

Women's Empowerment Thematic Review

Prepared for
SHOUHARDO
of
CARE Bangladesh

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by

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Acronyms

CAP	Community Action Plan
EKATA	Empowerment, Knowledge and Transformative Action
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
HH	Household
IGA	Income Generating Activities
MTR	Mid-Term Review
NGO	Non Governmental Organization
PNGO	Partner NGO
PTA	Parent Teacher Association
REFLECT	Regenerated Freirean Literacy through Empowering Community Techniques
SDC	Slum Development Committee
SHOUHARDO	Strengthening Household Ability to Respond to Development Opportunities
SMC	School Management Committee
SO	Strategic Objective
UNO	Upazila Nirbahi Officer
UP	Union Parishad
VGD	Vulnerable Group Development
VDC	Village Development Committee
V/SDCs	Village and Slum Development Committee

1. Executive Summary

While poor women are among the most marginalized in Bangladesh, they also contribute most effectively to development aims. This thematic review focuses on the 'approaches' introduced by SHOUHARDO to achieve the third strategic objective (SO3) which contributes to the SHOUHARDO's overall goal. The review was conducted in two out of the four regions in which women's empowerment applications are most apparent in the Kishoreganj and Rangpur areas. To this end, it aims to capture the main successes, challenges and recommendations in SHOUHARDO approaches.

Specific learning objectives include:

- To assess how effectively the approaches and systems are contributing to positive change, and how sustainable these changes are.
- To provide recommendations on how the approaches and systems can be improved for future programming, especially in relation to the 'impact statement' and 'impact groups' CARE Bangladesh is committed to.

The three domains in the women's empowerment impact statement – enhanced decision-making, reduced violence against women and social movements engaging men – are addressed within EKATA circles. Securing entitlements and strengthening livelihoods and enhancing accountability of service providers are addressed through EKATA circles.

Data were combined from three sources: 1) interviews (in-depth and focus group discussions) with SHOUHARDO beneficiaries, key stakeholders (e.g. UP members, EKATA facilitator) PNGO staff and CARE staff, 2) project documents, and 3) observation.

SHOUHARDO adopted the EKATA model, which stands for *Empowerment, Knowledge and Transformative Action* to promote education, empowerment and social change to attain women's empowerment goals.

SHOUHARDO's women's empowerment approach sees individual behaviors embedded in their social and cultural context. SHOUHARDO focuses largely on changing determinants related to three overlapping categories-- agency, relationships, and structure particularly in light of gendered social norms in Bangladesh. In addition to these three categories, the findings section begins with a part on knowledge and awareness. The findings are based on three to five case studies drawn from each of the five study sites

SHOUHARDO recipients demonstrated knowledge and awareness in key areas related to adolescents and empowerment, violence against women and access to resources. While knowledge and awareness of community entitlements are evident, these findings vary across the sites and cases. Not surprisingly, the findings reveal that this is particularly the case in EKATA sites.

Agency - or women's decision-making through choices from available options - is accomplished when women carry out analysis, generally facilitated through EKATA processes. SHOUHARDO recipients demonstrated agency at the collective level, through EKATA, across the four EKATA sites. The most dramatic change was apparent in women's reports of increased mobility, marked by events such as going to the market, trainings or to school outside the village parameter. While women's decision-making and choices were evident, these findings varied across the sites and cases. The findings reveal that changes in women's agency was most apparent in the EKATA sites. Some women were members of the village and slum development committees, but generally did not assume leadership roles. While indicators show that women's agency increased, there is more evidence that it did so at the collective level rather than the individual level where social norms play a strong role in limiting women's decision-making and choice.

Relationships were examined at three levels- household, internal (within EKATA), and external (outside EKATA) such as the VDC, standing committees, Union Parishad and services. The findings show that changes at the household level are more difficult to change than internal group changes, within EKATA. In some cases girls' relationships with their parents became more open. By and large, however, girls remained largely deferential to their parents' wishes. EKATA members' capacities to accommodate and cooperate within the group represented the biggest challenge evident at the internal group level. Leadership attributes supporting group members was not apparent. EKATA's relationships to external actors such as standing committees, VDC, and the union parishad vary. When elite men are represented in the VDC or union parishad, EKATA members often fall back in an acquiescent role, rather than claiming their rights, as in the VGD case. Initial steps to build partnerships, with formal governing structures such as the Union Parishad, have taken place through standing committees.

This study looks at two aspects of structural change. One is concerned with social norms and the other with institutional changes. Social structures, defined by social norms and values, have been the slowest to change in SHOUHARDO. One of the most striking aspects of SHOUHARDO's program is its use of two contradictory behavior and social change tactics. On the one hand, EKATA uses dialogue to build up a critical perception of the social, cultural, political and economic forces that structure reality. Perhaps unwittingly, SHOUHARDO also relies heavily on fear appeals accomplished by invoking the law to threaten alleged perpetrators of violence and their families. While these appeals seem to have had some effect, they may do so at the cost of building relationships, transparency, and supporting empowerment of poor boys and men. Moreover, they may have an immediate visible impact, but it is unlikely that structural changes would sustain after the life of the project.

SHOUHARDO participants have seen some changes in social norms. Some examples of girls re-enrolling in school and postponing their marriage is promising. Community-level changes are observed through collective action activities to support women who have survived violence. However, as evidenced in the examples cited in the report, changes at the household level are less evident.

Institutional changes are evident in terms of representation. Through SHOUHARDO efforts, women are represented in development and standing committees to a greater extent than had been seen before. However, women have not contributed in genuine ways through active inclusion in the VDCs and SDCs examined. In terms of standing committees, many women reported that they were represented on such committees. However, these committees were inactive. Perhaps this demonstrates that it is too early to expect changes beyond greater representation of women

Recommendations include:

The EKATA approach should be applied throughout SHOUHARDO to ground the women's empowerment work.

Enhancing leadership skills is necessary for EKATA groups to sustain themselves.

An empowerment approach rather than law-and-order demands a closer focus on the structural causes that underlie violence beyond the injury in the violence cases.

The authors suggest that SHOUHARDO move away from orienting the program around victims through case management.

Revisiting SO3 may be warranted. Narrowing your focus on the second sub-objectives may be considered. While there is little discussion on resolving violence against women cases, much of SHOUHARDO's women's empowerment efforts are focused on that.

SHOUHARDO may consider assigning one community facilitator to no more than two sites so that proper attention is provided. Instead of playing the role of social workers, the community/field facilitators should support wide reaching empowerment processes inherent in the EKATA model. More training is necessary.

Changing social norms around women's economic independence, whether or not she is married, should be considered as an outcome.

Encourage IGA activities to support collectivization which would not only support individual women's needs but will help sustain EKATA circles. This should be

complicated by linking EKATA groups with regional and state-level NGOs and networks to ensure sustainability, quality, and ongoing maturity of the program.

Consistent with an empowerment approach (vs. a victim approach) there should be a zero tolerance for violence at any cost in the communities; this includes violence manifested by the state through ill conceived laws that are being abused such as the dowry law.

Activities which normalize relationships between boys and girls, rather than targeting boys as predatory categories may go a long way in protecting girls on the road and in the home.

2. Introduction

While poor women are among the most marginalized in Bangladesh, they also contribute most effectively to development aims. This is evident in several studies demonstrating women's success in microfinance and livelihood programs as well as those addressing specific women's rights concerns such as gender-based violence. CARE Bangladesh's focus on women's empowerment is one of four key strategic objectives in SHOUHARDO to reduce chronic and transitory food insecurity among poor households in four major regions in Bangladesh—Kishoreganj, Rangpur, Tangail, and Chittagong.

This thematic review focuses on the 'approaches' introduced by SHOUHARDO to achieve the third strategic objective (SO3) which contributes to the SHOUHARDO's overall goal. The review was conducted in two out of the four regions in which women's empowerment applications are most apparent in the Kishoreganj and Rangpur areas. To this end, it aims to capture the main successes, challenges and recommendations in SHOUHARDO approaches.

Box

SO3: Enhanced empowerment of 400,000 women and girls from targeted vulnerable HHs.

SSO 3.1: Women and girls are participating in enhanced educational opportunities

IR 3.1.1: Women and girls trained and practicing life skills and functional literacy in formal and non-formal settings

IR 3.1.2: Participation of women in 300 SMCs/PTAs increased, and the committees are demonstrating responsiveness to promote women and girls education

SSO 3.2: Entitlement of women/girls improved whereby they can effectively voice concerns, mobilize resources and influence decisions

IR 3.2.1: Targeted areas are sensitised on women's entitlements

IR 3.2.2: Enhanced capacity of 400 women's groups to identify, analyse problems/opportunities, develop action plans, access/mobilize resources

IR 3.2.3: 50 women's groups establish linkages with Regional/National women's networks for greater voice in policy, laws related to reproductive rights, family laws and violence against women

3. Specific objectives include:

SHOUHARDO is helping Bangladesh achieve health and poverty targets reflected in the millennium development goals. SHOUHARDO plays a key role in supporting CARE Bangladesh' vision and mission which is led by four long term impact statements. One of these statements pertains to women's empowerment. In this regard, SHOUHARDO seeks to empower the most socially, economically and politically marginalized women. The path of that change is reflected in CARE-Bangladesh' impact statement. Specifically, it focuses on *women exercising greater choice in decisions affecting their lives combined with reduced violence against women and the emergence of strong social movements built on women's solidarity and participation of men*. The study concentrated on the approaches and systems introduced by SHOUHARDO to achieve the concerned program strategic objective-- in this case, strategic objective three (SO 3). As outlined in the terms of reference, this assessment focuses on two learning objectives:

- To assess how effectively the approaches and systems are contributing to positive change, and how sustainable these changes are.
- To provide recommendations on how the approaches and systems can be improved for future programming, especially in relation to the 'impact statement' and 'impact groups' CARE Bangladesh is committed to.

In view of the impact statement and SO3, this study focuses on empowerment in relation to decision making, violence against women (family violence, verbal divorce, polygamy, and dowry) and SHOUHARDO's solidarity groups, as seen through EKATA approaches. Given the focus on adolescent girls in SO3, the study also includes in its analysis indicators on girls' education, early marriage, and "illegal relationships". Lastly, indicators reflecting women's control over resources are also investigated with specific focus on asset management and access to resources.

