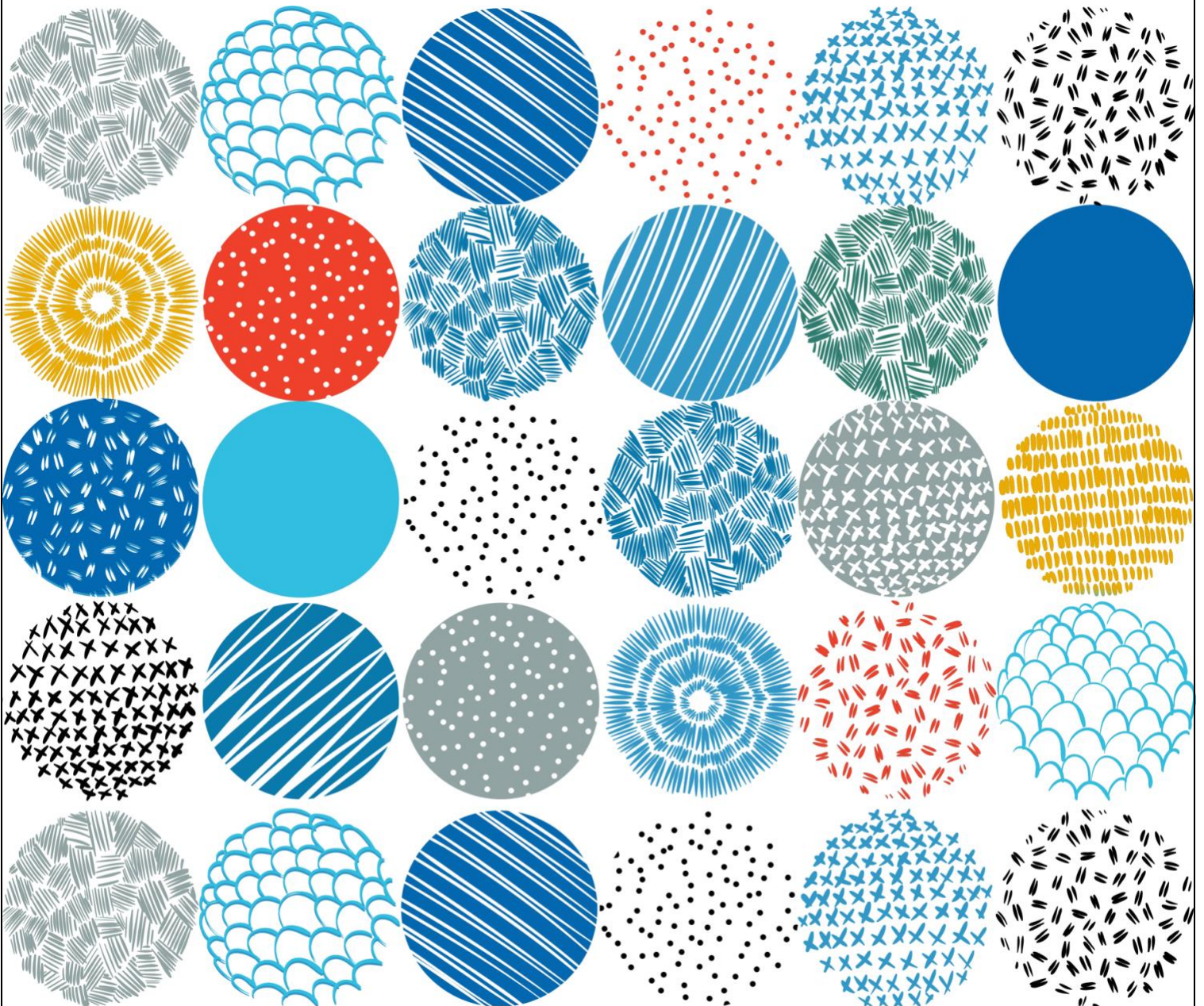


SYSTEMS, POWER, AND GENDER

Perspectives on Transformational Change



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INTRODUCTION

As the world becomes increasingly complex, we must adapt our way of understanding and responding to development challenges – using approaches that consider systems rather than silos; that favor opening of options rather than narrowing to single-point solutions; that enable dynamic rather than static management; and that prioritize learning rather than compliance.

If Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development, with its focus on integrated responses, had not already made clear, the events of the past few years – the COVID-19 pandemic, disruptions to the global supply chain, increasingly volatile and severe climate conditions, **diminished peace and security** – have demonstrated that we live in an increasingly complex world, with interconnected and compound development challenges that feed into and off one another. It is now quite evident that failing to “see” complexity and failing to respond at a systems level will not allow for the transformational change that is needed to achieve sustainable development for people and planet.

In its new Strategic Plan (2022-2025), UNDP committed to “build not just new skills, like systems thinking, but a new culture: one that embraces complexity, actively manages risk, continually adapts and seeks to learn alongside delivering results.... In an uncertain world, its business model must empower UNDP to respond to partners with the flexibility and at the scale they expect.”¹

As we become more comfortable with managing complexity and thinking in systems, the issue of power becomes more obvious, and we are called upon to consider the role that power, particularly as it relates to gender, has in our understanding of development challenges and in the design of our response.

