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**RESEARCH PAPER**

# **Breaking the gender trap**

Challenging patriarchal norms  
to clear pathways for peace

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# **Breaking the gender trap**

## Challenging patriarchal norms to clear pathways for peace

Authors: Ndeye Sow and Swechchha Dahal

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# Abbreviations

<b>CEDAW</b>	Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discriminations Against Women
<b>FDG</b>	Focus group discussion
<b>GBV</b>	Gender-based violence
<b>KII</b>	Key informant interview
<b>MCW</b>	Magna Carta of Women
<b>MDGs</b>	Millennium Development Goals
<b>NWC</b>	National Women Commission
<b>SAP</b>	State action plan
<b>SDGs</b>	Sustainable Development Goals
<b>SGBV</b>	Sexual and gender-based violence
<b>VAPPA</b>	Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act
<b>WARN</b>	Women Action Response Network
<b>WPS</b>	Women, peace and security
<b>UNSCR</b>	United Nations Security Council Resolution

# 1. Introduction

Gender is a key component of conflict and violence and thus an integral aspect of building sustainable peace. It is well recognised that conflict dynamics are fundamentally gendered and shaped by gendered norms and identities. Patriarchal constructions of masculinities and femininities entrench the subjugation of women in all spaces, marginalising their voices and undermining their rights. Patriarchal gender norms shape global, national and local power structures and institutions which, in turn, shape peace and conflict.

In 2020, to mark the 20th anniversary of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security (WPS), International Alert (Alert) undertook a review of its 20-year history of working with women peacebuilders on the ground. The research identified a range of cross-cutting issues related to the implementation of the WPS resolutions and gender equality agenda; however, present in all discussions was the ongoing prevalence of institutional patriarchal gender norms and how these reflect the broader socio-cultural norms related to gender equality and reduce the efficacy of WPS implementation.<sup>1</sup>

At the community level, women experienced various types of pushbacks and backlash when working towards increased participation, protection and violence prevention. This was often the result of familial and community-level norms that work against women being active agents of change.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the highly masculine nature of national and global governmental working spaces and cultures resulted in norms that discredited those seeking to challenge patriarchal ideologies. Recent years have seen discourse around women's rights becoming notably less progressive.

Alert has worked to address the key findings of our 2020 research by building a cross-regional intervention that develops and connects programmes in Kyrgyzstan, Nepal, Nigeria and the Philippines to assess the influences and impacts of patriarchal gender norms at a local level. The four settings have experienced conflict, crisis and violence over the past decade. In the Philippines' Bangsamoro region, the signing of peace agreements has not been enough to stop the unabated violence. Bauchi state in Nigeria faces multiple internal conflict dynamics, including high rates of gang-related violence, struggles for control of resources, and value-based conflicts among faith groups. Kyrgyzstan continues to be divided along ethnic and regional lines with violent extremism as one of the most critical issues. In Nepal, caste-based violence remains prevalent post-conflict and identity-based tensions continue.

Women, children and youth have been the most affected by conflict in the four contexts, including through high levels of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), early and forced marriage, abduction by armed groups, increase in the number of widows, high rate of poverty and unemployment, and exclusion from peace processes and political decision-making. The national governments in the four settings have tried to address some of these issues. All four countries have developed UNSCR 1325 WPS national action plans, but without initiatives to transform discriminatory gender norms and promote gender equality in a meaningful and sustainable way.

Minimal and/or poor gender-responsive budgeting has resulted in a lack of proper institutionalisation of gender mainstreaming in sectorial strategies, policies and programmes. Most of the four 1325 WPS national action plans lack allocated budgets and comprehensive monitoring and evaluation frameworks with measurable and reliable indicators. Overall, in the four countries, the status of the vast majority of women remains very poor in terms of education, income, health, participation in decision-making and access to capital, credit, land and property ownership.

### A brief introduction to social norms

**Social norms** are the collective beliefs around the standards for behaviour in specific groups and social contexts; **gender norms** relate specifically to those standards for women, men, boys and girls. Norms consist of two elements that shape how people perceive their gendered identities. In relation to gender, **injunctive norms** are what an individual thinks is the 'right' thing to do, corresponding to the reference group's broad ideals of masculinity, femininity and social order. **Descriptive norms** are an individual's perceptions of how others within the reference group are behaving in reality, corresponding to the generally accepted notions of lived gender roles.

### Patriarchy, the patriarchal system and patriarchal norms

In this report the term **patriarchy** is used to refer to a structure of power relations to explain and characterise a system of gendered oppression that does not benefit all men, but still allows and justifies the male grip on political leadership, moral authority, social privilege and control of property and assets. Patriarchy shapes gender norms and supports the authority of gatekeepers who maintain these norms. The **patriarchal system** is sustained through continuous production and reproduction of socially constructed gender norms, embedded within social, cultural, economic and political systems. **Patriarchal masculinity** emphasises the superiority of heteronormative masculinity over femininity and the authority of heteronormative men over women. Ideas about, and practices of, patriarchal masculinities maintain gender inequalities.

