

TIME TO **ACT!**

Gender-Transformative Programme Strategies for Addressing
Child, Early and Forced Marriage and Unions in Asia Pacific

Toolkit for Practitioners





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Designed by: QUO Bangkok
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First published by Plan International in April 2022
Text, illustrations, design © Plan International 2022

This Toolkit was made possible thanks to the financial support
by Plan International Japan.



**GIRLS
GET EQUAL**



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Plan International Asia-Pacific Regional Hub
April 2022

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This Toolkit has been shaped in close consultation and with significant contributions by Plan International Asia-Pacific Country Offices and Regional Hub Child, Early and Forced Marriage Focal Points and teams. Heartfelt gratitude and appreciation go to Ms. Kashfia Feroz (Plan International Bangladesh), Ms. Chankrisna Sawada (Plan International Cambodia), Mr. Tushar Anchal (Plan International India), Ms. Rani Hastari (Yayasan Plan International Indonesia), Ms. Israt Baki (Plan International Laos), Mr. Salai Thura Aung (Plan International Myanmar), Ms. Shanti Upadhyaya (Plan International Nepal), Ms. Selena Fortich (Plan International Philippines), Ms. Wanvira Yodwangjai (Plan International Thailand), Ms. Etha Mota (Plan International Timor-Leste), Ms. Pham Thi Thanh Giang (Plan International Vietnam) and Mr. Raša Sekulović (Plan International APAC Regional Hub). Thank you to Plan International Global Hub colleagues and Gender and Inclusion (Tinotenda Hondo), PfV (Joanna Shepherd) and SRHR (Jessie Freeman, Erika Silva and Katie Lau) AoGD teams and networks for their precious inputs and technical guidance provided. Many thanks to Heather Barclay, Director of External Engagement and Shipra Jha, Head of Asia Engagement at Girls Not Brides for their review and insight.

This Toolkit was prepared and consolidated for Plan International by Includovate under the Plan International APAC Regional Hub guidance and supervision. Plan International would like to acknowledge and thank Includovate for the extensive data review upon which this resource is based. Special thanks go to the Includovate lead consultant Dr Marta Welander for her overall strategic role throughout the drafting process, and the Includovate team members Ms. Archana Sharma (local expert, India), Ms. Ommerra Ahmed (local expert) and Marit Jones-Virma (administrative support).



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FOREWORD

Child marriage has been impacting the Asia Pacific region, as well as the rest of the world, for too long, depriving girls of their rights and opportunities while eroding their survival, health and overall development. In many parts of the region, girls' freedom, dignity and integrity are further compromised by premature adolescent pregnancy and early unions, often reducing their existence to conditions of exclusion and submission. The COVID-19 pandemic, with its immediate and long-term impacts on regional economies, health-care systems and disrupted education, is threatening to reverse decades of progress made in reducing the prevalence of child marriage and adolescent pregnancies and their detrimental effects. We cannot afford to lose the gains this progress made!



Ms. Bhagyashri Dengle

Executive Director Asia Pacific
and Gender Transformative
Policy and Practice,
Plan International

We know already that the progress in reducing child marriage is possible under enabling and conducive conditions – particularly with the transformation of the status of girls and women, and the continuous and stable provision of essential gender-responsive services. Over the past decade, we witnessed a global decrease of young women who were married as children by 15 per cent, going from 1 in 4 to about 1 in 5. However, no single region has yet reached the pace of progress needed to meet the Sustainable Development Goal target of eliminating this harmful practice by 2030. In order to achieve this ambitious target, the expected rate of progress needs to be 15 times faster than the pace observed over the last decade. Otherwise, over the next 10 years, up to 10 million more girls might be at risk of getting married early as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, the time to act and accelerate these efforts is now!

We are increasingly learning from the emerging body of evidence that a myriad of solutions have been proven effective in reducing the harmful practice of child marriage with the aim of its eventual elimination. The tight knot of child marriage can only be disentangled by implementing combined holistic and gender-transformative interventions and strategies, which are described in this practical resource. As one of the many contributions to accelerating efforts towards eliminating child, early and forced marriage by 2030, we are proudly presenting this toolkit for practitioners – those brave individuals and organizations who are at the forefront of this historical battle. It is hoped that this resource, featuring a range of operational strategies informed by good practice and field-based experiences, will be of help in providing ideas and pathways to solutions for those who are directly engaged in planning and implementing relevant interventions.

So much more remains to be done! Equipped with knowledge and practical skills, we'll have better chances to reach the ambitious goal of having Asia Pacific as the first child-marriage free region in the world! I wholeheartedly commend you for your excellent efforts and wish you all the very best with your important work,



Bhagyashri

LIST OF ACRONYMS

ASRH	Adolescent sexual and reproductive health
C4D	Communication for Development
CCWC	Commune Committee for Women and Children
CEDAW	Committee on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CEFMU	Child, Early and Forced Marriage and Unions
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CSE	Comprehensive sexuality education
CSO	Civil society organisation
DCWC	District Council for Women and Children
DHS	Demographic and Health Surveys
ECD	Early childhood development
GAP	Gender Action Plan
GBV	Gender-based violence
GEM	Gender Equality Marker
HIV/AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
INGO	International non-governmental organisation
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
SAIEVAC	South Asian Initiative to End Violence Against Children
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SRHR	Sexual and reproductive health and rights
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WASH	Water, sanitation and hygiene
WHO	World Health Organization

WELCOME!

