Mackie and Le Jeune, 2009; Mackie et al., 2012; UNICEF, 2010). In line with these dynamics, social norms have such power that can make women not to claim their legal rights due to pressure on them to conform to societal expectations (UN Women, 2015).

Finally, regarding pluralistic ignorance, social norms can prevail when individuals lack information or knowledge on how to act in a different way or have different attitudes (Mackie and Le Jeune, 2009; Marcus, 2014; UNICEF, 2013). Because of the intertwined social dynamics, challenging discriminatory norms that threaten GEWE will require acting on more than one factor simultaneously.

Social norms and identity

Social norms relate to several different aspects of an individual’s identity – their gender, age, ethnicity, religion, ability and so on, and these are heterogeneous and multidimensional. Discriminatory social norms and stereotypes reinforce gendered identities and determine power relations that constrain the expected behavior of women and men in ways that lead to inequality. They also have an impact on the
prescribed expectations for masculine and feminine behaviour regarding what is considered socially acceptable and what is looked down and frowned upon with censure. As such, these directly impact the choices and freedoms of individuals, and upon their functionings and capabilities.

Social norms can be broadly defined as tacitly agreed regularities observed amongst groups of individuals. Those rules of behaviour are set according to certain standards of behaviour, or ideals, attached to a group’s sense of identity (Charles, 2012). Individuals have multiple social identities and behave according to identity-related ideals, and they also expect others sharing a common identity to behave according to these ideals. Norms of behaviour related to these ideals affect people’s perception of oneself and others, thus engendering a sense of belonging to particular groups of identity. The beliefs one may hold about what is appropriate behaviour often greatly determines the range of choices and preferences that individuals choose to exercise – and in that context norms can be determinative of autonomy and freedoms, and the beliefs of social censure and opprobrium create real barriers for individuals who transgress these boundaries. With regards to gender roles, these beliefs can be particularly important in determining the freedoms and power relations with other identities – particularly compounded when overlapping and intersecting with those of age, race and class hierarchies.

**Social norms and democracy**

Social transformation occurs when there is support for change both at the individual level and acceptance of the change at the level of the broader community – hereafter a transformation both in terms of the interpersonal and the public domains. Hence the ability to aspire for changed capabilities and functionings requires an enabling environment – much of which is what social norms are made of, and which impact upon the social institutions that can bring about those changes – whether it is the institutions of the state, the market or of households and communities (Watson, 2012). Consequently, peoples’ expectations of individual’s roles in households, communities, workplace and in society play an important role in creating an enabling environment – which in turn is reflected by the level of functioning that can be achieved by different groups. This is particularly significant with regards to women, for whom there are strong conventional societal expectations in terms of their roles as caregivers and homemakers, and of men in terms of breadwinners. These overarching gender norms also must adapt to the economic realities to modern and transforming societies, where households must adapt to both males and females needing to find waged work, to both adapting to work on fields that are typically dominated by the opposite gender, to both needing to share the burden of unpaid work and household responsibilities for care of children and elderly etc. These pressures on individuals and family’s impact upon social norms and attitudes towards education and employment, to concerns about reproductive rights, physical security and freedom of movement to political participation, self-determination and autonomy.

Moreover, since education and employment are the two key drivers of women’s empowerment (Duflo, 2012), it is critical to understand the quality of education and the nature of employment to assess their potential for empowerment and autonomy. Education that essentializes gendered roles and expectations have led to an under representation of women in subjects that are considered more appropriate for males, e.g. in Science Technology Engineering and Math (STEM) disciplines, which lead to their under-representation in the career paths for those fields. There is also a societal predisposition to regard males as having a role of ‘breadwinner’ and for females to be ‘caregivers’ and these lead to the prioritization of professions that reward males with higher salaries for the same work, and for caring professions to be undervalued as women’s (less-skilled-yet-naturally-talented) work.
Social norms and backlash

