



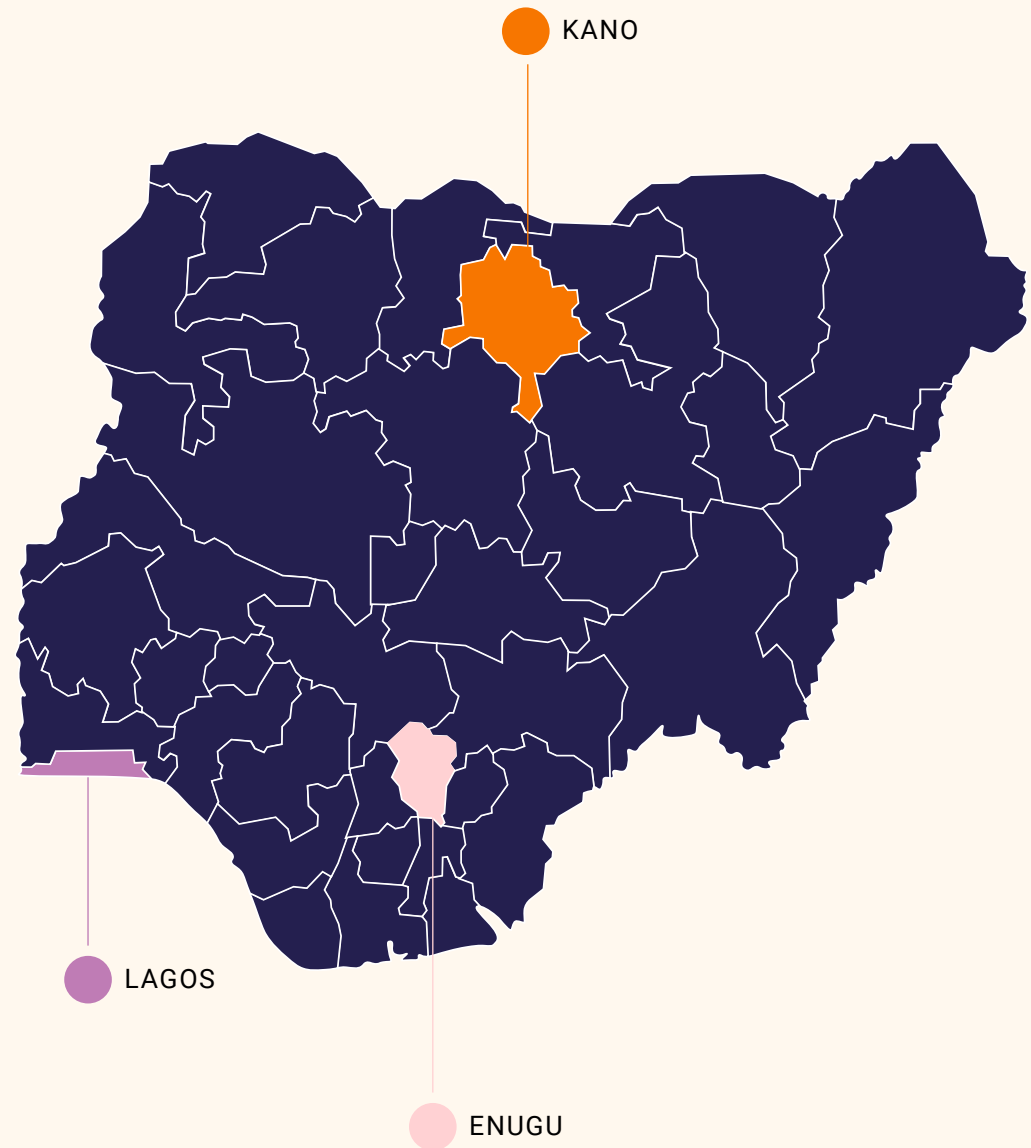
# Gender Norms Learning Agenda

Norms Diagnosis: Findings and Media Application in Nigeria

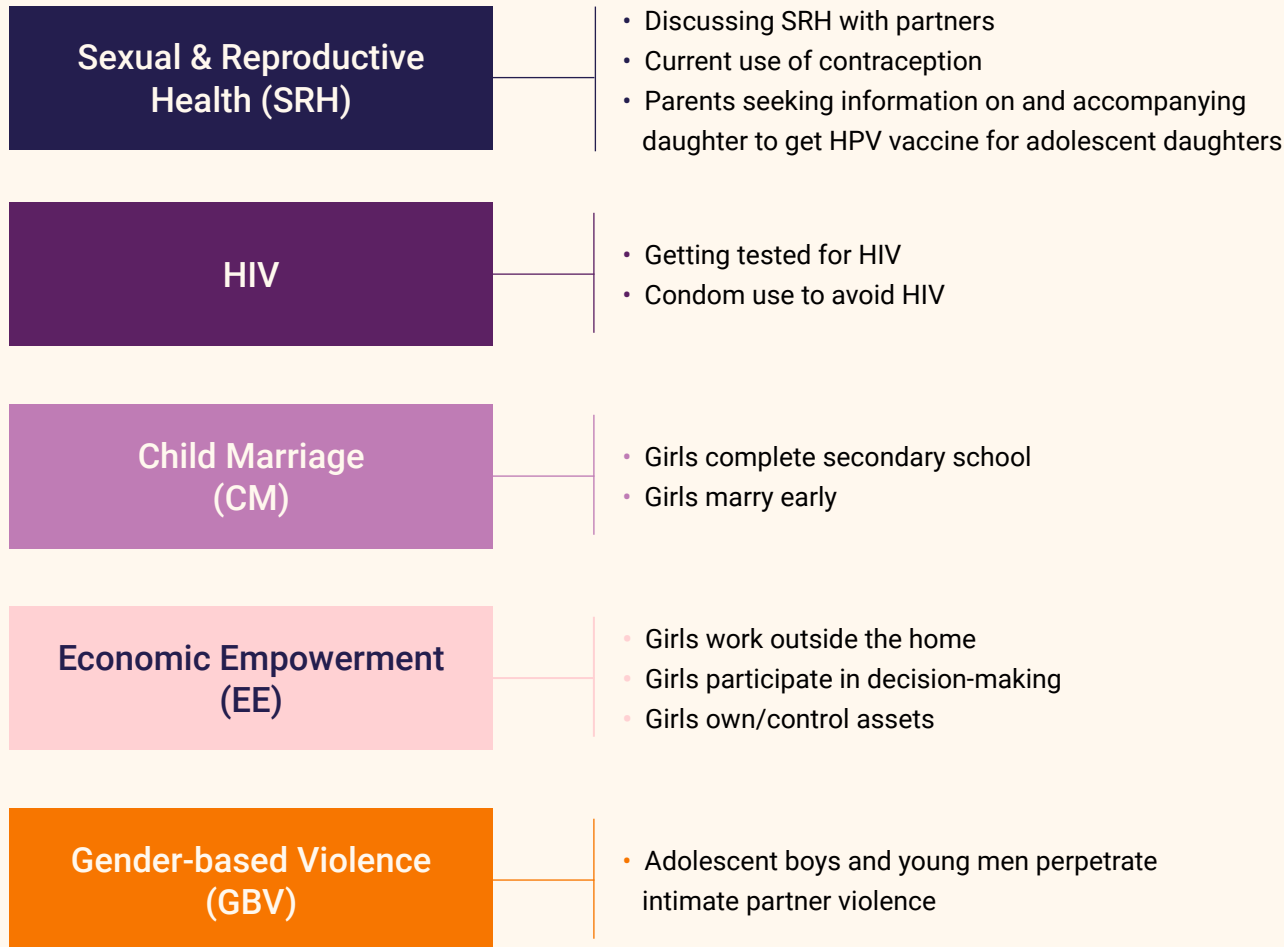
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The Gates Foundation’s Gender Norms Learning Agenda (GNLA) funded research in three states in Nigeria to identify which social norms influence key gender-based violence, sexual and reproductive health, economic empowerment, and child early and forced marriage behaviors of adolescent girls and young women, how these norms influence girls’ behaviors, and who enforces and upholds these norms. CARE’s Gender Justice team, CARE Nigeria, and the Center on Gender Equity and Health at University of California San Diego collected qualitative data with married and unmarried girls, married and unmarried boys, and those who influence the norms that most impact their lives and wellbeing between March and June 2024.

