

# Making the invisible visible

**Re-thinking traditional gender relations to increase gender equality in rural families**

A case study on Nijera Kori and the ACCESS-program in Kumarkhali, Bangladesh



# Content

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<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Background .....</b>	<b>5</b>
Bangladesh and gender equality .....	5
Nijera Kori and the ACCESS program .....	5
The Kumarkhali context.....	6
Study purpose .....	6
Research aim and objectives .....	7
<b>Methodology.....</b>	<b>8</b>
Study design.....	8
Strengths and limitations .....	8
Ethical aspects .....	9
<b>Gender relations in the household.....</b>	<b>10</b>
Gender theory and analysis .....	10
Women in Development or Gender and Development.....	10
Gender in the household .....	10
Women’s paid and unpaid work in South Asia .....	11
<b>Eight families in Kumarkhali .....</b>	<b>13</b>
In the household.....	13
Engaging in income generating activities .....	14
Freedom of movement .....	15
The relationship between work and free time.....	16
The division of work.....	16
A desirable wife & husband.....	17
Views on leadership and decision-making .....	18
Violence and punishments .....	19
Sexual relations.....	20
The future and way forward.....	21
<b>Discussion .....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Conclusion and recommendations .....</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>References.....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>Annex 1: Interviews and attended activities .....</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Annex 2: Interview guide for individual interviews.....</b>	<b>31</b>

## **Making the Invisible Visible:**

### **Re-thinking traditional gender relations to increase gender equality in rural families**

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**Photo:** Jenny Molin. Cover - Female members of Nijera Kori gather with the staff for a group picture after fulfilling a training program in one of the organisation’s training centres in Khulna, Bangladesh. Nov 2014.  
Page 3 - Empty rice fields after harvesting season in Kumarkhali. Dec 2014.

**Layout:** Jenny Molin





## Acknowledgement

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This report is the result of a journey with many people at one point or the other making contributions. I first want to acknowledge Nijera Kori and The Swallows India Bangladesh for making these four and a half months possible and for facilitating and funding my stay.

I want to express my gratitude to the staff at the Kumarkhali field office for supporting and assisting my work as well as sharing your friendship, laughter and serving me some of the best meals I have had in Bangladesh. I want to thank all the members I meet during my six weeks in the field. Your struggle for a better society has been inspiring and you made me feel welcomed! I also want to thank my respondents for sharing your thoughts and knowledge with me, though my questions sometimes seemed stupid and difficult.

A special thanks is given to my dear Swallows colleagues Sanna, Emma and Isabelle for keeping me company and supporting me in all the challenges faced during the stay. Last but not least, I wish to acknowledge my beloved friends and family back in Sweden who have listened and encouraged me along the way.

Jenny Molin  
Dhaka, January 2015

# Introduction

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“While men are still sleeping, women has done so much hard work”  
(Male respondent 2)

Since its creation in the midst 1970s, Nijera Kori’s work for landless poor in rural Bangladesh has contributed to significant change, especially when it comes to rural women’s empowerment. However, despite women’s increased participation in social movements and the public village life, previous studies have found that gender equality is lagging behind at the household level and in the intimate relationships between women and men.

The overall objective of this study is to provide Nijera Kori, and the specific ACCESS-program, in-depth knowledge and a better understanding of gender relations and the changes taking place in their members’ families. The study investigates women and men’s different roles in the family, the norms and values surrounding household duties and decision-making, as well as the practice of violence. Furthermore, with base in Nijera Kori’s and the ACCESS program’s goal to increase women’s role and status in the family, the study discusses challenges and

possible methods to address this in their future work.

The report is a result of a qualitative study carried out on in Nijera Kori’s working area Kumarkhali in Bangladesh. For the study, I spent four and a half month in Bangladesh and six of these weeks in a field office in Kumarkhali. In order to understand the situation and challenges faced by Nijera Kori’s members and their families, I took part of the staff’s daily work and carried out individual and group-based interviews with the organisation’s members. With an academic background in the field of gender, development and global health and experience from working with women’s rights and gender equality in the Swedish civil society, I hope my reflections can contribute to new perspectives and ideas on how to advance the important work of Nijera Kori and the ACCESS-program in the future.

## Abbreviations

ACCESS	A Program for the Enhancement of Women’s Accessibility in the Social, Political & Economic spheres
GAD	Gender and Development
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NK	Nijera Kori
SUS	Sabalambay Unnayan Samity
TSDS	Thanapara Swallows Development Society
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nation’s Development Fund
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
WID	Women in Development

# Background

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## Bangladesh and gender equality

Crammed into a small delta-area in the north-eastern part of South Asia, Bangladesh is one of the most densely populated nations in the world. According to the latest statistics, the population have now reached 158,5 million people and a vast majority of these live in rural areas (World Bank, 2014). In 2013, Bangladesh ranked 142 out of 187 countries on the UN Human Development Index and 115 out of 149 surveyed countries on the Gender Inequality Index. Despite recent years of socioeconomic development, the country still face challenges with a poverty rate reaching 31,5 % and a constant threat of sudden, natural or man made, shocks (UNDP, 2014).

The constitution of Bangladesh, several national laws and signed international agreements, guarantee equal status and rights for women and men in the country. Yet, gender discrimination, subordination and subjugation is still present in every sphere creating inequalities in areas such as health, education, employment and political freedom (Parveen, 2009). Poverty and the existing patriarchal and patrilineal system is responsible for many of these inequalities since having a strong influence on power relations within the household, the organisation of the family, marriage, decision-making and allocation of resources (Parveen, 2009).

## Nijera Kori and the ACCESS program

Since its creation in the midst 1970s, Nijera Kori's work has been proved successful and its contribution for women's increased empowerment in the rural societies where they are active is significant (Ali et. al., 2007; Kabeer et. al., 2007; and Maitrayee & Jashodhara, 2007). The organisation focuses on social mobilisation of the rural poor and rejects the popular service-based approach used by many Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in Bangladesh today, which they mean creates dependency and will not contribute to any long-term change (Nijera Kori, 2013).

Nijera Kori's strategy is to raise consciousness of the rights people have as citizens of Bangladesh and assist rural societies to build collective strength and take action to hold decision-makers accountable. This will lead to the establishment of rights, elimination of discrimination and real societal transformation. Until now, a total of 202 000 people have joined Nijera Kori as members and the organisation is active in 1 168 villages through 30 sub-centres across the whole country (Nijera Kori, 2013).

Through Nijera Kori's programs, female members have gained more freedom of movement, they now participate in public activities, for example meetings and dialogues, and loudly protest against discrimination by planning and joining demonstrations and rallies (Nijera Kori, 2013; Ali et. al., 2007; Kabeer et. al., 2007;



and Maitrayee & Jashodhara, 2007). Women in leadership positions in the organisation's committees and in other informal and formal forums are increasing, as well as their participation in income generating activities (Nijera Kori, 2013). Moreover, attitudes against women's presence in the public sphere are changing and more men support their wives' engagement in Nijera Kori's activities (Maitrayee & Jashodhara, 2007).

