

Stewart Hickman:

Thank you, Bastian, and good morning everyone. Before we get officially started, let's hear a few words from our DRG Center Director, Tim Meisburger.

Tim Meisburger:

Good morning, good afternoon, or good evening, wherever you are in the world. I'm Tim Meisburger, the director of USAID's Center for Democracy, Rights and Governance, and your host for this series of fireside chats we call the DRG Tipping Point. This series focuses on often overlooked but surprisingly critical factors that can increase the impact of DRG programming. This series began in February and will continue until June with a new episode premiering on the first Tuesday of each month.

Tim Meisburger:

In today's session, we look at social and behavioral change, or SBC, and that's maybe why I'm standing in front of a wall of tools because SBC is a tool. It's a tool that we seek to use in all of our work across the center. It's a methodological approach pioneered in the health sector and which we are hoping to adapt as an approach for advancing democracy, human rights, and good governance.

Tim Meisburger:

Social and behavioral change approaches focus on how we can achieve development goals by changing individual behaviors or attitudes, social norms, and cultural practices. It asks the question, who needs to do what to achieve our desired outcomes? We often assume that people would act rationally if only they had adequate awareness and access to information and resources, but many programs fall short because people do not behave as we expect them to behave. Social and behavioral sciences explain why people act as they do, and we think these sciences can be applied to help strengthen DRG programming.

In this webinar, you will learn some of the fundamentals of SBC and how SBC can help achieve development outcomes instead of outputs, and how SBC enhances sustainable development by addressing the root causes of development challenges. I encourage you to participate actively in these discussions with representatives from the DRG Center, and we welcome your feedback on this and on previous episodes.

If there is any topic that you'd like us to cover in the future, please let us know. And with that, on with the show.

Stewart Hickman:

Hi, everyone. Welcome to the DRG Tipping Point. As Tim said, this is our fourth virtual session of the Tipping Point series. We are very happy that you could attend.

Stewart Hickman:

We are joined today by Laura Van Berkel. She is the Social and Behavioral Change Advisor AAAS fellow in the DRG Center. We also have with us today, Aaron Abbarno, the Director of Social and Behavior Science at Democracy International, and a former Democracy Fellow at the DRG Center's Learning Division.

Stewart Hickman:

So by the end of today, you will be familiar with the objectives that you see on your screen. I'll let you have a look at those. It's a summary of what Tim mentioned in his video.

Stewart Hickman:

So with those objectives, we have a lot to cover in the hour that we have. So without further ado, I'd like to introduce Laura Van Berkel, who will take over and take us through some of the basics of the concept and engage with us. Good morning, Laura.

Laura Van Berkel:

Good morning, Stu. Thank you for that introduction. So you should all see a poll on your screen, either now or momentarily, asking you to answer what you think social and behavior change is from the options provided. It may appear on the right hand side of your screen [inaudible 00:04:28]. We'll give you a minute to complete that poll.

Laura Van Berkel:

Okay. So I think as many of you answered, the correct answer here is option two, that social and behavioral change is activities, interventions, and other research-based processes that seek to change behaviors and the social factors that enable them. As Tim mentioned in the video, SBC asks who needs to do what to achieve our goals? You may be familiar with SBCC, or social and behavioral change communications as it's traditionally been carried out, especially in the health field. But we're dropping the last C, and just making it SBC, social and behavioral change to emphasize that behavioral interventions can and often do occur outside of communications campaigns. So social and behavioral change can still include communications, but can also include other interventions such as nudges, where we focus on changing the context of behavior as you saw with things like labeling the stairs in the example before the session started with the amount of calories you burn by walking up them, or other interventions that address the social and psychological factors that influence our behaviors.

Laura Van Berkel:

So what makes SBC a tipping point is that we're really focused on a few things. First of all, we're focused on measuring outcomes and not outputs. So for example, instead of measuring the number of women that we train to run for political office, if we want more women to participate in politics, we instead focus on measuring the actual behavior. So the number of women who ran for political office. So whether the training is effective or not? Whether we're actually achieving our behavioral goals.

Laura Van Berkel:

Social and behavioral change also has the potential to enhance the sustainability of results. So we don't start with the intervention as we can sometimes be prone to do. But instead, we start with the desired outcome and work backwards to get at the underlying causes.

