



## **Summary Brief - UNDP / PAPP Gender Journey**

### **Gender Transformative Workshops**

### **October 2022**

#### **I. Introduction**

This brief documents the learning experience of UNDP's Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People (UNDP/PAPP) in rolling out a series of Gender Transformative Workshops for all staff, which were carried out between April and October 2022. The workshops are part of UNDP/PAPP's Gender Equality Seal Action Plan 2022 – 2023, and wider gender journey.

In addition to providing an overview of the scope and rationale behind the rollout of the workshops, significant attention is given to elaborating insights on key results and lessons learnt from this experience, as well as outlining measures to enhance sustainability.

A more comprehensive version of the Gender Transformative Workshop Knowledge Package will include reference material such as the Workshop / training manual, to share knowledge with other UNDP Country Offices (COs) in the region and beyond, for potential up-take and tailoring to different contexts.

#### **II. How did it start - Why Gender Transformative Workshop?**

Staff of UNDP/PAPP operate within, and create the culture of the organization. Individual perceptions, biases and stereotypes that may be carried by staff, whether consciously or unconsciously, influence the organizational culture, and can be instrumental in creating an inclusive working environment that is conducive to gender equality. Gender biases and stereotypical thinking at the individual level can also affect the ability of staff to ensure sound gender mainstreaming across UNDP/PAPP's programmatic interventions and effectively promote gender equality and women's and girl's empowerment within Palestinian society.

While the existing UNDP/PAPP Gender Equality Strategy 2019-2022 recognizes the importance of awareness raising and staff training, and a Gender Working Group has been established to lead the implementation of the associated Action Plan, there was recognition by senior management that this was not sufficient and a different approach was required.

Against this backdrop, UNDP/PAPP started its second UNDP Gender Equality Seal certification process in 2021. The initial baseline assessment highlighted opportunities and key entry points for improvement, which informed the development of UNDP/PAPP's Gender Equality Seal (GES) Action Plan (April 2022 - April 2023).

Building staff capacity constitutes a key element of the GES Action Plan, with the Gender Transformative Workshops expected to improve staff awareness and to foster a safe and inclusive working environment as part of UNDP/PAPP's institutional transformation. It was also expected to increase staff motivation for and commitment to gender mainstreaming within UNDP/PAPP's programmatic interventions. The Gender Transformative Workshops were considered an essential foundation/cornerstone, upon which further capacity development activities would be built. This would include technical workshops / trainings and refreshers to strengthen programme staff skills and knowledge for gender equality and women's empowerment.

### III. What took place - What is a Gender Transformative Workshop?

The three-day Gender Transformative Workshop offered a safe space for critical (self)reflection and open dialogue on personal, socio-cultural and religious perceptions of gender-related topics and issues, including social norms and gender roles, behaviors and stereotypes. It provided a safe and inclusive space for discussion, active listening and questioning of issues that are often addressed and talked about among colleagues, whether in the workplace or outside the office.

The aim of the Workshop was to foster positive change across different dimensions, namely in terms of:

- Enhanced ability to critically (re-)think and self-reflect on personal gender related views, behaviours, norms and values;
- Increased knowledge of sensitivity and ability to respect women's and girls' rights and to engage boys and men in gender equality; and
- Increased sensitivity towards and ability to create an open and safe working environment within UNDP and with partners.

The Gender Transformative Workshops were rolled-out through a series of 9 sessions, each with the participation of 15 – 25 colleagues. While most sessions lasted three days, the last session was a shortened one-day programme focused on staff who only speak Arabic, with translation provided.

Workshop sessions took place in external venues, to give participants the space to temporarily disconnect from the workplace and fully focus on themselves as individuals. Mixed participation of both women and men in the Workshop sessions was crucial, in line with the gender transformative methodology aimed at engaging both women and men as agents of change towards gender equality. Furthermore, each Workshop session included staff from both programme and operations, as well as from different levels of seniority, and a combination of national and international staff.