The framework used to analyze women's empowerment is drawn from CARE's global research protocols on knowledge and awareness and practice in relation to three interrelated dimensions of empowerment-- agency, social relations and structure (See Annex 1). Agency reflects the extent to which girls and women exercise choice through decision-making among available options. Social relationships refer to the extent to which women/ girls and men/boys negotiate needs and rights of women through interdependence and cooperation with others. Structure refers to women/girls changing institutions (such as markets, education systems, committees, and the government) and social norms and values through active inclusion.

Given the breadth and scope of SHOUHARDO across 18 districts, in 2,211 villages and 137 slums, guided by four strategic objectives, it is important to highlight what this study has not been able to accomplish. There are several activities within SHOUHARDO in which women participate. This study focuses specifically on women's empowerment as reflected in the impact statement and in SO3. While there are several exemplary places in which gains have been made to include greater participation of women, this study does not explore such areas unless they are explicitly part of the women's empowerment process described above.

4. CARE/SHOUHARDO's Women's Empowerment Approach.

SHOUHARDO reached full implementation by the end of 2006. Over the past two and half years, it has sought to create conditions that transform traditional power structures, largely focusing on the oppression of women, which marginalize and exploit the poorest segments of society.

SHOUHARDO adopted the EKATA model, which stands for *Empowerment, Knowledge and Transformative Action* to promote education, empowerment and social change to attain women's empowerment goals. Drawn from the REFLECT model, developed by Action Aid, EKATA processes encourage participants to analyze their own circumstances in a structured manner with a view to generating solutions to the problems they face. These processes support the systematization of people's own experience-based understanding and validate it through the development of literacy tools. EKATA assumes that transformation occurs when women and girls receive skills which support their ongoing strategies for gaining status and respect with established hierarchies of gender and class.

Maps and tables used in EKATA become tools for generating new interpretations of gender and women's empowerment. When women use graphics to abstract and dissect local concerns, they are learning to take an objective perspective on these matters and to present them as shared problems demanding public action. Maps and graphics are also used for building consensus. Community action plans are used to prioritize and plan activities to this end.

The three domains in the women's empowerment impact statement – enhanced decision-making, reduced violence against women and social movements engaging men – are addressed within EKATA circles. Securing entitlements and strengthening livelihoods and enhancing accountability of service providers are addressed through EKATA circles.

5. Methodology

Data were combined from three sources: 1) interviews (in-depth and focus group discussions) with SHOUHARDO beneficiaries, key stakeholders (e.g. UP members, EKATA facilitator) PNGO staff and CARE staff, 2) project documents, and 3) observation. All interviews were conducted over a three week period. Approximately 9 to 18 In-depth and short interviews were conducted at each of the five sites. Two to four focus group discussions associated with the study site in general and EKATA group members more specifically. Project documents included summary reports, tools, and overview documents. Community structures, such as the Union Parishad, were visited. Community facilitators were interviewed at each of the 5 sites. Interviews were used to gather examples, stories, knowledge, attitudes and practices related to women's empowerment. Since the EKATA groups drive SHOUHARDO's women's empowerment work, they became the focus of the study. The other groups (IGA and natural disasters) focus on participation. Their empowerment work is grounded in EKATA activities. The research framework and tools were vetted by CBHQ. Translation was provided by SHOUHARDO staff. Notes were transcribed within 72 hours.

The study was implemented in five sites – where implementation and approaches have had sufficient time to mature over at least two year. Because

95% of SHOUHARDO is implemented in rural Bangladesh, only one slum was selected as a study site. In order to better understand SHOUHARDO's women's empowerment interventions, vis-à-vis solidarity groups, one non-EKATA village was explored. By comparison, that village helps us better understand the approaches that are making a difference.

The study sites include:

Gastalghat Slum, Bhairab

Boroshakoa village, Nabigonj, Hobigonj

Murikandi village, Niamotpur Kishoregonj

Char Varot village, Jaldhaka, Nilphamari (Non-EKATA village)

Purba Chatnai village, Dimla, Nilphamari

Specific procedures were undertaken in all five study sites, including: The researchers first met the SHOUHARDO members and other villagers in a community consultation meeting. The interviewers held FGDs and key informant interviews with SHOUHARDO participants as well as EKATA member. The researchers conducted in-depth case studies focused on women's empowerment using a case mapping method. The purpose of this research component was to understand the level, nature and extent of empowerment at the community and household levels in a detailed and in-depth manner. Initial key informant interviews and FGDs provided information about illustrious women's empowerment cases. Cases were sampled using a snowball method. Individuals affected by or involved in identified cases were interviewed. Multiple perspectives were narrated to understand the patterns and themes that contribute or detract from empowerment process. A range of informants were identified in which a variable can be referenced once links were identified with the specific cases under examination.

It is important to note the study limitations. The study could cover only five sites, therefore, it does not evaluate the performance of women's empowerment in SHOUHARDO based on outcomes. Instead, the study explores the strengths and weaknesses of the approaches used by the SHOUHARDO to empower women. To analyze findings, a case study method is used as an alternative to traditional descriptive approaches, emphasizing the community's perspective as central to the process. The focus of the study was on all girls and women identified as poor or extreme poor. Focused inquiry on select groups of women identified by their marginal status through religion, marital status, household role, or occupation did not take place since the study objectives were broad and time was limited. Moreover, SHOUHARDO's focus is on poor and extreme poor women, not on specific categories of women outside of that. Lastly, comparison between slums and villages did not take place. Only one of the five sites selected is a slum. The other four are villages. Because of delays created by the mutiny and re-arrangement of researchers' roles, the women's empowerment researchers spent only one day collecting data in the selected slum. Consequently, there is insufficient evidence to compare the effectiveness of women's empowerment work in the slum versus village contexts.

6. Findings:

SHOUHARDO's women's empowerment approach sees individual behaviors embedded in their social and cultural context. Instead of focusing on psychological processes as the basis for women's oppression, SHOUHARDO focuses largely on changing determinants related to three overlapping categories-- agency, relationships, and structure particularly in light of gendered social norms in Bangladesh. In addition to these three categories, the findings section begins with a section on knowledge and awareness. The findings are based on three to five case studies drawn from each of the five study sites (see Annex 2 for select case studies).

6.1 Knowledge and awareness

SHOUHARDO recipients demonstrated knowledge and awareness in key areas related to adolescents and empowerment, violence against women and access to resources. While knowledge and awareness of community entitlements are evident, these findings vary across the sites and cases. Not surprisingly, the findings reveal that this is particularly the case in EKATA sites. The EKATA approach which combines awareness and literacy contributes most effectively to this change among women. Because men have not received knowledge and consciousness raising inputs, changes in knowledge and awareness among men were not apparent. According to the respondents, SHOUHARDO does not use other more conventional knowledge and awareness approaches such as audience assessments and messaging in the area of women's empowerment.

6.1.1 Adolescence and empowerment

Promoting girls education – by preventing and re-enlisting drop outs - is a key component of SHOUHARDO's women's empowerment initiative. The researchers analyzed six case studies of adolescent girls who work to promote girls education, primarily through EKATA. All six girls were identified by EKATA members as ones who had dropped out of school and were active in EKATA (in Boroshakoa, Gastalghat, Murikandi, and Purba Chatnai). The findings show that EKATA activities effectively supported changes in knowledge level among participants. Five of the six girls reported that girls' education improves well being. As one girl reported,

I know the importance of education for a girl. I learned this at EKATA session. I now have a dream to finish my education. Ruma, Murikandi village.

Similarly, four girls reported awareness that they held the right to an education just as a boy. Four of the girls were aware of the negative effects of illiteracy. We could not identify girls from Char Varot (non-EKATA Village) who had dropped out and engaged in girls' education activities. The young women interviewed, in Char Varot, were not aware of the link between literacy, education and their entitlements.

Apart from Char Varot, women from the other four study sites identified early marriage as a priority area in which they work, primarily through EKATA. The researchers followed five early-marriage case studies of girls between the ages 13 and 16 years of age. When asked why girls should not get married before 18 years of age, EKATA members and young girls reported that, “her life will be ruined,” “she will not be prepared,” “she will not be able to take adequate care of her in-laws,” and “she would have difficulty with her pregnancies.” Most informants also reported awareness that early marriage is against the law. Respondents from four of the five study sites reported that pregnancy may result in serious consequences for the girl. As one focus group participant stated,

If anyone gets pregnant at an early age, she may die. EKATA member Murikandi Village

Those in Char Varot village, where EKATA activities were absent, however, were unable to identify reasons that a young girl should not get married.

Eve teasing, or public sexual harassment, by young men is a common concern among adolescent girls in the study sites. Respondents reported that eve teasing ranges in severity from sexually suggestive remarks, such as professing, “I love you,” to catcalls and outright groping. On the surface, eve teasing may appear innocuous, but girls and mothers frequently speak about how a young girl finds herself fighting off boys, compromising her safety and her honor. The threat of eve teasing prompts parents to restrict her mobility to the boundaries of their home. She is not permitted to go to school and is married early. In rare cases eve teasing can lead to rape. Young girls and community members in the study sites agreed that eve teasing is unacceptable and violates a girl’s right to security. While they are aware that girls are at risk and that boys are largely culpable, girls and their families are largely responsible for maintaining her chastity and boys’ behavior is considered deviant. As the study findings show, the community acted on boys’ eve teasing behavior which will be discussed in more depth in the sections on agency, relations and structure.

6.1.2 Violence and Women

Once she is married, women’s concerns largely shift away from her natal family’s needs to her marital family. These concerns are largely related to violence associated with economic insecurity. The two most commonly reported forms of women’s oppression cited by villagers and slum dwellers were not related to physical abuse but rather to the threat of financial insecurity namely through polygamy and verbal divorce. A woman’s financial security is at risk when her husband declares a triple oral divorce or marries a second woman with whom he shares his earnings.