¹ <https://www.undp.org/publications/undp-strategic-plan-2022-2025>

I. WHY THIS EXPLORATION INTO SYSTEMS, POWER, AND GENDER?

UNDP's Strategic Plan emphasizes the importance of examining challenges at the level of **systems** if we are to make transformative and lasting change that leaves no one behind. The Strategic Plan states that UNDP will invest in "fostering innovation and creativity to help change systems and tackle the hardest challenges standing between us and the SDGs."²

To induce transformative change in complex systems (e.g., a sector, an economy, a city), efforts are needed to identify potential "leverage points." These are places within the system "where a small shift in one thing can produce big changes in everything." (Meadows: 1999) While this initiative acknowledges the multitude of leverage points, we believe that the transformation of systems, especially systems that manifest deep equity, hinges on **power** across leverage points. We cannot address complex problems or speak of transforming systems without recognizing and confronting power dynamics and (im)balances. We can support distribution of power by enabling co-ownership of problems and co-design of solutions; this starts by questioning, studying, reimagining, and restructuring systems – the very rules of the game – that are primarily dictated by the few and often overlook the many.

Power dynamics are acutely manifest in **gender**, specifically gender norms, identities, and roles. Recognizing that power based on gender is inextricably linked with other factors (e.g., race, ethnicity, ability, class, sexual orientation, religion, political orientation, and socioeconomic status), we believe that gender is a crucial element in understanding power imbalances and distribution and in designing systems-level responses. This is critical as UNDP seeks to "help governments shift systems and power structures that generate gender inequalities and women's disempowerment," as stated in the UNDP gender equality strategy, 2022-2025.³

II. WHAT IS OUR OBJECTIVE?

This initiative aims to support the inclusive transformation of systems, by bringing to the fore the issue of power, specifically as considered through the lens of gender.

² <https://www.undp.org/publications/undp-strategic-plan-2022-2025> - Foreword

³ <https://www.undp.org/publications/gender-equality-strategy-2022-2025> - P.5

We set out to deconstruct the role of power and gender dynamics in our approach to systems transformation. We sought to understand together with UNDP colleagues how power relations and inequalities are addressed and sometimes perpetuated through the process of understanding and managing complexity, developing portfolios in response, and ultimately transforming systems.

This initiative was produced through a process of **research** in the systems thinking field at the intersection of power and gender (desk review, benchmarking of practices, interviews with UNDP colleagues at national, regional and global levels) and **development** of the framework and tools in the sections that follow (co-creation workshops conducted with UNDP colleagues). Throughout the process, we were mindful to ensure that “inclusive” did not unintentionally cultivate a monotone, complacent environment but created a space for provocative yet respectful dialogue that prompted continuous inquiry and institutional development.

We hope that deepened sensitivity to power and gender dynamics can guide our immediate everyday decisions, actions and behaviors on the one hand, as well as the design and implementation of our projects and portfolios on the other. This cannot happen in isolation; it happens through challenging conversations. With this initiative, we invite leaders and development practitioners to have these conversations. To support these conversations, we offer a “Power Dispersal Dandelion,” an easy-to-use framework that anchors users in an inquisitive and explorative mindset and facilitates conversations that contribute to a deeper understanding of, and sensitivity to, power and gender dynamics in systems transformation work.

III. WHOM AND WHEN DOES IT SERVE?

This effort complements, first and foremost, the local knowledge of the communities with which development practitioners collaborate. It also builds on and supplements the array of tools that are already available in the development field for analyzing and understanding systems, enhancing policy coherence, and ensuring that no one is left behind. Our hope is that it prompts reflection by, and offers guidance to, development and “systems-change” practitioners as they wade through the world’s complexities full of power and gender dynamics and strive for transformative and sustainable change that yields profound benefits for all. It intends to be a conversation starter for teams as they design a portfolio of options or interventions; it might also be helpful for teams as

they take stock of progress during the implementation phase. We also advise including in these important conversations and interactions the community partners, other national partners, donors, and vendors who affect or are affected by power and gender dynamics.

In the following sections, we present our perspectives on “**why**” systems, power, and gender are crucial factors to explore in pursuit of transformational change; “**what**” are some key systemic levers that influence the dynamics of power and gender; and “**how**” these levers can be understood and applied to our programming individually and collectively. We include a representative sampling of reflections from UNDP colleagues as shared during interviews and the co-creation workshop. We also offer a framework, called the **Power Dispersal Dandelion**, and a set of questions which we hope will help development practitioners better recognize and understand power and gender dynamics in systems and in turn design programmes that support more equitable systems.

THE NEXUS OF SYSTEMS, POWER, AND GENDER

As UNDP shifts its focus towards transformative change, how do we understand systems in ways that recognize power in its various manifestations and inequities, particularly gender-based inequities? How might we support the design and delivery of interventions that enable inclusive and sustainable systems to thrive?

Suppose one enabler of effective transformation of systems is working to design, support, and interact in a way that does not reflect or reinforce the problem we are trying to solve. As we strive to better understand systems, and the power and gender dynamics operating within them, a few provocations for consideration:

- How do we transform systems, rather than reinforce them, where inequalities are structurally and culturally embedded?
- How might we move away from imposing a top-down, bureaucratic approach to social, environmental and economic equity and justice within these systems and within communities with which we work?
- How do we prevent the unintended consequences of misguided “good intentions”?

These are some of the questions that guided our inquiry into understanding the nexus of systems, power and gender.

I. WHY SYSTEMS?

As a philosophy and as a framework, systems thinking is recalibrating the development sector’s approach to problem solving for complexity – moving towards less siloed approaches, less tactical interventions, and less tinkering on the margins, in favor of more holistic approaches that attempt to reconfigure and transform the policies, structures, and norms that have produced the social, environmental, and economic problems that we confront today.