Finally, senior management perceived the roll-out of the Gender Transformative Workshop as a golden opportunity to strengthen unity within UNDP/PAPP, overcoming the existing geographic barriers that physically separate the teams in Jerusalem, Ramallah and Gaza. Thus, extra effort was made to give the opportunity to West Bank colleagues to attend the Workshop sessions in Gaza, and vice versa, whenever logistically possible. This also allowed geographical nuances in gender norms and biases to be explored.

The workshop was facilitated by an international Gender Advisor, who has extensive experience in the gender transformative approach, and has designed and delivered gender transformative trainings in various countries and settings.

A total of 146 staff have been trained thus far, representing almost 95% of current UNDP/PAPP staff. Additional Workshop sessions will be organized in the coming months, to give the opportunity for the few remaining colleagues as well as newly hired staff to participate.

#### **IV. What is a Gender Transformative Approach?**

A gender transformative approach *'seeks long-term changes in gender relations and power dynamics, at all levels of society'*<sup>1</sup>. The core principle is "Change starts with the Self", with the approach entailing the following essential steps:

- Encouraging critical awareness of gender roles and norms among both women and men;
- Questioning the costs of harmful and inequitable gender norms, including toxic masculinity, and making explicit the benefits of actively challenging and changing such norms, for both women and men;
- Empowering women, girls and people with diverse gender identities and/or sexual orientations; and
- Engaging boys and men in a positive way and as agents of change, towards gender equality.

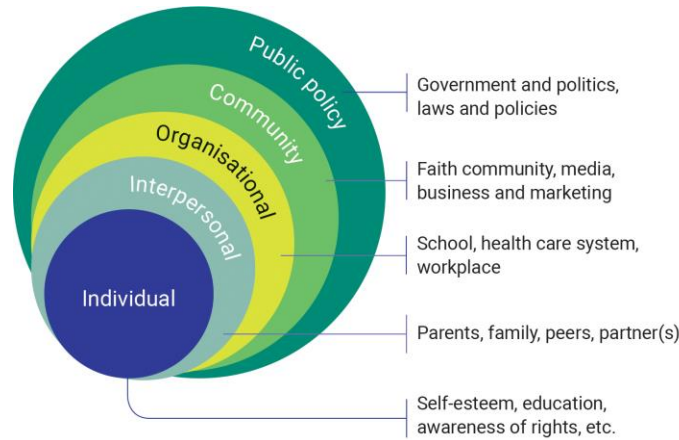
The approach uses the socio-ecological model (Urie Bronfenbrenner, 1979), which allows analysis and interference with the complex interplay in the relationships between the individual and others, at personal, household, community, institutional and policy level. The model visualizes institutional structures where arrangements of formal and informal rules and practices enable and constrain the agency of women/girls and men/boys, where rigid stereotypical and discriminatory gender ideologies and norms are often perpetuated and govern the distribution of resources<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: [Gender Transformative Approach Toolkit Module 1 - Rutgers](#) (2019)

<sup>2</sup> Dworkin, Shari L. et al. (2015). 'The promises and limitations of gender transformative health programming with men: critical reflections from the field.' Culture, Health & Sexuality.

### Socio-ecological model:



The Gender Transformative Approach utilized in the Workshop consisted of the following six interrelated components, which are contextualized to the Palestinian reality and practices:

- ✓ Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA);
- ✓ Power-Gender and Intersectionality;
- ✓ Norms and Values;
- ✓ Empowerment of women and girls;
- ✓ Engaging men and boys in gender justice; and
- ✓ Gender diversity and sexual orientation (pending on context whether facilitated as a separate topic, or integrated within discussions and based on input from participants).

One additional session focused on the difference between consent and sexual violence, allowing participants to understand the grey areas. Grey areas are acts and/or behaviors that are perceived as acceptable by the society, but are still harmful to the individual who is subject to them.

### Interactive, participatory learning techniques and methodology

The sessions take a practical and human-centred approach, with information / knowledge sharing and conceptual framing only to facilitate understanding of the applicability of gender equality to the participant's own life and professional experiences.

