TACKLING THE TABOO:

Sexuality and gender-transformative programmes to end child, early and forced marriage and unions

Full Report

Photo: Bas Bogaerts / Plan International

1. FOREWORD

In response to the limited discussion of sexuality in the global discourse on child, early and forced marriage and unions (CEFMU), 41 local, national and global program implementers, government representatives, philanthropic foundations, researchers and policy advocates in the field of adolescent development and sexuality gathered in New York in March 2016 to discuss the control of adolescent girls' sexuality in the context of CEFMU. The two-day meeting was hosted by the American Jewish World Service, CARE USA, the International Women's Health Coalition and GreeneWorks. One of the objectives of this meeting was to develop recommendations for addressing sexuality within the context of CEFMU, including to fill programmatic, research and advocacy gaps.

Coming out of this meeting, the CEFMU and Sexuality Programs Working Group was formed. The working group commissioned a review to identify gender-transformative programmes that promote bodily integrity and girls' rights and development and result in normative change that helps end CEFMU. The findings are captured in this report, which also showcases in detail, through case studies, some of the ground-breaking, gender-transformative work on sexuality carried out by three organisations: **Trust for Indigenous Culture and Health (TICAH)** in Kenya, **International Centre for Reproductive Health and Sexual Rights (INCRESE)** in Nigeria and **The YP Foundation** in India (see case studies, pages 29–31).

We would like to thank all the organisations that shared their time, expertise and information with us. Without their generosity and important work, this report would not have been possible.

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In solidarity and partnership, the CEFMU and Sexuality Programs Working Group:

American Jewish World Service (AJWS), CARE, CREA, Global Fund for Women, *Girls Not Brides*, GreeneWorks, International Center for Research on Women (ICRW), International Women's Health Coalition (IWHC), Nirantar Trust, Plan International, Population Council and Promundo-US.

Photo: Fran Afonso / *Girls Not Brides*

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2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Control and regulation of sexuality – in particular adolescent girls' sexuality – is a critical and often unaddressed manifestation of gender inequality that exists in different cultural contexts and communities around the world. For adolescent girls, restrictions on sexuality are exacerbated by age and gender, which are key dimensions of inequality. Adolescent girls usually lack power and agency over their own lives and are often highly constrained in their ability to make decisions for themselves.

Rooted in patriarchy, control of adolescent girls' sexuality is a driver of one of the world's most prevalent harmful practices: child, early and forced marriage and unions (CEFMU). CEFMU is a stark example of how women's and girls' life choices – down to the most intimate of if, whom and when to marry – are taken from them and controlled by others. While there is a growing awareness amongst practitioners, policymakers and others that addressing patriarchy and control of sexuality are key to understanding and effectively combatting CEFMU,[1] too few programmes that aim to reduce CEFMU take on the issue of sexuality as central to their work.[2] Unless control of sexuality and harmful gender norms that subordinate the position of women and girls in society are addressed head on, CEFMU will persist.

In response to this, the CEFMU and Sexuality Programs Working Group was formed. The group commissioned an analysis to **identify gender-transformative approaches (GTAs) that work at the intersection of CEFMU and sexuality** that could potentially be adapted for other contexts and to understand the key determinants of success for these programmes.

This report captures promising gender-transformative work taking place in politically and culturally conservative contexts, including programmes led by grassroots organisations. The findings are meant to be used: 1) as a learning tool for programme implementers, 2) to present gaps and opportunities for future research, and 3) as a tool for advocates to open dialogue with leaders and policymakers about how programming designed to address CEFMU can advance girls' and women's greater sexual agency, bodily autonomy, freedom and dignity.

Photo: Mikko Toivonen / *Plan International*

For adolescent girls, restrictions on sexuality are exacerbated by age and gender, which are key dimensions of inequality.

Gender transformative approaches (GTAs) encourage critical awareness of gender roles and norms; promote equitable positions of girls and women in society; challenge the distribution of resources and allocation of duties between men and women; and/or address the unequal power relationships between girls and women and others in the community, such as service providers or traditional leaders. The ultimate aim of GTAs is to achieve gender equality, empower women, girls and gender non-conforming young people, promote health and eliminate violence.

[1]M.E. Greene, S. Perlson, J. Hart and M. Mullinax. *The centrality of sexuality for understanding child, early and forced marriage.* Washington, DC, GreeneWorks and American Jewish World Service, 2018, https://ajws.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/centrality_of_sex__final.pdf.
[2]Ibid.

Findings

The findings reveal elements of promising gender-transformative approaches employed to address the control of girls' sexuality in the context of CEFMU.

A cross-cutting theme that emerged from this review was **backlash** – and the various ways in which organisations using gender-transformative approaches to address adolescent sexuality and CEFMU grapple with, overcome and learn from backlash in their work. This review found a range of examples, from using strategic entry points for recruitment to dialoguing with parents and community leaders to engaging men and boys as allies in the journey towards gender equality.

***Recommendations for key actors*:**

A comprehensive conceptual framework and common measures of success are needed

- Further research and understanding of the interdependence and linkages between sexuality, rights, autonomy, poverty, class and caste in the context of CEFMU are needed. Indicators measuring success beyond age of marriage, such as access to services and autonomous decision-making, should be prioritised, as age-focussed measures can miss larger issues of gender inequality, choice and consent.

Discussion, research and guidance are needed related to criminalisation of adolescent sexuality

- Greater examination and evaluation of the impacts of laws on adolescents is needed, with particular attention to age and gender controls. Conflating the age of marriage and age of consent risks curbing adolescents' agency, can stigmatise or criminalise individuals who have sex before marriage, and make health providers more reluctant to provide services to adolescent girls.

Findings: Key elements of GTAs for CEFMU

- Sexuality curricula: gender-sensitive, context-specific, flexible and relatable
- Centering girls as agents of change
- Working with men and boys to advance gender equality
- Careful selection, training and ongoing support of programme facilitators
- Addressing intersectionality: understanding the complexities, reaching the most vulnerable
- Grounding programmes in local contexts
- Activating families, communities and local stakeholders
- Innovative strategies for recruitment and retention
- Monitoring, evaluation and learning – mixed methods
- Ensuring sustainability for social change

Recommendations for programme implementers

- Design, implement, monitor and evaluate gender-transformative programming that addresses the root causes of CEFMU, including patriarchal control of adolescent girls' sexuality.
- Ensure CEFMU programming places girls at the centre, building their skills, perspective and agency to open up alternative life options beyond child, early and forced marriage and unions.
- Work with men and boys to check and challenge their own privilege and power and to become active supporters of gender equality.
- Build strong relationships and strategic partnerships with stakeholders – family, community and institutions – to address norm change at all levels.
- Ground programmes in local contexts and hire and support local staff who know the values and practices of their community.
- Take an intersectional approach, cognisant of how gender, disability, age, race, caste, class, and other factors affect adolescent girls and how CEFMU may affect the most vulnerable.

Recommendations for researchers

- Share existing and develop additional short- and long-term measurements for assessing social norm change and impacts of CEFMU programming, and for demonstrating causality in programme interventions and shifts in attitudes and beliefs related to sexuality, gender equality and CEFMU.
- Support monitoring and evaluation (M&E) capacity building in smaller organisations so they can better monitor and evaluate their work.

Recommendations for funders

- Develop guidelines/criteria for grantees in order to encourage gender-transformative approaches that address sexuality and links to CEFMU.
- Support long-term, flexible approaches to gender-transformative programming that addresses sexuality.
- Direct funding toward programming all levels, including grassroots, community-based groups.

Recommendations for advocates and young activists

- Highlight issues of CEFMU and sexuality within a broader framework of development and human rights agendas.
- Empower girls to advocate for themselves; strengthen their capacity to bring their messages to the public – it empowers them, and is a powerful tool for impacting decision-makers.

Greater examination and evaluation of the impacts of laws on adolescents is needed.

Photo: Howard Cerrato / Plan International

3. INTRODUCTION

3.1. The relationship between sexuality and child, early and forced marriage and unions

Control and regulation of sexuality – in particular adolescent girls' sexuality – is a critical and often unaddressed manifestation of gender inequality that exists across different cultural contexts and communities around the world. Virtually all societies place some level of legal, religious, political, social or economic restrictions on:

- how sensuality, intimacy and pleasure are experienced
- how people engage in sexual and other intimate relationships
- how people express their sexuality and sexual orientation
- how they ensure their own sexual and reproductive health
- how they exercise sexual agency and bodily autonomy more generally[3]

For adolescent girls, these restrictions are exacerbated by age and gender, which are key dimensions of inequality. Adolescent girls usually lack power and agency over their own lives and are often highly constrained in their ability to make decisions for themselves.

Rooted in patriarchy, control of adolescent girls' sexuality is a driver of one of the world's most prevalent harmful practices: child, early and forced marriage and unions (CEFMU).[4] CEFMU is a stark example of how women's and girls' life choices – down to the most intimate of if, whom and when to marry – are taken from them and controlled by others. While concentrated in some countries and regions of the world, CEFMU is present in many societies, affecting many millions of girls and their communities each year.[5] CEFMU is associated with girls' and women's foregone education and employment, domestic violence, poverty and increased risk of HIV, and can amount to a lifetime of subservience and oppression.[6]

In places where patriarchal gender norms are strictly enforced, people, especially girls and women, are extremely constrained in their freedom to express their sexuality. Girls are valued for their virginity, and those who engage in sex before marriage may be seen and treated as a disgrace to themselves and their families. In such circumstances, marriage may be viewed as the only legitimate scenario for engaging in sexual activity,[7] and families and communities are motivated to ensure girls are married, regardless of their own dreams or wishes.[8]

As a social, cultural and economic institution, marriage, in particular CEFMU, also plays a key role in reinforcing patriarchy and gender inequality, upholding traditional gender norms and roles that limit girls' and women's autonomy and aspirations, including regarding their bodies and sexuality. CEFMUs are not equal partnerships: girls' and women's sexuality, reproductive choices and mobility remain under surveillance and scrutiny, and any deviation from the dominant gender norms is severely penalised. Girls are denied consent and choice, as well as pleasure in relation to sexuality. Therefore, control of the female body is an important focal point of patriarchy – both contributing to and reinforced within child, early, and forced marriage and unions.

While CEFMU is complex, and is experienced and justified differently across the many cultures where it persists, the underlying drivers of patriarchy and gender inequality form a common thread across these settings.[10] The issue has gained global visibility and is seen as an important aspect of the international development agenda, as evidenced through Target 5.3 in the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda calling for its eradication. There is a growing awareness amongst practitioners, researchers, media, activists and policymakers that addressing patriarchy and the control of sexuality are key to understanding and effectively addressing CEFMU.[11] However, too few programmes that aim to reduce CEFMU take on the issue of sexuality as central to their work. Unless the harmful gender norms that subordinate the position of women and girls in society are addressed head on, CEFMU will persist.[12]

Gender norms are shared expectations or informal rules about how people should behave, according to their gender. For example, a common gender norm is that women and girls will and should do the majority of domestic work.

Gender norms hold in place a hierarchy of power and privilege that typically **emphasises a gender binary** and favours that which is considered male or masculine over that which is female or feminine, reinforcing a systemic inequality that undermines the rights of women and girls and restricts opportunities for women, men and gender non-conforming individuals.[9]

Photo: Flemming Gernyx / *Plan International*

[3]Sexual agency is defined as the volitional, self-determined exercise of control over one's body and sexual choices. Bodily autonomy encompasses freedom from violence, control over decisions relating to one's body (including fully informed consent to medical procedures), and the ability to make decisions over when, where and with whom to engage in sexual activities.

[4]According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR): Child marriage, or early marriage, is any marriage where at least one of the parties is under 18 years of age. Forced marriages are marriages in which one and/or both parties have not personally expressed their full and free consent to the union. A child marriage is considered to be a form of forced marriage, given that one and/or both parties have not expressed full, free and informed consent. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Child, early and forced marriage, including in humanitarian settings, https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Women/WRGS/Pages/ChildMarriage.aspx (accessed April 2019). While this term has become accepted in United Nations documents to describe this varied practice, the word 'unions' is added to reflect the informal marriages or free unions that are so common in the Latin American and Caribbean region, and equivalent to marriage (adapted from Plan International).

[5]Approximately 650 million girls and women alive today were married before their 18th birthday (UNICEF, 2018). This statistic does not capture the full extent of the problem, as many young women may enter into marriage against their will or choosing after turning 18; the patriarchal norms that drive CEFMU do not cease to exist after girls turn 18.

[6]For more information and resources about the impact of CEFMU see, for example, the *Girls Not Brides* resource centre, https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/resource-centre/.

[7]CARE Tipping Point, Child, Early, and Forced Marriage: CARE's global experience, https://caretippingpoint.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/CARE_CEFM_CapacityStatement.pdf.

[8]M.E. Greene, S. Perlson, J. Hart and M. Mullinax. *The centrality of sexuality for understanding child, early and forced marriage.* Washington, DC, GreeneWorks and American Jewish World Service, 2018, https://ajws.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/centrality_of_sex__final.pdf.

[9]Plan International, Heise L, Greene M, et al. Gender Inequality and Restrictive Gender Norms: Framing the Challenges to Health. Lancet Series on Gender Equality, Norms and Health. Publication date tbc.

3.2. Gender-transformative approaches to address CEFMU

By commissioning this report, the Child, Early and Forced Marriage and Sexuality Programs Working Group (henceforth "the working group") acknowledges that CEFMU and sexuality are intrinsically linked to power and, as such, require an understanding of various dimensions of inequality, including sex and gender, age, class, caste, sexual orientation and gender identity. The group highlights the importance of challenging practices of CEFMU with gender-transformative approaches (GTAs).

GTAs go beyond the symptoms of CEFMU and seek "to reshape gender relations to be more gender equitable, largely through approaches that free individuals across the gender spectrum from the impact of destructive gender and sexual norms".[13] To this end, GTAs critically examine and address the roots of power relations that underpin gender inequality.

Gender-transformative approaches encourage critical awareness of gender roles and norms,[14] promote equitable positions of girls and women in society; challenge the distribution of resources and allocation of duties between men and women; and/or address the power relationships between girls and women and others in the community, such as service providers or traditional leaders. The ultimate aim of GTAs is to achieve gender equality, empower women, girls and gender non-conforming young people, promote health and eliminate violence.

Successful gender-transformative approaches may entail addressing gender norms at all levels of an ecological model (individual – family/relationships – communities – society, etc.) and call for a deep understanding of local context.[15] Change can be measured by examining individual and collective agency; cooperative dynamics and expectations; and the informal and formal institutional rules that govern social practices.[16]

In addition to requiring effective gender analysis that assesses the impacts for people from across the gender spectrum, in diverse circumstances and with a wide range of other social characteristics, the principles of GTAs include:

- **Gender consciousness:** Redefining rigid gender norms pertaining to both men and women through reflection, education, awareness and insights that challenge the harmful and restrictive constructions of masculinity and femininity that drive gender-related vulnerabilities and inequalities and hinder health and well-being.[17]
- **Awareness of diversity:** Considering intersectional factors such as ethnicity, class, sexual diversity, age, gender identity and expression, race, ability, religion, and others.
- **Girls and women as agents of change** and leaders, and not passive actors in their lives.
- **Men and boys contribute to achieving gender equality** and the goals and objectives of the women's rights movement.
- **Spaces for gender non-conforming people** – moving away from binary approaches to programming.
- **Social movement building** for gender equality and women's and girls' rights.

The ultimate aim of GTAs is to achieve gender equality, empower women, girls and gender non-conforming young people, promote health and eliminate violence.

The aim of this review is to **identify promising gender-transformative programming that works at the intersection of CEFMU and sexuality.** The report identifies gender-transformative programmes taking place in politically and culturally conservative contexts, with particular attention to those led by grassroots organisations. The empowerment approaches highlighted in this report consider the disproportionate vulnerabilities that married and unmarried girls and young women face. They aim to build girls' autonomy with skills, knowledge and agency (including sexual agency), while addressing the root causes of gender inequality and seeking to reshape destructive gender and sexual norms.

