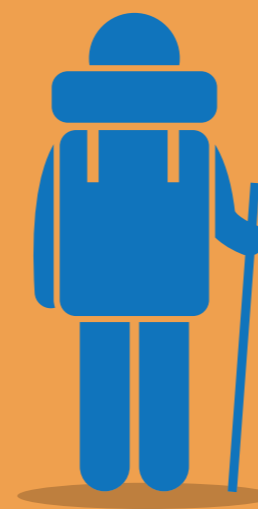# Social Norms in Practice

Short Guide Series for Practitioners

February 2022

Corruption, Justice and Legitimacy Program

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS SHORT GUIDE?

Our 4th guide offers an example of a corrupt behavior driven by a social norm. It identifies the components of the norm and explains how the norm differs from other social dynamics.

If new to social norms, we recommend first reading short guides
#1 Social Norms and Corruption: An Overview and
#3 How Are Social Norms Different.

BACKGROUND:
APPLYING ADMINISTRATIVE SANCTIONS

Section 46 of Uganda's Anti-Corruption Act mandates that any public servant convicted of corruption must be removed from the state payroll and pension. However, this administrative sanction is rarely implemented. Convicted individuals continue to be paid or receive a pension, even while serving their sentence in prison.

See: *Understanding the Underlying Values, Norms and Behaviors Constraining the Implementation of Administrative Sanction in the Ugandan Public Service.*

MONTH 1: PETER, THE NEW GUY

Peter is a civil servant who has recently transferred to the Public Service Commission. In his new role, he is responsible for removing public servants who have been convicted of corruption from payroll or pension.

Peter sees that the way his colleagues process files typically does not follow official procedure. In fact, the process they use actually delays action.
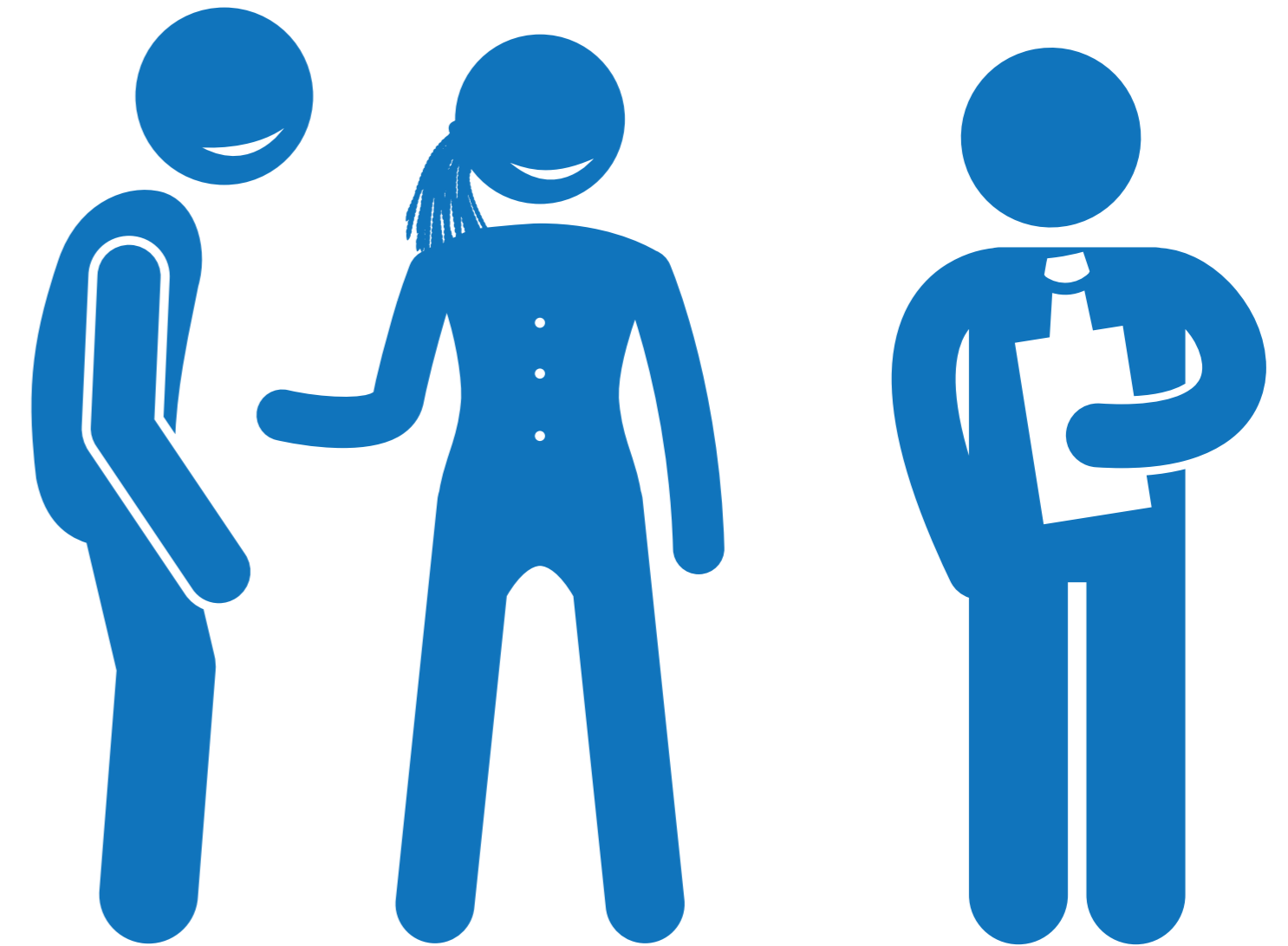
MONTH 2: PETER'S FIRST CASE