In 2011, a program, the ACCESS-program, was established with the specific aim to increase women's accessibility and participation in social, political and economical spheres. The program is a joint cooperation between The Swallows India Bangladesh, Nijera Kori, Thanapara Swallows Development Society (TSDS) and Sabalamby Unnayan Samity (SUS). Holding the position of secretariat within the program, Nijera Kori is responsible for its coordination including facilitating workshops and meetings. Per plan, the ACCESS-program will be implemented in 80 villages in rural Bangladesh and is expected to benefit around 8800 people.

## The Kumarkhali context

Nijera Kori's work in Kumarkhali was established already in the end of the 1970s. The initiative to organise landless people in the area was driven by a high rate of violence against women and the widespread inequality among people working in the town's textile industries. A small number of dedicated field workers walked from village to village with the mission to encourage the villagers, and especially women, to organise themselves and fight back discrimination. Slowly, groups of women were formed and despite strong resistance from influential and rich people in the area the work spread.

Today the ACCESS-program's working area in Kumarkhali covers 2 unions, 20 villages and 235 individual groups are included. The groups consist of 16-30 members and are gender segregated, 170 groups being strictly female and 65 male. All together, a number of 4 710 people are today reached directly by the ACCESS program's groups in Kumarkhali, but far more benefit indirectly, as for example the member's families and neighbours. In the field office, the area coordinator and six field workers are working to implement activities and give support to the different groups in the area. In addition two service staff are employed to facilitate the work of the field staff.

Kumarkhali is really a small town centred around a narrow high street offering a variety of shops, markets and snack stalls. But just a few minutes bicycle ride from the town centre, small villages are scattered between the rice paddies and crop fields. A majority of Nijera Kori's members, and the people living in the Kumarkhali area, earn a living by working in the textile industry, mostly by weaving on a handloom or processing the thread. However, a substantial part also engage in farming as daily labourers or drive the *van*<sup>1</sup>.

## Study purpose

Despite the greater role of women in activism and movements in Nijera Kori's working areas, previous studies on their overall program reveal that within the household and in intimate relation little has changed. Men's attitudes surrounding decision-making and responsibility for household work are holding women back

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<sup>1</sup> Bicycle rickshaw with a platform behind for transporting people and goods.

and dowry, early marriage and domestic violence is still common (Maitrayee & Jashodhara, 2007). Concern has therefore been raised on the actual achievements of Nijera Kori's work for gender equality on the household level. One of the objectives of the ACCESS program is to address women's role and participation in decision-making in the family and since the program started in 2011, no evaluation has so far addressed this issue further (The Swallows India Bangladesh 2013).

## **Research aim and objectives**

The overall objective of this study is to provide Nijera Kori and the ACCESS program in-depth knowledge and understanding of the level of gender equality in the households of Nijera Kori's members. Research will be carried out on households in one of the ACCESS-program's areas, Kumarkhali, and the results analysed to a framework of contemporary literature on gender and development. The aim is to answer the following questions:

- a) What manifestation of gender relations are found in the households and what are women and men's perceptions of their role in the family? This includes looking at norms and values within the family, household duties, decision-making and practice of violence.
- b) How can these perceptions and manifestations be understood to the overall goal of Nijera Kori and the ACCESS program, to strengthening women's power and role in the family?
- c) What are the challenges and how can these be addressed for future progress of Nijera Kori's work and the ACCESS program?

# Methodology

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## Study design

To be able to provide in depth knowledge and understanding of a complex issue, a study design that can relate to its material with an open mind and follow the stories and reflections of respondents in a sensible and flexible way it required. A qualitative research method with semi-structured interviews was therefore chosen to collect the needed sources. Semi-structured interviews also enables important interaction form the respondent and a possibility for him/her to influence the conversation, which helps minimising the risk of the researcher, consciously or unconsciously, entering the conversation with a pre-set agenda. As a compliment, a literature review on contemporary theory and research on the field of study was carried out. The outcomes were then summarised in a conceptual framework that has been used to discuss and gain a broader understanding of the study material.

For six weeks in the fall of 2014 I stayed with Nijera Kori in Bangladesh. I spent a few weeks in Dhaka at the head quarter, but most of my time in the country I was based in Kumarkhali where one of the organisation's field offices is situated. I participated in the office's every day work and joined several meetings, cultural activities, rallies and training. Participatory observations from these activities, along with eight individual deep-interviews with Nijera Kori members in Kumarkhali and Koksha (a neighbouring district), constitute the study's main and preliminary data. I also participated in 13 weekly group meetings where the main purpose of the gathering was to discuss the group's

weekly activities. However, these meetings often turned out more like informal group interviews since an opportunity often was given to exchange questions. A more detailed outline of the activities and held interviews can be found in Annex 1.

## Strengths and limitations

Both individual and group interviews were carried out in an everyday context, in the respondent's home or a familiar and safe meeting places in their village. To make the respondents as comfortable as possible, the conversations were kept in a relaxed way and tried not to become too formal.

Sampling is a great challenge when you are working in an unknown area where you do not speak the local language. Nijera Kori's field staff therefore helped to connect me with the right groups and individual respondents. Due to this fact, it is therefore for me to guarantee that my criteria list was actually followed in the sampling, even though the importance of a neutral selection was cleared beforehand. For example, it is a possibility that I only meet with "good" and "progressive" examples. Furthermore, there is always a risk that a respondent try to "please" the researcher by giving answers he/she might think the researcher are looking for. All these aspects has to be considered and taken into account when discussing the results.



Data from qualitative interviews are in one way or other always marked by the background and preconception of the researcher. It is important to notify that I am a white, young, educated woman that has been raised in a secure, middle-class family in one of the richest and most gender equal countries in the world. Inevitably, this affects the way I see and experience my surroundings, and vice versa what the surrounding world sees when looking at me. Therefore, when meeting Nijera Kori's members, as well the field staff, this most likely had an effect on the interaction and communication. Another aspect is the fact that all interviews were carried out with an interpreter who also might have brought her own set of norms, values and ideas into the material.

With this in mind, it is by no means possible to outline whether the final sample and the results of the study is representative for a whole village, the entire Kumarkhali area or Bangladesh as a

nation. The contribution of this study is instead to describe the reality of small, but significant, group of rural poor and present insights their lives that can be valuable for the Nijera Kori and the ACCESS-program's future gender equality and development programs.

## **Ethical aspects**

Due to the sensitiveness of this study's purpose, and the importance that the respondents felt secure to share their thoughts and experiences honestly, they were guaranteed strict anonymity. The information gathered was treated confidentially and the respondents were briefed beforehand how their answers would be used and presented. With prior consent, all interviews were audio-recorded but on the condition that the material would not be shared with anyone except me as a researcher.

# Gender relations in the household

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## Gender theory and analysis

Gender is distinct from sex and refers to the biological characteristics and differences between women and men (UNESCO, 2003). Shaped by socially and culturally constructed norms and values, gender refers to understandings of what it means to be a man or a woman (Lui, 2014). The gender concept includes expectations held on what male and female behaviour are (femininity and masculinity) and what roles and responsibility one has. Gender roles are learned and something that one “does” recurrently in daily interaction with others. These expectations are also proved to change and reshape over time (UNESCO, 2003). A gender approach, stressing the social and changeable construction of domination and subordination based on gender, thus brings hope that it is possible to change uneven power relations.

