ADDRESSING SOCIAL AND GENDER NORMS TO PROMOTE GENDER EQUALITY

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OVERVIEW

Social norms are context-specific informal rules about acceptable or appropriate behaviors in a given context. When social norms reinforce expectations that men and women will occupy distinct and unequal social roles, they reproduce and perpetuate gender inequality in access to resources and opportunities.

Challenging unequal social norms is critical to achieving gender equality across domains, including more gender equal markets, institutions, laws, policies, households, and societies. Unequal social norms can be changed via policy interventions supported by a more informed, data-driven approach to social norms—not just attitudes. Building on ongoing efforts and lessons from various diagnostics, the World Bank can further invest in better quality social norms measurement and data collection tools to monitor sustained normative changes. Operational work and projects can increase effectiveness with better diagnostics and use of social norms information.

Examples from the World Bank and academic research of interventions that have aimed to address unequal social norms show promise for change; however, longer-term measures of the sustainability of their impacts are needed. While there is a growing set of examples of interventions that aim to change social norms—by addressing attitudes or changing the contexts that support norms adherence—gaps remain. Norm changing interventions are not being implemented at scale and more effort needs to be made to assess the duration of impacts and whether more equitable norms prevail overtime. Lessons from recent societal shocks indicate that norms can re-entrench, and attitudes can change depending on changes in context.

Policy interventions need to be norms-aware and use tools to support adoption of more equal gender norms when appropriate. All policy interventions, not only those targeting gender inequality, should consider norms in their design and implementation and whether they will play a role in potential gender differences in access to and benefits from the specific policy actions. Norms-aware interventions include an assessment of social norms enforcement mechanisms and how these can be overcome. A failure to consider norms is not norms neutrality, but norms blindness. Norms-blind policies can be inefficient, may not achieve their intended outcomes, and can inadvertently reinforce gender inequality. Norms-aware interventions have a clear understanding of the social norms at play and the main actors and channels enforcing them. As such, these interventions create the conditions that enable individuals, households, and communities to deviate or circumvent unequal norms at no or low cost.

ACCELERATE EQUALITY | WORLD BANK GROUP Gender

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Social norms, or the unwritten shared expectations about what should or should not be done in different social situations, are part of the many social cues that guide human behavior within a given social context. (Cislaghi and Heise 2020; Bicchieri, 2006). Social norms are a tool for collective coordination and part of the fabric of society. People follow norms when they value the behavior and opinion of others who also follow the norms and believe everyone should follow them too, as there are rewards and sanctions for following (or not) the norms (Bicchieri 2017).

Gender norms are the social rules and expectations about how women and men should act and the roles they should play in society. Gender norms reflect gender relations, including the power differences and inequalities that are part of these relations. A subgroup of gender norms supports inequality and is disadvantageous to women or individuals that do not conform with the expected gender behaviors.[1] Norms that are used to justify or limit access to opportunities on the basis of an individual's gender are the focus of this note.

The impact of social norms on gender outcomes is well documented. Social norms are one of the main determinants of unequal gender outcomes across domains, including women's economic participation, gender-based violence (GBV), sexual and reproductive health, and representation in political bodies (Jayachandran, 2021; Paluck and Ball, 2010; Amin et al., 2018; World Bank 2012). As they shape individual and collective preferences and behaviors, social norms permeate formal institutions, policies, the operation of markets, legal frameworks, and overall allocations of resources and power in societies, communities, and households. For example, in a traditional view of gender roles, house and care work are allocated to women, and may be associated with a specific identity (i.e., mother or wife). This is then linked to a series of social expectations—such as, a "good mother" looks after her children—and a series of positive or negative sanctions, including gossip or spousal disapproval.

These expectations and related choices not only permeate what is acceptable behavior, but also influence policies and institutions. Labor markets and employers, in particular, might value men and women differently, even if they are equally matched in education and experience. Even employers who are theoretically neutral toward gender in hiring may assume productivity will differ by gender due to care responsibilities and factors associated with gender, thus limiting opportunities for women.[2] Formal state institutions might respond to the norm that implies mothers should have a preference for caregiving by not investing in childcare services. Deprioritizing investments in formal childcare services can lead to low demand of such services and hamper the development of a childcare market, reinforcing the social expectation. Legislation might respond to these assumed female preferences by focusing all childcare-related benefits just toward women (e.g., maternity leave, employer-provided childcare), which, in turn, reinforces the labor market perspective that women prioritize care. Together, these signals indicate to women and households the expected behaviors of women. Moreover, these social norms can further impact regulations that reinforce power inequality in the household as women are not income providers.[3]

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[1] For individuals with different sexual orientations or gender identities (SOGI), social norms related to gender tend to be applied in relation to their biological and/or observed sexual characteristics. These individuals are often seen as norms transgressors, deviating from the expected behaviors, and as such, threatening the societal expectations and balance that norms present. While this note does not delve into the specifics of social norms related to SOGI groups, there are several resources, such as Browne (2019); Schilt and Westbrook (2009); and Westbrook and Schilt (2014). Also see the thematic policy note in this series on SOGI Inclusion and Gender Equality.

[2] Taste-based or statistical discrimination (Arrow 1998).

[3] For example, in Ecuador or Chile, husbands had the right to manage solely community property. The Ecuador Civil Code was reformed in 1990, but in Chile, the Civil Code continues to uphold the husband as the head of the household and manager of the community property.

Gender norms are also prescriptions of behavior for men and boys, as well as for individuals with different gender identities. As with women, men and all other individuals are expected to conform to certain behavioral prescriptions and social expectations. Masculinity norms persist, like other norms, by imposing sanctions on those who deviate from a norm and those who do not enforce them. The OECD (2021) identifies 10 of these norms that are associated with gender inequality, including norms around the role of men as the main breadwinner, financial dominance, household authority (including control of assets), and sexual dominance, among others. Norms around male dominance support an imbalance of power and, in many cases, lead to suboptimal outcomes for men as well as women and households as a whole.[4]

Addressing the social norms that perpetuate gender inequality or limit access to opportunities based on gender differences requires adequate policy interventions. Norm-sensitive interventions that directly address underlying beliefs and expectations that uphold norms, address the structural and environmental factors that reinforce them, and support the creation of new positive norms are necessary for equality gains. The most effective interventions are not solely focused on social norms but consider their institutional and economic context that prevent norms from changing. Norms-blind policies ignore the presence and role of social norms, which can cause them either to fail in achieving their objectives or to reinforce existing norms and gender inequality.

Policies can benefit from a better understanding of social norms. This includes better data for policy design and implementation that support greater gender equality, policy efficiency, and returns to human capital investments. Policies that address social norms and their determinants need adequate data and information about the presence and strength of social norms. Understanding gender norms and how they operate has moved from "nice to have" to a core element of policy intervention for gender equality (Harper et al. 2020). Advances in academic and applied fields on the measurement of social norms and how they interact with program design elements and innovative interventions can help improve policy outcomes on gender equality and other development goals.

This note discusses advances in measurement of social norms, how to identify possible interventions based on this knowledge, and successful examples of policy actions to address and change social norms. It documents both academic literature and examples from different institutions working on gender equality. To assess how social norms theory and insights have been transferred to World Bank Group operations, a document review was conducted of World Bank projects that had included a focus on social norms in their design during the period 2017–2022.[5]

The evidence on interventions that have successfully examined and changed social norms at scale remains limited. To the extent possible, the note focuses on lessons from the literature and applied work on how to identify and address norms that impact the achievement of gender equality by restricting choices, limiting access to opportunities and resources, and sustaining power imbalances in decision making and physical autonomy.

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[4] For example, Blum, Mmari and Moreau (2017) and Muñoz Boudet et al (2013) document how gender norms impact boys' risk behaviors. Baranov et al (2018) document how historically male-biased geographic areas are characterized by more risk behaviors, such as violence and excessive alcohol consumption. Jewkes (2002) and Jewkes, Flood and Lang (2015) documents how intimate partner violence is related to social norms and male identity and reinforced by conditions, such as poverty.

[5] In total, 111 Project Appraisal Documents (PADs) were reviewed that explicitly mention or flag the inclusion of social norms and/or behavior change interventions related to social or gender norms. Interviews were conducted with Bank staff to understand the motivations, challenges, and rationale for including social norms in projects. The document reviewed are project design documents prior to implementation and not project implementation or completion ones.

