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Facilitator’s Guide

Dynamic of Social Norms: Female Genital Mutilation
Overview

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this module, participants will be able to:

→ Differentiate between independent and interdependent behaviour.
→ Define social norms in operational terms.
→ Define key concepts relevant for understanding social norms, including conditional preferences, beliefs and expectations, enforcement mechanisms and pluralistic ignorance.
→ Share a common understanding of gender and related concepts, mainly in the context of social norms.

TIME

7 hours, including:

→ 6 hours and 30 minutes for running from Step 1 to Step 14
→ 2 coffee breaks, 15 minutes each

At the end of Module 1, participants will take 2 hours, on their own or by country team, to work on an individual or country team action plan.

LAYOUT

The module 1 [FACILITATOR’S GUIDE] comprises the following parts:

→ Overview
→ Procedures describing the different steps of the training process
→ “Notes to facilitators” with additional step-by-step support
→ Presentations with detailed slide-by-slide comments in the “Notes to facilitators”

KEY MESSAGES

→ A social norm is a rule of behaviour of the relevant population. Individuals see that others conform to the rule and feel a social obligation to conform as well. They believe they will be subject to a form of social punishment if they do not.

→ Where it is widely practised, FGM is typically upheld as a social norm. Families expect other families to cut their daughters, and they believe other families expect them to cut their own daughters. They believe that if they do not, they may be criticized or excluded, and their daughters may not be able to marry.
> When a social norm exists, people’s behaviour is interdependent. Individuals are conditioned by others. There are mutual expectations for behaviour. It will therefore be difficult for an individual or a family to abandon FGM on her/their own.

> A “social norms perspective” has been used to explain the social dynamics that perpetuate FGM. It delineates the means by which actions of individuals are interdependent and makes evident why changing social expectations among interconnected actors is necessary to eliminate the practice.

> Concepts of recategorization, devaluation of FGM, equilibrium states, reaching critical mass, public manifestation of commitment to change behaviour, organized diffusion and, where applicable, achieving a tipping point are central to FGM abandonment.

> Abandonment of FGM will be sustained at scale if the process entails the creation of a new social norm that girls not be cut. With such a rule, families will expect other families not to cut their daughters, and may also expect social sanction if they do.

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### HANDOUTS

- **HANDOUT 1.1** A mother’s story: challenges faced by those who begin the process of change
- **HANDOUT 1.2** Social norms definition
- **HANDOUT 1.3** Skit on standing at plays and at concerts
- **HANDOUT 1.4** Instructions to participants for development and presentation of a brief action plan

### PRESENTATIONS

- **PRESENTATION 1.1** A mother’s story
- **PRESENTATION 1.2** Social norms: introduction to basic concepts
- **PRESENTATION 1.3** Khadija’s dilemma
- **PRESENTATION 1.4** Pluralistic ignorance

### READINGS/RESOURCES

- **READING 1.1** Reading (for participants and facilitators):
  > How Changing Social Norms Is Crucial in Achieving Gender Equality (UNFPA, 2020)

  **READING 1.2** Reading, optional, for facilitators:
  > Norms in the Wild, Chapter 1 (Bicchieri, 2017)

### VIDEO

Dynamics of social norms: female genital mutilation
Procedures

Before Day 1, participants should read the following handouts:

**HANDOUT 1.1** "A mother’s story: challenges faced by those who begin the process of change"

**HANDOUT 1.2** "Social norms definition"

Also important to review: **READING 1.2** Norms in the Wild, Chapter 1.

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01 **RECAP OF MODULE 0**

10 MINUTES Invite the participant assigned to report on the evaluations of Module 0 to give a brief summary.

→ Allow questions and brief answers.

02 **VIDEO ANIMATION AND OBJECTIVES**

10 MINUTES Display the video animation: "Dynamics of social norms: female genital mutilation", summarizing Module 1’s main concepts.

Display **PRESENTATION 1.1** Slide 2, showing the module objectives. Place the flip chart with the objectives on the wall.

03 **PLENARY CASE STUDY DISCUSSION AND INTRODUCTORY EXERCISE:**

**“A MOTHER’S STORY”**

40 MINUTES Reminder: begin with a concrete experience.

Ask participants to take out **HANDOUT 1.1** "A mother’s story: challenges faced by those who begin the process of change". Continue with **PRESENTATION 1.1**.

→ Show **SLIDE 3** of the presentation: “Khadija is a devout Ansar Sunna Muslim from the Beni Amer tribe...”

→ Ask participants to read the story on the screen and give quick answers to the questions (**SLIDE 4**):

1. How would you describe Khadija’s state of mind?

2. What do you infer from Khadija’s statement? “If I don’t cut her (her six-year-old daughter) there won’t be anyone to marry her. I wish I didn’t have daughters, because I am so worried about them.”
→ Write the main answers on a flip chart.

→ Summarize by explaining that Khadija is caught in a situation where she cannot deviate alone from the prevailing social norm. This is going to be the focus of **PRESENTATION 1.2**.

### PRESENTATION 1.2: “SOCIAL NORMS: INTRODUCTION TO BASIC CONCEPTS”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>04</th>
<th>60 MINUTES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reminder: observation and reflection.</td>
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Facilitators should have read **STEP 4** of the “Notes to facilitators” for slide-by-slide details on Presentation 1.2.

→ Run **PRESENTATION 1.2**, “Social norms: introduction to basic concepts”.

### DISCUSSION OF PRESENTATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>05</th>
<th>20 MINUTES</th>
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<tr>
<td>Allow 20 minutes discussion to ensure all participants understand and agree on the conclusions of the discussion</td>
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→ Ask participants to take out **HANDOUT 1.2**, “Social norms definition”.

### PRESENTATION 1.3: “KHADIJA’S DILEMMA”

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<tr>
<th>06</th>
<th>30 MINUTES</th>
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<tr>
<td>Reminder: draw conclusions, identify general principles.</td>
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→ Announce animated **PRESENTATION 1.3**, “Khadija’s dilemma”. It is based on images from the Saleema campaign in Sudan.

→ Run **PRESENTATION 1.3**. It shows how Khadija in her context cannot deviate alone from the prevailing norm.

→ Invite participants to react to the presentation with some comments or questions, and draw conclusions.

→ Announce participants will form working groups to discuss Khadija’s dilemma.
07

INSTRUCTIONS FOR WORKING GROUPS

10 MINUTES

Divide participants into four working groups.

→ Ensure that all groups have a flip chart page and some markers, and HANDOUT 1.1.

→ Each group should select a chairperson and a spokesperson.

→ Once the groups begin their discussions, walk from group to group to help them and ensure everyone is participating.

→ Give a 10-minute notice before closing the discussion.

The working groups will allow participants to apply what they have learned and put it into practice by planning for FGM abandonment.

08

WORKING GROUP EXERCISE: A SOCIAL NORMS PRESEPCTIVE: KHADIJA’S DILEMMA

60 MINUTES

Reminder: put learning into practice by planning to change the norm.

Now that participants understand what kinds of social dynamics can cause conformity to harmful norms in a given community, and that FGM is maintained by a deeply rooted social norm, ask the working groups to discuss the following questions:

3. What does Khadija think others expect her to do?

4. What does Khadija believe would happen if she does not have her daughter cut?

5. What does Khadija prefer to do, given her context?

6. In the absence of communication, what is Khadija’s best strategy? Does she have any alternatives?

→ Ask participants to write their answers on different flip charts, and make lists of:

- Concepts linked to the nature and definition of social norms
- Different strategies to be put in place, based on a social norms perspective applied to FGM
09 REPORTING BACK IN THE PLENARY

30 MINUTES

→ Bring the groups back to the plenary.

→ Ensure all flip charts are put on the wall.

→ Allow 5 minutes per group.

→ While each group is presenting the results of their discussions to the questions, write down responses on a new flip chart, avoiding repetition.

→ Allow some feedback from participants.

Summarize the main points raised.

10 PRESENTATION 1.4: INTRODUCING PLURALISTIC IGNORANCE

40 MINUTES

Reminder: observation and reflection.

→ Reconvene the plenary.

→ Run PRESENTATION 1.4, “Pluralistic ignorance” (see also STEP 10 in the “Notes to facilitators” for details on each slide).

→ At the end of the presentation, ask the following questions:

Now I know what many others think, but do they know what we all think?

How do we get common knowledge among those who disapprove/dislike the social norm?

→ Allow brief questions and answers.

→ Announce the working group exercise on pluralistic ignorance.
11

WORKING GROUP EXERCISE: PLURALISTIC IGNORANCE

Reminder: draw conclusions, identify general principles.

→ Now that participants understand what kinds of social dynamics can cause pluralistic ignorance, ask them to discuss the following questions:

① What are some examples of a significant proportion of individuals having private attitudes/preferences in conflict with the prevailing norm?

② What might happen if an increasing number of individuals have private attitudes/preferences in conflict with the prevailing norm?