This brief is meant for mass-media focused partners to understand key norms impacting priority behaviors, which additional audiences need to be targeted with media interventions, and where opportunities lie to promote examples of positive norms change.



# Sectors and key behaviors included in the study:



Josh Estey / CARE

## What is a gender norm?

Norms are the unwritten rules of behavior that we learn throughout our lives. People that matter to us—our parents, our religious communities, media, friends and all types of leaders—enforce these rules. These people are called “reference groups”. Gender norms are the expectations we have for how people should act based on sex at birth and what gender we present to the world. For an adolescent girl, gender norms influence how she speaks, what she wears, if and who she is able to date or marry, and more.

# Priority Norms Affecting All Sectors

The following norms impacted every sector explored in the Nigeria study and should, therefore, be considered priority topics for implementing partners. Media interventions have an important role in contributing to efforts to shift norms which influence behavior. These findings provide insight into why girls may avoid certain behaviors and how their reference groups influence their choices.

How does this norm keep girls from practicing healthy behaviors, and what happens when they violate these norms to safeguard their sexuality and sexual health?

## Adolescent Sexuality

For unmarried adolescents in particular, asking about, discussing, or seeking services related to sexual health—such as modern contraceptives or HIV testing—is not approved. Moreover, talking about sexual health or seeking services raises suspicion that an adolescent is sexually active, and even promiscuous. Premarital sex and unplanned pregnancy bring shame and must be avoided at all costs; if not, it can lead to child marriage. For married girls, community members, in-laws, and husbands control their sexuality by blocking behaviors related to sexual and reproductive health and making decisions on their behalf to maintain their purity and family honor.

## Sexual & Reproductive Health

### NORM

It is typical for adolescents to use modern contraceptives.

### CONSEQUENCE

Even though it may be common, acceptance of modern contraceptive use is varied or accepted only under narrow conditions. In Lagos, unmarried girls view contraceptive use as normal to prevent early and unplanned pregnancy and to maintain their health. Community members, however, only approve contraceptive use for girls who are married early. In Lagos and Enugu, girls who use contraception face stigma, gossip, and accusations of promiscuity. In addition to these sanctions, in Enugu, contraceptive use is seen as a sign of disrespect towards husbands. Yet, despite these sanctions, it is widely viewed as common for adolescents to use contraception.

## HIV

NORM	CONSEQUENCE
It is common for AGYW to request condoms to avoid HIV (Enugu, Lagos)/It is not acceptable for AGYW to request condoms to prevent HIV (Enugu, Kano).	In Kano, unmarried girls do not and should not request condoms, as premarital sex is forbidden, and the same is found for married girls whose husbands control decisions related to their sexuality and sexual health. In Enugu, married girls requesting condoms are assumed to have multiple partners, be HIV positive, or doubt their partner's fidelity.

## Child Marriage

NORM	CONSEQUENCE
Girls typically enroll in and complete secondary school.	Parents' inability or unwillingness to pay for school was consistently mentioned as a reason why girls would not complete secondary school across all sites. In Enugu and Lagos, unplanned pregnancy was also commonly mentioned as a reason for not completing school. All respondents in all sites mentioned that girls who drop out of school face name calling and exclusion and their families are blamed for their inability to pay for their daughter's education. The most severe consequence of either dropping out or not being able to finish secondary school was early marriage in Kano.
Girls marry early.	In Kano, signs that a girl's body is maturing communicates that she is ready for marriage. Even though early marriage is not typical in Lagos and Enugu, constraints on girls' sexuality and expectations of her future role as mother hasten marriage and/or present it as a solution.

“If a girl of 15 to 20 gets pregnant some parents will ask her to pack to the man's house, automatically that girl has moved to her husband's house.”

MOTHERS, LAGOS

# Household Roles and Decision-Making

Men are the head of the household and lead decision-makers, while adolescent girls are expected to fulfill the role of mother and caregiver. These dynamics act as barriers to some SRH behaviors, facilitate relationship conflict and violence, and make women's economic empowerment contingent on their husbands' approval.

How do household roles prevent girls from practicing healthy behaviors and what happens when they expand their aspirations and behaviors outside of their domestic role?



Marie Torp Christensen / CARE

## Sexual & Reproductive Health

### NORM

Modern contraceptive use.

