



care® TIPPING POINT

Girl Led Social Norms Shifting Activities

Adolescence is a time of transition from childhood to adulthood. Gender and social norms restrict girls from occupying spaces outside the home, but centering their voice, priorities and participation can strengthen their leadership skills to come together and collectively shift norms towards greater equality of the project's objectives: build girls' individual and collective agency and shift unequal social norms, both of which are integral to comprehensive impact across sectors that support adolescent empowerment.

Girl led programming

The traditional way of addressing a behavior includes a communication strategy with activities targeting individual behavior change. Most of these activities are planned and led by the program staff with community consultations, investing in community members, and enhancing their knowledge and skills. A girl-led approach is not about a training or knowledge transfer but more about planning and executing activities based on issues they prioritize, supported by a mentorship

process. It can build girls' confidence in managing and leading interventions as well as taking up public spaces with visibility. As the girls have lived experience of the community's social milieu, they can be mindful of risks and can plan for an assessment and mitigation of backlash in advance. The following components can be considered to support girl-led social norms programming:

A. Trust

Most adults think that they need to help adolescents, and especially girls, do their work. While girls benefit from allyship with the adults from the community, the first step towards girl led programming is to work with program implementors and managers to check their understanding and level of trust in girl led initiatives. The budget holders must feel confident in allocating a budget that is led by girls for issues and activities they select to work on and use the funds accordingly.

EXAMPLE:

The project staff worries about giving advance cash to girls and their ability to organize events on their own. They do not trust that girls will be able to protect the cash until it is spent. They also worry girls will be cheated by shopkeepers as they do not normally go shopping and handle cash for the events. For girls to be able to use cash, they should have access to it and people should trust them to organize events effectively. If the cash is not handled properly, girls can also learn a lesson as anyone else does, but adults - including budget holders - need to trust girls and their abilities to organize and lead interventions.

B. Mentorship

It is a key strategy to support girl-led programming and is also a learned skill. Projects should invest in mentors to work alongside girls to encourage and support them to shift harmful social norms – not provide the answers or lead girls into taking action. Mentors preferably are older girls in the community or young female project staff who can work closely with adolescents in the community. Having mentors who have similar backgrounds and experiences as girls and have some exposure to working outside their village, helps girls relate to them better. Eventually, the girls taking part in the project can take up the role of mentoring the younger girls who join the group.

EXAMPLE

Mentors should not show the girls their way but inspire them to find their own way. Mentors should guide and support to identify priorities and identify ways to address those issues to shift norms in a structured way. Mentors ask questions of girls about their plans, helping them weigh the pros and cons of each action instead of providing solutions. They can

help girls to reflect and think critically about what helps in shifting norms and support them in taking action. When the girls wanted to play in public, the mentor asked what stopped them from playing in public, if they could do anything about it, who could be supportive to them at the community level and what their first steps could be. Would there be any risk when they play and what could help to mitigate the risk? Having someone work with girls to ask such questions and be a support when needed gives confidence to girls to lead.

C. Planning and decision-making

To build skills and cohesion amongst girls, they are brought together by mentors who facilitate a process to identify and prioritize an issue that affects them. The girls list out situations where they felt discriminated against due to unequal social norms. Then they jointly prioritize one issue together and plan to collectively address the norms that can be challenged.

EXAMPLE

Tipping Point girls prioritized restriction on mobility as a key issue. First, they gathered information from other girls about their perception and their aspirations for their ability to move around their community. They then planned activities that served more than one purpose. For instance, they brought the findings of their research to inform the community about how the norms on mobility were restrictive for most girls and how it affected them physically and emotionally – boosting awareness of the issue, and girls going around in the village and collecting information actually increased their mobility. It also helped them to negotiate with their own family and the family of girls whose data they collected, which enhanced their research and articulation skills. The process already shifted the norms related to mobility. For each event planned, girls used a format that helped them to plan, assign responsibilities, tap resources required, assess risks and develop timelines.

Having allies whom the girls can turn to when needed is critical.



D. Risk Mitigation

For every event planned by girls, staff or mentors alike need to be certain the event will not be harmful to the group members or the community. A risk mitigation format to map any possible risk and ways to mitigate it helps girls to organize the norm shifting events with more confidence and engage potential allies to support their activism.

EXAMPLE

When girls planned for a football match to be played in the open ground, they brainstormed about the potential risks. After listing them, they discussed ways to mitigate each risk. For risks around some girls' parents getting angry, scolding, or hitting them and not permitting them to play, they identified someone to help talking to parents. If they suspect that the religious leaders would not approve of this activity, they chose someone to talk to them in advance and build arguments around it. If they fear backlash from the local goons, they make a list of people who could be contacted to take responsibility for informing the police to cover the venue of the match.