③ Can you suggest an explanation for the discrepancy between the prevalence of FGM and support for the practice shown in the Sudan data (see the slide on “FGM prevalence versus support for the practice”)?

④ What are the implications for the design of policies and programmes?

→ Ask participants to write their answers on flip chart pages.

12

REPORTING BACK IN THE PLENARY

① 30 MINUTES

→ Bring the groups back to the plenary.

→ Allow 5 minutes per group.

→ Ensure all flip charts are put on the wall.

→ While each group is presenting the results of their discussions to the questions, write down responses on a new flip chart, avoiding repetition.

→ Allow some feedback from participants.

→ Summarize the main points raised, including:
  ▸ FGM is a social norm.
  ▸ Understanding how to change people’s behaviour around FGM requires grasping the reasons behind it.
  ▸ Khadija’s choice is influenced by social expectations.
  ▸ The reactions of other people who matter to Khadija are very important in conditioning her behaviour.
  ▸ Abandoning FGM depends on changing people’s expectations.

→ Announce the “Skit on standing at plays and at concerts”, aimed at a factual understanding of the dynamics of social norms abandonment.
Reminder: observation and reflection.

→ Ask participants to take out **HANDOUT 1.3**, “Skit on standing at plays and at concerts”.

→ Give instructions:
  - Explain that everyone will take part.
  - Allocate a time limit.
  - Take the role of the outsider or, if appropriate, let a volunteer play it.

→ During the skit and immediately after, rise the following questions:

① What do you think needs to happen for the initial group to sit down?

② Do you think that people will revert to the previous “standing convention” once they have collectively changed their behaviour?

③ What kinds of dynamics lead the majority to sit down?

④ What individual benefit would you get from changing the social norm of standing into sitting?

⑤ What happens when the social norm changes from standing to sitting? Will all individuals willingly sit?

⑥ Would you see any analogy with FGM dynamics of abandonment?

WRAP-UP AND EVALUATION

10 MINUTES

→ Distribute evaluation forms and ask participants to fill them out.

→ Ask for a volunteer to review the evaluations and present a summary at the start of Module 2.
Reminder: put learning into practice by planning to change the norm.

→ Divide participants into groups for individual or country team work, according to the chosen options of organizers and participants, to work on the draft projects in action plans, they began preparing before the workshop.

→ There will be four groups, should the option of individual work be chosen. Conversely, should the option of a country team be chosen, there may be a number of groups equal to the number of country teams present at the workshop.

→ Facilitators should walk from group to group, helping participants if they are struggling and advising on project in action plan and revisions.

→ Each participant or country team will have on hand:
  ▸ The template on action plan preparation sent in advance of the workshop
  ▸ HANDOUT 1.4, “Instructions to participants for development and presentation of a brief action plan”.

→ Working groups talk about the concepts they have learned and put them into practice by planning for FGM abandonment.

→ Questions to discuss:

1. Using the concepts presented today, what elements of your current programme would you continue and why?

2. What elements would you change? How?

For this question, let participants suggest some ways of programming differently:

3. What new elements would you introduce?

→ For 2 hours, participants will discuss and apply lessons learned to their individual projects in action plans.

The composition of the groups will stay unchanged during the workshop (see Module 4, STEP 10, and Module 5, STEP 3).

IMPORTANT: Whether action plans are organized by country teams or by individuals is up to the workshop organizers and participants.
Notes To Facilitators

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS

This module is about theoretical concepts that might be less familiar to participants. The concepts are not difficult; they are just not yet commonly used to design programmes for the abandonment of harmful practices.

Concepts will be presented making reference to technical terminology, for instance, empirical and normative expectations. There may be a concern that unfamiliar terminology could convey, at first, an impression of unnecessary difficulty. Evidence shows, however, that people understand, appreciate and bring out concrete examples that illustrate the concepts (Yes! This is what is happening in our communities! Naturally, this is the way things go!).

For example, a participant in the Kombissiri Training on Social Convention Theory, held in Burkina Faso in April 2010, said:

“I saw a convention shift! In a village I know well, there was a norm that girls shouldn’t get pregnant before marriage. A girl got pregnant and she was chased from her village. Actually the girl died. When villagers knew it, they were upset. They met publicly altogether and they pledged to ‘never again chase a pregnant girl out of the village’. They kept their commitment. Since then, no girl who happened to be pregnant was chased out of the village.”

Make sure that participants have read the MODULE 1 HANDOUTS before the workshop.

Facilitators should read in advance: (READING 1.2 Norms in the Wild, Chapter 1 (Blcchieri, 2017) and READING 1.1 How Changing Social Norms Is Crucial in Achieving Gender Equality (UNFPA, 2020).

Stress that the module is based on the case study in HANDOUT 1.1, “A mother’s story: challenges faced by those who begin the process of change”. The animated PRESENTATION 1.3 “Khadija’s dilemma”, depicts in simple terms the social dynamics of FGM.
HANDOUT 1.1 will be presented in the plenary and discussed at:

→ **STEP 3**  
  Plenary case study discussion and introductory exercise: 
  “A mother’s story” (adult experiential approach to learning: 
  beginning with concrete experience)

→ **STEP 6**  
  Presentation 1.3: “Khadija’s dilemma” (adult experiential approach 
  to learning: draw conclusions, identify general principles)

→ **STEP 8**  
  Working group exercise: a social norms perspective on Khadija’s 
  dilemma (adult experiential approach to learning: put learning into 
  practice by planning to change the norm)

→ **STEP 11**  
  Working group exercise on pluralistic ignorance (adult experiential 
  approach to learning: draw conclusions, identify general principles)

Sufficient time should be allowed for presentations, and participants should keep handouts available during classes.

**MODULE OBJECTIVES**

Run **PRESENTATION 1.1** “A mother’s story”. The objectives should be on a flip chart hung on the wall. Explain that the concepts being presented are not difficult; they are simply not widely used yet in development programming.

**PLENARY CASE STUDY DISCUSSION**

Present the case in **HANDOUT 1.1** and the two questions to discuss. Participants should reply to each and comment one by one.

Guide participants through the analysis of the case in a manner that is inclusive and participatory. Encourage participants to reflect on the initial question first.

Aspects to be emphasized during discussions:

- Khadija’s dilemma: her personal willingness to change and her fear of social sanctions
- The lack of communication between Khadija and others who would like to change
- The fact that if everybody behaved as Khadija would like to behave, everybody would be better off.
Let participants distinguish in simple terms between:

→ Beliefs not pertaining to social aspects: What are common beliefs that “justify” FGM? Do people believe that uncut girls will be dirty, not trustworthy? Do people believe that uncut girls will be sexually promiscuous?

→ Beliefs about what other people do (empirical expectations): What does Khadija see or infer in her context, or what does she hear from persons who matter to her, about whether or not people perform FGM on their daughters?

→ Beliefs about what people think that others expect them to do (normative expectations): What does Khadija believe would happen to her daughter or to her family if she does not perform FGM on her daughter? What does Khadija believe that others expect her to do?

→ Personal preferences: What would Khadija prefer to do for her daughter if there were no social obligation?

→ Conditional preference: What does Khadija prefer to do for her daughter in her context where FGM is a social obligation?

Note that **STEP 5** will feature a discussion of the definitions of social norms.

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**Some points of discussion in answering the questions**

1. **How would you describe Khadija’s state of mind?**

   Emphasize her context, where FGM is prevalent. Emphasize her lack of choice as an individual and the importance of a collective perspective.

2. **What do you infer from Khadija’s statement? “If I don’t cut her (her six-year-old daughter) there won’t anyone to marry her. I wish I didn’t have daughters, because I am so worried about them.”**

   Emphasize that Khadija disapproves of the practice, she remembers her suffering as a child, and she would like to protect her daughter from the excruciating pain of FGM. In the absence of communication with important others who would like also to abandon the practice, she feels she cannot stand in front of her community and family to protect her daughter. She feels the bad social consequences for her daughter will prevail over the advantage of being uncut.
In advance, the facilitators and resource persons should read **HANDOUT 1.2 “Social norms definition”** as well as Chapter 3 of *How Changing Social Norms Is Crucial In Achieving Gender Equality.*

See the presentations at the end of this guide.

**What social norms are not**

- **Legal norms**: Enforced by sanctions, specialized enforcers
- **Moral norms**: Inner sanctions, often unconditional (we do not care much about others’ actions or expectations)
- **Conventions (descriptive norms)**: No sanction, what we expect other people to do matters, solve coordination problems

**SLIDE 2: “WHAT SOCIAL NORMS ARE NOT”**

- Point out that the presentation will highlight concepts derived from lectures by Bicchieri (2010-2013b). Concepts are developed in Chapter 3 of *How Changing Social Norms Is Crucial in Achieving Gender Equality.*

- Point out that in addition to social norms, mechanisms that regulate behaviour include legal norms, which may prohibit a harmful norm, and moral norms, such as doing what is best for one’s loved one. These norms may act in harmony, reinforcing one another, or they may be at odds.

