

Passages Project

Transforming Social Norms for Adolescent & Youth Reproductive Health



What is Passages?

Passages addresses the root of chronic challenges in family planning and reproductive health — such as gender-based violence, child marriage, and unintended pregnancy — by transforming social norms. This USAID-funded project (2015-2021) fosters normative environments that enable young people to use voluntary family planning (FP) and achieve healthy timing of first and subsequent pregnancies through scalable programs. Passages also builds evidence-based programs and services to reach younger adolescents transitioning to puberty to lay the groundwork for their life-long health and well-being. These evidence-based approaches to addressing social norms can be applied to strengthen programming in other health areas and other sectors across USAID.

Passages bridges the gap between science and effective policy and practice by 1) **replicating and scaling up social norm interventions**, and applying implementation science principles to explain what makes interventions effective and sustainable at scale in real world contexts; 2) **strengthening in-country capacity** to plan, implement, monitor and evaluate the scale-up of effective initiatives to address normative change; 3) **distilling and sharing evidence** and sparking dialogue on integration, measurement, and evaluation of normative interventions. Strengthening reproductive health is central to improving global health efforts; as such, initiatives to end preventable maternal and child deaths and achieve an AIDS-free generation could benefit from this project.

How does Passages differ from other projects?

- ✓ Addresses a critical program gap by focusing on **scalable normative interventions** that create, transform, and reinforce positive social norms.
- ✓ Capitalizes on **life course transitions**— children entering puberty, women and men entering marriage, and new parents— and focuses on the processes that create and reinforce social norms during these transitions.
- ✓ **Strengthens local capacity** to implement, assess, and expand normative interventions.

Why address social norms?

Social norms — often-unspoken rules that govern behavior — shape the reproductive journeys of young people. In many settings, sustained improvements in FP and reproductive health will only be obtained by addressing norms that inhibit FP access and use. Passages is uniquely positioned to address this challenge by focusing on interventions that aim to reduce stigma and myths related to FP use, increase male engagement in FP, reduce gender-based violence, and improve gender equity attitudes and behaviors. Efforts to identify, examine, and (re)define social norms can strengthen programming to achieve development objectives in other health activities and in other sectors across USAID.

- ✓ **Provide technical assistance to health and other sector programs interested in including social norm interventions leading to behavior change.** For example, assistance could be provided to programs wanting to include normative interventions to empower women, prevent gender-based violence, delay marriage, and improve reproductive health.
- ✓ **Provide technical assistance to FP and other behavior change programs** to integrate approaches that foster supportive social norms, and ensure they are designed and implemented **with scale-up in mind.**
- ✓ **Raise awareness and strengthen the capacity** of national and organizational stakeholders to **understand and address at scale the social norms** that affect FP uptake and other development outcomes.
- ✓ **Support assessments and systems-based planning to expand and scale up pilots** and other evidence-based approaches to establish social norms that support FP, reproductive health, and other outcomes.
- ✓ **Conduct ‘Realist Evaluations’ of existing social norm interventions to inform expansion,** using an evaluation approach designed to answer the questions: “What works, for whom, in what respects, to what extent, in what contexts, and how?”
- ✓ **Design and conduct research to measure the effect of normative interventions and assess their expansion.** Apply new approaches to measure gender norms, conduct research with early adolescents, and monitor and evaluate scale up.

Possibilities for collaboration

Passages is managed by USAID’s Office of Population and Reproductive Health. As a cooperative agreement, Passages is able to accept funding from all USAID accounts, as well as funding from missions and other donors. To explore opportunities to add a research, monitoring and/or evaluation component to existing or planned activities or to learn more about applying evidence-based practices to scaling up interventions with a focus on normative change, please contact:

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