



# Promoting Gender-Transformative Change through Social Protection

An analytical approach

Elena Camilletti, Zahrah Nesbitt-Ahmed and Ramya Subrahmanian

Innocenti Research Report

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## Keywords

gender; transformative change; social protection; gender-responsive social protection; low- and middle-income countries

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## Executive summary

Social protection has expanded across many low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), and demonstrated significant potential to reduce income poverty and food and economic insecurity, address financial barriers to accessing social services, and promote positive development outcomes throughout the life course, particularly for women and girls. However, whether and how social protection programmes and systems can address pre-existing gender inequalities through their design, implementation and finance is yet to be fully explored. To strengthen social protection's potential to contribute to gender equality, it is important to continue building a robust evidence base to identify 'what works', 'how' and 'why', to enable social protection programmes to address underlying gender inequalities and promote gender equality outcomes. This also requires an analytical approach to research and evaluations, which can help guide the integration of gender considerations into all aspects of social protection.

This report proposes and presents an analytical approach to evidence generation on gender-responsive social protection for gender-transformative change. It builds on the Gender-Responsive Age-Sensitive Social Protection (GRASSP) conceptual framework, and on the theoretical, conceptual and empirical literature across a range of social science disciplines that has conceptualized the linkages between gender and social protection. It is structured as a socio-ecological framework and presents three interconnected change pathways through which gender-responsive social protection can contribute to gender-transformative results, with specific design and implementation features. It is further underpinned by a set of change levers that existing evidence suggests can strengthen the gender-responsiveness of social protection systems.

### Change Pathway 1: Encouraging gender-equitable investments in children's education and health, and increasing women's access to, ownership of and use of resources

At the individual level, gender-responsive social protection can contribute to gender-transformative change across the life course through three mechanisms: first, by increasing gender-equitable household investments in children's education and health and nutrition (Change Mechanism 1); second, by helping households to manage risks and withstand shocks (Change Mechanism 2); and third, by increasing women's access to, ownership of and control over resources (both material and immaterial) (Change Mechanism 3).

#### Implications for research:

- Measure the desired outcomes that social protection programmes seek to affect, those related to potentially unintended effects on the target population, and spillover effects (positive and negative) on other household members beyond the main recipient.
- Unpack the role of moderating factors, such as social and gender norms and attitudes, on the effects that social protection can have on gender equality outcomes at the individual level.
- Adopt both the individual and the household as units of analysis.
- Consider both quantitative and qualitative research strategies and a variety of research and evaluation methods to account for the complexities of gender inequalities.

## Change Pathway 2: Addressing intra-household decision-making dynamics and rebalancing power relationships between women, girls, men and boys

At the household level, gender-responsive social protection can contribute to gender-transformative change by addressing intra-household decision-making dynamics and practices in order to rebalance power relationships, through three mechanisms: first, by supporting women in developing, expressing and exercising their voice and agency within the household (Change Mechanism 1); second, by reducing violence against women and children (Change Mechanism 2); and third, by reducing and redistributing women's and girls' disproportionate responsibility for unpaid care and domestic work (Change Mechanism 3).

### Implications for research:

- Measure the desired outcomes that social protection programmes seek to affect, those related to potentially unintended effects on the target population, as well as spillover effects (positive and negative) on other household members beyond the main recipients.
- Measure agency and voice across the life course, including children – and girls in particular – within the household, in a safe and ethical way, and invest in methodological developments to ethically measure agency and voice directly.
- Unpack the pathways through which change occurs, including by using mediation analysis.
- Adopt both the individual and the household as units of analysis, to capture dynamics between household members of different genders.
- Investigate the single and cumulative effects of programmatic linkages to advance understanding of how best (relational) gender equality goals can be achieved.

## Change Pathway 3: Challenging unequal gender and social norms and increasing the voice and agency of women and girls beyond the household

At the societal level, gender-responsive social protection can contribute to gender-transformative change beyond the household in the community through two mechanisms: first, by increasing women's voice and agency in their interactions outside the family, as well as contributing to changing the norms, attitudes and perceptions of other actors (e.g., service providers) regarding women's access to services; and second, by ensuring women's safe and meaningful access to and engagement with public and social services, and ensuring their perspectives are integrated into the design of available, appropriate and gender-responsive services.

### Implications for research:

- Measure the voice and agency of women and girls in settings beyond their households – for example, in their communities, labour markets and services – in a safe and ethical way.
- Collect data from social protection implementers, service providers, community leaders and other community stakeholders to explore if and how women as social protection beneficiaries, as well as other vulnerable groups, are discriminated against when accessing social protection benefits or services, as well as if they can effectively access accountability mechanisms (such as grievance).
- Employ a variety of research methods, including process evaluation methods, to explore implementation challenges and bottlenecks (for example, to explore whether women face discrimination when accessing social protection benefits and services that are directly due to them, or when accessing accountability (such as grievance) mechanisms).

## Change levers

For gender-responsive social protection to contribute to gender-transformative change, a set of four change levers need to be in place at the level of the social protection system. First, there is a need to shift and transform the prevailing harmful attitudes, ideas and norms around gender equality, poverty and the right to social protection, as held by policymakers, political elites (and their constituencies and parties), and programme managers and implementers – for example, harmful gender norms, which discriminate against women and girls, or preferences against redistribution that may express attitudes towards poverty and the role of social protection (and the state) on how to tackle it (Rost and Nesbitt-Ahmed, forthcoming). Second, there is a need to strengthen the political commitment to, and institutional capacity and accountability for, gender equality; and third, to ensure gender-responsive, adequate, sustainable financing. Fourth, it is important to amplify and expand the voice and capacity of civil society organizations, including women’s and children’s rights organizations, as well as women’s representation in social protection institutions and entities that are responsible for the design and delivery of social protection programmes, as well as in social protection coordination and governance mechanisms.

### Implications for research:

- Explore the role of evidence (data, research, evaluations) in informing decision-making around social protection system reform and how gender gets integrated into it.
- Investigate the role of improved accountability to gender equality outcomes in the process and mechanisms for integrating gender into social protection systems.
- Unpack the role of civil society in social protection system reform and if and how this helps make these reforms gender-responsive.
- Build the evidence base on the cost and cost-effectiveness of social protection systems.

## Implications for the GRASSP research programme

This analytical approach aims to inform evidence generation efforts that can test these change pathways and mechanisms, as well as systemic change levers. The purpose of this analytical approach is also to serve as the foundation to guide the GRASSP research programme in three ways. First, the GRASSP research programme is working to identify and map existing quantitative measures of gender equality outcomes that have been employed in research and evaluations, both in social protection and beyond, to help the research and field of measurement advance. Second, the GRASSP research programme will contribute to filling evidence gaps by rigorously evaluating social protection programmes, primarily cash and cash plus programmes, against a range of gender equality outcomes employing a mixed-methods approach. Finally, the GRASSP research programme will contribute to filling evidence gaps by exploring if and how gender can be institutionalized in social protection systems, and what factors, including political economy and financial ones, are needed to ensure such a reform process is enacted and successful.

# 1. Introduction

Social protection – defined as the set of policies and programmes aimed at preventing or protecting all people against poverty, vulnerability and social exclusion throughout their life course (UNICEF, 2020c) – which has expanded across many low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) in Africa, Asia and Latin America, has demonstrated its effectiveness in reducing income poverty and economic insecurity. Social protection programmes have also demonstrated significant potential to promote positive development outcomes for women and girls.<sup>1</sup> Specifically, improvements in girls’ education, women’s health during pregnancy and childbirth, and reduced poverty across the life cycle, during childhood, adolescence, as well as in old age for women specifically, have been found in evaluations of social protection programmes (see, for example, Bastagli et al., 2016; Camilletti, 2020; Richardson et al., 2020; UNICEF, 2020b; see also extensive evidence from the Transfer Project<sup>2</sup> including Davis et al., 2016).

As social protection systems and programmes mature and expand, their potential to address pre-existing gender inequalities in their design, implementation and finance continues to be explored (Camilletti et al., 2021; Holmes et al., 2019; Perera et al., 2021). In particular, despite decade-long advocacy and research on the linkages between gender and social protection, there remain questions that have not been fully resolved regarding the potential for social protection programmes to move from improving the *condition*<sup>3</sup> of women and girls (such as addressing their daily needs, workloads and responsibilities) to also contributing to broader gender equality outcomes, through addressing structural barriers to gender equality – namely, shifting women and girls’ *position* in societies (see, for example, Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler (2004), Holmes and Jones (2013), as well as Camilletti et al. (2021) and UNICEF (2019, 2020b, 2020c) for a discussion of these debates in recent decades). The vision that guides this ambition is for gender-transformative change, in terms of both process and outcome, which addresses the structural barriers and root causes of gender inequalities, including harmful social and gender norms and unequal power dynamics, among other factors.

The COVID-19 pandemic has made more apparent the critical role that social protection can play in the context of sudden health and economic shocks (Tirivayi et al., 2020). It has highlighted the rise in gender inequalities, including women and girls’ increased risk of domestic violence, the greater level of responsibility for unpaid care and domestic work placed on them, and the greater burden of job loss and employment insecurities they experience (see, for example, UN Women, 2020; Peterman et al., 2020). It has also demonstrated the speed at which gains can be reversed if population groups vulnerable to risk are not protected with appropriate investments. While governments around the world have put in place social protection interventions to mitigate the negative impacts of COVID-19 on individuals and households (Gentilini et al. 2021; FAO, 2020), preliminary analyses suggest that these insufficiently or poorly address structural gender inequalities, such as violence against women and children, unpaid care and domestic work responsibilities, and women’s economic insecurity, which is a lost opportunity (Camilletti and Nesbitt-Ahmed, 2022; UNDP and UN Women, 2021<sup>4</sup>). The current window of opportunity, as the short-term emergency nature of government social protection responses to COVID-19 leaves space for longer-term considerations around social protection system reforms, is a critical one in which to strengthen social protection programmes and systems to deliver gender equality (Camilletti and Nesbitt-Ahmed, 2022; Gavrilovic et al., 2022; Graham-Goulder et al., 2022).

- 1 A review of persisting gender inequalities around the world, and how social protection can help address these inequalities, is beyond the scope of this report; but for more details of this, see: UNICEF (2020c), Camilletti (2020), Perera et al. (2022).
- 2 The Transfer Project is a multi-country cash transfer research initiative, established in 2008 and in collaboration with UNICEF Innocenti, Food and Agriculture Organization, University of North Carolina, UNICEF Regional and Country Offices, national governments and local research partners. Since 2008, it has generated evidence on the effects of cash transfers on children and adolescents’ well-being outcomes, such as education, and the contribution of cash transfers to gender-equitable outcomes, such as intrahousehold relations and decision-making. See: <https://transfer.cpc.unc.edu/themes/>
- 3 The terms ‘condition’ and ‘position’ are broadly used to distinguish between the material conditions and the social status or position of women respectively (Young, 1993). See *Box 2*.
- 4 See, for more information, the UNDP and UN Women COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker, which captures women’s participation in COVID-19 taskforces and government policy measures that address women’s economic and social security, such as unpaid care work. See: <https://data.undp.org/gendertacker/>

UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti’s Gender-Responsive Age-Sensitive Social Protection (GRASSP) research programme (2018–2023)<sup>5</sup> was established to explore the potential of and lessons from social protection programmes and systems, to identify how they can move from being gender-sensitive to being gender-responsive and transformative in their approaches, design and outcomes. To strengthen social protection’s potential to contribute to gender equality, it is important to continue building a robust evidence base to identify ‘what works’, ‘how’ and ‘why’, to enable social protection programmes and systems to address underlying gender inequalities and promote gender-equal outcomes. Such an evidence base needs to be founded on robust conceptual frameworks that draw on both theory and empirical literature, showing the ways in which gender inequalities both shape social protection outcomes and can be shaped by social protection programmes. This also requires a clear analytical approach that can help guide the integration of gender considerations into all aspects of social protection systems – from intent and design, through implementation and financing, to monitoring and evaluation, as well as future research and evaluations on gender-transformative change through social protection.

## Objectives

The overall objective of this report is to help guide evidence generation efforts on gender-responsive social protection that can contribute to gender-transformative change. It does this by proposing and discussing an analytical approach that builds on previous research and frameworks, and it operationalizes the GRASSP conceptual framework (UNICEF, 2020c).

The analytical approach this report proposes consists of a set of interconnected change pathways and mechanisms, through which social protection can address gender inequalities at the individual, household and societal levels, as well as a number of systemic change levers that help make social protection systems gender-responsive (namely, institutionalizing gender into social protection system reform).

Specifically, this analytical approach will help with guiding new research and evaluations that seek to fill gaps and explore contradictions in existing evidence on effective social protection programmes and systems, and enable: (a) the testing of these change pathways and mechanisms in empirical research, including the mixed-methods research under the GRASSP research programme, which will take place across 11 country case studies; (b) the strengthening of overarching research considerations and implications for generating evidence on gender-responsive social protection to contribute to gender-transformative change, and (c) the provision of new opportunities to address the remaining questions and challenges that face the social protection community.

## Methodology

To further translate conceptual ideas, theories and recent empirical evidence into an analytical approach that can support evidence generation (data, research, evaluations) on linkages between gender and social protection across the life course,<sup>6</sup> and develop hypotheses on how gender-responsive social protection can contribute to gender-transformative change at an individual, household and societal level, this report builds on a range of existing literature.

This includes some key theoretical and conceptual literature across a range of disciplines<sup>7</sup> (including feminist economics and political economy approaches), which has conceptualized the linkages between gender and

5 The GRASSP programme has three research streams. Research Stream 1, of which this report is an output, supports empirical research in Research Stream 2 (research and evaluations unpacking design and implementation features of social protection programmes) and Research Stream 3 (research on institutionalizing gender into social protection systems). See more at <https://www.unicef-irc.org/research/gender-responsive-and-age-sensitive-social-protection/>.

6 See, for example: Agarwal, 1997; Alderman and Yemtsov, 2014; Antonopoulos and Hirway, 2010; Buller et al., 2018; Esquivel, 2014; Gammage et al., 2016; Grosh et al., 2008; Hoskyns and Rai, 2005; Kabeer, 1997, 2000, 2001, 2016; MacDonald, 1998; OECD, 2019a; Razavi, 2007; Seth, 1997; UN Women, 2019; Women’s Budget Group, 2018.