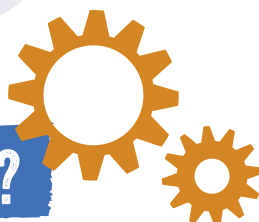




WELCOME!



WHY THIS TOOLKIT?



There is of course already a vast literature looking at the damaging harmful practice of Child, Early and Forced Marriage and Unions (CEFMU) in the Asia-Pacific region, including an evidence base documenting the prevalence and incidence rates, key drivers and consequences.

However, there is no practical compendium of programming guidance available for practitioners, so we set out to fill this gap! This toolkit has been developed by Plan International Asia-Pacific Regional Hub to fill this gap and contribute to accelerated efforts to end CEFMU by 2030, in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The key intention behind it is to offer and make available consolidated practical guidance on effective and impactful CEFMU programming and practices for Plan International and other civil society practitioners and actors in the region and beyond. This toolkit is informed by global commitments, conceptual thinking and practice, and builds upon the expertise, innovation and energy of Plan International's work across the Asia-Pacific region, gathered through a literature review and analysis of available project information, as well as through key informant interviews carried out with CEFMU focal points in October 2021. As such, the practical guidance and ideas presented in the toolkit have been developed based on good practices, lessons learned and programme evidence from the Asia-Pacific region, promoting a gender-transformative, multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder approach to CEFMU programming.



WHO IS THIS TOOLKIT FOR?

This practitioners' toolkit on CEFMU is intended, first and foremost, to serve as a resource for Plan International staff and partners designing and implementing interventions aimed at preventing, reducing and eliminating CEFMU in the Asia-Pacific region, with the ultimate aim of accelerating efforts to eliminate CEFMU by 2030.

It can also serve as a useful tool for any other civil society actors across the Asia-Pacific region to inform their respective CEFMU programming. While this particular toolkit was not developed specifically to cater to youth advocates and girl-leaders, some useful tips and guidance on meaningful girl-led youth engagement has been incorporated throughout the resource.

WHAT WILL YOU FIND IN THIS TOOLKIT?

The toolkit is divided into three sections:

SECTION 1

provides an **overview of CEFMU in the Asia Pacific region**, outlining prevalence, main drivers and root-causes, and key harmful effects and consequences.

1

SECTION 2

outlines **key principles and concepts for a gender-transformative approach**. When designing and implementing a CEFMU programmatic intervention, Plan International's Gender-transformative programming and influencing approach helps to ensure that the interventions go beyond addressing the symptoms and explicitly tackle the root causes and drivers of the harmful practice.

2

SECTION 3

is the core part of the toolkit, focusing on the **practical aspects of CEFMU programme design and implementation**. Here, you will find a wide range of possible interventions to address CEFMU in a holistic, multi-sectoral and multi-dimensional approach, organised under the seven key thematic intervention clusters, in line with Plan International's 18+ Theory of Change and the Asia-Pacific Strategic Framework. For each intervention, the toolkit provides a concise synthesis, as well as key considerations and helpful tips, always drawing on good practices and expertise provided by Plan International Country Offices and derived from a thorough desk review.

3



SECTION 1

UNPACKING CHILD, EARLY AND FORCED MARRIAGE AND UNION IN ASIA PACIFIC



SECTION 1

SECTION 2

SECTION 3



SECTION 1

UNPACKING CHILD, EARLY AND FORCED MARRIAGE AND UNIONS IN ASIA PACIFIC



Welcome to Section 1! Let's set the scene and get into the background and context of Child, Early and Forced Marriage and Unions (CEFMU) around the world and in the Asia Pacific region.

Some of the information in this section might come in handy for your awareness and advocacy work, but make sure to supplement it with your own country-specific facts and figures as well!

INTRODUCTION TO THE ISSUE

Child, Early and Forced Marriage and Unions (CEFMU) is a harmful practice and global issue disproportionately affecting girls and reinforcing gender inequality, while also undermining a child's right to education, health, participation and life opportunities. CEFMU violates human rights. Despite steady progress in reducing it, this harmful practice remains widespread across countries of varying regions, cultures and ethnicities.

According to UNICEF statistics, 45 per cent of girls have been affected by CEFMU in South Asia; 39 per cent in Sub-Saharan Africa; 23 per cent in Latin America and the Caribbean; and 18 per cent in the Middle East and North Africa. Twelve million girls under the age of 18 are married each year; 23 every minute; 1 every 2 seconds.¹ By 2030, it is expected that more than 800 million women would have suffered the consequences of child marriage, up from more than 650 million today.² According to recent data by UNICEF in October 2021, without any further acceleration in rates, more than 150 million additional girls will marry before their 18th birthday by 2030. Globally, 115 million boys and men were married before the age of 18, making the practice not exclusive to women and girls.³

An important emerging phenomenon in some countries of the Asia-Pacific region, along with child marriages, is early unions. The term 'unions' refers to informal marriages or free unions, which are equivalent to formal marriage but without the legal status of a marriage. Often, these unions are not formalised by the state or religious authorities, which makes it difficult to account for them and collect sufficient data on the issue. There are a number of interchangeable terms used to refer to these unions, including 'consensual union' or 'self-initiated union', 'early union', and 'cohabitation'.⁴

1. UNPACKING CHILD, EARLY AND FORCED MARRIAGE AND UNIONS IN ASIA PACIFIC

Another widely seen phenomenon across the Asia-Pacific region and beyond is adolescent pregnancy, evident in the growing adolescent birth rate in South East Asia, currently at 47 per 1,000 girls, which is higher than the South Asia average of 35 per 1,000 girls.⁵ While global adolescent birth rates are falling, they are either stagnant or increasing in several countries in East Asia and the Pacific.

