

CHANGE STARTS AT HOME, NEPAL

PROGRAMME AT THE GLANCE

Change Starts at Home (Change) is a multi-component social and behavioural change programme designed to shift attitudes, norms, and behaviours that underpin power imbalances between men and women and contribute to the perpetration of intimate partner violence (IPV) among couples in Nepal. The intervention uses media (radio), a structured curriculum, and community mobilisation to primarily engage married women aged 18-49 and their husbands. It also involves actors across multiple levels of influence, including family members, peer/social networks, and community leaders. The intervention comprises three key components:



- ▶ **Couple's Intervention:** 40 weekly group sessions (26 sex-segregated, 11 joint, and three family sessions) for selected couples, guided by a curriculum.
- ▶ **Behaviour Change Communication:** A radio series with 39 episodes, combined with short message service (SMS), interactive voice response (IVR) platforms, and social media to ensure ongoing engagement.
- ▶ **Organised Diffusion:** A specific curriculum to guide couples' engagement with community members through activities such as town hall meetings and a community-based campaign.

The Change programme was one of the first interventions in Nepal to adopt a multi-pronged approach to IPV prevention and is unique in its iterative approach to design and implementation. The programme has undergone three study and intervention iterations between its launch in 2015 and the current phase (2024), with each new cycle adapted to incorporate the learnings from the previous iteration. All three programme cycles were evaluated through multiple studies, including a cluster-randomised controlled trial of the core couples' intervention (2017), a pilot to develop and test a diffusion curriculum and community-based campaign (2019), and, more recently (2023), a quasi-experimental test of the combined intervention (couples' curriculum and

diffusion component). The Change programme and study were designed and implemented in collaboration with Equal Access International, Emory University and Vijaya Development Resource Centre (VDRC). Iterations of the programme implementation were supported by multiple funders, including the UK Department for International Development (now the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office) through the What Works to Prevent Violence against Women & Girls Global Programme, Sexual Violence Research Initiative (SVRI), the World Bank Group innovation grant, and other anonymous funders.

BACKGROUND

In recent years, there has been a growth in IPV prevention strategies that engage couples²¹ with an emphasis on shifting harmful gender norms in relationships. In addition, organised diffusion has shown the potential to influence norms change at the community level.¹ Recognising the importance of social norms programming in IPV prevention, the Change programme was designed to shift norms towards gender equality, reduce the acceptance of violence against women, and enhance the acceptability of help-seeking. The latest iteration of the Change programme includes an intentional approach to organised diffusion through both the design (including a 12-session diffusion curriculum) and the measurement of outcomes. As a result, the programme's impact has extended beyond the couples who had the most intensive programme exposure to the wider community level.



PROGRAMME CONTEXT

Nepal is a small landlocked country that recently rose to 'lower-middle income' country status but remains one of the poorest and slowest-growing economies in South Asia.