7 We draw on neoclassical economics, feminist economics, social norm theories and political economy approaches, and use these different disciplines, theories and models to attempt to tease out insights into how social protection should be designed to address gender inequalities (see, for example, Petit, 2019).

social protection (see, most notably, among others, Holmes and Jones, 2013; Sabates-Wheeler and Kabeer, 2009; and FAO, 2018). It also draws on recent GRASSP publications that review the empirical literature on gender and social protection,<sup>8</sup> which include: Camilletti's (2020) literature review on social protection design features and impacts on gender equality; Perera et al.'s. (2022) systematic review of reviews on the impacts of social protection on gender equality; and Rost and Nesbitt-Ahmed's (2022) literature review on the linkages between social and gender norms and social protection (see Annex for more details on the methodologies employed in these reviews). The hypotheses proposed in this approach can be further tested in different geographical, socio-economic, cultural and programmatic settings, including fragile and conflict-affected settings where rigorous and high-quality evidence is notoriously lacking, to explore how they play out in these settings and the role of contextual factors in moderating these pathways.

## Structure of this report

This report is structured as follows. The next section, Section 2, briefly describes the GRASSP conceptual framework, which outlines the linkages between gender and social protection across the life course (UNICEF, 2020c). It then introduces the proposed analytical approach.

Section 3 discusses the three change pathways and the systemic change levers that help make social protection systems gender-responsive. Each sub-section first discusses the conceptual and theoretical underpinnings of each pathway, and then provides a brief overview of the empirical research conducted in LMIC settings. Following that, it teases out key implications for future research and evaluations – especially in relation to the outcome variables to consider, related measurement issues and the most appropriate units of analysis, as well as research strategies and methods – which can support the testing of the pathway and mechanisms.

The last section, Section 4, concludes with a discussion on evidence gaps, and proposes future empirical research that would test specific aspects of the three change pathways where evidence is particularly lacking, or of the systemic change levers. It also highlights how the GRASSP research programme will contribute to fill these evidence gaps, specifically by: (a) testing specific hypotheses related to change pathways at the individual, household and societal levels, through evaluations of gender-responsive social protection programmes in LMICs, especially unpacking the role of design and implementation features in delivering change; and (b) contributing to a better understanding of gender-responsive social protection system reforms – how and why they integrate gender, or not, and are sustained over time.

8 The methodologies employed in these literature and systematic reviews are described in each of these papers, and briefly summarized here.

## 2. Gender and social protection intersections across the life course – conceptual and operational dimensions

### The GRASSP research programme conceptual framework

The starting point for the development of our analytical approach is the GRASSP conceptual framework (UNICEF, 2020c). The framework outlines the conceptual linkages between gender inequalities, investments in social protection policies, programmes and systems, and positive gender equality outcomes (see *Box 1 for a definition of these outcomes*) across the life course. Specifically, it starts from the assertion that “poverty, risks and vulnerabilities are gendered” (UNICEF, 2020c: 5), and can change throughout the life course and accumulate over time. Further, it maps how social protection systems can “address gendered risks and vulnerabilities through specific programmes and features across the social protection delivery cycle, including the legal and policy framework, design, implementation, governance and financing;” thereby contributing to positive gender equality outcomes (UNICEF, 2020c: 5; see also *Box 1*).

The GRASSP conceptual framework applies three lenses to conceptualize the intersections between gender and social protection: intersectionality, life course and gender integration. From an intersectional perspective, it acknowledges the importance of conceptualizing and understanding gendered risks and vulnerabilities across the multiple identities that individuals and households have – accounting for age, disability status, rural or urban or peri-urban residence, ethnicity and religion, among others. From a life course perspective, it recognizes that gender inequalities, risks and vulnerabilities differ across ages and stages in the life course (UNICEF, 2020c). As a result, the social protection responses to such inequalities, risks and vulnerabilities must differ accordingly, and be designed and implemented in ways that specifically address these distinctions. Finally, from a gender integration perspective, it recognizes that addressing gender inequality depends on purposive actions, such as specific design and implementation features of social protection programmes and the overall functioning of social protection systems.

In addition to these three lenses, the GRASSP conceptual framework centres on the understanding that not tackling the underlying drivers of inequalities – such as discriminatory social and gender norms, which are common root causes of women and girls’ vulnerabilities – can also lead to adverse impacts on a series of gender equality outcomes, including economic security, health, education, mental health, safety and protection from violence, and voice and agency. As such, the gender-transformative approach we propose in this report is nested in the space between social protection as addressing the root causes of inequalities that impact women and girls throughout their life course, and social protection as positively influencing gender equality by making significant contributions to gender equality outcomes. We refer consistently in this paper to the potential for gender-responsive social protection to support and positively impact gender-transformative outcomes, through appropriately designed and implemented social protection investments and actions.

#### Box 1: Gender equality outcomes of social protection proposed in the GRASSP conceptual framework

The gender equality outcome areas in the GRASSP conceptual framework are defined as follows.

**Economic security and empowerment:** Right to access opportunities and decent work, including the ability to participate equally in existing markets; control over and ownership of resources and assets (including one’s own time); reduced burden of unpaid care and domestic work; and meaningful participation in economic decision-making at all levels.

**Improved health:** Right to live healthily, including sexual and reproductive health rights, and right to access safe, nutritious and sufficient food. This is also concerned with information, knowledge and awareness of health issues, and access to health services.

**Enhanced education:** Right to inclusive and equitable quality education, leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes, including cognitive skills and knowledge; and right to lifelong learning opportunities.

**Improved mental health and psychosocial well-being:** A state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity, in which an individual realizes their own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.

**Increased protection:** Freedom from all forms of violence (physical, sexual and psychological violence, including controlling behaviour), exploitation, abuse and neglect, including harmful practices (child, early and forced marriage, and FGM) and child labour (including children's unpaid care and domestic work).

**Enhanced voice and agency:** Ability to speak up and be heard, and to articulate one's views in a meaningful way (voice), and to make decisions about one's own life and act on them at all levels (agency).

In these definitions, 'all levels', refers to these gender equality outcomes being present at the household, community and national level, and be individual or collective.

Source: Perera et al. (2021).

## Gender-transformative change pathways and mechanisms in social protection

This report presents an analytical approach (see Figure 1) to operationalize the GRASSP conceptual framework described above, and draws from the review of conceptual, theoretical and empirical literature listed in the methodology section above. This analytical approach is structured as a socio-ecological framework, adapted from Bronfenbrenner (1979).<sup>9</sup> While Bronfenbrenner (1979) places the child at the centre of the framework, in adapting the framework, we centre both the child and the woman at the individual level, as both women and children face specific, gendered vulnerabilities, discriminations and inequalities, which often make them worse off, relative to men. This highlights the intergenerational dimensions of gender inequality.

The analytical approach consists of the three interconnected levels (and change pathways) – individual, household, and societal, through which we hypothesize that gender-responsive social protection can contribute to gender-transformative change. The three levels and related change pathways propose how social protection programmes can be made gender-responsive to contribute to gender-transformative change, by addressing specific gendered vulnerabilities and structural inequalities. This involves specific programmes, as well as specific design, implementation and financing features of social protection programmes. Underpinning these three change pathways are a set of systemic change levers that operate at the level of the social protection system and can strengthen its gender-responsiveness. The systemic change levers refer to factors that the existing evidence suggests can make social protection systems gender-responsive (for a definition of gender-responsive social protection, gender-transformative change and related terminology, see Box 2).

In conceiving our analytical approach, we emphasize that the three levels are interconnected, reinforcing and building on each other. They are also not conceived as necessarily chronologically linear or sequential. Instead, we acknowledge that change can happen at different times or simultaneously at various levels, and change at one level can trigger change at another. Further, change at each level can happen via multiple change mechanisms, namely through specific gender-responsive social protection programmes and design and implementation features that contribute to specific outcomes.

The interconnectedness of the three levels and change pathways also raises implications for evidence generation. Research must be carried out both at each level and at the interactions of various levels. This requires data collection efforts, research questions and research methods that can appropriately capture whether gender-transformative change is due to one specific change pathway, or to intersections between more than one. For example, researching and evaluating two or more social protection programmes or programme components could shed light on whether there are cumulative changes in the desired outcomes, or positive spillovers between them, or adverse effects.

<sup>9</sup> The socio-ecological framework is a model for understanding the multifaceted levels within a society and how these different levels – from individual to societal – interact within and across a system. Bronfenbrenner (1979) originally proposed this to conceptualize how child development outcomes (individual level) are influenced by factors at the household, community and structural levels, and by intersections between these.

As with the GRASSP conceptual framework (UNICEF, 2020c), this analytical approach should be seen as a 'living' document, to be revisited and updated as further empirical information becomes available from the GRASSP programme and other research on gender-responsive social protection.

## Box 2: Defining the key gender-related concepts used in this report

In this report, we define the key gender-related terms as follows.

**Gender-transformative change** refers to changes at the individual, household, societal and system levels that explicitly address "unequal gender relations in order to promote shared power, control of resources, decision making and support for women's [and girls'] empowerment" (UNDP, 2019), and achieve gender equality.

**Gender-transformative change pathway** refers to a set of changes happening at one level of the socio-ecological framework.

**Gender-transformative change mechanism** refers to one of such changes, happening at one level of the socio-ecological framework, and materializing following specific features of social protection programmes and systems (e.g., design and implementation features).

**Gender-responsive social protection** (systems, programmes, policies, strategies) refers to social protection that acknowledges gender dynamics and deliberately responds to women's and men's specific needs (FAO, 2018) through gender-equitable strategies. In these interventions, gender equality is a central outcome of development investments (not just a means to achieve other goals) (UNICEF, 2020c).

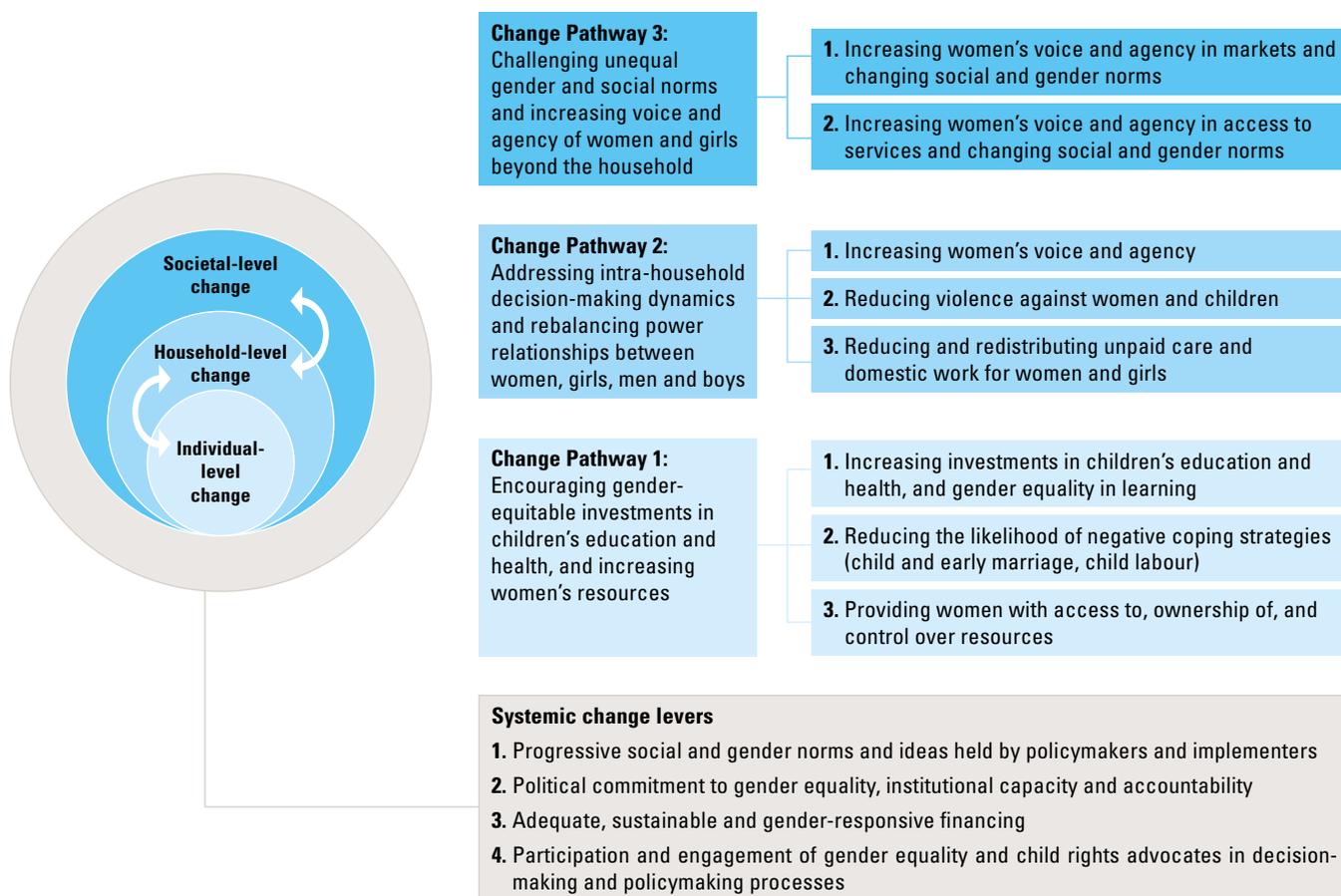
**Gender-equitable strategies** refer to approaches and interventions that address and redress imbalances or inequities in access to resources and opportunities between women, men, girls and boys to ensure gender-equitable outcomes.

Women's **condition** refers to the immediate, material circumstances in which men and women live, related to their present workload and responsibilities (March et al., 1999). Women's position refers to the place of women in society relative to that of men (March et al., 1999). Changing women's position requires addressing their strategic gender interests, namely the way gender determines power, status and control over resources (see below, and March et al., 1999).

**Practical gender interests or needs** are "those needs which are formulated from the concrete conditions women experience, in their engendered position within the sexual division of labour" (Moser, 1989:1,803). They are "usually a response to an immediate perceived necessity which is identified by women within a specific context" (Moser, 1989:1,803). The term was first coined by Molyneux (1985), who talked about practical gender needs, and later developed by Moser (1989), who talked about interests instead. Practical gender needs do not "generally entail a strategic goal such as women's emancipation or gender equality [...] nor do they challenge the prevailing forms of subordination even though they arise directly out of them" (Molyneux, 1985:233).

**Strategic gender interests or needs** are "those needs which are formulated from the analysis of women's subordination to men, and deriving out of this the strategic gender interest identified for an alternative, more equal and satisfactory organization of society than that which exists at present, in terms of both the structure and nature of relationships between men and women" (Moser, 1989:1,803).