The researchers examined 'threats of desertion' through polygamy or verbal divorce in four cases across three sites. In all four cases, women knew which laws – within Sharia decrees - affected them in relation to their rights. They were also aware of reconciliation principles, particularly having experienced the EKATA-VDC led procedures based on compromise, not unlike the village shalish. Many informants from the study villages involved in desertion cases reported awareness of the effect of the laws if the wife filed a case through the police. However, awareness about equity and rights of the second wife was not well understood, even among EKATA members committed to universality of women's rights. It was believed that second wives and their children did not share the same rights or access to justice as the first wife. In both polygamy cases, Lippie (from Parba Chatnai) and Shireen (from Murikandi) received tremendous EKATA support to ensure that their husbands divorce their second wives. When asked about the rights and wellbeing of the second wife and her children, EKATA members claimed that the first wife is the legal wife and the law was on her side. When further probed as to whether EKATA principles of discrimination and equality applied to second wives, they were not able to respond.

Knowledge and awareness related to sex determination was also weak. In one case in which a woman (Shireen) was blamed for having four daughters, her husband married a second woman and had another daughter. Interestingly, Shireen, her husband, EKATA members, the UP Chairman (heavily involved in the case) and the community facilitator were not aware that the father determines the sex of his children. This information may have prevented him from getting married a second time and the subsequent problems that arose.

Char Varot informants demonstrated awareness of laws that affect women's rights, particularly those related to dowry, and the Muslim inheritance for women.

Dowry-related violence was frequently cited as a problem in the communities. Informants across all five sites claimed that dowry is against the law and punishable as a criminal offense. They were aware that girls and their natal families were often placed under excessive pressure that was both needless and unwarranted. Most informants agreed, however, that social pressure to provide a dowry for their daughters was great.

PNGO staff had limited Knowledge in the technical areas of gender and VAW. Their commitment and hard work notwithstanding, the SHOUHARDO training that they received did not prepare them for their extensive work in VAW. For example, one community facilitator described an encounter with a 13 year old girl who had a vaginal infection. She described how she managed the case by taking her and her mother to the hospital for tests. The doctor diagnosed the girl with syphilis. When I asked how she got syphilis, the community facilitator reported that she got it through pubic scabies and a urinary tract infection. She did not demonstrate understanding that this girl had a sexually transmitted infection

which was most likely contracted through a male family member or close male associate.

6.1.3 Control over resources

Two cases studies related to asset management were documented. One case study followed an individual woman – Rinku from Boroshakoa - who received support from CARE in income generation. The other case follows an EKATA group engaged in a village-wide initiative in Purba Chatnai village. Income generation projects for women linked to empowerment approaches were not apparent in Char Varot.

Some knowledge related to running a business was evident in both cases. However, they had limited knowledge of the market. Rinku learned how to stitch and run her own business together with other women in her community. She knew what materials to buy. However, Bisheajit, VDC Secretary of Boroshakoa, controlled the embroidery market. She and other women in Boroshakoa did not know how to access her buyer. She also did not know that the training she went to was for three days which prompted a protracted quarrel with her husband who expected her to return within a day. Similarly, EKATA group members in Purba Chatnai were able to identify what kinds of materials they needed for production of shoe boxes. However, only three of the women in EKATA knew the amount of profit they were making and how much capital they had.

Two examples of women's improved access to resources were observed through community level interventions. In Murikandi village, EKATA members solicited support from the VDC to obtain Vulnerable Group Development (VGD) card. With this card, poor families receive 30 kilograms of rice. Villagers knew that they were entitled to VGD cards. They were also aware of how VGD cards are obtained and ways in which their representatives, in the UP forums, cheat them. Similarly, once EKATA members, from Purba Chatnai, learned about their entitlements to health and services, they enforced better service delivery quality. Prior to their intervention, the family welfare visitor did not maintain her working hours and secured medicine for the public market and for people from her village. EKATA members from both villages expressed clear understandings of women's entitlements to services, such as health, legal justice, education and ration cards.

Discussion

The findings show that knowledge and awareness exist in relation to women's rights and entitlements, with limited knowledge related to the market in relation to control over assets. In EKATA villages women and girls were aware of girls' right to education, delayed marriage, safety and security. Understandings of women's empowerment are grounded in the law. That is, for most informants across all sites, knowledge of the law helped to define for them what is permissible or not. Behavior may or may not be linked to that knowledge, as will be discussed

below. Knowledge and awareness of more multifaceted issues related to violence, such as sex determined by father and abuse related to sexually transmitted diseases, revealed a lack of depth necessary for a program dealing with complex issues on women's rights. Char Varot (non-EKATA) village revealed relatively little knowledge and awareness outside what is popularly understood in the community. Little critical analysis was demonstrated which was important given the complexity of the cases there. In terms of control over assets, women understood basic skills related to running a business. However, dimensions related to the market remained elusive.

6.2. Agency

Within the context of SHOUHARDO, agency - or women's decision-making through choices from available options - is accomplished when women carry out analysis, generally facilitated through EKATA processes. Such analysis appears to have enabled women to carry out actions that are both informed and collectively deliberated. SHOUHARDO recipients demonstrated agency at the collective level, through EKATA, across the four EKATA sites. The most dramatic change was apparent in women's reports of increased mobility, marked by events such as going to the market, trainings or to school outside the village parameter. While women's decision-making and choices were evident, these findings varied across the sites and cases. The findings reveal that changes in women's agency were most apparent in the EKATA sites. Some women were members of the village and slum development committees, but generally did not assume leadership roles. While indicators show that women's agency increased, there is more evidence that it did so at the collective level rather than the individual level where social norms play a strong role in limiting women's decision-making and choice.

According to the respondents, SHOUHARDO does not use other more conventional behavior change approaches such as trainings on self-esteem and assertiveness to promote women's decision-making skills. SHOUHARDO does not work directly with men, religious (and other community) leaders to address women's empowerment. No other approaches which support capacity building in the area of women's agency were evident.

6.2.1 Adolescence and Empowerment

As indicated earlier, the six case studies on girls who dropped out of school were active EKATA members working towards improving girls' education. All six girls dropped out of school prior to SHOUHARDO's entry to their communities, three years prior to the interview. Interestingly, only two of the six girls interviewed were actually re-enrolled in the formal school system. The other four were actively involved in EKATA literacy and reflective sessions but not in the formal system. When asked why they were not attending school, the four girls claimed

that a lack of family income discouraged parents from supporting their education, despite their keen interest. Interestingly, three of the four out-of-school girls are working on IGA projects in order to support younger siblings' tuition for school. Fathers, who had not received girls' education messages, were most influential in blocking girls' choice to attend school. As one father indicated, "we did not attend school, you will only get married. There is no need for you to go to school." Fathers played a critical role in three of the four cases of young girls who did not attend school. In these cases, the girls' choices were constrained by both economic instability and fathers' beliefs about the value of school. Ironically, Sonia remains active in EKATA by remaining engaged in literacy classes and women's empowerment activities. For example, she encourages other parents to allow their daughters to attend school. This demonstrates her level of knowledge and awareness of girls' education, but is not able to realize her educational pursuits because of socio-cultural constraints which will be explained in greater detail below.

Of the five early marriage cases, three had sexual relationships with boys – one married without parental consent, one married her suitor through the Uncle's arrangement and the other had a two-month old girl but remained unmarried, since he was already married. The EKATA groups prevented marriage in the other two cases. In both these cases, EKATA visited the girls' parental home and cited the law which forbids families to marry daughters before they are adults. In both cases, the girls were not consulted by the parents before their marriage. Family elders had made decisions for them. At 14 years of age, Khairun from Murikandi village, was not sure whether she wanted to get married or not. Together with the community facilitator, the EKATA group from Murikandi, contacted the VDC to prevent her marriage from taking place on the day of the wedding itself. Together with the VDC, the EKATA members went so far as to instruct the UP chairman not to permit the Kazi to marry Khairun with a fake birth certificate usually granted to families through the Union Parishad. Group level agency – provided through EKATA – presented opportunities for women to exercise power not previously available to them. Individual level agency is less optimistic. For example, Khairun's father told an interviewer that he would wait until EKATA provided the right date Khairun could marry. He told a different interviewer that he will find a way to get Khairun married sooner, implying that he would not wait until she is 18 years.

Three eve teasing cases were documented in three study sites where EKATA was active. In each case, EKATA members, family members and the adolescents implicated the boys for this problem. Two girls reported that prior to SHOUHARDO, the girls were blamed for this problem which was remedied by keeping girls at home. Since EKATA's presence has opened possibilities for girls and women to leave the home, regulating boys' behavior to prevent eve teasing had become more common. They do this by scolding the boys, speaking with their parents and threatening them with the law. As one EKATA member reported,

These naughty boys.... They cause more problems here... we must punish them and make them stop. EKATA member, Barashokua

In all three cases, girls and EKATA members were aware that eve teasing violates a girl's right to security. Girls claimed that the eve teasing had reduced and that they did not refrain from leaving the home for fear of eve teasing.

6.2.2 Violence and Women

Anxiety around socio-economic instability within the family incited a series of marital disputes and abuse in all four polygamy and verbal divorce cases described earlier. In the two polygamy cases, the women suspected that their husband maintained a second woman, while he was away, because he suddenly stopped sending remittance home. Many men, from the study sites, migrate to Dhaka or Sylhet during the low season and work as cycle-rickshaw pullers. In the verbal divorce cases, tension arose as a result of shortfalls in household available cash. For example, in China's case, her husband took a loan from a neighbor to buy rice for the week. When the neighbor came to collect the money, China was unable to return the loan. In response, she asked her husband why he had not gone out fishing, to bring in badly needed resources, that week. This aggravated her husband instigating him to react with angry epithets and a triple verbal divorce.

In all four cases, marital unrest manifested by physical and emotional abuse over several months and even years. The underlying cause, in all the cases, was largely due to insecure household resources. Despite protracted periods of abuse and tension, all four women made decisions to reconcile with their husbands. When asked why, they said that by remaining in a conjugal relationship, they would be able to secure their husband's income and maintain the identity of a married woman, which is highly valued in their communities.