If we are to meet the target of eliminating child marriage by 2030, as set out in the SDGs, and fulfil existing commitments in this regard, progress needs to be 15 times faster globally than the rate observed over the past decade.⁶ Meanwhile, the COVID-19 emergency is exacerbating matters, exposing millions of girls across the globe to CEFMU as families resort to this harmful practice as a negative coping strategy to respond to effects such as deepened economic hardship, interrupted education, early adolescent pregnancies and increased gender-based violence. This threatens to reverse a decade of progress in preventing, reducing and eliminating CEFMU unless positive mitigation strategies are deployed at scale.⁷

DEFINITION OF CHILD, EARLY AND FORCED MARRIAGE AND UNIONS

A harmful practice affecting children worldwide, CEFMU refers to marriages and informal unions whereby either one or both the groom and the bride is under 18 years of age, and has not personally expressed their full and free consent to the union. While child marriages mostly stem from cultural norms, traditions or increased instability and pressure on families to cope, self-decided marriage or unions are when adolescents, without getting into a formal marriage, make the decision to live together. As a result, a striking number of young girls become pregnant without having planned to, or without having any control of their pregnancy.

In this toolkit, we use the term CEFMU to reflect current United Nations terminology, whilst also encapsulating informal unions which are akin to CEFMU, albeit without the legal status of a marriage, and which are increasingly common in parts of South East Asia. The term reflects the complexities of different situational factors or manifestations. At times, however, the toolkit uses the broad term child marriage for shorthand.

CEFMU constitutes a violation of children's human rights and a form of gender-based violence that robs children of their childhood, disrupts their education and health, and makes them vulnerable to violence, discrimination and hardship. It is a global issue, fuelled by gender inequality, poverty, harmful social norms and economic insecurities, and has devastating consequences on adolescents all over the world.⁸ In particular, CEFMU affects how young women and men's lives unfold – shortening their childhoods, limiting their education and economic opportunities, and subjecting them to social isolation and vulnerability to violence.⁹



A FEW CEFMU FACTS AND FIGURES



Globally, **1 in every 5 girls** is married, or in union, before reaching the age of 18. In the least developed countries, that number doubles: **40 per cent of girls** are married before age 18, and 12 per cent of girls are married before age 15.¹⁰



Each year, some **12 million more girls** will marry before reaching age 18 – and of those, **4 million** are under age 15.



90 per cent of adolescent births take place within the context of marriage – child marriage and adolescent pregnancy are closely linked.



Complications during pregnancy and childbirth is globally the **number 1 cause** of death for girls in the age group of 15-19.¹¹



If efforts are not accelerated, more than **150 million girls** are estimated to get married before their eighteenth birthday by 2030.¹²

PREVALENCE OF CEFMU IN ASIA PACIFIC

South Asia had one of the highest CEFMU prevalence rates in the world, however, in the last decade, the risk of a girl marrying before age 18 has declined by more than one third from nearly 50 per cent to 28 per cent.¹³ Bangladesh has the highest rate of child marriage in Asia, ranking the fourth highest in the world.¹⁴ Despite the declining prevalence rates, South Asia is still home to the largest number of girls and young women who are married, with more than 40 per cent of the global burden.¹⁵ This can be attributed to the legacy of how common child marriage was in previous generations and to the region's large population. India has the largest absolute numbers of girls and young women who are married in the world, which is one third of the global total, and data shows that the global burden of child marriage is shifting from South Asia to sub-Saharan Africa, where levels of child marriage have declined at a modest rate.¹⁶ In South Asia, almost all adolescent mothers are married.

Although CEFMU rates in Southeast Asia are also significantly high, there are fluctuations across the region. In Lao PDR, 35.4 per cent of women aged between 20 and 24 were married before the age of 18, compared with 11 per cent in Viet Nam.¹⁷ There is a strong correlation between rates of CEFMU and rates of adolescent pregnancy, with regions with the highest level of CEFMU also having the highest rates of births to adolescent mothers.¹⁸ The highest adolescent birth rates per 1,000 can be found in Lao PDR (94), Cambodia (57), Thailand (50), Indonesia (48) and the Philippines (47).¹⁹

