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Deep Dive: A Country- Specific Exploration of Evidence on Programming for Adolescent Girls and Young Women in India

**Deep Dive Report on Social
Norms Evidence Review (India)**

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Attributions Statement

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Intervention Details

Table 1. Detailed list of interventions included in review.

Title	Implementing Organisation/ Support Agency	Intervention Name	Duration	Outcomes Measured
Gender Norms, Violence and Adolescent Girls' Trajectories: Evidence from a Field Experiment in India	Professional Assistance for Development Action	Community Campaign	3 years	Gender norms and adolescent girls' choices
Using Social Media to Change Gender Norms: An Experiment within Facebook Messenger in India	Population Foundation of India, World Bank's Development Impact Evaluation, WEvolve	An Experiment within Facebook Messenger in India	5 months	Reshaping gender norms
Process and Impact Evaluation of a Community Gender Equality Intervention with Young Men in Rajasthan, India	Centre for Health and Social Justice, Local Organisation - Manjiri	Community Gender Equality Intervention with Young Men in Rajasthan	1 year	Challenging gender stereotypes
Effectiveness of a Multilevel Intervention to Reduce Violence and Increase Condom Use in Intimate Partnerships Among Female Sex Workers	Chaitanya AIDS Tadegattuva Mahila Sangha, Karnataka Health Promotion Trust	Samvedana Plus	2 years	Reducing intimate partner violence and increasing condom use
Preventing Violence Against Women and Girls in Bihar: Challenges for Implementation and Evaluation	Population Council, Centre for Catalysing Change, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, UK Aid	Do Kadam Barabari Ki Ore	17 months	Attitudes, agency, and legal awareness
Can Media Campaigns Change Attitudes and Spark Actions to Reduce Early Child Marriage?	Breakthrough	Breakthrough's Early Marriage Campaign	6 years	Early marriage
How Does a Social and Behavioural Change Communication Intervention Predict Menstrual Health and Hygiene Management?	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, India	Social and Behavioural Change Communication Intervention GARIMA	3 years	Menstrual health and hygiene management
Encoded Exposure and Social Norms in Entertainment-Education	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, National Rural Health Mission, National AIDS Control Organisation	Kyunki Jeena Issi Ka Naam Hai	3 years	Social norms
Community Gender Norms Change as a Part of a Multilevel Approach to Sexual Health	International Centre for Research on Women, Population Council, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, United States National Institute of Mental Health	The Prevention of HIV/STI among Married Women in Urban India	6 years	Gender norms
Does Mass-Media Public Communication Campaign Normalize Condom Use Among Married Men?	Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation	Condom Normalisation Campaign	1 year	Perceptions about condoms and promoting condom use among men
Contesting Restrictive Mobility Norms Through Sports-Based Mentorship	Apnalaya, International Centre for Research on Women, Skills Strengthening for Industrial Value Enhancement	Parivartan Programme	4 years	Gender-based violence

Role of Mothers-in-Law on Family Planning. Gender-Synchronized Family Planning Intervention	University of California, San Diego, Indian Council of Medical Research-National Institute for Research in Reproductive and Child Health, Population Council	Counselling Husbands to Achieve Reproductive Health and Marital Equity	2 years	Gender equity and family planning
Engaging Youth in Sustainable Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene Strategies	Canadian Institute of Natural and Integrative Medicine -India	Project Sanitation and Hygiene Innovation in Education	1 year	Youth in sustainable water, sanitation, and hygiene strategies
Addressing Child Marriage Through Comprehensive Gender-Transformative Program	International Centre for Research on Women, SATHEE, Badlao Foundation, Project Concern International, Government of Jharkhand	UMANG Program	6 years	Child marriage
Gender Equity Movement in Schools	International Centre for Research on Women, MacArthur Foundation, Nike Foundation	Gender Equity Movement in Schools	6 years	Gender-equitable attitudes
Pushing Boundaries by Engaging Adolescent Girls and Communities	International Centre for Research on Women, Professional Assistance for Development Action, Institute for Fiscal Studies, United Purpose	Promoting Adolescents' Engagement, Knowledge and Health	3 years	Improving marriage, education, and sexual and reproductive health
AdhaFULL: Assessment of Adolescence Programme	BBC Media Action, United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund	AdhaFULL (Half Full)	3 years	Gender norms and life choices
Mardon Wali Baat: Masculinities	The Young People's Foundation	Mardon Wali Baat	9 years	Exploring masculinity and its impact on sexual and reproductive health and rights
Enhancing Reproductive Health Among Adolescent Girls: Go Nisha Go Mobile Game	Howard Delafield International, United States Agency for International Development	Go Nisha Go	1 year	Sexual and reproductive health
Ab Meri Baari: National Campaign for Normative Change	Dasra Adolescents Collaborative	Ab Meri Baari	2 years	Agency
Audience-Centred Discourses in Entertainment-Education: Voice Book of Main Kuch Bhi Kar Sakti Hoon	Population Foundation of India	Main Kuch Bhi Kar Sakti Hoon	29 months	Regressive social norms
Hello Saathi Helpline	Hello Saathi, Telehealth	Hello Saathi	1 year	Sexual and reproductive health, and menstrual health
Impact of an Empowerment and Employability Program for Adolescent Girls	Restless Development, Pravah, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation	Plan-It Girls	7 years	Agency and life skills
Hamari Shaadi, Hamare Sapne (Our Marriage, Our Dreams)	Dalberg, Project Concern International-India	Hamari Shaadi, Hamare Sapne	1 year	Family planning decisions post-marriage
The Reduction in Anaemia Through Normative Innovations (RANI) Project	Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, George Washington University	Reduction in Anemia Through Normative Innovations	3 years	Reducing anaemia
MTV Nishedh	MTV Staying Alive Foundation, Children's Investment Fund Foundation, Packard Foundation, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation	MTV Nishedh	2 years	Contraception, consent, and tuberculosis

Be a Man, Yaar	Yuva Originals	Be a Man, Yaar!	1 year	Exploring emotional vulnerability and societal pressures
UnStreeOType	Yuva Originals	UnStreeOType	1 year	Breaking stereotypes about women
Youth Ke Bol	Dasra, United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, Yuva, Restless Development, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation	Youth Ke Bol	3 years	Sexual and reproductive health, and contraceptive access
Increasing Women's Digital Literacy in India: What Works. Accelerating Digital Adoption in Women's Collectives	BBC Media Action, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Chaitanya Women's Integrated and Synergistic Empowerment, Professional Assistance for Development Action, University of Southern California, University of Denver	Digital Women Empowerment Project	3 years	Digital literacy
Love Matters	The Development Consortium: Packard Foundation, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Ideas 42, Amplify Change	Love Matters	13 years	Sexual and reproductive health information for young people
Chhaa Jaa (Go Forth and Shine)	Girl Effect, Children's Investment Fund Foundation	Chhaa Jaa	5 years	Gender and empowerment
Halla Bol TV Mini-Series	Red Dot Tellyworks	Halla Bol	1 year	Empowering young women to be fearless and fight against gender-based violence
Breakthrough Campaign: Bell Bajao!	Breakthrough, Ministry of Women and Child Development, United Nations Development Fund for Women, United Nations Trust Fund	Bell Bajao!	3 years	Engaging men and boys
'We Can' Campaign in South Asia	Oxford Committee for Famine Relief	We Can	7 years	Social attitudes
Increasing Contraceptive Use Among Young Married Couples in Bihar, India: PRACHAR Project	Pathfinder International	Promoting Change in Reproductive Behavior of Adolescents	10 years	Delaying marriage, promoting contraception, and birth spacing

Executive Summary

This report presents findings from a country specific deep dive conducted by Project Concern International-India in collaboration with the Center on Gender Equity and Health at the University of California San Diego, in support of the learning objectives of the Gates Foundation's Adolescent and Youth Learning Agenda team. This deep dive builds on a global evidence review that revealed a significant gap in the literature on norms-shifting interventions in India, despite growing global interest in these approaches. It explores norms shifts and behavioural changes, focusing on the impact of norms-shifting interventions that leverage entertainment media and cultural champions. It examines how these interventions influence the health and well-being of adolescent girls and young women aged 10 to 24 years across key outcomes related to women's economic empowerment, child, early, and forced marriage, gender-based violence, and sexual and reproductive health in India.

Key Findings and Insights

1. Influence of entertainment media and cultural champions

Entertainment media, including TV serials, short films, digital storytelling, and social media content, alongside cultural champions such as grassroots influencers, leaders, and community mobilisers, play a pivotal role in challenging normative expectations in India. These platforms and actors shape public discourse, humanise taboo topics, and offer relatable role models that help audiences reimagine possibilities for adolescent girls and young women.

2. Targeting marginalised populations

Over the last 10 years, interventions leveraging entertainment media and/or cultural champions have made efforts to engage marginalised groups, especially in rural and underrepresented geographies. However, their inclusion varies. For example, while some interventions have directly engaged out-of-school girls, married adolescents, and lower-income households, others have had limited reach or failed to consistently centre the most excluded groups.

3. Qualities and strategies for norms shifting

Both approaches have used cultural messages and anecdotes, storytelling, emotional appeal, humour, music, and participatory formats to break the silence around sensitive topics and question the status quo. For instance, edutainment, blending education with entertainment, often embedded progressive values in relatable narratives, while cultural champion-led dialogues created space for reflection and discourse in community settings.

4. Community engagement and capacity strengthening

Community engagement varied widely across interventions. Some interventions fostered deep, sustained interaction through peer networks, while others relied on one-off or top-down messaging. Interventions that prioritised local ownership and built capacity, for example, by training peer educators and cultural leaders, or co-creating content with youth, tended to demonstrate stronger and more sustained norm change.

5. Roles and risks of incentives

Interventions often used incentives such as recognition, public appreciation, or resource access (like skills training) to encourage participation by cultural champions. While these can be particularly important in resource-constrained settings, incentives must be managed carefully to ensure sustainability and authenticity of norm change efforts.

