TIPPING POINT SOCIAL NORMS INNOVATIONS SERIES

Brief 1: Amader Kotha (Our Voice)

BANGLADESH

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Amader Kotha
Adolescents use street drama and dialogue to challenge existing social norms and show positive alternatives.

Football for Girls
Read about how girls participation in sports is changing social norms in some parts of Bangladesh.

Amrao Korchi
Girls and boys switch roles to challenge gendered social norms, where boys do household work usually done by girls (cooking, doing laundry, etc).

Tea Stall Conversations
Men gather to drink tea and discuss gender roles, girls rights, and child, early, and forced marriage with each other.

NEPAL

Cooking Competition
Boys compete in a cooking competition and girls judge their food.

Intergenerational Dialogue
Communication gap between adolescents and their parents is bridged in order to better understand adolescent's aspirations.

Raksha Bandhan
The traditional ritual of a sister tying a thread around a brother's wrist and asking him for protection is modified where brothers also tie a thread around their sisters' wrist and both vow to practice gender equality and pursue their dreams.

Street Drama
Girls and boys perform street dramas to challenge social norms around dowry and early marriage, and introduce the benefits of investing in girls.

BACKGROUND

Research and experience show that social change toward gender justice requires more than supportive attitudes and awareness among individuals.[1] People do not exist as islands; they make up a social system that is interdependent and built on tacit conventions of behavior. What people believe others do, what they think others expect from them, and what people believe the consequences of nonconformance to be—these are dimensions of social norms that play a tremendous part in determining people's actions and choices, even when an individual has knowledge and attitudes that would suggest a different choice.

Change for gender justice requires more than sharing knowledge and promoting equitable attitudes of individuals. It also requires a society in which people's support for gender justice becomes as normal and accepted as removing your shoes indoors or paying respect to your elders is in many parts of Asia. So then, how does one engage with social environments to shift what is considered 'normal'?

The Tipping Point[2] initiative, which aims to promote positive alternatives to child, early, and forced marriage (CEFM) for girls in Bangladesh and Nepal, has taken up this question as a core part of its work. From 2015 to 2017, the project built on findings from its **Community Participatory Analysis (CPA) Study** to identify ways to drive social norms change that transforms the root causes of CEFM. This brief is part of a series highlighting Tipping Point programming innovations based on key design principles for social norms work, which CARE developed based on the existing academic and gray literature.[3] These innovations complement a broader suite of activities to facilitate the agency and options of adolescent girls, working with girls, boys, parents, key formal and informal influencers, and local decision makers.[4]

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1 Heise, L. & Manji, K. (2016). Social Norms. GSDRC Professional Development Reading Pack no. 31. Birmingham, UK: University of Birmingham
2 For more information on Tipping Point and partners, visit https://caretippingpoint.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/care_tipping-point_web.pdf
3 Bicchieri, C. (2006). *The Grammar of Society: The Nature and Dynamics of Social Norms.* New York: Cambridge University Press.; Bicchieri, C., Lindemans, J., & Jiang, T. (2014). *A structured approach to a diagnostic of collective practices.* Front. Psychol. 5:1418;. Mackie, G., Moneti, F., Shakya, H. & Denny, E. (2015). *What are social norms? How are they measured?* California, USA: UNICEF/Centre on Global Justice, University of San Diego
4 See the full Theory of Change for the programming of Tipping Point here: https://caretippingpoint.org/innovation/theory-of-change-2/

DESIGN PRINCIPLES FOR SOCIAL NORMS PROGRAMMING

To guide and inform its work, Tipping Point distilled 8 design principles for engaging with social norms change, drawing from academic and gray literature on the topic. These include:

1. **Find early adopters:** Often, people are already living their lives in positive ways that support girls' choices and opportunities. Find them.

2. **Build support groups of early adopters:** It can be hard to embody positive, rights-based change alone. Groups help individuals support, encourage and trouble-shoot.

3. **Use future-oriented positive messages:** Help people imagine positive alternatives. Change is possible.

4. **Open space for dialogue:** Get people talking to each other about new ideas. Challenge the implicit assumptions that everyone holds the same views, experiences and preferences.