CEFMU is also an issue in the Pacific. It is estimated that around 8 per cent of the girls in the Pacific are married by the age of 15 and around 26 per cent of the girls are married by the age of 18, standing right after South Asia in terms of prevalence. The age of marriage is low in countries such as Solomon Islands, where almost 3 per cent of the children are married by the age of 15 and 22 per cent by the age of 18. Moreover, there is no official birth document required for a wedding, making weddings



happen simply based on one's physical presence. These practices are mostly cultural in nature, where the father's consent is preferred for such underage marriages.²⁰ In Vanuatu, 21 per cent of girls are married before the age of 18,²¹ and one in five girls marry before the age of 18 in Kiribati.²² Only four of the Pacific Island countries have set the minimum age of marriage at 18, in line with the CEDAW, namely, Kiribati, Nauru, Fiji and the Republic of Marshall Islands. In countries like Tonga and Solomon Islands, the minimum age of marriage can be reduced to as low as 15, if the permission of the guardian is obtained. Countries such as Niue, Cook Islands, and Palau allow child marriage, in a sense, because there is no prohibition by law.²³



There is a noticeable increase of new forms of child marriage, including those linked with human trafficking, 'circumstantial' marriages or voluntary unions, or juvenile self-determined relations, which contribute to the greater diversity of driving factors within the sub-region.²⁴ This highlights a new kind of emergency, which the Asia-Pacific region is at the highest risk of globally, exacerbating existing vulnerabilities facing adolescents, especially the young girls.

In addition, customary and voluntary unions continue to exist among many tribes in India and its neighbouring countries. Polyandry, both fraternal and non-fraternal, is practiced in a few tribal communities in India (the Kota, Khasa, Toda, Ladani Bota and Khasi), mostly along the foothills of the Himalayas. The Nayar women in the South also practice a form of non-fraternal polyandry and constitute matriarchal families.²⁵ Among the Adivasis, the husband pays for his wife's parents in kind or cash on marriage (well distinguished from the practice of dowry). Live-in relationships are also common among the tribes in India, where the boy would be courting multiple partners and living in the girls' houses.²⁶ Many marriage proposals for girls come at the age of five or six, and several tribes retain old child marriage traditions even today. For example, the Rabri Tribe in the Kutch region in Gujarat still marry off children, something which is also part of the customs among the Paniya and Kattunaikar tribes in Waynad.²⁷

Although a number of harmful practices associated with child marriages have been identified, research reveals important linkages between child marriage and dowry practices. The cultural aspects of the practice depend upon the girl's age, level of education and virginity. According to popular beliefs, the longer a girl remains unmarried, the higher the risk of her not remaining 'pure' and 'virgin', and the longer she will spend gaining education or knowledge. Younger girls are deemed more pure, and easier to control and socialise into new families, therefore, a smaller dowry is demanded in case of younger girls, and this encourages parents to arrange child marriages.²⁸ The cultural practice of girls moving away from their parents' home and into a new family, coupled with dowry demands and other marriage costs, are important drivers of 'son preference' in the region.

DRIVERS AND ROOT-CAUSES OF CEFMU IN ASIA PACIFIC

Although the factors that drive CEFMU vary considerably across Asia Pacific, understanding the commonalities while paying due attention to specifics is key to preventing and reducing CEFMU rates. The following section outlines key drivers of CEFMU in Asia Pacific, with some being more prevalent than others in certain sub-regions, countries and pockets within countries. Importantly, many of the drivers are interlinked and interconnected, which means that interventions to address CEFMU require a multi-faceted approach that tackles root-causes and drivers at different levels and from various angles.

It is important to note some significant differences within the Asia-Pacific region. In South East Asia, key drivers and root-causes of CEFMU are varied, and include poverty, religious and cultural traditions, lack of education, and loopholes in the marriage laws. While the legal age of marriage in Southeast Asian countries ranges between 18 to 21 years, customary or religious law, parental consent and court orders can be obtained to facilitate child marriage, which clearly shows that local customs still precede international norms in the region. In Indonesia, the legal age for girls and boys to marry is 21 years, but with parental consent, it is 16 for girls and 19 for boys.²⁹ On the other hand, in South Asia, it is the high value placed on girls' sexuality, discriminatory social and gender norms, poor enforcement of child marriage prevention laws, and instability due to conflict and natural disasters that are the major drivers of CEFMU.³⁰ Additionally, there is a pattern in South and Southeast Asia, with age of marriage slow to go beyond the age of 18 in South Asia, while it has increased to the age 19 and into ages in the early 20s in Southeast Asia.³¹ The complexity increases with the move in South Asia to increase the minimum age of marriage of women from 18 to 20 years in Nepal and to 21 years in India, which contradicts the internal standards and recommendation of a minimum age being set at 18 years for both girls and boys.

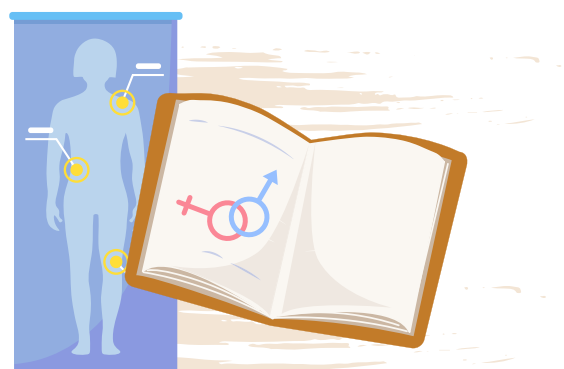
GENDER INEQUALITY

A gendered imbalance of power, resulting in gender inequality, gender-based discrimination and exclusion, is a major underlying cause of CEFMU across Asia Pacific. This results in girls not having access to realising their rights or having the same opportunities, protection or resources as boys have. In male-dominated patriarchal societies in many Asia-Pacific countries, girls and women are often confined within the walls of their own homes, particularly in rural areas, with the intention of keeping them safe and protecting their image/reputation as good sisters, daughters, wives and mothers, and preserving their family's 'dignity' and 'honour'. This often reduces girls and women to traditional reproductive roles of being mothers and homemakers.