Promising Practices and Recommendations

Evidence suggests that well-designed entertainment media and cultural champion interventions can significantly influence attitudes, shift perceptions of what is socially acceptable, and support behaviour change. This deep dive revealed several promising practices, including:

- Co-creating narratives with adolescents and local influencers
- Implementing long-term engagement strategies, rather than one-time messaging
- Combining the reach of entertainment media with cultural champions to create multiple levels of influence
- Applying insights from formative research to tailor interventions to local realities

Despite these promising practices, norms-shifting interventions in India, as elsewhere, have faced several persistent challenges, such as:

- Difficulties in measuring norm change and attributing causality
- Risk and experiences of backlash or resistance from conservative groups
- Lack of integration between entertainment media and community-based efforts to achieve the synergies needed to shift norms at scale
- Limited focus on norms affecting boys and men, despite their critical role and influence

Moving forward, investment in norms-shifting interventions should include intersectional approaches, improving monitoring and evaluation systems, and scaling hybrid models that blend digital storytelling with community mobilisation.

Introduction

Shifting deeply entrenched social norms, especially those surrounding gender, agency, mobility, and sexual autonomy among adolescents, requires innovative, context-sensitive approaches that resonate with lived realities (Heise & Manji, 2016; Lundgren et al., 2021). In India, where patriarchal structures and normative expectations continue to shape the lives of adolescent girls and young women, interventions increasingly recognise the transformative potential of entertainment media and cultural champions as catalysts for social change (BBC Media Action, 2024; Population Foundation of India, 2021). From TV serials and digital storytelling to grassroots influencers and leaders, these actors and platforms have emerged as powerful vehicles for shaping public narratives and sparking intergenerational dialogue within families and communities (Cislaghi et al., 2019; Breakthrough India, 2020).

In recent years, interventions in India aimed at improving adolescents' lives have targeted critical domains such as child, early, and forced marriage, sexual and reproductive health, gender-based violence, and women's economic empowerment. Each of these areas is governed by deeply rooted social norms that determine what is acceptable, expected, or possible for girls and women. These norms shape individual attitudes by defining what is typical (descriptive norms) and what is socially approved (injunctive norms) within a given community. In turn, these influence behaviours, particularly when individuals seek social acceptance or aim to avoid disapproval or sanctions (Cialdini & Trost, 1998; Tankard & Paluck, 2016). In India, such norms continue to influence behaviours around mobility, education, digital access, and employment, reinforcing constraints on adolescent girls and young women's choices and opportunities. Understanding the interconnectedness of norms, attitudes, and behaviours is crucial for designing culturally grounded interventions that can effectively challenge harmful norms and foster more equitable outcomes.

This report presents the findings of a deep dive review of norms-shifting interventions in India conducted between December 2024 and April 2025. It builds on programmatic experiences and is informed by a Global Evidence Review conducted by the Center on Gender Equity and Health at the University of California San Diego. The Global Evidence Review revealed a growing international focus on norms-shifting interventions, particularly those involving entertainment media and faith and cultural champions. However, it also highlighted a significant gap in both the depth and breadth of the literature from India, despite the country's dynamic cultural landscape and the increasing implementation of such approaches. As such, this deep dive further investigates how cultural influencers and entertainment media can effectively shift social norms affecting adolescent girls and young women in India by synthesising existing literature, research findings, and lessons learned across different geographical and cultural settings, providing a comprehensive overview of the effectiveness and challenges of interventions. Building on the broader evidence review, this report aims to surface actionable insights to inform and strengthen the design and implementation of future norms-shifting interventions. Specifically, the deep dive seeks to uncover effective strategies, illuminate persistent gaps, and identify opportunities for intervention designers, implementers, funders, and researchers in India.



Snapshot of the Global Evidence Review

The Global Evidence Review conducted by the Center on Gender Equity and Health used a scoping approach to identify interventions aiming to shift social norms to improve outcomes for adolescent girls and young women in the areas of women's economic empowerment, gender-based violence, child, early, and forced marriage, and sexual and reproductive health in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.

The review involved a systematic search of both peer-reviewed and grey literature. Interventions were included in the analysis if they self-identified as social norms interventions and measured attitudes, behaviours, or norms.

Only 11 interventions were identified in India—six focused on entertainment media and five on faith and cultural champions—indicating that a more targeted country-level search might reveal additional evidence.

Methodology

This deep dive was guided by the following research questions:

- What strategies have entertainment media and cultural champions in India used to influence social norms, particularly among adolescents?
- Which approaches have proven effective—or ineffective—in leveraging these actors and platforms to catalyse meaningful change?
- What has the process of social norms change looked like in practice, and what have been the key drivers and barriers encountered along the way?
- How can the insights and recommendations emerging from this work inform more coherent, evidence-based approaches to enhancing adolescent well-being?

A multi-pronged qualitative approach was used to examine how entertainment media and cultural champions have helped shift norms related to child, early, and forced marriage, sexual and reproductive health, gender-based violence, and women's economic empowerment. The study drew from stakeholder insights, a focused literature review, and a secondary analysis of real-world interventions to generate actionable learnings and recommendations.

All interventions included in this deep dive came from the following two sources:

1. Sensemaking Workshop

Key insights were gained from an in-country sensemaking workshop held on September 30 and October 1, 2024, which brought together civil society organisations, media practitioners, donors, and implementers. Participants discussed what works, what doesn't, and why when using media and engaging cultural champions to drive social norms change. They also recommended specific interventions which formed the foundation of the dataset.

2. Revisiting Identified Evidence

To complement the insights from the workshop, we conducted a deeper analysis of the 13 articles identified by the University of California San Diego's Center on Gender Equity and Health as part of the Global Evidence Review which were relevant to India. To build on the global review with context-specific insights for future interventions, the team extracted and analysed additional information, identifying trends, theory of change models, and mechanisms through which entertainment media and cultural champions catalysed behaviour and norm change among adolescents and their communities.

Secondary Analysis of Interventions

A secondary analysis was also conducted on interventions that were either completed between 2014 and 2024 or are still ongoing. These interventions used entertainment media or cultural champions as core strategies to influence norms and behaviours related to key outcomes. Sources included intervention design documents, reports, case studies, evaluations, and peer-reviewed and grey literature.

Each intervention was assessed through a comprehensive lens, drawing on mechanisms of change grounded in intervention design and evaluations, stakeholder insights, and relevant behaviour change theories such as the Capability, Opportunity, Motivation – Behaviour Model (Michie, van Stralen, & West, 2011), the Socio-Ecological Model (McLeroy, Bibeau, Steckler, & Glanz, 1988), and the Behavioural Drivers Framework (Petit, 2011). This analysis aimed to understand (1) the role of leaders and media in shaping social norms; (2) intervention strategies; (3) factors contributing to successful implementation; (4) contextual nuances,

challenges, and opportunities; (5) unintended consequences during implementation; and (6) evidence of norms and behaviour change.

The triangulation of these three methodological components—stakeholder engagement, evidence review, and secondary analysis—provided a rich, grounded understanding of how and why certain approaches have succeeded in shifting norms, while others have fallen short. This layered methodology ensured that the findings and recommendations were not only evidence-based but also contextually grounded, helping to inform the development of more effective norms-shifting interventions in India.

Interventions Overview

To offer a comprehensive overview, **Table 1** presents a consolidated summary of over 36 norms-shifting interventions implemented across India. The table includes details such as the implementing organisations, type of intervention (cultural champions, entertainment media, or a combination of both), intervention titles, duration, thematic focus, and key outcomes measured.

Cultural champion interventions were the most common, representing 18 of the 36 initiatives (50%), reflecting an emphasis on localized, participatory models that engage mentors, self-help groups, peer educators, and family or community leaders. Entertainment media interventions accounted for 11 of the 36 (31%), while combination interventions made up the remaining seven (19%). These interventions reflect a growing shift toward scalable, technology-enabled strategies that leverage both storytelling and digital platforms.

This section offers a deeper analysis of these interventions across the four outcome areas, exploring patterns in intervention duration, geographic distribution, target groups, and levels of engagement. Additionally, it examines the methods used to measure and evaluate impact, providing insights into the effectiveness of varied approaches in driving social norm change.

Interventions by Outcome Area

Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of interventions across four key thematic areas: sexual and reproductive health, gender-based violence, women’s economic empowerment, and child, early, and forced marriage. While some interventions overlap across themes, the figure highlights the relative focus on each area based on the number of interventions implemented.

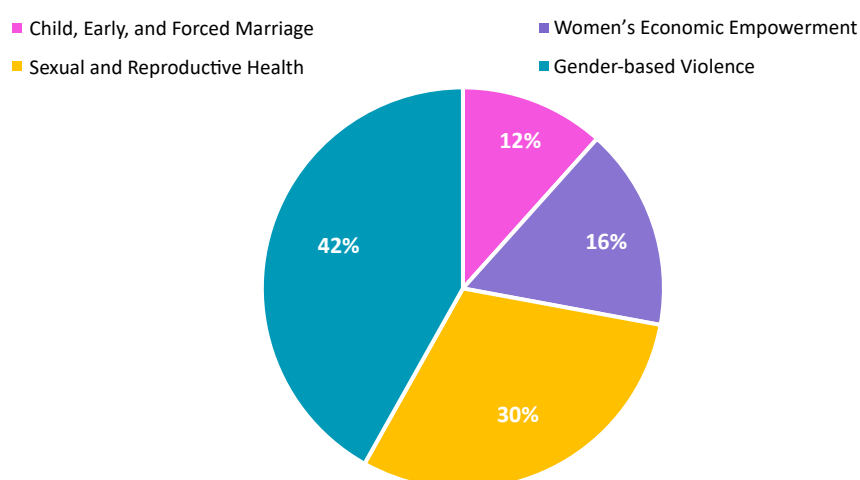


Figure 1. Distribution of Interventions Across Outcome Areas

Among the 18 cultural champion interventions, eight (44%) focused on sexual and reproductive health, targeting both young women and their reference groups, such as partners, mothers-in-law, and community members. Five (28%) addressed gender-based violence, often engaging peer leaders, male mentors, and role models to challenge harmful norms. Three interventions (17%) promoted women’s economic empowerment by enhancing digital access, leadership skills, and voice among girls. Only two (11%) directly addressed child marriage, though the issue was often embedded within broader sexual and reproductive health or gender-based violence programming.

