



# TIPPING POINT SOCIAL NORMS INNOVATIONS SERIES

**Brief 2: Football for Girls**  
**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://caretippingpoint.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/care\\_tipping-point\\_web.pdf](https://caretippingpoint.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://caretippingpoint.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: FOOTBALL FOR GIRLS

In rural communities in the Sunamganj district of Bangladesh, adolescent girls are rarely seen spending leisure time outside their homes like their male counterparts, who play sports and meet for casual conversation. Particularly as they become adolescents, girls are expected to be busy with household work and not spending idle time in public spaces. Tipping Point's football initiative aims to make outdoor team sports an accessible activity for girls and shift existing norms around the acceptability of adolescent girls occupying public spaces and the prevailing belief that girls are not capable of athletics.

The initiative started with an invitation to adolescent girls to attend a 'try-out' session organized through the project's ongoing girls' groups. Among the girls who showed up keen to play football, some had support from parents to participate, and many others did not. These **early adopters of girls' sports** (the girls themselves as well as the supportive parents) worked to convince a larger set of parents to allow their girls' participation. By taking on the risk of challenging a deeply gendered social norm, they also served as examples that other parents and girls could observe to see if any negative consequences resulted (**Design Principle 1**).

At the same time, Tipping Point staff employed strategies to reduce the social risk for any individual girl. They recruited coaches who actively supported the girls. Having **allies like parents and coaches** to respectively encourage and guide the girls openly and in public helped facilitate the acceptability of girls' sports among the community (**Design Principle 8**).

A team approach also ensured that no girl would be alone as an early adopter. The initiative eventually yielded exceptional interest among girls to play in a league – which grew to seven teams, **creating a network of support** and a sense of togetherness through a shared identity as football athletes (**Design Principle 2**).

There was some resistance in the wider community. In one project area, an Islamic solidarity group organized an *Islamic Jalsha* (a religious gathering) and issued a fatwa (religious order) against the girls who played and their families, strictly prohibiting girls from playing. In response, CARE, partner organizations, athlete girls, and **their families stepped in to advocate** with their Local Elected Bodies (LEB) seeking their support to go forward with the final tournament of the girls' football competition (**Design Principle 6**). These allies played a vital role in advocating with the religious leaders. Although the religious leaders were not fully convinced, they did allow the girls to play.

Through this program, the teams had the opportunity to compete in a tournament. The final match attracted significant public attention and curiosity across villages. Seeing girls participate in an outdoor sport **demonstrated the alternative capabilities of girls** (**Design Principle 7**). Subsequently, the organizers held a **dialogue with the community** to discuss their reactions to girls' playing sports and the gender norms that limit those opportunities (**Design Principle 4**).

The implementation guide at the end of this brief provides more information about the girls' football initiative.

## 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

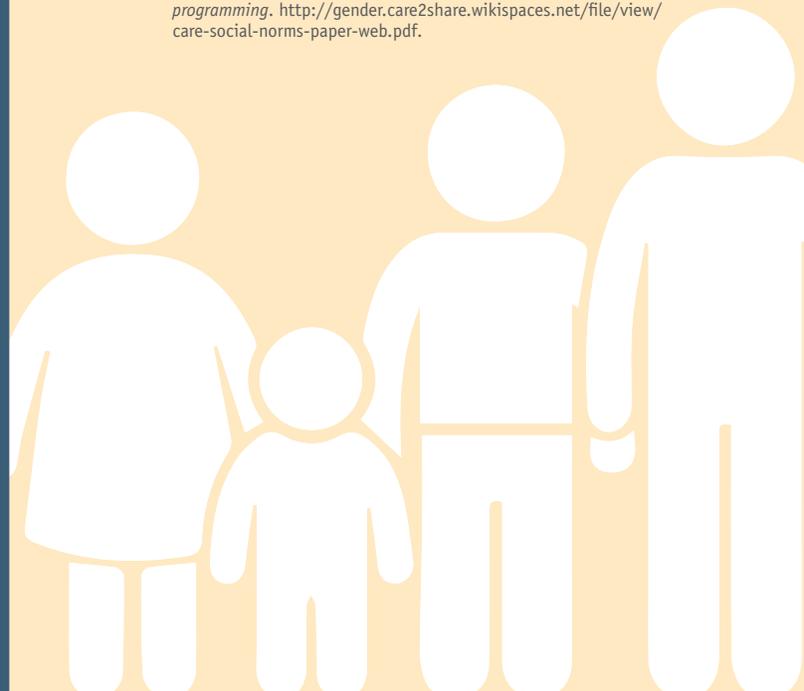
Under what situations is it acceptable to break the norms.