Within UNDP, systems thinking is driving a transition from “one-off” interventions and single-point solutions to portfolios of options in response to systems-level development challenges. It is reframing what development responses look like in times of radical uncertainty and complexity, when for example, challenges manifest across sectors and geographic borders or when multiple crises occur simultaneously and compound each other. Importantly, it is taking account of the intersections of multiple and systemic power imbalances and gender injustices.

II. WHY POWER?

Power dynamics shape interactions in public, private and intimate spaces. In public spaces, these dynamics play out in employment, livelihoods, market activities, public social spaces, and individual interactions in the community. (VeneKlasen & Miller 2007) In private, they shape one’s experience of family, community, relationships, friends, and marriage. In the intimate realm, power dynamics can affect personal self-esteem, confidence, and dignity. Power must be understood within these various spaces, but also at their intersections.

Neglecting the role of power can lead to a gap between theory and practice, between good intentions and actual change, and can help explain why so many recommended development solutions fall short of their potential. To illustrate, in Koh Miyaoi’s experience (Gender Team Lead, UNDP Bangkok Regional Hub), these spaces are intricately linked as she reflected on a project in which women received training to run online businesses. In terms of employment opportunities (public space), these women may have gained some power; but their access to power in the private space remained limited as they could not get a bank loan – a next step in their new venture – unless their husbands, fathers or brothers permitted them.

Attention to power relations can prompt development practitioners to question the use of linear thinking often used in designing development projects, especially for achieving quick wins. (Beck, 2005). As we design and deliver development interventions that strive for the transformation of systems, we must acknowledge and become more attuned to power, where it is concentrated, how it reinforces the status quo of inequitable systems, where and how it can be dispersed. Finally, and perhaps most important, we recognize that everyone has power in different contexts, so it is less about giving people power than creating avenues that allow people to exercise it safely and consistently.

III. WHY GENDER?

If we want to achieve transformational change of systems, we must first work on understanding women's experience of those systems and how their experiences differ from men's. What social norms keep women from full participation in economic and civic life? Which aspects of rule of law do women prioritize and how does their prioritization differ from men's? How do women's experiences in urban settings vary from men's? Which parts of systems reinforce these differences, which parts need to be transformed, which parts need to be dismantled altogether? In this initiative, we suggest aiming not merely for "more seats at the table" but to question the concept of the table altogether, systematically questioning the root causes, paradigms, and norms that have inflicted current power imbalance, exclusion and discrimination.

Gender inequality is arguably the most pervasive, endemic and disparate manifestation of power imbalances. As António Guterres (Secretary-General, United Nations) pointed out: "Gender equality is fundamentally a question of power. Centuries of discrimination and deep-rooted patriarchy have created a yawning gender power gap in our economies, political systems, and corporations. The evidence is everywhere... Our world is in trouble, and gender equality is an essential part of the answer. Man-made problems have human-led solutions. Gender equality is a means of redefining and transforming power that will yield benefits for all."⁴

Transforming systems towards more distributed power and gender equality supports progress across all Sustainable Development Goals, from eradicating poverty to climate adaptation to biodiversity protection and sustainable economic growth. (Ivanova 2021) Gender equality and women's active participation in development interventions have yielded significant progress in addressing complex situations. Peacemaking is an evident case. A study by Desirée Nilsson (2012) stated that the inclusion of civil society groups, particularly women's organizations, reduces the likelihood of failure of peace agreements by 64%. When women are involved in peace processes, the final accord is more permanent and effectively executed. (Krause et al., 2018) As showcased in UNDP's report on [Women, Peace & Security: Sensemaking Beyond 2020](#), women often build decentralized social service delivery infrastructure that supported the delivery of emergency help

4 <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/articles/2020-03-02/the-gender-power-gap>

and the dissemination of health and safety information resulting in communities being able to better deal with catastrophes and crises such as COVID (UNDP, 2020) .

From an economic stance, when women can realize their full potential in the job market, there will be substantial macroeconomic benefits. According to Aguirre and others (2012), increasing the female labour force participation rate (FLFPR) to country-specific male levels would increase GDP by 5% in the United States, 9% in Japan, 12% in the United Arab Emirates, and 34% in Egypt. However, when we speak of the business case for women's full economic participation as adding trillions to global GDP (Woetzel et al. 2015), we are neglecting the fact that it is because of the role women have played, that we have reached such advanced levels of socio-economic and technological development in the first place. Women and girls contribute 12 billion hours of unpaid care work every day, and yet even when they are compensated, they earn just 77 cents for every dollar earned by men (Antonio Guterres, 2020).

DISPERSING SEEDS OF POWER



Based on extensive desk research and co-creation workshops with UNDP colleagues worldwide, we identified and prioritized the following concepts, from among many considered, for exploring power and gender dynamics in systems transformation: **Structures, Participation, Data, and Money**. We acknowledge that these concepts are all critical elements and manifestations of power in their own right, while recognizing the interdisciplinarity between and among them. Development portfolios that enable seismic structural transformation require continuous institutional awareness and inquiry of where power is concentrated and how it can be dispersed. Consequently, our attempt is that each concept is addressed through the lens of power—individually and inter-sectionally.

I. What do we mean by “Structures”?

Structures are the institutions, policies, procedures, and rules that enable and often limit the use of power. Structural inequity generates prejudiced outcomes based on gender, class, race, migration status, etc. Development interventions need to incorporate ways to override or dismantle obsolete structural formalities that exclude or marginalize certain groups.