Participants are encouraged to bring their own experiences and examples from their daily life, as well as from their interactions in the workplace. They are invited to actively participate, learn and connect with other participants, through a wide range of interactive, participatory learning methodologies and techniques which create a safe space for dialogue. Plenary sessions are alternated with focus groups discussions, group work (man and women separated, or together) and/or work in couples, as well as with individual reflections and interactive exercises.

The participants sit in a circle, allowing them to see everyone's face, which naturally contributes to a sense of equality and equity. Every day of the Workshop starts with a 'check-in' round offering participants the opportunity to share any observations, questions and/or concerns, allowing the participants to get to know each other more. The day ends with a brief 'check-out' round, by inviting the participants to stand in a circle and share a few words about how they feel about the Workshop-day.

### **Golden (Group) Values**

As a kick-off to each Gender Transformative Workshop session, group values are established and collectively endorsed, to ensure that all participants feel heard, respected and able to safely express themselves, without risk or fear of being judged by others. These values serve as guiding principles throughout the whole Workshop and can be considered as the backbone of a gender transformative process.

The following values help create an inclusive and safe space for sharing, (self)reflection and learning in a respectful manner:

- ❖ Strict confidentiality of all that is discussed during the Workshop;
- ❖ Actively listening to each other
- ❖ Only one person speaking at a time, with no interrupting when someone is speaking / sharing;
- ❖ There is no wrong or right answer;
- ❖ Everyone has a right to speak;
- ❖ Honesty is paramount, but there is no pressure to share private matters;
- ❖ Everybody is seen as equal, irrespective of age or gender, religion, class, job position, etc.
- ❖ No judgmental remarks or disrespectful reactions to what another person says;
- ❖ Full hearted presence.

*Note: Content and methodology of the Gender Transformative Workshop rolled-out within UNDP/PAPP are based on the [Gender Transformative Approach Toolkit Module 1 - Rutgers](#) (2019)<sup>3</sup>*

## **V. Key Results & Lessons Learnt**

*“ It was amazing, the best thing about this Workshop is respecting the opinions of others, listening to the participants, and delivering the Workshop in the form of questions that will motivate the listeners and make them more interested’ . (participant)*

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<sup>3</sup> Gender Transformative Approach Toolkit Module 1: Six Interrelated Components and the Socio-Ecological Model. Rutgers' innovative and comprehensive toolkit for implementing a gender transformative approach has been designed as a resource and a guide to support the integration of a gender transformative approach (GTA) into sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) programmes and organisations (2019).

## Overall reflections

A key learning for the Workshop participants was that gender is more than women. It placed gender back into its original meaning, namely seen as a relational concept involving both women and men within a certain context. The limitations and discrimination women suffer within a patriarchal culture are well known and has been the focus of attention for decades. The recognition that while men certainly have privileges in a heavily patriarchal society, they are also paying a price for it, was a new insight for the participants.

In the Palestinian context, men experience high levels of financial, social, and emotional responsibilities, and are expected to be the breadwinners, while being confronted with harsh realities of severe unemployment and limited economic opportunities across the West Bank (incl. East Jerusalem) and the Gaza Strip. Men - and especially young boys in Palestine also face violence and are more vulnerable in some aspects than women and girls. Moreover, their ability to freely express their emotions - other than the socially expected stamina and boldness – is limited. This means that most Palestinian men often do not have the freedom to express their vulnerabilities, fears, or weaknesses - particularly in the public space, but also at home.

Once given a safe space for sharing their vulnerabilities and being listened to, men felt heard and acknowledged in a way they often do not experience when exposed to traditional development initiatives solely focused on women's rights. Once heard and acknowledged, men felt more motivated to critically reflect on their own behaviors and show more interest in respecting and actively supporting women's and girls' rights and empowerment, starting from the household level.

