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Tackling the structural drivers of HIV

SOCIAL NORMS AND GENDER- RELATED HARMFUL PRACTICES

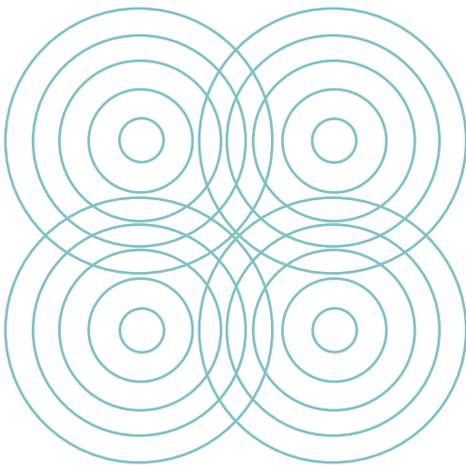
LEARNING REPORT 02

Theory in support of better practice

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Learning Group on Social Norms and Gender-related Harmful Practices
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Tackling the Structural Drivers of HIV



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CONTENTS

Introduction	2
The Learning Group on Social Norms and Gender-related Harmful Practices	2
The Baltimore meeting on Social Norms Theory and Gender-related Harmful Practices	2
Summary of key learnings	3
Social norms theory: An introduction	4
Gender theory meets social norms theory: What opportunities exist for cross-fertilisation?	6
The literature on social norms	7
The literature on <i>gender</i> norms	9
Where next?	9
Social norms, values, agency and power: What key constructs can be used with social norms theory to design effective interventions?	11
Social norms, agency and power	11
Social norms and values	13
Direct and indirect norms	13
Where next?	14
What activates a norm?	15
The out-group and in-group effects	16
The effect of financial incentives on pro-social behaviour	17
The role of emotions: Shame activates and reinforces gender norms	17
Where next?	17
What makes norms more or less powerful?	18
Variations across contexts: how culture affects the influence of social norms	18
Variations within context: How characteristics of a practice affect the influence of a social norm	19
Where next?	19
What works to change social norms?	20
Grounding social norms change within existing cultural values	20
The importance of making social norms change visible	21
A holistic approach to gender norms change	21
Where next?	22
The next, third, meeting of the LSHTM group on social norms and gender-related practices	23
References	24



INTRODUCTION

THE LEARNING GROUP ON SOCIAL NORMS AND GENDER-RELATED HARMFUL PRACTICES

In 2016, the Gender, Violence and Health Centre (GVHC) at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) launched a learning and reflection group on social norms and gender-related harmful practices (GHP). Donors and development practitioners have become increasingly interested in harnessing insights from social norms theory to catalyse change around gender inequity and harmful gender-related practices. Little guidance is available, however, to help programme implementers to integrate simple norms measures and change strategies within field-based programming. While theory-based insights open promising avenues for achieving change, a gap has emerged between theory and its application within development practice.

The mission of this group is thus to:

- Adapt insights and methods from social norm theory and research into practical guidance for development practitioners seeking to transform harmful gender-related practices in low and middle-income countries.
- Share and discuss individual solutions to common dilemmas around measurement and practice.
- Develop a programme of research and practice to test strategies that can help people negotiate new positive norms and/or dismantle norms that keep harmful practices in place.

Our collective experience will inform the next wave of norms intervention design and evaluation.

THE BALTIMORE MEETING ON SOCIAL NORMS THEORY AND GENDER-RELATED HARMFUL PRACTICES

As part of the learning initiative, LSHTM convened an expert group meeting in July 2017 on the theory of social norms sustaining GHP. Participants included a select group of multi-disciplinary researchers working on social norms. In particular, the group brought together experts from the fields of gender theory and social norms theory. In bringing together thinkers and “doers” from various backgrounds, we sought to investigate which insights from social norms theory and gender theory could help transform the norms sustaining harmful gender-related practices. In this meeting, we addressed the following five theoretical questions:

1. What opportunities exist for cross-fertilisation between gender theory and social norms theory?
2. What key constructs can be used with social norms theory to design effective interventions?
3. What makes people aware of the norm?
4. What makes norms more or less powerful?
5. What works to change social norms?



SUMMARY OF KEY LEARNINGS

What opportunities exist for cross-fertilisation between gender theory and social norms theory?

Practitioners do not need a single and harmonised definition of norms, as long as they use a coherent theory that matches their understanding of the context. The definition and theory they will use, then, will differ according to the purpose of their work. Generally speaking, however, participants suggested that looking at descriptive and injunctive norms as two separate constructs will likely be helpful when designing and evaluating interventions.

What key constructs can be used with social norms theory to design effective interventions?

It is important to design interventions that integrate social norms within a wider framework. Agency, power, norms and values can be aligned or exert opposite influence on people's actions. Successful social change interventions should understand how these factors intersect and address them in their interplay.

What makes people aware of the norm?

Observing an out-group comply with a norm has been shown to reduce the in-group's motivation to comply. This evidence highlights the dangers of designing a large-scale intervention that targets multiple groups with the same message and strategy.

What makes norms more or less powerful?

Practitioners' efforts to understand how norms change need to take into consideration factors that affect the strength of a norm. They should be careful not to assume that a widespread normative belief exerts a strong influence. There exists greater potential for norm change when deviance can be detected by "others" as opposed to when compliance occurs in private. Observing widespread deviance is critical for norms to change.

What works to change social norms?

Participants discussed three key learnings for social norms interventions. The first is the possible danger of creating a "boomerang effect" with campaigns that emphasise the widespread prevalence of a harmful practice. The second is the importance of "cultural-embeddedness" to the success of normative interventions. The third is the importance of engaging community members as leaders of the change process.



SOCIAL NORMS THEORY: AN INTRODUCTION

Social norms help sustain a variety of gender-related harmful practices, including female genital cutting (FGC), child marriage and intimate partner violence. As development practitioners have sought to transform these norms to achieve greater gender equity, they looked to social norms theory for guidance. Preliminary efforts, mostly led by UNICEF, to address FGC, relied on game theoretical accounts of social norms[1, 2]. Today, due to an increase in the time and resources invested in using social norms theory for gender equality, practitioners are engaging with the wider constellation of social norms theories. The theory is indeed vast and varied, with multiple – sometimes contradictory – definitions of what social norms are and how they influence people’s actions.

Here, we offer a short summary of social norms theory for those less familiar with it, noting that theories on norms emerge from many different disciplines and are multi-faceted. Mackie and colleagues (2015) offer an overview of the different disciplinary perspectives on social norms in their paper, *What are social norms? How are they measured?*

Social norms are behavioural rules shared by people in a given society or group; they define what is considered “normal” and appropriate behaviour for that group. They can influence, for instance, how people dress for a wedding, stand in line when buying something, shake hands when meeting someone, say “bless you” when someone sneezes, offer their seat on the bus to someone older, or speak quietly at the library, to cite a few examples from the Global North. Social norms influence what people do both in familiar situations (because they know the rules) and in unfamiliar ones (because they do their best to learn the new rules and comply with them).

How do people know what rules – that is, what norms – exist to guide behaviour in a particular situation? They learn mostly through observing what happens around them and less often through direct instruction. As they observe what happens in situation Y, people develop two beliefs:

1. What **other people do** (X) in situation Y; and
2. How **other people react** (including no reaction) when someone does X in situation Y.

