

DRG Learning Digest

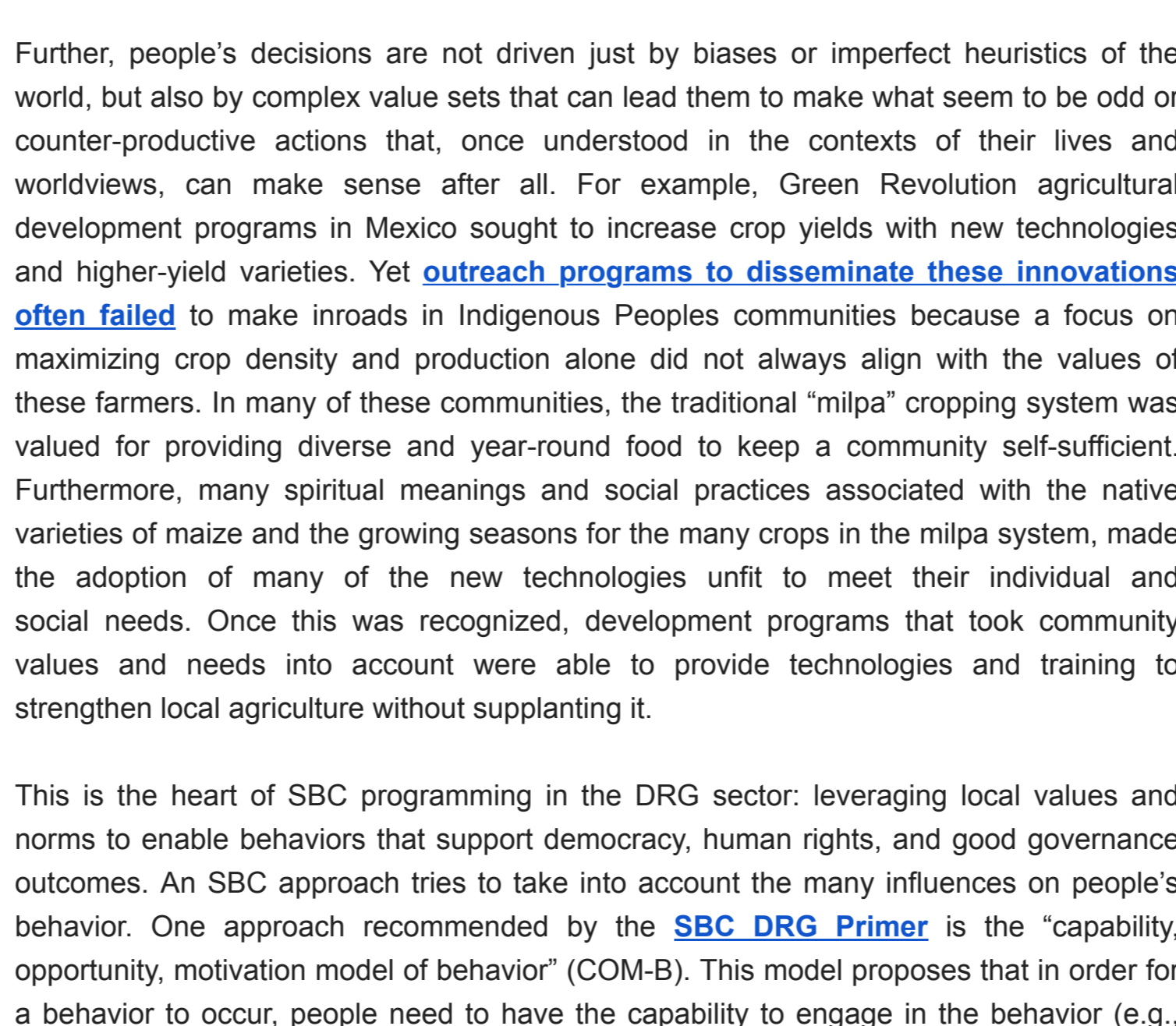
Social and Behavior Change: Ideas and Practice in DRG