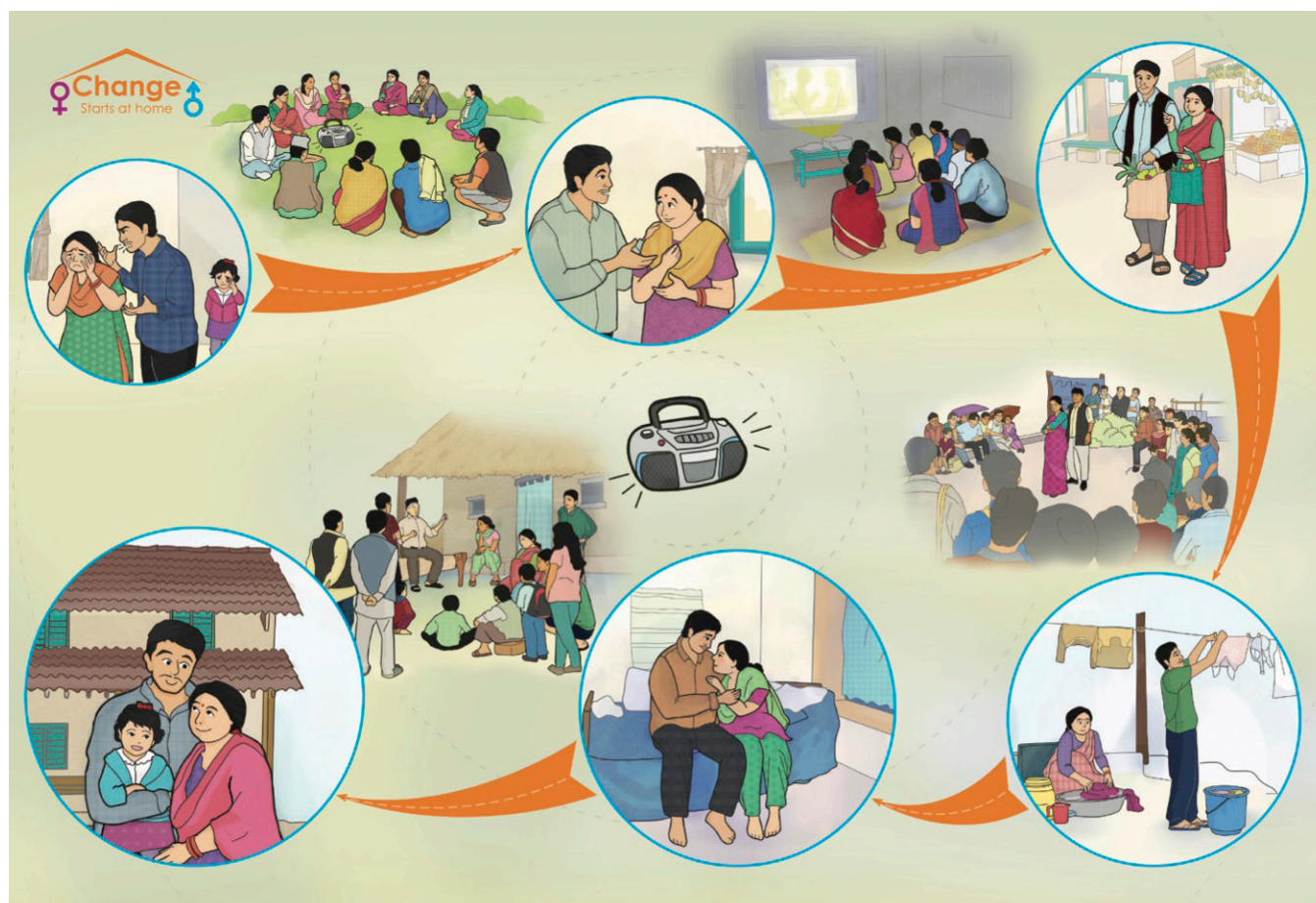
In Nepal, gendered norms around men's dominance, aggression, and the sexual rights of husbands over their wives are deeply rooted and act as significant barriers to women's education and employment and increase their risk of IPV.^{2-4, 6, 7} Nepali women bear primary responsibility for domestic tasks, have limited agency, and are often expected to tolerate violence for the sake of family unity and honour. Recognising the need to include both wives and husbands in dialogue around changing the norms and behaviours that drive IPV, the Change programme was launched in 2015. The programme's goal was to provide married couples with the knowledge, skills, and safe space needed to address power imbalances and reduce IPV in their relationships. In line with best practices for social norms change, the programme utilised multiple mutually reinforcing modalities, including a radio programme, facilitated group discussions for couples and their families, and skill-building workshops and training for community leaders.

The first iteration of the programme was implemented in the Terai region of Nepal (Chitwan, Nawalpur, and Kapilvastu districts), which has the highest prevalence of IPV in the country.² Subsequent iterations were conducted in the Hupsekot and Binayi Tribeni municipalities of Nawalpur district. These areas consist of diverse communities with unique cultural, ethnic, and social characteristics. The communities also interact in multiple settings, including social gatherings with friends and family, common schools, marketplaces, and hospitals. Both municipalities have local FM radio stations, which residents regularly tune in to, particularly for news and information.