5. **Facilitate public debate:** Engage publicly with community members to debate on what is OK in this context.

6. **Expect by-stander action:** Move from envisioning possibilities of justice to action. This involves building community and accountability, so that people show up for girls' rights in their words and actions.

7. **Show examples of positive behavior in public:** Demonstrate that the positive shift we hope for already exists. And it is totally normal.

8. **Map allies and ask for their support:** Identify the resources and networks we need to support positive change for individuals, families and communities.

THE INNOVATION: AMADER KOTHA (OUR VOICE)

Forum theatre is an entertaining, engaging, and interactive form of street theatre that enacts everyday situations to provoke discussion and promote social change. Having observed forum theatre that was performed by a professional group, some of the adolescent girls and boys participating in Tipping Point groups in **Bangladesh** wanted to do their own plays to promote adolescent girls' rights, showcase alternative possibilities, and publicly celebrate role models. To make the most of this opportunity, the Tipping Point team and the adolescents innovated by building on the forum theatre platform. They added two other components based on the social norms programming principles and created a **community talk show**. The community talk show consisted of a theatre performance followed by a **facilitated dialogue and debate on the theatre story themes (social norms design principles 4 & 5)**, and a **recognition and celebration of people from their communities who are early adopters and are practicing norms (design principle 7)** that support girls' options and possibilities beyond CEFM. The topics covered in the theatre **component focused on positive possibilities and outcomes for empowering girls (design principle 3)**, as opposed to the perils of CEFM. These events highlighted the benefits of girls' education, employment, participation in sports, mobility, and delayed marriage. The adolescents called this community talk show "Amader Kotha" which means "Our Voice". For a detailed step by step description of the community talk show see page 12. In rural communities in Sunamganj district of Bangladesh, adolescent girls' mobility is extremely limited, and their leadership in public spheres is uncommon. Amader Kotha pushed the boundaries not only by starting conversations about these issues, but also by demonstrating what the alternative looks like. All Amader Kotha talk shows were performed and facilitated by adolescent boys and girls – setting precedent and examples for public leadership. Amader Kotha explored topics ranging from girls' access and rights to education, to play sports, to employment and delayed marriage.

CARE SOCIAL NORMS ANALYSIS PLOT (SNAP) FRAMEWORK

SNAP was developed to measure the nature of specific social norms and their influence, and offers a useful framework to examine the initial reactions to a social norms focused activity. Specifically, it examines any preliminary effects on:

EMPIRICAL EXPECTATIONS

What I think others do.

NORMATIVE EXPECTATIONS

What I think others expect me to do.

SANCTIONS

Anticipated reactions of others whose opinions matter to me.

SENSITIVITY TO SANCTIONS

How much sanctions matter for me.

EXCEPTIONS

Under what situations is it acceptable to break the norms.

What are the initial reactions of community members?

Tipping Point staff developed inquiry questions based on **CARE's Social Norms Analysis Plot (SNAP) framework**[5] to get a preliminary pulse check on what, if any, loosening of social norms about gender roles assigned to adolescent girls might the Amader Kotha community dialogue be contributing to. They interviewed six adult community members (4 women and 2 men) from a randomly selected village in which the community talk show had taken place. The ages of the respondents ranged from 25-50 years. All respondents had attended an Amader Kotha talk show and half of them knew someone involved with other Tipping Point programming, such as the adolescent groups or the community based forum to end violence against women (EVAW).

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5   Stefanik, L. & Hwang, T. (2017). *Applying theory to practice: CARE's journey piloting social norms measures for gender programming.* http://gender.care2share.wikispaces.net/file/view/care-social-norms-paper-web.pdf.

THE TALK SHOW WAS ENJOYABLE AND THE POSITIVE ALTERNATIVES WERE WELL RECEIVED...

All respondents reported enjoying the Amader Kotha community talk shows. They found that the format of Amader Kotha evoked people's curiosity about what was being discussed and also created excitement about the celebration of role models. The messages and content of the show stuck with the respondents, eliciting pride, and reflection on many of the issues discussed.

The introduction of successful people through theatre was what I liked most.