Laura Van Berkel:

So changing things like social norms or creating new social norms can help create lasting change, long after traditional information campaigns or trainings would have ended. Some SBC interventions, like changing the way that information is presented to fit with our psychological processes and biases can be relatively cheap or no-cost. For example, just adjusting the information on a flyer that was going to go out anyway, and can provide a simple way to maintain the intervention over time.

Laura Van Berkel:

And finally, social and behavioral change really incorporates flexibility in our programming and learning. So it's important to remember that context is going to influence behavior a little bit differently depending on the culture, and the country, context, and situation. It's important that we pilot our interventions before scaling up to make sure that something that works in one context will apply to a new context. And because we're focused on outcomes and not outputs, we also want to be sure to measure the behaviors themselves and learn whether what we're doing is actually leading to change. So here, impact evaluations and randomized control trials are the gold standard, but there are lots of ways to incorporate learning within smaller budgets and smaller time frames as well.

Stewart Hickman:

Thanks, Laura. This is very interesting. And of course, when we talk about human behavior, it's very complex. Can you give us a sense of some of the key factors that influence social behavior change, so we can appreciate its complexity here?

Laura Van Berkel:

Yeah. So our behavior is influenced by a number of factors that can be broadly classified by the level at which they impact us in society. One way of doing this is in these three categories of individual, social, and structural factors. Individual factors are those that are internal to the individual, factors like attitudes, knowledge, and personality. And although these factors are internal to an individual, it's important to remember that they can still be influenced by context.

Laura Van Berkel:

For example, someone may know. They may have the knowledge of when an election date is, but forget to go because work, family, or other obligations arise. Or as many of you answered in the warm-up poll, you may value exercise and being healthy, but yet you're still not using your gym membership. So you're still not engaging in that healthy behavior that you may have the right attitude about.

Laura Van Berkel:

At the social level, these are factors where other people influence the individual. So these are things like social norms, what we see other people do, what we think other people expect us to do, and also our social networks and support systems, and group identities. So the religion that we are, our gender, racial, ethnic identities, things like that.

Laura Van Berkel:

And finally, at the structural level, these are things really at the cultural or regional or country level. So big society-wide factors, and these may include things like our laws at the national, local, or state level, and also things like infrastructure. You can't go to your town hall meeting if you have no way to get there because there aren't roads or you don't have a car, things like that. So all these things at various levels can affect us, and SBC typically focuses more on the social and individual factors that influence our behavior.

Stewart Hickman:

Thanks, that's very helpful. So what we want to do now is take a deeper dive into behavior because I know it can be tricky to define precisely the behavior that you want to see?

Laura Van Berkel:

Yeah, exactly. I think that it can sound really easy to pick a behavior. We all know what that word means, but it's harder than it looks because we want to be sure that the [inaudible 00:11:13] is really something that we can influence and that we understand really well, so that we can understand all the underlying factors.

Laura Van Berkel:

So this is a general checklist of what constitutes a behavior. First of all, it's action or actions, so there needs to be a verb involved in choosing your behavior. Behavior needs to be feasible or doable. It needs to be time-bound, so we need to specify things like frequency, or duration, or if there is a deadline.

Laura Van Berkel:

Behavior needs to be measurable and we'll get more into what that means in just a minute. It needs to be tied to specific outcomes, so our larger development goals and objectives based in research. We need to... Behavior will affect these larger goals, and it need stock be what irrational labs have called uncomfortably specific. So a good behavior is one that is so detailed and so specific that they say you should feel a little bit uncomfortable about how specific it is.

Laura Van Berkel:

I'll also note that awareness is not a behavior. So we see that a lot at USAID, that people want to raise awareness about issues. I think that you should keep in mind what you want people... End goal, or is it one of the individual factors like knowledge or attitudes that you expect to affect behavior. Or if you really do want people to have awareness, there may be a way to break that down further. So what does awareness mean? Is it watching the news, for example? Talking to friends, things like that. You can think about what awareness behaviors might be as well.