As people see how others react to someone doing (or not doing) a certain thing, they form beliefs about what others think should be done: if others are happy and smile when someone does X, probably that’s what they think should be done. Conversely, if others get angry or roll their eyes, it probably means they think X shouldn’t be done. Others giving no reaction might suggest that a behaviour is acceptable for the situation. Robert Cialdini, a seminal thinker in empirical work done on social norms in high-income countries, calls the first type of belief (what others do) “**descriptive norms**” and the second type of belief (what others think should be done) “**injunctive norms**”.

Similarly characterisations of norms are found elsewhere in the literature. The most notable is in the work of philosopher Cristina Bicchieri, who calls the first type of belief (what others do) “empirical expectations” and the second type (what others think should be done) “normative expectations”. While Cialdini believes that descriptive and injunctive norms are two different types of social norms, Bicchieri suggests that a belief only becomes a norm when people hold both empirical and normative expectations.

Various streams in social norms theory hold that norms apply within a “reference group”; that is, different groups of people have different rules. In Japan, the norm suggests that people don’t leave a tip at the restaurant, while in the United States customers are expected to do so. So, as people move from the United States to Japan, they move across reference groups and might knowingly change their behaviour to comply with the different norms in place there. As another example, in a rural African village, where two different ethnic groups coexist, different norms might apply within the two groups. People in each group would comply with the norms that exist within their own group, but would know that others outside of their group behave differently and approve of different things, adapting their actions when they meet them.

Theories of social norms disagree on how norms influence behaviour. Among those currently interested in social norms theory as it relates to gender, most posit sanctions as the primary motivator. That is: people comply with the norm because they anticipate social rewards for doing so and social punishments for not complying. But many pathways to compliance exist. Consider the following main four:¹

1. Uncertainty (e.g. I don’t know how to behave, so I look at what others do and do the same);
2. Identity (e.g. I comply with the norm to express membership in a group);
3. Reward (e.g. I behave expecting positive or negative sanctions for compliance and non-compliance, respectively); and
4. Enforcement (e.g. I am coerced into compliance).

Even though the theory, as it is presented here in its most basic form, can appear relatively simple, its operationalisation– particularly in interventions addressing gender-related harmful practices – presents challenges related to its applicability, some of which we address in this report.

1. Taken from Bell, D.C. and M.L. Cox, *Social Norms: Do We Love Norms Too Much?* Cited in Cislaghi, B., and Heise, L. (in press). *Health Psychology*.



GENDER THEORY MEETS SOCIAL NORMS

THEORY: What opportunities exist for cross-fertilisation?

Interest in social norms is now common among the community of actors working to achieve global gender equality. These activists and practitioners have traditionally identified *gender norms* as both a source and a re-enforcer of inequality between men and women. Participants discussed the potential for cross-fertilisation between social norms theorists and those studying gender, as a means to improve the design and implementation of development programming.

The relative independence of the discourses on social norms and gender norms has resulted in different and fairly separate bodies of scholarship. Lori Heise (LSHTM/JHU) presented a few theoretical differences between these two related but historically distinct streams of thought. Social theorists, including anthropologists, sociologists and feminist scholars, have tended to conceptualise norms as rules of behaviour at the level of culture or society. Gender norms exist in the world *outside* of the individual and are present when a boy or girl is born. Through various social mechanisms (including socialisation in the family, the media and engagement with institutions), gender norms are learnt and can be internalised. By contrast, other disciplines, such as social psychology, philosophy and behavioural economics, have tended to define social norms as people’s beliefs about what is in the mind of others. Norms thus exist inside the mind. Both perspectives have value; they differ, however, in how they understand and conceptualise the path to normative change.

Beniamino Cislighi (LSHTM) and Lori Heise then proceeded to explore these two streams of thought in greater detail. Table 1 below presents some of their observations.

Table 1: Differences between gender norms as understood in the gender literature and social norms as understood in social psychology and behavioural economics

Gender norms in the gender literature	Social norms in social psychology and behavioural economics
Gender norms are in the world, embedded in institutions and reproduced by people’s actions.	Social norms are in the mind; people’s beliefs are shaped by their experiences of other people’s actions and manifestations of approval and disapproval.
Gender norms are produced and reproduced through people’s actions and enforced by powerholders who benefit from people’s compliance with them.	Social norms are equilibria that maintain themselves, not necessarily benefitting anyone.
Gender norms are often studied as shaping people’s individual attitudes.	Social norms are often studied as diverging from people’s individual attitudes.
Gender norms define what it means to be a man or a woman in a given setting; they can be so ubiquitous as to become invisible, hence exerting influence even when they are harmful.	Social norms serve a purpose of interest to the individual, hence exerting influence even when they are harmful.
People follow the gender norms of their culture, society, or group, the boundaries of which are usually blurry.	People follow the social norms of their reference group, the boundaries of which are usually fairly defined.
Changing gender norms requires changing institutions and power dynamics. Often this will happen through conflict and renegotiation of the power equilibrium.	Changing social norms (at its simplest) requires changing people’s misperceptions of what others do and approve of in their reference group.

Changing gender norms is a political project that leads to equality between women and men.

Changing social norms is a health-related project that leads to greater wellbeing for women and men.

So, learning from both gender and social norms theory, how might we define gender norms? Here's a proposition.

Gender norms are social norms that specifically define what is expected of a woman and a man in a given group or society. They shape acceptable, appropriate and obligatory actions for women and men (in that group or society), to the point that they become a profound part of people's sense of self. They are both embedded in institutions and nested in people's minds. They play a role in shaping women's and men's (often unequal) access to resources and freedoms, thus affecting women's and men's voice, agency and power.

Note that gender norms are but one component of the larger gender order, which also includes gender roles, gender relations, gender stereotypes and gender identity. The examination of these other components is beyond the ambitions of this group, but others have discussed them elsewhere [e.g. 5].

THE LITERATURE ON SOCIAL NORMS

Next, Cislighi presented an overview of distinctions among social norms theories, based on a "review of reviews" he recently completed (currently in publication as a separate paper). Three main themes emerged from this work.

Norms as clean vs. norms as messy. While some theorists consider social norms as separate from moral norms, others do not draw a firm distinction. Scholars in the first group contend that people follow social norms (e.g. shake hands when you meet somebody) based on what others do, while they follow moral norms (e.g. don't kill) because they desire to do what is morally right, independent of what others do. Scholars in the second group suggest that compliance with moral norms is also dependent on what others do. To some experienced practitioners, this distinction might seem to bear little relevance for designing effective interventions. People's actions are never motivated by a single cause and they might be acting under the influence of both types of norms (as well as other factors). That is, most actions are carried out under moral and social motivations at the same time. To encourage people to reconsider their actions, then, it might be important to work both with people's social networks (peers, neighbours, colleagues, etc.) and their moral authorities (religious leaders, traditional leaders, etc.).

Norms regulate (only) interdependent actions vs (also) independent action.