In the polygamy cases, the women solicited support from the community facilitator and EKATA to exercise agency through choices that would avail them more options. Specifically, EKATA and the community facilitators supported women in polygamy cases to force their husbands to divorce his second wife and take his property. EKATA members met with both husband and wife to ensure that the husband would indeed divorce his second wife. In Shireen's case, EKATA sought out the support of the UP chairman who is a woman. Together with EKATA members, VDC members and the community facilitator, she visited Shireen and her husband at least forty times over a three month period. According to Shireen's husband, they insisted that he divorce his second wife and continue to send money home during the months he works in Dhaka. In addition, with the support of EKATA, the two women demanded that the husbands turn over their property to them. Without the support of EKATA, the

women would not be able to have exerted their agency to obtain control of their husbands.

In the verbal divorce cases, EKATA and the community facilitators became involved in the disputes with the aim to keep the marriage together. In China's case, however, she did not want reconciliation initially. She was angry at her husband and wanted to return to her father before steps towards reconciliation took place. The EKATA members convinced her otherwise.

Given strong social pressures for the women to remain in conjugal relationships, perhaps it is not surprising that discussions about expanded choices based on alternative options for these four women did not arise. Supporting their children on their own with the support of IGA opportunities and the EKATA community, though unconventional, was not considered as an alternative choice.

Three of the four EKATA groups, in Gastalghat Slum, Boroshakoa village and Murikandi village, identified the 'elimination of dowry' as one of their primary priorities. Not surprisingly, most informants reported that they did not exchange dowry. In one village, an active EKATA member indicated that she had prevented two marriages from exchanging dowry. When asked how she did this, she claimed that she reasoned with the boys' parents since the girls were very poor and their fathers did not have enough money. In addition, the girls had sellable features-- one girl was very beautiful and the other had learned a livelihood skill which made her more attractive to the suitor. When probed, several informants confessed that they would provide "voluntary gifts" to their daughters at marriage. Dowries ranged between 20,000 to two lakhs taka. Pressures to produce robust dowries originate from society at large. However, the husband's family uses dowry as an opportunity to access resources to offset the stress of poverty. According to several respondents, the girl's father is obliged to give at least a partial sum before the marriage. The other part is due within a year or an agreed upon time.

On the most part, dowry related violence was described as a past problem, in the EKATA villages since EKATA members claimed that they eliminated dowry. There were no cases identified in which dowry demands and consequent violence was negotiated. However, when probing, most families agreed that they exchanged "voluntary gifts" such as furniture, motor bikes, saris, jewelry and even large sums of money. Families talked about "voluntary gifts," in place of "dowry." This may be because dowry is a non-bailable criminal offense, forcing it under ground, making it less visible.

Chihena's father, from Char Varot, filed a dowry case against Shahidul, her 19 year old husband. She had been diagnosed with a 'female disease' and was instructed by her doctor to avoid conjugal relationship with her husband. Her husband had not reimbursed Chihena's father for her medical expenses. On several occasions, he had also tried to bring her back to his home, without her

parents' consent. Her family believed that black magic had been cast on her which is why they restricted her from leaving them to attend to her husband. Because he had not paid for her medical expenses as he had originally agreed, his parents filed a dowry case against the husband. Because many domestic violence laws are non-bailable for six months, Chihena's husband was imprisoned three times for over 120 days when they filed three cases against him, including dowry-demand accusations.

6.2.3 Control over resources

Rinku, from Barokshakua village, and the three vocal EKATA leaders, from Purba Chatnai, demonstrated confidence in relation to using their new found asset management skills as emerging entrepreneurs in their communities. Rinku decided to expand her skill-based by attending a three-day workshop on her own, unaccompanied. Prior to SHOUHARDO she had never left the house. Similarly, EKATA leaders from Purba Chatnai left their homes to establish key relationships necessary to establish their business, such as the buyer. Despite dramatic changes in their levels of confidence and mobility, choices and decisions related to their business lacked the maturity necessary to sustain themselves after SHOUHARDO's departure. For example, in the EKATA group case, they had not made effective decisions related to their assets as they chose a livelihood activity (box-making) that produced irregular incomes based on occasional demands from the merchants. Before starting the business a market survey is necessary in order to demand a product with readily available raw materials.

Interestingly, in both cases, these new entrepreneurs had come in with higher capacities. In Rinku's case, her mother who was a widow not only set a strong example, as a single woman successfully managing a household, she also encouraged Rinku to develop skills on her own. Similarly, the EKATA leaders had the encouragement of past experiences. All three leaders had been involved in previous income generation activities through NGOs such as Concern and BRAC. When SHOUHARDO began, experience and skills had been instilled in them.

Emerging confidence and skills helped EKATA groups secure access to resources in a variety of ways. With support from the community/field facilitators, ten EKATA members joined by a VDC representative secured 25 VGD cards from the UP chairman, in Murikandi village. The EKATA informants felt that procuring 25 cards for their village was a success, despite the fact that there were a total of 266 eligible recipients.

Similarly, an active EKATA member demanded attention from the family welfare visitor in Purba Chatnai, during her regular office hours. In the past, the family welfare visitor generally stayed in her room above the clinic with the clinic door closed and claimed that she was out of stock. The community/field facilitator

followed up with a visit explaining the relevance of EKATA's demands in reference to their rights. Previously the family welfare visitor claimed that she did not receive medicine from the central government when in fact she sold the medicine in the black market.

Agency - or women's decision-making through choices from available options - is accomplished when women carry out analysis, generally facilitated through EKATA processes. Such analysis appears to have enabled women to carry out actions that are both informed and collectively deliberated. SHOUHARDO recipients demonstrated agency at the collective level, through EKATA, across the four EKATA sites. The most dramatic change was apparent in women's reports of increased mobility, marked by events such as going to the market, trainings or to school outside the village parameter. While indicators show that women's agency increased there is more evidence that it did so at the collective level rather than the individual level where social norms play a strong role in limiting women's decision-making and choice.

Discussion

The findings in this section reveal that women and girls are more likely to exert agency in cases where some level of agency existed and the immediate household environment is enabling to her. For example, Rinku's mother, a widow as she was growing up, was a strong example of a successful woman who had supported Rinku's education interests. Similarly, the EKATA leaders who formed a self help group to develop a small box-making business had received previous training through other NGO efforts.

Agency claims, at the collective level, were more evident than those at the individual level. For example, while the practice of dowry is rejected within the EKATA groups, many EKATA members discretely exchange dowry for their daughters. Similarly, early marriage is prohibited within the EKATA ethos but nonetheless reinforced by parents who believe a girl should be married as soon as she begins menstruating. For this reason, it is not clear the extent to which group level agency influences (or is in the process of being adapted to influence) individual level agency.

The role of men, in SHOUHARDO's women's empowerment activities appears unstable. On the one hand the dominant father who restricts his daughter from attending school may not be adequately challenged. On the other hand men and boys encounter heavy handed EKATA approaches to deal with their undesirable behavior. For example, the 'naughty boys' and polygamous husbands, considered deviant and treacherous, in the eyes of their wives face EKATA collectives that use shame and fear appeals to regulate their behavior. By invoking the law, to enact desired behavior change, transformative change will not evolve. Agency can not be won if it is done at the expense of another or in isolation.

6.3 Relationships

Relationships were examined at three levels- household, internal (within EKATA), and external (outside EKATA) such as the VDC, standing committees, Union Parishad and services. The findings show that changes at the household level are more difficult to change than internal group changes, within EKATA. In some cases girls' relationships with their parents became more open. By and large, however, girls remained largely deferential to their parents' wishes. EKATA members' capacities to accommodate and cooperate within the group represented the biggest challenge evident at the internal group level. Leadership attributes supporting group members was not apparent. EKATA's relationships to external actors such as standing committees, VDC, and the union parishad vary. When elite men are represented in the VDC or union parishad, EKATA members often fall back in an acquiescent role, rather than claiming their rights, as in the VGD case. Initial steps to build partnerships, with formal governing structures such as the Union Parishad, have taken place through standing committees. However, these structures are not influential since they are largely not operating.

6.3.1 Adolescence and empowerment

The CARE Bangladesh empowerment framework focuses on agency, relationships and structure as an analytical framework. Accordingly, this section explores girls' education, reflected in SO3. Relationships within the household, in relation to the girls' education cases, reveal that those girls who garnered support from EKATA, usually through their mother or sister-in-law, had a better chance of attending school. Unlike the four girls who did not enroll in school, the two school-going girls also reported that one or more 'champions' among female family members advocated for their decision to go to school. For example, Ruma's sister-in-law (Murikandi village) persuaded her husband and Ruma's parents to allow Ruma to attend school. She, herself, had graduated from class 10 and was respected within her family and community. EKATA members provided hardware for income generation activities to offset the cost of Ruma's tuition. Ruma works in her families' business and attends Open University once a month. Her mother and sister-in-law helped with her household chores and prepared her food on the days she was at the Open University. Similarly, Akhter's mother was very enthusiastic about Akhter's education pursuits. When Akhter's father prohibited her from attending school, her mother solicited EKATA's support in convincing him to permit her go to school. In both these cases, SHOUHARDO represented a key catalyst to support the girls' education through these female figures, namely the mother or sister-in-law. In both cases, the girls had substantial family responsibilities to support household chores and livelihood needs. They were given time to study. Neighbors, aunts, or the sister-in-law were enrolled to support the girls' school attendance efforts by providing child care to younger siblings, preparing food, and working. Three of the girls, not

attending school, reported that they tried to persuade their parents but were unsuccessful.

Relationships at the house hold level, namely between girls and their parents, in the five early marriage cases revealed little communication between them. In the three cases in which girls were romantically involved with boys before marriage, parents were not aware of the relationship. Although she was not romantically involved with the boy she was betrothed to, Khairun did not indicate to her parents that she was too young to be married, both in terms of health ramifications and the eyes of the law. When asked why she did not discuss this with her parents, she reported,

I knew about the law, but I was not confident to tell my parents. How could I raise the point to my parents? I was shy. 14 year old, EKATA member

Similarly, Khairun did not discuss her marriage plans with the EKATA facilitator, despite their close relationship. As with her parents, Khairun reported that she was too shy to discuss marriage. In contrast, EKATA participants engaged in several discussions about early marriage among themselves. In two cases, with the support of the VDC, this led to EKATA actions which forcefully put an end to Khairun's marriage quite dramatically. Interestingly, at the group level, early marriage was forbidden in the eyes of EKATA and VDC. However, within the families, as seen in Khairun's relationship with her parents and EKATA members, it is less visible.

