

SOCIAL NORMS STRUCTURING MASCULINITIES, GENDER ROLES, AND STEREOTYPES

Iraqi men and boys' common misconceptions
about women and girls' participation and
empowerment

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The limited participation of Iraqi women in community decision-making in Kirkuk and Diyala is the result of various intertwined factors. This study explores emerging opportunities for social transformation in the context of sedimented layers of male privilege and the questioning of restrictive gender norms in the two governorates. With this report, Oxfam and its partners aim to dismantle barriers to women's active participation, which is currently constrained by stereotypes and restrictive ideas about gender. Among the promising pathways for change are awareness-raising activities with male allies, alongside other longer-term efforts advancing transformative change in attitudes, practices, and behaviors.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Oxfam in Iraq is currently implementing a Women and Girls Rebuilding Iraq project funded by Global Affairs Canada (GAC). The project contributes to the development of policy, decision-making mechanisms and peacebuilding processes at all levels to ensure that women and girls play a significant role in shaping the new rehabilitation and development agenda. It engages women and girls in two governorates, Kirkuk and Diyala, which have long suffered from protracted conflict and now face the reintegration of different war-affected groups. An added value of this initiative is the community awareness-raising component, which is aimed at ensuring the engagement of community members, especially men, in order to push boundaries and challenge the accepted social norms and cultural beliefs that constrain women and girls' participation in policy-shaping, decision-making, and peacebuilding.

Between **November 15, 2020** and **January 25, 2021**, a team of experts from Gender consulting with support from Oxfam and its local partners Iraqi Al Amal Association (IAA) and Youth Activity Organization (YAO) conducted a study on the social norms surrounding masculinities, gender roles, and stereotypes in order to identify the common misconceptions held by men and boys about women and girls' empowerment. In addition, an awareness-raising, context-specific 'edutainment' toolkit by and for men and boys was developed.

This toolkit was piloted during an induction workshop for male role models that took place between January 19– 21, 2021 in Sulaymaniyah with 24 participants (21 men and 3 women) from 10 communities in Kirkuk and Diyala. To inform the implementation of this workshop, a study using largely qualitative research methodology captured information from 117 community respondents and Oxfam project participants (59% men and 41% women) through focus group discussions (FGDs) and selected key informant interviews (KIs). Complementary information was collected from Oxfam and implementing partner staff through an online survey.

The study sought answers and insights for the following questions:

- a. What are the prevalent masculinities and femininities in the Iraqi context, particularly in Diyala and Kirkuk, and what are the respective social norms associated with them?
- b. How do the norms and stereotypes about masculinities and femininities affect the daily lives of women and girls in the private and public spheres, and in particular, how do they affect women and girls' participation in decision making?
- c. How do norms and stereotypes that reproduce harmful masculinities sustain gender inequalities and intersect with other social inequalities, such as age, religion, sect, and disability?
- d. How can a shift from negative to positive masculinities materialize in Diyala and Kirkuk, and how do conceptions and practices of power need to be adapted?
- e. How can male role models promote positive masculinities to advance gender equality?

The main findings were:

- In Diyala and Kirkuk, the idea that men should make decisions and hold positions of authority and leadership has been normalized at both the household and community levels. This is a historical pattern that is visible through prevalent expressions of men's entitlement and male privilege. This hegemonic and context-specific pattern of domination is maintained through intertwined ideas of male superiority and female subordination that are translated through tribal, religious, and everyday attitudes, practices, and behaviors that present these gender arrangements as 'normal.'
- The most stigmatized and rejected masculine traits are those that run counter to custom and cultural norms. For example, 'allowing women to control men,' 'treating your wife equally,' or 'depending entirely on your wife's salary' are considered unmanly practices. When men fail to comply with the established norms for authority, they are ridiculed, made fun of, and

disrespected by other men and women. Consequently, men and women in households and larger kinship structures as well as at the community level actively participate in stigmatizing and rejecting men who do not comply with accepted gender norms. There are no notable differences between Diyala and Kirkuk governorates in this regard.

- Constructions of idealized femininities center on the role of women as dedicated mothers and good wives. To be considered respectable, women are expected to demonstrate the values of loyalty and dedication. Women are subjected to reputational damage and become undesirable in society and their families when they fail to live up to gendered norms of femininity.
- While both women and men face costs for transgressing established gender norms, the consequences are more severe for women. Women of all ages are disproportionately controlled and sanctioned, compared with their male peers.
- Gender norms are linked to tradition and are considered a source of stability. Consequently, study participants describe them as 'set in stone' or unchanging. However, decades of armed conflict compounded by multiple humanitarian crises, complex dynamics between displaced peoples, remainees, and returnees, exposure to programs by international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs), and capacity building, awareness-raising, and community engagement sessions have generated a certain disposition for change, particularly among the younger generation.
- Several different factors account for changing attitudes about gender roles and norms, including inter-generational shifts, changes related to modernization, urbanization, and technological advances, and external factors such as the occupation by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), the role of INGOs, and the influence of new information and communication technologies, TV, the internet, and mass media.

To understand how gender norms and prevalent attitudes undermine the active engagement of women at the community level, a series of intertwined elements need to be addressed.

1. The **rigid division of labor by gender**, which places women and men into different roles and links women to domestic responsibilities, thus acting as one of the major constraints on women's empowerment in the public and private spheres.
2. The **multiple ways in which men control women's lives**, whether this is done by individual men asserting dominance or imposed by tribal or religious tradition.
3. **Attitudes around women's contributions**, including stereotypes and assumptions that belittle women's roles, trivialize their contributions, and undermine their voices, thereby undermining women's active engagement in community affairs.
4. **Violence against women, including domestic and intra-partner violence**, which, in addition to early marriage, are among the most significant constraints for women and girls in the private sphere.
5. **Depression** caused by the pressures of everyday life and societal expectations, which was commonly reported by study participants.
6. **Gossip and peer pressure related to women being active outside the home**, which effectively constrain women's activities in the public sphere.
7. **Tribal and religious traditions** that justify men's control over women and restrict women's involvement at the community level.
8. **Attitudes about women and sex** that result in a vicious circle wherein women within the household need to be protected, while preying on women outside the home is seen as permissible.

Therefore, overcoming the barriers to women's participation involves different strategies such as engaging tribal authorities, generating awareness among communities, and acknowledging women's contributions.

- In order to advance men’s engagement, Oxfam needs to plan and implement a scalable outreach program that involves building a nucleus of dedicated male role models while safeguarding women from any possible backlash.
- Efforts toward change need to be holistic and multidimensional, addressing the *internal level* (personal beliefs and attitudes), the *interpersonal level* (the practices and behaviors of individuals within interpersonal relationships), the *institutional level* (institutional policies, practices, and cultures), and the *ideological level* (social norms and belief systems).
- Due to the dynamic nature of social change, capacity building for male role models should be done using a flexible approach that views their personal and collective change as a journey. To stimulate personal transformation toward a more gender-equitable perspective, it is important that this journey:
 - fosters critical consciousness building, ongoing self-reflection and self-critique;
 - challenges privileges and the status quo;
 - encourages reflection upon injustice in connection with personal life experiences of power imbalances and inequality;
 - fosters activism within each role model; and
 - plants the seeds of hope, potential, and possibility while inspiring positive change.
- A training-of-trainers method is recommended, as one part of an ambitious and holistic outreach approach advancing transformative change through changes in attitudes, practices, and behaviors at the different levels.
- This holistic outreach approach needs to be strategically aligned and synchronized with other gender-transformative projects implemented by Oxfam in Iraq.

1 BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

1.1 ABOUT THE WOMEN AND GIRLS REBUILDING IRAQ PROJECT

Oxfam in Iraq is currently implementing a Women and Girls Rebuilding Iraq project funded by Global Affairs Canada (GAC). The project contributes to the development of policy, decision-making mechanisms, and peacebuilding processes at all levels to ensure that women and girls play a significant role in shaping the new rehabilitation and development agenda. It engages women and girls in two governorates, Kirkuk and Diyala, which have long suffered from protracted conflict and now face the challenge of reintegrating different war-affected groups. The initiative aims to:

- increase the active participation of women and girls as transformative leaders in decision-making processes in public and political environments.
- improve the social and political environment to enable the effective participation of women and girls in government structures.

As part of the project, community awareness-raising is being undertaken to ensure engagement from community members, especially men, in order to push boundaries and challenge the accepted social norms and cultural beliefs that constrain women and girls' participation in policy-shaping, decision-making, and peacebuilding.

1.2 OBJECTIVES

Oxfam in Iraq is currently implementing a Women and Girls Rebuilding Iraq project funded by Global Affairs Canada (GAC). The project contributes to the development of policy, decision-making mechanisms, and peacebuilding processes at all levels to ensure that women and girls play a significant role in shaping the new rehabilitation and development agenda. It engages women and girls in two governorates, Kirkuk and Diyala, which have long suffered from protracted conflict and now face the challenge of reintegrating different war-affected groups. The initiative aims to:

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The specific objectives were to:

- document the social norms surrounding masculinities, gender roles, and stereotypes, understand how expectations about boys and men's social roles and responsibilities impact women and girls, and determine to what extent all of these factors limit women's opportunities to participate in private and public decision-making processes;
- develop an awareness-raising edutainment package (including a facilitation manual, key messages, and information, education, and communication tools) to be used in the community to highlight gender norms and stereotypes, promote positive masculinities, and support women's participation in formal and informal decision-making processes;

- develop criteria for identifying and selecting men and boys to become positive role models in the community; and
- conduct training of trainers for the identified positive role models to build their capacity in awareness raising and collect feedback to improve the edutainment package.

2 RESEARCH FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study's overarching research question was '**what are the common misconceptions men and boys have about women and girls' empowerment?**' This was analyzed by answering the following five sub-questions, outlined in the terms of reference:

- a. What are the prevalent masculinities and femininities in the Iraqi context, particularly in Diyala and Kirkuk, and what are the respective social norms associated with them?
- b. How do the norms and stereotypes about masculinities and femininities affect the daily lives of women and girls in the private and public spheres, and, in particular, how do they affect women and girls' participation in decision making?
- c. How do norms and stereotypes that reproduce harmful masculinities sustain gender inequalities and intersect with other social inequalities, such as age, religion, sect, as disability?
- d. How can a shift from negative to positive masculinities materialize in Diyala and Kirkuk, and how do conceptions and practices of power need to be adapted?
- e. How can male role models promote positive masculinities to advance gender equality?

2.2 METHODOLOGICAL RESEARCH

In order to explore the changing and shifting of gender norms, the study adopted a largely qualitative research methodology, capturing information from community respondents and Oxfam project participants through KIIs and FGDs. Complementary quantitative information was collected from Oxfam and implementing partner staff, in part through an online survey (via Survey Monkey) using closed questions (e.g. voting and rating exercises).

KEY PRINCIPLES AND METHODS

Four key principles underpinned the study and contributed to the quality and sustainability of the results.

Gender-transformative inquiry: This means that feminist principles were applied in all stages of the project.¹ These seek to explicitly overcome gender biases and inequalities, and center the experiences of marginalized women and minority groups while including male allies. Oxfam's Integrating Gender in Research Planning Guide² provided a framework for the project, guiding the collaborative development of an evidence base to inform long-term practical changes in structural gender power relations and their accompanying norms, roles, and inequalities.

Participatory research: The study engaged with the key stakeholders, Oxfam and its partners, at the local, sub-national, and national levels. Designated Oxfam staff and partners in selected locations

in Kirkuk and Diyala governorates played a vital role in project planning, implementation, and follow up. The Gender.consulting team was embedded into the wider GAC team and served as a catalyst for the project rather than extracting data from the field. The participation of the people Oxfam works with in Kirkuk and Diyala in planning, implementing, and validating the project's findings was emphasized in order to enhance ownership and provide support for follow-up programming.

Action-centered, utilization focus: This involves collecting evidence, learning from the data, engaging in critical reflection, and initiating evidence-based changes in practice through testing and reiterating the learning process. All knowledge, evidence, and findings are translated into shareable products for the community of practice, internally and externally.

Sustainability: The project focused on developing the community of practice among Oxfam staff and partners, building their competence, confidence, and ownership, and facilitating learning and transformation across different Oxfam programs.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Due to the potentially sensitive information disclosed by the study participants, all data collected was kept confidential. No full names of respondents were recorded. Respondents were also free to end interviews at any point. Furthermore, verbal consent was secured prior to the FGDs and KIs. The Gender.consulting team collaborated closely with Oxfam's GAC team, security advisor, and field-based staff and volunteers to comply with security standards and movement-tracking procedures, and participants were briefed before the study. During the inception phase, local security conditions were considered when selecting locations. The Gender.consulting team embraced Oxfam's commitment to zero tolerance of sexual harassment, exploitation, and abuse, and was fully compliant with Oxfam's Code of Conduct. Finally, the team monitored the latest COVID-19 related trends and policies, including closely collaborating with Oxfam teams to create specific plans to address concerns. This included, for example, opting for online FGDs and KIs to avoid physical contact among the participants.

2.3 DATA COLLECTION

- a. **Contextualization/secondary data review:** A comprehensive desk review took place to ensure adequate contextualization. The literature review included academic literature and other publications in English and Arabic as well as reports and grey literature from Oxfam and partner organizations.
- b. **Deep dive/focus group discussions:** The deep dive focused on primary data collection and was the most crucial part of the study. Using a bottom-up grounded theory approach allowed us to collect authentic and validated information while maintaining a mindful and critical perspective towards the lived experiences and potentially biased beliefs of women and men of different ages.³ The evidence collected was triangulated with the views of Oxfam staff and partners. The FGDs were tailored to two main groups: affected women and men, including young women and men; and female and male community leaders, including defenders of women's rights, opinion formers, and policy makers.
- c. Twelve FGDs took place—six in each of Kirkuk and Diyala—with 60 participants in total, 40 men (67%) and 20 women (33%). The FGDs were moderated by an experienced field researcher and trainer who was also an Arabic-speaking woman, and conducted online through Zoom and Skype. Field-based researchers from Gender.consulting worked closely with designated Oxfam or partner staff to identify participants based on the agreed profile criteria and to ensure compliance with security and COVID-19 related procedures.
- d. **Informing action/online survey for Oxfam staff and partners:** Oxfam staff and partners are seen as connectors with unique experiences generated through their direct interaction with the communities.⁴ The survey included 52 respondents in total—24 men (46%) and 28 women (54%). Their ideas, feedback regarding realistic and feasible solutions to promoting positive forms of

masculinities, and recommendations for a way forward greatly contributed to this study. The survey also served to triangulate the primary data obtained via FGDs and KIIIs.

- e. **Needs assessment/key informant interviews of five candidates for male role model induction:**
The KIIIs took place remotely with five candidates selected strategically based on pre-determined criteria. They aimed to collect complementary data and explore the needs, role, and preferences of male role models specifically and in depth. The KIIIs were conducted in Arabic during the later phases of data collection and fed into the data collection process, as well as the production of the edutainment toolbox and the induction workshop for male role models.

Table 1 provides an overview of the data collection process.

Table 1: Overview of data collection

Method	Number carried out	Location	Participants	Number of participants	Purpose
<i>FGD</i>	12	Kirkuk (6), Diyala (6)	Local community, Oxfam program participants	60: 40 men (67%), 20 women (33%)	Deep dive into authentic views and lived experiences
<i>Online survey</i>	1	Online via Survey Monkey	Oxfam staff and partners	52: 24 men (46.15%), 28 women (53.85%)	To inform strategies to engage male role models
<i>KIIIs</i>	5	Via mobile phone	Current or future male role models	Five men from Kirkuk and Diyala of different ages and backgrounds	To assess participants' capacity building needs as male role models
Total	18			117: 64 men (59%), 48 women (41%)	

2.4 DATA ANALYSIS

The primary qualitative data were captured using written notes in a pre-established template. The text files were duly cleaned, systematized, and analyzed using ATLAS.ti qualitative data analysis software. Adequate contrast between qualitative and quantitative information as well as adequate triangulation of different data sources took place until data saturation was reached. A first draft proposal of this research fed into the development of the pilot workshop with role models. Inputs were collected from the different team members to ensure consistency, gain insights on context-specific variations, and guide the implementation of the pilot workshop. The findings of this research report will also feed into a final review of the awareness-raising edutainment toolkit and the selection criteria for male role models.