The findings are meant to be used as 1) a learning tool for programme implementers, 2) to present gaps and opportunities for future research, and 3) as a tool for advocates to open dialogue with leaders and policymakers about how programming designed to address CEFMU can advance girls', young women's and women's greater sexual agency and bodily autonomy in an effective manner.

Photo: Allison Joyce / *Girls Not Brides*

[10]CARE Tipping Point, Child, Early, and Forced Marriage: CARE's global experience, https://caretippingpoint.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/CARE_CEFM_CapacityStatement.pdf.
[11]M.E. Greene, S. Perlson, J. Hart and M. Mullinax. *The centrality of sexuality for understanding child, early and forced marriage.* Washington, DC, GreeneWorks and American Jewish World Service, 2018, https://ajws.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/centrality_of_sex__final.pdf.
[12]Ibid
[13]S. Dworkin, P. Fleming, C. Colvin. 'The promises and limitations of gender-transformative health programming with men: critical reflections from the field.' *Culture, Health and Sexuality,* 2015, 17(2), https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13691058.2015.1035751.
[14]Ecological models aim to change multiple forces of a person's environment that may be perpetuating harmful gender norms. They typically include five different levels: individual, interpersonal, organisational, community and public policy. See: L.L. Heise. 'Violence Against Women: An Integrated, Ecological Framework.' *Violence Against Women*, 1998, 4, 262, https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1077801298004003002
[15]M.E. Greene and A. Levack, *Synchronizing Gender Strategies: A Cooperative Model for Improving Reproductive Health and Transforming Gender Relations*, Washington, DC, Population Reference Bureau and Interagency Gender Working Group, 2010, https://www.engenderhealth.org/files/pubs/gender/synchronizing_gender_strategies.pdf.
[16]E. Hillenbrand, N. Karim, P. Mohanraj and D. Wu, *Measuring gender-transformative change: A review of literature and promising*, CARE USA, Working Paper, 2015, https://www.care.org/sites/default/files/documents/working_paper_aas_gt_change_measurement_fa_lowres.pdf.
[17]M.E. Greene and A. Levack, *Synchronizing Gender Strategies: A Cooperative Model for Improving Reproductive Health and Transforming Gender Relations*, Washington, DC, Population Reference Bureau and Interagency Gender Working Group, 2010, https://www.engenderhealth.org/files/pubs/gender/synchronizing_gender_strategies.pdf.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1. Research methodology

The working group hired a research team, which conducted extensive information-gathering and a detailed analysis to identify and understand promising gender-transformative approaches for addressing sexuality and CEFMU, with the potential to be adapted for other contexts. An initial 194 programmes were identified through outreach to the working group members and key informants, and to donors identified as potentially funding grassroots organisations working at the intersection of sexuality and CEFMU. In addition, a survey conducted in 2017 by AJWS, FemJust, GreeneWorks, the ICRW and *Girls Not Brides* included an option for civil society organisations to self-identify as working at this intersection and interested in sharing information about their work.[18]

Table 1 presents a summary of the parameters used to narrow the sample (See Annex 8.1 for more detail). These parameters were developed in consultation with the working group and include existing criteria for gender-transformative sexuality programming (as detailed in the previous section). The first cut parameters were applied to all 194 organisations by examining online resources, such as published literature, or information provided directly by the programmes and organisations. Documentation of their work was key, since the focus was on prospects for adapting the best programmes for other contexts. Thus, a large number of organisations were excluded from the analysis at this stage due to lack of response or insufficient materials.

The outcome was a list of 49 organisations, which that was then submitted to the second cut parameter to identify those that were working on CEFMU and had sufficient information for a later in-depth analysis. A short-list of 23 organisations was ultimately identified for analysis for this report.

The 23 programmes/organisations were analysed in detail using available resources. Variables of interest were established, including: a general characterisation of the participant groups; programme objectives and implementation information (curricula, community involvement, length of the programme and frequency of sessions, and programme cost); articulation of a gender-transformative perspective in programme principles; the processes for girls engagement; the use of an ecological model; work around sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR); and strategies and innovative entry points. A more detailed description for the variables of interest can be found in Annex 8.2.

First-cut parameters
• Highlights/targets girls (may also target others, including transgender and gender non-conforming children and youths, but at least some of the programming is specifically designed for girls and young women only).[19]
• Focussed on promoting autonomous decision-making.
• Gender-transformative,[20] with an intersectional approach.
• Anchored in the rights of girls and young women.
• Grounded in the complexity of girls' lives, i.e. focussed on the unique characteristics of the girls with whom they are working and based on an understanding of their particular needs and characteristics.
• Highlights voices of girls. For example, engaging girls (and other programme participants, which may include transgender and gender non-conforming children and youths) in programme evaluation or review, and ideally in programme development. Creates spaces for girls to express themselves safely.
• Sensitive to particularities of the community in which it is located and engages community stakeholders, including with men and boys as partners for gender equality and challenging harmful masculinities.
• Considers linkages across social ecology (i.e. family, community and society-level barriers), including structural and legal barriers, harmful gender norms and cultural expectations, either as interlinked programming or through referrals.
• Addresses sexual and reproductive health.
Second-cut parameter
The programme works explicitly on CEFMU

The information reviewed for this report comes primarily from available documentation, email correspondence and phone conversations with the organisations. Documentation reviewed typically includes programme materials related to working with adolescents and young people directly, including curricula, reports to donors, proposals and evaluations, or other evidence of results. Where available, additional documentation related to engaging the community and parents was reviewed.

While the report includes work by large international organisations, it was important to the working group to also showcase the work of grassroots organisations as well as work that has not been widely documented. Accordingly, small organisations doing groundbreaking work are highlighted through the report. Furthermore, three grassroots organisations from the final 23 were selected for case studies: **The YP Foundation** (India), **TICAH** (Kenya) and **INCRESE** (Nigeria) (see case studies, pages 24–31). These organisations had well-articulated programming that embodied the GTA criteria, and were also chosen based on geographic diversity.

Noting the safety and security issues surrounding many of the organisations included in the report, the project maintained a high degree of confidentiality. All organisations were asked for written consent to be mentioned in the report and case studies, which they also had the opportunity to review before publication.

[18]This survey was part of another research project led by AJWS on funding for civil society organisations addressing CEFMU (report forthcoming in 2019).
[19]Population Council, 'Girl-Centered Program Design: a toolkit to develop, strengthen and expand adolescent girls' programs.' 2010. The toolkit notes that many communities lack programming that is designed for girls. Rather, girls are expected to participate in general youth programming, but such programming often does not meet their needs or focus on their gender-specific experiences. The toolkit further comments that "Girls tend to receive the maximum benefit when the programs they participate in are girl-only because they feel free to open up, express themselves, ask any questions and take on leadership roles that they might not otherwise."
[20]We drew upon the *Girls Not Brides* definition of 'gender-transformative'.

Photo: Russell Watkins / Department for International Development

194 programmes were reviewed. 23 organisations were found to have programmes that address sexuality and CEFMU. These programmes were analysed for this report.

4.2. Research limitations

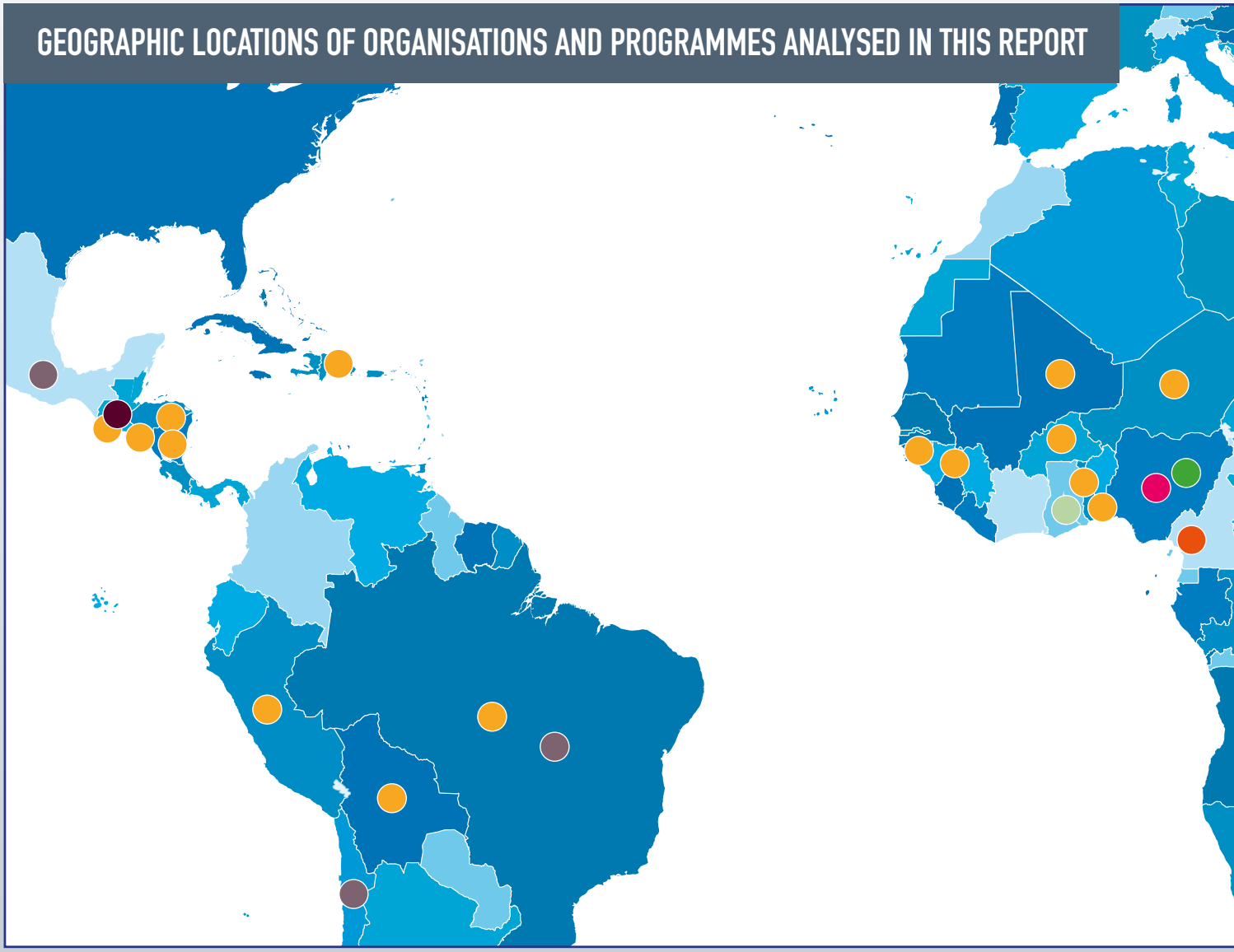
A number of methodological and procedural challenges were encountered in the process of gathering information from many of the organisations. Some organisations did not provide an exhaustive collection of materials; a few organisations were unresponsive; some materials were available only in local languages; smaller and less established programmes had less capacity to respond to information requests; or thorough documentation or systematically collected evidence was not available at all, particularly in the case of older programmes.

Finally, while the research team put considerable effort in identifying programmes from Latin America and the Caribbean, only a few of the organisations originally long-listed responded to our queries. This is unfortunate as the rates of early marriage, and especially informal unions, are high in the region.

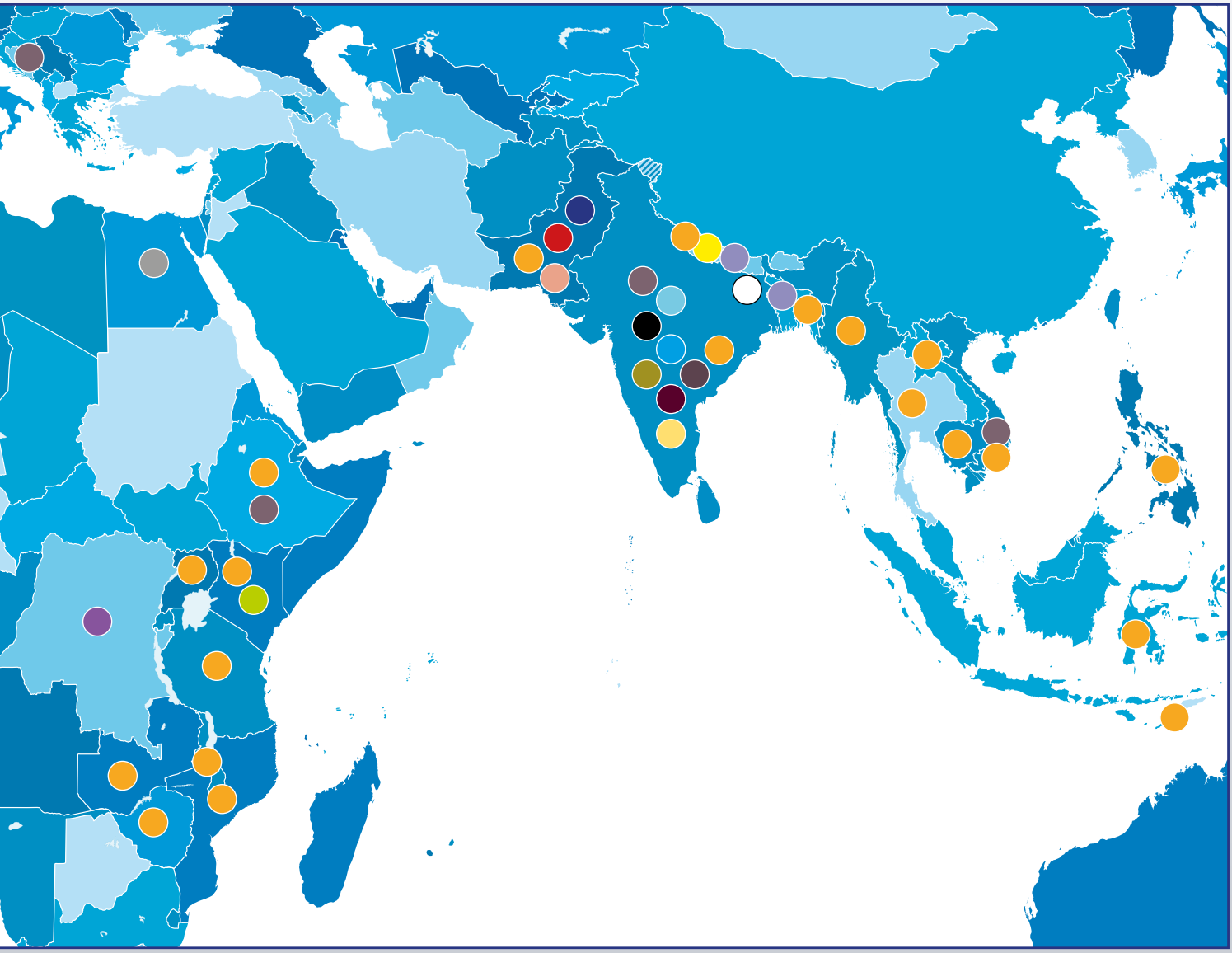
Additionally, the report does not focus specifically on humanitarian settings. Programming in both of these settings should be explored in further research.

This research is not exhaustive nor illustrative of the totality of the programmes and organisations working across the globe to address sexuality and CEFMU. Nevertheless, it yields important findings that can be built upon and strengthened in future work in this area. Some of the limitations encountered helped build the recommendations section and can shed important light on what else is needed for donors, programme implementers and researchers, among others.