Such mixed gender transformative processes also generated opportunities for women to embrace new insights and learnings. The recognition and sharing of similar experiences had an empowering effect, transcending national and international borders. However, different religious backgrounds among the participants also revealed differences in socialisation and the way women grew up. By shedding light on the gender-related impact of socialization and social conditioning<sup>4</sup> for both girls and boys, women gained a better understanding of not only their own behavior, but also of men's behavior. They came to understand, deconstruct, and ultimately challenge their role as mothers in perpetuating harmful gender norms vis-a-vis their children, sons and daughters alike. Transformation became not only an issue of advancing girls and women's rights and empowerment, but also a matter of critically looking at and re-shaping boys and men's roles, norms, values and behaviors. The binding factor was very much the joint horizon - which does not differ much between women and men: striving for a healthy, happy, peaceful, and prosperous future for their families and communities.

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<sup>4</sup> Social conditioning is the sociological process of training individuals in a society to think, act and respond in a manner generally approved by the society, as well as by peer groups within such society. Social conditioning works by rewarding behavior that is acceptable and punishing thoughts and actions that are not acceptable.

The Gender Transformative Workshops also revealed the intrinsic power of moving beyond gender and the men-women dichotomy. It created a space for deep and critical thinking about oneself as a person, and what it means to be human. It enhanced a sense of agency to liberate oneself from social restrictions and limiting (gender)roles to become the person one wants to be, within one’s personal and professional life.



Figure 1. Participants responses to online evaluation and feedback survey - "In one word, describe your experience with the Gender Transformative Workshop"

In every Gender Transformative Workshop session, an evaluation and feedback survey was carried out through Mentimeter (see Annex I for a snapshot of key results). This online survey aimed at gathering participants’ feedback on the relevance of the topics discussed and their satisfaction vis-à-vis the interactive methodology adopted. It also aimed at understanding the main takeaways/ learnings from the participants’ perspective, as well as assessing their motivation and commitment to actively challenge harmful gender norms and behaviors moving forward – both in their personal lives and in the workplace.

### Key Results

- Increased awareness and acknowledgment that creating positive change towards gender equality starts at the individual level -“Change starts with the Self”, rethinking and challenging own behaviors that reproduce harmful gender norms.
- Positive changes at the individual level, including a stronger sense of empowerment, feeling free to express oneself and own weaknesses, positive changes in the relationship with own partner, led to increased commitment and support by men within the household, as well as mutual support between the partners.

- Strengthened commitment to practice the Golden Values both in their personal and professional lives - especially actively listening and trying to understand other people's perspectives and experiences, communicating in a respectful manner, and being aware of the ways in which their actions, words or behaviors can affect other people, whether family members or colleagues.
- Enhanced positive relationships and group dynamics in the workplace, based on mutual respect.
- Increased positive interactions among staff, including colleagues from the opposite sex and/or those who were not used to interacting before the Workshops.
- Increased interest in, motivation for and commitment to strengthen gender mainstreaming in ongoing and new projects/programmes.
- Enhanced interactions between programme staff and Gender Focal Points and experts within the office, including increased requests from programme colleagues for technical support in mainstreaming gender in ongoing and new projects/programmes.

### Lessons learnt

- Strong commitment and leadership from senior management regarding the Gender Transformative Approach and rollout of the Workshop (including making it mandatory for all staff, regardless of contract modality) is crucial and powerful – particularly in stimulating staff interest and motivation to participate in gender-related activities.
- Having a senior manager (either in-person or on-line) opening each Gender Transformative Workshop with a strong message demonstrates that the gender equality agenda is a priority within the organization.
- High level of gender knowledge and expertise of the facilitator, coupled with strong interpersonal communication skills and (culture) sensitivity, are essential.
- The entry point of gender serves as an 'equalizer' for connection and dialogue, as everyone has experiences with gender roles, expectations, norms and values which influence their lives.
- Golden (group) Values represent the backbone of Workshop, and having all participants endorse these values at the beginning, and reinforcing them repeatedly throughout the Workshop are key to ensuring a safe space for dialogue, sharing and learning.
- Acknowledging the importance of active listening and refraining from judging others was a key take-away throughout all Workshop sessions, amongst both female and male colleagues, which can have a ripple effect going beyond gender relations.
- Workshop planning should be done for the entire group of participants - in this case all staff, taking into consideration the overall gender balance within the organisation, in order to ensure a relatively good gender balance for each of the Workshop sessions. (UNDP/PAPP took the approach of asking all staff to sign up for the preferred Workshop session, which resulted in more women participating in the earlier sessions, and poor gender balance in the last few sessions.)
- Rolling out the Workshop sessions with mixed groups, including both men and women, helps participants gain a better understanding of the other sex and respective challenges, resulting in more positive interactions and mutual support for moving out of the traditional gender box.
- Rolling out the Workshop sessions in mixed groups regardless of position in the organization, age and geographical area (Ramallah, East Jerusalem, Gaza), national or international, contributes to a better understanding of each other and improved interaction and group dynamics.
- Sensitive topics - such as LGBTQI+ rights, women's sexuality, and sex before marriage – can be dealt with as part of a broader exercise and/or when spontaneously addressed by participants,



