RESOURCE BRIEF

This brief provides an overview of CARE’s journey to understand Social Norms theory from academia and apply it in development practices through innovative interventions for more precise and systematic outputs.

Since 2014, CARE has been looking at how to shift and measure changes in gendered social norms more systematically and precisely. The journey’s included:

- An initial training on social norms theory and measurement from some of the leading expert researchers from the University of Pennsylvania Social Norms Group.
- Adapting the theory into practical implementation design and measurement approaches & tools that can be more easily applied to CARE’s development programs.

Theoretical Overview on Social Norms

The concept of social norms has roots in various academic disciplines including behavioral economics, anthropology and social psychology.

A social norm is made up by one’s beliefs about what others do, and by one’s beliefs about what others think one should do. Bicchieri’s synthesized theory of social norms labels these “empirical expectations” (EE) (beliefs about what others do) and “normative expectations” (NE) (beliefs about what others think one should do). Bicchieri says that people prefer to conform to the norm if both these social expectations are in place – that is, if they expect that most other people conform to the norm and expect them to conform to it (and would disapprove if they did not).
UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL NORMS

In general there are **FOUR** key elements of social norms

**1. Constructed and shared by a group and are different from individually held beliefs or attitudes.**

**2. Maintained by social influence, i.e. the anticipation of social approval or disapproval for one's actions.**

**3. Influenced by Reference Groups or Networks, i.e. the relevant others who matter to people.**

**4. Made up by one’s beliefs about what others do, and by one’s beliefs about what others think one should do.**

There are many different factors that influence behavior, including: individual-level factors such as personal attitudes and knowledge; structural factors such as laws; social factors such as power dynamics in relationships; and material constraints such as access. Within this interplay of factors, social norms can either hinder the process of behavior change, or act as an accelerator; thus, understanding more about the potential role that social norms play in sustaining specific behaviors, and in what contexts, is important.

**Findings** from CARE’s social norms’ data suggest that as soon as girls hit puberty, they perceive more restrictive norms and adopt increased sensitivity towards sanctions from families and community members leading them to uphold the norms by following normative behavior. The network of verbal discourse between adult family members and neighbors keeps the fear of sanctions alive in informal community structures. There are some signs of flexibility in repressive norms restricting girls’ lives and options, especially when it comes to interactions, mobility, education, and decisions about marriage for girls in school settings or to pursue education. However, perceived threats to a girls’ virginity or reputation as “chaste” that affect her marriageability acts as a push factor towards child marriage.

SNAP FRAMEWORK
CARE’s Social Norms Analysis Plot

CARE’s Social Norms Analysis Plot (SNAP) framework identifies the key components of a social norm, and additional questions that will help develop vignettes and measure changes in those norms over time (e.g., two time point uses of the vignettes), but also inform ways that interventions can be further tuned for greater impact.

**Empirical Expectation**

**Definition:** What I think others do

**Sign of Change:**
- Responses reflect a different perception of what people think others are doing
- Increase in respondents report a perceived change of behavior of others
- Changes in the extent of conformity and disagreement among homogeneous groups, and across the different groups

**Example Response:**
"Once you have got the chance, you have to marry. Your friends are getting married."
Normative Expectation

**Definition:** What I think others expect me to do (what I should do according to others)

**Sign of Change:**
- Responses reflect a different perception of what others expect respondents to do
- Increase in respondents reporting the desired new behavior as expected of them
- Changes in the extent of conformity and disagreement among homogeneous groups, and across different groups
- Changes in alignment between empirical and normative expectations

Example Response: “...everybody in the community expects adolescent girls...at the age of 13 to 15 years...to get married”

Sanctions

**Definition:** Anticipated opinion or reaction of others (to the behavior) – specifically others, whose opinions matter to me

**Sign of Change:**
- Changes in sanctions that are identified
- Changes in the severity of sanction
- Changes in the likelihood of sanctions being enacted
- Changes in consistency across groups

Example Response: “If a girl is not married at age of 15 years, many adolescent girls in the community would insult her saying 'haftu', (one who is not needed, or unattractive)”

Sensitivity to Sanctions

**Definition:** Do sanctions matter for behavior? If there is a negative reaction from others. (Negative sanction), would the main character change their behavior in the future?