Among the 11 entertainment media interventions, six (54%) focused on sexual and reproductive health, particularly youth engagement, family planning, and shifting norms around contraception and consent. Three interventions (27%) focused on gender-based violence, with an emphasis on masculinities and challenging male stereotypes. One intervention promoted women’s economic empowerment by using digital media to build agency, aspirations, and role models for girls, and another addressed early marriage, as part of broader sexual and reproductive health and agency-focused efforts.

Of the seven interventions that combined approaches, four (60%) focused on sexual and reproductive health—especially adolescent health, anaemia, and menstrual hygiene—by leveraging both digital media and community outreach. Two interventions focused on gender-based violence, and one addressed women’s economic empowerment. **Figure 2** illustrates the number of interventions by thematic focus and type.

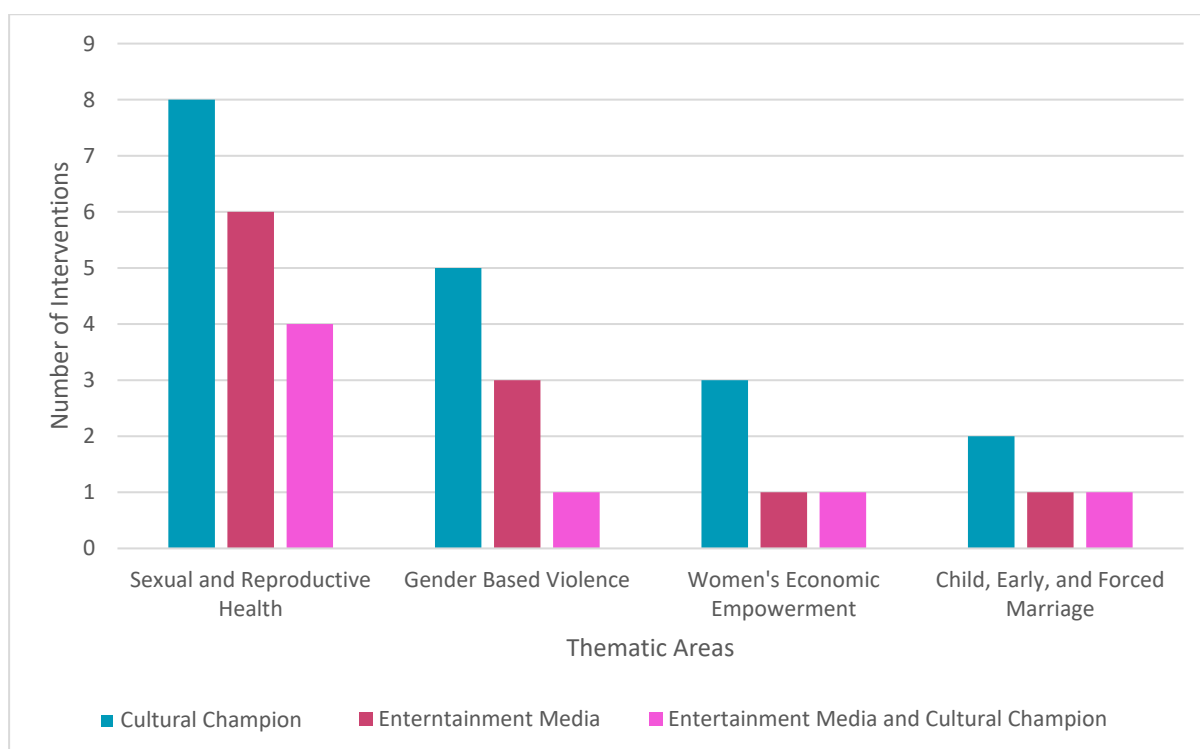


Figure 2. Number of Interventions (n=36) by Thematic Area and Type, Distributed Across Outcomes

Duration of Interventions

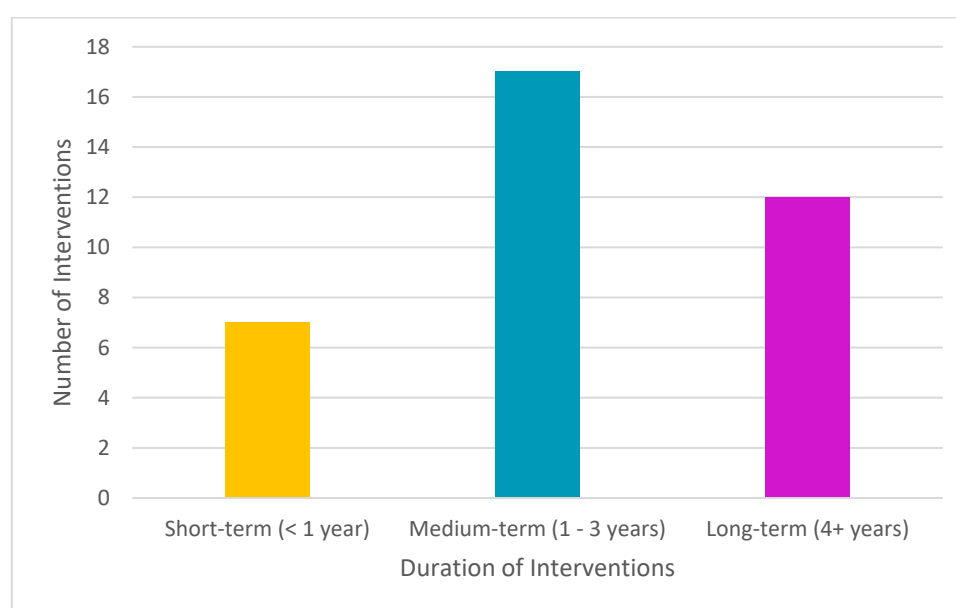


Figure 3. *Distribution of Interventions by Duration*

Figure 3 illustrates the distribution of interventions by their duration, revealing that the majority (47%) were medium-term, lasting between one to three years. This trend may be attributed to practical considerations such as project-based funding cycles, timelines set for evaluations, and the need to strike a balance between feasibility and measurable impact. Around one-third (33%) of the interventions were long-term in nature, extending beyond three years. These long-term interventions often demonstrated deeper levels of community engagement and sustained efforts at shifting entrenched social norms. Notable examples include **We Can Campaign**, **Gender Equity Movement in Schools**, and **Promoting Change in Reproductive Behaviour of Adolescents**. For instance, **Promoting Change in Reproductive Behaviour of Adolescents**, an intervention led by Pathfinder International in Bihar, was implemented in three phases and combined various media—such as radio, street plays, and print materials—with intensive community-based strategies over extended periods. It engaged adolescents in monthly peer-led sessions and worked closely with parents, religious leaders, community elders, school teachers and frontline workers through workshops, community meetings, and home visits. The intervention also invested in training local youth, created safe spaces for girls, tailored content to different life stages, and reinforced messages through platforms like wall art and street theatre.

Short-term interventions, accounting for 19% of the total, were primarily entertainment media-driven campaigns that aimed to spark rapid awareness or attitude change within a limited timeframe. For example, **Condom Normalization Campaign**, implemented by BBC Media Action, was developed to create shifts in awareness over a short period of time. The campaign ran intensively over six weeks, with online public service announcements, radio advertisements, and a dedicated website, as well as disseminated content via platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube with the aim of reducing stigma and promoting condom use.

When comparing intervention types, norms-shifting interventions—particularly those involving cultural champions or a combination of champions and entertainment media—tended to be implemented over medium or long durations. Notably, 12 of the 18 interventions involving cultural champions, and five of the seven combined interventions, were designed to last more than two years.

Geographic Trends in Interventions

The interventions included in this deep dive spanned across India's diverse geographic and socio-cultural contexts, demonstrating the applicability of both approaches across both rural and urban realities.

Figure 4 illustrates that approximately 70% of the interventions were implemented in rural or semi-urban areas, reflecting a focus on locations where social norms were generally more restrictive and resources more limited. In these contexts, interventions implemented in states such as Bihar, Rajasthan, and Karnataka used community-based outreach, engaged religious and cultural leaders, and organized local events to challenge deeply entrenched norms. About one-third (31%) of the interventions were urban-centric, often leveraging technology-enabled strategies to influence norm shifts. National-level efforts typically used mass media, digital storytelling, and entertainment-education formats to engage diverse populations across the country.

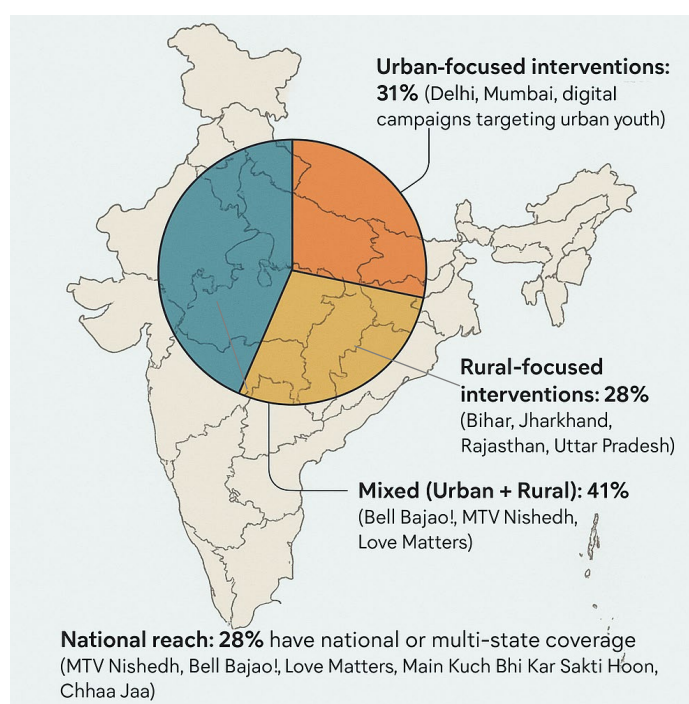


Figure 4. Geographic Distribution of Interventions

Participant Groups and Inclusion of Marginalised Populations in Interventions

The interventions targeted a diverse range of age groups, including adolescent girls and young women (10-30 years) and focused on areas such as digital literacy, sexual and reproductive health, gender norms, menstrual hygiene, and violence prevention. Interventions like **Gender Equity Movement In Schools**, **Chhaa Jaa (Go Forth and Shine)**, **AdhaFULL (Half Full)**, and **Ab Meri Baari (Now My Turn)** were tailored for adolescent girls across both early and late adolescence. Others, such as **Be a Man, Yaar!** and **Mardon Wali Baat**, engaged adolescent boys and young men (12–25 years) to critically reflect on masculinities and gender roles. School-based interventions targeting students in grades 9–11 (12–14 years), as well as one college-focused initiative aimed at young men, specifically addressed gender-based violence and promoted gender-equitable attitudes. Young adults (18–30 years), including newly married couples, were reached through interventions such as **Hamari Shaadi**. **Hamare Sapne (Our Marriage, Our Dreams)** emphasised reproductive decision-making, agency, and shifting intra-household norms. Additionally, married women (18–40 years) were engaged through interventions such as **Reduction in Anaemia through Normative Innovations**, which addressed community-level gender norms and improved access to reproductive health services.

