

LEVERAGING SOCIAL AND BEHAVIOR CHANGE COMMUNICATION (SBCC) TO TRANSFORM GENDER ATTITUDES AND NORMS IN MASHREQ COUNTRIES

MAIN TAKEAWAYS

- a. **Effective SBCC campaigns rely on behavioral diagnostics to identify discrete gender norms and tailor messages accordingly.** Cultural sensitivity, including the selection of trusted and relatable personas, is crucial to avoid backlash and reinforcing undesirable gender norms.
- b. **Quality of creative production is essential for enhancing the impact of evidence-informed messages.** Well-produced content increases audience engagement and messenger credibility.
- c. **Nation-wide behavioral change requires targeted efforts by a range of actors, including government agencies, civil society organizations, and public figures who champion the campaign messages.** This collaboration ensures integration with broader national policy priorities and extends the reach of communication efforts to local communities.
- d. **Social media is a cost-effective way of reaching wide audiences, but it won't reach vulnerable communities and cannot guarantee sustained behavior change without efforts to institutionalize content in educational materials.** Internet penetration in Mashreq is 75%, with just 55% social media users in Iraq and Jordan (Kemp 2023a; 2023b; 2023c). Poor households have limited access. Social media campaigns need complementing materials like school curricula and workshops, institutionalizing gender-transformative content in education and communities.
- e. **One-off SBCC campaigns alone are insufficient to address restrictive gender norms.** SBCC campaigns are an effective tool in optimizing structural reform and cultivating an enabling social environment for the uptake of such reforms. For instance, a women's employment program could be more effective in ensuring uptake if accompanied by a campaign underscoring the importance of women's contribution to economic productivity and national development goals.

BACKGROUND

Gender roles, society, and norms are important levers to promote greater economic participation among women.

Female labor force participation (FLFP) in Mashreq countries is notably low, with only 15 percent of women in Jordan and 11 percent of women in Iraq engaged in employment or job-search (World Bank, World Development Indicators 2021 data). Lebanon has a relatively higher FLFP rate at 29 percent, but all three countries are significantly below the global FLFP rate of 47 percent. Challenges contributing to low FLFP in Mashreq countries include limited access to affordable childcare, unequal pay, and transportation issues such as access and safety. Structural constraints for women are exacerbated by gender norms, perceptions of acceptable working hours, workplace composition, caregiving expectations, and safety concerns in public spaces (Gauri, Rahman & Sen 2019, Arab Barometer 2022, Redaelli et al. 2023). To boost women's labor force participation, the [Mashreq Gender Facility](#) (MGF) collaborates with government partners to leverage Social and Behavior Change Communication (SBCC) to transform gender attitudes hindering women's inclusion in local economies and reshape behaviors related to gender roles and women's labor market engagement.



In the last decade, the power of media and entertainment has been harnessed to provide more educational content that addresses gaps in knowledge about critical issues such health, education, social cohesion, and elections. Broadcast and digital media, including TV, radio, print and online media, can transform attitudes, beliefs and norms. Despite the promise of media in promoting gender equality, global media monitoring reports highlight the underrepresentation of women in news and certain topical coverage such as politics, the labor market, and sciences, as well as overrepresentation of women in traditional and stereotypical roles and settings such as the home, fashion and makeup, charity, etc., especially in Arab states (GMMP 2020).

Social and Behavior Change Communication (SBCC) employs communication techniques rooted in the principles of behavioral science to effectively shape and enhance the understanding, beliefs, and societal conventions held by individuals, institutions, and communities (Manning et al, 2020).

More recently, entertaining educational content — referred to as edutainment — has been leveraged to transform gender norms in developing countries, but not enough has been done on women’s work. Documentaries and soap operas have been proven effective at positively transforming attitudes towards Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and sexual and reproductive health in Sub-Saharan Africa and India (Banerjee, La Ferrara & Orozco 2019). Such content is one example of SBCC interventions that use communication tools to promote positive behaviors. Systematic reviews of SBCC interventions have highlighted gaps in the existing literature around tackling gender norms to encourage more women to join the labor force, especially in low - and middle - income countries (Nasruddin 2021, Jayachandran 2021, Boudet et al. 2023).