Through these circular ways of working and reviewing, the team ensured that all complementary insights fed into all project deliverables.

2.5 DURATION AND GEOGRAPHIC LOCATIONS

The study took place over a two-month period between **November 15, 2020** and **January 25, 2021**. Due to circumstances resulting from COVID-19 and, more importantly, the nature of the topic to be explored, **10 communities within Diyala and Kirkuk governorates** were proposed as locations for

qualitative data collection. They were chosen because Oxfam has a presence in those communities, and it was expected that the data collection activities would be easier to plan, implement, and monitor. The locations were discussed and determined during the inception phase in close collaboration with Oxfam staff and partners. The specific locations were Hawija, Huzerain, Al Failaq, Yaychi, and Amal Shaabi in Kirkuk, and Jalawla (Wahda and Talia), Qaratapa, Banmil, Tulafrosh, and Khanaqin in Diyala.

2.6 STUDY LIMITATIONS

The most notable limitation was that the overall research set-up was unrealistic in terms of its timeline and the intention to sequence five deliverables in two months. This timeline was established to allow the four members of the Gender consulting team to work in parallel. As a consequence, rather than rooting the development of the edutainment toolkit in the primary data and research findings, these two deliverables were completed together. Consequently, any subsequent rollout and implementation of the workshop with role models would benefit from additional contextualization.

With regard to concrete findings, the limited time frame only allowed for data collection from 12 FDGs with community members. Complementary information to allow for limited triangulation came from the online survey with Oxfam and partner organization staff. In-depth differentiation across geographical locations, between Diyala and Kirkuk governorates, or across different age brackets cannot be derived in a representative manner from the type of qualitative data collected from community members. This information did provide a solid foundation for the efforts to engage male role models; however, cumulative knowledge and findings will need to be included as the process continues.

3 PREVALENT GENDER NORMS AND CONSTRUCTIONS OF MASCULINITIES AND FEMININITIES

This section engages with the first research question, which explores the prevalent forms of masculinities and femininities and their respective social norms in the Iraqi context, especially in Diyala and Kirkuk.

The qualitative data indicate that in Diyala and Kirkuk, **the expectation that men will hold positions of authority has been normalized** for leadership and decision-making roles at both the household and community levels. Men's power and authority have been further established through gendered roles in tribal and religious leadership. This pattern has developed historically and is visible in multiple expressions of **male privilege and entitlement**. As a result, 'the [men] do not give power to women, and all decisions are made by men' (online survey, November 2020). This hegemony or context-specific pattern of domination is maintained through intertwined ideas about male superiority and female subordination that are transmitted through tribal, religious, and everyday attitudes, practices, and behaviors. What maintains these ideas through time is that these types of unequal gender arrangements are seen as 'normal.' For example, the idea that women and girls are bound to the household or 'belong to the private sphere' asserts male entitlement and privilege as 'natural' or 'normal.' This means that women and men buy in to this to maintain gendered inequality.

Nevertheless, decades of armed conflict, compounded by multiple humanitarian crises and complex displacement dynamics, alongside exposure to INGO programming and capacity-building,

awareness-raising, and community engagement sessions, generate a certain disposition for change.

Box 1: Key terms

Gender refers to the socially and politically constructed roles, behaviors, and attributes that a given society considers most appropriate and valuable for girls/women and boys/men. Gender confers systems of power that shape the lives, opportunities, rights, relationships, and access to resources of women, men, and sexual and gender minorities.⁶ This is where the basis for inequality between men and women lies.

Power is the capacity or ability to direct or influence the behavior of others or the course of events. Among other things, power arises most crucially from one's position, rank, influence, status, or control of resources. All relationships are affected by the exercise of power. For instance, 'some men use violence against their spouses to assert their power.'⁷ This kind of **power 'over'** others is a form of domination that imposes obligations on others while restricting and controlling their lives. **Power 'to' or power 'with'** are more egalitarian forms of power that can be nurtured and promoted.⁸ 'When power is used to make decisions regarding one's own life, it becomes an affirmation of self-acceptance and self-respect that, in turn, fosters respect for others and acceptance of them as equals.'⁹

Gender inequality is a form of power inequality. It intersects with other dimensions of identity such as age, ethnicity, dis/ability, caste, class, religion, marital status, and sexual orientation.

Gender relations are social relationships between girls/women and boys/men. They can be relations of cooperation, connection, and mutual support, and/or of conflict, separation, competition, difference, and inequality. Gender relations are concerned with how power is distributed between the sexes and the subsequent status enjoyed by members of each category.¹⁰

Gender roles are activities assigned to girls/women and boys/men by each community or society over and above their biological roles. They are often classified as **productive** (generating income and wealth), **reproductive** (caring for and maintaining human life), and **managerial** (making decisions and establishing and maintaining the structures and systems in a community).¹¹

Gender norms are social 'rules' and expectations about how women and men should be and behave to be accepted in the local community. Gender norms are dynamic and change over time. People often experience significant pressure to conform to these norms and rules. For example, gender norms impose strict expectations on men and boys to assume responsibility for household provision and protection and to show strength and hide their feelings. These expectations can hamper the development of healthy relationships and often lead men and boys to high-risk behaviors. 'Gender norms are produced and perpetuated by political, economic, cultural, and social structures, including education systems, the media, religious institutions, welfare systems, and security and justice systems.'¹² They are specific to particular cultures or societies and often to particular social groups within those societies. What may be expected behavior for a man or woman in one culture may be unacceptable in another.

Masculinity refers to anything that is associated with men and boys in any given culture, just as **femininity** refers to that which is culturally associated with women and girls. Ideas about what is masculine and what is feminine vary over time as well as within and between cultures. In most societies, attributes and behaviors seen as masculine are more socially valued than those viewed as feminine. Most societies socialize their males to display *superiority, leadership, dominance, aggression, and entitlement*. Most societies socialize their females to accept a *lower status, be dependent, be service providers, be passive, and tolerate violence*.¹³

Gender justice, according to Oxfam, is full equality and equity between women and men in all spheres of life, resulting in women jointly, and on an equal basis with men, defining and shaping the policies, structures, and decisions that affect their lives and society as a whole.¹⁴

Gender equity refers to **fairness and justice** in the distribution of resources, opportunities, and benefits to women/girls in relation to men/boys.¹⁵ Equity proceeds from the recognition that certain groups face disadvantages for historical and structural reasons.

Gender equality refers to **similarity in the treatment** of women/girls and men/boys in terms of recognition, allocation of resources and opportunities, and overall assignment of status.

Gender-transformative action refers to interventions that address both the immediate symptoms and the structural causes of gender inequality with the intention of creating lasting, positive change in gender relations and the choices that women and men have over their own lives.¹⁶ Gender-transformative action seeks to create lasting changes in the everyday lives of women and men.

3.1 PREVALENT GENDER NORMS

In order to identify the prevalence of specific gender norms, the online survey completed by the staff of Oxfam and its implementing partners probed into 11 gender norms (Box 2), which were triangulated with previous research and secondary literature.

Box 2: Prevalent gender norms

1. Men are responsible for providing for the family financially.
2. Women may contribute financially, but they should not earn more than their husbands.
3. A man should not engage in cooking or cleaning.
4. Caring for children is the responsibility of women.
5. It is preferable for married women to stay at home and not work.
6. Women and girls are the responsibility of husbands/fathers (and other male relatives).
7. Women cannot go out the house without the permission of men.
8. Women need the permission of men to work or participate in community meetings.
9. A young woman should not engage in community activities by herself.
10. Women are not capable of engaging in politics.
11. Women and men who are not related should not mix.

In terms of overall responses, gender norms 1, 2, 7, 10, and 11 were particularly strongly held. These norms mainly relate to a rigid gendered division of labor that determines who does what within the household.

Gender norms 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, and 9 received less attention in the responses. Even so, the number of responses still indicated that these norms represent considerable barriers to women's ability to engage in community matters related to governance in meaningful and active ways. One of the most significant barriers is the idea that women need permission to participate in community meetings.

Figure 1: Gender norms by location (online survey of staff)

Which of the following gender norms have you encountered in this location?

(According to male and female respondents)

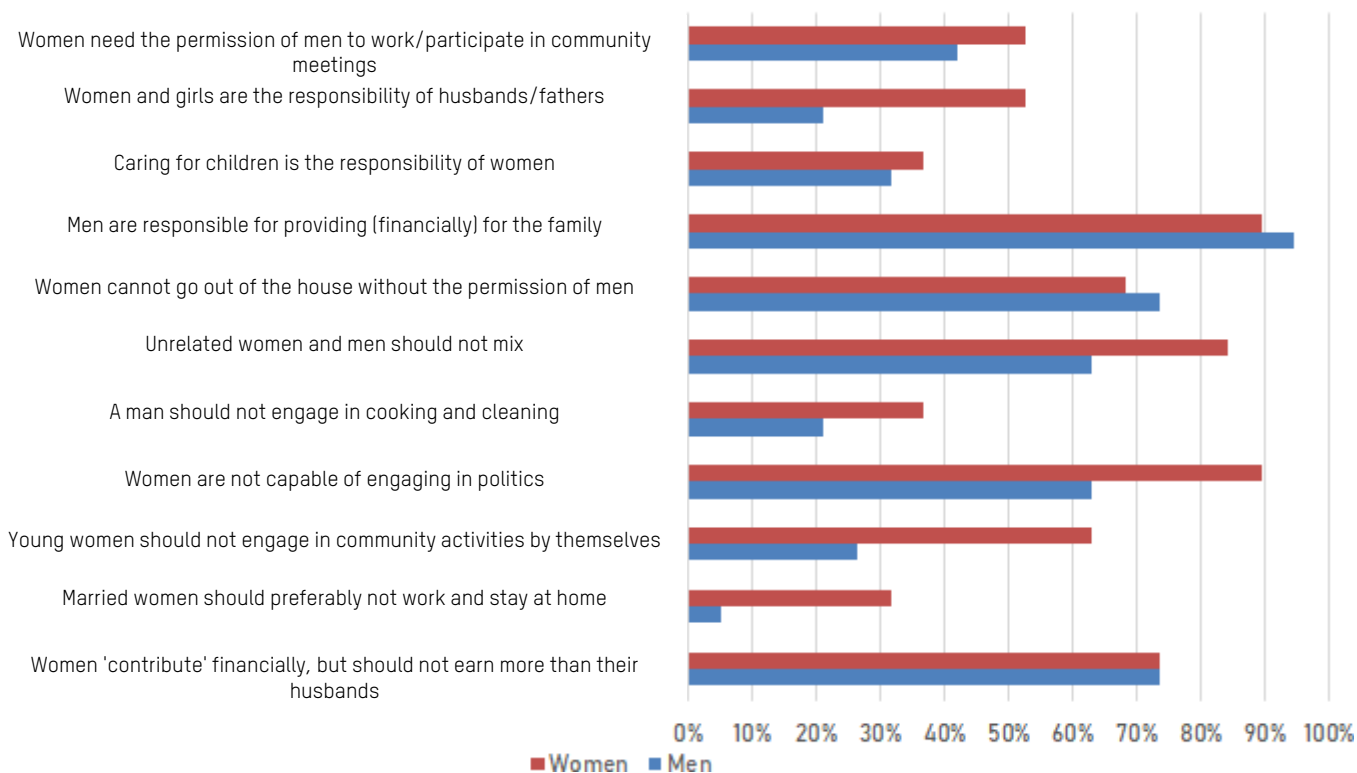


Figure 1 presents the staff's responses about the gender norms they have encountered in their work location. Women show a higher response rate than men. For example, considerably more women than men reported encountering the norms that women are the responsibility of men, it is preferable for married women to stay at home and not work, and that women are not capable of engaging in politics.

In order to understand how the gender norms and attitudes highlighted in Figure 1 undermine the active engagement of women at the community level, a series of intertwined elements need to be addressed.

The first element is the **rigid division of labor by gender**, which places women and men into different roles and links women to domestic responsibilities. For example, sewing, farming, embroidery, cooking, and cleaning are female-coded tasks: 'Women are mostly engaged in housework [etc.] and some ... are working in agriculture as well' (online survey, November 2020).

The second element is the **control men exert over women's lives**, whether this is done by individual men asserting dominance or imposed by tribal or religious tradition. One example is that 'in the targeted communities, **women cannot work in the public space except with the consent of the husband or family**, and their work is limited to certain areas' (online survey, November 2020). Moreover, women also often need men's permission to work and participate in community meetings, according to the online survey. In the view of one staff member:

In Iraq and specifically in Diyala, women are not allowed to participate in any community activities without their husband's, father's, or brother's permission. In some cases, the father does not have any problem with sending his daughter to college, but he still refuses to grant permission due to abstract family or cultural norms' (online survey, November 2020).

Finally, Oxfam and partner staff report that there are men who do think that women have the right to decide to participate in community activities, yet still believe that such participation ‘should only be done after men grant permission’ (online survey, November 2020).

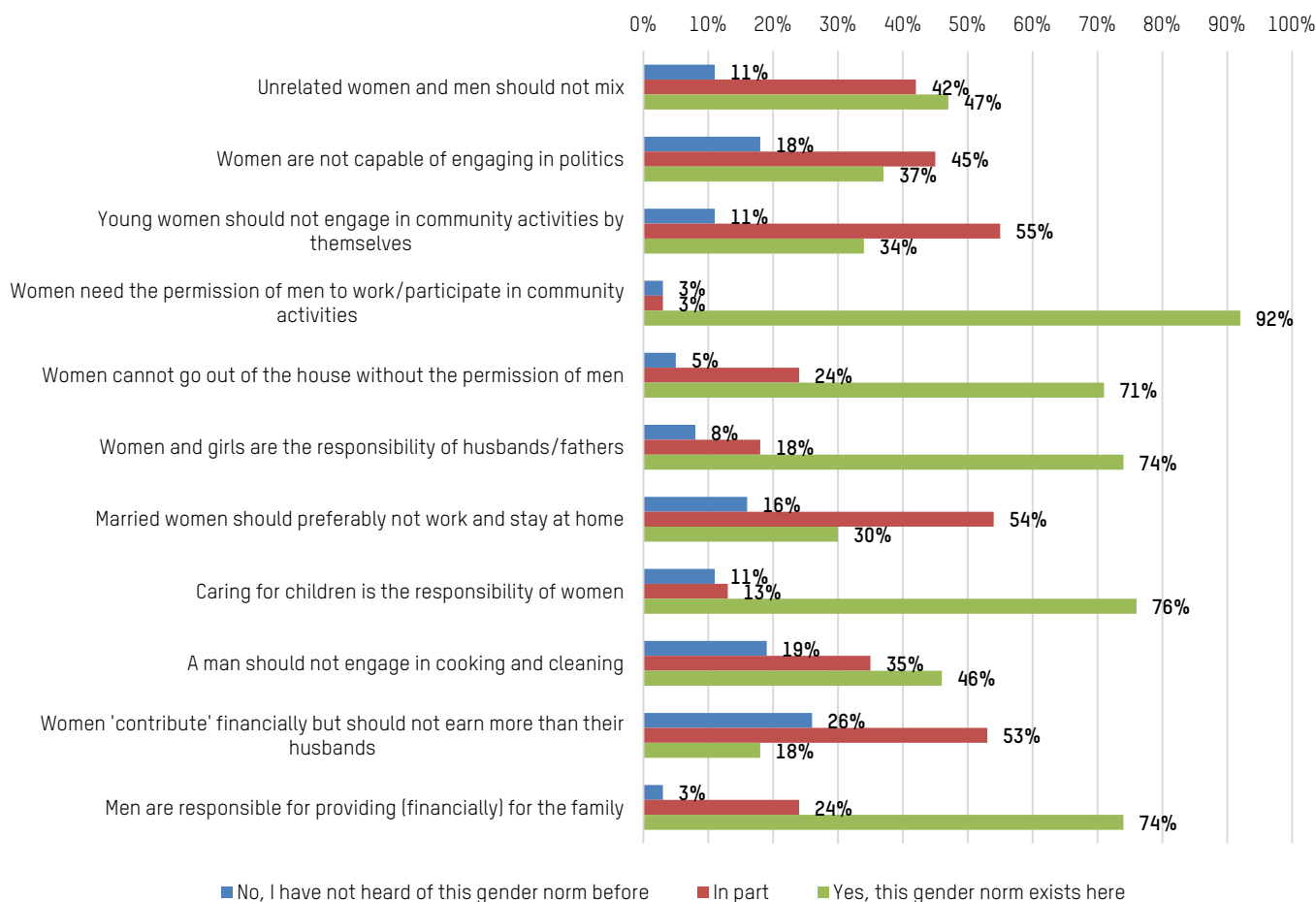
The third element relates to **negative and constraining attitudes about women’s contributions**. Stereotypes and assumptions that belittle women’s roles, trivialize their contributions, and undermine their voices constitute a barrier to women’s active engagement in community affairs. Built up over generations, these attitudes and practices lead to limited self-esteem among women and girls. Moreover, this continuous belittling limits women’s connections to each other and weakens their networks, further undermining women’s disposition to proactively engage in community affairs.