Peter's first case involves Kolo, who was convicted of accepting bribes when he worked for the Ministry of Transportation. Since Kolo was convicted, he is supposed to be removed from the government payroll.

Peter feels unsure how to handle his first case due to the differences between official procedure and what he has observed. Eager to fit-in with his new colleagues, Peter reaches out to team members for advice.

LEARNING THE WAY THINGS "WORK"

One of Peter's colleagues explains: *"Files can always be lost or delayed; processes can always be forgotten. You should be wary of how your actions may lead to serious consequences for yourself."*

As the conversation concludes, Peter hesitantly puts Kolo's file into his drawer. Peter's colleagues gently nod at him and walk away.

SOCIAL NORMS ARE MUTUAL EXPECTATIONS HELD 'BY A GROUP'

mutual expectations

BELIEFS about what others **DO**

BELIEFS about what others **THINK** we should do.

rewards and punishments

In this case, the reference group is Peter's colleagues in the administrative department who have a role in processing files related to administrative sanctions. This includes peers as well as those in a supervisory capacity.

SOCIAL NORMS ARE MADE UP OF COMMONLY HELD BELIEFS IN THE GROUP

A descriptive norm is a belief about what others in the group do. The majority of Peter's team believe that other bureaucrats involved in the enforcement of Section 46 find ways to avoid moving the file forward (e.g. inaction, excessive consultation etc.).

An injunctive norm is a belief about what others in a group approve and disapprove of. Most civil servants involved in the group believe that their peers expect them to find avenues to help convicted civil servants avoid removal from payroll.

WHAT ARE THE REWARDS AND PUNISHMENTS?

POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT
FOR COMPLIANCE

Reward: Peter is new and wants to fit in and be accepted by his new colleagues.

CONSEQUENCES
FOR NOT BEHAVING

Punishment: Peter's conversation suggests that if he doesn't follow the social norm, others may perceive him as someone who doesn't know how to behave properly and therefore can't be counted on.

WHAT IS THE SOCIAL NORM?

Adding it all together, the social norm that Peter is experiencing is:

Those responsible for processing administrative sanctions where Peter works are expected by their peers to find avenues within official procedures to help colleagues avoid punishment.

Remember, one cannot tell if a social norm is driving a corrupt behavior from a single example. In this case, CJL used participatory methods with civil servants to gather sufficient information to understand if the behavior was typical and deemed appropriate across the team.

How does the social norm differ from . . .

Attitude: A person's beliefs or judgements (e.g. favor/disfavor) about something or someone.	While Peter refrained from initiating the process to remove a convicted civil servant from the payroll (his behavior), he does not think that it is something they should be doing (his attitude).
Behavior: What people actually do.	The desire to be a trusted part of his new team and his concern about the possible consequences of deviating weighs strongly on his mind. In this case, the social norm overrode Peter's individual attitude toward following the Anti-Corruption Act.
Moral: Deeply held inner convictions that help people decide what is right or wrong.	Peter does not see corruption in moral or amoral terms. It is the way his world works which is different from his inner convictions.

How does the social norm differ from . . .

