



D.1.3

# THE RE-WIRING TRANSFORMATIVE EQUALITY APPROACH AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY TEMPLATE



Funded by  
the European Union

Document Data	
Report Title	THE RE-WIRING TRANSFORMATIVE EQUALITY APPROACH AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY TEMPLATE
Contributors	Linda Senden, Dolores Morondo, Elena Ghidoni, Lorena Sosa, Ángel del Fresno-Díaz, Natasza Kosakowska-Berezecka, Barbara Kijewska, Ajohche Nkemngu Awungjia, Tamara Shefer, Devran Gülel, Panos Kapotas, Karen Johnston, Colette van Laar
Work Package	1
Responsible Project Partner	UU
Reviewers	Khamsavath Chanthavysouk (UNWomen), Virginija Langbakk, Giulia Morando (OECD), Mirella Visser (CFIL)
Due Date	29 February 2024
Delivery Date	29 February 2024 1 July 2024 (updated version)
Type	R – document, report
Dissemination Level	PU -public
Keywords	Gendered–intersectional - power hierarchies, structural inequality, transformative equality approach, checklist, effectiveness benchmarks and recommendations

## Table of contents

Table of contents	3
<b>Executive Summary</b>	4
List of abbreviations	5
1. Introduction	9
<b>PART A: The RE-WIRING Transformative Equality Approach</b>	<b>11</b>
2. Its three-dimensional foundation and key characteristics	11
3. The RE-WIRING Transformative Checklist	15
4. When transformative is ‘effective’: the RE-WIRING testing framework and recommendations	19
4.1 The RE-WIRING effectiveness testing framework	19
4.2 The RE-WIRING Implementation Strategy	22
<b>PART B: Explanatory background: Existing TEAs and their methodologies</b>	<b>28</b>
5.1 Theoretical approaches	28
5.2 Policy-making approaches	48
5.3 Action-oriented approaches	57

## Executive Summary

The Horizon Europe “Realising Girls’ and Women’s Inclusion, Representation and Empowerment” (RE-WIRING) project rethinks existing institutional approaches and systems. It aims to identify the structural root causes of gendered power hierarchies and develop effective change approaches and solutions to prevent and reverse existing gender inequalities.

This document constitutes the third deliverable of Work Package 1, “Synchronisation: Transformative Theory and Methodology.” The overall goal of WP1 is to establish a Theory and Methods Innovation Lab, within which the foundations are laid for a context- and crisis-sensitive, systematic analysis of the dynamics of intersectional gendered power hierarchies and an assessment of the effectiveness and unwanted effects of laws and policies. To this end, two previous deliverables have carried out a thorough review of concepts of gendered power hierarchies and established their taxonomy (Deliverable D.1.1), and assessed the ethical implications for research on gendered hierarchies of power, addressing scientific-methodological debates and discussing critical practices for addressing them (Deliverable D.1.2).

Building on these previous results, this paper translates the findings and theories of transformative equality into a research methodology template, which will guide the research in the different RE-WIRING work packages. The template of the RE-WIRING Transformative Equality Approach (TEA) builds on its main starting points, which shape the methodology of the project as well as the 'transformative equality' benchmarks. These **starting points** are:

- **The three-dimensional foundation:** institutional, experiential and symbolical.
- **Key characteristics:** intersectional, decolonial perspective, cross-cultural relevance and applicability, co-creation approach, crises-robustness and human agency.

With a view to potentially **transform gendered power hierarchies**, consortium members will in their work follow three consecutive levels of guidance, to be sure of a proper problem definition before proposing any solutions. These levels are the foundation of the **RE-WIRING Transformative Checklist**, which sets out the relevant questions to be considered at each level to check the compliance of any (proposed) measure, approach, or practice with the different dimensions of the RE-WIRING TEA (**Part A of this paper**). These **levels of inquiry** are:

### I. Acknowledgement and Diagnosis

What problem of inequality can be identified and what is the nature of this problem, not only numerically but in terms of the structural inequality and gendered dynamics of power hierarchies that it results from; what are root causes of women's and other genders inequality and exclusion and how are these associated with (harmful) gendered roles/stereotypes and with – traditional/cultural -

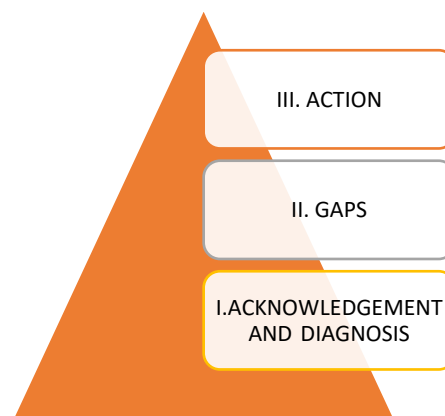
determinants considered as natural or objective? In identifying the root causes, we thus focus on the underlying power dynamics, systems and hierarchies and their intersection as well as their possible colonial, cultural, intersectional and crisis dimensions.<sup>4</sup> This focus also requires a multi-stakeholder perspective and the taking into account of the diverse realities of women, acknowledging the gendered inequalities anchored in a binary, heteronormative and cis-normative reality. We also seek to explore how indigenous/non-Western epistemologies and their construction of gender can be helpful in accurately diagnosing the workings of neo-colonial and neo-liberal ideologies in maintaining structural inequalities in leadership positions in various cultural contexts.

## II. Determination of the Gaps

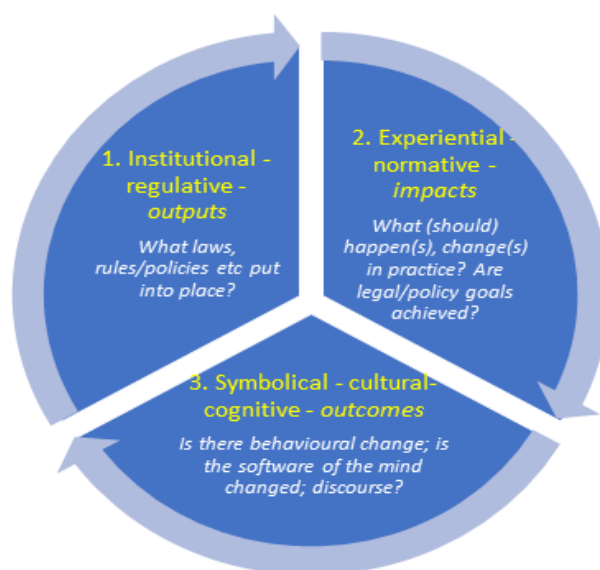
A relevant question to address here is whether existing data are sufficient and whether/how those data allow to establish (direct) causal links to the identified root causes of inequalities. Particular issues requiring attention in this regard are: what data are lacking and/or what are possible weaknesses, limitations, faults in existing data sets as produced by different institutions, both at the national, European, global levels? How can indigenous and non-Western knowledge systems be helpful in revealing such gaps and inconsistencies in dominant representations and narratives on gender, grounded in binary logics of gender and neo-colonial power? How does the lack of data impact on different groups; does it entail that the underrepresentation of certain undocumented groups remains invisible or that their situation is not (well) addressed, wrongly approached, etc.?

## III. Identification of Effective Transformative Actions

In the final step, the research identifies approaches, practices, laws, policies, rules and mechanisms that can be considered as effective transformative actions for addressing the root causes of inequalities and exclusion. As such, they are tested by the benchmarks the template sets for 'transformative' actions and for their 'effectiveness'.



At each level, the research methodology template ensures that the focus is directed at ‘fixing institutions’ (not women) and enquires about the dynamics of power behind unequal outcomes from an intersectional and decolonial perspective. To test the **effectiveness of TEA**, the approach relies on Scott’s theory of institutional change. The three main pillars - regulative, normative and cultural-cognitive – underlying this theory, connect to RE-WIRING’s institutional, experiential and symbolical starting points in the following way.



1. **From the institutional/regulative dimension**, a comprehensive approach to gender equality must address the deep structures of inequality, decolonize ingrained institutional practices and adopt a transformative approach that recognizes structural intersectionality and the power dynamics at play. This implies actively challenging stereotypes, subverting power hierarchies and moving towards institutional and legal changes that promote gender equality in all its dimensions.
2. **From the experiential/normative dimension**, convince those who are unmotivated for change or resistant (e.g., men) through storytelling or behavioural and systemic interventions, such as blind recruitment, diverse hiring panels, gender-neutral language, flexible working policies, and setting up metrics that reward workers for engaging in activities that promote women and diversity.

3. **From the symbolic/cultural-cognitive dimension**, question the cultural and media representations that maintain dominant Eurocentric, capitalist and heteropatriarchal ideologies. To effectively transform gender representation, it is crucial to question who controls and benefits from these narratives and how they reinforce or challenge existing global power structures, promoting a more inclusive and equitable representation in the media.

To **effectively transform** gender roles and overcome gender power hierarchies, it is crucial to address not only the visible symptoms but also the root causes within the structures. Complementary to the Transformative Checklist, the template provides a list of **recommendations** ensuring that transformative equality measures, approaches, and practices are **effective in real life**. To unleash real transformation, the recommendations highlight the importance of building a change through integrated multi-level strategies and intersectional coalitions, specifically involving civil society organizations. Acknowledging that change involves dismantling privileges, effective, transformative actions should foresee and mitigate resistance at different levels. This leads us to the following **RE-WIRING Implementation strategy**:

- **Address the cause, not just the manifestations.** Reform both laws and attitudes that perpetuate gender inequality.
- **Ethical practices in research design, data collection and processing** (e.g. gender is a spectrum, human agency, language, avoiding imperialist and colonialist practices, open science practices).
- **Look for changes that benefit all.** Taking intersectionality seriously, but also considering the logics of coloniality and the coloniality of power.
- **Empower women and girls:** Promote their active participation at all levels and strengthen grassroots organisations.
- **Involve men and boys:** Encourage their role as partners in promoting gender equality. Men and boys need to be sensitized and encouraged to assume their role in dismantling patriarchal systems and actively engaging in promoting gender equality.
- **Build an integrated strategy and broad alliances of public and private stakeholders committed to transformative change and gender mainstreaming.** Stakeholder alliances across the public sphere, from employers and unions to elected officials, legislators and community leaders.
- Build **intersectional coalitions** (e.g., LGBTIQ+), understood as promoting collaboration and alliance behaviours among disadvantaged groups.
- Being **sensitive to the local national and cultural context**.
- **Preventing and mitigating resistance and backlash:** Addressing opposition with empathy, dialogue and examples of success to foster lasting change.

The questions and recommendations constituting the RE-WIRING TEA research methodology template are supported by theoretical findings from the explanatory background (**Part B of this**

paper). A selection of the most prominent theoretical, policy-making, and action-oriented approaches to transforming existing gendered power hierarchies is presented.

Beyond the RE-WIRING project members, the research methodology template will be further developed and adjusted to be a useful tool for the broader academic community, policymakers, and other public and private stakeholders (e.g., NGOs and companies) who are keen to develop and adopt a transformative approach to address gender inequalities. It provides as such also the starting point for the development of the RE-WIRING TEA Handbook on Mainstreaming an Intersectional Transformative Equality Approach in Africa and Europe, the key deliverable at the end of the RE-WIRING project (D.8.2).

Concluding, Deliverable D1.3 is an effort to develop a common framework of understanding and a shared methodology to be used in all the WPs that make up the RE-WIRING project to change institutions (not women) by reshaping gendered power hierarchies. It must be transformative, effective and overcome resistance.

## List of abbreviations

BMT – Behaviour Modeling Training

CEDAW – The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

CPR – Confronting Prejudiced Responses

EIGE – European Institute for Gender Equality

GAD - gender and development

GECT – Gender Equality Continuum Tool

GEPP - Gender Equality Policy in Practice Approach

LGBTQIA+ – Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual and other identities

OECD – the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

SDG – Sustainable Development Goals

SIGI – Social Institutions and Gender Index Report

TEA – Transformative Equality Approach

UN – United Nations

UN Women – the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

WEIRD – Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich, Democratic



## 1. Introduction

Deliverable D.1.1 constituted the first step in developing the overarching conceptual and methodological framework of the RE-WIRING Transformative Equality Approach (TEA) for the research in all the work packages.<sup>1</sup> In addition, deliverable D.1.2 incorporated an assessment of the ethical implications for research on gendered hierarchies of power, addressing scientific-methodological debates and discussing critical practices for addressing them.<sup>2</sup> Both review papers have laid the theoretical and conceptual groundwork for the RE-WIRING TEA. This paper represents the next step of developing RE-WIRING's Transformative Equality Approach into a research methodology template that guides the research in the different work packages. These three working papers have thus to be read and considered in conjunction.

This paper builds upon the **common starting points** that underlie the overall RE-WIRING project and all its work packages, as detailed in deliverables D.1.1 and D.1.2. D.1.1 focused on constructing a taxonomy of concepts that capture the various dimensions of gendered power hierarchies, whose understanding is necessary to bring about transformative and effective change. D.1.2 was a review of relevant ethical issues in the context of research on gender power hierarchies. Considering the standard guidelines to which gender research must adhere, this deliverable discusses scientific debates in law, psychology, sociology, or media sciences. These starting points are:

- a. Gendered - intersectional - power hierarchies are engrained in the 'wires' of all institutions;
- b. Gendered - intersectional - power systems, reflected in (white, able, propertied) male privileges and the standards developed and maintained by men, lead to systemic and structural (institutional and social) inequalities and discrimination, which result in symbolic and material imbalances and sustain gender stereotyping and biases. Only an interdisciplinary and contextual approach can effectively tackle such dynamics;
- c. A transformative approach should be geared towards addressing root causes of gender inequalities and gendered – intersectional - power hierarchies, and thus towards fixing the institutions, and mechanisms that create/sustain gender inequalities and hierarchies, and not towards fixing women.
- d. The research process focused on gendered power hierarchies (e.g., data collection, data analysis or results discussion) has to follow a transformative approach and thus must be

---

<sup>1</sup> A Review of Concepts of Gendered Power Hierarchies and their Taxonomy, RE-WIRING Deliverable Report 1.1, 30 September 2023, available at [https://re-wiring.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/A-Review-of-Concepts-of-Gendered-Power-Hierarchies-and-their-Taxonomy.300923\\_compressed.pdf](https://re-wiring.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/A-Review-of-Concepts-of-Gendered-Power-Hierarchies-and-their-Taxonomy.300923_compressed.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> The ethics of doing research on gendered power hierarchies, RE-WIRING Deliverable Report, February 2024.

guided by an ethical approach that avoids androcentric, binary, and colonial biases in investigation while increasing its transparency and scientific standards.

The **main aim** of the project is to develop an approach and methodology that leads institutions to 'rewire' themselves towards a transformative equality approach (TEA) that allows for effective inclusion, representation, and empowerment for girls and women.

With a view to the development of the RE-WIRING TEA, all its work packages share the following **research questions**:

1. What are current gendered power hierarchies/gender gaps/gendered laws and policies/root causes of inequalities/gender equality processes and approaches in the field/sector under review?
2. How is knowledge generated, how are these gendered power hierarchies investigated, and how is data processed?
3. How are crises relevant in this context, and what is their impact on these gendered power hierarchies, etc. (elements mentioned under 1), especially in finance, health, and climate?
4. To what extent can remedying approaches/rules/measures/practices be qualified as transformative, fitting the key benchmarks for this?
5. How can their effectiveness be assessed?
6. What are the best approaches and practices towards transformative equality and 'fixing the institutions', and what practical recommendations/toolkits/trainings can we design for that purpose?