## 2. Integrating patriarchal norms, men and masculinities into peacebuilding

Patriarchal gender norms and structures that marginalise women's voices and suppress equal participation in decision-making processes are prevalent at all levels of society and in all societies, undermining efforts to build positive peace. These issues have always been at the heart of the difficulties in fully implementing progressive legislature towards gender equality, such as the WPS agenda, the Convention for the Eradication of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), or the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Based on the findings from the four case studies, this report makes eight recommendations for integrating patriarchal norms, men and masculinities into peacebuilding policy and programming.

## 2.1. Integrating understanding of the impact of patriarchal norms on masculinities and femininities into peacebuilding implementation

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- **Place patriarchal norms at the centre of the WPS agenda. Develop more peacebuilding programming that addresses patriarchal gender norms and the constructions of masculinity and femininity.**

The link between gender equality and peace is well known. Donors, national governments, non-governmental organisations and other peacebuilding practitioners need to acknowledge and understand how patriarchal gender norms prevent the pursuit of gender equality and sustainable and inclusive peace. Alert has found that peacebuilding efforts that tackle patriarchal norms allow women to demonstrate resilience, rise above the status quo and fully participate in society. If donors want to support positive peace, they must fund programmes that actively address patriarchal gender norms and their impacts on the construction of masculinities and femininities and gender-based social practices and values.

- **Provide tailored support to women-run networks and women-led women's rights organisations working to shift gender norms and promote gender equality.**

Women face a complex reality of navigating, negotiating and choosing their path within the parameters of the norms, values, traditions and beliefs into which they are socialised. There is no one-size-fits-all solution. In the Philippines, the response and welfare network led by women themselves contributes to effective actions that are suited to their specific context, reality and needs. A further step could involve investment in small-scale prototype projects incubated and implemented by women that directly address their needs and concerns. This would go some way towards filling a longstanding gap in support for women's agency to discuss, identify and claim their stake, as well as to set the agenda for change.

- **All peacebuilding actors must contextualise concepts such as gender inequality, masculinities and femininities, in language that works for communities.**

Contextualising these concepts is a critical part of adopting Do No Harm, localisation and conflict-sensitivity approaches, which are vital to avoid backlash from and conflict within communities. In Kyrgyzstan, the project identified the need for a sensitive Kyrgyz-language lexicon to communicate key concepts around gender equality and violence prevention. This ensured buy-in from stakeholders at all levels, particularly at the rural grassroots level.

## 2.2. Reducing the impact of patriarchal norms and masculinities on SGBV

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- **Take action to make the reporting of and response to gender-based violence (GBV) inclusive and intersectional.**

National, local and donor governments need to prioritise this in their SGBV response programming. The research revealed that the way states respond to SGBV is rarely inclusive or intersectional. In Nepal,

reporting mechanisms for SGBV are significantly more accessible to upper classes and castes, which means women from poorer backgrounds and lower castes are under-represented in national statistics. Women can only be protected from SGBV if they can report it. Furthermore, in rural areas in both Nepal and Nigeria, there is also a lack of access to affordable response and support mechanisms, including justice, police stations, livelihood support and medical assistance.

- **Address the lack of reliable, accurate and transparent statistical data on SGBV.**

The research in the four settings clearly showed the challenges in accessing reliable and accurate statistics around GBV and abuse against women. Although the most important barriers to reliable, accurate and transparent data collection on GBV are social and cultural, it is also important to acknowledge that there are institutional barriers. Data serves to raise public awareness to the serious risk of violence and abuse that women face, particularly in violent conflict and fragile settings. Access to information is vital to create positive change that benefits women and children.

- **Address the lack of affordable, accessible and inclusive justice mechanisms and better harmonise the pluralistic legal systems (e.g. traditional, religious and secular) that respond to GBV.**

In Nigeria and the Bangsamoro in the Philippines, cases of GBV are often handled by Sharia law or traditional legal systems. The primary goal of traditional and religious redress mechanisms tends to be reconciliation between the victim and perpetrators to preserve the 'harmony of the family' and the community. This means survivors can be made to marry their perpetrators. National and local governments need to take action to ensure all operating legal systems are gender sensitive and deliver justice to survivors.

## 2.3. Reducing the impact of patriarchal norms and masculinities on women's participation in political and public spaces

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- **Institutionalise learning on gender norms and SGBV to sensitise and raise awareness among cultural, social and religious institutional stakeholders, including local authorities and faith leaders.**

The enhanced understanding of institutional stakeholders will help to ensure that SGBV response and gender norm programmes will be implemented with greater effect. Buy-in tends to remain at the leadership level and does not make the next step of transforming the whole institution to be gender sensitive. In Kyrgyzstan, faith and religious leaders were identified as the main problem-solving actors to prevent SGBV, due to their social and moral authority within the community. Tailored SGBV-prevention training with all faith leaders will go a long way towards changing attitudes towards SGBV and gender norms within communities.