**Sign of Change:**
- Changes in how the main character would respond to negative sanctions
- Increase in respondents who say the main character would still behave in the desired way despite sanctions

Example Response: Most girls would change their minds and marry after prolonged insults and isolation

Exceptions

**Definition:** Under what circumstances would it be okay for the main character to break the norm (by acting positively)?

**Sign of Change:**
- Change in the # of exceptions allowed to break a norm
- Changes in # or types of individuals who deviate from the norm
- Changes in responses about individuals who are impervious to social sanctions

Example Response: Girls can refuse marriage if they excel at school and their teachers convince their family to let them continue school

The application of Social Norms theory proposes a divergence from traditional behavior change interventions, which seek to change individuals’ personal attitudes and knowledge and consequently their behaviors, usually through awareness raising and information sharing. Social norms, however, as the rules of behavior within a group, may be blocking this pathway of change. Individuals may personally disagree with a social norm, but act in accordance with it out of a desire for social belonging and to avoid social backlash.

Attitudes and knowledge are still important factors to address for behavior change, but addressing social norms as well may be a key piece in transforming some of the more intractable behaviors – especially those that are kept in place by gender norms.
Often, people are already living their lives in positive ways that support girls’ choices and opportunities. Find them. It can be hard to embody positive, rights-based change alone. Groups help individuals support, encourage and trouble-shoot.

Help people imagine positive alternatives. Change is possible. Get people talking to each other about new ideas. Challenge the implicit assumptions that everyone holds the same views, experiences and preferences.

Engage publicly with community members to debate on what is OK in this context. Move from envisioning possibilities of justice to action. This involves building community and accountability, so that people show up for girls’ rights in their words and actions.

Demonstrate that the positive shift we hope for already exists. And it is totally normal. Identify the resources and networks we need to support positive change for individuals, families and communities.

Based on the mentioned key design principles for social norms work, CARE’s Tipping Point developed a series of innovative programs. Football for Girls, Amader Kotha, Tea Stall Conversations and Amra-o-Korchi are the innovations which complement dynamic activities to facilitate the agency and options of adolescent girls, including all stakeholders. Football for Girls confronts the norms that limit adolescent girls’ mobility and visibility in public spaces. Amader Kotha featured street drama and became successful in initiating conversations about topics that have otherwise been taboo. Tea Stall Conversations targeted the men and successfully held conversations on gender norms, girls’ rights, and CEFM. Amra-o-Korchi involved men in positive practices and promoted change towards equitable workloads in the home. The key design principles developed for social norms programming guided these activities throughout the campaign.
CASE STUDY IN
SOCIAL NORMS PROGRAMMING: TIPPING POINT

CARE’s Tipping Point Initiative addresses the root causes of Child, Early and Forced Marriage (CEFM). Tipping Point views CEFM as an act of violence, so it enables girls to assert their rights, helps families and communities to support them, and influences policy to sustain change through community-level programming in Bangladesh. Evidence generation & multi-level advocacy along with influencing efforts at national, regional and global levels have also been Tipping Point’s way of intervention.

Community Participatory Analysis

The Tipping Point Community Participatory Analyses (CPA) Study was designed to deepen understanding of the contextual factors and root causes driving the prevalence of CEFM in a particular region of Bangladesh which has high rates of the practice. The findings were also intended to inform innovative and context-specific program design. The Tipping Point team participated in a series of workshops with its two implementing partners in Bangladesh (The Association for Slum Dwellers & Jaintia Shinnomul Songstha or Jashish) to draw out each group’s knowledge about child marriage and related practices in their operating regions, and drafted theories of action, identified key stakeholders, and mapped the CPA program.

Priority Social Norms for Tipping Point

- Girls’ mobility
- Girls ride bicycles and play sports
- Girls’ input into decisions about her marriage
- Girls can talk with an adolescent boy
- Girls take collective action for girls’ rights

Where does the CPA lead Tipping Point?