Meeting the aim and addressing these common research questions on gendered power hierarchies requires a **common understanding** across all working packages of:

(i) when we qualify certain processes and mechanisms as 'transformative'. This implies the identification of common benchmarks to ascertain the capability of such processes and mechanisms to bring about transformative change. Whether transformative change materializes in practice depends on yet another assessment;

(ii) when we can consider such processes and mechanisms **effective. This requires conceptualizing 'effectiveness' as a key standard and determining** specific benchmarks for its application.

In addition, it requires addressing a common challenge that any initiative seeking effective, transformative change faces both in public and the private realms (individual, institutional/organizational, and societal) and at all levels of representation (education, work, media, and arts, (crisis) decision-making and leadership):

(iii) How can resistance to transformative change, especially due to the fear of losing privileges, be overcome, and how can the TEA be supported, developed, and implemented across all necessary institutions and levels, thereby transforming masculinities?

These three issues constitute the main building blocks of the RE-WIRING TEA, which this paper will develop as a research and methodology template and which will lay the foundations for its key final deliverable, the RE-WIRING Handbook on Mainstreaming an Intersectional Transformative Equality Approach in Africa and Europe (D.8.2).

This report is structured in two parts. Part A contains three sections. Section 2 sets out the three-dimensional foundations and key characteristics of the RE-WIRING TEA, which shape the methodology of the project and the 'transformative equality' benchmarks. Section 3 contains the RE-WIRING TEA Checklist with concrete questions to assess whether the transformative dimensions of the TEA are incorporated in research and action, following three levels of analysis: diagnosis, research, and action. Section 4 provides the benchmarks and a list of recommendations to ensure that transformative equality measures, approaches, and practices are effective in real life. Part B of the report provides an explanatory background on existing transformative equality approaches from its three underlying perspectives, building on the work developed in the previous deliverables (D.1.1 and D.1.2).

## **PART A: The RE-WIRING Transformative Equality Approach**

### **2. Its three-dimensional foundation and key characteristics**

The RE-WIRING Transformative Equality Approach lies at the basis of the methodological and analytical framework of the research in the project. It will enable the development and validation of concrete policy responses and practical tools targeted at societal norms, institutional structures, and cultural beliefs that impact an individual's experience.

As was posited in the RE-WIRING project proposal, in recent years, there has been a shift towards the development of transformative equality approaches to enhance gender equality and girls' and women's empowerment at the legal level (CEDAW) and in scientific research. In essence, such approaches go beyond formal and substantive equality by seeking to overcome gender biases and stereotypes and dominant institutional patterns and codes that obstruct girls' and women's equality,

inclusion, participation, representation, and empowerment.<sup>3</sup> They are thus geared towards the transformation of gendered, gender-blind, gender-neutral, gender-exploitative, and gender binarism institutions, making them sensitive and responsive to the deeply entrenched and interlocking factors that perpetuate gender inequalities and promote harmful stereotypes about women and men (e.g. 'men take charge, women take care').<sup>4</sup>

To date, however, most gender equality approaches are mono-disciplinary in terms of their theoretical and legal development, policy design, practical institutional implementation, and delivery of the desired effects. The RE-WIRING TEA, therefore, adds to the state of the art first of all by conceptualizing gendered power hierarchies through a sophisticated and robust multidisciplinary theoretical and conceptual framework for bringing about transformative equality and enabling the development of new tools that can contribute to its progressive and more effective implementation.

This approach is thus built on a three-dimensional framework targeting effective transformation at the institutional, experiential, and symbolical levels:

- **Institutional:** What are the responses to inequality and exclusion on the institutional level, particularly in laws and policies, including in (international, regional and national) human rights law?
- **Experiential:** How do these laws and policies work out in practice? How do women and girls and (non) dominant group members experience the many forms of inequality, oppression, and sexism in the context of social institutions such as the workplace, enterprises, educational settings, the family, etc., and how do they experience institutional measures aimed at correcting these inequalities?
- **Symbolical:** How are women, girls, and (non)dominant groups and their societal roles represented in the linguistic, narrative, and visual structures that shape society?

Furthermore, the RE-WIRING TEA builds on six other key anchoring and defining elements. To bring about effective, transformative change across Europe, South Africa and beyond, the approach needs to secure:

- (i) an **intersectional perspective**;
- (ii) a **decolonial perspective**;
- (iii) **cross-cultural relevance and applicability**;

---

<sup>3</sup> See in more detail on this the approaches and explanations provided in Part B.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. See also D.2.2. on gendered law- and policymaking.

- (iv) a **co-creation approach** and engagement with relevant stakeholders;
- (v) **crises-robustness**;
- (vi) **human agency**.



**Figure 1.** RE-WIRING’s three dimensions and anchoring elements of its Transformative Equality Approach

The RE-WIRING TEA, thus, aims at **identifying structural inequality and gendered hierarchies** and to propose solutions that **might revert them**. Structural inequality is inherently a complex phenomenon, requiring an intersectional analysis to understand the interplay between the different axes of oppression and how relative positions of disadvantage and privilege are created and experienced. As part of this interplay of axes of oppression, but with a particular role when it comes to knowledge production, RE-WIRING TEA requires a **decolonial challenge** of hierarchical legacies deeply embedded in institutions, cultures, and ideologies, which select and exclude, and impede efforts towards broader transformation and equality across country and continent borders. It equally includes the untangling of how binary logics, such as observed in gender dynamics, depend on existing and adaptive axes of power for legitimacy. Our approach, therefore, seeks to develop innovative solutions that allow us to re-imagine gender and the human in ways that destabilize existing binary logics of coloniality.

RE-WIRING takes a **human agency** perspective, meaning that we do not approach girls and women from different backgrounds as disadvantaged because they lack something or as ‘vulnerable’ and (merely) ‘victims’ requiring protection. Instead, we start with the notion that all humans are vulnerable

and (at times) lack power, but that all humans also have agency and power to bring about change.<sup>5</sup> In other words, **in line with a structural intersectional approach**, we do not focus on vulnerability, but look at the structures and dynamics that put people in a position of vulnerability, critically reflecting on the fundamental structures and processes that keep people in privileged or subordinated positions, and what avenues and (potential) mechanisms (can) exist for change. Importantly, our analysis is thus not centered solely on the nondominant or underprivileged groups themselves. Still, we very much **focus on the people, institutions, and processes that maintain existing power structures**, who profit therefrom, and how this can be changed institutionally, experientially, and symbolically. So, instead of directing our analyses towards lack of power, we look at how the power of nondominant groups is neutralized or disabled, by which institutions, processes, and actors, as well as what conditions and actions allow (re-)empowerment to the benefit of those groups. Therefore, we take it that it is not the ‘women that need fixing,’ but the institutions and that transformative equality, change, and women empowerment require allyship with agency and emancipation by all humans alike, including men.

This combined **multidisciplinary and contextual approach** enables more in-depth identification of the root causes of gender-based and intersectional social inequalities in differing contexts and the gaps resulting from these in political, socio-economic, and cultural domains. But it also works to structurally and intrinsically stimulate institutions to change their organizational gender-neutral/blind/exploitative logic, behavior, and interactions, as well as cultural symbols and narratives, into gender-transformative ones and to eradicate harmful gender norms and systemic forms of discrimination and exclusion.

Finally, our TEA **cross-cultural lens** enables us to move beyond Western-centric and WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich, and Democratic) perspectives and to engage with diverse cultural contexts, practices, and knowledge. The concepts presented in this paper were seen to apply to different cultural contexts. Considering the cultural nuances and specificities of different societies or communities, a culturally sensitive framework allows for developing gender transformative strategies that are contextually relevant, respectful of diverse traditions, and inclusive of marginalised voices. In addition, a culturally sensitive conceptual framework builds a foundation for working collaboratively with people from affected societies to develop the most suitable strategies to combat the nature of gender inequalities in that specific cultural context.

---

<sup>5</sup> Martha A Fineman, ‘Vulnerability and Social Justice’ (2019) 53 Val. U. L. Rev. 341.

### 3. The RE-WIRING Transformative Checklist

To ensure that our research for the RE-WIRING work packages, as well as the deliverables, outputs, and proposals produced by the Consortium, aim at and address the issues that might transform gendered-intersectional power hierarchies, RE-WIRING members will be guided in their work by the following questions at the three distinctive levels of acknowledgment and diagnosis (A), gaps (B), and action (C).

#### A. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT and DIAGNOSIS

Some problems need to be acknowledged and named before we can address them. RE-WIRING TEA starts from the **identification and acknowledgment of structural inequality and gendered dynamics of hierarchical power** by exploring the following questions:

1. On acknowledging the **existence of structural inequality and gendered power hierarchies**, is the situation we are examining recognised as a problem in and of itself or as an instance of a broader system of inequality? What elements typically associated with structural inequality can we detect in our observation of girls' and women's exclusion and underrepresentation? Can we find hierarchies (watch out for binary representations),<sup>6</sup> gendered roles or stereotypes, fixed elements that are considered natural or objective, or otherwise left out of the action of the law/policies/society (on the ground of tradition or culture, for example)? For example, is the under-representation of women in public positions considered as a problem in itself (that we need to solve by raising the numbers) or is it recognised as the symptom / a manifestation of a broader phenomenon?
2. When we research and dive into mapping out **the dynamics of hierarchical power** behind the gendered manifestations we identify (the statistical data, the image in the advertisement, the female scientists that are not mentioned in textbooks), the RE-WIRING TEA requires that we check:

---

<sup>6</sup> Ways of representing an issue in binary terms (male breadwinner/female housekeeper; market/family; public/private, etc.) usually indicate that there are some power hierarchies in place. As many other binary representations, which form the basis for stereotypes.

- How do we measure the constructs associated with gendered power hierarchies through *qualitative or quantitative methods*? *What indicators* are we selecting, and what are our methodological choices' implications for capturing these hierarchies?
  - *What power systems/dynamics* are at play, how do they intersect, and how may these be influenced by colonial constructs of knowledge, power, and being?<sup>7</sup>
  - *Are we culturally sensitive and embracing the variety of cultural factors at play in a given national context*, e.g., gender equality progress, human development, and local cultural values?
  - Are we ensuring that our research practices do *not reproduce extractivism* (selecting a study community and collecting data solely to advance one's own scientific or professional goals, without benefiting the community) *or ethical dumping* (applying practices that would be ethically questionable in Europe to other low-income countries where there may be a lack of a strong legal framework and mechanisms for ethical compliance)?
  - How are *crises* (specifically in the domains of climate, health, finance) relevant in these power systems/dynamics?
3. Is our attempt at mapping structural inequality behind the identified gendered manifestations an enterprise considered from a **single or multiple perspective**? Which views, advantaged, disadvantaged, or both, are included in our analysis? Are we listening to the experience and knowledge of relevant stakeholders and beneficiaries? Are we considering intersectionality and decolonial perspectives when looking out for stakeholders and beneficiaries?
4. Taking into account the complex gendered nature of unequal power structures, do we acknowledge and recognize gender inequality anchored in a binary, heteronormative, and cisnormative reality? In other words, do we consider the **diverse realities of women** when addressing the transformation of power structures in our analysis?

---

<sup>7</sup> Together they help us target the three dimensions; institutional, experiential and symbolic.



## B. GAPS

Structural inequality is a complex, multifaceted phenomenon with interconnected dimensions. RE-WIRING TEA is committed to charting this phenomenon and identifying **lacunae or shortcomings in our knowledge**.

5. Does our observation of a gendered manifestation show a broader picture of structural inequality (or some dimension of it)? Can it be well established and defined, or is there a **lack of data** that prevents its proper and full understanding? For example, we know that the gender pay gap is a compound inequality phenomenon, but how can we delimit how much of it is due to salary discrimination, job / sector segregation, lack of promotion, internalized stereotypes, or the care gap?
6. Does the **lack of data** (and the possibility of knowing about structural power dynamics) **affect different groups differently**? To explain, the situation of some groups may be more 'undocumented' than others, and such lack of knowledge may not only make the equality gap invisible but may also bring improper diagnosis, erroneous decision-making, etc.
7. Do we use measures or data from third parties that have treated gender in a way that does not represent your diversity of expression (e.g., gender as a continuum or a static gender based on binarism) or involve **unethical** research practices?
8. Considering **existing indicators of gender and structural inequalities** at national and institutional levels (e.g., Global Gender Gap Index, Gender Equality Index; Economic GINI index), do these indexes accurately **capture the roots of such inequalities from the three-dimensional perspective of the RE-WIRING TEA and its other key characteristics** (see section 2)? For example, do these indicators capture all relevant dimensions of the inequality? Are there inherent (e.g. cultural, colonial) biases in the selection of measurement of these indicators that may distort our understanding of the roots of inequality? Should we be aware that these indicators may be affected by other individual variables (e.g., socio-educational level, attitudes, beliefs, and ideologies)? Are they focused on women as a homogeneous group, or do they include an intersectional perspective?

9. Given that binary logics of gender and neocolonial power mutually support and constitute each other, **how can non-western and indigenous knowledge systems reveal gaps and inconsistencies** in dominant representations and master narratives on gender?

### C. ACTION

To be clear, the RE-WIRING TEA is intended to address gendered—intersectional—power hierarchies and combat structural inequality and exclusion. It is therefore focused on 'fixing the institutions'. The action it proposes should, therefore, contribute to 're-wiring' institutions towards a transformative equality approach and not be geared towards “fixing the women.”

10. Are our proposals/recommendations/intervention tools [thereinafter, our action] directed adequately to the **source of the problem** in the gendered manifestation and the institutions/actors involved? In particular, as structural conditions give power in the social hierarchy (e.g., being a man, being a cis person, a heterosexual person, a white person, or a rich person):

- Do our actions target the individuals who hold power in the hierarchy?
- Do our actions contribute to overcoming resistance and encouraging the revision of the privilege of those who can be agents of change, stimulating them to hold an ally role?
- Do our actions lead to unintentional, negative outcomes (e.g., perpetuating gender stereotypes or hierarchies)?
- Are the powerful groups that engage in these actions concerned about structural inequality, or can they be involved or committed to transforming it?

11. Does the action lead to **unintentional or negative outcomes**? In particular, when our action is directed towards women and girls, does it contemplate **the risks of reinforcing gendered power hierarchies** and/or structural inequality dynamics (through stereotyping or ghettoization). If those risks exist, does our action include a risk assessment and mitigation strategies?

12. When our action goes beyond the gendered manifestation itself and seeks to **remedy its root causes of structural inequality**:

- Does it **identify specific power nodes/dynamics** and their relationship with the gendered manifestation?

- Are the **requirements of intersectionality, cultural sensitivity, decoloniality, and crises-robustness** met?

Can our actions **generate group coalitions** to address struggles that go beyond the gender grievance at hand? Does our action rely on **co-creation** and meet (also) the interests of identified and/or participating stakeholders?

13. Our ethical research practices give research and stakeholder participants a voice, empowering them so that research is **not extractivist or exploitative** but representative and provides opportunities and a platform for transforming thinking at institutional, experiential, and symbolic levels.

