# THE ACT FRAMEWORK:
## TOWARDS A NEW M&E MODEL FOR MEASURING SOCIAL NORMS CHANGE AROUND FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION



UNFPA

DREXEL UNIVERSITY
**Dornsife**
School of Public Health

unicef
for every child

The UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme on the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is pleased to announce the creation of a new framework for measuring and tracking changes in social norms related to FGM. The ACT Framework, developed in partnership with Drexel University's Dornsife School of Public Health, in consultation with experts around the world, is being validated in two countries (Guinea and Ethiopia), and will provide programme planners with new practical resources for measuring and tracking changes in social norms related to FGM. While this document provides a summary of the framework, a revised full version will be published in 2020 following completion of a validation process in two countries.

## The need for the ACT Framework

An estimated 3 million girls living in 30 countries in Africa, the Middle East and Asia are at risk of undergoing the harmful practice of FGM every year, and more than 200 million girls and women alive in the world today have experienced FGM. Despite significant global investment and efforts to eliminate the practice, it persists largely because of its deep rooting in long-standing social norms. Recognizing the central role that social norms play in both upholding and ending FGM, international and national efforts have increasingly put rights-based, culturally sensitive, social norms change at the centre of programme strategies. These efforts have been challenged, however, by a lack of tested approaches, indicators and tools for measuring social norms change.

## AN ANSWER TO THE MEASUREMENT CHALLENGE

Tracking changes in the social norms that sustain FGM over time is a methodological challenge because measurement has traditionally relied on two sources of data, each with significant blind spots.
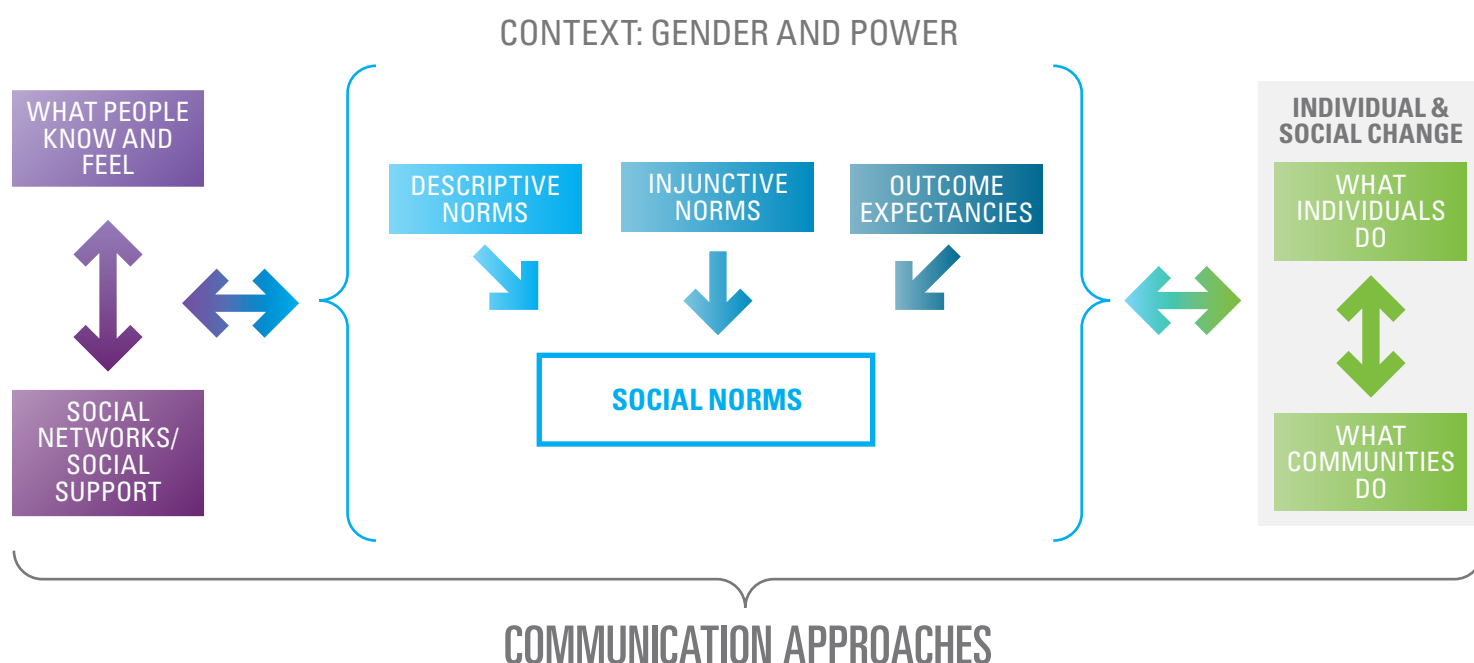
- Population-level data, collected only periodically, are unable to capture community-level changes attributable to social and behaviour change interventions.
- Monitoring and evaluation methods that employ proxy measures of community-level change (often in the form of communities making public FGM-abandonment declarations) do not adequately capture local shifts in social norms or the ultimate changes in the practice.