PROGRAMME DESCRIPTION AND ACTIVITIES

The Change programme employs a range of strategies to engage married couples and their close social networks in a journey of critical reflection on their beliefs, values, and norms related to marital relationships and violence. It also provides opportunities for participants to develop and practice various skills needed to build and maintain healthy marriages and to foster group solidarity among programme participants.¹⁵

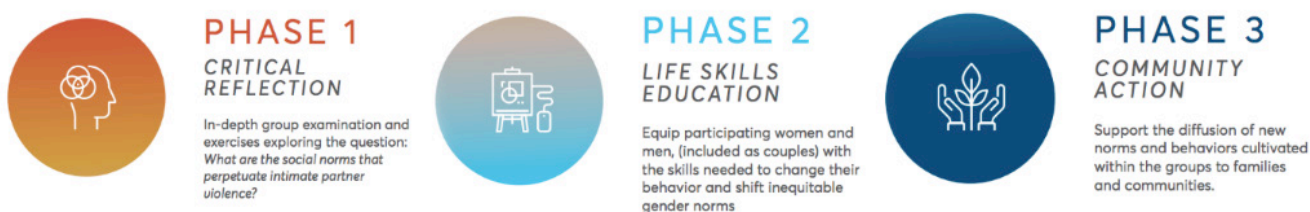
Figure 1: Poster Highlighting the Programme Components



The key components of the Change programme are described below and summarised in Table 1. **Engagement with Couples:** Selected couples participate in a 40-session curriculum (offered weekly over nine months) known as the 'Change B.I.G curriculum'. Most sessions are conducted in single-sex groups (26 sessions); monthly, the couples are also brought together for combined couples' sessions (11 sessions). In addition, three sessions were conducted (once every three months) with the selected family members of the couple (such as in-laws, brothers, and sisters). The B.I.G curriculum sessions are fully digitised, developed as a software application that can be downloaded onto a mobile device, and used by trained facilitators to facilitate the curriculum sessions.¹⁵

Figure 2: The B.I.G Change Theory

THE BIG CHANGE THEORY



The B.I.G curriculum takes couples through three phases of change: first, an internal reflection on existing beliefs, norms, and values that impact marital relationships; second, equipping couples with key life skills that support behaviour change, such as effective communication, empathy, critical thinking, and managing stress and emotions; third, supporting couples in reaching out beyond their small group to share their changing norms and behaviours with their family and friends and inspiring them to do the same.

Radio Programme Series: A 39-episode edutainment radio programme, each episode 30 minutes long, was produced as a serial drama. The drama follows the story of a husband and wife who run a small hotel on Nepal's east-west highway and takes listeners on a journey on how they find ways in their day-to-day lives to resolve issues, misunderstandings, and conflicts that arise between them. The storyline was developed to complement the themes and topics included in the B.I.G curriculum. These radio episodes were played during the weekly sessions with couples to reinforce the key messages and were also broadcast widely through local radio stations to support the diffusion of ideas and actions beyond those intensively exposed to the programme activities.

Specific Curriculum to Guide Organised Diffusion: After the completion of the couple sessions, a 12-session B.I.G Change Diffusion curriculum was implemented²⁰ with an intentional

focus on how couples can engage their social networks for the implementation and tracking of diffusion. The curriculum guides facilitators in leading discussions with couples for over 9-12 months. Facilitators also support couples in carrying out various diffusion activities in their community in close collaboration with their local elected leaders and other key influencers.

Social Media Campaign: This campaign is designed to align with the radio programme to encourage broader listening and interaction beyond those directly engaged through the couples' curriculum. Each social media post (on Facebook) is designed to integrate key messages from the curriculum sessions and radio programme episodes, accompanied by a catchy illustration and a single call to action to prompt ongoing engagement. Additional campaign videos, including testimonies from the couples who have positively benefited from the intervention and endorsements of the programme from community leaders and local government, are also disseminated to keep the audience engaged.

