



# TIPPING POINT SOCIAL NORMS INNOVATIONS SERIES

Brief 4: Tea Stall Conversations  
BANGLADESH



# TIPPING POINT SOCIAL NORMS INNOVATIONS SERIES

## BANGLADESH

### 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.<sup>1</sup> 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<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup>

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://caringpoint.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/care\\_tipping-point\\_web.pdf](https://caringpoint.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://caringpoint.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: TEA STALL CONVERSATIONS

Gender norms often play out in relationships, where power imbalances between men and women are reinforced or challenged. Fathers and brothers hold a great deal of power in the lives of adolescent girls in the Sunamganj district of Bangladesh. In this context, men and boys must be engaged to achieve social norms change. However, Tipping Point teams faced a challenge reaching men, primarily because men tend to be outside the home working during the day when community visits were usually made.

For men and older boys in rural Bangladesh, the tea stall is a common spot to gather, rest, chat, and drink tea with peers. Often they are situated near markets where men work or by the roadside where men traveling between villages can stop for refreshments. The project identified these tea stalls as a potential space to begin dialogues with men on gender and equity in a comfortable and familiar setting and through the dialogue exposing the variations of thought that exists amidst them, which is likely to be more diverse than they think (Design Principle 4).

Monthly, Tipping Point staff visited local tea stalls and facilitated conversations on various topics – from girls’ education and sports, women’s mobility, decision-making, equitable sharing of household work, and child marriage – sparking discussions and helping men visualize alternative futures for girls (Design Principle 3). These conversations drew out men’s opinions and perceptions of women and girls and challenged their assumptions about girls’ capabilities, roles, and relationships with fathers and brothers. Eventually, the frequency of the conversations led to a normalization of open dialogue about these topics – a positive example for others to see (Design Principle 7) – and men openly sharing with each other how some of them do support women and girls in their daily lives (Design Principle 6). The end of this brief provides a detailed description of the process used for tea stall conversations.



## 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.

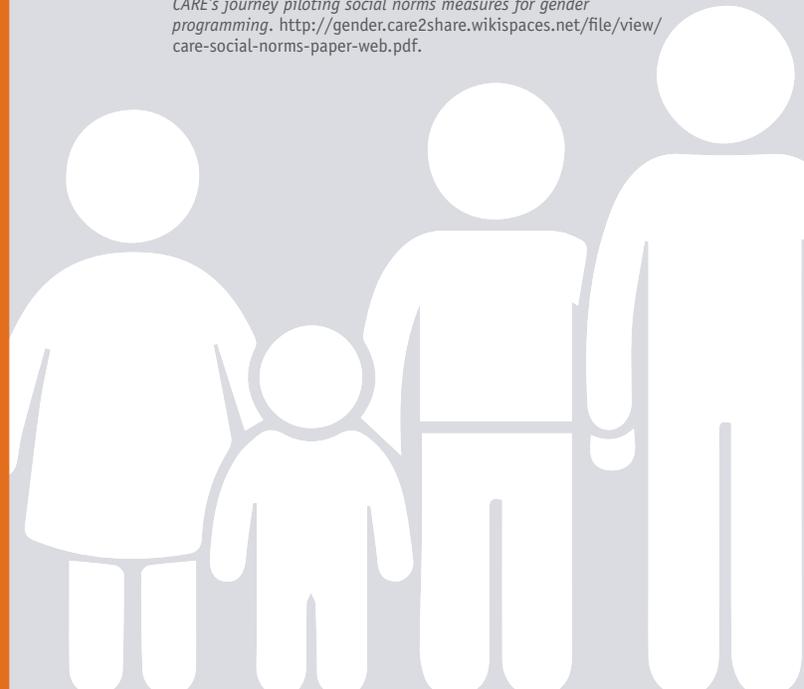
**SENSITIVITY TO SANCTIONS**  
How much sanctions matter for me.

**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**<sup>1</sup> to learn what, if any, contributions the Tea Stall conversations were making to shifting social norms about gender roles of adolescent girls. They spoke with seven men from a randomly selected village where the tea stall conversations had taken place; in one case, the interview was done with two men at the same time. The age of the men ranged from 26-50 years. Many respondents were familiar with the conversations, some having attended a tea stall conversation several times; others had attended a tea stall conversation once every two to three months. Four had family members involved in other Tipping Point project activities, and one had a neighbor active with the project.

