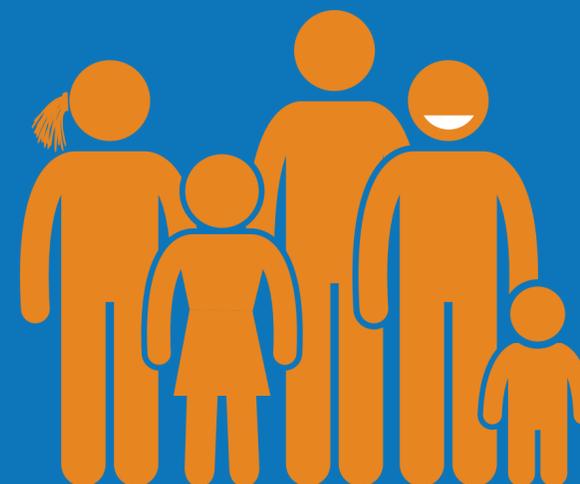




# Why Social Norms Matter to Anti-Corruption: Short Guide Series for Practitioners

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## WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS SHORT GUIDE?

This guide explains why integrating social norms into accountability, corruption or integrity related programming matters and highlights possible negative consequences of the failure to do so. It follows upon our [first short guide](#), which boils down the complexity of social norms into the need-to-know components relevant to programming.



## HOW DO SOCIAL NORMS INFLUENCE CORRUPT ACTIONS?

Corrupt behavior is influenced by social norms because norms play a pivotal role in individuals' choices about how to behave. Be it offering a bribe, demanding a sexual favor, or showing a preference for an unqualified friend – all are corrupt behaviors that could be motivated by social pressure.

While social norms are not the only determinant of people's behavior, they are especially powerful because they are grounded in people's desire to belong. They are maintained and enforced by social rewards or punishment from people whose approval or disapproval matters to the individual.

## DO SOCIAL NORMS HAVE MORE INFLUENCE IN FRAGILE AND CONFLICT AFFECTED STATES?

Absolutely, social norms can wield more power in insecure contexts.

There are three main reasons for the increased influence.

**Social norms have increased influence in fragile and conflict affected states because...**



**The punishment for not following a social norm is harsher.** Conflict enhances intra-group cohesion and solidifies an “us versus them” mentality that breeds distrust, fear, and, at the extreme, dehumanization of the “other.” Not only are people likely to be more “loyal” to their group, but the social punishment for being “disloyal” is likely to be more severe.

## Social norms have increased influence in fragile and conflict affected states because...



**The consequences of punishment for breaching a norm are more serious.** Ostracization, isolation, harm to reputation, diminished support— these are all common negative sanctions for breaching social norms.

They have far more serious consequences in fragile and conflict affected contexts than in stable ones because in these contexts, membership in a group can be critical for survival.

**Social norms have increased influence in fragile and conflict affected states because...**



**Social norms provide some order and predictability.** The social norms and traditional practices enforced within groups provide a sense of security for members and the rules and processes offer a level of predictability. Given the uncertainty of a conflict setting, group members can come to rely on this for a semblance of order.



## CAN IGNORING SOCIAL NORMS IMPACT THE RESULTS OF YOUR ANTI-CORRUPTION PROGRAM?

Social norms can be so strong in some environments that they are able to act as a brake on positive behavior change. When social norms are a driver behind a corrupt behavior, then ignoring them can significantly **diminish** the likelihood of achieving **sustainable results**. It further **undermines the positive momentum generated by good work** targeted at other factors driving or enabling corruption.



## COULD AN ANTI-CORRUPTION PROGRAM THAT IGNORED SOCIAL NORMS MAKE CORRUPTION WORSE?

Ignoring social norms can backfire i.e., **make corruption worse**. For example – standalone awareness raising campaigns that highlight how bad corruption is, are designed to mobilize public outrage and action against corruption. But calling attention to the behavior can actually exacerbate it by creating the impression that the behavior is ubiquitous. This can lead people to increase corrupt acts by confirming perceptions about corruption's entrenchment and immutability.



## WHAT IS THE WORST THAT CAN HAPPEN IF YOU DO NOT INCLUDE SOCIAL NORMS INTO YOUR ANTI-CORRUPTION PROGRAM?

Ignoring social norms in conflict contexts can **endanger lives and livelihoods**. For officials in positions of authority (i.e. civil servant), there is sufficient social pressure that securing jobs for family or one's identity group can feel mandatory. While it might seem routine to prohibit patronage positions for unqualified applicants as part of an anti-corruption drive, care should be taken lest it opens some officials up to negative professional consequences, social isolation, even violent reprisals.



## **WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO INCLUDE SOCIAL NORMS INTO ANTI-CORRUPTION PROGRAMMING?**

First, it means doing an initial assessment to identify when a corrupt pattern of behavior is driven by a social norm, versus a functional need versus greed. When these concepts get mixed up, program designs will target the wrong thing. Second, it means integrating a social norms change strategy that directly targets the different components that make up social norms. Finally, this work should be integrated into a multi-faceted program because norms alone will rarely be sufficient to catalyze enduring change.

For more knowledge about social norms and their role in corruption refer to:

Short Guide Series for Practitioners

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# Social Norms and Corruption

*An Overview*



CJL's first short guide for practitioners: Social Norms and Corruption (An overview)



CJL's comprehensive reference guide for understanding Social Norms



## WHAT IS THE CORRUPTION JUSTICE AND LEGITIMACY PROGRAM?

The Corruption, Justice, and Legitimacy (CJL) Program is a research-to-practice initiative committed to improving the effectiveness of anti-corruption programming in contexts of endemic corruption.

The program has developed a systems-based approach to corruption analysis that empowers practitioners to see the interconnected nature of drivers and enablers of corruption. After testing the approach in several fragile states, CJL realized that more effective responses would also require more insight into the conflict, peacebuilding, and corruption nexus along with greater practical guidance on how to integrate social norms into programming.



*For more from the CJL Program follow at:*



**THE CORRUPTION IN FRAGILE  
STATES BLOG**



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