Many interventions extended beyond individual participants to include key reference groups such as parents, in-laws, elder family members, and frontline workers. These influencers were especially impactful in areas like marriage, reproductive rights, and the reinforcement of prevailing gender norms. For example, **Do Kadam Barabari Ki Ore (Two Steps Towards Equality)** exemplified this approach through context-specific interventions targeting four groups. Adolescent boys and young men (13–21 years) took part in weekly gender-transformative activities and cricket sessions, along with community events, facilitated by peer mentors and

coaches. Married women in self-help groups (18–49 years) attended sessions on financial literacy, livelihoods, gender equality, and violence against women, while their husbands received monthly sessions and mobile phone messages. Peer mentors also led community street plays, whereas elected representatives participated in a three-day workshop and biweekly sessions, supported by local campaigns. Frontline health workers were trained to screen, counsel, and refer women and led awareness activities in the community.

A few interventions strategically targeted marginalised and underserved populations to promote inclusivity and equity, particularly among women facing intersecting vulnerabilities. For example, **Samvedana Plus** was a multi-level intervention designed to reduce intimate partner violence and promote consistent condom use within the intimate relationships of female sex workers in northern Karnataka, India. The intervention worked directly with sex workers, their intimate partners, the sex worker community, and the broader public to shift harmful social and gender norms. It challenged the acceptance of violence as discipline, questioned gender roles that upheld male authority, and promoted equitable, respectful relationship models. **Samvedana Plus** also addressed the structural drivers of violence and vulnerability, including caste-based discrimination and the legacy of the Devadasi system, which disproportionately affects Dalit women engaged in sex work. In another initiative, in urban resettlement colonies and slum areas where patriarchal norms severely restrict mobility, **Parivartan (Transformation)** in Mumbai empowered young women through sports-based mentorship, leveraging trusted social development organisations to facilitate community engagement and parental negotiations. Low-income women were reached through campaigns such as **Chhaa Jaa**, **UnStreeOType**, and **Halla Bol (Raise Your Voice)** TV series, which promoted education, mobility, digital access, and progressive gender narratives. Notably, none of the interventions included in this deep dive specifically aimed to improve health and livelihoods outcomes for individuals living with disabilities. Given the layered and compounding vulnerabilities faced by adolescent girls and young women living with disabilities, this presents a significant gap and opportunity to adopt an intersectional lens that explicitly recognizes disability as a key axis of marginalization, alongside gender, caste, socioeconomic status, and geographic location, in the design and implementation of future interventions.

Levels of Engagement in Interventions

Understanding behaviour change involves examining how individuals interact with their social environments. The Social Ecological Framework (McLeroy et al., 1988) provided a useful lens to analyse entertainment media and cultural champion interventions across levels—individual to societal. Building on the work of Kincaid et al. (2007), our analysis revealed the dynamic interplay between personal behaviours and collective influences, showing how change unfolded across society. **Figure 5** illustrates the extent to which entertainment media, cultural champions, and combined approaches targeted different socioecological levels.

Entertainment media interventions primarily operated at the individual level, using digital content, storytelling, and mass media to influence knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and aspirations. All 11 interventions directly engaged individuals through relatable narratives and characters. For instance, **An Experiment within Facebook Messenger in India** delivered personalised content to reshape gender norms, while **Kyunki Jeena Issi Ka Naam Hai (This is What Life Is)**, a TV soap opera reaching 145 million viewers, embedded educational messages to influence personal beliefs. Digital campaigns like **UnStreeOType** and **Be a Man, Yaar!** used podcasts and YouTube to challenge stereotypes and promote mental health awareness. A smaller subset (three of the 11 interventions) extended their influence to the interpersonal level, encouraging dialogue among peers, families, or within broader social circles. For example, **AdhaFULL** prompted viewers to engage in conversations about gender issues with those around them, while **MTV Nishedh** used drama to portray friends collectively tackling societal taboos. These interventions—**Kyunki Jeena Issi Ka Naam Hai**, **Be a Man, Yaar!**, **AdhaFULL**, and **MTV Nishedh**—showed evidence of viewers sharing stories and discussing key messages within their networks. Two interventions engaged indirectly at the societal level by shifting public discourse through wide dissemination; for instance, content from **An Experiment within Facebook Messenger In India** was globally shared by 34,000 people, 55 times the size of its initial audience. However, none of the entertainment media interventions

directly engaged with organisational structures or policy-level actors. An exception was a combined intervention, **Ab Meri Baari**, in which ‘Girl Champions’ presented policy recommendations to government representatives.

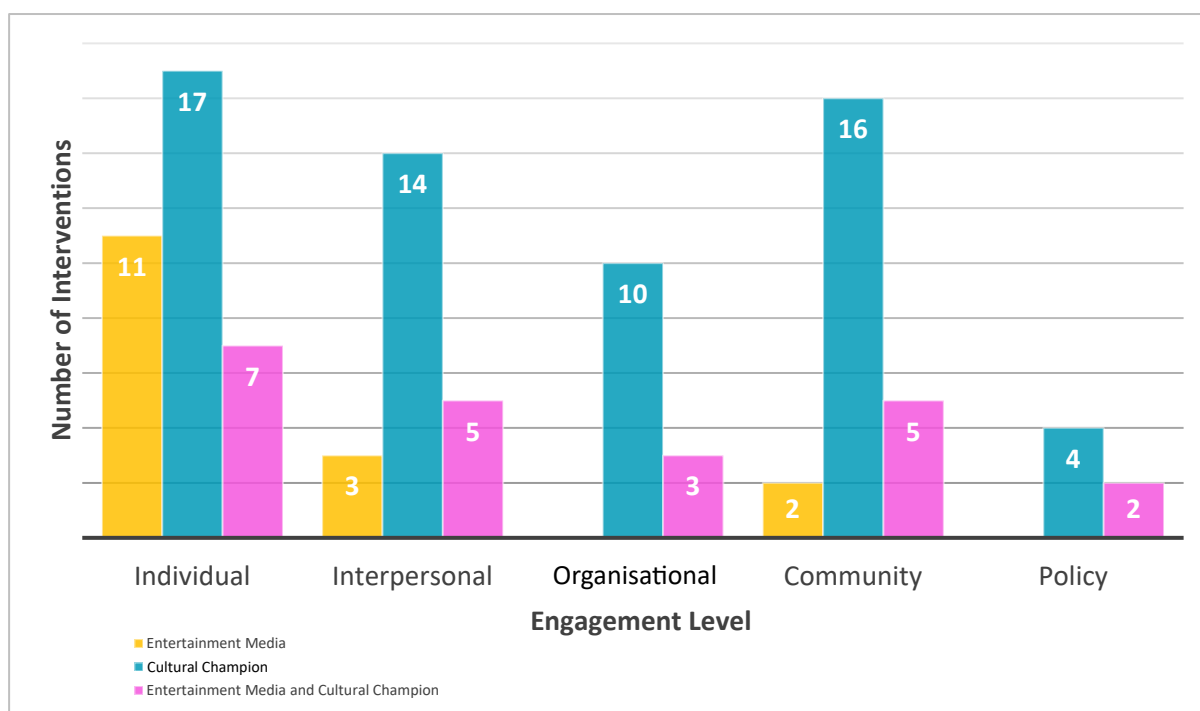


Figure 5. Levels of Engagement by Intervention Type

Interventions involving cultural champions operated across multiple levels, reflecting their deep integration in social and community ecosystems. Nearly all (17 of the 18 interventions) engaged at the individual level, working directly with adolescents and young women through mentoring, counselling, and awareness-building. For example, **Gender Equity Movement in Schools** used diaries and classroom activities to reshape adolescents’ attitudes, while **Counselling Husbands and Wives to Achieve Reproductive Health and Marital Equity** conducted gender-equity sessions with married couples. A significant majority (14 of the 18 interventions) also operated at the interpersonal level, involving families, peers, and reference groups, such as parents, spouses, or community elders, to reinforce behaviour change. For the intervention **Professional Assistance for Development Action**, peer mentors led power walks and sports sessions to strengthen peer bonds and spark dialogue among girls, whereas **Plan-It Girls** organised meetings with mothers and teachers to align familial and educational support for adolescent girls. Ten interventions engaged organisational structures like self-help groups, mahila mandals, youth clubs, and non-governmental organisations to expand their influence. For example, **Manjiri** in Rajasthan partnered with local leaders to train young men’s groups as change champions, while interventions in Bihar mobilised self-help groups to collectively resist domestic violence. **Gender Equity Movement in Schools** institutionalised change by integrating gender curricula and training teachers. Community-level engagement was especially strong, with 16 of 18 interventions conducting events, discussions, and campaigns led by cultural champions. **Promoting Change in Reproductive Behaviour of Adolescents** used street theatre and community meetings to normalise conversations on reproductive health, while **We Can** trained “Change Makers” to influence peers and neighbours through everyday interactions and public discourse. Four interventions also reached the policy or systems level, working with governance bodies and enforcement agencies. For instance, **Samvedana Plus** partnered with community actors and authorities to connect sex workers with Crisis Management Teams and local police. These teams, comprised of leaders, non-government organisational staff, legal advisors, and law enforcement, were trained to respond swiftly to violence and harassment.