As Danakhan Malhas (Innovation Specialist, Gender and Youth Focal Point, UNDP Jordan) noted during an interview, *“We talk about the rights of different excluded groups of society, depending on their vulnerability, but we’re not really addressing the systemic structural issues that are contributing to that vulnerability.”*

To illustrate, even procurement processes that by design seek to be more inclusive can exclude the most marginalized informal sectors and women-led micro-vendors through their requirements of formal and institutionalized service providers. Eduardo Gustale (Monitoring, Experimentation and Learning Specialist, UNDP Accelerator Labs Global Team) has observed in his work in Africa and South America that procurement procedures favor formal, established, and therefore older organisations, which men usually lead.

Addressing structural inequities offers an opportunity for development practitioners to facilitate redistribution and rebalancing of power so that communities define their own narratives, co-own meaning-making and decision-making, and fulfill their inherent ability to effect change. It also offers an opportunity to move beyond traditional strengthening of institutions to transformation of structures that privileges gendered interests and strives to change power and gender imbalances.

How can we support the override of structural inequities, or even challenge them, in favor of equality while staying within legal and regulatory bounds? We can be conscious of how re-distribution of power can generate new modes of structural value exchange; we can facilitate alternative ways of thinking about power’s different forms: visible and hidden, formal and informal; we can develop new models for how structural inequities can be measured; we can support distribution of power in ways that facilitate the co-creation and delivery of interventions that drive transformational change... to name just a few ways.

II. What do we mean by “Participation”?

Participation highlights not only “who is in the room?” but critically enables development practitioners to question and act upon the inclusion of all of those who *should* be in the room. Exploring participation deficiency begins to address the reasons preventing the needed people from being in the room and suggests how decision-making power can be given to both those present and those who lack access to the room.

Lilian Abou Zeki (Head of Solutions Mapping, UNDP Lebanon) candidly shared that there is often *“.....a sense of time scarcity and also the sense of fear of engaging in [systems thinking] fully, because [...] of how much time people have to engage with these tools or who’s facilitating.”* She continues by pointing out: *“How we allow people to contribute to these spaces, and how much of their empathy can actually show up there, has a direct correlation with how safe that space is.”*

Inclusive participation means safety and comfort, protects against intimidation, and enables vocality. These various elements, their presence or absence, contribute substantially to who can participate, who cannot participate, the extent of that participation

, and its resulting impact in understanding a system and the development challenges within it, and developing relevant responses.

There are many reasons for inhibited participation. For example, prevailing economic structures, gender roles, and family arrangements have reinforced stark differences between men and women concerning time distribution. Women spend more hours on unpaid caregiving work leading to inequality in opportunities and outcomes for personal and professional development and health and education outcomes—inequality that is transmitted across multiple generations. (Gaëlle Ferrant et al., 2014) These systemic gender paradigms highlight the intersectionality between systems and participation with a gendered lens; it showcases how power is withdrawn from women due to their care obligations which severely affects the degree to which they can participate, have their voices heard, and therefore make contributions to more inclusive and diverse systems.

How can we support more inclusive and meaningful participation? Here, we emphasize the importance of creating a friendly environment that feels safe to experiment, question, and challenge leadership, funders as well as each other. It is equally important to reflect on who has the power to create those safe spaces, who is currently cultivating those spaces, and who has the power but is not cultivating them. We must also consider local customs and traditions to avoid inadvertently excluding specific social segments or creating an environment that is psychologically unsafe or even unlawful in that particular context. We also emphasize the importance of participation throughout a process, not just participation in select pieces of a process; this includes agenda-setting, problem definition, systems mapping, program design, collective problem solving, decision-making, and importantly resource allocation.

The redistribution of participatory power also encompasses women-owned or racially disenfranchised entities. Assessing how many new organizations or entities a development agency has worked with can potentially support diversification and avert a default to the same working relationships year on year.

Finally, inclusive participation cannot be reduced to simply “informing” or “consulting” with communities. Otherwise, we risk propagating the very inequalities that we set out to change.

III. What do we mean by “Data”?

Data are a collection of values that may be analyzed and interpreted to convey information. Data are neither neutral nor objective, and biases in data analyses often emerge as a result of unequal social relations. Outdated information, incomplete data, lack of representative sampling and myriad other issues affect the quality of data and can severely hinder its relevance and usefulness.

We explore parallel issues related to data equity: that of the *process* of selecting, collecting, analyzing and interpreting data, i.e., does the process itself acknowledge power and gender dynamics and is it designed in such a way as to promote power and gender rebalancing; and that of the *substantive area of focus*, meaning are data being collected and used not only to further understand a development issues, but also to assess and expose power and gender imbalances and contribute to a redistribution of power within systems.

Important questions to ask are: What metrics and data are identified for collection; from whom will data be collected; how are the data collected and does it allow for collection from groups historically marginalized, under-represented or unheard; who analyzes and interprets the data and how are their biases mitigated.

How can we support an equitable approach to data? Data equity calls for diversification of data sources and types and equitable access to data and information while ensuring the protection and privacy of data enablers and systems. Here, we emphasize the importance of expanding the types and sources of data to be captured, for example selecting data that provide insights into the lived experience context, or the existing power and gender dynamics, equities and imbalances within systems, etc. We also emphasize placing value on multiple forms of knowledge, including the wisdom that comes from lived experiences and people as living, emotional beings in the world; this approach that values emotion as a part of data science allows us to reconnect to the people from which the data are derived.

