

# How Changing Social Norms is Crucial in Achieving Gender Equality



## Acknowledgements

The compendium draws on a social norms perspective. It uses the social norms definition articulated by the social scientist Cristina Bicchieri and applies the concepts of social expectations, empirical and normative, to determine whether female genital mutilation or any other maladaptive practice is a social norm in a specific context. The compendium also uses and adapts some of the outcomes of the UNICEF-Penn course on Advances on Social Norms, 2010–2016, co-chaired by Cristina Bicchieri and Gerry Mackie at the University of Pennsylvania and some of the outcomes of the UNFPA expert meeting on “Gender-Biased Harmful Practices: A Long Term Coordinated Strategy To Accelerate Abandonment And Achieve Measurable Results By 2030”, 2016, in Brussels.

Case studies have been taken from articles and papers by the social scientists Sajeda Amin, Heeran Chun, Ellen Gruenbaum, Antanas Mockus, Kaivan Munshi, Shereen Usdin, Patricia Rudy and Molly Melching and from the Saleema Campaign in Sudan, the Tostan programme in Senegal, The Soul City IV TV entertainment programme in South Africa, the Maternal and Child Health and Family Planning programme in Bangladesh, the Sex Ratio at Birth Transition in Republic of Korea.

The compendium is a continuation of previous work by UNFPA and UNICEF, including the UNFPA-UNICEF Manual on Social Norms and Change in 2016, the UNFPA-UNICEF in How to Transform a Social Norms in 2018, the UNFPA-UNICEF Proposal For Phase III of The UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme in 2017, the UNFPA-UNICEF 17 Ways To End FGM/C in 2017, the UNFPA-UNICEF Metrics Of Progress Moment Of Change, Annual Report, in 2015, the UNICEF “Coordinated Strategy to Abandon Female Genital Mutilation/ Cutting in One Generation” in 2007 and the UNICEF series on Social Norms and Harmful Practices, all of which were informed by collaboration with social scientist Gerry Mackie, and a multitude of academic and development partners.

The compendium also uses and adapts some of the outcomes of the Learning Collaborative “How and Why Norms Matter for Sustainable Development” (2019), Gerry Mackie “Social Norms Change: Believing Makes it So” (2018), Cristina Bicchieri “Norms in the Wild” (2017), the Overseas Development Institute “Social Norms, Gender Norms and Adolescent Girls: a Brief Guide” (2015).

**Credits** Direction of Nafissatou J. Diop. Maria Gabriella De Vita for writing the compendium, Tom Franklin and Daniela Colombo for reviewing the compendium, Ramz Shalback for providing comments and images, Wanda Rodriguez for supporting the work on the compendium.

**The following people provided valuable ideas and comments:** Tom Franklin for insights and additional suggestion, Katryn Weny for support with statistics.

The compendium was edited by **Prepress Projects** and designed by LS Graphic Design.

The compendium was made possible through funding to the UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme on the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation supported by **the European Union and the governments of Austria, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, Norway, AECID Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom for their generous financial contributions.**

## Table of Contents

<b>Executive summary</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>1. Introduction</b> .....	<b>8</b>
1.1 The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development .....	10
1.2 Background .....	11
1.3 General observations .....	14
<b>2. Changing maladaptive social norms</b> .....	<b>15</b>
2.1 Amplifying the issue of "changing maladaptive social norms" to gender norms transformation .....	17
2.2 Three main clusters of gender ideologies .....	19
<b>3. Conceptual background and illustrative case studies</b> .....	<b>22</b>
3.1. The definition of social norms and the concept of expectation .....	23
3.2. Diagnosing a social norm .....	27
3.3. Khadija's dilemma and the power of social sanctions: an illustrative case study of the conceptual background .....	28
3.4. Attitudes do not correlate with practices .....	29
3.5. Pluralistic ignorance, or the systematic bias in the information people reveal to each other .....	30
3.6. The spread of social norms through relevant social networks/reference groups .....	32
3.7. Social norms and fertility transition: an illustrative case study on the conceptual background .....	34
3.8. Three regulatory systems and associated emotions .....	36
<b>4. The process of social norms change and illustrative case studies</b> .....	<b>37</b>
4.1 Abandoning old social norms and adopting beneficial ones .....	38
4.2. The power of value deliberations: an illustrative case study of the process of change .....	42
4.3 Designing a media message to entertain and educate: an illustrative case study on the process of change .....	43
4.4. Saleema: unharmed, intact, pristine: an illustrative case study on the process of change .....	45
4.5. Shifting to daughter preference in one generation: an illustrative case study on the process of change .....	47
<b>5. A theory of change</b> .....	<b>49</b>
5.1. Adherence to a new behaviour .....	51
5.2. Creating space for discussion with governments, institutions and services, and public declarations .....	52
5.3. Promoting positive change regionally and globally .....	54
5.4. A move towards resonance and amplification .....	55
<b>6. Recommendations</b> .....	<b>58</b>
6.1. Social norms and gender rules .....	59
6.2. Enhancing the capabilities of individuals.....	60
6.3. Context is crucial .....	61
6.4. Conclusions .....	61

## FIGURES

Figure 1. Descriptive and injunctive norms .....	25
Figure 2. Diagnostic process for identifying collective behaviour .....	27
Figure 3. Interactive shift of attitude and coordinated shift of practice .....	29
Figure 4. Prevalence of versus support for FGM among women aged 15–49 years old .....	31
Figure 5. Social networks representing intermarrying communities .....	33
Figure 6. Social norms change: programme design framework .....	40
Figure 7. Creating a new norm first, and then abandoning the old one .....	44
Figure 8. Sex ratio at birth changes in the Republic of Korea, 1980–2014 .....	48
Figure 9. Key outcomes of FGM programming .....	50
Figure 10. Factors in the abandonment of an old norm and creation of a new norm .....	52
Figure 11. Factors that contribute to continuing or abandoning FGM .....	53
Figure 12. Social norm formation at the global and regional level .....	55
Figure 13. Movement to accelerate the abandonment of FGM .....	56

## TABLE

Table 1. Co-existence and harmonization of law, morality and culture .....	35
--	----

## BOXES

Box 1. Seeing is believing .....	9
Box 2. Human behaviour may not be choice-based .....	16
Box 3. Hidden gender dynamics and exercise of agency .....	17
Box 4. Girls and economic vulnerability .....	19
Box 5. Girls and emphasis on purity .....	20
Box 6. Norms' activation is usually an automatic process .....	23
Box 7. Social norms are unwritten rules .....	23
Box 8. Punishment and a person's sensitivity to the norm determine compliance .....	24
Box 9. A mother's story: challenges faced by those who begin the process of change .....	28
Box 10. Attitude is meant to be an evaluative disposition .....	29
Box 11. Pluralistic ignorance: definition .....	30
Box 12. Pluralistic ignorance: a belief trap .....	32
Box 13. Comments on Figure 6 .....	38
Box 14. Understanding a social practice .....	41
Box 15. Change may take place at intervals .....	41
Box 16. Censuring the abusers .....	43
Box 17. Importance of language.....	45
Box 18. FGM terminology: from shame to pride .....	46
Box 19. Public declaration of Tutti Island, Sudan .....	51
Box 20. An important hypothesis .....	55
Box 21. Norms reproduce underlying gendered relations of power .....	59
Box 22. Economic vulnerability and dowry .....	60

# Executive summary

Human behaviour is not always a choice. Often it is automatic and unintentional, and rooted in the belief that others expect us to behave in a certain way, particularly when upholding traditions and culture.

This document is a compendium of key articles and writings that examines the social dynamics of normative human behaviours not only through experimental academic routes, but also through the complementary vision and extraordinary insights of entire community and population groups. This is an attempt to contribute to the change of maladaptive human normative behaviours. Applying certain game theory principles has helped enormously in gaining an understanding of how change can be leveraged through reflection on the "games" of reciprocal human interactions. The social expectations surrounding normative behaviour are a major obstacle for those who might otherwise wish to abandon a discriminatory norm. The main challenge is hidden gender and power dynamics, the socially constructed gender roles that uphold related behaviours, and the obstacles that present for girls' and women's acquisition or not of capabilities that lead to the exercise of agency.

First the report considers briefly the difficulty of separating "social norms" from "gender ideologies and rules". This is because (i) gender ideologies and rules are social norms per se, (ii) gender norms affect all other social norms and (iii) almost all other social norms have an impact on the balance of power between males and females. This makes it difficult to apply "gender" to "social norms theory" as though they are separate. Even in situations where gender does not appear to be an issue, it has the potential to be so and has to be taken into account. (This is one of the reasons why almost all development agencies have a policy that stipulates that

gender should be taken into account in all aspects of their work). Taking this as its point of departure, this document presents some of the most promising strategies for changing social norms and achieving gender equality. A greater understanding of the conceptual background of social norms and norms change provides a schematic – a skeleton outline – for social transformation. Two possible overlapping processes for change may be identified: (i) the abandonment of a maladaptive norm, first through value deliberations and the further creation of a new norm (often contrary to the original norm, for example cutting or not cutting); and (ii) conversely, the creation of a new positive norm at first, and further or concurrent destabilisation of the original discriminatory norm. For each of these two options, diverse stages of change can be considered. The theory of change and the resonance and amplification movement expand the process of change. They derive from the principles of social norm theory and can use and support existing positive social forces to influence the shifting of norms and behaviour through a global institutional response.

On 25 September 2015, the 193 Member States of the United Nations unanimously adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a set of 17 goals to transform the world over the next 15 years. For the first time, a gender equality goal specifically sets out the intention to end violence and discrimination against women and girls:

*Realizing gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls will make a crucial contribution to progress across all the Goals and targets. The achievement of full human potential and of sustainable development is not possible if one half of humanity continues to be denied its full human rights and opportunities.*

This goal includes Target 5.3, “Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation”, with the corresponding indicator “Percentage of girls and women aged 15–49 years who have undergone FGM [female genital mutilation], by age group”. This is a pivotal moment to further increase global action and recognize that female genital mutilation is a worldwide issue. It is evident that, when a holistic, respectful approach, engaging communities and wider society, is taken to end problematic social norms, progress is also made in weakening unequal social systems, bolstering women’s agency and increasing gender equality.

# Introduction



**Diagnosing collective patterns of behaviour as interdependent, and being very specific about the nature of this interdependence, helps to identify interventions that offer the best chance of success when facing intractable, collective and discriminatory patterns of behaviour.**

(Cristina Bicchieri, 2017)

**T**hink of HIV awareness campaigns in African countries; where condoms are freely distributed to the population, yet the number of newly infected people is increasing. Distributing condoms and relying on information campaigns about the risk of unprotected sex are insufficient if, among other factors, the men share a common view of masculinity that glorifies promiscuity and men refrain from using condoms at home for fear of giving away the existence of "other women".<sup>1</sup>

When behaviours are interdependent, we have to consider entire communities, as individuals' choices depend on what others who are important to them do, and possibly on what they judge appropriate or inappropriate.<sup>2</sup> Social norms can be quite stable and operate automatically and unintentionally over generations because they are locked in by such interdependence. For the same reason, social norms change may happen rather quickly at the local level. We also have to consider wider factors that frame changes in norms – economic, political, religious; global and local changes: there are circuitous routes as to how social norms eventually get impacted and new norms take the place of the old ones.

1

### Seeing is believing



How do we change harmful social practices, abandon old social norms, and/or adopt beneficial new ones? Two key principles apply: i) Enough people have to believe that enough other people are changing their behaviour, and ii) Seeing is believing.

(Gerry Mackie, 2019)

# 1.1

## The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

The 2030 Agenda states in its preamble:

**They [the Agenda's goals and targets] seek to realize the human rights of all and to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. They are integrated and indivisible and balance the three dimensions of sustainable development: the economic, social and environmental.**

The 2030 Agenda continues by describing a vision in which:

**Realizing gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls will make a crucial contribution to progress across all the Goals and targets. The achievement of full human potential and of sustainable development is not possible if one half of humanity continues to be denied its full human rights and opportunities. Women and girls must enjoy equal access to quality education, economic resources and political participation as well as equal opportunities with men and boys for employment, leadership and decision making at all levels. We will work for a significant increase in investments to close the gender gap and strengthen support for institutions in relation to gender equality and the empowerment of women at the global, regional and national levels. All forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls will be eliminated, including through the engagement of men and boys. The systematic mainstreaming of a gender perspective in the implementation of the Agenda is crucial.**

In line with this, the UNFPA strategic plan not only mainstreams gender but takes a "social norms perspective" as an operational framework for *amplifying* the scope of the programme to include gender equality more widely.

An important aim is to contribute to the social dimension of the 2030 Agenda by achieving Goal 5.3: **"Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation"**. In fact, the greater theoretical understanding already reached by UNFPA and UNICEF on the dynamics of social norms and social norms change, the emergence of remarkable fieldwork and the availability of new data have generated significant excitement and innovative programming which may go beyond the Joint Programme's scope.<sup>3</sup>

# 1.2

## Background

The Technical Note *Coordinated Strategy To Abandon FGM In One Generation* was published in 2007.<sup>4</sup> This provides a game theory analysis, illustrated with a matrix, of female genital mutilation as a self-enforcing social convention. It explains that:

**The social processes of female genital mutilation resemble the social dynamics of the self-enforcing social convention theory identified by Schelling.<sup>5</sup> Families carry out female genital mutilation to ensure the marriageability and status of their daughters within the intramarrying group. For marriage and for status, what one family chooses to do depends on what other families in that community choose to do. No one family can abandon the practice on its own; to do so would ruin the marriageability and status of that family's daughters. To change the convention, it is necessary to coordinate abandonment by the intramarrying community as a whole.**

It continues:

**Because of the conventional nature of the practice – what one family chooses to do depends on what other families choose to do – it is unlikely that the shift from a convention of cutting to a convention of not cutting would come about spontaneously. After the core group is mobilized, a sufficient proportion (past the tipping point)[<sup>6</sup>] of families willing to abandon the practice must be enrolled – which would be unlikely in the absence of an organized abandonment effort. There must also be a moment of social recognition, e.g., a public declaration, where the ending of the practice is witnessed – a moment of coordinated abandonment when most people are assured that most other people are ending the practice. Only at this point is the marriageability and status of their uncut daughters assured.**

This theory was further refined.<sup>7</sup> Female genital mutilation was defined as a "social norm" maintained by two kinds of reciprocal expectation: empirical (I do so because I see others doing so) and normative (I think that others think I have to do so). Published in 2016, the UNFPA-UNICEF *Manual on Social Norms and Change* explains the most important developments:

This is the result of a process of thinking and further revision during recent years, where social norms theory has been introduced as a refinement of social convention theory. Social convention theory helps us to see that our choices are often interdependent. It reveals that, for social change to work, we often have to coordinate our change with other people. Social norms theory allows us to better understand the nature of this interdependence. A social norm perspective sheds light on issues that seem complex and sometimes intractable and offers insights that put attitudinal and collective behavioural change at the forefront of positive social change. Recognizing FGM or other harmful practices which follow the same social dynamic as social norms entails working with multiple channels to create social movements and mobilize people among practising groups and other individual who are influential and make decisions, including religious actors.<sup>8</sup>

**Concerning religion, for example, in the struggle against honour killing,<sup>9</sup> Islam is an ally. However, the code of honour faces moral and religious challenges. It would be unwise to ignore the fact that, in a country such as Pakistan, aspects of the way sexuality is treated in law and in society both violate human rights and have a solid foundation in the Muslim tradition. Whereas in the case of honour killing we do not have to argue against traditional Islam, in respect of other aspects this cannot be avoided.<sup>10</sup>**

The same can be said of female genital mutilation, which predates both Islam and Christianity and yet is often perceived as a specific step that a girl or woman must take to fulfil a religious obligation.

