




Social Norms Change at Scale: CUSP's Collective Insights

The Community for Understanding Scale Up (CUSP) is a group of nine organizations with robust experience in developing social norms change methodologies that are now being scaled across many regions and contexts: the Center for Domestic Violence Prevention (CEDOVIP), Intervention with Microfinance for AIDS and Gender Equity (IMAGE), the Institute for Reproductive Health at Georgetown University, the Oxfam-initiated “We Can” campaign, Puntos de Encuentro, Raising Voices, Salamander Trust, Sonke Gender Justice, and Tostan. CUSP members currently work in Latin America, Africa, the Pacific, Caribbean, and South Asia.

CUSP originated in 2016, when Raising Voices and Salamander Trust began informal conversations about challenges and opportunities in their methodologies (*SASA!* and *Stepping Stones*, respectively) being taken to scale. Critical issues emerged such as: How can fidelity to the core structures and principles of our models be maintained when our initiatives are taken to scale? How can programming at scale be led by, and accountable to, communities? What types of organizations or institutions are well suited to manage scale-up? What adaptations and changes are needed at scale, and how does this affect fidelity? With these and other questions in mind, we organized CUSP as a community of practice to draw on a broader collection of experiences on social norms change interventions to prevent violence against women and girls (VAWG) and improve sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR).

CUSP represents a unique perspective on evidence-based methodologies from organizations that have worked both autonomously and with a variety of partners to implement, adapt, and/or scale their interventions. With donor demand growing for social norms change programming at scale, CUSP offers insight into what it takes to adapt and scale methodologies effectively and ethically; the challenges and opportunities in bringing the innovations to scale; and the political implications of the donor landscape with the growing emphasis on such methodologies.

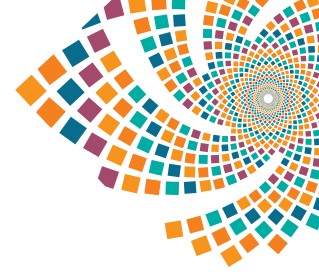
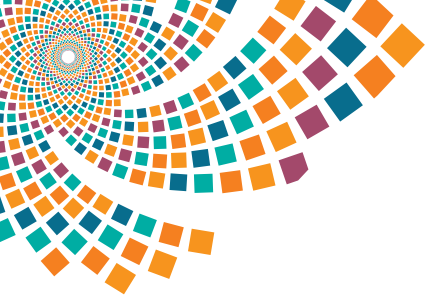
In our [first collective publication](#), CUSP identified core collective principles for social norms change programming (see box to the right). We received



Core collective principles for social norms change programming:¹

- Do no harm
- Work across the ecological model and change matrix
- Use an intersectional, gender-power analysis
- Ensure sustained commitment
- Promote personal and collective critical reflection through aspirational programming
- Support and invest in staff and community activists/facilitators
- Support theory- and evidence-informed innovations

¹ Community for Understanding Scale Up (CUSP). (2017). [On the cusp of change: Effective scaling of social norms programming for gender equality](#).



requests following that publication to share detailed, real-life examples—both positive and negative—of how our methodologies have gone to scale. Over 2018, through a process of reflection and analysis, we worked together to consider and expand our collective understanding of the importance of holding to these core principles as our methodologies go to scale. As a result of this process, several CUSP members share case studies here on their methodologies at scale—[GREAT](#), [IMAGE](#), [SASA!](#), [Stepping Stones](#), and [Tostan](#)—with the intention of supporting programmers’ and funders’ efforts in scaling existing, and creating new, social norms change programs.

What is Scale?

The World Health Organization/ExpandNet Consortium defines scale as “deliberate efforts to increase the impact of...innovations successfully tested in pilot or experimental projects so as to benefit more people and to foster policy and programme development on a lasting basis.”² Scale can include increasing the coverage of health interventions or increasing financial, human or capital resources.

ExpandNet classifies four types of scale: **horizontal** scaling up (expansion or replication); **vertical** scaling up (policy/political/legal/institutional scaling); **functional** scaling up (adding interventions to an existing package); and **spontaneous** diffusion (when the innovation addresses a need within the programme or when a key event draws attention to a need).



