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Social Norms Design Checklist

Purpose of this checklist

We created this checklist to support both program design and ongoing implementation of social norms-shifting interventions. Often programmers plan to challenge and shift harmful social norms but are not certain of where to begin and how to adapt their activities to include norms-shifting components, effectively moving beyond individual behavior change. Programs that do not understand how to shift harmful norms may inadvertently reinforce them, or simply be ineffective at challenging and shifting them. This checklist provides examples of questions to ask while designing activities, examples of how to fill in any gaps identified, and what norms-shifting interventions look like in action. The checklist should be used *after* the program identifies the harmful social norms that act as barriers to positive behaviors and outcomes and thus the context in which norms operate. If you have already done formative research and need guidance on how to use that data, please see the [Social Norms Data Use Tool](#) before using this checklist. For guidance on formative research and understanding norms in your context, please see Annex A.

Before you get started

Throughout the implementation of all programming, including programming related to social norms, the [Do No Harm principle](#)¹ should guide and inform our work. Due to the sensitive nature of social norms programming, this should be considered while designing and implementing programs, and it is recommended to monitor for potentially harmful or violent backlash in order to mitigate risk wherever possible.

To guide and inform its work, CARE articulated [8 design principles for engaging in social norms change](#), drawing from academic literature and internal learning documents. For the purposes of this checklist, we have simplified these into just 5 actions for your project to take. These are reflected in the checklist below:

ACTION 1

Find early adopters and support them: Often, people are already living their lives in positive ways that support gender equality and opportunities for change. These people tend to show low sensitivity to the sanctions when going against a norm and can be easily motivated and organized to become champions for change. Find these people (often called “positive deviants”) and connect them with each other. It can be hard to embody positive, rights-based change alone, so groups can help individuals support, encourage and trouble-shoot public and private demonstrations of positive norms, working with role models and champions to challenge prevailing social norms.

ACTION 2

Map allies and ask for their support: Identify the influential people, resources and networks needed to support positive change for individuals, families and communities. Identify ways to bring these people, networks and resources on board, and connect them with those who are leading change.

ACTION 3

Open safe space for dialogue: Get people talking to each other about new ideas. Challenge the implicit assumptions that everyone holds the same views, experiences and preferences. Then make sure to do this in public-facing spaces to engage publicly with community members to debate on what is OK in this context.

ACTION 4

Use future-oriented positive messages: Change is possible, so help people imagine positive alternatives. During the dialogue, look for positive statements that can become relatable, future-oriented positive messages. Use these in reflective sessions with community members, mass media communications, and information, education and communication (IEC) materials. This is especially important because many well-intentioned communication efforts build on negative messaging about the norm, which can be shaming and counterproductive when compared to presenting ideas for positive alternatives.

ACTION 5

Expect bystander action: To help the community move from envisioning possibilities of justice to action, demonstrate that the positive shift we hope for already exists, thus helping positive behaviors become normal. This can happen privately and publicly and involves building community and accountability so that people show up for change in their words and actions.

¹ For more information on the Do No Harm principle, see the [International Women’s Development Agency \(IWDA\) Do No Harm Toolkit \(2018\)](#)

ACTION 1

Find Early Adopters and Support Them

Check your project's design and activities using these questions	Ways to fill the gap <i>If you haven't found early adopters or found ways to support them, you can:</i>	What this can look like
Have you identified people already demonstrating the positive norm or behavior within directly engaged groups or community stakeholders?	Do a quick mapping of the groups your project works with to note what positive behavior do people demonstrate for the selected norm.	<p>Tipping Point reflected with participant groups of girls and boys about men, women, girls and boys sharing household chores. They discussed how women and girls do most of the household chores, but there were some exceptions where men and boys also do the chores. Then, participants identified those exceptions and talked to them, then brought them together to discuss if they wish to put up a public event showcasing these tasks for discussion. The project team held series of public events for different household chores done by men as a competition where they invited the entire village and government officials to judge. A spice company even agreed to sponsor the men's cooking competitions. After the event, a discussion was facilitated with the participating men and the community that had gathered to watch the event and taste the food. The early adopters shared how they felt and that they were happy to be role modeling this behavior for boys in their home and community. The facilitators also asked the community about what stops them from sharing household tasks and the responses created a good discussion on gender equality in a large community forum.</p> <p>Read full case study here.</p>
Are you building support for early adopters – either through mentoring, building solidarity amongst group members to support them, or providing a space for reflection on challenges or backlash to the early adopters are facing?	Organize opportunities for early adopters to come together and discuss positive sides of their behavior, understand what factors made them change the behavior, what were the barriers, what risks they took, and how did it make them feel when adopting this positive behavior. These early adopters will be the role model to for showing positive behavior and challenging the norm. In public spaces, early adopters might find comfort to talk about the pressures and also find people who are going through similar situations. This will further help to find additional allies in the community.	
Did you consider gender and power norms while identifying early adopters?	Consider the identity of the early adopters, whether they are men or women, boys or girls, their social class, religion, ethnicity. Consider what power each group holds and to what norms they generally adhere. For example, if a woman goes outside village to work, this could be positive deviance for women's mobility and economic empowerment, but does she also have control over her income? Be mindful of these issues to bring them up in later communication.	
Do you have monitoring mechanisms to identify and analyze instances of backlash against change champions?	<p>Consistent and safe spaces for discussing with the early adopters are important times to identify backlash and decide how to handle it. If you have a regular meeting in the community, you can use the following discussion questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ How did people react when early adopters raised questions and challenge norms – i.e. was there any backlash, how did they handle it? ■ Did early adopters face any problem due to the backlash (ex. Friends stopped talking to them), what did they do to minimize the backlash? ■ Were there any positive comments to counter the backlash? How useful was it to address the backlash? ■ Would it help to seek out allies or supporters to help in managing the backlash, or mitigating it? 	

