

Co-designing type 2 diabetes social and gender norms change messages: How does the future state look like? A technical brief based on cross-cultural learning of four cultures of Uganda.



Translating indigenous knowledge into scientific evidence

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Background:

In 2020, Fidelitas partnered with Makerere University School of Public Health to conduct a social norms exploration diagnosis on social norms, beliefs and attitudes that influence Type 2 Diabetes and later a co-design workshop was conducted through a participatory approach to design an innovation on social norms change and transformation around the negative social norms and beliefs. Based on the findings from the exploration and codesign work, there was need to understand whether the norms, beliefs and attitudes in cultural regions of Busoga and Samia cut across the other cultural regions (Lango and Teso) and whether the innovation can be adopted or adapted by other regions of Uganda.

With the above background, conducted a cross cultural learning and reflection workshop involving reference groups and behaviour influencers from the four cultures. The learning event was aimed at identifying cross-cultural social norms that influence type 2 diabetes risky behaviors, culturally specific social norms that influence type 2 diabetes risky behaviors and to find out influencers, duty bearers and reference group members' views and insights on adaptability of norms change innovation in Teso and Lango cultural grouping.

The process of cross-cultural learning and adaptation on norms that influence type two diabetes risky behaviours involved understanding how the risky factors affect each culture and the ultimate goal was to develop social norms change messages i.e. desired future state. The evidence informed learning process involved raising awareness of cultural norms specifically among the adapting teams from Lango and Teso, identification of social cultural practices in the two cultures, an education and communication-oriented sessions where cultures shared with each other their practices, beliefs norms and traditions as well as cross-cultural collaboration in developing future state messages – designed to be implemented across the four regions.

From the learning event, it emerged that the social norms around type 2 diabetes risky behaviours are cross-cultural and thus the change innovation package can be adapted and tested across the four cultures (Samia, Busoga, Teso, and Lango). This nature of the social, cultural and gender norms around type 2 diabetes risky factors suggests that the social norms innovation can be implemented across the four cultures. This may not be limited to type 2 diabetes and NCD risky factors, but also to the design of other social and development programs needs to have this in mind.

In addition, the idea behind cross cultural learning was to generate ideas that address the key driving factors of type 2 diabetes i.e. dietary factors, smoking habits, sedentary/non-physical exercise lifestyle and excess alcohol consumption. We conducted a technical process in which we developed converted the harmful norms into positive future state or actions to change the norms. Based on field practice, the teams were guided to select an appropriate action to the social norm i.e. fortify, shift/change or reframe/create a new social and gender norm. Fortifying the norm means that the community has decided to strengthen the norm or make it more common. Shifting/changing the norm means that the community can change the norm. The action of reframing/creating new norms means that the community change agents have chosen to talk about the norm in a different way so that it can be useful to improve wellbeing. The teams developed a future state matrix for the identified social and gender norms as per the table below.

Table A. Social and gender norms change and transformation matrix (Future/desired state)

