STRENGTHENING RULE OF LAW APPROACHES TO
ADDRESS ORGANIZED CRIME:

Social Norms

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and Management Systems International (MSI) are hosting a series of round-table discussions to better understand key dynamics between rule of law (ROL) and organized crime. The third roundtable, in June 2019, examined lessons learned on social norm change related to organized crime. It brought together about 30 participants from USAID, the interagency, donors, research organizations, and implementing partners. This white paper captures key points from the discussion.

Social norms are the mutual expectations within a group about the appropriate way to behave. They are driven by beliefs we have about how groups we care about a) typically think and behave and b) expect us to behave.[1] Groups enforce compliance with these informal rules through social punishment (e.g., ostracism or shame) and social reward (e.g., group acceptance or status). Social norms exert a powerful influence on behavior because of people's desire to belong to their group.

Social norms do not drive all common behavior; a practice may be widespread or "normal" because it is convenient (e.g., artisanal miners not wearing helmets, or using mercury for gold panning) or because people have common attitudes about it (e.g., buying illicit tiger bone because people believe it has healing properties). These are customs or conventions. Social norms are driven by people's desire to conform to underlying social expectations or rules about how to behave.

When social norms are in play, changing behavior is difficult. People may ignore laws or act against their own beliefs if the pressure they experience as a result of social norms prevails. Social norms can act as a brake on interventions. For example, laws may ban the trade of ivory, but social norms supporting the consumption of wildlife products and those within the police or customs service to use their positions to make money may sustain it. Similarly, awareness campaigns may shift individual attitudes against the consumption of shark fin soup, but social pressures from family members or colleagues may sustain it.

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1   The social norms field does not have a common definition. We draw heavily on the work of Cristina Bicchieri as most relevant to the issue of social norms and organized crime. See Cristina Bicchieri. 2016. *Norms in the Wild: How to Diagnose, Measure and Change Social Norms*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

DISCLAIMER

Where social norms uphold harmful behaviors, interventions should work to change them. Creating new social norms can also be part of a strategy to reinforce and sustain changes in customary behaviors that are not underpinned by social expectations. In the organized crime field, creating or changing social norms can help to:

- Reduce consumer demand for illicit goods and services, including wildlife, drugs, child labor, and sex;

- Deter involvement in illicit activity, such as poaching animals or extorting businesses;

- Reduce engagement in corruption; and

- Lower social acceptance of illicit activities more generally..

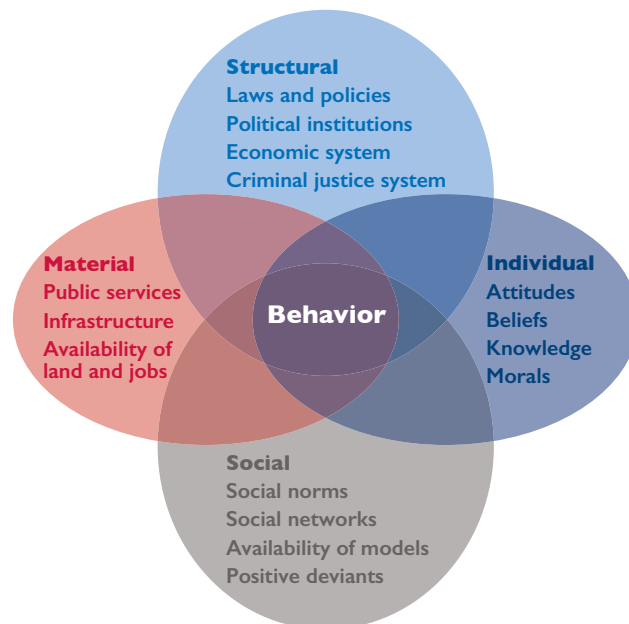Social norms are one factor among many that can influence behavior. Figure 1 shows the four types of factors that drive behavior:

- **Individual** factors, including attitudes, beliefs, knowledge, and morals;

- **Societal** factors, including social norms, social networks, availability of models, and positive deviants;

- **Structural** factors, including laws, policies, political institutions, economic systems, and criminal justice systems; and

- **Material** factors, including public services, infrastructure, and the availability of land and jobs.

Often, some combination of these factors drives behavior. [2] When multiple factors are sustaining a harmful behavior, interventions that address more or all of them are more likely to bring about the desired change.[3] Practitioners should thus consider social norm change as a complement to other interventions.