47-YEAR-OLD WOMAN

I mostly liked the football player role model more than any of the other roles. I really liked that girls of our village are playing football and they are sharing their experiences through the talk show.

35-YEAR-OLD WOMAN

I liked most that girls from our village presented news, just like on television. There was information and news about our village too. Our boys and girls are better informed now.

48-YEAR-OLD MAN

I liked a scene in the drama very much where the girl informed her parents that she does not want to marry at an early age. She wants to be a teacher or a nurse in the school by completing her education. I felt good when I noticed that a number of women and girls in this village are college students, members of Union Parishad and football players.

50-YEAR-OLD WOMAN

COMMUNITY MEMBERS APPEAR TO BE TALKING ABOUT THE ISSUES WITH OTHERS...

The talk shows also provoked respondents to start conversations with others on the topics covered in the performance. Everyone reported their own expectations and views for girls' futures are changing, and the norms are indeed shifting as well, albeit slowly.

Interviewees suggested that the existing gender norms limit girls' mobility, education, and their freedom to openly occupy public space, and that these topics are not usually openly discussed. In light of that, Amader Kotha challenged the norms in two ways: by opening the discussions on these norms, and by giving adolescent girls a platform to publicly lead and broach these topics themselves. The talk show also got community members talking to each other about the issues not only with those who were there but also with others who hadn't attended the talk show.

All of my neighbors were glad to see the talk show. Most of the neighbors were present there and they discussed the topic with those who were absent. Women discussed more on girls' education.

47-YEAR-OLD WOMAN

I heard from one of my neighbors that they are having discussions about their girls. They said that they will not marry off their daughter at an early age. They shared with me that they felt they had ruined the life of the one they had married off early, and did not want to do any further harm.

25-YEAR-OLD WOMAN

I have discussed with my friends that adolescent girls from my village can continue their education, can involve in job after completing their education, can involve in sports besides their basic education like football, badminton and bicycle racing.

25-YEAR-OLD MAN

PEOPLE'S OWN BEHAVIORS SEEM TO BE INFLUENCED BY SHIFTS IN WHAT THEY THINK OTHERS EXPECT THEM TO DO....

Normative expectations are what we think others expect us to do. Seeing certain types of behaviors being celebrated and other types of behaviors being publicly denounced informs what we think others expect us to do. Seeing the role models in the talk show and the demonstration by adolescent girls of their abilities and strengths appears to have influenced audience members in their own thinking and behaviors.

As can be seen from the quotes, watching the talk show appears to have in some ways influenced some audience members about what is expected from parents in terms of how they support their daughters for education, sports, and mobility.

> I did not go to school but my younger sister reads in class four. We have a dream that she will be a doctor in the future. She also wants to be a doctor. After seeing the talk show my thinking has changed. Now we are determined and we will not care about losing our wealth for fulfilling her dream.
>
> **25-YEAR-OLD MAN**

I have a poor household. But still I want to educate both my sons and daughters. Also I will let my daughter play football.

35-YEAR-OLD WOMAN

After hearing the discussion of talk show, I realized that I should educate my daughter and let her decide independently. I am trying to admit her in University of Dhaka. Before when she was out of home or Sylhet, I usually send someone with her. But after 'Amader Kotha' program I let my daughter move alone. Now she is more confident. My younger daughter reads in class 10 and now I let her play football at Shayamarchar field. I promised to myself that I will continue their study at any cost.

45-YEAR-OLD WOMAN

EMPIRICAL EXPECTATIONS APPEAR TO BE LOOSENING...

Empirical expectations are what people think others in their community are doing. Based on social norms theory, empirical expectations can also influence our behaviors; they are often formed on the basis of what we see or hear around us. Hence, a key principle of social norms program design is to visualize publicly the positive alternatives so that it can influence people's empirical expectations. Several of the respondents said they think there have been shifts in what others are doing. However, not surprisingly, it appears that it is a combination of the community talk show as well as other activities that Tipping Point and others have engaged in that are salient influences.

...girls' education was not a priority before. They wanted to marry them off as soon as possible. Now people are more progressive. People are exposed to media now, different [non-government organizations] NGOs are working too and the prime minister herself emphasizes on girls' education as well. Parents are realizing that both girls and boys have equal rights and so they are investing in their education now.