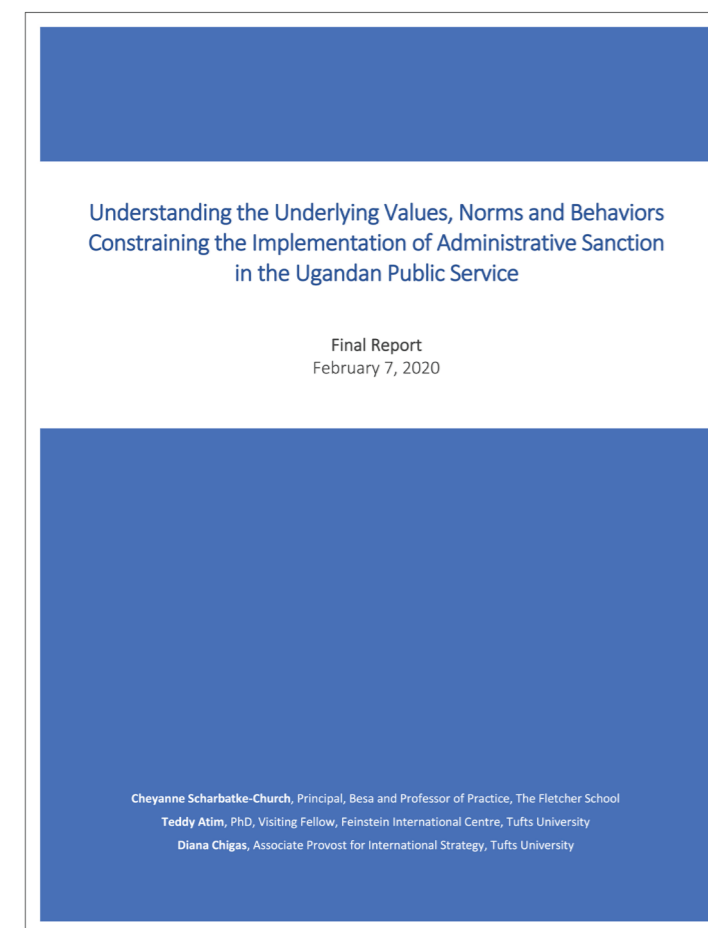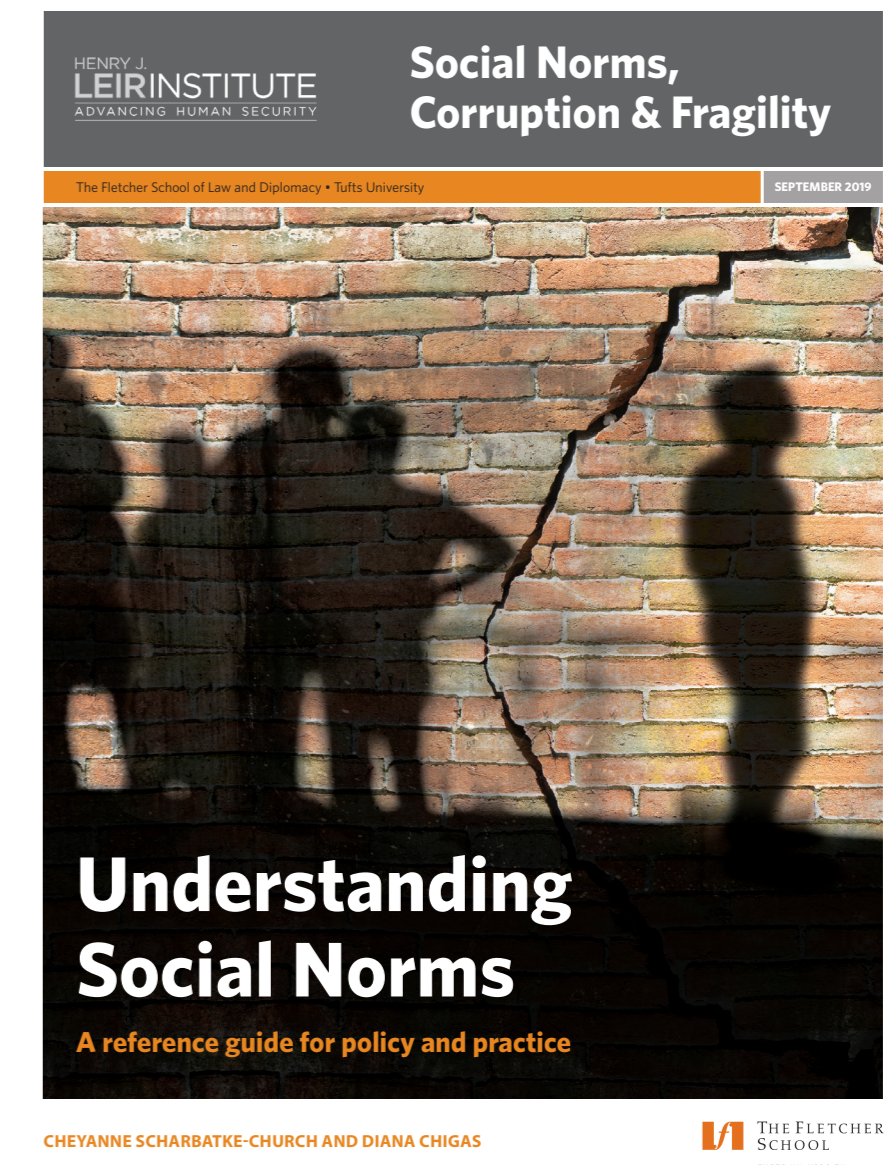| **Convention:** A convention is a common pattern of behavior people engage in; normal behavior.	Peter's act of forgoing the initiation of the sanction was not because it was convenient for him or that it met his needs. If that was the case, this would have been a convention. Peter's actions were driven by the social pressure or mutual expectation to act in a certain way backed by the fear of punishment on failure to do so.
Culture: Culture encompasses patterns of behavior, social institutions, attitudes, norms, values, language, etc., that are characteristic of a given group and are socially transmitted.	This social norm is part of the larger culture in Uganda, but it is not synonymous.