January 2022

This month's Learning Digest covers the intersection of social and behavior change (SBC) science and democracy, human rights, and governance (DRG) practice. DRG programming often focuses on certain objectives, such as improving election administration, access to justice, or voter turnout, but less often on the factors influencing the behaviors that need to change to achieve those objectives. As articulated in the new [SBC DRG Primer](#), the SBC paradigm "focuses on what motivates people to undertake behavior, especially on how social factors influence behavior. SBC accounts for factors like social pressure, norms of behavior, habits, salience, cognitive load/complexity, and institutional incentives to understand when and why a person engages in a behavior. This paradigm blends work from various fields, including psychology, neuroscience, economics, and political science." People-centered behavioral designs ask the question: what needs to change for people to engage in the target DRG behavior? An SBC approach involves identifying how to encourage people to engage in the target behaviors by removing barriers or building the relevant bridges. Underlying SBC efforts is the recognition that we are usually not trying to change people's minds, but rather enabling them to do what they already want to do by leveraging that existing motivation.

SBC approaches don't exist in a vacuum; instead, they complement and build on – not replace – many traditional forms of programming. In addition, SBC approaches are not new. For years they have been applied in global health efforts such as the [fight against AIDS](#) in [behavioral economics](#) (link only accessible to USAID personnel), and in tackling [many other public policy challenges](#) – and now we are encouraging their targeted and intentional application in the DRG sector. [Recent announcements of support for SBC programming](#) by USAID Administrator Power hold promise for improved SBC programming in international development in general and also in the DRG sector specifically.

The DRG Center Evidence and Learning (E&L) Team is pleased to inform USAID Fellow that our American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) SBC Reader, Levi Adelman stands ready to assist Missions with adapting SBC approaches to their DRG programming. He can be contacted at levidelman@usaid.gov or the general E&L Team mailbox at ddl.drge@maillist@usaid.gov.



"She convinced me that I should make my voice heard."

In a [SBC-assisted program](#), USAID trained Tunisian women as civic ambassadors to encourage more than 34,000 women to register and vote in May 2018 municipal elections. (Sebastian Lindstrom / USAID)

This edition of the DRG Learning Digest:

- Reviews the theory of behavior change and a programmatic approach to SBC laid out in a [new SBC Primer for DRG](#);
- Introduces three SBC intervention approaches, and evidence to support their use; and
- Highlights a SBC approach to human rights programming by the USAID/Philippines Mission.

