



TIPPING POINT SOCIAL NORMS INNOVATIONS SERIES

Brief 5: Boys' Cooking Competitions

NEPAL



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.

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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 Point² 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

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

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: COOKING COMPETITIONS FOR BOYS

Adolescent girls in the Terai region of Nepal where Tipping Point operates spend a great deal of their time engaged in household work, such as cooking, cleaning, washing clothes, and caring for siblings. Time that might be spent studying for exams, doing schoolwork, or participating in other self-development activities is absorbed by household duties. Considered ‘women’s work,’ domestic labor is less visible than work that earns an income and is in general undervalued socially. It becomes a downward spiral of missed opportunities for girls when they are denied the chance to apply themselves fully to their studies due to household responsibilities, subsequently fail to pass exams, and drop out of school altogether. A girl considered to be ‘idle’—even though she may be working sixteen hours a day at home—is more vulnerable to child marriage than a girl that is doing well in school and demonstrating the potential to follow an alternate path. Yet, boys, even before they have taken on outside work, are relatively free from expectations to help with household chores.

During the daily activity mapping activity facilitated with adolescent groups, girls and boys noticed the gender disparity in household labor and discussed the potential benefits of more equitable sharing of domestic tasks. The boys also shared their fear of being ridiculed for doing ‘women’s work’ when there were women and girls around who could do it. Together with the adolescents, the project team designed the boys’ cooking competition to counter the notion that a domestic task, in this case cooking, is necessarily only a woman’s job. They planned it for a public venue to **demonstrate and normalize the sight of boys doing domestic labor (Design Principle 7)**. Making it a good-natured competition judged by the girls added an element of fun and celebration of experimenting with gender roles.

The boys competed in teams of two. They had time before the competition to learn some cooking skills from their mothers or other women in the family, which presented **opportunities for family members to discuss roles in the home (Design Principle 4)**. On the day of the competition, **local leaders and officials attended** in addition to the crowds of observers that gathered (**Design Principle 8**). When the cooking finished and the judges had awarded the winners, **the team facilitated a discussion with the participants and audience** on what they had learned (**Design Principle 5**). Facilitators also asked participants to reflect on what was possible for them to **change in their own lives, and many boys committed to cooking at home (Design Principle 6)**.

The implementation guide at the end of this brief provides more details about the boys’ cooking competition activity.

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:



What are the initial reactions of community members?

The competitions were successful in that they publicly featured boys doing domestic work that is typically seen as ‘girls’ work’; they were well attended by the community; and the adolescents that were cooking, judging, and otherwise helping with the event enjoyed themselves. Tipping Point sought clues to whether the competitions and other project activities were having any effect on social norms in the community. Was it more acceptable for men and boys to cook in the home? Had the social value of domestic labor shifted?

Using inquiry questions based on **CARE’s Social Norms Analysis Plot (SNAP) framework**¹ Tipping Point project staff interviewed 13 community members—six women and seven men. Only two of the respondents had a relative involved in project activities, yet, aside from two respondents, they had all heard of Tipping Point. Two of the men said they were Muslim; the remainder of the men and all the women were Hindu. Their ages ranged from 20 to 62 years.

¹ 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>.

SHARING THE WORK BENEFITS EVERYONE

Most respondents reacted very positively to the boys' cooking competition, and many gave specific reasons why it was an important event.

I felt good seeing the boys cook. And it made me feel that they were getting an education.

45-YEAR-OLD WOMAN

These kinds of competitions where boys cook help the boys to move forward in life. The boys prepare themselves before going to the competition. Their cooking skills improve. They can even teach others how to cook and support family members in the household chores.

50-YEAR-OLD WOMAN

I found it [the competition] good. If this type of environment had been in my family, I would have had time and support to study. These types of events and activities are good for the welfare of society.

20-YEAR-OLD WOMAN

A few people found the sight of boys cooking surprising, strange, or amusing; however, even they generally agreed that the competition sent a good message.

I saw the cooking competition. I was amazed and worried about the boys and that their hands might burn.... I thought that teaching the children from a small age is very beneficial for gender equity.

29-YEAR-OLD MAN

Many respondents mentioned the benefits of men and women sharing household chores. The most common results mentioned were strengthening the spousal relationship, saving time for women and girls so that they could do other things like study, and making men and boys realize how much work and skill goes into food preparation. Another reason given why boys should learn to cook was that they may need the knowledge once they leave home, an important factor in this region where many young men spend periods away from the family working in India.