- The “reasons” to abide by a norm depend on the norm.³ Thus, one way to explain each of the three regulatory systems is by considering the reasons why we obey their corresponding norms.

- One can obey legal regulations because one considers the law admirable, meaning that one admires the way in which it was created, how it is applied or the effects it produces. On the other hand, a major reason why people abide by the law is fear of punishment, such as fines or jails.

- Moral regulation is closely linked to personal autonomy and the development of one’s judgment.⁴ Obedience to moral norms can come from the pleasure of doing so, or from a sense of duty. On the other hand, some people obey moral norms because by doing so they feel consistent with themselves, which in turn produces satisfaction.

- Finally, there is cultural or social regulation. How to dress for the occasion, how to address someone depending on the degree of familiarity, and what type of relationship to establish with colleagues, among others, are behaviours that are regulated by social norms. In contrast to moral norms, social norms depend less on individual conscience and more on the group to which a person belongs. Shame is generally the main emotion that leads to social obedience, and societies widely use it to keep a norm in place. However, this same feeling may be reversed and used to change a norm.
Different beliefs that motivate behaviour

Beliefs about the physical world:
- **Knowledge**: understanding about the nature, causes, state of affairs; factual understanding of breastfeeding, for example.

Attitude:
- What I like/dislike or approve of/disapprove of.

Expectations:
- Beliefs about what is going to happen or what should happen: they imply a continuity between past, present and future.

Knowledge includes beliefs about the physical world, which are beliefs about reality, rather than about people’s behaviour and thought. They can be false beliefs. For example: what are common beliefs that “justify” performing FGM on girls? Do people believe that uncut girls will be dirty, not trustworthy? Do people believe that uncut girls will be sexually promiscuous?

An **attitude** is an evaluative disposition towards some object, person or behaviour. It can be expressed by statements such as “I like/dislike...”, “I believe one should/should not...”, or “I approve/disapprove of...” (Bicchieri, 2017).

Expectation is a kind of belief. Whereas a belief is “any sort of disposition that is about the world” (for example, “I believe that today is 21 August” or “I believe in aliens”), expectation is a forward-looking belief that entails time and probabilities around an uncertain state of affairs. It is about what is going to happen, and presupposes continuity between the past and the present or future. Social expectations relate to other people’s behaviours and beliefs, and are driven by relevant social networks (Muldoom, 2012).

In contrast to individually held attitudes/beliefs and independent practices, **social expectations** are defined by “shared” beliefs about a behaviour or practice.

**Interdependent behaviour** is when other people’s opinions and actions matter to one’s choice; we behave taking into consideration what other people do.

A **reference network** includes similarly situated others/people who matter to me.

Key concepts to identify social norms

- **Independent behaviour**: No social motivation.
- **Interdependent behaviour**: When other people’s actions and opinions matter to one’s choice.
- **Social expectations**: 
  - Expectations about other people.
  - Behaviours and beliefs.
- **Reference networks**: 
  - The interdependence is not with everybody in the world.
  - Interdependence is with people that matter to me.

SLIDE 3: “DIFFERENT BELIEFS THAT MOTIVATE BEHAVIOUR”

- Say that we should distinguish among beliefs not pertaining to social aspects, including knowledge.
- **Knowledge** includes beliefs about the physical world, which are beliefs about reality, rather than about people’s behaviour and thought. They can be false beliefs. For example: what are common beliefs that “justify” performing FGM on girls? Do people believe that uncut girls will be dirty, not trustworthy? Do people believe that uncut girls will be sexually promiscuous?

SLIDE 4: “KEY CONCEPTS TO IDENTIFY SOCIAL NORMS”

- **Independent behaviour** is when actions are independent from those of other people; we behave regardless of what other people do. Moral and religious rules are similar. The fact that others behave likewise does not motivate me.
Collective patterns of independent behaviour

Collective behaviour that are completely independent are purely determined by economic or natural reasons in the sense that they involve undertaking certain actions regardless of what others do or expect us to do.

For example, we wear warm clothes in winter and use umbrellas when it rains, independently of what our friends and neighbours do. Are such choices influenced by social expectations? Naturally not. This action meets needs and will therefore be repeated when it is cold or rains.

Say that the habitual action that meets people needs is referred to as a custom. The consistency of the pattern of a custom is due to actors’ similar motivations and conditions.

Interdependent behaviour

Interdependent behaviour exists when other people’s actions and opinions matter to one’s choice.

Unilateral expectations occur for instance in fashion, where depending on the context, one might copy those in proximity, those in similar situations, etc. Women buy very high heels not for the (zero) comfort of the shoes, but instead because they want to be fashionable, copy trendsetters and expect other women in their circle to do the same. Once a fashion is established it will induce actions in line with it.

Multilateral expectations can be seen in traffic. Why do we obey traffic rules? Because we want to coordinate with other drivers. I don’t want to be killed – I stop because I expect other drivers will pass the green light. Our behaviour is really determined by our expectations of other drivers’ expectations. This is a convention that can be changed by a central agency, which coordinates people’s expectations and actions.

A common signalling system causes action via the joint force of expectation and a desire to coordinate with other users of the system. The existence of an established fashion causes an action consistent with it via the presence of expectations and the desire to imitate the trendy.

The definition of expectations as empirical or normative is important in order to understand the dynamics of social norms in general and of FGM in particular.

- **Expectations may be factual or empirical**: They may be beliefs about how other people are going to act or react in certain situations. What matters to our analysis is that very often these empirical expectations may influence our decisions.

  - For example, if every time I go to England, I observe people driving on the left side of the road, and I have no reason to think there has been a change, I will expect left-side driving the next time around.
  - These collective behaviors depend on empirical expectations about what others do or expect one to do in similar situation.
  - They are also called descriptive norms.
  - Some examples are the use of common signalling system like traffic lights or language for coordination purpose.

- **Other social expectations may be normative**, in that they express our belief that other people believe (and will continue to believe) that certain behaviors are praiseworthy and should be carried out, while others should be avoided.

  - Normative expectations are beliefs about other people’s normative beliefs (i.e., they are second-order beliefs): “I believe that the women in my village believe that a good mother should abstain from nursing her newborn baby” is a normative expectation, and it has a powerful influence on behavior.

- Say that when there is tension between empirical and normative expectations, empirical expectations prevail! Illustrate this concept with the following example: Corruption may be morally condemned in many countries. The normative expectation is against corruption, but people see that many other people practice it, so they do too. Normative and empirical expectations are divergent, and empirical expectations prevail.

- Expectations, empirical or normative, are in general not measured in surveys!
** Conditional preferences **

Empirical and normative expectations are not sufficient to motivate behaviour. Conditional preferences are necessary to motivate behaviour.

Example:

If I choose a vanilla ice cream, instead of CHOCOLATE, you may infer that I like vanilla better. Actually, I adore chocolate ice cream but I am allergic to it. So despite liking chocolate more, I prefer (choose) vanilla ice cream.

→ Preferences are conditional when you choose an action because you have expectations about what others do or do not believe.

→ Often people make the mistake of equating preference with a greater degree of “liking”. If I choose vanilla ice cream instead of chocolate, you may infer that I like vanilla better. What you may not know is that I adore chocolate, but I am allergic to it. So despite liking chocolate more, I prefer (choose) vanilla instead. Preference shouldn’t be confused with attitudes.

→ Preferences are unconditional in that one’s choice is not influenced by external factors (like the belief that others do certain things or approve/disapprove of certain actions).

** SLIDES 9-10: “CONDITIONAL PREFERENCES” **

How Changing Social Norms Is Crucial in Achieving Gender Equality, Chapter 3, section 3.1

Norms in the Wild, Chapters 1, 6–8

→ Empirical and normative expectations are not sufficient to motivate behaviour. **Conditional preferences are necessary to motivate behaviour.**

→ Preferences are **unconditional** in that one’s choice is not influenced by external factors (like the belief that others do certain things or approve/disapprove of certain actions).

Socially, conditional preferences imply that an individual may follow a social norm even if she/he disagrees with it. Her decision is different from what she would choose to do, if isolated from the pressures and requirements of the social group.

PRESENTATION 1.2

Social Norms: Introduction to Basic Concepts

9/16

PRESENTATION 1.2

Social Norms: Introduction to Basic Concepts

10/16
SLIDE 11: “WE WANT TO KNOW IF BEHAVIOUR IS SOCIALLY MOTIVATED”

- What we learn from a social norms’ perspective, in game theory terms, is that in a given social space, people facing a certain “state of the world” may converge towards the same “solution”, and this solution may be “bad.” Therefore, everyone conforms to the norm automatically and unintentionally. The result is that a collective behaviour that may appear “irrational” – that loving mothers (and fathers) “should” cut their beloved daughters – is perpetuated over generations without challenge.

- Remind participants that it is difficult to get away from language that has to do with decision. There is a premise that people think about something, they hear about something, they decide, and then they act. Somehow in much of social science literature, this is a “refrain”, but in reality it isn’t always so. A lot of human behaviour is not based on choice.