Introduction to the Case Study Collection

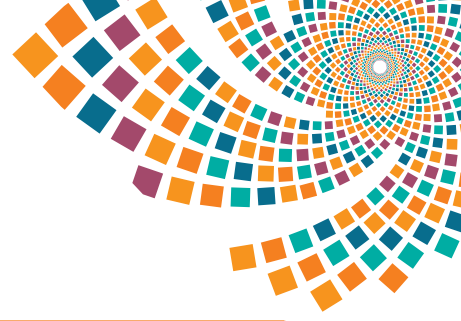
This case study collection is designed for funders, practitioners, and activists. It seeks to identify key elements for success, highlight challenges, and provide recommendations for adapting and scaling the methodologies of CUSP members and, more broadly, social norms change interventions.

The case studies draw on over 120 years of combined experience and practice-based learning among five CUSP programs.

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| GREAT | is a set of participatory activities designed to support girls’ and boys’ growth into healthy adults and promote nonviolence and SRHR in northern Uganda. An evaluation revealed improvements in attitudes and behaviors around gender equity, partner communication, family planning use, and gender-based violence (GBV). ³ |
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² ExpandNet, WHO. “Practical guidance for scaling up health service innovations.” Geneva: World Health Organization (2009).

³ Institute for Reproductive Health, Pathfinder International, & Save the Children. (2015). *GREAT project results*. Retrieved from <http://irh.org/resource-library/brief-great-project-results/>



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| IMAGE | is a combined microfinance, HIV, and GBV training and community organizing intervention in South Africa. Results from its randomized control trial (RCT) revealed lower rates of intimate partner violence (IPV) among clients. ⁴ |
| SASA! | is a holistic community mobilization approach for preventing VAW and HIV. An RCT demonstrated SASA!'s community-level impact on preventing violence against women from male partners, reducing the social acceptability of violence against women and sexual concurrency among men. ⁵ |
| STEPPING STONES | is a holistic, gendered, intergenerational, rights-based program to address VAW, SRHR, and related complex attitudes and practices towards people with HIV. In a cluster RCT, <i>Stepping Stones</i> significantly improved reported risk behaviors in men, with fewer men reporting IPV perpetration, transactional sex, and problem drinking. ⁶ |
| TOSTAN | is a three-year non-formal education program that empowers African communities to create positive social transformation based on respect for human rights. Findings from the intervention demonstrated improved knowledge, attitudes, and behavior among men and women around environmental hygiene, respect for human rights, and health. ⁷ |

While each of the programs is unique and designed for a different audience, all embody the principles described above to achieve ethical and effective social norms change.

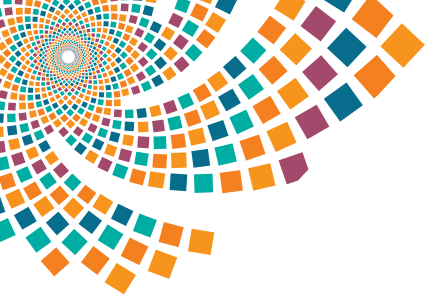


Shared Practices: CUSP Methodologies Going to Scale

This section identifies and analyzes commonalities across CUSP's collection of case studies to enrich the global dialogue and knowledge base on what it takes to take social norms change approaches rooted in social justice practices and principles to scale. Here we offer six interconnected insights.

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- ⁴ Pronyk, P. M., Hargreaves, J. R., Kim, J. C., Morison, L. A., Phetla, G., Watts, C., ... & Porter, J. D. (2006). Effect of a structural intervention for the prevention of intimate-partner violence and HIV in rural South Africa: A cluster randomised trial. *The Lancet*, 368(9551), 1973-1983.
 - ⁵ Abramsky, T., Devries, K., Kiss, L., Nakuti, J., Kyegombe, N., Starmann, E., ... Michau, L. & Watts, C. (2014). Findings from the SASA! Study: A cluster randomized controlled trial to assess the impact of a community mobilization intervention to prevent violence against women and reduce HIV risk in Kampala, Uganda. *BMC Medicine*, 12(1), 122.
 - ⁶ Jewkes, R., Nduna, M., Levin, J., Jama, N., Dunkle, K., Puren, A., & Duvvury, N. (2008). Impact of Stepping Stones on incidence of HIV and HSV-2 and sexual behaviour in rural South Africa: Cluster randomised controlled trial. *BMJ*, 337, a506.
 - ⁷ Diop, N. J. (2004). *The TOSTAN program: Evaluation of a community based education program in Senegal*. New York, NY: Population Council.





