

# ACCESS TO CONSCIANTIZATION?

- A RIGHTS BASED APPROACH TO GENDER EQUALITY

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Lisa and Magdalena, for keeping me company.

*Dhonnobad.*



## INTRODUCTION

This report details the outcomes of an internship and hence learning experience with the NGO Nijera Kori in Bangladesh during the autumn and winter of 2013. I interned with Access –a programme on women’s participation in the social, political, and economic spheres. The internship period has to a large extent been framed by the political turmoil faced by the country during this whole year, and it can be argued that issues of gender should not take priority in times like these. I beg to differ.

In times like these – of disagreements, states of exception, struggles, and bloodshed – we need to evaluate our relationships with other people and what affects them. Hence, we need to assess the structures that bind and separate us. Structures of gender are a large part of those social norms, and they frame and constrain our most intimate relationships.

The group members of Nijera Kori graciously allowed me access and taught me about their work in the Access programme. I hope my reflections here contribute to the analysis of how the Access programme works to change these social norms and consequently also the violence and emotional loss that those norms inflict.

## FRAMEWORK

In late September I was stationed in the Bagatipara sub-center of Nijera Kori, situated about one hour’s bumpy CNG ride south of Natore. With breaks for Eid and lengthy visa processes in Dhaka, I stayed until December, and this period of time thus consisted of me gaining a great deal of new understanding. I gained insight into the livelihood situation for some of the group members of the NGO as well as the day-to-day operations of the field office, both of which are discussed in this text.

The purpose of this report is twofold: to serve as an overview of the programming process with a focus on the implementation of the Access programme and to function as an analytical lens of the same. The Bagatipara working area is the subject for this case study. I focus on issues of gender within the programme, and how these contribute to the rights-based framework that Nijera Kori carries.

## METHODOLOGY

The methods I chose for learning while during this internship field placement were drawn from classical ethnographic methods from an anthropological perspective. In translation, only by living with the sub center staff, following their work, sharing their everyday lives and seeing their interactions with group members and villagers, was it possible to observe how social and relational dynamics work in this location and are shaped by various aspects of Bengali culture. The difference between just reading about Nijera Kori’s work from a book and connecting with them in person – if only for a brief moment in time – is that through this interactive experience I could ask questions about this reality, and it could ask questions about me. This dimension becomes a mirror of my own preconceptions, and hence, this report will also mirror this experience.

Because I inevitably brought all of myself to these interactions, my experience was shaped by various aspects of my positionality. Therefore, it should be noted that I am white, middle-class, perceived female, unmarried, able bodied, educated and raised in a Scandinavian country based on Lutheran and socialist democratic values. Of course, all of these things mentioned and others, affect the way I live my experiences, my perception of these, and other people's perception of me, which in turn affects how we interact with one another. It is highly likely that someone else doing a similar internship would come across different stories when in Bagatipara, and draw other conclusions from these. Nevertheless, there is an added value for the organization precisely by applying different lenses to its work.

Since this case study relies on perceptions, mainly qualitative methodologies have been used to collect information.

- I visited **27** group meetings with Nijera Kori members; both female and male and both with groups included in the Access programme and with those who are not – for comparison purposes. Attending group meetings can be described as a form of participatory observation, and almost all of them ended with an exchange of questions much like short informal group interviews.
- I attended **3** workshops: two on reproductive health and one on strategies for women's leadership.
- During my time in Bagatipara **2** types of rallies were organized. One rally was for the right to information, and one was a two-day long foot march for spreading the work of Nijera Kori through different types of cultural activities, such as drama performance.
- To better immerse myself in the organization I conducted **8** interviews. Five were with staff of the Bagatipara sub center, and the remaining were with group members. One of those was with two informants, and another one was with a non-Access group member.
- Furthermore, I attended internal office meetings; monthly ones, which included Natore and Lalpur center staff and weekly ones only for Bagatipara staff. I also attended a gram committee meeting with the elected group members.

## THE ACCESS PROGRAMME

The internship and hence this report was carried out within the Access Programme, which is a joint programme between The Swallows India Bangladesh, Nijera Kori, Thanapara Swallows Development Society and Sabalamby Unnayan Samity. The organizations all have different areas of focus for their work and therefore contribute to the programme in different ways, with the overall goal to increase women's participation in the social, political and economic spheres in Bangladesh. The long-term objective is to establish a more equal society for both men and women, with the specific objectives that:

- Women's accessibility and participation at the family and the community levels and in local governance structures are increased, thereby strengthening democratic institutions,
- The community support systems and mechanisms are created and strengthened to uphold women's rights as human rights,
- Women's collectives demand and attain increased inclusion in the government and non governmental services,
- Women's groups attain economic empowerment through economic activities and demanding rights over productive resources.<sup>1</sup>

With umbrellas of *empowerment* and *participation*, the organizations of the Access programme work with the fundamental premises of the constitution of Bangladesh – which directly addresses discrimination towards women in many of its articles – as well as international agreements signed by the state of Bangladesh concerning human rights.