KEY DIFFERENCES BETWEEN GENDER NORMS IN KIRKUK AND DIYALA

KIRKUK

The complementary quantitative data showed that, in Kirkuk, the most strongly held norms that constrain women’s participation are that: women need men’s permission to work or to participate in community meetings; and women need men’s permission to go out. In addition, the gender norms seen as existing in some part are that: a young woman should not engage in community activities by herself; and women and men who are not related should not mix. The controlling attitude of men, constrained freedom of movement, stigmatization of women’s participation (and particularly that of young women), as well as limitations on the mixing of women and men form a tight web of intertwined constraints for women’s engagement at a public or political level.

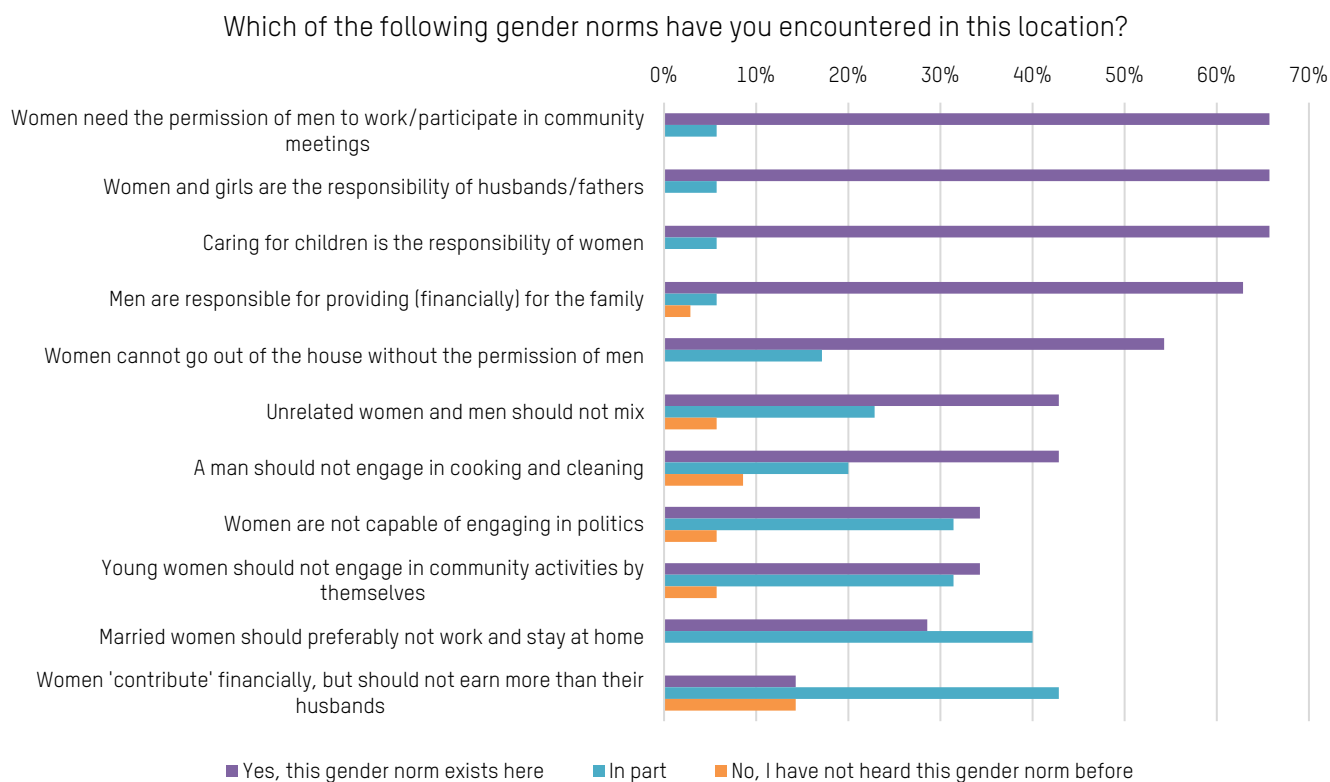
Figure 2: Gender norms in Kirkuk (online survey of staff)



DIYALA

The survey of Oxfam and partner staff highlighted the following differences between Diyala and Kirkuk. In Figure 3, the blue lines, representing gender norms that staff reported exist strongly in Diyala, are that: women need men's permission to work and participate in community meetings; women are the responsibility of their husband/father; caring for children is the responsibility of women; men are responsible for providing for their family financially; and women need men's permission to go out of the house. In Diyala, the gendered division of labor constrains women's potential aspirations to participate at the community level more than in Kirkuk.

Figure 3: Gender norms in Diyala (online survey of staff)



Although gender norms in Diyala seem to be more constraining than those prevalent in Kirkuk, there are regional differences. For example, Khanaqin, a predominantly Kurdish area, seems to be more liberal than other areas:

Women in this region are more liberal, with higher levels of development. Furthermore, there is a greater opportunity for women to participate in various fields. However, this also depends on the thinking of the family and the extent of their acceptance of the participation of women. The degree of acceptability also differs from one region to another (online survey, November 2020).

Gender norms also seem to be opening up more in other areas:

In a society such as Jalawla, women and girls have more space in terms of community customs and traditions. For example, there are many women employees and graduates, the role of women is greater in this region, and women are more visible (online survey, November 2020).

These quotes indicate that norms are continuously shifting and adapting, as will be seen in the next section.

SHIFTS IN GENDER NORMS

Study participants provided rich accounts of shifts in gender norms. Recurrent examples related to the increased visibility of women of different ages and their greater presence in public spaces. This included more girls in schools, more women seen in public alone, and more women employed in the private sector.¹⁷ In addition, there were references to women taking new and more active roles, but also the belief that more needs to be done: 'Now we are seeing women with jobs like teachers, doctors, and lawyers. Even in the agricultural sector we see women. In our Middle Eastern society, we have to educate people more. We should give women more space to participate in society' (male FGD participant, Huzerain, Kirkuk). Other responses also noted that more women are engaging in business opportunities: 'Now, some women have grocery shops in the city, drive tuk-tuks, and buy things to sell later. This is all something good' (male FGD participant, Failaq, Kirkuk). These men's positive dispositions towards women taking more active roles are a conducive entry point for potential male role models who seek to change attitudes. Another response stated that women are increasingly engaging in unprecedented roles, such as applying for jobs in the social police:

Before, women were invisible. Therefore, women are now trying to change and make themselves more visible. Before, we didn't hear about any women applying for the social police, but now there are a lot of applicants. With women working [in the social police] in this location, it will be safer for other women to be active here (male FGD participant, Huzerain, Kirkuk).

Social change, and in particular changing gender norms, are perceived as being rooted in the increased acceptance of women in public spaces.

REASONS BEHIND THE SHIFTS IN GENDER NORMS

Analysis of the qualitative data indicated that prevalent gender norms are linked to tradition and seen as a source of stability. Though often considered constraining by men and women alike, gender norms aligned to customs and traditions are still considered necessary for social cohesion. Consequently, several study participants described gender norms as 'set in stone' or unchanging. However, digging deeper into the responses revealed several references and anecdotes that indicate pathways for change in Kirkuk and Diyala.

Some shifts in gender norms occur because of **large-scale societal changes**, such as inter-generational shifts and changes related to modernization, urbanization, and technological advances, as highlighted by an older woman: 'the new generation now has more chances than our generation because society is different [more open] now. The younger ones suffer less than we did' (female FGD participant, Failaq, Kirkuk). This implies ideas of advancement over time. TV, the internet, and mass media were also highlighted as elements of change: 'The old generation were more conservative than the new generation, and now there are more possibilities for women to work or study. The internet and TV helped with this. This changed some of the traditions' (male FGD participant, Huzerain, Kirkuk).

Gender norms can also change due to **external influences**. These include different external forces referenced in participants' narratives, such as recurrent cycles of conflict, occupation by ISIS, (forced) displacement, the role of INGOs, or new information and communication technologies. As a result of displacements due to the ISIS occupation, several participants were exposed to new cultural practices, particularly those in the Kurdistan region of Iraq. One reported that:

After the ISIS crisis, people moved out of the city and moved to other cities like Erbil or Kirkuk. They also encountered other societies and met other people. After two or three years, when they came back to Hawija, I realized that people had changed their minds on many things. This had a positive impact on women. They are not affected like before (female FGD participant, Hawija, Kirkuk).

In addition, the role of **civil society, community organizations, and INGOs** was highlighted, particularly the awareness-raising sessions that aimed to change people’s mindsets with regard to the acceptance of women and girls in the public space:

Now we can see it; it’s visible for us. We can even see it at work. A few years ago, we didn’t see any girls working in shops, markets, or even malls. But now there are. Because of the NGOs and these workshops, women started to go outside and participate in some activities. At least we can use these activities as reasons for women to go outside and to convince their parents that it’s okay for women to go outside (male FGD participant, Jalawla, Diyala).

Finally, shifts in gender relations were in some cases motivated by the **financial needs** of the household. The idea that women could be (sole) breadwinners became more accepted in situations of need. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, some men took charge of the household chores while their wives worked:

Yes, I have a story of a relative. This year, because of corona, he lost his job. His wife is a teacher and continued working. He took care of the children and also started cooking. It was okay for him. The society made fun of him, and said she was controlling him, she is the man now—these kinds of comments. How can you accept this situation? (female FGD participant, Jalawla, Diyala).

As this quote highlights, this change might be temporary, and may be reversed in the face of criticism or economic changes that allow the men in the household to secure a stable income.

3.2 CONTEXT-SPECIFIC CONSTRUCTIONS OF MASCULINITIES AND FEMININITIES

According to Saferworld’s Gender Analysis of Conflict Toolkit,¹⁸ celebrated versions of femininities and masculinities can be contrasted with stigmatized notions to unveil the underlying gender constructions that serve as powerful barriers and/or enablers for women’s participation. The gender constructions in Kirkuk and Diyala appear to be rather traditional, based on segmented and hierarchical relations among women and men. They are intimately connected to what is considered respectable and appropriate.

CONSTRUCTIONS OF MASCULINITIES

The online survey asked about traits and behaviors that were accepted for men in the participant’s location. The responses indicated that the traits and behaviors associated with idealized masculinity center around being a responsible provider who takes care of and protects one’s family. In turn, the traits of stigmatized masculinities relate to associations with different female-coded traits, whereby men are seen as **playing female roles**. The fact that men and boys are criticized for doing ‘women’s’ work not only undermines efforts to engage them in the advancement of gender equality, but also can result in men being marginalized from community affairs. Consequently, proactively working for gender equality comes with costs for men.

STIGMATIZED TRAITS OF MASCULINITIES

The most stigmatized and rejected traits of masculinities are those that **counter traditional customs and cultural practices**. These include behaviors that are considered transgressions against traditional religious norms, beliefs, and morals, such as homosexuality or adultery. Furthermore, it is undesirable for men to be violent or overly controlling, for example by forcing girls into marriage or preventing their wife or sisters from finding a job. Drinking alcohol and committing violence against women are also stigmatized behaviors. However, many study participants

expressed the attitude that ‘everything is acceptable for men,’ while women face many more restrictions.

Other stigmatized traits of masculinities are relevant to the work of engaging male role models. Men who ‘**allow women to control them,**’ **treat their wife as an equal,** or **depend entirely on their wife’s salary** are considered unmanly. It is believed that men should not **engage in cooking and cleaning** or caring for children. Staying at home, engaging in daily household chores, and child rearing are actively stigmatized by male and female peers. Consequently, any action towards greater gender equality or men standing with women is likely to encounter resistance. For men, engaging in a renegotiation of household and parenting tasks comes with costs. Men might help with household chores but choose not to tell anyone out of fear of stigmatization. Consequently, male allies will need to find strategies to counter the pressure imposed on them by other men and women.

Nonetheless, several participants believe that the position of women and men should be equal. Another barrier and source of stigmatization for men advocating for gender equality is the fact that **mixing with women who are not relatives in public spaces** is not well accepted. Practices that are necessary in community deliberations such as speaking to others or hearing other’s opinions are not feasible if mixing with women is stigmatized. Encouraging women to be more active in community meetings, supporting increased independence for women and girls, or backing a woman who is running for election will be difficult for men without changes in awareness. As long as outspoken women are looked at with suspicion, associating with women is perceived as a mark against a man’s value in society, and women’s rights are considered a foreign agenda, the proactive engagement of men in order to enhance women’s participation at the community level will be limited.

COSTS OF NON-CONFORMING

When men failed to comply to masculine norms, they reported that they were ridiculed, made fun of, and disrespected, with no notable differences between Diyala and Kirkuk governorates. Particularly in conservative areas with higher levels of peer pressure, men who did not comply with norms reported being **isolated** from community activities. Other men described being **neglected by their community**; people refused to engage with them, bullied them, and looked down on them. Underlying these reports is the **role that peer pressure plays** in constraining, shaping, and reproducing men’s behavior. Consequently, effectively engaging male role models will require concrete strategies to help men resist the pressures and overcome the costs.

In order to avoid the costs of non-conformity to gender norms, men reportedly hide behind tradition. Whether men want to be enforcers of strict norms or not, they effectively act as barriers for women. Men refuse to allow women in their household to go outside:

If my sister, wife, or daughter want to go outside, I refuse. I’m scared that if she goes outside alone, she might be harassed. I have to consider these things, because in the end, they [society] will blame me if something happens, because I’m a man. Men implement these traditions, but in the end, it’s not about the men who want it, but it is about these traditions (male FGD participant, Jalawla, Diyala).

Other male participants in Failaq acknowledged that social norms have costs for men as well as women. One example emerged around **marriage traditions**: ‘I’m also suffering from these norms. I love someone from another tribe, but because of traditions, I cannot marry her ... because her cousin wants to ... [and because of tradition, this cousin can prevent anyone else from marrying her]’ (male FGD participant, Failaq, Kirkuk). This was confirmed by a similar example in Jalawla, in Diyala. Although there were other similar responses, men in the study did not readily consider themselves to be constrained by gender norms. Consequently, they were often not aware of the ways in which their actions and beliefs constrain others. It is therefore important to raise the general awareness of gender norms through the effective engagement of male role models.