It is now recognized that, although in the initial reflection on the change process, the concept of "tipping point", the threshold after which the change becomes irreversible for most of the population, was considered crucial to define the decline or creation of a social norm or of a web of social norms, this may not be the case in every social space. In other words, a social norm may or may not be a social coordination norm, depending on whether or not incentives to coordinate are present, whether or not a threshold for change is reached and how people differ in their preferences and values.

However, the social convention theory model that Gerry Mackie applied to the social dynamics of female genital mutilation<sup>11</sup> has had the merit of putting in evidence the interdependence of choices in situations where social norms are at stake, highlighting that individual change can be extremely difficult and the importance of coordination among many to achieve changes.<sup>12</sup>

# 1.3

## General observations

**C**hanging social norms is about real-life situations and experiences, and it also involves theoretical concepts with which some people may not be familiar. These concepts are not difficult but are not yet commonly used to design programmes for addressing social and public health issues.

Concepts will be presented with references made to unfamiliar technical terminology, for instance *empirical and normative expectations*. There may be a concern that such terminology could give the impression of unnecessary difficulty. Evidence shows, however, that people can understand, appreciate and draw out examples that illustrate concepts (*Yes! This is what is happening in our communities! Naturally, this is the way things go!*).<sup>13</sup> For example, a participant in the Kombissiri Training on Social Convention Theory, held in Burkina Faso in April 2010, said<sup>14</sup>:

**I saw a convention shift!! In a village I know well, there was a norm that girls should not get pregnant before marriage. A girl got pregnant and she was chased from her village. Actually the girl died. When villagers knew it, they were upset. They met publicly altogether and they pledged "never again in chasing a pregnant girl out of the village". They kept their commitment. Since then, no girl who happened to be pregnant was chased out of the village.**

# Changing maladaptive social norms



**A structured social norms perspective might give a better understanding of why harmful or maladaptive social norms persist and under what conditions these might shift in favour of more beneficial ones. It may also help to understand that abandoning a specific gender-biased normative behaviour may deeply change a given social and cultural system. It is clear that gender norms and social norms are strictly connected and have similar dynamics. Even when a power dimension is in play, this too is governed by a complex system of normative behaviours.**

**A**lso important is overcoming the misconception that people “consciously” decide about norms. A number of critics of the rationale choice model have pointed out the problem of assuming a direct link between an individual’s intention and his or her behaviour, stressing the importance of understanding the “interaction” of decision-makers with the context in which their decisions are made.

What we learn from a social norms perspective, in game theory terms, is that, in a given social space, people facing a certain “state of the world” may converge towards the same “solution”, and this solution may be “bad”.<sup>15</sup> This happens when an outcome that affects us depends not only on what we do, but also on what others do. Individuals are kept in a

2

**Human behaviour may not be choice-based**



It is difficult to get away from language that has to do with decision. There is a premise that people think about something, they hear about something, they decide, and then they act. Somehow in much of the literature in social science, this is a “refrain”, but in reality it isn’t always like so. A lot of human behaviour is not choice based.

(Adapted from Paul Stanley, Yoder, Round table discussion, UNICEF Academic Consultation on Harmful Practices, September 8–9, 2006, New York City)



stable state of reciprocal adjustment, which is the best possible state in a given situation. In trying to get out of this state, which might be represented by a social norm, individuals will end up in a worse situation (for example, non-conformers may receive social sanctions). Therefore, everyone conforms automatically and unintentionally. The result is that a collective behaviour that may appear “irrational” – that loving mothers (and fathers) “should” submit to the female genital mutilation of their beloved daughters – is perpetuated over generations without challenge. In game theory, such a situation, in which no player has an incentive to deviate unilaterally, is termed a “Nash equilibrium”.<sup>16</sup>

## 2.1

### Amplifying the issue of *changing maladaptive social norms to gender norms transformation*

**B**ecause people are socialized in their community’s gender ideologies and the associated norms about how boys and girls should think and behave from early childhood – often with limited exposure to other ideas or influences – individuals may not be able to imagine other ways of doing things. These ideologies and norms can thus set the boundaries of what girls and boys, and women and men, think, as well as what they do; they can make inequalities of power and resources seem natural or God-given, assimilating social norms to “moral norms”, and thus unchangeable.<sup>17</sup> Norms about who can speak out or make decisions also directly affect the distribution of power in society, typically to the disadvantage of children and adolescents in general, and of girls in particular.<sup>18</sup>

3

#### Hidden gender dynamics and exercise of agency



The central challenge is the account of the issue of hidden gender and power dynamics, of the socially constructed gender roles which uphold those behaviours, and the obstacle they represent for girls’ and women’s acquisition, or not, of capabilities, that leads to the exercise of agency.

(R. Kaur, 2016)

Because discriminatory gender norms maintain inequalities in access to resources and power, many people have a vested interest in upholding these. Men benefit most clearly, but adolescent boys also have a stake in norms that deal them a better hand than girls: more power, more freedom, better access to resources and the promise of substantially more power in adulthood.<sup>19</sup> Older women can also have a stake if they benefit from the prestige associated with having adult sons, or from having a daughter-in-law to share or take on the burden of domestic chores.<sup>20</sup> People often misperceive how far they benefit from existing gender norms and/or see these inequalities as natural and unable to be changed. For example, with regard to female genital mutilation:

**Women living in communities practicing FGM have “their” own logic and rational reasons for not readily adopting our logic. For them living under a strong patriarchal social and economic regime with very few options for choices in livelihood, the room for negotiating a limited amount of power is extremely small. Circumcising your daughter and complying with other certain social norms, particularly around sexuality and its link to the economics of reproduction, is an essential requirement to these silent power negotiations. Women instinctively know this. We may scare them with all the possible risks of FGM to health. We may bring religious leaders to persuade them that the practice is not a requirement. We can try to bring the wrath of the law to bear upon them. But in their desperate hold on the little negotiated power they have known for centuries, they are not willing to let go unless they see a benefit that is equal to or more than what they already have.<sup>21</sup>**

Discriminatory gender norms are upheld not only through the behaviour rules in everyday life that children quickly internalize – at home, at school, in the workplace, at markets and in other public places – but also by wider social institutions.

These include organized religion, traditional social structures (e.g. chiefs' courts), education systems and the media. Therefore, efforts to replace these norms with more equitable attitudes and practices need to address how discriminatory norms are reinforced across all institutions and settings.<sup>22</sup>

As mentioned previously, the power of reciprocal "social expectations" and the drive to "belong" can be so strong that people comply with norms even when these contradict their personal beliefs and attitudes. For example, some people in Nepal<sup>23</sup> continue to seclude menstruating girls and women – not because they believe that it is necessary but because they fear what others in the community will say if they do not. However, the desire for social approval can also motivate individuals to change their behaviour and attitudes.

## 2.2

### Three main clusters of gender ideologies<sup>24</sup>

**T**hree main clusters of gender ideologies, which may also be considered "meta-norms", underpin gender-biased social norms in many settings:

- **son preference/daughter aversion**
- **ideologies of femininity** at different stages of the life cycle, which affect perceptions of how adolescent girls should behave and their transition from girlhood to womanhood
- **ideologies of masculinity**, which not only govern the behaviour of boys and young men but also have far-reaching effects on girls' lives.



4

#### Girls and economic vulnerability

A girl is seen as a "small shop" (kaduka) out of which parents can gain income when she marries – even when she goes into the cohabiting arrangements, they can gain something from this. There is even a song about a young girl being more beneficial than a small shop.

District Education Officer, eastern Uganda (Bantebya-Kyomuhendo and others, 2014)

### 2.2.1. SON PREFERENCE/ DAUGHTER AVERSION<sup>25</sup>

**Son preference**, a powerful and long-standing norm, is closely connected to **daughter aversion**. Daughter aversion may not be a norm but stems from the belief that daughters have lower value. Daughters may be perceived as a burden, and this is underlined by material realities. In India, for example, a son is seen as continuing the lineage, providing support to his parents in their old age, enhancing the family status and bringing in dowry. In addition to intense social pressure to adhere to son preference, economic factors play an overarching role here. Discrimination towards daughters is clearly acted upon by practices of “eliminating daughters before birth” or, in poorer households, by discriminating in terms of food, health and education, as well as marrying a daughter earlier to avoid paying a higher dowry – and also because delaying a daughter’s marriage only adds to the costs of her upbringing. The economic factor is significant. In better-off households, discrimination manifests through norms that dictate the quantity and quality of education and inequalities in bequeathing property. Social sanctions affect women as wives and mothers: women have lower status if they do not produce sons, and as a result can be ill-treated, taunted, divorced or abandoned.<sup>26</sup>

5

#### Girls and emphasis on purity



**«I think this whole notion of what an ideal girl should be, this emphasis on purity – that is the most important norm that is leading to discriminatory practices.»**

Interview with Nepal research team  
(Overseas Development Institute, April 2015)



### 2.2.2. IDEOLOGIES OF FEMININITY<sup>27</sup>

A second cluster of highly influential gender ideologies, values and norms of **femininity** are those related to **girlhood and the transition to womanhood**. These translate into commonly accepted roles and standards of behaviour that depend on age and gender. For example, girls are expected to shoulder much of the burden of household labour. This tradition serves two purposes: households run smoothly and girls are trained in the skills they will need as wives and mothers.

Moreover, sexual maturity (the onset of menstruation and development of breasts) signals the end of girlhood and the start of womanhood, and therefore readiness to assume adult responsibilities and behave as an adult woman. As one district official in Uganda explained,

**“If a girl starts having menstrual periods (around 9 or 10) she stops being a child ... She is now a woman. Also when she has a child – even if she is only 13 years old, she is considered a woman.”<sup>28</sup>**

Girls seem to have no recognized adolescence, whereas boys are seen to experience a gradual change over which time they are less and less subject to parental authority. As more and more pubescent girls attend school, sexual maturity is no longer such an abrupt marker of readiness for marriage and adult life. Yet, in many communities, these traditional ways of thinking continue to influence norms about the appropriate age for a girl to be married.



### 2.2.3. IDEOLOGIES OF MASCULINITY<sup>29</sup>

The normative dimension of the ideology of masculinity arises from social, economic, psychological and emotional elements and from the lower value of girls, reinforced through socialization patterns as well as materially anchored in their lower entitlements. In research sponsored by the ODI (2012–2015), the influence of norms of masculinity, in particular on girls' lives and development opportunities, emerged repeatedly from fieldwork. Traditional or idealized norms of masculinity were often defined in opposition to norms of femininity. So, for example, in all countries studied, “good” men were expected to be breadwinners, and boys were expected to learn skills or study hard so that they could fulfil this role in future. With this role as family provider came the expectation that the man would be the head of the household and the ultimate decision-maker, with women and children deferring to him. Girls, by contrast, were typically expected to earn some income, albeit secondary to their main role as mother and home-maker – although in some research sites this expectation was found to be changing as a result of economic pressure.

Norms of masculinity include virility (interpreted in different contexts as the freedom to have more than one sexual partner, and fathering many children, particularly sons). In all of our research communities, norms of masculinity “condone” physical violence against women and girls in certain circumstances, particularly after marriage. In Hmong communities in northern Vietnam, girls reported that the most desirable characteristic of a potential husband was that he was not violent.<sup>30</sup>



# Conceptual background and illustrative case studies



# 3.1

## The definition of social norms and the concept of expectation

Various theoretical approaches to defining social norms make possible evidence-based interventions and also enable us to assess the impact of these interventions on gender equality. These approaches come from economics, psychology and philosophy. For example, since the 1980s there have been attempts to use theoretical approaches to female genital mutilation as a social norm.

**Social norm theory is the more recent entrant into the field and combines many of the insights from these other approaches – it aims to change social norms in game theory terms by emphasising reciprocal expectations and the collective nature of social norms.<sup>31</sup>**

6

**Norms' activation is usually an automatic process**



Norms' activation is usually an "automatic and unintentional process" as norms have "no realities" other than in our beliefs that others behave according to them and expect us to behave according to them.

(Cristina Bicchieri, 2016)

In contrast to individually held attitudes or beliefs, a social norm is defined by "shared" beliefs – expectations – about a behaviour or practice.

**A common social norm that differs across contexts and cultures is how closely people stand or sit next to friends and strangers. In some social spaces, the norm is to stand close and in others it is to keep a distance, even from people they know.<sup>32</sup>**

People might do those things even when they would prefer not to because they "expect" that others think this is the way to behave.

7

**Social norms are unwritten rules**



Social norms are unwritten "rules" governing behaviour shared by members of a given group or society. They are informal, often implicit, rules that most people accept and abide by.

(Learning Collaborative to Advance Normative Change, 2017)



8

### **Punishment and a person's sensitivity to the norm determine compliance**



If others believe one ought to conform, the reaction to non-conformity may go from slight displeasure to active or even extreme punishment. The extent of the social reaction varies, depending on how important or central to social life a norm is, how entrenched it is, and what sort of real or perceived harm disobedience creates. The combination of punishment (mild, serious, or absent) and a person's sensitivity to the norm will determine individual compliance.

(Cristina Bicchieri, *Norms in the Wild*, p. 32).

For example, a mother may perceive that all girls in her community are cut (descriptive norm: **a pattern of behaviour such that individuals prefer to conform to it on condition that they believe that most people in their reference network conform to it – empirical expectations**).