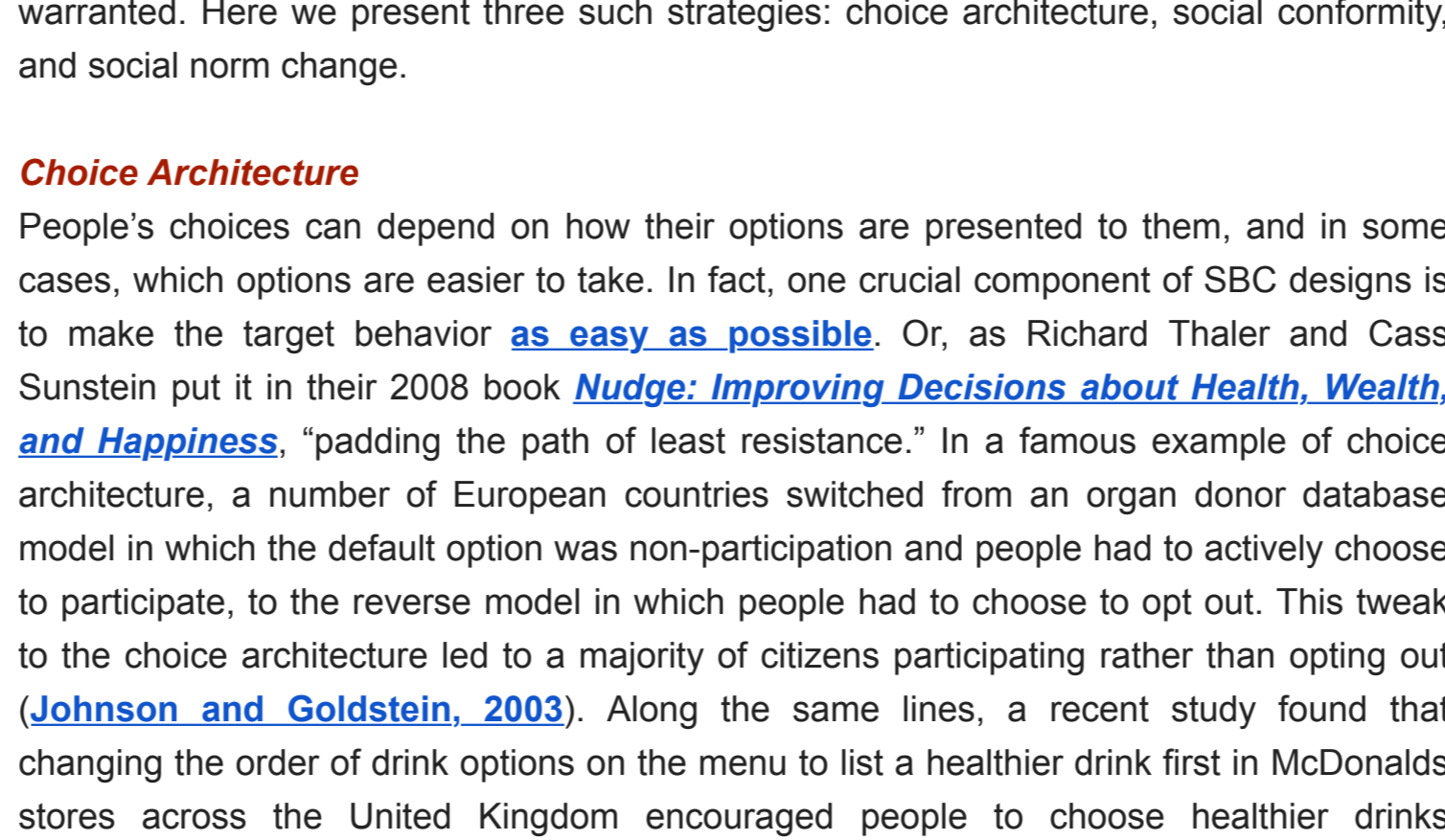
We provide a collection of additional SBC resources, and, as always, please make use of DRG E&L Team resources (see the text box at the end!)

Theory of Social and Behavior Change

Many early models of human behavior assumed that people made their decisions based on simple cost-benefit analyses, which often did not do a very good job of predicting behavior. This began to change when [Tversky and Kahneman, 1974](#) outlined how many decisions people make that don't depend solely on a rational analysis of risks and rewards, but instead are also influenced by many simple rules (heuristics) people use to navigate the world.

Further, people's decisions are not driven just by biases or imperfect heuristics of the world, but also by complex value sets that can lead them to make what seem to be odd or counter-productive actions that, once understood in the contexts of their lives and worldviews, can make sense after all. For example, Green Revolution agricultural development programs in Mexico sought to increase crop yields with new technologies and higher-yield varieties. Yet [outreach programs to disseminate these innovations often failed](#) to make inroads in Indigenous Peoples communities because a focus on maximizing crop density and production alone did not always align with the values of these farmers. In many of these communities, the traditional "milpa" cropping system was valued for providing diverse and year-round food to keep a community self-sufficient. Furthermore, many spiritual meanings and social practices associated with the native varieties of maize and the growing seasons for the many crops in the milpa system, made the adoption of many of the new technologies unfit to meet their individual and social needs. Once this was recognized, development programs that took community values and needs into account were able to provide technologies and training to strengthen local agriculture without supplanting it.