Independent actions don't require collaboration with others to be carried out (e.g. brushing your teeth at home). Interdependent actions, by contrast, do require coordination between individuals. Driving is a classic example of an interdependent action. Take two drivers going opposite ways on a road. Each needs to know on which side the other will drive (left or right) to avoid an accident. The law helps, creating an expectation of what each will do (driving on the right in Japan or on the left in France). Game theory approaches to social norms tend to focus on this latter type of action. In the example of female genital cutting in West Africa, for instance, scholars found that cutting was a marriage coordination strategy. A mother cannot withdraw her daughter from the tradition of cutting without sacrificing her daughter's marriageability. Likewise, she cannot drive on the wrong side of the road without risking a fatal accident.

Not all theories of norms, however, are exclusively concerned with interdependent actions. Various theories look at how norms influence independent actions, for instance through socialisation and internalisation of norms. Interventions should acknowledge the wider influence of social norms on various types of actions, rather than limiting their scope to the rare cases of strictly interdependent practices (discussed below).

Discordant norms and attitudes vs. concordant norms and attitudes. Certain streams of thought in social norms theory focus largely on people’s attitudes when they are discordant from the social norm (specifically when attitudes are protective and the norm is harmful). Early social norms work on FGC, for instance, studied contexts where people did not want to continue the practice, but did so because they thought it was expected of them. Others focus rather on concordant norms and attitudes. This happens when, for instance, people use recreational drugs both because they want to and because they think it is expected of them.

Work on gender norms often looks at situations where norms and attitudes align, for instance, in the way that norms of masculinity shape people’s positive attitudes towards men’s authority in the household. The distinction between concordant and discordant norms and attitudes is important for effective intervention design. When norms and attitudes are discordant, interventions that aim to correct people’s misperceptions of what others do and approve of might be effective. When they are concordant, practitioners would need instead to devise strategies that help shift both attitudes and norms (at the same time or in a scattered fashion).

Norms can be both harmful and protective. Interventions might leverage existing protective norms to help women and men achieve greater health and equality. For instance, in a group of adolescents a norm might exist that smoking is a sign of weakness. One of them might be tempted to try, but might be prevented by the protective norm. Figure 1 below offers a graphic representation of what Cislaghi said, that has the following two caveats: 1) it only includes norms and attitudes, while many other factors also influence people’s actions; and 2) it assumes that norms trump the attitude (which – as discussed later in this report – is not necessarily the case).

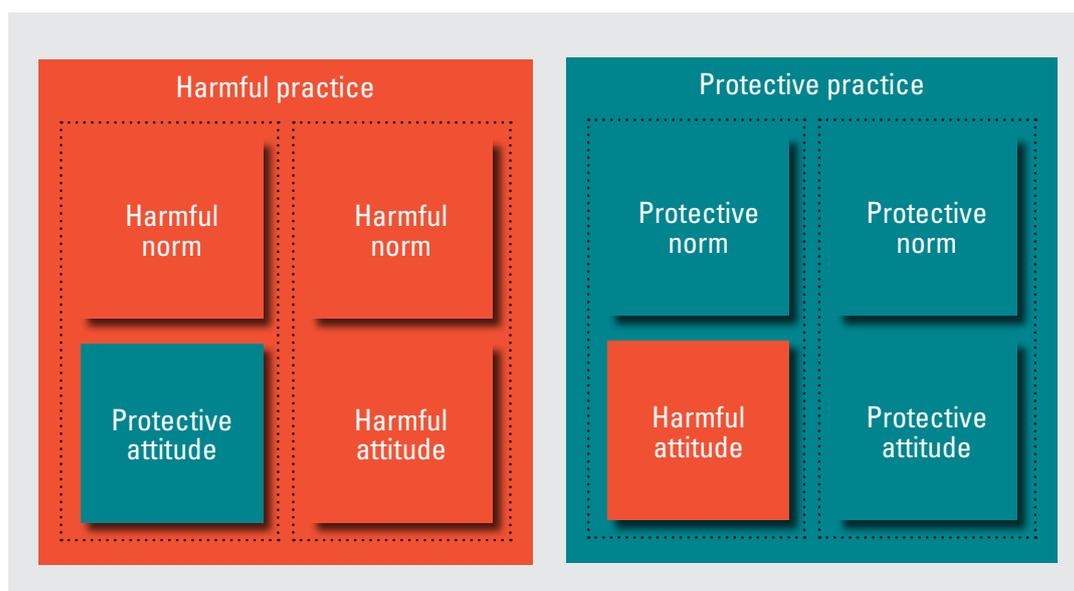


Figure 1: Possible relations between attitudes and norms and their potential effect on the practice (assuming the norm trumps the attitude). [Source: 6]

THE LITERATURE ON *GENDER* NORMS

Heise offered an historic review of the concept of gender norms as it emerged in global discourse. She outlined various takes on gender norms, suggesting that sometimes the term “gender norms” was used to refer to larger constructs, such as patriarchy, the gender order or unequal power relations between people of different gender. A summary definition coming from the literature on gender norms is that they are an expression of deep-seated patriarchal values and ideologies, embedded in structures and institutions.

What does the “gender norms” literature offer that the “social norms” literature does not? Heise noted that there are limitations to existing psychological theories on norms. In particular, these theories miss: 1) the role of power in structuring social relations; 2) the role of childhood socialisation practices in social learning; and 3) the recognition that norms can be embedded in institutions. Likewise, the social norms literature is less aware of the notion of gender as ‘performance’ [7, 8], which suggests that norms are sustained through daily interactions as people ‘do’ gender (i.e. communicate a certain gender identity via the way they talk, walk, dress, speak, interact). In addition, some scholars [9] theorise that gender is fluid and changing, as men and women can undo gender through conscious acts of resistance or by adopting new actions that respond to changing realities. The fluid nature of gender is missing in current social norms approaches.

Heise highlighted the potential benefits of integrating gender theory and social norms theory to improve development practice. As a complex and multi-faceted concept, gender norms are not easily measured using quantitative tools. Tracking gender norm change over time is best done through qualitative methods that examine the larger gender order and the relations of power between women and men.

WHERE NEXT?

Participants said that elements and learning from gender theory should form a crucial component of work on gender-related harmful practices. If it is potentially productive to integrate these intellectual traditions, which particular elements of social norms theory should be applied to transform gender discriminatory norms? To date, versions of social norms theory based on game theory [e.g. 10] have dominated programmatic efforts to shift harmful norms; participants noted the limitations they encountered when applying these ideas in the field: 1) the distinction between social, moral and religious norms is not always a necessary or useful one; 2) some theories use complex terms and definitions that are not easily translated into action; and 3) these theories fail to address how norms intersect with power to sustain gender-related practices.

Participants suggested that practitioners do not necessarily need a single and harmonised definition of norms, as long as they use a coherent theory that matches their understanding of the context. The definition and theory they use, then, will differ according to the purpose of their work.

Generally speaking, however, participants suggested that looking at descriptive and injunctive norms as two separate constructs will likely be more helpful when designing and evaluating interventions. That is, practitioners should consider as independent constructs both beliefs about 1) “what other people do” (descriptive norms) and 2) “what other people approve of” (injunctive norms). In some cases, these constructs may align (e.g. others both do and approve of x), whereas at other times, they may diverge (e.g. others approve of but don’t do x). In still other instances, people might not have adequate awareness of what other people do and/or approve of.

In the table below, we offer some **hypothetical examples** of practices that might be under the various combinations of descriptive and injunctive norms. These are presented as illustrative examples only. In real life, how descriptive and injunctive norms interact will vary greatly by context.