48-YEAR-OLD MAN

After 'Amader Kotha' program, a drive came within women to continue girls' education. Men are discussing about girls' participation in sports.

45-YEAR-OLD WOMAN

Those who heard the discussion, said that they will not marry off their daughter before the age of 18. They want to give equal rights to both girls and boys. Besides their son, they will give equal opportunity to their daughter in education and sports.

35-YEAR-OLD WOMAN

Now parents are letting their girls play outdoors. People were not aware before but now their mindset is changing. Moreover, organizations like BRAC, Tipping Point project also contributed to create awareness.

35-YEAR-OLD WOMAN

They are giving value to education and sports for all of their family members. As a result percentage of school going girls in the village has increased. Everyone wants the wellbeing of their daughters and sisters.

25-YEAR-OLD MAN

THERE CONTINUES TO BE NAYSAYERS AND CHANGE TAKES TIME...

Even though respondents reported an overall growing openness to discussions about alternative pathways for girls and some shifts in practices, some of them pointed out that not everyone is okay with the changes or viewing the discussions and portrayals in the talk show positively. Social change takes time and so this is an expected observation.

In the context of social norms theory, these observations of resistance speak to the idea that the talk show is indeed targeting issues that are not traditionally accepted in the community.

The people of my village do not all want to invest in girls' education due to poverty.

47-YEAR-OLD WOMAN

More time is needed to alter the traditional view because it is not easy to do so.

47-YEAR-OLD WOMAN

Some people understood a lot and some did not because everyone in the audience were not the same. Some of them agreed that playing football is good for their girls' health but some still disagreed with this as they viewed it as a negative thing for girls to be doing.

35-YEAR-OLD WOMAN

Potential of Amader Kotha as a Tactic for Social Norms Change

The interviews so far have suggested that Amader Kotha has been successful in sparking conversations about subjects that have otherwise been taboo. The playfulness and the jesting projected in a performance seems to have made these conversations easier for people in the community to engage. The portrayal of other possibilities also seems to have triggered people's imaginations for what is possible. All respondents were very receptive to this format. However, it is important to note that the talk show is one of many programming activities that took place in the communities through the Tipping Point initiative, and so while the talk show in and of itself does appear to be serving the purpose of promoting dialogue and influencing people's perceptions about girls choices and CEFM, the receptiveness of the messages is certainly also a by-product of the aggregate effects of the overall programming.

Taking advantage of the momentum of the success of this innovative approach, the work on shifting gender norms can expand by:

Building a community of accountability for those who are envisioning different possibilities and bringing them into action. **(Design Principle 6)**

Networking early adopters who are beginning to deviate from the norm to create support for each other and promote collective actions. **(Design Principle 1)**

Storytelling projects about early adopters deviating from the norm to celebrate **and validate their choice**. **(Design Principle 7)**

Implementation Guide: Amader Kotha (Our Voice)

Amader Kotha consists of three components:

1. **Street drama**

2. **Investment in Girls – a celebration of positive examples and role models**

3. **Facilitated dialogue after each of the first two components.**

Street Drama

The inception and inspiration of street drama came from observing forum theatre shows in the communities, which was initially a Tipping Point activity led by professional actors. The boys and girls from Tipping Point adolescent groups were big proponents of forum theatre when it came to their streets. They rallied people to show up and followed up with questions about the messages and behaviors discussed during the show. After having an opportunity of their own to role-play in their adolescent group centers, the adolescent girls and boys expressed interest in doing their own street drama for their community.

The Tipping Point team recognized this as a powerful opportunity for a few reasons:

- Being locals, the adolescents understand the context better, which is critical in getting to the nuances of a given scenario.

- It is a sustainable investment; there is no cost for contracting professional acting groups and it provides a skillset that can potentially become an alternative income generating path.

- It is an example of a positive image in itself, i.e. local girls performing in a play they wrote publicly highlights their agency and capability.