Engagement with Key Stakeholders and Influencers in the Community: Key stakeholders, including community leaders, locally elected representatives, and religious leaders, were engaged throughout the programme through various activities. These included orientation sessions, quarterly update meetings, town hall meetings, and workshops on gender and violence.

Table 1: Intervention Component Details

Key Interventions	Timing of Activity	Level of Exposure	Target Group
Engagement with married couples on IPV prevention	Month One - Nine	Weekly sessions (26 times), over 40 weeks	Females (wives)
	Month One - Nine	Weekly sessions (26 times), over 40 weeks	Men (husbands)
Joint couple sessions	Month One - Nine	Monthly (11 times), over 40 weeks	Married men and women
Family sessions	Month One- Nine	Quarterly (three times), over 40 weeks	Married men and women, and one member of their family (including in-laws)

Key Interventions	Timing of Activity	Level of Exposure	Target Group
Radio programme series	Month One-Nine, rebroadcast during Month 11-19	39 episodes broadcast in the weekly couples' session, community wide broadcasts through local FM stations	Selected couples, their families and friends, community members
Engagement with married couples, to facilitate organised diffusion (through diffusion curriculum)	Month 11-19	12 sessions, spread over nine months	Married men and women who were part of couples' intervention
A series of couples-led community-based activities	Month 14-19	Varies	Social networks of the couples and other community members in the intervention sites
Workshops on IPV prevention and social norms change programming	Month 14-15	Three day long workshops	Community/local elected leaders, religious leaders, local government officials and other key influencers

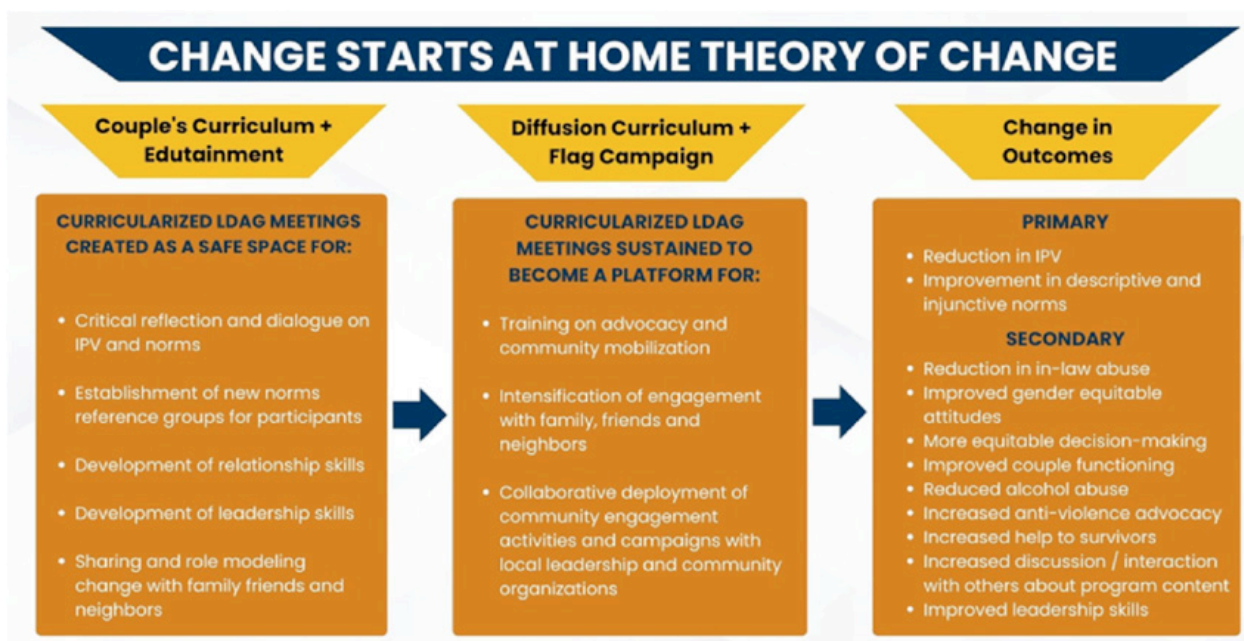
Note: Table 1 adapted from Online Supplement 1, Table 1.¹⁴

