

PILOT OF SOCIAL NORMS DIAGNOSTIC TOOL IN BANGLADESH

The following summary details the adaptation and test of a Social Norms Diagnostic Tool implemented within the Empower Youth for Work programme (EYW) in Bangladesh – a collaboration between EYW and the Knowledge Hub on Women’s Economic Empowerment in Agriculture (KH WEE-Ag).

The adapted version of the Diagnostic Tool constitutes of a set of exercises with community stakeholders to explore social norms relating to the economic empowerment of youth, especially young women, and to identify initial strategies on how to shift them at scale.

The Diagnostic Tool underwent multiple phases of adaptation in the run-up to the field test. The adaptation process included a revision by technical advisors and external experts, as well as a reflective half-day workshop in Bangladesh attended by Oxfam colleagues and academic partners.

Through adaptation the Tool was complemented to cover all related areas of the EYW programme’s theory of change, more geared toward a focus on youth economic empowerment with exercises more suitable for youth participants, and sharpened to the Bangladeshi context.

The EYW Bangladesh team tested the tool by implementing selected exercises in two communities. In each community, a one-day workshop was facilitated with 12 community members attending. Exercises were selected with a focus on exploring social norms around unpaid care work and paid and productive work.

The test of the Diagnostic Tool provided findings on social norms in the economy, related to the three areas within the EYW programme on which social norm interventions focus: unpaid care work and paid/productive work; gender based violence (GBV); and sexual reproductive health and rights (SRHR).

The results of the test showed a distinct difference in the ‘economic worth’ participants gave to on the one hand unpaid care work and on the other paid/productive work. While seen as equally important, participants thought paid/productive work to be among others more difficult and demanding.

Participants shared that women predominantly carry our care activities, while men carry out paid/productive work. Beliefs underlying these gender norms were among others that women are instinctively better at domestic and care work and that women and men are not physically equipped to do each other’s work, or simply that neither has the time for each other’s work given existing responsibilities.

It was also shared that in some instances the roles were different or overlapping – for example men carrying out ‘women’s’ care responsibilities before marriage or during sickness of female family members. For women, it can be at times acceptable to engage in paid/productive work before marriage. Yet, once married, participants shared that women and men have a strict division of gender roles. It would be not acceptable for married women or those with children to do paid/productive work, especially outside the home. Similarly, once men have married and live with female household members, it is not acceptable to perform care tasks unless the latter are unavailable.

Next to the mentioned exceptions in differing or overlapping roles, the transgression of the gender norms on unpaid care and paid/productive work can come with the risk of violence, harassment or mocking. It was seen as acceptable to harass women in public spaces or mocking men doing care activities. Fear of violence, community censure or gossip can prevent women taking on paid/productive work, while mocking can discourage men to take up care work.

Based on the findings from the exercises with participants several recommendations for the EYW programme in Bangladesh can be made – keeping in mind that the test was on a small scale. We can think of the importance of making use of entry-points to challenge social norms, such as men doing care work before marriage or women doing agricultural work when it is home-based. Another example is the potential to create new, ‘positive’ identities for women and men to replace those attached to traditional gender roles. In addition, participants developed their own suggestions to address social norms in the economy, including among others engaging in awareness-raising on role-sharing between men and women and the development women-only work spaces or public transport.

The test of the Diagnostic Tool provided several practical recommendations for tool implementation itself. When it comes to participants, a gender balance should be ensured with a maximum of 15 community members per session. Young people should make up a significant portion of participants to ensure their voices are heard. Careful consideration should be given when it comes to inviting participants such as political representatives, but also to practical

issues such as securing a venue location that is relatively isolated but accessible enough for all participants – for example enabling participants with care responsibilities to leave in case of emergencies. For the latter, it is also advised to provide child care were relevant, to facilitate participation.

As a next step, it will be explored how the findings of the tool can inform the EYW influencing strategy in Bangladesh, recognizing it represents a small-scale test. Further exploration within and beyond the EYW programme will take place to continue the development of specific parts of the tool, such as the relation between women’s economic empowerment and social norms related to GBV.

FULL REPORT

The full report is available [on demand](#). It intends to support colleagues to understand how the Diagnostic Tool can be adapted, used and what results can be expected.

A detailed account is provided on how the Diagnostic Tool was made fit to engage with social norms in the economy in the frame of the EYW Theory of Change and the Bangladeshi context. Further, the results are shared that came out of the initial test run, as well as the lessons for successful implementation.

The test of the Diagnostic Tool took place on small scale over the course of two days. The results in the report do not provide a holistic overview of social norms in the economy in Bangladesh.