Since socially constructed, there is a great variation of gender norms and values in different parts of the world, as well as within different groups and cultures. Yet, “women” and “men” are often seen as two fixed categories and based on the assumption that femininity and masculinity are natural opposites (Connell, 2011).

## Women in Development or Gender and Development

In the work for gender equality, one strategy can be to address technical solutions and target women specific activities such as promoting women’s participation and opportunities (UNESCO, 2003). However, a nowadays

common and more recognized method is to use the Gender and Development (GAD)-approach. This approach does not believe in quick-fix solutions to gender equality but instead question social structures and try to understand the power and politics of subordination and domination (Charlesworth, 2005:2-3). While the previous approach focuses on fulfilling basic needs for survival, such as food, water and safety, the latter has a more long-term perspective and addresses issues of control over resources and the right to political participation and decision-making processes (Pincha, 2008:5). The GAD-approach thus addressed both *practical* and *strategic* needs and interests of women and men.

## Gender in the household

Despite a number of theories’ attempts to explain the division of household work from an economic and cost-efficient perspective, most contemporary literature on the subject agree that complex and continuously shifting social relations, and especially gender relations, has a great influence (Lui, 2013). According to the theory of “doing gender”, interaction between couples reproduce gender inequality and marital power relations within the household on a daily basis. However, since gender relations are a result of social constructions, it can also be reconstructed or even deconstructed (Lui, 2013).

In South Asia, perceptions of what is seen as “natural” roles of women and men are formed already in childhood and influences the idea of that one is “born to” fulfil a set of tasks in life. Such an ascribed role for women is household work and for men to be the breadwinner for and guardian of the family (Lui, 2013). Being seen as a natural and essential division in a family, both wife and husband believe that the woman should be the one doing the housework. The explanation is simply that she is “better at it” and the issue of housework division might therefore never be raised. In this sense, Lui (2013) mean that the husband benefit from hidden, and for some maybe unconscious, power since his wife’s choice to be a housewife is seen as voluntary.

Contemporary research raise that there is a growing trend of “men rule outside, women rule inside” in Asia today. This kind of marital contract does not necessarily mean that women always “lose-out”, but it depends on how the family and society value the household work and traditional “female” qualities (Lui, 2013). In fact, by monopolizing certain skills and knowledge in the household the wife can increase her decision-making power.

Tradition and social norms have resulted in a system where women uphold status in the family by winning the love of her children and by staying in charge of their growth and well being. For women working outside the home it might therefore be hard to accept that a child’s love might need to shift or be shared with a grand parent, domestic helper (in richer families) or a spouse. Clearly, as much as men feel a loss of “manhood” if sharing the breadwinner role or engage in “female” household work, many women are also unwilling to share their traditional family role (Lui, 2013).

Past researcher have often ignored the active and prominent role that children and in-laws have on the power relation between husband and wife, as well as their effects on the division of labor in the household (Lui, 2013). Pasted studies in the United States have shown that wives who have a closer interaction with in-laws are more pressured to take on a strict traditional role in the household, while the husband gets discouraged to help with the home and child care (Lui, 2013).

In conclusion, a too simplistic model, where women only are seen as passive victims and men as bullies, will take us nowhere since it obscures the dynamic of negotiation between actors when deciding how to arrange the housework (Lui, 2013). By having the discussed aspects of this chapter’s in mind when analysing relations and the division of housework, we could finally move away from the discussion of biological sex and understand our surroundings through the lens of social gender.

## **Women’s paid and unpaid work in South Asia**

In South Asia, social norms often influence women to choose home-based work as a way to access an income (Kantor, 2003). Studies carried out in the region on women’s economical participation and gender equality reveal that home-based work does not function as empowering as a job that offers women a more independent and visible work location (Kantor, 2003).

Home-based work is one of the least visible forms of women’s paid work. More often, home-based work is not even considered to be proper job and if it does



not challenge already established gendered expectations, only limited effects on gender relations will be seen (Kantor, 2003). Moreover, a person with fewer resources outside the marriage, such as employment, education, family support, alimony and contact with friends, is more likely to compromise in decision-making. Hence, the outcomes become less likely to be in his or her favour (Kantor, 2003).

Women's increased participation in paid work, along with the limited redistribution of household tasks to men, has for many women in western countries resulted in a double, or even triple, working day. To combine the management of a household with a paid work and community or kin arrangement thus seems to be a tricky equation (Bulbek, 2005). According to a recent study, rural women in Bangladesh on average undertake 7,7 hours of unpaid work during a day while men only spend 2,5 hour on these kind of tasks (Khatun et. al., 2014). The same study reveals that 71 per cent of women who are not involved in paid work have a wish to be so but they find it difficult due to constraints from family members. They also believe a job

quite possibly would interfere with the time they need to spend in the home to fulfil their household duties. The women also state that if having a paid job outside the home, they would not be able to find any time for rest (Khatun et. al., 2014).

Women's increased engagement and contribution to the formal economy of Bangladesh is today highly prioritised and well recognised as one of the most important strategies to reach future development goals. A majority of today's development programs are targeting women in order to help them gain productive skills and access loans, markets and work opportunities. However, women's time consuming responsibilities in the home give them little room to engage in economical activities. Different strategies to decreasing the workload of women in the household have therefore been raised, for example by making women's duties easier, for example by increasing their access to drinking water, natural gas for cooking and by arranging day care centres for children (Khatun et. al., 2014).