Another relevant constraint relates to age, with it rooted in tradition that older men constrain younger men, as the following quote highlights:

It's the older one who has the right to talk and make decisions, not the one who has more knowledge. For example, when you are young, your father will decide, even if you have more knowledge on a topic than your father. We suffer from traditions, but also from religion, because if they don't find something in the traditions to control you, they will find a religious reason to control you (male FGD participant, Kirkuk).

Therefore, intergenerational power dynamics need to be highlighted and made visible to identify the constraining potential of men's pressure on other, younger men.

CONSTRUCTIONS OF FEMININITIES

Constructions of idealized femininities in Diyala and Kirkuk center on the role of women as dedicated mothers and good wives. The values of loyalty and dedication are closely linked with respectability. Unlike men, women of all ages, and especially younger women, reported being controlled. The following quote stresses the different layers of this control across the life cycle of a woman:

When she grows up, when she is a teenager, she lives under pressure and is always under stress because she doesn't know when one of her cousins will decide to marry her. She is always scared that someone will come to marry her, even if she doesn't like him (male FGD participant, Qaratapa, Diyala).

It is important to note that several men within the larger family and kinship structure exert this pressure over women's lives, including fathers, brothers, uncles and cousins.

However, the fieldwork also indicated that there are relevant shifts occurring in the constructions of femininities and gender norms that are allowing women to be more active. As a male FGD participant in Failaq (Kirkuk) reported, 'Women gained more trust and more confidence, and they started to be present in the market. They are working, and they depend on themselves more, supporting themselves financially, and their families too'. More 'freedom' is considered important, as reported in an FGD with women in Hawija (Kirkuk):

In the past few years, women have come to the court and asked for a divorce. Before, this never happened, that women would go and ask for their freedom. It's nice for her; it's a nice change. Even if sometimes they give up everything, they still get their freedom. It's interesting that freedom is now more important.

Despite the significant control exerted over women, there is also an increased value attached to freedom, particularly by women.

STIGMATIZED TRAITS OF FEMININITIES

Study participants confirmed that many girls and women are not allowed to go outside their houses without the authorization of men. Particular stigmatization befalls women who go out or walk about on their own, meeting friends, or late at night. Consequently, **working outside the home** and the village or participating in decision making for village matters is also stigmatized. When women do work outside the home, they are considered disobedient, a shorthand for being independent and strong-willed.

This criticism is at the core of stigmatized femininities. Women who are considered strong-willed, outspoken, and active are particularly stigmatized in communities in Diyala and Kirkuk: 'Strong women will not be accepted. She doesn't care about what society will say' (male FGD participant, Failaq, Kirkuk). Civil status plays a particular role. For example, **widows and divorced** women face particular hindrances. Women who ask for divorce as a result of an unsuccessful marriage are

particularly stigmatized for stepping outside of their socially accepted roles as wives and mothers. Women's appearance is also controlled. Wearing short skirts or not wearing a veil are considered inappropriate and even morally unacceptable. Being vocal and outspoken can be related to involvement in political activities such as asking for independence, pursuing one's rights, or seeking to have a voice. In this light, 'liberated women' are accused of spoiling the community fabric, disrespecting family values, and violating religious doctrines. Consequently, being an emancipated woman creates a negative reaction from the community and is seen as breaking rules and traditions: 'Some men consider those women liberated, women who have broken social, customary, and cultural restrictions' (online survey, November 2020). Similarly, **very liberated women**, those who mix a lot with men, laugh in public, or talk a lot and are loud, are especially stigmatized.

COSTS OF NON-CONFORMING

With regard to the costs and consequences of transgressing established gender norms for women, study participants reported that women are subjected to **reputational damage** and become undesirable in society and their families. As a consequence, many of these women may get divorced, neglected, criticized, isolated, and abused. Sometimes they face both threats and acts of violence. Stigmatization not only affects women individually, but also extends to their household and extended families.

3.3 AN INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH TO GENDER NORMS

Many FGD participants pointed out **differences between the younger and older generations**, indicating that the younger generation has more freedom than generations before. Displacement is one reason for this. The internet, which allows users to see life around the world, is also seen as a reason for the increased openness and freedom among the younger generation, especially in rural contexts (FGD for men, Kirkuk). In addition to the media and information and communications technology, participants made recurrent references to the importance of education as a means to advance gender equality:

People under 40 years old are more flexible, and they believe it's better if their daughters go to school. It's becoming better with every generation. In 10 years, the majority will be open-minded. Now people send their daughters to university. The university is mixed, but no one sees it because the university is outside their area, so no one from the old generation complains about it (male FGD participant, Qaratapa, Diyala).

Consequently, the extent to which gender norms constrain a woman's level of agency appears to be related to the educational level of both men and women. Therefore, education level is an important selection criterion for potential male role models.

While there are considerable differences between Arabs and Kurds around gender norms, inequalities operate in both cultures to maintain the control of men over women, even across generations: '**Both ethnicities** [Arabs and Kurds settling in Failaq] have similar habits and traditions for women. Neither ... allow women to work, go out, or participate in activities' (female FGD participant, Failaq, Kirkuk). However, several Kurdish women participants also pointed to the free culture that exists inside the household and the fact that everyone (including young women) participates in household decisions. It seems that Kurdish and Arab residents of Diyala and Kirkuk are subject to the same norms in society, but may implement those norms differently inside the household.

4 BARRIERS AND CONSTRAINTS FOR WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN DECISION MAKING

This section engages with the second research question, which explores the ways in which norms and stereotypes about masculinities and femininities affect women and girls' daily lives in the private and public spheres, with an emphasis on women's participation in decision making. In addition to identifying the key constraints for women and girls in the private and public spheres, it also focuses on the barriers and enablers to participation at the community level. Participation is understood as active involvement in the broadest sense and can include contributing to community activities, participating in decision making, as well as running for office.

The previous sections outlined the rigid confines of what women are supposed to do and how they are supposed to behave, constraints that do not apply to men and boys. This section focuses on constraints and opportunities with regard to adequate representation, meaningful participation, and active decision making. According to respondents, there are significant barriers to these activities: 'Women and girls are bound by specific actions and certain limits for all their actions. They are not able to break this barrier, and they are restricted to referring to men when making their decisions' (online survey, November 2020). Another participant stated: 'A metal frame is placed on what is wrong and what is right; they have to listen to society' (online survey, November 2020). Women are constrained and embedded within a close web of hierarchy: 'Women and girls are not allowed to disagree with the elders in their family, especially the males; if she participates in decision making in the community, she will be discredited' (online survey, November 2020). The questions of how women can break this constraining frame and how men can become allies need to be resolved through multi-pronged actions, as can occur in the journey of a male role model.

4.1 CONTRASTING THE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SPHERES

CONSTRAINTS IN THE PRIVATE SPHERE

The most relevant constraints women face in the private sphere are outlined below, and by default also contribute to women's absence at the community level in terms of representation and participation.

First, men's control over women is normalized and idealized. Men's constraint of women's ideas and behavior within the household and extended family is perpetuated by the idea that men need to authorize women's activities, particularly outside the home. This results in men controlling women in all spheres of life: according to online survey participants, women and girls outside the home are restricted to wearing certain clothes/dresses, behaving in certain ways, and even using specific words when they communicate. The normalization of this practice effectively undermines the prospect of gender equality between women and men.

Men's control over women is rooted in historical traditions, which relieves men of the responsibility of critically reviewing their attitudes and behavior. Participants in an FGD with men made the following observations:

Because we are used to thinking traditionally that a woman's place is at home, people are scared that if women go outside, they will get harassed. In society it just continues; the men decide everything, and they make the rules. If we don't deal with this point, women cannot do anything as long as they think women should stay at home. With these rules and this way of thinking, men control everything. If men think they're not successful in a job and think they should just stay at home, this is a problem. The majority of men believe this, that women cannot do anything [outside the house] (male FGD participant, Huzerain, Kirkuk).

The idea of 'tradition' is also related to the importance of being considered respectable and avoiding shame, as highlighted in the following example:

A father went to his daughter's university to give her money. He saw her standing with a male student ... and he said, "This is the last day for you," and "This is a big shame for you." He stopped her from going to university, and she married someone (female FGD participant, Jalawla, Diyala).

Consequently, deep-rooted ideas about respectability held by men and women alike also constrain the opportunities of women.

Men's attitudes and the privilege bestowed upon them by tradition need to be challenged in order for them to relinquish their control over women and girls, and allow for more women's involvement at the community level. The practice of fathers cutting their daughters' educations short, particularly 'the really smart girls who had super high degrees in school' (male FGD participant, Hawija, Kirkuk), undermines women's opportunities in life and their ability to claim their rights. When men in a household constrain teenage girls' and young women's use of media, the internet, social media, and other technology, this separates them from information and social networks. Refusing to allow women to work outside the home, despite their education, is also damaging:

I will tell you an example. After finishing university, I registered myself with the Department of Education, and as a [new] teacher, I was sent to Taqtaq [a village close to Kirkuk]. However, my husband didn't allow me, and I had to decline the position and lost my spot as a government employee [working as a teacher]. Because of this, even now, I don't have an official position and cannot get my salary after 10 years of teaching. But now my husband is okay with me teaching or going out of the house because the times have changed and I am older (female FGD participant, Failaq, Kirkuk).

Concerted efforts are needed to end these constraining attitudes and practices of men, especially the restriction of girls and young women, in order to prepare a citizenry that is eager to engage in community development.

Second, the rigid division of labor **overburdens women with domestic chores and care responsibilities, resulting in a lack of time** to actively engage at the community level. Women must arrange all household affairs, take care of the children, and attend to the needs of their husbands. Women are often expected to be accommodating and emotionally available. Consequently, women do not have enough time to participate. 'In community meetings, their voices are not heard. In addition, the most common case is that only the men are making decisions related to the community, without consulting women' (online survey, November 2020).

Third, **domestic and intra-partner violence and violence against women** was mentioned by online survey participants in discussions of constraints for women in the private sphere. Early marriage is seen as one of the biggest restrictions that girls face, and violence against women is among the most pervasive of human rights violations. Elements of this violence include harassment, physical violence, and structural violence embedded in tradition, such as early marriage. As women are becoming more visible and more actively engaged at the community level, a backlash is occurring:

I think that women are more active now, but this also has a negative side, as men are abusing women now. They allow women to work, but the men are doing nothing at home, and

the women are bringing home the money. Still, at home, the man controls everything. He is hitting her; the violence still exists (female FGD participant, Hawija, Kirkuk).

A recurrent theme is the acceptance of violence: 'We grow up in this way, and so we agree with everything men say. That's logical, because girls grow up in this way: if men slap me, that's okay—it's my husband. Because it also happened with their dad or their brother' (female FGD participant, Hawija, Kirkuk). This exposure to men's control, including their violence against women, constitutes one of the more pervasive barriers to women's effective participation.

Violence against women is largely committed by male perpetrators. Study participants linked men's abuse of alcohol and drugs to violence against women. When considering the content for men's awareness-raising sessions, a participant noted:

It would be good to also conduct awareness sessions about drugs and alcohol, the effects of this. Women need more psychosocial support in the city. Not just to protect them from physical violence. When men take drugs and alcohol, it has an impact on women, because they use violence against them. If he takes drugs, he will come home and hit his wife (female FGD participant, Jalawla, Diyala).

More extreme forms of violence were also mentioned, such as honor killings perpetrated by male relatives as well as women using violence to kill their husbands or to commit suicide. Another participant recounted:

In Basra, someone killed his two younger sisters. They realized he was addicted to alcohol and drugs, but he is still free because it's considered an honor killing, and in our traditions, you can kill your sisters. We know about laws, but no one applies them. If it comes to women, no one applies these laws (female FGD participant, Jalawla, Diyala).

The high levels of violence against women also result in violent reactions from women, as one participant indicated:

The violence is not just by men, but we have started to hear that women are using violence against men. There are some cases in which women killed their husbands. ... this topic is important to talk about because people use violence as a solution for their problems. For men, it's always been like this. If you see your sister with someone, then you're angry, and you go and kill her. Society will say, "Yes, he was angry, and he killed her," and that's it. He's allowed to do this (female FGD participant, Jalawla, Diyala).

While women do also commit violence against men, the levels cannot be compared, as male perpetrators constitute a significantly higher group.

Fourth, according to online survey participants, one of the constraints for women and girls in the private sphere is their mental health and wellbeing. Several participants stressed that depression constitutes a constraint for them. One indicated that:

A lot of girls have psychological problems because of all this pressure. Sometimes they get the idea of killing themselves. A relative's mom died, and the girl had to take care of her siblings. She stopped going to school. She had a very difficult life, while she saw other girls her age who were going to school and university. She told me several times, "If it wasn't haram, I would kill myself" (female FGD participant, Jalawla, Diyala).

Therefore, in addition to engaging men, quality services for women of all ages are required.

CONSTRAINTS IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE

The main factors that emerge from the public sphere to constrain women’s participation are outlined below. Although opportunities for participation are available, many factors affect women’s abilities to access these opportunities: ‘[Women’s] involvement in business and participation in local government depend on their treatment at home and their intellectual [level], which give them the freedom to work and go out, and [determine] how they behave in and out of the home’ (online survey, November 2020).

First, **gossip and rumors are circulated about women who are active outside the home.** This serves as a control mechanism and is grounded in a web of tribal and religious traditions that are used to justify men’s control over women. To offer just one example:

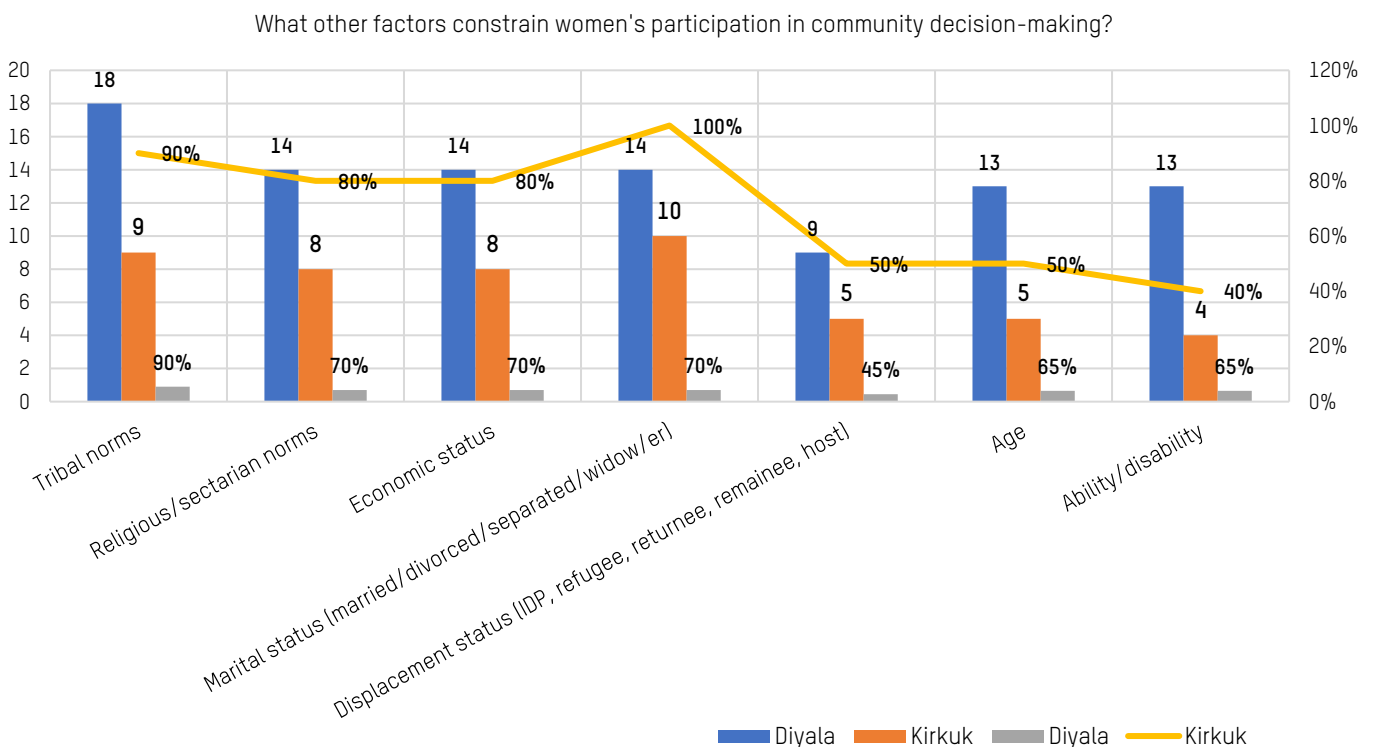
The main barriers are the tribal traditions, and it’s so difficult for women to move outside. As a woman, if I want to go somewhere, I have to bring my brother with me or my father. I need a male member of the family with me. If I don’t do this, then people start to talk about me. It’s not good for women to walk alone in the street. They will ask: “Why is she working? She has brothers and a father, and they have to work, and she has to stay at home” (female FGD participant, Jalawla, Diyala).

