



# Changing discriminatory norms affecting adolescent girls through communications activities: Insights for policy and practice from an evidence review<sup>1</sup>

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## Key messages

- There is strong evidence from this review of 61 programmes that communication programmes are an effective way to challenge gender-discriminatory attitudes and practices.
- No one approach is clearly more effective than others, but programmes with more than one communication component have achieved a higher proportion of positive outcomes. Integrated programmes with non-communication activities have also been slightly more effective.
- Many programmes drew on best practice in communication for social change, with sympathetic characters in radio and TV dramas and provision of new factual information and episode summaries; community dialogue-based programmes have created spaces for reflection and addressed key issues directly.
- The highest proportion of positive changes was in programmes addressing early marriage, education, female genital mutilation/cutting and intra-household relationships. These programmes often involve community-level dialogue and reflection.

<sup>1</sup> This paper and the report it summarises (Marcus and Page, 2014) are part of a wider programme of research undertaken by ODI and funded by DFID on achieving gender justice for adolescent girls.

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# Key findings

**Communications programmes have been effective in shifting gender norms affecting adolescents. Overall, 71% of outcomes recorded in the studies reviewed here were positive** (i.e. they indicated change in a gender-egalitarian direction), with very little difference between changes in attitudes and changes in practices (respectively, 72% and 69% positive).

**The gap between attitude change and practice change was greater for media-based interventions, and lowest for non-formal education-based approaches** than for other communications approaches. This is consistent with a tentative finding from these programmes: **approaches that stimulate discussion within a peer group are more likely to have positive outcomes** and may help bridge the gap between attitude and practice change.

**Longer or more intense exposure to a communications programme usually leads to greater and more sustained change in gender norms.** Related to this, programmes addressing multiple areas of gender equality usually achieve greater change on the issues they address in more depth than on those they address in passing. **An increase in the number of communications components appears to be associated with a greater proportion of positive outcomes.**

**Integrated programmes (including non-communications activities) have overall been slightly more effective than stand-alone communications programmes.**

**Working with multiple stakeholders (girls, family decision makers and community influencers) is often important in achieving norm change.**

**Many evaluations are missing opportunities to gather information on or report on key issues that affect programme effectiveness.** Efforts are needed to embed more analysis of the following issues:

- **Relative effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of different communications components;**
- **Relative effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of non-communications and communications activities;**
- **Thresholds beyond which there is no added value from additional activities or longer programmes;**
- **Types of message and format that most engage adolescent girls and other stakeholders;**
- **Most motivating types of message and different stakeholders' preferred formats;**
- **Importance of 'real life role models' in comparison with message content (in other words, who is delivering the message, rather than the message itself);**
- **Effectiveness of informal peer-to-peer communication, particularly among adolescent girls;**
- **Sustainability of change;**
- **Socioeconomic inequalities in access to and uptake of messages.**

Other key knowledge gaps include the potential of mobile phones and internet-based technology for shifting social norms on gender issues.

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# 1 Introduction

Recent years have seen growing policy interest in adolescent girls. Some of this has been inspired by instrumental concerns (girls as a good investment in future development, both as development actors and as mothers of the next generation). At the same time, there is also a more rights-focused emphasis (girls as actors whose wellbeing and opportunities are systematically undermined and whose rights are abused) (Chabaan and Cunningham, 2011; Jones et al., 2010; Levine et al., 2009).<sup>2</sup> This growing global interest in gender equality has led to increasing attention to discriminatory social norms as key factors that continue to impede gender equality and undermine adolescent girls' wellbeing and developmental opportunities (Ball Cooper and Fletcher, 2013; Harper et al., 2012; Huda and Calder, 2013; Wikigender/Wikichild, 2013).

Social norms are fundamentally expressions of ideas and practices simultaneously: ideas about how people in a particular community should and can be expected to behave, and ideas about how people actually do behave in a given situation. Like other social norms, gender norms encompass these two dimensions, corresponding roughly with gender ideologies (views about what gender relations should be like) and gender roles (expectations of how people of a particular gender should behave). Recent advances in understanding the processes that drive changes in social norms in general, and gender norms in particular (Mackie et al., 2012; Marcus, 2014; Marcus et al., forthcoming; Munoz Boudet et al., 2012), indicate that both large-scale social and economic trends and smaller-scale programmatic activity can lead to change in social norms. However, there is limited synthesised evidence of how different policies and programmes lead to changes in social norms affecting adolescent girls, and what may undermine those changes.

There is a long history in development practice of communications activities that are intended to transform the ways people think and act. Some of these originate in a top-down tradition of public service announcements and communication of information, some in a Freirean-inspired approach to education involving reflection and challenging orthodoxies, some in community-based activism. Recent understanding of the power of social norms has led to increased social norms marketing activity (Paluck et al., 2010), and the transformation of communications with the spread of the internet and mobile telephony in many low-income countries has created opportunities to communicate messages promoting gender equality and social change more broadly in new ways (Plan International, 2010). Despite all this activity, little is known about the effectiveness of different communications approaches to promoting more egalitarian gender norms.