Hayfa Sdiri (Former Youth and Innovation Program Analyst, UNDP Tunisia) reflects on multiple aspects of data collection, analysis and interpretation: *“When we design portfolios, it is important to diversify perspectives of those we include, consult, and co-create with, I am talking about age, gender, religion, different location/geography, different background, expertise, as much as possible.”* This clearly has a connection to the Participation lever of change discussed just above. Hayfa continued, *“To limit personal bias and increase awareness of its limitations, it would be good to have multiple people with different expertise revisit it [quantitative and qualitative data collected] before it gets consolidated.”*

IV. What do we mean by “Money”?

Money is a clear and quantifiable manifestation of power, as well as an enabler of power and a leverage point for transformational change. As it pertains to systems and gender dynamics, there are the twin questions of who is funding or financing initiatives and who (and what kinds of initiatives) get funded. We seek to explore the ways in which these decisions affect, positively or negatively, existing power and gender dynamics, by asking the next layer of questions about who benefits from the direct and indirect distribution of funds, e.g., women majority-owned companies and entrepreneurs.

How can we proactively design interventions that benefit those with the least access to money? Without conducting a strategic analysis of power and gender dynamics before allocating budgets, we could risk supporting financial investments that could perpetuate imbalances and inequities that privilege those who already have access to capacity and overlook, for example, women majority-owned organizations, entrepreneurs, or vendors. Therefore, in designing development portfolio interventions, we must reconsider how (and by whom) portfolios, programs and activities are financed, and in what ways they encourage or deter us from adopting a power-sensitive, gender-sensitive, and equitable approach to development interventions.

Proactively designing measures for women, indigenous peoples, people with disabilities and racially disenfranchised communities to have an equitable share of the wealth distributed through various sources such as knowledge, technology, participation access, enterprise, and land, partially remedies the appropriation of power that has caused underserved segments to fall behind.

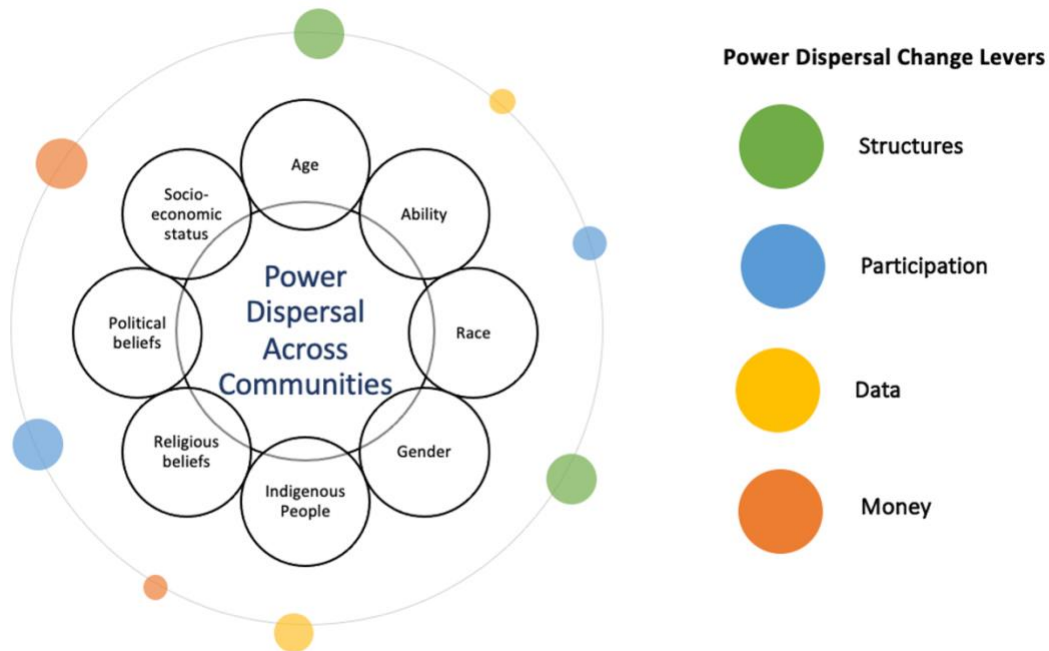
POWER DISPERSAL DANDELION: A FRAMEWORK FOR DISPERSING POWER

Dispersing Seeds of Power



Through our research and co-development process, colleagues across UNDP imagined an inclusive systems approach that address power and gender dynamics in the form of a **Power Dispersal Dandelion**. In nature, the seeds of dandelions are efficiently dispersed thanks to tiny discs of radiating threads that act as parachutes, where seeds can sometimes travel 150 kilometers on the wind. Incredibly, they do this with no energy consumption, and can survive in almost any ecological niche. In the dandelion's structure, it is the porous nature of the parachute—a virtually empty space—that lets air through and helps keep the seed steady as it flies. While dandelions are resilient and compete for territory, they never grow larger beyond their need. In fact, they fade quickly after blooming, and give other plants the chance to thrive by virtue of the nutrients and insects the dandelions send their way.

I. Where to start: Defining your Context



Where does the privilege of power lie in a system, and how will we actively disperse those privileges towards balance, equity, and belonging throughout an entire system? Who are our collaborators? Who are the individuals, communities, and organizations with whom/which we can co-lead and co-create through new forms of engagement and power dispersal? Who are the people who are systematically excluded, disenfranchised, or disempowered in a system? These are the important starting questions when defining context and identifying potential development collaborators and co-creators.

The optimum scenario is for a dynamic equilibrium of power where no one dominates over another across the relevant intersections of power and gender in a community. Common intersections include various diversity and belonging dimensions: Race, Ability, Age, Sexual Orientation, Ethnicity, Religion and Political Orientation (including sects, and lack of religious affiliation, political and politicized beliefs), and Socioeconomic Status (including class, caste, income, education, profession, marital status, indigenous people, and indigenous ways of knowing).