<sup>1</sup> Stefaniak, 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>.



## SHOULD WE BE HAVING THESE CONVERSATIONS?

All the men reported that the topics of girls' and women's opportunities and freedoms, and questions of equity, had never been discussed at tea stalls before. Two people had never had conversations about these topics at all, though one person had participated in similar discussions within the village.

However, nearly everyone reported that tea stall discussions on women's and girls' rights have been positive experiences for them; some called it educational and engaging. Many also pointed to topics that they had particularly enjoyed discussing and recalled sessions on women's mobility, girls' education, economic participation, girls' football, men and household work, and decision-making in the family. Men's receptivity to open dialogue is a promising sign that deeply entrenched gender norms are changeable. It is also exposing them to each other's opinions and practices, bringing to light the spectrum of thought on gender equality and girls' rights, which is likely to be more diverse than they expected.

*I take the discussion at the tea stall positively.*

38-YEAR-OLD MAN

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*I liked the discussion because, before, it hadn't been seriously discussed. By talking about it, people are getting more knowledgeable about it.*

50-YEAR-OLD MAN AND  
28-YEAR-OLD MAN

The last discussion was about girls' mobility and sports. It was enjoyable to me. Girls need to go out. They need to enjoy this right, too.

26-YEAR-OLD MAN



## HOW DOES TALKING MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

Empirical expectations are what we think others in our communities are doing or thinking. In social norms theory, empirical expectations influence our behaviors and are primarily formed by what we see or hear around us. Hence, a key principle of social norms programming is to publicly amplify and project alternatives to gender-inequitable patterns, to make the alternatives real and visible (**Design Principle 3**). While tea stall conversations do not directly demonstrate girls breaking norms, dialogues are designed to help participants visualize greater equity for girls. They also normalize the act of contemplating girls' rights by opening up topics and ideas that are rarely broached, issues that had previously been invisible to the participants.

Nearly all respondents reported noticing cases of men changing their behavior because of the tea stall conversations.



## MORE TALKING: THE RISK OF GOSSIP

Normative expectations are what we think others expect us to do. This is informed by the types of behaviors and individuals we see being sanctioned positively (celebrated or rewarded) versus those that are sanctioned negatively (publicly denounced, ostracized, or punished). Because tea stall conversations are a recurring activity where men gather with peers to share opinions and challenge each other, many people now express a comfort with alternative ways of thinking about girls' capabilities and rights. Yet this is not unconditional, and respondents perceived less support from certain groups of peers, based on education, religiosity, and age.

***Most people think that girls' education and sports is a good thing. But some people say negative things. They don't accept the mobility of girls easily. Those who understand, they take it positively, but those who do not understand easily, they take it negatively.***

**38-YEAR-OLD MAN**

***Those who are older than 50 years do not take it positively. But those who are less than 50, they take it easily.***

**31-YEAR-OLD MAN**

These anecdotes are significant less as signs of actual changes in behavior and more as indicators that empirical expectations of behavior are changing—respondents believe that peers are giving their daughters greater mobility and opportunities. This shift is a necessary precursor to widespread change.

**Those in the village who are aware took it positively. But those who are less educated usually spread rumors.**

**26-YEAR-OLD MAN**



According to the respondents, negative sanctions against expanding freedoms for women and girls mostly came in the form of gossip criticizing girls and families. Sometimes that gossip uses a religious framework to invoke authority and justify speaking badly of others, although the criticism may or may not be based in actual religious teachings.

***Not everyone liked the discussion or this type of talk. Those who do not understand spoke negatively. If girls play football, if they ride bicycles, if they study more, people take it negatively. To them, Islam says that women will be in the home, covered with headscarves, and so on. It is not right to reference religion [like this]. It is necessary to discuss these issues... Some people questioned, 'Why are they talking about women in the shop? Women stay at home, it is not right to talk about them'—even saying, 'It is not allowed in religion.'***

**46-YEAR-OLD MAN**

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***A few people in the village do not like to discuss women's issues. They said women must stay inside instead of going to the market or Haor [wetlands] for herding cows, as this is quite shameful. But I think it's totally okay for women to go out. Through dialogue, awareness will increase.***

**40-YEAR-OLD MAN**

Others said that schools' and national leaders' endorsement of girls' rights reduces negative sanctions of those who discuss them:

***I liked the discussion on girls' education. Because it is a necessity; our honorable prime minister also focused on that. I believe in the empowerment of women, too, like you are working for.***

**40-YEAR-OLD MAN**

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***Now the school is giving importance to [girls' rights]. For this reason, people are not criticizing it.***

**28-YEAR-OLD MAN**

## MEN AS AGENTS OF CHANGE

Not everyone is equally susceptible to sanctions. Material factors, such as outsized wealth, can have an insulating effect. Others simply are more resilient in the face of criticism. Most respondents stated that they were acting in their own families to support girls' and women's mobility and education, suggesting that any negative repercussions were not enough to influence them.

**I will not marry off my daughter before 18. I have a dream to send her in town for her education. For education, girls and boys are equal. I will not treat my daughter unjustly.**

**46-YEAR-OLD MAN**

**I did not let my auntie go to Tipping Point meetings previously. But now I permit it.**

**26-YEAR-OLD MAN**



One man appeared to be driven by possible negative sanctions for not treating sons and daughters equitably:

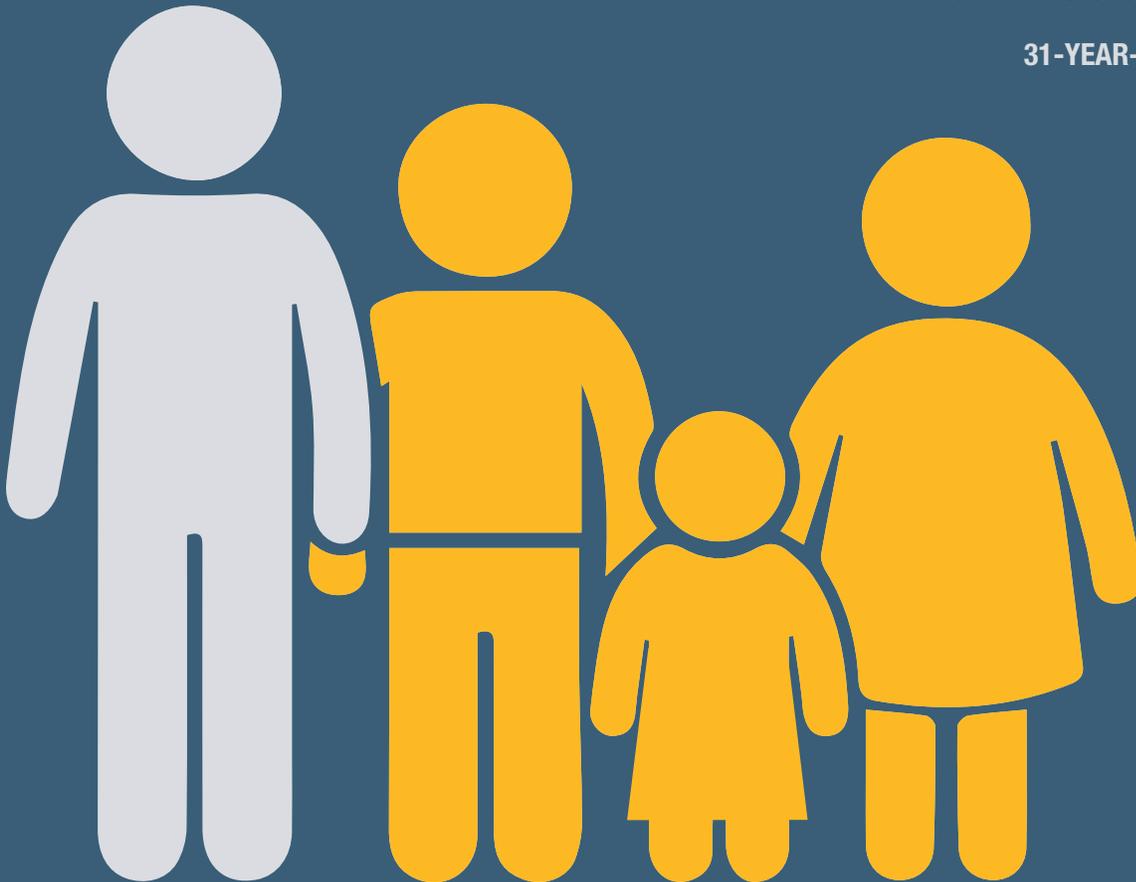
**I have two daughters and one son. I treat them equally so that people can say I did not discriminate between them.**

