THE SOCIAL NORMS
LEARNING COLLABORATIVE
NIGERIA

ADVANCING SOCIAL NORMS PRACTICE IN NIGERIA

Lessons from Academic Partnerships for Sustained Training Capacity on Social Norms in Nigeria

October 2023

AUTHORS

Paul Bukuluki, Department of Social Work and Social Administration, Makerere University

Rebecka Lundgren, Center on Gender Equity and Health, University of California, San Diego

Alex Bagabo, Department of Social Work and Social Administration, Makerere University

Akinola Marilyn, Center on Gender Equity and Health, University of California, San Diego

Hunter Davis, Center on Gender Equity and Health, University of California, San Diego

NIGERIA SOCIAL NORMS LEARNING COLLABORATIVE (N-SNLC)

The Nigeria Social Norms Learning Collaborative (N-SNLC) facilitates building knowledge and developing tools among researchers and practitioners across regions and disciplines to advance effective, ethics-informed social norm theory, measurement, and practice at scale.

The Collaborative draws members from government organisations, donor agencies, NGOs, and academia with an objective to strengthen networks, build sustained expertise and capacity in Nigerian organisations and institutions, and support good quality programming. Members work across multiple development focus areas including women's economic empowerment, sexual and reproductive health and family planning, infectious disease, gender-based violence, maternal and child health, nutrition, and immunization, among others.

The Community of Practice shares state-of-the-art social norms evidence, approaches and resources with key players and actors through proven learning strategies, with specific focus on gender norms and their impact on health and women's economic empowerment. The N-SNLC is made possible by the generous support of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The contents of this document are the responsibility of the N-SNLC and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

OVERVIEW

The Advancing Social Norms Practice in Nigeria Project brings together global social norms experts from five organizations (Centre for Gender Equity and Health, University of California San Diego (GEH/UCSD), FHI360, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, Makerere University) to provide distance and on-the-ground support to Nigerian partners to build capacity on social norms for research and programs implementation. This project is implemented in Nigeria with funding from The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

The project sought to integrate social norm theory, policy, practice, and research into pre- and in-service training to increase sustained capacity to apply a social norms-aware lens to social and behaviour change programs in Nigeria.
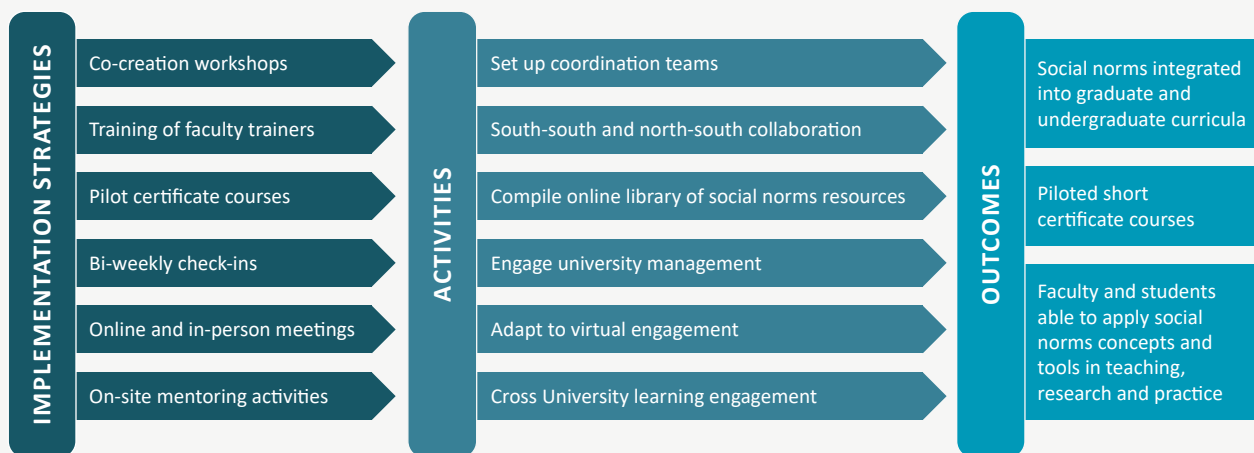

On-site visit by members of the project team from Makerere, LSHTM & GEH to University of Abuja for a 2-day workshop with faculty from University of Abuja and Bayero University, Kano

Partners worked with university faculty and staff to build knowledge and expertise, integrate content into undergraduate and graduate programs, offer short-term certificate courses, and support practicum opportunities. The University of Abuja and Bayero University, Kano were the Nigerian academic partners on this project, engaging faculty members from the Department of Community Medicine at the University of Abuja Teaching Hospital and the Department of Sociology at Bayero University.