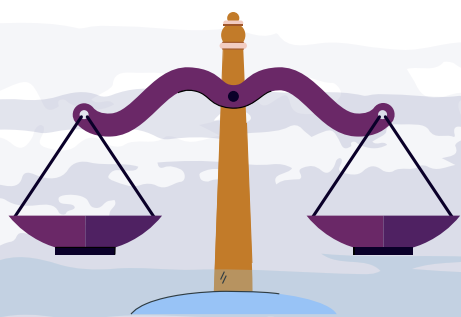
ADOLESCENT PREGNANCY AND MOTHERHOOD

Adolescent pregnancy and the high value accorded to “motherhood” play important roles in driving CEFMU in Asia. For example, in Indonesia, during the scoping survey conducted for Plan International’s ‘Yes I Do’ project in December 2016, it was found that seven out of ten child marriages in Indonesia were a result of adolescent girls becoming pregnant.³² Adolescents who may want to avoid pregnancies cannot due to the norms and laws that prohibit their education and access to services. This includes limited sexuality education in schools and at home, and poor access to safe abortion and modern contraception due to age, marital status or health worker biases and more. In the Asia-Pacific region, 10.4 million adolescent girls aged 15–19 were found to have an unmet need for modern contraception.³³ In such a situation, marriage and childbearing is considered the best option available, and girls who become pregnant are placed under pressure to get married early.³⁴ It should also be noted that in many places, motherhood is seen as desirable by girls themselves, especially where there is no other route to adulthood and recognition as a valuable member of society, due to limited alternatives for education and employment. In some cases, adolescent pregnancy is the result of rape or sexual coercion. Furthermore, girls are typically blamed for sexual harassment and violence, which brings shame to their families. Lack of understanding and weak laws on sexual consent contribute to adolescent pregnancies. A culture of impunity for sexual violence and limited access to services for survivors – including safe abortion – exacerbates the challenges, leading to forced motherhood.



WEAK LEGAL FRAMEWORKS AND THEIR ENFORCEMENT

Gender inequality can also be seen existing within legislations which exhibit a disparity between the minimum age of marriage for girls and boys. Legal complexities, such as inadequate policies, weak and inconsistent enforcement, insufficient resources and plural legal systems (customary, traditional or religious rules), also play significant roles in triggering CEFMU, and minimising efforts to reduce and subsequently end child marriage. A lack of awareness and failure to enforce legislation also means that some families who marry their young daughters off and against their will are commonly unaware that they are breaking the law.³⁵ Laws and (mis)understandings of laws also limit adolescent access to SRH services – it is important to recognise adolescents’ evolving capacity to make decisions about their own sexual and reproductive health, and to be able to access services that enable that. This includes ensuring that sexual consent laws and minimum age to access services are not conflated with the minimum age of marriage laws. Adolescents of a similar age engaged in consensual sex should not be criminalised and stigmatised.



SOCIETIES' VIEWS ON GIRLS' ROLES

The harmful practice of CEFMU, being inextricably linked to gender inequality, is often dictated by norms, customs and traditions imposing lower social status on women and girls than on men and boys within the family and community. Assumptions are made that women's responsibilities stretch little beyond traditionally perceived roles of a caregiver, wife and mother, therefore, restricting an active role in economic or societal development,³⁶ while increasing social isolation and limiting opportunities to continue education or seek better life opportunities and employment prospects.³⁷ These vastly accepted gender inequalities are fuelled by patriarchal views on demanding readiness for marriage, and restriction of movement and allowance to speak freely, which devalue a girl's societal worth and associate status with marriage, as well as dowry practices in some parts of the region.



TRADITIONS AND EXPECTATIONS

Traditional and patriarchal beliefs towards gender roles, rooted in social, cultural or religious customs, can instigate and perpetuate the harmful practice of child marriage. A deeply rooted practice in many communities and traditions, this harmful practice commands supposed legitimacy, and is, hence, deemed not to be questioned. In some societies and communities, which may be heavily influenced by traditions, and/or where there are prevailing concerns around adolescent sexuality, particularly fear surrounding girls becoming sexually active outside marriage and risk to become pregnant, families are concerned about the erosion or loss of 'family honour', which often leads to child, early and forced marriage.³⁸



ECONOMIC SCARCITY

Poverty is both a significant underlying cause and trigger in the occurrence of child marriage, with CEFMU often used as a negative coping strategy to relieve current and perceived economic burden. Higher levels of child marriage correlate with low household wealth, where families seek to alleviate hardship while safeguarding their children's economic future, especially when there is a lack of alternative livelihood options. There is also a direct correlation between low levels of education and increased child marriage and birth rates, which consequentially puts young girls at risk of maternal mortality and morbidity, as well as limits further opportunities for education and societal advancement.³⁹



CONFLICT AND INSTABILITY, HUMANITARIAN AND EMERGENCY SITUATIONS

In areas and situations of conflict and instability, displaced families often view early marriage as a means of protecting their daughter from anticipated hardship and harm. It is often the fear of rape and sexual violence, of unwanted pregnancies, of subsequent family shame and dishonour, of homelessness and hunger or starvation that lead to CEFMU in humanitarian crisis contexts.