Structural
Laws and policies
Political institutions
Economic system
Criminal justice system

Material
Public services
Infrastructure
Availability of land and jobs

Behavior

Individual
Attitudes
Beliefs
Knowledge
Morals

Social
Social norms
Social networks
Availability of models
Positive deviants

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2 One tool to assess the extent to which social norms (versus other factors) drive a particular behavior is found in chapter 3 of Vincent Petit and Tamar Naomi. Everybody Wants to Belong: A Practical Guide to Tackling Social Norms in Behavior Change Programming. UNICEF, 2019. https://www.unicef.org/mena/everybody-wants-to-belong.

3 See Cheyanne Scharbatke-Church and Diana Chigas. 2016. Facilitation in the Criminal Justice System: A Systems Analysis of Corruption in the Police and Courts in Northern Uganda. Leir Institute Occasional Paper. Medford, MA: Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University. https://sites.tufts.edu/ihs/files/2018/02/Facilitation-in-the-Criminal-Justice-System.pdf

Strategies for changing social norms focus on shifting the social expectations and pressures that sustain a behavior. This includes changing what people believe is typical behavior, as well as what people believe the group will endorse or censure. People need to feel that they can engage in a different behavior without the risk of stigmatization, isolation, or other punishment (or that they will be rewarded for engaging in the new behavior). Although not everyone needs to change for social norms to shift, any change needs to be visible and perceived as widespread.

The following presents broad approaches and tools to change social norms that could apply to organized crime. Determining the most appropriate approach and tools (or combination of the two) will depend on the specific characteristics of the social norm in question, how widespread compliance is, how much people's personal attitudes and values align with the norm, and how strong the sanctions for transgressing the norm are, among other things.
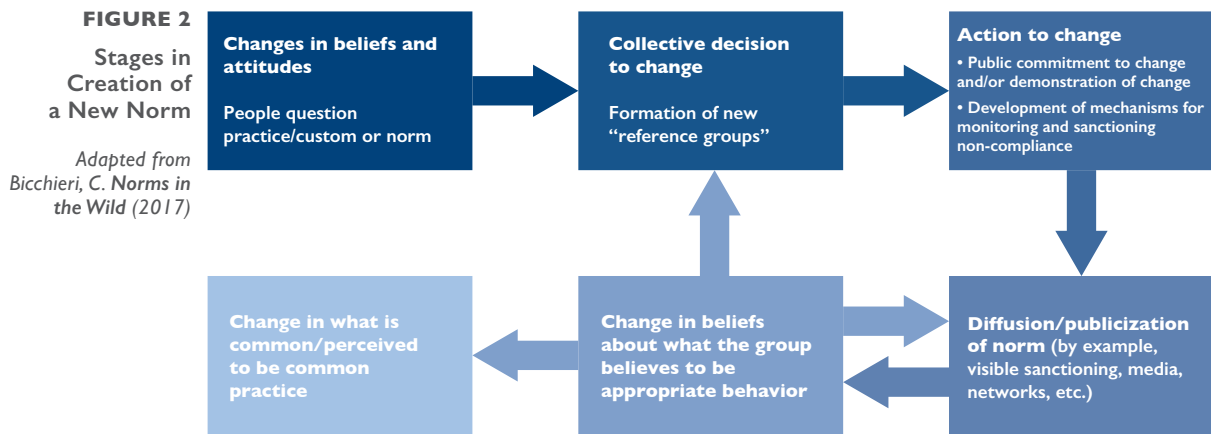
Approaches to Social Norm Change

1. *Create a new norm to motivate or reinforce behavior change.* This approach can pertain to any context, but is especially relevant when social norms are not the problem (i.e., practices are "normal" and acceptable, but not driven by people's desire to conform to a norm). For example, consumption of pangolin scales to cure arthritis or bribery of customs officials within a group of small businesses may be widespread, but not underpinned by social expectations. Yet, creation of a social norm could be part of a change strategy to reinforce the new (desired) behaviors. The creation of social norms entails numerous iterative steps.[4] To create a new norm, some people within the group first change their attitudes and beliefs about the existing practice or proposed behavior, becoming more open to change. They then develop consensus around a new rule of behavior, creating and diffusing new expectations about what is approved or disapproved of, and building on that to change behavior and, eventually, people's beliefs about what is typical. The chart that follows summarizes the stages in the creation of a new norm.

2. *Correct misperceptions of a social norm.* This approach is helpful only when people believe that the extent of the undesirable behavior is worse or that it has greater group support than it does. Providing credible information about what people in the group actually do or think of the behavior can influence behavior in the direction of the norm. For example, "Only X percent of people in this community use illegal drugs."