Your context – specifically power and gender dynamics, key influencers, potential collaborators, among many other factors – may already be clear to you. In case they are not, or you would like to have a clearer understanding, there are an array of power analysis and Diversity, Equity, Inclusion,

and Belonging (DEIB) tools available in the wider development field that are designed to be adapted to local contexts. (The Annex includes a list of resources that may be helpful in going deeper into specific aspects that are complementary to this framework.)

II. How to Use the Power Dispersal Dandelion Framework

The Power Dispersal Dandelion (PDD) framework encompasses four concepts: Structures, Participation, Data and Money. For each concept, we have prepared a list of questions or prompts that can facilitate an examination of where power imbalance and gender inequality sit within systems and how these can be addressed in the design, implementation and monitoring of interventions. We hope that asking these questions will help ensure a focus on power and gender dynamics in using systems thinking to effect transformative change.

Continuing the dandelion metaphor, we see entry points for these provocations at various stages of planning and programming:

1. **Seedling:** The project planning and/or portfolio, fundraising or contracting has not yet started to consider this question or dimension; or it has begun to consider it but has not yet proceeded.
2. **Flowering:** The relevant teams have started conversations about this or taken the first steps within the project and/or portfolio planning, resource mobilization or procurement, and there is room for improvement.
3. **Seed Dispersal:** The teams have fully taken this on board and have a clear strategy for how they will move towards power and gender equity and balance at each step of the project and/or portfolio planning, implementation, recruitment, procurement, resource mobilization, and monitoring.

We recommend using the Power Dispersal Dandelion framework as a conversation starter in your teams. Its value is most powerful when used at the start of a planning exercise, rather than applied as a checklist after you have finalized a project proposal. We could imagine it being used for thought-provoking discussions among colleagues developing new programmes or initiatives; conducting mid-term reviews; developing action plans for achieving UNDP's gender equality strategy 2022-2025. We could also envision it being used during discussions with donors,

partners, vendors, and community partners, as they are all critical system influencers in the very power structures we aim to address.

The questions are non-linear in nature, and they touch both strategic and operational levels. Not every question may seem initially relevant to your project, portfolio, or context, but we encourage you to engage with integrity, accountability, transparency, mutual respect, and professionalism as you work with colleagues and partners holding a shared mindset of improving possibilities for transformational change.

Assessment Questions	Seedling	Flowering	Dispersal
Structures			
<p>Are we⁵ incorporating power and gender dynamics into the mapping of the system? <i>e.g., exploring power and gender dimensions in a PESTLE analysis, a detailed power analysis of the system that takes into account gender discrimination, or adding power and gender as separate dimensions</i></p> <p><i>e.g., facilitating alternative ways of thinking about power's different forms: visible and hidden, formal and informal</i></p>			
<p>Are we applying power and gender dimensions in the definition of the problem space (including human experience, resources, and decision making) to ensure that we are working at the level of the root causes of our targeted development challenge, not the symptoms?</p>			
<p>To what extent can we apply DEIB principles taking into consideration the on-ground context where the interventions are operating?</p>			
<p>Are we designing the intervention in such a way that supports "ownership" by local partners that might hold the least power in the context?</p>			
<p>Are we considering the implications of our actions on established structures? (Are our actions likely to reinforce structures that contribute to power imbalance and gender inequality? Are we raising the possibility of dismantling structures, or even systems?)</p>			
<p>Are we considering / are we developing new models for how structural inequities can be measured?</p>			
<p>Have we understood and empowered our team to have the space, willingness, and safety to explicitly address power imbalances and gender sensitive topics?</p>			
<p>Have we established monitoring, evaluation and learning mechanisms that allow us to track contribution of our activities to positive power and gender dynamics?</p>			

⁵ In this set of questions, "we" comprises the colleagues, community partners, system influencers, and vendors, the group that is sitting together to develop a portfolio or development intervention.

Are we holding ourselves accountable to the least powerful groups? How?			
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Assessment Questions	Seedling	Flowering	Dispersal
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Participation			
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Have we analyzed our partnerships and collaborations to evaluate how often we work with the same entities? Do we have in place mechanisms to identify “new comers?”			
Are we exploring and measuring participation beyond conventional attendance? <i>e.g., participation throughout a process, not just participation in select pieces of a process; this includes agenda-setting, problem definition, systems mapping, program design, collective problem solving, decision-making, and importantly resource allocation</i>			
Have we designed means of participation that allow for marginalized communities to participate throughout the project cycle such as planning, implementation, monitoring and sustainability?			
Have we provided mechanisms for those unable to easily participate (access for those not in the room)? <i>e.g., due to time scarcity</i>			
Are we systematically centering women’s leadership and those led by traditionally marginalized populations in our projects? <i>e.g., through detailed stakeholder mapping</i>			
Have we created healthy motives and spaces of local participation? <i>e.g., use of local languages, practices, customs, stories, etc.</i>			
Are we creating spaces for participation that are physically and virtually safe, accessible and inclusive to community partners in consideration of visible and non-visible barriers and disabilities?			