Definitions: What do we mean by norms

Social norms can be defined as a set of informal rules of behavior that dictate what is acceptable or appropriate to do in a given situation within a given social context (Cislaghi and Heise 2020; Bicchieri 2006). While there are many definitions of social norms (see Box 1 for the ones used in different World Bank reports), they all share the following elements: that social norms are rules that people follow irrespective of what others do because 1) they believe others are following the norm, 2) they believe they are expected to follow the norm, and 3) they believe there are social sanctions for not following the social norm.[6] People follow norms when they believe others, whose behavior they observe and whose opinions about their own behavior they value, both conform to the norm and believe everyone should too (Bicchieri 2017). Gender norms operate the same way, but in relation to women's or men's behaviors.

Social norms are distinct from other drivers of behaviors—laws, morals, customs, or individual attitudes—because people comply with norms based on anticipated social sanctions for nonconformity. Social norms are upheld by informal social sanctions, making them different from legal norms, which are written, formal codes of conduct enforced by punishments, or penalties for non-compliers. Social norms are also different from moral norms, which are more internally driven, value-based motivators of behavior that push individuals to behave in compliance with their own ideal states for self and the world rather than those of others (i.e., what it means to be a "good person"). Attitudes, one of the most commonly used measures of social norms, reflect personal beliefs and values that individuals might uphold even in the absence of a social sanction or expectation. Social norms are also different from customs, which tend to be recurrent behaviors arising from repetition to foster social harmony or to meet individual need (in most cases, without additional instrumental value) rather than being reinforced by sanctions with social consequences (e.g., holding a door open for someone).

Social norms, in particular gender norms, are also often conflated with gender stereotypes and gender roles, that in some, but not all cases, are related to social norms. Stereotypes are generalized assumptions of characteristics regarding a group of people (Kite, Deaux and Haines, 2008). Stereotypes describe a characteristic and like norms, they create conformity. They do this not by imposing sanctions, but via discrimination and influence on self-beliefs about available and appropriate opportunities. For example, a stereotype that claims women are bad at politics can perpetuate preferences for men political candidates, irrespective of their ability or experience, and make women reluctant to compete for political offices.[7] Gender roles define the attributes men and women are expected to display and the actions they are expected to take in a given situation (e.g., a husband's role is to be the main provider of the household). Some, but not all, gender roles are linked to social norms, as not all roles are interdependent of expectations by others or sanctioned when not met.

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[6] These different elements are also known as empirical expectations or descriptive norm (expected behaviors by others), normative expectations or injunctive norms (expected beliefs by others), and personal normative beliefs (what I believe should happen).
[7] For further discussions on stereotypes, see Bordalo et al. (2016 and 2019), Carlana (2019), Bertrand (2020).

BOX 1: DEFINITIONS OF SOCIAL NORMS USED BY THE WORLD BANK

While the World Bank's work has highlighted the role of social norms in relation to gender inequality, social norms have not always been defined. Since 2000,[8] and more systematically since the World Development Report 2012 on Gender Equality and Development, definitions of norms have become more specific. They are included in sectoral guidelines ranging from social protection to financial inclusion, among others.[9] While there is no standard definition of social norms used across the institution, there are common elements to all of them, and they have evolved to include core elements agreed on by the broader academic literature on social norms.

Source	Definition
Engendering Development (2001)	Social norms and customs [...] shape individual preferences and power relations between the sexes. Social norms thus create powerful incentives that guide people's behavior, and behavior outside the accepted boundaries can unleash formal and informal systems of social sanction.
World Development Report (2012)	Patterns of behavior that flow from socially shared beliefs and are enforced by informal social sanctions.
Inclusion Matters (2013)	Exclusion plays out through both tangible and intangible practices and processes [...] it is rooted in intangible social norms and beliefs, which in turn lead to stereotypes, prejudices, and stigmas. These intangible features are socially constructed and played out by both the excluder and the excluded.
On Norms and Agency (2013)	Main characteristics- (a) regulates individual behavior in a society; (b) specifically prescribe what behavior is expected and what is not allowed in specific circumstances; (c) tell a person what to believe others expect of her behavior and tell others what to expect from that person; (d) expected agreement, or belief that the agreement exists, on the content of the norm and an enforcement of such agreement or belief by whoever holds power.
Voice and Agency (2014)	Powerful prescriptions reflected in formal structures of society and in its informal rules, beliefs, and attitudes. Such norms are reinforced by sanctions, which can be positive or negative, imposed by people belonging to the same reference group or by the state (Mackie and LeJeune, 2009).
World Development Report (2015)	Broadly shared beliefs about what group members are likely to do and ought to do- (they) are informal governance mechanisms that exert a powerful influence on individual decision making and behavior.
Addressing Gender Norms to Increase Financial Inclusion (2021)	Collectively held expectations and perceived rules for how individuals should behave based on their gender identity (Burjorjee, El-Zoghbi and Meyers, 2017). Social norms have three key features: high prevalence (irrespective of personal preferences); expectations that others comply and expect them to do the same; and sanctions and rewards from reference group.

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[8] In publications such as Engendering Development (World Bank, 2001).
[9] See for example CGAP's guidance on social norms (Koning, Ledgerwood and Singh, 2021), and the recent SPJ guidance note on social norms.
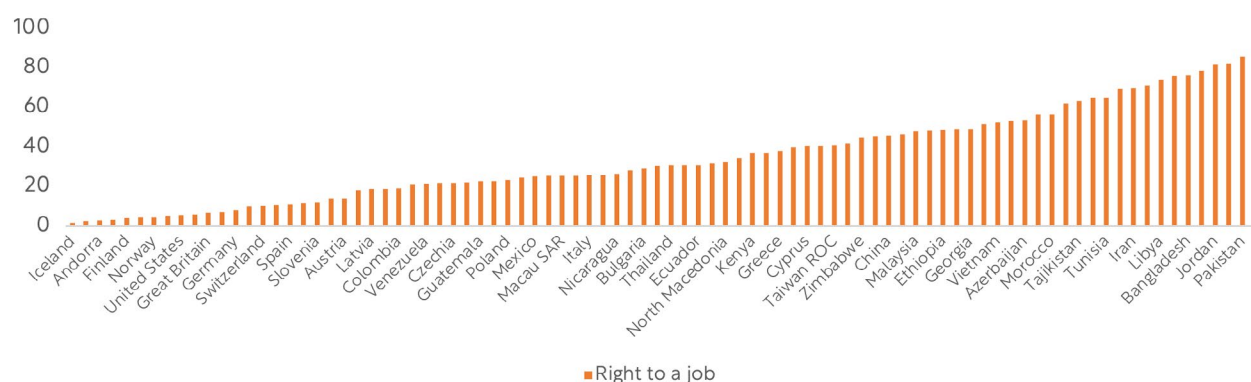
Measuring social norms

Advances in definition of social norms have only recently been matched with progress in measuring social norms presence and strength beyond proxies such as individual attitudes. Social norms are particularly difficult to measure and quantify, but progress is being made. Aside from qualitative data (e.g. Barboni et al. 2018 and Muñoz Boudet, Petesch and Turk 2013), social norms are most commonly observed via proxy measures. These are outcomes that are assumed to be strongly dependent on social norms (e.g., child marriage, son preference, or women's time allocation to care duties), individual attitudes or opinions that express commonly held views, or by the presence or absence of specific legal norms or policies (e.g., divorce or inheritance laws or parental leave policies).[10] Among the most widely used data sources on social and gender norms, the World Values Survey (WVS), the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), and the International Men and Gender Survey (IMAGES) all collect data on attitudes, and some outcomes, as proxies for gender norms. More recently, WVS and the Gallup World Poll have expanded to include direct social norms measures.

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[10] For example, the World Bank's Gender Data Portal currently tracks only outcomes and attitudes under "norms and decision making." Similarly, UNDPs Gender Social Norms Index uses attitudes questions from the WVS and the OECD Social Institutions and Gender Index (GINI) combines all three types of variables, namely legal frameworks, attitudinal variables, and practice variables or observable outcomes.

