



CARE'S APPROACH TO SHIFTING SOCIAL NORMS



WHAT are social norms?

Social norms are the rules that govern behavior and are shared by a group. They are different from individually held beliefs or attitudes and are made up by one's perceptions about what others do, and by one's perceptions about what others think one should do. Norms are held in place by people whose expectations matter in a given context - these reference groups may enforce behaviors through associated sanctions or rewards. Social norms are maintained by social influence - that is, by the anticipation of social approval or disapproval for one's actions, also called positive or negative social sanctions, respectively. Norm-breakers may face social backlash. This usually entails losing or conferring power and status in a community.

SOCIAL NORMS OR GENDER NORMS?

Social norms encompass all norms which govern a group's behavior.

Gender norms are a subset of social norms which specifically restrict women and girls from exercising their rights.

While many of the harmful norms which CARE works to address are gender norms, we use the term social norms more broadly to define our work in acknowledgement of the fact that all social norms may impact women and girls in different ways.

Waiting for your turn



We wait our turn because others do



...and because it is expected; others would disapprove of cutting in line

Waiting for your turn is an example of a social norm which governs behavior

SOCIAL NORMS: IMPACT IN ACTION

In communities in **Rwanda**, social norms dictated wives did not have freedom to work outside the home or have a say in how family money was spent. CARE used social norms approaches to address this.

Social norms impact: Women reported having an equal say in household financial decision-making.


Broader impact: 55% reduction in risk of intimate partner violence and increased odds of having cash income and household food security.


WHY is shifting social norms important?


To achieve gender equality, CARE believes change needs to take place across all areas of their lives: their individual agency; the power relations through which they live their lives; and the structures—both formal and informal—in which they operate.

Our evidence shows shifting social norms is effective in changing power relations at household level. Social norms are also a key part of the informal structures which govern expectations regarding women and girls in their communities and wider society. This means **addressing harmful social norms is crucial for achieving lasting change in the power and choices women have over their own lives.**

HOW does CARE approach social norms in our programs?

 **Identify the harmful social norms that act as barriers to positive behaviors and outcomes for women & girls.** CARE’s [Social Norms Analysis Plot \(SNAP\) Framework](#) and [Social Norms Data Use Tool](#) support teams to understand what social norms exist and the implications for programming.

 **Design interventions to shift harmful social norms.** CARE’s [Social Norms Design Checklist](#) provides examples of questions to ask while designing activities and what norms-shifting interventions look like in action. By following each of these steps, projects can move beyond individual behavior change to challenge and shift discriminatory norms that act as barriers to equity and wellbeing. Core models include the community engagement process [Social Analysis & Action](#) and the girl-les activism model [Learning Communities on the Move](#).

 **Measure change in norms over time.** CARE’s extensive [social norms measurement tools](#) support projects to monitor their impact over time.

Scaling impact

CARE sees social norms change as a key pathway to impact at scale. We aim to achieve this by scaling the **breadth** and **depth** of social norms interventions. Our teams are integrating social norms approaches into more programming across all sectors to replicate the achievements we have already seen. We are also deepening our understanding what role the organization can play in facilitating large-scale change in peoples’ lives through shifting social norms at macro level.

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NORMS SHIFTING VS. BEHAVIOR CHANGE?

Traditional **social and behavior change communication** focuses on individuals and all the things that support healthy behaviors—such as their knowledge, their motivation, the skills they need to practice a new behavior.

Social **norms shifting is defined by change within a group**, i.e. beyond the individual level. This requires deeper reflection and active engagement.

Social and behavior change communication projects may contribute to norms change, but strong norms change strategy requires dedicated effort beyond communication activities.

[See CARE’s Social Norms Design checklist for further detail >](#)

SOCIAL NORMS: IMPACT IN ACTION

In rural **Bangladesh**, social norms meant girls had no say in if, when and who to marry. CARE used social norms approaches to address this.

Social norms impact: Parents, community members and key influencers recognized a girls’ ability to have a say in a marriage proposal, influence the choice of her groom, and marry after age 20.

Broader impact: 63% reduction in risk of child marriage.