WHAT WERE THE TASKS?

To establish a sustainable training program in Nigeria, the project team conducted the following activities:

• Identification of academic partners

• Assessment of needs and opportunities to strengthen social norms training

• Co-creation curriculum workshops

• Training of trainers for focus faculty

• Pilot of a short certificate course and practicum model

• Integration of social norms content into undergraduate and graduate curricula

• Cross-university learning events

Steps Taken to Establish a Sustainable Training Program in Nigeria

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

- Co-creation workshops
- Training of faculty trainers
- Pilot certificate courses
- Bi-weekly check-ins
- Online and in-person meetings
- On-site mentoring activities

ACTIVITIES

- Set up coordination teams
- South-south and north-south collaboration
- Compile online library of social norms resources
- Engage university management
- Adapt to virtual engagement
- Cross University learning engagement

OUTCOMES

- Social norms integrated into graduate and undergraduate curricula
- Piloted short certificate courses
- Faculty and students able to apply social norms concepts and tools in teaching, research and practice

WHAT WAS THE OUTCOME?

Strengthened Capacity and Curriculum Expansion

Capacity-building trainings and workshops helped faculty gain knowledge on social norms concepts, theory and measurement and develop competencies in delivering courses on social norms. This partnership offered unique opportunities for the faculty and students to apply key concepts and tools for social norms in teaching, research, and program implementation.

At the University of Abuja more than 100 undergraduate students were introduced to social norms and five students conducted their final research projects on norms. At the graduate level, social norms were incorporated into the core curriculum, and the department is on track to have a stand-alone course on social norms as part of their Masters in Public Health program. At Bayero University, social norms content was integrated into a number of undergraduate programs, including Introduction to Sociology (Level I), Culture and Personality (Level II), Rural Sociology (Level III), Gender Studies (Level IV), and Medical Sociology (Level IV). Lectures on social norms were delivered to over 1,000 undergraduate students across these programs. At the graduate level, social norms were integrated into two graduate courses, Healthcare in Developing Societies and Healthcare Planning and Administration.

The initiative by the University of Abuja and Bayero University demonstrates a commitment to providing students a well-rounded education that includes social norms theory, research and practice. Through this initiative, students have been equipped with the tools they need to make positive contributions to building and applying deeper understandings of social norms.

Short Courses

Both universities developed and piloted short courses on social norms. At the University of Abuja, two short courses were delivered to staff from the teaching hospital and primary health care centres. Participants were drawn from across departments and hospital staff, including 21 participants from the outpatient units including the general, medical and surgical outpatient departments, antenatal clinic, directly observed treatment clinic, and child welfare clinic. During the training, participants identified several social norms relevant to their interactions with patient including; patients not being treated with respect, lack of empathy, and

University Professors from Bayero University Kano and University of Abuja share their thoughts during a training.

norms normalizing yelling at the patient's relatives, among others. Participants engaged in discussions about strategies to shift these harmful social norms in order to improve provider-client interaction and strengthen communication among the staff at the health facilities.

At Bayero University, one short course was piloted with staff from CSOs, UN agencies (UNICEF and UNFPA), and state and local governments. The course provided a small group of professionals including civil society personnel, postgraduate students, and government officials a basic foundation in social norms. The training contributed to their ability to identify social norms and engage in efforts to shift social norms at the institutional and community level. At the end of the course, participants expressed interest in joining future training opportunities. The university project team is working on formalizing the short course within the university structure.

Cross-University Learning

The project team held a learning exchange between universities in Nigeria (Bayero University, Kano and the University of Abuja) and East Africa (Makerere University, Uganda, and Mwalimu Julius Nyerere University, Tanzania) to share experiences and promising practices for integrating social norms into curricula and research. Universities shared experiences of formal and informal mechanisms to integrate social norms into their courses. Promising strategies included building staff capacity, involving high-level university stakeholders, offering small grants to help staff apply their learning, and creating a platform to share experiences.