Child marriage is often perceived by families as a 'protective measure' and is used as a negative coping method in times of natural disaster, conflict and instability, particularly as there tends to be a breakdown in community structures and an increase in gender-based violence in humanitarian settings.⁴⁰

LACK OF ALTERNATIVES AND OPPORTUNITIES

A lack of alternative roles and opportunities for girls, especially in regard to education and employment, are major drivers of early marriage. A socially imbibed son preference and a resultant lower social standing for girls means that marriage is seen as the only viable option for them, while for boys, there is a motivation to aim for jobs or enterprises. This ultimately results in girls and women being systematically denied educational, financial and social resources, and getting stuck in an inter-generational vicious cycle of deprivation and exclusion.⁴¹ The situation is all the worse for girls who migrate along with their families to urban areas. In developing countries, urbanisation is largely out of distress, with people moving into cities without basic infrastructure, where they are compelled to dwell in slums amidst an intense space crunch. In such a scenario, an early marriage of the daughter means there will be one person less to share the little space the family lives in and the limited resources the family possesses.⁴²

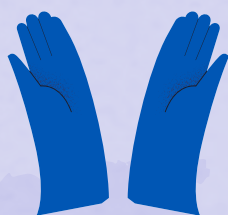


ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



- Tackling the Taboo: Sexuality and gender-transformative programmes to end child, early and forced marriage and unions (Girls Not Brides, 2019)
- Nothing about us, without us! Four insights on child marriage from young Indigenous women in Latin America (Girls Not Brides, 2021)
- Grassroots experience of using the Child Marriage Act, 2006 (Partners for Law in Development, 2018)
- Mapping the global evidence on child marriage over two decades: A large-scale systematic scoping review (GreeneWorks, 2021)
- Supporting Married Girls, Adolescent Mothers and Girls who are Pregnant. (Girls Not Brides, 2021)

CONSEQUENCES OF CEFMU IN ASIA PACIFIC



The serious consequences of the harmful practice of CEFMU in the Asia-Pacific region can be clustered into the seven broad categories, which are described in this section.

Importantly, just as with the root-causes and drivers of CEFMU, there are many interlinkages between the consequences of the harmful practice, which, once again, highlights the importance of adopting holistic, multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder intervention strategies to address the phenomenon.

MATERNAL AND INFANT MORTALITY

CEFMU has resulted in high maternal and infant mortality rates in Asia, particularly in Southeast Asia, especially because of limited access to quality sexual and reproductive health services, including contraception, safe abortion, emergency obstetric care, antenatal and postnatal care, and infant care and support.⁴³ Common complications of childbirth, such as hypertensive disorders, haemorrhage, premature labour, systemic infections, and obstructed labour, are more likely among girls aged 15 to 19 than among those just a few years older, and those aged under 15 are at even greater risk. Girls are also at increased risk of post-pregnancy related complications. A systematic review found that up to 86 per cent of cases of obstetric fistula occur in girls under the age of 18. The maternal mortality rates (MMR) are higher among young adolescents who give birth at an early age, for example, in Lao PDR, where the MMR among adolescents aged 15 to 19 is 190 per 100,000 live births compared to 178 per 100,000 live births for women aged 20-24. The same can be said for high infant mortality rates, which are also a major consequence of early pregnancy and childbirth. For instance, in Timor-Leste, the neonatal, infant and child mortality rates were all highest for children of mothers less than 20 years of age at the time of birth compared to all other age groups.⁴⁴ This can be attributed to the age, nutrition and inexperience of the young mothers who are likely to have low-weight babies, use poor feeding practices and are more likely to have stunted or wasted children. In Cambodia, 14 per cent of infants born to mothers under the age of 20 were very small in size.



POOR SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

Child marriages and voluntary unions negatively impact married girls' and adolescents' overall health, and their sexual, reproductive health and rights in particular. While boys are also married as children, child marriage affects girls in greater numbers and with consequences that can be devastating for their health and wellbeing. Many adolescent mothers report that the decision to have a child was not made by them, in violation of their reproductive rights. Girls are highly vulnerable to poor maternal health outcomes.⁴⁵ This is especially the case for the girls and young women who are married, given their low levels of education and their lack of access to gender-responsive and age-appropriate health services, early marriage often leads to adolescent pregnancy and childbearing before the age of 18. Married or in union adolescents often face repeated pregnancies with small intervals between each birth, both of which increase the risks of developing complications.⁴⁶



Pregnancy as a result of rape leads to forced motherhood in contexts where access to safe abortion is restricted, violating a girl's or woman's right to decide if and when to have children. Despite pregnancy being significantly riskier for girls under the age of 20, adolescent mothers are less likely to access maternal health services than older women.