	+ Descriptive norm (People think: most others do it)	– Descriptive norm (People think: most others don't do it)	No descriptive norm (People think: I am not sure what others do)
+ Injunctive norm (People think: most others find it appropriate)	Female genital cutting (People might think: others do it, and would approve of me doing it)	Volunteering with hospitalised children (People might think: Not many others do it, but for sure they would approve of me doing it)	Blood donation (People might think: Not sure what others do, but for sure they would approve of me doing it)
– Injunctive norm (People think: most others don't find it appropriate)	Urinating in a swimming pool (People might think: others do it, but they would disapprove of me doing it)	Having sex before marriage (People might think: Most people don't do it and most would disapprove of me doing it)	Corporal punishment (People might think: Not sure what other parents do, but for sure they would disapprove of me doing it)
No injunctive norm (People think: I don't know whether people approve or disapprove of it)	Tax evasion (People might think: others do it, but I don't know if they would approve of me doing it or not)	Becoming vegan (People might think: others don't do it, but I don't know if they would approve of me doing it or not)	Having an affair (People might think: Not sure whether my friends do it or not, and whether they would approve of me doing it or not)

Optimal interventions may vary for different cells in this table. This does not mean that every different combination of descriptive and injunctive norm requires a different intervention approach; rather, we suggest that practitioners be alert to the specific scenario they are facing when designing interventions. Formative research can help identify the specific descriptive or injunctive norms at play.



SOCIAL NORMS, VALUES, AGENCY AND POWER: What key constructs can be used with social norms theory to design effective interventions?

Participants discussed the extent to which changing norms alone can change behaviour or catalyse wider social change. Often, work on social norms needs to be paired with efforts to address other factors that help sustain harmful practices. As Cislaghi and Heise remarked elsewhere: “Human action almost never originates from a single cause. Relying exclusively on norms-based approaches to improving health outcomes oversimplifies the true complexity of human behaviour” [11]. Participants suggested that the existing approach to social norms should integrate awareness of how agency, power and values intersect with norms, as summarised in the table. Patti Petesch, Martine Collumbien and Michael Morris offered three reflections to inform participants’ discussion. Finally, Leigh Stefanik presented a case study from CARE’s work in Ethiopia, to highlight the importance of understanding the influence that both direct and indirect norms have on people’s practices.

Agency and social norms	Power and social norms	Values and social norms
Social norms can limit or expand agency by creating self-imposed obstacles to one’s actions.	Powerholders might be invested in keeping social norms in place, as those norms ensure they have greater access to resources, greater freedom, or more generally greater power.	Values and norms might be connected, as people try to protect the value behind the norm (e.g. value: love for children; norm: cutting my daughter).
Agency expansion is not necessarily positive: it can enhance either compliance with or resistance to harmful norms.	Social norms can distribute power unequally among people. ²	Interventions aimed at changing a norm could help people find new norms and practices to embody their existing values.

SOCIAL NORMS, AGENCY AND POWER

Patti Petesch (International Maize and Wheat Improvement Centre) and Martine Collumbien (LSHTM) discussed how social norms, agency and power interplay in sustaining harmful practices.

Petesch presented early findings from GENNOVATE, a qualitative comparative field study conducted in 137 villages across 26 countries. The study assessed how gender norms and agency interact to affect processes of agricultural innovation. Her findings suggest that norms often relaxed to accommodate how men and women negotiate and contest social expectations that present barriers in their everyday lives; however, this relaxation differs importantly from normative change. Where gender norms are relaxing, restrictive gender norms for women’s domestic and submissive roles are still valued; flouting them risks social disapproval and other sanctions. Thus, even as women perceived some growing agency (their “ability to define their goals and act on them” [13]) and described some gender norms changing, such as greater capacity to consult with their partners and to engage in “small” income generation activities,

2. They are also disembodied forms of power, as they can convince people to act against their own interest. See Hayward and Lukes (2008) for the three dimensions of power; participants suggested social norms fall into the third dimension.

they still could not use the new agricultural technologies and practices due to diverse normative barriers that constrain their decision-making roles and their access to the information, land and inputs required by the technologies. Men acted as gatekeepers to the innovations and the resources they required. While women were economically active, their activities were not resulting in the kind of normative change required for women to engage meaningfully with local innovation processes and to derive significant recognition and status from their economic agency. Such transformations in women's roles are resisted as they also effect normative changes in gender power relations and men's gender-ascribed authority and breadwinner roles. Petesch also noted more rare contexts where gender norms had changed for women's economic roles and the positive repercussions of these social change processes.

Martine Collumbien (LSHTM) presented two separate studies ("Samata" and "Parivartan") addressing social norms and girls' mobility in India. Both studies suggested that social norms can limit girls' agency and that expanding agency can help people challenge social norms.

Samata, a programme implemented by the Karnataka Health Promotion Trust (KHPT) in South India, aimed to delay girls' marriage by keeping them in secondary school [14]. As happens elsewhere, once girls reach puberty in this setting, parents begin to limit their mobility as a strategy to protect family honour. The fear is that if allowed to spend time unchaperoned, adolescent girls might voluntarily take up with a boy, or worse yet, be forcibly defiled. Parents value girls' education, but they fear that girls walking to school or waiting for the bus will attract attention from men and boys. The girls themselves, rather than the men, are generally blamed for this attention. Even if nothing untoward happens, neighbours might gossip, with negative consequences for the family's standing. One way to avoid these risks is to marry the girl young; another is to keep her at home. The Samata programme worked with girls to expand their agency to resist social expectations that encouraged early marriage and dropping out of school, and with parents to change their aspirations for their daughters and their sensitivity to neighbourhood gossip.

Parivartan, a programme implemented by the Indian NGO Apnalaya in peri-urban Mumbai, aimed to increase adolescent girls' mobility by addressing the norm that only men and boys should occupy public space [15]. Similar to the situation above, girls' mobility in this community is restricted once they reach puberty because of concerns about family honour. To both increase their agency and counter the norm against adolescent girls in public, Apnalaya and its research partner the International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW) implemented a programme that combined girls' sports with life skills reflection groups. The NGO staff recruited and trained young women from local communities to serve as coaches and mentors to the adolescent girls. Sessions alternated between playing the physical sport of "kabbadi," and reflection groups designed to build girl's agency and aspirations. Mentors served as role models for the girls, which helped the younger girls reflect on their potential and as change agents in the community. To visit households and accompany athletes to sports practice, the mentors had to break standing norms against young women travelling alone in the community. Over time, young athletes became more daring in their dress, substituting athletic attire for Muslim burqas and participating in a kabbadi competition in public.

SOCIAL NORMS AND VALUES

Michael Morris (Columbia University) presented a framework of what shapes social and personal norms and how they influence people's actions [16]. Descriptive norms, injunctive norms and personal norms (this last being what others call values) are called "subjective" elements in the framework because they are beliefs originating within the person. Each of these subjective elements has its origin in the "objective" social structure where people live. For instance, descriptive norms originate from people's observations of behavioural regularities around them. Injunctive norms originate from people's observation of others' reactions to one's compliance or non-compliance with the norm. Personal norms, Morris argued, originate from the group's institutionalisation (or sacralisation) of the behaviour.