When boys support their sisters in cooking at home, it saves their time. The girls can go to school on time. My son does the household chores, and others can learn from him. I appreciate him.... Working together has developed the love and bonding between us. I have also learned how to cook. It has made me realize how much effort you have to put in to cook.

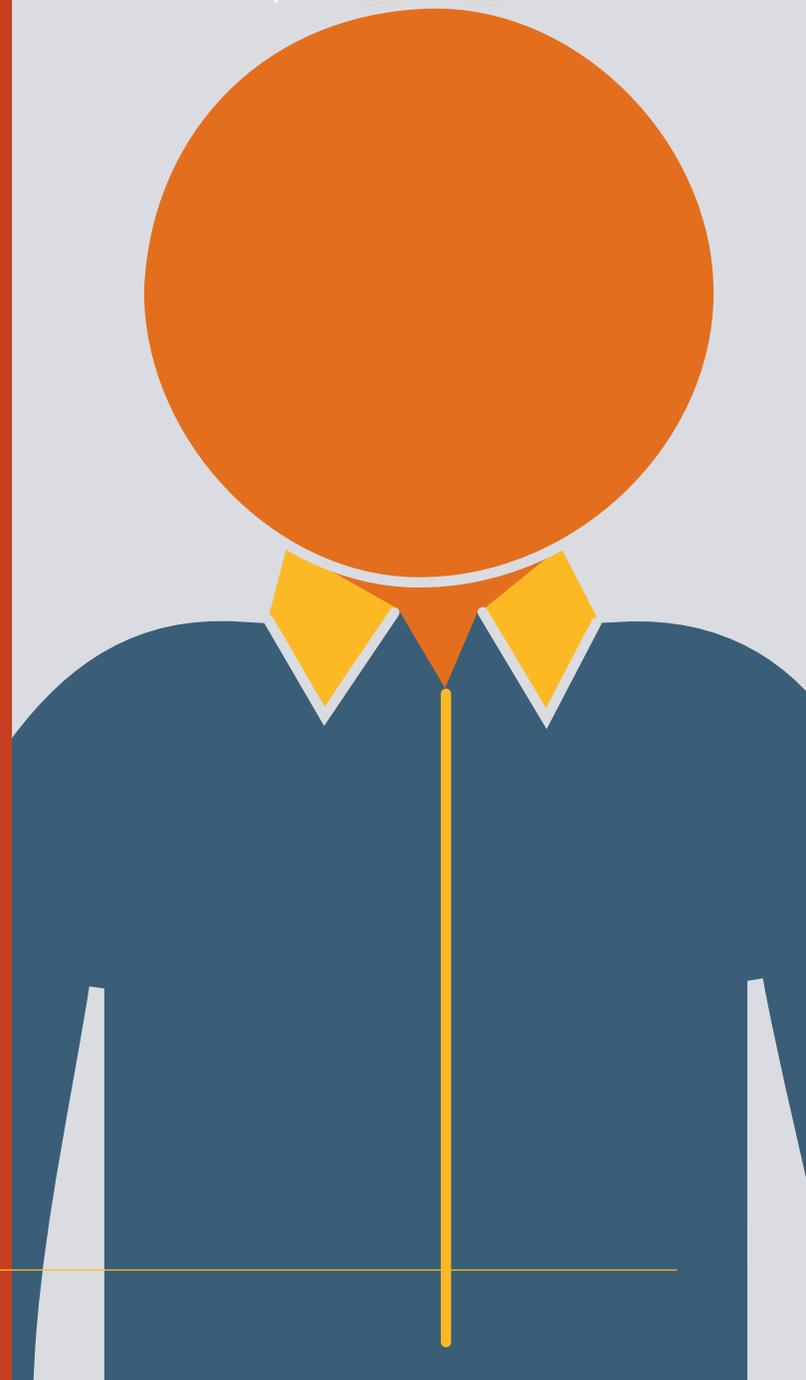
43-YEAR-OLD MAN

My husband, who works abroad, when he is at home helps me at cooking. My son has also been cooking at home for a year. When my son cooks at home, this helps my daughter get time to study at home and go to school, and it minimizes the work load of my daughter and myself.

45-YEAR-OLD WOMAN

The male members in my family have been cooking for four or five years. It has helped strengthen the love and bonding between the family members, and we live in harmony.

