USEFUL RESOURCES ON SOCIAL NORMS AND CHILD MARRIAGE

Photo: Allison Joyce / *Girls Not Brides*

Social norms are the informal rules and beliefs that groups of people hold and tacitly enforce around how people should behave. Individual behaviours are clearly influenced by how people believe they are expected to behave by others. Social norms, including those that underlie the practice of child marriage, can change over time, as a result of broader societal and economic development; exposure to new information and ideas; or laws, policies and programmes that are deliberately designed to spur change. A number of strategies may work to shift social norms - from mass media that reaches hundreds of thousands, to community-level engagement that targets a few individuals at a time.

It is important to recognise that social norms both derive from and are specific to particular social contexts, so understanding the norms related to child marriage in a specific region or community is an essential part of designing interventions to shift those norms and to help end child marriage. Further, norms related to gender have typically developed over many years, so we cannot expect them to change overnight. Indeed, the evidence shows that interventions that aim to shift social norms *work best over longer periods of time, and with ideas delivered repeatedly in different settings and in different formats.* While individual beliefs, values, behaviours and actions may change in the short-term, ensuring the sustainability and breadth of such shifts requires long-term planning and action.

Whilst social norms can be a key factor underpinning child marriage, they may not be the only, or indeed primary driver of child marriage. Barriers to accessing education, lack of economic opportunities and limited reproductive health services may all contribute to child marriage and it is important in designing interventions to see which combination of issues are the most important issues to address.

Interested in learning more about social norm change?

A number of new global initiatives aim to better understand and overcome harmful social and gender norms.

The **Advancing Learning and Innovation on Gender Norms (ALIGN)** Platform, led by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI), is a digital platform that seeks to advance understanding, challenge, and change harmful gender norms by connecting a global community of researchers and thought leaders committed to equality for adolescents and young adults. Through the sharing of information and the facilitation of mutual learning, ALIGN aims to ensure knowledge on norm change contributes to sustainable gender justice. The website contains curated knowledge and key resources on gender norms theory, research methodologies, interventions and innovations. Over time, ALIGN will create a members' space for the Community of Practice working on gender norms with features such as webinars and forums, and will publish new knowledge on innovative ways to address and measure gender norms in the Global South and North. The Align platform will shortly have a page dedicated to social norms and child marriage.

Gender and Adolescence Global Evidence – GAGE research programme **https://www.gage.odi.org/**

The Learning Collaborative to Advance Normative Change, led by the Institute for Reproductive Health at Georgetown University, envisions a world where the powerful influence of social norms in shaping adolescents' lives is widely understood, and where projects and programmes improve adolescent sexual and reproductive health by applying normative science at scale. Made up of a network of experts committed to facilitating collaboration between organisations and individuals working on adolescent sexual and reproductive health norm change initiatives, the

Learning Collaborative is working to enhance collective efforts, build knowledge and develop shared tools to promote and guide effective social norm theory, measurement and practice.

The **What Works to Prevent Violence Consortium** website has a wealth of useful online resources pertaining to ending violence against women and girls, including journal articles, reports, presentations, briefs, videos and blogs.


STRIVE and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) have a **learning group** on social norms and gender-related harmful practices that also offers reflections on the role of **norms for child marriage.** This initiative includes two free reports on **the measurement** and **theory of social/gender norms** that are very much practice oriented. The paper on the well-known **flower framerwork** was also produced as part of this initiative.

We encourage you to visit these websites and, as relevant, to join these networks to learn more. In addition, the following resources may be useful to those seeking to design, implement and evaluate social norm change programmes:

The UK government's **Changing Gender and Social Norms, Attitudes and Behaviours** (2017) is a useful summary of the existing evidence on interventions that work to generate changes in gender and social norms, as well as in wider attitudes and behaviours. It reviews interventions targeting individual and inter-relational levels (e.g. workshops); community levels (e.g. community dialogue, community mobilisation and youth initiatives); and wider societal levels (mass media and edutainment), and highlights the impacts of such interventions.
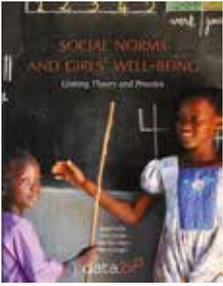
Social Norms and Girls' Well-Being: Linking Theory and Practice from Data2X provides a synthesis of social norms theory as it pertains to girls' wellbeing, as well as useful insights from programmes that aim to prevent child marriage (Tostan's *Community Empowerment Programme* in Senegal and the Population Council's *Abriendo Oportunidades* programme in Guatemala). The study suggests that successful programmes tend to employ integrated approaches, in which girls are empowered, communities are enlightened, and the many factors that contribute to gender inequality, such as the economic and legal circumstances that sustain harmful practices, are addressed.

Tostan is a veteran of community-led social norms change, working on child marriage in rural West Africa. They offer a training course on social norms and community-led programming. They are a very well-known grassroots organisation working on social norms and child marriage with a culturally-sensitive curriculum. Their 3-year long community empowerment programme has been evaluated multiple times, showing outstanding results. A number of resources and research learnings about their innovative approach can be found on the **Tostan website**

The **SASA!** community mobilisation approach was designed by Raising Voices to address the imbalance of power between women and men, girls and boys that contributes to both violence against women and

HIV. The rigorously evaluated programme that is now being implemented by more than 60 organisations in 20 countries aims to inspire and enable communities to rethink and reshape social norms, working with communities until a critical mass of people across society are engaged in creating social norm change around violence and relationships. A number of resources and research learnings about this approach can be found on the **Raising Voices** website.

The Overseas Development Institute (ODI) has produced several important publications related to social norms. ODI's **Social norms, gender norms and adolescent girls: a brief guide** brings together insights from gender theory and social norms theory to consider what influences gender norms and how they operate in particular circumstances. It distinguishes gender norms from practices (the manifestations of norms) and the values that underlie norms, drawing on fieldwork in Ethiopia, Nepal, Vietnam and Uganda. ODI's **How do Gender Norms Change?** provides useful insights and interesting case studies that illustrate some of the many drivers of social norms, as well as the factors that can contribute to social norm change. ODI explains that the processes of norm change are rarely straightforward and often messy, sometimes bringing unanticipated consequences such as backlash against those challenging the prevailing norms. While it is not easy to overcome resistance to change, engaging respectfully with all sections of a community can help minimise it. Lastly, ODI reports in its **Communications to Change Discriminatory Gender Norms Affecting Adolescent Girls** on the findings of a systematic review of communications programmes designed to promote changes in the gender norms affecting adolescent girls and young women in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. It found that the majority (71%) had positive impacts on norms, attitudes and practices, and that more effective programmes tend to employ multiple strategies to reach different audiences and to reinforce messages.
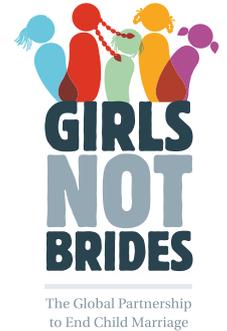
If you are interested in learning more about communication strategies as a means to shift social norms around child marriage, the above referenced ODI paper is a good one, but so too is a brief published by Girls Not Brides in 2017 that summarising what is known about using **Entertainment-Education to End Child Marriage.** Finally; you might be interested in the **Collaborator on the media and social norms change.**

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Programmes to keep an eye on:

Care

- Tipping Point initiative:
  https://caretippingpoint.org/innovation/

- Social Norms Analysis Plot (SNAP framework):
  http://gender.care2share.wikispaces.net/file/view/care-social-norms-paper-web.pdf

Using mass media to change social norms

- BBC Media Action: **http://www.bbc.co.uk/mediaaction/research-and-insight/health/maternal-and-child-health**

- Voices for Change - Nigeria: **https://medium.com/@DFID_Inclusive/voices-for-change-576781a5d30a** , **http://www.v4c-nigeria.com/**

Girls Not Brides is global partnership made up of more than 1000 civil society organisations from over 95 countries, committed to ending child marriage and enabling girls to fulfil their full potential.