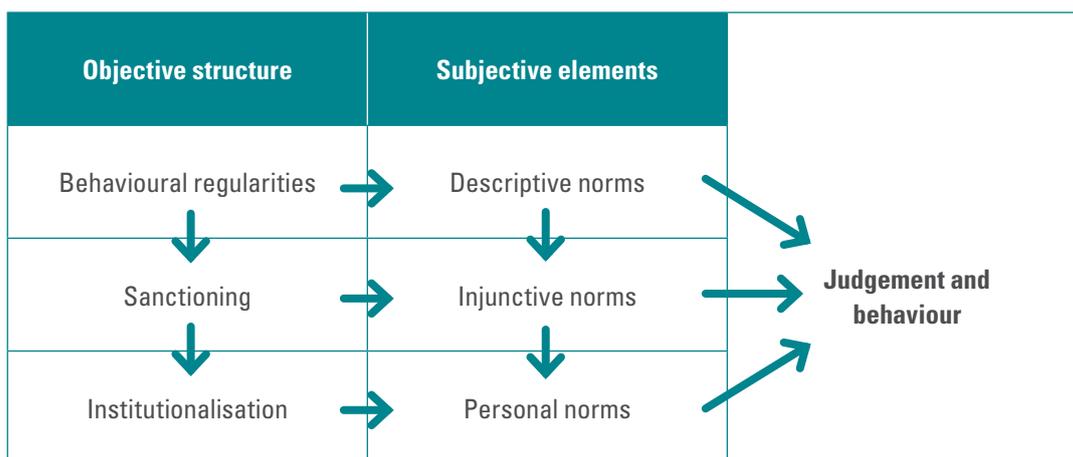


Table 2. Morris' Normative Framework [Adapted from: 16]

Descriptive and injunctive norms have separate but interlocking functions. Descriptive norms help avoid "social collision". People are always unconsciously tallying what is common behaviour around them; they follow, almost automatically, the descriptive norm that this behaviour implies. Injunctive norms, on the other hand, help people build strategic alliances. People tend to follow them more consciously than they do with descriptive norms, thinking about the advantages of meeting someone's approval. Effective change requires changing descriptive, injunctive and personal norms. While strategies exist for changing the first two, less is available in the norms literature about how to change behaviour motivated by rituals that are sacred and traditional (that Morris associates with personal norms). Rituals can be reconstructed with the help of traditional and/or religious authorities, preserving the sacred dimensions of the shared values. Morris gave the example of the elimination of foot-binding in China, where not only did people learn: 1) that nobody else engaged in the practice (descriptive norms) and 2) that members of high society families were no longer practising foot binding (injunctive norms), but also were given Confucian essays that described the tradition as barbaric, disproving the artificial idea of foot-binding as a Chinese "ritual".

DIRECT AND INDIRECT NORMS

Leigh Stefanik (CARE USA) presented on the challenges that gender-related practices pose to social norms theory, particularly as the CARE team applied it to address early marriage and girls' empowerment in Ethiopia.

Stefanik and colleagues studied norms affecting girls' participation at school. Although participants in their study valued education and believed others in their

group did so too, girls were still not being sent to school. That is, although norms and attitudes towards girls' education were positive, girls were not benefitting from those norms and attitudes. Further exploration revealed that there was no norm against educating girls, but there was a norm supportive of early marriage that impacted girls' education. Cislighi and Heise [3] differentiate between direct and indirect influence of a norm on a practice. A direct relation is when the norm and the practice coincide as is the case with FCG: the practice being: "Female genital cutting" and the norm being: "Respectable girls are cut". An indirect relation is when the norm and the practice are related, but do not coincide. For instance, the practice being: "Intimate partner violence" and the norm being "Respectable neighbours do not interfere in family affairs".

Stefanik and colleagues' findings confirmed the need to expand practitioners' understanding to include such indirect relationships between the norm and the practice. Their work showed that the practice "Girls not being sent to school" was indirectly related to the norm "Respectable girls marry early". Practitioners aiming to keep girls in school would thus need to address the system of norms that might indirectly affect school attendance.

WHERE NEXT?

Participants discussed the importance of testing interventions that integrate social norms within a wider framework. Successful social change interventions should understand how norms, agency and values intersect and sustain each other, and possibly address them in the wider ecology of factors.



WHAT ACTIVATES A NORM?

When do social norms influence people? Some norms might exist and yet influence actions only when they are salient to the actor; that is, when the person is consciously or unconsciously attuned to the norm. Cues in the external environment can focus people's attention on social norms ultimately affecting their actions, even if they are not fully aware of the cue.

Kees Keizer (University of Groningen) presented his experimental work on social norms activation. In particular, Keizer studied the ways in which observing other people's compliance with one norm can affect one's compliance with another norm and vice versa: observing non-compliance with one norm might bring about non-compliance with other norms (see, for instance, the experiment detailed below). The relevance of this insight for interventions is clear. Researchers who studied a norm-change programme in West Africa were puzzled as to why people mentioned "men and women together cleaning up the village" as a key driver of further social change: what did cleaning up the village have to do with changing gender relations in the household? [17] Keizer's experiments suggest that observing other people's compliance with a new norm of greater gender equality (both men and women cleaning up the village together) might have had spill-over effect on other gender-related practices.

In his experiments, Keizer studied, for instance: 1) how seeing graffiti on a wall in a no-graffiti area would push people to litter more [18]; 2) how witnessing littering would push people to steal more; or 3) how observing someone clean up the street would encourage people to be more helpful (in his experiment, helping a person who dropped some oranges) [19]. In the littering vs graffiti example, for instance, Keizer and colleagues put a flyer on bicycles parked next to a wall with a no-graffiti sign.



Figure 2. No graffiti on the wall condition



Figure 3. Graffiti on the wall condition

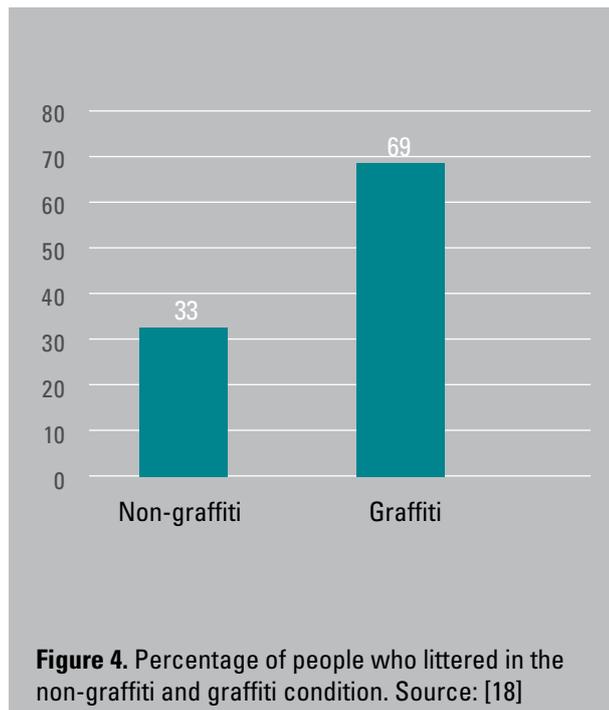


Figure 4. Percentage of people who littered in the non-graffiti and graffiti condition. Source: [18]

Keizer's suggestion is thus that norm-compliance and norm-violations "spread". However, he identified an important moderator of this effect that has critical relevance for intervention design: the "out-group" effect.