What are gender norms and how can they be transformed? Gender norms are expectations regarding the appropriate roles and actions men and women should perform in a given context and can shape individual beliefs about gender roles and traits (Bicchieri 2006; Boudet et al. 2023, Cislaghi & Heise 2020). In Mashreq countries, studies on FLFP suggest that gender norms are in fact correlated with women’s work status and willingness to work (Gauri, Rahman,

& Sen 2019; Sen et al. 2022; Ismail, Qarout & Sen 2023). Moreover, studies like the World Values Survey (WVS), the Arab Barometer, and El-Feki et al.’s (2018) masculinity study by UN Women and Equimundo in Lebanon and the study by UN Women (2022) in Jordan point to the prevalence of gender attitudes that confine women to domestic roles and working only if financial need was a driver. Both broadcast and social media have sought to counter restrictive norms, and SBCC campaigns are increasingly used for this.

The SBCC trend has not left Mashreq countries behind. Social media campaigns have the potential of reaching wide audiences in the region; in 2023, 91 percent of the population in Lebanon were social media users; this rate was 58 percent in Jordan and 57 percent in Iraq (Kemp 2023a, 2023b, 2023c). Capitalizing on this, NGOs and governments alike have launched close to 100 campaigns in the last decade or so in Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq.¹ These campaigns have predominantly targeted issues related to GBV, including intimate partner violence, economic violence, legal discrimination and harassment. Fewer efforts have tackled gender norms related to women’s work and sharing of childcare responsibilities.

Under the Mashreq Gender Facility (MGF) in Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq, the World Bank’s Mind, Behavior and Development Unit (eMBeD) and MGF country teams have been working closely with government partners to design, test, implement and monitor SBCC campaigns targeting gender attitudes and behaviors related to women’s work and responsibilities at home with the long-term goal of encouraging more women to join the labor force. Two behaviorally informed campaign videos were produced in each country with key messages focusing on women’s work and the sharing of household and childcare responsibilities between men and women.



¹ These findings are based on a desk-review conducted by the World Bank’s MGF team in 2020-2021. The findings have not been published but are available upon request.



INTRODUCING SBCC CAMPAIGNS TO CHANGE GENDER NORMS RELATED TO FLFP

In each of the Mashreq countries, a sequenced approach was followed to design and implement SBCC campaigns in partnership with government agencies working on gender-related issues:

1. Conduct and validate behavioral diagnostic to identify gender norms to target.
2. Design and produce SBCC.
3. Test and revise the content to maximize effectiveness.
4. Disseminate and monitor outreach.

Step 1: Behavioral diagnostic to identify the gender attitudes and norms to be addressed

Tailoring interventions to the context and respecting cultural nuances is important for the success of any initiative. A behavioral diagnostic is a crucial tool in determining the primary desired results of any campaign, as it identifies barriers to desired attitudes and behaviors and guides the selection of messages to address them. The diagnostic also provides the local data and a nuanced cultural understanding with regards to, for example, notions of respect, family honor and reputation, masculinity, and deference to elders that are instrumental to build on to avoid backlash with the targeted communities. It is important to avoid inadvertently reinforcing negative norms by highlighting the prevalence of undesirable behaviors or

showcasing that a negative norm is widespread within a community (White, Stackhouse & Argo 2018).

The diagnostic phase included a combination of primary and secondary data review. In Jordan and Lebanon, the teams conducted a series of qualitative formative research, along with a secondary literature review of survey findings from national and purposive samples. For each of the countries, the team reviewed data on gender attitudes from the World Values Survey (WVS), the Arab Barometer, the World Bank social norms studies in Jordan (2019), KRI (2022), and Iraq (2023) and the IMAGES Masculinity surveys by UN Women and Equimundo (2018).

In Lebanon and Jordan, the team organized a series of Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with adult men and women across various demographics to better understand beliefs and expectations about women’s work, role at home and the kinds of message framings that could convince men to change their mindsets. In Lebanon, the qualitative research helped identify the primary audience for the campaign, including the types of psychological and behavioral barriers that the campaign would address.

For the MGF SBCC campaigns, **a behavioral framework was developed to organize** the diagnostic based on the three main drivers of behavior posited by the COM-B model, which is grounded in theoretical and empirical evidence on social and behavior change: **Capability, Opportunity, and Motivation.** An example of this exercise from Jordan can be found in Table 1.

Table 1:

Example (simplified) diagnostic of barriers to men sharing household responsibilities and childcare with women based on COM-B model, Jordan

CAPABILITY	OPPORTUNITY	MOTIVATION
Men have low confidence in their ability to impact childhood development in the same way that mothers impact it.	Men do not know the true scale of men who actually carry out household tasks and childcare/development responsibilities.	Men have mental models of what men and women ought to do at home (men secure finances and women raise children).
Men have internalized society’s perception of their ability to effectively boost child development relative to mothers.	Men do not know the role of fathers is as important as the role of mothers.	Men are afraid of losing family values if gender roles in the household shifted and women were less involved at home. Men believe that there is little social acceptance of men taking on household chores and childcare.