Laura Van Berkel:

Let's go through this with a specific example that we're all familiar with these days is why we're having this meeting virtually is due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and you've all probably been subject to a number of social and behavioral change campaigns over the last few months, trying to get you to engage in behaviors to stop the spread of COVID-19, including things like wash your hands. So let's stop and think about whether something like wash your hands is a good target behavior.

Laura Van Berkel:

So... that I went through on the previous page and see if it fits the criteria. So is this an action? Yes, it does include a verb of washing your hands. So far, so good. Now, we need to ask, is this feasible? The answer here depends on where you live. It depends on your larger structural context. If you don't have access to water, to clean water, then washing your hands is not feasible and we may instead need to think of alternative behaviors, like using hand sanitizer or other hand hygiene behaviors.

Laura Van Berkel:

So is wash your hands time-bound? No. It doesn't say when we need to wash our hands or for how long we need to wash our hands.

Laura Van Berkel:

Is washing our hands measurable? Actually, it's really not. You may think that it is, but when you're thinking about whether something is measurable or not, I think it's a good idea to imagine yourself as a researcher, as somebody that needs to code whether hand washing has occurred or not. So imagine that you are in a public restroom, for example, and you're watching people come out and wash their hands or not, and you need to just check. Does hand washing behavior occur or not?

Laura Van Berkel:

Well, think about it. Does somebody wash their hands if they just use water, if they rinsed their hands off and don't use soap? What if they use soap and no water? What if they washed their hands with soap and water, but don't dry their hands? What if they just do it for one [inaudible 00:14:58] hand washing? What counts, and what doesn't?

Laura Van Berkel:

So when you get into measurable, you should really think about if multiple are looking at the same behavior, will they count it the same way? Will they count this as a behavior or not? Is it something that you can observe and know if it's occurred? So this would not fit that criteria.

Laura Van Berkel:

So then, we ask ourselves, is this tied to specific outcomes? Well, it's not articulated in the behavior itself. But yes, overall, hand washing is tied to a reduction in the spread of COVID-19, and this is based in research, that we know that washing hands helps reduce the spread of germs.

Laura Van Berkel:

And finally, is this uncomfortably specific? I would say no because we still... It's not really measurable. We still don't really know what counts as hand washing.

Laura Van Berkel:

So an improved behavior might be this campaign, which says wash your hands regularly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. So this is much better because it specifies that hand washing needs to include soap and water, and it includes the time component of at least 20 seconds and it includes the word "regularly" as well.

Laura Van Berkel:

So this could get even more specific, that we could redefine "regularly" to specify what that means and include more specific times, like as soon as you come home, before you eat, or even something like every hour, you should wash your hands. If you want to get really specific, we could define more deeply, what we mean by hand washing. You may have seen these types of campaigns as well, that it's not enough to just rub your hands together, but you need to make sure to get the back of your hands under your nails, between your fingernails. And so that only if you do these seven steps, are you doing the proper hand washing behavior.

Laura Van Berkel:

So then, once we've defined what we really mean by behavior, now we can move to considering the factors that shape this behavior at the various levels we discussed earlier, especially at the individual and social levels for SBC campaign. So this might ask questions like do people know how to properly

wash their hands? Are their friends and family washing their hands, and pressuring them into this behavior?

Laura Van Berkel:

So now... An example of what a behavior looks like in the DRG sector.

Aaron Abbarno:

Thanks, Laura. So before we dive into that, I think it's important you clarify something that maybe many of you DRG practitioners are thinking, which is hang on a second. Easy to define a feasible action that is time-bound and measurable like washing your hands, but we deal with large multi-dimensional intractable social problems, so why are we talking about washing our hands?

Aaron Abbarno:

Before we move on, I'd like to recognize two things. The first is that every uncomfortably specific behavior is tied to a larger multidimensional and often intractable outcome. In the case of hand washing, what we're talking about is reducing contagion. So in DRG, we usually start with that large unwieldy problem. For instance, increasing awareness of gender-based violence. The specific behaviors that contribute to increased awareness of gender-based violence are up to us to specify, and can include anything as small as, for instance, attendance. Attending a listening group for 30 minutes on Tuesdays and Thursdays with six other people in your village, for instance. Uncomfortably specific. The specific behavior is attendance, and it contributes to increased awareness of gender-based violence.

