© 2014 Erin Lubin/CARE

Social Norms Data Use Tool

Purpose of the Data Use Tool

While diagnosing and assessing the strength of social norms is becoming increasingly popular within formative research and baseline evaluations for a wide range of projects, it can be difficult to then use the data gathered to design programs that lead to social norms change. To help program staff utilize the social norms data and findings to design interventions, this guidance focuses on three things:

1. **Help identify** where a programmer should look in the data gathered on social norms (**Where to look**)
2. Help programmers review data to identify cracks in social norms that would lead to behavior change (**What to look for**)

3. Show design implications for behavior change where possible (**Why identifying the cracks matter**)

This guide does not offer guidance on how to collect social norms data nor solutions to the opportunities presented by each question above. Before using this tool, refer to the SNAP Framework and Tipping Point's resources on social norms measurement for guidance and examples of how to collect data on social norms. After using this tool which helps understand the social norms data, please see the Social Norms Design Checklist for examples of how to shift norms by using project activities.

Before you get started: A quick introduction to Social Norms and related data

Social norms are unwritten rules of behavior which are shaped by a group and are different from attitudes and beliefs held by individuals. Social Norms are made up by one's beliefs about *what others do* and *what others expect one to do*. Research on social norms has demonstrated that these expectations about what is considered 'normal', 'acceptable' or 'typical', along with peoples' personal attitudes and knowledge, shape people's behaviors.

Understanding social norms and differentiating them from behaviors and attitudes has been quite challenging in practice. Therefore, CARE developed the Social Norms Analysis Plot (SNAP) to identify, assess the strength of, and measure change in social norms. The SNAP Framework helps users identify five key components of a norm: empirical expectations (what I think others do or what is perceived to be normal), normative expectations (what I think others expect me to do), sanctions (anticipated reaction of others, sensitivity to sanctions (how affected I am by the sanctions) and exceptions (under what circumstances would it be okay to break the norm?).

What's a "crack" in a social norm and why is it important?

A crack is evidence that a social norm is beginning to or can shift. To assess where the "cracks" in the network of social norms are, a programmer should seek answers to the **'key questions'** in this tool when reviewing the social norms data. Answers to each question opens a window of opportunity to develop interventions that seek to "widen" the crack and alter prioritized norms that impact a project's specific outcomes.

© 2014 Carey Wagner/CARE

Who should use this guide and when?

This guide should be used by programmers and program evaluators to review the social norms data to identify "cracks" in norms so that they can be leveraged for behavior change and strengthen project outcomes. Thus, programmers and monitoring and evaluation colleagues should keep this guide handy at the following stages:

1. When reviewing formative research data which identifies the underlying norms targeting behavior
2. When reviewing the baseline social norms data that verifies the identified norms, assesses their strength and flexibility, and/or describes sanctions and reference groups
3. When developing program designs based on the "cracks" identified in the harmful norms that can be leveraged to facilitate positive behavior change

KEY QUESTION 1:

According to your data, which norms should be prioritized in your intervention?

To prioritize the norms for program design, look into the formative research and baseline data to identify which norms are weak or strong. Programs should prioritize those norms that have the most impact on behavior AND are weak to begin with or show signs of weakening over time. SNAP proposes several elements to gauge norm influence and strength, including: the extent to which there is broad agreement between expectations about what others do and approve of (i.e. everyone acts the same way as they are expected to), whether sanctions are weak or severe (i.e. disobeying a norm could result in no retaliation or backlash), the sensitivity to sanctions (i.e. people are vary wary of backlash or they are not worried about them), and the existence of exceptions to break a norm (i.e. you are allowed to disobey a norm for few or many reasons). Some of these ways through which the strength of a norm can be gauged are explained below:

a) Sanctions and sensitivity to sanctions around a norm in your data: Less rigid sanctions or people having less sensitivity to a negative sanction could suggest a norm is weak and thus program design can include attempts to further weaken the norm and bring about behavior change. In other words, programmers should consider if the norm's strength or anticipation of sanctions due to deviance from the norm matters for behavior.

KEY QUESTION 1: CASE STUDY In the TESFA project, data was collected from mothers-in-law of married adolescent girls to assess the norms affecting adolescent brides' mobility. It was found that both younger and older mother-in laws reported the same anticipated sanctions for daughter in-laws going out of the house i.e. others would gossip and discredit the honor of their daughter in-laws. But mothers in-law who were relatively younger were less sensitive to these sanctions, meaning they did not let this sanction determine how they behaved all the time. This suggests that the strength of the same norm varied between mother in-laws based on their age.

KEY QUESTION 1: CASE STUDY In the Tipping Point baseline data, educated parents didn't want their adolescent daughters to get married before receiving a complete education. They reported that the community's sanctions for their daughters finishing school and not marrying before then do not matter to them. This suggests a weak norm as the sensitivity towards sanctions is not strong enough to influence behavior in most situations.