The ACT Framework addresses these measurement challenges by providing a macro-level framework, based on leading research in social norms, that is accessible and practical for programme planners, and adaptable to local contexts.

## Conceptual model behind the ACT Framework

Social norms (see Box 1) are at the heart of the conceptual model guiding the ACT Framework. To illustrate the conceptual model, Figure 1 shows how social norms are an intermediary step between what people know and feel, and what individuals and communities do.

**FIGURE 1:** CONCEPTUAL MODEL BEHIND THE ACT FRAMEWORK



CONTEXT: GENDER AND POWER

WHAT PEOPLE KNOW AND FEEL

SOCIAL NETWORKS/ SOCIAL SUPPORT

DESCRIPTIVE NORMS

INJUNCTIVE NORMS

OUTCOME EXPECTANCIES

SOCIAL NORMS

INDIVIDUAL & SOCIAL CHANGE

WHAT INDIVIDUALS DO

WHAT COMMUNITIES DO

COMMUNICATION APPROACHES
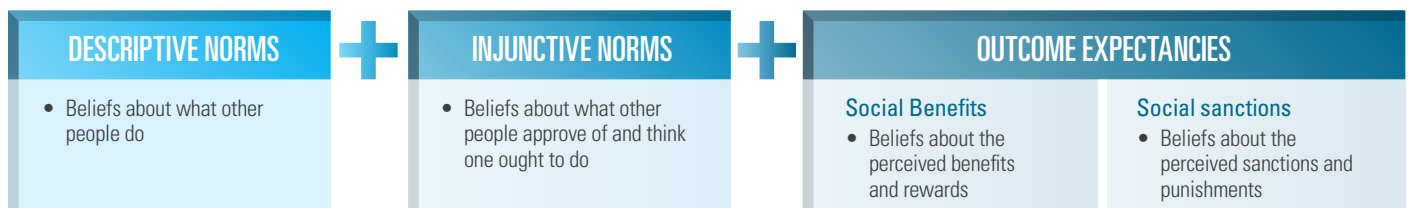
## BOX 1. SOCIAL NORMS

Social norms are the unwritten rules guiding behaviour. They guide what we do, what we think others do, and what we think others believe we should do. Norms influence behaviour, and vice versa. If normative beliefs can be changed, behavioural change can follow, and if behaviour change occurs then norms can change.

Social norms theory falls into two main schools of thought. The first considers social norms as an intrinsic characteristic of individuals and defines them as rules or expectations held by social groups that guide behaviours. This view often results in FGM interventions that focus on the community level with the aim of sparking dialogue, collective decisions and public declarations to abandon FGM. The second school, emerging from the field of communication, takes a social ecological perspective, where norms are viewed as one element of larger social systems. Interventions based on this model tend to use human rights-based social-ecological approaches that encourage a focus on

intersectional issues such as gender, power and religion. Although these theoretical schools may use different terminology, there are overlaps among the conceptual terms used to define social norms. The conceptual model behind the ACT Framework has consolidated social norms into four constructs: *descriptive norms* (or *empirical expectations*), *injunctive norms* (or *normative expectations*) and two different kinds of *outcome expectancies* (social *benefits* and *social sanctions*).