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4   This framework of steps is based on the work of Christina Bicchieri, Gerry Mackie, and Ben Cislaghi. See Bicchieri, Norms in the Wild; Gerry Mackie. "Social Norms Change: Believing Makes It So." *Social Research: An International. Quarterly 85,* no. 1 (2018). 141-166.

Changes in beliefs and attitudes

People question practice/custom or norm

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Collective decision to change

Formation of new "reference groups"

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Action to change

• Public commitment to change and/or demonstration of change
• Development of mechanisms for monitoring and sanctioning non-compliance

Change in what is common/perceived to be common practice

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Change in beliefs about what the group believes to be appropriate behavior

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Diffusion/publicization of norm (by example, visible sanctioning, media, networks, etc.)

3. *Change social norms.* If a social norm sustains or motivates a behavior, then changing behavior will require weakening or changing the original social norm. There are three general approaches:

a. *Induce abandonment of a harmful norm.* If a strong social norm is sustaining a harmful practice, it may also be necessary to erode that norm before creating a new one. The steps are similar to those for creating a new norm, except that to erode an existing norm, the emphasis will be on promoting and publicizing deviations from the norm and weakening sanctions.

b. *Strengthen an existing countervailing norm.* I. If other norms are countervailing but may be weak--either because their "enforcement" is infrequent or not sufficiently strong, or because they may not seem salient to the situation--one can boost their influence by strengthening the sanction (positive or negative) or by making them more salient. For example, in Bogota, Colombia, former Mayor Antanas Mockus replaced the notoriously corrupt transit police with mimes and cards that citizens could flash to signal approval or disapproval of traffic behavior; by mocking and shaming lawbreakers, the program strengthened the salience of citizens as a group, as well as the sanction for transgression of norms of following the law and being courteous to others.

c. *Reinterpret what the social norm dictates.* Some norms are direct: The norm dictates the exact behavior (e.g., civil servants are expected to hire their family members). Others are indirect: The norm can manifest in many behaviors (e.g., norms of reciprocity, "support one's family"). For indirect norms, it may be possible to reinterpret the norm to exclude or include behaviors (e.g., reinterpreting norms against stealing from other community members to include bribery, or reinterpreting norms to "do whatever is necessary to elevate your family's status" to exclude consumption of trafficked wildlife)..

Examples: Social norms marketing

The *Addiopizzo* movement, a youth anti-mafia movement in Sicily, created and publicized a certification of businesses who pledged to be "pizzo"-free. They also gathered public pledges by consumers people and mobilized them to patronize these pizzo-free businesses that were being pressured by the mafia. They also used "pizzo-free" certification stickers to post in shops, product labeling, websites and newsletters, festivals, and theater, among many tactics, to spread the perception of that it was possible to be pizzo-free--that the number of pizzo-free businesses were growing and the support for pizzo (and the unwillingness to challenge pizzo) was diminishing. (*See* Beyerle, S.2014. *Curtailing Corruption: People Power for Accountability and Justice*, Ch. 6. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner).

"Integrity Idol" is modelled on the British TV series Pop Idol. It names and fames public servants who demonstrate integrity and spearhead anti-corruption activities in their government departments. It publicizes an open call for nominations and works with youth volunteers to go out and seek nominations, to find honest government officials. Five nominees are shortlisted, a video of each contestant is made and shown on TV, radio and social media for a week.

Tools for Change

Social norm construction and change efforts require many of the tools used for other kinds of behavior and attitude change. The lessons learned from these approaches are useful in social norm change.[5] But because social norm change focuses on collective change in group beliefs and practices, the messaging needs to focus on people's beliefs about what others in their social group do, think, and expect of them. The tools for social norm change are complementary; most initiatives use various tools in sequence or in parallel.

1. *Deliberation and reflection.* Community or group deliberation can facilitate collective reflection on social norms as a means of promoting change in attitudes, shared analysis of barriers to change, and creation of shared commitments to change maladaptive behaviors and norms. Small, face-to-face interaction provides an opportunity for people to challenge and reflect on their implicit assumptions about the social norm--including whether it is as prevalent as they think. It also enhances the influence of mass media-type interventions (e.g., radio and TV) by providing an opportunity for discussion and personal observation of others' behaviors and beliefs.