GEOGRAPHIC LOCATIONS OF ORGANISATIONS AND PROGRAMMES ANALYSED IN THIS REPORT



Organisation(s) and programme name(s)	Country
Aahung	Pakistan
Association pour la Promotion de l'Autonomie et des Droits de la Jeune Fille/Femme (APAD)	Cameroon
Aura Freedom International	Nepal
Aawaaz-e-Niswaan	India
CARE – Tipping Point and TESFA programmes	Nepal, Bangladesh and Ethiopia
Caritas, CEDPA and Population Council – Ishraq Program	Egypt
ICRW, CORO and TISS – GEMS programme	India
CREA – It's My Body programme	India
ICRW – Development Initiative on Supporting Healthy Adolescence (DISHA)	India
Girls' Power Initiative (GPI)	Nigeria
Institute for Health Management, Pachod (IHMP) – Maharashtra Life Skills Program	India
International Centre for Reproductive Health and Sexual Rights (IN-CRESE)	Nigeria



Organisation(s) and programme name(s)	Country
Peace Foundation	Pakistan
Plan International – 18+ and Yes, I do programmes	Global
Population Council – Abriendo Oportunidades programme	Guatemala
Promundo – H I M D programmes	Global
Rutgers World Population Foundation (WPF) – Awareness to Action programme	Pakistan
Sarathi Development Foundation – Saloni project	India
Solidarité des Jeunes Filles Socioprofessionnelle (SOJFEP)	Democratic Republic of Congo
Trust for Indigenous Culture and Health (TICAH) – Our Bodies, Our Choices programme	Kenya
VACHA Trust	India
Youth Harvest Foundation Ghana	Ghana
The YP Foundation	India

Abbreviations: CEDPA, Centre for Development and Population Activities; CORO, Committee of Resource Organizations for Literacy; CREA, Creating Resources for Empowerment in Action; GEMS, Gender Equity Movement in Schools; ICRW, International Center for Research on Women; TISS, Tata Institute for Social Sciences.

5. KEY FINDINGS: Tackling the taboo through gender-transformative approaches

The following findings reflect promising GTAs employed by organisations to address the control of girls' sexuality in the context of CEFMU.

Insights and examples are organised into the following themes:

- Sexuality curricula: Gender-sensitive, context-specific, flexible and relatable
- Girls as agents of change: Centering their participation, leadership and perspectives
- Working with men and boys to advance gender equality
- Careful selection, training and ongoing support of programme facilitators based on clear and fully agreed principles
- Addressing intersectionality: Understanding the complexities and reaching the most vulnerable
- Grounding programmes in local contexts
- Collaborating with families, communities and local stakeholders
- Innovative strategies for recruitment and retention
- Monitoring, evaluation and learning using evidence-based approaches
- Ensuring sustainability for lasting social change

Overcoming backlash: A cross-cutting theme

In many parts of the world, addressing sexuality is widely considered taboo. Confronting the control of adolescent sexuality from a rights-based perspective, including addressing issues like sexual consent, choice and pleasure, can be very challenging and is often met with backlash and resistance at all levels – from families, communities, schools, health service providers, community-based organisations, government officials and policymakers.

Maturity, responsibility, consent, mutuality and respect were found to be generally touched upon by all programmes, to different degrees and through a wide range of methods and strategies.

A cross-cutting theme that emerged from this review was the various ways in which organisations using a gender-transformative approach to address adolescent sexuality and CEFMU grapple with, overcome and learn from backlash in their work – from using strategic entry points for recruitment, dialoging with parents and community leaders, and engaging men and boys as allies in the journey towards gender equality. Examples of this work are addressed throughout the findings of this report.

5.1. Promising approaches: Elements of programme design and implementation

5.1.1. Sexuality curricula: Gender-sensitive, context-specific, flexible and relatable

A fundamental aim of gender-transformative approaches is to challenge the social norms around gender and sexuality. A main objective of gender-transformative curricula is to develop participants' maximum ability for choice and freedom, especially regarding their bodily autonomy, sexual and reproductive rights and life plans in general.[21] Curricula focussed on social transformation emphasise political and social change and use information and teaching as vehicles for it. The delivery of such information was a key component for all the programmes analysed in this study. Sexuality curricula were rarely standalone programme components; they are usually delivered as part of life skills and other more comprehensive programming (including as cover for avoiding resistance and backlash).

Many organisations and programmes in this review, such as **The YP Foundation** (see case study, pages 31–33), **Plan International's 18+** programme and the **Girls' Power Initiative**, support participants to feel more comfortable speaking about sexuality, communicate positive messages about sexuality, dispel notions of "normal–abnormal" and move away from feelings of guilt or judgement. Several organisations cover menstrual health and hygiene, safe sex and prevention of sexually transmitted infections and pregnancy, as well as violence and harassment. Programmes in this review use different methodologies, such as discussion about "good and bad touching", games and stories to present information in a way that is understandable and relevant to participants.

A rights-based approach

Curricula that are gender-transformative and rights-affirming highlight the role of girls and adolescents as rights holders and therefore the authors of their sexual, reproductive and personal lives. Most programmes reviewed work from a rights-based perspective.

INCRESE, for example, uses a rights-based approach to train girls on core topics such as human rights, sexual and reproductive health, gender, sexual orientation and gender identity, leadership skills, life skills, and advocacy skills (see case study, pages 28–30). It also promotes feminist principles of equal and inalienable rights of girls and includes in-depth explanations of pleasure and desire.

Maturity, responsibility, consent, mutuality and respect were found to be generally touched upon by all programmes, to different degrees and through a wide range of methods and strategies. **INCRESE** and **The YP Foundation** were among the few organisations reviewed that address pleasure and desire, dimensions of sexuality that are considered particularly taboo in most of the contexts (see case studies, pages 26–33). This would be considered an important gap that could be built upon in future programming.

Sex and gender as axes of power

The curricula of most organisations in the review examined the differences between sex and gender and focussed on changing gender norms, with content that emphasises the social foundations of sexuality in people's lives and communities and how cultural norms of gender affect sexual attitudes, practices and experiences. Usually, sessions reinforced positive messages about sex and sexuality, moving away from guilt and judgement, normal–abnormal and natural–unnatural dichotomies.

However, only a few organisations showed results related to the difference between sex and gender – a notable gap in programming approaches. **Girls' Power Initiative** in Nigeria was one of them. Their evaluation mentions that students in intervention schools understood that sexuality encompasses sex, gender, identities and roles, as well as sexual orientation, while control school participants still described sexuality as "sexual

[21] J.M. Mutegi. 'The Inadequacies of "Science for All" and the Necessity and Nature of a Socially Transformative Curriculum Approach for African American Science Education,' J Res Sci Teach, 2011, 248(3), 301-316, https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1002/tea.20410.

relations". This organisation invites participants to share their experiences and build their voice to speak to others about sexuality, gender and pleasure. Sessions encourage discussion and exchange of experiences that provide participants with additional accurate and technical information to add value to the lessons learned.

Some organisations and programmes include reflective analyses of power and patriarchy in their curricula, including: **Plan International's 18+ programme**; **CREA's It's My Body programme**; **ICRW**, **Committee of Resource Organizations for Literacy (CORO)** and **Tata Institute for Social Sciences (TISS)'s Gender Equity Movement in Schools (GEMS) programme**; and **The YP Foundation** (see case study, pages 31–33). Finally, while all organisations did address sexuality in some manner, they did not always explicitly link it to CEFMU.

A few organisations and programmes in addition to **Girls' Power Initiative** moved beyond a binary approach to gender and address sexual orientation and gender identity – especially **CREA's It's My Body programme**, **Promundo's H, I, M, I and D programmes, TICAH's Our Bodies, Our Choices programme** (see case study, pages 26–27), **The YP Foundation** (see case study, pages 31–33), **INCRESE** (see case study, pages 28–30), and **Plan International's 18+ programme** – though addressing this dimension of sexuality was more often a noted gap in approach.

Tailoring to specific populations

To ensure relevance and pertinence, sexuality curricula should be tailored according to the audience, including age considerations. Many organisations pilot and evaluate their curricula before implementation, making necessary revisions with the help of reviewers, including girls themselves, civil society representatives, religious scholars, educators, subject experts, teachers and parents.

TICAH's Our Bodies, Our Choices is an SRHR programme that uses different curricula for different participant groups in Kenya, including men, women, trans and gender non-conforming individuals, women living with HIV, LGBTI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex) youths, women with disabilities and young mothers (see case study, pages 26–27). For younger participants, the programme offers more basic sexuality education content, including scenario cards and educational posters to exercise responsible and informed choices. Older beneficiaries are given more complex sexuality content, with more in-depth information such as an "ask a doctor section", where facilitators put together a panel of experts to help answer participants' questions regarding sexuality and gender.

The modules that make up **Plan International's Champions of Change for Gender Equality and Girls' Rights Curriculum**,[22] which is used in the two Plan programmes reviewed, were designed with two age groups in mind: young adolescent girls (10-14) and older adolescent girls (14-18). The organisation, however, recognises that defining strict age groups may not accurately reflect the reality of communities where the Champions of Change methodology is implemented. For this reason, throughout the modules, language referring to "younger girls" or "older girls" is used. Some activities are adapted for different age groups, while others are directed only at one group.

Referrals and linkages to information and services

Adolescents are often marginalised and lack decision-making power and agency to access essential services. This study found that most of the programmes analysed have mechanisms to refer or provide these services to adolescents who participate in their activities. Most of these focussed on SRHR and consist of youth-friendly spaces to consult with health care providers. **TICAH's Our Bodies, Our Choices programme** (see case study, pages 31–33) runs direct telephone lines to answer questions about sexual and reproductive health, conducts community advocacy to support adolescents' access to health services, and distributes contraceptives.

5.1.2. Girls as agents of change: Centering their participation, leadership and perspectives

Young people are crucial partners of successful gender-transformative approaches. Programmes work better when they refrain from treating them merely as participants. Indeed, girls' ability to speak up for their own rights played a major part in the achievement of some of the organisations' results; once girls asserted their own rights, it was generally easier for other people, such as their parents, to support their decisions. However, as **The YP Foundation** points out, "young people don't just run on motivation and fresh air"; strong support networks are needed, as well as strategies that include connecting participants and graduates with ongoing learning and development opportunities.

From clubs to collectives

Many organisations in this review provide physical safe spaces for girls, for education activities or other purposes. Spaces range from places to come together for learning, play and socialising to temporary or long-term shelters in contexts with very high rates of violence towards women, including in humanitarian settings. Ensuring safe

Photo: Parav / Plan International

[22]The curriculum is accessible here: Champions of Change for Girls' Rights and Gender Equality, https://www.alignplatform.org/resources/2019/02/champions-change-girls-rights-and-gender-equality

spaces for programmes is paramount for laying the groundwork for confidentiality and mutual respect. Safety is particularly important to parents as well, who expect programmes to ensure the physical safety of their daughters.

Population Council's Abriendo Oportunidades (Opening Opportunities), for example, works with community leaders to identify spaces where girls and adolescents can hold their weekly meetings. The safe nature of these spaces goes beyond physical layout, surroundings and accessibility. They are meant to be characterised by the respect and care for each other demonstrated by those who meet there. These safe spaces offer the opportunity to foster sisterhood, allowing girls to relate to each other based on their similar experiences and generate collective support.

Safe spaces can also be used to support girls' skill-building, an important dimension of supporting girls to build alternatives to CEFMU. **Aawaaz-e-Niswaan** (Voice of Women), for example, conducts curricular activities that strengthen girls' and adolescents' knowledge on various topics, and equipe them with life skills, leadership capacities and SRHR information in a safe space. The **Institute for Health Management, Pachod (IHMP)'s Maharashtra Life Skills Program** identified girls with low self-esteem in urban India for participation in girls' clubs for life skills education and leadership training. **Aura Freedom International** provided skills-building opportunities, including literacy and rights education, for girls at risk of gender-based violence and CEFMU in safe spaces in the aftermath of the earthquake in Nepal. The complementary nature of these components enables the programmes to provide adolescent girls with a comprehensive support structure.

Beyond safe spaces, training and strengthening individual leadership skills, many organisations reported that collectivising girls to take joint action has empowered them to voice their opinions and concerns at the community level and enabled them to collectively work out solutions to their problems. It can be difficult for young people, at an individual level, to challenge norms that are set by the society, the community or their families. Collectivising[23] brings together members of marginalised groups in ways that enable them to articulate their oppression and strategise for individual and social change. Collectives help girls build a sense of self while linking to issues in the larger world, in a safe space.

Many of the organisations in this review work with girls to build collectives. Organisations tend to combine knowledge, skills and opportunities in the practices of collective action to make it an empowering experience for young girls. Once girls form a critical mass that is seen in public behaving according to new social norms, these new platforms can sustain other activities and efforts that benefit other women and girls in their communities. Meaningful participation is at the core of building true autonomy. Especially when discussing their own sexual rights, having girls themselves be protagonists of their advocacy and outreach is crucial.

For example, one of the strategies employed by **CARE's Tipping Point programme** is to facilitate collective action and movement-building to impact girls' lives through 'fun-centred' sessions on understanding the context and social norms where girls live. Programme staff brainstormed with the girls and designed simple activities that they could enjoy together while forming and strengthening bonds with each other.

It is worth noting that collective action of those most affected by CEFMU is a challenge. For instance, married girls usually are not engaged in collective advocacy efforts due to restrictions on their mobility and agency. Effective movements should be led not only by those at risk, but also by those who are already affected by rights violations.

Political advocacy

GTAs take into account that the gender norms that limit bodily autonomy, control sexuality and dictate marriage are also found in the political sphere of society. This sphere is usually dominated by adults with a political agenda that is often not helpful to the challenges faced by young people. Political advocacy is a process by which a person or a group of people seek to influence the public policies that affect them, including laws, the functioning of institutions, the allocation of public resources and representation. Some of the organisations in this review put emphasis on involving youths, including adolescent girls, in their advocacy efforts and community outreach, using strategies from providing simple training to supporting clearly articulated advocacy efforts that are fully conceptualised and led by youth.

Solidarité des Jeunes Filles Pour L'Education et L'integration Socioprofessionnelle (in English: Solidarity of Young Girls for Education and Social-professional integration) **(SOJFEP)**, for example, uses peer education to sensitise, mobilise, engage and support indigenous girls and young women.[24] Learning sessions are carried out in safe spaces led by girls themselves and female peer leaders. The group's "Stop violence against girls in schools and families, let's preserve girls' education" campaign in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has allowed them to increase the participation of girls in activism against school and domestic violence, and in decision-making spaces (pupils' committees and children's parliaments), which have now integrated parity and gender through the reinforcement of early leadership for women in schools. **Plan International's Yes I Do** programme conducted country baseline studies as a step towards identifying strategies to involve young people in policy work and provided on-demand technical assistance on advocacy for youth participants in their programme.

Many organisations reported that collectivising girls to take joint action has empowered them to voice their opinions.

Youth-led organisations

Of all of the organisations reviewed in-depth in this study, only two were youth-led organisations: **The YP Foundation** and **Youth Harvest Foundation Ghana**. Core to **The YP Foundation's** mission is centering the power of youth leadership. Rather than seeing youth as leaders of tomorrow, **The YP Foundation** insists that youths are leaders today, and works to spread that message beyond youth-focussed spaces. Meaningful participation is achieved through a youth-run model, with all of their programming focussed on the power of youth leadership. Their peer educators create and implement programmes and influence policies in the areas of gender, sexuality, health, education and governance, and they are also part of monitoring and evaluation processes. **The YP Foundation** trains youth leaders to facilitate rights-based and feminist sexuality education sessions, engage in advocacy campaigns at different levels, and launch larger projects or their own advocacy campaigns.

[24]See more here: SOJFEP, https://youngfeministfund.org/grantees/solidarite-des-jeunes-filles-pour-leducation-et-lintegration-socioprofessionnelle-sojfep/.

5.1.3. Working with men and boys as active agents of change for gender equality

The formation of critical consciousness in young people drives their questioning of the norms and expectations imposed by tradition, culture and religion, which generate and perpetuate unequal power relations. The identification of boys and men as part of those inequitable relationships and as potential beneficiaries of gender equality is key.

It is important to start masculinity work by recognising that the social system tends to favour certain people's privileges over others, and that social and gender norms tend to reproduce these privileges. When boys and men follow the rules of this system, whether they realise it or not, they become part of this system of domination and privilege.

Thus, it is important when working with men and boys to educate and empower them to be more expressive and equitable in their relationships, challenge them to understand and reject their privilege, contribute to gender equality and hold other men and boys accountable for their actions towards girls and women.

Most programmes reviewed included specific curricular modules or other programme activities aimed at men and boys, helping them to perceive themselves as a key part of the effort toward gender equality, and to recognise their own privileges and the costs of gender inequality. **Plan International's Champions of Change Curriculum for Boys** (which is being implemented as part of the **18+** global programme), for example, addresses boys aged 14-18 to reflect more critically and consciously on their identity and sexuality, and to consciously challenge and transform gender practices and behaviour.