ACTION 2

Map allies and ask for their support

Check your project's design and activities using these questions	Ways to fill the gap <i>If you have not mapped allies and asked for their support, you can:</i>	What this can look like
Have participants identified potential allies in the family and community that currently or would potentially support the change they desire?	Do a quick mapping of the groups your project works with, reference groups ² identified in your formative research, or a stakeholder mapping during a group session.	Project participants, their families and neighbors consider who she feels is supportive and lists them. Then, they can help begin activist communication to challenge norms and change the perception of people they know.
Have you conducted a stakeholder analysis?	For each stakeholder conduct an analysis to see what level of support is required for them versus their influence to challenge and change the norm. For example: a religious leader in the community might need moderate support but he will have high influence on norm change. This assessment can help you prioritize support.	These allies in the community come together – in their words and actions – to create social pressure that supports positive attitudes and behaviors and fights backlash against those challenging a harmful norm.
Are there groups or organizations that support changing the harmful norm and creating a new one?	Look for other organizations, groups, celebrities or media, companies that do similar kind of work or support activism around harmful norms or support positive norms. These groups or organizations can be in the community or outside. Link them with the positive deviance or early adapters for support and further actions together.	The individuals from the community are aware and connected to the organizations that promote a positive norm. They are aware about the capacity, strengths and services provided by the organizations, so that if there is a need they can reach out to those organizations.
How equipped or experienced are stakeholders to support the desired change?	Do a stakeholder analysis that can help to map allies on moderate to high support v/s low to high influence on social norms change. This will help to identify what interventions can be done with each ally.	If the community members observe any discrimination, they ask questions challenging the behavior. In this way, raising one's voice can begin to develop a new norm about challenging discriminatory behavior and asking tough questions in the home and in the community.
Do you have a policy or law to support positive deviance from harmful norms?	Are there policies or laws in your country that support positive norms, for example: Does the labor policy in the country promote equal pay or wages for same work to men and women? If so, find those that support implementation of these laws and policies to work alongside the community-level activities project participants and change champions are doing.	For more on allyship, please see the sessions in Tipping Point's Structured Allyship to Girl-Led manual .

² 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. These reference groups can also then become role models for the community members to adopt positive behaviors.

ACTION 3

Open Safe Space for Dialogue

Check your project's design and activities using these questions	Ways to fill the gap <i>If you have not created open and safe spaces for dialogue, you can:</i>	What this can look like
Do you have activities beyond group-level platforms, either led by the project staff or by project participants where people share their views and opinions?	Identify existing or new places where people can gather to view and discuss activities, such as a street drama, radio or TV shows. Use tools for critical reflective dialogue sessions, such as the Social Analysis & Action (SAA) manual and Tipping Point's Inter-group Dialogue manuals that reach more than direct project participants.	Remember that public discourse events, where the community members who are leading change are free to express their struggles in challenging norms, are not one-off or singular activities.
Do these project activities involve different stakeholder groups, such as family members, community members, opinion leaders and service providers?	Direct participants can invite their family, friends, peers, or others they think are important. These additional people can participate in the reflection and change. The direct participants can use positive messages while inviting others, or positive messages can be posted on virtual groups with questions for reflection.	To foster parent/adolescent dialogue, Tipping Point Nepal brought together the project's adolescent groups with the parent groups once every three months for joint activities and discussions. When Mother's Day approached, they set up special games and conversation starters for mothers and daughters to do in pairs, which they did again for fathers and sons on Father's Day. Parents talked about their own childhoods, adolescents shared their hopes and dreams, and each pair discussed their expectations of one another. These intergenerational dialogues provided the chance for parents and children to learn new things about each other and challenge their assumptions about each other's thoughts and feelings.
Do these spaces discuss - openly and without judgement - how power relations or economic interests are impacted by the current and new norm?	<p>Facilitate a discussion about how the norm impacts on power relations: for example, if a girl is not allowed to go out, how would it impact her agency, how does exposure to the outer world build her confidence? How does mobility help her being economically independent? In what conditions it's okay for a girl to break norms? For example, does earning money impacts a girl's decision making. Are there any examples they can share from their community about such exceptions?</p> <p>Each of these questions can be connected back to communities' own stated norms: in our example, how does restricting a girl's movement align with or go against community values and their goals for everyone's health and well-being?</p> <p>Finally, these discussions require advanced facilitation skills: make sure staff are prepared to facilitate these dialogues openly and without judgement – our role is not to tell people the change we seek but to facilitate a process of critical reflection for them to lead the change they desire. Find resources for the project staff's own transformation on gender and power alongside skills to facilitate reflective dialogue in the SAA Global Implementation Manual</p>	