Figure 1: Gender-transformative change pathways and mechanisms across three levels of a socio-ecological framework, and systemic change levers



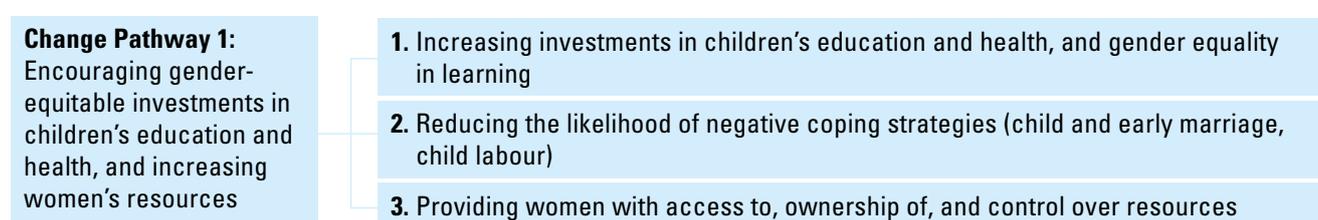
Source: Authors’ elaboration.

### 3. Gender-transformative change through social protection: pathways and mechanisms

#### Change Pathway 1

Individual-level change – encouraging gender-equitable investments in children’s education and health and increasing women’s access to and use of resources

Figure 2: Change Pathway 1



Source: Authors’ elaboration.

#### A. The hypothesized change pathway and mechanisms at a glance

At the individual level, there are three hypothesized mechanisms through which social protection can contribute to gender-transformative change (see Figure 1, first circle, and Figure 2).

First, by increasing gender-equitable household investments in children’s education, health and nutrition, gender-responsive social protection contributes to intergenerational well-being, especially for girls, breaking the vicious cycle of poverty and supporting safe transitions to adulthood (Change Mechanism 1).

Second, by strengthening the resilience of households and helping them to manage risks and withstand shocks, gender-responsive social protection contributes to gender equality insofar as it helps in reducing households’ risks of adopting negative coping strategies (Change Mechanism 2). Negative coping strategies are often gendered in their nature, prevalence and effects on well-being. Child marriage and child labour are two such examples that have particular and different implications for boys and girls. Gender-responsive social protection would thus support breaking the cycle of gender inequality and poverty.

Third, by increasing women’s disposable income and access to, ownership of and control over resources – both material (e.g., cash, assets, livelihoods, access to labour market opportunities) and immaterial (e.g., psychosocial well-being, self-competence, self-esteem) – gender-responsive social protection reduces women’s income insecurity and poverty specifically. This both increases women’s material condition, through enhanced access to, ownership of and control over resources, and strengthens their position within the family (Change Mechanism 3).

## B. Theoretical underpinnings and empirical evidence

The three proposed change mechanisms under this pathway are drawn from a wide range of theoretical and conceptual studies and literature that have developed a theoretical understanding of the processes of gendered change in different contexts, as well as from empirical studies<sup>10</sup> that have identified the positive effects of social protection programmes on women and children (see also Table 1 detailing the empirical evidence of the effects of social protection, and Table 2 outlining the implications for social protection design features based on the existing empirical evidence).

### Change Mechanisms 1 and 2: Increasing investments in children’s education and health, and reducing the likelihood of negative coping strategies

As one of the main social protection interventions, by transferring cash or in-kind resources to households, it is argued that social protection programmes can encourage household investments in women’s and children’s well-being, in particular education and health, through easing financial constraints (OECD, 2019a; Sebastian et al., 2019; Dammert et al., 2018; Alderman and Yemtsov, 2014; Grosh et al., 2008). Through lowering out-of-pocket costs for education and health-related expenditures, social transfers can further enable households to take up opportunities and services (e.g., education and health) that they would have had to give up (Grosh et al., 2008). By reinvesting freed up or novel resources, including in children’s education and health, households can break cycles of intergenerational poverty (OECD, 2019a) (Change Mechanism 1).

Empirical evidence confirms that cash transfers, when well designed,<sup>11</sup> can support households with both the direct costs of going to school, such as school fees (where these are still a barrier), transport, school supplies and uniforms, and the indirect or “opportunity costs of the child’s time” (see the overview of the empirical evidence presented in Table 1, and literature referenced therein), which could otherwise be used for paid and unpaid labour as suggested by the theoretical literature and confirmed in empirical studies (Grosh et al., 2008: 15; Dammert et al., 2018). The theoretical literature predicts this would help shift incentives that may otherwise compel households to underinvest in children’s education and health, particularly for girls. However, a gap in the empirical evidence remains around whether and how social protection programmes and design features can help improve learning outcomes for girls, beyond increasing school enrolment and attendance. Specifically, while the existing evidence has shown that, for instance, cash transfers can incentivize school participation, these programmes have not been found effective at translating attendance into improved learning outcomes. A hypothetical explanation for this is that, while social protection can lower the direct and indirect costs of schooling, improving learning outcomes may require additional non-financial interventions. For example, supply-side investments in education systems might be required. Further, it can be hypothesized that programmes to ensure that children have time for studying outside school rather than undertaking domestic chores (particularly for girls) or other forms of paid or unpaid work (particularly for boys) are needed. We further hypothesize that incentivizing and supporting households to renegotiate harmful norms around children’s work and education (and the devaluing of girls’ education in particular) can help ensure that girls participate in and benefit equitably from school, improve their learning outcomes and benefit from skills-building opportunities. One approach could include linking social protection to interventions that seek to shift these norms, such as behaviour change components<sup>12</sup>.

Social protection programmes can also prevent the adoption by households of negative coping strategies, such as child and early marriage or child labour, which poor or economically insecure households often resort to in order to manage financial constraints, especially when facing crises and shocks (Change Mechanism 2). Because of the low economic and social value attached to girls’ education, health and nutrition, relative to boys’, households tend to underinvest in their girls’ human development (Kabeer, 2016). Empirical evidence confirms that shocks that

10 See, for example, Perera et al., 2022, and Camilletti, 2020, and specifically the following, all cited in Camilletti, 2020: Alam et al., 2011; Andrew et al., 2018; Angeles et al., 2014; Attah et al., 2016; Baird et al., 2013; Bakrania et al., 2018; Bárcia de Mattos and Dasgupta, 2017; Barros et al., 2011; Bastagli et al., 2016; Bazzi et al., 2012; Bernal and Ramírez, 2019; Camfield, 2014; Cheema et al., 2016; Chinen et al., 2018; Clark et al., 2019; Cluver et al., 2013; Cookson, 2018; Dammert et al., 2018; Del Carpio et al., 2016; FAO, 2018; Handa et al., 2014, 2015, 2016; Hasan, 2010; Hojman and López Bóo, 2019; Jones et al., 2019; Kabeer et al., 2012; Kalamar et al., 2016; Leroy et al., 2011; Manley et al., 2013; Martínez and Perticarà, 2017; Mateo Diaz and Rodriguez-Chamussy, 2013; Moussié, 2020; Nanda et al., 2016; Natali et al., 2019; Orozco Corona and Gammage, 2017; Pereira and Peterman, 2015; Peterman and Natali, 2016; Peterman et al., 2019; Salinas Rodríguez et al., 2014; Seidenfeld, 2014; and UN Women, 2017.

11 For example, evidence suggests that positive design features include a sufficiently high benefit size and the idea of children’s well-being as an objective that is clearly communicated to beneficiary households. (see empirical evidence reviewed in the Table)

12 For further evidence and discussion around the linkages between social protection and education, see UNICEF (2021b).

households face are associated with school dropout and early marriage for girls (see, for example, UNICEF, 2020a, 2021; Trinh and Zhang, 2020). While social protection transfers can be gender-equitable by addressing constraints on investments in girls, encouraging their education and preventing them from being married off early, more attention may be required to transform harmful social and gender norms<sup>13</sup> around the value of girls' education and unpaid care and domestic work.

### **Change Mechanism 3: Providing women with access to, ownership of and control over resources**

The third mechanism under this pathway, through which gender-responsive social protection can contribute to gender-transformative change, is by increasing women's resources (e.g., income, assets), thereby strengthening their 'condition' (i.e., their material circumstances). This can also in turn contribute to strengthening their 'position' (i.e., within the power dynamics) in the household (linked to Change Pathway 2), as well as contributing to strengthening their psychosocial well-being and resilience. Theoretical frameworks from feminist economics conceptualize women's lower economic security as a result of power dynamics in households (and in society at large). The existing empirical evidence suggests that "by age 25 (and up to 34), women are two percentage points poorer than men" (Boudet et al., 2018: 12; see also UN Women, 2019) in the same age group. They also face greater discrimination in the labour market and are less likely to participate in the labour market in the first place (UN Women, 2019), or to work in the formal economy in many LMICs. They are also more likely to face interrupted careers due to care responsibilities (ILO, 2019), with implications for their access to employment-based social security systems.

It is argued that providing social protection directly to women can contribute to their human development by increasing the resources they control, own and have access to, reducing their poverty and improving their well-being (e.g., enabling women to save, pursue labour market opportunities and purchase productive assets). As we elaborate in relation to Change Pathway 2, the rise in feminist economics<sup>14</sup> – as a critical response to neoclassical economics – has provided a robust challenge to the assumption that household members share resources equally, including income and time, or that household members benefit equally from household expenditures or resources more broadly (Women's Budget Group, 2018; MacDonald, 1998). Feminist economists and researchers have argued and demonstrated that households are not necessarily harmonious units where cooperation and solidarity prevail (UN Women, 2019; Kabeer, 1997; Women's Budget Group, 2018; MacDonald, 1998). They are instead typically sites of contestation and power imbalances, which influence negotiation around how resources, such as money and time, are shared between different members, resulting in gender-unequal outcomes (UN Women, 2019; Kabeer, 1997; Women's Budget Group, 2018; MacDonald, 1998).

According to intra-household bargaining models, at the individual level, the welfare effects of a cash transfer depend on the gender of the recipient and on whether and how male and female household members cooperate and share resources (UN Women, 2019: 29; see also Antonopoulos and Hirway, 2010) – and, as such, the gender of the recipient is likely to determine the effects. Such cooperation, and sharing of resources, depends on each household member's relative bargaining power, defined by several factors, including "the strength of the person's fall-back position"<sup>15</sup> (Agarwal, 1997: 5; see also UN Women, 2019: 29). The fallback position includes "different economic characteristics of individuals, such as their relative earnings and wealth" (Kabeer, 2000: 27; see also Kabeer, 1997). It has also been expanded to include "extra environmental parameters" (Kabeer, 2000: 27), such as "sex ratios in the relevant marriage markets, women's ability to return to their natal homes or to get other types of support in case of marital breakdown, and the cultural acceptability of outside work for women" (McElroy, 1990, cited in Kabeer, 2000: 27).

Hence, it is argued that transferring social protection directly to women is needed to improve women's condition through increasing their access to, ownership of and control over resources. Empirical evidence confirms that

13 Social norms are informal rules that define what behaviour is socially approved (Marcus, 2018).

14 Feminism can be defined as "the pursuit of equality between men and women" (Women's Budget Group, 2018). Feminist economics is a sub-discipline within economics that is grounded on questions around power, resources and decision-making. It has developed from critiques of mainstream neoclassical economics, dating back to at least the 1970s (Nelson, 1995; Women's Budget Group, 2018). It consists of three main core ideas: the individual is not always a rational, utility-maximizing agent, and the economy does not only depend on the production and distribution of goods and services but also on cooperation and care; the household is not a unit, as inequalities within the household in the distribution of resources, including time, affect household members' bargaining power as well as the outcomes of decision-making processes; unpaid care and domestic work is work, rather than 'leisure', and must be measured and counted as such. See, for example, Agarwal, 1997; Elson, 2008; Folbre, 1994; Kabeer, 1999, 2005; MacDonald, 1998; Molyneux, 1985; Moser, 1989; Nelson, 1995; Young, 1988; Pearson, 2019; Women's Budget Group, 2018.

15 Fallback position refers to "the outside options that determine how well-off s/he would be if cooperation failed" (Agarwal, 1997: 5).

women benefit from receiving cash or in-kind transfers, or access to labour market programmes or social care services, experiencing positive outcomes – including reduced poverty, increased consumption, better access to productive assets and increased labour market participation (see Table 1). As discussed below under Change Pathway 2, to increase women’s control over resources it is critical to design more social protection programmes that aim at specifically improving women’s well-being outcomes. For example, in Latin America, countries that significantly expanded social pensions succeeded in decreasing the share of women aged 60 and older with no access to personal income (UN Women, 2017: 41). It is also critical to design social protection programmes that have the household as the benefit unit, instead of an individual, as in the case of household allowances. In these kinds of cases, it may still be appropriate in many contexts to target women as the recipients of household benefits as this can help increase women’s ownership of (household) resources.

However, two caveats must be kept in mind. First, simply transferring resources (however defined) to women, or facilitating access to services, may not be sufficient to change the power dynamics within a household and improve women’s position. Simply giving poor women access to economic resources may not automatically lead to their overall empowerment (Batliwala and Dhanraj, 2008). Many evaluations have shown that social protection programmes have been effective in reducing material poverty, as well as some aspects of multidimensional poverty, and in contributing to different well-being outcomes for women, such as increased savings and improved consumption (see overview of the empirical literature in Table 1, and literature referenced therein). In fact, feminist critiques of these programmes have highlighted how they have in practice tended to be more focused towards the ‘conditions’ of poor women, rather than their ‘positions’, which are the structural and root causes of poverty and gender inequalities (Holmes and Jones, 2013). Further, directly targeting women as social protection beneficiaries for the explicit purpose of increasing household welfare, without addressing their ability to make and influence decisions in the household, may even have unintended consequences such as male backlash (see Change Pathway 2 and literature referenced therein). Improving women’s positions in their household would require increasing women’s voice and agency, including their ability to make and influence decisions within their household.

Second, feminist researchers have warned of the risk that social protection programmes – especially those that seek to achieve children’s objectives rather than broader household-level ones, and those that impose conditionalities on recipients in order to achieve such objectives – may entrench gender norms,<sup>16</sup> especially those that emphasize women’s caregiving roles, and thereby perpetuate gender stereotypes and biases that arise from this association. For instance, research using diverse sources of data and employing different methodologies has found that, in many cases, for women, “access to a range of valued resources, such as education, employment, land, cash transfers, and credit, is very often associated with increased investments in family welfare, including children’s health and education” (Kabeer, 2020: 14). However, targeting resources to women rather than men, based on the notion of their higher likelihood to invest in the education and health of children, could in fact reinforce the stereotype of women as primary caregivers, further entrenching normative divisions of labour, rather than helping to challenge them (Camilletti, 2020; Bastagli et al., 2016). Empirical evidence by Molyneux (2006), on the conditional cash transfer (CCT) programme Progresá (later renamed Oportunidades and then Prospera) in Mexico, showed that women received the cash transfer benefit in an instrumental way as mothers, to meet children’s human capital objectives, while they were left bearing the burden of conditionalities. Similarly, Tabbush (2010) and Cookson (2018) challenged Latin American CCT programmes and their conditionalities, which claimed to ‘include’ women by making them the recipients of the cash transfer, but in practice also resulted in women being the ones who were left having to comply with conditionalities, which increased their unpaid care and domestic work burden, given the limited availability and accessibility of public services and infrastructure. Further, evidence from more recent empirical research indicates that, while in most if not all contexts and countries, women are expected to spend more on children (relative to men), this does not always translate into their greater likelihood to do so, as gender roles and responsibilities are context-dependent (FAO, 2018). This may either mean men’s actual contribution to unpaid care and domestic work is made invisible, or they are disincentivized from making such a contribution.