2. *Trendsetters and positive deviants.* Trendsetters and positive deviants are willing and able to be "first movers" in initiating change. Their nonconforming behavior helps erode perceptions of the norm. Building support groups of early adopters can provide a forum for mutual support, encouragement, and planning. Moreover, when a first wave of positive deviants or trendsetters is willing to defy the norm and endure the consequences, they can make it easier for a second wave to change. However, publicizing trendsetters or positive deviants can also backfire and expose them to danger in the case of a backlash or if insufficient protective mechanisms are in place.

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5   See Gregory Pirio, 2018. Improving Development Outcomes Through Social and Behavioral Change Communication: Applying a governance lens. Washington, D.C.: USAID. https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00TG2X.pdf.

3. *Creating a new "reference group."* A "reference group" connotes the group whose judgment a person cares about in relation to a particular behavior, and which may be able to enact social sanctions against them. Forming a new "group" can help change the dynamic in relation to social norms. A new reference group allows mutual support, but also provides a new reference point for members to determine what is typical and approved. The "Kuleta Haki" ("Provide Justice") network in the Democratic Republic of Congo, for example, brought together approximately 40 judicial actors in Lubumbashi and another 60 civil society allies with a reputation for integrity to work together to resist engaging in corrupt practices. The group provided both support and encouragement (as well as protection) for each other to withstand any social sanction for refusing corruption, and served as a new reference group whose approval or disapproval counted in their behavioral decisions in difficult situations.[6]

4. *Public commitments or declarations.* Many interventions include some form of public commitment by an individual or a group to a particular behavior. Individuals may pledge to engage in a new behavior (e.g., to not pay pizzo or, as a consumer, to patronize businesses in Italy that do not pay pizzo to the mafia) or the pledge may be by a group (e.g., Chinese footbinding societies). The public nature of the commitment increases visibility and commitment to change.

5. *Providing feedback on performance vis-à-vis the norm.* Comparing the behavior of an individual or subset of a group to that of the group through scoring and ranking can induce people to adjust their behavior—for example, comparing the integrity of customs officials in X city to the national norm or to the customs officials in a more desirable city can induce change in a given institution. As with social marketing, it is important that the comparison be to people who are similar (within "their" group) or a group to which the person wants to belong.

6. *Social norms marketing.* Social norms marketing uses traditional marketing techniques to alter perceptions about what behaviors are typical and expected at a large scale. Common interventions include mass media campaigns, information campaigns, edutainment, community theater, radio, posters, education, "branded" products, T-shirts, etc. Good practice emphasizes the use of multiple techniques "redundantly to make visible repeatedly, at many levels and in many ways, that enough people see that enough people are changing" their behavior or their support for the behavior.[7]

Using multiple methods of outreach can help create the impression of a groundswell; if people believe that everyone is receiving the same message, they are more likely to believe that their group knows of and endorses the idea.[8] Credible messengers

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6   See Kiely Barnard-Webster. 2018. "What Worked: Fighting Corruption Through Collective Action" (blog). https://sites. tufts.edu/ihs/what-worked-fighting-corruption-through-collective-action/; Cheyanne Scharbatke-Church, Kiely Barnard-Webster and Peter Woodrow. 2017. "Collective Action Against Corruption in the Criminal Justice System." CDA Innovative Practice Brief. Cambridge, MA: CDA Collaborative Learning Projects.

7   Mackie, "Social Norms Change: Believing Makes It So," 143.

8   See Elizabeth Levy Palcuk and Laurie Ball. 2010. Social Norms Marketing Aimed at Gender-Based Violence: A Literature Review and Critical Assessment. New York: International Rescue Committee.

who are seen as part of the group should deliver messages. Membership of a "group" differs between contexts; in some instances, people may look only to their family for guidance on behavior; in others, they may defer to their department, profession, or all citizens. Targeting the relevant "group" that holds or enforces the social norms is important; the message and/or messenger will not influence people who aren't part of the group. Messages can also be more influential if they are seen in the setting or situation in which the behavior often takes place (e.g., in home for sexual violence). Moreover, in some contexts, interactive formats such as call-in shows, interviews, and panel discussions may enhance trust and thus have greater impact than unidirectional messaging.[9]

7. *"Organized diffusion."* An alternative and complementary strategy to social norms marketing, this tool builds on using social networks to spread the norm. It often starts with a core group, carefully selected to ensure that connections exist to all sectors of the relevant network, and uses social networks to spread information and new practices. It uses leaders within the network and people who have particular influence because their behavior and opinions are noticed more than others' to disseminate messages throughout the network.