THE OUT-GROUP AND IN-GROUP EFFECTS

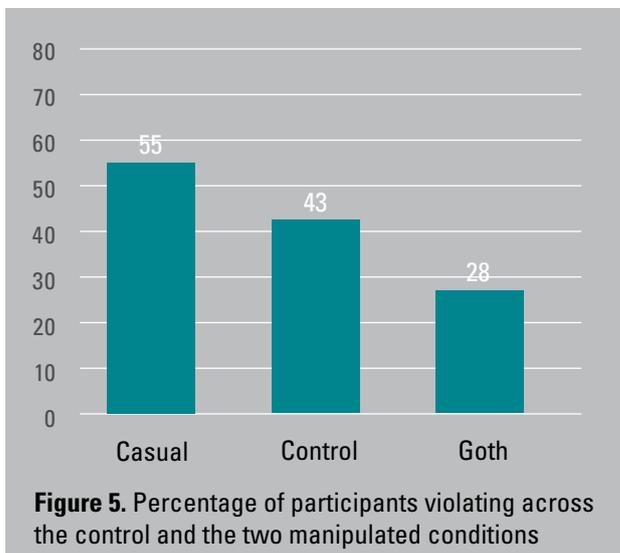
Keizer's experiments tested how observing compliance or transgression of a norm by someone from a different social group might operate differently to affect the observer's behaviour than someone from their own social group.

Keizer and colleagues put this question to test in a train station. On one side of a platform in a train station is an area where smoking is allowed. On the other side are the stairs. Travellers arriving on that floor and wishing to smoke need to walk across the entire platform to reach the smoking area. Keizer and colleagues placed confederates transgressing the norm (that is, smoking outside of the smoking area) in the centre of the platform, so that all travellers wishing to smoke in the smoking area would necessarily see the transgressors. In condition 1, the smoking confederates were dressed "casually". In condition 2, they were dressed as Goths. In the control condition there were no smoking confederates.



Figure 4. Condition 1 (casually dressed smokers) and condition 2 (Goth dressed smokers) in Keizer et al. experiment (Photo by Sebastian Pohl, University of Groningen)

The percentage of transgressors increased (as compared to the control group) when the smoking confederates were casually dressed, but it decreased when they were dressed as Goths.



Keizer's experiments suggest that the simple observation of an out-group transgressing might increase observers' compliance with the norm.

This observation might have important implications for behaviour change interventions. Take for instance, an intervention to reduce female genital cutting in Senegal. Practitioners designing the intervention might want to reach the largest possible number of people. They might decide to use the language

of the largest ethnic group (the Wolof) which is spoken by most non-Wolof people too. How will the Fulani react to a normative campaign featuring Wolof-speaking people abandoning cutting? Will their cutting be reduced, increased or indifferent to the ethnic identity of the campaign spokespeople? It could be that the simple observation of Wolof speakers endorsing non-cutting might increase Fulani's cutting. While the applicability of the out-group effect has not been experimentally verified in Senegal, practitioners may be wise to consider its potential implications when planning media campaigns to shift social norms.

THE EFFECT OF FINANCIAL INCENTIVES ON PRO-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

Finally, Keizer's work suggests that observing norm compliance that is induced by financial incentives rather than brought about by intrinsic motivation is less likely to spread. This would imply that a man and woman cleaning the village, specifically have a positive effect on gender equality in a village when the villagers assume the two really care about gender equality and not because they were rewarded for cleaning together. Keizer's findings align with some other recent findings that suggest that extrinsic incentives might actually undermine social norms, suggesting caution in using them indiscriminately [20].

THE ROLE OF EMOTIONS: SHAME ACTIVATES AND REINFORCES GENDER NORMS

Karima Manji (LSHTM) discussed the role of shame in gender norm compliance, using evidence from her PhD study on domestic violence in Tanzania. Several models propose that individuals comply with social norms to avoid shame. According to Elster [21], shame is an emotional response to the violation of social norms. The violation of social norms elicits contempt in observers, which in turn triggers the experience of shame in the violator. According to this view, the operation of social norms depends crucially on the agents being observed by others.

Empirical evidence from Manji's study suggests that the experience of shame does indeed activate norms, which in turn incites fear of social punishment. The desire to avoid punishment then motivates people to comply with gender norms. Shame thus operates as a red flag to prevent the person from transgressing the norm in the first place, thus acting to reinforce the norm.

Manji pointed out that some theorists of gender norms have acknowledged the role of shame in norm compliance. Gita Sen and colleagues observe:

*"Norms are vital determinants of social stratification as they reflect and reproduce relations that empower some groups of people with material resources, authority and entitlements while marginalising and subordinating others by **normalising shame**, inequality, indifference or invisibility" [22].*

WHERE NEXT?

The theoretical and empirical findings on norm activation have several important applications for practitioners working to change gender-related harmful practices. Evidence of the 'crowding out' effect raises a question about the efficacy of financial incentives to change gender-related practices. Evidence shows that observing an out-group comply with a norm might reduce the in-group's motivation to comply. This in turn highlights the dangers of designing a large-scale intervention that targets multiple groups with the same message and strategy. More research needs to be done on the implications of similar findings for real-world interventions on changing social norms.



WHAT MAKES NORMS MORE OR LESS POWERFUL?

Participants discussed the reasons why the influence of social norms varies 1) from context to context and 2) within contexts. On the one hand, differences exist across cultural contexts: some societies appear to be more normative, allowing for little divergence, while others seem to be more lenient. At the same time, some norms within the same society appear to exert more influence than others.

Both points have important implications for intervention design. First, a social norm intervention in an urban multicultural “normatively lenient” setting might require a different design if it is to be implemented in a small, isolated rural community. Second, understanding the varying influence that different norms exert in the same setting can help practitioners design interventions or predict people’s future compliance with the norm.

VARIATIONS ACROSS CONTEXTS: HOW CULTURE AFFECTS THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL NORMS

Michele Gelfand (University of Maryland) studied how the strength of norms varies across different cultures. Together with her colleagues, Gelfand conducted an empirical 33-country study on social norms [23] where they were able to rank countries on a scale from extremely “culturally tight” to extremely “culturally loose”. In culturally tight countries, social norms exerted strong influence, social sanctions were very likely and little deviance from the norm was tolerated. In culturally loose countries, by contrast, norms exerted a weaker influence and deviance was generally considered more acceptable.

Subsequent studies found correlations between cultural tightness and social order and openness. Culturally tight countries have greater order – they have generally lower crime rates and more security personnel, for instance, and greater uniformity in clothing and homogeneity in people’s choices of car make and colour. People living in culturally loose countries, on the other hand, showed greater openness – they have greater acceptance of immigrants, more positive reactions towards stigmatised identities and more creativity. Gelfand’s subsequent research also showed that tightness-looseness differentiates U.S. states [24], organisations [25] and social classes [26] in much the same way as it does nations.