University Faculty during a cross-university sharing event in Abuja, Nigeria.

WHAT WORKED WELL AND WHAT WERE SOME CHALLENGES?

The partnership launched in 2021, while the world was dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, engagement with academic partners was strictly virtual in the first year. Although working in a virtual world came with challenges such as creating engaging content, developing brief sessions and most importantly, internet connectivity, the lock downs offered one advantage — faculty had time to participate in training sessions and regular check-in calls. Biweekly calls facilitated collaboration and provided an accountability platform for partners. It also made it possible for all partners involved to engage actively despite limited resources and opportunities for travel. Another facilitating factor was co-developing a structured training agenda in consultation with partners to tailor the training to the specific needs of each academic partner.

In addition to the university closure in response to COVID-19 early in the project, prolonged university strikes, national elections and university bureaucracy impacted the efficiency and effectiveness of some aspects of the project. For example, piloting the social norms modules was delayed for several months due to the prolonged strike.

Although the training content and delivery mode were perceived to be relevant and constructive, academic partners identified the following gaps:

• Some of the literature contained illustrations and examples that did not suit the Nigerian context. There is a need for a clear delineation of the components of social norms, with specific examples and case studies relevant to the context. Participants underscored the need for more local examples that relate to people's experiences of social and gender norms in Nigeria.

• Training materials were perceived as weak on aspects of positive social norms. The focus of the materials was biased toward harmful social and gender norms (these are social norms defining acceptable and appropriate actions for women and men in a given group or society[1]) with few examples of positive social norms.

• Insufficient attention was paid to meta-norms (norms that connect with deeply rooted determinants, operate at a more profound level of society, and influence multiple behaviors[2]) and the indirect norms that influence behavior. More attention was given to proximal/direct norms (those which act directly or close to directly on a behavior or outcome).

---

1   Cislaghi, B., & Heise, L. (2020). Gender norms and social norms: differences, similarities and why they matter in prevention science. Sociology of health & illness, 42(2), 407-422.

2   Heise, Lori and Karima Manji. 2016. "Social Norms," in GSDRC Professional Development Reading Pack no. 31. Birmingham, UK: University of Birmingham

WHAT LESSONS DID WE LEARN?

- **In-person interaction is very important for relationship building but virtual platforms allow for more interaction time.** The two onsite visits to the university of Abuja with faculty from both academic partners played a major role in strengthening the partnership and provided opportunities for more interaction between faculty from the local university partners. Workshops and training sessions held in person were also more engaging. However, despite this, pivoting to virtual platforms for training and capacity building sessions in response to COVID-19 restrictions allowed time for more sessions and greater interaction between academic partners and the project team than might have been possible if most of the interaction took place physically.

- **Engaging university leadership contributes to building support and project ownership.** Members of the project team from UCSD and Makerere University met with one of the Deputy Vice-Chancellors at University of Abuja during an onsite visit to Nigeria. Similarly, high level leadership at the Faculty of Clinical Medicine at the University of Abuja as well as the head of the sociology department at Bayero University were involved in project activities. Unfortunately, the project team could not visit Bayero University due to security restrictions. The support of top management played a role in facilitating approvals for formal curriculum integration, course creation and offering short courses.

- **Contextualizing training content is key.** Local examples drawn from Nigeria's research on social norms were important to improve clarity of social norms concepts and make training sessions more relatable.

- **Strengthened capacity and commitment of faculty paves the road to sustainability.** The academic partners have continued to teach social norms modules and work towards creating a stand-alone course even though their project funding has ended. They have also conducted additional short courses and are working on formalizing those courses to provide in-service training.

- **Offering small grants to faculty and students provides practical experience and consolidates learnings.** In addition to building the capacity of staff as an incentive to teach and conduct research on norms, incentives such as offering small grants to faculty and students help them pilot what they learned on norms and consolidate learning.

- **It is important to establish strong relationships between the Social Norms Learning Collaborative and academic partners.** These strategic relationships are crucial for learning opportunities and sustainability.

- **Creating platforms for academia, implementers and policymakers to share experiences and lessons facilitates shared understanding and mutual goals,** which supports efforts to build capacity for social norms research, policy, and advocacy.