E. Structured allyship

Most development programs, civil societies and social movements work with multiple stakeholders. While working with parents, boys or community leaders within a project using girl led social norms shifting approaches, the focus must be on allyship in addition to a basic understanding of gender inequality. Having allies whom the girls can turn to when needed is critical. The allies are either of similar age, such as brothers or other adolescent boys, or adults such as parents or other opinion leaders. Structured sessions were done with boys to reflect on harmful masculinity and allyship to girls. Similarly, with adults and parents, gender and power norms were discussed to understand and plan for their roles as allies. This is central to allyship: boys, parents or opinion leaders do NOT guide the girls but are committed to supporting the girls' plans.

EXAMPLE

Girls planned their activities and shared them with allies asking them to support specific actions. Allies watched the girls and boys rehearse a play, then stayed amongst the audience to observe reflections while the play was staged. They also tried to manage crowds and ensure that the activity and discussions went smoothly. In one case, the girls identified some boys who would possibly disrupt the play, so they involved the allies to make sure that those boys' parents also attended the event.

Girl led social norms shifting activities

Tipping Point distilled 8 social norms design principles and developed a [Social Norms Design Checklist](#) for programmers engaging with social norms change. The principles include finding early adopters who are already living their lives in positive ways and building their support groups, using future oriented positive messages, showcasing the positive behavior in public, creating open space for dialogue, and mapping allies and networks to support positive change for individuals, families and communities. Following these principles, Tipping Point addresses a number of norms that drive child marriage, including the norm that parents think 'girls playing outdoors' is not appreciated by others and hence they are not expected to send their daughters to play. But individually they would not be against sending their daughters to play. Girls recognized such norms and wanted to bring them to the public through planned norms-shifting events. Girls leading the events often entails the involvement of their families, neighborhoods, and communities. They are informed and sometimes involved in the actions the girls take together while planning and executing a norm-shifting event. When the change in behavior is seen in public, modeled by their own people, the change gets visibility and the possibility of the behavior becoming normal is higher. Small budgets are allotted for girls to conduct these norms shifting events in their communities. Here are some examples of girl led social norms shifting interventions from Bangladesh and Nepal:

Division of labor


Care work is gendered and hence the norm related to division of labor was challenged by girls. The Tipping Point package had an activity of making a 24-hour clock with separate groups of boys, girls, mothers, and fathers. In a family meeting, girls displayed the workload clock to discuss how many hours go into each task, highlighting that the household tasks and caregiving fall on women and girls. Girls led a discussion

with parents and boys and planned a cooking competition in the village. They made small working groups that entailed invitations, registration of participants including boys and fathers, identifying judges for the competition, budgeting for ingredients for cooking grains, vegetables and meat, cooking oil and spices, arranging for utensils and stove or firewood. Preparatory meetings added more responsibilities of looking at who will be responsible for the audience, who will do facilitation, what questions to include, and practice for discussion after the event, as well as backlash mapping. The girls themselves managed shopping, arranging loudspeakers, sound system and venue decoration. The event was conducted smoothly including post-competition public discussion. As a follow up, several boys and fathers committed to continue sharing household tasks and take their pictures working at home to display in the next meeting.

Girls' occupying public spaces

Restricted mobility for girls was identified as an important norm that the girls wanted to shift and take up public spaces. The girls conducted a social and vulnerability mapping and identified the places in the community where they felt unsafe. They listed the responses from girls identifying those places as inaccessible. The girls then organized a transact walk with the parents, boys, schoolteachers, and other opinion leaders to those places and held a facilitated discussion. In some places, the boys who walked with them said that they never thought that these places were not accessed by girls due to fear of harassment. It ended in a central marketplace in the village where they conducted a talk show. The place had maximum visibility and hence more people attended. A boy in one of the talk shows said, *"This is not true, we have never done this, this looks like an effort to malign the image of boys, we have never teased girls."* To this, a girl member thanked him and appreciated that he and his friends might not have done it but wanted to take this opportunity to make people like them aware of such instances happening in the village. Prior to the event, the girls prepared themselves and were ready to address any such questions. In another village, the girls had shown a stretch of road that is dark, and the girls feel vulnerable while returning from classes in the evening. After the event, they got a solar light sponsored by the school committee.





In some villages, girls organized games, such as a football match, slow cycle-race, cricket and Kabaddi¹ match. These are outdoor games and, in these communities, girls are not expected to play outside, run and shout while playing. The girls organized these forbidden games and made sure to include opinion leaders in their planning so that they were able to rule out risks from the community members. Many girls wanted to play but their parents did not allow it. The activist parents' groups² were instrumental in getting permission from other girls' parents. Though not all girls got permission in the first few months of the interventions, gradually many girls joined the football and other teams.