## 4. When transformative is 'effective': the RE-WIRING testing framework and recommendations

To assess the effectiveness of any transformative equality approach, one needs to be clear on how 'effectiveness' is understood and against what benchmarks or standards it is evaluated. In the following sections, we establish the RE-WIRING effectiveness assessment framework (section 4.1), followed by recommendations of key aspects to make the RE-WIRING TEA truly effective (section 4.2).

### 4.1 The RE-WIRING effectiveness testing framework

RE-WIRING's three-dimensional interdisciplinary approach, as outlined in section 2 fits in very much with **institutional change theory** as developed by Scott, who posits that to bring about real organisational change three pillars that underpin institutions need to be addressed since "Institutions comprise **regulative, normative and cultural-cognitive elements** that, together with associated activities and resources, provide stability and meaning to social life".<sup>8</sup>

To explain, in an instrumental sense, the regulative pillar of institutions constrains and regularises behaviour and refers to rule-setting, monitoring and enforcement/sanctioning activities and mechanisms. The normative pillar underscores that there is not only a logic of 'instrumentality' that

---

<sup>8</sup> Scott W. R., *Institutions and Organizations. Ideas, Interests and Identities* (Sage Publications, 2014), p. 56.

underpins institutions, but also a logic of 'appropriateness' that rests on certain values and norms. These introduce a prescriptive, evaluative and obligatory dimension into social life. So, the emphasis is here on how institutions should be and behave from a value perspective. Fundamental, human rights have been enshrined in strong international (UN), regional (e.g. EU, Council of Europe) and national normative frameworks (constitutions as well as specific laws), which set norms and standards for equality and non-discrimination.<sup>9</sup> The cultural-cognitive pillar refers to "the shared conceptions that constitute the nature of social reality and create the frames through which meaning is made."<sup>10</sup> Every human institution is seen as a kind of sedimentation or crystallisation of meanings and its interpretive, internal processes are shaped by external cultural frameworks. Beyond that, there is also a recognition that symbolic processes work to construct social reality, including the definition of the nature and properties of social actors and of social actions.<sup>11</sup>

As such, these pillars connect very well to RE-WIRING's three-dimensional multidisciplinary approach. The regulative pillar links very much with the institutional level of inquiry of the RE-WIRING project, which focuses foremost on the laws and policies put into place to bring about gender equality, representation, inclusion and empowerment. The normative pillar as described ties in not only with that institutional level but foremost with RE-WIRING's experiential level of analysis for bringing about institutional change in practice. The cultural-cognitive level goes hand in hand with the symbolical dimension of our approach, geared towards **changing the "software of the mind"**.<sup>12</sup> As such, the RE-WIRING TEA covers all aspects that are considered crucial for bringing about institutional change.

The RE-WIRING TEA also aligns well with **compliance and effectiveness theory**. In its simplest form, effectiveness has been described as "the quality of being able to bring about an effect".<sup>13</sup> But any effectiveness assessment will be geared towards establishing a *qualified or particular intended*

---

<sup>9</sup> See in more detail on this D.1.1 The Taxonomy of Concepts. Such normative frameworks include amongst others CEDAW, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Istanbul Convention, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU and the European Convention on Human Rights.

<sup>10</sup> Scott W.R., *Institutions and Organizations. Ideas, Interests and Identities* (Sage Publications, 2014), p. 67.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.

<sup>13</sup> Zerrin Savaşan, *Paris Climate Agreement: A Deal for Better Compliance? Lessons Learned from the Compliance Mechanisms of the Kyoto and Montreal Protocols* (Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2019) p. 18.

effect. Mitchell has relied on the distinction of three indicators for effectiveness: outputs, outcomes and impacts:<sup>14</sup>

- **Outputs** relate to laws and regulations that states adopt to implement and transform national law;
- **Impacts** relate to policy change, such as securing more environmental quality or equality;
- **Outcomes** are geared towards bringing about behavioural change in individuals and groups.

Mitchell underlines that outputs in themselves are not enough to induce outcomes or impacts, to bring about both the desired behavioural as well as policy change.<sup>15</sup> The outputs level connects mostly with the institutional dimension and regulative pillar as discussed above; the impacts level mostly to the institutional and experiential dimensions and regulative/normative pillars of institutional change; and the outcomes level mostly to the symbolical dimension and normative and cultural-cognitive pillars.

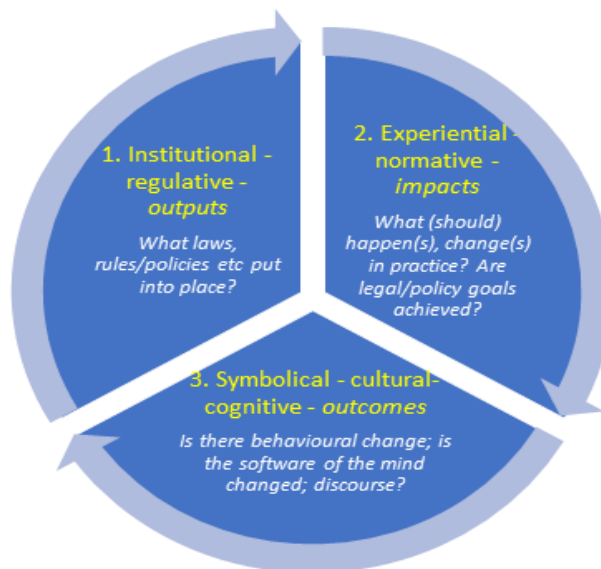
Drawing on these approaches, we propose a **testing framework for the effectiveness of the three-dimensional RE-WIRING TEA** along the following lines and questions:

1. **Institutional – regulative – output:** What type(s) of rule, measure, approach, practice is/are at issue? What rights and obligations do they establish? By whom are they set: public, private, social partners? Are they created with the voices/participation of girls and women? Are they legally binding, non-binding? What is the level of the legal implementation, compliance, monitoring and enforcement?
2. **Experiential – normative – impacts:** What are the normative goals and values underlying the institutional measures, laws, policies etc. that should be achieved? Are they gender-exploitative, -blind, -neutral, -sensitive, -transformative? Do they seek to mainstream gender equality in all policy fields? What are identifiable effects in terms of realizing policy change and progress in the field that can be traced back to the rule, measure, approach, practice at issue? What are obstacles; why do they work, why not? What is necessary to make them work? Do they have unintended effects that negatively impact on girls' and women's inclusion, representation and empowerment?
3. **Experiential/Symbolical – cultural-cognitive – outcomes:** Is there any behavioural, organizational or social change on the part of the institutions/actors involved, that can be

<sup>14</sup> Ronald B. Mitchell, Compliance theory: compliance, effectiveness, and behaviour change in international environmental law, in: Daniel Bodansky, Jutta Brunnée and Ellen Hey (eds.), *Oxford handbook of international environmental law*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, pp. 893-921.

<sup>15</sup> Zerrin Savaşan, Paris Climate Agreement: a deal for better compliance?, (Cham: Springer 2019), p. 20.

considered a demonstration of change of ‘the software of the mind’ towards realising more gender equality and tackling gender stereotyping and biases as root causes of structural and institutional discrimination and exclusion? For instance, are there any awareness raising or publicity changes in terminology/discourse/narrative that suggest change and evolution towards transformative equality?



## 4.2 The RE-WIRING implementation strategy

Building on the RE-WIRING’s taxonomy of concepts, the theoretical and practical insights in this report, including the above testing framework and its Part B, as well as other project deliverables,<sup>16</sup> we establish in this section the RE-WIRING implementation strategy. It comprises a number of connected recommendations, as key building blocks for ensuring that transformative research and action are effective in the light of the testing framework outlined here above.

<sup>16</sup> Apart from D.1.1 and D.1.2, these include also the deliverables of the other work packages. For an overview, see the RE-WIRING website: <https://re-wiring.eu>

## Recommendations for the effective implementation of the RE-WIRING TEA:

### 1. Treat the cause, and not (only) its manifestations

Laws, policies, programmes and interventions in any sector (e.g. employment, education, media, health, etc.) geared towards transforming gender roles should aim at **changing the structures and mechanisms as well as the cultures and attitudes within institutions that perpetuate gendered power hierarchies, particularly the public/private division, the gender ‘gaps’, and economic inequality.**

### 2. Research design, data collection and evaluation of effectiveness

Improve diagnosis of gender gaps and knowledge through disaggregated and coordinated data collection, and collaborative research on effective interventions, actions, and policies, including stakeholders.

In addition, the **ethical practices of research design, data collection as well as data processing** must pass through some of these critical points:

- a. Gender is a spectrum, and categorizing it based on the binary distinction of female and male is, in fact, limiting and not a reflection of everyone’s experiences, especially when gendered power hierarchies are examined in an intersectional way. It is therefore recommended to treat and measure gender (e.g. select your gender/gender identity: men, women, non-binary, other, prefer not to say) as a non-binary construct.
- b. Within this gendered power hierarchy, girls and women are not considered powerless victims. Using a human agency perspective can help to identify leverage points for empowerment, including men. Therefore, it is recommended to incorporate and address the advantaged groups that need to be mobilised.
- c. Language plays an important role in the maintenance of gendered power hierarchies. It is recommended for researchers to make deliberate linguistic choices whenever they address participants as well as whenever they communicate about groups or their findings more generally.
- d. Ethical gender research should provide research participants with a voice, empowering participants. It is important to reflect on ethnocentrism and to take non-WEIRD / Global South contexts into account to prevent imperialist and colonialist practices in research.

- e. Ethical considerations also matter for the data itself. A human rights-based approach to data as well as open science practices and compliance with FAIR principles can facilitate ethical handling of data.

**In extension of data collection, it is crucial to engage in monitoring and evaluation** of laws, policies, programmes and interventions in all areas where gender transformative actions are taken (e.g. employment, education, health, etc.), to measure their effectiveness, the degree of change they produce, improvements, etc. **in view of the effectiveness benchmarks** set in section 4.1.

### 3. Strengthen girls' and women's voice, agency and decision-making at all levels, including in civic space and grassroots organisations

Transforming social structure at different levels of action and intervention in the public and private domain (law- and policymaking, business, employment, education, international development, humanitarian crises, etc.) requires empowering women and girls and making their voices heard in a broad range of public and private institutions. It also requires the **fostering of their participation in grassroots organisations**, and strengthening these organisations. Civic space is a key site of political participation, organisations work as gatekeepers, bridging communities and institutions. Often, they provide essential services, addressing gendered inequalities that institutions cannot reach. They are key actors in holding public and private authorities accountable, and in pushing for legal and policy reforms towards gender equality.

### 4. Look for changes that benefit all

Gender equality is the gold benchmark; effective policies, practices, and interventions should aim at improving the situation of **all women and girls**, not only those in a position of relative privilege. This requires not only **taking intersectionality seriously but also taking into account the logic of coloniality and the coloniality of power**. We also need to emphasise that gender equality also benefits men: by showing benefits of gender equality progress for men and hazards to men's physical and mental health when gender equality is not achieved.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> Colette Van Laar, Aster Van Rossum, Natasza Kosakowska-Berezecka, Renata Bongiorno, & Katharina Block, MANDatory - why men need (and are needed for) gender equality progress [2024] *Frontiers in Psychology*, 15. doi:<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1263313>



## 5. Engage men and boys

Gender equality is not a ‘women’s issue’, it is a **shared goal** that requires active participation from all members of society. Relegating the responsibility solely (or, at least, primarily) to women and girls can inadvertently perpetuate gender stereotypes and hinder progress towards transformative equality. **Men and boys need to become aware and stimulated to take up their role in dismantling patriarchal systems and to be actively engaged** in promoting gender equality alongside women and girls. For these reasons, we refer to men who act to improve the group conditions of the unprivileged group, in this case women, as agents of change.<sup>18</sup> A larger body of critical masculinities scholars, embedded in feminist theory, highlight the importance of men being invested in and active agents in gender equality and justice struggles.<sup>19</sup> Arguably, men are as much (or should be), if not more, agents of change as women, given the existing gendered power hierarchies that see more men than women occupying positions of power across the public sphere.<sup>20</sup>

We also note that beyond being invested in gender justice efforts as a democratic goal for women’s and girls’ empowerment and inclusion in the face of continued patriarchal power, men and boys also stand to benefit from gender justice. A wide body of scholarship has shown how men and boys are victims of restrictive binary gender roles, and these have consequences for their physical and mental health, and for their engagement at work and at home. As scholars have argued for decades, male stereotypes and what has been termed ‘hegemonic masculinity’ are problematic for men and boys, and strongly associated with risk-taking, ill health, early mortality, amongst many other psychological

---

<sup>18</sup> Helena R M Radke, Maja Kutlaca, Birte Siem, Stephen C Wright and Julia C Becker, ‘Beyond allyship: motivations for advantaged group members to engage in action for disadvantaged groups’ [2020] 24 *Pers Soc Psychol Rev* 291. Cf. OECD, *Engaging men as allies for gender equality and diversity*, OECD Forum, 2020.

<sup>19</sup> See recent Handbook – Lucas Gottzén, Ulf Mellström, & Tamara Shefer (Eds.) *Routledge international handbook of masculinity studies* [2020] Routledge.

<sup>20</sup> Colette Van Laar, Aster Van Rossum, Natasza Kosakowska-Berezecka, Renata Bongiorno, & Katharina Block, *MANDatory - why men need (and are needed for) gender equality progress* [2024] *Frontiers in Psychology*, 15. doi:<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1263313>

and physical risks, as they are for women and girls.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, global studies have flagged the association between more gender equal and less binary societies and the well-being of men.<sup>22</sup>

## 6. Build an integrated strategy and broad alliances of public and private stakeholders engaged with transformative change and mainstreaming equality

An effective transformative strategy should address all levels at which gender inequality presents itself. As such, a coordinated and **integrated strategy across the individual, organisational and societal levels need to be developed**. Such a strategy would make sure to consider changes at both the institutional-regulative level (legal and policy frameworks put in place) as well as at the experiential-normative level (their underlying values) and their impacts and outcomes in practice, including not only the experiential but also the symbolical-cultural cognitive level.

TEA is also only going to be an effective tool of social transformation if it is propagated **by broad alliances of stakeholders across the public sphere, from employers and trade unions to elected officials, law- and policymakers and community leaders. Equally importantly, the vision of a truly gender-equal society and use of tools such as gender impact assessments must become a core component of socio-political platforms that cover the biggest possible part of the socio-political spectrum**. This inclusive approach will ensure that the message of gender equality reaches a wide range of individuals and organisations, fostering a collective understanding and commitment to change. It requires a coordinated and mainstreaming effort where each stakeholder contributes within their competency area. Additionally, these socio-political platforms must prioritise the implementation of policies and initiatives that address gender disparities, such as equal pay and reproductive rights, to create tangible progress towards a more equitable society.

---

<sup>21</sup> see for example Jeff Hearn, *The problems boys and men create, the problems boys and men experience* [2007] In Tamara Shefer, Kopano Ratele, Anna Strebel, Nokuthula Shabalala & Rosemarie Buikema (Eds.), *From boys to men: Social constructions of masculinity in contemporary society* (pp. 13–32). University of Cape Town Press; Kopano Ratele, *Masculinity and male mortality in South Africa* [2008] *African Safety Promotion Journal*, 6(2), 19; Kopano Ratele, *Liberating Masculinities* [2016] Cape Town: HSRC Press.