Currently there are still several factors that are pressurizing these social norms that keep gendered roles separate in society to change – not least because of the forces of shifting attitudes due to generational and demographic change, globalization and migration and the intermingling of different expectations and perspectives. And while these pressures are challenging the conventional gender division of labour between the private and the public domains, it is also becoming subject to a backlash from the conventional relations of power between males and females, between age, race and class hierarchies in traditional societies. The backlash against changing gender roles in households, workplaces and in politics affects entire societies that are profoundly impacted by the shifting power relations. These lead to resistance to the changes that these represent in gender expectations and can often be seen as a clash of values – a conflict for example of women’s rights with traditional family values, or of gender gaps in the workplace as a product of subconscious biases. In fact, the worrying trend of reversals and increased biases against women’s rights and gender equality can be traced to these broader shifts that impact attitudes – highlighting that norms can be reversed and progress towards gender equality needs to be defended.

While there have been proactive policy interventions that have tried to address these issues – either through affirmative action or positive discrimination – sometimes they have overlooked or underplayed the role that social norms have on the overall outcomes. For example, efforts to improve women’s overall participation in the waged workforce have yet to address the issue of unpaid work burden that they disproportionately bear across countries in the world, or that they tend to be employed in the informal sector which is vulnerable yet adaptive to their needs. Efforts to promote women’s representation in positions of leadership have yet to lead to the expected outcomes, and significant presumptions persist about women’s ability for political participation and functioning in high offices. In fact, sometimes policy interventions have led to a false narrative about the direction of social change that these have resulted in. Efforts to get women in school and in the workplace have been rendered as trying to overturn traditional values of women’s role in society as homemakers, and of putting them at risk of unwarranted harassment in the workplace. Women themselves seem to have a difficult time resolving these dilemmas, often perceiving them as tradeoffs rather than empowered choices – as we see in several of the questions in the World Values Survey results. What is critical to recognize here is that while there can be varied preferences, it is important from the human development perspective that these are prioritized in terms of multiple and complementary identities rather than competing, conflictive ones – for example the multiple identities of an individual as a woman, a mother, a worker, and a citizen should not be counterposed but mutually supportive. Hence choices that enhance freedoms on multiple fronts are to be prioritized over those that diminish others over a singular identity.

To track whether social norms are supportive of gender equality and economic empowerment, one can track attitudes of respondents across a range of dimensions – and it shows a rather mixed performance – sometimes attitudes change in some dimensions while remaining immutable in others – and these can reflect the constraints that these impose on women and girls in terms of gender equality and economic empowerment. This also depicts another complexity in how we consider the issue of gender equality – that there are multiple identities in addition to that of gender, that play an important part in an individual’s identity and their wellbeing.
Multidimensional Social Norms

As described in the sections above, social norms operate in different ways as barriers to GEWE. At the aggregate level they capture elements that are both uni and multidimensional, and they can operate at the individual and collective level. Hence in order to analyze the described dynamics and interactions there is a need for a flexible methodological approach, but also an approach that gives the ability to integrate and decompose the presence of these interactions. The following is a framework for the multidimensionality of social norms in terms of unions and intersections between individuals and collective, as well as uni and multidimensional.

**Figure 1. Multidimensional gender social norms through unions and intersections**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Unidimensional</th>
<th>Multidimensional</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Individual</strong></td>
<td>- Self-limiting behavior of a woman in one area.</td>
<td>- A person who is an obstacle to GEWE in multiple fronts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Men opposing one specific dimension of GEWE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Collective</strong></td>
<td>Specific consensus around one dimension of GEWE.</td>
<td>- Overlapping consensus about restricting GEWE based on different dimensions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Bundle of positions around GEWE in political debate.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: HDRO.