Aaron Abbarno:

The second thing to recognize is that we want to encourage many specific behaviors, but these together probably do not meet the objectives on their own. So just as reducing contagion of COVID-19 requires a vaccine in addition to washing hands, so is media content necessary to increase awareness in combination with attendance. So there are structural issues and interventions, as well as SBC. They work together as complements, and SBC doesn't supplant these traditional interventions, so let's keep that in mind.

Aaron Abbarno:

When we think about how we want to or how we can identify the behaviors that we want to see in DRG and separate them from non-behavioral changes that our program should achieve, it's helpful to think about a straightforward example to start, like voter turnout. This is a program that Democracy International did with the Middle East Partnership Initiative and the Department of State. This is a good place to start because it's pretty straightforward.

Aaron Abbarno:

So the objective is increasing voter participation. So what is the specific behavior? Is it voting? No, it's not uncomfortably specific enough, but voting is a function of a lot of more specific things, like walking, or driving, or busing to the polling center, waiting outside in the rain, if possible or if necessary. It's asking for instructions once you're inside the polling center, and texting people you know after you vote to remind them to vote. These are the kinds of behaviors that we're talking about. They can be even more specific when we're talking about target groups. Specific groups that we're working with [inaudible 00:20:39].

Aaron Abbarno:

From there, we want our behaviors to be the outcomes. So we're working, we want to manipulate the behaviors to correspond to what is desirable. In this case, going to the polling center. So there are outcomes, if you will. The question is are these really behavioral problems? This is when we have to ask ourselves, to what extent are these addressable with social and behavioral change approaches?

Aaron Abbarno:

There are various things that could inhibit or could be a barrier to walking to the polling center or waiting outside in line. Some of those things are non-behavioral, like you may lack transportation, or you may lack the information. You may simply not know when the election is. You may not know where to go. Providing information there is not a behavioral issue.

Aaron Abbarno:

Your polling center may be inaccessible to you because you're a person with disability or because maybe you're illiterate and it's not equipped for that. There are, however, several behavioral issues at the core here. For instance, you may have poll information but your friends don't vote, so you're following the herd there to abstain. You may intend to go, as Laura mentioned earlier, but status quo wins out. You start your day, you start your chores. The next thing you know, the polls have closed. You would go perhaps, but you don't see or let's say you would text your friends to remind them to vote but you don't see any reward for doing so.

Aaron Abbarno:

There is no real immediate benefit incentive for communicating with your friends. That's one of the reasons a sticker is a useful tool in DRG. It's more of an immediate reward for voting, or you may fall into a belief trap. You don't think voting matters, so you'll never subject that belief to a test and you won't go vote.

Aaron Abbarno:

These are the kinds of behavioral issues that SBC can address very effectively, and we're going to break one down together in a group exercise. Stu?

Stewart Hickman:

Thanks, Aaron, and thank you, Laura, for that helpful context, and we'll get a chance a little bit to get a taste of this and get our minds around this in a specific example. So we're going to go into breakout rooms, where you'll have some minutes, as Aaron said, to walk through this example.

Stewart Hickman:

Basti, can you help us transition to the breakouts?

Basti Gras:

Sure, and thanks to you. So in just a few moments, you will be automatically transitioned into a breakout room. And here, you have some more advanced capabilities, so please refrain from clicking on Stop Sharing at any time. There is the Stop Sharing button in the top right corner because otherwise we might be losing our content in that space, and a producer will circulate among the rooms to ensure that the technology is working well and a facilitator will be also in each room, helping to guide your

discussion. So furthermore, you will receive a series of broadcast messages that will help you to keep time, and we will now transition into breakout rooms and you may be asked to reconnect your audio, so just go ahead and activate your listening in option. And with that, I wish you a wonderful breakout room discussion.

Aaron Abbarno:

Okay, great. So I'm really grateful to have the chance to talk with you about social and behavioral change in practice at Democracy International. What we've been talking about so far today has been the challenge and difficulty of problem identification and just getting it so precise, and specific, and uncomfortably so that we can generate interventions that address it. That's the end point here. We want to be able to essentially address these behaviors and change them in a way that is for the best.