She also believes and expects that her daughter will not receive as much respect from others in the community if she is not cut (injunctive norm: **not only we do expect others to conform; we are also aware that we are expected to conform – normative expectations**). In this example, even if for personal reasons a mother (or father) strongly disapproves of cutting and would like not to cut her/his daughter, she/he may conform to the social norm of cutting her/his daughter. Not conforming may result in negative reactions from the people who matter to her/him, and conforming is likely to be rewarded by feeling that her/his daughter is welcomed and respected.<sup>33</sup>

**Figure 1.** Descriptive and injunctive norms<sup>34</sup>



“Expectation” is a kind of belief. However, whereas a belief is “any sort of disposition that is about the world” (for example “I believe that today is 21 August” or “I believe in aliens”), expectation is a “forward-looking belief” that entails time probabilities around an uncertain state of affairs. It is about what is going to happen, and presupposes continuity between the past and the present or future. Social expectations relate to other people’s behaviours and beliefs and are driven by relevant social networks.<sup>35</sup>

Normative<sup>36</sup> and empirical<sup>37</sup> expectations are crucial to norms change:

**As examples, I discuss children’s sexual exploitation, but my point is more general. Negative practices are part of a complex of norms, attitudes and values that support them. My work on social norms has many practical implications and recommendations for changing such practices. In particular, I stress the importance of changing people’s expectations, and of doing it in a public, collective way. I also recommend re-categorizing the practices that we find harmful in a way that is easily accepted and understood by the parties involved.**

**A norms-based approach “predicts consistency between expectations and actions” (and lack of consistency would suggest that other factors are at work). Since so many of our choices are interdependent, we do not simply have the option of making our choices without regard to what others do or expect us to do. We have to think about what they are going to do. My decision to drive on the right side of the road is completely based on my expectation that everyone else will drive on the right side of the road. If they are driving on the left, then so will I. Likewise, when I go to a party, I want to coordinate how dressed-up I get with how dressed-up I think everyone else will be. If I wear a T-shirt and shorts to a formal dinner party, I expect that other people will be upset with me.<sup>38</sup>**

C. Bicchieri, 2008, 2017.

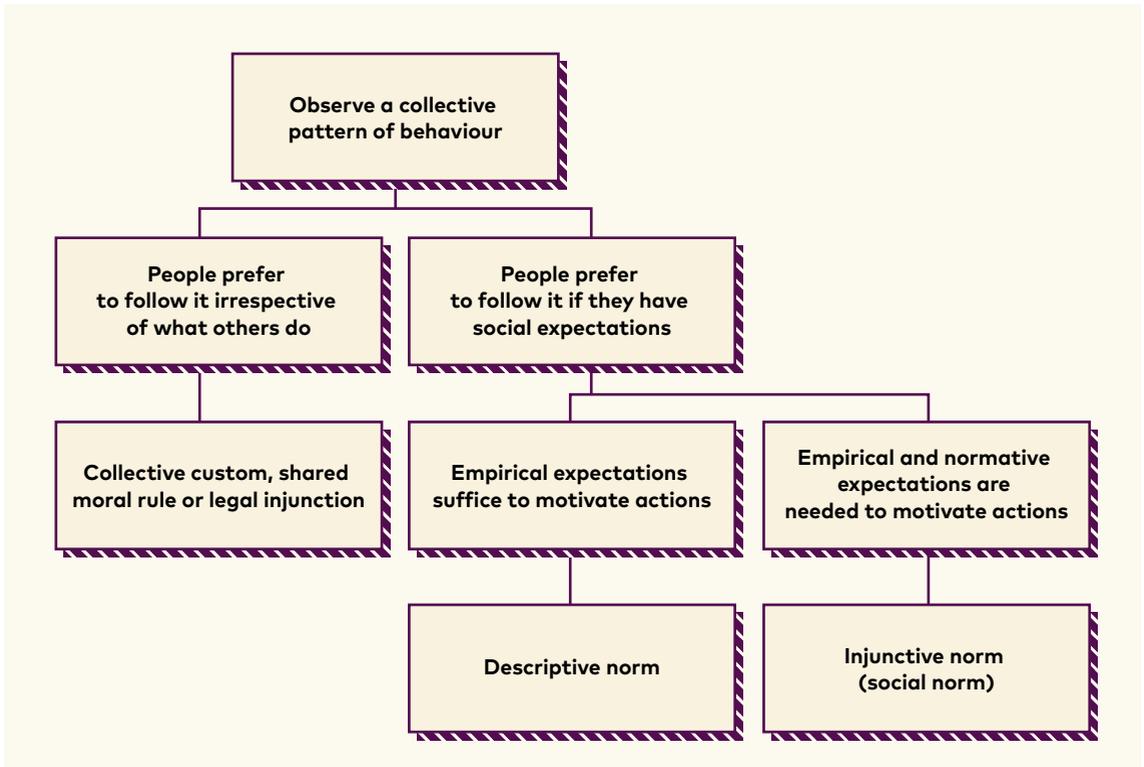
# 3.2

## Diagnosing a social norm<sup>39</sup>

Figure 2 shows that "social expectations", or lack of them, determine whether an observed practice is or is not a social norm<sup>40</sup> and more precisely whether or not it is independent or interdependent and (if so) what sort of dependence it is.

In contrast to independent practices, descriptive and injunctive norms are supported by social expectations within a reference network. A descriptive norm (such as a convention), such as driving on the right side of the road, needs only reciprocal "empirical" expectations to keep people following it ("I see others driving on the right side of the road"). A social norm such as "secluding women" will need reciprocal "empirical" expectations (I see that others women in my reference network are secluded) *and* "normative" expectations (I think that the important others in my reference network think that women should be secluded and may sanction me if I do not follow the norm) to survive.

Figure 2. Diagnostic process for identifying collective behaviour<sup>41</sup>



The following case study is about a mother's challenge in attempting to initiate a process of change.

## 3.3 Khadija's dilemma and the power of social sanctions: an illustrative case study of the conceptual background<sup>42</sup>

### 3.3.1. ISSUE

This case study describes the dilemma faced by Khadija, who would like to begin the process of change and is willing to change, but she fears social sanctions. It highlights the lack of communication between Khadija and others who would like to change, and the fact that, if everybody behaved as Khadija would prefer to behave, all would benefit.

### 3.3.2. CONTEXT

**Khadija is a devout Ansar Sunna Muslim from the Beni Amer tribal group in eastern Sudan. She lives with her extended family. When she leaves the house, she covers herself in a black abaya (garment) and face veil to be properly modest. As a girl, in accordance with Beni Amer tradition, she underwent infibulation. This is the most severe form of female genital mutilation and is known in Sudan as "pharaonic" procedure. Now Khadija has a six-year-old daughter who has not yet gone through female genital mutilation. Khadija attended a programme that covered the topic of harmful practices, where she learned about the health complications associated with female genital mutilation. She also learned that, contrary to common belief, the practice is not required by Islam.**

**Along with other women, she registered her daughter with the group of uncircumcised girls. Yet Khadija is troubled. Although she does not want her daughter to suffer from the health complications she heard about, she knows that men favour female genital mutilation for religious reasons. She also expects that her mother-in-law will have something to say about it.<sup>43</sup>**

### 3.3.3. DILEMMA

Khadija would like not to cut her daughter so that she does not cause her pain and risk health complications. However, she lives in a community that expects everyone to cut their daughters. In this context, without communicating with others about alternatives, she needs to think about the best solution for her daughter.

### 3.3.4. BEST SOLUTION

Note that Khadija cannot independently get out of "the state of the world", represented by the social norm of cutting, without ending up in a worse situation. In the absence of communication, Khadija is "better off" choosing to cut her daughter.

9

**A mother's story: challenges faced by those who begin the process of change**



"If I don't cut her, there won't be anyone to marry her", says Khadija. "I wish I didn't have daughters, because I am so worried about them."

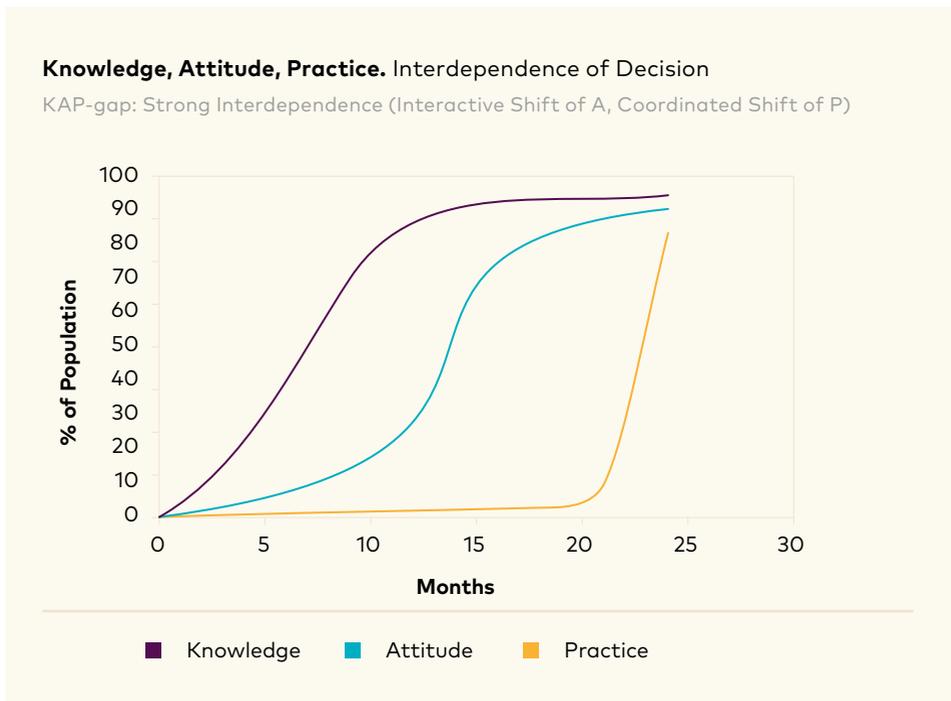


# 3.4

## Attitudes do not correlate with practice

It has been observed consistently that attitudes and practices are not positively correlated.<sup>44</sup> Individuals may positively judge behaviours that they do not engage in. Khadija has a strongly negative personal *attitude* towards female genital mutilation. However, she may "prefer"<sup>45</sup> her daughter to undergo the practice. Her preference may be "conditional" on what she "expects" from her community and family, and the sanctions her daughter will receive if she does not conform. Therefore, even though her *attitude* is to defect, in this situation her *preference* is to conform.

**Figure 3.** Interactive shift of attitude and coordinated shift of practice<sup>46</sup>



10

**Attitude is meant to be an evaluative disposition**



An attitude is meant as an evaluative disposition toward some object, person or behaviour. It can be expressed by statements such as "I like/dislike...", "I believe one should/should not..." or "I approve/disapprove of ...".

(Cristina Bicchieri, 2017)



Figure 3 shows that although knowledge and attitude might move in the same direction – “I acquire knowledge and more or less in an interactive way I gradually change my attitude”<sup>47</sup> – attitude and practice, when a decision is more “interdependent”, may not change in an interactive way. Instead, it can be a coordinated behavioural change, quite slow, and then sudden: **enough people have to believe that enough people are changing – seeing others manifest change is often the best way of being sure of it.**<sup>48</sup> In one way, social norms are very easy to change (or establish), but in another way they are very hard to change because of the need to get enough people to coordinate on making the change.

## 3.5

### Pluralistic ignorance, or the systematic bias in the information people reveal to each other<sup>49</sup>

The analysis of data from Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) and Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) shows discrepancies between the prevalence of female genital mutilation and the support for its continuation (attitude), suggesting that female genital mutilation may be carried out as a result of perceived social obligations (see Fig. 4 “Prevalence of versus support for female genital mutilation among women aged 15–49 years old”). Changes over time in the degree of discrepancy provide an indication of the extent of social change that may be under way, although this may not be sufficient to motivate large groups of families to stop the practice of female genital mutilation.

11

#### Pluralistic ignorance: definition

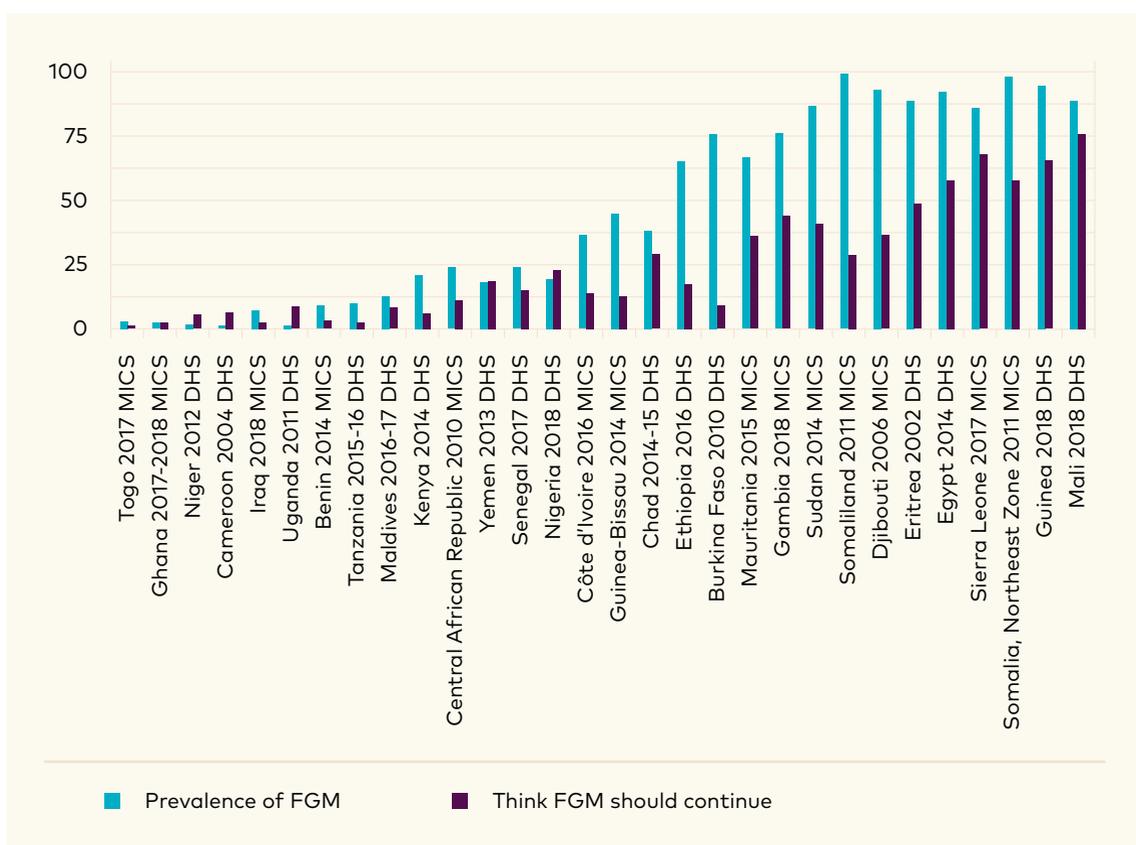


When there is “pluralistic ignorance”, individuals may incorrectly believe that most in their social group support a given behaviour because they see “others” conforming to it. Therefore, the norm persists, even though some, or even many, privately oppose it. The absence of transparent communication enables the norm to survive despite the fact that individual support for it has been eroded

(Adapted from Cristina Bicchieri, *Norms in the Wild*, 2017)

Systematic biases in the information people reveal to each other, (...) conspire to produce widespread overestimation of private support for social norms.<sup>50</sup> Pluralistic ignorance<sup>51</sup> means that, when uncertainty and misgivings about a norm go unrecognized, people who oppose the norm still perform it. Taken to the extreme, everyone in a community could be personally against female genital mutilation, but also believing that others support it because they practise it. This phenomenon can lead to a vicious circle in which genuine preferences remain hidden for a long time and therefore can be one of the social realities that support the persistence of the practice.<sup>52</sup>

**Figure 4.** Prevalence of versus support for female genital mutilation among women aged 15–49 years old<sup>53</sup>



12

### Pluralistic ignorance: a “belief trap”



In a state of pluralistic ignorance, individuals are caught into a “belief trap” and will keep following a norm that they deeply dislike. How long can this last? One may suspect that a norm that is so much disliked would not be stable, since even small shocks to the system of beliefs that support it would lead to its demise. Once the frequency of true beliefs is conveyed to the relevant population, a change would occur. This conclusion is only partially true. When actions are strongly interdependent, it is not sufficient to publicly disclose that most individuals dislike the norm and would like to do something different. Since a norm is supported by normative expectations, the participants must also be sure that its abandonment will not be followed by negative sanctions. People face a double credibility problem here: they must believe that the information they receive about others’ true beliefs and preferences is accurate, and they must also believe that everyone else is committed to change their ways. There are many ways to achieve these goals, and there are several examples in the literature of successful changes of negative norms by means of information campaigns, public declarations, and common pledges. (Bicchieri and Mercier, 2014)

## 3.6

### The spread of social norms through relevant social networks/ reference groups<sup>54</sup>

**S**ocial norms spread through relevant social networks – or networks of similarly situated others – where the individuals and groups are characterized by the structure of their connections (for example whom they talk to, are persuaded by, take orders from, get advice from). Relevant social networks (or reference groups) include those whose actions and expectations affect an individual’s actions.