SLIDE 12: “BEHAVIOUR DEPENDS ON BELIEFS (CONSCIOUS OR NOT)”

How Changing Social Norms Is Crucial in Achieving Gender Equality, Chapter 3, pp. 29, 53

Norms in the Wild, Chapters 1, 8

Explain and summarize the diagram:

- **Knowledge** includes beliefs about the physical world, which are beliefs about reality, rather than about people’s behaviour and thought.

- **Attitude** is defined as an evaluative disposition towards some object, person or behaviour. It can be expressed by statements such as: “I like/dislike...” “I believe one should/should not...” or “I approve/disapprove of...”

- **Preferences** are just a disposition to act in a particular way in a specific situation.

- **Expectations** are beliefs about what is going to happen or should happen, and presuppose continuity between past and present or future. Social expectations relate to other people’s behaviours and beliefs, and are driven by relevant social networks.
**SLIDE 13: “NORMATIVE EXPECTATIONS MAY ENTAIL SANCTIONS”**

*Norms in the Wild, Chapter 1, p. 32*

The diagram in Slide 14 illustrates how expectations, empirical and normative, influence behaviour. The circle on *sanctions* on the left is associated with normative expectations.

- **Normative expectations** may entail sanctions. The definition of normative expectations tells us that most people in your reference network believe they *ought* to conform to the norm.
- As a consequence, if others believe one ought to conform, the reaction to non-conformity may go from slight displeasure to active or even extreme punishment. For example, uncut girls may be ridiculed and ostracized in communities where FGM is the norm.
- Normative expectations may also be accompanied by positive sanctions, such as liking, appreciation, trust and respect.
- Again, the existence of strong positive rewards may move the indifferent and the contrarian to comply, while it will just reinforce the supporter's conviction.

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**Reference networks**

- People who matter to my choices (family, village, friends, clan, religious authority, co-workers...). What I expect them to do matters; it influences my choices.
- What I believe they think I ought to do matters; it influences my choices.

In a favela in Brazil, dwellers punish stealing within the group, but not outside the group.

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**SLIDE 14: “REFERENCE NETWORKS”**

*Norms in the Wild, Chapter 1, p. 11*

- **Reference networks** are composed of: people who matter to my choices (family, village, friends, clan, religious authority, co-workers...). What I expect them to do matters; it influences my choice. What I believe they think I ought to do matters; it influences my choice. In a favela in Brazil, dwellers punish stealing within the group, but not outside the group.
- Network thinking can help to uncover the relevant populations of individuals whose expectations drive a particular social norm. Highlight the case cited in *Norms in the Wild*, Chapter 1, p. 11: People who mattered to the Pakistani father living in Italy, who killed his own daughter, whom he thought was dishonoured, were friends and relatives in his native country, and not his own co-workers and neighbours in Italy, where he had lived for 20 years.
SLIDE 15: “IS A BEHAVIOUR OR PRACTICE A SOCIAL NORM?”

This diagram allows us to analyse a situation and understand whether a certain behaviour or practice is or isn’t a social norm. It makes possible a diagnostic of social norms.

Figure 1. Diagnostic process for collective behaviours
It has been consistently observed that attitudes and behaviours are NOT positively correlated. Individuals may express positive judgments toward behaviours that they nevertheless do not engage in. Explain that: A woman in Sierra Leone, for example, might prefer not to breastfeed after giving birth, even if she has learned about the advantages of feeding colostrum to the baby, and her attitude would drive her towards breastfeeding immediately after birth. Similarly, a family in Bangladesh might prefer to give their young daughter in marriage even if it would have liked it better to send her to school (the family attitude would have been to marry their daughter later).

Figure 2. Interactive shift of attitudes and coordinated shift of practices
The animated PRESENTATION 1.3 shows how for Khadija, in her context, it is very difficult to deviate alone from the prevailing norm. The presentation helps participants develop an intuitive understanding of the dilemma she faces. Emphasize the context, where cutting is virtually universal.

Khadija would like not to cut her daughter in order not to cause her pain and risk health complications. She lives in a community that expects everyone to cut their daughters, however. Within this context, in the absence of communication with others about alternatives, she needs to think about what is the best thing she can do for her daughter.

To understand this situation, we have to think of norms as "equilibrium states". An equilibrium state is what the group will end up choosing if everyone is trying to do the best thing they can do for their daughters. Given that everyone else is trying to do what’s best for their daughters, everyone chooses to cut her/his daughters. But everyone would be better off cooperating on abandoning FGM.

Notice that Khadija in her situation cannot independently get out of "the state of the world" represented by the social norm of cutting, without ending up in a worse situation. In the absence of communication, Khadija is better off choosing to cut her daughter.

Questions to be discussed:

③ What does Khadija think others expect her to do?

Emphasize the context surrounding Khadija: She sees others circumcising their daughters and hears all others circumcise their daughters.

④ What does Khadija expect would happen if she does not have her daughter cut?

Emphasize social sanctions such as ridiculing, ostracism.

⑤ What does Khadija prefer to do, given her context?

Emphasize that in her context, she prefers to perform FGM on her daughter, although she would like not to do so.

⑥ In the absence of communication, what is Khadija's best strategy? Does she have any alternative?
Remind participants of concepts such as “interdependent decision” and “reciprocal expectations” (empirical and normative).

Point out that for those who initiate the process of change, there cannot be an alternative to the cutting of daughters without paying a high cost. The “best” choice for everyone in these situations is still to cut their daughters, even though they would like not to do so.

Let participants express their own ideas on how to encourage people to communicate.

Close this step by asking participants to comment on the table in Presentation 1.1 on “FGM prevalence versus support for the practice among women 15-49 years old” (Slide 6).

Explain, based on How Changing Social Norms Is Crucial in Achieving Gender Equality, Chapter 3, p. 29, and Norms in the Wild, Chapter 1, p. 38, that:

- In all these cases, people were questioned about their attitudes and personal normative beliefs around FGM.
- There were several cases of discrepancy between aggregate beliefs and behaviours.
- Why do we see differences in beliefs/behaviours between countries?
- What do you expect those people would say if asked about their normative expectations?

Why do we see differences in belief/behaviour between countries?

What do you expect those people would say if asked about their normative expectations?

Wait to see if anybody will be able to infer from the graph that in different countries there are several discrepancies between aggregate attitudes and behaviours. FGM prevalence among girls and women is almost always higher than girls’ and women’s support for FGM.

Point out that Demographic and Health Survey data on prevalence refer to several years before the survey, while data on support for the practice refer to the time of the survey. Even taking this time gap into consideration, the trend is constant in different countries, which suggests that many women cut their daughters even though they would prefer not to do so.
Facilitators should have read *Norms in the Wild*, Chapter 1, Section 6, “Belief Traps: Pluralistic Ignorance” (pp. 35-36).

**SLIDE 2: “PERCEIVED OR REAL SUPPORT FOR THE NORM?”**

→ This is a diagnostic tool to understand whether support for the norm perceived by individuals in a given group is real or false. May normative expectations be false in a certain context?

“In real life experience, systematic biases in the information people reveal to each other, (..) can conspire to produce widespread overestimation of private support for social norms. Under these conditions of pluralistic ignorance when uncertainty and misgivings about the norm go unrecognised, people who might oppose a norm still perform it. For example, in American colleges’ campuses often students engage in what is called binge drinking, a norm of excessive alcohol consumption. It has been found that students systematically and substantially overestimate their peers’ comfort with heavy drinking. As a consequence, it has been enough to have discussions with students and make them understand that many wanted to abandon binge drinking or in secret disliked it, to achieve a 40 per cent reduction in alcohol consumption. This achievement was relative to a control intervention, at a follow-up assessment four to six months after the discussions” (Schroeder and Prentice, 1998).

**SLIDES 3 AND 4: “WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THERE IS PLURALISTIC IGNORANCE?” AND “PLURALISTIC IGNORANCE AND CHILD MARRIAGE”**

These slides are self-explanatory.
SLIDES 5 AND 6: “GIRLS AND WOMEN UNDERESTIMATE THE SHARE OF BOYS AND MEN WHO WANT FGM/C TO END” AND “EVIDENCE OF LACK OF COMMUNICATION”

These slides show how girls and women underestimate the proportion of boys and men who want FGM to end. Actually, in many countries, the proportion of men who would like FGM to end is much higher than women think. For example, in Guinea, the difference is 30 percentage points; it is 21 points in Chad, 20 in Burkina Faso, etc. The second slide is on lack of communication: Women and men don’t know what others are thinking and therefore may infer false conclusions.

SLIDES 7 AND 8: “WITH PLURALISTIC IGNORANCE, INSTABILITY LIES BEHIND APPARENT STRENGTH” AND “A WAY TO ACCELERATE CHANGE”

These slides are self-explanatory. A sudden change in a norm is sometimes due to the fact that the majority of people did not in fact support the norm. The moment people understand this, the norm is abandoned.

