The Problem at Hand

Spousal violence against women is a major issue in India, with 31% of women reporting that they have been victims of spousal violence in the past year (National Family Health Survey, 2015-16). Excessive consumption of alcohol by married males increases the likelihood of them engaging in spousal violence (WHO, 2006). This seems especially a concern among poor disadvantaged populations in rural India where there is a stark absence of recreational activities for married males to engage in after sunset. The poor disadvantaged population in the village of Mandra, located 50 kilometres from the city of Kolkata in India, is no exception, as is observed by the exodus of males at sunset to the local alcohol store in the market and subsequent return to the village inebriated commonly followed by acts of spousal violence. During my time conducting focus group discussions with this population, I learned that the two major unfulfilled demands that they had for alternative evening activities was for additional income-generating activity and infrastructure for recreational sports and games, in that order.

Program Description

Sondhe Holo, Khelte Cholo is a community engagement program that is aimed at engaging married males in poor disadvantaged communities in the village of Mandra in recreational sports and games and incentivize them to reduce the excessive consumption of alcohol and thus reduce the prevalence of spousal violence. This program provides individuals with an attractive and engaging alternative daily evening activity that does not involve alcohol. Additionally, the program provided monetary incentives to individuals to encourage sustained regular participation and also provide a tangible benefit for their abstinence from alcohol. The program strictly implemented the norm that anyone who is drunk will not be allowed to participate. This has made alcohol consumption an undesirable activity for the married male as he would not only be missing out on recreational sports and games with fellow community members but he would also lose an additional income opportunity. The dynamic incentives for participants were structured as follows:

- Rs. 50- for the first day of participation
- Rs. 100- for 1 week of continuous participation
- Rs. 150- for 1 month of continuous participation
- Rs. 200- for 2 months of continuous participation

The incentives are intentionally provided in a staggered fashion and for participation to ensure that there is sustained participation irrespective of how good an individual is at any game or sport.

The Role of This Grant

I requested a Davis Projects for Peace grant in order to engage married males in poor disadvantaged communities in recreational sports and games and incentivize them to reduce the excessive consumption of alcohol and consequently reduce the prevalence of spousal violence. Funds from this grant supported setting up the infrastructure for organizing the sports and games in the evenings in each hamlet of the village of Mandra, provision of dynamic monetary incentives for participation to encourage sustained regular attendance, and compensation for appropriately specialized teams for
awareness campaigns, conducting household surveys for impact evaluation and monitoring the activities each evening in each hamlet.

Role of Implementation Partner

The program was implemented in close collaboration with Mandra Unnayan Sansad (MUS), a village-based non-governmental voluntary organization in Mandra village established in 1957. MUS has worked over the past few decades in various capacities in the village to improve its socio-economic status, from establishing free hospitals, schools, creches and agricultural storage facilities to organizing women and elderly into self-help groups, creating awareness about sanitation and promoting sports and cultural activities. The good reputation of MUS among the people of Mandra and neighbouring villages made it possible to implement such a program that aims to bring about a change in the social and cultural behaviour in the village. MUS staff were designated to spread awareness about the program, provide monitoring and evaluation support and general oversight of the program.

Implementation Details

I spent the first 15 days making arrangements for the infrastructure for organizing the sports and games in the evenings in each hamlet of the village, which included selecting an appropriate location that is central and sheltered from possible rain, arranging for electricity, purchasing equipment such as carrom boards, playing cards, lights and fans. Subsequently, I spent the next 10 days training appropriately specialized teams amongst MUS staff for the awareness campaigns, conducting household surveys for impact evaluation and monitoring the activities each evening in each hamlet. Once these preparations were in place, awareness campaigns about the program started through door-to-door campaigns, mic announcements and leaflet distribution. Right after this, a survey was conducted with all those males who were interested in the program and their household members. After this was completed, the daily evening activities started for a period of 2 months. After these 2 months, MUS is overseeing the sustainability of this program through maintaining infrastructure and providing opportunities to participate in agricultural training, credit and other income-generating programs. Hence, the first 2 months of the program is aimed at creating a habit of engaging in recreational activity away from alcohol and aid the individuals to “graduate” their households to a higher income trajectory.

Impact and Outcomes

This program created a culture of evening sports and games in the Mandra village away from the current culture of excessive drinking and also improved the situation with regards to spousal violence. These were carefully measured through behavioural surveys with both male and female members of the households designed from my experience in impact evaluation of programs for social change in consultation with faculty in my department and conducted by appropriately trained and sensitized survey teams at MUS. The success of this program gives me confidence to approach policymakers at the district and state levels to implement similar programs and attract future funding to spread the program in many more areas.
Section II: Photographs