<sup>22</sup> See for example, EU project by CROME Men in Europe in 2000 to 2003 and Jeff Hearn, & Keith Pringle with members of CROME, *European Perspectives on Men and Masculinities: National and Transnational Approaches* [2006] Palgrave Macmillan; Øystein Gullvåg Holter, "What's in it for men?" Old question, new data [2014] *Men and Masculinities* 17(5) 515. doi: 10.1177/1097184X14558237.

## 7. Build intersectional coalitions

One important contribution of intersectionality is its potential for political coalitions among oppressed groups (rather than competitive victimhood).<sup>23</sup> Intersectional coalitions, understood as the promotion of collaboration and pro-alliance behaviors between disadvantaged groups (e.g., cis-hetero women and LBT+ women), are key components of an effective transformative strategy, as they allow building a platform of common claims and struggles. In the view of radical democracy, transformation should have positive outcomes for *all* the oppressed groups.

## 8. Be sensitive to the local national and cultural context

Another important consideration is to plan actions and programs to be aware and sensitive to the values and needs of the individuals present in different contexts, because they might be of different national and cultural origins and have different attitudes and readiness towards gender equality progress – make sure you involve them in the development of both goals and tools. In addition, adapt your actions and programs to the local context – the countries differ with regard to the content of gender norms, expectations and practices.

## 9. Prevent and mitigate resistance and backlash

Transforming gender roles implies questioning privileges some groups hold. This inevitably leads to resistance and backlash that may occur at **individual, organisational and societal level**.

**All aspects of resistance** need to be **taken into account** and the TEA should involve a **combination of awareness-building** (through open dialogue and awareness campaigns debunking misconceptions around equality measures); **discursive shift promotion, and concrete steps for addressing gender bias**. These initiatives aim not only to counter criticism and backlash, but also to change 'the software of the mind' and to create a lasting impact on institutional practices and contribute to the broader goal of combating structural inequality and exclusion and therewith achieving gender equality. Such steps would not only allow researchers and other relevant actors to investigate the gendered nature of current institutional discourse, but they could also assist institutions in conducting self-inquiries.

---

<sup>23</sup> Arie Nadler, & Nurit Shnabel, *Intergroup reconciliation: Instrumental and socio-emotional processes and the needs-based model* [2015], *Eur Rev Soc Psychol* 26(1), 93.  
doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10463283.2015.1106712>

Ways to do this include:

- (a) acknowledgement and addressing of concerns or resistance with empathy and understanding;**
- (b) creation of fora for open dialogue where individuals can express their apprehensions, providing an opportunity to dispel myths and misconceptions;**
- (c) recognition of efforts to change attitudes and behaviours; and**
- (d) showcasing success stories and empirical evidence.**

## **PART B - Explanatory Background: Existing TEAs and methodologies**

The main components of the RE-WIRING TEA emerging from the analysis of the TEA approaches in different areas of research and action are reviewed and analysed. As it was posited in the RE-WIRING project proposal, in recent years there has been a shift towards the development of transformative equality approaches to enhance gender equality and girls' and women's empowerment at the legal level (CEDAW) and in scientific research. In essence, such approaches go beyond notions of formal and substantive equality by seeking to overcome gender biases and stereotypes and dominant institutional patterns and codes that obstruct girls' and women's equality, inclusion, participation, representation, and empowerment.<sup>3</sup> They are thus geared towards the transformation of gendered, gender-blind, gender-neutral and gender-exploitative<sup>4</sup> institutions, making them sensitive and responsive to the deeply entrenched and interlocking factors that perpetuate gender inequalities and women's disadvantage as well as men's (dis)advantages and stereotyping (e.g. 'men take charge, women take care').

Transformative approaches, thus, go a step further than formal and substantive equality approaches (as explained in D1.1), by seeking to address the root causes of gender inequality, identifying and challenging underlying gender norms and stereotypes, and tackling social beliefs and unequal power structures, bearing in mind the contextual and cultural specificities.

In what follows, main components of the RE-WIRING TEA emerging from the analysis of theoretical transformative equality approaches in the institutional, experiential and symbolical areas of research are reviewed and analysed (section 5.1), as well as in the policymaking domain (section 5.2).

## 5.1 Theoretical approaches

Many of the theoretical contributions to the idea of transformative equality, the understanding of its working and components have been developed in relation to the legal norms that regulate the lives of women and girls. There is a detailed account of those contributions in the RE-WIRING Report: *A Review of Concepts of Gendered Power Hierarchies and their Taxonomy*.<sup>24</sup> Here, we want to distil key components of the idea of transformative equality that will contribute to the RE-WIRING TEA and methodological model.

### A. Institutional dimension: - addressing - underlying constructs

- **Addressing hierarchy: rethinking social identity and role construction, economic redistribution, decolonialism and dismantling the public/private division**

Notwithstanding the difficulty of introducing questions of power in legal analysis and discourse, transformative equality approaches (TEAs) point constantly at power. Equality analysis and interventions aimed at transforming root structures of inequality have shown how gender is established as a difference or distinction, supported by a hierarchical distribution of power, roles and rights/obligations. The distinctions gender roles introduce, for example, are not simply different tasks attributed to men and women, but a differentiated distribution of tasks that determine one's position in society and the corresponding access (or lack thereof) to rights and opportunities, as it is condemned in Article 5 of CEDAW.

In its 2010 definition of gender, the CEDAW Committee makes a clear connection between the socially constructed groups or identities and roles, plus their social and cultural meaning, *and* the hierarchical results of that combination: “gender refers to socially constructed identities, attributes, and roles for women and men, and society’s social and cultural meaning for these biological differences, resulting in hierarchical relationships between women and men and in the distribution of power and rights favouring men and disadvantaging women”.<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> A Review of Concepts of Gendered Power Hierarchies and their Taxonomy. RE-WIRING Report 1.1., 30 September 2023. available at: [https://re-wiring.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/A-Review-of-Concepts-of-Gendered-Power-Hierarchies-and-their-Taxonomy.300923\\_compressed.pdf](https://re-wiring.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/A-Review-of-Concepts-of-Gendered-Power-Hierarchies-and-their-Taxonomy.300923_compressed.pdf)

<sup>25</sup> CEDAW Committee, General recommendation No. 28 on the core obligations of States parties under article 2 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, CEDAW/C/GC/28 (2010) para 5. It also qualifies gender as a “social positioning” of women and men in a hierarchical relationship.

**Hierarchy constitutes social groups in unequal relationships.** TEAs aim at identifying the elements and dynamics that produce and perpetuate hierarchies, and in doing that they move beyond the “mere” redress of oppressed groups’ situation. Redressing oppressed groups’ disadvantage is often achieved without altering the dynamics that created the disadvantage.<sup>26</sup> When looking at “distinctions” and “differences” between women, men and other gender identity groups from a transformative equality approach, it is useful to keep in mind Catharine MacKinnon’s observation: “No question about it, categories and stereotypes and classifications are authentic instruments of inequality. And they are static and hard to move. But they are the ossified outcomes of the dynamic intersection of multiple hierarchies, not the dynamic that creates them. They are there, but they are not the reason they are there.”<sup>27</sup>

Based on the idea of “power over”,<sup>28</sup> Maggy Barrère has proposed the idea of **subdiscrimination** as a way to understand those differentiated treatments (which is what the legal idea of discrimination covers) that, obtaining their meaning in one or various power systems, diminish the social status of certain social groups, reproduce it or prevent it from changing.<sup>29</sup> The concept of subdiscrimination shows that what the law sees as individual litigation cases of discrimination are, in fact, individual manifestations of a broader system of oppression, and allows us to investigate further into the system that attribute meaning to those unequal treatments or conditions, and the structures and dynamics that diminish, reproduce or prevent from changing the status of oppressed groups.

Some hierarchical divisions, such as the public/private one, have been highlighted as particularly relevant in the fight against structural inequality women suffer from. **Transformative constitutional approaches** have shown how **these hierarchical divisions affect both material and immaterial dimensions of life.** Transformative constitutionalism is a concept that has been developed in legal doctrine with two different understandings. The first sees the potential of the Constitution in transforming economic inequality and defending redistributive policies. The second reading of the

---

<sup>26</sup> And sometimes, even perpetuating it. For example, part-time work discrimination as indirect sex-discrimination reinforced the idea that women are responsible for care duties and that part-time work was a conciliation strategy for women instead of a “ghetto” labour contract responsible for a large part of the gender pay and pension gaps. Also, the CEDAW Committee has warned that the category of indirect discrimination can exacerbate existing inequalities, if it “fails to recognize structural and historical patterns of discrimination and unequal power relationships between women and men”, CEDAW Committee, General recommendation no. 28 (n 15) para 16.

<sup>27</sup> Catharine A MacKinnon, ‘Intersectionality as Method: A Note’ (2013) 38 Signs 1019, 1023.

<sup>28</sup> Jo Rowlands, *Questioning Empowerment. Working with Women in Honduras* (Oxfam 1997).

<sup>29</sup> María Ángeles (Maggy) Barrère, *El Derecho Antidiscriminatorio y sus límites. Especial referencia a la perspectiva iusfeminista* (Grijley 2014).

concept focuses on the dismantling of the sexual division of labour and the public/private division. Both approaches are particularly relevant to address gendered power hierarchies, from a structural, intersectional and decolonial perspective.

In South Africa, transformative constitutionalism points at the potential for **enabling social and economic change through the recognition of socio-economic rights at constitutional level** (e.g., access to adequate housing, health care services, sufficient food and water, and social security). Karl Klare defined the concept as “a long-term project of constitutional enactment, interpretation, and enforcement committed (not in isolation, of course, but in a historical context of conducive political developments) to transforming a country’s political and social institutions and power relationships in a democratic, participatory, and egalitarian direction”.<sup>30</sup>

In few judgements,<sup>31</sup> the South African Constitutional Court has shown the path towards the recognition of socio-economic rights, establishing that the state has a duty to ensure “the basic necessities of life [be] provided to all”, to secure dignity of people living in poverty.<sup>32</sup> This jurisprudence had significant distributive consequences, leading to the expansion of social rights, lowering prices for medicines, and ensuring protection in case of eviction.<sup>33</sup>

However, this case law has been limited so far, as is the role of courts. The Constitution lays the foundation for more radical redistributive outcomes, especially regarding measures to “address inequality at the top end threshold” (e.g. wealth tax, regulation of profits, etc.). On the other hand, a pre-requisite for this change is the political choice to adopt transformative policies, in a context constrained by the privatised nature of the economy and the “imperatives of a market driven agenda”.<sup>34</sup>

Building on this literature, Ruth Rubio-Marín has developed a different interpretation of transformative constitutionalism more focused on **dismantling the public-private division and bringing issues**

---

<sup>30</sup> Karl Klare, ‘Legal Culture and Transformative Constitutionalism’ (1998) South African Journal of Human Rights 146.

<sup>31</sup> Jaftha v Schoeman and Others 2005 (1) BCLR 78 (CC); Mazibuko v City of Johannesburg [2013] ZACC 28; Khosa v Minister of Social Development [2004] ZACC 11; City of Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality v Blue Moonlight Properties 39 (Pty) Ltd [2011] ZACC 33; Government of the Republic of South Africa v Grootboom 2000 (11) BCLR 1169.

<sup>32</sup> Government of the Republic of South Africa v Grootboom 2000 (11) BCLR 1169.

<sup>33</sup> Catherine Albertyn, ‘(in)equality in the South African Constitution’ (2019) 36 Development Southern Africa 762.

<sup>34</sup> Penelope Andrews, ‘Imagine All the Women: Power, Gender and the Transformative Possibilities of the South African Constitution’ in Muno Ndalo and Margaret Grieco (eds.), *Power, Gender and Social Change in Africa* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing 2009).

**belonging to the private sphere under constitutional scrutiny.**<sup>35</sup> It is differentiated from exclusionary, inclusive, and participatory constitutionalism because it addresses the roots of the constitutional gender order by “taking the domestic sphere and the types of activities centrally associated with it as a relevant domain of citizenship contribution and by defending the need to fully expand the constitutional ethos of democratic equality and individual autonomy to the various ‘private spheres’, ultimately contributing to the full disestablishment of gender roles and fixed gender identities and concept”.<sup>36</sup> The author identifies three key issues concerning the private sphere that have constitutional relevance: women’s right to life that is free of violence (also in the private sphere) as a constitutional concern, the affirmation of women’s sexual and reproductive autonomy, and of care and caring as a citizen contribution in all its forms.

Taking a **decolonial perspective**, it must be understood that decolonization means more than the material and political end to colonial rule. Decolonial scholars of African and Latin American origins argue that colonial logics and the coloniality of gender persist given continued dehumanization perpetuated by racial capitalism. Decolonial scholars within this perspective posit that although colonialism was achieved through military conquest and a dictatorial political system, the colonial agenda was mainly sustained through the domination of the mind and imagination through epistemological colonisation<sup>37</sup> and cultural imperialism.<sup>38</sup> Even after the political independence of colonised states, institutions such as the media, universities, churches and the market have remained sites that continue to reproduce and reinforce western frames of meaning and the subjugation of those othered in a binary system, such as people of colour, women, children, etc. Anibal Quijano coined the term *coloniality* to capture this condition in which colonial domination persists long after the attainment of colonial independence.<sup>39</sup> **Coloniality is maintained in three ways: the coloniality of power, the coloniality of knowledge and the coloniality of being.**<sup>40</sup>

The coloniality of power describes the structure of the current geopolitical order configured into racially hierarchised power structures established during colonial rule.<sup>41</sup> Power, which can be seen as the ability to control the actions of others, is used to propel a particular social order, through the

---

<sup>35</sup> Ruth Rubio-Marín, *Global Gender Constitutionalism and Women’s Citizenship* (CUP 2022) 212.

<sup>36</sup> Rubio-Marín, *Global Gender Constitutionalism* (n 25) 19.

<sup>37</sup> Maria T. Lugones, ‘The Coloniality of Gender’ in Wendy Harcourt. (ed), *The Palgrave Handbook of Gender and Development* (Palgrave Macmillan 2016).

<sup>38</sup> Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Empire, Global Coloniality and African Subjectivity* (Berghahn Books 2013); Walter D. Mignolo, ‘Delinking’. 2007 21(2-3) *Cultural Studies*, 449.

<sup>39</sup> Anibal Quijano, ‘Coloniality of Power and Social Classification’ (2000) 6(2) *Journal of World Systems* 342.

<sup>40</sup> Ramón Grosfoguel, R, ‘The epistemic decolonial turn’ (2007) 21(2-3) *Cultural Studies* 211.

<sup>41</sup> Anibal Quijano, ‘Coloniality of Power and Social Classification’ (2000) 6(2) *Journal of World Systems* 342.



silencing of the ‘other’.<sup>42</sup> The coloniality of knowledge critiques the dominance of "Western" knowledge production, questioning who creates knowledge and for what purpose and how this knowledge empowers certain groups of people. Finally, the coloniality of being emphasises the idea that coloniality persists in areas of power, knowledge and economy, *and* in the way colonised people experience daily life, and in the overall perception of being.<sup>43</sup> These three concepts, working together, illustrate the lasting impact of colonialism on power structures, knowledge production, and the very being of those colonised.