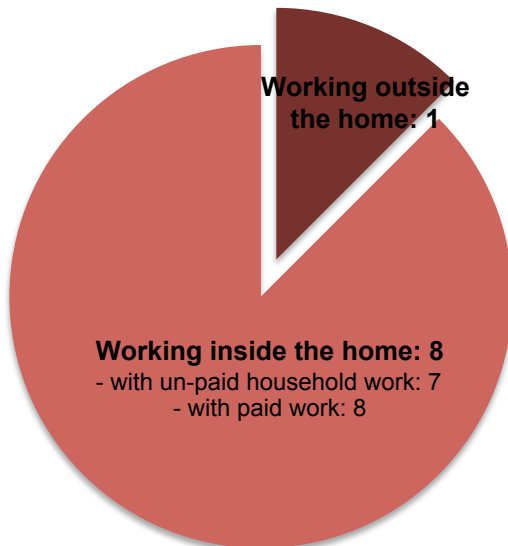
# Eight families in Kumarkhali

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## In the household

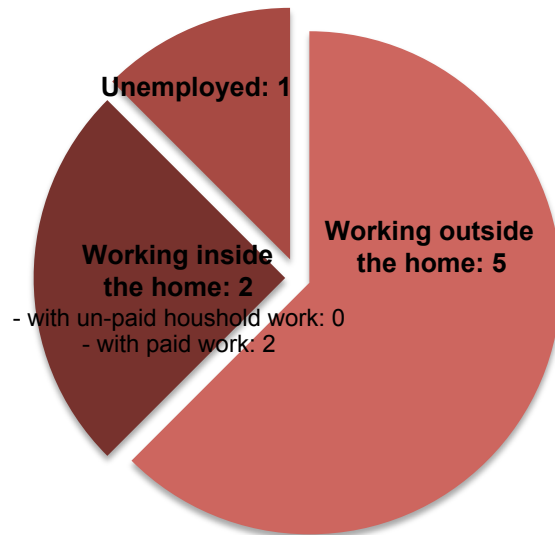
### Women's paid & un-paid work

Total number of women in the study: 8



### Men's paid and un-paid work

Total number of men in the study: 8



In this study's family cases, women hold the overall responsibility over household duties and the wife's main occupation is being a housewife. The women are responsible for preparing, cooking and serving the family's all three meals: breakfast, lunch and dinner. This includes fetching water, collecting and preparing firewood, making sure the right food items are available at home as well as keeping the cooking facility clean and tidy. Some of the families have combined household arrangements, which mean the family live together with the husband's parents and brothers' families and they share common inner yard and cook together.

In general, women start their day by the first *azan* (prayer) around 5.30 - 6 AM. They clean the inside and outside space

of the home, wash the dishes from the night before and prepare breakfast before the rest of the family wake up. After the wife has prepared the children (if having any) for school and sent them away, the day continues with tasks of taking care of and feeding livestock (hen, ducks, goats and cows), working in the kitchen garden and washing the family's clothes. When finding time during the day, the women will take care of their own hygiene and shower. Most of them go to bed around 9 - 10 PM after the whole family has eaten, the children's homework is completed and she has finished her last tasks of the day.

For families engaging in farming and agriculture, women's responsibilities and workload increases significantly during the harvesting time. Even though the wife

most of the time does not work in the actual field, she plays an important role in the preparation of the crop before selling it.

Most men wake up at least one hour after their wives. They freshen up and have breakfast together with the family before taking off for work. In all families, except for one, the whole family sit down and eat their meals together. All men, except for one who at the time for the interview was unemployed, spend most of their day engaging in income generating activities. The men's occupations include working as daily labourer in a field, driving van or working as weavers, either in a smaller fabric or by running an own business and working from a hand loom installed in the home.

**“Both women and men could work outside the home, but taking care of the household is not possible for men. They are not habitude to do it. Men could learn the cooking, yes, because it's now a lot easier with the gas and stows, but to raise a kid, no. They can't take care of washing the child's clothes and feeding it. Feeding a child is an extended process and you might need to try several times before it will take the food. If a man would do the feeding he would just get annoyed and say: 'Okay, you don't want to eat, fine, then I'll go back to my work'. Men are not passionate and dedicated enough, but naturally women are. Another woman could do it, but not men.”**

(Female respondent 4)

None of the men in this study have fixed evening schedules or duties in the household. However, when they are at home most of them help their wives if she is very busy or ask for it. In most cases the housework he helps out with is connected to taking care of the family's livestock and kitchen garden. In many families men are often the ones going to the market to buy

groceries and vegetables for the cooking. However, only two said they help with the actual cooking. Also few men, only two, seem to have or have had an active role when it comes to bringing up and taking care of their children.

**“While men are still sleeping, women has done so much hard work”**

(Male respondent 2)

Most of the women feel that there has been a substantial change when it comes to their husband's role in the home now compared to before the Nijera Kori membership. For example, nowadays the women do not always have to serve the husband the meal but he can get the plate and glass himself.

## **Engaging in income generating activities**

Both the women and men have through membership in Nijera Kori learned about the connection between women's economic contribution to the family and increased empowerment and decision-making power. Through training or by learning from other members, the women have gained productive skills and most of them are earning a small, but important, income by for example sewing, preparing and dying the thread for the loom or making hand fans. The work is carried out inside the home and they do it whenever they can find some spare time from regular household duties. Only one woman was earning money outside the home and combined a full time job in a grain factory with working three times a month in a medical clinic and running the household. This was seen as quite unfortunate both for her and the family and she described it as a temporary solution just for now when her husband was unemployed.



**“Since I am illiterate it is difficult to find a job outside the home. It is easier for my husband since he can engage in physical work but also because we live in a male-dominated society. There are many restrictions for women and we cannot move wherever we want. Women also risk facing harassment, taunting and bad proposals from colleagues and other men at the workplace.”**

(Female respondent 1)

**“I have no wish to leave the home and work outside. Now I am making money inside the home by sewing and selling vegetables and products from the cow and goat and I don't think it would be possible to foster my child if I would move so much.”**

(Female respondent 2)

When discussing with the male respondents, a concern for the potential clash between a wife's engagement in income generating activities outside the home and her role as a housewife was raised. One man also highlighted that customs and social expectations on women and men could be hindering factors that made it difficult for women to work outside.

## **Freedom of movement**

All respondents, except for one woman, claimed that they themselves or their wives are free to move wherever they want, for example to the market, hospital, parent's house or a Nijera Kori training. According to the respondents, the women do not need to seek permission from anyone to leave the house. Yet, most of them do when the husband is around to make sure their absence does not interfere with any of his plans.

**“Women work inside the home and men work outside, this is the custom in the village and it goes back a long time. If the customs weren't there I could be more included in the household and my wife could work outside, but I can't start that change now and not alone.”**

(Male respondent 3)

When asking how often the women actually leave the house, most of them stated that it happens rarely. This was mainly due to the difficulty to hand over the responsibility of the household work to someone else when being away. One man claimed that there is also no need for his wife to go outside since he can arrange whatever she asks for and bring it to the home. In this way he will also spare her the time and hassle. At the same time, the same man found it important that his wife did not get too isolated because it is important that she knows the neighbourhood and surroundings in an emergency situation. For example, if he gets sick she needs to know where the hospital is situated so she can take him there. Several of the respondents also highlighted social customs and security issues as obstacles hindering women from leaving the home.

**“Family members often question why a woman wants to leave their homes. If seeing a woman walking outside they would presume she has bad manner and is a bad woman”**

(Female respondent 1)

## The relationship between work and free time

Discussing free time with women and men in Kumarkhali revealed two different perceptions of the concept. All women in the study state that more or less they dedicate their whole day to work and the only free time they have they spend on sleeping. Some women consider themselves having free time when breastfeeding their children since it creates an opportunity to sit down. However, most of the women think this is also a part of a housewife's duties and should be considered as work.

Most of the men in the study described how they at several points of the day can take a break and enjoy some free time. This time was normally spent on having a chat, drinking tea and watching TV by a snack stall. All men in the study, no matter if working outside the home or running an own business, have a working day ending in the afternoon.

When finishing work most of the men stay out while only a few go home. Most of returning men stated that they go home to have rest and only two said it was to help their wives in the household. Nevertheless, most of these men only stayed for while and went out again to go for a walk, meet up with some friends at the village centre or, if being a member, attend a Nijera Kori activity.

## The division of work

Despite the differences between women and men when it comes to the time spent on rest and entertainment, all respondents were happy with the division of household responsibilities and work. They think the

burden of work is even and that both wife and husband are working equally hard.

