**Social progress and behavioral change**

*A proposal to start operationalizing part of the “Inspirations, social progress and behavioral change” action of the “Unleashing the potential of social change” component of the IPSP Social Progress Agenda.*

Understanding and changing human behavior is essential to addressing some of the major economic, social, political, environmental, and cultural challenges facing the world today. And while systemic, regulatory, and policy measures are critical to addressing these issues as well, sustainable changes in the behavior of different actors are often at the heart of the transitions needed to move toward better societies.

Fostering conversations between the most influential voices working on applied behavioral science for development around the world and the IPSP community is essential to harnessing this potential in the Social Progress Agenda. We propose to do this by organizing a series of online recorded presentations and interviews in which these leading voices explain, in accessible and non-technical language, how behavioral science can contribute to the four components of the IPSP Social Progress Agenda. The videos and edited transcripts of these dialogues will then be published widely online (e.g., on the IPSP website and in PPIAS) and in print (e.g., in an edited volume by a reputable publisher).

Proposal

International organizations, governments, NGOs, and other actors have begun to understand the importance of behavioral science to increase the impact of their work and are rapidly building their capacity in these areas, either by hiring behaviorally oriented professionals in sectoral teams, by creating full-fledged internal behavioral units, or by hiring external consultants. These teams and professionals are working to integrate various behavioral analysis and intervention methodologies into the work of these organizations, often with the goal of increasing the impact of policy, regulatory, and other types of interventions.

Organizations such as the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, the U.S. Agency for International Development, the International Rescue Committee, and many United Nations agencies, all of which mobilize massive amounts of resources around the world to promote social progress across sectors, are all actively implementing strong behavioral interventions and producing guidance through internal and external staff. One of the most visible recent examples is the [Guidance Note](https://www.un.org/en/content/behaviouralscience/) on the Application of Behavioral Science Across UN Agencies, produced by an inter-agency team coordinated by the Office of the Secretary-General. Governments are investing significant resources in creating nudge units, which the [OECD recently estimated](https://oecd-opsi.org/guide/behavioural-insights/) at 200 (and private companies are following suit, such as Google, Facebook, Walmart, to name some of the most visible examples). While initially applied to developed countries, this explosion has created a solid base of evidence and applications in other areas of the world (i.e., the “global south”).

And yet, as in many other social science fields, evidence of inspiring case studies of initiatives and reforms is emerging rapidly but in a scattered fashion, adding a complexity that prevents the kind of actionable insights and recommendations that IPSP seeks. This proposal represents a first step toward operationalizing the "Inspiration, Social Progress and Behavior Change" action of the "Unleashing the Potential for Social Change" component of the IPSP Social Progress Agenda: "Individual behavior change is a powerful driver of change in many areas of society (health, nutrition, education, social inclusion, etc.). *A better understanding of successful examples of nudging for social progress would provide important insights for public policies, as well as for interventions designed by civil society and/or private organizations*". In addition to being an important component of successful policy and development interventions, behavioral science can and has also been used to open new inspirations for debate and change when traditional policies are not (yet) being implemented, or even discussed (e.g. broader community change processes or sustainability adaptations - see for example [here](https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2004/03/academic-turns-city-into-a-social-experiment/)).

**In the same spirit and goals of the work of International Panel for Social Progress in other areas, this volume brings together influential voices who are leading the work of international organizations, governments, and NGOs around the world to apply behavioral insights across sectors, to explain in accessible and non-technical language how behavioral science can contribute to the four components of the IPSP Social Progress Agenda**:

1. Reforming the economic and social system, designing reforms and transformations that address the structural flaws of current institutions and regulations.
2. Unleashing the potential for social change, by fostering social innovations and experimentation.
3. Strengthening democracy and participation at all levels, in order to improve collective action and enhance the legitimacy of public decisions.
4. Promoting global security and solidarity, to foster peaceful conflict resolution and enhance global cooperation for planetary well-being.

Rather than technical articles, contributors will provide an online, filmed, one-hour session that includes an introductory 15-minute presentation and 45 minutes of interview/discussion with questions that are defined in advance by members of the IPSP Advisory Board and the volume editors. These sessions will then be fully transcribed and published in both text and video formats. The final texts will be accompanied by short commentaries by members of the IPSP Advisory Board. Short video clips of interventions will also be produced and used as teasers for the full volume.

In addition to operationalizing behavioral science contributions to the Social Progress Agenda, the collected materials will be an invaluable resource for a wide range of thinkers and doers seeking to apply behavioral science to the work of their organizations. It will allow them to get an overview of what is being done in this domain around the world and by whom, and how it can inform the global Social Policy agenda. Finally, it will facilitate connections between those actors around common interest domains.

Using these results will also allow the IPSP in a subsequent phase to begin identifying and documenting specific interventions and practices in a systematic, intentional manner. This would be done following the four IPSP components and the main challenges, opportunities, and experiences identified in this current volume, giving more depth and content to inform the work of the other IPSP workgroups.