This is the heart of SBC programming in the DRG sector: leveraging local values and norms to enable behaviors that support democracy, human rights, and good governance outcomes. An SBC approach tries to take into account the many influences on people's behavior. One approach recommended by the [SBC DRG Primer](#) is the "capability, opportunity, motivation model of behavior" (COM-B). This model proposes that in order for a behavior to occur, people need to have the capability to engage in the behavior (e.g., knowledge of their political rights), the opportunity to engage in that behavior (e.g., an environment where social norms allow for women to run for political office, or safe access to voting stations), and the motivation to engage in the behavior (e.g., believing that their vote counts or that they can be part of the fight against corruption). When the people who wish to change their behaviors meet these requirements, then it becomes more likely to see the target behaviors. For example, programs have addressed capability, opportunity, and motivational components of behavior to [increase voter involvement and turnout in Tunisia](#), [counter violent extremism](#), and [protect the rights of domestic workers](#).



[SCORE](#), a USAID/Kenya and East Africa countering violent extremism activity, aimed to address the root causes of conflict and violent extremism and reduce the allure of potentially radicalizing messages in Kenya's coastal region. (SCORE / USAID)

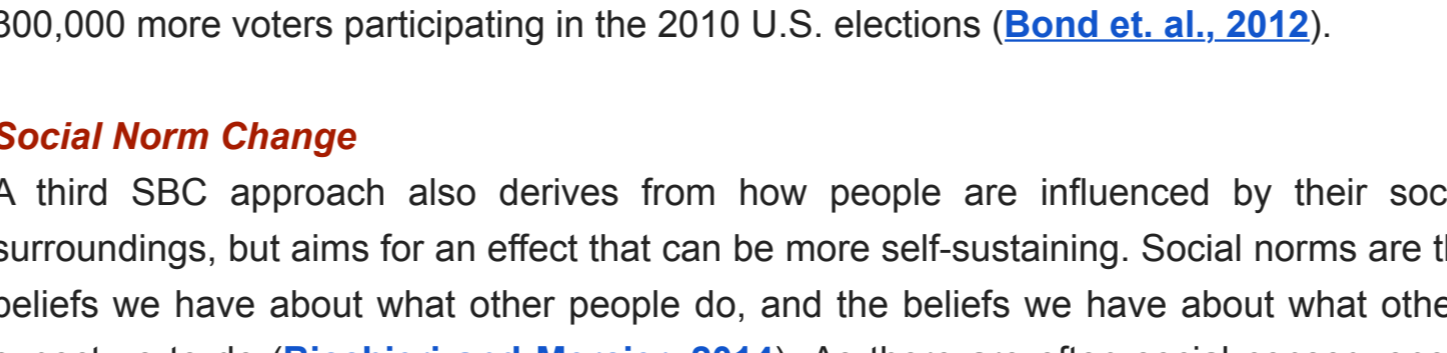
To achieve successful outcomes, programming needs to start with an understanding of what behaviors should be changed, and why people are engaging in the current behaviors. For example, a program to decrease corruption in Ghana by increasing police salaries backfired, with better-paid police [raising the cost of bribes](#) rather than decreasing bribe demands. Successful interventions are far from an exact science, but understanding the social determinants of behavior and developing programming based on existing knowledge from the behavioral sciences can lead to more effective programming.

Social and Behavior Change Interventions for DRG: Three Strategies

There is no single method for SBC interventions. Depending on what resources are on hand, and on the unique elements of the situation, a range of different strategies might be warranted. Here we present three such strategies: choice architecture, social conformity, and social norm change.

Choice Architecture

People's choices can depend on how their options are presented to them, and in some cases, which options are easier to take. In fact, one crucial component of SBC designs is to make the target behavior [as easy as possible](#). Or, as Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein put it in their 2008 book [Nudge: Improving Decisions about Health, Wealth, and Happiness](#), "padding the path of least resistance." In a famous example of choice architecture, a number of European countries switched from an organ donor database model in which the default option was non-participation and people had to actively choose to participate, to the reverse model in which people had to choose to opt out. This tweak to the choice architecture led to a majority of citizens participating rather than opting out ([Johnson and Goldstein, 2003](#)). Along the same lines, a recent study found that changing the order of drink options on the menu to list a healthier drink first in McDonalds stores across the United Kingdom encouraged people to choose healthier drinks ([Schmidtko et al., 2019](#)). In the DRG sector, choice architecture was used in introducing "motor voter" registration in California. When Department of Motor Vehicle (DMV) customers began to be given the opportunity to also register as voters, [three times as many people](#) registered to vote through the DMV compared to previous averages. Based on the organ donor database research reported above, this rate probably could have been even higher if voter registration had been made the default option.