This short paper discusses findings from a systematic-style review<sup>3</sup> of studies of 61 communications initiatives in low- and middle-income countries (Marcus and Page, 2014). These communications initiatives all aimed to change norms on gender issues, and studies included in the review either examine specific areas of adolescent girls' wellbeing or include adolescent girls as respondents. Just over half the programmes directly involved adolescent girls; some worked primarily with family and community decision makers, seven (11%) focused on men or boys and others were mass media programmes aimed at general audiences.

Although discriminatory gender norms affect adolescents everywhere, their specific expression varies considerably. While we recognise there is much relevant experience of communications programmes with adolescents in high-income countries, we were particularly interested in approaches that were proven in resource-poor settings, and thus focused on approaches in low- and middle-income countries.

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<sup>2</sup> Other proponents include Girl Hub (<http://www.girleffect.org/>)

<sup>3</sup> The review used systematic principles of comprehensive searching, appraisal of study quality, coding and extraction of relevant information and full transparency concerning decision making. Not all papers were double-blind-coded, thus we do not describe this as a systematic review.

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Unlike many systematic reviews, which focus on a particular thematic area, such as early marriage (Malhotra et al., 2011) or female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) (Berg and Dennison, 2012), this review examines multiple areas of adolescent girls' development and wellbeing. It therefore synthesises evidence concerning the impact of communications programmes on the following areas: early marriage, physical and sexual violence, FGM/C, transactional and intergenerational sex, education, work and aspirations, a cluster of issues related to gender relations in girls' natal households and attitudes to gender equality more generally. These foci reflect both key obstacles to adolescent girls' capability development identified in earlier work (Harper et al., 2012) and the availability of evidence.

As other reviews (e.g. Paluck et al., 2010) have found, very few evaluations examine norms, in the sense of widely shared beliefs about how things are or should be done – in this case about correct gendered patterns of behaviour. We therefore included studies that examined changes in attitudes or practices, as windows on gender norms, as well as the few that directly examined norms.<sup>4</sup> The review took place over the period June 2013-June 2014, and aimed to answer the question: *What types of communication activities in what contexts have had the greatest traction in challenging discriminatory gender norms affecting adolescent girls in low- and middle-income countries?*

### Box 1: Study methodology and limitations

Systematic reviews involve extensive and systematic searching and then rigorous filtering of studies on relevance and methodological grounds. Of the 504 studies retrieved through our extensive and systematic searches, 66 were eventually classed as sufficiently relevant and of high enough quality for inclusion in our review. Studies were assessed using the Maryland Scale of Scientific Methods and an adapted version of the Mixed Methods Assessment Tool. Full details of the methodology are discussed in Marcus and Page (2014). These 66 studies examined 61 programmes. More than one study was included per programme only if they used substantially different methodologies or if they referred to implementation of the programme in different regions or at different times. A total of 65% of studies were based on quantitative methods and another 24% used mixed qualitative and quantitative methods. In addition to these 66 studies, the review also draws on contextual materials about the programmes in question.

The conclusions of any evidence review are inevitably affected by the studies that are ultimately included. This review's findings may be skewed in the following ways. Around half the studies are based on internal evaluations, involving people who had also worked on programme implementation. Only 26% were peer-reviewed journal articles, although all the grey literature included in the review is methodologically and analytically rigorous. 50% were based on quasi-experimental designs with matched/ similar participants or randomised control trials. Most studies were in English.<sup>5</sup> There is very little discussion of specific issues arising in conflict-affected or fragile contexts, and indeed little contextual analysis that would help explain findings, particularly in some of the more quantitative studies in a public health tradition.

None of the studies reviewed comments on possible social desirability biases in respondents' reporting on their views and practices, and only one observed that responses to questions about attitudes and prevalence of FGM/C may be affected by widespread knowledge that it is illegal (Ouoba et al., 2004). Only two studies (Marketeers International Research and Consultancy, 2013; Rajan et al., 2010) reported efforts to triangulate what respondents said about how their views and practices had changed. Among the qualitative studies, none took an anthropological approach, which might have led to greater insights about how respondents perceived the ideas communicated and their likelihood of acting on new learning or ideas. Because all studies were based on primary research, as is standard practice in systematic reviews, the review does not comprehensively analyse secondary research or literature reviews, although it draws on these as far as possible. Thus, conclusions are based on the sample of papers ultimately included in the review, rather than a systematic assessment of all literature on communications initiatives on gender norms affecting adolescent girls.

Very few of these studies included details of the messages they transmitted or content of non-formal education curricula, as these are usually reported in project descriptions or analyses of formative research rather than in impact studies. Taken together, these limitations impede assessment of how far programme outcomes reflected actual messages, other programme design or implementation issues or contextual factors.

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<sup>4</sup> Two studies examined changes in perceptions of gender norms (in terms of shared beliefs) quantitatively (Hutchinson et al., 2013; Usdin et al., 2005); three other studies explicitly discussed changing norms as part of qualitative analysis of change (Diop et al., 2004; Leerlooijer et al., 2013; Pathfinder International, 2011).

<sup>5</sup> One study in French was included in the review (Ouoba et al., 2004). We also searched the websites of Développement Holistique des Filles (Guinea), Brisons le Silence (Côte d'Ivoire) and Somos Diferentes Somos Iguales (Nicaragua) but did not find any other studies in French or Spanish that met criteria.

