Learning to Respond to Social Norms to Improve Maternal and Child Nutrition

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Conflict of Interest Disclosure

I have no conflict of interest to report in relation to this presentation.

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**What are Social Norms?**

- Social norms are rules and expectations surrounding typical behaviors
- Culturally and socially enforced—often unspoken

*Photo Credit: Moctar Menta, IFDC*
Social Norms and Nutrition

Food-Related Norms

• **Dietary practices and food choices:** Dictates foods to eat/avoid during pregnancy and postpartum period

• **Quantity of food:** Pregnant women told to limit food intake to avoid harm to baby
Social Norms and Gender

Gender-Related Norms

• Gender roles
  — Typical roles and responsibilities at the household level
  — Mothers must ensure family members have food (and **sacrifice** herself)
  — Pregnant women expected to continue working

• Household food allocation
  — Expectations surrounding food and resource accessibility
  — Food purchasing, decision-making

Photo Credit: Thomas Cristofoletti, USAID
Approaches

- Need for gender transformative approaches to consider roles within family
- Using different information dissemination methods at community level (videos and social media)
- Actively engaging influencers at multiple levels:
  - Hear from family members as those who largely enforce and uphold norms
  - Support groups for various key actors
  - Opportunities for change agents and champions to build on positive norms
  - Involvement of community volunteers, health workers, and community leaders
Key Considerations

- Need to understand what drives and underlies key behaviors
  - Used to inform norm-focused program design

- Social norm consideration during evaluation process

- Want understanding of community level thinking of norms

- If norms shift, how does this influence nutrition behaviors and outcomes?

- Use of theoretical frameworks that note social norms for program design

- While focus may center around women, the responsibility is beyond their actions
  - Critical to engage family members and other influencers
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