Source: California Secretary of State

Voter registrations per month at California's Department of Motor Vehicles increased threefold under its California New Motor Voter (CNMV) automated voter registration (AVR) law. [Public Policy Institute of California, p. 5](#)

Social Conformity

A second strategy of using social and behavioral science to promote behavior change is by drawing on the social influence people feel from observing other people's behaviors. The strength of social influence can be seen in the classic research of Solomon Asch. In a series of studies, people were asked to make a simple judgment. On their own, most people had little trouble making the correct judgment. However, when put in a group of people who all made the wrong judgment, nearly three-quarters went along with the wrong judgment of the group around them ([Asch, 1958](#)). Many people have this powerful drive to conform to the behaviors of others, and this offers a potent form of SBC intervention to encourage target behaviors. In a particularly notable DRG example, Facebook's inclusion of "I Voted" messages and stickers is estimated to have been responsible for at least 300,000 more voters participating in the 2010 U.S. elections ([Bond et al., 2012](#)).

Social Norm Change

A third SBC approach also derives from how people are influenced by their social surroundings, but aims for an effect that can be more self-sustaining. Social norms are the beliefs we have about what other people do, and the beliefs we have about what others expect us to do ([Bicchieri and Mercier, 2014](#)). As there are often social consequences for deviating from the norm, these expectations are powerful forces that can be an important part of driving behavior change. These norms can cut both ways, as researchers working on energy conservation discovered in an experiment that gave people information about how much energy their neighbors were using. While giving normative information about energy use reduced consumption for those who were high consumers, it also raised consumption for low consumers ([Schultz et al., 2007](#)). However, when properly understood and applied, strategies to [change social norms](#) offer the potential to create self-sustaining and self-enforcing patterns of behavior change.

This brief review of three SBC approaches is not exhaustive, and SBC offers these and many other strategies to encourage behavior change across the DRG sector, relying on the same foundational basis of identifying the motivations and needs for people's behavior in a particular context, to encourage or discourage target behaviors.

SBC and Human Rights Advocacy: A Promising Approach

"It seems like we have failed", ponders Maria (not her real name), a Filipino human rights worker. Like many advocates, she has been searching for answers to the question of why human rights in the Philippines have suffered [tremendous setbacks](#).