FOR MORE ABOUT SOCIAL NORMS AND CORRUPTION:

The report this example came from:

Understanding the Underlying Values, Norms and Behaviors
Constraining the Implementation of Administrative Sanction
in the Ugandan Public Service

Final Report
February 7, 2020

Cheyanne Scharbatke-Church, Principal, Besa and Professor of Practice, The Fletcher School
Teddy Atim, PhD, Visiting Fellow, Feinstein International Centre, Tufts University
Diana Chigas, Associate Provost for International Strategy, Tufts University

CJL's report on how social
norms are constraining the
implementation of the Ugandan
Administrative Act

How Are Social Norms Different: Not Just An Academic Exercise
Short Guide Series for Practitioners

October 2021

CJL's third short guide for
practitioners:
How are Social Norms different?

HENRY J.
LEIRINSTITUTE
ADVANCING HUMAN SECURITY

Social Norms,
Corruption & Fragility

The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy • Tufts University   SEPTEMBER 2019

Understanding
Social Norms

A reference guide for policy and practice

CHEYANNE SCHARBATKE-CHURCH AND DIANA CHIGAS

THE FLETCHER SCHOOL
TUFTS UNIVERSITY

CJL's comprehensive
reference guide for understanding
Social Norms

WHAT IS THE CORRUPTION, JUSTICE AND LEGITIMACY PROGRAM?

The Corruption, Justice, and Legitimacy (CJL) Program is a research-to-practice initiative committed to improving the effectiveness of anti-corruption programming in contexts of endemic corruption. The program has developed a systems-based approach to corruption analysis that empowers practitioners to see the interconnected nature of drivers and enablers of corruption. After testing the approach in several fragile states, CJL realized that more effective responses would also require more insight into the conflict, peacebuilding, and corruption nexus along with greater practical guidance on how to integrate social norms into programming.