FIGURE 1: SHARE OF POPULATION AGREEING WITH THE STATEMENT "WHEN JOBS ARE SCARCE MEN SHOULD HAVE MORE RIGHT TO A JOB THAN WOMEN" (WVS 2017–2022 WAVE)
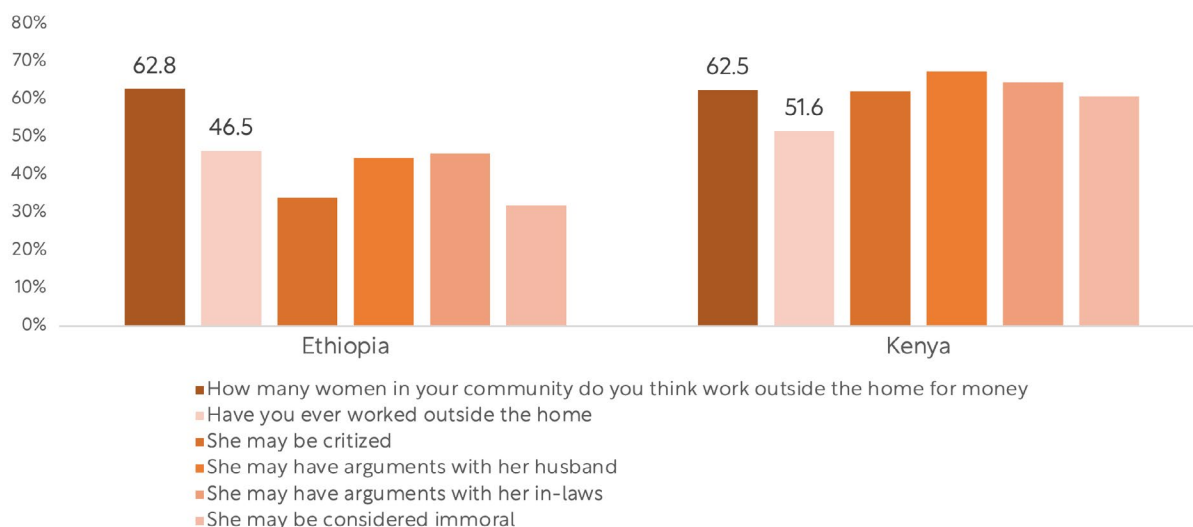
More effort is needed to measure social norms directly to understand them more fully. Efforts to document and identify the different elements that indicate the presence and strength of social norms (e.g., sanctions or behaviors people do because they assume they are expected are important to influence the type of policy intervention), and even whether policy action should focus on a specific social norm or not. Take, for example, attitudes about job scarcity (see Figure 1). When asked if men have more right to a job than women when jobs are scarce, the level of agreement varies widely across countries. In countries such as Indonesia, Jordan, and Pakistan respondents more strongly agreed than respondents from the United States, Poland, and Guatemala. Attitudes questions like these are a partial capture of social norms and may not be an accurate reflection of the actual social norms at play. The preference for men holding a job over women can be attributed to a social norm that disapproves of women working (in all cases, and not only when jobs are scarce); it might be related to a prevalent view of men as the main breadwinners of households that can be normative or

can be a response to the types of jobs available in a given economy; or can depend of the current economic situation in a country at the time of the survey. Attitudes respond to varying economic and political circumstances; hence responses can also shift depending on the salience of the circumstance for the respondent.

Direct measures of social norms ask respondents to estimate how common it is for people in their social group to exhibit a behavior, whether they approve the behavior, and the consequences of them. For example, the latest round of the WVS included a larger gender module that asked respondents about women in their communities (empirical expectations), women's own behavior, and possible negative impacts (sanctions) for women who work for pay.[11] Comparing Ethiopia and Kenya, two countries with similar levels of reported women working (at the community and self), the possible social costs of working appear to be very different (see Figure 2). Women in Kenya are more likely to face criticisms, family conflict, and reputational costs.

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[11] Sanction questions are phrased as, "If a woman works outside of the home for money, how likely is it that the following consequences might occur."

FIGURE 2: NORMS AROUND WOMEN WORKING FOR PAY (WVS 2020, 2021)

Legend:
- How many women in your community do you think work outside the home for money
- Have you ever worked outside the home
- She may be critized
- She may have arguments with her husband
- She may have arguments with her in-laws
- She may be considered immoral

Ethiopia: 62.8, 46.5
Kenya: 62.5, 51.6

Measurement of both social expectations and personal beliefs can reveal phenomena, such as pluralistic ignorance (when personal beliefs are misaligned with the expected social beliefs), that can be targeted with policy interventions. A recent survey by Meta and the World Bank (see Figure 3) asked respondents to report both their personal beliefs as well as those among people around them.[12] The results show how there is a difference between individual attitudes and social expectations. When asked if boys and girls should share household tasks equally, respondents' personal beliefs were more egalitarian than what they attribute to their neighbors. The findings were similar when asked about the norm of women's role as care provider and homemaker or men's role as economic provider. However, the survey finds that for respondents in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, individual and collective perceptions are aligned.

Pluralistic ignorance is an important insight for policies as it indicates an opportunity to adjust social expectations with information. Bursztyn et al. (2023) find a similar pattern using similar questions construction in the Gallup World Poll. They find that misperceptions are common across countries, and that these misperceptions are different between men and women (with men having higher levels of misperceptions).[13] These insights are important, as the belief that others have lower support for equality may lead individuals to act in line with these misperceived societal expectations, despite their own beliefs to the contrary.[14]

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[12] Questions were phrased as "How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement?" and "Out of 10 of your neighbors, how many do you think believe that...," respectively.

[13] A similar difference was found by Gauri, Rahman, and Sen (2019) in Jordan, and in Iraq by Sen et al. (2022).

[14] This is the mechanism and difference leveraged by Bursztyn, González, & Yanagizawa-Drott (2018) in Saudi Arabia intervention.

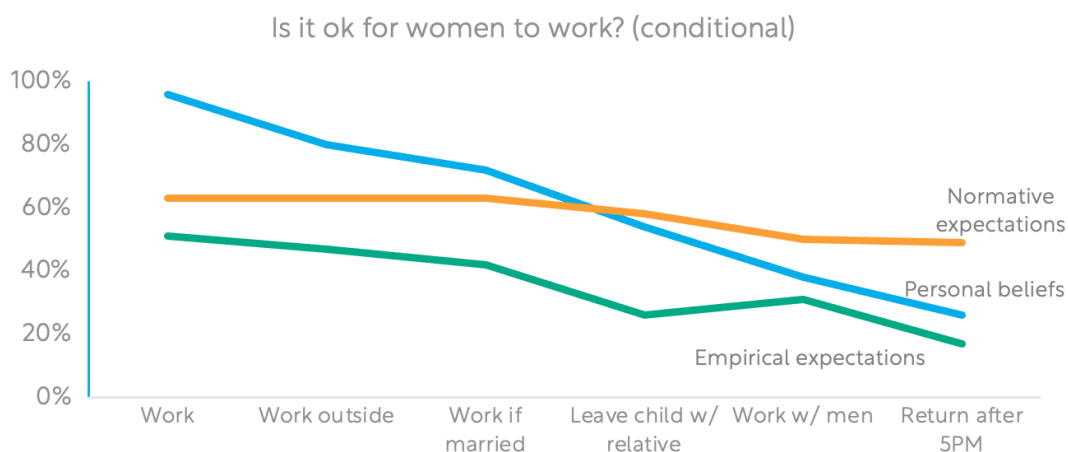**FIGURE 3: INDIVIDUAL ATTITUDES AND NORMATIVE EXPECTATIONS ON GENDER (META, SURVEY OF GENDER EQUALITY AT HOME)**

Boys and girls should share household tasks equally

A woman's most important role is to take care of her home and children

Household expenses are the responsibility of the man, even if his wife can help him

● Individual attitudes ● Normative expectations

Better measurement of social norms is especially important for program design, monitoring, and impact assessment.[15] The mechanisms through which social norms impact gender equality outcomes may be complex, involve multiple actors at various levels (households, communities, societies), and operate differently depending on the heterogeneity of women's opportunities, agency, and constraints. In many cases a complete norm change might take time that goes beyond the lifetime of a program or project. The same can happen with the observation of changes in the outcomes that are expected to shift by a change in the social norm. Using tools that can reveal intermediate changes in sanctions and other areas can inform a policy intervention. These include changes in levels of adherence and perceived adherence to a norm, changes in the conditions under which a norm triggers sanctions— see Figure 4 for example, the Jordan survey on social norms shows an important variation and decline of support on women's work depending on the specific conditions of such work, and a decline in personal beliefs (attitudes) from a general question to one with more specificity. How strong or weak the sanctions are for those who deviate from the norm are also important to be observed as they can indicate the strength of norm enforcement. All of these measures can indicate that the process of norm change is taking place, even if not yet reflected in outcomes or aggregate levels of individual perceptions.

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[15] It should be noted that efforts such as the EMERGE (Evidence-based Measures of Empowerment for Research on Gender Equality) initiative that have compiled several tools aiming to measure social norms are part of the efforts to document what is available in terms of tools.