**“I don't think the division is uneven because the household work belongs to women, and I enjoy it. Since my husband doesn't stay for many days when he is at home I don't want to put too much pressure on him. When he is away he has to cook and do all other work for himself so I want him to have some free time and a break when he is here.”**

(Female respondent 2)

**My wife can perform the household work much better than me. That's why she is doing this kind of job. I don't think it's just my wife, the poor women are much more patient and work harder than men. It's because of their experience. I got married to my wife in 1986 and we have lived like this since then. I have realised that she is much more patient, and that women [in general] are more patient. I think women work harder than men.”**

(Male respondent 2)

**“We chose to divide it like this because here in the village women stays at home and do the household works. My brother and wife who live in Manikganj [a larger town] both work but this doesn't happen here. If the customs weren't here it would be easier to develop the family situation because then both could be working. With only one person it is harder. If both of us was working outside I think we could manage doing it [the household work] together in the morning and evening since we don't have that much work.”**

(Male respondent 4)

However, with one male respondent a longer discussion followed and after giving the question a second thought he added:

**“The works that women do is kind of invisible. I go for the hand looming work but no one can see what my wife is doing in the home. Women are working very hard, even harder than men. I don't think this is fair.”**

(Male respondent 4)

# A desirable wife & husband

**“A wife should respect and understand her husband and speak to him nicely. If a husband is good to his wife she should in return obey him and count him as the head of the family.”**

(Female respondent 1)

**“When a woman gets married she will come to her husband's house or in-laws and will stay there until her death, so the man and woman will have to be good partners. She should work in the household and give birth to and raise children and try to participate in productive activities that can give money and the freedom to move.**

**It is equally important that she is good with household works and earn money for the family.”**

(Male respondent 1)

**“A woman should always think about how she can improve her family's situation. She should care about her husband and shouldn't run around outside the home, that's not a good sign”**

(Female respondent 2)

**“A good wife should be well behaved with everyone, speak to her in-laws in a nice way and give them good food. That's her responsibility”.**

(Female respondent 4)

**“He shouldn't quarrel or fight with anyone and lives a decent life. It is important that a husband is a good leader because he is the guardian of the wife and family. A husband should make sure that his wife knows what is good and bad, that she has clothes and food and also look after her honour and respect.”**

(Male respondent 4)

**“A good husband should be employed and he should love his wife. If he is rich but scold and fight with her he isn't a good husband. Even though you're penniless you can be a good husband.”**

(Female respondent 3)

**“A good husband does the household work together with his wife and doesn't make any decisions on his own but discuss with his wife. He should see that his wife is a powerful person and could be a leader. It is important that a husband earns money for the family, yet, that's not all. There are so many men who earn money but don't share it and punish the wife and kids. I think it is equally important that he has good behaviour, speak to her nicely, cooperate and give her support.”**

(Female respondent 1)

**“Women should be decent, for example there are some women who wear very short sleeves and so much ornaments and this is not good.”**

(Male respondent 4)

**“It doesn't seem good if the woman work outside the home in the field or somewhere else. She could have done that kind of work by staying at her parent's house. Then there was no need for her to get married and come to the husband's house. Women's role is to take care of the child and do household works, and giving service to the husband.”**

(Male respondent 4)



## Views on leadership and decision-making

In seven out of eight family cases, the wife had a role in decision-making. In most families, important decisions, such as for larger investments for the home, decisions were made jointly and the whole family, including in-laws and children, would sit down to discuss. Most of the respondents shared a view that leadership in the family should not be of a dominant kind since decisions that are made by just one person risk not being good for the whole family. All respondents mentioned that the best decisions are made when everyone has had a say.

**“It’s not necessary to have a leader of the family and it is better to work by sharing with each other. Then you won’t need a leader.”**

(Male respondent 1)

A majority of the women in this study are free to make own decisions when it comes to “smaller” and “silly” issues, such as the buying of livestock, food and clothes for the children. This was described as a practical solution since the husband often spends all day out and it would be inconvenient to always wait for his opinion and consent.

The women explained that they enjoy the freedom of taking care of the household themselves, which was not the case before getting involved in Nijera Kori. However, some women expressed that greater freedom in the household have resulted in a passive attitude from their men, and this was not always positive.

**“In my family my word is often the last word since my husband doesn’t understand family issues. He doesn’t pay much interest in family issues anymore since he knows that I am in the home. He thinks that I will manage and take care of everything even though he is not there. He has faith in me and believes that I can manage it. [At the same time...] it would be better if my husband got more involved in the family. Now it is like working with one hand, but if he helped more we would have two.”**

(Female respondent 1)

When discussing what would happen if a wife and husband disagree and it is difficult to come to a joint solution, both male and female respondents raised the importance of keeping the discussion calm and trying to get an understanding of each other’s positions. Most of the respondents preferred sorting out problems in a sensible way and that there is no such thing as someone alone having the last say.

**Both husband and wife have to make adjustments and try to understand each other by discussing and sharing. If I think he is wrong I will protest but since my husband is so well behaved it is better to discuss first and try to make him understand the point calm and quietly.”**

(Female respondent 1)

The female respondents stated that they always try to put what is best for the family in first place. This means that if it is impossible for the husband and wife to come to a joint solution, she will act upon these premises. One woman mentions that she sometimes does not tell her husband that she will make an investment for the family’s sake because she knows that he will prioritise in a different way and insists on spending it on “wrong” things.

For example, once she bought bricks for the house and initiated some construction work without acknowledging her husband (he works in another town and comes home once a month). When he later found out he could see the advantage of the decision and then he approved.

Another woman, among the few stating that her in-laws and the husband has the last say in her family, also complained about the different perspective she and her husband has about what is a good and needed investment for the household.

**My husband decides for himself if he wants to buy things. For example, he bought a computer even though I found it unnecessary, but he said he has a wish to have it so he bought it. If we have an argument I will try to convince him but if he doesn't listen I just have to accept it. He should listen more and be more inclusive, make decisions by discussions with me and if I don't agree he shouldn't do it. I want to develop the whole picture of my family, for example the kids education and economic security, and I want him to support that."**

(Female respondent 4)

## **Violence and punishments**

Within the scope of this study, violence and punishments was discussed highlighting both physical and verbal features. When asking if quarrels and disagreements ever turn violent or if any of the respondents face punishments if doing something that their partner does not like, different stories was revealed.

Both female and male respondents claimed that violence was more prevailing in their household before they joined Nijera Kori and often there had been a connection to the payment of dowry. One

man described that he used violence if his wife's behaviour was "bad", for example if she scolded at him.

**"Before when I was facing physical torture I was suffering alone in my home. I felt like a burden and wanted to do something myself, to earn money and be someone. Therefore I joined Nijera Kori. First I joined Nijera Kori for the savings and started to work and earned some money. Later I got more involved and attended trainings. I tried to make my husband more acknowledged and wise and sang the songs of Nijera Kori to him in bed. I now realize that the violence [my husband previously used against me] isn't because of a habit or natural character but the lack of knowledge and insight."**

(Female respondent 1)

All respondents was of the opinion that punishments, especially physical ones, does not solve problems but it is better to discuss and try to understand each others opinions or actions. A few supported the idea that the husband should be the guardian and leader of the wife, and thus have the last say in arguments. However, the wife still has the right and responsibly to protest if she believes he is wrong, especially if she thinks his position is bad for the family.