With these caveats in mind, appropriately designed social protection programmes (i.e., both programmes targeted at households where women are identified as recipients, and programmes aimed at and received by women) can improve women’s ‘condition’, by increasing their access to, control over and ownership of resources, and without perpetuating harmful norms (e.g., by avoiding stereotypical representations of women as mothers and caregivers;

16 Gender norms historically emerged as an area of research and practice from feminist scholars addressing gender inequality (Cislaghi and Heise, 2020). However, they can be conceptualized as a subset of social norms, and defined as “informal, deeply entrenched and widely held beliefs about gender roles, power relations, standards or expectations that govern human behaviours and practices in a particular social context and at a particular time” (UNICEF, 2020d: 1; Petit, 2019). Underpinning the perpetuation of gender norms are power dynamics and asymmetries that see actors with power holding sway in certain settings, contributing to perpetuate norms (and in turn behaviours) through sanctions and rewards.

encouraging women's ownership of resources and assets) (Change Mechanism 3). This is the first step towards strengthening women's 'position' in the household, increasing their bargaining power and decision-making capacity, which is discussed below under Change Pathway 2. Gender-transformative change could further be promoted by complementary measures, including available, accessible public services and infrastructure, interventions that shift the norms around the care and domestic responsibilities to redistribute them within the household, and investments in the labour markets to cater for decent work opportunities, among others, which are also discussed below under Change Pathway 2.

Table 1: Change Pathway 1 – empirical evidence on the effects of social protection on gender equality by change mechanism

<b>Change Mechanism 1</b>	<b>+ Children's school enrolment and attendance, often with stronger results for girls (cash transfers)</b>
	Facilitating return to school for children that dropped out, or incentivizing children to stay in school, potentially due to cash transfers reducing financial constraints on families. This is especially important for families with girls due to entrenched gender norms around the value of girls' education. For example, see: Baird et al. (2013); Handa et al. (2014); Jones et al. (2019); see also: for Bangladesh, Behrman (2015); on Pakistan's Punjab Female School Stipend Programme, Alam et al. (2011) and Hasan (2010), who also found positive spillover effects on boys' enrolment; on Malawi's Social Cash Transfer Programme and Zambia's Multiple Category Targeted Grant, Natali et al. (2019); and evaluations of the Mexican CCT Prospera (Orozco Corona and Gammage, 2017) and the Moroccan 'labelled' cash transfer (Benhassine et al., 2015).
	<b>? Learning (e.g., test scores, receptive vocabulary) (cash transfers)</b>
	Some positive effects on maths and language achievement scores (e.g., the long-term impact evaluation of the Nicaraguan CCT Red de Protección Social by Barham et al. (2014) and the study of PROSPERA in Mexico on learning outcomes measured by standardized achievement tests by Behrman et al. (2019), who did not find any significant differences by gender). However, most studies concluded that increasing school enrolment and attendance do not automatically translate into improvements in learning outcomes (see, for instance, Andersen et al. (2015) and Gaentzsch (2019) on Juntos CCT in Peru; Baird et al. (2013); and UNICEF (2021b)).
	<b>- Risky sexual behaviours (e.g., reduced prevalence of early sexual debut, higher likelihood of contraceptive use, reduced HIV risk, risk of pregnancy and prevalence of transactional sex and multiple partnerships) (cash transfers)</b>
	Change, mostly for girls, and often due to increasing school enrolment and attendance, and increasing knowledge around contraception and HIV (e.g., AIR (2014) for Zimbabwe's Harmonised Social Cash Transfer Programme; Cluver et al. (2013), for South Africa; Handa et al. (2015, 2016) for the Kenyan CT-OVC; Natali et al. (2019) on Malawi and Zambia).
	<b>No evidence on increased fertility (cash transfers)</b>
	For example, Handa et al. (2017); Palermo et al. (2016) for Zambia.
<b>? Nutrition (i.e., + meal frequency, - prevalence of overweight, wasting and stunting) (cash transfers)</b>	
For example, on increased food expenditure (Braido et al. 2012's evaluation of Bolsa Alimentação in Brazil; Chakrabarti et al. 2019's evaluation of the Zambia Child Grant Programme, with findings also on increased meal frequency); on increased height-for-age for boys, reduced BMI (Body Mass Index) and overweight prevalence for girls (Andersen et al. (2015), evaluating the Peruvian CCT Juntos); on reduced girls' wasting (Cheema et al. (2016), evaluating Pakistan's cash transfer BISP (Benazir Income Support Programme)). However, studies also find no evidence of any effects. Evidence on height-for-age is either of no effects (see Berhane et al. (2017); Chakrabarti et al. (2019) on the Zambia Child Grant Programme), mixed evidence (Gaarder et al., 2010) or small and non-significant effect (Manley et al., 2013).	
<b>+ Healthcare service utilization (e.g., antenatal care visits, skilled attendance at birth, delivery at a health facility) (cash transfers)</b>	
Evidence of cash transfers incentivizing health-seeking behaviours (e.g., Novignon et al. (2019); Gaarder et al. (2010); Glassman et al. (2013); IEG (2014), cited in Bastagli et al. (2016)).	
<b>+ Child health and development (childcare services, with few exceptions)</b>	
See, for example, systematic review of daycare programmes by Leroy et al. (2011).	

Notes: The plus/minus (+/-) sign indicates a positive/negative effect of social protection on the outcome of interest, whereas the question mark (?) indicates the evidence is mixed or inconclusive. Source: All references are cited in Camilletti et al. (2021), Camilletti (2020), or Perera et al. (2022).

<b>Change Mechanism 2</b>	<b>? Child and early marriage (cash transfers)</b>
	Evidence that interventions that support girls' schooling through cash or in-kind transfers show the clearest pattern of success in preventing child marriage (systematic review by Malhotra and Elnakib, 2021). However, evidence from the qualitative component of the impact evaluation of India's ABAD programme finds that it only delayed marriage until 18 years. Specifically, many adolescent girls get married as soon as they turn 18 and use the money in the savings account to pay for marriage and dowry costs. Families also interpreted the savings account as being for marriage and dowry costs (Nanda et al., 2016).
<b>Change Mechanism 3</b>	<b>? Child labour within and outside households (cash transfers, depending on cash transfer value, and household decisions regarding how and on what to invest the cash transfer)</b>
	Evidence from Dammert et al. (2018)'s systematic review indicates that public policies, including social protection, that address child labour by either reducing household vulnerability or helping households to cope with exposure to risk, produce the desired child labour reduction effect. However, policies aimed at increasing adult household members' participation in the labour market or entrepreneurial activities can generate demand for child and adolescent work. See also analysis by Bárcia de Mattos and Dasgupta (2017) on India's public works programme MGNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act), where a decrease in women's time spent on unpaid care and domestic work was substituted by girls' increased time spent on these activities, especially when their mothers spent 30 hours or more a week in the programme.
<b>Change Mechanism 3</b>	<b>- Poverty (cash transfers, pensions)</b>
	See, for example, Latin America, where countries that significantly expanded social pensions saw a decrease in the share of women aged 60 and older with no access to personal income (UN Women, 2017: 41).
	<b>? Women's disposable income</b>
	There is evidence that cash transfers increased women's disposable income, whereas the evidence is mixed for childcare services (e.g., systematic review by Mateo Diaz and Rodriguez-Chamussy (2013), finding mixed results on their effects on women's or household income).
	<b>+ Women's savings, access to investments in productive assets and productivity</b>
	Although the increases in investments in productive assets seem to follow rigid gender norms around what assets are appropriate for women to own (Kabeer et al. (2012); Bastagli et al. (2016) for cash transfers in Ghana, Kenya, Malawi and Tanzania; Cheema et al. (2016) on Pakistan's BISP; Peterman and Natali (2016) in Zambia Child Grant Programme; FAO (2018)).
<b>? Women's labour supply and number of hours worked (cash transfers, pensions)</b>	
Most studies found no evidence of a reduction in labour supply as a result of a cash transfer, or on the overall number of hours worked for either men or women (Banerjee et al. (2017) for cash transfers in six countries; Salehi-Isfahani and Mostafavi-Dehzoeei (2018) for Iran; Handa et al. (2017) for evidence across the Transfer project countries). A few studies found a reduced proportion of women engaged in unpaid work (Cheema et al. (2016) on the unconditional arm of BISP, in Pakistan), and paid work (Kits et al. (2015) in Georgia), or a marginal decrease in the number of hours worked in aggregate terms or by women (Kabeer et al. (2012) for women's number of hours worked; IEG (2014), cited in Bastagli et al. (2016) on the Albania's UCT on women, and the non-contributory pensions in South Africa and Mexico).	
<b>+ Women's employment and labour force participation (childcare services)</b>	
See, for example, the systematic review by Mateo Diaz and Rodriguez-Chamussy (2013), finding positive effects on their employment and labour force participation; see also evaluations by Clark et al. (2019) on vouchers for daycare in Kenya, Martinez and Perticará (2017) on afterschool care in Chile, Hoijman and Boo (2019) on childcare centres in Nicaragua, Barros et al. (2011) on childcare centres in Brazil, and Angeles et al. (2014) on daycare in Mexico.	
<b>- Depression, + hope, optimism, happiness, life satisfaction</b>	
Evidence from Kenya's unconditional cash transfer for men aged 20–24 years in the Kenyan cash transfer for orphans and vulnerable children but not on women (Pereira, 2016; Kilburn et al., 2018); Zambia's cash transfer programme (Natali et al., 2018).	

Notes: The plus/minus (+/-) sign indicates a positive/negative effect of social protection on the outcome of interest, whereas the question mark (?) indicates the evidence is mixed or inconclusive. Source: All references are cited in Camilletti et al. (2021), Camilletti (2020), or Perera et al. (2022).

Table 2: Change Pathway 1 – Implications for social protection design features based on the existing empirical evidence by change mechanism

Change Mechanism 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Ensure that the design features of social protection programmes follow through from their objectives. For cash transfers, ensure to keep the flexibility for beneficiaries to choose how to spend the resources.</b> For cash transfers that have children's education and health as objectives, ensure that their design is informed by an understanding of the gendered barriers and constraints on achieving these outcomes. Consider intended and unintended effects – for example, targeting girls in cash transfer programmes aimed at increasing their education may unintentionally decrease boys' enrolment (Dickson and Bangpan, 2012).</li> <li>• Avoid conditionalities and opt for universal programmes. If enforcing conditionalities, eliminate risk of being punitive – for example, by adequate supply-side investments in availability and accessibility of services, including education and health; and by incentivizing fathers to take on the responsibilities of meeting these conditionalities equally with mothers or other caregivers.</li> <li>• If childcare services, ensure quality, availability, accessibility (both physically and financially), and flexible operating hours.</li> <li>• If cash transfers, complement them with behaviour change communication interventions to shift norms around girls' education, improve their school participation and learning, by increasing their time allocation on studying (especially outside school) (suggestive evidence).</li> </ul>
Change Mechanism 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure that the design features of social protection programmes follow through from their objectives. Effectively communicate programmatic objectives to beneficiaries. Consider the role of awareness and 'framing' of the issue, promotional, outreach and communication strategies in the implementation of social protection programmes. Ensure available and accessible accountability mechanisms (e.g., grievance).</li> <li>• If cash transfers, complement them with behaviour change communication interventions to shift norms around girls' marriage to change the acceptability of child and early marriage (suggestive evidence). However, ensure a sufficiently extended period of follow-up to measure change over the long term, consider a sufficiently high intensity of each component of integrated programmes, and a high quality. Ensure smooth and fast uptake of each component of integrated programmes.</li> <li>• Ensure regular, predictable transfer of benefits of adequate level/size so that households and their members can plan expenditure and investments.</li> <li>• Ensure legal and policy efforts to change individual behaviours.</li> </ul>
Change Mechanism 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider how women's uptake of social protection programmes is contingent on the support women receive from family members, including to meet care and domestic needs, and determined by social and cultural attitudes.</li> <li>• If cash transfers, complement them with behaviour change communication interventions to shift norms around women's access to, control over and ownership of resources (suggestive evidence only, more evidence needed).</li> <li>• Account for programme-induced expenses (e.g., childcare, transport, medicine and material costs).</li> <li>• Consider the acceptability of transfers to women, which seems to increase if they aim to support an activity considered to be part of the responsibilities of women, such as child nutrition (Buller et al., 2018), and decrease for those transfers that disrupt gender norms in highly patriarchal societies (Bastagli et al., 2016; Buller et al., 2018). Similarly, for labour market programmes implemented in contexts where women are not expected to work outside the home (Chinen et al., 2017; Gibbs et al., 2017; Oya et al., 2017).</li> <li>• If active labour market programmes for women's labour market participation, complement them with investments in decent market opportunities to ensure qualitative improvements in labour market outcomes, and better-paying, more formal jobs with better protections (including social and labour protections).</li> </ul>

Source: All references are cited in Camilletti et al. (2021), Camilletti (2020) or Perera et al. (2022).

## C. Implications for research

The theoretical and empirical evidence reviewed above has several implications for future research and evaluations. First, when measuring gender-transformative outcomes, it is important to include both the intended ones that social protection programmes seek to affect and those related to potentially unintended effects on the target population, as well as spillover effects (positive and negative) on non-beneficiary household members. For example, as discussed above, theoretical and empirical studies suggest that increases in child labour and child or early marriage may materialize as a result of specific design features of social protection programmes targeted at households, women or men. Ensuring that data collection efforts, including tools and instruments, capture these dynamics will be critical to ensure any unintended adverse effects are identified and corrected through programme adaptations and reforms.