In Char Varot, a 14 year old girl gave birth to a baby girl 1.5 months prior to her interview. She was trying to get over the trauma of the loss of her child who was kidnapped at two that morning. According to her, she became pregnant by a neighboring young man. Several months back when she discovered she was pregnant, she had wanted to marry him. Although he was married, he had agreed to a short term marriage so that she could maintain chastity and the child could show paternity. As in the case of Khairun, however, Amina was not consulted and the decisions were left to the parents. A series of deliberations and legal threats against him ended when the child was stolen the morning of the interview. There were two stories narrated, among villagers, including the families involved. It was unclear which story was true-- whether the child was taken by the boy so that he could hide his paternity or whether the child was taken to be sold to someone associated with the sex industry or adoption agency.

Two boys, accused of eve teasing, were interviewed to better understand their perspectives on their relationships with girls in the communities. Both reported having romantic feelings for girls, but having few outlets through which to express themselves. They indicated that they would like to talk to girls but do not have occasions in which they can communicate.

A girl can not go outside the house like me. I did not see girls around since they are always staying inside the house. We could not talk to them. I did not feel happy. ... One time I wrote a letter and asked a friend to deliver the letter to the girl. She wrote back and nobody found out.... If they would discover this, it would be a miserable condition. Young man, Purba Chatnai

In the three eve teasing cases reported, EKATA members engaged directly with the boys to redress boys' behavior. In Purba Chatnai, girls responded to eve teasing by arguing with the boys collectively. The adult EKATA members sharply reprimanded the boy using hard-hitting obscenities. According to the girls, this stopped the unwanted behavior. In another case, from another village, one of the EKATA members used a different approach. Like the other EKATA members she scolded the boy using heavy handed language. After becoming exacerbated with his refusal to change, she used a conciliatory tactic. That is, she began to develop a relationship with the boy by sharing her concern about his behavior while also expressing an interest in his life and future. They spoke for several hours, which led to a mutual understanding. He felt dignified and was never reported eve teasing a girl thereafter.

6.3.2 Violence and Women

In the two verbal divorce cases, the wives relied heavily on EKATA to negotiate on their behalf. One case also relied on her natal family to negotiate the terms of their relationship with her husband. In both cases the wife appeared somewhat passive in her negotiations with her husband. EKATA acquired a written statement from the husbands ensuring that they would remain with their wives and support their families.

Within EKATA, women agreed to take individual cases, such as these forward as a collective group. Collaborative relationships between the VDC and EKATA groups helped promote cooperation between them VDC members indicated that they would not engage in women's empowerment cases but rather preferred to leave such cases in the hands of EKATA. This not only demonstrated mutual cooperation, but also trust in the way EKATA managed cases. VDC would get involved in cases when a problem arose or a resolution could not be found. While EKATA members repeatedly demonstrated stalwart commitment to these cases, they demanded extensive attention and time from EKATA members, the community/field facilitators and in one case, the UP chairman. Emotional engagement to reconcile the marital problems represented a heavy burden to everyone drawn into the cases, including the husbands. As one Shireen's husband claimed,

I was shocked, confused... and for a man, like me there was shame. Who are these EKATA women? they appear at my door. Husband with second wife, Murikandi

EKATA's relationships with external actors mediating between the woman, EKATA and the UP were tenuous. For example, the Nari Najantan groups existed in all of the sites, but were largely inactive. When the researchers met with Nari Najantan, the members were not able to identify when they last met, what their roles were and the general Nari Najantan mandate. Similarly, standing committees for women's repression and girls' education reportedly existed. However, there was little if any activity that emerged from these groups.

Those involved in negotiating dowry liabilities and commitments did not include the girls. Because no cases were identified which could be attributed to dowry-related violence, dowry negotiation practices were not elicited. However, EKATA members expressed commitment to negotiate the non-use of dowry before girls are married. One member said that her EKATA group discussed the pros and cons of dowry and concluded that they were against it since it was against the law.

Instead of being grounded in EKATA groups, the women's empowerment activities in Char Varot village, were placed in the hands of the technical officer who visited the village at least once a week. She had an excellent rapport with the villagers and was genuinely committed to supporting women's empowerment. They placed their trust in her with very complicated cases. The Nari Najantan committee had been established but was non-operational. Because there was no other system in place, the women's empowerment activities revolved around the technical officer who made key decisions in relation to the cases. For example, it was the technical officer who advised the parents to file a rape case against the neighboring boy after getting an ultrasound. This led to a series of actions and ultimately the kidnapping of her infant.

6.3.3 Control over resources

Asset management through income generation helped to engender confidence in building relationships with those in EKATA as well as outside EKATA such as the buyers and sellers of a business. Their relationship to the market, however, is questionable. As described earlier Rinku, from Boroshakoa relied heavily on the VDC secretary who controlled the relationship with the embroidery buyer. She and other women in Boroshakoa did not know how to access her buyer. EKATA group members in Gastalghat, engaged in a cooperative shoe-box making business were earning more than what they could earn as laborers. They are nonetheless working middle men who are greatly affecting their profit.

While these entrepreneurs exhibited self-assurance, their new-found confidence was not always accompanied by cooperative engagement with their peers. For example, Rinku made a profit from her stitching business. She uses a part of her profit to lend to others in her community and charges an interest rate well over the market rate. She has also begun to sell insurance. With thirty insurance policies sold, she has made a sizeable profit. When asked whether she can ensure that the insurance policies are legitimate and cost-effective for her clients,

she could not say that the policies helped poor households manage their income risk.

The efforts to secure access to resources, in the case of VGD card allocation, prompted several EKATA members to establish relationships with the VDC and UP chairman. As mentioned earlier, this EKATA group, in Murikandi village, was well versed in their rights to food security and that the government, through the UP Chairman, was responsible to realize these rights. EKATA members approached the UP chairman and paraphrased the following:

EKATA member: On behalf of all, as you know, there are many hard core poor that don't have land, income and many children. We request that you give VGD cards to the poor in our village.

UP chairman: There are many poor in other villages so I have limitations, but can give some cards.

EKATA member: Please consider how many you can spare. We would appreciate your generosity.

The above dialogue reveals EKATA's shift in posture when approaching powerful elite, in this case the UP chairman. While going to the chairman took courage, EKATA's fainthearted approach was inconsistent with their level of knowledge and awareness of their rights described earlier. The manner in which they approached the UP chairman reflected a pleading tone as if the cards and money belonged to him personally. When asked why they did not demand that all 266 VGD cards be distributed among the poor and extreme poor, they said they were happy with what they received and that the UP chairman has financial burdens to contend with. Several informants reported that in order to get VGD cards, recipients were still obliged to pay between 3000 to 6000 taka for one VGD card. Others who received one of the 25 cards distributed claimed that they did not have to pay a bribe and have no trouble receiving their monthly rice allotment.

Villagers were unable to identify a women's empowerment case involved in accessing resources in Char Varot village.

Discussion

The relationships described in the case studies reveal the advances made through women's empowerment activities, primarily through EKATA. The findings show that relationships within the family and village elites have been the most difficult to change. Young girls still defer to their parents, or remain silent. In general, she is not consulted, even in relation to decisions directly affecting her. Although women are approaching village elites (VDC, UP), unlike they had known before, they tend to acquiesce to elites' interests, even when their concerns reflect legitimate rights claims. Relationships among EKATA members, within the group, do not value mutual interests, as described in Rinku's case. Many of the cases described progress unconstructively into protracted

engagement accompanied with heavy laden emotions, turbulent episodes with problems that have the potential to deplete one's internal resources. Despite the best of intentions, the technical officer in Char varot and the field/community facilitators in the other sites function as case managers and respected extended family members to many women in crisis. Moreover, these relationships are often laden with emotions and draw her attention away from broader empowerment priorities.

6.4 Structure

This study looks at two aspects of structural change. One is concerned with social norms and the other with institutional changes. Social structures, defined by social norms and values, have been the slowest to change in SHOUHARDO. One of the most striking aspects of SHOUHARDO's program is its use of two contradictory behavior and social change tactics. On the one hand, EKATA uses dialogue to build up a critical perception of the social, cultural, political and economic forces that structure reality. Perhaps unwittingly, SHOUHARDO also relies heavily on fear appeals accomplished by invoking the law to threaten alleged perpetrators of violence and their families. While these appeals seem to have had some effect, they may do so at the cost of building relationships, transparency, and lasting change. Moreover, they may have an immediate visible impact, but it is unlikely that structural changes would sustain after the life of the project.

SHOUHARDO participants have seen some changes in social norms. Social acceptance of women's mobility outside the home has been dramatic. Some examples of girls re-enrolling in school and postponing their marriage are promising. Community-level changes are observed through collective action activities to support women who have survived violence. However, as evidenced in the examples below, changes at the household level are less evident.

Institutional changes are evident in terms of representation. Through SHOUHARDO efforts, women are represented to a greater extent than had been seen before. However, women have not contributed in genuine ways through active inclusion in the VDCs and SDCs examined. In terms of standing committees, many women reported that they were represented on such committees. However, these committees were inactive. Perhaps this demonstrates that it is too early to expect changes beyond greater representation of women.

The Ekata approach uses reflective practices to both raise awareness and act on structural norms. According to the respondents, SHOUHARDO does not use conventional structural-change approaches such as sponsoring campaigns, changing or influencing laws, or implementing advocacy tactics and strategies.