Whereas the Swallows India Bangladesh supports the implementing organizations through facilitating the development of the programme by functioning as a source of information, capacity builder, and reporting coordinator, Nijera Kori holds the position of secretariat within the programme. This implies the responsibility to coordinate the programme process, to facilitate workshop and meetings, and to hold the financial responsibilities for these.

The Access programme will be implemented in 80 villages in rural Bangladesh and is expected to directly benefit 8800 people. Of those, 5800 are women who are poor and marginalized in different ways, landless, and usually live on small-scale income-generating activities such as agricultural day labor or sharecropping.

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Svalorna 2010: Sweden, The Swallows India Bangladesh (2010) *Access –A programme on women's participation in the social, political and economic spheres 2012-2017*, Lund: Proposal for programme development during 2011.

## BAGATIPARA CONTEXT

As mentioned, Nijera Kori holds the secretariat of Access and also covers the implementation of the programme in half of the area of action. Bagatipara upazila, in Natore district, covers 20 of those villages.

Bagatipara is one of the oldest working areas of Nijera Kori, who has been working for development in Bangladesh since the early 1980s. The work in Bagatipara started initially as a take over responsibility from a program ran by the Eksjö – Bangladesh Twin Town Association that had established projects in Noshera village in 1974. When Eksjö withdrew from the area, Nijera Kori took over with financial support from Eksjö, channeled through the Swallows.<sup>2</sup>

Bagatipara working area consists of three thanas – Bagatipara, Natore, and Lalpur – but this report focuses on Bagatipara.

Apart from the sub center leader and service staff, Bagatipara sub center employs seven field coordinators that implement the ongoing programmes. Although the number is increasing, they currently maintain 508 groups in the thana, segregated according to gender, with one mixed gender indigenous group. Of the segregated groups, 311 are female groups, each containing between 16 to 30 members. Out of the 508, the Access programme involves 182 groups in this area.

The area of Bagatipara faces many challenges such as poverty with built-in hierarchies, increasing fundamentalism, and a heavily enforced patriarchal system. The latter is embodied in various structures such as dowry and the restrictions on women to move freely outside the home.

## CONSCIENTIZATION

In his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, the Brazilian educator Paulo Friere presents the concept of the 'Culture of silence', in which people who are dominated by others tend to lose their means of raising their voice and critically responding to that culture. Friere presents the term *conscientization* as a tool to counteract this.<sup>3</sup> Conscientization, or consciousness raising, is a process by which a

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Masud Ali, A.K.M., Mustaque Ali, A.K.M. and Sarkar, R. (1998) *Struggle in the Northern Plains – an impact evaluation of Nijera Kori program in Bagatipara*. Dhaka: Incidin Bangladesh

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Barkat, A. Halim, S. And Poddar, A. et al. (2008) *Development as Conscientization – The case of Nijera Kori in Bangladesh*. Dhaka: Pathak Shamabesh Book

learner moves towards a more critical consciousness, which in turn is a basic necessity for informed action. The difference between conscientization and just 'regular' consciousness raising is that the latter may refer to acquiring pre-selected knowledge and may fail to challenge the dominant culture. Conscientization on the other hand means to break with the existing mythologies that prevail in society to reach new levels of awareness, especially awareness of oppression and the condition of being an 'object' for others rather than a subject determined by yourself.

The process of conscientization involves dialogue. Through this it is possible to identify experiences that contradict each other and hence to start the process of change. The change involves breaking the culture of silence where people who are socially dispossessed have internalized negative images of themselves that are created and reproduced by oppressors in situations of poverty and marginalization. Conscientization gives other types of self-images by focusing on exposing injustices and contradictions when it comes to social, economic, and political life. As a part of this re-learning process, another important part is for the learner to take action against perceived unjust elements in their life.<sup>4</sup>

#### RIGHTS BASED APPROACH

"A rights based approach to development describes situations not simply in terms of human needs, or of development requirements, but in terms of society's obligations to respond to the inalienable rights of individuals, empowers people to demand justice as a right, not as charity, and gives communities a moral basis from which to claim international assistance when needed." (UN 1998)

