



**APPLYING THEORY TO PRACTICE:**  
CARE's Journey Piloting Social Norms  
Measures for Gender Programming

**REPORT**



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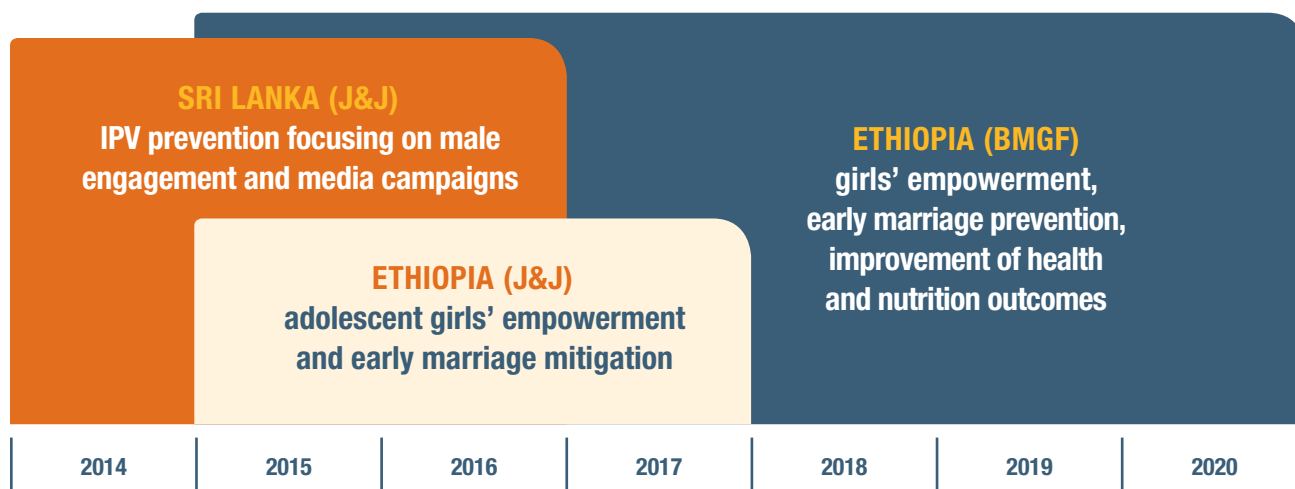
## INTRODUCTION

While advancements in gender equality have been made globally in the past two decades, there are still pockets lacking progress and more intractable aspects of women's rights that lag in progress. CARE has found that there are persistent gender inequitable behaviors that are not changing despite working on attitudes and providing information, and where good policies are in place. CARE sought out to test whether a deeper understanding of social norms could shed new light on what is holding certain behaviors in place, and lead to more effective strategies for transforming gender norms and behaviors that seem stuck. This paper focuses on CARE's journey to understand social norm theory from academia, and apply it in development practice.

Since 2014, a small team within CARE came together to look at how to shift and measure changes in gendered social norms more systematically and precisely. The journey included an initial training on social norms theory and measurement from some of the leading expert researchers from the University of Pennsylvania Social Norms Group (UPenn SoNG). CARE has since been adapting the theory into practical implementation design and measurement approaches and tools that can be more easily applied to international development programs in resource constrained settings.

A key piece of this adaptation process has been an iterative piloting and learning process across three project sites:

- **ReNEW** (Redefining Norms to Empower Women), focused on engaging men and boys to reduce intimate partner violence (IPV) on tea plantations in Sri Lanka, funded by Johnson & Johnson (J&J) Corporate Contributions (2014-2016);
- **TESFA** (Towards Improved Economic and Sexual Reproductive Health Outcomes for Adolescent Girls), focused on the needs of ever-married adolescent girls in the Amhara region of Ethiopia, also funded by J&J (2015-2017); and
- **Abdiboru** (Improving Adolescent Reproductive Health and Nutrition through Structural Solutions), an operations research intervention focused on reducing early marriage and improving health and nutrition outcomes for young adolescent girls in the Oromia region of Ethiopia, funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) (2015-2020).



This paper focuses on describing the measurement approach and tools CARE has been piloting.

## THEORETICAL OVERVIEW

The concept of social norms has roots in various academic disciplines including behavioral economics, anthropology and social psychology, and definition and terms vary. In general, however, there are four key elements of social norms:

- Social norms are **behavioral rules** constructed and shared by a group, and are different from individually held beliefs or attitudes.
- A social norm is made up by one's beliefs about what others do, and by one's beliefs about what others *think* one should do.
- Bicchieri's synthesized theory of social norms labels these "**empirical expectations**" (**EE**) (beliefs about what others do) and "**normative expectations**" (**NE**) (beliefs about what others think one should do).<sup>1</sup> Bicchieri says that people prefer to conform to the norm if both these **social expectations** are in place – that is, if they expect that most other people conform to the norm and expect them to conform to it (and would disapprove if they did not).<sup>2</sup>

1 Other terms for these expectations include "descriptive norms" for empirical expectations, and "injunctive norms" for normative expectations, and distinguish between these two types of social beliefs as separate norms. Cialdini (1998), as referenced in Mackie, G., Moneti, F., Shakya, H. & Denny, E. (2015). *What are social norms? How are they measured?* California, USA: UNICEF/Centre on Global Justice, University of San Diego.

