

ENGAGING COMMUNITIES IN EXPLORING SOCIAL NORMS

Learnings from the Social Norms Exploration Guide & Toolkit



THE SIGNIFICANCE

Social norms are beliefs about which behaviors are **typical** and **appropriate** within a given group. They are informal, often implicit, rules that most people accept and abide by. Norms are influenced by community beliefs and held in place by influential people who comprise reference groups and by perceived social rewards and sanctions.

Social norms play a powerful role shaping individual and group behavior and can have a significant impact on wellbeing. Underpinned by values such as honor and respect, and by conceptions of masculinity and femininity, social norms may drive family planning use, gender-based violence, child marriage, and early pregnancy. Social norms are garnering increased attention and many programs are considering how to shift norms to achieve their goals.

Historically development programmers have focused on increasing knowledge and awareness, while improving the quality and access of services. Although many of these programs have achieved improvements, often unidentified and unaddressed norms persist, perpetuating unhealthy behaviors and limiting sustained program impact. As interest in social norms has grown, so has the **need for simple, practical tools to identify key influencers and diagnose the social norms driving behaviors of interest.**

THE INNOVATION

The Institute for Reproductive Health at Georgetown University (IRH) with support from the USAID-funded Passages project and members from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation-funded Learning Collaborative to Advance Normative Change developed the **Social Norms Exploration Guide & Toolkit (SNET)**, a rapid, participatory guide and set of tools that translate theory into practical guidance. Using the SNET can help you to quickly gather the critical information needed to design norms-shifting interventions.

THE SOCIAL NORMS EXPLORATION GUIDE & TOOLKIT HELPS PROGRAM IMPLEMENTERS

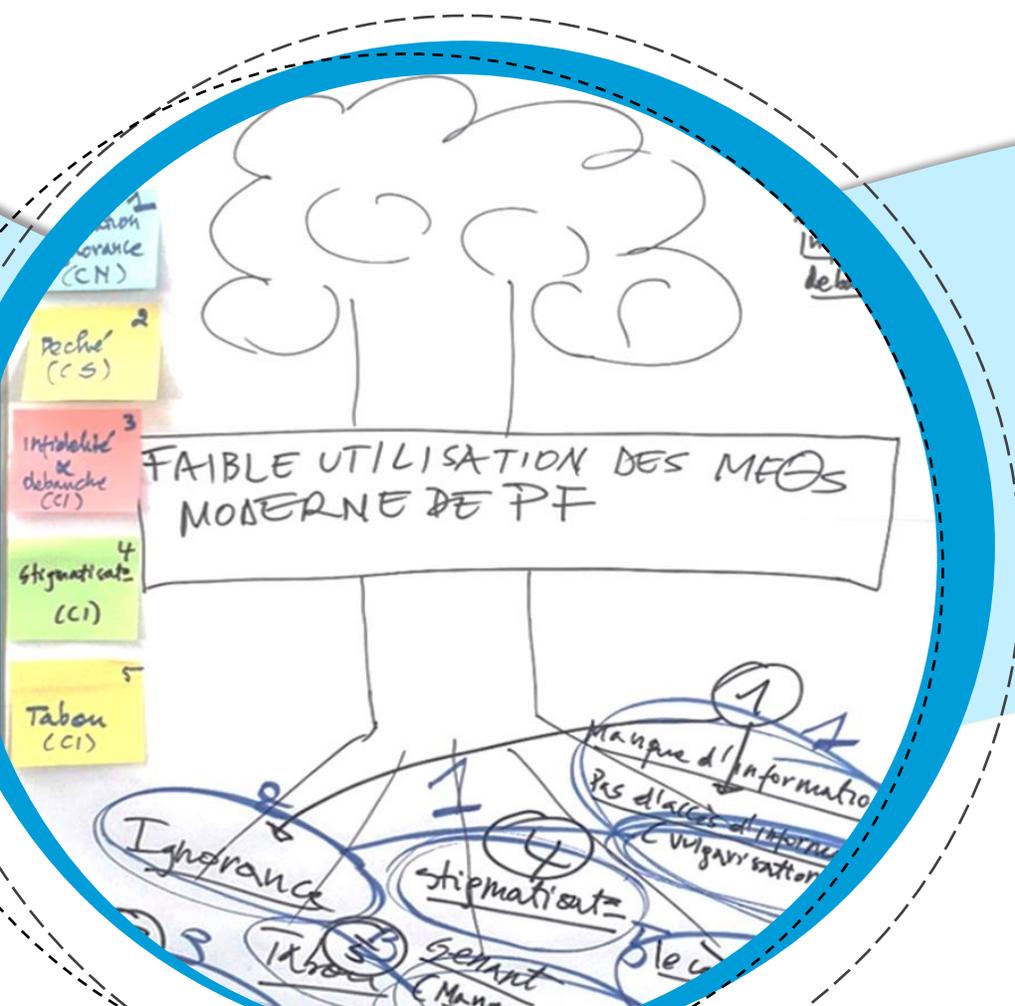
- ☑ Understand social norms theory and concepts
- ☑ Prepare staff to identify and investigate social norms
- ☑ Engage community members through participatory learning exercises to 1) identify reference groups, and 2) explore social norms influencing behaviors
- ☑ Analyze information with project team and communities
- ☑ Use findings to inform the design of norms-shifting activities and develop good evaluation tools.