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## 2 Overview of programmes and approaches to communication

Just over half the 61 programmes examined in this review took place in Sub-Saharan Africa, and 31% in South Asia. The remaining programmes were divided between Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Middle East and North Africa (respectively, 7% and 8%), with one study from South-East Asia. These programmes fall into four main categories:

- **Adolescent development programmes** – typically working face to face with adolescents to change attitudes and practices on a range of issues, and most likely to involve non-communications components. These made up just over a quarter (26%) of programmes.
- **Sexual and reproductive health (SRH) promotion programmes.** These span mass media and community-based programmes and are principally oriented towards promoting good SRH and integrate gender equality promotion into messaging. This was the largest group with 38% of programmes.
- **Programmes promoting gender equality as a main objective.** Some of these address multiple aspects of gender equality; others are particularly focused on one issue (e.g. violence, FGM/C, education or early marriage). These comprised 30% of the programmes examined.
- **Broad community development programmes** – typically integrating an emphasis on gender equality, adolescent girls or SRH into broader activities. This was the smallest group, comprising 7% of programmes.

These programmes made use of seven different types of communications activity (see Box 2). A total of 38% of programmes used one communications approach, 33% involved two communications component and 29% used three or more communications approaches.

### Box 2: Main communications approaches used by programmes examined

**Media** – mass media programmes, for example TV and radio edutainment programmes or factual programmes, and communication of information through print media. Used in 33% of programmes.

**Information, education and communication (IEC) material/large-scale sensitisation** – includes leaflets, comic books, posters, billboards, stickers and other promotional material, educational video and events aimed at a large audience, such as street theatre. Used in 41% of programmes.

**Community dialogue** – discussion-based approaches at a community level. Used in 41% of programmes.

**Non-formal education** – includes life skills and other education programmes on a variety of issues and targeted at adolescent girls and other audiences. These were almost all participatory and involved dialogue and reflection, and often were part of broader adolescent development programmes. Used in 59% of programmes.

**One-to-one communication** – includes mentoring and peer education based on communication at an individual level. Used in 16% of programmes.

**Public ceremonies** – includes alternative rite of passage and public declaration activities. These programmes are most likely to be concerned with FGM/C. Used in 7% of programmes.

**Training and capacity building** – includes a variety of training approaches, most commonly for professional personnel, for example training health workers in the risks of FGM/C. Used in 5% of programmes.

A total of 30% of programmes involved non-communications activities in addition to communications activities. Over two-thirds of programmes with non-communications activities were adolescent development programmes that provided vocational skills training, sometimes small loans or grants, occasionally cash or in-kind transfers, safe spaces for adolescent girls to meet and socialise and opportunities for playing sports and games. Three programmes also offered catch-up education to enable out-of-school girls to return to mainstream schooling.



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## 3 Main findings

This section presents synthesised findings from the evaluations of 61 programmes. A series of boxes highlight examples of promising practices.

**Communications programmes are an effective way of promoting change in gender norms**, and have reached a variety of stakeholders with both broad pro-gender equality messages and messages on specific discriminatory norms. Evaluations of these programmes recorded more changes in attitudes than in practice (attitude change comprised 54% of recorded outcomes and practice changes 46% of recorded outcomes).

**Overall 69% of outcomes recorded were positive** (i.e. they indicated change in a gender-egalitarian direction), with very little difference between attitude and practice change (respectively, 71% of outcomes positive and 69% outcomes positive). The gap between attitude and practice change was greater for media-based interventions than for other communications approaches (a 30 percentage point difference), indicating that approaches that involve people more actively, and especially stimulate discussion within a peer group, may help bridge the gap between attitude and practice change.

The diversity in human behaviour and attitudes, even in relatively homogeneous communities, means no programmes are likely to lead to a complete eradication of gender-discriminatory attitudes and practices. However, successful programmes typically lead to a reduction in gender-discriminatory practices and an increase in gender-egalitarian attitudes. As a participant in Humqadam's programme with boys and young men in Pakistan put it,

*'There are some changes and in some other areas they are not many changes [...] there are things that we still do [...] it's not that we have completely left those, but yes before the sessions we used to tease (harass) girls and now it has decreased [...] And I don't behave violently with my young brother and sister at home now'* (Rozan, 2012: 36).

Longer or more intense exposure to a communications programme usually leads to greater and more sustained change in gender norms. Overall, some of the clearest evidence of norm change took place in long-term programmes such as Tostan in Senegal (Diop et al., 2004) and PRACHAR in India (Pathfinder

### Promising approaches: appealing characters and role models in radio and TV dramas

Our review's findings chime with well-recognised good practices in communication for social change, such as the importance of crafting messages with emotional appeal, which may, of course, be culturally specific. One common way this is achieved is through developing appealing or memorable characters, and modelling desirable characteristics or caricaturing negative ones. Evaluations of Taru, a radio soap opera in India that featured a young woman health worker, and the Meena Communication Initiative in South Asia, which featured a feisty young girl, Meena, indicate that these appealing characters were seen as role models. Singhal et al. (2004) found that listening to Taru had led adolescent girls who had previously been confined to home to challenge conventions by talking with boys in public and engage in community problem solving. Watching Meena animations on TV or in planned film screenings had inspired girls to do activities seen as 'masculine', such as repairing hand pumps, and had made some adult viewers challenge accepted practices, such as giving boys more or better food than girls (CMS, 2004).