THEORY OF CHANGE (ToC)

The programme's ToC relies on several theories and conceptual frameworks, including the Revised Conceptual Framework for Partner Violence¹⁶, which situates IPV within the range of risk and protective factors at the individual, relationship, community, and macro-social levels. Social norms theory^{17, 18} informed the team's understanding of norms, their influence on behaviour, and the mechanisms through which norm shifting occurs. Organised diffusion theory explains how

information is shared, adopted, or discarded through mutual deliberation within social networks in a community.^{1, 19}

Figure 3: Change Programme Theory of Change (Third Iteration)¹⁵



PROGRAMME CURRICULUM

Table 2: B.I.G. Couple's Curriculum Sessions

Phase I Topics Begin to Question - Critical Thinking	Phase II Topics Imparting Life Skills	Phase III Topics Go !
Week 0: Welcome to Change (Joint Couples' Session)		
Week One: Samajhdari 'Mutual Understanding'	Week 14: Ingredients for a Healthy Marriage	Week 27: Supporting Change
Week Two: Positive and Negative Power	Week 15: Understanding Me, Understanding You (Couples' Session Four)	Week 28: Let's talk about Sex
Week Three: Gender Identities (Couples' Session One)	Week 16: Getting to the Root	Week 29: Enjoying Intimacy

Phase I Topics

Begin to Question - Critical Thinking

Week Four: From a Wedding to a Marriage

Week Five: Roles and Respect

Week Six: Expectations and Pressures

Week Seven: Love and Respect (Couples' Session Two)

Week Eight: Understanding Violence between Married Couples

Week Nine: Money and Power

Week Ten: A Violence-free Home makes a Happier, Healthier Family (Couples' Session Three)

Week 11: Gender and Sexuality

Week 12: Sex and Consent

Week 13: Family Week One

Phase II Topics

Imparting Life Skills

Week 17: Recognising and Communicating Stress

Week 18: Communicating without Arguing (Couples' Session Five)

Week 19: Managing Anger without Violence

Week 20: Making Decisions Together (Couples' Session Six)

Week 21: Alcohol and Gambling

Week 22: Sharing and Responding

Week 23: Communicating Consent

Week 24: Bringing out the Best (Couples' Session Seven)

Week 25: Let's Reflect

Week 26: Family Support (Family Week Two)

Phase III Topics

Go !

Week 30: Just You and Me (Couples' Session Eight)

Week 31: Seeking Help

Week 32: Stepping In

Week 33: Staying Supportive

Week 34: Staying Safe (Couples' Session Nine)

Week 35: Knowing When it's Too Much

Week 36: Safer Communities

Week 37: Changing our Communities (Couples' Session Ten)

Week 38: Involving our Leaders

Week 39: Keep Change Going (Family Week Three)

Source: B.I.G Change Curriculum for Listening and Discussion Group Facilitators Nepal.¹⁵

Table 3: Diffusion Curriculum Sessions (Violence-free Community Campaign)

Session Topics			
<p>Week</p> <p>1</p> <p>Looking back, Looking Forward (Couples' Session)</p>	<p>Week</p> <p>2</p> <p>Community Mobilisation</p>	<p>Week</p> <p>3</p> <p>Respecting and Supporting Change (Couples' Session)</p>	<p>Week</p> <p>4</p> <p>Positive Change</p>
<p>Week</p> <p>5</p> <p>Raising our Flag</p>	<p>Week</p> <p>6</p> <p>Identifying Key Influencers (Couples' Session)</p>	<p>Week</p> <p>7</p> <p>Spreading the Word (Through Splashes and Dives)</p>	<p>Week</p> <p>8</p> <p>Recap- Community Mobilisation and Safety</p>
<p>Week</p> <p>9</p> <p>Working with the Media</p>	<p>Week</p> <p>10</p> <p>Sustaining Change and Supporting Each Other</p>	<p>Week</p> <p>11</p> <p>Reflections: What's Working Well, Challenges and Finding Solutions</p>	<p>Week</p> <p>12</p> <p>What We Take Forward</p>