Definition of common knowledge: The opposite of pluralistic ignorance is “common knowledge” (I know, that you know, that they know, that everybody know that I know). Attaining common knowledge of mutual beliefs and trusting that appropriate actions will follow is always necessary to abandon an inferior norm (Bicchieri, 2012); this can be stimulated by facilitating access to information and discussion within communities, by the media and through national events involving various social groups.
Only Cameroon, Uganda and Yemen show an inverse trend. The situation in Burkina Faso is emblematic: 76 per cent FGM prevalence versus 9 per cent support to the practice.

At the end of the presentation, ask: *Now I know what many others think, but do they know what we all think?* How do we get common knowledge among those who disapprove/dislike the social norm? Stress that common discussion and values deliberation help attain common knowledge. Common manifestations of commitment to change the social rule confirm individuals’ commitments to each other that they will uphold a new social rule. Common knowledge is enhanced insofar as every individual now knows the intention of the others.

This graphic is used also in HANDOUT 1.1. It shows how FGM prevalence is systematically higher than support to the practice in almost all countries where FGM is prevalent.

**PRESENTATION 1.4**

**Introducing Pluralistic Ignorance**

Have participants return to the working groups. Using understanding gained on social norms as applied to FGM and the “pluralistic ignorance” concept, ask participants to discuss the following questions:

1. **What are some examples where a significant proportion of individuals have private attitudes/preferences in conflict with the prevailing norm?**

Remind participants about the experience with “binge drinking” on campuses in the United States (see comments on SLIDE 2).

2. **What might happen if an increasing number of individuals have private attitudes/preferences in conflict with the prevailing norm?**

Point out:

- If communication makes people aware that “many want to change” and some have already changed, the norm becomes more and more weak, and a shift into the “norm contrary” (the coordinated abandonment of the norm) can suddenly occur.

- The unpopular norm will tend to persist when private views that object to the norm remain private and communication does not relay to a sufficient proportion of the population that a change is occurring.
Can you suggest an explanation for the discrepancy between the prevalence of FGM and support for the practice found in the Sudan data?

What are the implications for the design of policies and programmes?

Reiterate the concept of “pluralistic ignorance”. Point out:

“I observe extensive child beating, and assume parents beat children because they believe it is right and good for the child. I think that it is excessive punishment, and does not benefit the child. Many of us may think corporal punishment is not right. Yet, we keep beating our children” (Bicchieri, 2010-2013b).

What happens?

▸ Individuals engage in social comparison with their reference group.
▸ Others’ behaviour is observable.
▸ No transparent communication is taking place.
▸ Individuals assume that the behaviour of others is consistent with their attitudes and preferences.
▸ Individuals infer that all endorse the observed norm.
▸ As a result, they also conform to a public norm even though they do not approve of it.

“SKIT ON STANDING AT PLAYS AND AT CONCERTS”

BASED ON MACKIE AND LEJEUNE, 2009

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE ROLE PLAY

Facilitator explains the role play:

To understand, imagine that there is a group that has a convention whereby audiences (at the cinema, at plays, at recitals) stand up, rather than sit down. Sitting has been forgotten. Standing is both universal and persistent. An outsider comes along and explains that elsewhere audiences sit. After the shock of surprise wears off, some people begin to think that sitting might be better, but it would be better only if enough other people sit at the same time. If only one person sits, she doesn’t get to see anything on the stage. If only one family abandons FGM, its daughter doesn’t get married.
The facilitator, unless a participant volunteers, will play the role of the outsider.

1. Explain that all participants will take part in the role play, and ask them all to stand. State that they belong to a community where standing at plays is the rule. It is believed that sitting is disrespectful of the performance and that something terrible will happen to any individual who sits.

2. Ask participants to set chairs in theatre lines – for instance, for 32 participants, 8 lines of 4 chairs each.

3. Ask participants to stand in front of each chair. Emphasize that this is the rule.

4. The role play proceeds as follows:

   ▸ Ask the participants on the 2nd, 6th, 10th and 14th positions to sit. Subsequently, ask them how they feel. Usually, they reply they feel much better because they can watch the play and be comfortably seated. They may also be subject to criticism by others who are still standing.
   ▸ Ask those who are sitting whether they are more comfortable sitting and encourage them to communicate this to their neighbours. Also ask them whether or not they want others to sit, and what they plan to do to promote this.
   ▸ Ask four participants, for example, those in cells 3, 7, 18 and 23, to remain standing throughout the rest of the exercise.
   ▸ Ask all participants who are still standing if they still believe something terrible will happen to those who sit, and whether or not they are considering sitting and what it would take for them to sit.
   ▸ Proceed so that additional participants sit (usually by groups), until everyone is sitting except the four individuals asked to remain standing. Ask those whose view is blocked what they will do in order to see better. Usually, those persons will start shouting because they are not able to see the play and will ask those in front of them to sit, too.

5. Return to a plenary session and discuss the following questions.

   ① What do you think needs to happen for the initial group to sit down?

   Remind participants that an external stimulus might be necessary because “standing is quasi-universal in the group that practices it”. People might NOT be aware that “it might be possible to watch a play while sitting”.

   ② Do you think that people will revert to the previous “standing convention” once they have collectively changed their behaviour?

   “If a critical mass of people in the audience, even if less than a majority, can be organized to sit and recognize the advantage of sitting, they will have an incentive to (make known the benefits of sitting) and to recruit the remaining audience members to adapt the new practice, until it becomes everyone’s best interest to do the same” (UNICEF, 2007, p. 18). Therefore, once a social norm changes, there is no incentive to return to it.
What kinds of dynamics lead the majority to sit down?

People see that others are seated and that they are more comfortable. Some people are also shouting at others to sit down, because they are now aware that sitting is “a better way” to watch the play. Remind participants that, when empirical (I see people sitting) and normative (I ought to stand) expectations diverge, “empirical expectations prevail”.

What individual benefit would you get from changing the social norm of standing into sitting?

When enough of the population is willing to sit, people’s view of the stage would be at least as good as standing, and their comfort would be improved.

What happens when the social norm changes from standing to sitting? Will all individuals willingly sit?

Make the point that the new social norm of sitting is now established. There may be some individuals who follow it reluctantly, since they still believe it is disrespectful to the performers, and a very few others who refuse to follow it. (As a reference point, see also, in Module 4, Presentation 4.4, Slide 5, “Process of community social norms shift”.

Would you see any analogy with FGM abandonment?

“Standing and sitting” is an analogy. Emphasize that “standing” was both universal and persistent in the group given the social norm of “standing at plays and at concerts”.

This is analogous to the typical features of FGM (FGM is quasi-universal in the practising groups and persistent through generations).

It is also indicative of the way people’s behaviour changes: A small group sits, they begin to enjoy the benefit of being seated, they tend to recruit others, and they become a vociferous minority. (Here is a difference with FGM – the minority is silent. Recruitment, if any, is through word of mouth, in private settings. As a consequence, to achieve a sweeping change, communication techniques should enable voices of the minority to be widely heard.)

At a certain point, not identifiable in practice, everybody sees that “many others” have already changed. The overwhelming majority of the previously standing group will be seated. Some might nevertheless remain standing.

This sequence of change might be applied to FGM. A point may be reached when the social norm changes to not cutting, and families take pride in maintaining the physical integrity of their girls. New social rewards and punishments are in place that favour families who do not have their daughters cut and consider them good parents. There may be some individuals who still believe that FGM should be performed, however.
6. Summing up

Highlight lessons learned:

→ If an initial core group of families decides to abandon FGM and adopt a new way of not cutting, a dynamic is set in motion.

→ It is in the interest of this group to expand, thereby widening support for non-cutting and the benefits associated with it. The larger the non-cutting group becomes, the easier it will be for non-cut girls to marry. When the non-cutting group becomes dominant, marriage and status will be associated with non-cutting rather than with cutting.

→ When the group is large enough to ensure that girls and families do not suffer significant negative social costs for not performing FGM (they are able to marry and retain social status), non-cutting is self-sustainable within the group. This point is sometimes referred to as “critical mass”. The social dynamics that have led to this point will tend to continue with minimal additional external support. The group will have an incentive to actively recruit others, until it becomes in everybody’s best interest to do the same. Finally, a point may be reached, sometimes called the tipping point, non-identifiable in practice, where there is an acceleration of change towards the new way of not cutting, leading to the majority of the population adopting the new way. If the general expectation is now that girls are not cut, a new social norm of not cutting has been established.

Working groups take HANDOUT 1.4, “Instructions to participants for development and presentation of a brief project”, and talk about the concepts they have learned, and how they can put them into practice by planning for FGM abandonment.

Questions to discuss

1. Using the concepts presented today, what elements of your current programme would you continue and why?

2. What existing elements would you change? How?

For this question, let participants suggest some ways of programming differently.

3. What new elements would you introduce?
1. This video is available and can directly be received, by writing to JPenFedFGM@unfpa.org.