The rights based approach (RBA) emphasizes not only physical needs but also political, cultural, economic, social and civil rights. A right triggers an obligation that must be fulfilled by someone, and it cannot be addressed without also raising the question of who has that obligation. It is therefore crucial to support groups or individuals (called rights holders in the RBA terminology) who are marginalized or discriminated against in claiming their rights from relevant stakeholders (duty bearers).<sup>5</sup>

The RBA is focused on empowerment processes in society rather than delivery of service and can therefore function as a reflection of power-relations and ethics, since talking about rights is to talk about power and the associated obligations. At the core of the RBA is the priority of agency for those

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Barkat, A. Halim, S. And Poddar, A. et al. (2008)Page 59.

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Svalorna 2012: Sweden, The Swallows India Bangladesh (2012) *Rights Based Approach (RBA)*, Lund: Policy



living in poverty to drive the development process. This requires integration of human rights into the heart of decision-making processes and a focus on underlying power relations when dealing with poverty and social injustice.

In the 1990s there was a gradual shift in the dominant discourse in international development aid. When the UN adopted the Declaration on the Right to Development, the debate on poverty reduction swung, and human rights were mainstreamed into all parts of the organization. The idea that economic growth was the most important aspect of poverty alleviation was challenged, and human dignity and human rights were emphasized in the development agenda. At the beginning of the new millennium, the RBA had more or less replaced the Basic Needs Approach 'BNA', which had dominated the agenda before.

To illustrate the shift in development thinking one can use the comparison made by Kirkemann and Martin, researchers at the Danish institute for human rights<sup>6</sup>:

<b>Charity Approach</b>	<b>Needs Approach</b>	<b>Rights-Based Approach</b>
Focus on input not outcome	Focus on input and outcome	Focus on process and outcome
Emphasizes increasing charity	Emphasizes meeting needs	Emphasizes realizing rights
Recognizes moral responsibility of rich towards poor	Recognizes needs as valid claims	Recognizes individual and group rights as claims toward legal and moral duty-bearers
Individuals are seen as victims	Individuals are objects of development interventions	Individuals and groups are empowered to claim their rights
Individuals deserve assistance	Individuals deserve assistance	Individual are entitled to assistance
Focus on manifestation of problems	Focus on immediate causes of problems	Focus on structural causes and their manifestations

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Kirkemann Boesen, J. and Martin, T. (2007) *Applying a Rights-Based Approach –an inspirational guide for civil society*, The Danish Institute of Human Rights: Denmark

The critique against RBA has focused on the lack of novelty, in the sense that the approach does not bring any new kinds of activities to the development agenda, meaning the 'same old' activities are now dressed in new language. Whereas RBA *does* deal with issues dealt with beforehand within a development context such as food, access to water, and shelter, applying the approach would mean handling these issues via international law and state agreements.

I met Marie Persson, who worked as an analyst at Forum Syd, briefly at a human rights convention and asked her opinion on this change of approaches. Her reply was:

"The activities before were more like 'build a school, draw a water pipe, hire a teacher' which the state should have done. And this was done without people being aware of which rights they have, like the right to good health. If you don't receive that awareness you can never claim your rights if for example the health care center is shut down."<sup>7</sup>

#### IMPLEMENTING ACCESS IN BAGATIPARA

"-It's very good that they [the male family members] have joined in such type of group. I think that if we can't help other people by giving them money or other goods we can help them by supporting them, through suggestions or inspiring them in any way. As we are poor people, and we can't always have money, what we have is always the suggestions. We can help people by that. "

-Nijera Kori group member

Nijera Kori has four major activities, which are:

- To form groups, divided by gender,
- To give landless group members training in different subjects, which are divided in levels of basic training, advanced, higher selection, and higher,
- To raise awareness around issues important for the particular area in order to strengthen social mobilization,
- To network and advocate in line with the major objectives.

The last activity is mainly performed by the head office while the remaining are performed by the different regional centers. The activities in Bagatipara mainly revolve around group formations and their maintenance, to select and send group members to trainings, and to encourage and facilitate cultural performances.

The Access programme doesn't differ very much from Nijera Kori's regular activities, and so it is also implemented through discussions with group members. The groups who are in the Access programme already existed before, with a few newcomers since there is a demand built into the programme for the formation of new groups. According to Bagatipara staff, the 20 villages that were chosen for Access, were picked on the basis of being equal in strength. This means that the male and

female groups were perceived as rather equal in terms of number of activities they performed or in power in relation to each other. If one group would meet difficulties or experience a sudden lack of engaged group members, other groups in the area could give support and endorse them, by their own means. In this way, groups would rely less on staff reinforcement, which in turn would strengthen the programme.