Given the multidimensional nature of gender social norms, analyzing data from the World Values Survey wave 5 (2005-2008) and wave 6 (2011-2014), a gender social norms index is elaborated to capture how social beliefs can bias individuals to support GEWE. For wave 5, 59 countries have available data while for wave 6 there are 61 countries with information. Through its four dimensions trends in gender norms and stereotypes that determine gender outcomes can be identified. The index is composed by the following dimensions and indicators:

**Figure 2. Multidimensional gender social norms index**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DIMENSIONS</th>
<th>POLITICAL</th>
<th>EDUCATIONAL</th>
<th>ECONOMICAL</th>
<th>PHYSICAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>INDICATORS</strong></td>
<td>Men make better political leaders than women do</td>
<td>Women have the same rights as men</td>
<td>University is more important for a man than for a woman</td>
<td>Men should have more right to a job than women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Justifiable: For a man to beat his wife</td>
<td>Men make better business executives than women do</td>
<td>Economical empowerment index</td>
<td>Economical empowerment index</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DIMENSION INDEX</strong></td>
<td>Political empowerment index</td>
<td>Educational empowerment index</td>
<td>Economical empowerment index</td>
<td>Physical empowerment index</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Multidimensional gender social norms index (MGSNI)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: HDRO using data from the World Values Survey.
For each indicator chosen to represent the four dimensions, the possible choices differ depending on the nature of the question done in the World Values Survey. In the case of those indicators that had the choices strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree; we define as individuals with a bias those that answered strongly agree and agree. Regarding the indicators that present an ordinal scale from 1 to 10, the definition of the bias was included in an intermediate form for the political dimension. While for the physical dimension the nature of the indicators was considered, for the indicator Justifiable: For a man to beat his wife the bias was determined in its strongest form, allowing only for individuals that answered never justifiable to be unbiased. Finally, in the case of Justifiable: Abortion it was included in its weakest form, meaning only the individuals that answered abortion is never justifiable will be considered biased.

**Figure 3. Definition of social norm biases on the indices**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Choices</th>
<th>Defining bias</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Political</td>
<td>Men make better political leaders than women do</td>
<td>Strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree</td>
<td>Strongly agree and agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women have the same rights as men</td>
<td>1 not essential to 10 essential</td>
<td>Intermediate form: 1 to 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational</td>
<td>University is more important for a man than for a woman</td>
<td>Strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree</td>
<td>Strongly agree and agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economical</td>
<td>Men should have more right to a job than women</td>
<td>Strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree</td>
<td>Strongly agree and agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Men make better business executives than women do</td>
<td>Agree, neither, disagree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>Justifiable: For a man to beat his wife</td>
<td>1 never to 10 always</td>
<td>Stronger form: 2 to 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Justifiable: Abortion</td>
<td>1 never to 10 always</td>
<td>Weakest form: 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: HDRO using data from the World Values Survey.

**Methodology**

For the calculation of the multidimensional gender social norms index, two methodologies were followed to present the results. The first one consists on a simple index count, where each of the dimensions is added up having the same weight. The resulting index will represent the number of gender social norms biases an individual has, then this data can be aggregated at the country level as well as by region and could be disaggregated by gender.

\[
\text{Index count} = (\text{men political leaders}) + (\text{women democracy}) + (\text{university}) + (\text{jobs for men}) + (\text{business executives}) + (\text{violence}) + (\text{abortion})
\]

The index count methodology is very useful to convey the real number of gender biases or barriers individuals face around the world, without assigning any weight of importance to the dimensions. It allows us to do comparisons of the number of individuals with bias by gender and across the different time periods of the waves. Nevertheless, it complicates the disaggregation and analysis by dimension and indicator.
With the purpose of addressing this challenge faced by the index count, the second method follows the Alkire Foster counting methodology (Alkire & Foster, 2011). In this case we count the different gender social norm biases an individual face at the same time. These dimensions are analyzed to determine who has a bias or barrier in each indicator. Different from the index count here each dimension has the same weight, with this methodology indicators are weighted differently, given that the educational dimension has only one indicator.