- **Move beyond quotas and prioritise actions to make and implement policies that contribute to creating an enabling environment for women's political agency.**

Alert's research in Nepal highlights the need to address all the barriers that block women's full, equal and meaningful participation. These include economic equality, health, security rights and decision-making power. If parliaments remain patriarchal institutions, women will continue to have little space to exercise their agency, even if they make up the full 50% quota. Patriarchal institutions and norms must be tackled to achieve full gender equality.

# 3. Masculinities, femininities and peace

## 3.1. Pulling back the curtain on pervasive patriarchal values

Research conducted in Kyrgyzstan, Nigeria, Nepal and the Philippines shows how a range of social, cultural, economic and religious factors, stemming from patriarchal ideology and structure, combine to inform the construction of masculinities and femininities. To understand how masculinities and femininities are formed in different settings, it is useful to analyse the construction of gender roles and gendered division of labour.

The research showed that religious and cultural beliefs and values are major factors in the construction of masculinities and femininities. In the Bangsamoro, religion, the clan system and family, alongside a notion of honour that comes from Islamic faith and tribal culture, are the most significant factors that shape men's and women's lives and the ways in which they relate to each other. The clan is a strong and constant force that shapes and enforces the values governing the behaviours deemed acceptable, especially among women. Customary beliefs on gender roles largely define notions of what makes a 'good woman' and a 'good man'. Here, femininity and womanhood are closely associated with motherhood and the fulfilment of a reproductive role, while the hegemonic masculine figure appears to be the 'provider' of the family. Up to 90% of women survey respondents affirmed the prescribed role of a woman as a mother and see motherhood as their primary responsibility. Beliefs about gender roles and the division of labour, however, became ambiguous as the survey interrogated ideas around a 'good man'. Most women demonstrated egalitarian views around household chores by expressing that 'good men' should share household chores and that caring for children is a joint responsibility of both parents. Men are expected to have control of household finances, budgeting and expenditures. Although most women undertake income-generating activities in the informal sector, this does not necessarily result in an increase in their financial decision-making power in the household.

The survey conducted in Kyrgyzstan revealed that perceptions of the roles of women can change or become more rigid, depending on the respondents' location, ethnicity and level of religiosity. Nevertheless, most respondents emphasised the role of men as the main providers for the family, stating that women have no obligation to be breadwinners. Instead, their roles should focus on traditional reproductive tasks such as raising children, as well as cooking and cleaning, thus placing them in direct financial, physical and psychological dependence on men. The survey also revealed prejudices against men when they are seen to engage in so called 'non-male' activities such as washing dishes or cleaning. The difficult socio-economic context in the country is beginning to erode rigid gender divisions of labour, as well as beliefs and attitudes, because many women in the survey target areas were leaving Kyrgyzstan to work abroad, thus earning salaried incomes. Many respondents, however, attributed these changes to what they perceived as a sign of 'weakness' from men. Perhaps surprisingly, male respondents under the age of 23 expressed the most intolerant attitudes towards the notion of gender equality, perceiving it as the primary source of conflict within the family.

In Bauchi state, Nigeria, traditional and religious leaders who enjoy a high level of moral authority are a critical part of the community structure. Most of them perceive women's empowerment as encroaching on men's roles. Most participants in town hall meetings and dialogue groups agreed that men should be the breadwinners of the family. It was frowned upon for men to take care of children or household chores. Women are trained and socialised to handle the home, while men work solely to earn money for the family. For example, a girl is trained to "be a good wife" and take care of her husband by learning how to be obedient, "endure" any sort of abuse, and not be seen or heard arguing with him. Despite progress made towards gender equality and the emergence of a vibrant women's rights movement in Nigeria over the last decade, deeply conservative cultural norms and values persist. Combined with a lack of skills, good education and poverty, women continue to be relegated to domestic roles, particularly in rural areas.

## // Women are trained to handle the home front, while men work for the money."

– Participant in townhall meetings in Lmankatagum and Zango communities, Bauchi state, Nigeria

In Nepal, many traditional gender roles and relations were challenged during the conflict, only to be reaffirmed once the war had finished in 2006. The persistence of entrenched gender social norms and values form barriers against addressing some of the key root causes of gender inequality in Nepalese society. The research found that patriarchal norms were actually reinforced in some of the new political structures put in place after the conflict – despite aiming to institutionalise gender equality – serving to create new forms of exclusion and discrimination. This is the case in the post-conflict provincial and federal governments where men continue to occupy most of the key positions. Overall, the influence of women in decision-making and constitution-building processes remains limited. Women are still widely expected to support and follow men in their role as head of the family. They continue to struggle to find their identity and position within masculine social spaces.