The group meetings are usually initiated by a traditional song/rally song that deals with inequalities in some way, which are then explained and discussed by the group members. Thereafter, a theme for discussion is decided by the members –informed by the Nijera Kori staff – to enhance participation. After discussion weekly savings are put forward and counted. The weekly savings in the group format helps the landless members to counteract the large number of micro-credit lending institutions that operate in the area. The theme for discussion revolves around issues of exploitation in different forms. Gender-related themes often include dowry, violence against women, child marriage, the lack of education for girls, women’s unequal salary, and women’s access to move freely outside the household.

-“They [the groups] discuss about the social problems, but in the female groups they discuss more about problems relating to women’s issues. How they can overcome those issues in the society, or in their life. They emphasize on women’s issues, more and more. The male groups put emphasis on exploitation, fundamentalism, corruption, society issues..” -Bagatipara staff member

The theme of group discussions is balanced by the sub center staff, who functions as change agents as well as performing a role of non- intermittent, in the attempt of facilitating a process without doing so on behalf of any participation. The balancing act lies in initiating a process without making the group completely dependent on the initiator, so that the group members can control their activities in the long-term. This is an important factor to take into consideration with the implementation of the Access programme. The programme aims to increase different types of access for women, which implies talking about women and their position in society with the groups. To do this in a participatory way would require the subjects to come from the group, which in turn can be problematic with groups where there is no pre-existing interest in these issues and where the subjects then need to be introduced (and reintroduced) by the staff.

With this in mind, it is not too big of a leap to claim that the implementing staff view the Access programme as a form of experiment. The ingredients in Access are not anything new to the staff per se, since they have been working with the issues of different freedoms for women and exploitation from the beginning. Some staff members assert that the feel of Access does not differ much from that of other programmes. However, the experimental feature of it lies in the concentration of work specific to the Access area.

“We do the same work in the other villages - outside of Access programme- we talk about the same things, women’s empowerment, their freedom, their influence their rights, the other things related to women’s issues. So it’s not different, but after joining the Access programme we just give emphasis on those 20 villages selected.” - Bagatipara staff member

Hence, all the usual efforts, together with a heightened emphasis on women’s rights issues, are applied in an intensified way in the villages that belong to Access. This means that any results coming from Nijera Kori’s work, are also intensified within the Access area. Even though the

programme is fairly new, the staff have witnessed evidence of results already, which they can detect early on due to their interconnected relationships with the target groups and established trust. Results include for example, the numbers of child marriages and the use of dowry had reduced, more women in the area are aware of the notion of human rights and women who had previously been kept in the household are seen walking to the market (usually accompanied) and so have gained access to greater mobility. Women also contribute to the family economy by cultivating vegetables and are more often involved in taking decisions regarding the education of their children. However, this is a general pattern of development that can be seen in all of the Bagatipara working area, even outside of the Access programme since other NGOs work on similar issues, and TV-shows and radio talk shows discuss the negative impact of issues like child marriage. The difference is that the development happens quicker inside the programme area, and to a greater extent. This is a result of the staffs prioritization of Access which is manifested through the amount of time given to the programme – the staff visit Access groups more often than non-Access groups – and in discussions with group members where the staff tends to give more suggestions regarding women’s rights compared with non-Access group discussions.

Due to this, I can not claim that it is the Access programme that informs the surrounding villages and improves the results there, since many other factors are in play. What can be pointed to when talking about results is the amount of time invested in each village and the pre-existing power relations between groups of members.

## THE ACCESS PROGRAMME AND THE RIGHTS BASED APPROACH

-” In the beginning they [ the village men] used to say that 'so you demand for rights, but that is a lot of demand for you’..” -Nijera Kori group member

The concept of human rights is nothing new to Nijera Kori, and it has been embedded in the organization for decades. It is only a short step from talking about inequalities with a Marxist perspective on distribution and class to talking about acquiring what is distributed since you have a *right* to it. Hence, to have a rights based approach to development is a key framework of the organization. What should be noted is the methodology that Nijera Kori has adopted to implement this approach. By using conscientization as a process, Nijera Kori gives access to human rights while keeping a focus on empowerment and agency at the same time. In short, by working with group discussions to raise awareness of the position of marginalized people in society, the group members can receive a critical understanding of their own position, a preconception of human rights, and an understanding of their agency (a key component of conscientization) as they use their action to attain the rights previously denied to them.

