Chicken or Egg? Prioritizing Direct Interventions vs. Changing Social Norms

Date: June 28, 2017
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MODERATOR

Erin Markel, Principal Consultant*, MarketShare Associates*

SPEAKERS

Prerna Kumar, *ICRW*
Fatimah Kelleher, *Independent Consultant*
Namaya Lewanika, *Private Enterprise Program Zambia (PEPZ)*

Questions

Working in Market System Development and having to work with partners (not direct delivery), how can we make sure these partners work towards changing social norms?

> Prerna: It is critical that all the partners have a shared vision based on evidence. Unfortunately, often rights based advocacy does not yield results with partners working in market system development. Thus, the need to leverage existing evidence on the impact of female economic exclusion to advocate for changing social norms.

Such ecological approach is easier with programs on skills training, but difficult with enterprises that want to achieve productivity and not really interested in changing social norms

> Prerna: Most enterprises are willing to invest in increasing their productivity, improving quality of work and improving retention of workforce. ICRW's work with GAP Inc.[1] for over a decade has showcased that integrating life skills training for garment workers helps them become more effective at work and improve their personal lives. This also lead to increased productivity, greater retention and higher rate of advancement at workplace. Women also reported improved gender relations. There is a need to embed gender integrated skills training for human resources at all levels within the enterprises that focus on productivity. Also, it is crucial to identify critical stakeholders within the ecosystem. An additional component towards changing social norms within this

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[1] https://www.icrw.org/publications/advancing-women-changing-lives/

framework is that of systematic engagement with families of these workers and simultaneous engagement with key community gatekeepers.

I appreciate the observation that skills and norms changes need to change concurrently, but given the temporal differences required to succeed with those changes (months/years for skills, generations for norms), how do we really program for that?

Prerna: I agree that social norms take longer to change as compared to acquiring skills. However, norms are both descriptive norms, i.e. perceptions of which behaviors are typically performed and injunctive norms i.e. perception of which behaviours are approved or disapproved. A social norm is made up by one's beliefs about what others do, and by one's beliefs about what others think one should do[2]. Gender integrated life skills programs of ICRW challenges and addresses the beliefs that an individual hold, thus helping them find a voice, challenge the norms and negotiate for greater agency. Simultaneously systematic and planned engagement with all other stakeholders in the ecosystem, helps to create support for the change that individual is undergoing in the process of acquiring skills and mitigating the risks of challenging norms.

Namaya: The manner in which you design a programme given the differences will vary from intervention to intervention and the approach would need to be customised. However, given the fact that often deeply ingrained norms take a long time to change in our experience we have found that sometimes working around cultural norms as we work to change them has proved to be effective. For instance, one of the issues we face is that many women lack confidence and therefore making it difficult for them to take risks such as starting or growing their business beyond survival business. We ran a business plan competition and rather than just assume women will be confident enough to simply apply, we offer free women only training workshops to give them a platform in which they comfortable to learn and express themselves building their confidence and therefore increasing the likelihood that they would apply for the business plan competition. This ultimately increases the participation of women in business. As more women begin to run businesses successfully, it motivates others to follow suit because it because a really possibility for them.

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[2] http://www.careevaluations.org/Evaluations/CARE%20Social%20Norms%20Measurement%20paper.pdf