### CONSEQUENCE

It is common for unmarried individuals to use contraceptives, but married girls tend to use it secretly due to their husbands' disapproval. Using contraceptives without husbands' knowledge would challenge his role as decision-maker.

## HIV

### NORM

It is not acceptable for girls to request condoms to prevent HIV/STIs.

### CONSEQUENCE

In Kano, it is not typical nor is it accepted for married girls to use condoms as their husbands should make that decision. Across all sites, all respondent groups mentioned consequences for girls who suggest using condoms to prevent HIV, including mistrust between partners—leading to fights and potentially divorce. Community gossip and men's opposition to girls' desire to use condoms for HIV prevention were most effective in stopping the behavior in Enugu and Kano.

## Economic Empowerment

### NORM

It is typical for girls to work outside the home with their husband's approval.

It is typical for girls to participate in household decision-making if she works outside the home.

Ownership and control of assets is accepted when married girls are working outside the home with her husband's approval.

### CONSEQUENCE

All respondents in Kano perceived community disapproval for young women working outside the home, most especially if the husband was financially stable. Male respondents in Kano consistently said that husband's approval was the most important factor and would facilitate community's approval. Negative consequences of AGYW working outside the home were prevalent in Enugu and Kano for both girls and their husbands.

The boundaries were unclear and most examples provided were related to small expenses for children, girls themselves, and household needs—like food. Participants commonly mentioned sanctions for girls participating in financial decisions by in-laws and community members, such as labeling a girl as disrespectful, and for husbands, gossip that questioned his role in his household as a decision-maker and provider.

In Kano and Lagos, all respondent groups agreed that people approved of married girls owning assets, with husbands and married girls in Kano noting that this is facilitated by people's assumption that the husband approved the purchase. In Lagos, husbands of married girls and boys note that this is because girls support their husbands financially—either by working or acquiring assets. Gossip labeling girls as disrespectful and husbands as unable to maintain their status and control in their home limited girls' ability to work outside the home or to own or control assets.

“[People] will support it; they will even be happy for her because she's able to do something to assist her husband.”

MARRIED GIRLS, LAGOS

# Reference Groups

## The Why and the How of Targeting Adolescents' Supporting Cast

### Girls' Husbands

Across sites, husbands were discussed as the strongest reference group for married girls. Girls felt motivated and supported by their approval and support for working outside the home. At the same time, participants noted that husband's disapproval or opposition would likely derail married girls' plans to take a job. Economic stress led to increased acceptance of family planning and working outside the home, both decisions traditionally made by husbands. Therefore, storylines can show this reality of shared financial concerns and amplify husbands' support for girls working outside the home, making it more common for husbands to be proud of their wives' contributions.

“Yes, people will approve. Because it is a development to the community to see young girls like her expanding her business, She will also be seen as a role model by other girls.”

MARRIED YOUNG MAN, KANO

### What are reference groups?

- A group of people whose behavior and beliefs shape one's own behaviors and beliefs.
- Those who pass on and enforce social norms by using rewards for behavior that aligns with a norm and consequences for those acting outside the bounds of norms.



Habeen Sulaiman / CARE





## Adolescents' Parents

The mothers of married girls consistently **supported** their daughter's decision to work outside the home. Mothers of unmarried girls were noted as **trusting and communicative**, even supportive of condom use to avoid pregnancy and stay in school. Unmarried girls' fathers made decisions related to school fees and marriage, and were also found to be particularly influential for FP, HIV, and CM behaviors due the sanctions they deployed. Boys' mothers were also heavily influential: whether married or unmarried, boys noted that their mothers' opinions mattered across sectors. Married girls' mother-in-laws exerted pressure on their sons to not use family planning, gave advice on HIV testing, and blocked girls from working outside the home by scolding their daughter-in-laws and pressuring their sons. Girls and their husbands in Kano were also heavily sensitive to **negative reactions and disapproval** of girls' in-laws.

Showing conversations between girls and their parents or in-laws, or between husbands and their mothers, offers the opportunity to challenge the narrative that fathers are always strict and that mother-in-laws only want more grandchildren. These conversations also offer the opportunity to let more people know that it is typical for mothers and mothers-in-law to help girls access contraception and that fathers, too, are ashamed when their daughter does not finish secondary school.