Two male respondents mentioned the importance of acting as role models for other men and the contradiction between beating your own wife and telling others not to. However, one male respondent stood out from the rest of the group being the only one claiming that he, despite being a member for over 20 year, sometimes uses violence against his wife.

**“Sometime I get so angry, like instant anger, but it doesn’t stay for a long time. As we are living with each other both of us should have an idea of each other and [she should] know when to speak about these matters so I wouldn’t have to get angry. If the wife has a lack of knowledge about this [what makes him angry] after staying a long time together the possibility of pushing, slapping and instant anger increases.”** He continues: **“It happens more often during the cultivation times but now it has decreased a lot. If she has sent my lunch, seeds or anything else to the field and maybe she hasn’t done it properly or in time, at that point I might get angry. Also, let’s say I have asked her to arrange or do something when I’m away but when I get back she hasn’t done it. If I then say something negative to her or ask her why she has not done it and she keeps silent I would not get that angry. But if she says something more it’s like first you have not done it, and secondly you are arguing about it or trying to justify it. That would make me angrier. So it’s important to have a good relationship and understanding of what a wife and husband can do. When this is weak it [violence and scolding] happens more often.”**  
(Male respondent 2)

## **Sexual relations**

None of the respondents though it was okay to force sex if one of the parts did not want to have it. Sex, most of the times, happen upon the man’s request but the husband accepts a no from the wife and it would not happen if both parts do not approve. One of the male respondents clearly expressed that if having sex against someone’s will it should be called rape.

**“When having sex both should want to do it. It’s nothing to force or prove and it’s not about power. Someone might have a little bit less will and the other more, but if they**

**both want to it’s okay. A no from my wife has to be listened to.”** (Male respondent 2)

Having sex with both part’s consent was not always the case before the Nijera Kori membership and several of the respondents also highlighted that the common picture in their village does not correspond with their own families’. The same was said about the practise of violence and punishments, which was also said to be more common in other households.

**“In general women doesn’t go first for the physical relationship and in most cases men ask for it or even force it. Some men are very greedy, have a strong physical need and can’t wait whenever he feels for having it, so he doesn’t hear a no. Some are even addicted. Women then don’t think it’s worth taking a fight for it so it’s easier to give in.”**  
(Female respondent 1)

One woman stressed the importance of having sex to keep peace and happiness in the family and that it might be a problem if the wife turns down her husband’s wish for it too often. Another woman described that her husband’s sexual behaviour changed after he started facing some “physical” performing problem.

**“Before our first child he didn’t care so much, my husband’s word was the last word and if I said no it wasn’t important to him. But after our first kid he became sexually weak and has not been able to act in a physical way. As he is not strong enough he now asks for my consent.”**  
(Female respondent 2)

**“If he is interested in having a physical relationship and you say no every day, it’s not good. A wife should try to avoid clashes and conflicts because that will bring unhappiness within the family.”**  
(Female respondent 3).



## The future and way forward

The future was an interesting topic to discuss. Wishes to improve the family's situation, children's education, the economical security as well as women's mobility came up. Religious views and conservative social customs were raised as hinders, but also rich and influential groups and people who do not want to see poor people gaining more power and freedom. One female respondent mentioned that the fact that you as a villager live so close to each other, neighbours, family and relatives, sometime makes it hard to walk your own way and make changes in your life.

**“Personally I do not face any problems from my husband and closest relatives. He has faith in me, believes that I am a good person and that I act with honesty and dignity. A bigger problem is being taunted by other villagers and getting resistance from relatives. Even though I do not care I have to adapt to my environment to some extent since we live our lives so close to each other.”**

(Female respondent 1)

The dedication to continue working with Nijera Kori to bring changes was strong among all respondents and most of them stated that they want to spread the word about the benefits of a membership. They know that the family picture in most families in Kumarkhali is different from their own and that women rarely play an active role in decision-making, they cannot move freely and face violence to a much higher extent. Nijera Kori has helped them gain consciousness around a lot of

important issues. This has given them confidence and changed their lives completely. Now they want to expand the organisation's work to reach more people. Training has played a central role in the respondents' own development and they believe that if more people will be able to go, it might also broaden the support for women's rights in the society.

**“As long as I'm alive I'll continue this work. Suppose there are 50 people appreciating me in this village, I think it is a success and I'll count it as 50 million.”**

(Male respondent 1)

The importance of focusing more on children and young adults was also raised by several of the respondents. They mean that if they can manage to bring education and consciousness for this next generation it might take the development to a new level.

**“Children learn by seeing their parents. As my sons are watching our chemistry, they are taught the rights ethics and values already in their childhood. They will then get the same values that we have. Changes happen in chains. It starts with you, then your family, then the relatives and eventually it will affect the whole society”.**

(Female respondent 2)

# Discussion

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## The division of work

To divide household chores equally between a husband and wife is not a common feature in Bangladesh and all examples in this study confirm this picture. The interviews visualise a clearly gendered pattern when it comes to the division of responsibilities in the family. The women are in charge of and perform almost all household related duties, especially the reproductive ones. Men engage in income earning activities and have no fixed schedule in the home. However, almost all men claim that if there is a need they help their wives with some duties, mostly surrounding the care of livestock, small-scale farming and shopping. The respondents also state that this happens more frequently now compared to before joining Nijera Kori.

The progress reported from the respondents indicate that Nijera Kori do address the issue of household work in their groups. However, none of the men are much involved in the reproductive task, such as raising the family's children. Some men even seem to pay no interest at all of what is going on in their own households but rather spend time outside. When asking about the reasons to why men are not being more engaged in household chores, both the women and men stress biological explanations, such as men "do not understand" or that they by nature "are not patient enough". Most respondents also showed little sign of questioning the division of un-paid housework and paid work, but rather described how satisfied they are.

There is always a contextual social dimension to consider when understanding how people make choices in their lives. Customs was raised as a reason to the choice to separate women and men's roles in the family and that men simply are not habituated to doing the housework. We know that the society put a lot of pressure on what a husband and wife should and should not be, and that this is a factor that takes time to change. Nijera Kori as an organisation can contribute to produce positive examples and role models, which they also have shown to do. The quote to the right is a clear proof of this.

**"Before people were taunting my husband for helping me with "girls" and "wives" work but now more people are involved in Nijera Kori and it has become easier."**

(Female respondent 1)

However, the fact that men are still referring to their participation in the households as "help" and are reluctant to take on the traditionally more "female" and reproductive tasks in the home indicate that a substantial questioning of traditional gender roles has not yet taken place. In the long run, this might result in that changes will occur only *within* the already existing gender system and the current gender motivated division will therefore remain.

## Making joint decisions

Nijera Kori seems to deliver a clear message to their groups that family decisions ideally are made together. All respondents value and prefer the joint decisions, even though a few also say that if not being able to agree, the last word belongs to either the husband or in-laws.