FIGURE 4: CONDITIONAL SUPPORT FOR WOMEN'S WORK (JORDAN)

Is it ok for women to work? (conditional)

Normative expectations

Personal beliefs

Empirical expectations

X-axis: Work | Work outside | Work if married | Leave child w/ relative | Work w/ men | Return after 5PM

Y-axis: 0% – 100%
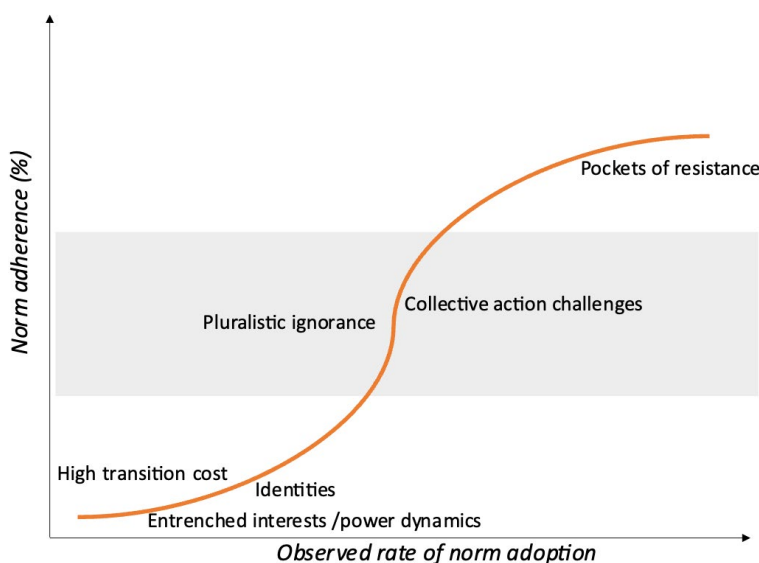
Source: Gauri, Rahman, and Sen (2019)

In sum, work on social norms has made important advances—both in definition and measurement—which should be adopted more systematically. While data availability on social norms remains limited, proxy measures (such as attitudes) should be used with greater attention to the fact that they are only a partial view. They may not be reflective of the prevalent social norms, and additional data and information may be needed for successful intervention design. Efforts such as Bussolo et al. (2022) that bring together long-term trends in outcomes and attitudes on certain areas, such as female labor force participation, son preference, or age at marriage, that have been documented in the literature to respond to social norms, are some examples on how to approach proxy data on social norms and analyze it. Other approaches that look at the evolution of laws in relation to the economic and other context factors are also a way to identify societal preferences and distinguish between what are the formally expected behaviors to follow and what are the socially acceptable ones (see for example Hallward-Driemeier, Hasan and Rusu 2013 analysis of the evolution of women's legal rights; and Lane, Nosenzo and Sonderegger, 2023 on laws effects on norms).

An intervention to address a social norm should be developed based on how deeply engrained the norm is within a given society as well as the mechanisms that allow the norm to persist. The relationship between the two interdependent elements of a norm—what others do and what I believe others believe should be done—can help identify the barriers to social norms transmission. This relationship takes the form of an S-curve.[16] Figure 5 shows the process of adoption of new social norms. The y-axis represents the share of people that adjusts their beliefs (personal and about others), increasing from zero where almost nobody thinks the beliefs of others are represented by the new norm. This is the rate of norm adherence. The x-axis represents the change in observed behaviors, similarly, departing from zero where nobody has changed their behavior to an almost universal adoption of the behavior. This is the observed rate of norm adoption.

Applied to, for example, women's participation in paid employment, the change from the social norm that dictates women should not work, to a new social norm that accepts women working follows the S pattern. At the start, only a small proportion of the population will agree with the idea of women working and, similarly, very few will agree with the idea that others believe women working is an adequate behavior. In parallel, very few women are seen to be working and few are willing to change their behavior. The cost to make the change at this point is extremely high, as the likelihood of people deciding to abandon a norm is tightly linked to individuals' risk sensitivity and risk perception.[17] As more people begin to change their beliefs (personal and collective), the rate of adoption of the new behavior accelerates rapidly as change is less risky. It reaches a peak when the norm is widely accepted by the majority of the population. At this point, the rate of adoption begins to slow down again as the remaining individuals who have not yet adopted the norm are likely more resistant to change.[18]

FIGURE 5: S-CURVE OF BARRIERS TO SOCIAL NORM ADOPTION

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[16] Adapted from Gauri, Rahman, and Sen (2019) that builds on Rogers's (1962) S-curve for diffusion of innovation.

[17] The first being dispositional or the degree to which people are risk-seeking or risk-averse; and risk perception being situational, or the level of certainty about the incurred risk of deviating from a particular social norm.

[18] A good example of this process for the case of female labor force participation increases in the United States, as described in Fogli and Veldkamp (2011) for the expansion of women's labor force participation in the US.

A better measurement of norms can help to identify where norm conformity falls on the S-curve and determine interventions best suited to overcome the main barriers to change. The S curve in Figure 5 shows some of the most commonly observed barriers at each phase of norm adoption.[19] When the wrong intervention is deployed, behaviors can go into hiding and norms can be reinforced instead of changed. For example, evidence shows that making female genital cutting (FGC) illegal had little effect. In some instances, outlawing the practice led to driving the practice underground. But in communities where FGC was being contested, the legal framework encouraged people to abandon the practice (Shell-Duncan et al., 2013).

Phase 1: Limited acceptance of a more gender egalitarian norm

At early stages, the existing norm is likely sustained by strong barriers, including high transition costs for deviating from the norm, entrenched interests by those who benefit from the status quo, and the norm prescription internalized in personal identities. Some acceptance or different behavior is observed among early adopters or trendsetters who may be willing to take on the risks and challenge the status quo, but, more commonly, they have no alternatives but to transgress the norm for other reasons (e.g., women who must work to support a sick husband). The costs of deviating from the norm can be expressed in social pressure, such as reputational damage to the woman, her family, or her spouse, and financial costs both direct (such as the cost of hiring domestic help) and indirect (such as higher income taxes). Entrenched interests, particularly those of men who benefit from maintaining the patriarchal status quo, can create resistance to change. Power relations, including those within the household, can also influence the ability of individuals and groups of people to change their behavior when active resistance is expected from powerful household members (Legros and Cislaghi, 2019).[20] Lastly, an individual's sense of both personal and social identities (i.e., being a mother) can be derived from internalized social norms that support gender inequalities.[21] How much one values opinions that others hold about these identities plays an important role on norm support, for example if these social identities determine one's social standing (Bursztyn and Jensen, 2017; Bursztyn and Yang, 2021).

Widely prevalent and deeply internalized norms will require intensive norm modification strategies that engage a collective to jumpstart change. For example, addressing masculinity norms that are strongly linked to men's identities and a status quo that gives men dominance requires redefining the elements of manhood or masculinity that make that norm. This is what Program H by Equimundo targeted with its interventions. It worked with young men to challenge masculinity stereotypes that support gender inequality using a combination of school curricula and community campaigns led by men. The program was successful in fostering more gender-equitable attitudes among men and lowering the perpetration and acceptability of intimate partner violence in a number of contexts (Miller et al. 2020; Doyle and Kato-Wallace, 2021). This was due to its collective nature (not having to deviate alone), information about others' acceptability of the new behaviors, and the sustained social identity it promoted. Similarly, strategic involvement of powerful groups or individuals can also facilitate transition away from restrictive norms by decreasing resistance and creating the space for norm deviation (Vaitla et al., 2017).

This early stage is also one where information diffusion is important. Seeing is believing. In the absence of people doing things differently, and in the absence of information of the consequences they face for such behavior, beliefs will not actualize. Interventions that leverage communication channels and media to showcase examples of new behaviors, or discussion on the prevalent norm, are an important first step (see Box 2).

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[19] The list is not exhaustive, and barriers can be present at other points in the S-curve.
[20] This is what Bernhardt et al. (2018) find in India, where they observe that the perceived social cost of women's work falls on men and that husbands' opposition to female labor is associated with their wives' lower uptake of employment. See also Pande and Hoy (2021) for a discussion on how intrahousehold norms and power relations impact women's labor force participation.
[21] Personal identify refers to an individual's sense of self that is based on traits and attributes that make them distinct from others, while social identify refers to an individual's sense of self derived from group membership (Tajfel, 1979).

Early norm change can also be encouraged through economic incentives, such as transfers, subsidies, and access to financial instruments. Financial incentives can alleviate some of the cost of changing behaviors under uncertainty of the consequences. Cash transfers—conditional or not—have delayed early marriage of young girls and succeeded in keeping them in education for longer (Malhotra and Elnakib 2021, Chaudhury and Parajuli, 2010, Baird et al. 2014), altered women's bargaining power and norms about decision making in the household (Ambler and de Brow 2017), and reduced incidence of GBV (Baranov, de Haas and Grosjean, 2018). Similarly, Field et al. (2021) find that giving women access to savings accounts increased their labor supply and changed gender norms regarding women working outside the home. A shift in incentives can also be achieved by introducing new sanctions (via legal changes) that alter the assessment of costs of norm adherence.