Design Implications:
Based on the example above, a project would prioritize continuing to weaken the norm among younger mothers-in-law first as they showed less sensitivity to sanctions, which suggests strong chances of positively deviant behavior. Older mothers-in-law may be prioritized for changing their behavior regarding mobility of married girls in the household.

b) Exceptions to the norms: When we see that exceptions to the norm exist, this is a sign that the norm is weak to begin with or in the process of weakening. For example, there is a norm that men do not do household chores. An exception to this norm is when the wife is out of town or too sick to work, men do household chores. Thus, exception to this norm exists in certain situations. This could indicate that either there are less sanctions towards behavior in exceptional situations, people are less sensitive to sanctions, or that defying the norm is becoming more and more acceptable. If there are absolutely no exceptions, the norm is likely more rigid, not as easy to shift, and strongly tied to behavior – all making progress harder.

Design Implications:
Once the data tells you where the exceptions lie, the program can be designed to target the people following these exceptions and use them as 'role models' to expand positive behaviors. For example, in the Tipping Point Initiative communities in Nepal, the norm that 'girls should get married by the age of 16' was seen to have an exception if the girl was a very good student in school. Thus, good grades in school was leading to exceptions to an otherwise strong norm. See the Social Norms Design Checklist to see ways to support early adopters, such as girls completing their education and their supportive parents, that will enhance both norms shifting and thus behavior change.

KEY QUESTION 2:

For prioritized norms, does your data show evidence of pluralistic ignorance?

Look into your formative research and/or baseline data to identify if pluralistic ignorance[1] exists around a norm. Pluralistic ignorance exists when majority of group members privately reject the norm but go along with it because they think that others expect them to follow the norm. If there is a pluralistic ignorance around a norm, there is opportunity for behavior change. We can analyze data on 'empirical expectations' or 'typical behaviour' to examine if pluralistic ignorance exists.

KEY QUESTION 2: CASE STUDY Community members associated with the CARE Tipping Point Initiative in Nepal believe that child marriage is harmful to a girl's sexual and reproductive health and they do believe that the girls should be at least 18 years of age before they can marry. However, everyone in the community might still think that others expect daughters to be married earlier and thus, everybody marries their daughters before she is 18 even with their private feelings contradicting this.

Design Implications:
If pluralistic ignorance exists, the norm can be shifted by making people aware of each other's personal beliefs and attitudes. If for example, all the people in the community are made aware that everyone thinks that child marriage

---

1   Pluralistic Ignorance exists when people hold incorrect assumptions about what others do and think. To read more, go to: Miller, D.T. and McFarland, C. (1991). When Social Comparison Goes Awry: The Case of Pluralistic Ignorance. In J. Suls & T.A. Wills (Eds.), *Social Comparison: Contemporary Theory and Research*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum. pp. 287-313.

is harmful to a girls' health, people's perception of what is considered 'normal' or acceptable might change leading to positive behavior change. See the Social Norms Design Checklist to learn more about community-level dialogue to bring up these contradictions and ways to support early adopters to demonstrate how many people are truly going against the norm in their lives.

KEY QUESTION 3:

Who are the Reference Groups?

Look into the formative and/or baseline data to identify the reference groups for the target population. Reference Groups are made up of people whose opinion matter to us and thus can be unique to each person or to each norm. Once the reference groups are identified, interventions can be designed to influence these groups to adopt positive attitudes and behaviors and be champions for change. These reference groups can also become role models for the community members to adopt positive behaviors.

KEY QUESTION 3: CASE STUDY Married women in a community often perceive the norm that 'women should not raise her voice to marital violence'. However, married women might see the neighborhood women as a reference group i.e. that is the group whose opinion matters the most to her. This means that she expects sanctions from the neighborhood women e.g. 'if a married woman raises her voice to marital violence, the neighborhood women would say that she is not a good wife'. For the same social norm, if the married women are factory workers, the reference group can be the managers or co-workers instead, who believe that we should not talk about marital violence in the workplace.

Design Implications:

There are two ways in which programmers can tap into the understanding gained from reference groups. The first way is to change the main character's perceptions about what a reference group does and thinks with respect to a particular norm. This could be done by creating space for **inter-group dialogues** between participant groups so that "main characters" have open communication with their reference groups and there is clarity and discussion regarding expectations from each other and reference groups' perceptions about 'appropriate behaviors'. A second way is to target reference groups' own behaviors and attitudes to then help or influence "main character's" behavior change, such as through public demonstrations of positive deviance, or supporting a different positive norm (ex. Local government supporting girl-led activism).

KEY QUESTION 3: CASE STUDY The ReNEW project made significant efforts in identifying and working with reference groups. The project participants were engaged in active discussions to identify the key reference groups, including the influential community leaders. The people identified as reference groups were then made part of discussions where their attitudes and beliefs regarding men's use of aggression in marital conflicts were discussed. The community leaders who were identified as more inclined to promote deviance from the existing harmful norm (through a scoring system), were identified as 'Reference Group Allies'. These carefully identified reference group allies became key actors in the program activities themselves and they were supported community talk shows which addressed the norm around men's aggression.

What Next?

Now that your project is armed with an understanding of the social norms data and how it can be used to improve program strategies, take a look at the Social Norms Design Checklist. This paired tool will help you take your deeper understanding of the norms and the opportunities present to "widen the cracks" presented in the data to then create or adapt activities that specifically seek to shift prioritized norms.