For example, in the United Kingdom the reference group for driving on the left is all other drivers in the country. In India, because families usually marry within their caste, the reference group for age at marriage is their caste in the area. In the same village, the reference group for the adoption of latrines would be all who defecate around the village and all who are harmed by open defecation. However, a reference group is not always in geographical proximity. For some immigrants, their reference group is not the inhabitants of their current city or country – it is instead those living in their original home.



Mapping existing social networks can identify relevant individuals and groups whose expectations drive a particular social norm. Often, the notion of geographical community may cover only part of the relevant decision-making group, and so other parts must also be reached simultaneously.

Social network analysis can help us in two ways:

- First, it provides tools for diagnosing the situation by finding the *structural features* of the *relations* in a group.
- Second, it helps guide the best intervention for responding to those structural features.

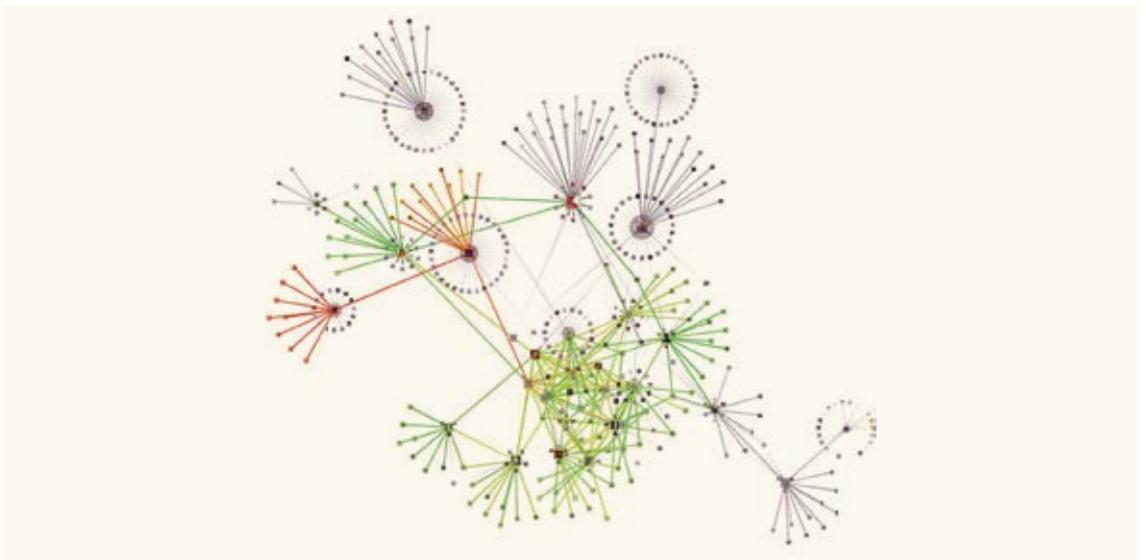
The unit of analysis is the "edge",<sup>55</sup> which represents the "relations" between people, rather than the individuals; it is important to look at the structure of these "edges", and at hierarchy and segmentation, to understand the spreading of norms.

Figure 5 shows the structure of these edges:

- Individuals are not independent; they are interdependent. We show this by connecting individuals (nodes) with relationships (edges).
- Nodes represent individuals, families or villages, depending on the level of analysis.
- Edges (also called ties) connect nodes and represent a particular relationship.

The same group might have multiple networks, each describing some kind of relationship.

**Figure 5.** Social networks representing intermarrying communities<sup>56</sup>



# 3.7

## Social norms and fertility transition: an illustrative case study on the conceptual background<sup>57</sup>

The following case study describes features of social norms regarding fertility in Bangladesh, and communities' opposition to contraceptives. Evident is the similarity of the social dynamics of the prevailing norms to those seen in the previous case in Sudan, and also the gender inequality implications of the social system. It illustrates some aspects of social and gender norms, norm rigidity, social sanctions, how traditions predate religions, the importance of social interactions and the role of social networks.

### 3.7.1. ISSUE

Although over the last few decades fertility rates have declined across the world, long delays and wide differences in the response to family planning programmes have also been frequently observed, both across and within countries.<sup>58</sup>

One explanation is that in a traditional economy many aspects of individual behaviour, including fertility, are socially regulated. Although such social regulation has advantages, it may prevent individuals from responding immediately to new economic opportunities.

### 3.7.2. CONTEXT

As neither the Koran nor the Hindu religious scriptures take a firm position on contraception, the attitude of the community in Bangladesh will typically follow the view of the local religious leader.<sup>59</sup> By making modern contraceptives available for the first time, the Maternal and Child Health – Family Planning (MCH-FP) project<sup>60</sup> ran counter to the tradition throughout rural Bangladesh of early and universal marriage followed by immediate and continuous child-bearing.<sup>61</sup>

Not surprisingly, the MCH-FP project faced strong opposition from community elders and local religious leaders, who were responsible for safeguarding the traditional norms.

In addition to this social opposition, the spread of contraception is hindered by “purdah”, the seclusion of women and the rigid segregation of work along gendered lines.<sup>62</sup> Purdah severely restricts the mobility of young married women, which would improve social interaction between them, and slows social change, including the distribution of modern contraceptives. Note that, although purdah is generally associated with Muslim societies, this concept of seclusion applies to both Hindu and Muslim people in Bangladesh. It has been suggested that this happens because the specific structure of purdah in Bangladesh and its association with gendered work patterns are specific to Bengali culture. To address this, community health workers meet each woman at her home every two weeks in an attempt to circumvent the restrictions on women's mobility.

### 3.7.3. RATIONALE

**Social norms typically emerge in environments characterized by multiple equilibria, to maintain the community in a preferred equilibrium.<sup>63</sup> Changes to the economic environment, such as making modern contraceptives more available, could reopen the possibility for such multiple equilibria to arise, which would explain the slow response to external interventions, as well as differential responses to the same external stimulus as each community gradually converges on a new reproductive equilibrium.<sup>64</sup>**



### 3.7.4. ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

The most striking result from *the norm-based game theory analysis* applied to this particular social space was that:

**Despite the fact that all individuals in the village have access to the same family planning inputs, individuals respond strongly to contraceptive prevalence within their own "religious group" in the village. Cross-religion effects are entirely "absent" in the data. In contrast, when we partition the village by other variables, such as age or education, we consistently observe "large and significant" cross-group effects.**

**We saw at the end that there appears to be no substitute for the social interactions among the women. And since these are very infrequent, contraceptive prevalence ultimately changed very slowly in the intervention area. With insight, a program that encouraged women to meet at the primary health clinic, instead of delivering services to their homes, might have been more effective despite the initial resistance and delays in adoption that would almost certainly have occurred.<sup>65</sup>**

**Table 1.** Co-existence and harmonization of law, morality and culture<sup>67</sup>

	Positive reason	Negative reason	Typical emotion in a violator
LEGAL NORMS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Legitimacy of authorities</li> <li>Respect for the law</li> </ul>	Penalties from authorities	Fear
MORAL NORMS	Good conscience	Bad conscience	Guilt
SOCIAL NORMS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Esteem</li> <li>Acceptance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of esteem</li> <li>Rejection</li> </ul>	Shame



# 3.8

## Three regulatory systems and associated emotions<sup>66</sup>

Finally, in addition to social norms, mechanisms that regulate behaviour include *legal norms*, which may prohibit a harmful norm, and *moral norms*, such as doing what is best for one's loved ones. These norms may act in harmony, reinforcing one another, or they may be at odds. Any analysis undertaken to inform policies and programmes aimed at eliminating a norm or web of norms needs to explore these three types of norm and how they interact.

The "reasons" to abide by a norm depend on the norm.<sup>68</sup> Thus, one way to explain each of the three regulatory systems is by considering the reasons why their corresponding norms are obeyed. One can obey *legal regulation* because one considers the law admirable, meaning that one admires the way in which it was created, how it is applied or the effects it produces. On the other hand, a major reason why people abide by the law is *fear of punishment*, such as fines or jail.

*Moral regulation* is closely linked to personal autonomy and the development of one's judgement. Obedience to moral norms can come from the pleasure of doing so, or from a sense of duty. On the other hand, some people obey moral norms because by doing so they feel consistent with themselves, which in turn produces satisfaction. For example, if one has as a moral principle not to tell lies, then not doing so, even when one is very tempted to, is gratifying. In these cases, one experiences harmony with oneself. The opposite feeling, a sensation of discord or discrepancy with oneself, works as a moral punishment, and this is known as guilt. Fear of guilt can also be a reason to obey moral regulation.

Finally, there is *cultural or social regulation*. How to dress for the occasion, how to address someone depending on the degree of familiarity and what type of relationship to establish with colleagues, among others, are behaviours that are regulated by social norms. In contrast to moral norms, social norms depend less on individual conscience and more on the group to which a person belongs. *Shame* is generally the main emotion that leads to social obedience and societies widely use it to keep a norm in place. However, this same feeling may be reversed and used to change a norm.

---

# The process of social norms change and illustrative case studies



# 4.1

## Abandoning old social norms and adopting beneficial ones

**S**ocial norms change is complex, discontinuous and iterative. Because it is subject to the social context, the specific social space where it unfolds is crucial. Situations might be far apart, very different. However, what is common in any situation are the steps that must be taken to advance the process, and, more importantly, a community or communities acting as the agent driving the change.

Figure 6<sup>69</sup> shows a certain number of steps, identified from theory and relevant field experiences, that might be considered when designing a programme to change social norms. At the beginning – step 1 – a “social norm diagnostic” might be considered (see section 3.2, Figure 2) to identify the practice being observed, for example whether the behaviour is independent or interdependent and, if the latter, what sort of dependence is involved. It is important to understand whether the “conditions” are fulfilled for a social norm to exist or whether other factors are at play. Also important are identifying the “reference groups” and designing the relevant “social networks”.

---

See Figure 6, steps 2 and 3:

- **research on social norms: what is practised, by whom, how and why**
- **mapping the reference group network and communication patterns.**

---

See Figure 6, steps 4 and 5:

- **facilitate discussions that inform people of harms, inform people of their rights**
- **support norm questioning, harmonization of moral, legal and social norms and values.**

The process needs to involve a sufficient number of people who together are willing to change and, in a coordinated manner, to say so publicly (public pledges in all their forms). There will therefore be a “lag of time”, during which the change might not be “seen” to be implemented, or properly grasped by available indicators, but it will be happening gradually in people’s minds while attitudes incrementally change.

---

13

### Comments on Figure 6

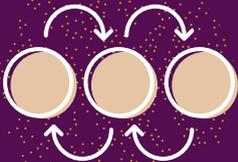


Figure 6 attempts to represent the processes of social norms change and a programme design framework. These processes are iterative, simultaneous and self-reinforcing. The arrow in the programme framework may seem to imply causality and linearity; this is not the case.

See Figure 6, step 6:

→ **support collective action and public pledges (commitments) to new norms and practices.**

---

A process that begins as community driven might be protected and supported by institutions and become widely recognized. See Figure 6, step 7:

→ **connect people to social and economic protection systems, publicize their actions.**

---

At the end of the process, an old norm is abandoned, for example "cutting girls", and a new norm is adopted, for example "keeping girls intact". See Figure 6, step 8:

→ **new norms and practices are stable.**

---

More generally, if one wants to be more explicit and amplify the change process by including gender norms and meta-norms, both at the beginning of and throughout the change process, one must analyse and understand the values and cultural "elements" in which a norm is embedded. For example, in India "child marriage" is embedded in a complex web and hierarchy of gender and social norms, including son preference, the low value of girls, arranged marriage, dowry cost and endogamy. This web of social and gender norms remains very strong and it is necessarily challenged by delaying marriage for girls.<sup>70</sup>

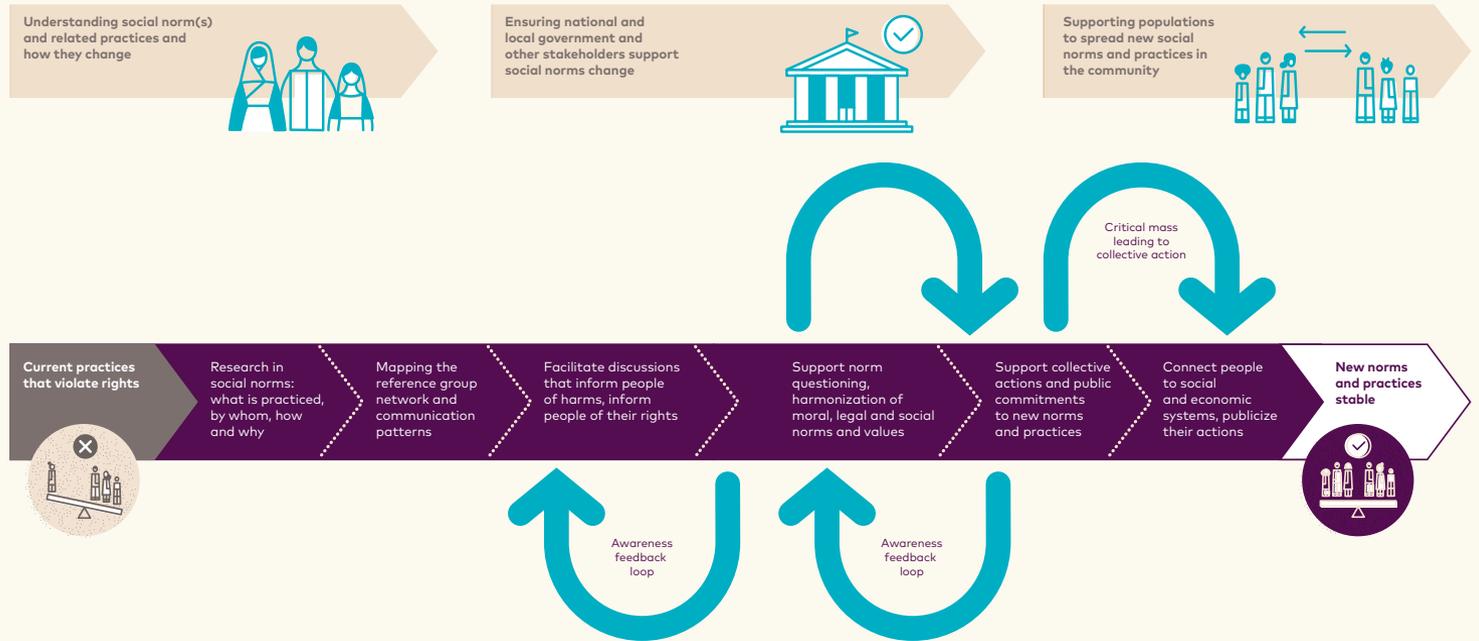
---

Therefore, when encountering a social practice one wants to change, one must first understand it by asking:

- **What is practised?**
- **By whom is it practised?**
- **How and why is it practised?**

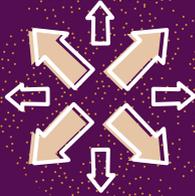
One should also think about whether the practice is a custom, a social norm, a simple convention, a response to the moral imperative to protect one's child, or a reaction to a difficult economic situation. All of these elements might be present in a given situation to various extents and their analysis should inform the local strategy.