Another participant explained it this way:

People feel ashamed if women have to work outside. For example, [working] as an engineer wearing a uniform and managing other people outside is not okay. There is a lot of gossip, and people are scared. People [community members] don’t allow women to be present (male FGD participant, Qaratapa, Diyala).

Many study participants and Oxfam and partner staff stated that the insistence that women be escorted by male family members or elderly women undermines their independence and their ability to actively engage and participate in political forums.

Figure 4: Factors constraining women's participation



Second, **tribal and religious traditions are used to justify control over women** and to limit their practical involvement at the community level. The online survey results (Figure 4) indicate that tribal norms (90%) and, to a lesser extent, religious sectarian norms (70%) constrain women's participation. It is notable that there is no difference between responses from Diyala and Kirkuk. One respondent explained that his willingness to support women's participation in the community is constrained by traditions based on religious or tribal norms:

We have traditions in society that are important. I can accept some rights for women. For example, I will let my daughter go to school if the school is just for girls. If my wife is pregnant or sick, I will not let her go to a male doctor; I cannot accept that. It should be a female doctor (male FGD participant, Kirkuk).

This leads to an obvious dilemma, as noted by a male participant:

I am confused with the traditions, because you don't allow your wife to go to a male doctor but also don't allow women to work. If you want them to go to a female doctor, you should give them the right to study and to work. We can give women the right to work and to study (male FGD participant, Huzerain, Kirkuk).

Another example of the ways in which traditions constrain women's presence and independent engagement in mixed spaces is highlighted in the following quote: 'Women are restricted by traditional norms; for example, women can have no contact, speak, ask for help, or even sit with men' (online survey, November 2020).

Study participants raised the idea that flawed interpretations of religious teachings are behind the use of **religious traditions** to justify control over women and undermine their aspirations of engagement in the community: 'Men are using the Koran in general to justify their attitude. They say, "In the Koran, I am the leader. My body is stronger than yours; that's the logic, and you have to listen to me"' (female FGD participant, Jalawla, Diyala). Religion is also used to perpetuate ideas such as 'God made women weak,' thereby belittling and trivializing women and disavowing equality between women and men:

Whatever women do, no matter how many efforts they put into their work, they cannot be as productive as men. God gave them this role. In society we are used to men having responsibility; he should provide a house, clothes, and money. For women, it's nice if they help financially, but they don't have to do it (female FGD participant, Qaratapa, Diyala).

Notably, most participants emphasized the restrictions arising from tribal traditions above those based on religion.

Third, **attitudes about women and sex result in a vicious circle** wherein women within the household need to be protected, while preying on women outside the home is seen as permissible. In a rather outspoken comment, a male participant stated: 'Because of our traditions and education, we learned and grew up [thinking] that women are just for sex. As men, we look at women from a sexual perspective, that she is there to have sex with' (male FGD participant, Qaratapa, Diyala). This underlying attitude contributes to the belief that women should be controlled and confined within the household, while women from other households who are outside the home are seen as sexually available. In this way, women's behavior and engagement at the community level (i.e. outside the home) is linked to the reputation of men, because men who do not shield the women in their family from public view are failing in their duty, while men who harass women in public spaces are not held accountable. These beliefs fuel a vicious circle of verbal and physical harassment on the streets and heightened control at home, as highlighted in the following quote: 'The family is also scared. The family doesn't let their daughter go out alone because they are scared of sexual harassment' (male FGD participant, Jalawla, Diyala). When asked whether they can walk alone in the city, all the participants in one FGD agreed that: 'No, in Jalawla that's not possible' (female FGD participant, Jalawla, Diyala).

On a more structural level, this attitude that women are just for sex, which underlies gendered inequality overall, is evident in women's limited access to justice. Women are prevented from reporting abuse in order to maintain privacy:

A woman had a conflict with her husband, and she went to the police to report this since she has rights that the men also need to respect. The mukhtar in the area was very angry and went to the family to complain about the woman going to the police alone to complain about her husband. It's a big shame for a woman to go to the police and ask for her rights. The way of thinking here is that if women need something, they go to the family, to the tribe, or maybe the mukhtar but not to the police or other government entities (male FGD participant, Jalawla, Diyala).

As long as constructs around shame constrain women, laws penalizing violence against women will not be enforced. This complicity among men, from the individual to the structural level, undermines the possibilities for women to claim their rights to report to the police, engage in political participation, or otherwise act independently. Other respondents mentioned the harassment of women wanting to report abuse at the police station: 'Now if a woman goes there to report something, the police officer forgets everything and starts to do something, like harassment. Women are scared of the police, and that's why they don't go' (female FGD participant, Hawija, Kirkuk). Tribal leaders have also removed reports filed with the police:

'The tribes' power is bigger than the government's. They can decide and say anything. For example, if you have a problem with someone and the police have an active case against you, you can go to the tribal leader to solve it. You can pay the tribal leader, and he will remove the police case; the police have to do this if the tribal leader asks ... The tribal leader will take money from the people' (female FGD participant, Hawija, Kirkuk).

Consequently, it is important for any initiative aiming to support women's participation by changing men's awareness to also consider raising awareness about larger structural and even legal issues due to the power these institutions hold over women. A particular case in point is divorce:

This is because they are more aware of the laws and their rights, and that's why awareness of the law is so important. Last week a woman came to the court and said, "They forced me to marry my cousin, and I didn't want to." Of course, the judge punished the cousin because he is not allowed to marry someone without consent (male FGD participant, Qaratapa, Diyala).

This quote indicates that some laws are in place to protect women (and are enforced once a case is brought to the court) but that either people are not aware of these laws or they are not applied in other areas.

Fourth, as a consequence of all of the elements of gendered inequality, **low self-esteem is a barrier to women's proactive engagement**. According to online survey participants, women are usually considered second-class citizens and must confront stereotypes and belittling attitudes, as the following quotes show:

- 'They think that she is not smart enough to participate.'
- 'They look at women as weak and needing somebody to protect them, so she cannot walk alone or make decisions.'
- 'Women are usually considered second-class citizens.'
- 'In the men's view, women do not have any role in managing society's affairs, and in most cases the work of women in community committees is a shameful act.'

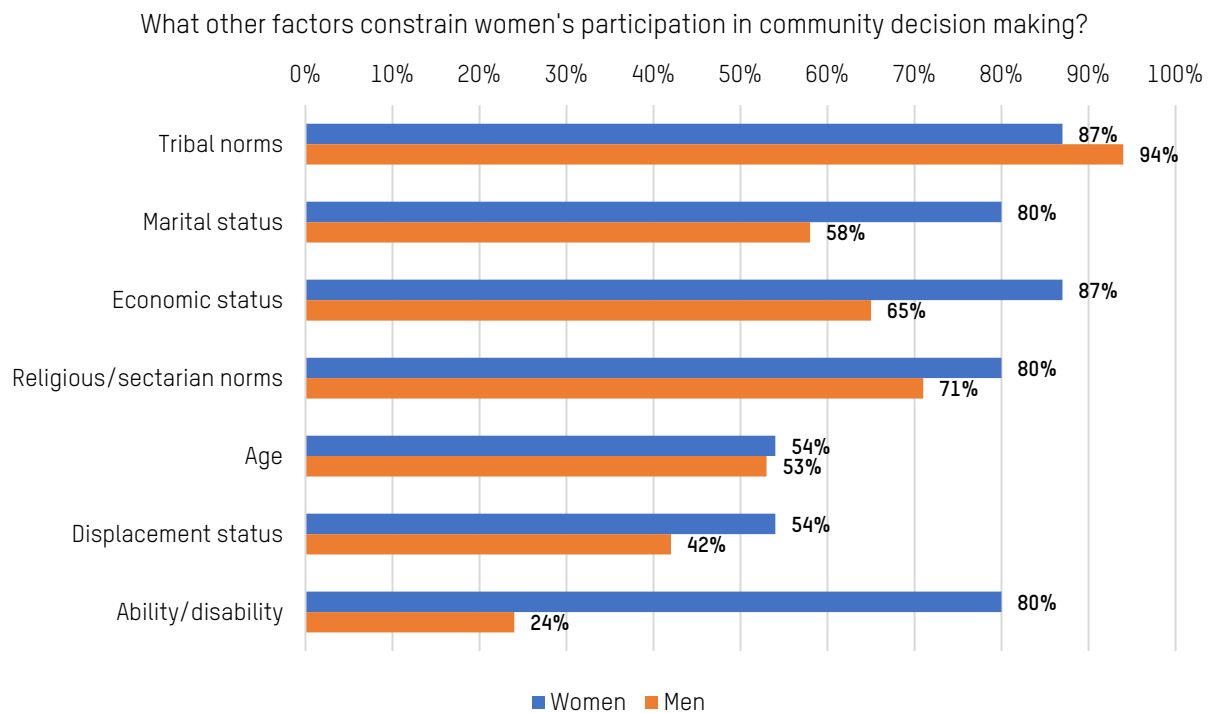
Political parties do not give women opportunities to participate in decision-making positions. Women are underrepresented not only in the political sphere but also in decision making in the **private sector**. For example, women do not get administrative positions despite their capabilities and competence. A major constraint for women's political participation relates to gossip and rumors employed against women displaying an interest in active engagement, while another barrier

constraining women who are interested in engaging more actively in politics and community matters is the way that women are attacked, trivialized, and demeaned on social media. For example, women are made fun of:

Society is better now than before, but still society is not able to accept this idea. Sometimes when on social media, people attack women. If someone posts a picture of a woman working or [running] a small business, people make fun of her, or they don't like the idea of this. At the same time, there is a woman who is 33 years old, and she works in a beauty center with men. She is a strong woman and is okay. She doesn't care about what society will say (male FGD participant, Failaq, Kirkuk).

Figure 5 presents the factors that constrain women’s participation, as reported by women and men. In their responses to multiple-choice questions, women consistently attributed more relevance to barriers linked to marital status, economic status, religious and sectarian norms, and, most notably, ability/disability than men did. There were no major differences between the two governorates, although respondents from Diyala considered age and ability/disability to be stronger constraints than respondents from Kirkuk did. Economic status and displacement status are two other notable constraints for women’s participation in decision making.

Figure 5: Constraining factors by gender



4.2 FACTORS THAT CONSTRAIN WOMEN'S MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION AT THE COMMUNITY LEVEL

The study participants highlighted a series of intertwined barriers and constraints that restrict women's engagement at the community level in the governorates of Diyala and Kirkuk.

STRUCTURAL CHALLENGES: GOVERNANCE, PARTICIPATION, AND DECISION MAKING

The limited political participation of Iraqi women, including women in Kirkuk and Diyala, is the result of various interacting and intertwining legal, political, socioeconomic, and cultural factors embedded at the societal level. A report by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems found that Iraqi women's participation in political structures is limited by the current 25% quota, which caps women's access to decision-making avenues.¹⁹ Only one woman was represented at the ministerial level in the government formed in May 2020.²⁰ Consequently, structural challenges around governance, participation, and decision making include diffuse power relations. For example:

because of tribal traditions and the government and political parties, power is separated. There is no central decision-making power. You don't know who you will ask to solve this problem. If you put women in a position of power, we mainly need women now to be in the position to solve the problem of corruption. I believe women can fight this corruption better than men (male FGD participant, Hawija, Kirkuk).

Another challenge relates to women being **constrained by tribal politics and power struggles**. The following anecdote speaks to the structural constraints that undermine representation as a solution in and of itself. The freedom to engage in meaningful participation is different than the opportunity to be a **token candidate**:

I am a social worker, and the tribe approached me and said, "We will support you for the parliamentary elections." Then I had a meeting with the son of a tribal leader. They said, "We will support you in the election, and without us you cannot win. We will guarantee 5,000 votes for you." I said, "Okay." He said, "Of course, you have to do what we ask you to do." Then I said, "You just want me as a 'front'." And he said, "Yes, of course. It's our vote and not yours." He also said, "We need you. People like it when there are women in the parliament." But he didn't really believe in this point, they just use it. In the end, it has nothing to do with women; it's just for the tribe and what they want (female FGD participant, Hawija, Kirkuk).

These different responses point to the structural barriers that women face, summed up by the following quote:

... the problem is the system. People don't put her on the spot and try to keep her on the side. The system focuses on the men. When the men do something, we make this big thing about it. For women, no one cares. They try to hide what she did (male FGD participant, Hawija, Kirkuk).

WOMEN'S VISIBILITY IN PUBLIC SPACES

The qualitative data indicated that women are not consistently seen in the public space. While there have been considerable changes over the past decade in different fields, more visibility would

reduce the barriers women face when participating in community decision making. A man from Diyala explained:

We are lucky with women's presence in the markets. In job fields, only in education do we see a lot of female teachers. But in other sectors, it's scarce; for example, in the medical field, it's clear we have few women as nurses or doctors. Of course, in the supermarkets and shops we don't see that many because we are still a traditional community, and it's not easy to do that (male FGD participant, Qaratapa, Diyala).

Another participant identified the government as a sector where women's visibility is lacking: 'It's possible for women to take a more active role. We have very good examples of women who are working or running their own business. The problem is in the government; there, they are not present enough' (male FGD participant, Jalawla, Diyala). Several respondents indicated that the public sector is one of the few sectors where it is acceptable for women to work outside the house, as is further explained below.

ATTITUDES ABOUT POLITICS AND GENDER

The women and men consulted for this research highlighted a series of constraining attitudes that can be summarized in the belief that politics is a man's task. Because of the web of constraints outlined previously— the gendered division of labor, restrictions on women's movements, and gender norms that cast suspicion on women who are active in the public realm (and their male relatives)—there are only a few women visibly engaging in politics. Consequently, the public space and in particular **politics is perpetuated as a male realm, which then is effectively controlled by men**. For one study participant: 'Everything is controlled by men, for example we only have 84 members of parliament. They can't do anything for the Iraqi women' (male FGD participant, Failaq, Kirkuk). Another respondent also remarked that the political parties and the governance structures are in the hands of men.