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Check your project's design and activities using these questions	Ways to fill the gap <i>If you have not created open and safe spaces for dialogue, you can:</i>	What this can look like
<p>Do dialogue activities discuss sanctions related to the norm, i.e. what happens when someone goes against the current norm?</p>	<p>In dialogue sessions, you can use the following questions and probes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ If someone acted outside of the norm or in a way that challenged a social norm, what would happen? How does that impact them, their families, and the community? ■ Think about where the sanction (reaction to going against the norm) came from – was it by someone from the same group as the person challenging the norm (i.e. a boy talks positively about another boy helping his sister with his homework) or someone else? Why do you think this is? <p>Are there instances where a change in norm was accepted? Was that acceptance facilitated or did it happen automatically over time?</p>	<p>Read the full case study here.</p>
<p>If your dialogue activities are led by community members, have they identified potential allies to help them deal with backlash or challenges from fellow community members or stakeholders?</p>	<p>Dialogue organizers bring allies and/or early adopters to a public forum to share their experience and support early adopters from any harm during discussion. They also ensure safe space – in terms of physical safety but also to manage dialogue participants if someone becomes judgmental or angry towards other participants.</p>	



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ACTION 4

Use future-oriented positive messages

Check your project's design and activities using these questions	Ways to fill the gap <i>If you have not used future-oriented positive messages, you can:</i>	What this can look like
Do your key messages, such as those used in mass media products or campaigns, focus on or demonstrate the harm caused by NOT adopting the new or positive behavior?	Instead, work with project participants, such as early adopters, to develop materials that are based in their own experiences of the positive side of behaviors and new or changed norms and how it has impacted their lives. Include messages on empirical expectations (what I think others do) and normative expectations (what others expect me to do).	Tipping Point responded to girls who wished to play outdoor games. Girls running in the open field was something people had never witnessed. Girls learned to play football in open fields and then organized a match with the community as spectators. After the match was over, they facilitated a discussion about how the girls felt and how the community felt emphasizing the message that girls can play equally well and can make their community proud of them.
Do your key messages, products or group session materials promote equality?	Check that the new message does not promote harmful gender norms. For instance, showing women cooking, cleaning or engaging in only “feminine” work may demonstrate power but only in the accepted household sphere.	The message was delivered in two ways: the visibility of girls in open space playing and running was a visual message, and later their facilitation and discussion with spectators on challenging norms that do not let girls play in the open. Girls and girls' parents started thinking that many girls play football now (empirical expectations). Community members (reference groups) and decision makers started appreciating girls' playing football (normative expectation).
Are the behaviors visible during the dialogue? If not, are they mentioned during the dialogue?	Some behaviors can be shown, such as men cooking or girls playing football, where the positive aspects of changing behavior and norms are seen at the same time as delivering messages. But there are opportunities for dialogue where the visibility of the new positive norm cannot be shown. For example, when an early adopter talks to his friends at the tea stall, facilitators can encourage dialogue by asking what multiple people think of an issue to bring up differing opinions that may challenge the friends and help share positive stories while challenging the harmful norm.	Read the full case study here .
Do early adopters design the activities themselves?	It's good for the early adopters to plan and execute the activities. Initially the project can support these participants' capacity for planning and facilitating community-led change processes, but gradually it should become a mentorship role in which early adopters find and create opportunities to challenge norms alongside their allies.	The visibility of the message can't always be possible. Future oriented positive messages can be delivered even when there is limited scope for visibility. Tipping Point staff visited local tea stalls in Bangladesh to facilitate conversations on various topics – from girls' education and sports, women's mobility, decision-making, equitable sharing of household work, and child marriage – sparking discussions and helping men visualize alternative futures for girls. These discussions did not ignore fathers' concerns, nor the harm done by current norms, but rather emphasized the possibility for new norms and the positive outcomes of change. Read the full case study here