6.4.1 Adolescence and empowerment

At the institutional level, SHOUHARDO has set up committees to support girls' education through which women can advocate for change. Parent-teachers association (PTA) committees and the school management committees (SMC) represent important institutions to this end. The aim of PTA committees is to address children's education needs to prevent drop outs and poor performance. The findings reveal that while these committees exist, they are not active. One teacher, in Purba Chatnai, reported that he does not know what takes place at these meetings since he never attended one. He also reported that people list their names to demonstrate their attendance, but that the meetings do not in fact take place. When CARE staff were asked about this, one reported that the PTA committees were launched only six months back which may be why their influence is not yet apparent.

In terms of cultural norms and values, EKATA members across the four EKATA sites reported a commitment to promoting girls education. Two out of six adolescent EKATA members had re-enrolled in school with the support of their mothers. One was not interested in going to school. The remaining three had succumbed to family pressures and stayed home. As illustrated earlier, Sonia had attended school through the support of her mother. After her mother died, her father insisted that she stay home to look after her younger siblings and take care of family needs such as cooking and cleaning. Sonia was troubled by her father's reaction. She had hoped to convince her father that her siblings – aged 10 and 13 – and her aunt could help with household duties. EKATA members also tried to persuade her father until her father reluctantly agreed. Unfortunately, the social pressure to present herself as the dutiful daughter outweighed Sonia's desire to return to school. She told the interviewers that while her father agreed to let her attend school, he did not express his consent genuinely which led her to turn down his gesture. When asked about learning a trade for income generation purposes, Sonia stated that learning a skill should be left to poorer girls in the slum. Interestingly, Taslima, the EKATA facilitator, corroborated with Sonia's gendered beliefs that while it would be nice if she could attend school, she had a larger obligation to her family.

Sonia is doing much in the community and it is much appreciated. She has good leadership qualities. I respect her sacrifice. We salute her sacrifice to her family. what she has done is consider the future of her brother and sister and the poorest girls in the community. EKATA Facilitator, Gastalghat Slum

Instead of challenging Sonia's gendered beliefs of a girl's role, Taslima reinforced the belief that a girl's primary responsibility is to the family's well-being. As Sonia's story implies, EKATA established the value of girls pursuing an education within the EKATA group. At the individual household level, however, the belief that girls have household responsibilities weighed heavier in three cases.

With the support of the community facilitators, EKATA stopped two early marriage cases, in Murikandi and Barashakua villages, by threatening families with filing a legal case against them and by summoning the police. In both cases, the VDC members worked together with EKATA to prevent the marriages from taking place. In Khairun's case, the community facilitator went with VDC and EKATA members to Khairun's house on the day of her marriage. The father pleaded with them and tried to get a false birth certificate which they precluded by calling the Kazi and UP chairman. The father finally agreed to postpone the marriage when they threatened to file a case against him. While he agreed that he had done a mistake, he also reported that he would get his daughter married once there is less attention on the case.

In all three eve teasing cases, EKATA members threatened to file cases against the accused boys and calling the police. There were no complaints of eve teasing, by the girls in the communities, after this. Nonetheless, girls are threatened, particularly inside the home when guardians are away. One young woman, involved in EKATA, confronted the young man who entered her house without invitation. She demanded that he leave. She also shared this event with her father who spoke with his parents. Similarly, in the non-EKATA village, a neighboring boy entered the hut of a 14-year old girl on repeated occasions. In contrast, this young girl was unable to resist his overtures the first time he approached her. The following five encounters were described as friendship encounters, after which she became pregnant.

There are some parents who want girls to get married early because they are afraid to let them go out. Parents are worried about those stupid boys who tease them and then offer them love. If people in the community see [a romance taking place], they spread a scandal across the community which affects her marriage prospects. EKATA Facilitator, Gastalghat Slum

The above quote illustrates that a girl's honor is at stake when eve teasing incidents occur. Honor, in this context, is defined by a girl's ability to maintain her chastity.

As the stories and quote above illustrate, girls are not necessarily safer at home than on the road as they walk to school. This illustrates that sexual harassment is not confined to the roadside, but includes her home. The two young eve-teasers interviewed did not appear to be delinquent, but rather having genuine interest in talking to girls their own age. They were eager to have normal relationships with girls, which they did not know how to develop. They got the girls' attention through seemingly subversive means. In this context, it is unclear whether girls really needed protection but rather a voice and safe shared spaces in which boys and girls could communicate.

6.4.2 Violence and Women

As mentioned earlier, fear appeal through legal threats is a widespread practice in the five study sites. These threats were not always acted upon. In the cases that they were, the outcome was devastating as illustrated in two cases where EKATA was not driving the women's empowerment work. Chihena's parents filed a dowry case against her husband in order to recover her medical costs. According to her uncle, Chihena's husband had not repaid them. UP members had taken money from each side of the family but her family was unsatisfied. They thought that filing cases on dowry, domestic violence and dower would be a quick and easy way to acquire the money they had hoped he would hand over to them. Shohidul spent over 120 days in prison for these three offenses where he was regularly beaten because he did not pay his in-laws for his wife's medical costs. Domestic violence crimes are non-bailable offenses which do not require proof. That is boys and men are found guilty as soon as they are charged.

The Amina's baby was forcefully taken from her the morning of her interview. It was believed that the baby's father sent his brothers to remove the child in order to conceal his paternity since a rape case was filed against him. The technical officer had advised Amina's family to file the case since the baby's father had not agreed to marry her or provide her with financial support. These two cases reveal the extent to which using the law can lead to serious ramifications.

EKATA, the VDC and UP chairman (in two cases), threatened husbands with filing legal cases against them if they did not reconcile with their wives. It was felt that the husbands would not change their behavior and agree to maintain their wives unless they use fear appeals as the quote below illustrates.

I think that only through talking... and threatening with the law, so they are scared... no other way can we work with men. (female) UP Chairman, Murikandi Village

Specifically, the husbands who had second wives were asked to divorce the second wives and send maintenance funds to their first wives while working in Dhaka. In both cases, through EKATA support, the husbands divorced the second wife and are sending remittances to the village regularly. The two husbands who gave verbal divorces were persuaded to accept their wives back home and retract their intention to divorce their wives.

In Murikandi village the UP chairman became quite involved in two of the cases. In Shireen's polygamy case, for example, the UP Chairman began the process of filing a legal case against Shireen's husband which prompted the husband to visit the UP chairman to request that the case be dropped. As described earlier, he then agreed to do as EKATA demanded, namely to divorce his second wife and send remittance. In both the verbal divorce and polygamy cases EKATA relied heavily on invoking the law to influence the husbands' behavior.

Within the context of EKATA, women who once were not able to leave their homes built solidarity groups through reflection and dialogue. It is difficult to determine, however, to what extent social and behavioral changes occurred, such as increased mobility and using laws to support their cases, as a result of EKATA activities or as a result of other social influences. Perhaps what is most striking is the extent to which policies do attempt to support women's best interest. All cases identified across the five sites took the women's side, despite appeals made by the men. The norms that had not changed and need examination are those related to the second wife. Sanctioned divorces and abandonment of the second wives do not reflect just alternatives consistent with a woman's empowerment agenda.

It is not surprising that all the women interviewed were interested in reconciling with their husbands, since the social norm to be married is strong. The concept of a woman supporting herself and family in cases where reconciliation is not possible has not been explored through EKATA. Indeed, sustainability of the marital reconciliation agreements forged by SHOUHARDO's support, namely but not only through EKATA is questionable. For example, in the four cases addressing verbal divorce or polygamy, the prospect of any of them to fall into the same circumstances is relatively high placing the woman's economic security at risk once again. According to interviews with husbands, husbands reluctantly and begrudgingly agreed to EKATA's edicts. Whether EKATA can or should police men's behavior, after the resolution, is questionable. But close follow up of the women's situation is called for. While a single woman's existence is difficult, the option for women to support themselves without dependence on husbands does not appear to be a focus EKATA groups have considered. Stigma against single women has not been acknowledged, through reflective exercises and awareness messages.

6.4.3 Control over resources

In terms of structural changes in the asset management cases, several changes at the institutional level evolved. Rinku and the EKATA leaders at Purba Chatnai became independent from men by controlling their links to the market on their own. However, it is unclear whether they were able to control raw materials. Since only one person was supplying materials, prices did not appear competitive. However, because they were unable to enter the competitive market, they felt content with what they could get. This, however, may not be a sustainable model. Perhaps most importantly, as discussed in the previous section on 'relationships', is the lack of leadership emerging from the groups. In this Purba Chatnai case, three domineering women control the flow of assets. The other members involved in the IGA activities do not have a sense of ownership. Norms around accountability and equity do not reflect cooperation and adaptation.

Norms regarding their ability to secure VGD cards based on their universal right is understood. However, 'rights' are not evoked when negotiating with elites as in the case of the UP chairman and the VGD cards. EKATA members appeared to have been satisfied with the distribution of 25 cards though they were eligible for more. Speaking to a male from a higher class commands deference and obedience. They spoke with the UP chairman as if he, himself, owned the cards which he gave to the villagers out of his generosity rather than his responsibility.

It is important to note the extent of women's engagement regarding institutional changes. This is particularly evident in women's engagement through SDCs and VDCs as well as standing committees. Out of the five study sites, only one had a woman development-committee president. According to the MTR, the V/SDCs must consist of a woman-led development committee represented as either the president or vice-president. In Gastalgat slum, the SDC president is a woman and focuses largely on women's empowerment issues such as violence against women. Not surprisingly, she was highly influenced by the reflective work conducted through EKATA. However, she was not equipped to focus on rights and empowerment focus issues beyond women's rights. While placing women's rights on the SDC agenda is a huge achievement, much more work is necessary to work, as a leader, on the slum's broader issues.

In the other four VDCs, the president positions are held by men, two of which are held by non-poor males. In all four VDCs, the women appeared to be marginalized. That is, during the community consultations and focus group discussions, only men responded to the questions. When asked why women were not getting opportunities to speak, the men said that women do not want to talk since it is a part of Bangladeshi culture. Not surprisingly, each of the collective-action initiatives is led by a man. In the four VDCs, the vice president positions are held by women. While their voices are stronger than other female SHOUHARDO participants as VDC position-holders, they do not lead initiatives, sway opinions, or make decisions. EKATA women are stronger than women members or position-holders in the VDC. EKATA members lead initiatives within their mandate; they have a voice and lead decision-making processes as seen in several examples throughout the report.