2. The Kolb Adult Experiential Approach to Learning, see Module 0.


4. What in the more classical Catholic tradition was deemed the age of reason: the emergence of judgment that translates into the voice of conscience, as exemplified by the cricket in The Adventures of Pinocchio, created by Italian writer Carlo Collodi. A fairy assigns the cricket to act as Pinocchio’s “conscience” and keep him out of trouble.

5. Bicchieri, 2006. A custom is a pattern of behaviour such that individuals (unconditionally) prefer to conform to it because it meets their needs.

6. Bicchieri, 2006. A descriptive norm is a pattern of behaviour such that individuals prefer to conform to it because they believe that most people in their reference network conform to it (empirical expectations).

7. Important for actions on the ground: take into consideration that when a norm begins to weaken, a first signal is weakening of sanctions on the ground, linked to weaker normative expectations of conformity. For example, a first signal of change can be the disappearance of songs ridiculing uncut girls.

8. Preferences should NOT be confused with “attitudes”. Preferences may be strictly individual (like I prefer vanilla over chocolate) or they may be social (I may not eat ice cream when I am out with friends since they have passionate views about dieting). Preferences can be unconditional or conditional.

9. This situation has been defined as a collective outcome of individual choices. This happens when an outcome that affects us depends not only on what we do, but also on what others do. Individuals are kept in a stable state of reciprocal adjustment, which is the best possible state in a given situation. In trying to get out of this state, which might be represented by a social norm, individuals will end up in a worse situation (for example, non-conformers may receive social sanctions).

10. Adapted from Yoder, 2006. It’s important to overcome the misconception that people “consciously” decide about norms. A number of critics of the rational choice model have pointed out the problem of assuming a direct link between an individual’s intention and his or her behaviour, stressing the importance of understanding the “interaction” of decision-makers within the context in which their decisions are made.


12. Mackie, 2011. The figure has been simplified to allow visualization of the process of change when a decision is strongly interdependent.
Dynamic of Social Norms: Female Genital Mutilation
Khadija is a devout Ansar Sunna Muslim from the Beni Amer tribal group in Eastern Sudan. She lives with her extended family. When she leaves the house, she covers herself in a black abaya (garment) and face veil to be properly modest. As a girl, according to Beni Amer tradition, she underwent infibulation. This is the most severe form of FGM and known in Sudan as "pharaonic" cutting. Now she has a six-year-old daughter who has not yet been cut. Khadija attended a programme that covered the topic of harmful practices, where she learned about the health complications associated with FGM. She also learned that, contrary to common belief, the practice is not required by Islam.
Along with other women, she registered her daughter with the group of uncircumcised girls. Yet, Khadija is troubled. Although she doesn’t want her daughter to suffer from the health complications she heard about, she knows that men favour the practice for religious reasons. She also expects her mother-in-law will have something to say about it. “If I don’t cut her, there won’t be anyone to marry her,” says Khadija. “I wish I didn’t have daughters, because I am so worried about them.”

1.2 EASTERN SUDAN SCENARIO: UNDERSTANDING KHADIJA’S DILEMMA

Wad Sharifae, where Khadija lives, is a large settlement with good transportation to the nearby city of Kassala in Sudan. The settlement has an unofficial subdivision into east and west zones, roughly corresponding to the ethnic division of people of West African origins and others. The division among the two settlements is quite invisible, as both make use of the same market. The Eritrean border is 35 kilometres away, and recently a refugee camp has been located in the area. Around 14,000 people live in Wad Sharifae. The ethnic composition includes the Beni Amer, one of the nomadic populations of eastern Sudan, and the Hadendawa and House, mainly concentrated in West Was Sharief. Many Eritrean or people of Eritrean origin also live here.

The economic situation is quite good, with irrigated orchards, herding, brickmaking, urban employment and day labour. There are seven basic schools for boys and seven for girls (grades 1-8); there is one high school for boys only. There are also 10 Koranic schools. Although illiteracy remains high among women, it is estimated that 60 per cent of the population has some degree of education. Schools are in a very deplorable state, and teachers complain about the lack of government support.

The most prominent groups of Muslims are the Khatmiyya, a traditional Sufi group quite numerous in Eastern Sudan, and the Ansar Sunna, a Wahhabist-oriented religious movement with close ties to Saudi Arabia. Pharaonic circumcision is quite diffuse; 57 per cent of girls aged 5-11 years have already been submitted to infibulation. Political and religious leaders from the Ansar Sunna movement often criticize Sudanese traditions, including girl’s circumcision and parts of the traditional wedding celebration. A wedding now consists of just a contract signing and a large, segregated gathering for a meal, after which the groom takes the bride home. Women’s movement is restricted; they must be accompanied by others and wear black veils when moving beyond the family compound.

1.3 QUESTIONS FOR PLENARY CASE STUDY DISCUSSION OF “A MOTHER’S STORY”

1. How would you describe Khadija’s state of mind?
2. What do you infer from Khadija’s statement? “If I don’t cut her (her six-year-old daughter) there won’t be anyone to marry her. I wish I didn’t have daughters, because I am so worried about them.”
Khadija understands that FGM implies a risk for her daughter and future newborn babies. Khadija herself experienced the pain of the procedure. However, if she does not cut her daughter, the risk of her daughter being penalized, shunned and having an inferior status in her community is very high.

Khadija sees others around her continuing to engage in FGM. She assumes that others support the practice since they are doing it. She is afraid to communicate her concerns about FGM/C to others, and she has no access to others’ private preferences about FGM. Therefore, even though she rejects cutting in her private thoughts, she may prefer, in her given situation, to perform cutting on her daughter in order to avoid the negative consequences that she believes would result both for her daughter and for herself and her family.

1.4 WORKING GROUP EXERCISE “A SOCIAL NORMS PERSPECTIVE: KHADIJA’S DILEMMA”

1.5 WORKING GROUP EXERCISE: “PLURALISTIC IGNORANCE”

What does Khadija think others expect her to do?
What does Khadija believe would happen if she does not have her daughter cut?
What does Khadija prefer to do, given her context?
In the absence of communication, what is Khadija’s best strategy? Does she have any alternative?

What are some examples of a significant proportion of individuals having private attitudes/preferences in conflict with the prevailing norm?
What might happen if an increasing number of individuals have private attitudes/preferences in conflict with the prevailing norm?
Can you suggest an explanation for the discrepancy between the prevalence of FGM and support for the practice shown in the Sudan data below?
What are the implications for the design of policies and programmes?
The data reveal that, among women 15 to 49 years of age, support for the practice is lower than actual FGM prevalence in Sudan, as well as in most countries where FGM is concentrated. Even in countries where FGM is almost universal, the level of support among girls and women is lower than the prevalence level.
Social norms definition

Based on excerpts from Bicchieri 2008a, 2010.

2.1 WHAT ARE SOCIAL NORMS?

The concept of social norms lends itself to different definitions. For clarity, here is a definition of social norms that has operational implications:

A social norm is a behavioural rule “R” that applies to a certain social context “C” for a given population “P”. People in the population prefer to follow the rule in the appropriate context if they believe that a sufficiently large part of the population follows the rule (empirical expectations), and further, if they believe that other people think that they ought to follow the rule, and may sanction them if they don’t (normative expectations).

For example, in Western countries, brides traditionally wear white at weddings because nearly all other brides do (empirical expectations) and they believe that others think that they should wear white (normative expectations) because white represents purity. This is unlike why everyone wears shoes. I wear shoes because I want to protect my feet, not because I’m concerned about what others do or what they think of me.

Social norms can solve social dilemmas. They can resolve the tension between what is the best choice for the group and the best choice for the individual. By aligning our incentives, they make it possible for us to coordinate on the best outcome. Social norms represent equilibrium states, which means that they are sustainable in the long run. Once we reach equilibrium, it becomes difficult to leave it.

A social norm might be enforced by informal social sanctions that range from gossip to open censure, ostracism and/or dishonour. Social sanction motivates individuals to follow a norm out of fear of punishment or out of a desire to please and thus be rewarded.

2.2 SOCIAL NORMS ARE NOT:

- Legal norms, which are enforced by formal sanctions with specialized enforcers.
- Moral norms, which are inner sanctions, often unconditional (we do not care much about others’ actions or expectations).
- Conventions, which define situations where “what we expect other people to do matters”; however, there are no sanctions if we do not comply with them.
2.3 THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CONCEPT OF EXPECTATION

Normative and empirical expectations are crucial in the process of norms change.

“My point is... general. Negative practices are part of a complex of norms, attitudes and values that support them. My work on social norms has many practical implications and recommendations for changing such practices. In particular, I stress the importance of changing people’s expectations, and of doing it in a public, collective way. I also recommend re-categorizing” the practices that we find harmful in a way that is easily accepted and understood by the parties involved.”