## 3.2. Women's agency in patriarchal systems

Women do have power within patriarchal systems, but over specific, limited decisions, for example, around childcare and household chores. Women can also adhere to the patriarchal systems that discriminate against them and teach and continue these systems themselves. Women therefore need to be a significant part of the solution and must be considered as actors with power. For example, Alert's research found that women-run networks are the most effective tool to create gender equality.

### 3.2.1. Women nurturing the patriarchy

The research and surveys conducted in the four settings confirmed that many women adhere to the gender ideologies, values and practices that discriminate against them. This can be through conviction, fear of reprisal and/or marginalisation by their family and community, or a lack of alternatives. The feminist academic scholar Deniz Kandiyoti coined the term "patriarchal bargain" to describe women's internalisation of patriarchal values and their active collusion in the perpetuation of their own subordination.<sup>3</sup> She further argues:

*"Despite obstacles that classic patriarchy puts in women's way, which may outweigh any actual economic and emotional security, women often resist the process of transition because they see the old normative order slipping away from them, without any empowering alternatives."*<sup>4</sup>

This was very evident in Nepal where respondents talked about backlash and social sanctions as obstacles to challenging prescribed gender norms. Likewise, in the Bangsamoro, most women respondents were overwhelmingly concerned with preserving the honour of their families. They strongly believed in the notion of honour, with 93% stressing that this was their first consideration when making decisions. Around 90% spoke of their fear of doing things that would bring shame on their families, and consequently being disowned by them and the wider community. Disciplining women's behaviour, including self-disciplining by women themselves, is an integral part of maintaining the normative social and moral order.

### **3.2.2. Women carving out their own spaces**

The feminist social economist Naila Kabeer defines the term 'agency' as "people's capacity to define their own life choices and to pursue their own goals, even in the face of opposition from others".<sup>5</sup> She relates agency to the notion of power, particularly the positive dimension of power such as "the power to" and "the power within", which both emphasise the ability to define one's goals and act upon them. For her, the term agency also encompasses the meaning, motivation and purpose that individuals bring to their activities, their "sense of agency".<sup>6</sup>

Alert's research has shown women's ability to use their understanding of gender norms to exercise some agency even in spaces dominated by masculinities. This is the case in the Bangsamoro where, despite the prominence of a highly patriarchal and dominant clan system, women respondents said they were able to make some choices in their lives. On the surface, clans can be seen as patriarchal institutions which maintain control through the imposition of behavioural rules and the fear of social sanctions. The survey suggested, however, that there are 'grey areas' that enable women to exercise some level of agency within their clans, mostly on matters relating to the household, childcare and reproduction. Women respondents stressed that they have a great deal of control over some aspects of their lives such as childbearing and the number of children they want.

The space and ability for women in the Bangsamoro to exercise agency outside their clan in wider society remains, however, considerably limited. Only 14% of women participate in community activities that are not related to their clan; 1% hold leadership positions; and 6% are part of civil society organisations.<sup>7</sup> In terms of the Bangsamoro, understanding women's roles within and between clans, the fluidity of gender norms in certain circumstances, and identifying 'grey areas' can be a strategic way for women to use customary gender roles to negotiate institutional power and authority.

### **3.2.3. Women-run networks are essential empowerment tools**

Networks are empowerment tools that can provide diverse groups of women with various types of essential support. Establishing response and welfare networks, led by women, can contribute to more effective actions suited to the specificities of their contexts, realities and needs. Alert's research has demonstrated the importance of adopting an intersectional and inclusive approach and taking account of women's different identities and life experiences in establishing women's networks.

In the Philippines, there is an interesting comparison to be drawn between Metro Manila, where Muslim women have strong social networks separate to the clan structure to help in cases of GBV, and the Bangsamoro, where fewer women's networks exist. In the Bangsamoro, there is limited understanding of women's lives in public spaces outside the household. It is not known by the research team if there are structures within the clan that women can rely on for support or to advocate jointly for their rights and concerns. Well-established and resourced Women's Action Response Networks (WARN) can play a role in monitoring and responding to SGBV issues. These networks can serve as emergency response systems, safe spaces for dialogue, and platforms for women to access educational and employment opportunities and information on their rights.



Women traders and small business owners attend an organisational training workshop in Tawi-Tawi with the Karandahan United Women Association who aim to strengthen their business management and entrepreneurial skills and forge viable and sustainable market links. © International Alert

In Nigeria, discussions conducted in focus groups and town hall meetings raised the important issue of intergenerational networking, and the need to establish an intergenerational women's movement. They emphasised the need to foster greater partnership between older women in positions of power and younger women to promote intergenerational dialogue and mentoring, and sustain the tempo of achieving greater gender equality.