**Figure 6.** Social norms change: programme design framework<sup>71</sup>



14

## Understanding a social practice



Why do people have conditional preferences? Why do they prefer to do something if they expect others to do it? Why do some behaviours spread? Why do they follow relevant social networks? Answering all of these questions is necessary to understand social change. Yet if norms exist because followers have certain preferences and expectations, an "external stimulus" might be needed to make people aware of inconsistencies in their own beliefs.

**Behaviour does not change smoothly because individuals may want to be reasonably sure that their choice to abandon a norm will not be penalized. The mechanism of coordination may not last long enough, or it may be heard by only part of the population, or there may be some doubt about the legitimacy of the signal. An imperfect coordinating mechanism may induce part of the population to initiate a behaviour, but if this behaviour is not substantial it may be too costly for people to sustain.<sup>72</sup>**

If so, people stop and return to the old norm, and the behaviour change becomes discontinuous (see feedback loops).

15

## Change may take place at intervals



Change may take place at intervals that represent the working of the coordinating mechanism. The process may continue, with stops and starts for a relatively long time, until a large enough majority move along.

(Cristina Bicchieri, 2017)

When referring to the imperfectly coordinated adoption of a new practice, this refers to change that is adopted in stepwise increments, beginning with a subset of the population; some adopters return to the old norm until a new and larger group of people attempt to adopt the new norm. This continues until a critical point is reached, at which time the new practice becomes stable, established among the population. Change is discontinuous, whereby coordination proceeds at intervals: the practice is adopted, then abandoned, then adopted again by greater numbers, then falls away, and so on until the critical point is reached and the change is embedded.

## 4.2

### The power of value deliberations: an illustrative case study of the process of change<sup>73</sup>

#### 4.2.1. ISSUE

In many situations, people “do not communicate”. The first step in programming with a social norms perspective might be to find a way to improve “transparent communication”, in various ways depending on the context. Here a Tostan<sup>74</sup> director’s letter to a field operator is reported, explaining how to facilitate discussions on violence and women’s rights among small groups in rural areas. It is worth noting how female genital mutilation emerges as an issue spontaneously during the discussions.

#### 4.2.2. METHODOLOGY

**In the session on the Human Right to be free from all forms of violence, the facilitator asks participants to define violence. Given this definition, the facilitator then asks participants to give example of violence against men, women and children in general, in the community, in the family, in the couple, etc. During this discussion, the participants often themselves identify female genital mutilation as a violence against girls and women and explain why. A discussion ensues. People start thinking of female genital mutilation differently. The facilitator asks what are our responsibilities in relation to this human right and the participants start reflecting on the needs to end all forms of violence in the family, community, etc. It is at this moment that the idea to end female genital mutilation starts germinating. They do this for the Human Right and Responsibilities to Health, to Be Free from all Forms of Discrimination, to Peace and Security, etc. During the whole module Tostan facilitators let the participants take the lead in discussing these issues as they start to identify important actions to take to stop human rights violations.**

**The women are thrilled because they may have wanted to end all forms of violence for many years, but because it was never discussed and seemed to be accepted by everyone else, the women could not stand up alone to oppose it. The class gives them the means to question, often for the first time, harmful practices, and realize there is general agreement on this subject from everyone, even the men, religious and traditional leaders. A surprise to everyone. They realize they often were following these practices from what we call “pluralistic ignorance”. They thought everyone agreed with this behaviour and it was no possible to question or change it. The class discussion and the organized diffusion (sharing the information discussed in class) to the rest of the community and other communities in their social network allow everyone to come to consensus around adopting new social norms and ending those that violate human rights.<sup>75</sup>**

#### 4.2.3. PROCESS OF CHANGE

Tostan methodology, together with other experiences and various theories, inspired the process of change illustrated in Figure 6. Value deliberations refer to steps 4 and 5 of the figure, which should be read as a series of steps that are often overlapping, sometimes synchronous, sometimes reversing. This process is in no way linear.

# 4.3

## Designing a media message to entertain and educate: an illustrative case study on the process of change<sup>76</sup>

This case study describes the power of television entertainment known as *edutainment*, in particular soap operas, in aiming to end intimate partner violence (IPV). “Edutainment” is the process of purposely designing and implementing a media message to both entertain and educate the audience to increase their knowledge about an issue, create favourable attitudes, shift social norms and change their behaviour.<sup>77</sup>

### 4.3.1. ISSUE

The aim of the prime-time South African television drama *Soul City* was to stop intimate partner violence, to allow abused women to feel able to make informed choices and to encourage people, including the police, to protect survivors.<sup>78</sup> The prevailing cultural norm in South Africa was for neighbours not to intervene in such a situation, even if they wanted to help.<sup>79</sup>

### 4.3.2. METHODOLOGY

In 1999, in the fourth series of *Soul City* (known as *Soul City IV*) in South Africa, a new collective behaviour was modelled to portray how neighbours might intervene in a situation involving intimate partners violence. People were taken through an emotional journey, which elicited deep engagement and collective shift of beliefs. The prime-time drama was watched concurrently by audiences of millions.

***Soul City's* methodology encourages social and behaviour change using an ecological model (KMG ecological factor) that builds on a mix of theories. It acts as a catalyst for collective efficacy and actions. The main transformative elements that determined the model are (i) enabling the environment, both structural and social, including social norms and law, for healthy choice; (ii) considering change a non-linear process; (iii) considering behaviour as the product of interactions between components of a complex system (complexity theory); (iv) considering change in the system linked by feedback processes; and (v) considering dialogue and debate, individual and community action and reflection, social learning, and self-efficacy and collective efficacy as key drivers of change. One of the intended outcomes is to change the perception of social norms. A fundamental principle is to make change visible and amplify it.**

What is important in this series is the attempt to change the norm by using the main emotion that leads to the enforcement of social norms, “shame”, which corresponds to step 4 in Figure 7, “destabilizing the norm and introducing alternative”. Neighbours publicly shame the perpetrator by banging pots and pans outside his house. The perpetrator’s social acceptance is at stake, IPV is no more condoned/tolerated. Shaming the perpetrators, because of social rejection of violence on intimate partners, is the most powerful driver of a lasting change in perpetrators’ behaviour.

16

**Censuring the abusers**



In *Soul City IV*, people “collectively” decide to breach the cycle of spousal abuse in a neighbouring home. When the next instance occurs, the neighbours gather outside the abuser’s residence and “bang pots and pans”, censuring the abuse.

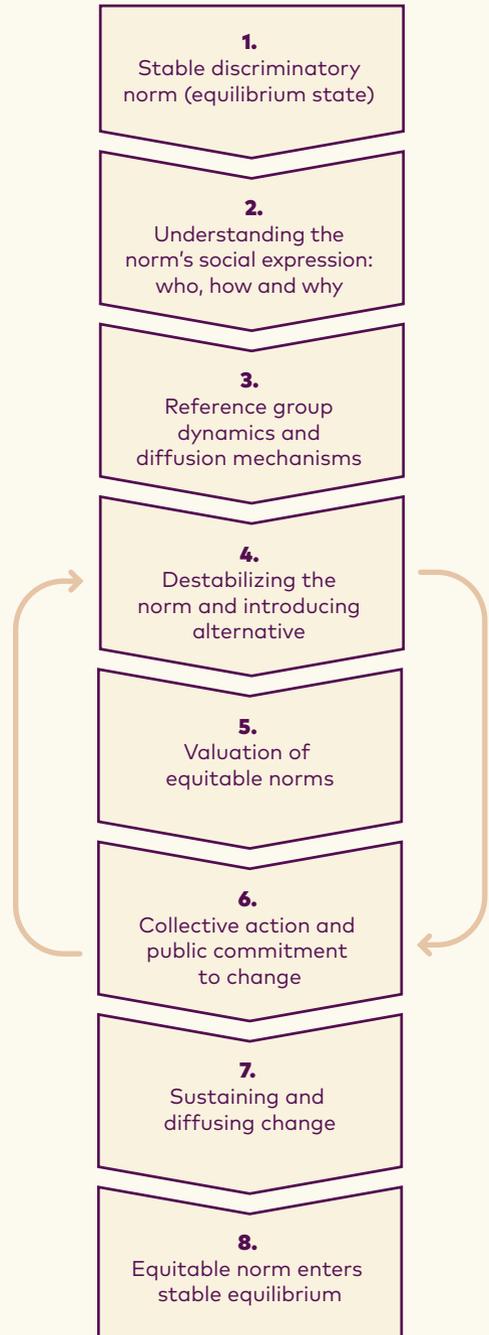


Compared with Figure 6 - **Social norms change: programme design framework** - this model performs a series of changes where some steps are reversed and the sequence is inverted. Figure 7 shows the new sequence.

However, using "emotions" to change social norms might not be possible. Although in the case of IPV "*shame*" might be a powerful deterrent and, therefore, used for *destabilizing the norm*, it might not be suitable for discouraging other harmful practices, of a different nature. IPV is perhaps more socially "*condoned*" than "*enforced*", and it is a form of violence with *intention of violence*. Other types of harmful practices are socially powerfully *enforced*, not only condoned - the *socially imposed ought* is pervasive - and they are sometime forms of violence "*without*" intention of violence, such as FGM. Therefore, mothers who subject their daughters to FGM, should not be shamed because they are trying to protect their daughters from social ostracism, a factor that should be taken into account. Their choice/preference depends on their social context.

Therefore, the way to deal with a maladaptive social norm depends on the *context* and the nature of the norm and the combination of social punishment and individuals' sensitivity to the norm.

**Figure 7.** Creating a new norm first, and then abandoning the old one (inversion of Figure 6)



# 4.4

## Saleema: unharmed, intact, pristine: an illustrative case study on the process of change<sup>80</sup>

The Saleema communication initiative emerged out of the recognition of the importance of changing values associated with female genital mutilation in Sudan. Language is critical: in Sudanese colloquial language, the word for Female Genital Mutilation is طهور *tahoor* or purification showing that the culture associates female genital mutilation with one of the most cherished social and moral values.

### 4.4.1. THEORY

The theory behind Saleema is that, in "re-categorizing" existing values and using them to re-create the scripts around the "completeness of a girl's body", it is crucial to build on the "foundational values" that can trigger engagement with change. Information provided should be coherent with the traditional belief system.

For example, "Every girl is born Saleema" respects the foundational values of purity and virginity in Sudanese society, but it redefines these, giving a more positive connotation to the value of an uncircumcised girl. This is in line with "persuasion theory",<sup>81</sup> which says that people want a coherent belief system.

### 4.4.2. METHODOLOGY

The Saleema initiative "re-categorizes" the concept of the "completeness of the girl's body". *Saleema* means purity, but also means *whole, healthy in body and mind, unharmed, intact, pristine, in a God-given condition and perfect*. It is also a girls' name.

**Saleema aims to stimulate new discussions about female genital mutilation/cutting at family and community levels; discussions are "new" with regard to both who talks to whom ("talk pathways") and the specific issues ("talk content"). Saleema is as much about introducing a range of positive communication approaches and methods into the discourse about female genital mutilation at all levels as it is about language. The initiative represents a shift in focus from the problem to the solution; the mood is always confident, upbeat, positive and inclusive...<sup>82</sup>**



When Mrs. Khitma, a local Tutti Island poet, and some of her peers were young, being uncut was considered "ghalfa", a word with shameful associations. But that has changed with the success of the Saleema national campaign, led by Sudan's National Council on Child Welfare and its National Strategic Planning Centre.

Tutti Island is an agrarian community situated at the confluence of the Nile River and its two main tributaries.

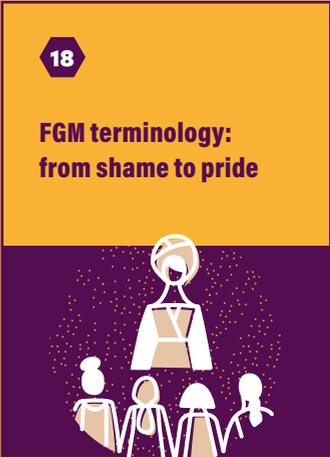
The campaign aims to link the state of being uncut with a range of positive qualities, including "whole, healthy in body and mind, unharmed, intact, pristine, and untouched, in a God-given condition". It encourages a new discourse and way of thinking about female genital mutilation within the family and community as an opening for new social norms to emerge around the idea that being uncut is natural and desirable.



Social marketing techniques play an important role in the development of both visual materials and message texts for Saleema, particularly "repetition with variation over a long exposure time". The Saleema "toolkit" is a collection of communication strategies, materials and activities designed for use at two main levels: (i) multimedia materials used mainly through wide-coverage media channels, including radio and TV (mass media); and (ii) small printed materials, training activities and activity guidance to support implementation directly at community level. New tools continue to be added, with a particular focus on strengthening and expanding the use of mass media to increase awareness and broaden engagement.

Top-down messaging is avoided in favour of communication that invites people to help construct the meanings of relevant messages and stimulates interpersonal discussion. In the Saleema materials, "*change is always positioned where a range of voices belonging to women, men, and children are rising*". This occurs repeatedly at different stages of the change process.<sup>83</sup>

In all materials, the language and style evoke everyday speech; ordinary people's wisdom is predominant. "Every girl is born Saleema, let her grow Saleema" became the core idea behind the national campaign launched in 2010.



