

Gender
& Health

VIHARA
INNOVATION NETWORK

Introduction

About Vihara Innovation Network

Vihara is an innovation and impact practice working in global health and inclusive development. We work in India, South East Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa and the Pacific.

We use contextual inquiry, behavioral insights, systems thinking, and human centered design to improve the way health and development services are conceptualized and delivered.

Vihara's Gender Practice Area works to understand gendered, sociocultural, and environmental determinants of health; specifically to uncover and conceptualise how gender norms transformation, greater financial and digital access for women, and advancing livelihoods and financial inclusion for women, can allow us to build healthy, resilient, and future forward communities.

CORE COMPETENCIES



- > **Ethnographic Research:** Gathering deep social-behavioural insight, understanding material-cultural realities, human factors and systemic contexts, while being open to new technology trends that can make new behaviours and interactions possible.
- > **Human-centred Design, Trialling and Evaluation:** Conceptualizing, rapid prototyping and testing product, visual-communication, process, technology, service and systemic solutions.
- > **Convening and Partnerships:** Developing un-conventional multi-stakeholder conversations, platforms and program consortiums that curate attention and resources toward solving specific challenges
- > **Innovation Implementation:** Working alongside aid agencies, social development organizations and government actors to enable the adoption and scaling of promising innovations
- > **Acceleration** of early-growth stage ideas or impact enterprises that seek to solve intractable social challenges of our times

Our Experience in Gender & Health

Key Projects

1. Design-Led Theory of Change for Behaviour Change around Livelihood, Psychosocial Health & Menstrual Health Management in times of COVID-19
2. Pathways: Discovering New Routes to Health
3. Couple Engage
4. Game of Choice, Not Chance
5. UN India-NITI Aayog Investor Consortium for Women Entrepreneurs
6. Bolstering The Uptake Of WASH And Hygiene Practices

1 Design-Led Theory of Change for Behaviour Change around Livelihood, Psychosocial Health & Menstrual Health Management in times of COVID-19

PCI | 2019

Vihara undertook research for PCI Bihar, to study **the impact of the economic crisis on rural women belonging to self-help group households to develop a theory of change to articulate challenges, goals and intervention strategies in three areas of livelihoods, psychosocial health, and menstrual health.** Our team reviewed literature and data generated by PCI and from relevant ongoing/ past research by Vihara.

Vihara developed a Theory of Change comprising **strategic intervention recommendations.** Interventions include strategies for;

- **early engagement** of boys and girls to build cross gender empathy,
- **couple building** by engaging young couples digitally,
- **inclusive budgeting** for women and children's needs in families for long term resilience
- mobilising adolescents for **life skills and livelihoods training** through the trusted channel of Jeevika SHGs
- **enabling expression of stress** and anxiety in the community and normalise discussions of mental health issues
- building **safe community spaces** and channels for victims of violence and abuse.

Some key challenges identified through the study

Women have been restricted from traditional sources of information and support to deal with the social, economic and health stresses exacerbated by the pandemic.

Women remain **isolated** and unable to **network**, reducing their source of information around **income, education, skilling** opportunities, etc.

Adolescent girls remain uninformed, alone and cut off from the outside world as the schools remain shut, gatekeeping of girls persists, and access to phones and other technology remains limited/absent as phones remain with men, no finances for cable/data recharge or selling off of women's personal phones for some ready cash. **This has not only disrupted girls' education but also job prospects for both women and young girls.**

Spending for women, including basic hygiene needs, have been found to be disproportionately affected.

Most women would purchase items for their personal need within daily/weekly spent **allowances and budgets** they get for purchasing food and other basic requirements of the children and family. With the slashing of household budgets, a lot of women have lost their personal expense budgets as buying food became difficult.