2 Bicchieri, C. (2006). *The Grammar of Society: The Nature and Dynamics of Social Norms*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

- 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.
- When it comes to social norms, the relevant other people who matter to us are called our “**reference group**” or “reference network”. These groups may differ for different norms – e.g., the people whose behavior and approval matter to you in deciding when to get married may differ from the people who are most influential to you in deciding how to dress. Usually we care most about the people in our community, or those around us, who can give us direct feedback on our actions. As such, reference groups may not consist of the same people who are considered influential in general in a community.

An example of a social norm in some cultures or situations is waiting in line for service. People wait in line for service because: 1) they expect that everyone else around them will do so; and 2) they expect that others expect them to do so, because if they skipped the line, they expect a negative social reaction from others around them.



In this paper, the term “social norms approach” is used to describe efforts to apply these elements of social norms theory into methods for measuring and designing development programming.

There are many different factors that influence behavior, including individual-level factors such as personal attitudes and knowledge, structural factors such as laws, social factors such as power dynamics in relationships, and material constraints such as access (see Figure 1). Within this interplay of factors, social norms can act as either a “brake” in the process of behavior change,<sup>3</sup> or an accelerator; thus, understanding more about the potential role that social norms play in sustaining specific behaviors and in what contexts is important.

3 Heise, L. & Manji, K. (2016). Social Norms. GSDRC Professional Development Reading Pack no. 31. Birmingham, UK: University of Birmingham.

Figure 1: Factors sustaining violence against women and girls and preventing change (from Heise & Manji, 2016)<sup>4</sup>



For example, in the life of a married adolescent girl: laws, facilities and supplies may be in place to allow her to access family planning services, and she may be aware of available methods and personally approve of and want to use contraception. But if she belongs to a community that holds dear to certain norms, such as immediate childbearing among new brides, it will be very challenging for her to break through these social norms in order to use contraception and even if she does, she may face significant backlash.

The application of social norms theory proposes a divergence from traditional behavior change interventions, which seek to change individuals' personal attitudes and knowledge and consequently their behaviors, usually through awareness raising and information sharing. Social norms, however, as the rules of behavior within a group, may be blocking this pathway of change. Individuals may personally disagree with a social norm, but act in accordance with it out of a desire for social belonging and to avoid social backlash. **Attitudes and knowledge are still important factors to address for behavior change, but addressing social norms as well may be a key piece in transforming some of the more intractable behaviors – especially those that are kept in place by gender norms.**

## MEASUREMENT APPROACH

While the concept of social norms has been around for decades, there has been little evaluated work on the influence of social norms on behaviors in development contexts. A lot of programming in international development talks about social norms, and some programs are doing normative work without calling it as such, but there is a dearth of existing work on measuring and monitoring shifts in social norms in a way that more closely follows social norms theory. A goal of this pilot was to design measures to capture better data on social norms and contribute to this evidence base.

<sup>4</sup> Heise, L. & Manji, K. (2016). Social Norms. GSDRC Professional Development Reading Pack no. 31. Birmingham, UK: University of Birmingham.

CARE developed and tested out new measures for social norms based specifically on Bicchieri’s synthesis of social norms theory. This included starting from Bicchieri’s assumption that social norms are held in place by both empirical and normative expectations (EE and NE), and that the presence of both these expectations together indicate the presence of a social norm.

When CARE began this work, most existing measurement tools and approaches focused on diagnosing or identifying if a social norm exists. However, as an implementing organization, CARE is also interested in understanding how strong or influential certain norms are for specific behaviors, and if and when norms are shifting and weakening.

CARE sought to understand the following overarching questions for measurement of social norms within the context of program implementation:

- What gendered social norms exist for the specific behavior or practice in question?
- Do gendered social norms influence the behavior in question, and for whom?
- Are social norms changing; if so, how and why?
- What are the opportunities to catalyze norm change?

CARE developed and piloted a combination of quantitative and qualitative tools and processes to explore ways to answer these questions within a standard implementation process. The team paid special attention to ease of use of tools for resource-constraint settings, so chose to adapt already well-known and used methodologies (e.g., surveys, focus group discussions (FGDs)). Recognizing the realities of implementation, the goal was to design a practical assessment and measurement framework that could somewhat easily be incorporated into implementation.

Table 1 below outlines the purpose, methods, and learning aims for each stage of measurement during implementation:

**Table 1: Measurement stages & methods**

| STAGE                     | PURPOSE  | METHODS   |
|---------------------------|--|---|
| <b>Formative research</b> | Identify possible social norms, sanctions, reference groups  | Literature review, informal discussions with community            |
| <b>Baseline</b>           | Verify social norms, assess strength, identify “cracks” in norms & opportunities for interventions | Quantitative surveys, qualitative interviews, & vignettes in FGDs |
| <b>Monitoring</b>         | Observe signs of norm change; monitor backlash   | Activity monitoring, observation                                  |
| <b>Endline</b>            | Changes in social norms, correlate with changes in behavior & attitudes                            | Quantitative surveys, qualitative interviews, & vignettes in FGDs |



## Formative Research

During the formative phase, the following key pieces of information were identified:

1. What, if any, social norms are at play for a specific behavior in question,
2. Who are the most influential reference groups for the specific norm, and
3. What social sanctions are anticipated for deviating from the norm.