8. *Modeling behavior.* Role models demonstrate a recommended behavior. These may be people with influence (political leaders, informal or community leaders, religious leaders, etc.) or people who are widely known within the relevant group. Key characteristics of an effective model are:

- They are widely known or well-connected across the group.
- They are seen as prototypical, i.e., reflective of the group's identity and similar to many group members. The research is unclear on whether it is more important for them to be similar to the group members or for people to like the model.
- They are also seen as legitimate and fair if the models are leaders

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9   Pirio emphasizes the use of culturally appropriate formats and community participation in social behavior change communication. See Pirio, Improving Development Outcomes Through Social and Behavioral Change Communication.

Saying "No" to Shark Fin Soup

Many Chinese have considered shark fin soup a prestigious delicacy, expecting hosts to serve it at weddings or other important social occasions. They have considered it inhospitable to not serve the soup at such occasions. This social norm has led to the killing of tens of millions of sharks each year and the threat of extinction for many shark species.

Environmental groups have worked to reduce demand through media campaigns about protecting sharks led by celebrities, business leaders, students, and activists. They have also have directed their advocacy to restaurants and hotels, and more than 300 businesses have stopped serving shark fin soup and now state on their menus "We proudly do not serve shark fin." In 2013, President Xi also banned shark fin soup at state events as part of a government crackdown on official extravagance. This sent a signal that the consumption of shark was no longer acceptable and led to an 80 percent drop in consumption of shark fin soup in China by 2016. To the Chinese, behavior that the government deems acceptable appears to matter.

Source: WildAid, "Sharks in Crisis: Evidence of Positive Behavioral Change in China as New Threats Emerge," 2018, available at: https://wildaid.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/WildAid-Sharks-in-Crisis-2018.pdf.

9. *Changing laws or regulations.* Legislation and law enforcement can help promote social norms by signaling that a practice is bad and encouraging social re-evaluation of a practice. However, they can also create a barrier to social norm change. If the law deviates too much from the social norm, people will ignore the law; public discussion will also be foreclosed, under-mining the possibility to create an opening for social norm change. By contrast, if a more moderate law that more closely follows the social norm passes (e.g., banning firearms on weekends), it is more likely to be obeyed (or enforced without great resistance) and can catalyze a process that eventually allows for more stringent laws as social norms change.

Programming Good Practices: Insights from Research and Practice

Because creating and changing social norms focuses on social expectations rather than individuals' decisions, the way the tools are used--what is done and how it is done--differs. These nuanced differences matter tremendously to the effectiveness of programming, especially messaging and media programming. Scant evidence exists about the effectiveness of approaches to change social norms in the context of organized crime. Much research and evaluation of social norms change does not measure social norms change, and the evidence that does exist comes from other fields (gender equity, health, sanitation, etc.) whose relevance to organized crime is not yet established. Nonetheless, some general good practices for social norms change do exist.

1. *Understand the social norm at play and assess its strength (if trying to change social norms).* Many methods exist for diagnosing and measuring social norms, ranging from surveys to focus groups and interviews with "vignettes." These try to measure people's perceptions of group behavior and group expectations and how and how much they influence their behavior.[10] The strength of social norms depends, among other things, on how public or private the behavior is, how strong the social sanction for trans-gressing the norm is, how tight the group is, and how important compliance is to the

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10   For resources on methods to diagnose and measure social norms, see Cheyanne Scharbatke-Church, "Research Methodology for Identifying Social Norms that Catalyze Corruption." Corruption in Fragile States blog, Sept. 12, 2017. https://sites.tufts.edu/ihs/research-methodology-for-identifying-social-norms-that-catalyze-corruption/; Leigh Stefanik and Theresa Hwang. Applying Theory of Practice: CARE's Journey Piloting Social Norms Measures for Gender Programming. CARE USA, 2017; Ben Cislaghi and Lori Heise. Measuring Gender-Related Social Norms, Learning Report 1. Learning Group on Social Norms and Gender-Related Harmful Practices of the London School of Hygiene &Tropical Medicine, 2016; Gerry Mackie & Francesca Moneti. What Are Social Norms? How Are They Measured? Working Paper. San Diego: UNICEF & UCSD Center on Global Justice, 2015.