Second, the theoretical and empirical literature further suggests that moderating factors, such as social and gender norms and attitudes, can play a role in reducing the effects that social protection can have on gender equality outcomes at the individual level. Take, for example, social protection programmes that seek to improve children's learning outcomes – harmful social and gender norms and attitudes around the value of girls' education may impede the transformative effects of social protection by limiting its effects on girls. Harmful norms around the resources that women should own, control and have access to can also impede social protection's transformative potential. Ensuring that social and gender norms and attitudes around a wide range of gender equality areas are measured in research and evaluations of social protection is an important research implication arising from the existing literature.

Third, while this change pathway focuses on achieving gender-transformative change at the individual level, the theoretical and empirical literature suggests that research and evaluations of social protection programmes on gender equality should adopt both the individual and the household as a unit of analysis, to explore what and how change happens at these levels. This is particularly important to measure spillover effects on non-beneficiary household members discussed above.

Fourth, the existing literature suggests that research strategies incorporating both quantitative and qualitative components should be adopted when researching and evaluating social protection programmes on gender-transformative change. This would help to identify not only what works in social protection to achieve gender equality, but also *how* and *why*, and to unpack gender dynamics that quantitative research strategies may not be able to capture.

Moreover, and related to the point above, different research methods may need to be adopted. For example, because gender inequalities are multiple, complex and intersect with other factors, rigorous mixed-method research and evaluations<sup>17</sup> can be designed to capture these complexities and explore a programme's effectiveness in achieving its ultimate goals. Specifically, designing and testing multi-component social protection programmes, or linkages between different social protection programmes, or linkages between social protection programmes and other types of interventions, is needed to disentangle the differential or compounding effects of different components and programmes, and to explore whether gender-transformative change materializes at the individual level. Additionally, process evaluations would be useful to monitor and assess whether the social protection programme has been implemented as designed, how well it is working, and any challenges, issues or bottlenecks that may be having an impact on the programme's effectiveness. Implementation research can also add value in teasing out factors that impede or facilitate the realization of desired objectives, in real time. The example of the ABAD programme in India cited in Table 1 is telling, especially as girls and their households understood the social protection programme benefits to be intended to be used for paying marriage and dowry costs.

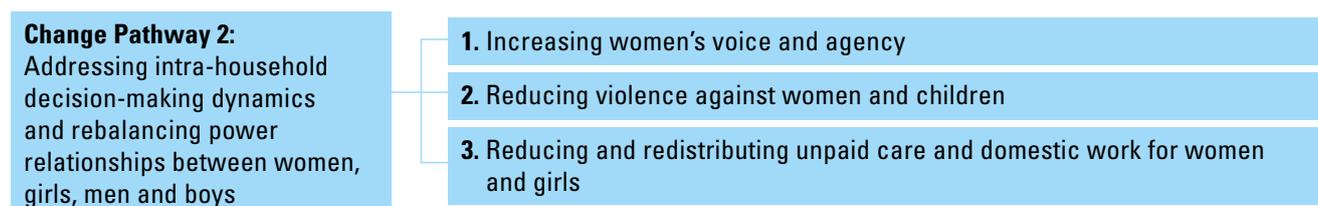
Finally, while the evidence under this pathway overwhelmingly focuses on social assistance – specifically cash transfers – it is also important to acknowledge an increasing evidence base from other social protection programmes, such as accessible and affordable childcare (see Change Pathway 2) and parental leave (see Perera et al., 2021, 2022).

17 While going beyond the remit of this report, we acknowledge the academic debate on the strengths and limitations of randomized controlled trials (RCTs) in social science evaluations, as discussed by, for example, Deaton and Cartwright (2018) and Kabeer (2020), in comparison with other research methods. Feminist critiques of RCTs in particular are worth noting, as they are relevant to the objective of this paper. Such critiques include "piecemeal analysis, ad hoc resort to theory, indifference to history and context, and methodological fundamentalism" (Kabeer, 2020: 1). While a full review and discussion of this literature would go beyond the scope of this paper, our approach underscores the importance of using a diversity of research and evaluation methods to capture nuanced and contextual gender dynamics.

## Change Pathway 2

### Household-level change – addressing intra-household decision-making dynamics and rebalancing power relationships between women, girls, men and boys

Figure 3: Change Pathway 2



Source: Authors' elaboration.

#### A. The hypothesized change pathway and mechanisms at a glance

At the household level, social protection can affect gender equality by addressing intra-household decision-making dynamics and rebalancing power relationships. This occurs through three mechanisms (see Figure 1, second circle, and Figure 3).

First, by providing women with access to, control over and ownership of resources (linked to Change Pathway 1), gender-responsive social protection can support women in developing, expressing and exercising their voice and agency within the household – for example, in household expenditure decisions (Change Mechanism 1).

Second, by increasing income security within the household, facilitating access to social services, and linking with interventions that seek to transform harmful social and gender norms (e.g., regressive attitudes and/or norms around women's access to resources such as income), gender-responsive social protection can contribute to reducing poverty-related stress and triggers for male violence against their partners, and caregiver violence against children. It can "lessen conflict" (Peterman et al., 2021: 9) by reducing arguments over limited budgets and money needed to run the household daily (ibid.), thereby reducing violence against women (Change Mechanism 2).

Third, by increasing household disposable income, providing social care services, and linking with interventions that seek to transform harmful social and gender norms, gender-responsive social protection can contribute to changes in the division of labour, and reduce and redistribute women's and girls' disproportionate responsibility for unpaid care and domestic work (Change Mechanism 3).

## B. Theoretical underpinnings and empirical evidence

As with the first Change Pathway, Change Pathway 2 and related mechanisms are drawn from theoretical literature and a wide range of empirical studies<sup>18</sup> that have identified positive effects of social protection programmes on gender equality at the household level (see Table 3). Unequal power relationships and dynamics within the household can manifest in diverse ways that defy or limit the possibilities for individual-level change. This has been the subject of much theoretical literature, which this section discusses.

### Change Mechanism 1: Increasing women's voice and agency

As we discussed earlier in relation to Change Mechanism 3 under Change Pathway 1, feminist economists (for example, Folbre, 1994; Hartmann, 1981) have challenged unitary household models, which assume that households act as a single unit, where it does not matter who within the household earns a particular income, including non-labour income, and hence that subsidies and transfers have the same effect on household welfare regardless of the gender of the recipient. Unitary household models, as theorized by Gary Becker (1981), suggest "either an altruistic consensus within the household (regarding the distribution of resources) or else an absolute but benevolent dictator who heads the household and ensures altruistic decision-making outcomes" (Seth, 1997: 2). For example, increased wages for women might lead to the expectation of increases in their share of household resources, but this does not necessarily translate into an increased capacity for decision-making (Kabeer, 1997). Instead, intra-household bargaining models show that the family is often a contested space, rather than a harmonious, altruistic one, where women are embedded in and confronted with patriarchal social relations (Hoskyns and Rai, 2005). This implies that resources are not necessarily shared equally within the household, due to power dynamics, and that, to improve women's well-being outcomes, it is necessary to make them direct recipients of social protection programmes or design programmes that specifically improve women's share of resources.

Therefore, highlighting the linkages between the change pathways and mechanisms, and building on Change Mechanism 3 under Change Pathway 1, social protection resources targeted at women may strengthen their position, by increasing their disposable income and thus their relative share of total household income. This can contribute to changing norms around women's control over, access to and ownership of resources, and, in turn, increase their voice and agency, bargaining power and decision-making capacity within the household (Change Mechanism 1), as well as strengthening women's 'immaterial' resources – namely, psychosocial well-being and resilience. However, without explicit efforts to support normative change, addressing the potential backlash against women's expressions of voice and agency, material improvements may not translate into sustainable relational equality. Therefore, linking social protection to interventions that can contribute to shifting norms and preventing backlash (e.g., around women being designated as recipients of the benefits of social protection programmes), especially from male members of the household or community, can support normative change.

18 See, for example, Camilletti (2020), and specifically the following, all cited in Camilletti (2020): Ambler and de Brauw (2017); Angeles et al. (2014); Barros et al. (2011); Bastagli et al. (2016); Buller et al. (2018); Camfield (2014); Chinen et al. (2018); Clark et al. (2019); Cookson (2018); Heath et al. (2018); Hojman and López Bóo (2019); Martínez and Peticar (2017); Mateo Diaz and Rodriguez-Chamussy (2013); Moussié (2020); Peterman and Natali (2016); Peterman et al. (2017).

## Change Mechanisms 2 and 3: Reducing gender inequalities around violence and care

Power dynamics are also reflected in two related dimensions of gender inequality – namely, violence against women and children (Change Mechanism 2)<sup>19</sup>, and the disproportionate responsibility for unpaid care and domestic work carried by women and girls (Change Mechanism 3), which gender-responsive social protection can help address. Both are underpinned by attitudes and norms related to gender that household members hold, as well as to poverty and economic insecurity and limited access to services (Buller et al., 2018; Esquivel, 2014; Razavi, 2007).

### Reducing violence against women and children

Theoretical evidence on the linkages between social protection and reduction of violence against women and children emphasizes different mechanisms through which this happens. We draw here on two systematic reviews of the empirical literature on violence against women and against children that have inductively developed theoretical predictions on the mechanisms behind these effects. With regards to violence against women, and specifically intimate partner violence (IPV), Buller et al. (2018: 218) argues that social protection is hypothesized to reduce IPV by: (a) enhancing ‘economic security and emotional well-being’; (b) lessening ‘intra-household conflict’; and (c) increasing women’s empowerment. Peterman et al. (2017) reviewed the existing empirical evidence on the linkages between ‘social safety nets’ (defined by the authors as referring to non-contributory social assistance) and childhood violence in LMICs. They concluded that, while most evaluations are not set up to unpack the pathways between these programmes and the experience of childhood emotional, physical and sexual violence, the most commonly hypothesized pathways operate on three levels, similar to those on IPV: at the household level – through increases in economic security and reductions in poverty-related stress; at the interpersonal level – through improved parental behaviours and caregiving practices, and improved psychosocial well-being; and at the child level – through education and decreases in problem or risky behaviours.

Hence, by increasing household income security and reducing household conflict over limited financial resources, gender-responsive social protection can contribute to improving psychosocial well-being and reducing poverty-related stress, often a trigger for male violence against their partners, and caregiver violence against children.

### Reducing and redistributing unpaid care and domestic work

Across many contexts and countries, women are expected to be the primary responsible household members for unpaid care and domestic work (see, for example, Esquivel, 2014). Feminist researchers have long argued that internalized social norms related to women’s reproductive roles and power imbalances influence the behaviours of women and men, and drive the unequal gap in time women and men spend on unpaid care and domestic work. Poverty and the limited availability of or accessibility (including financial) of infrastructure and services also increase the unpaid care and domestic workload of women and girls.

Gender-responsive social protection in the form of cash transfers, which increase household disposable income, can help purchase goods (e.g., labour- and time-saving equipment) that can reduce women and girls’ responsibility for unpaid care and domestic work (Change Mechanism 3).<sup>20</sup> Access to quality social care services, including childcare and elderly care, and maternity benefits and paternity leave, can contribute to redistributing unpaid care work. When combined with supply-side investments in infrastructure and services (e.g., access to water, electricity and transport), gender-responsive social protection can contribute to reducing unpaid care and domestic work within the household. Furthermore, when combined with norm change interventions, such as programming that encourages fathers’ uptake of childcare responsibilities or men’s roles in unpaid domestic work more broadly, gender-responsive social protection is one way to incentivize the redistribution of unpaid care and domestic work within the household.

19 We focus here on violence that occurs in the home, and exclude other forms of violence (for example, happening in the community and political spaces or services), not for reasons related to their importance, but because we are interested in forms of violence that take place within the household realm.

20 However, by increasing disposable income, social protection could also potentially improve certain outcomes that are associated with increased time use; for example, if social protection benefits lead to increasing the quantity of food and meals, this could in turn increase the time spent on activities such as cooking and shopping for the household, which may further compromise women and girls’ time poverty (see, for example, Miller and Tsoka, 2012). The final effect will therefore depend on social protection programme design and the extent to which programmes can explicitly address intersecting inequalities through specific and appropriate design features, including complementary components.

Table 3: Change Pathway 2 – Empirical evidence by change mechanism

	Empirical evidence on the effects of social protection on gender equality (by Change Mechanism)	Empirical evidence on the social protection design features (across the Change Pathway)
<b>Change Mechanism 1</b>	<p><b>+ Women’s decision-making capacity, but often only concentrated on decisions related to child-related expenses, household durable goods purchases, and contraception use:</b></p> <p>For example, see the evaluation of a daycare centre in informal settlement in Nairobi, Kenya, by Clark et al. (2019), finding only positive effects on women’s decision-making on children’s healthcare; the evaluation of the Zambia cash transfer by Bonilla et al. (2017), finding positive effects on women’s likelihood to make sole or joint decisions but not on the number of domains a woman is involved in; the evaluation of the South African pension by Ambler (2016), finding increased likelihood of women becoming the primary decision-maker in the household; the systematic review by IEG (2014, cited in Bastagli et al., 2016), finding no evidence of positive effects on women’s sole or joint decision-making, with few exceptions.</p>	<p><b>? Linking social protection programmes</b> with interventions such as behaviour change communications, which seek to empower women in using their voice and exercising their agency within their households, and which seek to transform harmful masculinities around women’s voice and agency, can be effective at increasing women’s decision-making capacity, not only in areas traditionally associated with women, such as children’s education and health, but also in other areas of household decisions and expenditures, and can promote cooperation within the household, shift men’s attitudes and norms.</p> <p><b>? Linking non-contributory social protection programmes</b> to violence prevention and response services, case management and referral mechanisms, to prevent male backlash, and to prevent and respond to violence.</p> <p><b>? Linking diverse types of social protection programmes</b>, such as cash transfers (or public works programmes, labour market programmes) and social care services and parental leave policies, to reduce women and girls’ unpaid care and domestic work burden and avoid negative spillover effects on other household members.</p> <p><b>? Linking non-contributory programmes</b> with behaviour change communications interventions to transform harmful norms regarding women and girls’ productive and reproductive roles, redistribute unpaid care and domestic work, encourage fathers’ uptake of such work.</p>
<b>Change Mechanism 2</b>	<p><b>Intimate partner violence (IPV), and violence against children, by reducing income insecurity, stress and the likelihood of arguments due to scarce resources and their allocation:</b></p> <p>For example, see the systematic review by Buller et al. (2018), finding that cash transfers to poor households were found to reduce IPV in over 70 per cent of the 22 studies reviewed, or the literature review by Peterman et al. (2017) on the role of ‘social safety nets’ in reducing violence against children.</p> <p><b>? violence against women and children in humanitarian settings</b></p> <p>For example, see the evidence synthesis of the programme What Works to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls in conflict and humanitarian crisis by Murphy et al. (2019).</p>	
<b>Change Mechanism 3</b>	<p><b>? Unequal distribution of care and domestic work within the households</b></p> <p>(- for some studies on cash transfers and social pension, others mixed depending on the type of social protection programme and the individual’s stage in the life course).</p>	

Notes: The plus/minus (+/-) sign indicates a positive/negative effect of social protection on the gender equality outcome of interest, whereas the question mark (?) indicates the evidence is mixed or inconclusive. Source: All references are cited in Camilletti et al. (2021) or Camilletti (2020).