MENTAL HEALTH

The practice of CEFMU can cause significant risk not only to the physical but also the mental health and wellbeing of girls. Being deprived of their childhood and adolescence, burdened with roles and responsibilities for which they are psychologically and emotionally unprepared, and being removed from their families and friends, leave girls trapped in early marriages, isolated and vulnerable. Girls married as minors are at increased risk of poor mental health outcomes, including fear, depression and suicide. In the absence of safety networks, girls are often isolated and left alone to cope with the physical and emotional challenges of early and forced marriage.⁴⁷ For example, a study conducted by the Campaign to End Child Marriages in Tamil Nadu (India) has shown that most of the girls forced into marriages faced health issues, and revealed that 25 per cent of them were depressed and 47 per cent of them felt lonely due to the severe abuse and violence they experienced.⁴⁸ Forced motherhood due to reproductive coercion and lack of access to safe abortion is also a source of major distress.



VIOLENCE

Violence is a major consequence of child marriage in many parts of Asia, where married girls are highly vulnerable to abuse including physical, sexual, psychological and economic violence. Their age and lack of education, combined with their status and lack of autonomy and decision-making power within the home, can make them more vulnerable to violence and abuse, and such violence is likely to continue into adulthood.⁴⁹ This has repercussions on girls' mental and physical health, confidence, autonomy and other indicators of social wellbeing.⁵⁰ It has also been found that the greater the age difference between girls and their husbands, the more likely they are to experience intimate partner violence. In addition, women who gave birth as adolescents are also more likely to experience intimate partner violence throughout their lives. Adolescent mothers who have experienced sexual violence are often not provided with adequate psychological support, referrals to social support services or access to justice.



EXCLUSION FROM EDUCATION

Low educational attainment is both a cause and a consequence of CEFMU. Girls who are married are unlikely to continue their schooling.⁵¹ As a wife, the girl is expected to take care of the home, children and extended family, which means that returning to school is almost impossible for a married girl.⁵² This can be caused by a range of practical barriers to education, such as household responsibilities, stigma, forced exclusion from school and gender norms that keep girls at home. In some communities and parts of the region, married girls must leave their own home for their husband's house, which means that girls have to drop out of their schools, with a very bleak possibility of returning to school or enrolling in a new school near the husband's house. Evidence highlights that schools in some countries have expulsion policies for girls who become pregnant, with some allowing girls to return to school, usually after 12 months, but not necessarily to the same school. Even in cases where schools do allow for re-entry, the policy is not always followed, and, in practice, girls often do not return to school due to domestic, social and economic barriers.⁵³

Other common obstacles adolescent mothers face after childbirth include lack of awareness of school re-entry policies, lack of school flexibility, financial difficulties, lack of parental support, lack of affordable childcare and prevailing discriminatory attitudes on the part of teachers, administrators and fellow students.



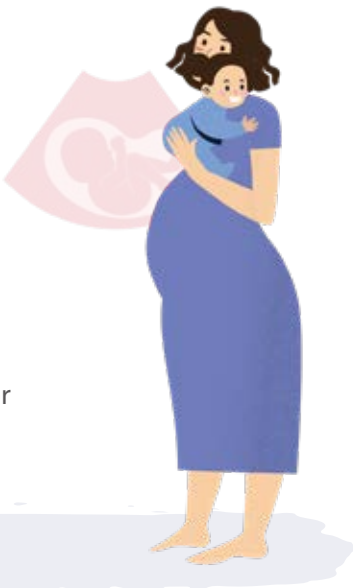
ECONOMIC IMPACTS

Child marriage has been identified as having a substantial impact on women's potential earnings and economic productivity. Girls and young women who are married are often economically marginalised; they have no income of their own and are dependent on their husbands. This is because child marriage curtails educational attainment, which in turn reduces women's expected earnings in adulthood. This can also curb their influence and decision-making power within the household, leaving them without any agency.⁵⁴ Research has found that, on average, child marriage can reduce women's earnings in adulthood by 9 per cent. This means that ending child marriage could generate an additional annual income of \$4.8 billion in Bangladesh and \$7.6 billion in Nigeria. The prevalence of child marriage and early childbearing also has tremendous negative impacts on the global economy. If child marriage and early childbearing had ended by 2015, the estimated global welfare benefit from reduced population growth would have been \$22 billion in the year 2015 and could be \$566 billion by 2030.⁵⁵



INTERGENERATIONAL EFFECTS OF EARLY CHILDBEARING

Girls who marry early or enter into unions tend to have children earlier than their peers, and also have more children than their peers do. The children of young mothers who have had no or little education are less likely to survive infancy, to have a good start to their education, to excel in school, or to continue beyond minimum levels of education.⁵⁶ In addition, the children of child brides are at risk of impaired growth and development experienced from poor nutrition, repeated infections and inadequate psycho-social stimulation, known as stunting. Daughters of uneducated mothers are especially likely to drop out of school, marry young and continue the cycle of poverty. In this way, the vicious intergenerational cycle of early marriage is perpetuated. Conversely, research also suggests that educated parents are less likely to arrange early marriage and are more likely to promote continued education for their daughters, particularly parents who completed secondary education at a minimum.