<i>e.g., consider local customs and traditions to avoid inadvertently excluding specific social segments or creating an environment that is psychologically unsafe or even unlawful in that particular context</i>			
Are we creating a friendly environment that feels safe to experiment, question, and challenge leadership, funders as well as each other?			
Are we aware of the (potential) impact of our participation on the current power distribution and whether our interventions on these issues might be unhelpful to local communities and civil society?			
<i>Note: Instead of actively “dispersing” power here, might it be better to dismantle and step back from our own participation?</i>			

Assessment Questions	Seedling	Flowering	Dispersal
Data			
<p>How can we support an equitable⁶ approach to data?</p> <p>eg: expanding the types and sources of data to be captured; selecting data that provide insights into the lived experience context, or the existing power and gender dynamics, equities and imbalances within systems, etc and placing value on multiple forms of knowledge, including the wisdom that comes from lived experiences and people as living, emotional beings in the world. This approach hat values emotion as a part of data science allows us to reconnect to the people from which the data are derived.</p> <p>Have we defined and used indicators that give insight into power dynamics and gender inequality?</p> <p><i>e.g., time use or space use indicators</i></p>			

⁶ Data equity calls for diversification of data sources and types and equitable access to data and information while ensuring the protection and privacy of data enablers and systems.

<p>Are we using methods across the entire research and development process that acknowledge and challenge systematic power imbalances?</p> <p><i>Examples of methods and tools: Gender analysis, Gender impact assessment, Gender-responsive public procurement etc.</i></p>			
<p>How are we ensuring that our access to data is protective to marginalized segments without exploitation and power abuse?</p>			
<p>Are we diversifying our data sources to include unconventional pathways that foster value in multiple forms, such as localized knowledge, lived experiences and emotions?</p>			
<p>Are we ensuring that the process of data analysis and interpretation enables diversified perspectives that will enhance the information's quality, effectiveness and comprehensiveness?</p> <p><i>Note: Did we go beyond our immediate circle of colleagues and experts before data was consolidated? Is the team handling the data diverse?</i></p>			
<p>Are we ensuring that data and insight dissemination is inclusive to a broader community?</p> <p><i>e.g., accessibility, digital inclusion, cultural respect, etc.</i></p>			

Assessment Questions	Seedling	Flowering	Dispersal
Money			
<p>Have we proactively designed for equitable support to the impacted communities to benefit from the direct and indirect distribution of funds, focusing on women and marginalized communities? How are the communities centered in that design?</p>			
<p>Have we channeled funding towards capacity bridging rather than capacity building? <i>Note: This assumes that local communities have the required expertise, and what is needed is to connect them with the resources and power they need to implement successful projects</i></p>			
<p>Are our funding schemes⁷ prioritizing organizations with diversified ownership and holistic impact? <i>Note: diverse ownership includes gender diversity and marginalized members in leading roles and holistic impact includes allocation of support to systematic change instead of specific verticals.</i></p>			
<p>Are we co-developing the budgets with the communities we co-create and co-deliver interventions with?</p>			
<p>Are we building systems that target early-stage and first-time vendors and partners, such as such as women-owned or led organizations from the impacted communities with which we are working with?</p>			

⁷ Private, public or civic financing tools, programs, initiatives that allocate resources designated to address an agreed upon topic/problem.

III. How to Move Forward: Defining Action Steps

As you go through the process of considering the questions most relevant to your context and assessing where you are on the Seedling, Flowering, Dispersal spectrum, you may identify a number of action steps (and equally likely you may identify many more questions to ask yourself). Some actions may be urgent and immediate, especially if you have realized preventable harm is possibly being caused to a community, or if you are developing a project proposal in which these change levers across systems, power, gender can be included. We hope that across different aspects of your activities, the questions will support in identifying opportunities to take action across programmatic and operational undertakings.

While we have framed the PDD as an exploratory, diagnostic and self-accountability tool, you will observe that we have not asked users to indicate 'final totals'. We are conscious about not reproducing another "deficit" assessment, one that can be used to classify organizations hierarchically, thereby assuming that there is only one kind of linear evolution for transformational change.

The PDD is meant to seed a more profound and long-term transformation in how we think and engage at the intersection of systems, power and gender. Transitioning from actions based on a culture of unintended consequences to a culture of cascading benefit is crucial. In acknowledging that the challenges of dispersing power are complex, we may feel the urgency to find quick solutions to long-term challenges. However, urgency-driven solutions often lead to ineffective results or superficial solutions that reinforce negative feedback loops.

As you highlight and plan your intended approaches and actions, it is essential to keep the space for co-development and co-creation open, i.e., seek to better understand these various factors in a system first, while simultaneously learning about what approaches are more likely to be effective. It is our hope that the PDD will support identifying long-horizon transformations that are based on change levers which are radically different from the ones underpinning conventional development approaches. When at dispersal, an open and critical mindset is crucial to scale the systematic impact that has been validated in a different context. The role of the practitioner here is to examine how dispersal can be customized to eliminate any negative power imbalances while

ensuring social, economic, environmental, political and cultural factors are aligned for dispersal of learnings that can support systems transformation.

IV. Limitations

As this initiative is aimed at starting challenging conversations, we must recognize that it comes with its own limitations.

As there is abundant exploration, research and literature on how systems are shaped and influenced by power and gender dynamics, this initiative is designed to offer development practitioners a framework to complement their understanding of systems and their efforts to drive transformational change.

Our approach was to generate insights based on research, interviews and co-creation workshops conducted with UNDP staff. Even though UNDP's work is multidisciplinary, includes abundant perspectives and insights coming from secondary research and covers a wide range of problems, interventions, cultures and locations, we also realize that the insights shared might be specific to the organizational context and culture of UNDP. We hope it provides UNDP staff with a framework they can clearly relate to and customize for adoption. It might be more challenging for development practitioners unfamiliar with the UN scope of work, language and system.