## C. Implications for research

The theoretical and empirical evidence reviewed under this pathway has several implications for future research and evaluations. First, in line with the research implications identified for Change Pathway 1, the outcomes to be measured should include both those that social protection programmes seek to affect and those related to unintended effects on the target population, as well as spillover effects on non-beneficiary household members. For example, as presented in Table 3, some empirical studies evaluating the effectiveness of different social protection programmes found increased time spent on unpaid care and domestic work, either as an unintended effect on the beneficiary, or as an unintended spillover effect on non-beneficiary women and/or girls depending on programme design, as a result of the programmes themselves. Intersecting inequalities by gender and age, as well as other dimensions, should be accounted for in research on and evaluations of social protection.

Second, increased investments are needed in efforts to measure voice and agency in a direct way and for different stages of the life course – including children, and girls in particular – as evidence suggests women and girls often have more limited say in both household and collective decision-making processes. Methodological advancements on this can ensure that solid and valid measures of voice and agency are included in research and evaluations of social protection. This will help explore relative contribution to household decision-making processes, as well as decision-making processes at the societal level. Measuring change as a result of social protection programmes requires capturing effects on diverse fronts that go beyond simply counting the number of decision-making areas where women can make sole or joint decisions, to also include which decisions they are making, how, why and who else was involved.<sup>21</sup>

Third, outcomes to be measured include factors that can play a role in mediating the relationship between social protection and gender-transformative change. For example, mediation analysis could be employed to explore the exact pathway of change in the relationship between social protection and reduced violence, building on work by Buller et al. (2018).

Fourth – in line with the research implications identified for Change Pathway 1, – future research and data collection efforts should ensure that the unit of analysis for the research comprises both the individual and the household, to capture dynamics between household members of different genders (and age).

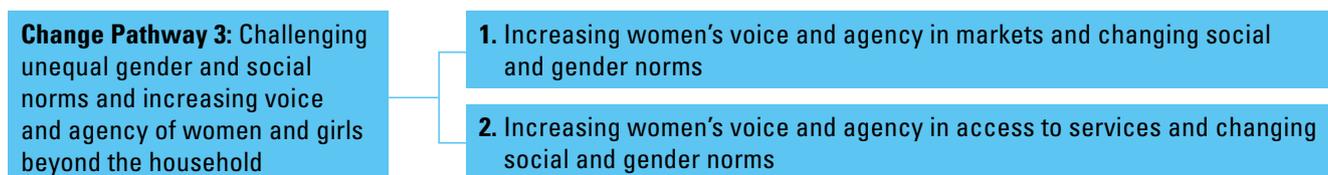
Fifth, the existing theoretical and empirical literature for this pathway suggests that future research efforts should focus on designing and testing the effectiveness of multi-component social protection programmes or linkages between social protection and other types of programmes. For example, research could focus on linking non-contributory social protection programmes and violence prevention and response services, and with case management and referral mechanisms, to prevent male backlash, and to prevent and respond to violence. Additionally, research could also focus on linkages between diverse types of social protection programmes, such as cash transfers, public works programmes and labour market programmes, with social care services and parental leave policies, to further reduce women and girls' unpaid care and domestic work burden and avoid negative spillover effects on other household members. The investigation of these programmatic linkages would aid in advancing our understanding of how best (relational) gender equality goals can be achieved.

21 As discussed in the conclusions in Section 4, the GRASSP research programme will also review existing measures of gender equality currently employed in research and evaluations in LMICs (see Camilletti, forthcoming), to help advance the measurement of gender equality in social protection research and evaluations.

## Change Pathway 3

### Societal-level change – challenging unequal gender and social norms and increasing voice and agency of women and girls in their communities

Figure 4: Change Pathway 3



Source: Authors' elaboration.

#### A. The hypothesized change pathway and mechanisms at a glance

At the societal level, social protection is hypothesized to contribute to gender-transformative change through two mechanisms that promote positive social and gender norms and increase voice and agency (see Figure 1, third circle, and Figure 4).

First, by supporting women's safe and active participation in markets, where economic transactions for goods and services take place, gender-responsive social protection can contribute to increasing women's autonomy, confidence and self-efficacy. This, in turn, leads to increased mobility, voice and agency in their interactions outside the family, as well as to shifts in the norms, attitudes and perceptions of market actors regarding women's participation in markets. This mechanism also involves addressing barriers and constraints related to public safety, infrastructure – including transportation – and capacity strengthening, to enable women to engage in market transactions, by complementing social protection with infrastructure investments (Change Mechanism 1).

Second, by ensuring women's safe and meaningful access to and engagement with public and social services, such as education, health and livelihoods, as well as social protection accountability mechanisms, including grievance, feedback and complaint mechanisms, gender-responsive social protection can contribute to addressing gender inequality by ensuring women's perspectives are integrated into the design of available, appropriate and gender-responsive services (Change Mechanism 2).

#### B. Theoretical underpinnings and empirical evidence

These hypothesized mechanisms are drawn from a wide range of studies<sup>22</sup> and literature that have identified positive effects of social protection programmes for women (see Table 4) and theorized the pathways to positive, mixed, unintended and negative changes.

##### Change Mechanism 1: Voice, agency and norms around markets

Gender inequalities within and outside households are interconnected (Agarwal, 1997). Further highlighting the linkages across the change pathways, the discrimination and unequal power relations that women and girls face in their own households are often accompanied by parallel discriminations in settings outside the household, albeit with variations. For example, empirical evidence suggests that, while many – if not most – societies ascribe primary responsibility for unpaid care and domestic work to women and girls, there are variations in the socially ascribed expectations regarding women and girls' productive roles and thus in female labour force participation (Kabeer, 2016). The underlying factor behind the dual discrimination, both within and outside the household, lies in the low position and condition that women and girls hold on average across settings.

<sup>22</sup> See Camilletti et al. (2021); Camilletti (2020); Gammage et al. (2016); Molyneux and Thomson (2011); Patel et al. (2015).

Even in those settings where female labour force participation is high, women may still face discrimination in their employment – evident in the gender pay gap, constraints on their career progression and interruptions in their careers as a result of care work (see Camilletti, 2020). Further, government policies and institutions can reproduce, reinforce and exacerbate traditional notions of masculinity and femininity.<sup>23</sup> For example, the perpetuation of gendered responsibilities can be found in parental leave policies that grant extended periods of leave following childbirth to mothers only (Richardson et al., 2020).

Yet, increasing voice and agency within the household for women and girls can lead to increased voice and agency in the markets and communities, and vice versa (Gammage et al., 2016). Furthermore, increasing women's labour force participation (including in public works and labour market programmes) can shift the norms and perceptions about women's role in the community and economy, and enhance their voice and agency in such settings. This is hypothesized to help women negotiate better employment terms, for example.

However, while feminist economics has explored women's agency in markets as it relates to gendered disadvantages women face and their inability to access productive resources, there has been less focus on how women's "access to these productive resources" (Gammage et al., 2016: 11) influences their ability in "exercising agency in the market itself" (ibid.). For example, how it "affects the terms and conditions of exchange for buyers and sellers, leads to better prices for inputs and outputs [due to greater bargaining power by women], or ... influence[s] the rules and regulations that govern market exchange" (ibid.).

It can further be hypothesized that such shifts in norms and perceptions could be potentially more effective if women's labour force participation is incentivized in those sectors that are not women-dominated. Greater effects on increases in women's voice and agency in their communities and societies would be achieved if social protection were to be accompanied by labour protection and collective bargaining agreements, to protect women's labour rights, as well as by other integrated programmes or interventions that work to avoid sanction, resistance or backlash against women's productive roles.

Finally, the evidence indicates that being a recipient of social protection benefits can improve the material and social status of women and their households in their communities, through a reduction in poverty. This, in turn, contributes to increasing women's social networks and support, increasing women's participation in the community and in the social and political life of their society. This hypothesis has been supported in empirical studies on cash transfer programmes in South Africa and Latin America, where women beneficiaries reported greater social capital and social networks (Patel et al., 2015; Molyneux and Thomson, 2011).

## **Change Mechanism 2: Voice, agency and norms around services**

Women's access to and use of services, in addition to social protection feedback and complaint mechanisms, are critical to improving both women's condition in their community and their position vis-à-vis actors and institutions beyond their own household. Norms around self-expression and mobility, which constrain women's role and participation in public decisions, may undermine the effective functioning of governance mechanisms in social protection programmes (Ulrichs 2016). For women's participation at the programme level, the argument could be made that, when women have no voice in decision-making about development options at the local or national level, they will not be engaged with or invested in the planned outcomes, thereby undermining the success of policies or projects (Fox and Romero, 2017).

By ensuring that women's participation in these mechanisms is encouraged and incentivized, women may be able to have greater confidence, as well as greater say, in matters that affect them in their communities. For example, empirical evidence gathered by Molyneux and Thomson (2011), through qualitative interviews and focus group discussions with women beneficiaries in Peru's Juntos CCT, suggests that participation in the programme led to improved interaction between teachers and the beneficiary mothers, due to increased school visits where they asked about the progress of their children.

23 For example, discriminatory laws (formal and informal) which "undermine women's rights to own, control or use land and non-land assets; discriminatory practices that restrict women's access to financial services; and social norms imposing that women's assets be mediated only by men. Insecure or weak rights to land, non-land assets and financial services can reduce income-generating opportunities for women and lower decision-making power for women within the household and in the community" (OECD, 2014:8).

Table 4: Change Pathway 3 – empirical evidence by change mechanism

	Empirical evidence on the effects of social protection on gender equality (by Change Mechanism)	Empirical evidence on social protection design features (across the Change Pathway)
Change Mechanism 1	<p><b>+ Social networks and social capital, voice and agency within their communities</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complementing active labour market programmes for women’s labour market participation with investments in decent market opportunities, to ensure qualitative improvements in labour market outcomes, better-paying, more formal jobs with better protections (including social and labour protections), and opportunities for women to meaningfully engage in market transactions.</li> <li>• Complementing social protection, such as active labour market programmes for women’s labour market participation, with investments in job creation in traditionally male-dominated sectors.</li> <li>• Complementing social protection, such as active labour market programmes for women’s labour market participation, with behaviour change communication interventions at the community level, which seek to avoid sanction, resistance or backlash against women’s productive role if prevailing norms dictate against it.</li> <li>• Designing grievance, feedback and complaint mechanisms available and accessible to women, and provide them with meaningful opportunities to engage and voice their complaints and ideas.</li> </ul>
Change Mechanism 2	<p><b>+ Participation in education services associated with conditionalities of social protection programmes:</b></p> <p>For example, see research by Holmes and Jones (2010), finding that women participating in Ethiopia’s public works programme (Productive Safety Net Programme or PSNP) in sites close to towns with other job opportunities reported in focus groups that programme implementers, paid men significantly higher rates in public work sites to incentivize men to participate.</p>	

Notes: The plus/minus (+/-) sign indicates a positive/negative effect of social protection on the gender equality outcome of interest, whereas the question mark (?) indicates that the evidence is mixed or inconclusive. Source: Camilletti et al. (2021), Camilletti (2020), Gammage et al. (2016), Holmes and Jones (2010), Molyneux and Thomson (2011), Patel et al. (2015).

### C. Implications for research

The theoretical and empirical evidence reviewed in the sub-sections above has several implications for future research and evaluations. First, in line with Change Pathway 2, measuring voice and agency directly would be critical to evaluate the effectiveness of social protection programmes on gender-transformative change at the societal level (e.g., in communities). For example, future research can fill the gap identified above on how women’s access to productive resources (e.g., income, labour) or care services can influence women’s ability to exercise agency in markets, by specifically evaluating whether providing access to social protection can also improve women’s position in the labour market, namely through their bargaining power and their self-confidence.

Second, to explore gender-transformative change at the societal level, future research efforts should include collecting data from social protection implementers, service providers, community leaders and other community stakeholders as relevant to their research questions. This would be important, for example, to explore if and how women – and other vulnerable groups – as social protection beneficiaries are discriminated against when accessing social protection benefits or services.

Third, developing and testing interventions that link different social protection programmes, as well as linking social protection programmes to other programmes and services including collective bargaining, is important to investigate if and how these strategies are effective at strengthening women’s bargaining power, expanding their opportunities for exercising their agency, and improving their position in their communities.

Fourth, process evaluation methods can be employed to explore implementation challenges and bottlenecks that occur when women social protection beneficiaries access social protection benefits and services. Future empirical research could further explore whether increased engagement in such services may bring about benefits for women in terms of increased participation, voice and agency in their communities.

## Systemic change levers for gender-responsive social protection across the social protection delivery cycle

Figure 5: Systemic change levers

<b>Systemic change levers</b>
<b>1. Progressive social and gender norms and ideas held by policymakers and implementers</b>
<b>2. Political commitment to gender equality, institutional capacity and accountability</b>
<b>3. Adequate, sustainable and gender-responsive financing</b>
<b>4. Participation and engagement of gender equality and child rights advocates in decision-making and policymaking processes</b>

Source: Authors' elaboration.

### A. The hypothesized change levers

In order for gender-responsive social protection to contribute to gender-transformative change, we identify a set of four change levers (UNICEF, 2020c) that the existing theoretical literature suggests need to be in place at the level of the social protection system (see Figure 5).

First, there is a need for a shift and transformation in the prevailing harmful attitudes, ideas and norms around gender equality, poverty and the right to social protection, as held by policymakers, political elites (and their constituencies and parties), and programme managers and implementers. These factors often shape social protection systems, from their political acceptability and throughout their delivery cycle, from intent and design, through implementation and financing, to monitoring and evaluation (Change Lever 1).

Second, it is necessary to strengthen the political commitment to, and institutional capacity and accountability for, gender equality. Commitment to, capacity for and accountability on gender equality are identified as critical factors for social protection stakeholders to have, to enable social protection systems to be designed, implemented and financed in a gender-responsive way (Change Lever 2).

Third, well-designed and implemented gender-responsive social protection systems should also be adequately and sustainably financed, including by creating the fiscal space needed for social protection. This includes, among other things, expanding social security coverage and contributory revenues (Change Lever 3).