### 3.3. Language and terminology matters

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In Kyrgyzstan and Nigeria, one of the main challenges encountered was around the concept of gender, with a general perception that anything gendered was Western. Gender sensitisation usually utilises Western words, which are not accurately translated or properly explained. In Kyrgyzstan, for example, the notions of gender and gender equality are mostly met with hostility and considered to be Western values that destroy social relations within the family. Therefore, it was important to work with our partners and other key stakeholders to identify gender terminology that can be repackaged and discussed in local languages, so they are accessible to local communities.

In Bauchi state, Nigeria, there were strong reactions against using the term 'gender equality', which participants in gender training sessions felt contradicted their religion and culture. Instead, the term 'gender equity' was preferred. This term still enabled the Alert Nigeria team to emphasise the inclusion and agency of women

and to use examples of common phenomena that represent change and an evolution of mentalities, such as women driving cars.

In Kyrgyzstan, the Alert team reclaimed gender as a local concept by firstly demonstrating that it does not originate from the West but from ancient Kyrgyz, and then adapting gender terminology to local languages and local socio-cultural realities. For example, the Living with Dignity methodology<sup>8</sup> was adopted to engage conservative communities in gender-sensitisation sessions, but the term 'gender equality' was not used, and the conversation was instead framed around preventing domestic violence and violence in the community.

Gender mainstreaming approaches in both Russian and Central Asian languages have always relied on English language terminology. This led Alert to develop a Kyrgyz language lexicon to better communicate concepts around gender equality and violence prevention. The purpose of this was also to ensure buy-in from stakeholders at all levels, particularly at the rural grassroots level. The lexicon, which was developed in collaboration with a Kyrgyz linguist expert, is divided into two parts. The first part describes historical and cultural aspects of the construction of gender relations in the Kyrgyz society; the second part features definitions of the main gender concepts and frameworks in the Kyrgyz language.<sup>9</sup>

### **Associations for the concept of gender in the Kyrgyz language**

- Equality
- Promotion of women in politics (specifically in connection with the adoption of a gender quota in the law on local elections)
- Women who only wear trousers and refuse to pour tea (to serve the husband and in-laws)

Source: focus group discussion in Kyrgyzstan

The development of the lexicon was grounded in research conducted in five conservative Islamic communities across Kyrgyzstan. During the course of the research, the five communities gained a deeper understanding into how gender, masculinities and femininities, and SGBV are perceived by different members of the community, as well as what is inhibiting religious authorities from preventing violence and promoting equality in their communities.

## **4. Recalibrating responses to SGBV**

Discriminatory norms, values and practices are rendering responses to GBV, the reporting of it, and the provision of justice and protection around it inadequate. In the four contexts, efforts have been made by national governments and local authorities to address the issue of GBV, but responses to GBV and service provision to victims and survivors remain wanting, a problem that is clearly linked to the discriminatory norms, values and practices. There are limited opportunities for victims to report violence or receive protection and justice.

In Nigeria's Bauchi state, progressive legal acts and actions are being hindered by the domination of courts by male judges. The Bauchi state adopted the Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Act<sup>10</sup> and Nigeria security and civil defence corps in Bauchi established an all-female squad to address increasing cases of rape, kidnapping and other security issues affecting women. Most cases of GBV, however, such as marital issues, rape and family disputes, continue to be addressed by the Sharia courts, which are dominated by male judges. These male judges often hold strong discriminatory views and values on gender equality, which influence their handling of cases. Women respondents to Alert's research suggested targeted advocacy to increase the number of women judges because the majority of women currently working within the Sharia courts are relegated to administrative departments.

In Nepal, the 24-hour, free, national helpline for victims of sexual abuse and GBV only serves elite women. The National Women's Commission (NWC) helpline user data showed that religious minorities, including Dalit Tarai and disadvantaged non-Dalit Tarai caste groups, comprised only 1% of the 15,568 cases registered by the helpline between November 2017 and September 2021. By contrast, women from the dominant Brahmin and Chhetri groups formed 44% of the survivors calling the helpline.<sup>11</sup> Women from marginalised groups can find it difficult to access or use the phone service. Clearly, Nepal's existing GBV response services have not yet adopted an intersectional approach that properly assesses and addresses the different needs and contexts of survivors of SGBV. Moreover, the research found that there is confusion over which department is responsible for leading GBV responses. While the response used to be governed centrally by the district-level Women's Development Offices, all authority for service delivery now lies with local governments within the new political structure. Alert's research revealed that there is currently an acute jurisdictional tussle between local and provincial governments around whose responsibility it is to provide these services. To complicate matters further, an old service provision structure from the previous centralised government system still exists as a transitional institution. These complex layers disempower GBV victims and survivors.