## What did people think about this?

The girls' football matches were an anomaly in the remote villages of Sunamganj where Tipping Point works, drawing significant attention, curiosity, and interest from community members. But what kind of preliminary effect did this initiative have on social norms about girls' behavior in public?

Using inquiry questions based on **CARE's Social Norms Analysis Plot (SNAP) framework**<sup>5</sup>, Tipping Point project staff interviewed six adult community members (four women and two men) whose daughters were not part of the football teams. Four identified as Muslim and two as Hindu. Their ages ranged from 19-60 years. All respondents had seen the football matches and knew of at least one person involved in the Tipping Point project – either via the adolescent programming or the community-based anti-violence (EVAW) forum. One woman had a younger sister who signed up to play in a team.

<sup>5</sup> 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>.





## GIRLS ARE PLAYING FOOTBALL?!

Although seeing girls play football in public is relatively new for people in rural parts of Sunamganj, all respondents but one reported to be accepting of it, at least for younger adolescent girls and when girls only play with other girls. The varied degrees of acceptance ranged in emotions from feeling proud to excited, happy, and supportive.

*I felt very happy seeing that girls are playing football in the village. Because when I was an adolescent, we (girls aged 12-14 years) were never allowed to play outside. We never thought about playing football. But now a lot of young girls in the village are playing football, and it seems to me the society has gradually changed... I like it when they play football as it helps them refresh their mind, brings awards for them and gives the opportunity to go different places that I never got to go.*

19-YEAR-OLD WOMAN

I like them playing football. If my sister plays good football, I will be very glad because I also can play with her then.

20-YEAR-OLD WOMAN



***Girls in the age range of 10-14 years can play... [I think] it's good because it is a necessity. Football, cricket, badminton, etc., everything is important for girls. It improves their physical and mental condition.***

**51-YEAR-OLD MAN**

**It is good if girls play sports with girls, not with boys...Through television, I have seen girls playing football. So, I feel proud when girls from my village play football.**

**32-YEAR-OLD MAN**

***I think girls can play football and badminton always. A girl's hobby remains after her marriage.... There is no specific age for play...I would be happy if all the girls of this village got to play football. This opportunity will help them cope with modern times. Girls can play football, and it is not unusual.***

**60-YEAR-OLD WOMAN**

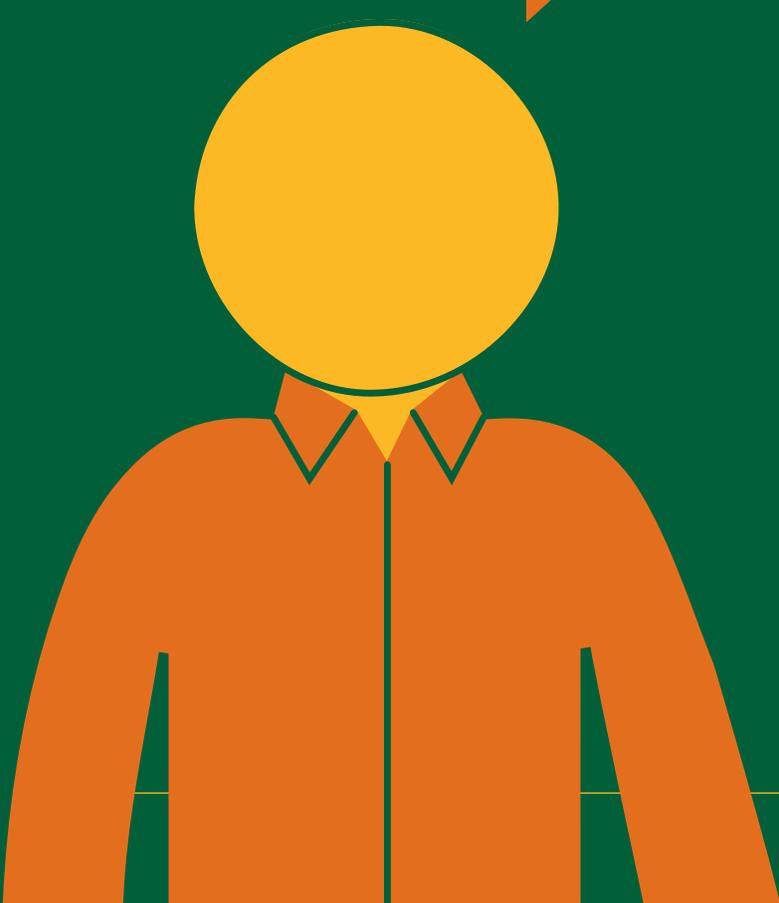
Having this type of support from some of the men and an elder woman who grew up with stringent gender norms is a significant indication of progress.