In a similar vein, recognisable 'villains' can also stimulate people to change their behaviour. Evaluations of Twende Na Wakati (Rogers et al., 2000) and Fataki (Kaufman et al., 2013), both of which were radio soap operas in Tanzania, showed that men who slept around and who tried to seduce adolescent girls were recognised as negative role models; Kaufman et al. (2013) found that *fataki* (a would-be sugar daddy) had entered popular consciousness and heard people advising one another, 'Don't be a *fataki*!'

Source: Based on CMS (2004), Kaufman et al. (2013), Rogers et al., (2000) and Singhal et al. (2004).

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International, 2011). Short intensive programmes were also associated with significant changes (e.g. Better Life Options in India, Acharya et al., 2009; Choices in Nepal, Institute for Reproductive Health, 2011; Program H in Brazil, Pulerwitz and Barker, 2006). In these cases, programme intensity probably accounts for the degree of change.

A total of 15 studies analysed the relationship between programme intensity and impact, focusing on 32 outcomes. In 75% of cases, greater exposure (either for a longer time period or to more communication activities or materials) led to an increased impact. See Box 3 for an illustration from Ishraq, an adolescent development programme, in Egypt.

### Box 3: Ishraq: the additional impact of longer exposure

Ishraq is a broad adolescent development programme for 12-15-year-old girls in Upper Egypt that combines literacy classes, life skills education, education in financial literacy and sports. It also provides girls with take-home rations (dry food), with amounts linked to attendance. At the time of Brady et al.'s (2007) evaluation, girls could attend Ishraq classes for up to two-and-a-half years.

Participation of over a year in Ishraq led to significantly greater change on six indicators than did participation of less than a year (school attendance, desired age of marriage, attitudes to and prevalence of FGM/C, acceptability of physical violence if a girl disobeys her brother or goes out without permission and attitudes to gender equality). For example:

- The proportion of girls wishing to marry by age 18 declined for all groups. The decline was smallest for the control group, 20 percentage points for girls who attended Ishraq for less than a year, 23 percentage points for girls who attended Ishraq for a year or more but did not complete the course and 25 percentage points for those who attended the full course.
- The proportion of full-term participants who intended to circumcise a future daughter fell by 52 percentage points to 2%, compared with 19% of participants who had attended for over a year (also a 52 percentage point fall) and 48% of girls who had attended for less than a year (a 27 percentage point fall).<sup>6</sup>
- 68% girls who had completed the full Ishraq course returned to school, compared with 24% of girls who had participated for over a year, 7% of girls who had participated for less than a year and 0% of the control group.

Source: Brady et al. (2007).

More programme experimentation, disaggregated measurement and analysis is needed to identify the minimum exposure likely to be effective in particular settings, as well as thresholds beyond which additional exposure leads to diminishing returns.

**An increase in the number of communications components appears to be associated with a greater proportion of positive outcomes.** There is likely to be a threshold beyond which additional activities contribute only marginally to norm change, but the studies in this review did not provide evidence on this issue. Our analysis suggests IEC activities played a helpful role in supporting and extending changes set in motion by other, more intensive, approaches, such as non-formal education.

**Dialogue-based approaches are often important in helping people shift both attitudes and practices.** Our results provide some tentative evidence that dialogue-based approaches that allow for reflection and discussion among peers (e.g. participatory non-formal education and community conversations) may be associated with greater attitude and behaviour change than approaches that incorporate fewer such opportunities. Of the seven studies that examined the added value of a dialogue-based component, six indicated that it led to more gender-egalitarian outcomes. This may be because dialogue helps participants personalise messages and identify ways they can translate messages into action in their own lives, an important element of best practice in communication for development (Paluck et al., 2010). These tentative findings are backed up both by isolated findings in the literature on gender norm change (e.g. Barker et al., 2007; Mekbib and Molla, 2010) and by a much more

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<sup>6</sup> These numbers have been read off bar graphs. Despite best efforts to ensure accuracy, there may be minor errors, but they are indicative of the scale of change among group with different exposure.

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sustained body of evidence from the broader communications literature (e.g. Abroms and Maibach, 2008; Kim et al., 1999; Rogers, 1995).

The apparent importance of dialogue could be further explored through both programme development and quasi-experimental evaluation. It should not be taken as evidence that mass media approaches are ineffective, as this is clearly not the case. Rather, both approaches can be effective, and the effectiveness of media- or IEC-based approaches can be increased through inclusion of activities that encourage discussion, whether through audience participation (e.g. radio phone-ins) or in a community setting, such as media listener groups.

Many non-formal education and community dialogue activities on gender issues are organised in single-sex groups. Two evaluations commented on the value of bringing male and female groups together to hear each other's perspectives (Rozan's 2012 study of Humqadam in Pakistan and Diop et al.'s 2004 study of Tostan in Senegal).