\[ Index \, alkire = \frac{1}{8} \cdot (men \, political \, leaders) + \frac{1}{8} \cdot (women \, democracy) + \frac{1}{4} \cdot (university) + \frac{1}{8} \cdot (jobs \, for \, men) + \frac{1}{8} \cdot (business \, executives) + \frac{1}{8} \cdot (violence) + \frac{1}{8} \cdot (abortion) \]

After calculating the Alkire index it is possible to calculate who is considered with or without bias specifying a cutoff of 0.25. This calculation allows us to calculate a headcount ratio that reflects the incidence of gender social norm biases (percentage of the population who have gender bias) and the intensity (percentage of biases suffered by each individual on average). The methodology allows for a disaggregated analysis by dimension and indicator, addressing the disadvantage of the index count.

**Results for index count**

Aiming to have global coverage, we use two different groups of countries to present the results. The first one groups those countries that have available data either for wave 5 (2005-2008) or wave 6 (2011-2014) we take the latest data available which results in a group with 77 countries accounting for 81% of the world’s population. The second group considers those countries that have data available for both wave 5 (2005-2008) and wave 6 (2011-2014), resulting in 32 countries that account for 59% of the world’s population. According to the index count, only 13.8% of women in the world are unbiased while 9.6% of men are unbiased (Graph 1).

**Graph 1. World: Social Norms Barriers**

(% of population)

![Graph 1](image)

Source: Based on WVS. Balanced panel of 77 countries (81% of global population)
A difference between the distribution of women and men can be appreciated in Graph 1, as women are more skewed towards having less bias against GEWE, while men concentrate more in the middle of the distribution. 52% of men have an average between 2 and 4 gender barriers. It is interesting too to look at the change in the patterns of barriers over time, comparing male and female population from 2005-2009 to 2010-2014. There is a slight evidence of the backlash regarding the conventional relations of power, as both women and men that do not have any gender norms barrier decrease from 2005-2009 to 2010-2014 (Graph 2).

**Graph 2. World: Social Norms Barriers**

(% of population)

Analyzing closely those individuals that have no gender norms biases across both waves. Looking first at the differences among men from 2005-2009 to 2010-2014, Chile, Australia, United States and the Netherlands are the countries that have shown more progress in this regard, increasing the number of men with no social norms against GEWE bias. While on the other extreme Sweden, Germany, India and Mexico have decreased the number of men with no social norms against GEWE bias (Graph 3).

Source: Based on WVS. Balanced panel of 58 countries (50% of global population)
With reference to the differences among women on the same time periods, Netherlands, Chile, Taiwan and Australia, have strongly increased the number of women with no social norms against GEWE bias. Whereas countries that have decreased the number of women with no social norms against GEWE bias are Sweden, India, South Africa and Romania (Graph 4).
Results for Alkire index

Taking into consideration the headcount from the Alkire index, 50.5% of the people in the world are biased against GEWE\(^1\). The percentages of the population can be disaggregated by gender and region, being the Arab States and South Asia the regions with greater percentages of men and women biased against GEWE, in average 76.2% and 68.8% respectively. For every region in the world the percentage of biased men is greater than the percentage of women, although the spread is bigger for Arab States where the differential between men and women is 25.1% and Sub-Saharan Africa where it is 14.8%. Finally, the less biased regions are the Developed countries and Latin America and the Caribbean. (Graph 5) With the same results from alkire index, now observing at the evolution of percentages from 2005-2009 to 2010-2014, both biased men and women have increased from one period to another in about 3%. (Graph 6)

---

\(^1\) Aggregate based on WVS. Balanced panel of 77 countries (81% of global population).
For most regions in the world the percentage of the biased population has increased from 2005-2009 to 2010-2014, except for Latin America and the Caribbean and Developed countries where it decreased between 1% and 2%. The regions with the more dramatic change are Sub-Saharan Africa increasing 9.4% and Europe and Central Asia with a 8.2% increase in biased population against GEWE.