Despite the fact that there have been some changes over the past decades, especially with regard to women being employed in the government, there has not been a significant change in the number of women in decision-making positions. A participant in an FGD with men in Huzerain, Kirkuk explained why it became acceptable for women to work in the government:

After 2014 and the displacement, a lot of tribes noticed that the government was focusing more on employing women. Because of the displacement, a lot of families were in a bad financial situation. There was a chance [for families] to receive money to live through their daughters, and they accepted the idea of letting their daughters work as government employees, for example, or continue their education.

Furthermore, 'now some of the women have higher [positions] than men in the government' (male FGD participant, Huzerain, Kirkuk). While it is significant that the role of women in the government is advancing, the next logical step is to overcome the barriers and increase the numbers of women in decision-making roles, political parties, and elected offices.

A final element relates to security concerns for women who are visibly involved in the public sphere. As one participant highlighted:

Also, we cannot forget when ISIS attacked the area here and the displacement that followed. All of these barriers are serious challenges for women's participation in the community. Despite all of this, women are seriously trying to improve themselves and to face these challenges in a brave way (male FGD participant, Huzerain, Kirkuk).

PREVALENT STEREOTYPES ABOUT WOMEN AND POLITICS

Another barrier to women's active participation relates to a series of persistent stereotypes and norms around women and politics. Constraining gender norms and stereotypes impact women's abilities to determine their children's futures, select partners, access education, participate in political systems, assert their right to vote, and earn livelihoods. This is especially the case for widowed and divorced women. There are three distinct, often intertwined, stereotypes that serve to perpetuate women's absence from the public and political spheres.

First, women's contributions are belittled and trivialized. Among the most pervasive stereotypes is the belief that women are not smart enough. It is not only men who express these views but also women, who may have low self-esteem and consider themselves incapable of taking an active role.

Second, women's participation is perceived as being abnormal or transgressive. This stereotype is particularly harmful and has real consequences and costs for women who seek to engage at the community level. In the men's view, women do not have any role in the management of society's affairs, and often women's involvement in community committees is considered a shameful act. In this context, shame, gossip and peer pressure perpetuate women's exclusion from public spaces.

Third, women are seen as being submissive to men. The prevailing stereotypes portray women as dependent and incapable of making decisions without consulting their husbands, especially on community matters. This leads to a general undermining of trust in women as community stakeholders in their own right.

In order to start countering these stereotypes, it is necessary to stand with those women who proactively participate or show intentions of wanting to do so.

SUPPORTING WOMEN WHO ARE RUNNING FOR ELECTION

Male role models can support women when they generate opportunities for women. A study participant asserted: 'If she has the opportunity, of course she can do it. We have examples in our society and also in Europe where women are ministers, presidents, and everything. They are fulfilling their roles and succeeding' (female FGD participant, Hawija). Therefore, it is important to showcase women who are running for election: 'Now we have a female member who will participate in the election next year. I attended a meeting with her, and I'm very proud that she is running for election' (male FGD participant, Hawija, Kirkuk).

Similarly, women's efforts in local government can be admired:

There is a woman who is a director of gardening. Everywhere in the city there are nice places and parks, and she directs all of this. Men don't care about these details. When men do this, they don't do it in a perfect way. I often see her when I'm walking around, and she is controlling and checking. She is not just sitting in the office (male FGD participant, Hawija, Kirkuk).

The important contributions and productivity of a woman member of parliament were also highlighted:

In the Iraqi parliament in Diyala, there are many male parliament members, and we have just one female member. But this one female member did a lot; she did more than all of the men together. Her achievements are very clear; for example, she found job opportunities for the young people in the city (male FGD participant, Qaratapa, Diyala).

At the same time that women should be celebrated for running for office or holding local positions, all women should be encouraged to express themselves politically, for example by participating in demonstrations. This kind of expression has a big impact on other women: 'Of course there are changes; for example, women participated in the demonstrations in Baghdad. This was very clear

and visible for everyone. And this was a big step for Iraqi society' (male FGD participant, Huzerain, Kirkuk).

Box 3: Arguments to facilitate the acceptance of women's participation

The quotes below, captured in the FDGs, can help to facilitate men's acceptance of women's participation.

Women are good workers at home; they can also do well in the community: 'Women can manage better than men. For example, they can manage the house, and that is comparable to a company or an organization. They know how to prioritize, know how to deal with kids' (female FGD participant, Hawija, Kirkuk).

Increasing women's participation improves society as a whole: 'If there were more women in the public space, women would feel more relaxed in society and also in the job market. This would have a positive impact on society in general. Women will be more creative because they will be more relaxed' (female FGD participant, Hawija, Kirkuk).

Women have important complementary capacities and will make valuable contributions: 'Women are creative, and they will bring different ideas to the city because they are more creative than men. Women multitask, take care of the house and children, and do a lot of different activities—women have the capacity. However, people always say that women cannot do anything. Even at home, sometimes they say that children are successful because of the father. Women need this challenge and need the opportunity to prove they can do more' (female FGD participant, Jalawla, Diyala).

Women have more and different networks and connections: 'Women in our society talk more than men, and men know about other women in society through the women in their lives (wife, sister, mother, etc.). If I go deeper, I would say that women should start with themselves' (female FGD participant, Failaq, Kirkuk).

Women are an asset in the fight against corruption: 'There is no central decision-making power. You don't know who you will ask to solve this problem. If you put women in a position of power, we mainly need women now to be in the position to solve the problem of corruption. I believe women can fight this corruption better than men' (male FGD participant, Hawija, Kirkuk).

Women are half of society: 'Women make up half of the society, so they really need to have an important role in society. They can do it by going beyond the norms in society. During my work as part of civil society, we received a lot of applications from women. We even had women working with us. So, they can definitely take a more active role and improve themselves' (male FGD participant, Huzerain, Kirkuk).

Women are equal, and they have human rights: '[Talk] about equality and women's rights, and explain to them that women have the same rights as men, and they have a right to work, to study, and to go outside' (female FGD participant, Jalawla, Diyala).

5 FROM CONSTRAINING TO EGALITARIAN MASCULINITIES

5.1 THE PERPETUATION CONSTRAINING MASCULINITIES

This section explores the third research question: how do norms and stereotypes that reproduce harmful masculinities sustain gender inequalities and intersect with other social inequalities, such as age, religion, sect, and disability? The research found that it is not necessarily only the 'harmful masculinities' that affect women, but also the constraining and controlling types of masculinities, especially within the context of peer pressure among men. This section is closely related to the previous discussion of the constructions of masculinities and femininities.

TRADITIONAL PATTERNS OF CONTROL

One version of a constraining masculinity develops from flawed ideas about men's responsibilities over women within kinship structures and extends to excessively controlling attitudes and behaviors. **Fathers controlling daughters and husbands controlling wives** are common examples. **As long as there is no clear need or financial benefit, some men do not see the value of allowing women to work.** For example, one male participant stated: 'I do not agree; even for work, I do not agree. I can offer money, and I work; why does she need to work? If we don't need money, why would she need to work?' (male FGD participant, Kirkuk). Another participant explained the challenges posed by this view:

Men decide everything, and they make the rules. If we don't deal with this point, women cannot do anything as long as they think women should stay at home. With these rules and this way of thinking, men control everything. If men think women will not be successful in a job and think they should just stay at home, this is a problem. The majority of men believe this, that women cannot do anything [outside the house] (male FGD participant, Kirkuk).

It is, however, important to distinguish between men who constrain women because they personally believe it is right and men who are pressured by others to do it. **Men who allow women more freedom are subject to a backlash from family members.** For example, one participant recounted:

My wife is free to do what she wants. She has social media, and I have no problems with that, even though my father criticizes me and asks, "Why do you give her this freedom? It's too much and that's not good" (male FGD participant, Kirkuk).

Another participant also faced pressure from his father:

I am supportive. It happened before that my wife was offered a position as a director. She asked me, "I have this offer, what do you think? If I take this offer, I need to go to conferences, sometimes outside Iraq." Of course, I agreed, even though my father was very upset with this. He didn't agree ... Also, her family was not very happy (male FGD participant, Huzerain, Kirkuk).

These participants are describing a form of **inter-generational pressure** that stems from the traditional position of mothers- and fathers-in-law within the same hierarchy that grants men control over women. Male role models will need to develop strategies to counter this kind of pressure within their awareness-raising journey.

THE DESIRE TO RETAIN POWER

A second type of constraining masculinity arises from men's desire to retain their dominant position amid social and cultural change. One participant explained the way the system of control perpetuates itself:

I think the reason that my father makes decisions is because his generation was allowed to do anything. They got support to study, to travel, and to see more than women. Somehow, he's trying to say this is the logic. My mother doesn't even have knowledge to make decisions because she has no background to do anything. She didn't study; she has no experience. Even if you ask for an opinion or a decision, she cannot tell you or make the decision (male FGD participant, Qaratapa, Diyala).

Men can therefore be fearful of providing women with information or opportunities:

[Take] your program or activities focusing on women's rights, for example. Many people, and mainly men, are complaining. Why are you talking to women in this way? You're destroying our rules. You're destroying our system, because the women do it without asking. They believe they have to cook, take care of children, and listen to men, so why do you teach women these kinds of things? We are satisfied with this system, and women are convinced. I don't want her to argue with me (male FGD participant, Hawija, Kirkuk).

Tribal traditions seem to matter more than religious values as a basis for maintaining male-dominated power dynamics.

CYCLES OF HARASSMENT AND PROTECTION

One reason women are not allowed outside is the fear that they will be verbally or physically harassed. As one participant stated: 'because we are used to thinking traditionally that a woman's place is at home, people are scared that **if women go outside, they will get harassed**' (male FGD participant, Kirkuk). This fear could prevent younger women from participating in courses or working outside the home:

Now the old women are participating in literacy courses because they are old. They got married, became mothers, and their children are older. They are sure that society will not talk about them in a bad way or physically or verbally abuse them [in a sexual way] because they're older (female FGD participant, Kirkuk).

Thus, societal views about women and sex perpetuate both the abuse of women outside of the home and the constraint of women to the home, even by well-meaning family members.

THE BACKLASH AGAINST 'UNMANLY' BEHAVIOR

Supporting women's independence is constructed as unmanly. Men who encourage women to act in the public realm are seen as failing in their responsibilities as providers and protectors, and men who take on domestic tasks are ridiculed for doing women's work. This kind of social backlash prevents many men from being more supportive of or open to expanding opportunities for women. Unfortunately, men's concern for their own reputation can take precedence.

THE LACK OF URGENCY FOR MEN

The circumstances of privilege allow men to express the idea that '**men are free.**' When asked whether men suffer from gender norms, all of the participants in an FGD for men in Jalawla/Qaratapa, Diyala agreed with the statement: No, we don't suffer from these norms—we are

free'. Until men recognize and critically consider the issues and constraints created by gender constructions, they will feel no urgency to act to change them.

PATTERNS OF DOMINANCE AND SUBMISSION

The norm of male dominance is reflected in the attitude that women and girls should be submissive. This conditioning **normalizes the unequal or even abusive treatment of women by men** and serves to perpetuate the structure of domination. As one participant explained, women:

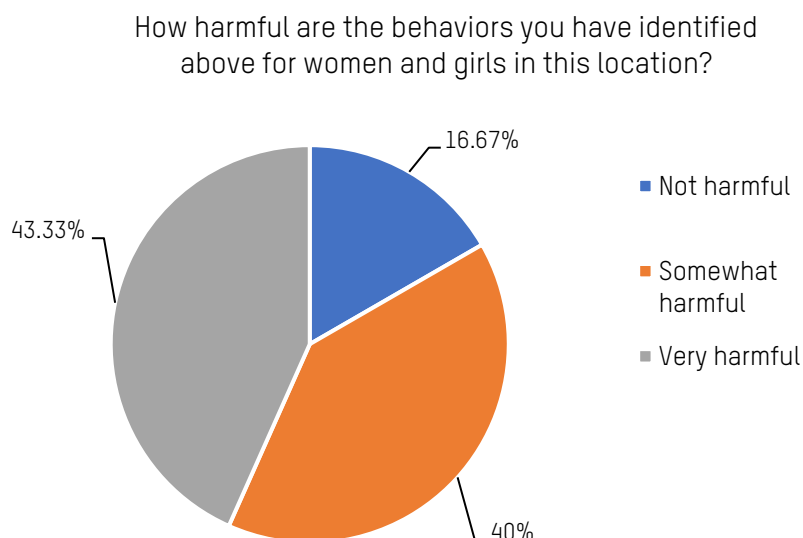
...don't challenge men when they ask something. The women don't fight for their rights. We grow up in this way, and so we agree with everything men say. That's logical, because girls grow up in this way: if men slap me, that's okay—it's my husband. Because it happened also with their dad or their brother (participant, FGD for women, Hawija, Kirkuk).

OTHER FACTORS

Survey participants were asked to rank a number of **other factors related to norms, stereotypes, and other social inequalities** that constrain women's participation in community decision making. Tribal norms were rated as the most constraining factor by 29 participants (90%), followed by economic status (24/75%), marital status (married, divorced, separated, or widow/er) (24/75%), religious/sectarian norms (23/71%), age (18/56%), ability/disability (17/53%), and displacement status (internally displaced person, refugee, returnee, remainee, or host) (15/47%). In addition to the options provided by the researchers, the participants added three other significant factors: the stability of the community and whether security is in place (especially because tribal law becomes more prominent in unstable communities where governmental rule is minimized); family history with regard to regional or ethnic conflicts (especially among Yazidis and Turkmen); and community law (which can conflict with governmental law).

5.2 CRACKS IN THE GENDER SYSTEM

Figure 6: How harmful are constraining masculinities? (online survey)



INCOHERENCE AND SHAME: THE DOUBLE BURDEN OF CONFLICTING NORMS

Several study participants noted a key incoherence in the gender norms that guide women's access to healthcare. While it is only socially permissible for women to see female doctors for health issues, few men would allow their daughters to be educated and work as a doctor. One male respondent noted: 'Because of traditions and lack of education, the majority of female doctors are not from the region. I always ask people, "Why don't you let your daughter be a doctor? Why not your daughter or sister?"' (male FGD participant, Hawija, Kirkuk).

Another participant spoke about the way this restriction adds complexity and shame to women's experience of healthcare: 'My wife is sick, and even with a small thing, I cannot take her to a male doctor; it should be a female doctor. Because of traditions, it's shameful [to see a male doctor]' (male FGD participant, Hawija, Kirkuk). It is important to deconstruct tradition by calling attention to the **incoherence** of these conflicting gender norms and the disproportionate burden of **shame** they place on women who need medical attention.

UNDERMINING EQUALITY: UNPACKING POLYGAMY

In one FGD, a participant reflected on role plays he had done in another training event and the profoundly skewed approach to polygamy that was presented:

Even in the workshop, the trainer only asked the female participants what they would think if their husband wanted to marry someone else. Then the trainer asked the men, "If you were a woman and your husband wanted to marry someone else, what would you do?" I said, "This is a very weird question." For me, it's also strange that men can marry two or three women. This is because of the traditions. The men are using these traditions or this power to abuse the women. The man is threatening to divorce with every small point and uses this to control his wife (male FGD participant, Failaq, Kirkuk).

Polygamy perpetuates gendered inequality by establishing that men are valued more than women. In addition, the consequences for divorce are more severe for women than for men, which constrains women within the home but also points to a structural inequality in terms of differential access to the legal and court systems.

THE BURDEN OF REPUTATION: WOMEN AS SEXUAL OBJECTS OR MARRIAGE MATERIAL

As highlighted above, there are strict norms that women must follow to maintain their reputation. Women are caught between being seen as sexual objects or marriage material. One participant noted:

Where I'm from it's very difficult. The women can't do anything. Even if she is outside, the men look at women in a sexual way. In general, the traditions are everything. We are applying the traditions, and going outside won't work; it's somehow haram. I don't know (male FGD participant, Qaratapa, Diyala).