Source: B.I.G Change Diffusion Curriculum.²⁰

PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION

To prepare for the implementation, facilitators, both female and male, were selected from the intervention districts and nearby areas. These individuals were identified through the networks of the local implementing partner (VDRC) using the following selection criteria:

- ▶ A12th-grade standard academic qualification or higher;
- ▶ Married and living with their spouse;
- ▶ Good communication skills;
- ▶ A good reputation in the community and;
- ▶ Ability to commit to the duration of the programme (24 months).

The facilitators were responsible for convening the weekly group discussions with ten selected couples and their family members and supporting the couples during the organised diffusion activities. To ensure their ongoing capacity strengthening, the selected facilitators went through a series of training sessions organised every six to eight weeks:

Training One: Understanding Gender, Violence and Norms and Facilitation Skills (Seven days)

Training Two: Refresher on Facilitation skills, Gender Equality and IPV (Seven days)

Training Three: Life Skills (Three days)

Training Four: Refresher on Life Skills (Three days)

Training Five: Training of Trainers (ToT) on Community Mobilisation (Three days)

Training Six: Reflection Workshop (One day)

In the second iteration, three additional three-day training sessions were organised to help facilitators understand and practice the diffusion curriculum.

Facilitators were provided with a monthly incentive based on the number of groups they facilitated each month, along with the local travel costs.

PROGRAMME MONITORING

The monitoring approach for the Change programme included a mix of tools to gather both quantitative and qualitative data to continuously monitor different components of the programme. These tools included:

- ▶ **Feedback Forms:** Completed by the curriculum facilitators after each session. These forms collected data on attendance, group members' ratings of session content and activities, personal safety concerns among group members (if any), and facilitators'

ratings of couples' participation in the session. A specifically developed mobile application (B.I.G app) was used to collect this data.

- ▶ **Session Monitoring Forms:** Completed by Change field monitors after attending the facilitated group sessions during their field visits. Field monitors, who were dedicated supervisors for the Change programme, were responsible for ensuring the overall quality of implementation, including the couple sessions. The data collected included observation notes on facilitation quality, whether the session followed the curriculum guidance, attendance rates, and the engagement levels of the group participants. These data were regularly analysed to provide ongoing feedback and guidance to the facilitators.
- ▶ **Toll-Free Phone Number:** Promoted to engage listeners of the radio programme and provide a space to share their thoughts, opinions, and open-ended feedback.
- ▶ **Interactive Voice Response (IVR) Platform:** Used to both engage listeners of the radio programme in a more structured manner and collect data. The platform facilitated the content dissemination to encourage listenership, promote key messages, and gather feedback on listening frequency through polls or open-ended feedback.
- ▶ **Diffusion Activity Reporting Forms:** Used to document information on whether the planned activities occurred, including how, when, and where they were implemented, who attended, and the immediate impact of the activity (as reported by programme participants). These forms were mostly completed by the local partner, Equal Access, who led the diffusion implementation.

PROGRAMME ADAPTATION AND EVALUATION

The Change programme is unique in its iterative approach to both design and implementation. After the first phase of curriculum sessions was written, it was tested with facilitators during training and finalised based on the feedback received. Facilitators began leading the sessions for Phase I while sessions for Phase II were still being written and tested. Thus, testing and rewriting occurred simultaneously with training and weekly sessions, which saved time. Since the radio productions were also happening concurrently and needed to align with the sessions, this iterative process helped refine both the curriculum sessions and the radio dramas based on the feedback from the group participants.