Phase 2: Norm tipping point

The point at which norm transmission happens fast is typically referred to as the norm tipping point. This falls along the gray portion of the S-curve (see Figure 5). When it comes to the adoption of new social norms or the abandoning of harmful ones, there is a threshold share of individuals that either relax their views on the norm (i.e., enforce it less or with lower sanctions) or practice a new norm. When that threshold is reached, social incentives reverse and propel rapid change as information on what happens if someone thinks and acts differently than prescribed is more available. Bicchieri (2017) notes that when about a third of the population has already abandoned a norm, moderately norm-sensitive individuals, who were previously unwilling to change their behavior when others did not, consider shifting their behavior. When over half of individuals have already deviated, a tipping point is reached. However, the heterogeneity of experiences and conditions means different norms have different tipping points. Evidence also suggests that education levels, poverty rates, and population density (for diffusion) are all critical elements of tipping points.

To reach norms tipping points, social norms conformity traps need to be addressed. Andreoni et al. (2017) define conformity traps as those that keep groups and individuals in a bad equilibrium despite knowledge of inefficiency and preferences for a different status quo. The trap is due to the pressure to conform to the behavior of the majority and the resistance to be the first deviant from the established norm. In some cases, individuals need to be offered an alternative to the norm via a role model, such as the case of women working in non-traditional economic sectors (Campos et al. 2015, Alibhai et al. 2017). In others, they need to be supported by others when challenging the norm (Anukriti et al. 2022; Anukriti et al. 2020).

Around the tipping point, a commonly found conformity trap is pluralistic ignorance. Pluralistic ignorance occurs when there is a difference between the perceived norm (what I believe others approve and expect), and reality. This difference will make people conform to a norm due an incorrect assumption about other peoples' actions and approval, even though most people have started changing their personal beliefs if not their behavior.

Pluralistic ignorance can be tackled by information interventions that make visible the views held by others to close the information gap. There is compelling evidence of this in the context of female labor force participation in Saudi Arabia. Disclosing private information to married men about views held by other married men who are supportive of women's employment increased the former group's willingness to encourage their wives to work (Bursztyn, Gonzalez, and Yanagizawa-Drott, 2020).[22] In Ethiopia, an intervention correcting men's misperceptions about social norms regarding housework increased their participation in so-called accepted tasks, such as firewood collection (Assefa et al. 2022). In India, changing young men's perceptions of their peers' gender norms increased their likelihood of doing household chores and encouraging their sisters to pursue college (Dhar, Jain and Jayachandran, 2018). However, correcting misperceptions may not always be sufficient, and may even result in negative spillovers if used to reaffirm adherence to the norm.[23]

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[22] Another study (Alkhuzam, Incekara-Hafalir, and Wang, 2023) in Saudi Arabia that replicated Bursztyn et al.'s study with university students found no treatment effects on expected labor market outcomes after correcting misperception about support for women's work, likely due to family and childcare concerns being made more salient in the experiment.

[23] Paluck and Ball (2010) show evidence of backfire in relation to GBV prevention campaigns. Banerjee, La Ferrara and Orozco (2019) also find mix evidence depending on the identification of subjects with the characters in their edutainment intervention.

The other common barrier around at the tipping point for norms change are collective action challenges. These arise when, despite their belief that changing the norm would be advantageous in the long run, people still prefer to continue acting in accordance with the norm because of fear of the costs associated with being an early adopter and not see opportunities to act in coordination with others to offset that risk. Collective action challenges may be resolved by creating space for people to question a norm or act on their beliefs without fear of negative consequences to their social status or reputation (see Box 3). For example, Tostan's Community Empowerment Program, which focused on reducing FGC, created a safe and supportive space for community members to discuss their own cultural values and beliefs and engage in participatory and inclusive dialogues around the topic. It also encouraged participating communities to explore alternatives to FGC and develop collection action plans (Diop et al., 2004; Easton, Monkman and Miles, 2003).

The use of role models and group mobilization can also support acceleration to pass norms tipping points. Here is where affirmative action and creation of a visible critical mass of people doing things differently can support new norm adherence. In India, gender quotas for local government bodies (*Panchayats*) created more exposure of women in leadership roles with positive spillovers, including in girls' aspirations and women's labor force participation (Beaman et al. 2012; Deininger et al., 2022). Similarly, self-help groups, which have been widely implemented in South Asia, have helped mobilize women to participate in income generating activities and overcome the fear of consequences from engaging in these activities.[24] Media interventions can also support on these efforts, such as those that highlight role models to reduce negative perceptions and sanctions around deviating from the norm.

Phase 3: Widespread acceptance of the gender egalitarian behavior

Last mile challenges require targeted inventions, sometimes with specific groups that are most resistant to change or hold very restrictive views. As acceptance of a new behavior or norm becomes widespread, and most individuals support and publicly express their support for the norm, small pockets or specific groups can remain strongly resistant to change. Two types of efforts

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BOX 3: COLLECTIVE COMMUNITY-BASED ACTION AND ALIGNMENT TOWARD NEW NORMS IN AFRICA

Bossuroy et al. (2022) document the cost effectiveness of a program to increase economic activity of poor women in Niger that complemented a multi-faceted social protection program under the Adaptive Social Safety Nets Project. The program added to skills development and cash transfer activities and community sensitization activities that included public discussion on social norms, aspirations, and community values around women's economic participation. They sought to address social norms change at the community level. Other projects, such as the Uganda Generating Growth Opportunities and Productivity for Women Enterprises, also include interventions that incorporate support for community empowerment, tackle negative social norms that impede women's business participation, and engage men and boys to advocate for women and girls in the community.

The Sahel Women's Empowerment and Demographic Dividend (SWEDD) project aims to increase women and adolescent girls' empowerment and their access to quality reproductive, child, and maternal health services across nine countries in the Sahel. The project has introduced a variety of activities, including husband schools, which bring together weekly groups of men to discuss women's rights, reproductive health, maternal health, family planning, hygiene, and other issues. Participants are not directly taught what is right or wrong; instead, they are provided information, which is discussed in facilitated conversations. The ultimate goal is to create sustainable shifts in local social norms. Anecdotal evidence and testimonies from participants indicate that the groups have had success in building a better understanding of the obstacles women face, a greater acceptance of women's rights (for example, to refuse sex), increased sharing of household tasks, as well as a reduction in GBV.

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[24] Self-help groups have shown a range of positive impacts, including women's employment, financial inclusion, empowerment (Hoffman et al., 2021; Dutta et al. 2017; Prennushi and Gupta 2014; Jejeebhoy and Santhya, 2018).

are important here. First, to solidify gains and prevent setbacks, formal legal changes or increased enforcement of legal frameworks can curb deviation at this stage. Legal decisions can lead people to update their perceptions about social norms, as in the case of the U.S. Supreme Court ruling in favor of same-sex marriage in 2015 (Tankard and Paluck, 2017).

Second, widespread support for the new norm can also be leveraged to create pressure to conform and increase the risk perception associated with breaches. For example, the #MeToo movement, which started in 2017, created a significant shift in the culture of silence and impunity by encouraging women to speak out about their experiences of sexual harassment. In addition to increasing awareness and challenging patriarchal power structures, the social movement also facilitated legislative changes at the state level in the U.S. (Hebert, 2018).

Preventing norms reversals

Norms reversal or re-entrenchment can happen as change toward a new norm unravels. Re-entrenchment, or the reinforcement or strengthening of the unequal norm, can occur when individuals, communities, or societies cling more tightly to what they know and have traditionally done because of changes in the economic, political, or social landscape, or as backlash following efforts to challenge or change gender norms too quickly or without an alternative norm being formed (Seguino, 2007). For example, the observed increase in son preference in the Caucasus countries followed the fall of the Soviet Union and the economic and social uncertainty that followed (Das Gupta 2015). The preference shifted into a norm that persisted long after the uncertainty diminished. During an economic crisis, gender norms around work and care can also reverse to more traditional gender roles. For instance, if a crisis results in a reduction of employment opportunities, it is likely norms dictating that women are the primary caregivers and men are the primary breadwinners will become more prevalent and will persist even during the post-crisis period (Alon et al., 2020, Harper et al., 2020).