Measurement and Evaluation

Out of the 36 interventions, roughly half had conducted some form of evaluation. Of these, 12 explicitly aimed to shift social norms by targeting collective beliefs, behaviours, or institutional practices, while the remaining interventions focused more on changing individual attitudes. For example, **MTV Nishedh**, which focused on sexual and reproductive health, saw observable changes in both individual attitudes and perceived social expectations. Another example, **Bell Bajao!** which promoted bystander intervention and increased reporting of domestic violence, saw shifts in personal attitudes and broader community norms that had previously tolerated silence around abuse. In contrast, some interventions indicated changes in individual attitudes but lacked evidence of broader normative or institutional shifts. For example, **Plan-It Girls** improved gender-equitable attitudes among adolescents but did not demonstrate norm change. Similarly, **Hamari Shaadi, Hamare Sapne** increased spousal communication on reproductive health but did not measure changes in broader marriage or gender-related norms.

Interventions employed both qualitative and quantitative methods to assess shifts in social norms. Quantitative tools included surveys and indices such as the Gender Equity Scale and Child Marriage Attitude Index. For example, interventions like **Samvedana Plus**—a multilevel initiative aimed at reducing violence and increasing condom use in intimate partnerships among female sex workers—and **UMANG**, which focused on empowering girls and ending child marriage, used these tools to evaluate attitudinal and behavioural change. In **UMANG**, for instance, it was reported that the "gender attitude index score increased in the positive direction" in intervention areas, reflecting improved gender attitudes. Behavioural outcomes were monitored through indicators such as marriage rates, school enrolment, contraceptive use, and menstrual hygiene management practices. An intervention implemented by **Professional Assistance for Development Action** on gender norms, violence, and adolescent girls reported a "20 per cent reduction in marriage rates." Qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and case studies, were also used. In **Community Gender Equality Intervention with Young Men in Rajasthan**, group members reported learning about the adverse effects of child marriage, demonstrating qualitative shifts in awareness and perception. In addition, some interventions assessed the impact of media engagement by analysing metrics such as social media interactions and platform-specific user behaviours. For example, in **An Experiment within Facebook Messenger in India**, participants were 91 per cent more likely to add the 'End Violence Against Women' frame on Facebook, indicating engagement with and endorsement of the intervention's message. Interventions also incorporated norm-specific indicators, such as perceived community acceptance and shifts in what participants viewed as prevailing norms. **Professional Assistance for Development Action** reported changes in attitudes and perceptions consistent with broader change in perceived prevailing gender norms, suggesting progress in transforming deeply held social norms.

Findings from Entertainment Media Interventions

This section offers a detailed review of entertainment media interventions in India, categorised by media type. It examines the communication materials, channels, and processes used in these interventions to promote change. Additionally, it highlights the influence of entertainment media on drivers of behaviours, best practices and summarises key takeaways.

Types of Media

Standalone Digital and Broadcast Media Campaigns

Most interventions relied heavily on TV, radio, social media, and digital storytelling to create relatable narratives, especially for youth audiences. For example, **AdhaFULL**, a TV detective series featuring adolescent protagonists, addressed local crimes and social issues like child marriage, dowry, and girls' education, empowering adolescents, particularly girls, through relatable role models. **MTV Nishedh**, aired on MTV India and YouTube, combined celebrity appeal and scripted drama to tackle taboo topics such as early marriage, contraception, tuberculosis, and romantic relationships, helping normalise sexual and reproductive health conversations among urban youth. **Love Matters**, a digital-first platform, provided engaging sexual and reproductive health content through videos, comics, articles, and immersive experiences such as virtual reality. It challenged taboos, promoted consent, and reached young audiences across various social platforms. **Be a Man, Yaar!**, a YouTube-based interview series, worked to deconstruct toxic masculinity by featuring Indian male celebrities and influencers who spoke openly about emotions, friendships, failures, and vulnerabilities, helping to normalise emotional expression among men. Three interventions integrated podcasts alongside digital content; one example is **UnStreeOType**, a podcast series that engaged listeners in conversations about everyday gender bias through discussions with actors, activists, and youth leaders, highlighting efforts to break gender stereotypes across different spheres.



Shifting Norms Through Storytelling, Screens, and Streets

- **Diverse media mix increases reach and depth:** 70%+ of interventions used digital and broadcast media, showing a strong shift toward scalable, youth-centric formats.
- **Underused Technology Tools:** Only ~20% leveraged gamification, use of Artificial Intelligence, or chatbots, indicating untapped potential for personalized engagement.
- **Power of Transmedia:** Integrated campaigns across TV, digital, and community media reached more groups within interventions, with potential for lasting impact.

Interactive/Technology-Enabled Edutainment

Two interventions used gamification, Artificial Intelligence, chatbots, and other interactive digital formats to personalise content and effectively engage youth. For example, **Chhaa Jaa** employed chatbots to deliver anonymous, accurate sexual and reproductive health information to young people. It also connected users to telemedicine platforms, encouraging actionable behaviour change. **An Experiment within Facebook Messenger in India** used messenger bots to deliver episodic, engaging content and sexual and reproductive health information to youth, showcasing the potential for scalable, personalized communication.

Multimedia Campaigns

Four campaigns used transmedia, integrating multiple platforms (TV, street theatre, digital, public art, interpersonal communication) to tell a cohesive story that drove social change by engaging audiences across diverse touchpoints, at home, in the neighbourhood, at school, and online, broadening reach and deepening impact through context-specific interactions. For example, **Bell Bajao!** was a landmark campaign that encouraged men to take a stand against domestic violence, symbolized by ringing the bell. It combined TV ads with street theatre and community-based interventions to promote bystander action. **Ab Meri Baari** was a youth-led campaign that spanned digital media, public art, theatre, and peer engagement.

Content Development and Delivery

The analysis of communication strategies in entertainment media interventions highlighted a deliberate use of narrative-driven storytelling to shift gender and social norms. These strategies hinged on edutainment, blending education with entertainment, to emotionally engage audiences and prompt reflection. Programs like **Main Kuch Bhi Kar Sakti Hoon**, **Kyunki Jeena Issi Ka Naam Hai**, and **MTV Nishedh** exemplified this by developing powerful, relatable narratives rooted in everyday life. Characters often underwent personal transformations that reflected broader societal change. For instance, **Main Kuch Bhi Kar Sakti Hoon** followed Dr. Sneha's return to her village, using her journey to address child marriage, domestic violence, and reproductive rights. **MTV Nishedh** tackled topics like safe sex, abortion, and tuberculosis stigma through youth-centric, emotionally engaging storytelling.

Entertainment media interventions used a diverse mix of materials to maximise reach and resonance, including TV series, short films, social media videos, mobile games, podcasts, and graphic novels. These were shared via traditional and digital platforms such as Doordarshan, MTV India, YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp, and streaming services. **Go Nisha Go**, a mobile-first transmedia campaign, used Instagram and WhatsApp to deliver interactive stories about a 15-year-old girl navigating puberty, relationships, and aspirations, combining games, quizzes, and storytelling. Similarly, **Chhaa Jaa** was a digital-only campaign that used chatbots, videos, and memes to explore topics like consent, contraception, and young girls' aspirations.

The 'character' and 'narrative' creation process in entertainment media interventions was guided by behavioural insights and an understanding of audience preferences and perceived barriers to norm change. Research and pre-testing shaped scripts, characters, and plots that reflected the lived experiences of the target audience. Characters were crafted to embody internal and societal conflicts, highlighting dilemmas and gradual transformations to model progressive behaviours.



Insights on How Entertainment Media Drives Behaviour Change

Knowledge: Entertainment media builds knowledge on social and health issues. By weaving information into emotionally engaging storylines, interventions helped audiences absorb and retain key messages.

Attitudes: Entertainment media can shift attitudes by presenting compelling narratives and relatable characters who challenge entrenched stereotypes and model progressive behaviours.

Skills: Entertainment media contributes to building both practical and advocacy-related skills by embedding skills-building within storylines that show characters actively learning and applying new abilities.

Social Support: Entertainment media fosters social support by using relatable stories to challenge norms and spark open dialogue.

Norms: Interventions strategically used storytelling and media campaigns to question traditional gender roles and expectations. By presenting characters who defied gender norms and showcasing narratives of transformation, these interventions contributed to challenging norms and fostering greater acceptance of gender equality.

Entertainment media interventions used a mix of humour, drama, and emotional storytelling to deliver impactful messages. For instance, [Sex Ki Adalat](#), a comedic mock court show, used satire to bust myths around sex, while celebrity endorsements and music rooted in popular culture amplified reach and credibility. Campaigns used familiar figures and catchy music videos to normalise condom use and spark conversations on reproductive health. Thematic content tackled issues like sex selection, virginity myths, menstruation taboos, and violence against women. Public service announcements such as [Riddle, Kabaddi, Ringtone, and Dog](#) used punchy slogans like “Condom matlab samajhdari” (Condom means being sensible) to promote condom use through humour and emotion. Many were designed as short, shareable videos for platforms like Instagram and Facebook.

Entertainment media interventions were also designed to match natural media consumption patterns, often using short edutainment video series of 3–7 episodes (20–25 minutes). Platforms like Facebook Messenger and chatbots enabled personalised engagement. Some campaigns, such as [Kyunki Jeena Issi Ka Naam Hai](#), ran in four phases between 2007 and 2008, to build on earlier themes. Reminder messages and teaser clips were also used over a 7–10-day period to sustain attention and viewership.

Promising Practices

In summary, **Table 2** presents promising practices identified from this deep dive review of entertainment media interventions. Each example illustrates how media formats can be tailored to build awareness, challenge norms, and inspire behaviour change.