## Boys' Peers

Friends and other peers clearly influence the behavior of boys and young men, punitively through gossip and mocking for not fulfilling the role of provider and household head, but also by offering advice. Condom use and intimate partner violence are influenced both positively and negatively by peers. Interestingly, in the case of married girls' economic empowerment, most sanctions come from their husbands' peers, influencing whether or not husbands allow their wife to work outside the home or participate in economic decisions.

The nuanced relationships of young men offer a range of opportunities to promote positive behaviors and demonstrate that conversations about taboo topics like sex, HIV, and GBV are in fact typical. Storylines can highlight positive areas, for example disapproval of violence by adolescent boys and young men, and support for married girls earning money, making financial decisions and taking care of their health.

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For more information on the impact of reference groups and how they offer opportunity for norms shifting, particularly faith and cultural champions, see the full GNLA Norms Diagnosis Report.

# Personas

## Norms in the Lives of Adolescents and Young People and How to Leverage the Findings

Characters in storylines can highlight how norms impact our lives and address their influence by:

- 1 reinforcing existing norms
- 2 challenging existing norms
- 3 demonstrating a positive new norm

The following personas are based on discussions with adolescents, offer potential character components, and identify opportunities for these characters to play a part in norms change.



### PERSONA 1 | Unmarried adolescent girl

This girl receives information from social media,<sup>1</sup> her friends at school, and her married older sister. She knows about various contraceptive methods but has not considered using any since she is not yet having sex with her boyfriend. This is partly because she learned from her parents that getting pregnant is irresponsible if you are not married and are still in school, and her father is likely to disown her or punish her in another way if she becomes pregnant. The biggest challenge in her weekly routine is spending enough time with her boyfriend in between school, friends, and other activities in a way that her parents will not find out about him

**OPPORTUNITY WITHIN THE STORYLINE TO PROMOTE NEW NORMS RELATED TO TAKING CARE OF YOUR BODY:** Girls are concerned about being seen as sexually active, and labeled as promiscuous and HIV positive. However, girls also said it is both common and approved for girls to request condoms to avoid HIV, particularly unmarried girls in Lagos. This same narrative of protection could be extended to HIV testing. For instance, there are many ways to be healthy—getting tested for HIV is one. By focusing on health and not on sexual activity, this avoids challenging deeply-rooted norms related to premarital sex.



Marie Torp Christensen / CARE

## PERSONA 2 | Married adolescent girl

This married girl worries about her husband being able to provide on a weekly basis for the family's needs. She does desire more children eventually, but her son's birth had complications, so she is using the pill for contraception but doing it secretly to avoid her husband's anger. This girl's biggest challenge in her weekly routine is stretching the money she makes from selling herbs and what her husband gives her to be able to care for her son. Her reference groups is her husband (she respects him and cares about his opinion most), but she also fears her mother-in-law's judgment and anger. She is supported most by her mother, who she shares her concerns with about money and her son's health.

### **OPPORTUNITY WITHIN STORYLINE TO PROMOTE MODERN CONTRACEPTIVE USE AND WORKING OUTSIDE THE HOME:**

This persona could be used to demonstrate the pressure married girls are under to uphold norms related to bearing children and taking care of the home—particularly from mothers-in-law and husbands' peers—while also presenting the opportunity to model discussions between married girls and their husbands about financial stress, family size, and working outside the home. Allies to this persona would be her mother and her husband, as they both can value girls' ability to contribute to the household finances.



Hajarah Nalwadda / CARE

## PERSONA 3 | Young man married to an adolescent girl

This young man has been taught that men are the head of the household, they must provide for their families, are fair, and make all decisions related to their family. He prefers a larger family, but does not regularly discuss SRH with his wife. His reference groups are his friends and peers, but he also has respect for and follows the advice of religious and traditional leaders. Finally, his mother offers advice but also pressures him to fulfill his role as husband and father respectfully, in a way that makes his family and his community proud.

**OPPORTUNITY WITHIN STORYLINE TO BROADEN DISAPPROVAL OF GBV:** Without directly showing intimate partner violence, this persona can demonstrate that many married young men do not approve of using violence in their relationships and show men sanctioning those who commit violence against their wives. Since young men's primary reference group is their friends and/or peers, stories can use these relationships to show young men creating distance from abusers and aiming for closeness with "mature" friends who handle their emotions in healthy ways and have healthy relationships.