Prioritize accountability to communities

Social norms transformation can be difficult and sometimes dangerous. Ensuring fidelity to a methodology's core elements is necessary, yet implementers also need to be mindful of contextual differences and possible repercussions that arise during programming. *Tostan's work on female genital cutting illustrates this principle. Early on, Tostan used a press conference to encourage diffusion of one community's decision to end female genital cutting to other communities. However, a prominent village imam explained that all intra-marrying communities would need to be visited and engaged more fully, especially with support from religious leaders. Tostan changed its course in response, to much success.*

Accountability requires community insights and substantive community involvement in planning, implementing, and monitoring social norms change programming. Typically, there is some reference to community involvement in planning documents; however, in practice, CUSP members often see that programs overlook meaningful community input and are instead driven by external factors such as organizational outputs and targets or funder demands.

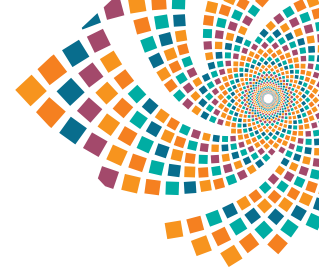
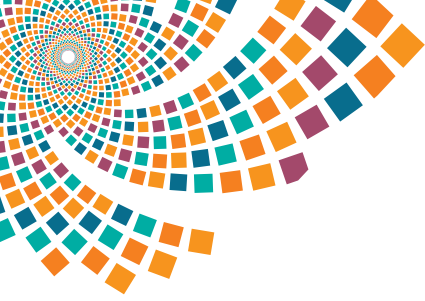
Accountability to communities also requires that organizations understand power differences within communities and that our inputs do not reinforce traditional gendered or intergenerational hierarchies of disempowerment. Staff and facilitators should have adequate time to internalize the issues faced by different community members and understand how the methodology is designed to address them while not alienating those with existing power. The process of in-depth training and ongoing mentoring and supervision is designed to ensure that they can first address, and try to resolve, such complex traditional power issues in their own lives before being expected to support others' transformational journey. *In one project in Africa, for example, resource pressure (and limited understanding) led to inadequate facilitation training for Stepping Stones implementers. Among other negative activities and outcomes, young women reported reduced violence against them because facilitators had taught them how to be more submissive to partners, contradicting the original methodology, which promotes violence reduction through the transformation of gender norms and encourages mutually respectful relationships.*

CUSP's collective experience tells us that it is essential to listen to communities—responding to both the silences and the loud voices of different groups within communities—and to remember the social justice refrain, “Nothing about us without us.” Social norms change is complex work that can increase risk, most of all for a community's women and girls. Determining in which communities to scale—and ensuring their meaningful input throughout—can avoid harm, enhance safety, and promote more impactful programming.

Fully understand the principles of, and align with, the values of the methodology

Changing social norms involves a deep commitment to communities and the issues being addressed. It is political and provocative work that requires organizations to work in solidarity with communities in a collaborative and sustained way. Many of CUSP's experiences with unsuccessful scale include a lack of explicit, internalized, gendered principles for the donor and/or implementing organizations. Organizations funded to take programs to scale are often selected primarily based on their managerial capacity and infrastructure, while others are for-profit entities. These groups often work within a top-down project-delivery mindset rather than a community organizing perspective. This sometimes results in a values disconnect between





the principles guiding a social change methodology and the priorities of the implementing organization.

Organizations working to change social norms need to model the equality and human rights embodied in social justice programming. Practically, this means that organizational leadership is willing to address internal power dynamics and models respect and solidarity. *For example, Raising Voices and CEDOVIP have found that because SASA! is a program that unpacks and questions power imbalances, the organizations in which leadership is willing to reflect on and discuss power inequalities (including within their own leadership) are more likely to facilitate and sustain meaningful, deep conversations about power, justice, and rights in communities.*

Additionally, CUSP's collective experience demonstrates that often, the organizations best placed to lead social norms change efforts are local women's organizations with strong social justice principles, a willingness to reflect critically on organizational culture, and interest in tackling the issues in a community-wide, politicized manner. Yet funding for scale most often flows to large international organizations better known for their management capacity than their feminist perspective.