To engage boys and men, programmes tap into young men's interests, through particular vehicles for intervention (e.g. sports) or through content and messaging to incorporate key issues facing young men. For instance, in order to lay the foundation for in-depth reflection around the cost of CEFMU for girls and their families, adapted versions of **Promundo's Program H** often start by focussing on increasing young men's awareness of the existence of unequal power dynamics, not only within their relationships with women and girls, but also with other boys and men – for instance due to age, class, employment status, ethnicity or sexual orientation. They encourage reflection on the many types of relationships in which one person might have power over another person – and the serious repercussions that unequal power balances can have not only on the lives of women and children but also on men themselves. This represents an important first step to motivate young men to construct more equitable relationships with men and women in their communities, and it can also generate greater empathy and willingness to question deep-seated beliefs and norms related to gender inequality.

5.1.4. Careful selection, training and ongoing support of programme facilitators based on clear and fully agreed principles

The attitudes and aptitudes of teachers, mentors and facilitators toward content areas such as sex and gender are important to the successful implementation of GTAs. According to the programmes in this review, the selection process should include assessment of a candidate's ability and willingness to facilitate the programme and/or teach the curriculum. Most organisations in this review also require that programme facilitators/implementors be local young women and men, so that they are familiar with the values and traditions of the community.

Supporting facilitators' feminist perspective

Providing structured spaces for staff's own critical reflection on gender and sexuality, and particularly how these issues impact their own lives, is central to their authentic willingness and ability to engage with CEFMU programming. Before a programme starts, some organisations conduct "values clarification" exercises to ensure that whoever delivers the curriculum fully embraces feminist principles of equal and inalienable rights. **CARE's Tipping Point** programme centres around critical reflective dialogue with staff throughout implementation: at the beginning of employment, staff receive training on gender equity and diversity, they practise critical reflective dialogue throughout implementation, and the organisation monitors and evaluates staff transformation.

While gender-transformative training and "staff transformation" are embedded in the theory of change of a few organisations or programmes in this review, consistent training and follow-up with teachers, mentors and facilitators on this specific area remain weak in many organisations. This is an important gap that should be strengthened in future gender-transformative programming.

Peer facilitators

The diversity of activities in which facilitators are involved is extensive, ranging from providing youth-friendly services to community advocacy. A good example of the multiple functions of a mentor/facilitator is found in **Rutgers World Population Foundation (WPF)'s Awareness to Action programme** in Pakistan. In this case, mentors/facilitators trained girl health leaders, known as *"kirans"*, in schools to promote access to health services and spread key messages on delaying CEFMU, the harmful effects of teenage

Photo: Josh Estey / CARE

[22]The curriculum is accessible here: Champions of Change for Girls' Rights and Gender Equality, https://www.alignplatform.org/resources/2019/02/champions-change-girls-rights-and-gender-equality

pregnancies, encouraging girls' education, and raising awareness of reproductive health and safe motherhood. They also taught *kirans* skills to effectively interact with the media and supported them to write letters and articles on social issues.

Youth Harvest Foundation Ghana selects adolescent ambassadors to become peer educators who conduct community outreach activities such as house-to-house visits.

CEFMU ... is often more prevalent amongst girls facing multiple deprivations, including the poorest girls, those out of school and those facing displacement.

Training and capacity building

Most of the organisations in this review hold regular training sessions to accompany and support people in these roles. The time and resources used for these efforts vary greatly from organisation to organisation, but all programmes offer ongoing support and materials to mentors after initial training. This support can take the form of group sessions with other facilitators or self-training session from a distance. **Promundo's Program M** and **Program H** use *Portal Equidade de Gênero nas Escolas* (PEGE, or Portal for Gender Equity in Schools in English), an online teacher training tool, to pair stronger facilitators with those who still have some room for growth. This system was born from ten years of programming and evaluation experience in schools and was designed with pedagogy specialists and experienced facilitators. Teachers' incentives to complete the course include certification (adding to their professional development) and pay increases. Besides the main training process, **Program M** and **Program H** also include refresher courses and mentoring.

Many of the programmes reviewed in this study use a "cascade" methodology to prepare their facilitators. A cascade model is one in which training is conducted at several levels by trainers drawn from a level above.[25] For many grassroots organisations, this approach is popular because it can reach many participants in a short period of time and allows training to take place in stages so that progress can be monitored.[26] In theory, cascade training is cost-effective because those who have been trained can then train others.[27] **CARE's TESFA programme**, for example, uses this model with government partners on SRHR topics, with girl-group mentors to equip them with facilitation skills and disseminate information from the facilitations to the wider community.

5.1.5. Addressing intersectionality: Understanding the complexities and reaching the most vulnerable

Intersectionality can be defined as "the complex, cumulative way in which the effects of multiple forms of discrimination (such as racism, sexism and classism) combine, overlap or intersect, especially in the experiences of marginalised individuals or groups".[28] CEFMU affects girls across different socio-economic strata, but it is often more prevalent amongst girls facing multiple deprivations, including the poorest girls, those out of school and those facing displacement.[29,30,31] Programmes that incorporate GTAs consider these intersectionalities when addressing CEFMU in order to more deeply engage with the problem and transform social and gender norms that promote sustainable change.

Among the programmes in this study that explicitly work with intersectional approaches is **The YP Foundation** (see case study, pages 31–33). They use a feminist methodology adapted for caste and religious minority communities that also brings in class, migration, sexual orientation and gender identity and other marginalised identities to broaden the conversation. Their work trains young leaders to conduct an analysis of how caste, class, religion, power, patriarchy, mobility and violence play out in the life of young people who are marginalised on different fronts.

Most of the short-listed organisations did not *explicitly* say that they employ intersectional approaches, but they did mention cross-cutting topics in curricula, recruitment processes and methodologies to reach the most marginalised communities. For example, **VACHA Trust** is aimed at girls from poor communities living in slums (*bastis*) and from one of the most marginalised groups in society. They are disadvantaged by poverty, caste, migrant status and lack of access to basic government services. The project intends to expand girls' knowledge about their health, promote positive attitudes towards their bodies, and make them aware of opportunities and systems they can access to solve their health issues.

Most of the intersectional approaches are focussed on participant selection. For example, many of the programmes take into account other demographic aspects when selecting participants, including school enrollment, poverty, displacement status and disabilities. One of **TICAH's Our Bodies, Our Choices programme** criteria, for example, specifies that at least three out of four girls belong to a minority caste or religion, or come from impoverished communities and families (see case study, pages x-y).

It is noteworthy that most of the programming reviewed is designed for in-school youths that are not yet married. Some programmes reach out-of-school youths, and, to a lesser extent, married girls and young mothers, and other vulnerable youths, such as trafficked girls, street youths and

Photo: Hossam M Omar / Unsplash

[25]D. Hayes. 'Cascade training and teachers' professional development,' *ELT Journal, 2000*, 54(2), https://www.freewebs.com/lilianriverazenoff/English%20Methodology%20II/Teachers_development.pdf
[26]M.M. Dichaba and M.L. Mokhele. 'Does the Cascade Model Work for Teacher Training? Analysis of Teachers' Experiences.' *Int J Edu Sci,* 2012, 4(3), 249-254, http://www.krepublishers.com/02-Journals/IJES/IJES-04-0-000-12-Web/IJES-04-3-000-12-Abst-PDF/IJES-04-3-249-12-210-Dichaba-M-M/IJES-04-3-249-12-210-Dichaba-M-M-Tt.pdf
[27]Ibid
[28]Meriam Webster: https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/intersectionality. In addition, CREA, an India-based feminist human rights organisation that is member of the working group, notes that "women who are marginalised in multiple ways, on the basis of their age, marital status, sexual orientation, disability, or choice of profession, are left out of the majority of development programmes, and activists and organisations working across different issues are limited in their ability to join forces to improve access to basic human rights".
[29]A. Erulkar. 'Early marriage, marital relations and intimate partner violence in Ethiopia,' *International Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health,* 2013, 39(1), 6–13, https://www.guttmacher.org/journals/ipsrh/2013/04/early-marriage-marital-relations-and-intimate-partner-violence-ethiopia.
[30]Women's Refugee Commission. *A Girl No More: The Changing Norms of Child Marriage in Conflict.* NY, Women's Refugee Commission, 2016, https://www.womensrefugeecommission.org/girls/resources/1311-girl-no-more.
[31]N. Otoo-Oryortey and S. Pobi. 'Early Marriage and Poverty: Exploring Links and Key Policy Issues.' *Gender and Development, 2003,* 11(2), 42-51, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/741954315.

Photo: Population Council

literacy-challenged boys. It is important to highlight that this review of programmes confirmed that the sexuality of girls and boys with disabilities is omitted by most organisations and has been noted as an important gap by many. The lack of explicit efforts to consistently address intersecting identities overall and their links to CEFMU in programme design has also been noted as an important gap that needs to be addressed so programmes more fully align with the principles of GTAs.

5.1.6. Grounding programmes in local contexts

One of the main characteristics of GTAs is the awareness of diversity and understanding what it means to be male or female and a certain age, sexuality, ethnicity and class, among other factors, in a given social and cultural context. Almost all the organisations included in this report make efforts to be culturally relevant and adapt to the contexts in which they plan to implement a programme. Most of these efforts are carried out at the beginning of a new programme as a way to assess its viability and compatibility with local values, and to identify unmet needs and rights of the population. Some organisations also use mechanisms for continuous monitoring of cultural relevance in their materials and content.

Understanding and adapting to context

Formative research ahead of programme design and implementation is critical to understand the specific local drivers of CEFMU and the ways in which sexuality is generally conceived in a community. In-depth contextual analysis helps to gain community trust and develop tailored strategies. One of the most common efforts among the organisations participating in this study is the use of preliminary assessment methodologies to locate potential participants, key stakeholders and levers of change to identify priority needs, and to adjust programmes to meet them. This exercise might also include a bibliographic review prior to implementation, or secondary data analysis.

The majority of the organisations in this review carry out pilot tests to measure the relevance of an intervention and its short-term results. For example, **the Ishraq Program** (meaning "enlightenment"), implemented by **Caritas, CEDPA and the Population Council**, conducted a representative national survey on the lives of young people living in Egypt. Results indicated that while many young people were receiving more education than their parents and expected better futures, one group, girls in rural Upper Egypt, continued to be disproportionately disadvantaged.[32] Research was used to design and implement a culturally and age-pertinent programme that created safe spaces for girls in socially conservative settings, improved girls' opportunities and life skills knowledge, and increased policymakers' support for girl-friendly measures. **The Ishraq Program** included context-specific adaptations that made it comfortable for girls and parents to participate. These adaptations included traditional games and sports that promoted positive messages, a schedule to accommodate girls' household responsibilities, and community engagement for sustained social change. Continuous evaluation helped shape the programme to respond to local realities and adapt to changes in communities and at the national level.

Several programmes and organisations have also adapted their materials and outreach to meet the different needs of different populations and contexts. These efforts include continuous updating of the language and design of materials to achieve high levels of relatability with different audiences and to recognise the diversity of participants. Examples of these actions include age-appropriate learning, innovative strategies to engage with Christian and Muslim youths, and pertinent materials for illiterate participants.

The importance of local staff

Hiring local staff – including from grassroots feminist organisations – who know the values and practices of their community, and investing in capacity building, including values clarification, is also instrumental in building trust, gaining community buy-in and driving change. This is especially important when addressing sexuality, to minimise backlash against the language and approaches used by the programme. It is important to note, however, that even when programme staff thoughtfully engage communities, resistance and opposition are still very common. Interestingly, some organisations have found that this process of dealing with and responding to opposition can be part of the journey of transformation that leads to longer-term and more sustainable change.

5.1.7. Collaborating with families, communities and local stakeholders

This review highlights the importance of taking an ecological approach, i.e. working at various levels with girls and boys, their families, communities and the institutions that affect them to address the drivers of CEFMU. Alliances are necessary to change the dynamics of power that allow harmful practices with respect to girls' sexuality and lives. A focus on structural changes in GTAs includes engaging parents and communities in sexuality discussions, honouring local experiences,

[32]M. Brady, R. Assaad, B. Ibrahim, A. Salem, R. Salem, N. Zibani. *Providing new opportunities to adolescent girls in socially conservative settings: The Ishraq program in rural Upper Egypt,* NY, Population Council, 2007, https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/fa90/f24486aaf15be15d5444bf5f2ff5072f0d22.pdf.

acknowledging concerns, and, in some cases, addressing basic needs of the community before introducing sexuality education curricula.

Parents and adult community members are critical to changing the social institutions that support CEFMU and hamper girls' bodily integrity and sexual agency.[33,34,35] Consulting, engaging with and securing buy-in from religious leaders – where possible – is important to inform and develop strategies of resilience to backlash. Organisations in this study recognised the importance of building relationships – through outreach and engagement before and during programming – not only to secure buy-in and manage backlash, but also to build collaboration with key stakeholders.

Organisations working in highly conservative settings use different entry points to overcome the various barriers to girls' ability to fully participate in their programmes.

Bringing parents along – an intergenerational approach

Many organisations use intergenerational dialogue to prompt people to learn from each other's perspectives and transform unequal power relations. To challenge gender norms and positively change behaviour, a joint process of reflection and communication is necessary. Participants of different ages and sexes are encouraged to listen, ask questions, share experiences and learn from each other. Intergenerational dialogues provide a space where participants can gain mutual understanding and appreciation of different perspectives on a certain topic. They can contribute to relationships between parents/caregivers and young people that are more consistent with and conducive of gender equality.

For example, **SOJFEP** convenes Child-Educator-Parent-Provider Circles (CEEP), which are debates organised by peer educator girls. These debates bring together leaders of youth groups, parents and legal guardians of children, teachers of life-skills courses, religious educators and health care providers, customary chiefs, and religious leaders to address specific concerns and needs of adolescent girls at risk of CEFMU. These debates have been effective at addressing negative social norms, prejudices and misperceptions and beliefs and have helped inform public opinion about the scientific realities (legal and medical).

The **Caritas**, **CEPDA** and **Population Council Ishraq Program** organised village committees that conducted home visits to address concerns of parents; these were led by parents who had allowed their daughters to enter school, with positive programme outcomes. The **Ishraq Program** reported changes in parent's attitudes, which became more progressive about girls' roles, rights and capacities; parents and the community became more comfortable with the youth centre being a place for Ishraq girls to gather.

Community and religious leaders

Working directly with religious leaders, local leaders and opinion leaders from the community has been particularly important for programme success in places where such engagement has been possible. Most of the programmes use training components to change leaders' views on CEFMU and adolescent girls' rights more broadly. The **Peace Foundation** has had outstanding results[36] in their work with religious leaders, despite initial challenges; some groups restricted girls' participation in drama and cultural programmes, perceiving it to be against their culture, and some did not allow married girls to participate in group meetings, workshops and fairs owing to social restrictions. The various meetings with this target group resulted in religious leaders, called pundits and priests, calling unanimously to take immediate measures to reduce CEFMU and committing to deliver sermons in their religious institutions and prayer places to this end.

The **Sarathi Development Foundation's** project, **Saloni**, leverages community-based models to enhance their sustainability and scalability. Its approach is inherently scalable because it involves formation of community change agents (volunteers, self-help groups, adolescent girls' groups and children's councils) to deliver the interventions. **Sarathi** trains these community groups on protocols governing documentation and dissemination of information, and escalation of issues to relevant public authorities. Project **Saloni's** team of

Photo: Jiki Prayuda / Unsplash

counsellors and cluster coordinators target behaviour change communication towards influential stakeholders, such as peer groups, family members and local community institutions.

Partnering with local service providers

Only a few of the programmes reviewed work directly with service providers and link with the health system to achieve systemic change. **Aahung** works with health care providers and integrates youth-friendly services content into all health care provider trainings, particularly on taboo areas such as contraception and family planning. In addition, they have trained tele-health workers on adolescent SRHR to link services to young people and try to overcome mobility issues, particularly for girls. **Aahung** has also trained teachers in-school on para-professional counselling to deal with immediate needs that arise out of the programme for young people (which is supplemented with a referral list of health care providers and psychologists).