Aaron Abbarno:

So if you've noticed our examples, all of them today have involved a person, decision-maker or an actor, and a situation. We have to understand the person because we can't change deep-seeded individual factors like personal traits, for instance, but we can work with the situation and we can work with the situation in which people encounter a choice in which they encounter information, and which they digest and process the information.

Aaron Abbarno:

The term of art for doing that is called nudging, and what it is is altering any aspect of how information or choices are presented to influence decisions and behaviors in predictable ways without forbidding options, or significantly altering economic incentives.

Aaron Abbarno:

So to give you an example of nudging, I'd like to continue with the [inaudible 00:27:43] Tunisian voter participation, the project that DI worked on in 2018 with the Department of State, US/Middle East Partnership Initiative. At DI, we treat behavioral challenges as part and parcel of our work. So where relevant, we design the interventions with nudges to help overcome behavioral challenges. You may be wondering, where do you find behavioral challenges? Well, one of the answers is in a tool that we already know, for instance, focus group discussions or even as part of a one-dimensional voter outreach campaign, where you're speaking with voters about the intentions. That's what we did, and we came back with a lot of really interesting points.

Aaron Abbarno:

For instance, people saying what the right thing to say is. "I'll definitely vote. It's the most basic responsibility that we have. We've got to do it," or other people saying things like, "Yes, but nobody cares what we think. Voting is pointless. It doesn't make a difference what I think," especially young people talk like this in Tunisia. And then, there are others who say, "It would be cool to vote. I might do it."

Aaron Abbarno:

These are types of behavioral elements of the decision to go vote, and we can extra from these kind of personas or these examples our typical nonvoters in Tunisia. There is the cynic, who says there is no point in voting. There is the indifferent voter, who maybe will go vote, maybe is a first-time voter but maybe watching Netflix instead. And then, there is this interesting category of voter, we call a



distracted voter. Someone who says they'll definitely go vote, does all the right things, but in fact has no voting record or doesn't really go vote. Here, we have to ask are these people lying to us, or should we take them at their word? We take them at their word and we assume that something gets in the way, that there is some gap between the intention to go vote and the action itself.

Aaron Abbarno:

So those types of insights lead us to develop interventions that speak to or rather address and nudge people toward the behavior that we think they need to overcome, or rather the hurdle that they need to overcome. For instance, the cynic. The cynic may not have ever received any positive feedback for voting. Maybe that feedback is in the form of a desired politician winning. Maybe that feedback is in the form of a sticker. One way to deliver feedback to overcome this idea of having no reward for doing a behavior is a simple thank you.

Aaron Abbarno:

So one way to provide feedback we attempted was to demonstrate gratitude. Show gratitude by thanking people for voting, thanking them for paying attention to politics. For the indifferent voters, they lacked motivation and we know, as Laura told us about social norms, people act pro-socially when they think others are watching or when they think that's expected of them. So we're able to leverage feelings of pride and shame and social identity by saying, "Hey, you know your neighbors are voting. What about you?"

Aaron Abbarno:

And finally, for those voters who have an intention-to-action gap, we're able to bridge that gap with a plan, asking people to define the when, the where, the how, the with whom of voting, so that they create these connections in their mind that essentially make voting a self-prophecy. The results are here. We distributed these messages via door-to-door canvassing and leaflets in two separate arms of this intervention. The average effects were here.

Aaron Abbarno:

Basic middle guide here is a flowchart where the critical question is whether the core problem that we addressing is in fact a behavioral problem. And if it is, we work to precisely specify the behavior we want to see, and then identify all the barriers to that behavior. To give you an example of what the barriers look like or what that process looks like, on the right hand side, we have a flowchart. It's very small but the point is this is a very typical goal in DRG of having a trainee attend a training. And so, we think about all the things that go into the steps from deciding to enroll, all the way through attending the training.

Aaron Abbarno:

The individual will have to, on one hand, decide to enroll. And then, there is a time period of waiting during which they may forget that they have enrolled. That they may need to collect a series of documents, call the office or walk to the office and provide that information to a program manager of sorts. They then, once enrolled, may have to wait until the seminar, at which point they have to remember the day of the seminar. When they remember the day of the seminar, they have to decide again whether to attend the seminar. Then, they have to get to the seminar. When they get there, they have to decide to stay at the seminar.