Table 2. Promising Practices Identified Within Entertainment Media Interventions

Promising Practices	Illustrative Interventions	Why It Worked
Use of serialised, relatable content across multiple platforms	<i>MTV Nishedh, AdhaFULL, Main Kuch Bhi Kar Sakti Hoon, Halla Bol</i>	Built narrative immersion and emotional connection with audiences; multiple touchpoints reinforced learning
Leveraging digital tools and games to increase interactivity	<i>Go Nisha Go, Love Matters, Chhaa Jaa</i>	Encouraged agency and private exploration of sexual and reproductive health topics; met youth in their digital spaces
Targeted and localised mass media messaging	<i>Bell Bajao!, Breakthrough’s Early Marriage Campaign, Reduction in Anaemia through Normative Innovations project</i>	Culturally grounded messaging resonated with local realities and norms
Use of influencers and real-life voices	<i>Be a Man, Yaar!, UnStreeOType, Chhaa Jaa</i>	Highlighted positive deviants; normalized progressive behaviour through peer relatability
Integration with interactive platforms (chatbots, helplines)	<i>Chhaa Jaa, Hello Saathi, Go Nisha Go</i>	Facilitated confidential, continuous engagement and support for behaviour change
Audience-centric design and co-creation	<i>Love Matters, Youth Ke Bol</i>	Enabled tailoring of messages to actual youth experiences; increased buy-in and trust



Key Takeaways: Entertainment Media Interventions

1. **Use Multiplatform, Transmedia Reach.** Campaigns combined TV, social media, mobile applications, games, and chatbots to reflect youth media habits, reinforcing messages and boosting recall.
2. **Ground Content in Behavioural Insights.** Stories and characters were crafted based on research into youth preferences and barriers, showcasing normative conflict and transformation to make progressive behaviours relatable. Characters in several interventions embodied internal struggles, making behaviour change appear realistic and desirable.
3. **Foster Interactive, Participatory Engagement.** Real-time features like polls, Q&As, storytelling, and pledges can turn audiences into co-creators and deepen engagement. Campaigns enabled youth to participate actively through social media polls and personal pledges.
4. **Use Humour and Emotion to Address Taboos.** Emotion and satire can help make sensitive topics more accessible and acceptable.
5. **Align with Youth Viewing Habits Using Short Formats.** Bite-sized videos released over time will replicate how young audiences naturally consume media. Several campaigns shared content episodically over a few days to maintain interest and increase accessibility.
6. **Embed Cultural Relevance and Celebrity Influence.** Local languages, popular culture, and celebrity endorsements can be used to enhance relatability and trust. Shows incorporated familiar visuals and music, and featured well-known personalities to anchor progressive messages

Findings from Interventions that Engaged Cultural Champions

The analysis of interventions that engaged cultural champions demonstrates the transformative power of locally rooted actors, such as peer mentors, youth leaders, self-help group members, teachers, and religious leaders in shifting social norms through trust-based, participatory communication. Often, these interventions leveraged existing grassroots networks such as self-help groups, schools, religious gatherings, and community events, and used culturally resonant tools, like street theatre, story cards, Interactive Voice Response messages, and flipcharts, to ensure local relevance and sustained engagement. This section is organised according to the extent and nature of cultural champions' involvement, discussing the diverse communication channels, materials, and engagement processes these interventions utilized. It also highlights how cultural champions influence drivers of behaviour, showcases promising practices, and offers key insights to guide future efforts.

Champion Engagement

Half of the cultural champion interventions engaged **peer mentors, youth leaders, and community role models** to create safe spaces, fostering trust and shifting behaviours among adolescents. For example, the **Professional Assistance for Development Action** intervention trained adolescent girls and young women as peer mentors to lead sessions on life skills, reproductive health, and self-confidence. Their shared experiences helped break down barriers to open discussion and created safe, supportive environments. **Parivartan** addressed structural drivers of gender-based violence through mentorship by trained local women who offered psychosocial support and guidance on navigating gender-based violence and accessing health services. **Plan-It**

Girls cultivated youth leaders by training them in life skills and employability. These leaders conducted sessions in schools, communities, and homes, acting as credible messengers and inspiring role models for their peers.

Approximately ten interventions strategically leveraged **existing community networks**, particularly self-help groups, cooperatives, and mahila sanghas, to amplify their impact. For example, **Samvedana Plus** collaborated with sex workers' collectives and self-help groups in Karnataka to integrate HIV prevention and violence response. They facilitated mahila sanghas as platforms for community dialogue and service linkages, helping women collectively address early marriage, reproductive health, and gender-based violence. **Prevention of HIV/STI among Married Women** in Mumbai promoted awareness among married women while strategically engaging men through trusted religious networks. Religious leaders, such as Imams, delivered key messages through familiar formats like Friday sermons, while events led by non-governmental organisations tailored content for women in ways that respected cultural sensitivities and norms. The **Digital Women's Economic Empowerment** intervention embedded digital tools and financial literacy training into rural self-help group networks. The project boosted women's economic empowerment, combining digital upskilling with group meetings to build confidence and enhance intra-household negotiation.

Nearly half of the interventions employed a comprehensive, ecosystem-based approach that **engaged individuals, families, communities, and institutions as stakeholders in the intervention**. By integrating advocacy, education, health services, and community participation, they ensured that behaviour change was reinforced across multiple layers. For example, **UMANG** implemented a holistic model that included adolescent girls' collectives, family counselling, teacher training, and engagement with panchayats to address early marriage, school dropout, and sexual and reproductive health concerns. **Prevention of HIV/STI among Married Women** utilized a community gender norm change component that worked at multiple levels reshaping community norms around adolescent sexual behaviour using peer educators, community leaders, and health providers.

Communication Channels

At the core of these interventions, it was critical to identify respected and credible community members to serve as champions; these included teachers, religious leaders, small group leaders, youth peer educators, and even frontline health workers. These champions were then trained through capacity strengthening workshops on topics such as gender sensitivity, facilitation techniques, active listening, and counselling. Once trained, champions facilitated peer engagement activities, including mentoring of adolescents, convening group discussions, and leading public awareness campaigns. For instance, in **Reduction in Anaemia through Normative Innovations**, women champions led anaemia awareness sessions and engaged reference groups such as husbands and mothers-in-law, building a supportive environment for behaviour change. These interactions were not one-off; champions engaged in sustained dialogue over time, reinforcing messages

through repeated contact and relationship-building. This long-term engagement helped shift community norms through trust and consistent exposure to progressive ideas.



Insights on How Cultural Champions Drive Behaviour

Knowledge: Cultural champions often shared knowledge, especially in contexts where external sources faced resistance.

Attitudes: Cultural champions were influential in shifting attitudes toward more progressive gender norms.

Skills: Cultural champion interventions imparted critical skills necessary for sustained behaviour change through mentorship and serving as relatable role models.

Norms: Cultural champion interventions challenged and reshaped social norms, especially those related to gender roles, marriage, and sexual autonomy.

Practices: The key strength of cultural champions lies in their ability to shift everyday practices through consistent, localised engagement. By modelling alternative behaviours within familiar contexts, they normalised progressive actions and made change feel both attainable and acceptable.

Example: In *Counselling Husbands and Wives to Achieve Reproductive Health and Marital Equity*, cultural champions used a person-centred approach to influence gender equity and family planning by targeting decision-making routines. By facilitating structured conversations and couple counselling sessions, they supported joint decision-making around contraception, helping couples integrate contraceptive use into their daily lives.

Cultural champion interventions mobilised trusted local actors and grassroots networks to catalyse behaviour change and shift social norms from within the community. These interventions relied on trust-building, dialogue, and empowerment to foster sustained normative change, particularly around gender, health, and empowerment issues.

Cultural champion interventions primarily employed a dialogue-centred, participatory communication strategy rooted in building trust through face-to-face interactions and continuous conversations. For instance, **Do Kadam Barabari Ki Ore** trained community-based peer mentors to lead participatory sessions with self-help group members and their husbands, sparking dialogue and challenging harmful gender norms, including those related to violence against women and girls. Similarly, **Reduction in Anaemia through Normative Innovations** in Odisha fostered community-level dialogue around women's nutrition by engaging influential women and community health volunteers who facilitated small group discussions. A key feature of this approach was the empowerment model, which centred on equipping local leaders, peer educators, and self-help group members with tools to spread awareness and challenge harmful social norms. These actors were often embedded within the social fabric of the community, such as teachers, mothers, Accredited Social Health Activists, or religious leaders, which gave them credibility

and influence. Additionally, localised messaging played a critical role; interventions adapted messages to reflect regional cultures, traditions, and dialects, ensuring that the messages were not only accessible but also emotionally resonant and socially acceptable.

Messaging strategies in cultural champion interventions targeted both individual-level behaviours (like equal division of domestic labour or improved spousal communication) and community-level social issues (such as child marriage or girls' education). **We Can Campaign** exemplified this dual approach by encouraging individuals to become "change makers" who would pledge to address violence against women and advocate for community-wide transformation. To ensure cultural appropriateness, messages were co-developed through participatory workshops with community members, including religious leaders like Imams, staff from non-governmental organisations, and local influencers. Dissemination occurred during culturally significant community events such as Women's Day celebrations, religious festivals, and school rallies, often through mediums like handbills, banners, street plays, and public announcements, increasing visibility and social legitimacy. Cultural champion interventions made use of simple yet impactful materials and community-driven channels to communicate their messages. Commonly used materials included role-play scripts, flipcharts,

visual aids, interactive voice recording content, posters, and toolkits designed for grassroots facilitators. Visual aids and story cards were often used to help peer educators initiate sensitive conversations about domestic violence and reproductive health, as in the [Women's Empowerment Collectives](#) initiative.

Channels of dissemination were firmly rooted in community life. These included schools, self-help groups, village meetings, door-to-door outreach, street theatre performances, and community radio broadcasts. In the [Bell Bajao!](#) Campaign, for example, street plays and skits were performed in local communities to encourage men to take a stand against domestic violence by symbolically “ringing the bell” to intervene. Such use of physical, visible public spaces for performance and dialogue helped normalise conversations around taboo subjects and demonstrated community-level support for change.



The Power Trio: Peer Leadership, Local Anchoring, and Ecosystem Engagement

- **Peer-led models were utilised in over 50% of interventions**, signalling a strong preference for trusted, relatable figures from the community to facilitate behaviour change and foster safe, open dialogue among adolescents.
- **Interventions embedded within existing community structures, such as popular self-help groups and religious networks, demonstrated higher acceptance and potential for scale**, indicating that leveraging familiar, trusted platforms enhances credibility and cultural alignment.
- **Multi-layered intervention designs that engaged individuals, families, and institutions simultaneously ensured more sustained impact**, as behaviour change was reinforced through coordinated actions across social, familial, and systemic levels.