5.1.8. Innovative strategies for recruitment and retention

Organisations in this study recognise the need for creative approaches to secure and retain the participation of adolescent girls, boys and other stakeholders in their programming. These approaches are motivated by the need to pique the interest of young people in their activities and create entry points for engagement in the face of resistance from parents and community members to programming related to sexuality.

[36]From their meetings and workshops with religious leaders, the Peace Foundation reports that pundits and priests called unanimously to take immediate measures to reduce child marriage and decided to deliver sermons in their religious institutions and prayer places. As key allies to youth advocated from their programme, they also decided to deliver special lectures to their students to understand the consequences of CEFMU. All religious leaders decided to meet after each quarter to discuss prevalent situations of harmful marriage practices and how to maintain peace and harmony in their communities. As a result, 560 group sessions were conducted with adolescent and young couples; 100 workshops with newlywed couples on safe sex and family planning have been conducted and improved health and nutrition knowledge, attitudes and practices of adolescents has been noted.

Entry points to overcome backlash

Organisations working in highly conservative and religious settings, including where legal and policy restrictions on rights-based work exist, tend to use different entry points to overcome the various barriers to girls' ability to fully participate in their programmes, including introducing the topic of sexuality through more general or indirect lenses. This study has found that sports, art and skill-building activities are the main strategies used by short-listed organisations.

For example, the **It's My Body** initiative from **CREA** uses sports as an entry point for girls to access public spaces, learn more about and become comfortable with their bodies, receive SRHR and human rights information, and increase their self-esteem and mental and physical well-being. They also learn teamwork, leadership and decision-making skills. The creation of girls' sports clubs is also used to challenge traditional views about gender norms and collectively demonstrate non-traditional behaviours, to foster social norm change. Some of the most common activities included marathons, fun or sport centres and youth-led sports teams. **Aura Freedom International**, **CARE's Tipping Point programme**, **VACHA Trust** and **Caritas**, **CEPDA** and **Population Council's Ishraq Program** also use sports as effective entry points.

Many organisations also use arts and storytelling as a key entry point for youth participation and community recognition of a programme. Drama, painting and blogging are used to increase respect toward girls and promote their rights. Art is also used as a collaborative activity for community advocacy between girls and local stakeholders in the form of cultural events, radio soap operas, newsletters, with stories written by girls, and audiovisual material with messages that increase girls' visibility and generate discussion. Some organisations even use art as a therapeutic method to identify and treat gender-based violence-induced trauma.

Dynamic platforms for engaging young people

The **GEMS programme** implemented by the **ICRW**, **CORO** and **TISS** in India uses a school-based campaign designed and led by children. **GEMS** organises a week of activities involving games, competitions and debates, which turned out to be very popular in their schools. The programme also launched its GEMS Diary, a book with games, comics, stories, information and space for students to express their reflections on gender roles, interpersonal relationships and violence.

Strategies used by other organisations to involve young people include drama, role play or plays, education and health fairs, workshops on gender and health, rallies and protest marches, street games, flash mobs, film screenings, youth talent festivals, excursions or educational activities, information fairs, film screenings with discussions, the production of bulletins, posters and brochures, and the use of social networks and the internet as learning platforms.

The **Association pour la Promotion de l'Autonomie et des Droits de la Jeune Fille-Femme** (APAD, or Association for the Promotion of Autonomy and Rights of the Girl / Woman in English) uses community radio to raise awareness of CEFMU, airing short interviews in the local language about girls' rights and the causes and consequences of early marriage. They also train girls on integrated animation techniques to create materials that raise consciousness on female empowerment and SRHR.

Finally, the organisations in this review also included strategies for their participants to overcome financial barriers, address immediate needs and add value to the programme for participants. **Plan International's Yes I Do** programme uses interventions to empower young people, including adolescent girls, to be economically active outside of the home. They do this by incorporating entrepreneurial skill-building within the curricula and facilitating access to financial and business

Photo: Vincent Tremeau / Plan International

advisory services to enable them to start their own business. Other organisations and programmes, including the **Caritas**, **CEPDA** and **Population Council's Ishraq Program** and **CARE's TESFA programme**, provide access to savings and loan groups and improve financial management skills such as bookkeeping and learning about balance sheets, income statements, cash flow, marketing and negotiation, to build girls' skills and opportunities.

5.2. Monitoring and evaluation using evidence-based approaches

A core set of monitoring, evaluation and learning capacities were considered essential to the development, monitoring and implementation of integrated programming. These capacities include sufficient monitoring and evaluation (M&E) expertise, including participatory approaches; and increased capacity to design, implement, and learn from gender-transformative programming. Learning-focussed M&E provides a basis for course-correction of ongoing programmes, including the design of additional programme elements that address any critical needs that may emerge, and can inform recruitment and retention techniques. In some cases, robust evaluation results proved critical in making the case for scaling up the programme, or in ensuring the institutionalisation of a programme by governments.

The organisations in this review applied a variety of evaluation methods and approaches to their programmes. From internal monitoring mechanisms to longitudinal studies using mixed quasi-experimental methodologies, the systematic collection of information about their programmes allowed organisations to reach their target populations in an informed manner with promising strategies. However, this review found that some methods are more commonly used by grassroots organisations, while others are generally used by large organisations. Small organisations often feel pressure to conduct evaluations that capture success in quantitative terms. However, many dimensions of social change are not linear and require qualitative methods to capture. It is also important to note that true learning means being able to capture when programme elements fail, in order to strengthen them.

Quasi-experimental and experimental studies, for example, are generally used by programmes that have the potential to expand or replicate in broader contexts and have access to significant funds, since these studies tend to be more expensive to carry out. This type of methodology generally combines quantitative and qualitative methods, such as PhotoVoice with baseline and endline assessments, or randomised control trials accompanied by life stories, allowing for the construction of different perspectives on the complex processes of change.

On the other hand, small organisations with scarce resources typically focus on narrative approaches and participatory methods designed to assess aspects of change in participants' lives and social norms that affect them, such as case studies, pre- and post-tests, and focus groups.

Some organisations have developed innovative M&E strategies and tools.

- **WPF's Awareness to Action** project began with a baseline study, and after project closure a final evaluative study was used to measure the project outcomes. The mixed-method approach was designed to incorporate multiple stakeholders' viewpoints and included a survey, focus groups, in-depth interviews and key informant interviews with different stakeholder groups. Findings across a range of predefined outcomes helped assess areas where new strategies were needed and those where progress had been made.

- **Youth Harvest Foundation Ghana** employed a mixed-methods waitlist-control design, comparing intervention and control schools. They used self-administered questionnaires at baseline, endline, and six-month follow up to assess changes in knowledge, attitudes, behavioural intention, skills, self-efficacy, risk perception and social norms relating to teenage pregnancy and CEFMU. The data collection included disaggregated information based on gender, age and religion, allowing them to understand results for different sub-groups of beneficiaries. The survey was accompanied by a process evaluation and use of the qualitative Most Significant Change (MSC) methodology, both of which helped programme implementers understand participant experiences.

Photo: CARE Bangladesh

- **CARE's TESFA programme** was evaluated with a four-pronged study to assess relative effectiveness of different combinations of programming in comparison to a control group. The mixed-methods evaluation included quantitative pre-post surveys and qualitative end-line interviews. The evaluation applied **CARE's** Social Norms Analysis Plot (SNAP) framework to analyse qualitative vignette data regarding social norms and used PhotoVoice as a form of visual storytelling. Participants then returned to the group to select and discuss the images they took, allowing for unique stories of how the participants experienced change and providing rich and moving quotes and images that speak to non-technical audiences in a powerful way. Other projects used this method as well.

Other feminist and participatory methods emerged as an important approach for measuring outcomes of interest for CEFMU programmes. These include the systematic measurement of the impact of an intervention on gender relations, an equitable perspective on the design and execution of M&E studies, and the results of the study were shared with the community. Several of the most innovative examples include:

- **CARE's Tipping Point** project employed a monitoring, evaluation and learning approach built on developmental evaluation and feminist evaluation principles. A participatory community analyses study explored the root causes of CEFMU in the community. This, in turn, informed programme design and allowed the team to engage in reflection to develop their theory of change.

- EMpower initiated **VACHA Trust's Learning Community programme**, coordinated alongside five partner organisations (Aangan, Akshara, CORO, Stree Mukti Sangathan and YWCA). The programme conducted participatory action research in Mumbai with participating girls, who collectively defined the data needed and implemented a survey focussed on restrictions, mobility and safety in their communities.

[36]From their meetings and workshops with religious leaders, the Peace Foundation reports that pundits and priests called unanimously to take immediate measures to reduce child marriage and decided to deliver sermons in their religious institutions and prayer places. As key allies to youth advocated from their programme, they also decided to deliver special lectures to their students to understand the consequences of CEFMU. All religious leaders decided to meet after each quarter to discuss prevalent situations of harmful marriage practices and how to maintain peace and harmony in their communities. As a result, 560 group sessions were conducted with adolescent and young couples; 100 workshops with newlywed couples on safe sex and family planning have been conducted and improved health and nutrition knowledge, attitudes and practices of adolescents has been noted.

Organisations reviewed for this report developed results frameworks that address outcomes areas with specific indicators. Some gender-transformative programmes working for change at different levels of the ecological model included indicators at the individual, community and national level in an integrated way. The following categories of indicators have been identified (see Annex 8.3 for a more detailed description).

Many dimensions of social change are not linear and require qualitative methods to capture.

- Delays at age of marriage and reductions in adolescent pregnancy
- Individual-level empowerment outcomes, including self-esteem and self-efficacy of unmarried adolescents
- Individual-level shifts in knowledge, attitudes and behaviours related to sexuality, gender, violence and CEFMU among programme beneficiaries and other community members
- Shifts in social norms related to sexuality, gender, violence and CEFMU at the community level
- Advocacy successes or policy changes related to CEFMU

A series of programmes developed or adapted indices or scales to evaluate results in specific contexts.

- The Child Marriage Acceptability Index, a tool developed by **Plan International** and used in its **18+ programme**, measures structural and environmental factors associated with the acceptability of CEFMU using a quantitative methodology. It is used to track progress and improve the effectiveness of CEFMU programming globally. The indicators included in this tool are grouped into themes of access to sexual and reproductive health and fertility services, financial security, education rates, legal frameworks, dowry, and sexual and gender-based violence.
- The Gender Equitable Men (GEM) Scale was developed by **Population Council**/ Horizons and **Promundo** to directly measure attitudes towards gender norms. The validated attitude scale has been adapted and applied in more than 20 settings. **Promundo's Program H** has been evaluated with quasi-experimental studies in different settings (Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa, Asia and the Balkans) using the GEM scale as a standard measure. The **GEMS programme**, of **ICRW**, **CORO** and **TISS** in India, used this scale to measure attitudes in a large cluster randomised control trial.
- The **IHMP's Maharashtra Life Skills Program** in India was evaluated using a culturally appropriate scale for the Indian context named the Pachod Paisa Scale, to measure self-esteem and self-efficacy of unmarried adolescents.
- As a strategy to conceptualise and assess empowerment as an outcome, **Population Council's Abriendo Oportunidades** measured social change outcomes, such as increased female autonomy, reflected in parental permission for girls to attend events organised by the programme, increased freedom to meet with friends, improved status in the home, participation in school and community activities, and comfort expressing their opinions.

5.3. Ensuring sustainability for lasting social change

Achieving sustainability during and beyond programme implementation requires multi-pronged approaches and strategies that involve working with youths, communities, governments, and other stakeholders. Gender norms and conceptions of sexuality are deeply rooted and normalised, making the process of ensuring sustainable change around gender and social norms (especially around sexuality) a complex one. Sustainable change requires patience, time, continuity and financial investment.

Sustainability may include the continuation of project activities after the initial source of funding expires, and/or integrating GTAs to addressing sexuality and CEFMU into more permanent institutions, i.e. introducing comprehensive sexuality education in schools. While the importance of sustainability

Photo: Priscilla Mora Flores / *Girls Not Brides*

is understood to ensure long-term impact, the organisations reviewed had mixed successes with this.

One of the strategies used by a few organisations, and deemed critical to enable scale up, is the development of structures and mechanisms to institutionalise programmes or curricula at the national and local level. **Caritas**, **CEPDA** and **Population Council's Ishraq Program**, for example, formed committees at village and national levels to provide ongoing support to the programme beyond the implementation phase. The village committee, comprised of parents, community and religious leaders (and other influential people), conducted events to raise awareness of issues important to girls, advocated for the **Ishraq Program**, and assisted girls in accessing local village services – e.g. social, health and economic services (banking, post office, school, etc.). The governorate committee with undersecretaries from the relevant ministries met quarterly to provide support for the **Ishraq Program** at the governorate level (e.g. via birth certificates, medical check-ups).

Besides their extensive work to institutionalise the curriculum with the Ministry of Education in Pakistan, **Aahung** also noted that building partnerships with organisations that work on gender equality and girls' education at the local, national and international levels plays an important role in sustainability, scaling up and replication of the programme.

The **IHMP's Maharashtra Life Skills Program** scaled up their interventions to reach up to 20,000 married girls and adolescents in each of the ten districts of the Maharashtra region. At the same time, the programme's administrative staff worked with the Ministry of Health for a replication strategy at the country level.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1. A comprehensive conceptual framework and common measures of success are needed

This review detailed programming from several organisations working at the intersection of sexuality and CEFMU, including in highly restrictive settings. The review showcased promising approaches that have the potential for normative and legal changes and to positively impact the lives of girls, while addressing backlash at many levels. While even well-articulated programmes that involved parents and communities experienced some sort of backlash, one could argue that this iterative and complex journey is by nature already transformative, as it shakes the foundations on which unequal gender norms are established.

The review also revealed the lack of a common conceptual framework on the link between sexuality and CEFMU, and lack of agreed-upon measures of success and impact, have manifold implications. These include challenges in coherent and effective programming, hampering meaningful evaluation of results and potentially donors' willingness to fund sexuality work. The review also highlighted specific gaps in dimensions of existing sexuality programming; recommendations for addressing these are included below.

This report is thus a stepping stone to support those working to address sexuality and CEFMU by offering greater conceptual clarity on the connection between patriarchal control of sexuality and CEFMU, insights and lessons from addressing the issues at all levels of the ecological model, and highlighting the gaps in information, practice and evidence of what works. Further research and understanding of the interdependence and linkages between sexuality, rights, autonomy, poverty, class and caste in the context of CEFMU are needed. The field would advance greatly with a bold and clear conceptual framework regarding the overlap between these complex issues to guide programming and investment.

It is important to prioritise use, and where needed, further development of, indicators based on access to services and autonomous decision-making, in addition to age of marriage; age-focussed measures often ignore larger issues of gender inequality.

6.2. Discussion, research and guidance needed on criminalisation of adolescent sexuality

This conceptual framework should include the role of legal frameworks in governing sexuality for all people, with particular attention to age and gender controls.

Whilst there is increasing consensus that girls should not be forced into marriage as children, there is far less agreement on when young people should be able to have sex and at what age they can make informed choices. In recent years, a number of governments have acted to increase the legal age of marriage to 18 years. In some cases, this has been accompanied by moves to increase the age of sexual consent to 18, particularly where there are taboos regarding sex outside of marriage.

Conflating the age of marriage and age of consent, whilst often introduced as a way of protecting children from sexual abuse and exploitation, risks curbing adolescents and girls' agency and, in many cases, can also stigmatise or criminalise individuals who have sex before marriage. Similarly, a lack of clarity around laws pertaining to the age of marriage and age of consent can make health providers more reluctant to provide services to adolescent girls and ensure they have information and services to protect themselves from unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases.

Whilst it is beyond the scope of this paper to summarise the different arguments around the legal age of consent for adolescents, these issues are well summarised in the recent Lancet Child & Adolescent Health article: S. Petroni, M. Das and S. Sawyer, Protection versus rights: age of marriage versus age of consent, The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health, 2018.[37]

6.3. Recommendations for programme implementers

Design, implement, monitor and evaluate gender-transformative programming that addresses the root causes of CEFMU, including patriarchal control of adolescent girls' sexuality. The analysis found that relatively few programmes address sexuality in their programming from a rights-based, gender-transformative approach. This is a missed opportunity to tackle the fundamental drivers of this harmful practice in a way that has the potential to create lasting change. While CEFMU is a complex issue with multiple contributing factors, programmes that only address related dimensions and other symptoms (i.e. poverty, girls' education) will ignore the "elephant in the room", perpetuating the gender norms that limit the agency and options of women and girls. All dimensions related to CEFMU should be addressed in a comprehensive approach to advancing adolescent girls' rights and empowerment.

