

Identifying social norms



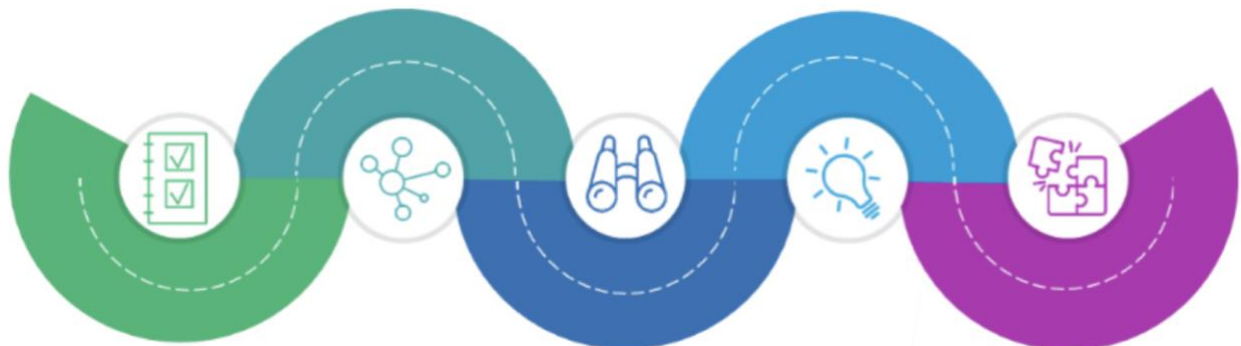
This brief summarizes the main concepts of the second webinar in our introductory series of social norms trainings for the Learning Collaborative to Advance Social Norms Practice in Nigeria. This series of four webinars will lay the foundation for understanding social norms, different approaches to identify them, strategies for norm change, and monitoring and evaluation for social norms programs.

Introduction

We all bring biases and assumptions into our work—including those related to social norms, the rules about what actions are appropriate in a given group. We sometimes assume that we know the reason for a particular issue, or that we understand why the community is engaging in a particular practice. These biases and assumptions may result in interventions that are ineffective or even harmful. This means it is important we think about what kind of evidence we have before we design and implement interventions.

There are tools that can help us to consider what evidence we have and what evidence we still need about norms to help us identify the social norms that might be relevant to our work. For example, the ‘Social Norms Exploration Tool’—SNET—is particularly helpful.ⁱ It has five phases:

1. PLAN & PREPARE
2. IDENTIFY REFERENCE GROUPS
3. EXPLORE SOCIAL NORMS
4. ANALYZE FINDINGS
5. APPLY FINDINGS



Different approaches to identifying norms

Depending on budget, timeframe and resources, we can choose which methods might suit our identification of norms. Before we get to actually exploring the norm and collecting data, we need to identify the people we need to talk to in order to better understand relevant norms. For example, religious leaders and parents might help us understand a norm about child immunisation. Once we have identified who we will ask, we need to think about what kind of knowledge we need: do we want to know about attitudes, beliefs, norms, experiences? This may impact the methods we choose.

For example, we may survey people to learn about how typical something is, by asking how many people in their community do certain things, and understand appropriateness of behaviours. Here are some example survey questions. Some are statements which participants react to:

- *A man should be outraged if his wife asks him to use a condom (Strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree)*
- *Most adolescent girls in my community marry before the age of 18 (Strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree)*

Alternatively, interviews can be a useful way of understanding reference groups. We can ask questions like:

- *If you wanted to decide whether to do X, whose advice would you seek?*

- *After having done X, would someone congratulate you? Who? How would that make you feel?*
- *If you didn't do X, would you be afraid someone finds out? Who? Why?*

Or, it may be that we use focus group discussions to understand group consensus about an issue. We can ask questions like:

- *In which situations is it acceptable for a woman to be hit by her husband?*
- *How are girls expected to behave in this community?*

We may feel the issue is more complex and we need to map out the different groups and relationships within a network. Social network analysis is an advanced type of methodology that can be used qualitatively or quantitatively to understand connections between people.

We may also choose to use other participatory activities like ranking exercises to learn about the way certain norms have priority over others. We may use vignettes (which tell short stories about imaginary characters) to learn about whose opinions are valued in a community and how communities might react if anyone challenges a norm.

The norms identification process is a vital step to designing change strategies. If our intervention is not grounded in a strong understanding of the norm, we may not see tangible changes.

i For further reading, see: <http://irh.org/social-norms-exploration/>