Dreams and aspirations

Social norms sometimes do not value women's and girl's aspirations and dreams. As a result, either they do not realize their dream or do not share their aspirations with others. Girls planned different activities to voice their dreams and show how girls can live up to their aspirations. For example, girls did a drawing activity and posted pictures of what they dreamt of in the community as an exhibition. These pictures included the ambitions they have as well as those of women who inspired them. Girls and parents participated in an intergenerational dialogue³ where parents also shared what their aspirations were as adolescents. Knowing that their mothers had a dream to play outdoor games and it matched their own aspirations, the girls organized a volleyball match between mothers and daughters followed by a discussion with the spectators and players.

Challenges

Any social and behavior change programs that address gender inequality have their own set of challenges. The girls also faced them when organizing activities, building consensus, finding time for rehearsals, selection of a venue

for the event, restricted resources, planning for risk mitigation and backlash, issues related to mobility for purchasing and ordering items. But these challenges were expected and managed. Other challenges while implementing include:

A. Adults tend to take charge, diminishing girls' voice and leadership:

The adults who work with girls had to remind themselves repeatedly that they are not to lead the work. The mentors led the discussions while facilitating a session on adolescent health and rights, gender equality or communication skills, sometimes imparting knowledge and sometimes helping girls to reflect on knowledge, attitudes and behaviors. However, in their role as mentors for girl led social norms shifting interventions, they MUST let girls reflect and decide and not feed them ideas and solutions. If they felt that the girls had an unrealistic plan, they must ask questions so that the girls are able to reflect and articulate their strategy better.

B. Girls are used to following adults:

Not only were adult mentors keen to guide the girls, but the girls also thought that the adults knew best and wanted to ask for opinions before thinking through any problems or planning out an activity. Building the girls' confidence to be able to think and respect each other's voices and opinions while building negotiating skills needs to be supported simultaneously.

C. Risk in handling budgets:

Girls groups are not authorized to take a financial advance and they do not have an organizational status. If the advance is stolen or lost, program staff that take an advance on the girls' behalf can feel insecure. This risk was mitigated by girls submitting budgets, receiving funds that were used within a couple of days, and submitting receipts afterwards.

Lessons learned

A. Strengthen girls' voices and confidence:

The girls were able to give voice to their thoughts and feelings once they saw that it was important. They were able to bring other girls to strengthen their voices. In this process, the girls were able to show up together which was a visible norm shifting activity in itself. They were able to take up public spaces to voice their concerns, becoming positive models of girls' strong voices. Many parents stood up in support as allies which gave girls more confidence.

B. Respecting divergent opinions:

The girls might have opinions that could be different from the adult mentors, and we need to work actively to respect those different opinions and ways of working. The exercises that were to be done with girls were done with mentors first.

For example, in one country, the mentors brainstormed issues and prioritized one issue that was value of girls' education whereas the girls' priority was that 'their voices were not given importance.' This helped the mentors see that the girls think differently and can find their solutions themselves if the mentors respect their opinions, trust them, and support their plans.

C. Girl-led social norms activities can lead to quick change at the community level:

Social norms changes are expected to require a long span of time, so many programs consider the need for long-term investment of time and resources. While this is true, Tipping Point's girl led social norms shifting model was only implemented for one-year. Girls were quick to identify and connect with each other on an issue and were able to conduct quick

research before jumping on organizing events in the community. It was all led by girls and the process sped up when girls took on more leadership. The events had a larger audience, and the issues were discussed during the regular meetings more. The participants who led the event were also the target of behavior change, so it spurred change in the norm to shift even faster. For example, if the girls wanted to shift norms on mobility, they were already going door to door to invite community members to watch a cricket/ football match they were playing. In the process of doing the norm-shifting intervention, going door to door, organizing the game, buying materials, hiring equipment, getting permission from an authority, playing in an open field outside their village, they were actually challenging restrictive norms related to girls' mobility.

D. Support for sustainability:

The activist girls gained strength by involving other girls from the community by recruiting girls in the social norms shifting events across the year. Their work on a small scale within their village is useful to build organizational skills and get support from allies such as parents and boys in their own community. As girls graduate and move outside the village to pursue their dreams, they can be connected if there is a structure to expand networks and can help new girls take up leadership at the community level. Girls' groups connecting and finding space in women's movements can sustain the process of girls continuing to find spaces to strengthen their voices.

Tools and resources

1. [Tipping Point Phase 2 Manuals:](#)
2. [Girl led Activism and Structured Allyship Brief](#)
3. [Structured Allyship toolkit](#)
4. Learning Communities on the Move: Mentors' toolkit
5. Learning Communities on the Move: Activist Girls' toolkit
6. [EMpower's Learning Together Toolkit](#)

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Endnotes

- 1 Kabaddi is played between two teams of seven players, a single player runs into the opposing team's half of a court, tag out as many of the opposite team members as possible, and returns to their own half of the court, all without being tackled by the other team, and in a single breath.
- 2 The activist parents were trained as allies using the Structured Allyship Toolkit:
https://caringpoint.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/FM_Boys_Parents_Activists_with-citation.pdf
- 3 https://caringpoint.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/FM_Intergroup_Dialogue_Manual_with-citation.pdf

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