**Integrated programmes (including non-communications activities) were overall slightly more effective than stand-alone communications programmes** – they had a slightly higher proportion of positive outcomes (73% compared with 70%) and a slightly lower proportion of negative outcomes (5% as compared with 8%). This effect probably reflects the additional attractiveness of programmes with vocational training or incentives to girls and their families, rather than indicating that families were more able to act on messages because of reduced economic constraints.

There was very little analysis of the added value of non-communications components in this set of studies. Bandiera et al. (2012) suggest it was primarily non-formal education on legal rights and rape rather than other aspects of the Empowerment and Livelihoods for Adolescents (ELA) Programme in Uganda that led to a substantial fall in girls reporting having recently had sex unwillingly (from 21% at the start of the project to 4% at the time of the evaluation). Mekbib and Molla's (2010) study of Berhane Hewane in Ethiopia<sup>7</sup> also found non-communications activities (economic incentives) to have a limited effect on rates of early marriage, but a much more noticeable effect on educational enrolment. More studies of this kind are essential for a clearer evidence base on the relative importance of communications and non-communications activities in shifting gender norm and practices.

### **Importance of targeting girls, decision-makers and influencers**

'Now boys are changing the thinking of the parents to let the sister go [to school]. (Young married male PRACHAR participant' (Pathfinder International, 2011: 24).

Adolescent girls are important agents of change in gender norms. Empowerment-oriented programmes frequently aim to facilitate girls advocating for their own interests via teaching negotiation skills alongside more factual information. However, girls alone may not be able to challenge discriminatory practices if family decision makers or influencers (such as brothers or community and religious leaders) are not exposed to ideas encouraging them to change. Just under a quarter of programmes targeted decision makers and influencers as well as girls. Qualitative evidence suggests working with multiple stakeholders has often been important in enabling norm change.

### **Promising approaches: working with multiple stakeholders – an example from Uganda**

The Teenage Mothers Project in Uganda worked with adolescent girl mothers, their families and community and religious leaders to change norms about girl mothers returning to school. Group discussions and one-to-one counselling with girls convinced them they had a right to return to school and could deal with any stigma experienced. It also provided practical financial support in the form of a goat. The project's work with girls' parents helped changed their attitudes from anger that girls had got pregnant outside marriage to acceptance that they needed support and could complete their education. Likewise, the project invested in the 'intensive, laborious process of participation and persuasion of influential community leaders'. As a result, although norms disapproving of premarital sex had not changed, more supportive social norms about teenage mothers and their rights to opportunities emerged, and, while previously almost no teenage mothers had returned to school, after the project 65% did so.

Source: Leerlooijer et al. (2013).

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<sup>7</sup> This paper was not included as a review study on methodological grounds but provides useful background for understanding impacts.



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Only one study examined the influence of religious leaders. Considering the impacts of Tostan's experience in Senegal, Diop et al. (2004) found that, where religious leaders claimed FGM/C was a religious duty, people were much less willing to abandon it, and the proportion believing it was a required practice rose considerably (though less among Tostan participants than in the comparison group).

**Addressing issues directly.** Programmes addressing multiple areas of gender norms usually achieve greater change on issues they address in more depth and directly than on those that are addressed in passing.<sup>8</sup> This is consistent with Barker et al.'s (2007) study of reproductive health interventions, which found programmes that had directly engaged men on gender equality issues led to much greater change than those that had not.

### **Change in different areas of girls' lives**

**The highest proportion of positive outcomes was recorded for early marriage, education, FGM/C and gender relations in girls' natal households.** Positive outcomes refer to changes in a more gender-egalitarian direction. In quantitative studies, only statistically significant changes were classified as positive or negative; statistically insignificant changes were considered neutral. In qualitative studies, several examples or analysis clearly showing a positive change were classified as positive outcomes.

The high success rate on these issues may reflect intensive community-based dialogue processes and non-formal education that led to a greater sense of self-efficacy on the part of adolescent girls to speak out and challenge discriminatory norms, and that effectively convinced parents, grandparents, brothers and other influential decision makers of the need for change. With respect to FGM/C, it also reflects attention to targeting adult decision makers as well as adolescent girls. The high proportion of positive outcomes on intra-household relationships is largely driven by programmes that enhanced girls' voice and negotiating ability within (and outside) the household.

The lowest proportions of positive outcomes were recorded for sexual violence and intergenerational and transactional sex. This is likely to reflect increased reporting as a result of increased awareness, and, in the case of transactional sex, some poorly framed messages that inadvertently presented transactional sex as normal (Jewkes et al., 2008). There was no obvious relationship between the type of programme and outcomes, suggesting messages and implementation may be important, as may addressing economic barriers to norm change (particularly in relation to transactional sex).

Table 1 presents some key findings on selected areas of gender discriminatory norms.

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<sup>8</sup> Examples include the limited change in attitudes to women working in Apwe Plezi in St Lucia, where the primary focus was on sexuality-related issues, and in early marriage in Tostan, Senegal (Diop et al., 2004).