***"The new system is struggling to institutionalise the old structures and results in the new system. The referral mechanism is disrupted, the policy provision mandates the local government but capacity and technical know-how to provide such services are with civil society organisations."***

**– Representatives from civil society organisations working on GBV responses, Nepal**

There is a similar situation in the Philippines' Bangsamoro area, where the authorities continue to address SGBV inadequately. Notably, SGBV was not discussed as part of the formal peace process. Despite national-level data collection, in the Bangsamoro, SGBV remains under-reported, under-examined and under-addressed.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, national-level data and statistics are considered by many to be inadequate due to the Anti-violence Against Women and Children Act 2004, which has had the unintended consequence of making disaggregated and granular data on gender-related violence opaque.<sup>13</sup> In addition to inaccuracy, data is affected by the social stigma and shame associated with rape and sexual violence. Women are forced to keep quiet about the violence they have experienced in order to preserve the honour and dignity of their families and prevent the escalation of clan and community-level violence. As a result, the full extent of the problem remains unknown.

Furthermore, GBV survivors in the Bangsamoro area have insufficient access to effective institutional or justice mechanisms. Many villages in these rural areas lack police stations and health centres where victims can report the violence they have experienced and receive protection and medical assistance. The plural legal system in Mindanao acts as an additional constraint for religious and indigenous women. Personal and family relations are mainly regulated by Sharia, customary laws, and traditional redress mechanisms, which many indigenous groups use to settle disputes and grievances, including those related to SGBV. Some of these mechanisms are patriarchal and discriminatory and include arrangements such as the forced marriage of a victim to the perpetrator and payment of 'blood money' as reparations.<sup>14</sup>

### **Masculinities, femininities and community violence**

Intra- and inter-clan disputes have a significant impact on the lives of women, and clan violence is closely linked to the occurrence of SGBV and GBV among clans. Clan feuding or '*rido*' remains one of the primary drivers of conflict in the region and is often driven by notions of honour and shame, in combination with issues arising from land disputes and political rivalries. The notions of honour and shame are highly gendered and closely tied to the construction of normative masculinity and femininity. Men resort to violence to fulfil their masculine duty to protect the family. As such, many conflicts between clans are triggered by incidents involving perceived slights against women and the honour of their families. For example, revenge killings are mostly triggered by cases of women who elope or who are romantically involved with individuals from a different religion or identity. Women are also targeted for rape as part of *rido*, and rape and sexual violence are commonly perpetrated by elite clans and their private armies.<sup>15</sup> Forced marriage as an outcome of SGBV is often tied to clan conflict dynamics, with young girls being abducted, raped, and forced into marriage by armed clan groups.<sup>16</sup>

## **5. Patriarchal power and women's participation in political and public life**

### **5.1. Making entire institutions gender sensitive**

Meaningful and sustainable work on patriarchal gender norms needs strategic alliance building at its centre. This cannot focus exclusively at the highest levels. Individuals with power across social, cultural and organisational institutions must be engaged in gender sensitivity, and it is essential that gatekeepers and men of influence are engaged. Community norms setters, such as religious and traditional leaders and local officials, are critical as peacebuilding agents and potential allies and champions to challenge and transform patriarchal normative frameworks. For example, in Kyrgyzstan, the role of religious leaders was emphasised by all respondents, due to their key role in the communities and the significant contribution they can make in the prevention of violence at the local level, such as by helping men to overcome alcohol abuse.

In Kyrgyzstan and Nigeria, the projects focused on engagement with traditional leadership structures and religious leaders to catalyse opportunities for the positive participation of men and raise awareness about the role of women in peacebuilding. Traditional and religious leaders were trained on issues such as gender and conflict sensitivity; gender, peace and security including UNSCR 1325; and SGBV. The training sessions were carefully designed and tailored to each context and group of participants, based on a comprehensive analysis of the local context.

In Kyrgyzstan, in view of the multitude of religious communities, the facilitators had to adopt a careful and sensitive approach when initiating discussions about various forms of violence, human rights and equality in the family and society. They had to take account of religious scriptures and explore common universal approaches in considering the issue of violence and the notion of 'evil' from a legal and religious point of view. While training sessions with the Protestant and Bahai communities were slightly more open, leaders from the Catholic, Sunni Islam and Russian Orthodox communities had very conservative views about the participation of women in decision-making processes and leadership in the religious sphere. This shows the importance of adopting sensitive, contextual and tailored approaches and gender terminology when promoting gender equality among religious communities.

There were similar challenges in organising focus group and dialogue group discussions, bringing together traditional and religious leaders and women and youth groups. In Kyrgyzstan, it was difficult to bring together women and men from the Muslim community in the same group, so the focus group discussions (FGDs) were split by sex and age to create safe spaces and allow open and frank discussions.