Graph 7. Multidimensional SN-GEWE (% of population)

One of the advantages of the Alkire index is the ability to disaggregate the analysis by dimension and indicator, which is especially useful at the country level. It is relevant to observe more into depth the results for those countries that were on the extreme of the distributions for men and women that have no biases across both waves. For instance, Sweden had decreased in more than 1% both the number of men and women with no social norms’ bias against GEWE from 2005-2009 to 2010-2014. In Sweden the biases concentrate in the political and physical dimensions, across time biases have intensified in thinking men make better political leaders than women do, and it is justifiable for a man to beat his wife.

Graph 8. Dimensions of multidimensional gender social norms index in Sweden, 2010-2014 and Multidimensional gender social norms index by indicator and wave in Sweden

Source: HDRO calculations using data from the World Values Survey.
In the example of India, the country has also decreased the number of men and women with no social norms against GEWE in a little less than 1% from 2005-2009 to 2010-2014. In India biases concentrate in the physical and economic dimensions, though they are fairly spread out among the four dimensions of the index. Across India time biases have intensified in thinking men should have more right to a job than women and men make better business executives than women do, as well as thinking abortion is never justifiable, in line with the dimension analysis.

Graph 9. Dimensions of multidimensional gender social norms index in India, 2010-2014 and Multidimensional gender social norms index by indicator and wave in India

On the other extreme of the distribution, Chile has increased between 1% and 2% the number of people with no social norms’ bias against GEWE from 2005-2009 to 2010-2014. In Chile the biases concentrate in the political and physical dimensions. While looking across time, several biases have been reduced regarding leadership in both politics and business, the importance of education and thinking of abortion as justifiable in some cases. The only dimensions that have stayed the same are with respect to women having the same rights as men and thinking it is justifiable for a man to beat his wife.

Graph 10. Dimensions of multidimensional gender social norms index in Chile, 2010-2014 and Multidimensional gender social norms index by indicator and wave in Chile

Source: HDRO calculations using data from the World Values Survey.
As Chile, Taiwan has increased the number of people with no social norms’ bias against GEWE from 2005-2009 to 2010-2014 to a lesser extent less than 1%. In Taiwan the biases concentrate in the economical and physical dimensions. While looking across time, the biases that have been reduced the most are leadership in politics and business and thinking of abortion as justifiable in some cases. The only dimensions that have increased are the same ones as in Chile, thinking women does not have the same rights as men and it is justifiable for a man to beat his wife.

Graph 11. Dimensions of multidimensional gender social norms index in Taiwan, 2010-2014 and Multidimensional gender social norms index by indicator and wave in Taiwan

Source: HDRO calculations using data from the World Values Survey.

Results for Latin America

In the case of regional coverage, for the first results 9 Latin American countries have available data either for wave 5 (2005-2008) or wave 6 (2011-2014) accounting for 87.9% of the region’s population. The second group considers those countries that have data available for both wave 5 (2005-2008) and wave 6 (2011-2014), resulting in 8 Latin American countries that account for 85% of the region’s population. According to the index count, similar to the world trend only 13.2% of women in Latin America are unbiased while the percentage of unbiased men is higher than the world average, 12.0% of men in Latin America are unbiased (Graph 12).

2 Argentina, Brasil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, México, Perú, Trinidad y Tobago y Uruguay.
A difference between the distribution of women and men can be appreciated in Graph 1, as women are more skewed towards having less bias against GEWE, while men concentrate more in the middle of the distribution. 80% of men have on average between 2 and 4 gender barriers. In contrast with the global results, 50% of Latin American men are concentrated in having either 1 or 2 social norms barriers. Looking at the change in the patterns of barriers over time, comparing male and female population from 2005-2009 to 2010-2014, opposite to the world trend there is no clear evidence of the backlash. The percentage of both women and men that do not have any gender norms barrier decreased less than 1 percentual point, but the percentage of women and men with 1 and 2 barriers increased (Graph 13).
Analyzing closely those individuals that have no gender norms biases across both waves. Looking first at the differences among men from 2005-2009 to 2010-2014, Chile and Argentina are the countries that have shown more progress in this regard, increasing the number of men with no social norms against GEWE bias. While on the other extreme Brazil and Mexico have decreased the number of men with no social norms against GEWE bias (Graph 14).