rather than a separate topic. Such topics are highly controversial in the Palestinian context, and must be dealt with carefully, to avoid creating resistance and potential backlash from participants.

- Firm religious views may interfere with the process and hinder the safe space for dialogue. As such, regular efforts from the facilitator to bring the participants back to the Golden Values collectively agreed upon are key, and can ensure mutual respect and positive group dynamics are preserved.
- Although the Golden Values included respect for diverse opinions, strong and vocal resistance from a few individuals (in this case men, potentially responding to the fact that the sessions were mandatory) negatively affected the overall group dynamics and sense of safety in the group. Reinforcement of the message from senior management in opening session of each Workshop around the purpose of the sessions and importance of respecting others was critical in preventing similar incidences from taking place.
- Clarifying in the opening session that the Gender Transformative Workshop is not a technical training was key in adjusting any mis-guided expectations that participants may have had. Communicating that this Workshop is the foundation of subsequent gender mainstreaming trainings and other Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA) and Sexual Harassment (SH) trainings helped participants understand how the Workshop fit within the overall strategy of the organisation to promote gender equality and women's empowerment.
- Measuring institutional changes (beyond the Global Staff Survey), particularly in terms of inclusive and safe work environment is important, and methods to capture such change should be explored moving forward.
- Gradually transitioning from facilitation by an international expert only, to co-facilitation with trained national colleagues can be effective in ensuring context-specific nuances are addressed and national capacity is strengthened within the organisation.
- The workshop venue can be a facilitating or constraining factor in creating an atmosphere of open dialogue, positive interaction, and safe space. Having a venue away from the office, with ample light and space was a key factor in ensuring a successful Gender Transformative Workshop.

## VI. Sustainability and way forward

The Gender Transformative Workshop sessions have been rolled-out as part of UNDP/PAPP Gender Equality Seal Action Plan. It is considered an important element to foster institutional transformation by creating a more inclusive and safe work environment, as well as to strengthen staff commitment to ensure gender mainstreaming across programming. These Workshops are complemented by technical refreshers on gender mainstreaming, as well as continuous technical support and guidance from the Gender Focal Points and the Gender Advisor to programme teams.

The Gender Transformative Workshops, as well as overall gender efforts within UNDP/PAPP, take place within the institutional set-up illustrated below, under the leadership and strategic guidance of senior management, and with the engagement of colleagues across programme and operations.