CARE experimented with different ways of initially identifying social norms, including review of relevant existing data, staff discussions, and primary data collection. This iterative process across three projects is described below and summarized in Table 2.

**Table 2: Iterative process for identifying social norms**

| PROJECT  | IMPLEMENTATION CONTEXT  | METHOD USED TO IDENTIFY SOCIAL NORMS  | OTHER METHODS TO MEASURE SOCIAL NORMS   | OBSERVATIONS   |
|----------|---|---|---|--|
| ReNEW    | Layering social norms activities onto existing, long-running project in same locality | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Project team discussions</li> <li>• FGDs &amp; surveys</li> </ul>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vignettes (endline only)</li> <li>• Surveys</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hard for respondents to identify and rank reference groups in surveys</li> <li>• Social norms identified via FGDs matched staff predictions – so worth the extra step?</li> </ul> |
| TESFA    | Local geographical expansion of existing program                                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Project team discussions</li> </ul>                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vignettes</li> </ul>                                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Short timeline</li> <li>• Less rigorous</li> <li>• Did not use quantitative measures for norms</li> </ul>   |
| Abdiboru | New project in new locality   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Project team discussions</li> <li>• FGDs &amp; interviews</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vignettes &amp; interviews</li> <li>• Surveys</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More rigorous – challenged assumptions</li> <li>• Extra time and resources to collect and analyze primary data in formative stage, but could be done quickly</li> </ul>           |

In CARE’s first attempt applying social norms theory to norms measurement in the ReNEW project, the team collected primary data using FGDs to identify social norms (by asking about typical behavior and sanctions), and surveys to identify reference groups and quantify norms. The norms identified through the FGDs turned out to be the same that staff expected based on their own experience, raising questions about what approach is “good enough” for identifying social norms and under what circumstances. ReNEW was adding social norms activities to a long-running project with relevant background data and experienced staff.

Following this experience, CARE experimented with a modified “short cut route” for identifying norms in the TESFA project. Similar to ReNEW, TESFA was building on years of previous programming and had relevant, context-specific

data. Through discussion, the project team selected two social norms which they deemed to be the most influential in holding back specific behavioral outcomes, then developed vignettes to validate and further explore these norms.

In the Abdiboru project, which entailed starting up new programming in a new context, CARE took a more in-depth approach to identifying norms in the formation research stage: primary data was collected over four days using a brief set of semi-structured focus group discussions and key informant interviews (KIIs) with a cross-section of community members. Abdiboru had a strong research partner, a specific research agenda on social norms, and adequate time and budget to support more rigorous research design.

These focus group discussions in the formative stage of Abdiboru were loosely framed around exploring specific practices or behaviors within the target community. Questions focused on trends in the community around a common event, such as marriage or mealtime (for norms around nutrition), which helped teams get an initial understanding of what was considered “normal”/common and appropriate courses of action within the community. For example, the below discussion guide was used to explore marriage practices for adolescent girls:

***In your community, what are the typical steps involved when a young woman gets married?  
(Probes:)***

- *At what age for the bride – range and average, who influences this?*
- *Who decides who is chosen to be the groom? Who else influences this?*
- *What factors lie behind the different decisions, economic, social, other?*
- *How much say do the bride/groom have? [Get a sense of the average and the range]*
- *How does the community see girls who are not married by age [use ideal age given above by respondents]? How does this affect those girls? Whose opinions matter most to the girls?*
- *What would others say about parents whose daughters are not married by [use ideal age from above]? How does this affect the parents? Whose opinion would matter most?*

It could also be useful at this stage to probe if there is anyone who does not follow the norm, and then request an interview with that individual.

## REFERENCE GROUPS

CARE experimented with different ways of identifying reference groups. In ReNEW, CARE developed quantitative survey questions to identify and rank reference group members, drawing from existing examples from the UPenn SoNG training. For instance, “*circle the four people whose opinions would most influence you if you were fighting with your spouse,*” or “*select the three most important people in your life whose opinions you listen to about roles of women and men in your household,*” etc. However, in practice, it was challenging for respondents to rank relative influence or importance of people in their reference group for specific behaviors. In later iterations, CARE pivoted to focus more on informally asking about reference groups in more open-ended, qualitative discussions with community members during the formative research (see example on this page). This data has seemed to be “good enough” to develop context-responsive vignettes in order to explore the composition and influence of these reference groups in more detail.