Finally, amplifying and expanding the voice and capacity of civil society organizations, including women's and children's rights organizations, is essential. Ensuring meaningful participatory consultations with civil society organizations during the social protection system reform processes contributes to making the risks and vulnerabilities of women and children seen and their voices heard during such processes. It also contributes to strengthening accountability for gender equality in social protection system reforms. All this would make social protection gender-responsive, which in turn contributes to gender-transformative change (Change Lever 4).

## B. Theoretical underpinnings and empirical evidence

The four hypothesized change levers for gender-responsive social protection are drawn from a wide range of studies, presented below.

### Change Lever 1: Positive norms and ideas held by policymakers and implementers

Underpinning this integration (or not) of gender in social protection are positive social norms among both policymakers and other strategic actors that have a role along the social protection delivery cycle. This includes implementers and stakeholders involved in monitoring and evaluation, and in grievance, feedback and complaint mechanisms (Holmes et al., 2019; Holmes and Jones, 2013).

Insights from political economy analyses from both the social protection and the gender fields highlight the important role played by ideas and norms<sup>24</sup> held by policymakers at national and subnational level, as well as by implementers on the ground, in shaping political behaviour, policy choices and policy outcomes (Holmes et al., 2019; Acosta and Pettit, 2013; DFID, 2009). For example, as noted in a literature review on norms and social protection (Rost and Nesbitt-Ahmed, forthcoming), the targeting of social protection programmes is often connected to social and gender norms that define who is ‘vulnerable’ or in need of support. Programmes that build on traditional gender norms of women being primarily responsible for care might target women as recipients of cash transfer programmes, in the belief that this would benefit children and vulnerable household members (Rost and Nesbitt-Ahmed, forthcoming). Social and gender norms about ‘appropriate paid work’ for men and women can also shape social protection design, especially for those interventions on work (e.g., the design of public work programmes may be shaped by ideas of what type of work men and women should do).

Moreover, even if the design of social protection is sensitive to gendered needs, norms among implementers may shape whether these design features are accurately implemented. Norms that render care work invisible may mean that even though, in theory, childcare should be provided, this is not realized in practice (see, for example, Chopra, 2019). Norms about suitable paid work among implementers can lead to job assignment segregation in public works programmes, or to women being under-represented in semi-skilled categories of work (e.g., as subcontractors and supervisors of projects), or being discriminated against by programme implementers (Rost and Nesbitt-Ahmed, forthcoming). This makes it critical to ensure the appropriate technical support is in place for policymakers on gender issues and dynamics, to share an understanding of how poverty, risks and vulnerabilities are gendered and the implications this has on social protection design and delivery.

Theoretical evidence from political economic approaches suggests that gender-responsive social protection initiatives might not make it through the process of policymaking, in part due to policymakers either not appreciating, not understanding or not agreeing with the importance of these types of programmes for achieving gender equality. Further, political influence, which “involves identifying and developing the policy and implementation roles within each relevant Ministry often requires a progressive process since political will and institutional capacity may develop at different paces in various ministries” (Samson et al., 2010:52).

Further, social and gender norms held by policymakers influence social protection design, including delivery modality, and social protection financing. Those positions held by implementers also influence whether social protection design features are adequately implemented with fidelity, such as grievance and redress mechanisms.<sup>25</sup>

24 Along with institutions and interests, these ideas, norms or values – including political ideologies, religion and cultural beliefs – constitute the ‘Three Is Framework’ (institutions–interests–ideas nexus), which political economy analysis (Rosendorff, 2005, cited in Holmes and Jones, 2013) employs to investigate political and economic processes and institutions interacting with each other (Holmes and Jones, 2013). Political economy analysis seeks to “reveal the underlying interests, incentives and institutions that enable or constrain change, as factors that drive decisions in the policy arena” (DFID, 2009:1). In uncovering these factors and processes, it is concerned with understanding how and why power is distributed between different actors, the processes over time in creating, sustaining and transforming the relationships between these different actors, and what this entails for the achievement of certain development objectives (Haines and O’Neil, 2018; Collinson, 2003).

25 For example, if prevailing norms in a community limit women’s opportunities for speaking up, then grievance and redress mechanisms may not work effectively, unless specific actions are taken to encourage participation of women in such mechanisms.

## Change Lever 2: Political commitment, institutional capacity and accountability

Generating political commitment to gender equality is critical for the design of gender-responsive age-sensitive social protection systems. Political commitment here refers to the willingness and support (political and social) of influential actors, such as policymakers, civil society organizations, international organizations and programme implementers, to act (and continue to act) (see, for example, Samson et al., 2010) to address the structural drivers of gender inequality through gender-responsive age-sensitive social protection. Without commitment, the policies, programmes and resources needed for effective gender-responsive social protection might be not adopted, not implemented or not sustained.

For example, empirical research on the introduction and expansion of social protection programmes in Africa, while not gendered, suggests that political commitment to social protection has been a driving factor (Scarlato and D'Agostino, 2019). Additionally, empirical cross-country studies on the politics of social protection in eastern and southern Africa (Hickey et al., 2019) found that “the expansion of social assistance has been driven by domestic political dynamics, reflecting the political elite’s need to ensure support and political allegiance” (ibid.: 1), and a concern with electoral success and popular pressures (see also research by Holmes and Jones, 2013). Political influence over access to resources and the institutional capacity to manage reform processes (Samson et al., 2010) are also of critical importance, including the extent to which women are visible as rights-bearers in these processes.

In practice, the best-designed policies can also fail if the government’s (or subnational authorities’) ability to deliver is too weak, hindering implementation. This could be for several reasons, including the presence of complex governance structures<sup>26</sup> or differences in the skills of frontline staff (OECD, 2015). Government capacity (i.e., “the institutions, human resources, leadership, experiences, systems and other public resources that support the delivery of policy objectives” – Samson et al., 2010:56) is relevant here. Further, effective social protection systems often require the involvement of several ministries, including those for social welfare, gender, women, children, health and education, as well as those for finance and planning (ibid.:51). Depending on the country context, there may be other relevant ministries (ibid.). Additionally, empirical cross-country research suggests that “the presence of a broad coalition of skilled and resourced actors” (Holmes et al., 2019: i) is also a key driving factor behind the progress towards gender-responsive social protection.

Actions aimed at strengthening capacity at the policy level (e.g., sharing lessons learned from experiences) (Samson et al., 2010:58) can further build commitment to gender equality and enable support for social protection that is gender-responsive and age-sensitive. Social protection programmes that integrate gender-responsive and age-sensitive objectives are more likely to be championed (and therefore designed and implemented) if more policymakers understand not only social protection (ibid.), but also how it intersects with gender and age. This is significant for securing finances as well – important when financial resources are impacted by global crises (ibid.), such as the current COVID-19 pandemic. Finally, technical support is required by policymakers for policy-level decision-making, including understanding the pros and cons of diverse types of social protection programmes (Samson et al., 2010), including for improved gender equality outcomes.

Less evidence is currently available on accountability, with research from Sabates-Wheeler et al. (2017) further indicating that the social protection sector has seen less focus on governance, accountability and rights than other sectors, such as health and education.

26 For example, developing integrated or joined-up services to improve efficiency in delivery by service providers comes with opportunities and challenges (OECD, 2015). Integrating services vertically (i.e., “integrating the hierarchy of governance and finance within multiple service settings” (ibid.:18) or horizontally (bringing together groups, services, professions and organizations across different sectors) requires coordination among service providers. While referring to OECD countries, at a vertical level, an example of a challenge experienced by those countries integrating services includes “multi-governance issues by region and department that can create competing incentives in terms of management and finance” (ibid.:26). This can create barriers for the formation of multisectoral delivery of services. Other obstacles include sharing data, challenges around working jointly or administering integrated services, such as requiring large financial investments (e.g., “in buildings and equipment needed to deliver the service” ibid.:33).

### Change Lever 3: Adequate, sustainable and gender-responsive financing

Identifying fiscal space<sup>27</sup> is another priority for the design and implementation of gender-responsive social protection systems. Political will and a broad political consensus positioning social protection as a vital investment, including for gender equality, is also essential to ensure long-term financial sustainability (ESCAP and Development Pathways, 2021; Longhurst et al., 2021) – further demonstrating the interconnectedness of the change levers in our analytical approach.

Existing evidence indicates that in most LMICs social protection is financed through a combination of domestic resources – through taxation, deficit financing and contributions from social insurance schemes (Durán-Valverde et al., 2020) and donor funds (OECD, 2019b; McCord et al., 2021). In the long term, domestic sources for financing social protection is an important element in creating sustainable and comprehensive social protection systems (Durán-Valverde et al., 2020). However, “fiscal deficits and the inadequacy of resources for universal social protection systems”, especially in some LMICs, can often translate into coverage gaps (ibid.:41). As such, donors play a prominent role in LMICs, particularly in financing non-contributory social assistance (Longhurst et al., 2021; McCord et al., 2021), and are likely to continue to do so in the future, especially in the context of the fiscal contraction resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic (Longhurst et al., 2021:18).

Based on a limited review of the evidence on social protection financing from a gender perspective, we draw on Holmes and Scott’s (2016) review of examples of countries financing social protection. While their study focused on expanding social assistance to the poor, as well as extending social insurance schemes to workers in the informal economy, these cases also have relevance for financing gender-responsive social protection. For example, Holmes and Scott (2016) indicate how both Brazil and South Africa have extended their social insurance schemes to paid domestic workers, many of whom are women. This extension entitled domestic workers to unemployment insurance in South Africa, and maternity provision in both Brazil and South Africa. Providing another example, Holmes and Scott (2016) illustrate how pension reforms introduced in Chile in 2008 included “top-ups for workers with low pension contributions and child credits”, which are particularly beneficial for women workers (ibid.:2). Holmes and Scott (2016) identify four strategies that have been beneficial for women, resulting in an increase in their coverage in social protection schemes and the potential equality of their benefits regarding pensions (ibid.:25).

First, Holmes and Scott (2016:24) identified the reduction by governments in the “affordability barrier” to extend social protection coverage and increase women’s access to benefits. This has included buying or subsidizing insurance premiums or contributions for low-income groups (ibid.:24). For example, in Ghana and Rwanda, the very poorest are exempt from paying premiums, and in Ghana, this exemption extends to pregnant women (ibid.:24). This approach is important as the cost of premiums is often a barrier for women – first because they are usually found in low-paid and insecure or casual work, and second because they spend less time in the labour market due to childbirth and their care roles and responsibilities (ibid.:24).

Second, Holmes and Scott (2016:24) identified the introduction of a “flat premium”, which can untie premium costs from wages. This can be particularly beneficial for women in the informal economy, given their “lower wages and unpredictability of income” (ibid.:24). For example, Argentina and Uruguay “introduced a single tax payment (monotributo)”, where registered workers paid “a single amount on the income generated from their work, which counts towards their contribution to social security and the tax system” (Van Ginneken, 2009, cited in Holmes and Scott, 2016:24). Those eligible include workers in the informal economy, which often has a high concentration of women, and this policy increased levels of registered workers (Holmes and Scott, 2016).

A third strategy for gender-responsive financing of social protection is the introduction of top-up systems for pensions, which also ensures gender equality in old age – particularly for workers in the informal economy (Arza, 2015; Holmes and Scott, 2016). This has been a key approach in pension reforms in Latin America (Holmes and Scott, 2016). For example, in 2010, pension reforms in Bolivia introduced a semi-contributory (solidarity) pillar, which provided improved “benefit guarantees for workers, especially those with low earnings and poor contributory records, most of whom are women” (Holmes and Scott, 2016:25). Chile’s solidarity pillar, introduced in 2008 to address poverty among the elderly (Fajnzylber, 2019), “provides basic social protection to those aged 65 years or over in households in the three lowest income quintiles, regardless of contributory history” (Holmes and Scott, 2016:25; see also Arza, 2015).

27 Fiscal space is normally defined as the “room in a government’s budget that allows it to provide resources for a desired purpose without jeopardizing the sustainability of its financial position or the stability of the economy” (Heller, 2005) and “the financing that is available to government as a result of concrete policy actions for enhancing resource mobilization” (Roy et al., 2007:i).

Finally, some countries have introduced child or care credits to foster gender equality, providing compensation to individuals – usually women – for lost contributions from time spent out of work due to their caring responsibilities (Holmes and Scott, 2016). For example, in Uruguay, child credits are provided to women with one year of contributions for each child (for a maximum of five children) (Holmes and Scott, 2016). In Chile, to increase women’s pension entitlement, the Bono por Hijo child credits include contribution credits to women aged 65 or older per child, which is equivalent to 18 months of contribution on a minimum wage per child, plus interest accrued from the moment the child is born, until retirement (Arza, 2012). However, Arza (2012) suggests that, while child credits are positive measures, they may not fully compensate for those periods of time women spend doing unpaid care and domestic work. Additionally, as these credits only apply to women with children, those women caring for an elder member of the family are less protected.

Beyond the above strategies, existing evidence indicates eight possible financing options to introduce and/or scale up social protection systems (Ortiz et al., 2017). As illustrated by Ortiz et al. (2017:iii), these options are re-allocating public expenditures, increasing tax revenues, expanding social security coverage and contributory revenues, lobbying for aid and transfers, eliminating illicit financial flows, using fiscal and foreign exchange reserves, managing debt, and adopting a more accommodative macro-economic framework. It is not within the remit of this report to go into these options in detail (see Ortiz et al., 2017; Durán-Valverde, 2020; and ESCAP and Development Pathways, 2021), but these options would need to be carefully examined to explore how they can be strengthened to be gender-responsive.

#### **Change Lever 4: Participation and engagement of civil society groups**

Representation in decision-making and policymaking by civil society groups, including child rights and women’s rights advocates, is critical in making visible the gendered and age-specific risks and vulnerabilities, and how different social protection programmes can address those risks and vulnerabilities. However, less attention has been paid in the social protection literature to the role of encouraging and supporting the participation of actors beyond policymakers and implementers with a mandate on social protection (see, for example, Sabates-Wheeler et al., 2017). For example, Holmes et al. (2019) reviewed the available empirical evidence to understand when and under what conditions “progress in advancing gender-responsive social protection is more likely” (ibid.:i). They found that one such factor is the presence of both “pro-poor and inclusive national government institutions and influential political elites championing gender-responsive social protection” (ibid.:i).