**Table 1: Key findings on early marriage, education, FGM/C and violence against women and girls**

Theme and % positive outcomes	Main changes	Main communications and additional activities	Examples
<p><b>Early marriage</b> 23 programmes 77% outcomes positive</p>	<p><b>Attitudes to age of marriage.</b> Notable increase in proportion of girls and parents believing 18 or older is a desirable age of marriage for girls.</p> <p><b>Actual age of marriage.</b> Timeframe of most evaluations too short to measure changes in early marriage rates/mean age of marriage, but some evidence of delayed marriage from Ethiopia (post-age 15) and India (post-age 18) (Better Life Options, DISHA, PRACHAR).</p> <p><b>Decision making about marriage.</b> Much greater acceptance of the idea that a girl should have a say in decisions about her marriage</p> <p><b>Dowry.</b> Some evidence of reduction in dowry giving and more negative attitudes towards dowry as a result of community dialogue and media.</p>	<p>Primarily non-formal education for adolescent girls and boys and community dialogue-based approaches targeting parents and other community members. Some evidence of effective TV and radio programmes. Community dialogue and non-formal education. Community dialogue and non-formal education</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DISHA, India (Kanesathasan et al., 2008); Better Life Options, India (Acharya et al., 2009); Ishraq, Egypt (Brady et al., 2007)<sup>9</sup> Vrai Djo, Democratic Republic of Congo (Koch and N'tkolo, 2013), Twende Na Wakati, Tanzania (Rogers et al., 1999)</li> <li>• Better Life Options (Acharya et al., 2009), DISHA (Kanesathasan et al., 2008), PRACHAR (Pathfinder International, 2011) (all in India); Berhane Hewan, Ethiopia (Erulkar and Muthengi, 2007);</li> <li>• New Horizons, Egypt (North South Consultants Exchange, 2003); BRAC GQAL, Bangladesh (Alim, 2011); Tostan, Senegal (Diop et al., 2004)</li> <li>• BRAC GQAL (Alim, 2011) and Kishori Abhijan (Amin and Suran, 2005) (both in Bangladesh); Meena Communication Initiative (CMS, 2004) and Taru, India (Singhal et al., 2004) (both in India)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Education</b> 27 programmes 78% outcomes positive</p>	<p><b>Attitudes to girls' education.</b> Dramatic shifts in attitudes in programmes focused on promoting gender equality and/or with strong focus on education. Smaller positive changes in attitudes in programmes where education was not the major focus, or where girls' education was already highly valued.</p> <p><b>School attendance.</b> Large increases in the proportion of girls attending school and of girls who had dropped out re-enrolling in programmes with a strong focus on education. Mixed impacts in two programmes with greater girls' school enrolment only in one location.</p>	<p>Non-formal education and community dialogue. Community dialogue; bridge to formal education classes for girls; in-kind incentives. Community dialogue, non-formal education, large-scale IEC activities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• GEMS India (Achyut et al., 2011); BRAC ADP (Ara and Das, 2010) and BRAC GQAL (Alim, 2011) (both in Bangladesh)</li> <li>• Filles Eveillées, Burkina Faso (Ouoba et al., 2004); Reprosalud, Peru (Ferrando et al., 2002); Alternative Rite of Passage, Kenya (Chege et al., 2001)</li> <li>• Berhane Hewan, Ethiopia (Erulkar and Muthengi, 2007), Ishraq (Brady et al., 2007); New Horizons, Egypt (North South Consultants Exchange, 2003); Teenage Mothers Project, Uganda (Leerlooijer et al., 2013)</li> <li>• Kishori Abhijan, Bangladesh (Amin and Suran, 2005); Behaviour Change Programme, Nigeria (Oduolowu, 2007)</li> </ul>

<sup>9</sup> Effective in changing girls' views on the desirable age of marriage, but not those of parents.