This additional data in the formative stage proved a useful and worthwhile step in Abdiboru, as it uncovered some important surprises and nuances that impacted the design of the baseline tools. For instance, FGDs revealed that girls themselves could also be a driving force in the decision to marry early, and were influenced to do so by their peers. These insights enabled the team to develop survey questions and vignettes to better understand the role of peer pressure by girls’ friends in girls’ own decisions about when to marry, sometimes against parents’ wishes. The implementation strategy may have otherwise missed this important reference group because traditional thinking was that adults were the main driving force, not girls themselves. Additionally, data revealed a lack of negative social sanctions for violating one of the social norms in question on girls’ education (i.e., that girls should not continue school beyond primary level), thus challenging the team’s assumption about what social norms were influencing decisions for girls to drop out of school.

Table 3 below from Abdiboru shows an example of what information was pulled out from the analysis of the formative research. The more specific the information gained in the formative stage, the more useful it was to inform baseline questions to resonate with respondents and explore the workings of social norms on specific behaviors in their lives and communities.

**Table 3: Sample analysis of formative research data, from the Abdiboru project**

| PRACTICE        | SOCIAL NORM                                      | WHOSE BEHAVIOR DO WE WANT TO SEE CHANGE<br>Who make decisions about the norm? | REFERENCE GROUPS<br>Whose opinion is most influential to decision maker?  | SOCIAL SANCTIONS<br>if deviate from norm   |
|-----------------|--|---|---|--|
| Girls’ Marriage | Girls are expected to marry before the age of 17 | Adolescent girls  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Close friends and siblings</li> <li>• Marriage brokers (peers, siblings, other relatives)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Considered by others as unattractive and unlovable</li> <li>• Considered as bad luck to family; humiliation to themselves and their family</li> </ul> |
|                 |  | Parents   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Other parents</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shamed to tolerate a burden to the family</li> <li>• Considered as unlucky parents</li> </ul>   |

Using this data, CARE developed baseline quantitative surveys questions, drawing from examples from Bicchieri’s work, to validate and measure social norms over time, and correlate social norms with personal attitudes and behaviors. CARE also adapted the use of qualitative vignettes, which are discussed later.



## Baseline & Endline

### QUANTITATIVE SURVEYS

Quantitative surveys were used to measure personal attitudes, knowledge, behavior, and social expectations, using response scales to try to better track incremental changes over time.

Social norms questions were added to existing Knowledge, Attitude and Practices (KAP) surveys by adding sections with prompts that asked about others' behaviors and attitudes (EE and NE).<sup>5</sup>

|              | TERMINOLOGY                 | DEFINITION   |
|--------------|-----------------------------|--|
|              | Attitude                    | What I think   |
|              | Behavior                    | What I do  |
| SOCIAL NORMS | Empirical Expectations (EE) | What I think others do   |
|              | Normative Expectations (NE) | What I think others expect me to do (what I should do according to others) |

Adapted from UPenn SoNG

<sup>5</sup> For a full review of social norms measures, see Mackie, G., Moneti, F., Shakya, H. & Denny, E. (2015). *What are social norms? How are they measured?* California, USA: UNICEF/Centre on Global Justice, University of San Diego.

Below is an example of empirical and normative expectations questions from the survey tool given to adolescent girls in the Abdiboru project, which also included measures (not shown here) on behaviors, knowledge, and personal attitudes related to key project outcomes. (For additional examples of survey questions for norms, see Annex 1.)

*I would like to ask you what you think others do in regards to adolescent girls' marriage. Please answer the following questions as it relates to your community context.*

|             |                |                   |                |            |        |
|-------------|----------------|-------------------|----------------|------------|--------|
| Agree a lot | Agree a little | Disagree a little | Disagree a lot | Don't know | Refuse |
|-------------|----------------|-------------------|----------------|------------|--------|

**Most adolescent girls marry before the age of 18. (EE)**

*Now, I would like to ask you what others think you should do in regards to adolescent girls' marriage. Please answer the following questions as it relates to your community context.*

|             |                |                   |                |            |        |
|-------------|----------------|-------------------|----------------|------------|--------|
| Agree a lot | Agree a little | Disagree a little | Disagree a lot | Don't know | Refuse |
|-------------|----------------|-------------------|----------------|------------|--------|

**Parents expect adolescent girls to get married before the age of 18 years. (NE)**

**Parents would look down on adolescent girls if they get pregnant before they get married. (sanctions)**

Normative expectations were measured in surveys by either asking respondents what behavior they think others would approve of, or whether respondents expect any negative social sanctions to take place in response to behavior that deviates from the norm under investigation. Answers to both types of questions reveal whether there is a normative expectation to behave in a certain way. Questions about social sanctions seemed to provide a more concrete and straightforward way to ask about NE by asking how someone else would react to a specific deviance. Other people's actions are more easily observable than their attitudes and hence easier to conjure up to answer a question.

Analysis of the survey findings provided some insight into the strength of the social norms identified in the formative research. The extent of the respondents' agreement that the behavior is typical (EE) or approved of (NE), was quantified. For example, "95% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that most adolescent girls in their community marry before age 18". This high percentage of agreement was interpreted as a sign of strong EE.

Data was also analyzed to compare EE to actual behavior, and NE to personal attitudes to reveal whether people hold incorrect assumptions about what others do and think (“pluralistic ignorance”).<sup>6</sup> If most people privately disagree with a harmful norm but believe that everyone else agrees with it, the norm persists. In such situations, a strategy to change the norm can be to correct people’s misperceptions by informing them of others’ actual behavior and attitudes.