Social and/or gender norm	Action	Desired future state
Serving tea without putting enough sugar is a mistreatment to your husband, so women are expected to serve tea with much sugar.	Change	Serving tea with moderate sugar is caring for your husband and his health, so women are expected to serve tea with less sugar
Young married women expect their husbands to bring cooking oil alongside sauce to use in preparing food because they grow up seeing their mothers do the same. So they too fry food daily.	Change	Young married women expect their husbands to bring vegetables as part of sauce to use in preparing food. So they too fry food sometimes but prepare vegetables almost daily.
Cooking greens and vegetables for a man is a sign of mistreatment and less care to your husband, so we cook fried foods for our husbands daily lest they leave us for other women. Cooking greens and vegetables for a man is a sign of mistreatment and less care to your husband, so we cook fried foods for our husbands daily or else, a man will leave you for other woman cooks for him with meat and fatty, fried food	Reframe	A woman who loves her husband prepares meals that include greens and vegetables as another way of improving a family health
Samia men expect their wives to serve them food that is fried, they believe that they are undermined if their wives serve them unfried food. Women cook and serve fried foods so that they are not seen as undermining their husbands.	Reframe	Preparing unfried food for the sake of a husband's health is a sign of love and respect. So, women love to improve their husband's health
In the Samia culture, men are not expected to struggle when they marry. Their wives are expected to serve their husbands food as they lie and rest under tree shades at home, thus many men don't exercise	Reframe	In Samia culture, a husband has to fend for his family and must not be lazy. Many men work hard and exercise their bodies in the process.
Families that do not fry their food and sauce are seen as poor, so most women fry their food to avoid being talked about.	Change	Families that do not fry foods daily are healthy families
Fat people are respected in society, so people eat fatty foods to gain weight and be respected in the society.	Change	Respect for any person is based on good behaviors and character not their body size
Community perceives fat people to be wealthy, eating well (chicken, pork, fish, meat) and not the pasted greens). So, people prefer lifestyle that increases weight.		Wealth is not seen by how fat or heavy in weight a person is but by how hardworking, respectable and contented a man is.

Social and/or gender norm	Action	Desired future state
In Teso, ajon is consumed frequently as part of culture. It is a must for ajon to be served on every event	Change	In Teso culture, drinking non-alcoholic drinks makes any family function or party enjoyable since no one will become drunk.
Most men in our community drink alcohol, so everybody drinks	Change	In our community, very few men drink alcohol so we are a community of respectable men
Culturally, a man is the head of the family, so he does as he pleases	Reframe	Culturally, a man is the head of the family and makes decisions together with the wife he leads
On big and special days, every home is expected to drink soda. "You cannot host people and you don't buy soda because they will think you are poor or they were not welcome"	Change	When you host visitors, it is respectable and good to serve food that is healthy to your visitor. Not drinks like soda that can affect their health
When you serve tea, even after putting in enough sugar, you are expected to place a tin of sugar on the table for the man to add himself, if you don't, the man can abuse you if it doesn't taste sweet. Women put the tin on the table.	Reframe	Women know how much sugar that is ideal for consumption. So men trust them to prepare and serve healthy tea
Waragi reduces the pain of diabetes because it is sour. So diabetic patients drink waragi to reduce pain and amount of sugar in their body.	Change	Waragi increases the risk of becoming type 2 diabetic. So men and women are not expected to drink it.
When you take alcohol with your friends, they can't abandon you in times of need, but if you don't drink, no one will help you in case you need neighbors help	Change	True friends respect your lifestyle choices and help you unconditionally
Men in Lango believe that if a man does not drink alcohol, then he is not a real man and not fit to be among men. So many men drink alcohol to fit in.	Reframe	A real man is not measured by whether or not he/she takes alcohol, but by how sober, peaceful and respectable he is.
When a breastfeeding mother does not have enough breast milk, they are expected to drink Ajon (Malwa) to be able to have enough breast milk for their baby	Reframe	Breastfeeding mothers are never expected to drink alcohol to increase breast milk. Alcohol reduces affects the child and the mother
Waragi reduces the pain of diabetes because it is sour. So diabetic patients drink waragi to reduce pain and amount of sugar in their body.	Change	Waragi (local brew) doesn't reduce pain among type 2 diabetic patients but makes their health worse
In Busoga, most old parents lived long and yet they were smokers, so we smoke because we saw them and they didn't die early.	Change	People who smoke have a high chance of becoming type 2 diabetic and live shorter than they would.