Even among programmes addressing sexuality, key areas stand to be strengthened and nuanced. This includes welcoming gender diversity and discussing sexual orientation and gender identity, as well as the complex aspects of adolescent girls' consent, choice and pleasure, as important aspects of sexuality.

Ensure CEFMU programming places girls at the centre, building their skills, perspective and agency to open up alternative life options beyond child, early and forced marriage and unions. This analysis showcased strong examples of programming that invests in not only building girls' practical skills but also building their political consciousness and supporting them to recognise, analyse and deconstruct the social norms that place women and girls at a disadvantage in all societies, and envision possibilities for themselves

Photo: Jessica Lea / Department for International Development

[37]This is summarised in the following brief: Girls Not Brides, *Age of marriage vs. sexual consent*, 2019, https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Age-of-Marriage-brief.pdf.

other than CEFMU. It also showed the power of girls' collectives in helping girls to find and use their collective power to raise awareness of and advocate for issues important to them among their peers, families and communities. Such approaches that support girls' agency and put them in control of their own life should be considered fundamental components of any CEFMU programming.

Work with men and boys to check and challenge their own privilege and power and become active supporters of gender equality. Empowering women and girls to envision change in their own lives does not make it their responsibility to challenge patriarchy and dismantle harmful social norms on their own. Programming should creatively engage men and boys with methodologies that support them to recognise, question and eventually reject their unequal share of power in society and control over women and girls, become active in working toward gender justice and equality, and hold other men and boys accountable.

Build strong relationships and strategic partnerships with stakeholders – family, community and institutions – to address norm change at all levels. Sexuality is a relational phenomenon based on power structures; overcoming its control and regulation cannot be addressed without involving individuals, families, communities and institutions. Structural approaches that work at the different levels of the ecological model to decrease gender inequality and increase sexual autonomy are important.

Ground programmes in local contexts. While patriarchal control of women's and girls' sexuality is found in all societies, exactly how it manifests and the approaches to address it will vary across cultural contexts. Organisations seeking to transform social norms need to take the time and make the investment in understanding local contexts, securing community buy-in in a way that does not compromise the centrality of women and girls, and tailoring programmes to be meaningful in a given location. Hiring and training local staff, and supporting them to reflect upon and transform any harmful beliefs and attitudes they may hold, is recommended to ensure programmes are implemented with an understanding of the local community while upholding feminist values.

Take an intersectional approach. It is imperative to understand sexuality in the context of power, in particular along various axes and dimensions of power and inequality – such as gender, age, race, caste and class. It is also important to recognise how CEFMU often affects the most marginalised women and girls. Few programmes in this review examined these issues through an intersectional lens, which can lead to failure to adequately address the issues and the ways they affect girls from different communities. Programmes should be inclusive in both their analysis and recruitment, with particular attention to groups that are often overlooked in sexuality programming, especially girls and boys with disabilities, those out of school, and married girls and young mothers.

6.4. Recommendations for researchers

Share existing short- and long-term metrics for assessing social norm change and impacts of CEFMU programming. Furthermore, develop new ones to fill gaps, including for demonstrating causality in programme interventions and shifts in attitudes and beliefs related to sexuality, gender equality and CEFMU.

In line with the conceptual framework discussed in 6.1 and building on existing indicators (See Annex 8.3 as well as additional resources and communities of practice referenced below),[38,39] measurements of success should go beyond tracking age of marriage to measure changes in attitudes and perceptions, girls' agency, outlook and other indicators of social transformation and empowerment. Research should also explore the growing evidence that indicates that the stigma around adolescents engaging in sexual activity prior to marriage may actually be contributing to CEFMU.

More capacity is needed to strengthen M&E processes and methodologies that link specific **components of high-quality sexuality programming with outcomes and strengthen the evidence base.** This review highlights the urgent need for increased methodological rigor and coherence, including support and capacity building for small organisations to evaluate their work.

6.5. Recommendations for funders

Develop guidelines/criteria that encourage grantees to take gender-transformative approaches to sexuality and CEFMU. In recognition of the need to address the root causes of CEFMU for transformative impact, funders should prioritise support for approaches that recognise and address the underlying drivers – patriarchy and gender inequality – and control of girls' and women's sexuality, in their work with adolescent girls, including on CEFMU.

Support long-term, flexible approaches to gender-transformative programming that addresses sexuality. It is important for funders to recognise the long-term, and sometimes non-linear, nature of social norm change and be prepared to provide multi-year, flexible support to programme implementers. Funders and implementing organisations alike must broaden their collective framework of assessing work and expand their definition of success and failure, and how to measure it, within the field. Donors should be flexible, including regarding any budget implications associated with having to redirect a project or change the implementation activities based on lessons learned.

Direct funding towards programming all levels. Foundations and other donors should prioritise funding to multi-level and multi-sectorial programmes (with collectives and grassroots organizations, communities and service provision at the local and regional levels) that address the relational aspect of sexuality.

6.6. Recommendations for advocates and young activists

Highlight issues of CEFMU and sexuality within a broader framework of development and human rights agendas. For policymakers, it is important to connect CEFMU to larger development goals and to facilitate coordination across sectors. For example, there are connections between education, violence prevention and CEFMU that can be made more explicit in discourse and policymaking. This is also true for HIV, reproductive health and CEFMU. Drawing out such linkages can open space for collaborations across sectors, draw more and better resources and foster sustainability of interventions.

Empower girls to advocate for themselves. The voices of young activists are key assets for designing new programmes and public policies to end CEFMU. Strengthening the capacity of and encouraging girls in particular to bring their messages to the public not only empowers them, but is also a powerful tool for impacting decision-makers. Transforming traditional and deeply entrenched gender norms takes time. The establishment of a mechanism to sustain youth activist groups would allow them to recruit new, committed young people, for sustainable, tangible results.

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[38]Sources for measuring norm change: Gender Equitable Men (GEM) scale developed by Population Council and Promundo, https://promundoglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Measuring-Gender-Attitude-Using-Gender-Equitable-Men-Scale.pdf; Plan International developed a Child Marriage Acceptability Index, https://www.alignplatform.org/sites/default/files/2018-06/ARO-User_Guide_Index_of_Acceptability_ACMI-Final-IO-Eng-nov15%20reduced.pdf; The Attitudes, Practice, and Social Norms Survey, http://www.v4c-nigeria.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Attitudes-Practices-and-Social-Norms-Survey-Report-FINAL-September-2015.pdf

[39]Institute for Reproductive Health, Georgetown university, Learning Collaborative to Advance Normative Change, http://irh.org/projects/learning-collaborative-to-advance-normative-change/; Community for Understanding Scale Up, On the CUSP of Change: Effective scaling of social norms programming for gender equality, http://raisingvoices.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/CUSP.SVRIpaper.Final_.6sept2017.forWeb.pdf; ALiGN platform, Advancing Learning and Innovation on Gender Norms, https://www.alignplatform.org/; STRIVE, Norms Learning Report 1: Measuring Social Norms, http://strive.lshtm.ac.uk/resources/norms-measurement-meeting-learning-report.

7. CASE STUDIES

The following case studies were developed to highlight gender-transformative approaches undertaken by grassroots organisations in diverse geographic contexts.

TICAH
Trust for Indigenous Culture and Health

CASE STUDY:

TRUST FOR INDIGENOUS CULTURE AND HEALTH (TICAH) – KENYA

General organisational overview

TICAH is a Kenyan-led grassroots organisation founded in 2003 to enhance the positive links among health and cultural knowledge, practice, belief, ritual and artistic expression. Since then, TICAH has focussed on **breaking the culture of silence around sexuality** and on challenging stigma and discrimination. TICAH is a national leader on advocacy to improve laws and policies on sexual health and rights nationally and internationally. It focusses on providing comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) for people of all ages, safe birth, safe abortion services and contraception, and on ending harmful traditional practices such as child, early and forced marriage and unions (CEFMU) and female genital mutilation. Keeping the indigenous wisdom at heart, their holistic and intersectional approaches range from "art with a heart", to rituals and meditation, to supporting inspiring community leadership groups.

Participant population

TICAH works with groups of adolescents and youths in urban and peri-urban areas of Nairobi. These include: boys and girls from primary and secondary school (ages 12-15 and 15-19, respectively); out-of-school girls (ages 15-19) who are more likely to experience drug abuse, sexual abuse and other forms of violence within the community; young mothers (ages 15-19), girls and young women living with HIV; and university students (ages 19-26). TICAH's participants come from environments affected by high levels of gender-based violence, including sexual violence, and some of them are violence survivors. Therefore, the organisation places a strong emphasis on creating safe spaces and upholding confidentiality.

Key features of TICAH's work: Pro-choice, holistic and bold sexuality education and advocacy

TICAH acknowledges that young Kenyans often lack places to safely ask questions or talk about their sexual feelings in a non-judgemental setting. To overcome these limitations, TICAH works with adolescents and young people to help them discover information related to sexuality so that they can enter their sexual lives with the confidence and skills to make conscious choices. TICAH creates an environment that acknowledges diversity and **celebrates everyone's right to a satisfying intimate life.** Their wide and deep remit goes beyond sexuality education, covering many aspects of a young person's identity and the communities around them, such as spirituality, traditional wisdom and art. As such, their strategies are holistic and diverse, seeking to bring local wisdom, ancient and new, to their quest for healing and justice.

> **We seek to learn from indigenous wisdom wherever we can. Our focus is on good relationships, healthy households, and community action.**
>
> TICAH staff member

These strategies include awareness creation around concepts such as contraception and safe abortion, leadership development, advocacy around sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), changing social norms and attitudes around sexuality, life skills development and collective action.

Featured programme: Our Bodies, Our Choices

Their Our Bodies, Our Choices programme covers all of TICAH's work around sexuality and is mainly focussed on education, counselling and advocacy.

Ensuring that young people feel safe, and crafting non-judgemental and supportive – "sacred" – spaces for them to share experiences, is core to their curriculum and guides most of their sexuality work. It is composed of a manual, scenario cards and educational posters that have been carefully developed and beautifully designed, and that present all the information in English and Swahili.

TICAH's compelling materials aim to break the barriers that exist in Kenya for talking about **sexuality, sexual orientation, desire, health and relationships.** Through the curriculum, participants engage in open conversations related to their own personal stories, the effects of patriarchy in their development, or the connections between **sex and power**, among others. Conversations to explore these different topics allow the participants to share their stories about losing their virginity, engaging in sex work or around personal sexual fantasies.

TICAH's model of **"leading from behind"** includes training adult facilitators, but having the sessions guided by the young people who are the participants. TICAH provides all participants with opportunities to conduct their own research, facilitate and give information on different topics, with the facilitator supporting these efforts and ensuring that the group has factual and accurate information. This boosts the participants' self-esteem and communication skills. In addition, serving as a peer educator

improves their leadership skills. The organisation also provides safe spaces for the trainers to share their experiences and learn from each other on a monthly basis.

TICAH seeks partnerships with others to expand their work around sexuality. For example, they have sought collaborations with an adolescent sexuality magazine to gather questions related to sexuality from TICAH's students and publish the answers in their nation-wide editions. They also partnered with a dance group to create "I'm Sexy, Too", a series of theatre stories about the sexual lives of young women living with HIV. The organisation operates a reproductive health hotline called **Aunty Jane Hotline**. It works with a network of 133 service providers that provide stigma-free, rights-based information and counselling to married and unmarried women.

Recognising that "beauty is powerful", TICAH has also used innovative strategies to engage and support their programme participants. For instance, they use art and meditation as therapy to work with survivors of violence.

Complementary to their Our Bodies, Our Choices programme is TICAH's **Teaching Calendar**, designed to stimulate learning and discussion in the communities where they work. The TICAH Calendar is filled with Kenyan art, provocative quotes and events in history. Each month includes "healthy seeds" in the form of simple herbal recipes for common illnesses, values to discuss, history to learn from, questions to consider in groups, clubs and classrooms, and excerpts from the Kenyan Constitution and other laws.

Their advocacy work mainly focusses on inclusion of **comprehensive sexuality education in schools**. TICAH has joined different alliances and caucuses with the same goal. There are several recorded wins as the government has made some progress to include it in the national life skills curriculum. TICAH has also joined other partners in pushing for the reinstatement of the standards and guidelines on safe abortion that were withdrawn three years ago. At the time of writing, the court process was ongoing.

TICAH carries out **values clarification exercises** on different sexuality topics, including abortion, with community leaders such as chiefs and religious leaders, including imams and priests, among other community members.

Evidence of results

TICAH uses questionnaires, focus group discussions and collection of stories for their monitoring and evaluation. They also use longitudinal, case control or cross-sectional studies with control groups, stories of change and observation to evaluate their programmes.

Photo: TICAH

> I have lived my entire life knowing that abortion was unacceptable, especially as a religious leader. Clarifying my values in this workshop actually made me see how women needed information and services to prevent unwanted pregnancies but also to access safe abortion. I was so excited when I got trained and learnt of all these things.
>
> Religious leader, Athi River

Elements of success at a glance

1. TICAH's culture: the spirit of "leading from behind"
2. Team work and ongoing support to the team members.
3. Creativity and use of arts as therapy and source of inspiration.
4. Building relationship with the community
5. Engaging spirituality in a sexuality-positive way

Results

TICAH reports having rolled out their curriculum to 300 primary school students, 300 secondary school students, 100 out-of-school girls, 60 young mothers and 2000 university students, to date.

Furthermore, eight schools where they have worked imparting their sexuality programme have incorporated their sessions as part of the school programme.

A number of changes in information and attitudes in the girls participating their sexuality programme have also been reported. The topic on consent (especially within relationships), for example, opened the eyes of so many girls who had largely ignored their rights. They also report increases in self-esteem, improved relations with peers, and better awareness on procedures to follow in the event of sexual abuse.

While they do not yet have concrete evaluation tools to measure the impact of the work with religious leaders, TICAH reports that the values clarification exercises have been pivotal to achieve change in attitudes, beliefs and behaviours of community and religious leaders in observable ways.

Challenges and opportunities

TICAH has not worked extensively around CEFMU to date; however, it is beginning to expand its work in this area and has initiated contacts with the Maasai community in the outskirts of Nairobi.

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CASE STUDY:

INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR SEXUAL REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS (INCRESE), NIGERIA

General organisational overview

INCRESE is a grassroots organisation that has been working in Nigeria for several decades to create a political, social and cultural environment that is conducive to expanded access to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) information and services. The organisation advocates for the sexual health and rights of society's most disenfranchised groups, including adolescents and young people, women living under Shari'a law, sexual minorities, survivors of sexual violence, sex workers, and widowed women living with HIV/AIDS.

INCRESE operates in a complex country context – which includes Boko Haram threats and government curfews and lock downs – to increase girls' self-esteem and give them a greater voice and agency to decide their future.

INCRESE's Executive Director, Dorothy Akenova, is an acclaimed feminist and women's rights activist, who personifies the potential of change.

Participant population

INCRESE works primarily with adolescents aged 11-19 years, approximately 25 per cent of whom are boys and young men, to reflect on and change harmful norms and masculinities in boys and to prepare girls to confidently interact with them. The girls and boys included in INCRESE's work are unmarried, in and out of school, girls and boys with disabilities and orphans, all of whom are at risk of being married young and taken out of school or leaving school due to pregnancy.

> "In the conservative North where we work, gender identities and roles are straight jacketed in conformity with patriarchal values. This means that girls are socialised as second-class citizens."
>
> INCRESE staff member

Photo: INCRESE

Key features of INCRESE's work: Addressing sexuality through a gender transformative lens

The culture of silence on issues of sexuality cuts across all communities in Nigeria, and patriarchal conceptions are deeply engrained in the country. The situation is aggravated by campaigns by groups that reinforce a negative and sometimes confrontational attitude among Nigerians towards information and education on SRHR, with devastating effects on Nigerians' human rights.