Re-entrenchment of gender norms is an observable phenomenon and follows a similar pattern shown in the S curve. The main difference is that instead of signals pointing to the adoption of a new norm, signals point to the strengthening of the old norm. Initial signs include an increase in sanctions or lack of action against the norm re-appearing. Visible sanctions can take the form of increased

gender inequality, discrimination, and violence. They can also come in the shape of limits to women's freedoms or agency (Kilgallen et al., 2021; Alvarez Minte, 2016). Reversals can also be observed via formal signals (such as reduced investment by governments in actions supporting the new norm or legal reversals) and informal ones (such as increased sanctions, trendsetters and role models publicly moving back to the old norm, and re-affirmation of identities).

Communication tools can also support norm persistence. The substantial increase in internet access supporting exposure to new norms and the questioning of existing unequal ones, also has the potential to further reinforce gender norms (Harper et al., 2020). The internet can facilitate the sharing of progressive views on gender equality and human rights across the world, particularly among communities that may have had limited exposure to alternative belief systems (Watson Kakar et al., 2012). However, it can also promote the rapid spread of regressive gender norms.[25]

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[25] An area less explored, but recent studies on online misogyny and other forms of gender discrimination have been documented. See Mantilla, 2013 and Jane, 2017

Like all policies aiming to increase gender equality, social norms interventions are not standalone solutions. Irrespective of their approach to social norms, policy interventions will not achieve their goals as standalone interventions. They are not neutral and require structural changes, monetary incentives, and other policies to support them. Normative change can and should be supported by interventions that create the conditions for change. Addressing the underlying drivers of the observed outcomes, including economic and social inequality, is as important as providing information or using other tools. Approaches to changing social norms can be incremental and accommodating (i.e., working within existing gender power dynamics), and they can start small—from awareness of the limitations imposed by norms in order to effectively circumvent them—as much as they can be ambitious for large transformations.

Policy action can take different forms, ranging from being aware of the social norms that might affect implementation or outcomes, to aiming to target and transform social norms. Successful interventions are, at minimum, norms-aware. They aim to change the conditions under which a norm is enforced or create opportunities that allow for more individuals to deviate from the norm at no or low cost to support the achievement of a policy outcome.

Norm-sensitive policies consider norm conformity traps or structural and environmental factors that can reinforce unequal norms, as well as create the conditions for norms change to happen. They can use indirect channels, such as providing economic incentives or introducing legal changes, or tackle direct channels of norm persistence. For example, in many countries, the requirement of a male guardian's signature can limit women's access to finance, employment, or assets (Hallward-Driemeier, 2013). Similarly, inheritance norms and laws limit women's property ownership and, as a consequence, also limit their ability to access loans that require collateral.[26] In such instances, norm-sensitive policies are needed to address systemic biases that obstruct women's access to services and opportunities. These policies can also encourage positive deviance from the established norm through reduction of sanctions. In India, a program that provided bicycles to girls who continued to secondary school led to a significant increase in girls' enrollment. Not only did the program offer a safer mode of transportation for girls, but it also circumvented norms around investment into girls' education, such as buying a bicycle or having to spend in girls' transport, and eased patriarchal norms around girls traveling to attend school outside their village (Muralidharan and Prakash, 2017). Other projects seek to reduce these sanctions via legal reforms, though as noted, laws and legal reforms need to be addressed with a norms lens rather than standalone efforts. For example, in Vietnam, a legal review considering gender inequalities resulted in a series of legal reforms that enabled greater gender equality by passing parental leave for fathers and expanding their access to daycare services as well as lifting restrictions that were meant to protect women from working in certain sectors to supporting both men and women engage in jobs and safety at work (World Bank, 2019; Buchhave, et al. 2020).

Norm-transformative policies and interventions seek to change fundamentally the underlying beliefs and values that support an unequal social norm. An effective approach is to reframe the sanctioned action from a positive gain to a negative one. For example, childcare can be reframed around the value of early childhood development investments for a child's future, such as in India, where investments in a girl's education can become a signal that increases her marriage prospects.[27] Norm-transformative interventions can also leverage other widely accepted norms that conflict with undesired norms. For example, norms rooted in human rights or social justice can be leveraged to increase women's participation in decision-making bodies or to invest in GBV regulation.[28] New norms can also be promoted as "normal" by mobilizing support, debunking inaccurate expectations, and providing more and new information.

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[26] The Women, Business and the Law database documents some of these restrictions.

[27] However, reframing to improve outcomes in one area can have implications in others. See Andrew and Adams-Prassal (2022) on parental investment in education for better marriage prospects in India, and Deng et al. (2023) for Egypt.

[28] For example, the introduction of reservation quotas in India for women in local elected bodies is rooted in social justice arguments (see Chattopardhay and Duflo 2004).

Evidence on what works to change social norms is slowly increasing but remains limited.[29] Table 2 summarizes interventions that have focused on the different channels of influence that support the persistence or change of social norms. They show documented impacts across direct and indirect channels of norms change.[30] This non-exhaustive set of examples illustrates possible policy entry points to address social norms and improve women's outcomes. The success of these interventions varies, with impact felt in some domains but not others.

TABLE 2: EXAMPLES OF INTERVENTIONS AIMED AT ADDRESSING SOCIAL NORMS	
Indirect influence on social norms (necessary but not sufficient)	
LAWS & POLICIES	• Mandatory paternity leave laws in Europe not only increased the number of men taking leave, but also attitudes of other family members. In **Germany**, men eligible for the mandatory leave show more gender equal views, (Unterhofer and Wrohlich 2017). In **Spain**, children of eligible fathers exhibit more egalitarian attitudes (Farre et al. 2021). • Land titling reforms to include women's names in title documents increased the likelihood of women's name being included in **Ethiopia**. In **Rwanda**, expanding this to women irrespective of marriage certificates increased their co-ownership (Milazzo and Goldstein 2019). Adding a financial incentive further increased co-titling in **Uganda** (Cherchi et al. 2018) and **Tanzania** (Ali et al. 2016), as did requiring the presence of both spouses during discussion of a title offer in Uganda (Cherchi et al. 2018).
SERVICES (access, quality)	• In **Uganda** vocational training, together with information on sex, reproduction, and marriage increased self-employment four years later among adolescent girls in treated communities, and also reduced teen pregnancy, early marriage, and unwanted sexual relations (Bandiera et al. 2020). • In **India**, young rural women participating in a job recruitment program were less likely to get married or have children and more likely to enter the labor market or obtain further education. They also changed their fertility and future employment aspirations (Jensen 2012). • In **India**, women were given control over their earnings through access to bank accounts. Those receiving direct deposit of wages into their own accounts and financial training changed their work-related norms and shifted perceptions of community norms toward more liberal ones (Field et al. 2021).
RESOURCES	• In **Tunisia**, unconditional cash grants and financial training were provided to women, which increased participation in income generating activities, but did not alter traditional gender roles. It also found that involving male partners can hinder the intervention potential impact (Gazeaud et al., 2022). • In **Malawi**, cash transfers and payment of school fees conditional on girls' school attendance reduced early marriage and teen pregnancy (Baird et al., 2010). • In **India**, a program provided bicycles to girls who continued to secondary school to encourage their secondary school enrollment and attendance (Muralidharan and Prakash, 2017).
MARKETS	• In **Bangladesh**, expansion of the readymade garments sector resulted in structural changes that significantly increased the demand for female labor and created opportunities for women to work outside the home (Heath and Mobarak 2015). • In **Mexico**, labor demand shocks across Mexican industries caused by China's admission to the WTO resulted in increases in labor market opportunities and improved women's decision-making power in the household (Majlesi, 2016).

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[29] While this note is limited to evidence on social norms related to gender, there is further work on the topic in multiple sectors. Lessons from activities in these sectors can be of value, such as the ones summarized in Chaterjee et al. (2023) regarding social cohesion in settings of fragility, conflict, and violence.
[30] The classification of channels is based on the one used in UNFPA (2020) report on social norms interventions.

TABLE 2: EXAMPLES OF INTERVENTIONS AIMED AT ADDRESSING SOCIAL NORMS (CONT)

Direct influence/reinforce norm

INFORMATION

- In **Nigeria**, a television series featuring a domestic violence story increased rejection of GBV among young men and women (Banerjee, La Ferrara and Orozco, 2019).

- In **Saudi Arabia**, private information was disclosed to married men about views held by other married men who are supportive of women's employment, increasing their support for their spouses' labor market participation (Bursztyn, Gonzalez and Yananizawa-Drott, 2020).