The girls and boys from different groups and across villages came together to form a drama group. This involved meeting at a designated spot every day for rehearsals. Some of the Community Volunteers and Centre Facilitators also supported them by playing roles in the drama. The support of Community Volunteers was important. It enabled the girls and boys to travel safely to rehearsals with them as

THE OBJECTIVES OF AMADER KOTHA

1. **To inform and reflect with the audience about Tipping Point activities involving participants from their community**

2. **To publicly discuss the rights of adolescent girls and the implications of early marriage**

3. **To demonstrate positive images of girls in different spheres**

4. **To publicly celebrate role models from the village who have deviated from the norm modeling successful alternative behavior**

THEMES COVERED IN AMADER KOTHA

- **Early marriage**

- **Girls' education**

- **Value of girl child**

- **Sports for girls**

- **Economic empowerment of girls**

- **Aspirations and dreams of girls**

many had to commute long distances across villages. The adolescent boys and girls wrote scripts and modified them during rehearsals and also after each performance. As a group, the adolescents decided to modify their scripts based on the decision that instead of showing the negative effects of child marriage, they would instead show the positive aspects of alternative options for girls. Additionally, the girls and boys practiced facilitation with their parents at home, asking them questions and prepping to receive questions form the audience on the day of performance.

Facilitated Dialogue

To create a substantially reflective experience for the audience, the adolescents followed each play with a facilitated discussion to ensure that the audience left the event with some key messages and points to consider about

valuing and investing in girls. The facilitation questions are illustrated below:

- What did you like about the drama? Why did you like it? What does it remind you of?

- Do you have similar stories in or around your houses? What was a common thing that was shown in the play?

- Which scene do you think was the most touching for you? Why?

- Whose character do you think was most important for the story?

- Do you think there are such positive examples in our community? Are the people who practice those positive behaviors known to all in the community?

- Do you think there could be a different end to this play? What could be different?

- Do you have any questions for us?

Investment in Girls - Celebration of positive examples and role models

The second component of Amader Kotha focused on taking advantage of its public reach to visibly celebrate role models and positive practices. This involved a process of identifying positive deviants and role models who have either followed a path other than marriage, or those who are champions of adolescent girls' rights by investing in girls. Examples include parents who delayed their daughters' marriage, or girls who play football or ride bicycle, or work. In addition, the team also identified speakers to engage audience on topics such as girls' dreams, aspirations, education, physical and mental health, among others. Service providers were also invited to be a part of these events in order to answer questions relevant to girls' rights.

Facilitated Dialogue

The dialogue for this session was facilitated by two characters who acted as hosts – a pair of nana-nati[1] – to keep with the spirit of fun and play. The community had the opportunity to direct their questions to the role models, and the role models shared how it felt to deviate from the norm. The questions asked were similar to the following:

- How did you feel when you did a behavior that was not common in the communities?

- Was there any reaction or comments from the community?

- How did you respond to them?

- Did you feel happy about your decision? Why or why not?

- Do you want to say something to the community regarding your experience?

- What has been the benefit of the new behavior or action?

- Was there any challenge? What was the challenge? How did you manage it?

Facilitator's experience: what helped implementation and what was challenging?

The facilitators who put on the show shared some of their successes and challenges to illustrate their experience:

- It was difficult for the community to understand what it means to invest in girls. Most understood investment as a monetary concept, rather than one about right to freedom, mobility, education, sports, etc.

- It was not always easy to identify role models or find examples of positive deviance.

- Role models and other models of positive deviance were shy to speak in front of a crowd. They needed preparation in advance.

- Reflections become more effective when the sessions were conducted using question and link questions. It helped positive deviants to express their opinion and experiences easily and to engage the community.

- The role play of nana-nati (grandfather and grandson) helped in gathering the community and keep audience interested in the talk show. It also helped in illustrating generational gaps and linking it to the present context for girls' rights.

- Having support from EVAW forum[2] members was pivotal as they are respected in the community.

- It was very easy to refer to the football match as an example for investment in girls. The football match was tough for community to accept in the beginning but it was able to steer discussions on the girls' dreams and aspirations effectively.

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1 Grandfather and grandson. The term nana-nati is taken from a local folklore called Ghambira. These characters were played by community members. Also known as These characters were chosen to illustrate and bridge the generational gap and encourage intergeneration dialogue.

2 Community based forum on eliminating violence against women.

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