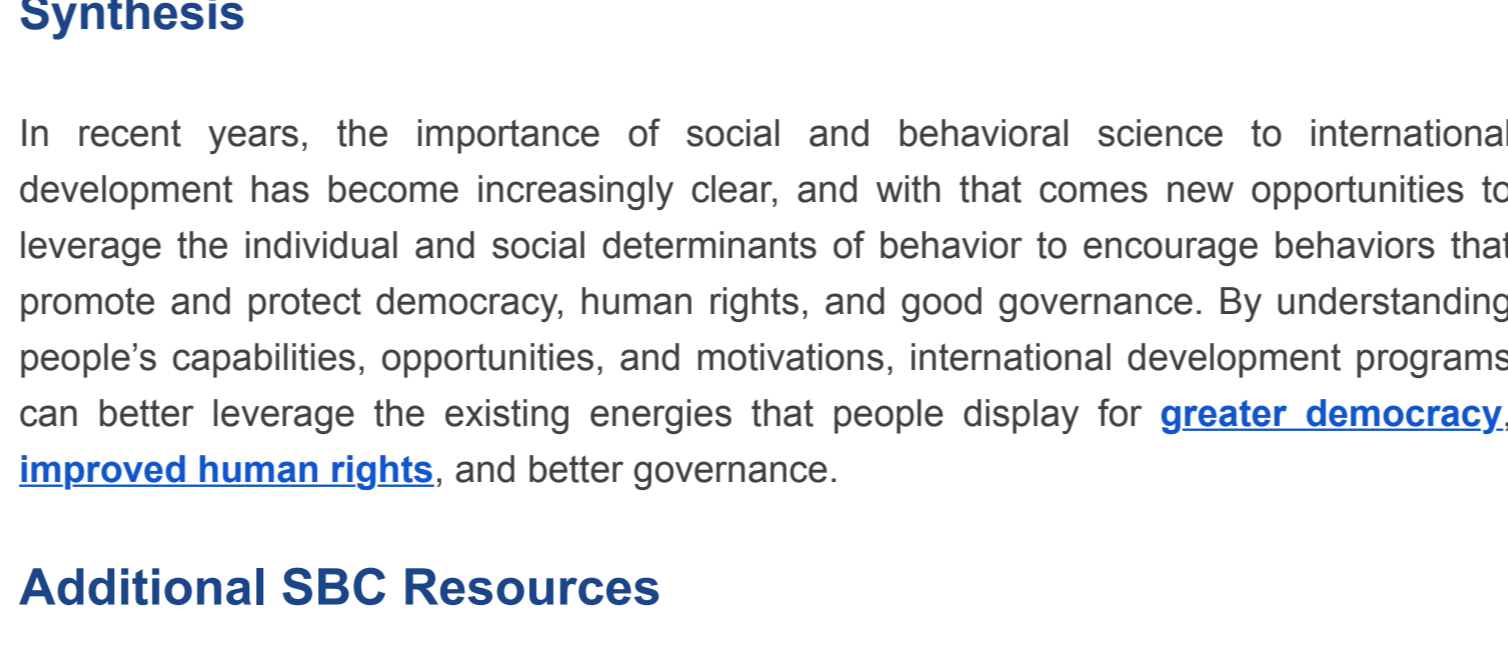
Regrettably, Maria's sentiment is shared by many Filipino human rights defenders. One of the oldest democracies in Asia, the Philippines has a strong constitutional base designed to [protect basic civil and political rights](#). Following redemocratization in the 1980s, the country was celebrated for its vibrant civic space in which non-governmental organizations, a free press, and universities flourished. But human rights activism has gradually weakened since then, [especially in the past five years](#). Extrajudicial killings associated with the campaign against illegal drugs; arrests and killings of political activists, lawyers, and [journalists](#); the closure of the country's largest media organization; and even [rights-limiting COVID-19 restrictions](#); were greeted by the public with disengagement. Heightened community and online surveillance, civil society regulation, [red-tagging](#), and [populist narratives](#) are weakening human rights advocates' ability to operate and engage a broader public. This has left rights advocates desperate for answers and strategies to call out abuses and educate the public on the value of human rights and the rule of law.

"Now, even ordinary Filipinos believe that activists are obstacles to progress, to peace and order," Maria laments.

There is some reason for hope. In 2019, the USAID/Philippines Mission and The Asia Foundation launched the Initiatives for Advancing Community Transformation (I-FACT) activity to bolster the capacity of local human rights organizations in the use of SBC approaches for human rights advocacy and public outreach. SBC offers effective pathways for civil society to connect with their communities, understand grassroots social experiences and collective mindsets, and address the barriers to rights activism.

As seen in USAID's [public health programming](#), successful SBC programs are founded on robust evidence. I-FACT invested in quantitative and qualitative research, and early evidence shows that Filipinos generally believe in human rights. The main challenge, however, is translating abstract knowledge and beliefs into concrete supportive actions. This is where SBC can contribute significantly.

I-FACT unpacked rights-seeking, rights-affirming, and rights-claiming behaviors, and the factors that encourage or discourage these behaviors. These in-depth analyses yielded insights for local civil society partners in exploring a range of interventions to reach and engage target audiences. The goal is to find the most effective ways to promote positive human rights behaviors. The activity tested different social behavior prompts, and how tonalities like anger, humor, fear and [hope](#) resonate across different demographic sectors.