<p><b>FGM/C</b> 11 programmes 76% outcomes positive</p>	<p><b>Key attitude changes:</b> Increase in % believing FGM/C is unnecessary and/or harmful to health; Reduced intention to have future daughters cut; Increased regret for circumcisions already performed; Increase in proportion of men, women or girls believing FGM/C is not a religious duty; Increase in proportion of respondents who believe FGM/C should be ended. <b>Practices.</b> Some evidence of reductions in reported prevalence related to interventions. Some evidence of a small shift towards cutting at an earlier age so circumcisions are a <i>fait accompli</i>.</p>	<p>Community dialogue, non-formal education, IEC, public declarations.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alternative Rite of Passage, Kenya (Chege et al., 2001); CARE Ethiopia (Chege et al., 2004); Health Worker Training Programme, Mali (Sangare et al., 1998)</li> <li>• Ishraq, Egypt (Brady et al., 2007); Tostan, Senegal (Diop et al., 2004)</li> <li>• Alternative Rite of Passage, Kenya (Chege et al., 2001)</li> <li>• CARE, Ethiopia<sup>10</sup> (Chege et al, 2004); Ishraq, Egypt (Brady et al, 2007); Tostan, Senegal (Diop et al, 2004)</li> <li>• CARE Ethiopia (Chege et al., 2004); Ndukaku, Nigeria (Babalola et al., 2006)<sup>11</sup></li> <li>• Tostan, Senegal (Diop et al., 2004); Tostan, Burkina Faso (Ouoba et al., 2004); Ishraq, Egypt (Brady et al., 2007)</li> <li>• Tostan Senegal (Diop et al, 2004)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Physical violence against women and girls</b> 28 programmes 64% outcomes positive</p>	<p><b>Attitudes.</b> Shift towards viewing violence against women and girls as always wrong rather than acceptable in some circumstances. In some contexts with endemic violence, participants maintained support for violence in particular situations (e.g. food burning, going out without permission). Reduced support for the view that a woman should tolerate violence to keep her family together. <b>Practices.</b> Evidence of:  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduced experience or perpetration of violence;</li> <li>• Increased reporting of violence to others.</li> <li>• Increased action to protest against violence/intervene in cases of violence.</li> </ul> <p>Two studies reported increased experience of violence but this may reflect increased awareness rather than an actual increase. Overall, greater impact on changes in attitudes to physical violence than on practices.</p> </p>	<p>Non-formal education, IEC and one-to-one communication most common elements in programmes with attitude change. Programmes leading to no change in attitudes were primarily media programmes without IEC or other activities. Media, non-formal education, IEC and one-to-one communication all associated with changes in practice.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We Can, India (Rajan et al., 2010); Married Men’s Project, Iran (Boroumandfar et al., 2010); OneLove, Namibia (Hutchinson et al., 2012a); Reprosalud, Peru (Ferrando et al, 2002)</li> <li>• Ishraq (Brady et al., 2007; Elbadawy, 2013) and New Horizons (North South Consultants’ Exchange, 2003) (both in Egypt)</li> <li>• Equal Access, Nepal (Equal Access, 2010); Community Media Trust, Mozambique (Hutchinson et al., 2013); Humqadam, Pakistan (Rozan, 2012)</li> <li>• Stepping Stones, South Africa (Jewkes et al., 2010); OneLove, Swaziland (Hutchinson et al., 2012c); Tostan, Burkina Faso (Ouoba et al., 2004)</li> <li>• One Love, Namibia (Hutchinson et al., 2012a); SafAIDS, Swaziland (Hutchinson et al., 2012c)</li> <li>• Equal Access, Nepal (Equal Access, 2010); Soul City, South Africa (Usdin et al., 2005); OneLove, Mozambique (Hutchinson et al, 2013)</li> <li>• GEMS, India (Achyut et al., 2011); OneLove, Mozambique (Hutchinson et al., 2013)</li> </ul>

10 In CARE’s programme in Kenya (discussed with its Ethiopia programme), these positive changes did not occur. This reflects some mobilising against ant-FGM/C messages in the Kenya study site.

11 This positive change occurred in one study site only. In the other, attitudes became more pro-FGM/C, but reasons for this are not given in the text.

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# 4 Practice-related knowledge gaps

In addition to the insights outlined in Section 3, this review has highlighted knowledge gaps on many areas of impact and effective practice that could help refine programme design and implementation and thus enhance effectiveness in challenging gender discrimination. Key gaps include the following.

## 4.1 Programme design and implementation issues

**What kinds of messages most motivate change.** Very little information was available on the detailed content and framing of messages, and thus what types of messages or approaches are most likely to engage adolescent girls and other audiences, perhaps because this information is discussed in project reports and formative research, rather than in impact studies. We expected to find more assessments of social norms marketing approaches that attempt to communicate new norms rather than spread injunctions about behaviour. However, it was not clear whether framing messages in terms of statements such as, ‘Violence against women and girls is wrong’ or injunctions such as, ‘Don’t hit your wife/ girlfriend/ daughter/sister’ is any more or less effective than social norms-based approaches, such as those that disseminate messages like, ‘Real men don’t hit women or girls.’

**Audience preferences for particular types of media/approach.** The studies we reviewed did not go into detail on different stakeholders’ reactions to particular types of communications or formats, perhaps because this was reported in formative research rather than in impact studies. More granular insights into the types of formats that most engage different audiences, and that are most successful in stimulating change on gender norms, is essential for developing tailored and effective communication strategies.

**Relative effectiveness of different communication approaches.** There is a broad lack of studies examining the relative effectiveness of different communications activities, and a specific gap concerning approaches such as mentoring, one-to-one peer education and community dialogue, both as sole programme approaches and in combination. Although 62% of programmes had more than one communications component, less than a third of the studies probed the relative effectiveness of different communications components – the rest reported on the impact of the whole package. More experimental programming (with different groups receiving different interventions) may be needed to enable rigorous assessment of the effectiveness of different communication activities.

**Relative effectiveness of communications and non-communications activities.** Only one of the studies reviewed and one background study provided clear evidence on the relative effectiveness of communications and non-communications activities. More studies of this kind are essential for a clearer evidence base on the relative importance of communications and non-communications activities in shifting gender norm and practices.

**Thresholds – how many communication activities are enough?** Although the numbers examined were too small for statistical analysis, the studies we examined suggested programmes with multiple communications activities were more likely to achieve positive outcomes than those with single components. This is probably because multiple communication activities are likely to reach a wider audience and repetition of messages may make them more memorable. What is not clear, however, is the point at which there are diminishing returns from additional activities. Further programme development or action research to identify such thresholds would be very helpful to identify strategies for achieving maximum impact.

**Importance of length of programme.** Further analysis of the importance of programme length, perhaps drawing on broader (i.e. not only gender norm-focused) communications initiatives, is needed. Our review suggested long-term media- and community-based (non-formal education and community dialogue) programmes have been particularly effective in achieving positive change in discriminatory gender norms. Many short, intensive

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programmes also appeared to lead to substantial change. However, the numbers concerned are too small in both cases to draw more than tentative conclusions.