Promising Practices

In summary, **Table 3** highlights promising practices from interventions that mobilised cultural champions that fostered trust, enabled peer influence, engaged reference groups and linked normative change to tangible benefits in health, education, and economic empowerment. The examples below demonstrate how community-led and culturally embedded approaches can shift norms and in sustained and context-sensitive ways.

Table 3. Promising Practices Identified Within Cultural Champion Interventions

Promising Practices	Illustrative CC Interventions	Why It Worked
Peer-led mentoring and community facilitation	<i>Gender Norms, Violence and Adolescent Girls' Trajectories, Promoting Adolescents' Engagement, Knowledge and Health, Parivartan programme, Hamari Shaadi, Hamare Sapne</i>	Created safe, relatable spaces; leveraged peer influence to shift norms related to gender and violence
Engaging family and reference groups (e.g., mothers-in-law, parents)	<i>Counselling Husbands and Wives to Achieve Reproductive Health and Marital Equity, Promoting Change in Reproductive Behaviour of Adolescents Project</i>	Engaged key influencers of adolescent girls' agency and decision-making
Youth-led or co-implemented interventions	<i>Youth Ke Bol, Plan-It Girls Program, Sanitation and Hygiene Innovation in Education</i>	Promoted ownership and relevance among youth, helping sustain change
Multi-level community-based models (e.g., community-based organisations, self-help groups, leaders)	<i>Samvedana Plus, We Can Campaign, Digital Women's Economic Empowerment Project</i>	Created trust and credibility, rooted in existing social structures

Linking gender norms to economic, education, and health outcomes	<i>Increasing Women's Digital Literacy, Child Marriage Program in Jharkhand, Reduction in Anaemia through Normative Innovations Project</i>	Showed tangible benefits of norm change, which enhanced motivation and family buy-in
Using trusted cultural figures and religious leaders	<i>Multilevel Sexual Health Program, We Can Campaign</i>	Leveraged authority and respect of traditional leaders to legitimise change



Key Takeaways: Cultural Champion Interventions

1. **Use Participatory, Dialogue-Centred Approaches.** Champions build trust by facilitating open discussions on sensitive topics like domestic violence, child marriage, and women's health.
2. **Localise Messaging with Culturally Resonant Materials.** Flipcharts, posters, toolkits, and street plays reflecting local languages, traditions, and values, can enhance acceptance and engagement.
3. **Invest in Capacity Strengthening of Champions.** Training in gender sensitivity, communication, and counselling equips champions to lead campaigns, mentor youth, and engage reference groups effectively.
4. **Leverage Multiple Grassroots Channels.** Champions can reach communities through self-help groups, schools, festivals, street theatre, and door-to-door outreach to sustain dialogue and reinforce behaviour change.
5. **Create Collective Spaces for Reflection and Learning.** Regular interactions in shared spaces helps normalise progressive behaviours through repeated messaging and interpersonal trust.
6. **Position Youth as Change Agents and Beneficiaries.** Involving youth in conversations and leadership roles will amplify their voice and strengthen their influence within the community.

Cross-Cutting Learnings

Entertainment media and cultural champion interventions represent two distinct yet complementary approaches to shifting social norms and driving behaviour change. While entertainment media excels at sparking awareness and influencing attitudes at scale, cultural champion interventions often offer intimate access to communities, deeper, personalised interactions that enhance ownership and possible paths to sustainability. This section covers approaches to norms shifting, communication, behaviour change, and understanding the drivers behind behaviours.

Approaches to Norms-Shifting

Table 4 presents an analysis of interventions across types, categorised by their primary focus: dispelling misconceptions or promoting positive values. Most entertainment media interventions were primarily aimed at dispelling misconceptions, while cultural champion interventions predominantly focused on promoting positive values. Combination interventions were more evenly distributed across both focus areas. Interventions targeting misconceptions addressed harmful beliefs, stereotypes, and taboos related to gender, health, violence, and sexuality by using storytelling, information dissemination, and behaviour change strategies. In contrast, value-promotion interventions reinforced protective norms, fostered gender-equitable

attitudes, strengthened individual agency, and encouraged collective community action. This dual approach highlighted how different types of interventions strategically engaged with social expectations to shift norms.

Table 4. Interventions by Focus: Dispelling Misconceptions vs. Promoting Positive Values

Intervention Name	Primary Focus	Description
Entertainment Media		
AdhaFULL (TV Program)	Dispelling Misconceptions	Challenges gender-based violence, sex-selective abortion, financial dependence, and child marriage
UnStreeOType (Podcast)	Dispelling Misconceptions	Tackles stereotypes around dating, friendship, career, and body image
MTV Nishedh	Dispelling Misconceptions	Confronts myths about contraceptives, consent, and tuberculosis
Be a Man, Yaar!	Dispelling Misconceptions	Questions about emotional suppression and societal pressure on men
An Experiment within Facebook Messenger	Dispelling Misconceptions	Uses humour and narrative to address gender norms
Kyunki Jeena Issi Ka Naam Hai	Promoting Positive Values	Female mentors empower younger girls via sports (<i>Kabaddi</i>) to challenge mobility norms
Condom Normalization Campaign	Dispelling Misconceptions	Breaks myths around masculinity, pleasure, and condom use
Cultural Champion		
Gender Norms, Violence and Adolescent Girls' Trajectories	Dispelling Misconceptions	Challenges menstrual taboos, mobility restrictions, and gender roles
Samvedana Plus (Karnataka)	Dispelling Misconceptions	Challenges normalisation of intimate partner violence in sex work contexts
Do Kadam Barabari Ki Ore (Bihar)	Dispelling Misconceptions	Questions male honour, justifications of violence, and bystander passivity
UMANG	Promoting Positive Values	Builds girls' confidence and mobility via sports and group education
Promoting Change in Reproductive Behaviour of Adolescents Project	Dispelling Misconceptions	Challenges myths about contraception and early pregnancy
Community Gender Equality (Rajasthan)	Promoting Positive Values	Encourages shared domestic roles and girls' education
Prevention of HIV/STI among Married Women in Urban India (Mumbai)	Promoting Positive Values	Uses religious leaders and non-governmental organisations to promote gender-equitable messaging
Gender Equity Movement in Schools	Promoting Positive Values	Promotes equal relationships and critical reflection among schoolchildren
Sanitation and Hygiene Innovation in Education (India & Tanzania)	Promoting Positive Values	Builds leadership through youth-led water, sanitation, and hygiene
Promoting Adolescents' Engagement, Knowledge and Health	Promoting Positive Values	Promotes sexual and reproductive health and girls' education
Hamari Shaadi, Hamare Sapne	Promoting Positive Values	Couples' family planning with financial decision-making in marriage

We Can Campaign	Promoting Positive Values	Mobilises communities to challenge and transform norms around violence
Counselling Husbands and Wives to Achieve Reproductive Health and Marital Equity (Rural Maharashtra)	Promoting Positive Values	Encourages women-led family planning decisions and male involvement
Entertainment Media and Cultural Champion		
Reduction in Anaemia through Normative Innovations Project	Dispelling Misconceptions	Corrects misinformation around iron-folic acid and diet diversity
Social and Behavioural Change Communication Intervention GARIMA	Dispelling Misconceptions	Tackles menstrual myths and helps girls question restrictive practices
Youth Ke Bol	Promoting Positive Values	Empowers youth to lead advocacy for access to contraceptives and sexual and reproductive health services
Mardon Wali Baat	Dispelling Misconceptions	Encourages youth to reflect on masculinity and gender-based violence
Bell Bajao Campaign	Promoting Positive Values	Promotes men's role and bystander action to end domestic violence
Ab Meri Baari	Promoting Positive Values	Strengthens girls' agency around education, sexual and reproductive health, and early marriage
Breakthrough – Early Marriage Campaign	Dispelling Misconceptions	Mobilises communities and trains youth to challenge early marriage norms

To influence social rewards and sanctions tied to social norms, interventions strategically embedded incentives and disincentives within their implementation strategies. For instance, [An Experiment within Facebook Messenger in India](#) offered prizes such as smartphones and selfies with Bollywood celebrities, for aligning participation with aspirational social rewards. Interventions like [Kyunki Jeena Issi Ka Naam Hai](#) and [Go Nisha Go](#) integrated social rewards and sanctions into their content by dramatising both the benefits of adopting progressive behaviours and the consequences of failing to do so. Characters who modelled desirable behaviours were socially validated within the narrative, while those who resisted change experienced setbacks, demonstrating how fictional narratives can mirror and reinforce real-world social expectations.

Collectively, these implementation strategies demonstrate a nuanced understanding of how social rewards and sanctions function within specific cultural contexts. By embedding incentives and disincentives into the design and delivery of interventions, interventions were realigning social norms in ways that made progressive behaviours not just acceptable, but socially desirable and rewarding.

Approaches to Communication

Table 5 presents communication approaches used by entertainment media and cultural champion interventions, each offering distinct yet complementary strengths in shifting social norms. Interventions that combined entertainment media with engaging cultural champions showcased the potential of integrating media-driven awareness with community-led action for sustained impact. For example, [Ab Meri Baari Hai](#) used transmedia storytelling (social media, audio-visual content) alongside youth-led community action, empowering girls to claim their agency and speak out on issues like education and mobility. Similarly, [Social](#)

and Behavioural Change Communication Intervention GARIMA utilised audio-visual storytelling and print campaigns to raise awareness, while concurrently engaging peer leaders in schools and self-help groups to conduct life skills sessions and menstrual hygiene workshops.