**40-YEAR-OLD MAN**

Most respondents had family members or neighbors involved in ongoing Tipping Point project activities, and their views may not be typical of others who have no interactions with project activities. One of those that did not know anyone participating in the project was less supportive:

***It is good to talk about [girls' and women's] development, but it is not good to permit women to discuss it.***

**31-YEAR-OLD MAN**



In general, these male respondents did not seem overly troubled by criticism about themselves stemming from either talking about women's and girls' rights or, although it was not asked directly, supporting a measure of increased freedom for women and girls. Women and girls themselves seem to be burdened with negative sanctions more so than their husbands and fathers.



## Potential of Tea Stall Conversations as a Tactic for Social Norm Change

The tea stall conversations were successful in reaching men and sparking conversations on gender norms. All respondents supported this approach, noting that the format offered a great opportunity to learn in a comfortable space, and they enjoyed participating. Men interviewed were overwhelmingly enthusiastic about discussing girls' rights and issues. As men grapple with new ideas and challenge each other, early adopters of positive change are emerging. That the majority observed changes in peer behavior signals that normative expectations are in flux – not only surrounding what girls and women can do, but also surrounding the role men can play in supporting women's and girls' rights.

As a promising innovation in men's engagement for gender justice, tea stall conversations can generate a greater impact by incorporating additional principles of social norm change. Tipping Point is looking to add the following components:

More intentionally **identifying 'early adopters' among fathers** and nurturing them as positive male role models and champions of gender equity (**Design Principle 1**).

Connecting and **convening groups of role model fathers** invested in their daughters' futures for mutual aid, support, and recognition (**Design Principle 2**).

Build the confidence of role model fathers in how to respond to common arguments against women's and girls' rights so they can **hold others accountable** and play a role as **active bystanders** (**Design Principle 6**).

**Highlight men's support for their daughters** at community events such as girls' football matches (**Design Principle 7**).

# Implementation Guide: Tea Stall Conversations

## BANGLADESH

The Tipping Point project's intervention plan includes working with men and boys. Men were tough to reach because they left villages early and came in late or had very irregular hours. Tea stalls are a common place for men to drop in, relax and chat with each other, and the team identified these as the best platforms to engage men in the discourse. This implementation guide shares sets of probing questions that were used for conducting tea stall conversations in the villages.

In a tea stall meeting, the facilitator poses thematic questions in such a way that people who are present at the tea stall can spontaneously pick up the topic and continue discussion and debate. The facilitator's goal is to make it a safe environment where people speak openly about what they think and why. The facilitator's task is to keep probing and avoid passing judgment on anyone's opinion. This makes it an open place where participants can share their opinions without hesitation and give the reasons why they feel as they do. In the context of rural Sunamganj, the tea stall conversations were intentionally facilitated only by male staff from the project as the tea stalls are usually not a welcoming space for women.

### Process

The facilitator goes to a tea stall where there are at least four to five people. In most contexts, this might need to be a male facilitator. The facilitator also orders tea and gets involved in the discussion. If people are not talking, he may himself initiate a discussion. And then, in a casual way, he puts forward a question related to the theme of women's empowerment, a girl's worth, or social norms around women's roles, status, and child marriage.

Let the participants discuss the question as they choose. Someone can respond positively or negatively. The best way to facilitate the discussion of a positive or a negative response is to ask why the participants think the way they do and the reasons behind their comments. The facilitator can then ask others to share their opinions.

If a participant shares a positive (i.e. gender equitable) behavior that is outside the norm, the facilitator asks how he felt doing that and if he had any support from people around him. Then the facilitator asks others at the tea stall how they feel about that behavior and why.

The facilitator is NOT to share his opinion but instead ask more questions using examples from the community. The facilitator can also summarize the recent discussion to build up to the next question.

### THE OBJECTIVES OF TEA STALL CONVERSATION

1. To use the tea stall platform for challenging social norms that limit opportunities for women and girls
2. To know the views of men on women's empowerment and gender equity and how men can play a vital role to bring collective positive changes.
3. To facilitate discussion about women's leadership, girls' empowerment and what these can do for a healthy equal life with examples from their own context
4. To identify role models who have already been practicing equality and whose behaviors could be celebrated.