Step 2: Design and Produce SBCC Campaigns

The diagnostic of key behavioral drivers of prevailing gender attitudes and unequal gender roles led to the development of campaign messages. These messages were then translated into creative content by the production firms, in close consultation with the government. Annex 1 details the attitudes and norms identified for each of the SBCC interventions in the Mashreq countries based on the diagnostic, including the behavioral mechanisms leveraged to address them.

Across the Mashreq countries, SBCC campaigns were designed and implemented to achieve key indicators in national women's economic empowerment action plans. The campaigns were led nationally by the Jordanian National Commission for Women (JNCW), the National Commission for Lebanese Women (NCLW), the High Council of Women's Development (HCWD) in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), and the Women's Empowerment Directorate (WED) in the federal government of Iraq.

Prioritization, Message Development, and Testing: Once the audience was defined, prioritization became pivotal. This step involved identifying key issues, developing compelling messages tailored to address them, and subjecting these messages to rigorous testing before the roll-out of the campaign.

Creative Direction and Production: Insights gathered from government partnerships and audience research converged to shape visually compelling and culturally relevant content for the target audience. This step also encompassed the selection of appropriate channels, influencers, and mediums to maximize the campaign's impact. It is important that the creative direction be adapted to the target audience, embedding culturally relevant ideas that could start the conversation around transforming gender norms.

To decide what kind of content to produce, it is imperative to understand which design and dissemination questions need to be answered for scale-up efforts.

- **Messenger:** which persona or public figure possesses highest credibility and legitimacy among target audience with regards to the messages being promoted? Who influences whom among the target audiences? Do these individuals embody traits that men and/or women admire?
 - **Format:** which type of content is most suitable for the messages being promoted and for the audience targeted: videos, still images, text-based messages, audios, etc.?
 - **Duration:** which length is most effective in ensuring content is actively consumed and impactful?
 - **Dosage:** how many times does the target audience need to be exposed to the content to effectively change their attitudes and behaviors? How much exposure is needed for medium- and long-term impact?
 - **Sequence:** if there are multiple types of content, what is the most effective sequence of exposure that could yield to highest impact?
 - **Uptake and drop-out:** what rate of attrition should be expected? What kind of dissemination strategies and boosting investments should be made to maximize not just campaign outreach, but also consumption?
- **Messages:** which framing of the message will yield higher impact on gender attitudes and behaviors of interest among men and women? How are the messages being interpreted by the target audience?



During the design phase of the intervention, teams could conduct multiple FGDs with the target population to assess messages, personas, format, duration, and sequence. Some aspects of design will have to be tested after the content is produced; for example, dosage and anticipated uptake of the content are better tested after the content is produced and administered to a substantial sample for a relatively extended period (see step 3 on testing).

Campaign Design:

- In Jordan, two videos were produced. Video A, titled [“Office Video,”](#) portrays a man sharing uplifting experiences during the COVID-19 lockdown, highlighting how he was able to foster a more intimate relationship with his wife and children by supporting with domestic chores. This video also role modelled a man’s active engagement in various parenting activities. Video B, known as the [“Barber Video,”](#) conveys similar messages to the office video but incorporates additional discussion about how the barber managed to effectively care for his infant, support his wife and increase involvement in his child’s life. Each of the videos is around 4 minutes long.

- In Lebanon, a 72-second [“Main Video”](#) and a 26-second [“Men’s Video”](#) were produced. The Main video chronicles a young woman’s — Sarah — journey challenging traditional gender roles across pivotal life stages, including formative years, higher education, entering the workforce, marriage, and reintegration into employment. Sarah exemplifies positive coping strategies in navigating societal expectations, household duties, job rejections, and inflexible workplace arrangements. The [“Men’s Video”](#) is a condensed version, highlighting supportive roles men could play in Sarah’s journey. These men included Sarah’s father, husband, and male employer and colleagues.



- In Iraq, two videos were produced. One video addresses a general Iraqi and Arabic-speaking audience, featuring a 65-second documentary-style interview with Um Mohammad, a middle-aged Iraqi woman from a rural village. She recounts the story of how she established her own business to employ women in her village. Um Mohammad discusses how she persuaded her husband to support the idea and subsequently convinced the community as well. The second video, lasting 116 seconds, presents a fictional story of a Kurdish woman in KRI detailing the challenges of (and solutions to) rejoining the labor force after having children and being inactive for several years.