Decolonial theory has been drawn on by feminist scholars to acknowledge the contextual and historical framework of gender. They have increasingly pointed out how eurowestern logics such as the cartesian divide (mind-body, rationality-emotions, culture-nature, man-woman, etc) continue to shape mainstream knowledge, which erases a wide range of knowledge and is implicated in extractivist research that bolsters patterns of domination globally and locally, not to mention in environmental exploitative practices that are implicated in climate change and other environmental damages and challenges. Gender binaries are entangled with coloniality from the slave to capitalist economies in which colonial power is extended in and through gender binaries including the policing of sexualities and heteronormativity as key components of the colonial project.<sup>44</sup> Notably in many African contexts, there are no terms for gender. As Oyèrónkẹ Oyèwùmí has pointed out, gender was ‘invented’ by colonization in her argument that **modern Yoruba gender divides are a Western colonial construct**.<sup>45</sup> Notwithstanding contestations, the intersectional and situated understanding of gender that decolonial feminism allows is an important framework for our work which involves “reversing, displacing, and seizing of the apparatus of value coding”<sup>46</sup> to redefine and reimagine what things mean and who we are.

- **Structural Intersectionality**

The concept of 'intersectionality' was first introduced by Crenshaw as a framework to understand the complex interplay of race and gender contributing to the unique challenges faced by African

---

<sup>42</sup> Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (Oxford University Press 2007).

<sup>43</sup> Nelson Maldonado-Torres, ‘On the Coloniality of Being’ (2007) 21 (2/3) *Cultural Studies* 240; Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh, *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis* (Duke University Press 2018).

<sup>44</sup> Maria T. Lugones, ‘Toward a Decolonial Feminism’ (2010) 25(4) *Hypatia* 74.

<sup>45</sup> Oyèrónkẹ Oyèwùmí, *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1997).

<sup>46</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Can the subaltern speak?* (Macmillan 2007).

American women.<sup>47</sup> This concept emphasises that oppression is multi-faceted, occurring not just based on a single ground of social distinction but at the convergence of various social markers. It argues that individuals (and groups) are affected by **multiple systems of oppression**.

**Intersectionality, as a critical tool, unravels the intricate interactions between gender, race, and other social distinctions in individual experiences, societal norms, institutional structures, and cultural beliefs, highlighting how these interactions influence power dynamics.**<sup>48</sup> It acknowledges that intersections occur at various levels, thereby exposing the structural nature of inequalities that manifest across different spheres like the family, the workplace, educational settings, etc. Through this multi-level analysis, intersectionality enriches our understanding of inequality, revealing how it is entrenched in both personal experiences and systemic structures across social institutions and legal frameworks. Consequently, it suggests that effective responses to intersectional inequalities must be comprehensive, addressing both their personal and structural dimensions.

While some intersectionality studies and public policies refer to 'identities' or '(vulnerable) groups', rather than to power relations, in this paper, we propose a structural approach to intersectionality since it offers the greatest potential for transformation. **'Structural intersectionality' examines the dynamics and processes that create and give meaning to categories of difference, leading to subordination.**<sup>49</sup> As suggested by Lorena Sosa & Ruth Mestre, structural approaches to

---

<sup>47</sup> Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, 'Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color' (1991) 1 Stanford Law Review 1241; Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, 'Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Policies' [1989] The University of Chicago Legal Forum 139; Combahee River Collective, 'The Combahee River Collective Statement' [1983] Home girls: A black feminist anthology 272; Gloria E Anzaldúa and Cherríe Lawrence Moraga (eds), *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (Kitchen Table- Women of Color Press 1981); Patricia Hill Collins, 'Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment' [1990] Black Feminist Thought 132; Angela Y Davis, 'Rape, Racism and the Capitalist Setting' (1981) 12 Black Scholar 39; Linda M Perkins and bell hooks, 'Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism' (1983) 98 Political Science Quarterly 145; Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Crossing Press 1984); bell hooks, 'Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness' [1989] Yearnings: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics 203.

<sup>48</sup> Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge, *Intersectionality* (Polity Press 2016) 64.

<sup>49</sup> Crenshaw, 'Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color' (n 27).

intersectionality look at the systems of inequality (patriarchy, nationalism, racism, etc.) as responsible of the unequal positioning of individuals and groups.<sup>50</sup>

Intersectionality refers to both subjective positions and a series of structural inequalities influencing each other in a dynamic and unstable way. By acknowledging the **interconnection of systems of oppression**, it focuses on both the outcomes of unequal social relations (discrimination, violence, segregation) and on the underlying causes, leading to long-lasting transformative changes in the dominant social and institutional arrangements”.<sup>51</sup>

- **Stereotyping as a mechanism of inequality**

The contribution of the CEDAW Committee regarding stereotypes and gendered roles is of particular interest in light of developing our TEA. Under the CEDAW, stereotypes are considered a root cause and consequence of gender inequality, and Article 5 in conjunction with Article 2(f) imposes an obligation on States to **eliminate gender stereotyping in laws and regulations, but also in customs and practices** which discriminate against women in all fields. As such, Article 5 is considered to posit a principle of cultural change and of tackling gender ideologies.<sup>52</sup>

As we argued in D1.1 (Taxonomy of concepts), stereotypes can be approached in their material dimensions, as entry points to look at the power structures that create them. **Framing stereotypes as mechanisms of inequality** make our analysis more transformative, in that it looks at power dynamics, rather than individual psychological attitudes. The RE-WIRING TEA considers stereotypes as products of power hierarchies, hence, always harmful, even when they appear to be positive,<sup>53</sup> as their function is the reproduction of inequality.<sup>54</sup>

---

<sup>50</sup> Lorena Sosa and Ruth Mestre i Mestre, ‘The Istanbul Convention from an intersectional perspective’ in Sara de Vido and Micaela Frulli (eds.), *Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence: A Commentary on the Istanbul Convention* (Edward Elgar Publishing 2023).

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. .

<sup>52</sup> Cf Rikki Holtmaat, *Towards Different Law and Public Policy; The significance of Article 5a CEDAW for the elimination of structural gender discrimination*, 2004, The Hague: Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/41992>

<sup>53</sup> A Review of Concepts of Gendered Power Hierarchies and their Taxonomy. RE-WIRING Report 1.1 (n 14) p. 59.

<sup>54</sup> Elena Ghidoni and Dolores Morondo Taramundi, ‘El papel de los estereotipos en las formas de la desigualdad compleja: algunos apuntes desde la teoría feminista del derecho antidiscriminatorio’ (2022) 28 *Discusiones* 37.

**Challenging stereotypes is not an easy task**, as they show resistance to contrary information and persist despite abundant knowledge as to their harm. Strategies of exposure to counter-typical narratives showed limited results in changing implicit bias.<sup>55</sup> Transformative approaches would need to point at the structures and mechanisms that sustain gender power hierarchies, if they want to produce change in stereotyped gender roles.

- **Strengthening the State / Society (positive) obligations**

When looking for a transformative result, no unequal arrangement or situation should be left outside the scope of the political action. **If gender is a “social positioning”, none of its effects must be deemed unavailable for change by human action, especially by the law or public policies, as collective mechanisms to direct social relations.** However, the distinction between formal and substantive equality has often been used to this effect: to draw the boundaries of what can be expected from the law (formal equality), as opposed to what can be attempted by public policy (substantive equality, usually through social policy), and the “real” world (de facto equality, which might be unattainable). TEAs do not see action as falling into one of these boxes (formal or substantive), but they set to identify “real wrongs”, as Sandra Fredman says,<sup>56</sup> and their root causes, as well as the dynamics and the structures involved in producing the wrongs.

CEDAW General Recommendation no. 28 confirms the qualification of gender as a “social positioning” of women and men in a hierarchical relationship, that can be changed. That is, existing gender-based disadvantage and inequality can be eliminated and **States have the obligation to do so by adopting a series of measures mandated by the CEDAW itself (cf the aforementioned Article 5)**, aimed at eliminating direct and indirect discrimination, ensuring de facto equality, and addressing harmful stereotypes. In this three-pronged approach to women’s equality, the CEDAW and the interpretation of its Committee have always maintained a focus on the root causes of inequality which might align with the transformative approach sought here.

**Reparation constitutes a principle grounded in international law, and international human rights law, where the rights of victims are enshrined** (e.g. right to access justice, to an effective remedy, etc.). In general terms, reparation entails the restitution to the original situation, compensation for any economically assessable damage, rehabilitation (including medical and

---

<sup>55</sup> Jerry Kang, Judge Mark Bennett, Devon Carbado, Pam Casey, Nilanjana Dasgupta, David Faigman, Rachel Godsil, Anthony G. Greenwald, Justin Levinson, and Jennifer Mnookin, ‘Implicit Bias in the Courtroom’ (2012) 59 UCLA Law Review 1124.

<sup>56</sup> Sandra Fredman, Substantive equality revisited, International Journal of Constitutional Law, Volume 14, Issue 3, July 2016, Pages 712–738, <https://doi.org/10.1093/icon/mow043>

psychological care and social services), satisfaction (including the cessation of violations, investigation of the facts and disclosure of the truth, public apology and sanctions), and guarantees of non-repetition.<sup>57</sup>

There is ‘a growing sense of the necessity of **‘engendering’ reparations**’, since this represents a singular opportunity for transformation rather than mere restitution to the original situation.<sup>58</sup> This approach has been supported by the Inter-American Court, when it argued that **“reparations must be designed to change this situation, so that their effect is not only of restitution, but also of rectification”**.<sup>59</sup> Indeed, it is paramount to “modify the status quo that causes and maintain violence against women and homicides based on gender.”<sup>60</sup>

**Reparations should be integral, transformative and emancipatory** to address the causes of gendered inequalities and **ensure prevention through the guarantees of non-repetition**. Restitution and compensation alone are not sufficient to change violence and discrimination, laying at the root of systemic human rights violations. Guarantees of non-repetition are measures that benefit the whole community and include “prevention measures (such as the effective control over the armed forces), the guarantee that all processes abide by international norms, strengthening the independence of the judiciary, the protection of human rights defenders, the training and capacity building on human rights protection, and legal reforms”.<sup>61</sup>

Strengthening the role of international courts in fighting structural gender discrimination would require them to issue transformative reparations that include **reforms of the legal and institutional gender-blind framework**,<sup>62</sup> as well as gender-exploitative and -neutral ones. Because gender

<sup>57</sup> UN General Assembly, Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violations of International Human Rights Law and Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law: resolution adopted by the General Assembly, 21 March 2006, A/RES/60/147, Articles 20–23.

<sup>58</sup> Ruth Rubio Marín (ed.), *The Gender of Reparations: Unsettling Sexual Hierarchies While Redressing Human Rights Violations* (CUP 2009); Ruth Rubio-Marín and Pablo de Greiff, ‘Women and Reparations’ (2007) 1 *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 318.

<sup>59</sup> IACtHR, *Case of González et al. (‘Cotton Field’) v Mexico*, Preliminary Objection, Merits, Reparations and Costs, Judgement of 16 November 2009, Series C No. 205, para 450.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.* [495].

<sup>61</sup> Tania Gicela Bolaños Enriquez and Diana Patricia Quintero, ‘Función transformadora y emancipatoria de la reparación integral’ (2022) 20 *Estudios constitucionales* 105, 113.

<sup>62</sup> Maria Caterina La Barbera and Isabel Wences, ‘The polysemy of gender discrimination in the IACtHR jurisprudence: towards the elimination of structural gender discrimination through transformative reparations’ (2023) 15 *European journal of legal studies* 171.

inequality is rooted in laws, institutions and practices, transformation should not stop at training and education but include legal and institutional reforms that tackle the gendered structure underpinning these very institutions.<sup>63</sup>

Such understanding and scope of reparation would also fit in with transformative constitutional thinking that underscores constitutional responsibility and State accountability to enhance gender equality.<sup>64</sup> In addition, the Beijing Platform of Action (though it is not binding) is a framework for addressing gender inequality. It provides 12 areas of concern. For 2025, when it will be Beijing+30, Member States are now asked to review their achievements and shortcomings in implementing the Beijing POA. As such, it provides an accountability mechanism and platform to ensure that States are doing something to advance gender equality.

### ***B. The symbolical dimension: representation and media imperatives***

Interrogating the symbolic terrain of inequality and exclusion of women and other marginal people is key to our approach. To understand the role of cultural representations such as public and social media in maintaining the hegemony of eurocentric, capitalist and heteropatriarchal ideologies (as these may be induced by religion), it is important to situate it within the global power matrix. It is argued, within the field of critical political economy, that media organisations are economic entities that engage in the production of commodities for accumulation. However, unlike other economic entities, the media produces two unique commodities - **ideas and audiences**<sup>65</sup>. Therefore, they play a **“direct economic role as creators of surplus value through commodity production and exchange”** i.e. **ideas and narratives** and **“an indirect role, through advertising, in the creation of surplus value within other sectors of commodity production”**.<sup>66</sup> In this way the media deploys particular narratives about gender and other forms of binary social identity to sell products. In short, the media is deeply invested in continued understandings of gender in binary terms, it reproduces

---

<sup>63</sup> This is in line with the OECD approach. The OECD 2015 Recommendation on Gender Equality in Public Life advocates for making gender equality a default lens, to be used when designing policies and adopting budgets: 2015 OECD Recommendation of the Council on Gender Equality in Public Life | en | OECD

<sup>64</sup> Cf. Sophia Spiliotopoulos, The amended equal treatment Directive (2002/73): An expression of constitutional principles/fundamental rights, *Maastricht Journal of European and Comparative Law*, (2005), Vol. 12, issue 4, 327-368. Timmer, Senden and Burri, *EU gender equality law. Concepts, Practice and Challenges*, OUP, 2024/2025, forthcoming.

<sup>65</sup> Sarah H Chiumbu & Mandla J Radebe, *Towards a Decolonial Critical Political Economy of the Media: Some Initial Thoughts* [2020] *Communicatio* 46(1) 1.

<sup>66</sup> Sarah H Chiumbu & Mandla J Radebe (2020, p.10).

and reinstates these in order to make a profit. Due to these unique affordances of media, it is intimately linked to neocolonial, neoliberal global capitalist systems and is primarily in the service of the political and capitalist elite, working to influence public opinion, governance, purchasing patterns, narratives, and societal dynamics in general.

To effectively transform the representation of gender in media, disrupt and reshape discursive meaning, we need to look into the ways in which relations of power are implicated in the production and consumption of media artefacts.<sup>67</sup> **That is, in addition to questions about who is represented and how, we also need to ask, by whom? And more importantly to what ends? And in what ways do media practices today (and their aforementioned links to economic and political systems) reinforce or disrupt the current colonial, capitalist and heteropatriarchal power structures?** These questions, amongst others we have outlined in section 3, allow the RE-WIRING project to implement a transformative equality approach with the potential to probe deeper into the issues of power hierarchies and how they are manifested or expressed in gender and as such, how they may be transformed.