The facilitator wraps up the discussion in a way that all the participants leave with a message to ponder after leaving the tea stall setting. The take away message is often a question.

Coming back from the tea stall, the facilitator recollects the main points of the discussion and writes down all comments in his diary to reference when preparing for the following month's conversation.

### Questions to probe

#### Education, dowry and women's participation in income generating activities

- Boys can go to high school; why can't girls? What are the obstacles that are stopping girls from going to high school? Why are these obstacles for girls? What can we do to remove those? Is there anyone who has girls going to high school in their families? What prompted them to send them to school? Who assists/enables them in the family or from the school?
- Who in the household decides about girls' schooling? Are the mother's wishes to send their daughters to school valued? What factors are considered by mothers? Is the opinion of the mother regarding what level of education her daughter should have important? If not, then why?

- Is there anyone in the group who arranged the marriage of their daughters without dowry? When and where did it happen? What do people think about that family? Is exchanging dowry good or bad for the families? Do we think that dowry is not good? Why? What can we do to eliminate dowry from our society?
- Is there any girl who went outside the village to study further? Why can't other girls leave to pursue higher studies? Boys are allowed to go abroad or outside of the village for higher studies; why can't girls? Has anyone sent their sons outside the village for higher studies? Why not for girls?
- Is there anyone here whose daughters and sons are free to talk to them? Do any of your children share their thoughts with you? Can girls talk to their fathers about their hopes and aspirations as freely as they can talk to their mothers? If not, then why?
- What enables a daughter to discuss her opinions with her father? What can a father do to help his children be close to him and talk about their lives, aspirations, dreams, likings?
- Can girls help their family with income generating activities (IGA) and earning money? Are there any women or girls who are involved with IGA? What factors help them? What types of risk or problems do they face? What steps can be taken to reduce those risks? Girls are treated as burdens in the family. Are they really burdens? What can you do to change this thinking?

### Roles with household chores

- How many of you know how to roll chapattis [bread]? When do you do it? How do you feel doing it? What do you see as the benefits and harms of men cooking, doing household chores, or taking care of children? How do you feel about men doing these sorts of activities?
- What types of activities are done by boys in this village? What may happen if girls do the same? Have you ever seen a girl in your village, in the city or on TV doing the same? What enabled them to do it? If girls in your village were to do it, what types of support might they need? What sort of risks might they face? What would be the role of family members in reducing these risks?

### Girl's participation in decision making

- Is there anyone who can share an example of when your daughter's views helped you make a decision? Why do you think that her opinion was important? Does everyone like you value their daughter's opinion? What difference

does it make when your daughter helps you? Can women or girls express their views or make their own decisions freely? Are there examples in your village when women made some decisions that were useful for the family and community? What helped them make such decisions? What can we do to create an enabling environment where girls' and women's decisions are valued and respected?

- Do any women and girls in your community have income from their work? How do you think their income is spent? Who makes the decision that women will earn income? Do women or girls have control of the income they earn? If so, how do they spend it? If not, why not?
- When is a girl's consent taken for marriage? Before the wedding is finalized or on the wedding day? Do you think it is important to get a daughter's consent before finalizing her marriage? Why?
- Are there girls or women you know who do not want to get married when their family wants them to? How does their decision to not get married go over with their family and community? What is your view about women who do not want to get married or who marry very late? Do you think it is also her right to decide to marry or not to marry, or decide when to marry? If yes, why, and if no, why not? What can be done to change this mindset?

### Mobility and participation in sports:

- Have any of you seen any girl playing? On TV or even in your village? What are the games girls play? At what age do the girls play in your village? Why? What would happen if they continue to play beyond that age? Are there any outdoor games they need to play in a field or a pitch? What are the benefits and challenges of girls playing outside? Do you know that some girls from the villages of Sunamganj play football? What do you think about this? Can you support the girls of your village who wish to join them? Why? Why don't more girls play football? What are the problems if they play football?
- Boys are allowed to go wherever they want alone. Why can't girls? Beyond the house and neighborhood, where else can girls of your village go? What enables them to move about in public, and what stops them?
- What are the cultural or social events that happen in your village? (Examples: drama, song, cultural event/song during marriage ceremony, etc.) Who participates? Why? Usually men participate in social and cultural programs. Why don't women? Do you think women should also participate? What difference would it make?



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This initiative is funded by