This quote highlights the way in which men follow traditions and are constrained by customs without really understanding the reasons behind them, including viewing women as sexual objects. In addition, another participant referenced the ideas that daughters are seen only as marriage material and that divorce brings shame upon the family:

For example, there was a guy who was married, but he was not on good terms with his wife, and therefore, he wanted to marry a relative. He convinced the family, and the father also accepted. But he didn't accept for him to divorce his first wife, so the relative would be wife

number two. But it turned out that he [already] had another wife and that the relative would become wife number three. Over time, he started to become more controlling and to check her phone, sometimes forbidding her to see her family. I supported her, and I tried to convince her to divorce him. She didn't have kids yet, and he was lying about his situation. But her dad was scared and didn't want to bring shame to the family; if she divorces, it will bring shame. Why do we push our daughters to marry and to stay in a situation like this? (male FGD participant, Hawija, Kirkuk).

TOWARDS EGALITARIAN MASCULINITIES

This section engages with research question four: how can a shift from negative to positive masculinities materialize in Diyala and Kirkuk, and how do conceptions and practices of power need to be adapted? The online survey respondents were asked what would need to change for women and for men to support women's participation in decision making. Table 2 groups their ideas according to the UN Women's 4 I's framework,²¹ which differentiates the following levels:

- **Internal level:** The personal beliefs and attitudes that people hold that support or justify the power of the male/masculine over the female/feminine.
- **Interpersonal level:** The practices and behaviors of individuals in their interpersonal relationships that enact or maintain the power of the male/masculine over the female/feminine.
- **Institutional level:** The policies, practices, and cultures of institutions that enact or maintain the power of the male/masculine over the female/feminine.
- **Ideological level:** The social norms and belief systems that support or justify the power of the male/masculine over the female/feminine

Table 2: What would need to change for women and men to support women’s participation in decision making?

	Internal level	Interpersonal level	Institutional level	Ideological level
<i>Women’s needs</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To fully understand their rights • To have faith in their own abilities, since many women are suffering from a lack of self-confidence • To believe they have agency to participate in decision making • To challenge constraining stereotypes that make them think they deserve less • To question their conviction that women are weaker than men • To expose themselves to other women’s experiences of participating in decision making • To believe that women have equal rights to men • To persevere, because working hard to ensure their rights is a pathway to success • To strive for independence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constructive approaches for explaining women’s needs • Moral and family support • Economic support to be more powerful and self-reliant so that their voices can be heard • To be involved in decision making • To champion other women working in different spheres • To support each other’s choices and accept differences and similarities • Time allocated for community meetings • Partnerships between women and men 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To build trust in institutions • Legal changes such as criminalizing (and enforcing the criminality of) honor crimes and sexual violence • Legislation and policies that further ensure women’s rights and their participation in decision making • Full protection and more shelters for women who experience gender-based violence • The enforcement of laws above tribal norms • The coordination of NGOs, INGOs, and the government in promoting change and transforming gender norms • Gender equality education for intermediate and high school students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes in large-scale social beliefs and norms • The widespread belief that women can do whatever men do • Supportive religious beliefs, customs, and traditions • Equal rights for all genders • Strong community roles for women and support for women participating in the labor market, education, and decision making • The right to move freely, divorce, marry, gain citizenship or custody, and be treated well

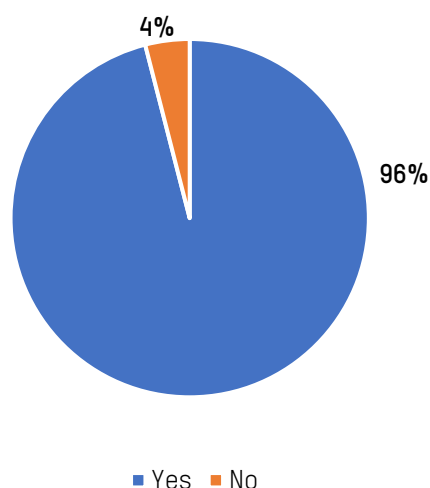
	Internal level	Interpersonal level	Institutional level	Ideological level
<i>Men's needs</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To clarify the importance of women's participation in decision making in a way that is beneficial to both parties and not focused on the role of a specific gender to the neglect of the other • To develop a more modern mindset and be less oriented to traditional beliefs • To start with themselves and set an example • To believe that women are able to be actively involved in decision making • To be exposed to men who support women's participation • To be conscious, stop negative thoughts, and trust in themselves and others • To believe in gender justice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To participate in household duties and raising children • To stop hurting women and insulting them in front of others • To believe in themselves and support other males in expressing similar feelings and thoughts • To trust their partners and daughters • Space to express themselves without criticism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To support women's promotions, increased responsibilities, opportunities, and equal pay in the workplace • To ensure female staff members feel safe • To work to change other people's strongly held beliefs in harmful traditions and norms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time to adapt to cultural changes • To be held accountable for their actions and mistakes • To believe that women's freedoms should not be restricted simply because they are women • To question traditional norms that are judgmental of women and make them adhere to specific practices • To question inequitable religious beliefs, for example the Islamic law that determines that men receive a larger share of an inheritance • To end tribal norms

ATTITUDES ABOUT SHIFTING MASCULINITIES

The online survey explored the possibility of transforming harmful forms of masculinities into more egalitarian forms. Almost all Oxfam and partner staff believed that this could be done (Figure 7). Only one respondent answered negatively. Explanations for the negative answer included the beliefs that 'the trust is lost,' and 'our societies are very closed.'

Figure 7: Perceptions as to whether harmful masculinities can be transformed

Do you think we can transform harmful masculinities into more egalitarian forms?



The actions recommended by the online survey participants included reducing gender norms that uphold men's privilege over women and providing extended awareness raising. Awareness raising should be aimed at all segments of society to inspire reflection on social structures and the potential for change. Further suggestions included working with men and boys to enhance their understanding of women's rights and gender equality. Awareness sessions in the community and workshops for both women and men can be transformational, but the process can take years and requires patience. This longer-term approach is relevant for ending some of the harmful traditions identified in the study and shifting attitudes and practices. Finally, respondents recommended targeting young people because adolescents can change their ideas more easily than the elderly and will be the leaders of the future.

Box 4: Summary of the attitudes that need to be challenged and deconstructed in the awareness-raising training by male role models

Traditions are unshakeable: Men might hold the attitude that tradition cannot or should not be changed, as demonstrated by the following responses: ‘We have had the same traditions for 1,000 years and are still applying the same traditions’ (male FGD participant, Failaq, Kirkuk); ‘Of course we should give more space to women, but in our society, it’s almost impossible to [do so]. We need to have a balance between male and female, but this is almost impossible’ (male FGD participant, Qaratapa, Diyala).

But gender norms do change, and shifts in women’s freedom of movement and increases in women working outside their homes were noted: ‘There is a new development in women’s presence in the job market, including in business or shops—and the situation is better than before. Now in my neighborhood women work in the supermarket, for example, and people accept that. A few years ago, people would not have accepted that’ (male FGD participant, Huzerain, Kirkuk).

An active woman brings shame: Men might hold the belief that women should not actively work, move freely, or engage in the community. Consequently, they do not allow women to work, study, or engage in community space. However, women have important contributions to make for the wellbeing of all.

Women do not belong in politics: Some men are more open to the idea of women working but remain closed to the notion of women’s political participation: ‘I would only allow my wife to work in the government as a local government employee. But any other job I would not agree with, including the local elections’ (male FGD participant, Huzerain, Kirkuk).

Tribal/religious tradition is too strong: Many men share this perception, as exemplified in the following quote: ‘The problem is our religion; the problem is that tribes are so strong. This is not easy to change’ (male FGD participant, Qaratapa, Diyala). However, there are opportunities to support women and to weaken some of the tribal traditions. Similarly, men use the Koran to justify their controlling attitudes, for example by saying: ‘In the Koran, I am the leader. My body is stronger than yours; that’s the logic, and you have to listen to me’ (female FGD participant, Jalawla, Diyala). Though change may take time to take hold, it is important to support women’s education and freedom of movement. In addition, there are examples of men who do not care about what others think and provide key support for women.

Women are just for sex: In the FGDs, men reported holding stereotypes that are profoundly harmful and misogynistic: ‘Because of our traditions and education, we learned and grew up [thinking] that women are just for sex. As men, we look at women from a sexual perspective, that she is there to have sex with’ (male FGD participant, Qaratapa, Diyala).

Women are weak: There is a continuous underestimation of women’s capacities and potential roles: ‘This is because of the image of women in society as weak or that they should just be at home’ (male FGD participant, Qaratapa, Diyala); ‘The problem is not the men, but a woman cannot be more than a housewife or have more than a cosmetics shop. What else can she do?’ (male FGD participant, Qaratapa, Diyala).

Women don’t fight for their rights—they don’t want more: ‘Women don’t challenge men when they ask something. Women don’t fight for their rights. We grow up in this way, and so we agree with everything men say. That’s logical, because girls grow up in this way: if men slap me, that’s okay—it’s my husband. Because it happened also with their dad or their brother’ (female FGD participant, Hawija, Kirkuk).

Overall, the goal is to work with men to embrace women’s rights and gender equality.

OVERCOMING THE BARRIERS TO WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION

It is important to develop context-specific strategies to overcome barriers to women's participation and engage men in their communities. First, it is necessary to **understand the role of tribal authorities** in maintaining a gendered inequality. Change is a slow process, and engaging with restrictive tribal authorities may not be the most conducive way forward, as the following example shows:

It will not work with us, and this is the last thing I can say. The law of the ashira [tribe] refuses this point completely. From the sheikh on down, no one will accept it. I would participate in a session, but I don't think there will be any result. Also, this discussion was useful for me, but I cannot prove that there will be any change/result. I would listen without doing anything. Nobody can prevent me from changing, but I don't accept being changed by anyone. I'm okay with women working, going to school, and everything, but in my family, the women are for cooking, taking care of the home and kids, and that's it' (male FGD participant, Huzerain, Kirkuk).

While tribal leaders and tribal norms are considered a key barrier to women's meaningful participation, the ways that male role models can or should engage with the tribal authorities will depend on the specific context and location. Given the pervasive barriers, energy should be focused on building a critical mass of men willing to stand firm with women. Oxfam should develop a concerted strategy operating on multiple layers rather than sending individual role models to engage tribal leaders.

Second, to address barriers to women's participation, it is necessary to generate awareness about women's engagement within the community. Community members will need to become more accepting of gender equality and of active women in their midst. Elements of this acceptance include the normalization of women moving freely and acceptance of women working in a range of income-generating activities. As there are so many barriers, this will not be a sudden change:

There is a saying in Arabic that we have to protect our traditions. We cannot change our skin. I support the opinion of giving women more opportunities and more freedom, but there are red lines where she should stop because I am not living alone. I am living with this society, which I have to respect and deal with. It also depends on where you live; in some places, it's more open. It can even differ between neighborhoods in the same city. I prefer to respect the society. Red lines are what society doesn't accept. The Arab problem is that a lot of men talk about women's rights, but at home they are not like this (male FGD participant, Men, Huzerain, Kirkuk).

Consequently, generating awareness requires adequate localization and contextualization, and adequate preparation by the Oxfam teams and the male role models.

Third, women's time is tied up with household chores and care responsibilities, which limit their ability to be involved in community activities. Assigning household responsibilities to women and tying them to the domestic realm also serve to maintain men's control and privilege. Effectively, men benefit from having their wives in their homes, as the following example shows:

Women have a big role in life, in general. When I come back home after working, I want to eat, and my wife makes food for me. She washes my clothes and takes care of my children, and she does this every day. My house is like a paradise. This is why I think women should play a bigger role in the community, because they can be responsible and work in a good way, better than men. Because they do everything well at home, they will be able to do things outside the house [beyond being a housewife] in a good way (participant, FGD for men, Huzerain, Kirkuk).

This quote is somewhat problematic, as it shows the extent to which men expect and rely on women's free labor. Effectively liberating women's time and energy is not being addressed in men's

narratives. The idea of men assuming their share of childcare and housework is not raised. However, a sustainable engagement strategy that includes men standing firm with women will require some form of division of labor.

Box 5: Positive examples and case studies

Men supporting girl's education: 'My husband also helps his youngest sister to go to school. Because people always repeat that it's dangerous for girls to go to school alone. That's why her brother was bringing her and picking her up every day. After a while, he started to let her go alone. Because of this encouragement, she started to go and come back alone, and he was looking from afar or waiting at home until she came back to make sure everything was all right' (female FGD participant, Hawija, Kirkuk).

Men encouraging each other: 'I saw a father who brings his daughter to the bookstore. I said, "This is very nice; you are doing a very good job bringing your daughter to the bookstore." I feel that what I said also had a good impact on him. That's why I think when you do awareness sessions, there will be a bigger impact' (male FGD participant, Jalawla/Qaratapa, Diyala).

Collective strategies: 'It's good that the families agreed with each other to send their daughters to university together. In this way, the daughters will protect each other. This encouraged other people to also send their daughters to university' (male FGD participant, Qaratapa, Diyala).

Persevering and communicating with family: 'Now, men in the city are more okay with giving women the freedom to decide what they want in their life. For example, if I talk about myself, when I got married to my wife, she was in the first year of university. My family said, "Don't let her continue university or go to the university by herself—how will she do that?" I said, "I will be with her, to pick her up and to drop her off, so where is the problem?" And then I started to convince my mom in an emotional way, and in the end, she agreed with me. So we became two people who supported her. It was a big challenge, but now she is in the third year, and she was able to continue. So, nothing is impossible. If I would have listened to my family, she would have stayed at home and done nothing. But I did the opposite. Based on this point, I can say, yes, I accept if she wants to participate in the local election, and I will support her. Most of the time, I think that criticism makes us more determined to succeed' (male FGD participant, Huzerain, Kirkuk).

Engaging the sheikh in awareness sessions: 'I would go to men to explain the importance of education for young girls. I would explain how it is important for them in their present and future life. The first type of men we need to change are the sheikhs. The reason is that they are the highest authority of the tribe, and they all go to the *madafa* [the place of the sheikh] to have discussions. If we can change their minds, they will change the minds of the tribe' (male FGD participant, Huzerain, Kirkuk).

BOTH MEN AND WOMEN HAVE VARIED POSITIONS AND STRATEGIES

The research highlighted different perspectives and strategies that men and women use to navigate prevalent gender norms. Unsurprisingly, not all women are explicitly in favor of women's emancipation; similarly, not all men are against women's rights, and many do support women's emancipation.

However, **the majority of men have a cautious view** of women working or participating at the community level. At the same time, **some men pride themselves on their supportive attitudes towards women** engaging in the public sphere. Men from urban areas tend to be more open-minded around accepting women's participation, while in the rural areas, men tend to refuse to allow women to go out and participate at the community level.

Box 6. Men's strategies²²

- **The open opponent** points out, willingly and frequently, that men and women are different and that this is something good that should be maintained and highlighted. The differences mean that women and men should remain in their gender roles, and that the gender-based power structure in which women are inferior to men is natural.
- **The hidden opponent** does not state his position openly, but believes in men's patriarchal privilege.
- **The man who is neutral** places the burden of evidence on women. Until something is proven he is not prepared to do anything, but if women can prove that they are disadvantaged this should be corrected.
- **The cautious activist** believes that equality is a women's issue and doesn't mean anything to men. He can see that equality is necessary, but not at his workplace.
- **The gender equality activist** has an overall perspective on the issue and highlights it in all contexts.