When it comes to the Access programme, Nijera Kori already held a strong position in Bagatipara as a facilitator for rights claims even before the programme, and many group members testify to the strength that comes with having an organization to turn to for advice and back-up. What is

demanding from the programme though, is to maintain a focus on the implementation and upholding of all human rights, particularly for women as a collective group of rights-bearers.

-“After organizing the group, it took almost two years before we could talk about women’s issues in my group meetings” -Nijera Kori group member.

This is a tough demand, since the process of claiming rights involves challenging and transforming cultures and social norms. It is especially so when the claim regards women in some sense. While both conscientization and RBA center on exposing power relations, what RBA adds specifically is a focus on duty-bearers. This focus can be quite easily forgotten when so much effort is put into making the rights-bearers aware of their potential as exactly that. However, the process of making this awareness happen will be quickened if the duty-bearers are constantly kept in the picture, as a counterpart but also as a potential ally. To keep duty-bearers in the picture is to invest in their capacity and build on this capacity. One aim with Access is to increase women’s participation in local governance, and whereas a lot of effort is being put into making women run for positions within different local democratic institutions, less focus is directed towards the institutions themselves and their capacity. Especially since Nijera Kori forms their own informal governance structures which has a potential of linking women into more formal spaces of elected governance, greater inclusion of these informal spaces – such as the shalish - for capacity building could prove much fruitful to the larger goals of the organization.

#### HOW DOES THE CURRENT MOBILIZATION STRATEGY CHALLENGE THE EXISTING GENDER STRUCTURE?

The focus on capacity building is important for the gender strategy of the organization, which otherwise tends to lean more towards gender mainstreaming rather than a Gender and Development (GAD) approach. This could lead to maintaining unwanted hierarchies although women’s access to participation in different spaces might increase. The problem with conscientization and the Rights Based Approach is that one can implement a programme with these strategies and methods without challenging the norms around gender, since taking action against perceived injustices in one’s life could still be based on existing social norms on gender although it might challenge other norms, on class for example. To sustain a focus on the possible obstacles for attaining the programme goals is one way of identifying people or institutions that need to be included when training for enhanced capacity.

Informed by studies, consultants, and research, Nijera Kori has adopted a GAD approach to its work and the trainings of their group members. The focus on social construction as the basis of how society treats women and men is evident when Nijera Kori staff argue on the reasons for women’s subordination. For example, the workshops I attended on reproductive health both opened with a historical overview on the role of women and men in society and how this relationship has not been static but has fluctuated due to different systems of hierarchy that evolved over time. This is then compared to biological differences such as reproductive systems as well as biological similarities between bodies.

However, the GAD approach is two-fold, containing both practical gender needs (PGN) and strategic ones (SGN). What can be noted with the Access programme is that in the implementation of it the tendency is to focus on PGN and their immediate solution, such as if women are not allowed to walk alone to attend meetings, it will be ensured that the women are escorted to the meetings and can attend. To have a larger focus on the practical gender needs compared to the strategic needs could give a risk of putting the responsibility of the advancement of women's rights on women themselves. It becomes the role and responsibility of the women to get educated, get aware of their position in society, understand the concept of rights, and raise their voices to claim these. The question is whether this is something that is feasible if an equal effort is not put on men and their education and awareness raising. Since despite being poor men still tend to possess most resources, and despite having low level of education and little substantial political power, men still tend to hold enough power to be able to dominate women. This shows that exactly that type of power, that men hold over women, trumps many other types of power structures. To change those we need to return to patriarchy over and over again to view how this is tackled. To implement a programme with a GAD approach and see to both gender needs, it is necessary to revisit the obstacles for the goals, and the obstacles for the wanted type of implementation. To implement the strategic needs, the structural basis of the social constructs must be questioned. For example, while the practical issue of women moving outside alone can be solved by ensuring escort, the structural need would beg the question why? And, who is standing in the way of changing this? The answers to these questions, in a strategic sense, involves talking about men and the roles men and the idea of masculinity play in society. In this way, we reduce the risk of adding to the change burden on women.

. -"Women need to develop so that the society can develop"  
-male Access group member.

Nijera Kori has male groups, sends men to gender trainings, and discusses women's rights with the male groups. Yet it is my understanding that these efforts can be altered to increase the realization of and enthusiasm toward women's rights.