ACTION 5

Expect bystander action

Check your project's design and activities using these questions	Ways to fill the gap <i>If you have not created space and expectation for bystander action, you can:</i>	What this can look like
Did you prepare the allies to support collective action and/or behavior change?	Prepare participants and their family members or other allies by practicing activist conversations. For example, if a girl takes up a job outside village and members of the community do not approve it and talk about her, an ally could step in. Have them practice intervening by using questions or offering alternatives. For more information, please see the sessions in Tipping Point's Structured Allyship to Girl-Led manual .	When Tipping Point's girl participants started playing football, they encountered significant resistance. In one project area, an Islamic solidarity group organized a gathering and issued a religious order against the girls who played and their families, strictly prohibiting girls from playing. In response, CARE, partner organizations, athlete girls, and their families stepped in to advocate with their Local Elected Bodies (LEB) seeking their support to go forward with the final tournament of the girls' football competition. These allies played a vital role in advocating with the religious leaders. Although the religious leaders were not fully convinced, they did allow the girls to play. See the full case study here .
Have you made the new or changed norm visible and facilitated discussion around it (so bystanders can be sensitized to the potential for change)?	Create opportunities where people can test out new behaviors that may go against the current norm, such as men showing other men and boys how they engage and enjoy care work, discuss importance of making joint decisions. The demonstration of positive behaviors that support a new norm is important as people should have visibility of seeing the new behavior very often to make it become a new normal.	
Have the allies or early adopters challenged the other community members on the harmful social norm they are practicing?	Facilitate a discussion in open public meetings, the role models who are early adopters and influencers can support positive norms by challenging harmful norms and also by showcasing positive norms. In these forums, create safe spaces to discuss power norms. For example, in a discussion about making joint decisions. The role models can ask others about what happens when we don't discuss and make decisions together.	
Are there diverse examples of gender equality, breaking stereotypes and following a new norm?	Create opportunities where people successfully demonstrating gender equality, defying gender norms, are seen in public spaces, for example, participating in Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLA), higher education, or football. Boys and men sewing or cooking, women farmers acknowledged, etc. When a few people step out of the old normal and take new roles, others who watch them succeed wish to try the same as a bystander, which then helps create a new norm.	

ANNEX A

Resources for More Information

[Social Norms Analysis Plot \(SNAP\)](#)

This measurement Resource contains the key components of a social norm, and measures **Normative and Empirical Expectations** (what I think others do and what others expect me to do), **Sanctions** (what happens if I go against a norm and how important are those sanctions to who I behave), and **Exceptions** to a norm. SNAP has helps to identify when norms are shifting or weakening (conditions, opportunities and circumstances) to better design targeted and effective programming

[ISOFI Challenge and Change: Integrating the Challenge of Gender Norms and Sexuality in a Maternal Health Program](#)

This report documents some of the processes CARE India undertook to integrate gender and sexuality factors into a maternal health project in Uttar Pradesh, India from 2007-2009. This includes sharing useful experiences related to the complicated and nonlinear process of social norms change.

[TESFA Evaluation Brief](#)

TESFA addressed the social and normative barriers faced by adolescents, especially married girls. The evaluation here demonstrates important findings for replicating social norms change interventions.

Gender & Power Analysis tools: [Community and Social Mapping](#); [Reflective Practice Root Cause Analysis tool](#), [Power mapping](#)

These tools help the user to gain a more thorough understanding of context, root causes of inequality, and who holds power in order to design equitable programs that shift harmful social norms.

[Tipping Point's Monitoring and Evaluation Tools](#)

Tipping Point has designed and used multiple quantitative and qualitative monitoring and evaluation tools to assess the changes in social norms, as well as conduct formative research. These tools can be adapted to use in many contexts.

[SNET from Passages Project and the Learning Collaborative to Advance Normative Change](#)

SNET a participatory guide and set of social norms exploration tools to translate theory into practical guidance to inform a social norms exploration.

[Investing in Women- Gender Norms: Resources to support campaign interventions to shift gender norms.](#)

This report, through its findings, supports the design and implementation of campaign interventions to shift gender norms. It is divided into the areas of social norms, strategies and lessons learned, monitoring and evaluation, and social marketing approaches

[CARE's Social Norms Data Use Tool](#)

This tool helps project staff utilize social norms data and findings to design interventions by identifying what social norms data is communicating, identify “cracks” in that norm, and show design implications for those findings.