## QUALITATIVE METHODS

### Vignettes & CARE’s Social Norms Analysis Plot (SNAP) Framework

Following Bicchieri’s recommendation, the main qualitative method that CARE adapted to measure social norms is vignettes. **Vignettes** tell short stories about imaginary characters in specific contexts, with guiding questions that invite people to respond to the story in a structured way. Bicchieri uses vignettes to diagnose whether a norm exists, because telling a fictional yet relatable story is a simpler way to ask respondents about their social expectations, and potentially reduces socially desirable responses because they focus on fictional characters.<sup>7</sup> In addition, CARE used vignettes at project baseline to understand how norms were influencing behavior and to identify weaknesses or “cracks” in the norms that could be addressed by program activities. At endline, CARE used vignettes to identify and track signs of norm change. To guide in the process of development and analysis of vignettes, CARE developed the Social Norms Analysis Plot (SNAP) framework.

Drawing from the data from the formative research, vignette scenarios were developed around relevant gendered social norms, tailored to each community and sub-group, pre-tested and revised as needed. Once designed, vignettes were conducted in FGDs with homogenous groups (adolescent girls, unmarried adolescent girls, adult men, adult women, etc.) to understand specific perspectives of key groups.

CARE’s first experience developing vignettes to measure social norms was in the baseline of the TESFA project. For TESFA, CARE developed an analysis framework for vignette data (the SNAP), and in the span of one week CARE staff designed vignettes, trained researchers, and piloted the vignettes. The aim of the approach was to be light and quick, and to develop and test the use of vignettes for the first time. While this data was being analyzed, CARE built on the promising early results of this experience and developed vignettes as part of the endline evaluation for the ReNEW project, using the SNAP again as a guide. ReNEW vignettes were reviewed and developed with the help of social norms expert, Ben Cislighi.

The third and most in-depth iteration of vignette development took place in the Abdiboru project, in which CARE and its research partner Addis Continental Institute of Public Health (ACIPH) developed vignettes for three norms, guided by the SNAP, along with interview guides for key informant interviews. ACIPH and CARE project staff received a one-day training on social norms theory, strategies, and measurement by a CARE USA technical advisor working across all three projects listed above, and then cascaded the training to their full teams.

CARE’s Social Norms Analysis Plot (SNAP) framework has become instrumental in CARE’s approach to developing vignettes and the practical application of social norms theory across the three learning sites.



6 Miller, D.T. and McFarland, C. (1991). When Social Comparison Goes Awry: The Case of Pluralistic Ignorance. In J. Suls & T.A. Wills (Eds.), *Social Comparison: Contemporary Theory and Research*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum. pp. 287-313.

7 Bicchieri, C., Lindemans, J., & Jiang, T. (2014). A structured approach to a diagnostic of collective practices. *Front. Psychol.* 5:1418.

## CARE’s Social Norms Analysis Plot (SNAP) Framework

CARE’s SNAP framework (Tables 4 and 5) identifies the key components of a norm, and additional questions that will help develop vignettes and measure changes in norms over time (e.g., two time point uses of the vignettes), but also inform ways that interventions can be further tuned for greater impact. Key questions the team sought to answer through vignettes:

- What behavior is considered to be typical in the group?
- What behavior is considered to be approved of in the group?
- What negative social sanctions are anticipated if someone deviates from the norm?
- What influence does the anticipated negative social sanctions have on behavior?
- Are there people or circumstances when it is more acceptable to deviate from what is considered typical and appropriate in the group?

**Table 4: CARE’s Social Norms Analysis Plot (SNAP) Framework<sup>8</sup>**

| COMPONENTS OF A NORM               | DEFINITION  | EXAMPLE RESPONSE  |
|------------------------------------|---|---|
| <b>Empirical Expectations (EE)</b> | What I think others do  | <i>“Once you have got the chance, you have to marry. Your friends are getting married.”</i>   |
| <b>Normative Expectations (NE)</b> | What I think others expect me to do (what I should do according to others)  | <i>“...everybody in the community expects adolescent girls...at the age of 13 to 15 years... to get married”</i>  |
| <b>Sanctions</b>                   | Anticipated opinion or reaction of others (to the behavior) – specifically others whose opinions matter to me   | <i>“If a girl is not married at age of 15 years, many adolescent girls in the community would insult her saying ‘haftu’, which mean the one who is not needed, or unattractive”</i> |
| <b>Sensitivity to sanctions</b>    | Do sanctions matter for behavior?<br>If there is a negative reaction from others (negative sanction), would the main character change their behavior in the future? | <i>Most girls would change their minds and marry after prolonged insults and isolation.</i>   |
| <b>Exceptions</b>                  | Under what circumstances would it be okay for the main character to break the norm (by acting positively)?  | <i>Girls can refuse marriage if they excel at school and their teachers convince their family to let them continue school.</i>  |

The SNAP was developed by Theresa Hwang and Leigh Stefanik at CARE USA, and tested in the three pilot projects. Debrief analysis sessions following collection of vignette data in the TESFA and ReNEW projects included critical reflection and discussion on the domains of the SNAP, and no significant modifications were made.