**Importance of ‘real life role models’.** Although there is evidence related to the inspirational effects of fictional role models such as Meena and Taru, there was no analysis in the studies examined of the influence of ‘real life role models’. This is a surprising gap, given that non-formal education was the single most common intervention and that, except in programmes aimed at men and boys, these classes were typically led by young women from nearby communities with secondary education. This is important, as it would shed light on the relative importance of curriculum content as compared with the identity of the person delivering messages.

### **Role of informal peer communication.**

Many programmes rely on informal communication between peers or in families, but there is a glaring silence in the studies reviewed on the extent of informal peer communications, the groups most likely to communicate new norms in this manner and whether there are issues that people in different contexts see as taboo for discussing, even among those they trust. There is a specific lack of analysis in these programmes about adolescent girls as peer communicators. The We Can End All Violence Against Women programme in India suggests harnessing the power of informal peer-to-peer communication can be very effective, but further programme experience and evaluation are needed, both of girls as peer communicators and of the potential of peer communication on gender norms more broadly.

### **Use of social media and new technologies (e.g. mobile phone-based approaches and game-based approaches) in promoting gender-egalitarian norms.**

Probably because these approaches are relatively new, or possibly because they have been less used in social

norm change programmes than in sectoral areas such as health, we found no evaluations of their effectiveness. With the high level of penetration of mobile phone technology among adolescent girls and their families in many low-income countries,<sup>12</sup> and developments in internet access via a range of devices, these approaches are likely to become of increasing importance for communication for social change.

### **Promising approaches: generating a critical mass in favour of change through informal communications**

We Can End All Violence Against Women in India was part of a six-year campaign to change norms on violence against women that ran between 2004 and 2010 in six South Asian countries. It aimed to generate a critical mass of people who opposed all forms of violence against women and girls, defined broadly to include discrimination, early marriage and unequal treatment of sons and daughters. The campaign was built around inspiring people – young, old, male and female – to sign up as ‘change makers’. Change makers took an oath to practise gender equality in their lives and to reach out to at least 10 other people and encourage them to do so. The campaign organisers provided change makers with IEC materials that they shared with the people they were seeking to influence.

The evaluation of We Can in India found that the change maker approach had successfully encouraged change makers and their wider circles of influence to make various pro-gender equality changes in their lives. For example, 25% of people in change makers’ circles of influence in Rajasthan had resolved not to marry off their daughters or sisters before age 18, and 21% in West Bengal had pledged not to commit any violence against women or girls. Quotes from people influenced by change makers attest to the effectiveness of this approach, particularly in contexts where discriminatory practices are endemic and naturalised:

*‘The change in my thinking is that all family members should get equal rights. We should not tolerate any violence in the home and girls should get equal status. I do not discriminate between my son and daughter. My son told me that violence does not mean only beating and hitting, but there are other, smaller forms of it, which we should stop. (mother of Akash, a 17 year old Change Maker) (Rajan et al., 2010).*

Source: Rajan et al. (2010)

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<sup>12</sup> A 2010 study indicates that, although women in low- and middle-income countries are 21% less likely than men to own a mobile phone, the highest rates of use among women are in the 14-27 age group (GSMA and Cherie Blair Foundation, 2010).



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## 4.2 Issues related to impact

**Sustainability of change.** Further research on how far norm changes have been sustained is needed. Studies are necessary that follow up on participants/audiences (both girls and other stakeholders) several years after contact with an intervention to assess whether attitude and practice changes have been sustained, and, if so, why. There is a particular gap in knowledge as to whether adolescent girls who have changed their views on issues such as equal treatment of sons and daughters or intention to circumcise future daughters have been able to maintain these views as they move into adulthood and family formation and come under social pressures from different stakeholders.

**Socioeconomic differentials in impact.** This set of studies provides little conclusive evidence on whether communication programmes lead to greater change in some groups more than others for several reasons, in part because many studies controlled for socioeconomic status and in part because community-based programmes were often targeted to poor areas with limited socioeconomic variation between participants. The studies that examined how far access to the communications programmes studied was limited by poverty found mixed results; some studies found girls from poorer households were less likely to participate (e.g. Acharya et al., 2009; Chege et al., 2001); others found the opposite or no effect (e.g. Brady et al., 2007). Analysis of media-based programmes generally found greater access to mass media among better-off groups, but the difference was not always large enough to significantly affect results. There was very little gender-disaggregated analysis of access to mass media. It is therefore not clear from these programmes to what extent socioeconomic, geographical or gender barriers constrain access to community-based programmes or uptake of messages, although the wider literature suggests women's and poorer people's access to mass media is lower than men's and better-off people's (e.g. Gurumurthy, 2004; Myers, 2009).

**More evidence on the cost-effectiveness of different types of communication programme is needed.** Only two studies (3%) presented data on programmes' cost-effectiveness, and only one compared the cost-effectiveness of communications approaches. This lack of information is a major knowledge gap in terms of assessing the relative effectiveness of communications activities and other approaches to changing gender norms.

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