Phones in most families are shared by the household or owned by men and women have very limited allowance in terms of screen time and data usage. With men being at home during the lockdown, their use of phones increased and to reduce expenses, most families constrained their usage to just one phone and also reduced spending on recharges. **In many households additional mobiles, primarily belonging to women, were sold off for ready cash and further limiting their digital access.**

Food scarcity due to stretched financial resources has led to poor nutritional behaviors and reduced portion for women who prioritise their families' diet over their own, eat less or skip meals entirely due to continued unstable finances.

2 Pathways: Discovering New Routes to Health

BMGF Seattle | 2018-20

Pathways is an innovative, multidisciplinary project to identify and deepen understanding of the social and environmental risk factors that can be mitigated to improve the health and wellbeing of vulnerable families. **Focusing on the journey of a woman over the course of her lifetime and until her children reach 5 years of age, the project utilizes a unique, design-led approach integrating anthropology, behavioral science, data science and human-centered design to develop a more holistic perspective of vulnerability among families.** The goal is to enable more holistic risk-mitigation interventions for the health of vulnerable women, under-5 children and their families.



Insights on impact of Covid-19 on Gender Norms and Livelihoods

Discomfort with being pushed into Atypical Gender Roles

COVID-19 related loss of employment, mobility restrictions and an increase in domestic labor particularly around hygiene, are beginning to **impact gender roles**, although it remains to be seen how long duree or temporary these changes are. Men are unable to fulfill the **provider role** and are required to stay at home while **severe economic stress has pushed many women to take on a provider role, increasing their burden.**

Adapting livelihoods in times of COVID-19

COVID-19 has led to rapidly depleting savings and debt accumulation. Some proactive individuals in geographies with market presence have started to adapt to the shifting market needs by **building new livelihoods**, reskilling and finding new market opportunities, to cope better. **Proactive women with high adaptive capacity** are able to adapt their livelihoods or leverage opportunities to deal with the socio-economic crisis of COVID-19 positively. Their participation in income generation also transforms the gender dynamics within the unit by bringing more flexibility, and create greater say in decision-making.

Findings show that women employed in the home-based mat (Chattai) and basket weaving industries in urban slums, used the lockdown time to produce and stockpile products to sell once the market re-opened. In remote villages of UP & Bihar, women collectives that make Bidis has to stop production since they were completely cut off from raw material supplies. Urban groups were more organised and their business more lucrative due to market proximity. **Women collectives such in both rural and urban settings need guidance on running businesses and support with linkages to markets and distribution channels that can help them develop their business further.**

3 Couple Engage

BMGF India | 2018–20

Existing health systems programs on Family Planning (FP) place the onus of modern methods of contraception on young women, who are already in **power negative situations** early in their marriage owing to rural patriarchal settings. This, coupled with **non-engagement of men** in these programs, has generated the perception that FP is a women's issue and is one key contributors towards its low uptake.

Couple Engage was a two-year, first-of-its-kind programme, designed to develop and test up to four gender-equitable approaches on male and couple engagement in family planning, with focus on spacing methods, using exploratory review of evidence and insights, and human centered design.



Insights on overcoming normative gender barriers to promote equitable family planning

Financial conversations and decisioning need to be opened for women, to enable better communication between partners.

In order to enable **discussions between partners** on what the shared and individual responsibilities for a couple could be, the **normative barriers** have to be addressed. Some of these are the dominance of men in decision making around finances and family planning, lack of communication on sharing responsibilities around household chores and finances, and around contraceptive use and family planning.

Evolving aspirations of women and men, and financial considerations translate into high intent for spacing

Couples were conscious of the costs of bearing another child and calculated how an additional child would result in excess expenditure that they may or may not be able to bear. Couples also struggled with this as they **overestimated their ability to provide** for the family and subsequent children. This was largely due to lack of financial planning of the additional cost. **Financial planning and estimation for another child had a marked influence on the couple's intent to have better-spaced and fewer children.** Couples who were more aligned in their choices and had women-led decision-making or joint decision-making on family planning, displayed better emotional intimacy and resilience.