In our analysis of gender representations in media, we look at **how our symbolic systems are organised** in order to produce meaning for various audiences<sup>68</sup> and the (un)intended effects of these constructions on social systems that perpetuate gender inequality. We look specifically at advertising as the indirect role played by media which “enables capital to expand in space and to create global zones of capital investment, accumulation, exploitation and political influence”<sup>69</sup> within which oppressive gender norms are systemically exploited, supported and legitimised. We are particularly concerned to generate ways of disrupting these symbolic systems towards alternative imaginaries of gender and other forms of intersecting binaries and inequality.

Several initiatives have been implemented to drive the transformation of oppressive and discriminatory views of gender through media, specifically advertisements. Some of these initiatives include gender role flipping, authentic vs stereotypical gender representations and the portrayal of positive role models. In addition, there have been some laws and policies passed in different countries to avoid the use of gender stereotypes in advertising. Our explorations of these initiatives

---

<sup>67</sup> Teraza J Kynčlová & Blanka Knotková-Čapková, *Postcolonial and Decolonial Thought in Feminism and Analyses of Othering Representations* [2017] *Gend. Res.* 18(2) 2.

<sup>68</sup> Gunther Kress *Multimodality: A Social Semiotic Approach to Contemporary Communication* [2010] Routledge.

<sup>69</sup> Christian Fuchs, Some Theoretical Foundations of Critical Media Studies: Reflections on Karl Marx and the Media [2009] *Int. J. Commun.* 3 369 (p. 384).

serve to (1) justifying our position that these attempts, although well-intentioned, are too simplistic and ill-equipped to handle the complex relationship between coloniality, power, media and gender outlined above and (2) lay the foundations for the questions that will orient our approach to dismantling gender power hierarchies from a media perspective in section 3.

Below, we discuss current strategies and approaches for transforming the depiction and perception of gender through media. **We show how current measures which do not apply a structural/systemic, decolonial and intersectional lens, although well-meaning, risk reinforcing gender inequality and global power hierarchies in general and eliminating the obvious markers of gender inequality (e.g. stereotypes) from representations while leaving the underlying structures in place.** This discussion serves as a rationale for our approach to representation with RE-WIRING's TEA, as detailed in sections 2, 3 and 4 above.

- **Representation of unconventional gender roles and identities in advertising**

As elaborated in D.1.1., stereotypes are popular (also in advertising practices) due to their ability to quickly get a message across and to target specific groups with them. In line with research on advertising, stereotypes are usually perceived as common sense or general knowledge that are attractive to audiences due to their ability to simplify cognitive processes and categorisation on the consumer's behalf. This is achieved through the erasure of 'distraction' in the form of nuanced or more ambiguous meanings and categorisations. More importantly, the advertising industry relies on simplistic stereotypes (and therefore resists change) because they have proven to be highly persuasive and effective in influencing consumer behaviour.<sup>70</sup> The use of reductive gender stereotypes in advertising has, as such, been critiqued in feminist scholarship for promoting gender inequality through the dissemination of distorted gender ideals presented as legitimate and acceptable.

In recent years, there has been an increase in the portrayal of unconventional gender identities in advertising.<sup>71</sup> One manifestation of this trend can be found in **gender role-flipping strategies**. Gender role flipping refers to the practice of portraying men in roles conventionally associated with women and vice versa. Advertising subgenres such as *femvertising* and *dadvertising* are designed to portray situations in which gender roles are reversed. Women are, for example, depicted as active, confident and sexually powerful while men are shown as being involved parents and emotional

---

<sup>70</sup> Eirini Tsihla, *The Changing Roles of Gender in Advertising: Past, Present and Future* [2020] CSE 7 28.

<sup>71</sup> Eirini Tsihla, *The Changing Roles of Gender in Advertising: Past, Present and Future* [2020] CSE 7 28.



vulnerable partners. Similar to gender flips is the call for the **portrayal of positive role models in advertising** to represent a range of non-traditional and non-stereotypical gender identities.

There are **mixed reports on the effectiveness of such strategies**. There are those that view advertising as an instrument for moulding and reshaping the social contexts within which they operate. They show that adverts that portray unconventional gender identities have achieved incredible success as they are favourably received by audiences.<sup>72</sup> Contrary to the popular belief that men in unconventional gender roles are stigmatised, these studies suggest an acceptance of men in non-traditional roles (in advertisements). The argument is that exposure to authentic representations of individuals with complex subject positions and positive role models in media can influence conventional views on gender.<sup>73</sup> This is based on the belief that media content influences social and psychological attitudes towards different individuals and the ideas and clichés represented are eventually incorporated into the audience’s conceptions of reality, influencing how they perceive themselves and ways of behaving that are consistent with the overrepresented stereotypical meanings. It thus follows logically that ads portraying positive and complex views of gender can influence self-esteem, assertiveness, and an even career paths individuals may follow.

Other studies have shown that despite the slow increase in the representation of diverse and arguably more authentic subject positions in advertising, **such attempts at new discursive and representational meaning are often too simplistic to transform the systemic support for binary understandings of gender, and in most cases, they only serve to further reinforce gender stereotypes and inequality**. For example, ads that show the unconventional image of women as strong and powerful in flipped adverts reinforce the stereotypical understanding of strength and power as masculine qualities. Such representations reinforce certain qualities as inherently masculine and others as inherently feminine, thereby keeping the binary logic of heteronormative gender categories in place.

In addition, studies that report positively on the use of non-traditional gender identities in advertising do not always take account of other contextual and intersectional factors that could be contributing to their success. For example, a study by Cheryan et al., showed, surprisingly, that in advertising certain career paths (e.g STEM) to women and girls, gender was less important than the extent to which role models embodied current stereotypes about STEM majors. In other words, women in the study felt more empowered by how similar or dissimilar they were to the “computer nerd” who spends

<sup>72</sup> Eirini Tsihla, *The Changing Roles of Gender in Advertising: Past, Present and Future* [2020] CSE 7 28.

<sup>73</sup> Eirini Tsihla, *The Changing Roles of Gender in Advertising: Past, Present and Future* [2020] CSE 7 28; Shuang Wu, Nina Krey & Ryan E. Cruz (2022) *Improving Representation Over Time? Assessing Intersectional (In)Visibility of Masculinity and Race/Ethnicity in Print Ads*, *Journal of Current Issues & Research in Advertising*, 43:4, 400-420, DOI: 10.1080/10641734.2022.2097347

all their time with computers and is socially awkward. Therefore, factors other than gender representations, could be contributing to the potential success or failures of any given advertisement.

As such, questions around what, who is represented and how are not enough as well as questions about who these representations serve and in what way.

- **The role of laws and policies in advertisement and industry initiatives**

In the last few years, several countries have adopted laws and policies to ensure stereotype-free advertisement. In 2019, gender-based stereotypes within adverts were banned in the UK.<sup>74</sup> The policy dictates “advertisements must not include gender stereotypes that are likely to cause harm, or serious or widespread offence”.<sup>75</sup> It particularly points out scenarios where individuals are depicted as incapable of completing a task solely due to gender. For example, the stereotypical view that men cannot competently change nappies or women are challenged by car parking is referenced. Although this is an important move in the right direction towards fair and inclusive gender representation, it is notable that **these regulations continue to allow depictions of individuals performing tasks traditionally aligned with their respective genders**, such as women engaging in shopping or men in construction work. Similarly, in 2017, France enacted a law that forbids advertisers from using digitally enhanced images unless a disclaimer accompanies them. Similar measures have been adopted across various countries such as Belgium, South Africa, Norway, and India.<sup>76</sup>

Similarly, the advertising industry and its regulatory entities have actively sought to tackle the persistent issue of stereotypical gender roles. Leading brands are pushing for widespread reform that reflects current shifts in cultural views. Several global corporations are pledging to craft ads that envision improved representations of gender roles by supporting platforms like the Unstereotype Alliance.<sup>77</sup> These strategic decisions stem from proprietary market analyses conducted within the industry. For example, in 2016, Lloyd Banking Group unveiled findings from their research into

---

<sup>74</sup> Natasa S. Valek & Gaele Picherit-Duthler, Pushing for Gender Equality in Advertising: Gender Role Stereotypes in the United Arab Emirates [2021] J. Int. Consum. Mark. 33(5) 512. DOI: 10.1080/08961530.2020.1820417

<sup>75</sup> Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) & Committee of Advertising Practice (CAP). Ban on harmful gender stereotypes in ads comes into force. <https://www.asa.org.uk/news/ban-on-harmful-gender-stereotypes-in-ads-comes-into-force.html> [Accessed 11 December 2023]

<sup>76</sup> Chiu, Bonnie. (2019). “What Advertisers Should Consider As U.K. Bans Harmful Gender Stereotypes in Adverts, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/bonniechiu/2019/06/17/what-advertisers-should-consider-as-u-k-bans-harmful-gender-stereotypes-in-adverts/?sh=266117f34db6> (accessed 1 December 2023).

<sup>77</sup> <https://www.unstereotypealliance.org/en>

advertising biases. Their findings highlighted a disconnection as **individuals did not see themselves accurately depicted in commercials and voiced a clear preference for more realistic portrayals** by brands across the UK.<sup>78</sup> This example shows the potential socio-economic benefits of representing men and women more authentically and holistically.

Several institutions developed a variety of methods including consulting, research, speaking and other creative outlets, to sensitise organisations and practitioners within the advertising sector towards the inclusive portrayal of men, women and non-binary persons in media and the representation of women in leadership roles within the creative industry e.g. the Unstereotype Alliance,<sup>79</sup> SheSays,<sup>80</sup> Equal Everywhere,<sup>81</sup> the 3% Movement,<sup>82</sup> the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media, and UN Women.

UN Women, for example, made recommendations to businesses on how to avoid gender stereotypes in their advertising material during the COVID 19 pandemic, a health crisis that affected nearly every aspect of social life. The **3Ps framework** represents a set of prompts that brands can use to consider how to show up responsively and avoid doing harm, including presence, perspective and personality:<sup>83</sup>

- **Presence:** Are we showing diverse people, girls, boys, women, and men in a way that authentically mirrors the diversity of our world?
- **Perspective:** How are we framing our brand communication, and whose perspective is being shown? Are male and female perspectives represented fairly and equitably?
- **Personality:** Are the people we feature in our brand communications portrayed with complexity, as multi-dimensional beings with depths of personality and agency and as individuals who look, think and behave differently?

The 3Ps framework is aligned with the different aspects of representation, i.e. *what* or *who* is represented and *how* the what or who are represented, but it does not engage with the questions of

<sup>78</sup> Valek and Picherit-Duthler (2021).

<sup>79</sup> <https://www.unstereotypealliance.org/en>

<sup>80</sup> <https://weareshesays.com/chapters/>

<sup>81</sup> <https://equaleverywhere.org/>

<sup>82</sup> <https://www.3percentmovement.com/>

<sup>83</sup> UNICEF & UN Women. (2020). Promoting Positive Gender Roles in Marketing and Advertising In the Context of COVID 19: Key Considerations for Businesses.

<https://www.unicef.org/media/67561/file/Promoting-Positive-Gender-Roles-in-Marketing-and-Advertising.pdf>

to what ends, and how these representations are constitutive of the status quo. This issue seems to recur across approaches to dismantle gender power hierarchies in media representations. We attribute the inadequacy of these initiatives to the fact these measures target the symptoms of the problem rather than the problem itself; colonial, intersectional systems of domination and control that shape and are shaped by gender norms.<sup>84</sup>

Moreover, **(media) institutions tend to engage in acts of social responsibility or brand advocacy linked to issues such as gender inequality or carbon emissions for their own self-serving interest and not for effective transformation.**<sup>85</sup> It is widely acknowledged that these strategic decisions usually reflect a response to governmental indexes that promise rewards or incentives for meeting certain benchmarks.<sup>86</sup> As issues around social consciousness and justice become more popular, corporations exploit such trends to position themselves as aligned with socially responsible practices which in turn attracts socially conscious consumers, enhances organisation's reputation and favourably positions them for government-led initiatives or indexes that reward such practices.<sup>87</sup> Therefore, the changes we are starting to see in the representation of gender (e.g. role flipping, positive role models) in media may be seen as a function of the neo-heteropatriarchal and capitalist machine that, on the surface, appear transformative, but maintains power and control in the hands of political and capitalist elites. **This is why effective transformation in the representational and symbolic field must be matched by efforts in other dominant sectors and power systems, given that gender inequality (in media) intersects with other oppressive processes and mechanisms which are mutually constitutive of global power hierarchies.**

What the discussion in this section demonstrates is the malleability of gender ideals and the ways in which media industries exploit trends and changes in gender ideologies for profit and not in an effort to disrupt gender hierarchies. Therefore, well-intentioned initiatives (e.g. government incentives) are and can be appropriated into the service of the colonial and capitalist heteropatriarchal social structure. This results in the transformation of the nature of inequality, but not in the eradication of inequality at a systemic level and the failure to realise equality.

---

<sup>84</sup> Maria Lugones, The Coloniality of Gender [2016] In Wendy Harcourt (eds) The Palgrave Handbook of Gender and Development. Palgrave Macmillan, London. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-137-38273-3\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-137-38273-3_2)

<sup>85</sup> Eirini Tsichla, The Changing Roles of Gender in Advertising: Past, Present, and Future. [2020] CSE 7 28.

<sup>86</sup> Sara Champlin, Yvette Sterbenk, Kasey Windels & Maddison Potee, How Brand-Cause Fit Shapes Real World Advertising Messages: A Qualitative Exploration of 'Femvertising' [2019] Int. J. Advert. 38(8)1240.

<sup>87</sup> Eirini Tsichla, The Changing Roles of Gender in Advertising: Past, Present and Future [2020] CSE 7 28.

Due to the weakness of these initiatives to disrupt power hierarchies, we have developed a decolonial and intersectional transformative equality approach that frames understandings of gender binaries within the foundational framework of colonial-patriarchal logics that determine social relations on the one hand and on the other hand, the avenues for disrupting and transforming these complexes in our sectors of interest and across our three – institutional, symbolical and experiential - dimensions.

### *C. The experiential dimension: transformative strategies in social psychology & behavioural studies*

Social psychological literature has shed light on of the important barriers to gender equality progress – namely – not doing enough with resistance to gender equality progress. **How do we convince people who are not willing, who resist gender-transforming changes**, especially when they have privileges that they might lose?

First, why do men resist the adoption of programs or social policies that promote diversity and inclusion of women and minorities? Some of the reasons why men may resist are: the legitimization or maintenance of their personal/men's status<sup>88</sup>, feeling threatened if faced with the belief that if women gain more power and money men will personally or as a group lose it (i.e., the "belief in a zero-sum game"<sup>89</sup>), or considering that the label "feminist man" can entail an attack on their traditional masculinity<sup>90</sup>.

Therefore, some ways to avoid these defensive responses is to point out the harmful effects that restrictive gender norms have on men (e.g., physical health and risk behaviors, mental health or well-being in different spaces, such as work) – see Van Laar et al., 2024<sup>92</sup> for a review. Additionally, explicitly encouraging men's participation can be an important factor in engaging men in gender-related social change, motivating them to support actions that ultimately benefit both men and

---

<sup>88</sup> Jim Sidanius, Felicia Pratto, 'Social Dominance: An Intergroup Theory of Social Hierarchy and Oppression' (New York, Cambridge University Press 1999).