However, there was one respondent out of six who said she believed that girls are weaker and less intelligent than men and suggested that norms about girls' behavior had already seen enough change:

***I have seen girls playing football. I liked that, but I won't let my daughter play it. I think education is enough for her***

**45-YEAR-OLD WOMAN**

How people felt about girls' playing football reflects their own personal attitudes. People's behavior—namely, whether a girl chooses to play or if parents allow a girl to play—also depends on their understanding of community norms, in part, what they believe other people's attitudes are.



## HOW DO PEOPLE THINK OTHERS IN THEIR COMMUNITY ARE RESPONDING?

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 (**Design Principle 7**) is to publicly demonstrate alternatives to gender-inequitable patterns, so they can be normalized, real, and visible.

While most of the respondents enjoyed watching girls' football matches, when asked how they think others in their community feel, respondents reported that people overall were more accepting of girls' sports than they were previously, but there are still some negative attitudes. As can be seen below, responses are mixed.

**25% of villagers will not support it, but most will feel positively. This change is happening due to changes in our times and context. Sports are arranged in schools, by NGOs, and thus the perception of people is changing.**

**51-YEAR-OLD MAN**

***Some took it positively but some did not. People say, "What a time, girls are playing football."***

**32-YEAR-OLD MAN**

***They used to say, "They do not have any work? They should work at home, but instead they are playing football." But now their mentality has changed, and they don't say bad things.***

**60-YEAR-OLD WOMAN**

***People are not as negative about it as before, because school teachers are arranging girls' football. Girls [in other organizations] are playing football too. For this reason, people are now changing their views toward it.***

**20-YEAR-OLD WOMAN**

***Not all people of the village are like-minded. People who have a daughter on the football team are taking it positively, but those who don't have are making negative comments about girls playing football. Like, "They are running around like a kite," "What a time, girls are also playing football."***

**19-YEAR-OLD WOMAN**

***When the girls' football match was arranged, many people of the village said, "Oh my God! Girls are playing football? They should be inside the home." Criticism is stronger for girls who are getting older. For example, "Girls have started wearing long pants, how are they playing football now?"***

**20-YEAR-OLD WOMAN**



## GOSSIP AND SHAME

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). In a context where people perceive both celebration and disapproval, we conclude that normative expectations are in flux.

What do sanctions look like in rural Sunamganj for girls playing football? The respondents explained that the community members who disapprove of girls' participation in public sports usually sanction them in the form of gossip and criticism – by questioning the values and morality of participants and their families. Respondents quoted what others have said or what they believed others would say:



The strongest anticipated rebuke comes in the form of social isolation:

***Sometimes [when a wedding is planned], a groom's family may change their minds. Community people do not accept it because it is a game for men, and when a girl plays it, men are offended. They also say that it is disrespectful for a girl. Some say that it is a shameful act. It brings shame to her family.***

#### **45-YEAR-OLD WOMAN**

The criticism against adolescent girls in football tends to increase with age and marital status. All respondents said it is perfectly acceptable for girls to play outdoors before puberty. For adolescent girls, it is most acceptable if the matches are organized by a school or an NGO, and least acceptable if girls organize a match independently. For married women, however, it remains taboo to be physically active in sports. As one young married woman remarked:



**When I saw them play football, I wanted to play. But now I am married and have children. If I play, people will say negative things. Even my husband would not accept it. So, I will not play even though I wish to play. This is not only my case, but also applicable for other women.**

**19-YEAR-OLD WOMAN**

All respondents hoped that these gendered expectations and negative sanctions will continue to lessen.