A norms-based approach predicts consistency between expectation and actions (and lack of consistency would suggest that other factors are at work). Since so many of our choices are interdependent, we don’t simply have the option of making our choices without regard to what others do or expect us to do. We have to think about what they are going to do. My decision to drive on the right side of the road is completely based on my expectation that everyone else will drive on the right side of the road. If they are driving on the left, then so will I. Likewise, when I go to a party, I want to coordinate how dressed-up I get with how dressed-up I think everyone else will be. If I wear a T-shirt and shorts to a formal dinner party, I expect that other people will be upset with me.

2.4 LEARNING TO UNDERSTAND SOCIAL SITUATIONS

In order to understand the dynamics of social norms, we should refer to the process by which we interpret, understand and encode social situations. This entails a series of steps, including categorization:

→ A category is organized around a prototype or exemplar (social, gender stereotyping).

Once a situation is categorized, a schemata or a script is invoked:

→ A schema represents knowledge about people or events (hunting in the forest, trading).

→ A script refers to social events (going to a restaurant, teaching a class).

A shared schema or script enables us to understand the situation, to make inferences [interpretations] about unobservable variables, to predict behaviours, to make causal attributions and to modulate emotional reactions.
A norm can be very fragile, particularly in cases of pluralistic ignorance. This occurs when a majority of individuals have private attitudes/preferences in conflict with the prevailing norm. Often people are not able to freely talk about their private attitudes, for fear of social sanction, and so the norm remains in place, even if most people do not want to continue to follow it. Until expectations are changed, individuals in a group will continue to obey the norm because of their belief that he/she is expected to do so. A public pledge to abandon a bad norm suddenly and collectively changes expectations and can therefore induce a norm shift. Public pledges allow people to create common knowledge of new expectations. For example, everyone knows that everyone else knows that we expect others not to cut their daughters.

2.5 WHY MAY PUBLIC PLEDGES TRIGGER WIDER CHANGE?

To offer a few examples, the following practices and views function/could function as social norms:

- “Acceptable behaviour governed through a set of known sanctions or through a powerful process of internalization that serve to recruit women themselves into norms upholding gender inequalities, such as a range of practices that control women’s mobility and autonomy, undercut rights such as to bodily integrity, and enforce a rigid division of labour by sex” (Jutting and others 2007, pp. 52, 54).

- The view that children can be used by families for economic purposes.

- The view that children should be severely disciplined, including through corporal punishment.

- Peer pressure to enter sex work and imitate the “successful” group.

- Different views of what exploitation is, and whether it is legitimate: “Haya girls who practiced prostitution in Nairobi helped buttress their fathers’ suffering finances...and were seen as dutiful daughters” (UNICEF, 2008a).
Given the collective nature of social norms, all interventions have to reach the entire group in which the norm is practised.

Making people aware of the negative impact of a given practice or implementing top-down policies may not be sufficient to change practices that are perceived as “normal” and approved by the relevant community.

If norms are part of larger scripts, then we may often need to recategorize the situation or the practice (Saleema example). Propose different scripts (new alternatives and/or new meanings), and pay attention to the network of values, beliefs, etc. that are part of the script.

Changing expectations is a relatively long process. It involves trust, public pressure, collective deliberation, common pledges and attaining common knowledge of what the group is going to do and expects one to do.

Imagine a community that has a social norm whereby audiences (e.g., people gathered at plays or concerts) stand up rather than sit down. It is believed that people should stand because sitting is disrespectful of the performers and something terrible will happen to any individual who sits (for example, she/he will have a heart attack). Standing is both universal and persistent.

An outsider comes along and explains that elsewhere audiences sit, and think that sitting is better because individuals do not get tired, their feet do not swell, etc. After the surprise wears off, some people begin to think that sitting might be better. Unless they are in the front row, however, they are aware that this would be the case only if enough other people who are standing in front of them also sit so that their views are not blocked by others who are standing. They will not decide to sit alone, but they may conditionally commit to sit – “I would sit if enough other people would sit as well” – so as to be more comfortable while continuing to have a view.

If an initial group of people can be organized to sit, even just a column of people who are far less than a majority, they realize that they can attain both the ease of sitting and a limited view of the stage. Those who are still standing now have evidence that those who sat did not suffer from heart attacks or other negative consequences. Seeing others sitting and being more comfortable makes it more likely that they will consider sitting to be a better option, individually and in groups (for example, an entire family or group of friends). Meanwhile, the initial people who
are sitting have an incentive to persuade their neighbours of the ease of sitting and recruit them to sit, for this will improve their limited view of the stage.

At a certain point, as more and more of the audience sits, a point is reached where there is a massive shift from standing to sitting. Past this point, sometimes called the tipping point, people who remain standing and continue to insist on the superiority of their practice lose credibility. Over time, they will adopt the new norm, possibly even if they do not agree with it. If they remain standing, pressure from the majority will be on them to sit, since they will block people’s view. The tipping point is rarely identifiable before it happens.

**Questions to be discussed in plenary:**

1. What do you think needs to happen for the initial group to sit down?
2. Do you think that people will revert to the previous “standing convention” once they have collectively changed their behaviour?
3. What kinds of dynamics lead the majority to sit down?
4. What individual benefit would you get from changing the social norm of standing into sitting?
5. What happens when the social norm changes from standing to sitting? Will all individuals willingly sit?
6. Would you see any analogy with dynamics of FGM abandonment?
By day five of the workshop, individual participants or country teams will have developed and presented approximately 5-10 pages of final action plans, describing a practical challenge and strategies for addressing their own or a country team experience using the theoretical and empirical tools discussed during the course. Below is a rough outline:

1. Description of the challenge using the theoretical tools learned in the sessions
   - Use the concepts learned to describe the problem you are addressing: its history, development, the negative effects it has, etc.
   - If relevant, compare the issue you are addressing (or have addressed in the past) with a case study we have studied during the session. How is it similar? How is it different?
   - Use the theoretical framework learned to describe the desired outcomes.

2. Critical evaluation of participant’s or country team’s work so far:
   - Describe the strategies, if any, that have been employed thus far in addressing the challenge you described in your action plan.
   - In what ways are these strategies already integrating what’s been learned during the course?
   - Which strategies, if any, appear less likely to be successful in light of what you’ve learned during the course?

3. Changes in practices:
   - Describe at least one new or modified strategy for addressing your challenge that’s been suggested by what you have learned during the course. How will you change your practice, and why? On what basis, considering what you have learned?

4. Presentation and executive summary:
   - Prepare a 1-2 page executive summary of your action plan that would be appropriate for sharing with colleagues.
   - Present your action plan to the other members of your working group or to the plenary for country team action plans.
A social dilemma is, by definition, a situation in which each group member gets higher outcomes if she/he pursues her/his individual interest, but everyone in the group is better off if all group members further the common interest. Examples of social dilemmas in everyday life include: overpopulation, pollution, and the depletion of scarce and valuable resources such as energy. These are all examples of situations in which the temptation to defect must be tempered by a concern with the public good. See Bicchieri, 2006, p. 140.

Equilibrium state: no individual acting alone has the ability to make a choice that fails to conform to the “established” choice of the group. See UNICEF, 2007. Equilibrium is a situation that involves several individuals or groups, in which each one’s action is a best reply to everyone else’s action. It is a situation of stable mutual adjustment: Everyone anticipates everyone else’s behaviour, and all these anticipations turn out to be correct. Equilibrium is a self-fulfilling prophecy that individuals formulate about each other’s actions. Note that the fact that social norms are in equilibrium does not mean they are good: There are a lot of cases of “bad” equilibrium around.

Normative expectations: Not only do we expect others to conform; we are also aware that we are expected to conform.

Empirical expectations and expectations of conformity matter. In other words, one expects people to follow a certain norm in a certain situation because he/she has observed people doing just that over a long period of time. See Bicchieri, 2006, p. 11.

Recategorization: activate a comparison process to assess the similarity of a new situation with members of a category stored in memory. A category is a collection of instances that have a family resemblance; it is organized around a prototype or is represented by exemplars. See Bicchieri, 2008b.

Bicchieri, 2006, Chapter 2, p. 56. See also Bicchieri, 2010.

The Saleema communication initiative emerged out of the recognition of the importance of changing values associated with FGM in Sudan. See Handout 4.3, Module 4.
Presentations

Dynamic of Social Norms: Female Genital Mutilation
A mother’s story
Objectives of Module 1

By the end of this module, participants will be able to:

→ Differentiate between independent and interdependent behaviour.

→ Define social norms in operational terms.

→ Define key concepts relevant for understanding social norms, including beliefs and expectations, conditional preferences, enforcement mechanisms and pluralistic ignorance.

→ Share a common understanding of gender and related concepts, mainly in the context of harmful practices.
Khadija is a Devout Ansar Sunna Muslim from the Beni Amer Tribe...