**18**

**FGM terminology:  
from shame to pride**

The Saleema "rebranding" has additional impact because of the swirling pattern and the orange, green and white palette that signify the campaign. "We took Saleema everywhere on Tutti Island because we knew that we needed a broad outreach to plant the change – from wedding ceremonies, to consultations with families, to women's coffee sessions, to family discussion picnics and school outreach", explained Mama Igbal. "Scales have been turned upside down in our community; being uncut is now a source of pride", she added.

# 4.5

## Shifting to daughter preference in one generation: an illustrative case study on the process of change<sup>84</sup>

The Republic of Korea appears to have shifted to daughter preference, away from a deep-rooted son preference culture, in one generation.

### 4.5.1. EVIDENCE

Evidence comes from an analysis of birth registration records in the Republic of Korea since the 1980s. In the 1980s, a change in the sex ratio, favour of male infants, became apparent, fuelled by *fertility decline* and the spread of *prenatal sex screening* technology. The preponderance of male births (sex ratio at birth) peaked in the early 1990s at 116 males to 100 females, and from then on followed a downwards trend. In 2015, the national sex ratio at birth reached a normal rate of 105.3 males to 100 females.

### 4.5.2. CONTEXT

Some factors affecting gender preference that may have triggered the *norm shift* from son preference to daughter "high valuation" can be attributed to the Republic of Korea's *stunning economic growth* since the 1970s, and particularly since the 1990s: a change in the "value of son" as caregiver and supporter in old age, the higher educational attainment of women, the higher status of women in family and society, the women's movement in the 1990s, regulations and legal policy actions against gender discrimination and sex selective abortion, and a well-designed communication campaign to value daughters.

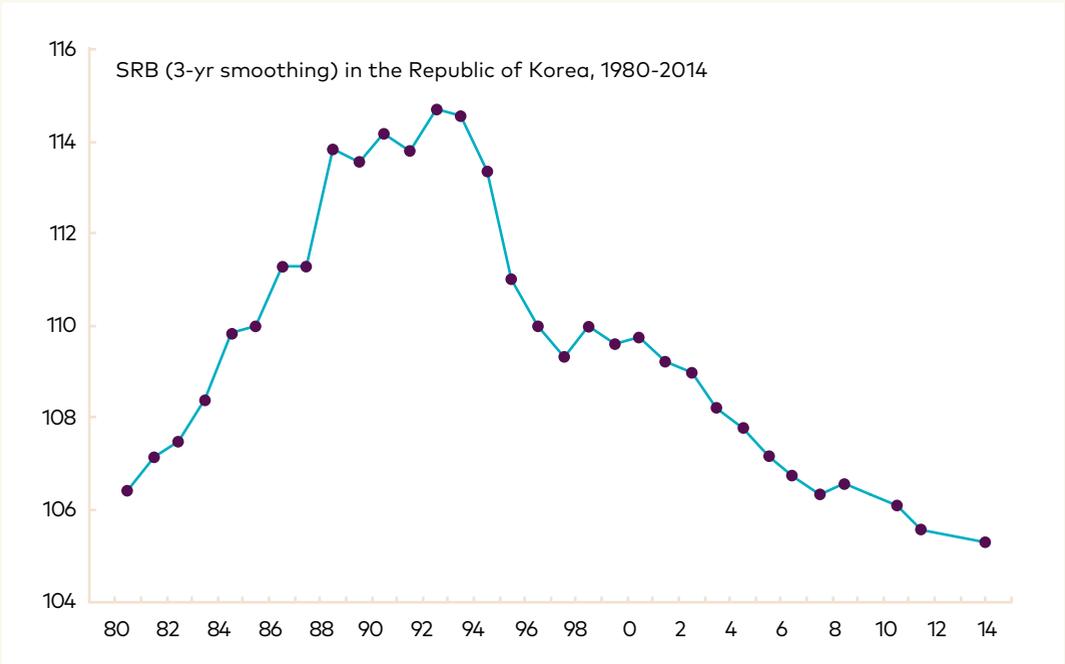
Posters were used to highlight the value of daughters, with slogans such as "daughters send their parents on trips by aeroplane, but sons offer bus ride tours" or "having two daughters is a gold medal, having two sons is cause for hanging oneself". One 61-year-old woman said: "When I tell people I have three sons and no daughters, they say they are sorry for my misfortune. Within a generation, I have turned from the luckiest woman possible to a pitiful mother."

### 4.5.3. DISCUSSION

The causes of this shift are yet to be understood. Was it because of the rapid economic growth of the Republic of Korea in the 1990s? Or is it attributable to the country's women's movement? Or the result of a well-orchestrated communication and education campaign? Whatever the reason, the shift was rapid and massive, reminiscent of other similar changes from harmful norms, such as the disappearance of foot binding in China at the beginning of the twentieth century. Data from the sex ratio at birth transition model in the Republic of Korea (1980–2014) – see Figure 8 – show that son preference peaked in the 1990s before falling precipitously in the following years and levelling off in 2014. In fact, *the Republic of Korea has been a unique case in the "sex ratio at birth" transition: after drastic ups and downs over the past three decades, the transitional epidemic is over.*<sup>85</sup>

**Figure 8.** "Sex ratio at birth" (SRB) transition in the Republic of Korea, 1980–2014

Source: <http://kosus.kr> for birth registration data



# Theory of change



Effective programming to change expectations and achieve sustained abandonment of a maladaptive practice requires a multi-sectoral, holistic approach, informed by a *social norms perspective* with elements of *game theory*, and sensitive to *cultural constructs*. The report continues here with a theory of change that conceptualizes the process complexity in all forms, emerging from the level of human interaction and driving towards the role of institutions.

It posits as crucial:

- leveraging and supporting existing positive social forces;
- giving greater voice, visibility and resonance to those who have already committed to the new norm; and
- defining four key outcomes in order to promote positive change both regionally and globally. Four key outcomes are listed in Figure 9.

**Figure 9.** Key outcomes of FGM programming

OUTCOME 1	OUTCOME 2	OUTCOME 3	OUTCOME 4
Countries have an enabling environment conducive to eliminating FGM or other maladaptive norms at all levels and in line with human rights principles.	Girls and women are empowered to exercise and express their rights by transforming social and gender norms.	Girls and women have access to appropriate, quality and systemic services for FGM prevention, protection and care.	Countries have better capacity to generate and use evidence and data for making policy and improving programmes.

# 5.1

## Adherence to a new behaviour<sup>86</sup>

The theory of change also takes into account those social norm theoretical principles by which, regardless of individual attitudes, adherence to the new behaviour is conditional on individuals' perceptions about what those who matter to them find acceptable. For example, in the case of female genital mutilation, especially where there is high prevalence and a perceived religious obligation, such as in Guinea and Somalia, individuals may be reluctant to make it known to others that they wish to end the practice.

It should be noted the process of social norms change is mainly a **collective process** – no individual can change on their own without ending in a worse situation; if individuals have increased opportunities for argumentation,<sup>87</sup> safe spaces and platforms for values deliberations, the new behaviour will be adopted faster (see Figure 10). Through facilitated discussion, it becomes possible to conclude as a group that, for example, "keeping girls intact" is a better way to achieve the shared value of doing the best for the girls, the family and the community. Moreover, it allows individuals to see that others may join them in taking on the new behaviour. This results in increased solidarity in, and confidence and agency about, adopting the new norm among an entire group. In addition, as female genital mutilation, or any other maladaptive norm, is not addressed as a stand-alone issue and calls into question the different treatment of boys and girls, discussions and awareness-raising sessions within communities and institutions can improve "gender equality" at all levels.

19

### Public declarations

Declaration of Tutti Island, Sudan



We, the grandsons and daughters of Sheikh Hamad Wad Mariom, declare our abandonment of FGM. This abandonment is derived from our belief that FGM has negative health and social consequences and has no solid religious basis. By this declaration, we commit to abandon this harmful practice and to work to make Tutti free from FGM.

Tutti Island is surrounded by three major cities: Khartoum, Omdurman and Khartoum North. Its inhabitants trace their heritage to Sheikh Hamad Wad Mariom, considered the great-grandfather of the population.

**Figure 10.** Factors in the abandonment of an old norm and creation of a new norm<sup>88</sup>



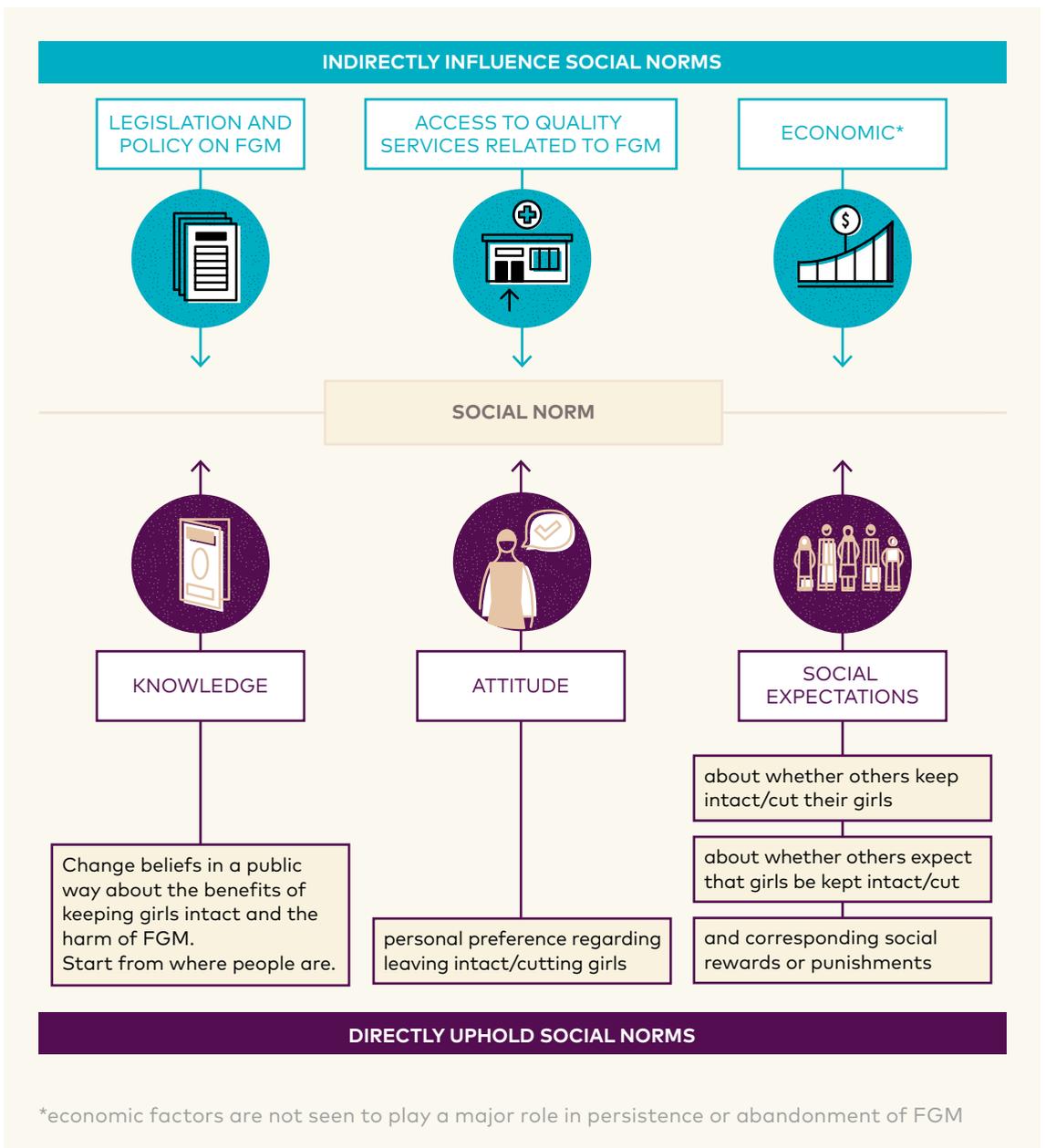
## 5.2

### Creating space for discussion with governments, institutions and services, and public declarations

**T**he importance of going beyond providing information and creating spaces for discussion applies also to government institutions and service providers. If they collectively discuss and explicitly agree to improve the health and well-being of girls and communities, they too can understand and have *common knowledge*<sup>89</sup> that "keeping girls intact" aligns with this goal, as well as with their own service goals. This will, in turn, increase their collective capacity to support the movement to end female genital mutilation/cutting. Furthermore, if one institution – for example a sectoral ministry – takes an official stand and has platforms through which to engage with other ministries, systemic change will accelerate.

The theory of change also takes into account the other ways in which services and national policy and legislation play an important role. The combination of factors influencing human behaviour is illustrated in Figure 11 and includes knowledge, attitudes, social expectations, legal and policy contexts, service provision and economic factors.<sup>90</sup>

**Figure 11.** Factors that contribute to continuing or abandoning female genital mutilation<sup>91</sup> and equally apply to other maladaptive norms that share the same social dynamics



Years of experience across countries has indicated that perhaps the most important consideration when determining the appropriate mix of activities in a particular setting is the "readiness" of the population to adopt the new norm. Although there is not yet a precise measure of this "readiness", local partners typically have a good sense of when it has been reached. At this point, a collective stance is taken in a public way through *public declarations or other forms of public pledges*; this signals a shift from conditional to actual commitment. However, it is understood that public declarations do not guarantee compliance with abandoning the practice, although for some it represents a milestone in the process because it signals a change in societal expectations.

It is also noted here that a *media model of collective efficacy* showing, for example, "neighbours towards banging pots and pans to breach the cycle of spousal abuse" also allows an important form of "para-social" public declaration.

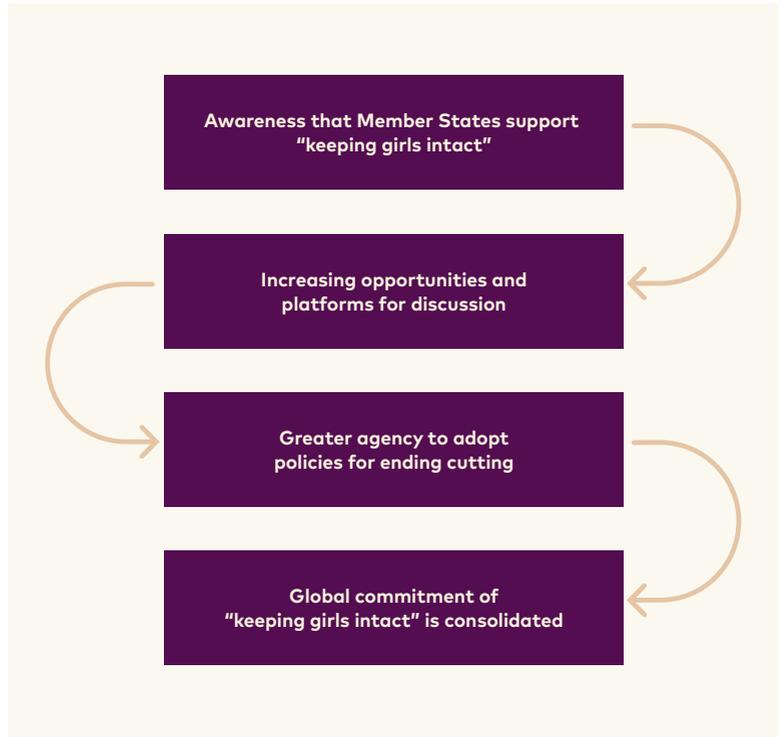
---

## 5.3

### Promoting positive change regionally and globally

**T**he theory of change is also the logic for choosing and pursuing strategies at both regional and global levels: when countries see that others are committed to ending female genital mutilation/cutting or other maladaptive practices, and support relevant policies, they are more likely to do the same. Major regional and global platforms, including the Summits of the African Union, the General Assembly of the United Nations, the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women and the United Nations Human Rights Council, are important for enabling Member States to discuss issues. Commemorating the International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation is an especially important way to highlight the increasing support across countries for abandoning the practice. These platforms can contribute to reports by the Secretary-General of the United Nations on female genital mutilation/cutting and assist Member States with drafting relevant resolutions. They could also support Member States in organizing high-level events that increase visibility of the commitment to ending female genital mutilation/cutting. In addition, when working with regional and international media it is important to emphasise the impact of these platforms and mechanisms by granting them extensive coverage (see Figure 12).