WHY IS EFFECTIVE SOCIAL NORMS DIAGNOSIS IMPORTANT?

Social norms matter because they influence behavior. Norms may perpetuate harmful practices and reinforce gender and other inequities. With a solid understanding of existing social norms in a specific community, who maintains (or is perceived to maintain) these norms, and how they relate to behaviors, practitioners can design more relevant and effective programs; and improve monitoring and evaluation efforts, contributing to best practices.

CRITICAL QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER IN A SOCIAL NORMS EXPLORATION

Questions	Why ask?
Who are the social reference groups that influence the behavior?	Identifying reference groups that influence social norms helps us know who to include in interventions and research
What are the social norms that influence the behavior? And what are the consequences for not following a norm?	Identifying the root causes of a problem – including social norms – ensures that a program articulates and addresses the range of behavioral determinants
What social norms influence the behavior the most ?	Discussing, analyzing, and ranking normative factors allows more effective, efficient use of resources



The SNET provides step-by-step guidance, exercises, and templates, for participatory, qualitative exploration of the social norms that drive behaviors of interest within a specific context. It also offers guidance on how to interpret findings to inform intervention design and monitoring and evaluation.

A FOUR-PHASED APPROACH

The SNET is divided into four phases:



PLAN & PREPARE

The team first reflects on norms that may be influencing behavioral outcomes of interest, then defines the exploration objectives and chooses and prepares participatory exercises.

EXPLORE

Two rounds of community discussions take place. The first round asks project participants to identify whom they seek advice from and who influences their behavior (reference groups). The second round asks project participants and reference group members about factors influencing specific behaviors, unpacking norms and their relative influence.

ANALYZE

Participatory rapid analysis is done during activities and then in more depth when returning to the office. Teams identify the norms that influence behaviors, their relative influence and consequences of conforming or violating norms (sanctions).

APPLY

The findings are then used to design or refine programs for action, ideally together with communities.

THE APPLICATIONS: PILOTING THE TOOLKIT

Since 2016, IRH and partners from the Passages project (Tearfund, Save the Children) have piloted, revised, and re-piloted the SNET with norms-shifting interventions. Below, we share highlights from explorations in two projects in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

PROJECT SNAPSHOTS	USING THE SNET	HIGHLIGHTS OF WHAT WE LEARNED	HOW WE APPLIED LEARNINGS
<p>Masculinite, Famille et Foi, DRC: Masculinité, Famille, et Foi encourages reflection, dialogue, and action to shape norms that underpin intimate partner violence (IPV) and support access to family planning (FP) services. Trainings, community dialogues, and diffusion activities guide faith leaders, young couples, and congregations to identify, create, and embrace positive masculine identities and gender-equitable behaviors.</p>	<p>Piloted in two faith communities in Kinshasa, DRC over eight days. Activities were conducted with 64 men and women, who were newly married or first-time parents.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For both women and men, faith leaders and their wives, friends, mothers/fathers, and mothers/fathers-in-law were strong referents for behaviors related to IPV and FP use. Stigma hindered FP use but not violence. In one congregation, respondents associated contraceptive use, infidelity, and promiscuity with religious teachings. In another congregation, key influencers placed high importance on having many children and expressed disapproval of FP use. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Revised research instruments, and other evaluation materials to more specifically refer to the norms and sanctions uncovered in the exploration. ✓ Improved intervention materials to include additional reference groups and specific sanctions and diffusion strategies to engage additional reference group members.
<p>Growing Up GREAT!, DRC: Growing Up GREAT! (or Bien Grandir!), consists of a toolkit of age-tailored, gender-transformative materials that explore health and wellbeing, gender-based violence, and gender equality. Growing Up GREAT! applies an ecological framework to address individual, family, school, and community factors that affect early adolescent life experiences.</p>	<p>Piloted in two communities in Kinshasa, DRC, in two waves over 12 days. Activities took place with 96 male and female in-and-out-of-school very young adolescents (VYA) as well as with 29 of their mothers and fathers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For in-and out-of-school VYA, reference groups were parents, siblings and grandparents; teachers were also influential. For parents, reference groups included faith leaders and their wives, friends with children, neighbors, and immediate family members. For parents, it was viewed as unacceptable within the community to discuss puberty or sex with VYAs. While there was disapproval of violence, both the VYAs and their reference groups acknowledged the expectation that a boy could punish a girl without repercussion if she was disrespectful to a boy. Meanwhile, a boy who did not commit violence against a 'disrespectful' girl could expect to be mocked by his peers as weak or feminine. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Adjusted intervention strategy to engage more family members (reference groups) in the parent activities, acknowledging others in the family should be engaged.

THE WAY FORWARD: FIELD TESTING THE TOOLKIT

A field-tested version of the guide is being applied in over 10 countries and is available for use. IRH can provide distance and in-country technical assistance to organizations and projects that wish to use it. The experiences and learnings from the field-testing of the SNET will inform revisions for a final version ready for dissemination in 2020.



Are you interested in using or learning more about the SNET? Contact us at info@passagesproject.org