- In **Ethiopia**, men's expectations were updated about their peers' acceptance of men engaging in home production tasks, increasing men's participation in these tasks, especially among those who underestimated their peers' acceptance prior to the intervention (Assefa et al., 2022).

- In **Egypt**, an edutainment program portraying women participants in an entrepreneurship competition changed general perceptions of women entrepreneurs to more positive ones. However, it also led viewers to think that discrimination against women was not as important as they had previously believed (Barsoum et al. 2022).

KNOWLEDGE & ATTITUDES

- Equimundo's Program H, implemented in **14 countries**, worked with young men to challenge masculinity stereotypes that support gender inequality using a combination of school curricula and community campaigns led by men. Positive changes included more gender-equitable attitudes among participating young men and some reduction in GBV perpetration or acceptance (Doyle and Kato-Wallace, 2021).

- In **India**, a school-based curriculum engaged boys and girls in classroom discussions about gender equality and resulted in more progressive gender attitudes (Dhar, Jain and Jayachandran, 2022).

- In **Pakistan**, an intervention to solicit men's support for women's voting used home visits and a video showing of a woman voter with male support. It helped increase women voter turnout as well as men's practical support to help women vote (Cheema et al. 2023).

SOCIAL NETWORKS

- In countries **across Africa**, Tostan's Community Empowerment Program took a human-rights approach, by creating a safe and supportive space for community members to discuss their own cultural values and beliefs and engage in participatory and inclusive dialogues around FGC. This led to many communities abandoning the practice (Diop et al., 2004; Easton et al., 2003).

- In **India**, women who were enabled to jointly visit a clinic with other women increased clinic visits and contraceptive use and improved reproductive autonomy of women who faced greater intrahousehold opposition than an intervention that only improved women's own access to the clinic (Anukriti, Herrera-Almanza and Karra, 2022).

- Self-help groups in **South Asia** facilitated norm deviation by gathering a critical mass of women to participate in a new activity, resulting in improved women's employment and financial inclusion (Hoffman et al., 2021; Dutta, Sarkar and Shekhar, 2017).

EXPECTATIONS & ASPIRATIONS

- In **India**, exposure to women in leadership roles in local Panchayats, raised both girls' aspirations and women's labor force participation. It also improved perceptions of women's effectiveness as leaders and weakened stereotypes about gender roles in the public and domestic spheres (Beaman et al. 2009).

- In **Ethiopia**, exposure to documentaries featuring local men and women role models increased parents' aspirations for their children's education and increased enrollment, time spent in school, and schooling expenditures. (Bernard et al. 2019).

World Bank projects widely acknowledge the importance of social norms, but the extent to which the programs are norms-aware or norms-transformative varies. Across the projects reviewed, there is a clear recognition that addressing and changing norms will lead to stronger program results and positive impacts. Many of the projects recognize the underlying drivers of social and gender norms, including the excessive burden of care on women, limited voice and agency, and the harms caused by GBV. Most projects recognize that prevalent social and cultural norms are a barrier to successful implementation and desired project results indicators, but very few go into further depth on the mechanisms by which norms have an impact, or how, through project actions, these will be addressed. In fact, among the projects reviewed, very few indicate having undertaken, or planning to undertake, a norms diagnostic.

One good example is the Additional Financing of the Program for Results (PforR) on Economic Opportunities for Jordanians and Syrian Refugees. The project supports the Jordanian National Commission for Women (JNCW) in addressing social norms and gender roles related to women's labor participation.[31] The program conducted a detailed diagnostic of social norms related to women's labor participation. As a result, it is planning to conduct a nationwide, multimedia campaign addressing the identified barriers, together with direct community and private sector outreach and development of educational content. Another example is the Supporting Andhra's Learning Transformation project in India, which aims to improve learning outcomes, quality of teaching practices, and school management in basic education. It aims to address early drivers of gender norms and stereotypes in an education setting by introducing training elements on how to tackle gender biases among teachers and other frontline workers. In Bangladesh, the Health and Gender Support Project for Cox's Bazar district is employing the Start, Awareness, Support, Action (SASA!) methodology to effect norms change in Rohingya camps to address GBV.

SASA! activities are broad and include tools, such as power posters, drama sketches and discussions, community leadership, and institutional strengthening, with the goal of creating role models for desired behavior.

A rare example of an operational project that incorporates systematic measurement of social norms is the Nigeria for Women Project. Aiming to support improved livelihoods for women in targeted areas of Nigeria, the project includes a deep-dive diagnostic of social norms, and the design and implementation of activities to address the social norms identified as restricting women's economic participation. Among the planned actions, project activities aim to build social capital by galvanizing women to become members of Women Affinity Groups (WAGs) and strengthening both new and existing WAGs. The project is unusual in its comprehensive approach to both measuring and seeking to directly impact social norms regionally and at the community level. The team implemented the Social Norms Exploration Tool (SNET)[32] to understand local beliefs and norms around areas such as decision making, drivers of GBV, inheritance and ownership of assets, and more. Notably, insights from both the qualitative analysis around norms and iterative approaches to norms challenges on the ground (for instance, norms around female cell phone use and meeting attendance, which are key to program implementation) have provided useful insights not only for project but also for other activities in Nigeria.

The Liberia Women Empowerment Project aiming to improve social and livelihood services for women and girls, seeks to leverage fostering positive social norms to increase women's voice, agency and economic opportunities. It is one of the few projects in the World Bank portfolio review that aims to not only monitor outcomes but also changes in individual attitudes to proxy changes in norms, using indicators such as share of men and women supported by the project that believe intimate partner violence is not justified; or that think that adolescent girls should not marry before 18.

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[31] This work is supported by the World Bank's Mashreq Gender Facility (MGF), which provides technical assistance to the Mashreq countries to enhance women's economic empowerment and opportunities.
[32] Developed by the Institute for Reproductive Health at Georgetown University (Institute for Reproductive Health, 2020).

Overall, attention to social norms is a key element for policy interventions aiming to address gender inequalities and improve people's overall access and use of opportunities. All policy interventions, not only those targeting gender inequality, should consider norms in their design and implementation and whether they will play a role in potential gender differences in access and benefits from the specific policy actions. Norms-aware interventions include an assessment of social norms enforcement mechanisms and how these can be overcome. Norms-blind policies can be inefficient, may not achieve their intended outcomes, and can inadvertently reinforce gender inequality.

There is a growing, albeit still insufficient, set of examples and good practices on how to measure and analyze social norms and of interventions that indirectly or directly address their enabling environment or beliefs and practices. Greater attention on how to better measure social norms, expanding from individual beliefs or observed outcomes, the value of triangulating information -when what is said is not what is observed- are providing new insights for policy design. Impact evaluation work from interventions that have aimed to addressed social norms are growing and increasing the portfolio of options available for policy action.

The following recommendations apply across sectors when designing effective policies and programs that aim to move the needle on gender norms. They highlight key approaches to unpacking gender norms and their relative effect on gender outcomes, and they consider what gender norms are—and what they are not—and their linkages to other drivers of behavior. In addition, multiple entities at the World Bank Group, under their broader mandate, work to support Bank teams via operational and evaluation support in developing projects that address and measure social norms (see Box 4).

BOX 4. WORLD BANK GROUP ENTITIES THAT ARE SUPPORTING NORMS CHANGE AND MEASUREMENT

Several entities at the World Bank work to provide support to Bank operations and teams through rigorous evaluation. They also support implementation of projects with a social norms component. Among these are:

The **Gender Innovation Labs** work with teams at the World Bank, aid agencies and donors, governments, non-governmental organizations, private sector firms, and researchers. Funded in part by the Umbrella Facility for Gender Equality (UFGE), the federation of GILs test various approaches to achieving women's economic empowerment and gain agency. GILs cover Africa (AFRGIL), East Asia and the Pacific (EAPGIL), South Asia (SARGIL), Latin America and the Caribbean (LACGIL) and the Middle East and North Africa (MNAGIL).

The **Mind, Behavior, and Development Unit (eMBeD)**, the World Bank's behavioral science team in the Poverty and Equity Global Practice works with World Bank projects to provide support (from diagnosis to design, implementation, and evaluation). eMBeD has supported teams across the World Bank on understanding and addressing social and gender norms, and produces public goods that focus on, among other things, the analytical underpinning of norms and policy recommendations for change.

The **Mashreq Gender Facility (MGF)** provides technical assistance to the Mashreq countries to enhance women's economic empowerment and opportunities as a catalyst towards more inclusive, sustainable, and peaceful societies, where economic growth benefits all. The MGF's early and ongoing efforts focus on understanding and addressing gender norms in the region as a key pillar within country-specific workplans.