Social and/or gender norm	Action	Desired future state
In Samia culture, a husband has to fend for his family and must not be lazy. Many men work hard and exercise their bodies in the process.	Fortify	In Samia culture, a husband has to fend for his family and must not be lazy. Many men work hard and exercise their bodies in the process.
In Langi, a respected person is one who has good character and behavior and is respect is not given based on one's body size	Fortify	In Langi, a respected person is one who has good character and behavior and is respect is not given based on one's body size
In Langi, men as head of family have more responsibilities than women. They don't have time to lie lazy and wait to be served everything	Fortify	In Langi, men as head of family have more responsibilities than women. They don't have time to lie lazy and wait to be served everything
Fat people who don't do anything that generates an income for their family or helps in the community are not given respect. They are nicknamed "Gwala" meaning fat for no good use. So, people watch their weight and try to work hard.	Fortify	Fat people who don't do anything that generates an income for their family or helps in the community are not given respect. They are nicknamed "Gwala" meaning fat for no good use. So, people watch their weight and try to work hard.
In Samia culture, a husband has to fend for his family and must not be lazy. Many men work hard and exercise their bodies in the process	Fortify	In Samia culture, a husband has to fend for his family and must not be lazy. Many men work hard and exercise their bodies in the process
In Langi culture, eating greens and vegetables is another way of improving our health because green vegetables have more food value for a healthy body. Thus, most Langi eat greens and vegetables often.	Fortify	In lango culture, eating greens is another way of improving our health because green vegetables have more food value for a healthy body.
Saved (Born again Christians) don't allow drinking waragi because drinking makes one un able to pay school fees for their children.	Fortify	Saved (Born again Christians) don't allow drinking waragi because drinking makes one un able to pay school fees for their children.
Religion does not allow us to drink alcohol so as expected, we don't drink alcohol.	Fortify	Religion does not allow us to drink alcohol so as expected, we don't drink alcohol.

Key learning aspects

- The results from the conversations about the future state show that some positive norms need to be **fortified**, some need to be **reframed** while others need to be **changed**. Therefore, if the time for pilot testing the innovation comes, we will use these future state gender and social norms, and transform them into behaviour change messages that will be spread using the adapted EAST framework for scale and spread.

- Social and gender norms are not all negative, thus there is need to take advantage and harness the positive social and gender norms – while working with reference groups and key influencers to change or transform the harmful/negative social norms.
- It should be noted that the social and gender norms that were identified also affect other issues for example gender-based violence, intimate partner violence, reproductive health and drug abuse. Thus, in addressing the social and gender norms around type 2 diabetes risky factors, we will indirectly and in some cases directly be contributing to non-type 2 diabetes related outcomes.
- By way of cross-cultural learning, we note that the current state in one culture may be the future state of another culture. For example, *“In Langi culture, eating greens and vegetables is another way of improving our health because green vegetables have more food value for a healthy body. Thus, most Langi eat greens and vegetables often.”* This is a future state for Busoga and Samia cultures where *“Cooking greens and vegetables for a man is a sign of mistreatment and less care to your husband, so we cook fried foods for our husbands daily or else, a man will leave you for other woman cooks for him with meat and fatty, fried food”*
- In the process of developing future/desired state of the gender and social norms, we noted significant descriptive norms manipulation. Across all the four cultures, participants seemed to “over-react” to complex normative information and “under-react” to simplified normative information – hence they demonstrated ability to update their own prior beliefs.
- We also noted that over-reaction and attachment to the social norm decreases with increase in cross-cultural diffusion. When we mixed up the groups to share experiences, the Busoga team also agreed that eating more of greens/vegetables and less of fried foods is not a sign of punishment to a man, and that this should not be a basis of a man leaving his wife for another woman who doesn’t care about their health. This shows that people update their injunctive beliefs after being exposed to positive descriptive normative information – hence there is a strong association between injunctive and descriptive norms congruent with findings by Eriksson et al., 2015.

Conclusion

While the cultures are diverse, there is convergence on most social and gender norms, and to Fidelitas, this suggests that the norms around type 2 diabetes risky behaviours are cross-cultural and thus the social norms change “innovation” can be tested across the four cultures to learn more about its cross-cultural effectiveness. Fidelitas together with Makerere University will pilot test the innovation in Busoga, Lango, Samia and Teso cultures – and plan cross country adaptation.

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