Three major iterations of the programme have been designed and implemented between 2015 and 2024, with each new iteration adapted to incorporate the learnings from the previous iteration.

Iteration One: Focusing on Couples (2015-2018)

The first iteration of the Change programme was implemented between 2015 and 2018. While the primary focus was on engaging couples, this iteration also sought to engage couples' family members and community leaders to initiate broader changes in social attitudes and practices towards girls and women in Nepal. The impact of this phase was evaluated using a two-armed cluster randomised controlled trial alongside qualitative interviews to examine pathways of change over three years.⁸ The study showed a 10 percent reduction in physical and/or sexual IPV among couples with high participation by the end of the project, as well as a significant shift in gender norms within households. This shift resulted in more equitable, supportive, and positive relationships between couples and a reduction in alcohol use among husbands.⁹⁻¹¹ The impact study also demonstrated the beginning of changes beyond the couples directly involved in the intervention. In intervention communities where extensive diffusion occurred through discussions of the material learned, there was evidence of greater assistance to survivors of violence¹ and more equitable gender norms.¹² The programme had a greater impact on sites with more gender-inequitable norms compared to sites with less equitable attitudes at baseline. Although the study showed promising signs of diffusion of programme impact from couples to their wider communities through engaging their family and community networks, it was not specifically designed to measure diffusion.

Iteration Two: Focusing on Diffusion (2018-2019)

The second iteration of the Change programme focused intensively on organised diffusion, both in its design and measurement, to identify and examine potential pathways for gender norms diffusion from a smaller group to a larger community. A 21-session curriculum was designed to guide this organised diffusion process for couples, and one community that had undergone the intervention in the first iteration was chosen to test this new curriculum. A campaign for a 'violence-free community' was launched and implemented over four months to activate existing pathways of norms diffusion through community-wide mobilisation activities. As part of this campaign, households in the community, starting with those couples who were part of the couples' intervention, were encouraged to raise an orange flag at their homes as a sign of commitment to gender-equitable and violence-free households. The flag helped to highlight household-level changes more openly and visually. To be eligible to raise the flag, households were required to make a public pledge to ensure gender equality, share domestic duties fairly among all family members, and declare zero tolerance for any form of violence within the household. A series of 'appreciation' events were organised in the community to encourage these households that raised the flags and inspire others to do the same.

Qualitative analysis conducted at the end of the second programme iteration showed that the Change programme was able to diffuse into the community through these various campaign activities and began to generate changes around norms related to IPV. Additionally, a survey

conducted after the completion of the ‘violence-free community’ campaign showed that 90 percent of the 455 households in the community publicly pledged to be violence-free as a result of the four months of organised diffusion activities. A follow-up survey and qualitative data collection conducted seven months after the campaign showed that 98 percent of community members recalled the public pledges, and 44 percent reported greater awareness of IPV at the community level. Analysis of the longitudinal data indicated a relationship between community norms change and the extent of diffusion, measured as the number of different individuals with whom the survey respondent had discussed the intervention content. The analysis also suggested that in areas where norms were less equitable at baseline, there was greater change in norms associated with diffusion.

Iteration Three: Putting It Altogether (2021-2023)

The third iteration of the programme built on the knowledge and lessons learned from the first two iterations, incorporating direct engagement with married couples, their families, and other social network members and an extended diffusion phase. The study for this iteration¹⁴ was conducted across ten intervention sites covering three clusters:

1. Couples’ groups;
2. Community members in intervention communities who were not members of the couples’ group; and
3. Three control sites where individuals from intervention sites had some social ties (such as family, friends, work, school, healthcare, or shared household shopping areas within the same ward).

In a mixed-methods quasi-experimental study, as expected, members of the couples’ group showed the greatest benefit by the end of the first phase of the couples-focused programming compared to members of their communities and the control sites. Notable improvements included significant reductions in IPV and in-law violence, enhanced relationship quality, increased women’s decision-making power, more gender-equitable attitudes, women’s leadership, and anti-violence advocacy. These improvements were sustained through the end of the second phase of the programming (diffusion phase).