![Graph 14. Change in Men with no SN-GEWE bias](image)

Source: Based on WVS. Balanced panel of 6 countries (70.9% of regional population)

With reference to the differences among women on the same time periods, Chile has strongly increased the number of women with no social norms against GEWE bias. Whereas countries that have decreased the number of women with no social norms against GEWE bias are Brazil and Argentina (Graph 15).

![Graph 15. Change in Women with no SN-GEWE bias](image)

Source: Based on WVS. Balanced panel of 6 countries (70.9% of regional population)
Results for Alkire index

Taking into consideration the headcount from the Alkire index, 28.8% of the people in Latin America and the Caribbean are biased against GEWE\(^3\). The percentages of the population can be disaggregated by gender and country, being Ecuador, Colombia and Mexico the countries with greater percentages of men and women biased against GEWE, in average 37.2%, 30.9% and 29.3% respectively. For every country in the region the percentage of biased men is greater than the percentage of women, although the spread is bigger for Ecuador and Mexico. Finally, the less biased countries is Uruguay with 17.1% in average. (Graph 16). With the same results from Alkire index, now observing at the evolution of percentages from 2005-2009 to 2010-2014, both biased men and women have slightly decreased from one period to another in about 2.8%. (Graph 17)

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\(^3\) Aggregate based on WVS. Balanced panel of 9 countries (87.9% of regional population).
For most of the countries in the region, opposite to the global results, the percentage of the biased population has decreased from 2005-2009 to 2010-2014, except for Argentina and Trinidad and Tobago. The more dramatic change occurred in Chile where the biased population against GEWE was reduced in almost 20%. (Graph 18)

Graph 18. Multidimensional SN-GEWE

Regarding the disaggregation at the country level and analyzing by dimension and indicator, Mexico has decreased in 3% both the number of men and women with no social norms’ bias against GEWE from 2005-2009 to 2010-2014. In Mexico the biases concentrate in the physical dimension, across time biases have intensified in thinking abortion is never justifiable. The bias has also increased in the political dimension to a lesser extent, thinking men make better political leaders than women do.

Graph 19. Dimensions of multidimensional gender social norms index in Mexico, 2010-2014 and Multidimensional gender social norms index by indicator and wave in Mexico

Source: HDRO calculations using data from the World Values Survey.
In the case of Argentina, the country has increased the number of men and women with social norms against GEWE in 1.5% from 2005-2009 to 2010-2014. Biases concentrate in the physical and political dimensions. Across Argentina time biases have intensified in thinking it is justifiable for a man to beat his wife and men make better political leaders than women do. While biases have improved in the case of abortion and the right of having a job.

Graph 20. Dimensions of multidimensional gender social norms index in Argentina, 2010-2014 and Multidimensional gender social norms index by indicator and wave in Argentina

Source: HDRO calculations using data from the World Values Survey.

Finally, Trinidad and Tobago has increased 1.4% the number of people with social norms’ bias against GEWE from 2005-2009 to 2010-2014. In this case the biases concentrate in the physical and economical dimensions. Increased biases include thinking abortion is never justifiable and men are better political leaders. While there is a reduced bias in thinking it is justifiable for a man to beat his wife.