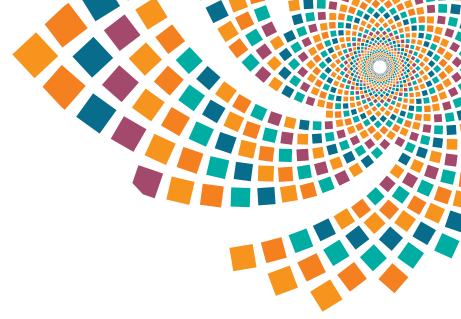
To realize transformative, enduring change, organizations can apply the values of social norms methodologies internally, as well as identify local partners who champion social justice principles to lead implementation.

Ensure adequate time and funding for programming

One of the most common barriers to fidelity is limited or short-term funding—each CUSP member has experienced this challenge. With donors often funding short-term, measurement-driven projects rather than longer-term initiatives, the crux of social norms methodologies and appreciation for the complex, yet effective, programming can be lost. *In one particularly challenging scenario, a donor withdrew funding just as IMAGE implementation was ready to begin because it felt the effort was taking too long to “get off the ground.” However, IMAGE and its partner were conducting critical preparatory work to ensure success and sustainability.*

Funding conditions and donor influence over programming has the potential to either facilitate or limit ethical social norms change work. If donors focus on numbers and the desire to make a maximum impact with minimum investment in the shortest time frame, the fundamental “do no harm” principle of ethical programming is more likely to be compromised during scale-up.

Undoing deeply held beliefs and behaviors that have been around for generations is not easy work. For a long time, it was assumed that social norms change would take decades, yet evidence-based approaches developed by CUSP members demonstrate that change can happen within programming cycles if done well, done with intensity, and led by communities. However, funders that purport to rely on evidence now often demand change within even shorter time frames, greater geographic coverage, and fewer activities. *In one case, SASA!'s holistic three-year program was reduced to a three-day training with community activists, with the activists required to have 10 contact hours with community members—even though raising sensitive issues in the community and expecting (and claiming) change after 10 contact hours goes against all the evidence on quality VAWG prevention programming.*



Prevention of VAWG and promotion of SRHR is possible, but programmers and donors must be realistic about the time and resources necessary to effect change. Investing in quality programming at scale can reap rewards, ensuring the changes are deeper and have more potential for being sustained.

Maintain fidelity to the elements of the original methodology

Social norms change programming is not merely a collection of activities but rather systematic and theoretically grounded work with key structured aspects that, together, make an approach effective. Neglecting any of these elements can compromise program success while also potentially harming the community. In CUSP members' experiences, effective use of our programs has strongly depended on implementing organizations' ability to adapt to context while maintaining fidelity to the methodology's core structure. Every CUSP member has experiences with donors and programmers "over-adapting" their methodologies, including picking and choosing from multiple programs to create something unrecognizable to the original designs.

In fact, Tostan decided not to share its curriculum publicly because of the results of truncated adaptation and scaling. It became clear that the curriculum alone would be insufficient to ensure replication since what drives the program's success is as much methodology and pedagogy as it is content. Other CUSP members have made their methodology available to the public, but misuse of the materials results in ineffective programming and can compromise the integrity of the program's reputation for positive, sustainable change.

Of course, CUSP welcomes the appreciation for and use of their methodologies, but partners who embark on adaptation, implementation, and scaling should be ready and willing to uphold the core principles and structures needed for successful social norms change.

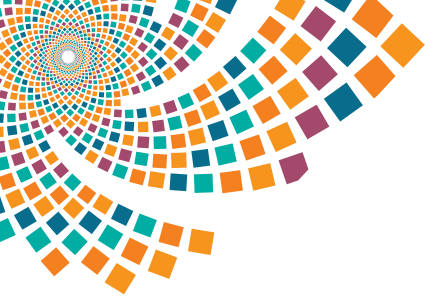
Involve originators

Organizations that create methodologies have much experience-based learning behind their work. They play an essential role in ensuring quality adaptations of their program, and ideally, these originators are consulted throughout the adaptation and implementation processes. By undervaluing or excluding originators' experience-based learning, donors and implementing partners may fall victim to the same mistakes these originators have already worked to address.