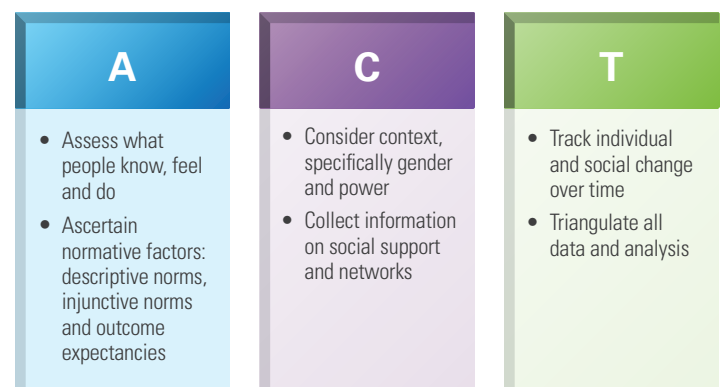| DESCRIPTIVE NORMS | INJUNCTIVE NORMS | OUTCOME EXPECTANCIES | |
|---|---|---|---|
| • Beliefs about what other people do | • Beliefs about what other people approve of and think one ought to do | **Social Benefits**<br>• Beliefs about the perceived benefits and rewards | **Social sanctions**<br>• Beliefs about the perceived sanctions and punishments |

The blue, two-way arrows indicate the dynamic relationship between social norms and these elements. The model incorporates a social-ecological perspective that situates individuals within their broader environment. The model acknowledges that what people know and feel shapes, and is shaped by, who they talk to (i.e. their social networks) and the social support they receive. Social norms cannot change if contextual factors such as gender and power (shown encompassing the social norms and their interactions) are not adequately addressed. Approaches to communication and public engagement designed to change social norms need to consider the whole model. Understanding the linkages between communication approaches and individual and social change will also allow key insights to be revealed about which interventions are contributing to social norms change around FGM, and how.

### ACT Framework components

The ACT Framework includes a menu of tested mixed-methods tools and indicators for measuring social norms change on the ground. Individual interventions can use the ACT Framework to build their own localized measurement frameworks based on their programming focus and on-the-ground realities.

The ACT framework is made up of three primary components – which are the source of the acronym "ACT". These are summarized in Figure 2.

**FIGURE 2:** THE THREE COMPONENTS OF THE ACT FRAMEWORK

| A | C | T |
|---|---|---|
| • Assess what people know, feel and do<br>• Ascertain normative factors: descriptive norms, injunctive norms and outcome expectancies | • Consider context, specifically gender and power<br>• Collect information on social support and networks | • Track individual and social change over time<br>• Triangulate all data and analysis |

### A: ASSESS AND ASCERTAIN

The 'A' in "ACT" is for *assessing what people know, feel and do*. This step is broken down into three measurement domains ("*know*", "*feel*" and "*do*"). These three domains correspond to the behaviour

© UNICEF/UN0281302/TADESSE

change continuum, in which people move from knowledge to action. Figure 3 details the factors that are measured in relation to each of the three domains.

**FIGURE 3:** ASSESSING WHAT PEOPLE KNOW, FEEL AND DO ABOUT FGM

| KNOW (cognition) | FEEL (emotion) | DO (behaviour) |
| --- | --- | --- |
| • Risks of FGM (physical and psychosocial)<br>• The degree to which legal, religious and moral norms associated with FGM are harmonized | • Reasons why FGM exists<br>• Positive beliefs about abandoning FGM<br>• Support for abandoning FGM<br>• Intention not to cut daughter<br>• Willingness to marry women who have not been cut<br>• Self-efficacy to abandon FGM | • Prevalence of FGM<br>• Proportion of households showing readiness to change (moving along the change continuum) |