Women also have multiple positions. **Some seek to develop** and expand the role of women, contribute to decision making, express their opinions, and work in the public sphere. Other women are **unable to participate and integrate** with society despite their desire to do so, since community norms do not allow them to operate in the public sphere. Finally, some women **do not want to participate**, do not seek to do so, and are satisfied with their role. They do not seek to break the barrier between the public and private sphere, do not express opinions and are submissive to the decisions of their husbands or family. When considering women's position with regard to change, it is important to take into account that 'the female dilemma is being an individual and at the same time part of a subordinate group. It is important to understand that women's attitudes to the issue of equality are strategies for survival or for progress in the male-dominated world.'²³

Box 7: Women's strategies²⁴

- The first strategy is to **choose not to see the subordination**. Reality is interpreted so the inequalities become invisible, such as: women have overall responsibility for the home and children because they want to; men earn more than women because women haven't become managers yet. This strategy is appreciated by society, and it works for a while—until the woman starts to understand this subordination, which often coincides with the birth of their first child. Then she changes to the second or third strategy.
- The second strategy is to **decide that this subordination is correct**. Women are worse than men at some things, and don't put as much effort into their jobs. Therefore, lower wages and not having a career is justified. A woman who adopts this strategy is passive and has low self-esteem.
- The third strategy is to **realize that this subordination is wrong**. Wage differences are because women are less valued than men, and the greater proportion of male managers is not because they are more competent than women, but because they are overvalued simply because they are men. This strategy is most difficult for her surroundings to cope with. The woman is often regarded as a troublemaker.

5.3 THE POTENTIAL OF MALE ROLE MODELS

This section engages with the fifth research question, which explores how male role models promote positive masculinities to advance gender equality. The research's theoretical considerations see men as gendered beings, socially constructed and reproduced in the given socioeconomic and political context. This enhances the localized understanding of the ways in which masculinities are produced through different social practices, regulated by norms and values, and shaped by public and private discourses. Therefore, the way these practices change

over time and the ways in which masculinities can be changed and transformed concretely into more equitable forms constitutes a key line of inquiry. Here, Michael Messner's triangle is useful.²⁵ Messner divides the apexes of a triangle into three categories of awareness that drive men's engagement in gender equality: recognition of and opposition to institutionalized privileges; recognition of the costs of masculinity for men but also for women and girls; and recognition of the differences between and inequalities among men—an intersectional perspective on masculinity.

When translated into policy and humanitarian interventions, men's engagement in gender-transformative practices could lead to: men's engagement in anti-violence programs; men's engagement in programs to reduce the negative impact of men's hegemonic practices on men, boys, women, and girls (e.g. positive fatherhood, healthy lifestyles, or reproductive politics); and programs that address differences and inequalities between men themselves (e.g. refugees and migrants, men survivors of violence including war violence, men ex-combatants).²⁶

Consequently, the question is how to engage community-based male role models and which entry points to select in order to advance women's inclusion, representation, and meaningful participation, as well as humanitarian programming.

PRACTICAL ENTRY POINTS FOR MALE ROLE MODELS

The online survey captured some of the entry points and strategies proposed by participants when asked what male role models should do in their location to concretely help other men be more supportive of women's participation and decision making. The respondents recommended the following:

- Leading **awareness-raising** workshops in which women play a meaningful role;
- **Establishing dialogue**, giving examples and evidence of the importance of women's participation in decision making, and highlighting their **experience** and capabilities;
- **Leading by example**, which can encourage others to support women via awareness raising and training, as well as including the male role model's wives (and other women in their personal circle) by giving them important roles in society so that they also become models for others;
- Taking part in **community activities supporting women's rights** so that other men will see someone they know defending women and be encouraged to do the same;
- Spreading positive ideas about the **power of women** and **women in power**;
- Leading the charge with women to **enact legislation** that promotes women's rights and repeal laws and policies that discriminate against women and limit opportunities;
- **Conducting campaigns** encouraging men and boys to speak up against violence against women, engaging men and boys in the fight for women's rights in the community, celebrating the birth of every girl child, and changing men's traditional ideas about women's rights;
- Sharing **success stories** with others and disseminating learning; and
- Not driving girls into early or forced marriage but giving them **the freedom to complete their education and get a job**.

SUGGESTIONS FOR MEN'S AWARENESS-RAISING SESSIONS

For the **formats**, spaces, and activities that would be most effective for raising awareness about positive masculinities, Oxfam and partner staff recommended the following:

- Incorporating the ideas of women and men, holding transparent dialogue sessions and discussions between the two parties, highlighting the roles of each and convincing the other of the importance of these roles;
- Engaging the **actual participation of women** at the community level in committees and community organizations in addition to training and awareness raising;

- Increasing men’s understanding of violence against women, the value of women's work (in private and public spaces), and **critical women's rights issues**;
- Encouraging **gender mixing** by sharing inspirations and roles and selecting activities based on cooperation and participation;
- Spreading the workshops or training **outside their city** to increase the effect;
- Encouraging men’s positive engagement as **fathers and caretakers**;
- Conducting awareness sessions on women’s rights for **young boys** in order to implant gender equality in their minds at an early age, while also conducting awareness-raising sessions for men and teenagers to change discriminatory practices;
- **Engaging women in men’s work** so that men can see their abilities and imagine them in these roles;
- Showing the value of decision making by women;
- Offering examples of men who have supported women; and
- Involving the role models’ wives in consultations on community workshops.

6 RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this exploratory study report feed into the awareness-raising edutainment toolbox and the manual for the induction workshop for male role models, two standalone deliverables that have been submitted separately to Oxfam. This section provides recommendations for complementary Oxfam in Iraq programming, followed by considerations for refresher training for male role models.

6.1 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR OXFAM PROGRAMMING

This research analyzed primary data collected on social norms of masculinities prevalent in Diyala and Kirkuk. Through five research questions, it focused on gender roles and stereotypes to identify common misconceptions that men and boys have about women and girls’ empowerment. Several of the findings confirm the presence of sedimented layers of male privilege that historically take root and grow over decades of conflict and instability. Therefore, this report recommends a concerted approach to rolling out the training-of-trainers for male role models laid out in the accompanying deliverables, the Male Role Models Awareness Raising Toolbox and Starting a Journey – Induction Workshop for Male Role Model Manual. The awareness-raising activities with men constitute one element among other longer-term efforts to advance transformative change in attitudes, practices, and behaviors at the different levels highlighted throughout this report.

The holistic outreach approach needs to be strategically aligned and harmonized with other gender-transformative projects that Oxfam implements in Iraq.

This section highlights some strategic guidance and complementary activities that can support the advancement of a successful journey.

To enhance the engagement of men, study participants indicated that **authority figures and influencers in the community need to be engaged**. This can include sheikhs, religious leaders, clerics, or famous or well-known people. However, if any of these authority figures and influences are resisters or constitute barriers to women’s meaningful participation, the edutainment toolbox is not likely to convince them. They are likely not willing to engage in awareness-raising activities,

and therefore a distinct and separate form of engagement for those who **strongly believe in harmful traditions and norms** needs to be developed.

It is important to **align the community-based awareness raising** and its outcomes with other efforts under the **gender justice programming/portfolio in Iraq** so that the intertwined outputs and outcomes have a stronger impact and lead to a sustained transformation of gender norms.

The male role models' approaches to social change and tackling the root causes of gender inequality will focus on different arenas, depending on their individual interests, professions, backgrounds, and education. However, it is recommended to plan to prepare male role models for **specific trajectories in the future**. This means that some male role models may specialize in policy development or the redistribution of care work, while others focus on campaigning or media. In line with the strategic objective of supporting the emergence of a new generation of male role model trainers, Oxfam and partners should organize a designated learning process using a series of training-of-trainers modules.

Furthermore, greater awareness raising on women's rights and women's participation is recommended for **community members** in ways that connect public and private spaces. This could include media and advocacy campaigns about women's rights and the contributions of women in the communities, alongside awareness sessions for men about women's rights and the importance of women's participation in decision making in society. Joint dialogue sessions between women and men within the communities are also recommended.

It is important to develop a **separate strategy to defend the gender-transformative changes generated** by this work. This involves acknowledging the shifts in gender norms and maintaining and furthering those elements that contribute to gender equality, such as women being more visible in the public space, girls attending schools, or young women working outside the home. All of the varied ways in which women of all ages contribute to society and positive change need to be acknowledged, understood, and supported.

A complementary strategy that supports male role models relates to specific support for **youth**, which requires capturing their interest through interactive methods and engagement. Critical reflections about one own's knowledge, attitudes, and practices will be necessary to advance change.

It will be necessary to generate and broaden concrete opportunities for women across their life cycles to engage with, participate in, and contribute to **community issues**. More notably, women and men should be involved in deliberation and decision making for crucial decisions, and stories of women's successful contributions should be shared.

Along with **complementary activities** to support male role models, women should be strengthened in a holistic and sustainable way that generates independence and space for agency. Concrete recommendations include seizing opportunities for women's economic empowerment and income generation, as well as women's and girls' education. Furthermore, it is important to create spaces for women, such as opportunities for sport. As one participant noted, although in certain locations 'women are not allowed to do sports, if they could, [it would] support them to develop their self-esteem and build self-reliance' (male FGD participant, Jalawla, Diyala).

Trust in institutions should be developed as a means to guarantee the sustainability of attitude shifts. This is the case, for example, for work towards implementing and enforcing laws against honor crimes and sexual violence. Consequently, people within the legal system need to be engaged as duty bearers, enforcing equality before the law. With equal access to the justice system, women's rights can be upheld. This is also needed to support the full protection of women who have experienced gender-based violence, alongside adequate services and shelters for survivors of domestic violence.

6.2 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A REFRESHER WORKSHOP

As requested by the Oxfam hiring manager, the research team recommends that a potential refresher workshop and any other future actions should follow *A Journey of a Male Role Model* (see figure 8 below) as a process of personal transformation and learning, as well as a collective action that opens routes for social transformation. In the approach proposed, we are keen to give adequate attention to both personal and collective change, as individual attitudes and behaviors influence people's practices and actions, which further shape the world around them. Dominant or harmful forms of masculinity are reinforced by both individuals and institutions.

In line with this, in the online survey Oxfam staff and partners stated that men and women should have more opportunities for exchange and dialogue about their understanding of their roles and expectations of one another and their aspirations for the future. A redistribution exercise in which roles and tasks are swapped may be an interesting experience for workshop participants. Importantly, gender transformation needs to be facilitated, and the diverse ingredients and components involved in the construction of different masculinities and femininities need to be understood in order to undermine the structures that sustain inequalities.

The refresher workshop should adopt the proposed balance between theoretical input and practical work and provide participants with new knowledge, skills, and attitudes. The program should follow the proposed stages of the journey:

- a. understanding gender transformation;
- b. building your arguments;
- c. understanding your allies;
- d. community awareness session design;
- e. running a community awareness session;
- f. learning from community a awareness session; and
- g. becoming a male role model or sessions related to personal development and growth.

The sessions at the induction workshop should be repeated in the refresher workshop, with a new layer of complexity added.

The main output of the workshop should be a consolidated male role model awareness-raising toolbox based on the role models' direct experiences during the implementation. The role models should learn by doing as much possible. Furthermore, participants raised two points that are important to address during the refresher workshop:

- Religious argumentation in favor of gender justice is a crucial topic for male role models. Although it is discussed briefly during the induction workshop, it will be more valuable to cover this topic once the role models have completed their first series of awareness sessions.
- Techniques for engaging difficult participants should also be presented. In particular, role models can learn how to make workshop participants 'look at themselves in the mirror' and recognize that their own logic with regard to gender justice is irrational and not set in stone. This technique will mainly be useful for participants who are less open-minded about change, and role models are less likely to encounter this type of participant during the first series of awareness sessions.

Furthermore, during the workshop, some participants asked how they should deal with important 'blockers,' such as tribal leaders. All of the participants in the induction workshop categorized tribal leaders as blockers, while religious leaders were seen as 'mixed' (some religious leaders promote change and others block change). Therefore, it is important to develop a separate (and, in some cases, an individual) approach for tribal and religious leaders.

A JOURNEY OF A MALE ROLE MODEL

To stimulate personal transformation toward a more gender-equitable perspective, it is important that the journey:

- fosters critical consciousness building, ongoing self-reflection, and self-critiques;
- challenges privileges and the status-quo;
- encourages reflection on injustice in connection with personal life experiences of power imbalance and inequality;
- fosters activism within each individual; and
- plants the seeds of hope, potential, and positive change.²⁷

However, gender equality and human rights for all cannot be achieved through personal transformation alone. Collective action is required to bring about sustainable social transformation. Change must occur across all levels of the society.

Therefore, becoming a male role model is more than being a participant at a one-time workshop event. Participants are asked to open to personal change through joint endeavors with others. Figure 8 sets out the journey and possible phases and steps that participants will go through in their process of becoming male role models.

Figure 8: Possible phases and steps in becoming a male role model

A JOURNEY OF A MALE ROLE MODEL



Source: created by the authors.

ANNEX 1: CRITERIA FOR IDENTIFYING POSITIVE MALE ROLE MODELS

We believe male role models have the power to transform the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors surrounding complex and multi-layered themes such as gender values and norms, gender-based violence, girls' education, and many others. The main focus will be mapping those men's transformative potential onto their communities, so that those who are influenced by the role models will not only be adaptive or responsive to gender issues but willing and capable of tackling root causes and therefore be disruptive to patriarchal systems. The patriarchal systems are supported by tribal and religious institutions and are restraining both men and women.

Male role models are men of diverse ages between **18–30** who share the following traits:

- They are **curious and open** to embarking on a journey that includes proactive engagement in their communities in solidarity with women and girls while persevering in adapting their own attitudes, behaviors, and practices with regard to women's participation.
- They are **self-starting and practical**, eager to learn and contribute to practical approaches for advancing women's rights in their communities.
- They have **diverse backgrounds** in terms of their location, education, interests, skills, and talents. They can be social media influencers, local football club coaches, humanitarian workers, or public servants.
- They are **accomplished individuals within their communities** who are respected and trusted by their families, peers, and other community members.

The criteria for the selection of male role models (which will be further tailored following the completion of the data collection process) include:

- Their **location and setting** should be considered to ensure an adequate spread and outreach is established based on Oxfam and its partners' program coverage and scale-up plans.
- Role models should demonstrate **achievements, leverage, and influencing** power, including but not limited to previous engagement with Oxfam and its partners.
- They should be **motivated** to embark on a journey that includes not only new community roles but also perseverance in their personal transformation. Approaches that can identify trends that potentially sustain negative motivation and result in fake allies need to be considered.
- They should have **diverse backgrounds** (in terms of education, interests, skills, talents, etc.) in order to reach out to different audiences as well as having various means of influencing (e.g., social media, public administration, local NGOs, humanitarian roles).
- They should be **self-starting and have practical ideas and input** to enrich Oxfam programming. Their willingness to share and contribute to learning and further development will be vital to their role.
- **Men who should be excluded** from selection are assessed based on their potential negative effect on the program and harmful behavior in their home or in public. Further understanding of men who are not role models and strategies to manage their negative influence will be included in the induction workshop.

NOTES

- 1 Oxfam Canada. (2018). *Feminist Principles: What They Are and How They Serve as a Guidepost for Our Work*. Retrieved August 10, 2021 from <https://42kgab3z3i7s3rm1xf48rq44-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Feminist-Principles-Oxfam-Canada.pdf>
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- 3 Originally developed by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, grounded theory is a method of qualitative research in which data collection occurs simultaneously with data analysis, with the aim of explaining the complexity of social phenomena through a process of constant comparison (Flick 2007). At the same time, grounded theory includes the critical review of the researchers' own prevailing gendered assumptions while allowing for alternative explanations of the ways gender norms and localized versions of masculinities and femininities are constructed. See B.G. Glaser and A. Strauss. (1967/1998). *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. Chicago: Aldine; and U. Flick (2007). *Qualitative Sozialforschung: Eine Einführung*. Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag.
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