What explains a group’s cultural tightness? Gelfand and colleagues found several variables that could predict a nation’s cultural tightness (e.g. high population density, resource scarcity, a history of territorial conflict, and disease and environmental threats) [23]. Computational models also have shown that threat causes the evolution of tightness–looseness [27]. Laboratory experiments using hyper-EEG neuroscience methods showed that people who feel they are under threat are able to coordinate faster [28]. These findings have important implications for field interventions: ethnic groups that feel under cultural threat might be or become culturally tight and more resistant to change. In Senegal, for instance, the second largest ethnic group – the Fulani – have been expressing uneasiness with the process of “cultural homogenisation” as the (much larger) Wolof majority increasingly dominates the social and cultural scene [29]. The Fulani have responded by tightening what they

believe to be their distinctive practices – potentially including (among some of the Fulani communities), female genital cutting.

Interestingly, Gelfand made a final point related to tightness and gender equality. Tightness and looseness are neither inherently “good” or “bad”. Tightness amplifies whatever gender values exist in a given culturally tight setting. For instance, gender-equal contexts that are culturally tight will allow little deviations from gender equal practices.

VARIATIONS WITHIN CONTEXT: HOW CHARACTERISTICS OF A PRACTICE AFFECT THE INFLUENCE OF A SOCIAL NORM

Cislaghi suggested that among the many factors that can affect people’s norm compliance, four are particularly important: 1) Whether the practice is independent or interdependent; 2) whether the practice is more or less detectable; 3) whether compliance is more or less likely to result in sanctions; and 4) whether the practice is under the direct or indirect influence of a social norm.

Independent and interdependent actions differ as follows. Independent actions are those actions where an individual can achieve a given goal without coordinating with other people: for example, brushing one’s teeth. Interdependent actions, by contrast, are actions that require cooperation with others to achieve a given goal: managing community resources, for instance. The strength of a norm’s influence over a practice varies by its degree of interdependence because observers will be personally invested in ensuring norm compliance. The second dimension of influence is whether the practice is more or less detectable. More detectable practices are likely to be under stronger normative influence because people anticipate that any non-compliance will be known to others, either through direct witnessing or indirect testimony. In an empirical experiment conducted in a public toilet in New York, the simple presence of an observer doubled the percentage of people who washed their hands after having used the toilet. The third factor is whether (non-) compliance is more or less likely to result in sanctions. Norms exert a stronger influence when people anticipate strong sanctions. Finally, the fourth factor is whether the practice has a direct or indirect relation to the norm. Norms have stronger influence when they directly relate to the practice in question.

Cislaghi suggested that the value of modelling normative strength as a continuum across these four factors is that it helps highlight the difference between the prevalence of a norm and its influence. Understanding the difference between how many people hold a given normative belief versus how many people comply with it has important implications for intervention design. If practitioners find in their evaluation that a protective normative belief is very prevalent (e.g. 90% in the sample say: “people around here disapprove of domestic violence”), they might conclude that the practice will soon disappear. But given that the practice is often hidden (undetectable) and seldom results in strong sanctions, it may be under relatively weak normative control.

WHERE NEXT?

Practitioners’ efforts to understand how norms change need to take into consideration factors that affect the strength of a norm. They should be careful not to assume that a widespread normative belief exerts a strong influence. There exists greater potential for norm change when deviance can be detected by “others” as opposed to when compliance occurs in private. Observing widespread deviance is critical for norms to change, particularly in tight settings.



WHAT WORKS TO CHANGE SOCIAL NORMS?

Participants reflected on the importance of understanding the existing socio-cultural context for translating scientific evidence into effective and sustainable delivery strategies at the community level. They particularly discussed the importance of understanding the role that culturally entrenched social norms might play as roadblocks to the success of an intervention. Consider, for instance, the efforts of health care educators to teach poor parents in Bolivia how to purify water for their families. A very simple and low-cost method exists to provide such water to the poor: fill a clear plastic bottle, place it on the roof and leave it exposed to the sun for several hours. And yet, research showed that the method can fail, not because community members do not understand the science behind it, but because they believe that others will regard them as too poor to afford more expensive means of purifying water [30]. Implementation failures such as these illustrate what happens when educators fail to consider the complexity of the environmental niche and the system of beliefs that are implied by new practices. Displaying one's poverty turned out to be a powerful normative inhibitor to embracing a new behaviour, a consequence unanticipated by outsiders during implementation. Kumar and Mackie discussed how using bottom-up approaches to norm change can help avoid such unanticipated outcomes.

GROUNDING SOCIAL NORMS CHANGE WITHIN EXISTING CULTURAL VALUES

Vishjaweet Kumar described an intervention that his organisation, the Community Empowerment Lab, developed in Shivgarh, a rural area in Uttar Pradesh, to prevent neonatal mortality. Practitioners worked closely with community members to develop a form of early infant care that built off of both modern scientific evidence and traditional practices. Together they co-developed the practice of “kangaroo care” where the infant is held on the caretaker's chest as a means to control hypothermia. As a side effect, babies were also more content and cried less. Community members explained the effect of skin-to-skin care as warding off evil spirits (which mothers attributed to crying babies in the first place), an explanation that ultimately contributed to the spread of the practice. Kangaroo care also made mothers more aware of their babies' feeding needs and increased breastfeeding. The intervention led to a 54% reduction in neo-natal death.

Intriguingly, the intervention also improved the conditions of “untouchable” women, those in the lowest caste. These women were considered the only ones who could cut the umbilical cord (considered an extremely “impure” part of the baby). By changing norms around the importance of cord cutting to the babies' survival prospects, appreciation and respect for untouchable women increased. To achieve collaboration across castes for the baby's sake, community members suggested leveraging the existing belief that the semi-divine nature of any new-born requires bringing community members together to help, protect and cherish this new life. The existing social cultural system became thus fertile ground for the new life-saving practices.

THE IMPORTANCE OF MAKING SOCIAL NORMS CHANGE VISIBLE

Gerry Mackie (University of California, San Diego) emphasised the need to develop interventions that are built on an integrated understanding of how norms shift. His key message was that social norms change when enough people in a reference group believe that enough people are changing. He referred to research done on “joint attention”, the human capacity to witness an event while also witnessing others witnessing that same event. Seeing other people witnessing a given event shapes expectations of how others will react when that same event happens again.

His work also drew upon the difference between brute facts (true whether or not people believe it to be so, e.g. it’s raining) and institutional facts (true only if enough people believe it to be so, e.g. a man and a woman dressed in a certain way and offering vows constitutes a wedding). He gave four examples of how the visibility of public events changed existing social norms. The first is the civil rights movement, where Martin Luther King’s “I have a dream” speech helped crystallize the degree of support for greater rights for African Americans. The second is the Saleema campaign, a coordinated intervention designed to encourage parents in Sudan to keep their daughters uncut. “Saleema” is an Arabic word that means “whole, healthy in body and mind, unharmed, pristine and perfect in God-given condition”. As Mackie observed, “If enough people in the reference group believe that female genital cutting is over... then it’s over.” The third is the Tostan programme where Mackie and colleagues found that men and women cleaning the village together served as visible testimony that gender norms were changing.