<sup>89</sup> Natasza Kosakowska-Berezecka, Tomasz Besta, Jennifer K Bosson and others, 'Country-level and individual-level predictors of men's support for gender equality in 42 countries' [2020]50 Eur J Soc Psychol 1276; Joelle C Ruthig, Andre Kehn, Brandlee W Gamblin, Karen Vanderzanden, Kelly Jones, 'When women's gains equal men's losses: Predicting a zero-sum perspective of gender status.' [2017] 76(1-2) Sex Roles 17.

<sup>90</sup> Laurie A Rudman, Kris Mescher, Corinne A Moss-Racusin, 'Reactions to gender egalitarian men: Perceived feminization due to stigma-by-association.' [2012] 16(5) Group Process Intergroup Relat 572.

women, **increasing empathy when it comes to social justice**, or pointing out the benefits of addressing restrictive gender norms for parenting, school, work, and society in general <sup>91</sup>.

Here are some strategies and practical ways to deal with such resistance:

- **Storytelling**

One way to overcome this is through **storytelling** - how stories are told. For example, women represent somewhat more than half of the population, so it is crucial that they are also in positions of power and decision-making. It is also a matter of fairness, allowing women to hold these positions based on equal competence as men. There is also the fact that more diverse staff benefit organisations as well in terms of productivity and reputation,<sup>92</sup> and there are better outcomes in societies with less gender inequality<sup>93</sup>. Furthermore, the OECD has found that greater gender equality also benefits fiscal sustainability, particularly in the context of an ageing population and lower fertility rates.<sup>94</sup> While these may not sway individuals solely focused on personal benefits, they provide a sense of the potential content of storytelling.

Women, men, and other gender groups must become agents of change; one way of facilitating this is to **appreciate their role as storytellers as a bottom-up strategy process** (changing individual attitudes, perceptions, and habits). What a father tells his children about why he chooses to spend more time with them than at work may be as transformative at a **micro-level** as the introduction of shared parental leave at a macro-level. At a **macro-level**, storytelling of sexual harassment and gender-based violence via social media platforms such as #MeToo, Time's Up and #BalanceTonPorc became powerful social movements for change in workplaces and societal attitudes towards violence against women and girls.

---

<sup>91</sup> Van Laar, C., Van Rossum, A., Kosakowska-Berezecka, N., Buongiorno, R., Block, K. (202). MANDatory - Why men need (and are needed in) gender equality progress. *Frontiers in Psychology* 15. doi:<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1263313>.

<sup>92</sup> Business in the Community's Opportunity Now. (June 2012). *Food for Thought: The Gender Business Case*; Williams, K., & Masons, P. (2015). More Women Into The Workforce: Using Law As Leverage. In (pp. SPE-175513). SPE. SPE Offshore Europe Conference and Exhibition. Aberdeen, Scotland. doi:<https://doi.org/10.2118/175513-MS>.

<sup>93</sup> Van Laar, C., Van Rossum, A., Kosakowska-Berezecka, N., Buongiorno, R., Block, K. (202). MANDatory - Why men need (and are needed in) gender equality progress. *Frontiers in Psychology* 15. doi:<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1263313>.

<sup>94</sup> OECD, Gender budgeting: the economic and fiscal rationale, OECD Journal on Budgeting, iLibrary

- **Behavioral and systemic interventions**

An effective strategy for addressing resistance and backlash against gender equality measures lies in the exploration of behavioural and systemic interventions, aligning with the principles of the widely endorsed **nudge theory**. This theory proposes solutions that emphasise inducing behavioural changes through the structuring of choices in a manner that is both easily implementable and cost-effective.<sup>95</sup> The work of Iris Bohnet focuses on strategies and behavioural interventions to reduce gender inequality and biases, aiming to create more equitable workplace environments. It suggests ways to 'nudge' individuals towards behaviours that promote gender equality. Examples include **blind recruitment, diverse hiring panels, gender-neutral language, flexible working policies, mentoring and sponsoring programmes, and setting up metrics that reward workers for engaging in activities that promote women and diversity.**<sup>96</sup>

A multifaceted strategy to counter resistance involves **addressing various forms of harassment**, including sexual and racial harassment, bullying, bias, incivility, sexual violence, and other forms of violence. The implementation of programmes such as **Confronting Prejudiced Responses (CPR) and Behaviour Modeling Training (BMT)** has proven effective in intervening when instances of bias and discrimination occur. CPR aids participants in comprehending factors that facilitate or hinder intervention, providing a systematic approach to deciding whether and how to intervene. On the other hand, BMT focuses on skill development and practice, enabling participants to transfer acquired skills to their work environments.<sup>97</sup>

Although the concept of allyship and research within solidarity-based collective action intentions to support gender equality has widely flourished during the past 10 years<sup>98</sup> proving the importance of majority group members being involved in gender equality progress, alliances can be misguided or threatening for non-privileged groups, as they can lead to the loss of distinctiveness of the disadvantaged group or to colour-blindness, among others. It is therefore important to note that the

---

<sup>95</sup> Richard H Thaler, Cass R Sunstein, *Nudge: improving decisions about health, wealth, and happiness* (NY: Penguin Books 2009); Sonia K. Kang, and Sarah Kaplan, 'Working toward gender diversity and inclusion in medicine: myths and solutions' [2019] 393 *The Lancet* 10171.

<sup>96</sup> Iris Bohnet, *What works: gender equality by design* (Harvard University Press 2016). See also OECD, *Fast Forward to Gender Equality: Mainstreaming, Implementation and Leadership*, 2019.

<sup>97</sup> Leslie Ashburn-Nardo, Kathryn A. Morris, and Stephanie A. Goodwin, 'The confronting prejudiced responses (CPR) model: Applying CPR in organizations' [2008] 7 *AMLE* 3; in: *Colwell, Bear and Helman* 114.

<sup>98</sup> Laura K Hildebrand, Celine C Jusuf, Margo J Monteith, 'Ally confrontations as identity-safety cues for marginalized individuals.' [2020] 50(6) *Eur J Soc Psychol* 1318; Charlotte E Moser, Nyla R Branscombe, 'Male Allies at Work: Gender-Equality Supportive Men Reduce Negative Underrepresentation Effects Among Women.' [2022] 13(2) *Soc Psychol Personal Sci* 372.

**involvement of allies does not always have positive consequences for disadvantaged groups.** For example, the inclusion of favoured groups in a movement on behalf of a disadvantaged group may lead privileged members to become the centre of attention, to act only when they have something to gain, to disregard how members of the disadvantaged group are affected by their participation, to pressure the disadvantaged group to include their voice in the movement or to expect that the disadvantaged group owes them something for supporting their cause.<sup>99</sup>

- **Ethics in organisations**

An additional avenue for surmounting resistance involves **fostering an ethical climate to reshape gendered institutional cultures.** Is it ethical to ignore women's capacity and qualifications? The pivotal role of organisational cultures in endorsing women's advancement in the workplace is underscored as crucial for achieving gender equity in leadership.<sup>100</sup> Initiatives aimed at instilling a sense of personal responsibility for change within the organisation, commencing with leaders, particularly male leaders, committing to and promoting change, are recommended.

## 5.2 Policy-making approaches

To understand the meaning of the concept of transformative equality, one needs to distinguish first the different types of approaches and policies that are currently recognised.

Several instruments have been developed to assess the degree of transformation of policy solutions. For example, the **Gender Equality Continuum Tool** (GECT) established by the Interagency Gender Working Group<sup>101</sup> distinguishes between **gender-blind and gender-aware** measures. Gender blind measures ignore the economic, social and political implications of gender relations, and the power

---

<sup>99</sup> Lisa Droogendyk, Stephen C Wright, Micah Lubensky, Winnifred R Louis, 'Acting in solidarity: Cross-group contact between disadvantaged group members and advantaged group allies.' [2016] 72 J Soc Issues 315.

<sup>100</sup> Cf Stamarski, C. S., & Son Hing, L. S. (2015). Gender inequalities in the workplace: the effects of organizational structures, processes, practices, and decision makers' sexism. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 6:1400; Coe, I. R., Wiley, R., & Bekker, L.-G. (2019). Organisational best practices towards gender equality in science and medicine. *The Lancet*, 393(10171), 587-593; Sreytouch Vong, Bandeth Ros, Rosemary Morgan, and Sally Theobald, 'Why are fewer women rising to the top? A life history gender analysis of Cambodia's health workforce' [2019] 19 BMC Health Serv Res 595. RE-WIRING. (2024, March 6). Toolkit – Better Practices Addressing Women's Representation in the Workplace. RE-WIRING. <https://re-wiring.eu/2024/03/06/toolkit-better-practices-addressing-womens-representation-in-the-workplace/>

<sup>101</sup> IGWC <https://www.igwg.org/2022/09/igwg-gender-integration-continuum-graphic-now-available-in-french-portuguese-and-spanish/>



dynamics between men, women and others. Instead, gender-awareness characterise policies that examine and address gender dimensions. Therefore, policies on the left side of the continuum can be identified as discriminatory and exploitative, whenever they reinforce existing gender inequalities.

A second category is that of **accommodation, gender sensitivity and responsiveness**. EIGE has defined gender sensitivity as the “aim of understanding and taking account of the societal and cultural factors involved in gender-based exclusion and discrimination in the most diverse spheres of public and private life” and as “policies that take into account the particularities pertaining to the lives of both women and men, while aiming at eliminating inequalities and promoting an equal distribution of resources, addressing and taking into account the gender dimension.”<sup>102</sup>

The third category of the continuum is that of **transformative policies**, which seek to address root causes of gender inequalities and exclusion. Examples as to the ingredients for transformative policies are given below.

- **Gender-sensitive institutional transformation**

Transformative policies are geared towards ensuring that both policies and processes, as well as products and services are responsive to gender equality concerns and needs. For example, the European Investment Bank uses funds to not only ‘protect’ (avoid doing harm or reinforcing existing gender inequalities) or ‘impact’ gender equality (creating positive impact), but to also actively “invest” in gender equality (target investments that improve women’s participation in the labour market).

In the words of EIGE, **gender-sensitive institutional transformation** concerns

“a process that aims to integrate gender equality into the regular rules, procedures and practices of an institution. A successful gender mainstreaming implementation will lead to the transformation of an institution, thus also impacting on the organisational culture [...]. This means there is an *internal dimension of gender mainstreaming* (organisational and personnel development) as well as an *external dimension* (service provision).<sup>103</sup> [our emphasis]

The concept of '**gender-mainstreaming**' emerged at the 1985 Nairobi World Conference on Women and was further endorsed as a gender equality strategy in the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action. Promoted by the CEDAW Committee, various UN entities, the Council of Europe, and the European

---

<sup>102</sup> European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE). (2016a) *EIGE Glossary and Thesaurus*. <https://eige.europa.eu/publications-resources/thesaurus/overview> See also D.2.2. and D2.3 on these approaches.

<sup>103</sup> European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE). (2016). *Institutional Transformation: Gender Mainstreaming Toolkit*. Publications Office of the European Union.

Union, it aims to ***embed gender equality as a core objective across all aspects of social and economic development.***

This approach necessitates the integration of gender perspectives in all stages of policy, regulatory and budgetary measures, and program development, implementation, and evaluation, to foster equal opportunities for women and men and to fight discrimination.<sup>104</sup>

EIGE has identified 13 steps to drive institutional change at the level of **the structure, the personnel, and the outcomes:**

Starting from the planning: create accountability and commitment; allocate resources; analyse the organisation, and develop a gender mainstreaming strategy and workplan.

At the implementation level: a support structure should be established, gender equality objectives should be set; gender mainstreaming should be communicated, its methods and tools should be introduced, a gender equality competence should be developed and sustained; with a gender information management system, and an action plan. Lastly, equal opportunities should be promoted within the personnel.

Once the implementation is completed, monitoring and evaluation should be carried out.<sup>105</sup>

The OECD approach aligns very much with these steps, underscoring also the importance of the systematic use of the introduced methods and tools.<sup>106</sup> The OECD has also established a Framework on Sound Public Governance<sup>107</sup> that identifies a key set of enablers that contribute to the effective governance on gender equality, including:

- Commitment, vision and leadership
- Equitable and evidence-informed policy-making;
- Whole-of-government co-ordination;
- Innovation and change management in the public sector.

---

<sup>104</sup> See: 'Gender mainstreaming: A global strategy for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls' <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2020/gender-mainstreaming-strategy-for-achieving-gender-equality-and-empowerment-of-women-girls-en.pdf?la=en&vs=3849>.

<sup>105</sup> EIGE (2016). Institutional transformation: Gender Mainstreaming Toolkit. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. p. 7 ff.

<sup>106</sup> OECD Toolkit, (3ddef.555.pdf, OECD iLibrary).

<sup>107</sup> OECD, <https://www.oecd.org/governance/policy-framework-on-sound-public-governance/> (last accessed 26 June 2024)

Since change brings forward **resistances** (at the individual, organisational, and discourse level), these reactions should be foreseen and addressed.<sup>108</sup> While resistances are opportunities to communicate about gender equality, EIGE's toolkit indicates **strategies to prevent them**, such as, increasing transparency and communicating the process, involving the staff and allowing them to develop ownership of the change; as well as **strategy to address them**, such as having open discussions focused on common goals and backed by facts and figures.

To measure the **effectiveness of institutional mechanisms** for the advancement of women, three objectives were identified by the Beijing Platform for Action, and subsequently indicators were set by the Council of the European Union.<sup>109</sup> A fourth objective was adopted by the same Council in 2013. These objectives are:

- 1) **status of commitment** to the promotion of gender equality (measured through the strength of the governmental and independent gender equality body, its responsibility, mandate, function, and accountability);
- 2) the **human resources** allocated to the governmental and independent gender equality bodies;
- 3) **gender mainstreaming** (commitment to it, structures set up for that and consultation processes, effective use of tools and methods for gender mainstreaming and of consultation of independent bodies); and
- 4) production and dissemination of sex-disaggregated **statistics**.

Gender mainstreaming can be realised in a three-steps process,<sup>110</sup> including:

- 1) **gender mainstreaming in general policies;**
- 2) **'diversity mainstreaming' into gender equality policies; and**

---

<sup>108</sup> EIGE (2016). Institutional Transformation: Gender Mainstreaming Toolkit. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, p. 47 ff.

<sup>109</sup> In 1995, the Beijing Platform for Action (BpFA) identified 'Area H: Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women' as one of 12 critical areas for achieving gender equality. Three objectives were identified under this Area, and indicators were adopted in 2006 by the Council of the European Union. EIGE (2023). *The pathway to progress: strengthening effective structures for gender equality and gender mainstreaming in the EU*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

<sup>110</sup> Lorena Sosa and Ruth Mestre, Ensuring the non-discriminatory implementation of measures against violence against women and domestic violence: Article 4, paragraph 3, of the Istanbul Convention (Council of Europe, 2022).

### 3) the adoption of transformative measures.

These transformative measures would encompass the fight against stereotypes and bias (e.g. awareness raising, cultural sensitivity, eliminating unequal treatment and institutional bias) and the fight against inequality and discrimination. The latter would require more attention to the context in which inequality takes place, and the different sectorial policies that relate/sustain inequality. RE-WIRING's TEA therefore takes this into account across all work packages, by remaining attuned to how (cultural) context shapes the nature of inequality and therefore the nature of the interventions/policies/instruments needed for effective transformation.