The analysis captured the reality that social identities, values and practices often align with economic, geographic and infrastructural constraints. The drivers of child marriage, in their inter-relatedness, are remarkably similar – social norms interacting with geographic isolation, poverty and poor livelihood options – and taken together, generate a powerful formula for the inter-generational perpetuation of child marriage. Religious and cultural beliefs differ between and among identity groups, but are similar in reinforcing early marriage. Dowry, above all, is a practice that encourages child marriage amongst the poor and very poor. The deeply engrained worldview that girls are of lesser value than boys is only too apparent at the root of the beliefs and social pressures driving parents’ decisions.
Adolescents use street drama and dialogue to challenge existing social norms and show positive alternatives. Amader Kotha has been successful in sparking conversations about topics that have otherwise been taboo. The playfulness of the performance made these conversations easier for people in the community to engage.

Girls’ football openly confronts the social norm that physical and public sports are only for boys and, more broadly, the norms that limit adolescent girls’ mobility and visibility in public spaces. The Tipping Point created an opportunity for girls to play in public spaces and in tournaments with the intention of drawing public attention and made a positive practice visible.

CARE developed 8 design principles for engaging with social norms change based on the existing academic and gray literature. According to those perceived principles, CARE deployed Tipping Point Social Norms Innovations Series. These innovations complement a broader suite of activities to facilitate the agency and options of adolescent girls, working with girls, boys, parents, key formal and informal influencers, and local decision makers.

The Innovations...

**Football for Girls**
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**Amader Kotha**
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**Tea Stall Conversations**
The tea stall conversations were successful in reaching men and sparking conversations on gender norms, girls’ rights, and child, early, and forced marriage. The tea stall proved to be a comfortable space for men to grapple with new ideas and challenge each other about the role men can play in supporting women’s and girls’ rights.

**Amra-o-Korchi**
Amra-o-Korchi or ‘We are also doing’ challenged gendered social norms for girls and boys by promoting change toward equitable workloads in the home. This intervention made positive practices such as boys doing household chores, such as cooking, laundry, etc., more visible.
CHALLENGING & SHIFTING THE NORMS

The Tipping Point Initiative has utilized learnings from the CPA analysis to develop and test a holistic and replicable implementation package. Tipping Point’s approach uses synchronized engagement with different participant groups (e.g. girls, boys, parents, community leaders), around key programmatic topics, and creates public spaces for all community members to be part of the dialogue.

Then, based on CARE’s SNAP framework, Tipping Point developed the tools for evaluating social norms, which facilitated a detailed understanding of the priority norms and led to develop the innovation series as a method of challenging & shifting the norms. These tools included Focused Group Discussions (FGDs) based on a Norm by Norm approach, In-depth interviews (IDIs) and Key Informant Interviews (KlIs).

Identified Social Norms Underlying Child Marriage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identified Social Norms</th>
<th>Details</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Adolescent girls’ mobility</strong></td>
<td>Girl’s mobility for education was partly accepted and mobility without cause expected sanctions. Exceptions found were in educated and wealthier families, and/or if the girls were raised by relatives</td>
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<td><strong>Girls’ non-traditional behavior</strong></td>
<td>After puberty, norms restrict girls playing “boys” sports and riding bicycles. Family members face sanctions along with the girls if girls are seen violating the norms. Exceptions found if girls play in school settings and ride bicycles to get to a long distant school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Girls’ interaction with boys</strong></td>
<td>Girls rarely socialize with boys unless in a school setting and only if the conversation is educational. Parents controls girls’ mobility and communication as interaction with boys is seen as a threat to girls’ sexuality. Fathers’ inability to deal with social pressure leads often to violence against mother and daughter.</td>
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<td><strong>Decision-making &amp; girls’ input into marriage decisions</strong></td>
<td>Fathers have the ultimate say on who the girl will marry. Girls who are considered promising students have little scope to say no to early marriage. High sensitivity to villagers’ rumors was identified.</td>
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<td><strong>Girls’ collective action</strong></td>
<td>Most adolescent girls do not take part in collective action to demand their rights. Parents did not report any expectations for girls’ collective action, neither supportive nor restrictive. People belittle supportive friends who tries to help if a girl is not willing to get married early.</td>
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Inter-Group Dialogues for Relational and Norms Change

In Tipping Point Phase 2, inter-group dialogues were organized to create opportunities for groups of girls, boys, mothers and fathers from the same village to discuss and reflect on different norms and their effects on their own life and on the community through structured facilitation.