An example of a behavior nudge for rights vigilance. This Facebook poster informs citizens that police profiling is against the law and offers a behavioral pathway for victims to seek advice on filing cases against rights violators. (I-FACT / The Asia Foundation)

Since late 2020 I-FACT has piloted SBC campaigns online, reaching over nine million social media users in the Philippines. Early results indicate vast opportunities to reverse a culture of apathy. Volunteering and donation platforms, as well as expanding digital communities, have begun generating interest among target audiences, engaging more than 30,000 Filipinos and growing.

Where do we go from here? I-FACT recently launched an intensive training program for over 100 local human rights organizations. Through capacity development support, I-FACT hopes to institutionalize SBC, bolster civil society resilience in a challenging context, and increase public support for human rights.

Maria has welcomed I-FACT's support. "SBC allows us to understand the challenges we face through a new and more positive perspective."

Synthesis

In recent years, the importance of social and behavioral science to international development has become increasingly clear, and with that comes new opportunities to leverage the individual and social determinants of behavior to encourage behaviors that promote and protect democracy, human rights, and good governance. By understanding people's capabilities, opportunities, and motivations, international development programs can better leverage the existing energies that people display for [greater democracy](#), [improved human rights](#), and better governance.

Additional SBC Resources

1. [Improving Development Outcomes Through Social and Behavior Change Communication: Applying a Governance Lens](#)
2. [Everybody Wants to Belong: A Practical Guide to Tackling and Leveraging Social Norms in Behavior Change Programming](#)
3. [Social Norms Exploration Tool](#)
4. [Designing for Behavior Change: A Practical Field Guide](#): Although this field guide was developed for the food security sector, the Designing for Behavior Change (DBC) Approach described in it has broad applicability to other sectors.
5. [Think BIG](#): A USAID activity to collect resources for behavioral programming.
6. [Health Communication Capacity Collaborative \(HC3C\)](#): A five-year global health social and behavior change communication activity.
7. [Project Breakthrough](#): A USAID initiative using behavioral science to achieve health outcomes.
8. DRG Center AAAS SBC Fellow: USAID staff can contact Levi Adelman at levidelman@usaid.gov or ddl.drge@maillist@usaid.gov to help you think through applying SBC approaches to DRG programming.

Use Our Resources!

Welcome to the DRG Learning Digest, a newsletter to keep you informed of the latest learning, evaluation, and research in the Democracy, Human Rights and Governance (DRG) sector. Views expressed in the external (non-USAID) publications linked in this Digest do not necessarily represent the views of the United States Agency for International Development or the United States Government.

Don't forget to check out our DRG Learning [Menu of Services!](#) (Link only accessible to USAID personnel.) The Menu provides information on the learning products and services the Evidence and Learning Team offers to help you fulfill your DRG learning needs. We want to help you adopt learning approaches that emphasize best fit and quality.

The Evidence and Learning Team is also excited to share our [DRG Learning Evidence and Analysis Platform \(LEAP\)](#) with you. This Platform contains inventories of programmatic approaches and indicators, evidence gap maps, and data portals – all of which can be very useful in DRG activity design, implementation, evaluation, and adaptation. Some of these resources are still being built, so check back frequently to see what has been newly added.

We also want to share our [DRG Learning Harvest](#) with you! (Link only accessible to USAID personnel.) This inventory is a searchable database of DRG learning products, including summaries of key findings and recommendations, drop-down menus to easily find documents related to a particular country or program area, and links to the full reports on the DEC.

Our friends at the [Varieties of Democracy \(V-Dem\) Institute](#) are also seeking to expand their research partnership with USAID on the complex nature of democracy by inviting research questions from you for V-Dem to work on. If there's a DRG technical question you've been wondering about, please email the Evidence and Learning Team at ddl.drge@maillist@usaid.gov.

We welcome your feedback on this newsletter and on our efforts to promote the accessibility, dissemination, and utilization of DRG evidence and research. Please visit the [DRG Center's website](#) for additional information or contact us at ddl.drge@maillist@usaid.gov.