50-YEAR-OLD MAN



I feel happy when I help in doing some cooking, and the females in my family also become happy with this. Love grows when men and women do the household work equally.

29-YEAR-OLD MAN

Only one respondent said that she did not like seeing the boys competing:

Personally, I did not like it. The competition seemed to be fake. A cooking competition for just a day in front of people will not make a difference.... I do not think men should cook. I would not be happy if my husband cooked when I am completely fine.

60-YEAR-OLD WOMAN

This respondent was an outlier, but she does represent a segment of the community, as later sections in this brief show. Otherwise, most respondents seemed to have contemplated what a change in the gendered division of labor at home would mean for them and found it to be positive for the family.

Before, when a female cooked food and the food lacked adequate salt and spices, the male family member scolded them and even hit them. But now, after they have seen and started cooking on their own, they realize the value of the work the females have been doing.

45-YEAR-OLD WOMAN



CHANGE WE CAN SEE AND CHANGE BEHIND CLOSED DOORS

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. Change becomes possible when we perceive changes in others. When asked how things had changed regarding men and boys cooking and doing other household tasks, many respondents offered up role models as drivers of change.

When we were in school, our brother used to cook food, feed us, and send us to school. Seeing my brother cook, other community people have been influenced.

20-YEAR-OLD WOMAN



Some also mentioned Tipping Point or the cooking competition itself as an influence:

The project has spread awareness. Seeing one person do the work, the other learned.

62-YEAR-OLD MAN

After participating and listening to the competition, some ten or twelve boys from the community I know are starting to cook at their homes.

20-YEAR-OLD WOMAN

However, two people—both older men—stood out for the strength of their disagreement that things had changed at all:

Men would rather stay hungry at home than to cook... The situation has not changed; men didn't cook and are not cooking now either... The boys only cooked for the cooking competition, because after it they went back to their home and back to normal.

50-YEAR-OLD MAN

Boys cooked because they had to, not because they wanted to... therefore they did not keep doing it. There has been no change in the family dynamics.

60-YEAR-OLD MAN

These respondents point out that what people do in public—cook in a competition—is not necessarily what they do in private. If a person has not witnessed men and boys cooking in the privacy of their homes, and they do not do it in their own home, they might assume that no one else does either. Pluralistic ignorance is a term to describe a mismatch between what people think others do and what others actually do. Raising awareness of change that is already happening in private can accelerate normative change.

SOME RULES ARE MADE TO BE BROKEN...

It is also important to understand when it is considered acceptable to 'break' a social norm, that is, under what circumstances exceptions are socially approved. Social movements can find leverage for change in exceptions, and an expanding set of justifiable exceptions to the norm suggests that old norms may be breaking up and new norms forming. In the case of men cooking, respondents pointed to several exceptions, times when men do cook, and it is seen as acceptable.

Men or boys cook at home when the female members of the family are sick, there is no one in the family to cook, or women are on their periods.

20-YEAR-OLD WOMAN

In our community, men or boys cook at home when women are on their periods. Priests and saints eat food that is cooked by themselves. Some men help women in the household work, when their children go to school and when it is the peak of paddy season.... A man cooks at home in situations when a man has lost his wife.

43-YEAR-OLD MAN

Examples given of when men cook include periodic, non-extraordinary events (such as menstruation, seasonal migration, and very busy times), special occasions like weddings, and long-term circumstances (e.g., a wife's disability or death). Some of these situations do and some do not involve the absence or incapacity of the person who normally cooks. Although the interviews did not explore how such exceptions have changed over time, the variety of scenarios in which it is acceptable for men to cook suggests a great deal of flexibility and many opportunities to drive broader change.

Men or boys in our society cook when the women in the household are sick, during their maternity times, and during their periods... I felt nice when I saw men cooking. Men were cooking during a wedding. They usually cook during social functions... If I talk about my home, I sometimes cook at home when meat items are being cooked.

50-YEAR-OLD MAN



...BUT BREAKING THE RULES STILL HAS CONSEQUENCES

Yet, we know that there is some stigma tied to men doing household work. 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). Interviewers asked respondents what people say about men and boys who frequently cook or clean at home.

While some people said that the community sees virtue in or feels indifferent to men and boys engaging in household chores....

If men cook, society will see it positively. The community will not backbite.