<sup>8</sup> © 2017 CARE, all rights reserved. For limited permission for noncommercial use by not-for-profit organizations in connection with humanitarian activities, Acknowledgments page of this Report.



## Vignette design

Vignettes have generally been written with two sections of narration and questions. The first part introduces a relevant, hypothetical scenario based in the local context that leads a fictional main character(s) to a decision point about how to act. The aim of these questions is to surface empirical and normative expectations and explore agreement about these expectations within and across key groups. Disagreement within or between EE and NE, for example, is a possible sign of weakness in the corresponding norm.

**FOR EXAMPLE,** in the ReNEW evaluation, women’s focus groups in some of the tea plantations said that the whole community would look favorably on men who did not use violence against their wives, but that most husbands used violence because they feared ridicule by their male peers for being seen as not in control of their wives.<sup>9</sup> That is, among this group, men’s use of violence was perceived as typical but disapproved of by the community. Thus, analysis revealed that the normative expectations of this group did not match their empirical expectations, and pointed to the opportunity to focus on shifting empirical expectations to change the norm.

The vignette narration continues with the main character deciding to act against the norm, followed by questions exploring groups’ expectations about social sanctions that come into force for defying the norm, and whether and how these sanctions would influence the character’s behavior. A possible sign of the perceived strength of sanctions is whether publicly defying the norm is even perceived to be an option. In the ReNEW endline study, when asked what might happen to the main character in a vignette after defying the norm, one respondent said: *“he would not tell his friends that he listened to his wife’s decision, because it would not even be possible for him to do that – he would lie about it instead.”*

Lastly, questions explore any exceptions for which it is considered more acceptable to act outside the norm. Are there individuals or groups who do not ascribe to the norm, and what makes it possible for them to do so? For instance, pregnant women may be allowed to eat before or at the same time as men in settings where women and girls are otherwise expected to eat after the males. Are there individuals or groups who face less social pressure for deviating, or who are more resistant to social pressure, and if so why? Interventions can work to amplify specific enabling factors, and network role models for additional social support.

<sup>9</sup> For the full report on the findings, analysis and tools from the ReNEW project, see CARE. (2016). *Redefining Norms to Empower Women: Experiences and Lessons Learned*. CARE International Sri Lanka. Available at <http://tinyurl.com/l dhcwxw>



The example vignette below from the Abdiboru project was designed for focus groups of married adolescent girls using findings from the formative research, which identified a social norm for girls to marry before age 17, that the girls themselves were choosing to marry early, and that their friends and peers were an influential reference group for the girls in following this norm. For an example of how a vignette on early marriage was written differently for girls' parents, see Annex 2. Each question corresponds with a component of the SNAP framework.

*I will tell you a story of a girl I will call Rehima (that is not her actual name) living in this woreda. I would like you to listen to the story carefully and discuss the questions that follow. Rehima is a 16-year-old student who lives with her parents. She attends school and helps her mother with household chores. One day Hindiya, Rehima's cousin, comes over to visit Rehima's family. They are about the same age. Hindiya announces that she is engaged and getting married in a month's time. She also strongly suggests to Rehima that she should also marry soon as she is getting old for marriage. Hindiya reveals that she also knows someone from their village who is interested in marrying Rehima.*

*What would most adolescent girls in Rehima's position do in this situation? (EE)*

*What would Hindiya and most other girls expect Rehima to do in this situation? (NE)*

*But Rehima doesn't want to marry young. She announces that she does not want marry at this age.*

*What would Hindiya and most other girls say about Rehima's decision? (Sanctions)*

*Would the opinions and reactions of her peers make Rehima change her mind about refusing the marriage? (Sensitivity to sanctions)*

*Are there any circumstances where it would be considered more or less acceptable for Rehima not to get married at her age? (Exceptions)*

## Vignette analysis

The SNAP framework has also been used to guide analysis of potential signs that norms might be weakening or shifting, or if not, what factors in particular seem to be holding norms in place. For instance:

- Are there any signs that disagreement is increasing about EE and/or NE among certain groups, and if so, why?
- Are social sanctions lessening or weakening over time? Are there any changes in the type, severity, or certitude, or influence of social sanctions?
- Are (more) alternative, non-normative behaviors perceived to be possible?
- Are there any increases in conditions when it is okay to deviate from the norm? Are there increases in the perceived amount of people who deviate from the norm?

A full version of the SNAP Framework (Table 5) includes potential signs of change for each of the five components in the SNAP. At endline, project teams will compare responses to vignettes over time to see if and how social norms are changing.