The 'A' component of the ACT Framework also stands for "ascertain normative factors". This step includes analysing descriptive norms, injunctive norms and outcome expectancies (See Box 1 where these are defined). The framework provides indicators to measure these norms at both the individual and collective levels, examining the impact of communication and community engagement in promoting social and behaviour change. The indicators for each normative factor are:

**Descriptive norms**
- Belief that others are abandoning FGM

**Injunctive norms**
- Belief that others approve of FGM abandonment
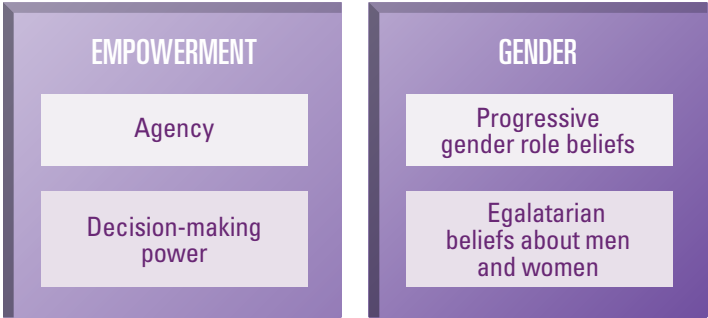
**Outcome expectancies**
- Identification of social rewards for abandoning FGM
- Identification of social sanctions for abandoning FGM
- Willingness to reward people who abandon FGM
- Willingness to impose sanctions on people who practise FGM

**C: CONSIDER THE CONTEXT**
'C' is for considering the context and providing special attention to exploring the dimensions of gender and power. While indicators to measure dimensions of empowerment can be found throughout the ACT
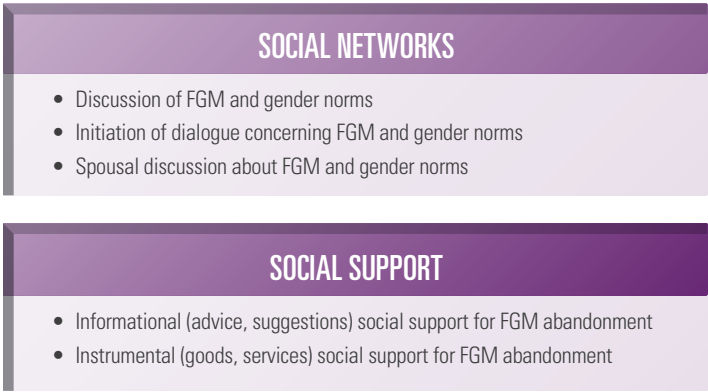
framework, this section focuses primarily on agency, decision-making, gender roles and egalitarian beliefs about gender norms (see Figure 4 for specific topics).

**FIGURE 4:** TOPICS FOR "CONSIDER THE CONTEXT"

| EMPOWERMENT | GENDER |
|---|---|
| Agency | Progressive gender role beliefs |
| Decision-making power | Egalatarian beliefs about men and women |

'C' is also for *collecting information on social networks and social support.* The framework provides indicators for the measurement of reference groups, the flow of information across social networks and the level of social support relative to FGM abandonment, all of which play a key role in social norms change. The indicator topics are listed in Figure 5.

**FIGURE 5:** TOPICS FOR COLLECT INFORMATION ON SOCIAL NETWORKS AND SOCIAL SUPPORT

**SOCIAL NETWORKS**
- Discussion of FGM and gender norms
- Initiation of dialogue concerning FGM and gender norms
- Spousal discussion about FGM and gender norms

**SOCIAL SUPPORT**
- Informational (advice, suggestions) social support for FGM abandonment
- Instrumental (goods, services) social support for FGM abandonment

**T: TRACK AND TRIANGULATE**

'T' is for *tracking individual and social change over time.* The framework provides tools for measuring outputs, short-term outcomes and exposure to communication activities. Sample indicators in the framework can be adapted to the specifics of a programme for measuring the effectiveness of social and behaviour change approaches.