**Figure 12.** Social norm formation at the global and regional levels



## 5.4

### A move towards resonance and amplification

**A**s stated, changing a social norm or a web of norms follows the same principles in any social space, as it stems from basic human behaviour. However, the context is crucial. This means that, although social norm dynamics follow common theoretical principles, the interventions in the field can be very different. This depends on, among other things, local beliefs and macroeconomic structures. That said, an important hypothesis remains, as described in Box 20.

20

**An important hypothesis (FGM is upheld as example)**



If policies and legislation are in place to eliminate FGM (or other maladaptive norms), and they are appropriately resourced, and if women and girls at risk of and affected by FGM are able to access comprehensive services, and if individuals, families and communities commit to abandoning FGM and adopt the new norm, then FGM will be abandoned at the household, community and society levels by 2030.

**Figure 13.** Movement to accelerate the abandonment of female genital mutilation<sup>92</sup>

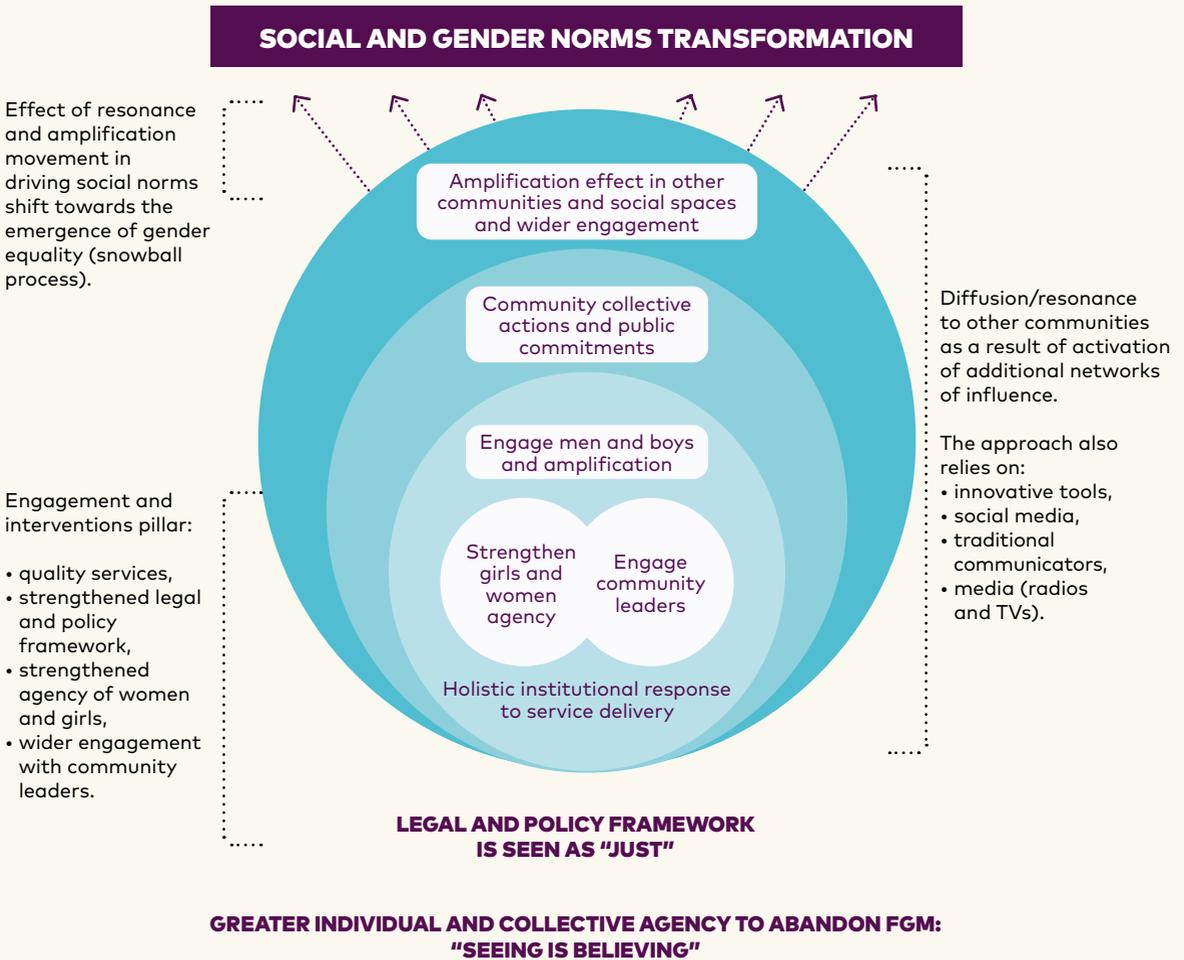


Figure 13 depicts a resonance and amplification movement for social and gender norms transformation, where collective action and public commitment are central.





# Recommendations



# 6.1

## Social norms and gender rules

The authors like to first reflect briefly on the difficulty of separating "social norms" from "gender ideologies and rules". *This is because (i) gender ideologies and rules are social norms per se; (ii) gender norms affect all other social norms; and (iii) almost all other social norms have an impact on the balance of power between males and females. This makes it difficult to apply "gender" to "social norm theory" as though they are separate. Even when gender does not appear to be an issue, it has the potential to be, and so it has to be taken into account. (This is one of the reasons why almost all development agencies have a policy that gender should be considered in all aspects of their work.)*<sup>93</sup> Therefore, this section will indulge in an analysis of some salient elements of social norms change, keeping in mind that changing a gender-biased social norm will, as a consequence, weaken negative gender rules and ideologies in a social system.

A central challenge is to understand social norms as "contextually rooted" and, concurrently, to take into account the "similarity" of their social dynamics. Therefore, any experience that leads to a social norm *shift* can be extrapolated, modified and contextualized to any social space where social norms are at stake. Female genital mutilation and the seclusion of women, although apparently different and often present in widely separated social spaces, display theoretically similar social dynamics.

21

**Norms reproduce underlying gendered relations of power**



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 marginalizing and subordinating others by normalizing shame, inequality, indifference or invisibility. It is important to note that these norms reflect and reproduce underlying gendered relations of power, and that is fundamentally what makes them difficult to alter or transform.

(Sen and others, 2007, p. 28)

## 6.2

### Enhancing the capabilities of individuals<sup>94</sup>

**S**tructural dimensions that anchor norms – after all, norms are not free-floating – are macroeconomic systems such as politics, kinship, marriage and gender rules affected by economic, political and technological developments. Unequal gender rules are a crucial aspect of these structures. Thus, social norms are materially, historically and culturally rooted and ingrained in a community. However, this does not mean that they do not change; the world community is witnessing a change in norms. The role of human agency, both individual and collective, is very important to this. Individuals and groups contribute to this change by resisting old norms or initiating new behaviours that they find more suitable. Socioeconomic transformation forms the background to the success of much norms change, as shown by the example from the Republic of Korea of the shift from son preference. Factors that enhance the capabilities of individuals, such as girls receiving education and women participating in the workforce, are the essence of successfully adopting new norms. Strengthening agency through capability enhancement (A. Sen's approach<sup>95</sup>) is, therefore, extremely important. This is how struggles for empowerment (material and psychological/normative) and rights lead to the acquisition of capabilities that in turn leads to the exercise of agency to achieve a desired outcome.<sup>96</sup> A "resonance and amplification approach" may be helpful in amplifying systemic change when social and gender norms are at stake.

22

#### Economic vulnerability and dowry



Economic vulnerability in rural Bangladesh manifests itself in various guises in decisions related to early marriage. The foremost among them is in reducing the number of dependants by marrying off a daughter at the earliest feasible time when she starts receiving proposals. Dowry as a major cost has to be calculated in taking a decision for marriage. Thus, proposals asking for no or little dowry are especially attractive and are therefore more difficult to prevent. Although the findings from the qualitative research on the entire intervention (Kishori Abhijan program) reveal desperate attempts by parents to make as "good" a choice for their daughter as their economic situation allows them to, the very poor often believe that they do not have a choice. They can then only rely on developing/ maintaining certain qualities (usually in the realm of demeanour, reputation, education and certain skills) of their daughter that have some value sought by boys' families to partially compensate for their inability to pay an adequate dowry.

(S. Amin and others, Key Factors of Early Marriage in Bangladesh, unpublished, 2005, pp. 48–54)

## 6.3

### Context is crucial

**C**ontext is crucial. For example, trying to change a norm such as female genital mutilation/cutting, addressing social restrictions that prevent the rapid spread of contraception in a given area, or creating a media model of “collective efficacy” are all situations in which understanding is needed of how the norms are expressed (who, how and why).

Compliance with prevailing norms depends on attitudes and beliefs, and agency (that is, people’s ability to make and act on their own decisions). As explained, norms can be so powerful and widespread that people do not consider the possibility of “defecting”. Yet even the most conservative, conformist societies give rise from time to time to “free thinkers” and rebels – people who do not accept prevailing norms and are willing to risk social disapproval to follow their beliefs.

People’s beliefs, attitudes and agency reflect their personality (their individual drive to conform or rebel) and their personal history (for example their families’ values, and ideas they have come across from peers, education, religion and mass media). They also reflect (but are not determined by) socioeconomic circumstances: for example, whether people risk financial loss from complying (or not complying) with particular norms and, crucially, whether their status in a family, peer group or community allows them to negotiate or challenge accepted norms and practices. Typically, adolescent girls, being both young and female, are expected to comply with decisions made by adults, and often have less room than their brothers to challenge these or to follow an alternative path.<sup>97</sup>

Also important in analysing what causes the perpetration of gender norms is an understanding of whether or not the strength of a norm or web of norms is *genuine*. Behaviours which at first glance are claimed to be socially enforced may actually stem from, for example, economic vulnerability.

---

## 6.4

### Conclusions

**A** crucial recommendation emerging from the issues discussed might be to keep an eye on the complexity of “norms and gender equality”. A comprehensive overview of the problem, specifically of the cumulative impact of normative behaviours on a social and cultural system, might help to solve gender issues, which continue to be unsolved or even non-perceived. The Joint Programme’s proposal, in line with the 2030 Agenda’s objectives, is to agree on the importance of changing discriminatory norms (or web of norms) in achieving gender equality. Changing or shifting even a single, marginal element (the norm) might help to weaken a gender-biased cultural system and drive positive change.

The theory of change, conceived by absorbing innovative reflections and thoughts from the field, postulates that a “comprehensive norm and gender vision” is crucial. Pervasive social normative changes, and therefore gender-related changes, happen when a localized change in norms spreads widely, and the new norms are assimilated and incorporated into all levels of society.

---

# Endnotes

- 1 Cristina Bicchieri, *Norms in the Wild* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 4.
- 2 Coursera, Course on Social Norms and Social Change, online, offered by The University of Pennsylvania and UNICEF, week 2, Instructor C. Bicchieri.
- 3 The UNFPA–UNICEF Joint Programme on the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation has piloted and scaled up the social norms perspective since its outset in 2008.
- 4 Gerry Mackie, chapter 2, “The social dynamics of female genital mutilation/cutting”, and annex 2, “Organizing the process: Critical mass, tipping point, coordinated abandonment”, in *Coordinated Strategy to Abandon Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting in One Generation*, UNICEF Technical Note (2007), pp. 13–18 and pp. 45–49.
- 5 Thomas C. Schelling, *The Strategy Of Conflict*, Harvard University Press, 1960.
- 6 A theoretical point at which there is rapid change (not identifiable in practice).
- 7 C. Bicchieri, *The Grammar of Society*, 2006 and *Norms in the Wild*, 2017; C. Bicchieri, G. Mackie University of Pennsylvania and UNICEF Course on Social Norms and Change, 2010–2015.
- 8 UNFPA–UNICEF, “Introduction & Bibliography”, in *Manual on Social Norms and Change* (2017), pp. 6–7.
- 9 It should be noted, to offer a wider perspective, that until recently the Catholic religion had an ambiguous position on honour killing in Italy; It should be noted also that the Penal Code in Italy until 1981 granted a special status to the so-called “delitto d’onore” or honour killing, mandating extreme leniency in judging the killing of “spouses, sisters, daughters caught in illicit sex”.
- 10 Adapted from Kwame Anthony Appiah, *The Honour Code, How Moral Revolutions Happen* (New York, W. W. Norton & Company, 2010).
- 11 Gerry Mackie, “Ending foot binding and infibulation: A convention account”, *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 61, No. 6 (1996), pp. 999–1017, and Gerry Mackie, chapter 2, “The social dynamics of female genital mutilation/cutting”, and annex 2, “Organizing the process: Critical mass, tipping point, coordinated abandonment”, in *Coordinated Strategy to Abandon FGM/C in One Generation* (2007), pp. 13–18 and 45–49.
- 12 A number of critics of rational choice models have pointed to the flaw of assuming a direct link between an individual’s intention and their behaviour, and stress the importance of understanding the interaction of decision-makers and the context in which decisions are made. As an alternative to the rational choice model, Mackie (1996, 2000, 2007) proposed a game theory model, social convention theory, which delineates the means by which the actions of individuals are interdependent, necessitating coordinated change among interconnected actors.
- 13 M. G. De Vita, personal note, presentation for UNFPA Global Consultation on Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting, Addis Ababa, 30 July–3 August, 2007.
- 14 M.G. De Vita, personal note, Training on Social Convention Theory, Kombissiri, Burkina Faso, 10–20 April 2010.
- 15 This situation has been defined as “a collective outcome of individual choices” (D. Lewis, 1975, p. 25).
- 16 To understand this, norms should be thought of as “equilibrium states”. An equilibrium state is a situation involving several individuals or groups in which each action is the best reply to everyone else’s action. It is a situation of stable mutual adjustment: everyone anticipates everyone else’s behaviour, and all of these anticipations turn out to be correct. An equilibrium gives rise to a self-fulfilling prophecy that individuals formulate about each other’s actions and it is what the group will end up choosing if everyone is trying to do the best thing they can. In Khadija’s case (see section 3.3), given that everyone is trying to do what they feel is best for their daughters, everyone chooses female genital mutilation/cutting; however, all would be better off if they cooperated to abandon the practice.
- 17 Adapted from Overseas Development Institute, *Social Norms, Gender Norms and Adolescent Girls: A Brief Guide*, part of the Knowledge to Action Resource Series 2015 (2015), p. 6.
- 18 Sen, G., Ostlin, P. and George, A. (2007) Unequal, Unfair, Ineffective and Inefficient. Gender Inequality in Health: Why it Exists and How We Can Change It. *Final Report to the WHO Commission on Social Determinants of Health*. Solna: Karolinska Institute.