Discussion

The use of fear to appeal to one's better sense may provide short term gains, but will ultimately lead to detrimental long term effects. Several cases demonstrated that EKATA unwittingly produced embittered husbands-- either because they were forced to take actions against their will (such as divorce their second wife) or be unjustly imprisoned. Such interventions do not lead to changes in men's behavior, but may result in criticism and counterattack.

In terms of social norms, several changes have emerged on the surface, most visible at the community level. However, social norms related to girls' education, early marriage, dowry, and single vs. married women still reflect individuals' beliefs at the household level.

Institutional changes occurred at the level of women's representation on the VDCs, SDCs and standing committees. While this is a big accomplishment, SHOUHARDOs success will depend on whether women will play a larger governance role in the months and years to come.

Leadership is at a nascent stage. While several EKATA members show confidence, leadership to ensure accountability and cooperation with the larger group is lacking.

Examination of EKATA vs. non-EKATA sites revealed stark differences between the two. The non-EKATA site fared poorly in promoting women's empowerment. Women not only reported limited knowledge and awareness of their rights, cases were poorly managed through the technical officer from the PNGO. Not only were legal threats used to control men's behavior, two threats had been carried through. One man was charged with rape and the other charged with dowry, domestic violence and dower. A nari nijantan group was established but non-functional. Women were overly dependent on the technical officer who was extremely committed and hard working.

PNGO staff have to ensure that women play a genuine role beyond that of being a position-holder. They should be seen to raise their voice on women's rights issues as well as community issues that are concerns expressed by both men and women.

7. Recommendations

The findings, from the five study-sites, reveal that SHOUHARDO did much to improve women's empowerment particularly at the level of knowledge, awareness, mobility and agency at the community level. More work is necessary to ensure that "group-level" changes related to choice, decision-making and social norms become evident at the house hold level. Only when this occurs can SHOUHARDO ensure that changes will be sustained over time.

EKATA's influence cannot be underestimated. This is particularly evident by comparing EKATA and non-EKATA inputs. The village that did not receive EKATA inputs dealt with violence cases inadequately, resulting in grave consequences. Not only did these villages rely heavily on fear-appeals, by using legal threats against boys, men and their families, they acted on the threats. As a result, two families had been seriously affected. In one case, a young husband endured repeated jail sentences after being wrongly accused of dowry and other offenses and in the other family a baby was taken from a 14 year old mother.

This section is not arranged according to recommendations that are specific to framework components. Instead, the recommendations are holistic as they include elements that will strengthen women's empowerment according to agency, relationship and structure together. The researchers developed these recommendations to ensure that women's empowerment achievements would be sustained. Indeed, sustainability is ensured only when social norms have shifted at the household level, when institutions authentically integrate gender equality, and when financial security secures the evolution of women's empowerment work—in this case EKATA groups.

It should be noted that women's empowerment can not be achieved in three years. Several more years are necessary before women's empowerment will be sustained over time. For this reason, the EKATA approach should be applied throughout SHOUHARDO to ground the women's empowerment work. In the site where EKATA was not implemented, the program was anchored in the hands of the technical advisor which created an unmanageable workload. Moreover, Saksham should ensure that sufficient time is spent on reflective work since this will be the core work necessary to change social norms. In so doing, reflective work, as envisaged in EKATA, should extend to men and boys through the VDC/SDCs.

EKATA groups can be graduated by establishing them as formal community based organizations. Stronger organizational development inputs are necessary to this end. To ensure sustainability, as articulated in SO3, more work should be done to link EKATA circles with women's networks in Bangladesh.

Enhancing leadership skills is necessary for EKATA groups to sustain themselves. One should not confuse confidence among EKATA members with empowerment or leadership. Leadership capacities should emphasize the leader's role as *steward* of the resources (human, financial and otherwise) provided by EKATA. Such leaders should cooperate with others while staying focused on achieving results in line with EKATA values and integrity.

In the last decade Bangladesh has responded to violence against women within a law-and-order framework, which focuses on victims, through the criminal court. Community facilitators and EKATA members use fear appeals by invoking the law to engage men in behavior change. This not only overlooks gendered norms in the way women experience violence, but also focuses on harm done rather than addressing the nature in which VAW takes place. An empowerment approach rather than law-and-order demands a closer focus on the structural causes that underlie violence beyond the injury in the violence cases. The EKATA structure, using reflective practices, is the ideal platform in which to do this.

The authors suggest that SHOUHARDO move away from orienting the program around victims through case management. Key strengths of the EKATA model

may be lost if empowerment activities, through participatory exercises such as the use of CAPs will be replaced with more urgent needs demanded by individual case management activities. Managing cases are time intensive and focus largely on “protecting” victims. Case management responds to violence by focusing on protecting the victim (in need of rescue) and draws attention away from prevention work that should address underlying causes of violence to ensure structural changes.

Revisiting SO3 may be warranted. Narrowing your focus on the second sub-objectives may be considered. While there is little discussion on resolving violence against women cases, much of SHOUHARDO’s women’s empowerment efforts are focused on that. While knowledge and awareness have largely improved, work must be done on addressing obstacles to changing behavior. For example, girls who know about the benefits of school, are not going to school because of socio-economic and cultural obstacles.

Community/field facilitators are the back-bone of SHOUHARDO. SHOUHARDO may consider assigning one community facilitator to no more than two sites so that proper attention is provided. Women’s empowerment, addressing violence, girls education, changing social norms, is a technical area. PNGO staff often feel ill-equipped to address women’s empowerment effectively, as seen in the syphilis case described earlier. More training key technical areas are warranted. As mentioned above, in-depth case management has consumed much of the community facilitator and technical officers’ time. Instead of playing the role of social workers, the community/field facilitators should support wide reaching empowerment processes inherent in the EKATA model. If case work is to be done, the community facilitator should shift responsibility of these cases to EKATA which can continue to play the *shalish* (conflict resolution) role, while not getting bogged down by cases.

In the women’s violence cases that were analyzed, economic insecurity appeared to be a key underlying factor. In all of the cases documented, women opted for reconciliation procedures. This would allow her to maintain her marital status and receive financial maintenance. Changing social norms around women’s economic independence, whether or not she is married, should be considered as an outcome. Violence cases – such as polygamy and verbal divorce – should receive priority IGA opportunities so she has the means to support herself and her children, even if it is in the guise of being married. This would allow her to remain economic viable in the face of being abandoned by her husband.

Encourage IGA activities to support collectivization which would not only support individual women’s needs but will help sustain EKATA circles. Ensure that economic independence with efficient market “know-how” allows women to run their own businesses free from village elites through established relationships with the market. A better understanding of the market, such as conducting a

market analysis, is necessary. This should be complicated by linking EKATA groups with regional and state-level NGOs and networks to ensure sustainability, quality, and ongoing maturity of the program.

Whether he is an eve teaser, restrictive father or husband who has taken a second wife, the male actor in several cases described above is insecure. In some cases he plays an authoritarian role with respect to decisions about his daughter's education. In other cases, he is seen as the "naughty boy" or "wayward husband." Women's empowerment initiatives will have less success if women are portrayed as 'victims' and men as 'villains.' Because women live side-by-side men it will not be possible to empower women if men are disempowered, particularly if their empowerment occurs at the expense of men's power.

Consistent with an empowerment approach (vs. a victim approach) there should be a zero tolerance for violence at any cost in the communities; this includes violence manifested by the state through ill conceived laws that are being abused such as the dowry law. As seen in many incidences, namely in EKATA villages, SHOUHARDO should encourage reconciliation if both parties agree. SHOUHARDO may also want to consider introducing reflective practices (as in EKATA) through the VDC.

Girls pay a large price for maintaining their chastity. An over-emphasis on protecting girls may in fact reinforce a victim identity. Perhaps the EKATA facilitators can help girls see themselves as pro-active actors in alliance with well meaning boys. Activities which normalize relationships between boys and girls, rather than targeting boys as predatory categories may go a long way in protecting girls on the road and in the home. The authors believe that boys' eve teasing is better addressed if boys can have their own space to deal with issues related to masculinity in terms of their own vulnerability and challenges to living up to the male ideal in Bangladeshi village communities.

Annex 1

Women’s Empowerment instrument

Changes over 3 years. Processes that led to (or impeded) changes

	KNOWLEDGE	ATTITUDES, AWARENESS	SKILLS, BEHAVIOR, PRACTICES		
			AGENCY - Girls/women exercising <u>choice</u> with available options	RELATIONSHIPS: Girls/women/men negotiating of needs and rights of women through <u>interdependence, cooperation</u> with others	STRUCTURE: Women/girls changing <u>institutions</u> (markets, education system, committees, gov), <u>norms</u> (socialized), <u>values</u> (religious/cultural) through active inclusion.
<p>Adolescent girls – education</p> <p>Early marriage</p> <p>Eaves teasing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Girls education improves well being; Negative effects of illiteracy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Son preference discriminates girls; Need for girls’ education Awareness that women have right to choose, decide, have options? Awareness that girls have education entitlement? Legal age of marriage 18 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are girls going to school where once they were not? How? What happened to bring about this change? Restrictions on girls’ Mobility lifted in past 3 years? How? What happened to bring about this change? Girls/mothers choice in marriage age (over 18) and partner? How? What happened to bring about this change? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> HH: changes (3 years) in relationship with mother, father and elders who now allow girls to have voice in family? to have time to study? How did change happened? What happened to bring about this change? Are girls now allowed to be mobile to attend school where 3 years before they were not? How? What happened to bring about this change? Internal: Adolescent girls able to negotiate within Ekata vis-à-vis family and other gatekeepers to attend school?; are girls involved in CAP participation meaningfully? External: are adolescent girls’ concerns represented in Women-child welfare standing committee, VDC, Ekota, UP? How do adolescent girls’ interests represented? How? What happened to bring about this change? Pourashova? Local alliances? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are mothers represented on PTA, NNPC, SMC to advocate for girls’ education? How? Are they effective? How? What happened to bring about this change? Changes in UP education policies for girls/women? How? What happened to bring about this change? Education of girls are valued evidenced by girls going to school and allowed to study. How? What happened to bring about this change? Changes in norms related to girls’ education