Another limitation is the subjectivity and variability of systems, power and gender across literature and context. The initiative attempted to simplify these concepts in return for creating a practical and easy-to-follow framework. We recognize that the simplification comes with the reality of not fully addressing factors related to systems, power, and gender. We attempted to compensate for this by addressing systems, power and gender through four different levers of change: Structures, Participation, Data, and Money.

CLOSING WORDS

Great attention must be given to current and historical inequities: their origins, their manifestations and the systems that endorse them. To do that, we must first acknowledge the inherent power of these systems, and work to transform the factors with them (structures, participation, data and money) that are preventing system actors from stepping into their power and challenging the harmful patriarchal traditions that have long outlived their purpose. Moreover, development should restore a harmonious relationship between human society and the rest of the natural world—of which we are a part—through an economy based on a fair and equitable distribution of resources that serves the well-being and resilience of communities which can be achieved by integrating a pluriverse of indigenous knowledge, cultures, and traditions into our language and interpretations.

Even though it is of good value that gender equality has proven and measurable impact as presented earlier, but this is not the main reason for advocating women's empowerment! Gender equality is first and foremost a question of human rights, not measurable benefits. The questions presented in the PDD framework acknowledge and support organizations in providing "opportunity equity" to women, especially in marginalized communities. We realize that doing so is not a privilege, but a necessity, for an inclusive and diversified understanding of problems and interventions.

While we are aware that we are providing more questions than answers, perhaps more provocation than leading the way, we are confident that humility, self-awareness, courage, curiosity, and seeing oneself as part of the system will continue and perhaps accelerate the way to a positive system change. The pertinent and daunting question in our view is: If we embark on deep democratization of power, do we have the courage to hold ourselves accountable to the populations we serve rather than (just) to our donors and partners? What channels may be opened to enable a continuous feedback loop on where we are falling short?

As we strive for systems-level transformation, our approaches should be adaptable and consider cultural context without being prescriptive. This allows for safe use and culturally, historically, and socially relevant applications, particularly in terms of creating a physically and psychologically safe

space—free of physical fear and the legal ramifications of foreign interpretations of “inclusion” in local settings. To do that, we cannot be the sole owners of defining what that space is and should be. As systems disruptors, we need to balance the tension of bringing in knowledge of multi-national best practices with the unintended consequences of representing communities we do not truly represent in our own experiences. We need to question how we as individuals and the broader development community value multiple forms of knowledge.

Donors will need to prepare for long-term engagement by acknowledging and working against harmful power dynamics, providing support that fits systems change leaders’ needs, and being patient and realistic about the time it takes to achieve systems change. Donors have a role in evolving paths to systems change by funding systems portfolios with inclusive, equitable and transformative visions of improved systems—rather than only projects—and investing in learning and capability building/bridging and encouraging collaboration among systems change leaders.

As we voice our intention to co-lead, co-construct, and co-create new forms of engagement and power dispersal between privileged and marginalized groups, we remain mindful that local systems change leaders must be the ones leading at the forefront. We also join a growing number of partners, initiatives, and alternatives worldwide that seek to do the same. In democratizing power and holding ourselves accountable to the populations we serve, we invite communities, changemakers, innovators, systems thinkers, and the development sector to co-create with us. We would like any early adopters interested in providing feedback on the first iteration of the Power Dispersal Dandelion to get in touch with us and share with us any feedback. Let us continue the conversation and the journey together!

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Annex 1: Recommended additional resources:

Many of these are featured in the SDGs Acceleration Toolkit, which is a compendium of tools for analyzing system interconnections, enhancing policy coherence, ensuring that no one is left behind, identifying risks and building resilience. In addition, for those looking into more gender focused resources; the UN Women Digital Library also features an array of useful gender scorecard tools and sector-specific guides that can be complemented with this piece of work.

Toolkits:

- The [Inclusive and Plurals Future Framework](#) developed by Prateeksha Singh, Consultant on Experimentation, UNDP Asia Pacific Regional Innovation Centre. Singh's framework supports deeper self-reflection on the pre-existing systems of privilege we might unintentionally be bringing into our work.
- The UNDP [Foresight Manual – Empowered Futures](#) features the participative principle of Foresight practice, which relies on a broad range of cognitive perspectives and unconventional data sources, including voices from the margin.
- The [Problem Driven Iterative Adaptation \(PDIA\) toolkit](#) is designed to guide users through the process of solving complex problems collaboratively. Including problem analysis, constructing, and deconstructing problems.
- The [theory of change methodological brief](#) prepared by UNICEF's Office of Research is a guide on how activities are understood to produce a series of results that contribute to achieving the final intended impacts. It assists in identifying root causes, key connections, and relations within a system.
- UNDP's [Gender mainstreaming made easy: Handbook for programme staff](#) features an array of simple and practical frameworks, such as the UNDP Checklist for Gender Mainstreaming in Project Proposals, recommended to be used at the beginning of the development of work plans to identify gaps in budgets and implementation. It also contains the Harvard Gender Analysis Framework, which is one of the earliest, yet still useful frameworks for strategic planning, informing project planners on how to address and alleviate gender differences and inequalities.
- The [Gender Equality Continuum Tool](#) takes users from gender blind to gender-aware programs, towards the goal of equality and better development outcomes.

- The [Heightened Risk Identification Tool and User Guide](#) has been developed to enhance effectiveness in identifying refugees at risk.
- [Humanitarian Response Plan templates](#), which assist in providing a more inter-sectoral analysis of crisis-affected people's needs and their severity, vulnerabilities, causes, and risks, including a disaggregation based on age, gender, disability and other context-relevant diversity characteristics.

Readings:

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