Step 3: Testing and revising content before roll-out

Testing content before deciding on the final campaign design and dissemination is critical to ensure that the campaign has optimal chances of succeeding with the target audience and to assess the effectiveness of various aspects of the content such as duration, messages, characters, format, and dosage. While the design of the content should be informed by engaging a subsample of the target audience around issues like messaging, personas, and sequence of content, it is important to assess whether the creative execution of these insights in the final product could change gender attitudes on a more representative sample of the online population. It is important to understand which aspect of the content needs to be tested so that the evaluation design includes the appropriate number of treatment arms to test.

Randomized Control Trials (RCTs) involve an empirical technique to identify whether a certain intervention can yield causal impact on a specific outcome compared to an alternative reality where that intervention is not administered. RCTs are one type of impact evaluations to test effectiveness of programs, services, content, etc.

In the context of the MGF campaigns, each of the two videos was tested for their relative impact on gender attitudes to inform decisions about which video to disseminate more intensively and whether certain aspects of the videos needed to be revised. This type of testing is referred to as “A/B testing”, where version A and version B of the campaign videos are assessed in comparison to one another.

There are various ways to test content, including qualitative and quantitative methods using digital tools. SBCC content could either be tested experimentally for more robust estimates of impact, or they could be tested qualitatively for rich descriptive insights into the likely reception of different types of content. The former method relies on experimental studies such as Randomized Control Trials (RCTs) and are typically conducted online for speed, ease of administration and cost-effectiveness. Alternatively, RCTs could be conducted through face-to-face or phone-based data collection methods.

The campaign videos were tested prior to roll out to assess the effectiveness of the messages (in both Jordan and Lebanon), as well as the duration (in Lebanon). Online data collection tools were used in both countries. In Lebanon, the relative effectiveness of the main video and the men's video in improving attitudes towards working mothers and traditional family values was assessed through a one-wave RCT using Facebook ads. While the main video yielded bigger impacts, the shorter video had higher completion rates. Since both videos positively influenced attitudes among men and women in the short term, the team decided to invest in disseminating the video targeting men more intensively to ensure higher engagement. In Jordan, the team wanted to assess whether the additional messaging on self-efficacy in infant care would yield a higher impact on men's self-reported self-efficacy. The A/B testing was carried out through a two-wave panel RCT using Facebook messenger. Both videos impacted attitudes and self-efficacy immediately after exposure, and JNCW chose to disseminate both.

The purpose behind testing the efficacy of content before launching the campaign is to explore needed content revisions. As such, it is important to consider:

- Embedding qualitative questions in the testing regarding the relatability of the characters and messages and the feasibility of solutions (if relevant) in the video to assess whether revisions to the content or casting are needed.
- Time and funding for the revision of content if needed. Pre-testing the content in as near final version as possible is the optimal way to assess the potential impact that the content could yield in a real-life campaign; however, some degree of revision should be built into the production, based on the results of the testing. Balancing between cost and benefit is important. The more robust the diagnostic used to inform the design of the content, the fewer revisions the content may need.

Therefore, it is critical to invest well in the diagnostic and design stage of the SBCC intervention.

Step 4: Dissemination and Monitoring

While it is important to design SBCC content based on evidence, it is equally vital for dissemination to be **far, wide, and intensive**. Pre-campaign testing is an effective way to assess potential impact if the target audience views the content. However, whether or not the target audience views and pays attention to the content also depends on how effective (and massive) dissemination efforts are. In a media landscape saturated with entertainment ads competing for attention, reaching wide audiences with social messages is no easy feat. Recent social media trends have illuminated the role and promise of collaborating with influencers and content creators to push out key messages and ads. Leveraging government TV channels that have pre-existing following and viewership could boost both outreach and legitimacy of the campaign. It is also important to invest in actively boosting content through paid ads and timing the posts to leverage peak media utilization times of the day and week. Without such considerations, outreach could lead to very little attitudinal and behavior change—if at all—among the targeted population.

In Lebanon, the videos were disseminated in partnership with NCLW in a nation-wide campaign “Reaching Our Full Potential” rolled out in September 2023. The videos were shown across [TV programs](#), [radio](#), [Instagram](#), [Facebook](#), [X](#), and [YouTube](#), and digital display banners were placed on 11 different websites, including Instagram, Facebook and YouTube.

