

**Timeline**

July-November 2020

**Study Type**

Randomized Evaluation

**Article Link**

<https://www.povertyactionlab.org/initiative-project/accelerating-changes-norms-...>

**Research Implemented by IPA**

No

# Accelerating Changes in Norms about Social Distancing to Combat COVID-19 in Mozambique

## Researchers

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## Abstract

Social distancing is one of the most important health behaviors limiting the spread of COVID-19, but people may practice it insufficiently for multiple reasons: they may not believe or realize that community norms have shifted towards support for social distancing, and they may not realize its public health benefits. This project is supporting Mozambique's effort to promote social distancing, in collaboration with the government's health research center for the central region. In a representative sample of 3,000 households across three provinces, many of whom were displaced by Cyclone Idai, researchers are evaluating two different messaging approaches to promote social distancing. One emphasizes that others in the community—either prominent individuals or a high share of other households—support social distancing. The other emphasizes social distancing's public health benefits. Data from high-frequency phone-based surveys will inform the government about how COVID-19-related knowledge, beliefs, and preventative behaviors are changing over time.

*Funding for this project was provided by the UK Department for International Development, awarded through IPA's Peace & Recovery Program.*

## Project Outcomes of Interest

Household social distancing behaviors, Perceived social distancing norms, COVID-19 related knowledge, beliefs, and behaviors

## Partners

Beira Operational Research Center at the Ministry of Health, Mozambique

## Key Findings

### Round 1 (July 17-August 16, 2020) English Summary Report:

- Household income has dropped by 33% on average since the onset of the pandemic, and 72% of households are food insecure.
- Respondents show high support for social distancing, but often underestimate their community's average support for social distancing.
- Respondents have uneven knowledge about COVID-19 and the government's pandemic response, giving correct answers to some questions but showing poor knowledge in other areas.
- Households report following major COVID-19 health recommendations, but also high rates of some false beliefs and non-preventive behaviors, such as meeting up with friends and spraying alcohol or chlorine on the body.

### Round 2 (August 26-October 4) English Summary Report:

- Household income has dropped more than 50% from February 2020, before the onset of the pandemic, to September 2020. 71% of households remain food insecure.
- Respondents' perception of their community's support for social distancing has improved over time, but still underestimates their community's true support for social distancing.
- Respondents' knowledge about COVID-19 has improved over time, especially with regard to the government's pandemic response, and preventative knowledge.
- TV and radio are the two most common sources of COVID-19 information. Over time, respondents report hearing about COVID-19 more from religious leaders and NGOs, and less from WhatsApp and ATM messages.

### Round 3 (October 5- November 18) Summary Report:

- 30% of households are taking on additional paid labor to cope with the economic impacts of COVID-19, the majority of whom are men.

- 28% of households have intensified agricultural production since the onset of the pandemic to manage food insecurity, the majority of whom are women.
- Despite their own hardships, 35% of all households provided donations or support for other struggling families.
- Households describe learning losses as a result of school closures, with 90% reporting that their child learned less this school year and 68% wanting their children to retake their current grade.

## Link to Results

- [Teaching and Incentives: Substitutes or Complements? \(Working Paper\)](#)
- [Correcting Perceived Social Distancing Norms to Combat COVID-19 \(NBER Working Paper\)](#)
- [Combatting COVID-19 in Mozambique \(University of Michigan Policy Brief\)](#)
- [Correcting Perceived Social Distancing Norms to Combat COVID-19 \(University of Michigan Policy Brief\)](#)
- [Combining Financial Incentives and Teaching to Improve COVID-19 Knowledge \(University of Michigan Policy Brief\)](#)
- [The Consequences of COVID-19 on Forcibly Displaced People: A Primer on Research Activities \(Joint Data Center on Forced Displacement Primer\)](#)

## Impact Goals

- Promote peace and safety, and improve humanitarian response
- Reduce COVID-19 transmission rates

## Project Data Collection Mode

- CATI (Computer-assisted telephone interviewing)

## Link to Pre-Registration

<https://www.socialscienceregistry.org/trials/5862/history/69197>

## Results Status

### Results

## Results

### Correcting Perceived Social Distancing Norms to Combat COVID-19 (NBER Working Paper):

Can informing people of high rates of community support for social distancing encourage them to do more of it? Our Mozambican study population underestimated the rate of community support for social distancing, believing support to be only 69%, while the true share was 98%. In theory, informing people of high rates of community support has ambiguous effects on social distancing, depending on whether a perceived-infectiousness effect dominates a free-riding effect. We randomly assigned a "social norm correction" treatment, informing people of true high rates of community support for social distancing. We examine an improved measure of social distancing combining detailed self-reports with reports on the respondent by others in the community. The treatment increases social distancing where COVID-19 case loads are high (where the perceived-infectiousness effect dominates), but decreases it where case loads are low (where free-riding dominates). Separately, randomized local-leader endorsements of social distancing are ineffective. As COVID-19 case loads continue to rise, interventions such as the social norm correction treatment should show increased effectiveness at promoting social distancing.