Table 5. Communication Approaches: Entertainment Media vs. Cultural Champions

Dimension	Entertainment Media	Cultural Champion
Primary Mode	Mass communication through TV, radio, social media, and digital platforms	Interpersonal, face-to-face, and community-based communication via local leaders, peer educators, and self-help groups
Reach	Broad and scalable: national or even global. Example: <i>MTV Nishedh</i> and <i>Go Nisha Go</i> reached diverse audiences via multiple platforms	Localised and context-specific. Example: <i>Gender Equity Movement In Schools</i> and <i>Reducing Anaemia through Normative Innovations</i> engaged communities in rural and peri-urban areas through grassroots mobilisation
Engagement Style	One-to-many; can be passive but can include interactive elements (e.g., polls, chatbots, Q&As). Example: <i>Sex Ki Adalat</i> used humour in a fake reality format	One-to-one or one-to-many; highly dialogic and participatory. Example: <i>We Can Campaign</i> mobilised communities through workshops, home visits, and peer mentoring
Emotional Resonance	High: leverages drama, humour, and relatable characters. Example: public service announcements like “ <i>Kabaddi</i> ” and “ <i>Dog</i> ” used satire to destigmatise condom use	High: draws on lived experiences, real-life champions, and local mentors. Example: Women in self-help groups engaged in the <i>Social and Behavioural Change Communication Intervention GARIMA</i> led life skills-based menstrual hygiene and health activities in their villages
Cultural Tailoring	Moderate: messaging can be generalised but adapted across geographies	High: messaging is deeply embedded in local language, traditions, and norms
Cost Efficiency	Cost-effective at scale; once content is produced, it can reach millions at a low cost per viewer	Higher cost per participant due to training, facilitation, and continuous community engagement
Sustainability	Often vulnerable to short-term funding or campaign cycles	More sustainable if local capacity, trust, and community buy-in are established
Behaviour Modelling	Fictional or celebrity characters model positive behaviours. Example: <i>Chhaa Jaa</i> used aspirational stories to influence the mindsets of youth	Peers, mentors, and community leaders model change. Example: <i>Youth Ke Bol</i> combined media with youth-led community dialogue to promote sexual and reproductive health and contraceptive access

Approaches to Behaviour Change

The effectiveness of social norms and behaviour change interventions was critically examined using the COM-B model, which highlights *Capability*, *Opportunity*, and *Motivation* as core drivers of behaviour change (Michie et al., 2011). This framework offered a structured lens through which to assess how interventions build capacities, create enabling environments, and motivate individuals and communities to adopt new behaviours.

Entertainment media interventions aligned well with the COM-B model, effectively enhancing participants’ capability, opportunity, and motivation, and thereby supporting shifts in attitudes and behaviours around gender equity, health, and empowerment. In terms of capability, entertainment media interventions significantly contributed to psychological and cognitive development. **An Experiment within Facebook Messenger in India** raised awareness about gender norms and violence against women while simultaneously building participants’ digital literacy. Through storytelling, interactive quizzes, and conversational prompts, the chatbot engaged users in thoughtful reflection on harmful gender norms and behaviours. As they navigated these conversations, participants also gained practical digital skills, enhancing their confidence and safety online. Similarly, interventions like **Kyunki Jeena Issi Ka Naam Hai**, a popular TV soap opera, trained influencers

to integrate gender-equitable messages into entertainment content, further strengthening audience understanding and skills. Opportunities were expanded through the creation of supportive social and environmental contexts. Campaigns like **Mass-Media Condom Use Campaign** normalised public discourse on sensitive topics such as sexual health, providing much-needed social support to individuals who might otherwise feel isolated. Additionally, the use of widely accessible digital platforms facilitated broader outreach, especially among youth and rural communities who often face barriers to participation in such conversations. In terms of motivation, entertainment media interventions engaged both reflective and automatic processes. Relatable characters in TV dramas encouraged viewers to reconsider existing beliefs and behaviours, especially concerning gender roles. Repeated exposure to progressive behaviours such as rejecting early marriage, as promoted in **Breakthrough's Early Marriage Campaign**, helped normalise these actions, embedding them into everyday life and social expectations.

Cultural champion interventions strengthened *capability* by focusing on both psychological and physical empowerment. **Prevention of HIV/STI among Married Women in Urban India** trained Imams to incorporate gender-equitable messaging into religious discourse. In Rajasthan, young men were engaged in leadership development initiatives that encouraged them to challenge patriarchal norms and build confidence to act as change agents. Cultural champion interventions also created opportunities by fostering safe, community-based environments for open dialogue. Structured sessions, such as those in **Counselling Husbands and Wives to Achieve Reproductive Health and Marital Equity**, enabled participants to discuss sensitive issues respectfully. Non-governmental organisations and self-help groups similarly created safe spaces, particularly for women and girls. For example, **Parivartan's** sports-based programs in Mumbai slums empowered participants to express themselves freely and learn from peers. Regarding motivation, cultural champion interventions used peer mentoring and social reinforcement, as observed in gender equality efforts in Rajasthan.

Challenges and Opportunities

Entertainment media and cultural champion interventions have demonstrated considerable potential in shifting norms and influencing behaviours. However, a range of systemic and contextual challenges exist, which has limited their long-term effectiveness and scalability. **Table 6** outlines key challenges, as well as illustrative examples and opportunities to address each challenge. For example, efforts to shift gender norms have faced significant challenges, including resistance from reference groups which in some cases has led to backlash against women who challenged traditional roles. These challenges were often compounded by short-term funding, deeply-rooted patriarchy, the digital divide, limited male engagement, and a lack of supportive laws and policies. To address these challenges, interventions engaged men and in-laws through dialogue and trust-building, built alumni networks and community protections, and integrated efforts into government schemes.

Table 6. Challenges and Opportunities for Norms-Shifting Interventions

Challenges	Example	Opportunities
Resistance from key Reference Groups (e.g., fathers, brothers, community elders)	<i>Counselling Husbands and Wives to Achieve Reproductive Health and Marital Equity</i> (Maharashtra): mothers-in-Law resisted modern contraceptives and maintained traditional norms	Engage men, fathers, and mothers-in-law through structured dialogue and trust-building strategies
Cultural Constraints and Deeply-Rooted Patriarchy	<i>Community Gender Equality Intervention with Young Men in Rajasthan</i> : norm shifts worked for progressive youth but had limited impact in restrictive communities	Pair norms-shifting interventions with structural reforms (e.g., legal support, economic incentives)

Backlash and Social Sanctions Against Women Challenging Norms	<i>Parivartan Programme</i> , sport-based Mentorship (Mumbai Slum): women faced restrictions post-intervention, and mobility gains reversed after marriage	Build post-intervention alumni networks, community protection mechanisms, and long-term engagement strategies
Limited Male Engagement in Gender Equality Programs	<i>Social and Behavioural Change Communication Intervention GARIMA</i> Menstrual Health and Hygiene Management: minimal father and male involvement, limited norm shifts	Develop targeted interventions for fathers and brothers, addressing masculinity and shared responsibilities
Digital Divide and Accessibility Barriers	<i>An Experiment within Facebook Messenger in India</i> : digital advocacy was effective, but rural and low-income groups had limited access	Expand interventions beyond social media to include community-based discussions and offline engagement
Short-Term Funding and Lack of Sustainability	<i>Breakthrough's Early Marriage Campaign</i> (Jharkhand & Bihar): funding cuts led to the discontinuation of training packages	Embed interventions into government schemes (e.g., Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana - National Rural Livelihoods Mission) and develop long-term investment mechanisms
Lack of Structural and Policy-Level Changes	<i>Do Kadam Barabari Ki Ore</i> Preventing Violence Against Women (Bihar): awareness increased, but weak law enforcement limited impact	Strengthen policy advocacy, integrate legal aid, and work with law enforcement for systemic change

Recommendations for Implementers

This deep dive offers valuable insights into how social norms can be shifted to improve the lives of adolescent girls and young women. By examining the strategies, outcomes, and challenges associated with norms-shifting interventions that use entertainment media and/or engage cultural champions, we gain a deeper understanding of what drives meaningful change and where opportunities for improvement exist. The following summarizes the most critical insights that can be used to inform future interventions.



Prioritise Inclusion of Adolescent Girls and Young Women with Disabilities

Design future interventions with an intentional focus on adolescent girls and young women living with disabilities, addressing their intersecting vulnerabilities related to gender, disability, caste, class, and location through inclusive outreach, content, and participatory design. This will help ensure greater representation and promote equality among young women, particularly those who are often excluded from interventions and face other deeply rooted social norms.



Measure and Evaluate Social Norm Shifts for Sustainable Impact

Integrate robust measurement frameworks in future interventions to explicitly track shifts in collective social norms—distinct from individual attitudes—particularly those related to gender roles, marriage, violence, and health. Use a mixed-methods approach combining baseline and endline assessments, norm-specific quantitative indicators, and qualitative tools such as vignettes, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions. This will help enable interventions to assess the depth, direction, and sustainability of norm change at the community level and inform adaptive programming.



Mobilise Trusted Leaders for Social Change

Cultural champion interventions have shown that deep community integration and engagement through respected local leaders can drive meaningful change across individual, social, and institutional levels. Future efforts should prioritise identifying and empowering these champions to foster credible, context-specific norm shifts and promote systemic transformation from within communities, while also being mindful of and mitigating any potential backlash.



Harness Emotionally Resonant Storytelling to Shift Social Norms

Entertainment media interventions have shown the ability to engage young audiences through powerful narratives that resonate emotionally. Future interventions can invest in high-quality storytelling, engaging local actors in design and story development, and strategically leverage digital platforms to spark interpersonal dialogue and reflection, enabling widespread and sustainable social norms change.

Ensure Sustained Engagement for Long-Term Change



In India, long-term interventions—typically implemented for more than three years—have often demonstrated deeper community engagement and more sustained efforts to shift entrenched social norms, underscoring the importance of time and consistency needed to influence deeply rooted beliefs and behaviours. These findings suggest that designing interventions with a longer-term horizon and a strong focus on community engagement may be more effective in achieving meaningful and lasting shifts in social norms. Long-term funding, follow-up activities, and booster sessions are crucial for reinforcing new behaviours and preventing regression.

Engage Reference Groups Through Sustained Dialogue to Build Supportive Norms



Resistance from key reference groups—such as fathers, brothers, and mothers-in-law—is a recurring challenge. Cultural champion interventions have shown that targeting both young women and their reference groups through ongoing, trust-based dialogue may help build a supportive environment for behaviour change. Future interventions should consider long-term, relationship-driven strategies that involve reference groups to gradually reinforce progressive ideas and foster community-level norm change.

Integrate Entertainment Media and Cultural Champion Approaches to Shift Norms



Entertainment media sparks widespread awareness and critical reflection, while cultural champion approaches build trust and deepen impact through dialogue and reinforcement, creating meaningful engagement and fostering sustained action. Interventions that pair integrated approaches, combining entertainment media with cultural champions, have demonstrated promise for future social norm change initiatives.

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