In a final example, Mackie cited work by Antanas Mockus, former Mayor of Bogota, who changed citizens’ hearts and minds through creative strategies that employed the power of individual and community disapproval. For example, faced with sky-high traffic fatality rates, Mockus disbanded the corrupt traffic police and offered to retrain and rehire them ... as mimes. The traffic mimes spread out through the city, mocking those who disobeyed traffic laws and applauding courteous drivers. The result: a 50 percent drop in traffic fatalities, reduced traffic gridlock and a marked shift in the traffic culture of the city.

Mackie then proceeded to detail the dynamic of community norm shift, partly drawing on his recent work with Cislighi and Gillespie [17]. He identified four key steps for social norms change. The first is the creation of core groups. Core groups of participants in the intervention renegotiate norms among themselves and develop skills to motivate others outside of the group. The second step is sustained values deliberations, where participants discuss within the group the common values that underlie their support for a practice (e.g. love for our daughters underlies female genital cutting). Differentiating between values and practices ensures that participants do not resist the discussions around changing the practice, reassured that they are deliberating around the best ways to embody their common values. The third step is the organised diffusion of knowledge: first from participants to other community members and next to other surrounding communities. The fourth and final step is the coordinated shift to new practices, sealed by public events where community members commit to the new practice.

A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO GENDER NORMS CHANGE

Rebecka Lundgren (Georgetown University) shared some results and reflections from the GREAT project. This aimed to promote gender equitable norms and sexual and reproductive health, and to reduce GBV among 10- to 19-year-old boys and girls in two post-conflict settings in northern Uganda. The programme built on existing

cultural views of positive masculinity and femininity, to strengthen gender-just practices among adolescent boys and girls. These included the points shown in the figure below.

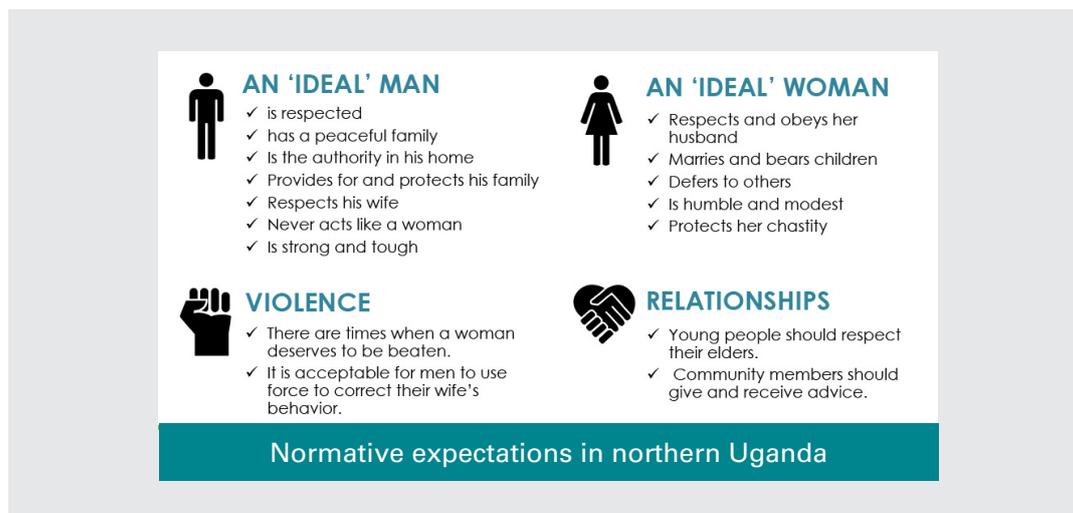


Figure 6. Social norms identified during the GREAT project that could prevent or exacerbate violence, or influence family planning (Figure source: Lundgren and IRH).

Seven strategies of the GREAT project helped achieve normative change:

1. Strengthening internal assets: increasing knowledge, self-efficacy and providing basic resources;
2. Encouraging youth to reflect critically on inequitable gender norms and roles;
3. Harnessing socialisation processes to form and transform gender norms and roles;
4. Strengthening social networks and mobilising economic and social support at key turning points;
5. Empowering youth to advocate for themselves and strengthen their ability to seek help and resist paths imposed upon them;
6. Addressing structural issues such as girls' education and access to resources; and
7. Mobilising communities to create enabling environments.

The holistic, dynamic perspective developed as part of the GREAT process achieved change because it treated culture as adaptive, not as static and immutable. It also built upon what existed already, rather than importing new cultural values and expectations. This reinforced what Mackie and Kumar observed about the importance of working on social norms within existing cultural worldviews, helping people leverage positive shared values and negotiating new ways to embody those values in gender-equitable relations.

WHERE NEXT?

Participants discussed three implications and risks of social norms interventions. The first is the possible danger of creating a “boomerang effect” with campaigns that emphasise the widespread prevalence of a practice. Showing the extent to which a behaviour is enacted could inadvertently attract more people to the practice (if everyone is doing it, why shouldn't I?).

The second lesson is the importance of “cultural-embeddedness” to the success of normative interventions. Interventions should leverage existing local values, understood in all their complexity and unearthed through early formative

research. A good understanding of shared cultural values and worldviews offers practitioners a solid ground to leverage positive norms and dynamics.

The third lesson is the importance of engaging community members as leaders of the change process. Rather than practitioners engineering normative change, effective interventions will help people: 1) look critically at their own cultural and social contexts, 2) envision the socio-political solutions that will bring about a positive change and 3) enact solutions together, challenging and possibly changing existing harmful norms and practice.

THE NEXT, THIRD, MEETING OF THE LSHTM GROUP ON SOCIAL NORMS AND GENDER-RELATED PRACTICES

This learning report is the second in a series that began with a report on a 2016 meeting on existing social norms measurement strategies (available at: <http://strive.lshtm.ac.uk/resources/norms-measurement-meeting-learning-report>).

Participants left the 2017 meeting with ideas and insights on both: 1) what can be done to change social and gender norms and 2) what next to investigate in terms of social and gender norm change. They agreed that the next meeting of the group would discuss innovative strategies to change social norms in low and mid-income countries.

The LSHTM-sponsored group is just one of several initiatives that have emerged in recent years to explore social and gender norms. Others include:

- **IRH learning collaborative** (a two-year coordination initiative) <http://irh.org/projects/learning-collaborative-to-advance-normative-change/>;
- **The Overseas Development Institute's (ODI) Align platform** (a two-year initiative to create a web-based platform on gender norms) <http://alignplatform.org>;
- **LINEA** (a learning initiative on child sexual exploitation and abuse) <http://same.lshtm.ac.uk/projects-2/linea/> ; and
- **The Lancet** special series Gender Equality, Norms and Health.

We encourage readers to explore these additional resources in their quest to improve programming on gender-based social norms.

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ABOUT STRIVE

A multi-year research consortium, STRIVE is led from the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine with partners in India, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda and the United States. Leading researchers in many disciplines – from biomedical trials to social science, epidemiology to anthropology, mathematical modelling to economics – head cross-partner working groups on crucial structural drivers of HIV risk:



Broadly, STRIVE:

- assesses how structural factors including stigma and violence impact on the treatment and prevention cascades
- designs, pilots, evaluates and analyses “upstream” structural interventions that yield multiple development benefits
- refines a new co-financing model and works with UNDP and African governments to test this approach in practice
- studies structural factors affecting young people’s HIV vulnerability, including alcohol, and tests combination interventions for adolescent girls in India, South Africa and Tanzania