-"We need to encourage women to get out of the household more so that they can contribute to the society." -male Access group member.

The problem seems to be that the male group members don't see the possible benefits of equality apart from economic gains. Also, the promise of increased income is the most common tactic to engage men on issues related to women's rights. This is a good strategy to get men interested, but not necessarily to make them active reflective participants for gender equality. An emphasis on greater gains and current losses can add value and results.

[male Access group member]: -"It is important to talk about gender to solve the problem in society?"

[me]: -"Also for men?"

[male Access group member]: -"Oh no, men are not deprived of their rights here, but if women get human rights the society would be more prosperous."

To talk about gender has become equivalent to talking about women in the groups, and although the Access programme has women-focused goals, the methods for reaching those goals has a need for men, as discussed above. If an emphasis were put on incorporating notions of hegemonic masculinities in a reflexive way into the programme implementation on target group level, men would more easily be able to see how they also loose from the current patriarchal system, how they function as agents within it, and what they can gain from a change of structures.

As Greig and Edström writes in *Mobilizing Men in Practice*<sup>8</sup> it is important to look at male privilege since men face disadvantages in life as a condition for their advantages. For example, if men enjoy the benefits of a woman doing all the domestic labor in the household, it is usually at the expense of the men's intimate connection with their children.

“Equally important, the men who receive most of the benefits and the men who pay most of the costs are not the same individuals. As the old saying puts it, generals die in bed. On a global scale, the men who benefit from corporate wealth, physical security, and expensive health care are a very different group from the men who provide the workforce of developing countries. Class, race, national, regional, and generational differences cross-cut the category ‘men’, spreading the gains and costs of gender relations very unevenly among men. There are many situations where groups of men may see their interest as more closely aligned with the women in their communities than with other men.”

-Greig and Edström, 2012<sup>9</sup>

Apart from the fact that men have an interest in gender equality due to the possible increase in economic well-being, men also stand to benefit from greater security. If the gender division of labor becomes more flexible, both men and women may make earnings, and this could alter social cultures associated with gender. Since violence is strongly associated with dominated forms of masculinities and inequalities in economy and politics, a challenge to this would be to challenge the violence that flows from this, which would give a more peaceful community, which in turn is of interest to both men and women.

Also, men may benefit on a more personal level of well-being from challenging existing gender norms. The current social systems, as well as economic and political, are bad for men's health, which is evident and well documented in studies connecting men and well-being. Men tend to have lower life expectancy, higher risk of accidents, high level of suicide or homicide by other men, injures from manual labor and drug abuse. Since toughness and invulnerability is equated with masculinity, a challenge to these norms could, apart from ease the pressure of being the breadwinner, increase the mental health status with men.

Finally, even though it can be argued that men as a group holds a common interest to defend their male gender privilege, men have more complex lives than that. Since many men have social relationships with women, be if a wife, sister, mother, daughter or friend, it is evident for many that a

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<sup>8</sup> Greig, A. and Edström, J. (2012) *Mobilising Men in Practice: Challenging sexual and gender-based violence in institutional settings*, Institute of Development Studies, Brighton: IDS

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. Page 30.

system that damages lives of women also damages men, since it damages the relationships. The quality of these relationships affects the quality of men's lives, and hence there is a built in interest for gender equality in self-development.<sup>10</sup>

For the male groups of Nijera Kori to be presented with other possible gains of challenging the gender norms apart from economic ones, like those examples mentioned here, would be to invest in capacity building for the duty-bearers and hence the Right Based Approach of the organization, as well as the programme.

#### SUMMARY

The Access programme is implemented in Bagatipara mainly through discussions with members in groups divided by gender or in trainings. The staff view the programme as a form of experiment to see if they can increase their results in 20 villages by putting emphasis on these in terms of the amount of time spent and suggestions given on the topic of women's rights. Even though the programme has only been in place for a couple of years, the advancement for women's rights seem to be happening more quickly inside of Access compared to non-Access villages. However, there is a tendency to limit the discussions on gender to women and a risk of reinforcing the responsibility of women's rights on women themselves. To counteract this, the suggestion is to focus on women's strategic gender needs by mobilizing men for gender equality. This could be done by;

- providing a space for reflection on males gender privilege,
- as well as reflecting on males disadvantages from the current social, political and economic systems and how these are connected with gender.
- to present the multiple gains that men could benefit from by challenging gender norms, such as greater access to emotional connections with others and reduced risk of violence in the community,
- work on how men can be strong *active* allies to women, without taking over the space.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid. Page 19.



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