Gender-specific Learnings from Research in Urban Informal Settlements

Home and Domestic Space

Literacy, internet usage and smartphone ownership is lower among women compared to men, explains why **women are less likely than men to have received first-hand COVID-19 information.**

Because most of the information about the pandemic was conveyed to women by their male family members, **adoption of most preventive behaviours relied mostly on what the men in the family think about.**

However, **women mentally felt responsible for their families' safety took on the sole responsibility of making home a safer space** for her family, also because it is perceived to be their 'gendered role' while men would have to go out to fulfill their provider role. Women spent active time and effort to ensure a relative level of hygiene and sanitation, as well as **nudge the men and children in the house to uptake preventive behaviours, often leading a strain within HH dynamics.**

Stepping up to provide for their families

During the lockdown, apart from taking complete control of hygiene and sanitation in the house, many women had to step out to also work when their husbands lost their jobs, or had to work for much lesser money. **Women were partaking in supporting the family income when situation of crisis arose. But that action and that labor was barely recognized even by the women themselves.**

Community Toilet Facility

COVID-19 and lockdown led to an increase in unemployment and uncertainty of the future, with shared washing and bathing areas now being populated by groups of unemployed men who participated in drinking and substance abuse. **Women found themselves in a conundrum of having to avoid using the facility vs open defecation and the shame that comes with it.**

The morning time at the toilet facility is supposed to be reserved for the working men in the community, women, therefore use facilities during other times of day. **The facility, thus, is available to women only for a certain number of hours in the day when most men are not around, while leads to women changing their eating and consumption patterns, impacting their health.**



4 Game of Choice, Not Chance

USAID | 2018-20

Game of Choice, Not Chance is a Direct-to-Consumer Serious Game platform that uses discovery and play to empower adolescents to become active decision-makers in their own lives. Vihara is leading the design of and conducting formative research for, a game that reflects a deep understanding of its users, their ambitions, vulnerabilities, and social circumstances. **Using the medium of a game, young men and women, get connected to real-world resources to become better equipped to make decisions and achieve positive health, safety, career, and educational outcomes.**



Insights on overcoming normative gender barriers to promote gender equitable thinking

Adhering to normative gender roles in early years, leads to role pressure, and to viewing women as dependents.

Our research with young men (15–19 years) in North India revealed that boys internalised **provider roles** from early adolescence. This meant they automatically viewed themselves as earners and women as financial dependents. This meant, that over time and by association, women came to be viewed as secondary in many different spheres of life – education, careers, and decisioning.

While this led to significant role pressure, where young men mentioned feeling deprived of choice (in face of having to prioritise financial support for current and future families), it also led to thinking that careers for women were secondary, and that women did not always need to be highly educated.

Gender transformative approaches that attempt to **recast women as co-providers**, and sharers of decisioning and financial responsibility can reduce role pressure for boys and young men, promote economic resilience in the family and community, and lead to gender equitable behaviours.

5 UN-India NITI Aayog Investor Consortium for Women Empowerment

To accelerate opportunities for investing in women's entrepreneurship, the UN (led by UNDP, and UN-Women) and the Women Entrepreneurial Platform (WEP) of NITI Aayog have partnered to establish the UN India-NITI Aayog Investor Consortium for Women Entrepreneurs; a platform which advocates for the reduction in gender disparities in startup investments by providing mentoring and networking opportunities, accelerating financial and market linkages, and showcasing success stories. Vihara Innovation Network partnered as a technical arm with UNDP and NITI Aayog on this consortium platform to design and facilitate the investor meets and webinars for women entrepreneurs. The Investor Consortium was a platform to bring together key partners who are committed to support women entrepreneurs through mentorship and possible funding opportunities.

Key activities included:

1. Capacity building activities in the form of structured masterclasses, webinars and expert panels to provide promising entrepreneurs with better understanding of the ecosystem especially in terms of fundraising methodologies, scaling enterprises and story-telling skills.
2. Investor pitching sessions were organized, giving more than 50 women entrepreneurs the opportunity to pitch their ideas to leading investors as well as seek guidance on their business propositions.
3. A "COVID-19 Business Response Webinar Series for Women Entrepreneurs" was organized to equip entrepreneurs with immediate and critical support systems to address implications of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Key Activities

The platform invited 50 early-growth stage women-led enterprises across India, to give access to financial linkages and upskilling workshops for rapid growth and scaling.