## WHO CARES WHAT PEOPLE SAY?

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. Some respondents felt they would support girls playing football regardless of what the community had to say.

*Some will be in favor, but some will not. However, I will permit my daughter to play... I will teach my daughter how to play football, badminton, and how to ride a bicycle, etc.*

**32-YEAR-OLD MAN**

*I will allow my daughter to play football. I do not care if anyone reacts negatively.*

**19-YEAR-OLD MAN**

Similarly, a young married woman said she feels very proud of girls in her village who play football and would support any girl in her family who wants to play as well:

**Now if my sister or cousin want to play football, I will let them do it even if people take it negatively. Because they will taunt them at first, but later they will be appreciated.**

**20-YEAR-OLD WOMAN**





## Potential of Girls' Football as a Tactic for Social Norms Change

The interviews so far have suggested that seeing girls play football has begun challenging the social norm that physical and public sports are only for boys and, more broadly, the norms that limit adolescent girls' mobility and visibility in public spaces. People have attributed this change to encouragement from NGOs and schools, media exposure through television, and higher levels of education.

Girls' football openly confronts the norm by creating an opportunity for girls to play in public spaces and in a tournament, with the intention of drawing public attention. The project initiative made an alternative and positive practice visible. The enthusiasm it generated by some attendees in the audience also publicly establishing that there are many people who support, rather than condemn, girls playing sports. People questioned their own assumptions that girls could not play football as well as boys and began to appreciate the benefits of sports to girls' physical and mental health.

To continue fostering normative change that supports girls playing football and, more generally, taking up roles in public spaces, Tipping Point hopes to strengthen the initiative by:

**Hosting more debates on what is acceptable, and under what circumstances,** when it comes to girls' and boys' sports (**Design Principle 5**).

Creating storytelling projects about girls' experiences with football to **stimulate dialogue that showcases a variety of opinions** (**Design Principle 4**).

**Expanding the network of allies** and resources to ensure a broad base of support from community members,

influential figures, and national or district level female football players (**Design Principle 8**).

**Seeking parents' commitments** to enroll new girls every season and grow the community (**Design Principle 6**).

**Networking across villages** to formalize the football teams and tournaments, ensure sustainability, and increase the legitimacy of girls' sports groups (**Design Principle 2**).

# Implementation Guide: Girls' Football

## BANGLADESH

The girls' football initiative had three key components:

1. Participatory analysis of gender roles
2. Developing support for new behaviors
3. Public dialogue

### Participatory analysis of gender roles

The desire of girls to play football came out of daily routine mapping—examining the differences in boys' and girls' daily activities—with adolescent groups and envisioning how a typical day might look if there were greater equity. Later, when the girls saw pictures of other girls' football and cricket teams, many of them dreamt of becoming football players. The Tipping Point facilitators helped girls clarify their vision and strategize on making it happen with questions such as:

- Can girls play games that boys play? Who stops them from playing?
- Have you ever seen a girl play football, hockey or cricket? Where did you see that? How did it make you feel? What age is okay for a girl to play? Do you think the people of your community would like to see a girl playing? Do you like to see girls playing? Why or why not?
- Who do you think makes the decision about whether a girl goes outside to play? Mothers, fathers, or others? What influences their decision? If they do not want their girls to play outside, what do you think would help change their minds?
- Can you still go play if your family does not agree with it? What would you do to convince them? What would happen if a girl goes out to play without her parent's consent? What would happen if a girl goes out to play with her parent's consent but without the community's approval?
- How can the group members help each other in convincing their families?