Yet typically, CUSP members are not involved in strategy or program design when their approaches are being taken to scale. *In a challenging case shared by Stepping Stones, the donor and grant holders were either not in touch with the originators or misunderstood basic program principles. When this happens, contact often has been too late to influence strategic decisions or correct ineffective materials or processes.* Lack of, or limited opportunity for, involvement places the originators in a no-win situation, where some CUSP members have been asked to come in emergency mode to "fix" programming without any of the power to make the decisions (around, for example, timing, funding, partner selection, or training) that would minimize risk of harm and optimize opportunities for effective and ethical programming.

In addition, implementers of successfully adapted and scaled-up programs have also developed deep, sustained working relationships with community members and an in-depth understanding of the issues and context. When donors, implementers, researchers, and other stakeholders all work with program originators and with communities, there is more likely to be a win-win.





Re-examine the role of government and international organizations in effective and ethical scaling

CUSP members' experiences have varied on engaging government, international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), and international development corporations (IDCs) in scaling efforts. Programs designed by CUSP members have repeatedly identified internalization of values as a critical component of both implementation and scale. To transform the status quo and redistribute power in a more equitable way, we must ask whether IDCs, INGOs,⁸ and governments are best placed to foment social change, and whether they can reasonably and genuinely reflect on internal hierarchies when their missions demand they ensure profit, maintain the status quo, and/or sustain growth. *For example, while local government structures successfully coordinated GREAT expansion and national officials endorsed scale-up in Uganda, meaningful national-level support failed to materialize and local organizations were prevented from implementing the program due to broader national or donor priorities.*

It is important to be mindful of which individuals and organizations benefit from the status quo and have principles that may inherently be at odds with social norms transformation—including government, international nonprofit organizations, and IDCs. While government can and has played an essential role in most approaches developed by CUSP members, as a field, we can question the assumption that government, the marketplace, and/or large-scale organizations are always the best primary mechanisms for scaling social norms change programming.



Moving Forward Together

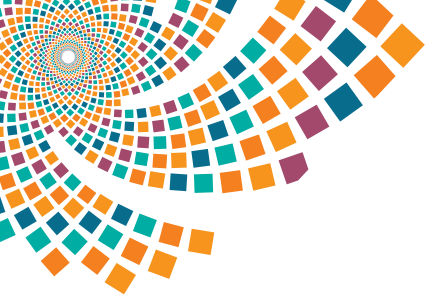
CUSP's experiences provide a unique perspective in scaling social norms change initiatives. Our gendered, feminist, rights-based approaches and practice-based learning can create lasting impact if, as a field, we are willing to reconsider the current “business-as-usual” approach to scale. Rather than wasted financial and human resources or harmful repercussions within communities, thoughtful and strategic scale of social norms change methodologies has the potential to create more equitable, healthy, and peaceful communities. With the desire to scale must also come the commitment to use these initiatives for what they were designed—to examine social inequalities and transform deeply ingrained hierarchies.

In summary, CUSP's collective practice-based experiences and insights for scaling social norms change are:

1. Prioritize accountability to communities
2. Fully understand the principles of, and align with, the values of the methodology
3. Ensure adequate time and funding for programming
4. Maintain fidelity to the elements of the original methodology
5. Involve originators
6. Re-examine the role of government and international organizations in effective and ethical scaling

⁸ Porter, F., Ralph-Bowman, M., & Wallace, T. (Eds.). (2013). *Aid, NGOs and the realities of women's lives: A perfect storm*. Practical Action Publishing.





With humility, we conclude that we must recognize that as a field, we still lack the know-how to take social norms change programming to scale. This will require ongoing principled collaboration, innovation, experimentation, long-term thinking, and evaluation. Assumptions that evidence-based programs can be “cut-and-pasted” and implemented at scale—or that certain components can be selectively chosen while overlooking others—does not serve communities or the field.

CUSP encourages and values innovation; this is essential for reaching our collective goals of ending violence against women and ensuring SRHR. When using existing methodologies as a starting point for innovation, it is critical—financially and ethically—to ground them in the current and growing evidence base and practice-based insights, such as those presented here, in order to ensure meaningful and safe programming.

Finally, we encourage and look forward to robust debate and increased collaboration on the scaling of existing methodologies. With collective commitment to quality implementation and rigorous testing, our efforts and investments can ultimately serve communities—and enhance the rights of the women and girls who live in them.

CUSP is interested in learning about the experiences of others in scaling social norms change approaches. Please contact us at info@raisingvoices.org.



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