**Table 5: Social Norms Analysis Plot (SNAP) with signs of change<sup>10</sup>**

| COMPONENTS OF A NORM               | DEFINITION  | SIGNS OF CHANGES IN A SOCIAL NORM  |
|------------------------------------|---|--|
| <b>Empirical Expectations (EE)</b> | What I think others do  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Responses reflect a different perception of what people think others are doing</li> <li>• Increase in respondents report a perceived change of behavior of others</li> <li>• Changes in the extent of conformity and disagreement among homogenous groups, and across the different groups</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Normative Expectations (NE)</b> | What I think others expect me to do (what I should do according to others)  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Responses reflect a different perception of what others expect respondents to do</li> <li>• Increase in respondents reporting the desired new behavior as expected of them</li> <li>• Changes in the extent of conformity and disagreement among homogenous groups, and across different groups</li> <li>• Changes in alignment between empirical and normative expectations</li> </ul> |
| <b>Sanctions</b>                   | Anticipated opinion or reaction of others (to the behavior) – specifically others whose opinions matter to me   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Changes in sanctions that are identified</li> <li>• Changes in the severity of sanction</li> <li>• Changes in the likelihood of sanctions being enacted</li> <li>• Changes in consistency across groups</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Sensitivity to sanctions</b>    | Do sanctions matter for behavior?<br>If there is a negative reaction from others (negative sanction), would the main character change their behavior in the future? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Changes in how the main character would respond to negative sanctions</li> <li>• Increase in respondents who say the main character would still behave in the desired way despite sanctions</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Exceptions</b>                  | Under what circumstances would it be okay for the main character to break the norm (by acting positively)?  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Change in the # of exceptions allowed to break a norm</li> <li>• Changes in # or types of individuals who deviate from the norm</li> <li>• Changes in responses about individuals who are impervious to social sanctions</li> </ul>   |

<sup>10</sup> © 2017 CARE, all rights reserved. For limited permission for noncommercial use by not-for-profit organizations in connection with humanitarian activities, Acknowledgments page of this Report.

## Monitoring

CARE pilot efforts to date have begun experimenting with practical ways to integrate the SNAP framework into monitoring efforts, in a way that does not overburden staff. For example, for public activities that facilitate critical discussion on harmful norms, observation prompts of group dynamics and reactions can be added to monitoring forms, such as:

- In response to ideas or opinions that challenge the norm, do most participants voice resistance or agreement?
- If participants' voice resistance or support to ideas that challenge the norm, how do (most) other participants react?

Such observation aims to gauge whether and how resistance or support is expressed publicly and by whom, to get a temperature check on social sanctions for behaviors or viewpoints that deviate from the norm.





## KEY INSIGHTS, PRACTICAL CHALLENGES, AND REMAINING QUESTIONS

Social norms theory has offered a systematic and targeted approach to identify and focus in on key elements underpinning social norms for program design and measurement, including new ways to identify signs of change using the SNAP framework. Adapting and testing this approach so far has yielded a number of key insights and practical challenges across the three pilot settings.

### KEY INSIGHTS

- **The identification of social norms was an important first step before investing time developing in-depth measures for norms**, especially vignettes, which require a high level of effort to develop, facilitate, and analyze. **But it was difficult to determine how much effort or rigor to invest in identifying or “diagnosing” social norms in the formative research stage, given practical time and budgetary constraints.** Formative research could help rule out whether or not a certain social norm exists in a certain setting before devoting considerable time and effort to its measurement in the baseline study. **More iteration and learning is needed to understand when it is necessary to collect primary data in the formative stage to identify social norms.** Based on experiences in this pilot testing, it may be more suitable to invest in primary data collection to identify norms as part of the formative research stage when beginning programming in a new context.
- So far, **this measurement approach has come with high demands on staff capacity and time.** Training of enumerators included the basics of social norms theory, the SNAP, facilitation skills, and ample practice with the tools. It was important to train research staff in basics of social norms theory, especially for vignettes, so they understood how to probe and focus respondents on the information in the SNAP. Some components of the SNAP, such as sensitivity to sanctions and exceptions, required additional practice (role playing) and example responses. Good facilitation skills proved particularly important in moderating vignettes. There were also added demands for coding and making sense of this new kind of data, especially vignette data.
- **Staff reflection on their own beliefs and values is important** to be able to identify and problematize gendered norms that are acting as barriers to health and development outcomes.

- **A focus on social norms seems particularly appropriate in cases where programs seek to change intractable behaviors held in place by gender norms and shielded from scrutiny by taboo.** Given added demands on time and capacity at this nascent stage of testing, replication of this measurement approach may be more appropriate in places where strong research partners are available and can build on solid programming experience.

## PRACTICAL CHALLENGES

- **Some of the terminology in Bicchieri’s theory was hard to translate, and could be alienating to practitioners.** “Empirical” and “normative expectations” lack clear translation in many languages and are not easily understood, so CARE tried to explain these concepts through lots of practical examples and discussion of participants’ own examples. Also, participatory reflective exercises were used to help staff to think about social norms in their own lives and how to tell if norms are changing, and then link back to these experiences to explain the SNAP.
- **There are some concerns about the hypothetical nature of survey questions** that ask about what others “generally” do or theoretically would do under certain circumstances, because people are not used to answering questions about others or about theoretical events. Questions about social sanctions seemed to provide a more concrete and straightforward way to ask about NE, by asking respondents how someone else would react or respond to a norm violation. Others’ actions are more easily observable and hence easier to envision than others’ thoughts. Alternatively, some researchers are experimenting with leading into NE and EE questions with short vignettes in quantitative surveys as well, such as the Global Early Adolescent Survey (led by Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health). In CARE’s pilot projects so far, respondents have seemed to understand the new types of norms questions, but further testing is needed.
- **Questions about EE and NE increased the length of already-long surveys.** For each norm in question, surveys included multiple questions for empirical expectations and normative expectations, in addition to routine questions on behavior and personal attitudes. This additional length and complexity for coding and analysis can be especially challenging for multi-sectoral projects in which surveys are already strained to accommodate measures on a broad range of outcomes.