1. **Girls’ mobility and access to safe spaces | Adolescent girls with Adolescent boys**
   **Result:** Interactive discussion between adolescent girls and boys on steps that can be taken for girls to access public spaces comfortably and to be seen in different spaces more frequently.

2. **Menstruation | Adolescent girls with mothers**
   **Result:** The mothers and daughters commit to challenging harmful norms around menstruation.

3. **Girls aspirations | Adolescent girls, boys, mothers and fathers**
   **Result:** Adolescents and parents create posters to show what adolescent girls’ dreams are, and the pathways to accomplish them. The process leads to a better understanding between them.

4. **Gendered division of labor | Adolescent girls, boys, mothers and fathers**
   **Result:** All participants have an opportunity to share their experiences related to the division of labor and reflect on how they may change it, followed by an interactive session on workloads.

5. **Dowry | Adolescent girls, boys, mothers and fathers**
   **Result:** Participants share positive stories they have known when dowries were not taken or given, and plan actions at a personal level to challenge the practice of the dowry.
**MEASURING SOCIAL NORMS**

As an implementing organization, CARE was interested in understanding how strong or influential certain norms are for specific behaviors, and if and when norms are shifting and weakening.

**MEASUREMENT STAGES & METHODS**

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>FORMATIVE RESEARCH</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Purpose: Identify possible social norms, sanctions, reference groups</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Method: Literature review, informal discussions with community</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>BASELINE</td>
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<tr>
<td>Purpose: Verify social norms, assess strength, identify “cracks” in norms &amp; opportunities for interventions</td>
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<td>Method: Quantitative surveys, qualitative interviews, &amp; vignettes in FGDs</td>
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<td></td>
<td>MONITORING</td>
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<tr>
<td>Purpose: Observe signs of norm change, monitor backlash</td>
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<td>Method: Activity monitoring, observation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>ENDLINE</td>
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<tr>
<td>Purpose: Changes in social norms, correlate with changes in behavior &amp; attitudes</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Method: Quantitative surveys, qualitative interviews, &amp; vignettes in FGDs</td>
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**QUANTITATIVE SURVEYS**

Quantitative surveys were used to measure personal attitudes, knowledge, behavior, and social expectations, using response scales to try to better track incremental changes over time.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Terminology</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attitude</td>
<td>What I think</td>
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<tr>
<td>Behavior</td>
<td>What I do</td>
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**Social Norms**

- Empirical Expectations (EE): What I think others do
- Normative Expectations (NE): What I think others expect me to do (what I should do according to others)

**Sample Question**

I would like to ask you what you think others do in regards to adolescent girls’ marriage. Please answer the following questions as it relates to your community context.

**Most adolescent girls marry before the age of 18. (EE)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agree a lot</th>
<th>Agree a little</th>
<th>Disagree a little</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disagree a lot</td>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>Refuse</td>
</tr>
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**QUALITATIVE METHODS**

The main qualitative method that CARE adapted to measure social norms is **vignettes**. Vignettes tell short stories about imaginary characters in specific contexts, with guiding questions that invite people to respond to the story in a structured way.

**Vignette Design**

Vignettes have generally been written with two sections of narration and questions. The first part introduces a relevant, hypothetical scenario based in the local context that leads a fictional main character(s) to a decision point about how to act. The aim of these questions is to surface empirical and normative expectations and explore agreement about these expectations within and across key groups. Disagreement within or between EE and NE, for example, is a possible sign of weakness in the corresponding norm.

**Vignette Analysis**

CARE developed the SNAP framework to guide in the process of development and analysis of vignettes and analyze potential signs that norms might be weakening or shifting, or if not, what factors in particular seem to be holding norms in place.

**CALL FOR ACTION**

Knowing that social and gender norms are at the root of development issues across sectors and continue to act as barriers to more equitable outcomes for all, programs and projects must not only collect information on prioritized norms throughout evaluation processes but also shape strategies and activities to address those norms through gender-transformative programming.