FOR MORE FROM CJL FOLLOW

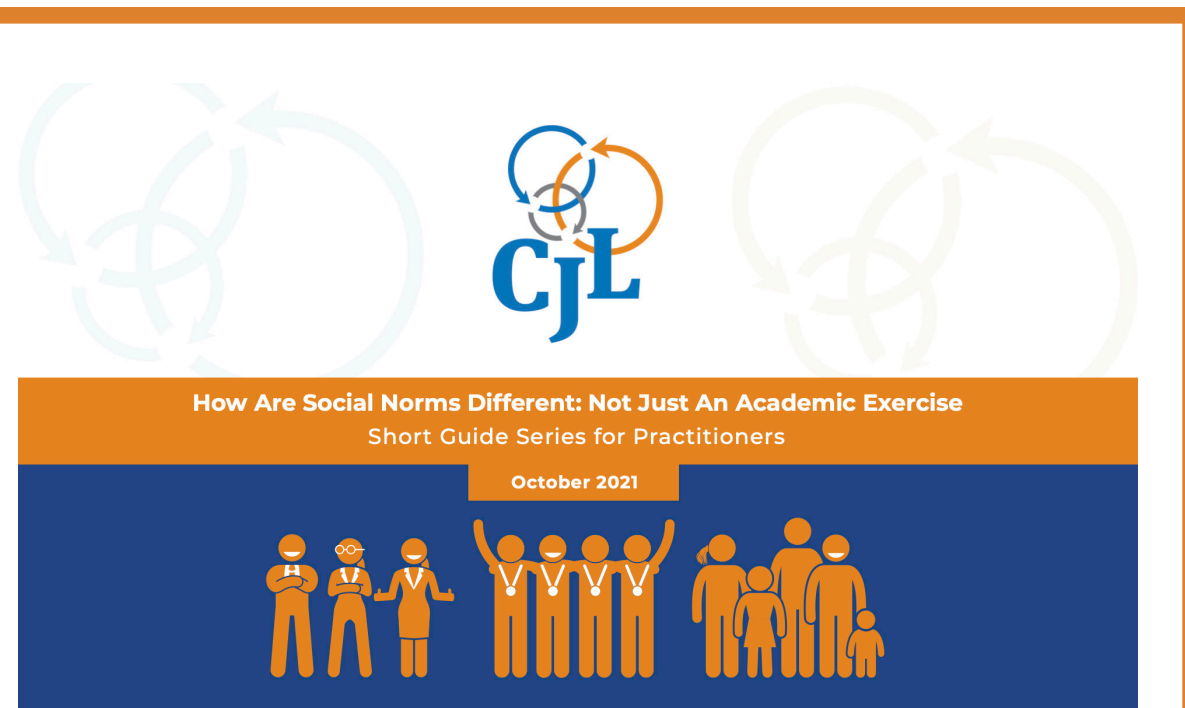www.corruptionjusticeandlegitimacy.org
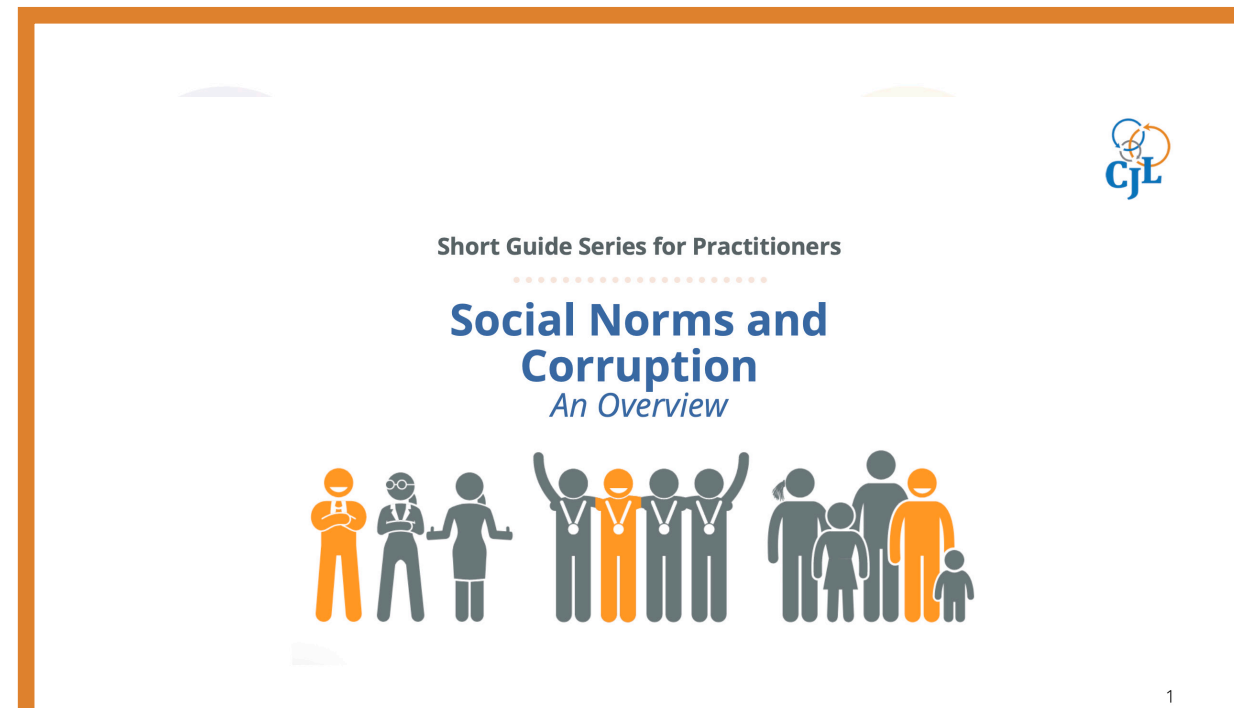
THE CORRUPTION IN FRAGILE STATES BLOG

LINKEDIN

Check out the other guides in this series!

How Are Social Norms Different: Not Just An Academic Exercise

Social Norms and Corruption

Why Social Norms Matter to Anti-Corruption