The loosening of the husband's sole control in the household has created a more democratic decision-making and the wives find it practical and enjoy the fact that they do not have to run "silly" issues though their husbands anymore. However, for some men, the "lost control" coming with increased independence of their wives, also seems to mean that it is okay to pull out their engagement in the household completely. The respondents stress the fact that men do no longer hold a position as an authoritarian leader in the family and that nowadays, even women can be leaders. Contra dictionary enough, the husband is in most families still descried as the overhead of the family, having the main responsibility to guide the wife and children.

#### **Women gain power, men lose interest**

With women's increased empowerment in the family, most of the men have clearly lost a sense of ownership of what is going on in the household. According to previous research, historically we can see that in areas where men used to dominate, they tend to lose interest when women increase their presence and power. Scholars call it a "feminisation" of, for example, a specific job sector and in a patriarchal system this also means that the value (and money) disappears (Wikander, 1991; Drufva, 2004). The men in this study have never paid interest in the actual *performing* of the household duties. However, when they had a more authoritarian and controlling role in the family, at least they were present.

Despite a more democratic decision-making practise in the families, the fact that men in most cases still are seen as the guardian over the family further strengthen the reasoning that women's empowerment does not necessarily have to result in that traditional gender roles are

being challenged.

The need to find a balance between men's loosening of their dominant role and control and not letting go completely have to be highlighted in the groups of Nijera Kori. Also, a discussion on men's *new* role in the family needs to be addressed. For example, if the man is not to decide *for* the woman in the household anymore, how can he instead become a part of it? Due to the deeply rooted and unquestioned nature of the gender roles, are women today open to letting men take on a new role in the household? Can the sharing of household chores also affect a wife's status and record as a "good" wife and this result in a social stigma? All of these questions are important and have to be address and discussed in relation to this issue.

#### **Deepen the discussion of gender roles**

A good starting point could be to gather people and talk about their current understanding of what women and men's roles are, but also encourage them to examine its effects on their lives. This study brought up questions connected to this, and it was obvious how the members are missing the right tools to analyse their own gendered behaviour. Based on this conclusion, it would be interesting if Nijera Kori's staff emphasised these kinds of discussions in their groups and put more pressure on the members to investigate their own role and family arrangements. By understanding your own situation better you will also be able to see where change potentially is needed.

#### **The value of a platform for discussion**

Home-based work does, according to theory, not bring as much empowerment as outside work. This is explained by its isolated nature and the fact that it gives fewer opportunities for the worker to meet

and share experience with other workers. In the Nijera Kori example this is not valid since women and men who are engaged in a group, and regularly go to meetings, access this kind of platform for discussion in a different way. Here, women meet to discuss problems, develop new skills and teach each other bargaining strategies. So even though this study's women have no access to the outside job-market, they have managed to gain both increased economic empowerment and higher status in their families.

### **The paid work and the extra burden**

No man directly expressed that his wife's housework is of lesser value than his. Neither did he state that this was a reason behind the division of labor in the family. In fact, many of the men explained that all family members' contribution to the household is important. However, if calculating the hours women and men spend on work and free time during a day, it is obvious that women in order to uphold the current status and equal value has to work a lot more than men. This correlates with previous studies' results showing that women in the name of economic and social empowerment, sometimes also face a double or triple burden of work in the household (Bulbek, 2005).

Women's engagement in income generating activities is stressed as a much needed and positive contribution to the family economy, as long as it does not interfere with the household duties. Clearly, the wife's household chores come first and then she will have to squeeze in the paid work. By listening to the female respondents talking about economic engagement, it is obvious how proud they are of earning their own money and make investments for their family.

When reading the quotes describing an ideal wife and husband (p 17), it is easy to draw the conclusion that one of the most important roles of a wife is to make sure her family is well and progressive. With an income, it seems to be easier for a woman to be a good (stereotype) wife and she can act according to the norm without being dependent on and compromising with someone else (who also might have different priorities). Therefore, the women push themselves to find the time for these activities. From this point of view, women's economic empowerment can thus actually be seen as a way to uphold gender stereotypes, and not the opposite way around.

### **Engaging in society on equal terms**

Another aspect of women's workload is how the disproportionate time they spend on work during a day, also might hinder their active presence in public life. One of the goals of Nijera Kori's work, and the ACCESS program specifically, is to increase women's participation in political institutions and their active contribution to social change. As of today, women have very little time to spend on community development and local politics, when at the same time managing a household and a paid job. Clearly, in order for a transformative change to happen in the society as a whole, a more equal distribution of the workload between men and women is needed in the family. Only then can women become engaged citizens on the same terms as men.

### **Moving forward**

So what can we do to increase women's empowerment without increasing their burden in the home and risk ending up with a group of passive husband? In the attended group meetings, emphasis was mostly put on discussing economic productivity, violence against women,



early marriage and dowry. In no group were issues specifically related to gender roles and household duties raised by either staff or members. However, when taking the lead and asking questions about it, the groups were quick to pick up a discussion. It seems like so far little focus has been put on discussing the pros and cons with women and men's separated roles in the family. This is also shown in the respondents' and groups' confusion when being confronted with questions forcing them to think outside traditional gender stereotypes and roles.

### **Challenging gender roles, also for men**

To challenge women and men's roles in the family and society and move towards a more equal distribution of household labor and burden of work, there is a need to broaden the basis of discussion in the groups. A more *strategic gender approach* (page 10), addressing the root causes to why we choose to divide responsibilities the way we do and how we value each other's participation in the family, could be useful.

According to Greig & Edström (2012), also men are losing out from the current social, economic and political system. Today, men have lower life expectancy, higher risk of accidents, there is high level of suicide or homicide by other men, and injuries from manual labor is common. Toughness and invulnerability is strongly connected to a masculine gender role and it is clear that this has a negative effect on their mental health (Greig & Edström, 2012). So, if challenging the current male gender role and starting a discussion about how men also could benefit from getting more involved in the household, by for example getting a closer relationship with their children, we would quite possibly also see an increase in their health status (Greig & Edström, 2012). In conclusion, if

gender norms and the division of labor become more flexible in the home, men would benefit also on a more personal level.

Clearly, the goal to work for more gender equal family arrangements is not only for the sake of women. Therefore, we have to stop referring to this struggle as a women's issue, but see it as a concern for the whole family and society.

### **Forming a strong team**

By blurring the boundaries between women and men's roles, it could open up for a greater understanding of each other's struggle and challenges in life. Clashes and friction in the relationship would probably decrease, as well as the problem that women and men sometimes seem to have different priorities. Both the female and male respondents found it important for a husband and wife to work as a team, to make joint decisions and that both parts compromise and adjust to each other. The approach to challenge gender roles would clearly benefit also these goals and make adjustments easier. By forming strong family teams it could make it easier to overcome outside social pressure and the sometimes-faced resistance from people outside the Nijera Kori.