Another example can be found in research carried out by Sabates-Wheeler et al. (2017) on active citizenship, rights and accountability in social protection. In developing a conceptual framework on these issues, Sabates-Wheeler et al. (2017) envisage social protection operating on a spectrum: from closed and invited to claimed spaces. At one end of the spectrum, social protection is a closed space that is “more instrumental and technocratic”, with barriers to participation as “programmes are delivered in a top-down manner to citizens who are passive ‘consumers’ of social protection” (ibid.:17). The closed space has “no entry points for citizens to engage in the design, targeting or implementation of the programme and there are no mechanisms to voice concerns, with decisions undertaken by a group of policy elite” (ibid.).

Further along the spectrum is the invited space, which widens participation and engages citizens as “users and choosers” of social protection (Sabates-Wheeler et al., 2017:18). For example, during the implementation of the programme, citizens can be “active users” monitoring and asserting their citizenship through grievance mechanisms or social audits where they can discuss their concerns (ibid.:18). Examples include consultations on the preparation of a new law or policy, and robust monitoring systems that collect the opinions and experiences of participants and feed such information into programme and policy revisions (ibid.:18).

At the end of the spectrum are claimed spaces, where citizens who share an identity or a set of common concerns, are actively engaged as “makers and shapers” to participate in designing, implementing and modifying social protection programmes (Sabates-Wheeler et al., 2017:19). For example, citizens’ groups that discuss programmes at the community level and provide feedback to improve programme design and delivery (ibid.:19). According to Sabates-Wheeler et al. (2017:19), this interaction has the “potential to enable better policy design and governance, as well as to empower citizens and build trust and legitimacy around the social contract”.

Using the cases of Brazil’s Bolsa Família and India’s MGNREGA, Sabates-Wheeler et al. (2017) further indicate the role played by various actors, including civil society organizations and citizens, in shaping the emergence and design of social protection programmes. For example, institutional policy analysis by Barrientos (2013,

cited in Sabates-Wheeler et al., 2017) shows that the “historical and political genesis” of Brazil’s flagship cash transfer programme, Bolsa Família, was the “result of champions for change at the national level,” as well as “local-level pressure and active citizen involvement emerging from the success of municipal-run poverty-focused pilot programmes” (Barrientos, 2013, cited in Sabates-Wheeler et al., 2017:25). India’s MGNREGA was the product of a policy process, “set against a backdrop of India’s history of famine relief schemes, an emerging election ... and a long trajectory of social movements in the 1990s” in the country (ibid.:20). This led to the Right to Food campaign, “a coalition between activists, academics and poor citizens, which lobbied for an entitlement-based Employment Guarantee Act” (ibid.:20). The first draft of the Act in 2004 was prepared by the National Advisory Council, “a 14-member organization comprising ex-bureaucrats, academics, civil society and lawyers” (Barrientos, 2013, cited in Sabates-Wheeler et al., 2017:20). While evaluations of both programmes paint a mixed picture in their implementation – including on citizen engagement and around their gender-responsiveness – these examples illustrate the ambitious vision and design of social protection programmes, which actively encourage the participation of various actors, including civil society organizations and citizens.

### C. Implications for research

The theoretical and empirical evidence reviewed above has several implications for future research and evaluations. First, rigorous, actionable evidence, including data, research and evaluations of programmes, can inform decision-making around social protection, making its design and implementation responsive to gendered risks and vulnerabilities. However, more empirical research is needed to test the role of evidence as a driving factor behind gender-responsive social protection reforms.

Second, as social protection continues to expand across many contexts and regions, more evidence is needed, particularly on improved accountability and its impacts for gender equality outcomes in social protection, including mechanisms in existing programmes for addressing and improving accountability, such as grievance mechanisms or social audits.

Finally, the need to scale up social protection programmes (from pilot or small programmes to nationwide ones) in turn spurs the need for additional research and evidence on the impact of a strong civil society in shaping the design and implementation of social protection that enables women and children, as recipients, to participate in the decision-making, voice their concerns and demand accountability. Additionally, another question remains: Under which context and conditions will the hypothesized change levers play the most influence in shaping social protection design and implementation to ensure their sustainability in the long term? For example, in the India case illustrated above, laws and policies were a crucial step in providing a framework for citizen rights and entitlements. However, the realization of those rights requires sustained political commitment at all levels, and the ability for citizens to claim and hold duty-bearers accountable for those rights. The experience in Brazil demonstrates a road from constitutional reform, through the support of champions in the federal government and local activism, towards holding the state accountable for its social responsibilities.

## 4. Concluding summary and implications for the GRASSP research programme

Through identifying three interconnected change pathways and related change mechanisms operating at various levels of a socio-ecological model, and four systemic change levers within social protection systems, this report presents an analytical approach that can guide future empirical research and evaluations that can test these pathways across different contexts. Appropriately designed research and evaluations will help to unpack if and how different social protection programmes can address different gendered risks and vulnerabilities, and in turn contribute to evidence-informed strategies to deliver sustained gender equality outcomes through social protection.

The overview of empirical evidence presented in this report has highlighted areas where evidence supports the important role of social protection programmes in contributing to gender equality, albeit we acknowledge that it draws considerably from non-contributory social protection programmes, as these are often over-represented in research and evaluations in LMICs. This calls for the future research agenda on gender-responsive social protection to dedicate more efforts to other types of social protection programmes and explore how they can contribute to gender-transformative change at the individual, household and societal level (see Perera et al., 2022). This report has also highlighted areas where further research is needed to empirically explore proposed change pathways and mechanisms, especially in relation to the institutionalization of gendered change strategies for gender equality. This report is part of the GRASSP research programme on gender-responsive and age-sensitive social protection, which aims to build on the existing evidence and work towards testing concepts and addressing evidence gaps in three ways.

First, through building a conceptual framework (UNICEF, 2020c) and analytical approach (this paper), the GRASSP research programme seeks to contribute towards strengthening the foundations for a coherent, ambitious research agenda on gender-responsive social protection across the life course. Alongside this, the GRASSP research programme is working to identify and map existing measures of gender equality outcomes that have been employed in research and evaluations, both in social protection and beyond, to help advance research and measurement related to gender-transformative change (Camiletti, forthcoming). Given the complexity of gender, encompassing many dimensions and aspects of an individual's life, measures of gender equality outcomes need to address intersections between several of these outcomes, including economic, health and nutrition, education, safety and protection, and mental and psychosocial well-being. These measures should also encompass, but at the same time be sensitive to, different age groups as well as different geographies, such as countries, regions and income groupings. These outputs will collectively contribute to an integrated set of concepts, analytical tools and measures that can be used to further research and evaluations on gender-responsive social protection.

Second, the GRASSP research programme will contribute to filling evidence gaps by rigorously evaluating social protection programmes, with a focus on cash transfer programmes, including cash plus, against a range of gender equality outcomes employing a mixed-methods approach. This report has shed some light on how much the field of social protection has learnt in the past decades through many rigorous evaluations. However, evidence gaps remain. In particular, evidence gaps remain around how social protection can be designed to specifically prevent potential unintended adverse consequences that are related to gender equality, such as violence, unpaid care and domestic work, child marriage and children's labour. Given that social protection does not operate in a vacuum, a critical gap remains in our understanding of how government-led social protection programmes and systems can be better linked to other programmes, interventions and services, to achieve better, more sustained outcomes. Related to that, given the complexities associated with gender dynamics, future research and evaluations should strive for mixed-method approaches, rather than single-method ones, bearing in mind the strengths and limitations of each method. When rigorously and ethically designed, such approaches are better suited for unpacking processes, mechanisms and dynamics, in a way that is not possible within single-method research and evaluations. Further, an analysis of macro social and economic contexts is needed to contribute to improving our understanding of the drivers of gender inequalities in a holistic sense, and to shed light on the moderators and mediators of different social protection effects in different contexts.

Third, the GRASSP research programme will contribute to filling evidence gaps by exploring if and how gender can be institutionalized within social protection systems, and what factors, including political economy and financial ones, are needed to ensure that such a reform process is enacted and successful. GRASSP will also contribute to building the evidence base on the cost and cost-effectiveness of social protection systems and programmes. This report has shown how change towards gender equality does not, and cannot, only happen at the household level. Individual, interpersonal, societal and systemic-level dynamics interact and intersect, reproducing discriminations and inequalities. However, these interactions also represent an opportunity for change. Investments that lead to societal, and systemic, change are needed, including to ensure that achievements in gender equality are sustained and sustainable. However, these are also the areas where more evidence gaps have been found.

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## ANNEX: METHODOLOGY

This Annex describes the methodology developed and employed in this paper in more details. First, for the review of the conceptual and theoretical literature, we focused on key theoretical and conceptual literature across a range of disciplines, and specifically neoclassical economics, feminist economics, social norm theories and political economy approaches, which have conceptualized the linkages between gender and social protection. We built on existing literature that has discussed the relationship between gender and social protection in an analytical way – most notably, among others, Holmes and Jones (2013), Sabates-Wheeler and Kabeer (2009) and FAO (2018). We used these different disciplines, theories and models to attempt to tease out insights into how social protection should be designed to address gender inequalities, the mechanisms through which this change happens, as well as what this all means for designing and executing research and evaluations.

To retrieve this theoretical and conceptual literature, we searched for literature using broad search terms related to ‘gender’ and ‘social protection’ in databases and search engines such as Google Scholar and Web of Science, as well as grey literature. In addition, we relied on knowledge of most prominent researchers in the field. For feminist economics literature, we drew specifically from scholars such as Bina Agarwal, Naila Kabeer, Diane Elson, Valeria Esquivel, Nancy Folbre, Sarah Gammage and Shahrah Razavi – all members of the International Association for Feminist Economics (IAFFE), as well as from literature produced by feminist organizations such as UN Women and the Women’s Budget Group. For neoclassical economics, we retrieved literature produced by scholars working in leading international institutions such as the OECD and the World Bank, and in international research projects such as the Transfer Project. For political economy approaches, considering the scant evidence that exists specifically linking gender and social protection, we retrieved scholarship by Shirin Rai and Catherine Hoskyns, Rebecca Holmes and Nicola Jones, who focus specifically on gender, as well as from other political economy scholars such as Tom Laver and Sam Hickey. For social and gender norms theories, we retrieved literature produced by social norms scholars, such as Cristina Bicchieri, Robert B. Cialdini, Ben Cislighi and Lori Heise, and literature and technical guidance around social and gender norms produced by UNICEF (such as UNICEF, 2020d, and Petit, 2019).

For the empirical literature, we drew on three reviews of the literature recently produced by the GRASSP research programme: Camilletti (2020), Perera et al. (2022) and Rost and Nesbitt-Ahmed (forthcoming).

The first is a review of the literature on effects and design features of social protection on a set of gender equality outcomes in LMICs (Camilletti 2020). It focused on four types of social protection programmes: non-contributory social protection programmes, contributory social protection programmes, labour market programmes and social care services. With regard to contributory social protection programmes, the review specifically focused on health insurance, and old age contributory pension programmes, and with regard to social care services, it focused specifically on childcare: these policies and programmes were selected both for their relevance from a gender equality perspective and for the expected more abundant evidence on gender compared with other types of programmes. The review also focused on a set of gender equality outcomes: economic security, education, health, psychosocial well-being, protection, and voice and agency – drawn from the GRASSP conceptual framework (UNICEF, 2020c). The review drew on evidence synthesis (such as systematic reviews and evidence gap maps) and single evaluations of social protection programmes, primarily employing quantitative or mixed-methods strategies, and primarily published in peer-reviewed outlets as well as grey literature by key players in gender and social protection (such as UNICEF, ILO, UN Women, FAO and World Bank) and renowned international research projects (e.g., Transfer Project). It was based on a broad literature search strategy through database search, reference tracing and snowballing using broad search terms related to the concepts of interest and variations of the two (e.g., ‘gender’ and ‘social protection’), as described in the methodology section (Camilletti, 2020).

The second is a systematic review of reviews on the effects of social protection on gender equality (Perera et al., 2022). It has three main research questions:

1. What is known from systematic reviews on the gender-differentiated impacts of social protection programmes in low- and middle-income countries?
2. What is known from systematic reviews about the factors that determine these gender-differentiated impacts?
3. What is known from existing systematic reviews about design and implementation features of social protection programmes and their association with gender outcomes?

The systematic review of reviews focused on social assistance programmes, social insurance interventions, labour market programmes and social care interventions, but included a broader list of interventions than Camilletti (2020) – for example, under contributory social protection programmes (or social insurance interventions), the systematic review of reviews includes: birth payments/benefits; maternity, paternity and parental leave; childcare cash benefits and family allowances (e.g., for public servants); unemployment benefits/insurance for former employees; health insurance; housing subsidies for employees; household contents insurance; retirement pensions. Under social care services, it included prenatal and postnatal services (not primary or secondary healthcare, e.g., nurse home visiting); family supports (e.g., parenting education, IPV interventions, centre-based childcare, after school clubs); care for children or older people services. On the other hand, it focused on the systematic reviews that investigated the effects of social protection on the same six outcome areas of gender equality as Camilletti (2020), namely economic security and empowerment, health, education, mental health and psychosocial wellbeing, safety and protection, and voice and agency. A systematic search and appraisal process was followed, as described in Perera et al. (2022; see also the protocol in Perera et al., 2021), resulting in the inclusion of 70 high- to moderate-quality quantitative, qualitative and mixed-methods systematic reviews.

Finally, the third is a review of the literature on social and gender norms and social protection (Rost and Nesbitt-Ahmed, forthcoming). This rapid literature review drew on academic and grey literature identified through bibliographic database searches (e.g., Web of Science, Google Scholar), searching on relevant websites (e.g., UNICEF, UN Women, ILO, World Bank, Oxfam, Plan International, Save the Children, ODI, ALIGN Platform) and targeted searches/snowballing. Only literature written in English since 2000<sup>28</sup> with a focus on LMICs was included. The review included qualitative, quantitative and mixed-methods studies, theoretical work, literature reviews, case studies, policy reports and grey literature. Most sources were reports published by recognized international organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or think tanks, or academic papers. Different search terms related to social protection (e.g., social protection OR social assistance OR social care), social and gender norms (e.g., norms OR gender OR belief) and location (e.g., LMIC, low-income country/ies OR developing country/ies) were used (see Appendix 2 in Rost and Nesbitt-Ahmed forthcoming, for more information on the search strategy). As very little has been written directly on the relationship of social and gender norms and social protection, the review built on two distinct strands of literature: (1) social protection and gender; and (2) social norms literature.

It must be noted that, while our definition of social protection (UNICEF, 2020c) is broad and encompasses many different programmes, the three reviews whose methodology is described above have yielded an over-representation of the literature on social assistance or non-contributory social protection programmes, which may be partly explained by the higher prevalence and coverage of these programmes in LMICs (at least in low- and lower-middle-income countries) in the first place.

28 Some theoretical literature that was written earlier is also included.

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