In Nigeria, it was easier to organise mixed-sex training sessions and dialogue groups, which included not only religious and traditional leaders, but also women groups' leaders, representatives from local authorities and non-governmental organisations. This was alongside members of the He4She Champions, a group of men committed to working for women's equality in their circle of influence.<sup>17</sup> The Alert team ensured that the spaces for dialogue between these various stakeholders were safe enough to allow fruitful discussions about the roles of men in promoting women's participation in decision-making in the private and public spheres.

## 5.2. Women are more than numbers

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Political and constitutional gains on gender equality must be sustainable. Nepal has made progressive gender equality commitments: due to the adoption of quotas, 41% of women were elected at the local level in 2017, the highest percentage of women elected in Nepal's history. A similar percentage of women were elected again in the 2022 local elections, but these successes have yet to be translated into true equality and inclusion for Nepalese women more widely. Men from dominant castes and social groups continue to occupy most of the key positions in the municipal governments, while the majority of deputy mayors are women and members of ethnic and religious minorities such as Madhesi, Dalits and Muslim. Only 25 women were elected at the highest level of mayor or chairperson in 2022. Moreover, women belonging to upper castes benefit most from the representation system and hold 48% of major municipal seats, compared with only 2% by Dalit women.<sup>18</sup>

In these relatively new political spaces, women's participation has been often perceived as insignificant. Their minimal participation in parliament is a persistent issue in government. According to a study on the contribution of women to constitution making in Nepal,<sup>19</sup> only 27 out of 197 women representatives had previous parliamentary experience. Consequently, the majority of women parliamentarians have problems understanding complex legal issues and therefore experience great difficulty in engaging meaningfully in political debates. Furthermore, men rarely acknowledge women's participation in debates and discussions on different subjects.<sup>20</sup> Women in politics have been depicted across generations as being capable of dealing only with trivial matters and "women's issues". Patriarchal mindsets of family members, and community and state mechanisms are key barriers for women who aspire to be active in political spaces.

*"I have to spend more time and effort as a mayor because my deputy is a woman. She has several hurdles to run office being a woman and the public expect more from me than from her."*

– Mayor in Sudpaschim province in Nepal



Participants of the regional forum of young people, We Are the Same, aiming to promote social cohesion and peace in Batken region, Kyrgyzstan as part of our EU-funded *Yntymaktuu Zhashoo* (Living in Peace) project. © Iuliia Babiuk/International Alert

The value system and attitudes of most Nepali people continue to be influenced by unequal social relationships and hierarchies, which block efforts to build an inclusive and non-discriminatory society and state. As a result, women find themselves in a challenging position within the structural framework of Nepali politics, which remains male dominated, and political parties have not promoted women into leadership roles within their hierarchies. Increasing the number of women representatives is an important first step, but it does not automatically mean women are able to claim and exercise their rights. This requires investment in the transformation of gender narratives and norms, as well as societal power dynamics.

State institutions must be transformed in a way that strengthens the ability of women to negotiate political spaces. This means supporting women's agency and amplifying their voices so that they can discuss, identify and stake their claim, as well as set their own agenda for change. This also means training them in technical areas to enhance their capacity to shape and influence legislative processes. Such support must include an intersectional understanding of gender equality, to ensure that diverse women and gender minorities have an equal stake in the social and political process. If women's representation in political spaces continues to be tokenistic, the meaningful participation and inclusion required to establish gender equality and sustain peace will remain elusive.

## 6. Conclusion

The examination and analysis of patriarchal gender norms in Nepal, Nigeria, the Philippines and Kyrgyzstan have demonstrated how discriminatory gender norms are one of the main obstacles to the promotion of gender equality. Gender norms are deeply embedded within the social fabric, shaping values, attitudes and practices. Gender as a system of power exists not only on the personal level but is also embedded in structures and institutions. To bring about genuine transformation of gender norms, the structures that reinforce discriminatory attitudes and behaviours must also be challenged.

Countering the value system of people and establishing new sets of values must not be envisioned in short-term intervention or engagement. These are deeply political and cultural issues that require fully targeted, long-term interventions to address them. Effective implementation of broader peacebuilding work – at field level, undertaking advocacy, in peace negotiations or policy development – is perpetually compromised by the pervasive effects of patriarchal gender norms. Deeper understandings of gender identities and societal power relations can truly improve gender and peacebuilding work over the long term.

Ultimately, it is essential to engage with men and masculinities to challenge patriarchal normative frameworks and transform patriarchal norms and institutionalised male privilege. Without adequate inclusion of men and boys in programmes and policies, it is impossible to interrogate patriarchal norms within security and justice institutions, governments, communities and schools, to allow women, men, girls and boys to contribute equally to the pursuit of peace in their context.<sup>21</sup> The engagement of men and boys and a coordinated effort to tackle patriarchal norms can propel us towards reaching gender equality and the women's empowerment goals enshrined in major global gender-equality frameworks such as the WPS agenda, which is a significant and strategic entry point for addressing gender dynamics in conflict.