- 19 Adapted from Overseas Development Institute, *Research and Practice Note*, part of the Knowledge to Action Resource Series 2015, p 6.
- 20 Kandiyoti, D.1988, 'Bargaining with patriarchy', *Gender and Society* 2(3): 274–290.
- 21 Nahid Toubia, *Legislation as a Tool for Behavioral and Social Change*, Proceedings of the Afro-Arab Expert Consultation on Legal Tools for the Prevention of Female Genital Mutilation, Cairo, 21–23 June 2003 (the Italian Association for Women in Development (AIDOS) and No Peace Without Justice). See also UNFPA–UNICEF, *Manual on Social Norms and Change*, 2016, Module 3, Reading 3.2.
- 22 Marcus R. and Harper C., 2014 *Gender Justice and Social Norms – Processes of Change for Adolescent Girls*.
- 23 Adapted from Overseas Development Institute, *Research and Practice Note*, part of the Knowledge to Action Resource Series 2015, produced as part of a four-year programme, "Transforming the Lives of Adolescent Girls", involving fieldwork in Ethiopia, Uganda, Nepal and Vietnam, 2015.
- 24 Ibid.
- 25 R. Kaur, Indian Institute of Technology, New Delhi, India, UNFPA Expert Group Meeting on Gender–Biased Harmful Practices, Brussels, 30–31 May 2016.
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 Overseas Development Institute, *Social Norms, Gender Norms and Adolescent Girls: A Brief Guide*, 2015, p. 8.
- 28 Kyomuhendo Bantebya, G., Muhanguzi, F.K. and Watson, C. (2013) *Adolescent Girls and Gender Justice: Understanding Key Capability Domains in Uganda*.
- 29 Adapted from Overseas Development Institute, *Research and Practice Note*, part of the Knowledge to Action Resource Series 2015, produced as part of a four-year programme, "Transforming the Lives of Adolescent Girls", involving fieldwork in Ethiopia, Uganda, Nepal and Vietnam, 2015.
- 30 Jones, N., Presler–Marshall, E. and Tran, T.V.A. (2014a) *Early Marriage among Viet Nam's Hmong: How Unevenly Changing Gender Norms limit Hmong Adolescent Girls' Options in Marriage and Life*.
- 31 R. Kaur, Indian Institute of Technology, New Delhi, India, UNFPA Expert Group Meeting on Gender–Biased Harmful Practices, Brussels, 30–31 May 2016
- 32 Beniamino Cislighi How and Why Norms Matter For Sustainable Development (London, Learning Collaborative To Advance Normative Change, 2017).
- 33 Ibid.
- 34 Ibid., p. 1.
- 35 Ryan Muldoom, "Reference networks includes all others whose actions and expectations affect an individual's action" (personal communication, 2012).
- 36 Normative expectations: not only do we expect others to conform, we are also aware that we are expected to conform.
- 37 According to Cristina Bicchieri, *The Grammar of Society* (Cambridge University Press, 2006, p. 11), empirical expectations are "expectations of conformity matter – in other words, one expects people to follow a certain norm in a certain situation because he/she has observed people doing just that over a long period of time".
- 38 Cristina Bicchieri, *Norms in the Wild* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2017); see also UNICEF–UNFPA, *Manual on Social Norms and Change*, Module 1, Handout 1.2 (2017).
- 39 Cristina Bicchieri, *Norms in the Wild* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2017).
- 40 Adapted from Cristina Bicchieri, *Penn–UNICEF Course on Social Norms and Change* (2012), and *Norms in the Wild* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 58–59.
- 41 Adapted from Cristina Bicchieri, *Norms in the Wild* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2017); see also UNFPA–UNICEF, *Manual on Social Norms and Change*, Module 1 (2016).
- 42 Ellen Gruenbaum, *FGM in Sudan: Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices. Qualitative Research on Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting in West Kardofan and Kassala States* (UNICEF Sudan Country Office, Khartoum, 2004). See UNFPA–UNICEF, *Manual on Social Norms and Change*, Module 1, Handout 1.1.
- 43 UNICEF Innocenti Research Digest, *Changing a Harmful Social Convention* 2015, Box 5, p. 13; taken from Ellen Gruenbaum, "FGM in Sudan: Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices. Qualitative Research on Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting in West Kardofan and Kassala States" (Khartoum, UNICEF Sudan Country Office, 2004).
- 44 Allan W. Wicker. *Attitudes Versus Actions: The Relationship Of Verbal And Overt Behavioural Responses To Attitude Objects* (Journal Of Social Issues Volume Xxv, Number 4, 1969).
- 45 Cristina Bicchieri: "Preferences should NOT be confused with 'attitudes'. Preferences may be strictly individual (like I prefer vanilla over chocolate) or they may be social (I may not eat ice cream when I am out with friends since they have passionate views about dieting). Preferences can be unconditional or conditional: Preferences are unconditional in that one's choice is not influenced by external factors, like the belief that others do certain things or approve/



- disapprove of certain actions. Preference is conditional when you choose an action because you have expectations about what others do or do not believe." See UNFPA–UNICEF, *Manual on Social Norms and Change*, 2016, Module 1.
- 46 Gerry Mackie, *Penn–UNICEF Course on Social Norms and Change* (2011). The figure has been simplified to allow visualization of the process of change when a decision is strongly interdependent.
- 47 "Attitudes thus include personal normative beliefs, since they express a person's positive or negative evaluation of particular behaviours" (Cristina Bicchieri, *Norms in the Wild*).
- 48 Gerry Mackie, "Social norms change: Believing makes it so", *Social Research: An International Quarterly*, Vol. 85, No. 1 (2018), pp. 141–166.
- 49 Adapted from UNICEF, *Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting: A Statistical Overview and Exploration of the Dynamics of Change* (UNICEF, 2013), pp. 19–20.
- 50 D. Prentice, *The Psychology of Social Norms and the Promotion of Human Rights*, 2012.
- 51 D. T. Miller and C. McFarland, "When social comparison goes awry: the case of pluralistic ignorance", in *Social Comparison: Contemporary Theory and Research*, Jerry Suls and Thomas Ashby Wills, eds. (Hillsdale, New Jersey, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1991), pp. 287–313.
- 52 The opposite of pluralistic ignorance is "common knowledge"; this can be stimulated by facilitating access to information and discussion within communities, by the media and through national events involving various social groups.
- 53 UNICEF, *Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting, A Statistical Overview And Exploration Of The Dynamics Of Change*, July 2013.
- 54 R. Muldoon, Lecture, *Penn–UNICEF Course on Social Norms and Change* (2011).
- 55 Edges are also called "ties".
- 56 R. Muldoon, lecture, *Penn–UNICEF course on Social Norms and Change* (University of Pennsylvania, 2011).
- 57 Kaivan Munshi and Jacques Myaux, "Social norms and the fertility transition", *Journal of Development Economics*, Vol. 80, No. 1 (2005), pp. 1–38.
- 58 Cleland, John, Phillips, James, Amin, Sajeda, Kamal, G.M., 1994. *The Determinants of Reproductive Change in Bangladesh*. The World Bank, Washington, DC.; Bulatao, Rodolfo, 1998. *The Value of Family Planning Programs in Developing Countries*. RAND, Santa Monica, CA.
- 59 Amin, Sajeda, Diamond, Ian, Steele, Fiona, 1997. *Contraception and religiosity in Bangladesh*. In: Jones, G.W., Douglas, R.M., Caldwell, J.C., D'Souza, R.M. (Eds.), *The Continuing Demographic Transition*. Clarendon Press, Oxford.
- 60 The International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research in Bangladesh launched MCH–FP in 1978, covering 70 villages in Matlab thana, Comilla district. The project is possibly the most intensive family planning programme ever put in place.
- 61 Arthur, Brian W., McNicoll, Geoffrey, 1978. *An analytical survey of population and development in Bangladesh*. *Population and Development Review* 4 (1).
- 62 Amin, Sajeda, 1997. *The poverty–purdah trap in rural Bangladesh: implications for women's roles in the family*. *Development and Change* 28.
- 63 Kandori, Michihiro, 1992. *Social norms and community enforcement*. *Review of Economic Studies* 59.
- 64 Kaivan Munshi and Jacques Myaux, "Social norms and the fertility transition", *Journal of Development Economics*, Vol. 80, No. 1 (2005), pp 1–38, adapted.
- 65 Ibid.
- 66 Adapted from Antanas Mockus, "Co–existence and harmonization of law, morality and culture", *Prospects*, Vol. 32, No. 1 (2002), p. 19. See also UNFPA–UNICEF, *Manual on Social Norms and Change*, Reading 3.1, p.37.
- 67 UNFPA–UNICEF, *Manual on Social Norms and Change*, Module 4, Handouts, p. 33.
- 68 Adapted from Antanas Mockus, "Co–existence and harmonization of law, morality and culture", *Prospects*, Vol. 32, No. 1 (2002), p. 19.
- 69 C. Donahue, UNICEF, in 2015 draft of the *Manual on Social Norms and Change*, Module 1, page 25.
- 70 Interview with Joachim Theis, Coursera online course on *Social Norms and Change*, University of Pennsylvania – UNICEF, 2017.
- 71 Adapted by Nafissatou Diop, UNFPA (2019), from original design by Cody Donahue (UNICEF, 2012).
- 72 Hugo Mercier, lecture, *Penn–UNICEF Course on Social Norms and Change* (2011).
- 73 This section will look at Tostan, a community–led programme in Senegal.
- 74 Tostan has a particularly important empirical dimension of implementing community–led change based on Demba Diawara's ideas about how to end female genital mutilation: "this is a practice that cannot be abandoned by one individual, one family or one community alone; all those in the group of people linked by deret (blood) must be respectfully consulted and decide together; sanctions are too harsh if they do not conform to the social norms in place; to end female genital cutting, extended family and others who matter must come together, collec-



tively commit to ending female genital cutting and establish new community sanctions decided upon by the group". Empirical results support Diawara's ideas and correlate with insights from social norm theory. Public pledges are a prominent feature both of KMG – an Ethiopian non-governmental organisation: Kembatti Mentti Gezzima–Toppe (Women Of Kembatta Pulling Their Efforts To Work Together) – and of Tostan, which systematically uses intervillage meetings to celebrate the intention to abandon female genital mutilation.

- 75 M. Melching, personal communication to Zeyneb, UNICEF field operator, 3 September 2010.
- 76 Adapted from a lecture by Shereen Usdin, Senior Executive, Soul City Institute for Health and Development Communication – South Africa, UNFPA Expert Group Meeting, Brussels, Belgium, May 2016.
- 77 Ibid.
- 78 Shereen Usdin and others, "No short cuts in entertainment education; designing *Soul City* step-by-step", in *Entertainment-Education and Social Change: History, Research and Practice*, Arvind Singhal and others, eds. (Mahwah, New Jersey, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2004).
- 79 Formative research showed that barriers to change in perpetrators were patriarchal norms such as "I think IPV is acceptable" (even desirable); "my community think it's acceptable (even expects it of me as a man – it is my right as a man: it is culturally endorsed through 'lobola')". Women on their side thought: "even though my attitude is that I don't think that domestic violence is OK, my perceived norm is that most people think it is acceptable – my community expects me to endure it"; "it's a woman's lot in life"; "it's a cross you must bear". Or in reality most women don't think it's OK, but "I think they do ... So I better shut up and endure in silence".
- 80 M.G. De Vita, notes, Based on P. Rudy, S. Ahmed and others, personal communications, UNICEF Sudan Country Office, 21–28 June 2011.
- 81 Hugo Mercier, lecture, Penn–UNICEF Course on Social Norms and Change (2011)
- 82 P. Rudy, personal communication, 2012.
- 83 Ibid.
- 84 Heeran Chun, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Science, Jungwon University, Republic of Korea, lecture, at the Expert Group Meeting on *Gender-biased harmful practices: a long term comprehensive approach to accelerate abandonment and achieve measurable results by 2030*, Brussels, Belgium, May 30–31 2016.
- 85 Ibid.
- 86 Adapted from UNICEF–UNFPA, *Metrics of Progress, Moments of Change: 2015 Annual Report – UNICEF–UNFPA Joint Programme on Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting: Accelerating Change* (2015).
- 87 Arguments have been described as "the change from within", as they point to some incoherence between beliefs and intentions and make people realize themselves that their views are inconsistent, thus leading to appreciation of different set of beliefs.
- 88 Adapted from UNICEF–UNFPA, *Metrics of Progress, Moments of Change: 2015 Annual Report – UNICEF–UNFPA Joint Programme on Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting: Accelerating Change* (2015)
- 89 Common knowledge: Rather than relying on individual knowledge – for example about the negative consequences of female genital mutilation/cutting – through discussion they come to realize that others also have this knowledge, which makes it easier to agree on coordinated action. In short: I know that you know; I know that you know that I know; I know that everybody knows that I know; all know that all know.
- 90 Economic motivations favouring the persistence of female genital mutilation/cutting include incentives for the people who perform the cutting. The economic incentives for "keeping girls intact" include avoiding the costs of negative consequences, such as the cost of treating health complications, and avoiding fines.
- 91 2015 Annual Report, Metric of Progress, Moment of Change, UNFPA–UNICEF Joint Programme on Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting: Accelerating Change.
- 92 UNICEF–UNFPA, *Joint Programme on Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting: Accelerating Change*, Proposal for Phase III, p. 20.
- 93 T. Franklin, personal communication, September 2019.
- 94 Adapted from R. Kaur, lecture at UNFPA Expert Group Meeting on Gender-Biased Harmful Practices: Long Term Coordinated Strategy to Accelerate Abandonment and Achieve Measurable Results by 2030, Brussels, Belgium, 30–31 May 2016.
- 95 A. Sen, 1999, *Development as Freedom*, New York: Knopf; 2005; "Human Rights and Capabilities," *Journal of Human Development*, 6(2):151.166
- 96 Adapted from R. Kaur, lecture at UNFPA Expert Group Meeting on Gender-Biased Harmful Practices: Long Term Coordinated Strategy to Accelerate Abandonment and Achieve Measurable Result by 2030, Brussels, Belgium, 30–31 May 2016.
- 97 Ibid.





**United Nations Population Fund**

605 Third Avenue  
New York, NY 10158  
[www.unfpa.org](http://www.unfpa.org)