Aaron Abbarno:

So there is a great deal of small seemingly insignificant steps that can break this change. People may not remember. People may not have the energy. People may simply lack the sense of urgency. They may procrastinate. They may see no immediate benefit. These red boxes indicate all the potential hurdle to these very small, seemingly insignificant behaviors that as implementers, we need to address to make sure that we are able to achieve our goals.

Aaron Abbarno:

As Tim said in his video, we make assumptions about how people will actually and how they'll make choices. When those assumptions falter, so do our projects. So it's incumbent on implementers to take social and behavioral change seriously, and to think about how to scope out the problem and address those micro stages in-between a simple decision and outcome.

Aaron Abbarno:

So I'll stop there, and I think I'll turn it back to the facilitators. Thank you.

Laura Van Berkel:

So we'll go ahead with the questions that I believe you all should be able to see. So the first question is that multiple target audiences may require different SBC components for each one based on what influences them different. So how do you manage the costs and LOE of multiple target audience strategies?

Laura Van Berkel:

I think that's a great question because as we saw in the breakout, you do have to think about who you want to engage in the behavior. Is it everybody, or is it specific groups. For that, I would say it depends on the specific context, but I think it's important to think about whose behavior needs to move the most and who to prioritize. So depending on the time and budget that you have, you may want to only prioritize one specific target audience. Or you may, as Aaron laid out, want to have different strategies and target audiences depending on what the specific barriers are. You may want to have one target for people that feel disengaged, another target for people that may need to just have reminders, so it may depend as well on the specific barriers.

Laura Van Berkel:

Aaron, did you want to add anything to that?

Aaron Abbarno:

Yeah, I think this is a great question and it's definitely something that implementers need to be thinking about when designing their activities. One thing here is to encourage USAID too in solicitations to specify that this is a welcome strategy, in which case, implementers will be very likely to respond to it. I think it fits really nicely with a local solutions approach. Nudges, for instance, are hyper-local. They are really contextualized. For instance, DI's work in some places is divided by municipality, where we're working with local partners in each context, in each municipality, and work with those groups to identify the behavioral problems that they confront. And then, build nudges, tailor them for those partners' specific problems.

Aaron Abbarno:

So it has to be built in from the beginning at the project design stage, and budgeted appropriately for the project. But I think at USAID's level, thinking about breaking the problem down or encouraging problem identification based on subgroups and locations, and then encouraging solutions that are tailored will help go a long way.

Laura Van Berkel:

Great. Thanks, Aaron. So I'm happy. We're at time right now at 9:00, but I am happy to continue answering a few more questions if folks are able to stay on the line, but we understand if you need to leave the session.

Laura Van Berkel:

So we'll end with this question, and again, feel free to contact me, [Ivanberkel@usaid.gov](mailto:Ivanberkel@usaid.gov), with more questions, and I'm sure that Aaron is open to questions as well at... It's [aabbarno@democracyinternational.org](mailto:aabbarno@democracyinternational.org), right, Aaron? Maybe you could type your...

Aaron Abbarno:

Dot com.

Laura Van Berkel:

Yeah, your email in the main chat for people to reach out to you as well. So the question here is we have a concept like PITA, participation, inclusion, transparency and accountability, that can translate in behavior as well, but how do we apply a BC approach to that? Yeah, so that's a good question about how to connect this with larger concepts.

Laura Van Berkel:

So here, I would say that part of it is to break down what the specific behavior is. As you mentioned, you can translate it into behavior as well. So once you break down the specific behaviors of what you mean by each of these components, like participation, inclusion, transparency and accountability, to think through these individual social and structural factors that influence the specific behaviors that you've been able to translate, and to think through, again, who needs to engage in the behavior? How do you want them to engage in the behavior? When do they need to be engaged in the behavior?

Laura Van Berkel:

Yeah. Does that help answer the question? I don't know, Aaron, if you have anything specific you want to add to that?

Aaron Abbarno:

No, I think you've covered it, Laura. This is precisely a target for behavior change. Each one of those elements has behaviors that contribute to it. What encourages accountability? What specific behaviors do you want to see that make accountability? That's a concept. What are the concrete actions? Think about it that way.