### **Connecting with others**

Connecting to other people in the same situation has been proven important to broaden people's minds and to bring transformative change. In order to encourage a discussion that re-thinks traditional family arrangements, one idea is to not only connecting wives with wives and husbands with husbands, but also whole families with other families. By comparing how different families arrange their housework and divide responsibilities and roles in the home, it could broaden the member's minds and inspire to new more

gender equal arrangements in the family.

### **The role of in-laws and children**

Even though this study has not specifically focused on the role of in-laws and children in the forming of gender relations in the family, it is clear that these actors *do* have an effect. The importance of highlighting the role and responsibility of the whole households' actors in the groups is therefore crucial.

Previous studies have also shown that a person growing up in a household with gender-equal arrangements are more likely to later choose a similar division for their own household (Bulbeck, 2005). This also brings further incentives for Nijera Kori to include and focus on the next generation, the children, in their group work. This following quote summarise this perspective in a very comprehensive way and it will therefore finish of this discussing section.

**“Children learn by seeing their parents. As my sons are watching our chemistry, they are taught the rights ethics and values already in their childhood. They will then get the same values that we have. Changes happen in chains. It starts with you, then your family, then the relatives and eventually it will affect the whole society”.**

(Female respondent 2)

# Conclusion and recommendations

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Thanks to the membership in Nijera Kori, great change has taken place in all families studied for this report. However, the results indicate that this change so far predominantly has occurred *within* the framework of existing traditional gender roles. Thus, it has not really challenged the stereotype picture of what is seen as acceptable for women and men in the society. This can explain why women still stay at home and men does not take more responsibility at home.

Women's empowerment in the home does not necessarily and automatically challenge traditional gender roles, and this study in many ways validates this reasoning. To move forward on women's social, economical and political situation, a discussion of what women and men's role should and could be is needed, as well as blurring the boundaries between "paid work" and "care work". This study also highlight the importance of finding a balance between men letting go of their dominant and controlling role in the family, but at the same time becoming passive.

To reach the goal of Nijera Kori and the ACCESS program is to contribute to strengthening women's role in the family and society, this study concludes that a more equal distribution of housework and burden of work is crucial. Furthermore, we have to add the uncomfortable and difficult questions to the discussion to be able to re-think and challenge the current gender system. First then it will be possible to understand how our behaviour and the way we arrange responsibilities and roles in the family affects, and also might hamper, development, health and affluence in society.

## Recommendations:

To strengthen the work of Nijera Kori and the ACCESS program to increase women's role and power in the family and society, this study suggests:

- **The field staff to increase support to the groups in order to broaden the basis of discussion.** Encourage questioning of stereotype gender roles and relations and discuss the effects of the unequal division of paid and un-paid work on the family, as well as the society. Highlight men's new role and how and why they should take more responsibility for the household.
- **Increase the number of male groups** as a way to accelerate the speed of change and increase the support for a new social system with more flexible gender roles.
- **Find new platforms for discussion to encourage experience exchange and discussions across age and sex boundaries.** Connect women and men and whole families with each other and emphasise analysis of different household arrangements, faced challenges and future prospects.
- **Increase the base of members being able to join trainings**, especially gender trainings, as a way to increase the capacity and knowledge in the groups. Make sure the trainings encourage the questioning of stereotype gender roles and relations and discuss the effects of unequal division of paid and un-paid work for the family, as well as the society.
- **Make sure there is sufficient knowledge and capacity among staff** at all level of the organisation, especially in the field offices, of the importance to challenge the gendered division of housework as well as deeply rooted gender norm. Trainings should include the basic theoretical and context specific practical concepts of gender and be mandatory for all staff working in the field.

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# Annex 1: Interviews and attended activities

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## Individual interviews

Number	Sex	Referred to in text
1	Female	Female respondent 1
2	Female	Female respondent 2
3	Female	Female respondent 3
4	Female	Female respondent 4
5	Male	Male respondent 1
6	Male	Male respondent 2
7	Male	Male respondent 3
8	Male	Male respondent 4

## Weekly group meetings

Number	Date	Men/Women	Village
1	20/9	Women	Elongi
2		Women	Elongi
3	22/9	Women	Chokor Hjinha
4		Women	Chokor Hjinha
5		Men	Motmaliyat
6	22/9	Women	Shibrampur
7		Mixed	Dorimatika Dara
8	23/9	Women	Motmaliyat
9	24/9	Women	Korackanddi
10	13/10	Women	Elongi
11	16/10	Men	Bed Baria
12	7/12	Men	Hijlakor
13	15/2	Women	Hashimpur

## Cultural activities

Number	Date	Men/Women	Event	Village
1	20/9	Mixed	Drama performance	Baniyakanddi
2	23/9	Men	Rehearsal drama performance	Elongi
3	20/10	Mixed	Village conference	Baticamra
4	27/10	Mixed	Village conference	Elongi
5	5/11	Mixed	Village conference	Hijlakor
6	10-11/12	Mixed	Cultural long-march	Kumarkhali and Koksha

## Other activities

Number	Date	Men/Women	Event	Place
1	25/9	Mixed	Area committee monthly meeting	Nijera Kori filed office, Kumarkhali
2	28/9	Mixed	Right to Information Day celebration	Head office, Dhaka
3	17/10	Children	Child meeting	Elongi
4	22/10	Mixed	Seminar on women's participation in politics	Kumarkhali library
5	14/10	Mixed	Martyred Intellectual Day celebration	Kumarkhali town
6	16/10	Mixed	Victory Day celebration	Kumarkhali town

# Annex 2: Interview guide for individual interviews

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## **Household duties**

- What does a normal day look like? What do you do and what duties do you have in the household?
- What duties do your husband/wife, in-laws and children have?
- Do you share any of your duties and are you happy with the division?
- What should a good/ideal wife/husband look like? What roles should they have?

## **How are decisions made in your households?**

- Who is included? Wife, in-laws, children, village, other?
- Differences in issues? (money spending, education, health, marriage and children?)
- What decisions are you/your wife free to make on your/her own? What decisions are you/your wife required to seek permission for? From whom?
- Can your children decide for themselves what they want to do with their lives?
- Who decides when to have sex? Can a woman refuse?
- If you disagree over something, who has the last say?
- Is a husband's role to lead the household and guard his wife and children?
- Can a husband share the leading role with his wife?

## **Violence**

- Should a woman always obey her husband?
- If you/your wife do something that your husband/you doesn't/don't like or disagrees to, has he/you got the right to punish you/her? Why? In what way?
- Should a wife tolerate punishments? What kind?

## **Freedom of movement**

- Are you/your wife free to move by yourself/herself? Where can you/she go?
- Do you/Does she need/s to seek permission? From who?
- Do you/Does she go out on you/her own?

## **Changes**

- Has any of these things changed with the Nijera Kori membership? Home duties, decision-making, violence and freedom of movement in your home?

## **The future**

- If you think about the future, what would you like to change in your own life and in your family?
- What do you need to make it happen?

“Children learn by seeing their parents. As my sons are watching our chemistry, they are taught the rights ethics and values already in their childhood. They will then get the same values that we have. Changes happen in chains. It starts with you, then your family, then the relatives and eventually it will affect the whole society”

Female member of Nijera Kori,  
Kumarkhali 2014