- **Measuring empowerment and change through the SDGs**

The **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** represent another useful instrument to measure transformation, as it sets targets and indicators to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment. **SDG 5** specifically **targets gender equality** by:

- 1) ending all forms of discrimination;
- 2) eliminating all forms of violence against women;
- 3) eliminating harmful practices;
- 4) recognising and valuing unpaid care and domestic work (providing public services, infrastructure, social protection, and shared responsibility);
- 5) ensure women's full and effective participation and equal leadership opportunities;
- 6) ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Three additional targets are set:

- 7) to ensure equal rights to economic resources (land, property, financial services, etc.)
- 8) to enhance the use of technology for empowerment; and
- 9) to strengthen laws and policies for gender equality.

Furthermore, **gender-sensitive indicators** are established within other SDG, especially in the field of poverty (SDG1), food security (SDG2), health and wellbeing (SDG3), education (SDG4),

employment and decent work (SDG8), reduce cross-country inequalities (SDG10), inclusive cities (SDG11), climate change (SDG13), peaceful and inclusive societies (SDG16).<sup>111</sup>

In the last report, UN Women identifies **active resistance, chronic underinvestment, and insufficient data and evidence to monitor advances and incentivise policy actions** as key barriers to progress. For example, an intervention aimed at job creation for all, but lacking a gender lens, might fail to be transformative, if it does not address biased social norms, and the gender care gap that hinders women's participation in the labour force.

- **Transforming social institutions (public, private and civil society organisations)**

Transforming institutions will require a coordinated effort. According to the last Social Institutions and Gender Index Report (SIGI) from the OECD,<sup>112</sup> in order to accelerate change and eliminate discrimination in institutions (from governments and policy-makers to development partners, the private sector, philanthropic actors and civil society organisations), a coordinated effort is required from all these actors. Accelerating change also requires recognising the intersectional forms of discrimination. All stakeholders (public, private, philanthropic, and civil society organisations) are expected to take the following actions:

- Reform laws** to protect women's rights: legal reform and a comprehensive policy framework should be informed by a gender and intersectional lens across areas (particularly economic affairs, education, employment, and health). Governments should ensure that legislation is enforced, and that the population is aware of their rights.
- Transform social norms** and restrictive femininities and masculinities: all actors should commit to transforming social norms, leveraging the power of edutainment and role models; and mobilising community leaders and gatekeepers to achieve transformative change (social norms are collectively enforced, thus, strategies should target all relevant stakeholders); and ensuring sustained commitment (both financial and technical support). The budget should be also allocated to monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of these programs.
- As part of the transformation of social norms, **men and boys should be included** in policies and programmes on gender equality. The deconstruction of traditional gender roles should involve them, for example by setting up safe spaces where men and boys can learn about gender equality and discuss it or receive training, support and resources on how to adopt

---

<sup>111</sup> UN Women and United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2023). Progress on the sustainable development goals. The gender snapshot 2023. <https://bit.ly/gender-snapshot-2023>

<sup>112</sup> OECD, Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI). Gender equality in times of crisis [2023] OECD Publishing.

more gender-equitable attitudes and behaviours. Budget should be invested in research and communication to show men and boys that gender equality is not a zero-sum game, and that all would benefit from a more gender-equal society.<sup>113</sup>

- iv. **A better collection** of gender-disaggregated, gender-relevant and intersectional data and indicators should be ensured, as well as **monitoring the impact of initiatives** and collecting best practices and lessons learned. Adequate support to **grassroots and feminist organisations** should be foreseen, to enable them to fulfill their **accountability role**.
- v. **Finance gender equality** is key to ensure transformation. The OECD suggests joining forces among different funding entities, to make better use of public financial management and budgeting tools, as well as mainstreaming gender into green financing. Transformative actors such as grassroots and feminist movements should also receive financial support.

- **Feminist evaluation of transformative policies**

Measuring transformation should embrace complexity and context-specificity. Applying a **feminist evaluation lens** to gender-transformative measurement systems can provide epistemological guidelines to capture complexity and intersectionality “in the power dimensions of agency, relations and structures”.<sup>114</sup> First, feminist evaluation problematises the very **definition of “success”**, claiming that success should be **contextualised and negotiated**, involving the participation of all actors, especially those most marginalised.<sup>115</sup> For this reason, it usually requires going beyond the pre-established criteria for summative evaluation (efficacy, efficiency, impact, pertinence, sustainability) developed by the OECD,<sup>116</sup> to include aspects contingent upon the policy and context, and the dialogue with stakeholders. Espinosa-Fajardo and Bustelo suggest that different frameworks

<sup>113</sup> Colette Van Laar, Aster Van Rossum, Natasza Kosakowska-Berezecka, Renata Bongiorno, & Katharina Block, MANDatory - why men need (and are needed for) gender equality progress [2024] *Frontiers in Psychology*, 15. doi:<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1263313>; Loes Meeussen, Colette Van Laar & Sanne Van Grootel, How to foster male engagement in traditionally female communal roles and occupations: Insights from research on gender norms and precarious manhood. [2019] *SIPR* 14 29. doi:10.1111/sipr.12060; Aster Van Rossum, Colette van Laar & Daan Scheepers, (under review). *Advancing the health and wellbeing of boys and men: Lessons from the social cure and curse framework*.

<sup>114</sup> Donna Mertens, Feminism [2005] In Sandra Mathison (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Evaluation*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. 154, mentioned in CARE (2015).

<sup>115</sup> Julia Espinosa-Fajardo & Maria Bustelo, ¿Cómo evaluamos el éxito de las políticas de igualdad de género? Criterios y herramientas metodológicas. [2019] *Rev. Esp. Cienc. Polít.* 49 151. <https://doi.org/10.21308/recp.49.07>

<sup>116</sup> OECD (2004). *Effective strategies to promote gender equality*. Available at <https://www.oecd.org/dac/gender-development/44750309.pdf>

such as the critical change theory, transformative paradigm, and the “theory of programme” (which insists on redefining the criteria of evaluation in each context) are useful for feminist evaluation and these will be within RE-WIRING’s TEA framework in which cultural and contextual sensitivity as well as progressive notions of co-creation are fundamental.<sup>117</sup>

Building on Kriszan and Lombardo,<sup>118</sup><sup>118</sup> they suggest an expanded understanding of **seven criteria to evaluate the success of gender equality policies**. The cross-cutting rule is that each criterion should be discussed and negotiated in each context and together with all stakeholders involved, which is in line with RE-WIRING’S concept of co-creation. This is particularly important since there are aspects of transformation that are not easily measurable (e.g. changes in patterns of behavior).

Criteria are:

1. The **incorporation of different dimensions of gender** in different steps of policymaking and through a contextual approach;
2. **Political commitment to face emerging obstacles** and resistances;
3. The **understanding of complexity** (inequality is structural and systemic, thus requiring organizational change);
4. **Contextualising gender equality** (understanding different interpretations of gender equality in each context);
5. **Intersectionality** (attention to the interplay between inequality grounds);
6. **Participation and empowerment: measure the level of active participation and skills development in politics;**
7. **Incremental transformation:** measures changes in gender equality, compared to the context.

For each of these criteria, tools for evaluation are suggested: gender analysis, analysis of resistances (institutional, individual, explicit and implicit), gender-sensitive organisational change, programme theory and intersectional analysis.

The **Gender Equality Policy in Practice Approach (GEPP)** to assess policy success and failure in bringing about gender transformation, developed by Engeli and Mazur,<sup>119</sup> provides insights into the determinants of successful policies. The approach specifically focuses on the post-adoption phase

---

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Andrea Kriszan & Emanuela Lombardo, The quality of gender equality policies: A discursive approach [2013] Eur. J. Women’s Stud. 20(1) 77. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350506812456462>.

<sup>119</sup> Isabelle Engel & Amy G. Mazur, Taking implementation seriously in assessing success: The politics of gender equality policy. [2018] EJPJG 1(1-2) 111.

of the policy process and on the impact implementation and evaluation of policies. The GEPP identifies the tools, instruments and processes used to implement and evaluate equality policy (outputs) and the changes that are expected to result from those policies (outcomes). It assesses which outputs are used, how, and if they produce an increase in gender equality outcomes.<sup>120</sup>

The post-adoption phase of policies is broken down into three components:

(C1) **the mix of implementation instruments** for policy action (e.g. regulatory instruments, incentives, capacity and learning tools, symbolic tools);

(C2) the process of **inclusive policy empowerment in practice** (inclusion of the claims, frames and solutions of the concerned groups, and their physical integration in the policy process); and

(C3) **gender transformation as the ultimate outcome**, or the gold benchmark towards the dismantling of gender power hierarchies.

Acknowledging that transformation is a long-term, incremental, and non-linear process, Engeli and Mazur emphasise both direct outcomes (was the problem solved?), and indirect ones (did the frames of the policy implementors change in the process of implementation to take on board gender equality? Did societal attitudes change with regard to that policy area?), and four different levels they could achieve in terms of gender equality: “gender neutrality”, “gender rowback”, “gender accommodation” and “simple or complex gender transformation”.<sup>121</sup>

According to Bustelo and Mazur,<sup>122</sup> several components should be taken into account to make policy success and gender transformation possible:

- 1) **connections between actors, institutions and ideas on gender equality** (these ideas or positions can change and undergo negotiations during implementation too);
- 2) **resistance and counter-resistances during policy implementation** by gender equality actors;
- 3) the importance to adopt frames that reflect **improvements for all groups of women**, and not just women elites, is key to ensure transformation incorporates intersectionality;
- 4) **saliency of sectoral trends** for the effectiveness of policies (e.g. social and family policies are prone to resistance to gender norm change);

---

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Maria Bustelo & Amy G. Mazur, The practice of ideas in gender equality policy: comparative lessons from the field. [2023] EJPG 6(1) 3.



5) **multi-level dimensions (implementation involves international, national, regional and local level).**

Bustelo and Mazur's components are useful in that it provides a kind of checklist that teases out issues related to cross-cultural sensitivities and dominant meaning-frames policy makers depend on to do their work effectively. These also constitute ingredients of the RE-WIRING TEA.

### 5.3 Action-oriented approaches

Research also shows the importance of feminist mobilisation and the strength of gender equality machineries as crucial aspects for achieving more gender-transformative policy outcomes. The approach developed by CARE International for instance allows reframing empowerment from women's individual responsibility to collective and political action. Moreover, it takes into account the role of grassroots mobilization of women. It considers that transformative change can be measured by examining three broad domains of empowerment:<sup>123</sup>

- **Agency:** individual and collective capacities (knowledge and skills), attitudes, critical reflection, assets, actions, and access to services;
- **Relations:** the expectations and cooperative or negotiation dynamics embedded within relationships between people in the home, market, community, and groups and organizations;
- **Structures:** the informal and formal institutional rules that govern collective, individual and institutional practices, such as environment, social norms, recognition and status.”

In order to measure changes in empowerment, this CARE international approach examines the multiple manifestations of power and how they interact: 1) **power over** (control over people, resources and lives); 2) **power to** act and realise one's own aspirations (measured in terms of skills, capacities and self-confidence); 3) **power within** (sense of self-worth and awareness as an individual and within a group); and 4) **power with**, which points at collaboration and collective power through mutual support, collaboration and recognition.<sup>124</sup>

---

<sup>123</sup> CARE (2015). Measuring gender-transformative change. A review of literature and promising practices. p. 5. [https://prevention-collaborative.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/CARE\\_2015\\_Measuring-Gender-Transformative-Change.pdf](https://prevention-collaborative.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/CARE_2015_Measuring-Gender-Transformative-Change.pdf)

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

- **Specific sectoral gender transformative programmes**

Lastly, the framing of transformative policy approaches is also dependent upon the area or policy domain at issue. The following constitute some examples of this.

According to UNICEF, gender transformative education “seeks to utilize all parts of an education system – from policies to pedagogies to community engagement – to transform stereotypes, attitudes, norms and practices by challenging power relations, rethinking gender norms and binaries, and raising critical consciousness about the root causes of inequality and systems of oppression.”<sup>125</sup> Steps towards it include strategies and programmes that intentionally challenge inequalities in gender roles through:

1. Transforming **policies and political engagement**, by investment in evidence-based approaches and solutions, and by including gender in education sector plans, budgets and policies.
2. Transforming **pedagogy** by promoting gender equality in teaching practices and challenging inequalities in the classroom, reforming curricula, promoting teacher-to-teacher peer learning.
3. Transforming the **school environment**: making it a safe space for all, linking education with gender-responsive health and protection services, improve diversity among teachers as educators and role models.
4. Transforming the **participation of children and young people in public and private life**, equipping them with skills and confidence to challenge gender inequality and acts of violence (UNICEF does not refer to gender-based violence specifically, but it should be taken into account ).
5. Transforming **community** leadership (outside of school): parents and community-based structures have an important role in socialising children in equality.
6. Transforming **stakeholder engagement**, by strengthening partnerships with local authorities, civil society and grassroots movements, and the private sector.
7. Transforming **evidence-generation** to understand what works and what does not work, and how to scale up effective strategies, and to measure changes in gender norms and attitudes, rather than learning outcomes (e.g. changes in girls’ agency and community perception).

---

<sup>125</sup> UNICEF (2021). Gender transformative education. Reimagining education for a more just and inclusive world. [https://plan-international.org/uploads/2022/01/unicef\\_plan\\_ungei\\_te\\_gender\\_transformative\\_education\\_web\\_copy\\_10dec21.pdf](https://plan-international.org/uploads/2022/01/unicef_plan_ungei_te_gender_transformative_education_web_copy_10dec21.pdf)

These steps suggest actions to be taken at different levels, including the institutional (laws, policies and teaching practices), the experiential (equipping children, engaging the external community and various stakeholders), and the symbolical (changing the space).

Similarly, **health-related programmes** that are successful in gender transformation include these elements:<sup>126</sup>

- Multiple-level interventions, at the individual, community, institutional, and policy levels, combining opportunities for individual and institutional change;
- Each program participates through diverse intervention strategies;
- Foster critical consciousness and active mobilisation among community members;
- Combining health interventions with other multisectoral interventions shows synergistic effects.

Similarly, in the **gender and development (GAD) sector**, the transformative approach is condensed into five interconnected principles:

- motivation towards lasting change;
- focus on systems which perpetuate inequalities;
- strategic gender interests;
- recognition and valuing diverse identities; and
- adoption of transformative methodological practices.<sup>127</sup>

---

<sup>126</sup> Doris Bartel, Francesca Alvarez and Stephanie Perlson. Lessons learned in gender transformative health programming. A rapid literature review. (USAID, IGWG, PACE, PRG: 2022). [https://www.igwg.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/IGWG\\_ResearchBrief\\_GenderTransformativeHealthProgramming\\_FNL.pdf](https://www.igwg.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/IGWG_ResearchBrief_GenderTransformativeHealthProgramming_FNL.pdf)

<sup>127</sup> Jess MacArthur, Naomi Carrard, Federico Davila, Melita Grant, Tamara Megaw, Juliet Willetts, Keren Winterford, Gender-transformative approaches in international development: A brief history and five uniting principles, Women's Studies International Forum, Volume 95, 2022, 102635. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2022.102635>.