International House, UC Berkeley  
Student Name: Sayantan Mitra  
Project Name: Sondhe Holo, Khelte Cholo: It's Evening, Let's Play!  
Project Location: Mandra village, India

Problem Statement

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 aims to engage 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 will provide individuals with an attractive and engaging alternative daily evening activity that does not involve alcohol. Additionally, the program will provide monetary incentives to individuals to encourage sustained regular participation and also provide a tangible benefit for their abstinence from alcohol. The program will strictly implement the norm that anyone who is drunk will not be allowed to participate. The staff monitoring the program will take a call regarding this in consultation with an elderly community member and an office-bearer of the implementation partner. This is expected to make alcohol consumption an undesirable activity for the individual 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 would be 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.
Implementation Partner Background

I plan to work closely with Mandra Unnayan Sansad (MUS), a village-based non-governmental voluntary organization in Mandra village established in 1957, to implement this program. 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. Hence, the good reputation of MUS among the people of Mandra and neighbouring villages makes it suitable for such a program that aims to bring about a change in the social and cultural behaviour in the village. In addition, MUS has also been partners in research projects involving academic institutions from around the world like Indian Statistical Institute, London School of Economics and Boston University. I have also worked with MUS in the past to implement a project “A Coin Box for Health” in 2015 funded by the Clinton Global Initiative (University) to reduce the catastrophic out-of-pocket health expenses in Bhandherhati village. Based on my discussions with MUS, their staff will be designated to spread awareness about the program and provide monitoring and evaluation support.

Implementation Plan

I plan to spend 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 includes selecting an appropriate location that is central and sheltered from possible rain, arranging for electricity from a neighbouring household with compensation, purchasing equipment such as carrom boards, playing cards, footballs and cricket bats. Subsequently, I plan to spend 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 are in place, I plan to spread awareness about the program through door-to-door campaigns, mic announcements and leaflets. Immediately following this, the daily evening activities would start for a period of 2 months. After 2 months, MUS will oversee 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.

Expected Outcome and Future Impact

It is expected that this program will create a culture of evening sports and games in the Mandra village away from the current culture of excessive drinking and also improve the situation with regards to spousal violence. These will be 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. I have already started discussions with Professor Aprajit Mahajan on the research and impact evaluation design. I hope that this program has an impact large enough for me 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.