Against this backdrop, INCRESE employs **four main strategies:**

- **Conducting research** to generate evidence and contest the resistance to and denial of reproductive and sexual rights, including by using research to educate leaders and debunk myths.
- **Increasing access to information** and awareness through behavioural change communication.
- **Advocating** to influence policies and laws to be gender sensitive and to protect sexual and reproductive rights principles.
- **Establishing linkages with providers** to make legal services accessible and affordable to individuals and groups, especially adolescents, women living under Shari'a law and sexual minorities.

They have also worked extensively with health workers to encourage them to be youth-friendly, disability-friendly and LGBTI- (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex) friendly, and to address stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV/AIDS. In this regard, they also build a support network that assures protection for young people, LGBTI people and people with disabilities, and they often facilitate access to services to those at risk of abuse, including by covering costs.

Featured programme: Girls Leadership Programme

INCRESE delivers its trainings through the Girls Leadership Programme. They use Sara Longwe's analytical and change model to move girls from being passive recipients of services to being advocates who hold governments accountable to

commitments, including domesticating international treaties; who articulate policies, review or promote laws that protect the rights of girls and women; and who monitor budgetary allocations and disbursement.

Their programme team identifies fully with **feminist principles** of equal and inalienable rights and undergoes values clarification exercises as part of their training. INCRESE builds the capacity of their facilitators on sexual reproductive health and rights, life competency and leadership skills, gender, principles of feminism, advocacy, facilitation skills and psychosocial support and counselling. **Peer educators**, who are alumni of the Girls Leadership Programme, support the facilitators during sessions, serving as mentors to the participants. Various facilitation methods are employed such as small lectures, group work, presentations, role plays, experience sharing and use of visual and audio-visual materials. Alumni also meet periodically with programme participants to share experiences, linking participants and graduates with other learning and development opportunities, creating a support network the girls can trust and count on.

Programme sessions take place in a centre that **offers a safe space** in which girls can express themselves freely – including choosing what clothing they wear – and where interactions with other participants, including the few male peers, can occur without fear of violence or the threat of it. Besides being a safe space where INCRESE's curriculum is delivered, the centre also serves as a space to participate in **dance, drama, singing and other activities.**

INCRESE's curriculum was developed in 2011 and borrows heavily from the comprehensive sexuality education training manual published by Action Health Inc. and the All in One curriculum, the Adolescent Sexuality Training Manual of the Federal Ministry of Health of Nigeria and its clinical protocol. The core components are **human rights, sexual reproductive health, leadership skills, life competency skills, gender analysis, advocacy, and understanding sexual orientation and gender identity.** The sessions include anatomy and physiology, sexuality and pleasure, body image, contraception, pregnancy, HIV, sexually transmitted infections, the full mix of contraception, stigma and discrimination, gender analysis, gender-based violence, girls' rights, CEFMU and intersectionality. As part of their focus on leadership, activities also focus on strengthening participants' negotiation, refusal and pressure resistance skills, for example using case study scenarios that lead participants to stronger responses and attitudes.

Acknowledging the importance of working across the different levels of the ecological model, the programme also mobilises participants to **involve parents and teachers**, including through inter-generational dialogues. INCRESE also organises an outreach programme to rural communities in order to sensitise villagers on SRHR issues through theatrical performances and question and answer sessions. The outreach visits build rapport between INCRESE and community leaders for continued partnership.

Photo: INCRESE

INCRESE's advocacy work is largely articulated around an open forum where officials and **religious and local leaders (and also parents and teachers) who want to participate can engage in discussions** together to strengthen their commitment. The forum is also a key tool for recruiting adult champions who understand the role of SRHR and gender equality and, as a result, can help to generate change in their communities. INCRESE also invites parents, teachers, friends, alumni, policymakers and the media to its annual graduation ceremony to generate public awareness.

INCRESE also addresses participation in decision-making at home and in public places and stimulates reporting harmful practices, including sexual abuse and CEFMU through their Hajara Usman Girls' Leadership Programme. In fact, INCRESE's response to cases of abuse is a cornerstone of their programme and a key element of success. They offer direct support or referrals to health, psychological and legal support and shelters for those participants suffering violence or needing SRHR services, and they also report the perpetrator to the police.

Photo: INCRESE

Photo: INCRESE

Since 2011 INCRESE has mobilised 255 girls through their leadership programme.

Evidence of results

INCRESE uses a logical framework evaluation tool to monitor and evaluate the progress and impact of the training before, during and after completion. INCRESE also conducts regular evaluation and assessments with participants. They also evaluate the number of girls that delay marriage.

INCRESE involves young people in the design of intervention strategies through regular evaluation and assessments of how they are learning the issues and putting the skills learned into use in their lives.

Results

Since 2011 INCRESE has mobilised 255 girls through their leadership programme. Their evaluations show the following results:

The content of the pre-programme tests demonstrate that virtually all of the girls had high internalisation of patriarchal values. For example, girls made either written or oral (for those with weak writing skills) statements such as these: "Boys are more brilliant than girls''; "A Woman's place is in the kitchen"; "While dating, a boy beats a girl as a proof of love"; "Woman who reports her husband for battering is not a good wife"; "There is no such thing as rape in marriage".

Upon completion of the programme, girls were conversant with the human reproductive anatomy and physiology, which met with a lot of resistance initially among the participants. They could facilitate presentations and their vocabulary had grown. Many of them were holding leadership positions in their school or in their church communities, and their school performance had improved

1. Girls reporting high self-esteem and confidence to aspire and take on leadership roles in their schools and communities increased.
2. Integrated CSE into the school curriculum.
3. Increased number of girls and women reporting cases of violence to INCRESE.
4. Increased number of girls who have chosen to delay marriage and have the skills to do so.
5. Improved sensitisation and awareness created on the adverse effect of CEFMU to rural areas of Niger State.
6. Over 500 young people had access to condoms and lubricants though their outreach programme and voluntary counselling and testing (VCT) was provided to hundreds of antenatal care attendees. INCRESE has followed up with those who tested positive to stay on HIV treatment.

Elements of success at a glance

1. A programme team that has its values clarified and identifies fully with feminist principles of equal and inalienable rights
2. A robust curriculum with well-articulated modules
3. Mobilising participants from various settings (schools and homes) with the involvement of parents and teachers
4. Providing support for transport fare and light refreshment for participants
5. A viable alumni network that serve as mentors
6. Linking participants and graduates with other learning and development opportunities
7. Acting swiftly on reported cases of abuse
8. Creating a support network that the girls can trust and count on
9. Recognising and rewarding merit and outstanding performance among the girls

Challenges and opportunities

In the past, INCRESE found that individual advocacy visits to policymakers were either hard to schedule due to the lack of commitment by officials or were trivialised when conducted. Therefore, INCRESE decided to host an open forum where officials and leaders who want to participate can engage in discussions together with parents and teachers to strengthen their commitment.

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the yp foundation

CASE STUDY:

THE YP FOUNDATION – INDIA

General organisational overview

The YP Foundation was co-created by young people in 2002, in the aftermath of the Godhra Riots that took place in Gujarat. The hope was to bring young people together from across the country to build a stronger understanding of human rights, and create opportunities to work together and discover leadership skills on social issues young people were passionate about through a safe, open and non-judgemental platform. It quickly transformed into a youth-run and youth-led organisation providing comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) to young people and advocating for systemic changes. The **connections between sexuality and child, early and forced marriage and unions (CEFMU) permeate their entire curriculum**, which is also the centrepiece of their Know Your Body, Know Your Rights (KYBKYR) programme. A unique feature of this programme is its rights-based, stigma-free and affirmative approach towards sexuality and sexuality education. The YP Foundation works with and for young people across issues such as gender, sexuality, leadership, health and education to advance the rights of young women, girls and other young people who face marginalisation. All of their work is based on intersectional, feminist and rights-based principles.

Participant population

The YP Foundation works with youths aged 10-25 from diverse backgrounds, especially young women in schools, institutional care homes, after-school learning centres and community youth groups. Its programmes are run by peer educators (18-22 years), most of whom are college students that partake in a two-year or longer leadership programme. Their beneficiaries have diverse backgrounds in terms of what regions they come from (urban/semi-urban/rural), their sexual orientations, their gender identities, their religions, their class and their caste.

Key features of The YP Foundation's work: Youth-led model that promotes feminist, intersectional and rights-based sexuality education

In India, programmes aimed at advancing sexuality education of young people often confront considerable opposition from politicians, parents and teachers who, despite evidence showing otherwise, believe that such positive sexuality perspectives will foster irresponsible and promiscuous sexual behaviour among young people. Furthermore, programmes and policies that focus on the sexuality of young people are generally designed and developed or discussed amongst adults, neglecting to embrace the opinions and desires of young people themselves.

Photo: The YP Foundation

Because of this, The YP Foundation's existence and mission is centered around **the power of youth leadership**, ensuring that young people are equal stakeholders in programmes and policies that target them and are able to meaningfully participate. Rather than seeing young people as leaders of tomorrow, The YP Foundation insists that youths are leaders today, and it works to spread that message beyond youth-focussed spaces.

Moreover, The YP Foundation proudly adopts a **rights-based, stigma-free and affirmative approach to sexuality**, which is deeply engrained in all of their interventions. As such, their work emphasises informed consent, choice and pleasure, issues that they discuss directly and openly with participants, educators, parents and policymakers. In particular, The YP Foundation creates platforms and tools to engage young people and other relevant stakeholders on the importance of CSE and mobilises them to include issues of sexuality in policies and programmes designed to reach young people in India.

In addition, acknowledging that the experience of 'youth' is not homogeneous and that all youth-centred programming should accommodate the diverse nature of youth identity; by design The YP Foundation is **explicitly inclusive of diverse groups**. Across programmes, they work with marginalised youths from low-resource backgrounds, and predominantly Dalit and Muslim communities. Their **intersectional and feminist approach** also considers migration, sexual orientation, gender identity, caste and other marginalised identities or statuses in their interventions.

The YP Foundation's programmes focus on

> **Rather than seeing young people as leaders of tomorrow, The YP Foundation insists that youths are leaders today.**

empowering young people to lead implementation and use that experience to become effective advocates with policymakers, communities, gatekeepers and other stakeholders. In this manner, the organisation creates **youth-adult partnerships** and makes a case for youth leadership at all levels and in all processes.

The YP Foundation supports young people to respond to real-life situations in a positive manner and take informed decisions for their lives. They **provide a safe space** for youths to learn to articulate their concerns and opinions, share their personal experiences, and to ask questions without getting judged or reprimanded. At the broader community level, they provide a platform for young people to voice their views and advocate for themselves in front of their family members, for example through small-scale social action projects.

Featured programme: Know Your Body, Know Your Rights (KYBKYR)

The Know Your Body, Know Your Rights **(KYBKYR) programme** provides CSE to young people from diverse backgrounds. The KYBKYR programme design is directly informed by outreach to adolescents and young people who face discrimination and marginalisation. Its implementation is youth-led with strong collaborations across grassroots non-governmental organisations alongside focussed engagement with local and national stakeholders from health and education sectors, including government officers, health care providers, counselors, frontline health workers and teachers.

> **An affirmative and celebratory approach to sexuality, which emphasises informed consent, choice and pleasure, guides our work on SRHR (sexual and reproductive health and rights).**
>
> Organisational principle of The YP Foundation

> **Ours isn't just an objective curriculum to teach the biological aspects of reproductive health. The curriculum is based in the real world and interweaves aspects of intersectionality, power, and patriarchy. For example, while discussing menstruation, we not only address issues of menstrual hygiene, but also create a space to discuss the shame and stigma around menstruation.**
>
> Introduction to the curriculum

Sex-positive messaging in KYBKYR's curriculum

- Sexuality is a healthy part of life and there is no fixed or prescribed way to experience or express our sexuality.
- Feeling attracted to another person is a common experience for many people. It is also perfectly fine to not feel attracted to anyone.
- There are no good or bad sexual acts. Different people may enjoy different sexual acts.
- Our experience of sexuality is impacted by the cultural and social norms around us.
- Sexual identities can be of many types and it is important not to judge someone based on their identity or to discriminate against a person because of their sexual or gender identity.

A **peer education model** drives KYBKYR programme implementation. The peer educators, called **Youth Leaders**, who facilitate KYBKYR's curriculum are a diverse and dynamic group of young people who are passionate about social justice, intersectional feminism and learning more about their world. The YP Foundation follows a leadership-building approach to peer education where the young leaders are engaged for a year in **rigorous feminist training** and intense capacity building.

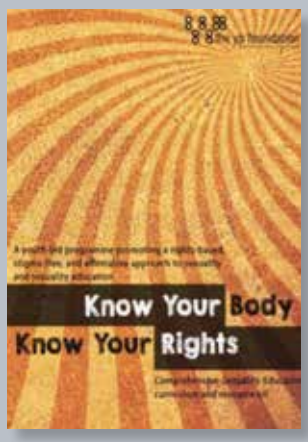
The Youth Leaders build an in-depth understanding of gender-related concepts such as different gender and sexual identities, learn the subtleties of rights-based action and understand violence and discrimination as human rights issues.

Acknowledging that one size does not fit all, The YP Foundation has opted to use a flexible curriculum that is adapted to different groups of participants. Following a bottom-up approach, **the curriculum development process starts with the girls and boys themselves**, engaging them in the actual design and adaptation processes. The YP Foundation changes some of the language and case study content in order to ensure that the curriculum is acceptable, accessible and relatable to different audiences, such as using examples extracted from local newspapers that might be familiar to the participants. They also update their materials regularly. The peer educators use a lot of creative tools to engage the participants and strengthen their understanding on issues, including **audio visual tools, interactive games and blogs about sexuality and sexual rights**. For example, they use case studies, group work and exercises to discuss "good sex and bad sex", norms that impact sexuality, understanding sexual identities and discrimination related to different sexual orientation and gender identities, and other topics.

Tearing apart gender norms

In this exercise from the curriculum, The YP Foundation explores the concepts of patriarchy and discrimination with personal stories, like the story of Mohan, and leads participants to conclusions like this:

Mohan faced violence because he does not identify with the gender assigned to him at birth and he has broken the gender norms. Patriarchy wants men to be manly and women to be womanly. Transgression of gender norms destabilises patriarchal structures, which is why people like Mohan are discriminated against, violated, and punished.



Furthermore, the curriculum moves away from instilling fear in young people and focusses on empowering them by training them on concepts such as choice, autonomy, rights and sexual expression, including positive messaging and **in-depth discussions about pleasure and desire**. In

Photo: The YP Foundation

doing so, they build young people's skills to develop a positive self-image and healthy attitude.

The YP Foundation also includes thoughtful analyses of power and patriarchy in their curriculum and **works specifically with young men and boys** on challenging gender-based violence through questioning patriarchal notions and norms of masculinity.

Evidence of results

The YP Foundation used a multi-method qualitative study in 2017 to evaluate the impact of its programme (2016-2017) on the peer educators, participants and partner organisations. The evaluation included a review of secondary data sources as well as interviews and focus group discussions conducted with a range of stakeholders (including peer educators, participants and staff) with different perspectives about the programme. The report also briefly explored whether the participants and partner organisations sustained changes brought about by their participation in the KYBKYR over time.

Additionally, as part of their commitment to full engagement, participants have also been involved in different accountability processes. Youth Leaders, for example, have undertaken mystery-client social audits to assess the youth-friendliness of sexual and reproductive health service delivery in 36 public, private and non-governmental health centres. The data from these audits was used in multi-stakeholder district-level and state-level consultations to facilitate constructive dialogue between youth leaders and frontline health workers, doctors and government and non-government representatives on these issues.

Results

KYBKYR demonstrates that youth-centred and youth-led programming through a multi-sectoral collaboration model has immense potential to transform the lives of adolescents and young people by empowering them to become agents of social change.

On an annual basis the KYBKYR programme engages over 1500 youths (mostly young women ages 10-25) in schools, institutional care homes, after-school learning centres and community youth groups in urban and rural setting across three states in India. Meanwhile, the programme's public and policy advocacy components have an annual outreach of over 50,000 people online, through social media campaigns, and offline, through youth-led social action projects including street plays, youth-led audits of SRHR service delivery and multi-sectoral consultations.