... in Eastern Sudan. She lives with her extended family. ...As a girl, she underwent infibulation, known in Sudan as “pharaonic” cutting, according to Beni Amer tradition. Now she has a six-year-old daughter who has not yet been cut. Khadija attended a programme about harmful traditional practices, where she learned about the health complications associated with FGM. ...Yet, Khadija is troubled. Although she doesn't want her daughter to suffer from the health complications she heard about, she knows the men favour the practice for religious reasons. She also expects her mother-in-law will have something to say about it.
Question 1-2

① How would you describe Kadhija’s state of mind?

② What do you infer from Khadija’s statement?

“If I don't cut her (her six-year-old daughter) there won't be anyone to marry her. I wish I didn't have daughters, because I am so worried about them...."
Question 3-6

③ What does Khadija think others expect her to do?

④ What does Khadija expect would happen if she does not have her daughter cut?

⑤ What does Khadija prefer to do given her context?

⑥ In the absence of communication, what is Khadija’s best strategy? Does she have any alternative?
Social Norms
Introduction to Basic Concepts
Adapted from Bicchieri 2013-2017
What social norms are not

Legal norms

→ Enforced by sanctions, specialized enforcers

Moral norms

→ Inner sanctions, often unconditional
  (we do not care much about others’ actions or expectations)

Conventions (descriptive norms)

→ No sanction, what we expect other people to do matters,
  solve coordination problems
Different beliefs that motivate behaviour

Beliefs about the physical world:

→ Knowledge: understanding about the nature, causes, state of affairs; factual understanding of breastfeeding, for example

Attitude:

→ What I like/dislike or approve of/disapprove of

Expectations:

→ Beliefs about what is going to happen or what should happen: they imply a continuity between past, present and future
Key concepts to identify social norms

**Independent behaviour**
- No social motivation

**Interdependent behaviour**
- When other people’s actions and opinions matter to one’s choice

**Social expectations**
- Expectations about other people:
- Behaviours and
- Beliefs

**Reference networks**
- The *interdependence* is not with everybody in the world.
  Interdependence is with people that matter to me.
Collective patterns of independent behaviour

Independent behaviours
Custom

Carrying an umbrella is a “custom”, a habitual pattern of behaviour we engage in because it meets our needs. There is no social motivation.

Not all customs are benign, though they may efficiently serve some basic needs.

Open defecation is an example.
Interdependent behaviour

**UNILATERAL EXPECTATIONS**
- *Imitating* successful people
- *Copying* those in proximity
- *Copying* trendsetters
- Fashion

**MULTILATERAL EXPECTATIONS**
- We want to *coordinate* with others
- Traffic, signalling system, language
- Our behavior is determined by our expectations on others’ expectations.
Two types of social (multilateral) expectations

**Empirical:** based on “facts” — beliefs about how other people are going to act or react in certain situations.

→ We see (and hear) other people waiting in line, and we expect we have to wait in line too

**Normative:** beliefs about what people in our reference network think we should do.

→ We expect other people think that we should not cut in line, and may sanction us if we do so
Two types of social (multilateral) expectations

**Empirical:** based on “facts” — beliefs about how other people are going to act or react in certain situations (what people see and hear around them).

“In my village, girls always marry right after puberty.”

**Normative:** beliefs that other people think that certain behaviours should be carried out, or are bad and should be avoided.

“In my village, parents believe that people in the village think that girls should marry right after puberty.”
Conditional preferences

Empirical and normative expectation are not sufficient to motivate behaviour. *Conditional preferences* are necessary to motivate behaviour.

Example:

If I choose a vanilla ice cream, instead of CHOCOLATE, you may infer that I like vanilla better.

Actually, I adore chocolate ice cream but I am allergic to it. So despite liking chocolate more, I prefer (choose) vanilla ice cream.
Conditional preferences

An individual’s conditional preferences – and her/his actual behaviours – do not necessarily correspond to what she/he would like to do.

Socially, conditional preferences imply that an individual may follow a social norm even if she/he disagrees with it. Her decision is different from what she would choose to do, if isolated from the pressures and requirements of the social group.
We want to know if behaviour is socially motivated

Social expectations
(empirical or normative)

Choice:
a behaviour
(conditional preference)

Social expectations may have causal effect on behaviour:
AN UNCONSCIOUS, AUTOMATIC PROCESS
Behaviour depends on beliefs (conscious or not)

- Attitudes (personal normative beliefs)
- Knowledge (beliefs about the physical world)
- Social expectations (empirical or normative + may have sanctions)

Conditional Preference to engage in a behaviour in the relevant network
Normative expectations may entail sanctions

**Empirical:** beliefs about how other people are going to act or react in certain situations

**Normative:** belief that other people think that certain behaviours should be carried out, and others should be avoided

**Sanctions:** beliefs that other people will negatively or positively sanction a behaviour

**Social expectations**

**Choice:** a behaviour (conditional preference)
Reference networks

→ People who matter to my choices (family, village, friends, clan, religious authority, co-workers...).

→ What I expect them to do matters; it influences my choices.

→ What I believe they think I ought to do matters; it influences my choices.

In a favela in Brazil, dwellers punish stealing within the group, but not outside the group.
**Is a behaviour or practice a social norm?**

C. Bicchieri, 2017

- **Observe a collective pattern of behaviour**
  - People prefer to follow it, irrespective of what others do
    - Collective custom or shared moral or religious rules
  - People prefer to follow it, if they have social expectations
    - Empirical expectations suffice to motivate actions
      - Conditional preferences motivate behavior
        - Descriptive Norms/Conventions
  - Empirical and normative expectations are needed to motivate action
    - Conditional preference motivate behavior
      - Social norms
Consistency between attitude and behaviour?

→ Attitudes do not necessarily reflect behaviours.

→ We may succeed in changing beliefs about the physical world and the corresponding attitudes, but behaviours may not change.

→ The reactions (and expected reactions) of other people who matter to us can be very important in conditioning behaviour.

→ There is strong correlation between a behaviour and the presence of a widespread sense of social obligation (mutual normative expectations are present).
Khadija’s dilemma
Personal preference/attitude
Beliefs about others/empirical and normative expectations
Beliefs about negative consequences of not conforming (for daughter)
Beliefs about negative consequences (for her)
Self-sustaining

Observation of conformity confirms expectations of universal endorsement...

“"I see everyone doing it. It must mean they agree with it and wish it to continue.”

The belief that the norm is almost universally endorsed generates widespread conformity.

“I think everyone agrees with it, so I should do it too. It’s what’s expected of me.”
Are social norms stable?

What happens if many in the group have personal attitudes/preferences in conflict with the prevailing norm?
Introducing Pluralistic Ignorance
Adapted from Bicchieri 2013
Perceived or real support for the norm?

Social norm

Are normative expectations false?

- yes
  - Pluralistic Ignorance

- no
  - Endorsed social norm

Some (or many) individuals may incorrectly believe that most others in their social group support a social norm (because they see others conform to it).
What happens when there is pluralistic ignorance?

→ Some (or many) individuals may incorrectly believe that others in their social group support a social norm (because they see others conform to it).

→ The social norm persists even though it is privately opposed by some (or many).

→ The absence of transparent communication/information enables the norm to survive even though individual support for it has eroded.
Pluralistic ignorance and child marriage

→ In Nepal, the age of marriage for girls is around 13, but survey results show that parents think the appropriate age of marriage is much later (around 18).

→ Parents observe other parents marrying their daughters at an early age and assume they do so because they believe it’s right or, at least, that they agree with the practice.

→ In fact, many think child marriage is not the best choice. But they do not talk openly about it and are not aware of each other’s opinions. So they keep marrying girls early.
Girls and women underestimate the share of boys and men who want FGM/C to end (Source Unicef 2013)
Evidence of lack of communication (Source Unicef 2013)

Significant percentages of women and men are unaware of what the opposite sex thinks about FGM/C

![Bar chart showing evidence of lack of communication among women and men in countries like Mali, Chad, Benin, Burkina Faso, Senegal, Guinea, Nigeria, and Egypt. The chart indicates that women do not know the opinion of men, and men do not know the opinion of women, with varying percentages across the countries.](chart.png)
With pluralistic ignorance, instability lies behind apparent strength

→ The social norm sustaining FGM/C will be fragile if many people do not support the practice.

→ But for change to take place at scale, individuals must become aware that others do not support the practice.

→ Hidden personal preferences need to become public.
A way to accelerate change

→ Pluralistic ignorance can be broken down by promoting **common knowledge**.

→ This requires making it possible for people to know what other people believe regarding the practice, and know that other people know what they believe about the practice.

→ If pluralistic ignorance is widespread but common knowledge is achieved, the social norm may change quickly.
FGM/C prevalence versus support to the practice among women 15-49 years old
Question for discussion

① What are examples where a significant proportion of individuals have private attitudes/preferences in conflict with the prevailing norm?

② What might happen if an increasing number of individuals have private attitudes/preferences in conflict with the prevailing norm?

③ Can you suggest an explanation for the discrepancy between the prevalence of FGM/C and support for the practice shown in the Sudan data?

④ What are the implications for the design of policy and programmes?