'T' also stands for *triangulate all data and analysis.* Triangulation is the use of multiple data sources to measure individual indicators. This is built into

the fabric of the ACT Framework with quantitative, qualitative and participatory tools to help validate findings, enrich data, foster holistic interpretations and establish a feedback loop to improve programming.

## ACT Framework measures

The ACT Framework includes consolidated measures for monitoring and evaluating social norms change relating to FGM. The indicators and the corresponding tools are based on social norms science and constructs summarized in this document. The framework offers a menu structure to provide flexibility for users to choose the indicators best suited for their programming needs. Page 6 provides an overview of the ACT components, the constructs within them and the aggregated indicators/measures for each construct.

## Validation and next steps

Validation field research has concluded in Ethiopia and Guinea. After that, additional expert consultation meetings will be held within both countries and at a global level, following which the ACT Framework will be finalized and published. UNICEF and UNFPA are also establishing a Global Committee for Social Norms, a technical advisory committee comprised of experts on social norms and FGM that will advise on operationalisation of the framework and other social norms programming tools within the Joint Programme. The ACT Framework will be available for use by UNICEF, UNFPA, partners and other development agencies in 2020. Many of the tools and concepts in the ACT Framework can be adapted and used for social norms related to other harmful practices such as child marriage or violence against children. UNICEF, UNFPA and Drexel plan to explore opportunities to adapt the framework to these issues.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE ACT FRAMEWORK, PLEASE CONTACT:

Charlotte Lapsansky at clapsansky@unicef.org,
Mar Jubero at mjubero@unicef.org,
Suruchi Sood at ss3724@drexel.edu or
Berhanu Legesse at legesse@unfpa.org.

# MEASURES OF FGM SOCIAL NORMS CHANGE IN THE ACT FRAMEWORK

The ACT Framework provides a consolidated set of measures with corresponding tools for the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of social norms change relating to FGM. The structure of these indicators allows programme implementers the flexibility to use those that are best suited to their context and M&E needs. A validation process will further refine this menu. The table below lists the aggregated ACT measures/indicators for each construct within the ACT components.

| AGGREGATED ACT MEASURES/INDICATORS | | |
|---|---|---|
| **COMPONENT OF THE ACT FRAMEWORK** | **SOCIAL NORMS CONSTRUCT/CONCEPT** | **AGGREGATED MEASURE/INDICATOR** |
| **Assess what people know, feel and do** | Know | Change over time in knowledge of FGM |
| | Feel | Change over time in beliefs about FGM |
| | | Change over time in intentions not to practice FGM |
| | Do | Proportion of girls and women who have undergone FGM |
| | | Proportion of households moving along the continuum of change |
| **Ascertain normative factors** | Descriptive norms | Change over time in perceived prevalence of FGM |
| | Injunctive norms | Change over time in the approval of FGM by self and others |
| | Outcome expectancies | Change over time in individuals' identification of benefits and sanctions related to FGM |
| | | Change over time in intention to give rewards and impose sanctions related to FGM |
| **Consider context** | Empowerment | Change over time in agency |
| | | Change over time in decision-making power |
| | Gender | Change over time in gender role beliefs |
| | | Change over time in egalitarian beliefs about men and women |
| **Collect information on social support and networks** | Social Networks | Change over time in interpersonal communication about FGM |
| | | Change over time in spousal communication about FGM |
| | Social support | Change over time in informational social support for FGM abandonment |
| | | Change over time in instrumental social support for FGM abandonment |
| **Track individual and social change over time** | Individual and social change | Proportion of the intended audience participating in individual and social change communication programming on FGM abandonment |
| | | Proportion of the intended audience exhibiting encoded exposure to individual and social change communication programming on FGM abandonment |

# THE ACT FRAMEWORK:

## TOWARDS A NEW M&E MODEL FOR MEASURING SOCIAL NORMS CHANGE AROUND FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION

UNFPA

DREXEL UNIVERSITY
Dornsife
School of Public Health

unicef
for every child