Community members in the intervention communities also showed signs of improvement in a number of outcomes as a result of the diffusion phase, including IPV, in-law violence, and women’s decision-making power. However, their benefits relative to the control communities were smaller in areas such as gender-equitable attitudes, relationship quality and equity, and anti-violence advocacy because of improvements in the control communities by the end of the second phase. This suggests some degree of diffusion to the control communities. Analysis of data collected seven months after the conclusion of this third phase is ongoing to substantiate these findings and examine the trajectory of the changes across the three communities.

PROGRAMMING LESSONS

Long-term strategic work with couples can be transformative. Addressing harmful social norms, combined with an explicit focus on organised diffusion, can be highly effective in IPV prevention efforts. More specifically:

- ▶ A comprehensive prevention strategy that leverages multiple interventions to engage the primary group (couples) and their social networks, utilising media (radio programming) and community mobilisation efforts, was shown to be effective in shifting attitudes, norms, and behaviours around IPV, resulting in significant reductions in all forms of IPV.
- ▶ An intentional approach to organised diffusion of key messages showed positive impacts, reinforcing the potential of organised diffusion to facilitate norms change for IPV prevention.

Implementation Lessons Learned:

- ▶ The use of media (radio programming) can be an effective and engaging tool for demonstrating new ways of relating between couples, modelling new norms, and encouraging discussions on sensitive topics related to married couple relationships and IPV.
- ▶ The iterative approach to developing the programme allowed for parallel content development and testing, which saved time by obtaining user feedback and input simultaneously.
- ▶ Group facilitators should be engaged as full-time team members, ensuring they are available for intensive and regular training. This approach encourages ownership of the programme activities and supports retention.
- ▶ Significant investment in the capacities of curriculum facilitators is required through intensive and recurring training throughout the programme. These trainings should focus not only on curriculum content but also on providing a safe space for facilitators to reflect on their personal norms and values related to violence. This personal transformation is crucial for facilitating in-depth and honest discussions among couples. Close mentoring of the facilitators during implementation supported their personal and professional development, which contributed to higher levels of retention of trained facilitators.
- ▶ Having a dedicated, intensive inception phase (including a household census, building rapport with key stakeholders and local government, formative research, and

consultation with communities) would have been helpful before the launch of each iteration, to validate tools, make the required modifications to the curricula and radio programming, and carry out pilot work.

- ▶ Focusing on social networks can be a cost-effective and sustainable way to encourage the diffusion of impact beyond those most intensively engaged by a programme.

AREAS OF FURTHER RESEARCH

The evaluations of the Change programme have generated important insights into how community diffusion occurs and how to leverage it to reduce IPV and support norms change. However, the final study's sample size was relatively small, covering only 13 sites. A larger study would increase confidence in the findings and help determine the extent to which the programming can be scaled.

Given the promising findings, a future cost-effectiveness assessment would provide information to assess the programme's value for money and identify its benefits to community members and neighbouring communities.

Study findings suggest that the intervention components are working generally as planned. However, outcomes in iteration three that did not show improvement (such as the frequency of quarrelling and conflict resolution) warrant further investigation. This will help determine whether the intervention is not intensive enough in these domains or if the measurement has not detected changes that have occurred.

Finally, investigation is needed to evaluate whether and to what extent the Change programme can be credited for changes in the control communities. The timing of the reported changes in the control communities aligns with the diffusion phase of the curriculum; however, ongoing analysis drawing on follow-up data will provide clarity on this issue.

Acknowledgements: This programme summary was written by Binita Shrestha and reviewed by Erin Stern, Cari Jo Clark, Gemma Ferguson, Ruti Levitov, and Tania Ghosh. It was copyedited by Oluwatobiloba Ayodele and designed by Ana Lucia Nustes.

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