<p>VAW Abandonment (Verbal divorce, polygamy) Dowry</p>	<p>- Knowledge of legal instruments, entitlements; - Nari Nirjaton cell knowledge? Legal and social framework (statutory law)? Government's policy on the advancement of women?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocacy campaign-early marriage, dowry, marriage registration, inheritance?; • Choices available to women to have rights • Consciousness that women have right to choose, decide, have options • Women should be mobile? • Increase in age of marriage? • Dowry hurts women? • VAW should end? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self esteem? • marriage registration? • Inheritance? • Government's policy on the advancement of women? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do girls women have choice around marriage? Increase in age of marriage? • Choice not to be married with Dowry? <p>Choice to encounter violence (e.g. complain to Ekata group, solidarity, get justice through shalish/UP/husband or other? How? What happened to bring about this change?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self esteem? • In past 3 years, has there been change in marriage registration? • Over 3 years, have women claim Inheritance? Alimony? Child custody? How? What happened to bring about this change? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HH: are women able to negotiate with husband, in-laws? E.g. Negotiate marriage without dowry? E.g. negotiation child custody? <p>Have these changed over 3 years? How? What happened to bring about this change? Has VAW reduced in past 3 years? How? What happened to bring about this change? Internal: women able to negotiate through Ekata to influence shalish? UP? Standing committee? How? What happened to bring about this change?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CAP participation on VAW? <p>What relationships do you have with Nari Nirjaton cell? How? What happened to bring about this change? External: ekata's relationship with Regional/national network linkages (SARC, dept of women affairs, ministry of women/children, municipal affairs (mahila parishads) ? relationships with BLAST, ASK built over past three years? How? What happened to bring about this change?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In past 3 years, Ekata women represented in Nari Nirjaton cell (standing committees)? Effective contributors? How? What happened to bring about this change? <p>In past 3 years, changes in UP policies related to women's rights/VAW? How? What happened to bring about this change? Examples? Is there now more access to justice (i.e. shalish) over past 3 years? How? What happened to bring about this change? Examples? Are ekata women represented on UP? Are they effective? How? What happened to bring about this change?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Norms changed over three years: taboo to discuss vaw openly changed? Perceptions of single women?
<p>Control over resources</p>	<p>knowledge of asset management and market link (eg. Shoe making, caps, fish net, rugs) - entitlement to resources (e.g. VGD card, education, health services)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women's entitlements; • Right to assets? (e.g. land, livestock, HH assets); • Okay for women to be Entrepreneurs? • Analyze problems and opportunities; • Consciousness of interdependence with others? • Awareness of power relations related to access to entitlements and how to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choices (and opportunities) over assets/employment? Eg. Inheritance land, livestock, HH assets? Has your Confidence increased over the past three years? • Have Women chosen entrepreneurship (#, 3-year change, contribution to family income)? • Advocacy campaign (land/water access, fishing rights, eviction, etc) at multiple levels. 	<p>HH: Has relationship changed with Husband in past 3 years in relation to resource access and control? How? in-laws? How? Internal: Describe relationship with Self help group members? What negotiations and adjustments were made? What challenges? How are the dynamics played out among members in relation to power, control?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationship to market? <p>External: VDC/SDC/UP—describe examples of ways women in Ekota negotiated resources for</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe examples in which women are now in control over assets/employment (e.g. market link,)? • Control over institutions controlling resources—e.g. UP, standing committees, VDC, etc. • UP policy changes on women and resources • Examples of changes in social norms related to women's access to resources

		manage power	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community level decisions/choices regarding entitlements (education, VGD card, health, other) • Develop action plans to mobilize resources 	women/girls/children through these bodies for entitlements (e.g. VDG, health, education, PTA, IGA)?	
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Annex 2

Select CASE Studies

Amina of Char Varot Village Shoulmari, Nilphamari, Rangpur Illegal relationship

Amina had an “illegal relationship” with her neighbor (Asador) who is 26 and married with three children. She described their first sexual encounter as one in which he used force (in her house when parents were gone). The other encounters were consensual and described as “friends”. She wanted to marry him to which he agreed. Through the marriage, they had hoped to give paternity to the child and maintain her chastity, after which he would divorce here. The parents filed a case against Asador upon suggestion of Sharifa, the Community Facilitator of the partner NGO. Asador’s family gave 30,000 taka to the UP to resolve the case. According to Amina he was told to flee. Amina’s family gave the UP 7,000 taka. She feels that her case was not adequately addressed by the UP. Amina’s uncle wanted to file a case so he and the girl’s father lodged a case. On the morning of her interview, Amina’s 1.5 month baby was kidnapped, allegedly by Asador’s brother and two other men. According to villagers, the parents agreed to settle the case for 50,000 taka. They said that the 1.5 month girl was sold for 50,000 taka.

Chihena of Char Varot Village Shoulmari, Nilphamari, Rangpur False Dowry

Chihena was married to Shohidul for 2.5 years and have no children. Shohidul had grown distant from his parents. He stayed in same house, but separated cooking and other activities. Chihena’s parents took her home since she had a ‘woman’s disease’. They thought someone cast a spell on chihena. When Chihena went to doctor, he advised that she avoid conjugal relations with her husband which would worsen the disease. Shohidul went back to her home repeatedly with the aim to bring her back. Shohidul was obliged to pay for her Manohar but he never came up with the money. Chihena’s family filed three cases against him because he did not give money as agreed. They filed a dowry, Manohar and violence case against him. As a result, Shohidul was placed in prison three times, without bail.

China of Murikandi Village, Niamatpur Union, Karimgonj Verbal divorce

China is 31 years old and has two boys (14 years and 11 years) and one girl (six years). Her husband, Rafik, did not have money so he purchased rice on credit from his neighbor. When his neighbor came to collect the money, China suggested that Rafik go fishing to pay off the rice. Rafik got angry and began to run after her but could not capture her which prompted him to yell a verbal divorce. He felt frustrated, angry and dishonored. Sunjita, an Ekata member, was passing by when this occurred. Sunjita, along with Ekota facilitator and Champa

(UP member) came to meet Rafik. They helped to reconcile the marriage encouraging them not to recognize the divorce.

Kirun of Murikandi Village, Niamatpur Union, Karimgonj

Early marriage

Kirun was only 15 when she was to be married six months earlier. Her paternal uncle wanted his son to marry Kirun while he was still alive. Her father, Ali Hussein, agreed. While she knew that she was too young for marriage, she didn't disclose the marriage arrangement to the Ekata facilitator. She said she was afraid to tell anyone. Ali Hussein said, "my daughter didn't want to get married. But she has to obey me. That's why she said I agree." Kirun had a poor understanding of why she should not get married, which related primarily to the law. Ekata became involved with this case after discussing it with the VDC committee members. They sent two members to Kirun's house who was preparing to get married. The Kazi prevented the marriage as he was instructed by the UP not to give false birth registration. Father joked with the interviewer implying that he would get her married soon. Kirun is not interested in attending school. She said that she has too many household duties. "I have little time to go to school. And I'm not so interested." In terms of her dowry, her family was planning to exchange gifts after the dull season when crops would flourish. Now-a-days dowry exchange is made by parents' assets (suitcase, furniture, bed, bed sheet, etc.). Although Ekata members reported that there is no dowry in the village, Ali Hussein took a loan of 40,000 taka.

Rinku Ravi Dev of Baroshakua village, Korgao Union, Hobiganj thana

Income generation business owner

Rinku got married, to a street vendor, eleven years ago. She has two boys. Rinku's mother was very influential as successful entrepreneur, although she was a widow. Rinku received handi-craft training through SHOUHARDO, which catalyzed her success. Bisheajit, the VDC Secretary, is the link between her and the buyer. A male relative invited her to the VDC which gave her confidence. She opened a bank account for a fixed deposit scheme and saves 100 taka per month. Rinku went to an embroidery training in Sylett which she thought was for only one day. She returned after three days which made her husband angry. He beat her at which time she took shelter in a neighbor's house. The VDC president talked to the husband to persuade him that she should get training. He threatened to go to the police if he restricts his wife a gain. Rinku has become an insurance agent for 31 clients. She is also on health standing committee and EP standing committee.

Shireen of Murikandi Village, Niamatpur Union, Karimgonj

Polygamy

Shireen's has three daughters. Her husband (Abdul Halim) married a woman who is a distant relative, in part because he wanted a son. He had a daughter with him. Abdul stopped remitting money to his wife, in the village, from Dhaka.

Shireen agreed to let the second woman stay if he put the land in her name which he did. Despite transferring the house in her name, Shireen left the house with the three daughters there and moved in with her father. He divorced the second wife left who is believed to be working in a factory in Dhaka. Abdul Halim does not remit funds to her. Chompa, a female UP member, was very involved in solving the case. She made over 40 visits, with EKATA members and the facilitator. She had threatened to file a case against him. Abdul Halim came and implored that she withdraw the case and he would do she instructed.

Sonia of Gastalgat Slum, Bhairab, Haor

Drop-out adolescent girl

Sonia is the eldest of three children and completed 10th class and appeared for her exam. Her mother gave financial, physical, and moral support to Sonia to finish school. Her mother died last year. So Sonia is now responsible for the well-being of her younger sister and brothers who are 10, 15 and 13 years. Despite her large interest in school, Sonia's father advised her to stay home since he does not feel school would add value to the household needs and because he feels she should look after her younger siblings. He works as a carpenter, earning 200-250 taka per day. Sonia has an aunt who is willing to help with household duties so Sonia could attend school. Her younger siblings are old enough to contribute to household needs. Her father once told Sonia she could go to school. Sonia reluctantly dismissed the idea since she felt her father was not genuine in his permission to allow her to attend school and she felt obligated to stay home and attend to families concerns. Taslima, the Ekota facilitator, feels it is noble of Sonia to sacrifice her education for her family. She sees the role of 'the dutiful daughter' as a good characteristic.