Addressing patriarchal norms and the social constructions of masculinities and femininities is critical for achieving gender equality and building sustainable positive peace.

## Annex 1: Methodology

To build a localised evidence base on the varying articulations and impacts of patriarchal gender norms, four programmes were designed by Alert country teams in Kyrgyzstan, Nepal, Nigeria and the Philippines. Each sought to address a particular aspect of gender inequality within that context, while assessing the common thread of patriarchal norms as one of the root causes of these inequalities.

- In Kyrgyzstan, the *Taktykuu Zhashoo* project worked with religious leaders to better understand their role in the prevention of SGBV and take practical measures to begin to dismantle harmful attitudes towards women and girls. Qualitative research was conducted to gain a deeper understanding of how gender, masculinities, femininities, and SGBV are perceived among communities, as well as what is inhibiting religious authorities from preventing violence and promoting equality in their communities. Five conservative Islamic communities across Kyrgyzstan (Suzak in Jalal-Abad province, Alla-Anarov

and Kara-Suu in Osh province, Kara-Buura in Talas province, and Ak-talaa in Naryn province) were selected as target areas. The study sample consisted of a diverse group of 191 respondents (87 women and 104 men) ranging from local activists to religious leaders, minority groups and ordinary citizens; 20 FGDs and 13 key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted. In-depth interviews took place with local government officials, religious leaders and local informal leaders. To offer safe spaces that allowed different groups to speak openly, the FGDs were split by age and sex: older men, older women, younger men and younger women. Primary data was complemented by secondary data, which included a review of published research on SGBV in conservative and religious communities.

- In Nepal, the Understanding and Documenting the Learnings for Evidence-Based Advocacy to Prevent and Respond to GBV project drew analytical lessons from years of engagement with patriarchal gender norms and GBV, particularly since the promulgation of the new constitution in 2015. Reflections on significant experiences and challenges were analysed across two key areas of Alert's engagement in Nepal: firstly, the dilemma presented by progressive policies that do not match reality, and secondly, ensuring that gender equality policies resonate with practice by addressing embedded norms. Engagement analysis was then conducted using qualitative methods, including a literature review, external consultations and reflective workshops related to different projects.
- In Nigeria, the Addressing Patriarchal Gender Norms and the Construction of Masculinities in Conflict-Affected Settings programme built upon findings from Alert's extensive work on the WPS agenda in Bauchi and Benue states. The project sought to better understand the role of conservative patriarchal norms within traditional leadership structures and assess what works to increase awareness of women's roles, as well as overall participation in peace processes. Methods included town hall meetings with 153 men and 148 women to create awareness on women's participation in inclusive decision-making processes, the training of 20 traditional and religious leaders on gender sensitivity and UNSCR 1325, and dialogue sessions on the role of men in promoting women's participation and social inclusion. These sessions brought together key stakeholders including representatives from local government, traditional institutions, local non-governmental organisations, and Christian and Islamic clerics.
- In the Philippines, the Why Counting Gender-Based Violence Counts project started meaningful discussions on how different actors can monitor and address GBV, and help shape the development and/or reform of relevant policies, strategies and actions. To do this it conducted quantitative research into the boundaries of patriarchal gender norms and the linkages between identity, gender-based issues and violent conflict, including violent extremism in the Bangsamoro. The project undertook a survey covering a sample of 400 women from four municipalities in the Iranun Corridor in the province of Maguindanao. The survey highlighted context-specific information, including interrogating longitudinal conflict data from Alert Philippines' conflict-monitoring system, which is crucial to establish an evidence-based determination of the magnitude of the problem, identify the baseline, and track changes over time. Some of the key questions at the core of the survey included: how do gender inequalities in the Bangsamoro shape and reinforce patriarchal gender norms that limit women's capacity to exercise their agency fully; is there space for women to negotiate these gender norms to allow them to participate in different domains of society beyond traditional roles; and how do clans or families, often viewed as patriarchal institutions that maintain gender norms, expand spaces where women can exercise their agency?

An intersectional approach was adopted across the four programmes to avoid conflating women and men into a homogenous category. In all four countries, the different identity markers of participants were taken into account, such as socio-economic status, ethnicity, caste, age, disability, sexual orientation and geographical

location. This practice allowed recognition of the significant disparities in the ways that different people experience dominant patriarchal norms, as influenced by various markers of identity.

The report purposely focuses on examining and understanding the impact of patriarchal norms and constructions of masculinities and femininities on women. Very little reference is made to men and boys, nor to sexual and gender minorities, although the authors fully acknowledge that they can also be negatively impacted by patriarchal values and practices. Further research and discussion are needed in the four settings to generate a solid evidence base on these important issues. Nevertheless, all the research, FGDs, interviews and dialogue meetings conducted in the four settings included, where possible, equal numbers of women and men to ensure that men's perceptions of social norms and gender equality were heard and integrated into the discussions and analysis.

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