The World Bank's **Development Impact Evaluation (DIME)** department focuses on the generation of high-quality and operationally relevant data and research from impact evaluations to produce actionable information and recommend specific policy pathways to maximize impact. DIME has implemented and tested several interventions to change social norms.

Use available data to document the presence of social norms but do so with an understanding that attitudes or outcomes may not reflect prevalent social norms. Social norms, attitudes, beliefs, and outcomes might not always align, and are different from each other. A family might believe that education is beneficial for girls and might even send their daughters to school, but they may still prefer to marry their daughter at an early age even if it means her leaving school before completion because the community expects them to do so. In this case, attitudes have little bearing on actual choice, especially as these preferences are conditional on the expectation of potential sanctions. For example, the daughter might not be able to marry later, or the cost of marriage will be higher, in terms of money or the possible groom. Understanding and documenting social norms and privately held beliefs can reveal important opportunities to address mismatches, but social norms cannot be observed or assumed to operate in isolation of structural and financial barriers; they need to be considered together.

Recognize that gender norms are tied to power and agency imbalances that support their persistence. The most persistent and resistant to change norms are those tied to the power and control one group has over another group, whether husbands relative to wives, mothers in law relative to daughters in law, or others. Power and privilege differences, such as those surrounding control over resources and assets or decision-making power, will interact with norms. Power imbalances within the household could mean that, for example, interventions that will increase women's empowerment may not be perceived with equal enthusiasm by those with a vested interest in maintaining the status quo (see for example McKelway, 2021). Another example is resistance to redistribution of assets (inheritance or land) among spouses or between sons and daughters. There are opportunities for social norm change that reframe or counterbalance such power differences These include conditioning asset sharing as a default for additional benefits; enacting legal changes that promote redistribution of power, like the Hindu Succession Act that granted women inheritance rights; and reframing collaboration or losses of such power -i.e. enrolling men as champions.

Consider that everyone faces normative barriers, even if the norm only constrains one groups' behavior or opportunities. A common fallacy of policies and programs around gender norms is focusing only on women or the group that is negatively impacted by the norm. They do not adequately consider that everyone is involved in upholding the norm. People can be both enforcers and subjects of gender norms. This is important for policy design in two ways. First, interventions that do not change the broader normative environment place the burden of change on those negatively impacted by the norm, making change more difficult. Second, interventions aimed at positively impacting one gender might negatively impact the other. For example, women-only metro cars in Mexico City increased male-to-male violence in the subway (Aguilar, Gutierrez, and Villagran, 2021). Masculine norms prescribe, for instance, that men be the providers and protectors of their families, take risks, and be sexually active and aggressive. Failure to live up to these expectations, especially the provider role, could lead men to experience emotional distress, social isolation, or increase violence toward women, children, and other minority groups.

Recognize that norms do not stand alone; they are connected to economic and structural contexts as well with other norms that can influence multiple outcomes. Not all norms that influence gender outcomes are related to one specific behavior and not all behaviors depend on a single social norm. Larger norms or meta norms that operate over multiple behaviors (Heise & Manji, 2016, Axelrod, 1986) such as those related to authority, control and violence, male honor, and similar, should be considered as part of an intervention. Even if they are not the direct norm or behavior to be addressed, they could prevent change from taking place (The Social Norm Learning Collaborative, 2021). For example, if a daughter or wife does not meet expected behaviors (e.g., leaves the house without permission, does not observe purdah, or is seen in the company of men), there are two transgressions. First, the woman has done something considered inappropriate and socially sanctioned, even if her spouse agrees, as in the case of an emergency. Second, the man has lost honor that imposes a sanction or price on him to restore. The restitution might require different displays of honor, such as physical punishment of the woman or an honor killing. In these cases, the norm not only preserves male authority within the household, but also in relation to other men in the community.

Identify linkages between legal norms and regulatory frameworks and social norms. Social norms and legal frameworks can influence one another. Legal frameworks serve an important signaling function. The presence of a law communicates to people unequivocally that a certain behavior is no longer deemed acceptable, thus shifting expectations for conforming. Legal thresholds have been shown to have a causal influence on what people consider to be socially appropriate behavior (Lane, Nosenzo, and Sonderegger, 2023). Similarly, legal changes that move toward greater equality signal that old sanctions are losing value and support (Bicchieri, 2017). This does not mean that legal changes will always bring about the expected abandonment of a norm, but they are an important signal. If norms are deeply ingrained in personal and cultural beliefs, enforcing severe legal consequences might have the adverse effect. Prosecutors, police, and other enforcers might not have the incentive to enforce the law (Kahan, 2000). A more effective approach could be to introduce mild and gradual enforcement of legal penalties to motivate progressive distancing from the norm.

The process legitimacy of new formal norms and their enforcement matters for social norms adoption or abandonment. The credibility of decision makers; the consistency of their goals and priorities with societal values; perceived benefits, and the participation and transparency of their processes should not be overlooked (Barron et al., 2023). Trust in formal institutions is tightly linked to the abandonment of harmful practices in response to legal reforms. When legal frameworks and law enforcement are used to discourage a norm, the credibility of the enforcers and decision makers, the consistency with agreed-upon rules and societal values, and the perceptions about the procedural fairness of the legal system, as well as the legitimacy of the origins of the law, perceived benefits, transparency, and other issues can impact their outcomes (Bicchieri & Mercier, 2014; Barron et al., 2023).

Finally, the day-to-day operation and implementation of programs can have important consequences. From forms to how options are presented and discussed, how a policy or law gets practically implemented and how those elements do or not implicitly affirm the social norm can hinder change, particularly if steps have not been taken to adapt default materials, documents or trainings. For example, documents, forms, and communications can perpetuate assumptions, such as men are the head

of the household or the rightful owners of land or assets (think of forms having only one signature line, or program application forms listing only the income and occupation of the household head), services for children that default on mothers reinforce assumptions of women's role as main caregivers. Without adaptation and training to a different configuration, adoption of programs as well as norms changes are likely to not happen as expected -see for example the gains by considering female role models in agricultural extension services (Kondylis et al. 2016; Lecoutere, Spielman, and Van Campenhout, 2023).

Conducting a social norms diagnostic is the first step toward designing and implementing a project that is sensitive to norms or aims to change them.[33] Understanding the type of norm present, the impact of these norms on the design and implementation of the project, as well as the behaviors the project is designed to target is critical to intervention design. World Bank Group and country teams can use the following guiding questions to think through whether and how norms might be influencing a project. By considering these questions, project teams can gain a deeper understanding of the role of social norms in shaping project outcomes and identify opportunities to design and implement more effective, equitable, and sustainable development interventions.

- For behaviors encouraged by the project—be it loan application review by bank employees, the provision of advice by agricultural extension agents, or the uptake-up of employment opportunities by youth—whose beliefs will have an influence at each step of the process? How would that influence take place? This includes the beliefs, values, and opinions held by individuals or communities regarding the roles, responsibilities, and capabilities of men and women, as well as the expectations and standards of behavior that individuals believe are prevalent within their social group or community. For instance, financial officers' views on women's financial abilities or creditworthiness

may affect women's access to loans, as found by Alibhai et al (2019) in Turkiye. In agriculture, beliefs that women should not be engaged in certain for-profit activities or that they are not the ones who normally do it may result in limited advice being provided by agricultural extension services to women, which can hinder their productivity or opportunities for growth.

- Do any gender norms or expectations of gender behavior exist that may restrict women's access to services and assistance, increase dropout rates, or impede the final intended outcome? The program delivery design and success of take-up or implementation process will be impacted by gender norms and expectations of gender behaviors in the specific project context. For instance, micro-loans may have women as borrowers, but due to gender norms discouraging them from income generation, their male counterparts may be in control of the loan (Sohel, Ninger, & Gunawardana, 2021). In entrepreneurship programs, norms restricting women's mobility outside the home can have a significant impact on their ability to set up home-based businesses. When women are unable to leave their homes or travel independently, they may be reliant on a man to purchase materials, sell products, or conduct other business-related activities outside of the home (Carranza, Dhakal, & Love, 2018).

- Are there any changes in social norms that are likely to occur as a result of the project, and how will these changes impact the project and its goals? For instance, if there is an expectation for women to take on increased work outside the home, it is crucial to implement measures that provide the necessary structures of support, particularly if they still have primary responsibility for domestic tasks. When faced with shifting gender norms, men may also experience feelings of exclusion or threat. Therefore, it is essential to actively involve them in the process of change and assist them in reshaping their roles in society. This approach ensures that interventions are sustainable.

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[33] There are several tools available summarized in Marcus (2021).

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