The evaluation revealed that the programme achieved an increased level of leadership, self-confidence and negotiation skills amongst young women and girls who participanted.

Other results included:

1. Increased in knowledge and information of young people on sexual and reproductive health, clearing up myths and misconceptions.
2. Improved attitude of male participants towards girls and women.
3. Young people became critically conscious and started to question ideas that were imposed on them by their family or society in the name of tradition, culture and religion.
4. Created a demand for CSE.
5. Created a large cohort of young people who are ready to act as social activists and take forward CSE as an agenda.
6. Young people started to challenge social norms and influence their peers do to the same.
7. A majority of the participants recognised how the stigma attached to SRHR issues adversely impacts their bodily integrity and rights

The YP Foundation ... works specifically with young men and boys on challenging gender-based violence through questioning patriarchal notions and norms of masculinity.

Elements of success at a glance

- Young people are the leaders and all programmes are youth-led and youth-centred.
- Rights-based, stigma-free and affirmative approach to sexuality.
- Knowledge and experience working with young people with diverse backgrounds and levels of marginalisation.
- An intersectional feminist perspective, helping to connect with diverse groups.
- Flexible CSE curriculum based on a bottom-up approach and that is accessible, acceptable, relevant and relatable.

Challenges and opportunities

The evaluation pointed at three main areas that could be strengthened, including the engagement with families and communities, engagement with partner organisations, and increased focus on the power of collectives to advance girls' goals. The organisation also acknowledges the critical gap in reaching out to and serving people living with disabilities, and would like to expand their materials and approaches to this end.

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8. ANNEXES

8.1. Full definition of first and second cut parameters and contextual parameters

First cut parameters

- Highlights/targets girls (it may also target others which may include transgender and gender non-conforming children and youths, but at least some of the programming is specifically designed for girls and young women only).[40]
- Focussed on promoting autonomous decision-making.
- Particularly in contexts where it may not be expected for girls and women to independently make decisions, programmes should work towards building girls'/women's skills to do so, while also working to change social norms in families and communities.
- Programmes should support girls to have the information they need to make decisions about their lives, and support their ability to make such decisions, for example by building financial skills and economic independence.
- Programme is participatory and focusses on building concrete skills, including girls' leadership; this could include, for instance, programmes that provide, highlight and/or support comprehensive sexuality education.
- Gender-transformative, with an intersectional approach.[41]
- Anchored in the rights of girls and young women. This might include:
  - Programming that includes girls' right to health information and services, including age-appropriate information about SRHR.
  - Addresses girls' access to community spaces.
  - Specific rights awareness/"know your rights" programming.
  - Engages girls in policy or legal advocacy on their own behalf.
  - Creates safe spaces for girls.
  - Advances women's and girls' safety and mobility.
- Programme clearly identifies *which* girls they are reaching and tailors programming to them.
- Grounded in the complexity of girls' lives, i.e. focussed on the unique characteristics of the participant girls and based on an understanding of their particular needs and characteristics. Girls' realities will differ across communities, contexts, religious and social settings. Additionally, gender intersects with other social, legal and cultural experiences in different ways in different contexts. Programmes should explore, understand and address these different realities to the extent possible. Programme logic may not be linear but will be emergent and change over time as the complexities of girls and women's lives play out.
- Highlights voices of girls: engages girls (and other programme participants, which may include transgender and gender non-conforming children and youths) in ongoing programme evaluation or review, and ideally in programme development.
- Creates spaces for girls to express themselves safely. This could include girl- and women-only spaces, or it could include supporting girls and women to express themselves in public and shared spaces where they were not able to before. It could also include working with men, boys and communities to change social norms about the acceptability of girls and women expressing themselves.
- Sensitive to particularities of the community in which it is located and engages community stakeholders, including with men and boys as partners for gender equality and challenging harmful masculinities. This involves including the community beyond token participation and understanding local perspectives, barriers and approaches and to ensure that programming is situated appropriated in that context.
- Considers linkages across social ecology (i.e. family, community and society-level barriers), including structural and legal barriers, harmful gender norms and cultural expectations, either as interlinked programming or through referrals. Evidence suggests that programmes that work across multiple levels of the social ecology are more likely to successfully influence key behavioural outcomes. Some programmes, however, do not have the resources or scope to work at multiple levels (e.g. with individuals, families, schools and religious institutions, and on social norms). This does not mean those programmes aren't effective at achieving what they seek to do, but it does potentially limit the transformational effects that a programme that works across the social ecology might have. For the sake of this analysis, we included programmes that work on more than one level, acknowledging that working at two levels might be more feasible than working at all levels.
- Addresses sexual and reproductive health. Age-appropriate information is presented on a range of SRHR topics, including puberty, sexual intercourse, sexually transmitted infections including HIV/AIDS and contraceptive methods. This information is accompanied by information about pleasure and sexuality, and also about sexual coercion. Provides advice on communicating SRHR topics with others, allowing participants to feel more comfortable discussing them. Provides adolescent-responsive services or provides referrals and support for such services.

Second cut parameters
• If the programme works explicitly on CEFMU (Yes/No)
Contextual parameters (pink parameters – not used to exclude programmes)
• Well known organisation (Yes/No) • Country context (Humanitarian/Fragile) (Yes/No) • Urban/rural settings • Conservative/religious setting for the programme (Yes/No) • Locally led/locally conceived (Yes/No) • Region

8.2. Full definition of variables of interest

Target participant group overview
• Age groups of the targeted girls (and boys) (and rationale for choosing those, when available). • Specific characteristics of the targeted girls (and boys) (including married/unmarried, in/out of school, other vulnerabilities such as girls (and boys) with disabilities, refugee girls, girls living with HIV, etc.). • Total number of girls (and boys) targeted (by a programme or per year) and indirect participants, when available. • Other specific participants (women, grandmothers, fathers, community leaders and health workers, etc.). • How does the programme reflect girls' realities in different communities, contexts, religious settings and social setting in its programming? Does it have different programming for different groups of girls? How, specifically?
General programme information
• What dimensions of change (objectives) does the programme aim to work toward? • Who leads the work with girls (peer education models, community workers, peer educators, programme staff, government functionaries, a combination of these, others)? • How much time/resources are invested in training educators/mentors? Where does the training take place? Is it in-school and/or community-based (teachers, trainers)? • What is the capacity-building process for those who deliver the curriculum/education materials and are in direct contact with the girls (and boys) and community stakeholders? • Does the programme use a cascade model? Does it rely heavily on delivery of curriculum or does it also include free flowing activity/ discussion dialogue? • What is the session frequency and duration? • What are programme costs (in the context of local cost of living)?

[40]Population Council, 'Girl-Centered Program Design: a toolkit to develop, strengthen and expand adolescent girls' programs.' 2010. The toolkit notes that many communities lack programming that is designed for girls. Rather, girls are expected to participate in general youth programming, but such programming often does not meet their needs or focus on their gender-specific experiences. The toolkit further comments that "Girls tend to receive the maximum benefit when the programs they participate in are girl-only because they feel free to open up, express themselves, ask any questions and take on leadership roles that they might not otherwise."
[41]We drew upon the *Girls Not Brides* definition of 'gender-transformative'.

Deeper analysis of overarching principles and articulation of the broad objectives of programmes (promotion of autonomous decision-making of girls, gender transformation, etc.)

- What are the specific strategies the programme uses to promote girls' autonomous decision-making?
- What is the organisation's rationale for promoting autonomous decision-making?
- How specifically is the organisation/programme gender-transformative?[42] In particular, how does it engage boys and men? Does it aim to: 1) raise awareness about discriminatory gender norms? 2) question the costs of adhering to these norms? 3) replace unhealthy, inequitable gender attitudes, behaviours and norms with redefined healthy ones, and 4) change systems through advocacy work? (add specific advocacy work details when available).
- Does it help participants understand the relationships between gender and sexuality? How?
- Does it aim to contribute to overcome women's and girls' unequal access to financial resources and schooling?
- Does it provide spaces for gender non-conformity and challenge/move away from gender binary? How are these conceived?
- Does it address norms around sexuality? How?
- Does the programme take an intersectional approach, addressing race, class, ethnicity, disability, language, place of origin, health status and (im)migrant status? How are these issues interwoven into the programme or by the organisation?

Girls' engagement processes

- How does the programme engage girls (and other participants) in ongoing programme evaluation or review, monitoring and programme development? Does it create spaces for their visibility and leadership, allowing them to be at the forefront of advocacy and programing? Are they meaningfully engaged throughout, including in M&E efforts?
- Does the organisation simply gather girls together to attend their programmes or does it collectivise[43,44] them to advance their rights? How is the work accomplished?
- Does the programme put an emphasis on mobilisation for achieving gender equality and changes related to sexuality and SRHR? How is the programme connecting youth groups?

Ecological model

- How has the programme involved the families, community or institutions (including during programme development)?
- How, specifically, is the project targeting gender inequality and inequity and changing norms around sexuality and reproduction (being gender transformative) at the different levels of the ecological model?
- How does the organization engage with the local context and current realities? Does it, for example, support and encourage the project team to take action related to local incidents of violence and discrimination? How does the programme link community-based protection mechanisms and support their enhancement?
- Does it bring relevant people together to challenge patriarchal institutions and structures, such as laws that exclude women from land ownership or prevent women from divorcing?
- How does the programme link local, national and global levels of work?

[42]In the first-cut shortlisting of programmes, the researchers were attentive to whether or not there was evidence that the program or organisation's work was gender-transformative, but in most cases this was not easy to determine, so they did not eliminate those that did not have overt references to gender transformation, given the challenges in assessing this based on a cursory review of materials.
[43]'Collectivising' refers to the bringing together of members of marginalised groups in ways that enable them to articulate their oppression and strategise for individual and social change. In its various forms (self-help groups, cooperatives, women's sangathans, trade unions, and so on) it is regarded as an important strategy for realising the rights of marginalised people around the world (Ramachandran and Jandhyala, 2012; Steady, 2006). D. Bhog and D. Mullick, *Collectivizing girls for social change: Strategies from India*, AJWS, 2015, https://ajws.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Collectivizing-Girls_FINAL-EDIT-17Feb2017.pdf.
[44]R Vedula, Collecting vs collectivizing adolescent girls: What's the difference?, 2016, https://ajws.org/blog/collecting-vs-collectivizing-adolescent-girls-whats-the-difference/.

Work and information around sexuality and SRHR

- How is the information presented? Is it presented on a range of SRHR topics, including puberty, sexual intercourse, sexually transmitted infections including HIV/AIDS, reproductive rights including access to safe abortion, contraceptive methods, sexuality and sexual orientation?
- Is this information accompanied by perspectives and information about pleasure and sexuality, sexual coercion, sexual violence, sexual norms, consent and positive choices?
- Does it provide advice on communicating SRHR topics to others, allowing participants to feel more comfortable discussing them with others outside of the programme?
- Does it provide adolescent-responsive services or referrals and support for such services?[45]
- What are (other) core components of the curriculum? Does it include an analysis of power and patriarchy?
- How is the curriculum pitched – rights-affirming, harm prevention, other?
- Does it explicitly link CEFMU and sexuality? How?
- Are there any other interesting aspects of the written curriculum to highlight (programme logic and implementation, or other materials)? Is there an M&E framework for the curriculum?

Strategies used and innovative entry points

- What key strategies does the programme use? (Capacity building, leadership development, life skills development, advocacy, public education, awareness generation, legal advocacy, evidence building, changing social norms, collectivising, etc.)
- Did the programme use different entry points (e.g. sports, language training, IT teaching) to introduce the concepts of sexuality or gender or rights? Which ones, and how?
- Did it use any other innovative approaches? Which ones, and how?

Programme results and key determinants of success

- How was success defined? Were gender-transformative as well as sectoral results taken into account?
- What does the organisation think are the three most important things that enable them to achieve meaningful success?
- What were the most relevant results?
- Does the programme have any monitoring data? If so, what kind? Does the programme have any evaluation and learning plans? What type of evaluation has been conducted? (1) Randomised control trial, quasi-experimental, cohort-longitudinal, case control or cross-sectional with control group; 2) cross-sectional without control group; 3) rigorous qualitative; 4) other.
- What type of measurements and methods were used for M&E of the programme?
- Do they link the elements of success to type of approach used? Is there good articulation of objectives, frequency of contact, selection and training of team, process, methodology of reflection and learning, curriculum, scale, etc.?
- Did they define the type of learning they hoped to achieve and how to use it? Is there information of process, frequency and methodology of reflection on results and learning processes?
- What are the key lessons learned? In particular, is it clear why the programme has been successful in the context it is being conducted? For example, were there elements that played a crucial role in shaping the intervention and making it effective, and were there any expected or unexpected challenges faced by the programme (internal or external) and how were they addressed?

Other information

- The source and amount of the funding for the programme.
- Has this programme been adapted for other context(s)? Can it be adapted for other context(s)?

[45]Adolescent responsiveness has been described by the World Health Organisation as the changes that the health sector needs to make to progress toward universal health coverage. This will require a number of changes in service delivery, workforce capacity and financing:

- **"Service delivery:** *A transition is needed from "adolescent-friendly" projects to programmes that strengthen mainstream capacity at primary and referral levels to respond to the priority health and development needs of adolescents…*
- **Preventive care:** *Transitions are required to create opportunities for all adolescents to make contact with primary care services for individual preventive services…*
- **Workforce capacity:** *Transitions are required in the ways the workforce is trained, so that all providers have a basic knowledge of adolescent development and their implications for clinical practice…*
- **Financing:** *Transitions are required in the way that resources are allocated and purchasing of services is designed, so as to meet the need of adolescents…."*

8.3. Illustrative list of indicators used in the programmes reviewed

Delays in CEFMU and reductions in adolescent pregnancy
• Age at marriage (**Development Initiative for Supporting Healthy Adolescence, DISHA**). • Age at first birth (**Maharashtra Life Skills Program**). • Number of households with CEFMUs (**DISHA**). • Percentage of programme participants that have not married until the age of 18 (**VACHA Trust**).
Individual-level empowerment outcomes, including self-esteem and self-efficacy of unmarried adolescents
• Percentage of girls showing improved self-efficacy – a greater belief in their ability to complete tasks and reach their goals (**VACHA Trust**). • Percentage of girls who acquired self-confidence to become agents of change in their communities (**VACHA Trust**). • Improved communication between students, including between boys and girls (**GEMS**).
Individual-level shifts in knowledge, attitudes and behaviours related to sexuality, gender, violence and CEFMU among programme beneficiaries and other community members
• Percentage of adolescent girls and young women with increased knowledge and skills, and improved attitudes, to make safe and informed decisions regarding SRHR (**Awareness to Action**). • Percentage of participating girls and young women with improved knowledge and attitudes regarding the negative consequences of early marriages and teenage pregnancies (**Awareness to Action**). • The proportion of students believing that girls should be at least 18 years old at marriage. (**GEMS** and **Ishraq Program**). • Percentage increase in the use of modern contraceptives by young married women (<24 years) in the target areas (**Awareness to Action** and **DISHA**). • Percentage of community leaders and gatekeepers with improved attitudes towards the SRHR of adolescent girls (**Awareness to Action**).
Community level: Shifts in social norms related to sexuality, gender, violence and CEFMU
• Increased involvement of boys and young men in advocating against sexual harassment, early marriages and teenage pregnancies in targeted communities (**Awareness to Action**). • Percentage increase in the acceptance of SRHR of adolescent girls among community members in targeted areas (**Awareness to Action**). • Percentage increase in access to reproductive health and family planning services by adolescent girls and young women in the target areas. (**Awareness to Action**).
Advocacy successes or policy changes related to CEFMU
• Number of SRHR-relevant policies or legislation implemented, changed or adopted at district and provincial levels (**Awareness to Action**). • Number public activities or events implemented in the community by programme participants (e.g. rallies, surveys, street plays, protests, meetings, film screenings and online campaigns) (**VACHA Trust**). • Number of programme beneficiaries who have written an article or letter to a newspaper (**Awareness to Action**).

Photo: Ezra Arif Maulana / Unsplash

TACKLING THE TABOO:

Sexuality and gender-transformative programmes to end child, early and forced marriage and unions

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