### THE OBJECTIVES OF GIRLS' FOOTBALL

1. Introduce football as a non-traditional game for adolescent girls and show that girls can excel in the games that boys usually play.
2. Challenge social norms around young adolescent girls' mobility by showing them playing in the open and voicing their needs and rights.
3. Energize youth to engage in productive ways to improve girls' autonomy and do advocacy with other stakeholders who oppose girls playing in public.

- Are any of your brothers in the boys' groups? Can brothers advocate for their sisters who want to play? Are there any examples where the brothers have advocated for their sisters' rights or wishes?
- Is there any benefit to girls playing? What are they? What are the benefits to their families? And what are the benefits to the community? If none, why do you think there is no benefit? Or is there any harm if a girl goes outside to play?

In mothers' groups and the EVAW forum, Tipping Point staff led similar discussions guided by questions like:

- Have any of you seen a girl playing football outside? On TV or in your village? Until what age do girls play in your village? Why do they stop? What would happen if they continue to play beyond that age? Are there any outdoor games that need to be played in a field? What are the benefits and challenges of girls playing in a field in public?
- Do you support girls playing football? What makes you support it? How do people in the community react to your support? Have you felt pressure from the community to not support girl's football? How did you act/ react to it? Why?
- Do you feel proud of the girls playing football? Why or why not?

## Developing support

The process of achieving the dream to play football had many twists and turns that required the girls and their allies to adapt along the way. CARE provided sports equipment for badminton, football, carom board, skipping rope, and other games, but parents and EAW forum members did not approve of them playing outside. Eventually, after girls started questioning their parents and EAW forum members about why girls could not play outdoor games, they were allowed to play badminton in a courtyard or on a verandah.

From badminton to football was a natural progression. In the courtyard or verandah, girls were already kicking balls, and they loved it. CARE's partners started exploring what would it look like if the girls could play in a league, and they gained support from the government to find a coach for the girls.

All the adolescent groups were informed that there would be a selection of girls for a football team at the Upazila level. Not many girls came forward. Playing indoors or in the near vicinity had been accepted, but playing on a field with thousands of people watching was on a different scale. Girls who did come forward were incredibly brave; they also had parents who listened to them. These were the early adopters, role model girls who inspired many others.

The coach identified was a male coach, which presented its own challenge to norms. But soon the girls were comfortable with the coach, and they started enjoying practice. In the process, they made friends with the team members from different villages.

Once practices were regular, football became so popular that the league needed seven teams. The teams played matches until, for the final match, girls from each team were selected to play. The girls themselves designed the uniforms and felt proud to be in them for their last practice. The shirt and trousers defied the norm for girls' dress.

When backlash from conservative elements of society happened, the girls reached out to their allies in government and local leadership, who continued to support their right to play.

## Public dialogue

When a football match of girls is announced in a district like Sunamganj, no advertisement is needed. Activities that go against social norms get a lot of attention; hence, the field was full of people who came from all over to watch the girls play. Thousands of people gathered: men and women, parents and teachers, government and non-government people, and social and religious leaders.

After the match, the project team facilitated a public discussion with audience members and girl athletes, guided by the following questions:

### For the girl players:

- How did you feel being here? What has been your greatest inspiration? Do you want to keep playing football matches? What support would you need?

### For the audience:

- Did you like today's match? What is it that you liked about it? Was this different than other matches you have seen? Why do you think there was a difference?
- What did you expect from this match? Was your experience of the match different than what you had expected?
- What do you think about the girls' abilities in football? What contributes to their playing well?
- What roles have girls been playing in society? In the whole country? Do you think the girls of Sunamganj also have the capacity to play such roles? What will enable them to live their dreams?
- Are there boys from the adolescent groups here, and can one of them share how you supported the girls to play football? How do you feel seeing girls from your village play, and maybe even win?
- How can you support our girls?

The audience was quite supportive of the girls after having enjoyed watching the match and cheering them on.



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Founded in 1945 with the creation of the CARE Package, CARE is a leading humanitarian organization fighting global poverty. CARE places special focus on working alongside poor girls and women because, equipped with the proper resources, they have the power to lift whole families and entire communities out of poverty. Last year CARE worked in 87 countries and reached 82 million people around the world. To learn more, visit [www.care.org](http://www.care.org).

This initiative is funded by