## REMAINING QUESTIONS

- **Is measuring EE and NE worth the extra investment to understand influences on behavior?** CARE and ACIPH will be correlating quantitative data on behavior with NE and EE in the Abdiboru baseline in 2017 to begin to gain insight into this question.
- Most work to date has focused on influencing and measuring change in existing (harmful) social norms, but some social norms programming may be about introducing a new, positive norm. **To detect the emergence of entirely new norms, other qualitative methods may be more appropriate, such as Most Significant Change, direct observation, or individual interviews.**
- While using a social norms lens to understand and change behavior has the potential to hone and improve intervention approaches and behavioral outcomes, **there is a philosophical slippery slope of moving towards convergence to one singular acceptable norm.** For example, if working to replace a norm about marrying early, with delaying marriage, could we go further to create an environment where it is also acceptable for individuals to choose not to marry? A diversity of norms (barring those supporting harmful behavior) may be a more sustainable and just path forward for social change.

# ANNEXES

## Annex 1: Examples of survey questions on empirical expectations from Sri Lanka's ReNEW survey<sup>11</sup>

### Examples of questions about EE:

*Please tell me how much the following activities are prevalent in your neighborhood. Do you think such practices/activities and incidents are very prevalent, can be seen sometimes, or rarely?*

|   | VERY PREVALENT | SOMETIME OBSERVABLE | RARELY OBSERVABLE | DO NOT KNOW |
|---|----------------|---------------------|-------------------|-------------|
| Husbands scolding their wives                             | 1              | 2                   | 3                 | 4           |
| Husbands beating their wives                              | 1              | 2                   | 3                 | 4           |
| Wife keeping silent so as to not prolong a domestic fight | 1              | 2                   | 3                 | 4           |

### Examples of questions about NE/sanctions:

*Now I am going read out some attitudes prevalent in our society towards men and women. Could you please tell me, to what extent such attitudes exist among the people in your neighborhood?*

|  | GREAT EXTENT | TO SOME EXTENT | DOES NOT EXIST | DO NOT KNOW |
|--|--------------|----------------|----------------|-------------|
| A man who is not tough enough does not command respect at home.  | 1            | 2              | 3              | 4           |
| A man who beats his wife has no place in his neighborhood.   | 1            | 2              | 3              | 4           |
| During an argument, a man who listens to his wife's point of view, is considered as being 'not manly enough' by his neighbors and relatives. | 1            | 2              | 3              | 4           |
| A woman who talks back at her husband earns a bad reputation among relatives.  | 1            | 2              | 3              | 4           |

<sup>11</sup> For complete set of measurement tools from the ReNEW project, see CARE. (2016). Redefining Norms to Empower Women: Experiences and Lessons Learned. CARE International Sri Lanka. Available at <http://tinyurl.com/ldhcwxx>

## Annex 2: Sample vignette

### From Abdiboru project, early marriage vignette for girls' mothers and fathers

Next I will tell you a story of a mother named Merima and her daughter Asha. Let's pretend they are from this village. I don't want you to think about a real Merima and Asha who lives here. We could have chosen other names, but for now let's stick to those.<sup>12</sup> I would like you to listen to the story carefully and discuss the questions that follow.

Merima is a mother of five. She has three daughters, of whom the eldest [age 17] had moved back with her after divorcing her husband of 1 year. They all live in the same compound, including her sons and their wives. One day when all of them plus some mothers in neighborhood were sitting at a coffee ceremony in their compound, a marriage broker comes to their house and tells them that Merima's younger daughter Asha [age 15] is being sought by a young man for marriage. Asha firmly announces that she is not interested to marry any time soon.

- *What would most other mothers like Merima do in this situation?*
- *What would most other mothers advise Merima to do regarding her daughter's refusal to the proposal?*

Let's return to the story. Merima listens to Asha and tells her neighbors that she respects her daughter's decision to delay marriage until she's older.

- *What would most other mothers say about Merima in this situation?*
  - *What would other people such as the marriage broker say about Merima?*
- *Would the opinions and reactions of the other mothers make Merima change her mind about her daughter's marriage?*
  - *Would their reactions have an effect on her?*
    - *If so, what would be the effect?*
    - *If no effect, what makes you think that way?*
- *Are there any circumstances where it would be considered more or less acceptable for Asha not to get married at her age?*

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<sup>12</sup> This language emphasizing the arbitrary selection of the characters' names is borrowed from the work of TOSTAN, and thanks to invaluable inputs from Ben Cislaghi.



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