## Gender & PAPP

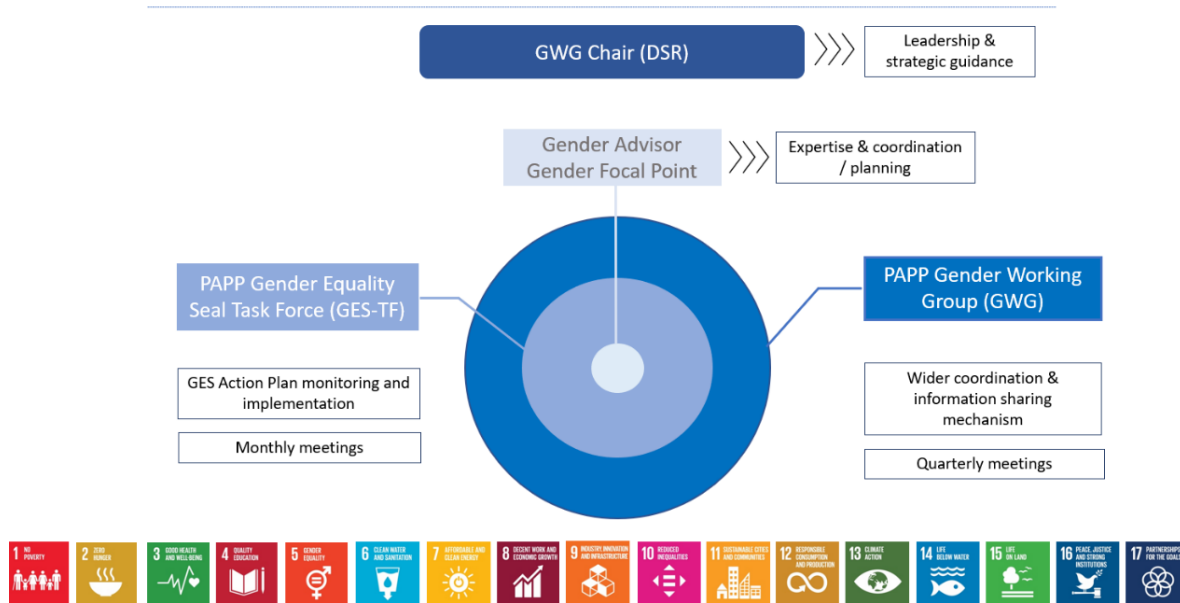


Figure 2. Gender in UNDP/PAPP - Organisational set-up, Roles & Responsibilities

A communication platform for continuing exchange, including sharing of and discussing gender related topics in an interactive, creative and stimulating way is essential to keep colleagues engaged, building on the various Workshop sessions and interactions. Social media channels such as WhatsApp groups have been set up, and discussion is ongoing with regard to organizing monthly cafes or other informal in-person exchanges.

A Training of Trainers on Gender Transformative Approaches (GTA ToT) for selected UNDP/PAPP staff will be rolled-out, with a view to enhance sustainability and build institutional capacity to sustain and scale up implementation of gender transformative approaches.

Once trained, the new trainers will be expected to (co)facilitate:

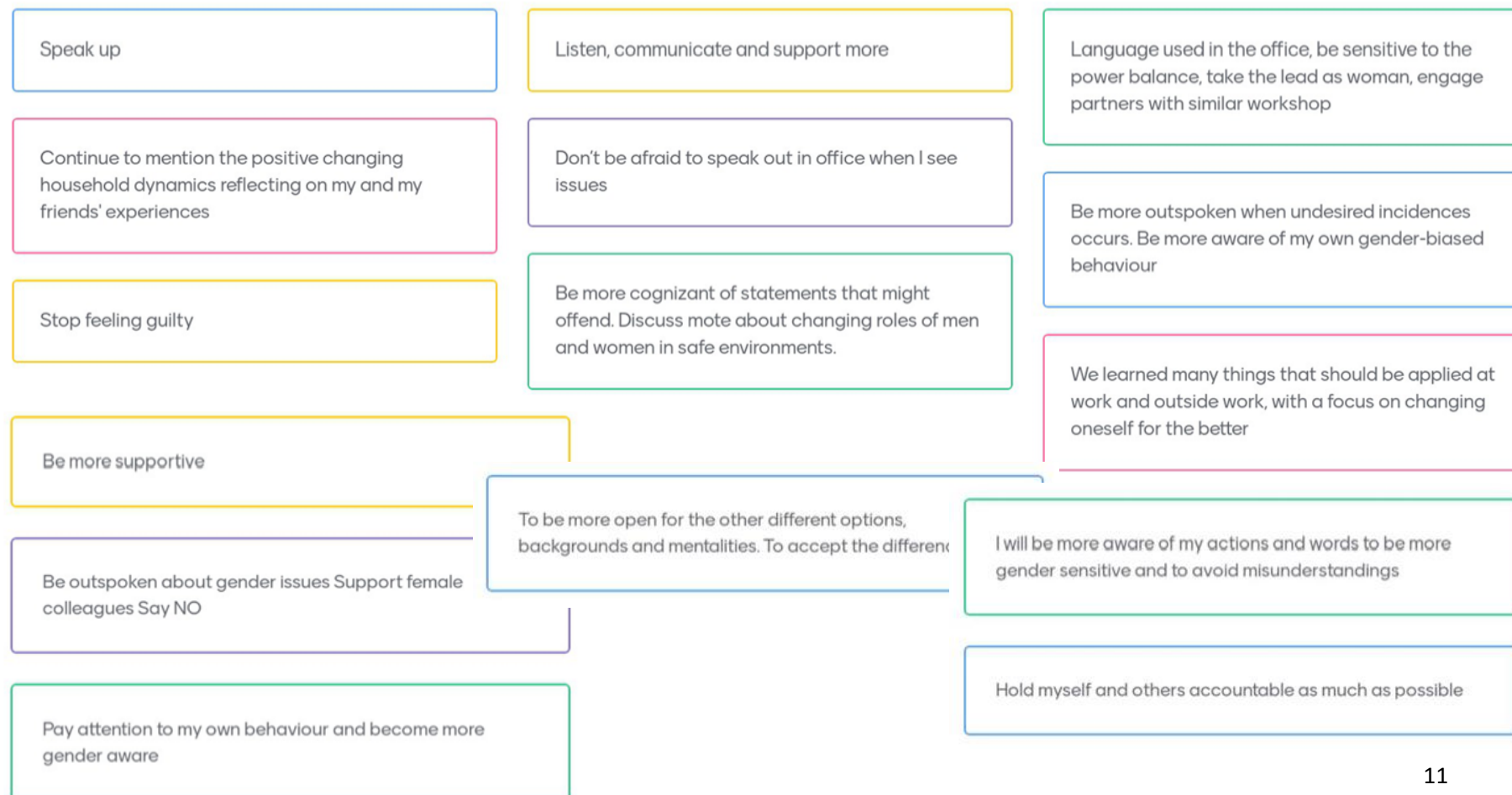
- Gender Transformative refresher sessions;
- Gender Transformative Workshop sessions for newly hired staff; and
- Gender Transformative Workshop sessions for relevant and interested Implementing Partners.

Such focus on building in-house capacity on gender transformative approaches, coupled with technical capacity development on gender mainstreaming for programme staff, are key elements of UNDP/PAPP's gender journey and are expected to enhance UNDP/PAPP's contribution to gender equality in the oPt.

With interest being expressed by other UNDP COs in the region, as well as UN agencies and donor partners in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt), UNDP/PAPP is exploring opportunities to share the gender transformative approach and methodology with a broader group of stakeholders who could collectively make a more significant difference in people's lives.

## Annex I. Snapshot of Mentimeter evaluation and feedback survey results

# What, if anything, will you change in your work because of what you have learnt?



## What, if anything, will you change in your personal life because of what you have learned?

Making jokes about sexuality and be aware of what's defined as sexual harassment and tolerated within the society. I would change the way we upbringing children and deciding to identify their sexes without their choice

Consider how certain situations might be for the other gender

Show more trust and appreciation

Be more proud of my gender

Be more flexible and accommodating

Do more homework with the kids. Discuss more household roles and responsibilities.

Be more willing to let go of certain responsibilities

Maybe focus on listening more, accepting others

Listen more and understand emotions of my male family members

interact more with my family

I will share and cooperate with my wife inside the house in terms of helping her in the house works and try to use more emotional and lovely words towards her

Challenge myself more

I will share my wife's life with me more and more in many ways. Love will be the MAX to share ❤️

Pay more attention to the details because it might be something small but it is big for the other party

Being more supportive

Respect Respect Respect

Listen more

Active listening