22-YEAR-OLD WOMAN

If men cook regularly, then they will be called very helpful.

60-YEAR-OLD MAN

.... some also gave examples of ridicule and disrespect targeted at those men and their wives.

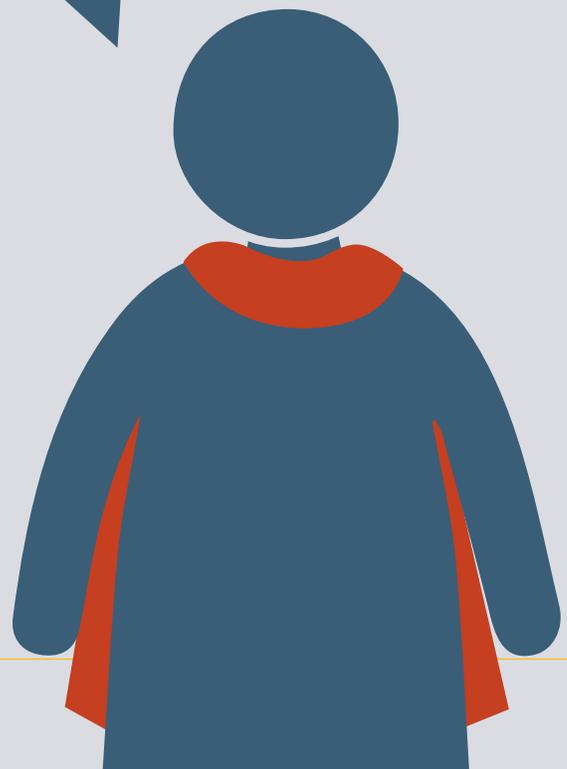
If a man is asked to cook by his wife and he does, that man will be humiliated for giving in too much to what his wife wants.... A woman who doesn't cook or makes the husband cook is not seen with respect in the community.

50-YEAR-OLD MAN

When the adolescent groups were planning the cooking competition, some adolescent boys expressed a fear of being ridiculed for doing 'women's work'. The comments above give us an idea of what that ridicule might look like. It is also noteworthy that the criticism of men who regularly cook at home references their wives, who are thought to be flawed, useless, or domineering. Referencing women here reinforces findings of the CPA study that women and girls are primarily held responsible when gender norms are broken.

If any man cooks regularly, then the community calls them a 'hen-pecked husband.' The community would prefer men wondering around and doing nothing to cooking at home... The community would label her [the wife] useless and say she should leave, go, because there's no reason to keep her.

60-YEAR-OLD WOMAN





Potential of Boys' Cooking Competitions as a Tactic for Social Norms Change

The reactions to the boys' cooking competition and people's opinions on how it played into changing norms on male participation in domestic tasks reflected attitudes that were welcoming of more equitable practices at home, not only for practical reasons such as time efficiency, but also for loftier goals like family harmony and gender equity. However, attitudes in the community were not unanimously in favor of greater equity, and boys and men who do household work—and their wives—do face ridicule and criticism. Based on comments from the boys themselves, as well as from respondents, the activity helped community members understand the value of daily housework, which is a good foundation for future activities.

The interviews also provided evidence that men already contribute to meal preparation in a wide variety of circumstances that are accepted as exceptions to the norm. However, these instances were usually portrayed as men and boys 'helping' rather than fulfilling a shared responsibility. A question going forward is how to better center the innovation on distributing the locus of responsibility for household work. Tipping Point continues to adapt project innovations and is considering modifications and additions that would:

Pair fathers and sons together in a cooking competition, to better support boys and **demonstrate men's approval of their sons' gender equitable behavior in public (Design Principle 7)**.

Highlight successful women and girls from the program areas and **how fathers and brothers supported them at home** and otherwise while they were growing up, to inspire men and boys (Design Principle 3).

Use photography or art projects to capture scenes of men and boys taking on domestic duties during daily life, to **make hidden work-sharing more visible** outside the home (Design Principle 7).

Celebrate mothers and daughters with a community 'day off' from domestic tasks or work swapping between sisters and brothers for a designated period of time, followed by a **dialogue on roles in the home and family (Design Principle 4)**.

Create community dialogues with the parents' groups that **elicit diverse views** on the value of different kinds of work and contributions to a household, who holds responsibility for them, and how our perceptions change based on who is doing the work (Design Principle 4).