The consortiums collectively convened enterprises coming from varied sectors: Education, Livelihoods, Healthcare, Water & Sanitation, Agriculture, Service-based Enterprises, and Textiles.

To ensure right alignment and tailored support, the team onboarded angel investors and VC firms with a smaller ticket size of \$ 0.1-0.5 Million, with investments in consumer internet, mobile applications, Internet, Rural Sector, Outsourced Services, Agribusiness, Energy, Media, Consumer and Business services, and Healthcare.

Consortium activities included:

- Masterclasses on Pitching and Communicating Stories of Change
- Pitch Sessions
- Expert Talks
- Discussing the Impact of COVID-19 on Women-Led Startups

6 Bolstering The Uptake Of WASH And Hygiene Practices

Reckitt Benckiser | 2020

This project aimed at designing **strategic recommendations for local community-based organisations and government bodies to prevent rise in COVID-19 positive cases** bolstering the uptake of necessary WASH practices.

Considering sample population from urban slums of Dharavi and M East ward, Mumbai, the project focused on understanding local perceptions around COVID-19, people's access to necessary information and availability of preventative resources and the facilitation of WASH service support near settlements.



Our Intervention Directions and Concepts

1. Young Women's Empowerment Collectives
2. Camps/events to impart financial education and product information and benefits and associated tool kits
3. Game-Based Learning to Promote Interactive Financial Learning and Inclusive Goal-Setting

Young Women's Empowerment Collectives

YWE Collectives leverage the existing SHG platform and women led producer groups to allow mobility of adolescent daughters of members and increase their exposure. By way of aligning with these trusted channels and gendered spaces it facilitates their access to information, builds peer support, aspirations and skills, with limited pushback or restrictions from the community.



Key Stakeholder

18-25 yo women

Adolescent girls

Intervention Upon

MHM information & supply and distribution of menstrual products

Discontinued education leading to early marriage

Increase access to role models and influencers to build aspiration

Skill building in new areas

Levers

SHG women as trusted mobilisers for girls

Marketing for small businesses

Self management skills

Camps/events to impart financial education and product information and benefits and associated tool kits

Create mobility and access for women

/ Formalise informal networks in the community to create social support for women so increase their mobility and access to financial service.

/ Use physical artefacts to have commitment from group members and to engage them in supporting each other on a regular basis

/ In the Panch Paar project, Vihara had prototyped “Maasi Mandali”, a group of guardians for every newborn and their mother. The women who are friends/ relatives gather for the Chhathi ceremony and pledge to look over the newborn baby and support the mother. The promise is sealed through a ritual of marking hands on a paper or on a wall and writing their phone numbers. Two Other relevant prototypes Vihara had created in Panch Paar was a child health tracker bag where families could store all health products; medicines, prescriptions, mark illness and medicine administration and write down numbers of persons who own vehicles for emergency transportation and village maps with health service providers/ centers marked to visually reduce the perception of distance to health care from homes.

Vihara can create and test existing prototypes for enabling finance tracking, and creating access and mobility for women by leveraging their own networks and local resources.



Game-Based Learning to Promote Interactive Financial Learning and Inclusive Goal-Setting

Mera Sapna board game

/ Family/ couple game to visualise aspirations, challenges and setting financial goals.

/ The game shows an overview of the path to achieving one's aspirations, taking into account various situations that require expenditure (accidents, birth of a child, health risks) and ways to counter the same (savings, upskilling, planning for children, taking loans).

/ 4 people can play side by side with each player having an individual path to follow. This adds a competitive element but also enables them to learn from each other's journeys in the game.

/ The visuals help show the journey is not easy and has its obstacles, but also has its rewards and it is possible to end up in a good scenario.