Graph 10. Dimensions of multidimensional gender social norms index in Trinidad and Tobago, 2010-2014 and Multidimensional gender social norms index by indicator and wave in Trinidad and Tobago

Source: HDRO calculations using data from the World Values Survey.
Policy Implications

Even though there is a trend for new regulations and policies targeted towards women to be in place, there are entrenched inequalities, that arise from discriminatory social norms and harmful traditional behaviors and practices, that undermine their implementation and positive effects. Well-intentioned policies towards gender equality might not work or have unintended consequences if policy makers do not consider the role of deeply rooted norms and practices.

In addition, current structures and institutions can act as enablers of discrimination by perpetuating gender norms and traditional roles, this constraint women to enjoy their rights and exercise their agency. It is generally believed for long-term change to happen policies and actions should transform structures and institutions. Nevertheless, the first step is for short term policy approaches towards gender equality to be social-norms-sensitive. Public policies and other implementation actions must be coordinated for redressing women’s socioeconomic disadvantage; addressing stereotyping, stigma and violence; and strengthening women’s voice, agency and participation (Dugarova, 2015).

With widespread social norms and individuals reluctant to change beliefs, there is little space for policy design towards improving gender equality. As there is a wide range of factors that hold gender norms in place, challenging discriminatory norms will require acting on more than one underpinning factor simultaneously: (Marcus, 2014). To change social norms, it is important to understand how social norms interact with policy outcomes.

It is important to realize the objective of policies and programs does not necessarily need to be changing a social norm, but rather to challenge descriptive norms, meaning people’s perception of what women and men usually do (gender roles). In this regard programs and policies should be centered in providing people with new information that incentivizes different values and behaviors. Addressing on a multidimensional way the social aspects that influence gender social norms, social convention and pluralistic ignorance. Exposing them to innovative ideas and new knowledge can model and endorse changes in traditional practices and attitudes.

On the political dimension, for example, it is relevant to generate public debate, political campaigns and collective organizing around the importance of human rights as well as challenging and questioning discriminatory social norms, unequal power relations and unequal distribution of resources. These concrete actions can encourage vulnerable, poor and marginalized women to see themselves as rights holders. (UN Women 2015)

Regarding the economical dimension, the challenge falls in changing the perception of what is considered as a normal practice in a social group or an area (descriptive norms). To achieve this goal, more specific policies are needed to make growth and gender equality compatible: social regulation of labour markets to erode gender-biased social norms and remove discriminations that account for the persistence of gender segmentation, together with removal of structural constraints on women’s ability to take up widening labour-market opportunities. (UNRISD, 2005). While simultaneously promoting more equal share of unpaid care and domestic work between women and men addressing stereotypes.

In the case of educational dimension, actions should focus on changing perceptions of traditional female and male roles at the household level. Interventions that introduce the importance and value of women and girls for education, have proven to be effective for both economic and education dimensions, increasing the school and labor participation of women. Besides this, educational institutions can
constitute a mean for the youth and new generations to expand their social networks and be exposed to new role models defying pluralistic ignorance by learning how to act in a different way or have different attitudes towards what a boy or girl can do.

At last one of the most complicated and polemical dimensions is the physical dimension, as gender norms and biases can shape how women perceive their own health and influence whether and how they can act on their own health needs. For this case, increased access to information and communication can be done through the mass media and ICTs. Exposure to alternative discourses, values and modes of social organization can help shift gender norms to being understood as one of a range of possible modes of social organization (Marcus, 2014).

Conclusions

Gender-based discrimination remains one of the most prevalent forms of discrimination, creating barriers to the development of the full potential of half of the world’s population. Deep-seated discriminatory norms and harmful gender stereotypes, prejudices and practices, including unequal pay for equal work and gender-based violence against women and girls, continue to prevent equality and the full realization of women’s human rights. (UN System, 2017)

It is important to recognize the multidimensional aspect of gender social norms, and to measure how social beliefs can bias individuals to support GEWE to be able to address the backlash both women and men have experienced a in the last years. Policies and actions must not be blind, they should rather address how their programs can have unintended consequences from deeply rooted norms.
References