Implementation Guide: Boys' Cooking Competition

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The project team and adolescents implemented the boys' cooking competition activity in three stages:

1. **Participatory gender analysis**
2. **The competition**
3. **Adolescent and community reflection**

Participatory gender analysis

Tipping Point project staff participated in Gender Equity and Diversity (GED) trainings and subsequent monthly reflection meetings in which they reflected on the stereotypical gender roles they played in their own lives. They challenged each other about these behaviors and gradually tried to shift unequal gender norms in their own families. Female staff—who were earning income and therefore felt an increased ability to negotiate responsibilities in the home—were quite successful in getting husbands to share more household tasks. Male staff who started doing more housework faced more resistance from their families and especially their communities. These experiences helped them prepare for similar processes with the project's community groups.

During early meetings of the project's adolescent groups, boys and girls conducted daily routine mapping and compared who does what in the household and the social construction of 'men's' and 'women's' work. They pondered why household work was not considered skilled labor, yet girls know how to roll a chapatti (tortilla-like bread) by the time they are eight years old and 16-year-old boys do not. The girls felt that the boys would not be able to make round chapattis—and the boys took it as a challenge.

Some of the discussion questions presented in sessions with boys, girls, and parents were:

- What would happen if boys and men cooked at home? Who stops them from cooking? Are there boys and men in the community who cook? What do others

THE OBJECTIVES OF BOYS' COOKING COMPETITION

1. **To challenge social norms that belittle boys for engaging in household chores and promote the idea that boys and men are equally responsible for household chores.**
2. **To initiate discussion about equitable sharing of household chores by women and men, girls and boys.**
3. **To promote and celebrate positive deviance among men and boys who undertake household chores.**

in the community say about them? Why do they say such things about them? Do you agree with what others say about men and boys who cook?

- How many of you know how to roll chapattis? When do you roll chapattis? How do you feel doing it? What are the benefits and harms of men cooking, doing household chores, or taking care of children?
- Do the boys who cook receive any appreciation or ridicule from friends and family? What do they say? How do they respond to those comments?
- What are the benefits to the boys and men who cook? What are the benefits to girls and women when boys and men cook? How do the older people in the family react to men and boys cooking, and are there any examples to share? How do you (the boys/ men who cook) respond to people's negative comments?
- What is the environment at home when men or boys cook? Does anyone want to share an experience?

The competition

When the idea of having a cooking competition for boys was raised, many of the boys wanted to participate but felt anxious about doing something new and having the results judged. In addition, the boys who volunteered for the competition were initially teased by their family members when they asked their mothers to teach them how to roll chapattis and prepare vegetables, although they reported truly enjoying that experience with their mothers. They decided that doing the competition in teams of two would lighten the pressure they felt, and the project team began to shape the event as a fun celebration. Selected girls would judge the food. The groups chose central locations in the village to hold the competition, and they invited community leaders and parents.

Competitions required the boys to use traditional methods, such as makeshift stoves using a few bricks and firewood. During the cooking process, boys found it was harder than they expected it to be, and adolescent girls and mothers gave the boys tips and advice on spices to use.

Adolescent and community reflection

Immediately following the competition, the project team facilitated a public discussion with the participants and the audience that had gathered. The boys spoke of their surprise that making delicious food was difficult, and many expressed regret for the times they had gotten upset or even rebuked their sisters when the food was late or didn't taste good. Some of them committed publicly to cook at home and lighten their sisters' and mothers' burden of work.

One unplanned result of the competitions was seeing community members from different castes eating the food the boys cooked together, as sharing the same dish across castes is rarely done. The team was pleasantly surprised to find that the cooking competition could counter the norms around caste discrimination in the communities in this way.

The questions used to guide the community discussion after the competition included:

- Did you like the competition? Why or why not? What is the message this event gives the community?
- Do you think this behavior will continue in the household? What needs to happen to make it a common behavior?
- *(To male village council members and other government stakeholders who attended the event)* Do you cook at home? Would you do so now? Do you think there would be resistance from your family members? How would you convince them?
- *(During subsequent meetings of parents' groups)* Has the cooking competition changed the responsibilities at the household level? Has it changed anything else at the household level? What has changed? How would you describe the change, and how do you feel about it?
- What allowed people of different castes to come to the cooking competition and eat together? Do you think this builds more equitable relationships in the village? What are ways to continue doing this kind of harmonious event?



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