Social Norms around Child Labor

Both practical considerations and persistent social norms contribute to child labor and related human trafficking. In Ghana, USAID supports livelihoods programming to improve family incomes and reduce incentives for child labor and human trafficking. Addressing these practical considerations also provides a window of opportunity to create a new positive norm around valuing child education that could help families withstand changes in income. In other contexts, efforts to combat child labor and human trafficking may need to target existing social norms. For example, in countries such as Colombia, communities may hold a social norm that at age 10 or 11, children become responsible through work. In those contexts, changing the social norm to prove responsibility in another way would be important.

group.[11] If the norm is strong, programs will likely need to create a core group of motivated actors who want to change (e.g., through deliberation and finding trendsetters or positive deviants), then help them reach out to the wider community until a critical mass of receptive people exists, so that coordinated action and/or mass communication can effectively persuade people that what was prevalent and socially expected behavior in their group has changed. If the norm is weak (e.g., weak or inconsistent sanctions result for deviating), a media campaign targeting perceptions of what people do or demonstrating that norms supporting a harmful behavior have shifted, may be enough.

2. *Make sure the intervention addresses social norms, not just attitudes and values.* A common pitfall in social norms interventions is to conflate attitudes,

values, and social norms. The confusion is understandable, as attitudes often align with norms. Attitudes and values concern what people think about a thing or an individual and their inner convictions about right and wrong. Social norms are about social interactions and reflect what people perceive that others do and approve or disapprove of. The result of the confusion is that both program strategies and evaluation often unintentionally focus on individual attitudes or values, or on behaviors, but not norms. For instance, if an initiative undertakes dialogue within a group that focuses on bad consequences of corruption and the need to resist it, the program might be effective in changing people's attitudes about common corrupt practices. But if the program does not also target the mutual expectations within the group about asking for bribes, behavior may not change. While attitude change, education, or appeal to morals may be useful parts of an intervention, they do not add up to social norm change--even when they reach many people. Others in the group must know of the attitude change and it must accompany publicly visible behavior change or other signs that can persuade people that social sanctions no longer result for behaving differently.

3. Three questions provide a quick check of whether a social norm--or something else--is in question. If the answer to all three questions is yes, it is likely a social norm:

- Is the behavior **typical** or common in the group and, if so, do people engage in the behavior because others in a group they care about do it?

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11   Scharbatke-Church and Chigas. Understanding Social Norms: A reference guide for policy and practice; Ben Cislaghi and Lori Heise. 2018. "Four Avenues of Normative Influence: A Research Agenda for Health Promotion in Low- and Middle-Income Countries." Health Psychology 37, no. 6 (2018: 562-73).

- Is the behavior perceived to be **appropriate** or approved by others in the group, i.e., do people engage in the behavior because they do and/or because they believe they are expected to by others in the group (even if they don't like it or personally think it's wrong)?

- Is there a social punishment or reward associated with the behavior? Do people perceive there will be a negative social sanction for deviating from the behavior, or a positive social reward for conforming? What is the **sanction**?

4. *Do not emphasize the prevalence of behavior you want to change.* If awareness-raising campaigns underscore how big a problem the behavior is, this can reinforce the norm by solidifying people's perceptions of how typical it is. That can act as a magnet for behavior, as well as undermine hope for the possibility of change. This can happen even when the intended message is positive, e.g., that more people are reporting corruption or crime. Accompanying awareness-raising messages (e.g., stop corruption, corruption is evil, etc.) with strong normative messages--e.g., messages that the relevant groups do not approve of the behavior--can help mitigate, although not eliminate, this risk.

5. *Embed initiatives in the community and/ or reference groups that are important.* Community participation and leadership in the planning and implementation of norms-shifting activity, and embedding new norms within the group's value system, enhance effectiveness. They help ensure the credibility of messages about norms and ensure that community members support and sanction, both positively and negatively, the normative behaviors.

6. *Channel people to action.* Efforts to change social norms are more effective when they provide specific recommendations on alternative behaviors, such as demonstrating alternative behaviors (e.g., in the South African TV show "Soul City," neighbors banged pots when they overhead the male neighbor beating his wife on the show) and providing a channel for people to take action in accordance with the new social norm (e.g., a phone number to call for help).

7. *Make sure the programs are long enough in duration.* The trajectory of social norm change is not linear. There may be little change for a long time, but when "enough people believe that enough people have changed," then a shift can occur quite quickly. Stabilizing new norms also requires time; without continued support, monitoring, and reinforcement, new norms can erode.

8. *Do No Harm.* Social norms may support particular economic, political, and socio-cultural interests. Shifting social norms may therefore challenge the interests and power of some people within the group and provoke a backlash that can endanger participants in a social norms creation or change effort. Analyze the risks and create ways to mitigate them.