- **Influencers' platforms:** 11 influencers, with a combined total of 12 million followers, were selected to collaborate on the dissemination. The sharing of the videos on their Instagram stories resulted in a total of 823k views.
- **TV:** The campaign was broadcasted on 5 local TV stations and included a total of 183 advertisements. Among these, 86% were aired during peak time programs, and 94% were shown in the first two breaks of the program. The campaign reached approximately 82% of its intended audience on TV (adults aged 18 to 65).



- **Radio:** the videos' voiceovers were used for radio dissemination across 10 stations.
- **Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube:** the men's video received 2,320,050 views and the main video received 592,769 views. The main video has been shared 819 times across Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook, while the men's video has been shared 63 times.

In Jordan, JNCW led the dissemination of the two campaign videos on social media. The videos were posted on [JNCW's Facebook page](#) and boosted using Google ads in January and February 2023. The campaign's total reach was 405k and garnered 1.4m impressions across eight ad posts promoting the videos on Facebook overall. The barber video got 197k views, while the office video got 22k views on Facebook.

Iraq: In KRI, the K24 TV station plans to broadcast the video across its programs. The Iraqi government is planning on airing the video for a month on the Iraqia TV program to maximize outreach.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Relevant learning for policy makers:

- Leverage in-house gender experts, media and communications experts, as well as subject matter experts to ensure effective design and implementation of SBCC interventions.
- Use gender norms campaigns as a tool to encourage the uptake of structural reform or reinforce the impact of such reform by cultivating and sustaining an enabling social environment.
- Plan for a multi-year comprehensive communication strategy that utilizes multiple channels and partners (e.g. CSOs, NGOs, influencers) and allows for sustained engagement and behavior change.
- Be mindful of the target audience and their perceptions of the credibility of the campaign brand, channels and messengers used in the campaign.
- Invest in dissemination efforts and boost content across different social media platforms to ensure high reach and engagement.

Key take-aways for practitioners and communications experts:

- Identify and work with the right kind of experts with clear definition of roles and responsibilities (terms of reference), including on subject matter, gender, behavioral communications, evaluations, and identify a high-quality production agency with experience in SBCC, social media and PR.
- Set realistic goals for the campaign's impact on attitudes and behaviors given available budget, resources, partnerships and timeline.
- Design gender focused SBCC interventions based on a thorough behavioral diagnostic of the target audience and gender norms to address.
- Implement effective quality assurance procedures on the overall process to ensure consistency in the vision and desired quality from design to campaign execution.
- Ensure continuous monitoring and evaluation of the campaign's impact and make necessary adjustments based on the findings.

Annex 1:

Summary of design elements and outputs for SBCC campaigns in Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq

COUNTRY	BEHAVIORAL BARRIERS	MESSAGES	TARGET AUDIENCE	CREATIVE OUTPUTS
Jordan	Traditional attitudes about division of roles and responsibilities at home. 87% of men believe a woman’s most important role is to take care of the home & cook for the family. 52% of women believe that too (UN Women 2022).	Men can cultivate strong relationships with their female relatives and children when they participate in household chores and childcare/parenting.	Adult men, including fathers.	Two 4-minute fictional narrative videos.
	Men have low self-efficacy when it comes to infant care and parenting (FGDs 2021).	Men can be just as effective at infant care and parenting as women.		
Lebanon	Traditional attitudes about division of roles and responsibilities at home. 54% of men believe a woman’s most important role is to cook for the family and take care of home (Elfeki et al. 2018).	Women can succeed in finding the right job opportunities if the men in their lives support them.	Adult men and women, including those who have children under 18 years old.	Two fictional narrative videos.
	Beliefs that if a woman works, the children will suffer (WVS 2018).	Men and women need to share household responsibilities to make sure they both thrive in their careers. Women should not give up after facing various challenges in finding a job.		One 72 second “main” video. One 26 second “men’s” video.
Iraq	Misperception about the social acceptability of women’s work in Iraq, especially in the private sector (Sen et al., 2022; Ismail, Qarout, & Sen, 2023).	People in Iraq underestimate the level of support local community has for women’s work.	Adult men and women.	One 1:05 long documentary-style video for Federal Iraq
	Most women report preference for starting their own business (Ibid).	There are local role models of female entrepreneurs who have convinced the local community and their male relatives that work for women is important for both the local economy and the empowerment of the women themselves.		One 1:56 long fictional narrative video for KRI



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For further information, please visit: [🌐 https://www.worldbank.org/en/programs/mashreq-gender-facility](https://www.worldbank.org/en/programs/mashreq-gender-facility)

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