GIRLS' WELLBEING AND SOCIAL AND CIVIC PARTICIPATION

Apart from the physical and mental health of adolescent girls, CEFMU also impacts their wellbeing by depriving them of their childhood and adolescence, overburdening them with responsibilities, robbing them of their confidence, and leaving them with no scope for reviving their autonomy.⁵⁷ Another major consequence of early marriage, which is reinforced by societal norms regarding the role of women, is that women do not engage in activities that will positively shape their communities, nor do they participate in civic activities that will contribute to the development of their community and society at large. This proves that CEFMU does not merely impact the girl, but also her family and community. A girl who is married as a child is more likely to be out of school and not earn money and contribute to the overall community development and growth. In essence, girls and young women who are married are disempowered, invisible, and lack leadership capabilities and ownership of their lives.⁵⁸



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Ending child marriage and adolescent empowerment (UNICEF)
- Child, early and forced marriage legislation in 37 Asia-Pacific countries (WHO, IPU, 2016)
- The Impact of Child Marriage in Asia (Peace for Asia, 2021)

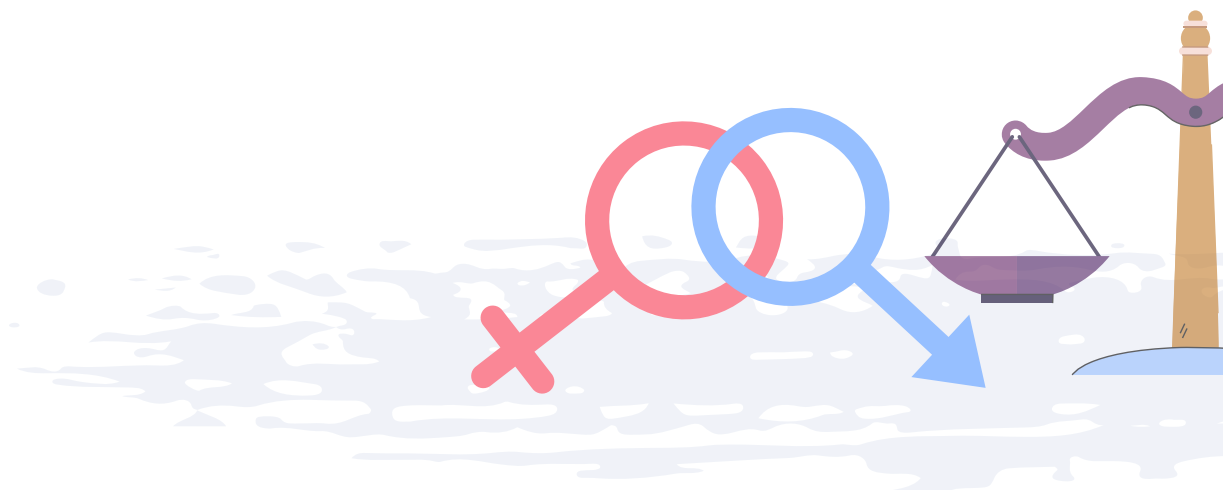


PLAN INTERNATIONAL'S FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION TO ADDRESS CEFMU

In order to address the root causes and consequences of CEFMU in the Asia-Pacific region, Plan International has taken a multi-pronged approach to turn these many challenges into opportunities for positive and lasting change. While Plan's approach is, of course, merely one of many available approaches, and one that reflects Plan's organisational mandate and priorities, this approach is presented here to inspire and potentially orient others' work to address CEFMU across Asia Pacific.

As highlighted in Plan International's CEFMU Policy Brief 2020, given the multiple causes and consequences of CEFMU, eliminating it requires a multi-sectoral and coordinated approach to prevention and response. Recognising CEFMU as a form of gender-based violence, the statement suggests the upholding of human rights so as to avoid further perpetuation of any kind of discrimination, violence, neglect or exclusion, including CEFMU.

Plan International's interventions to address CEFMU globally, including in the Asia-Pacific region, are broadly framed by Plan's Global 18+ framework and Theory of Change. This is an overarching, action-oriented framework for tackling CEFMU across the globe, formalised in 2016. The 18+ Theory of Change recognises that in order to achieve its vision, a holistic strategy must be adopted. Harmful social and cultural attitudes must be transformed, while adequate legal and policy frameworks are put in place, consistently enforced and further reinforced by effective and gender-responsive public services and social safety nets. The inclusion and empowerment of girls, young people, their families and communities are central pillars of this strategic approach.



18+ THEORY OF CHANGE

Purpose: We strive for a just world that advances children's right and equality for Girls

To ensure that all children, particularly girls and the excluded:

Enjoy the right to live free of CEFMU

+

Are safer, more resilient, and thrive

+

Are empowered and have a more effective voice

Social Norms, Attitudes, Behaviours, and Relations

- Girls are empowered to make choices about who, if and when to get married
- Boys and men challenge gender stereotypes and lead the fight against CEFMU
- Families (including caregivers) and communities transform gender norms and practices that drives CEFMU
- Religious and traditional leaders, champions and role models actively oppose CEFMU
- Civil Society Organisations initiate and scale up innovative approaches and programmes to end CEFMU
- Government officials and technocrats challenge gender stereotypes and lead the fight against CEFMU

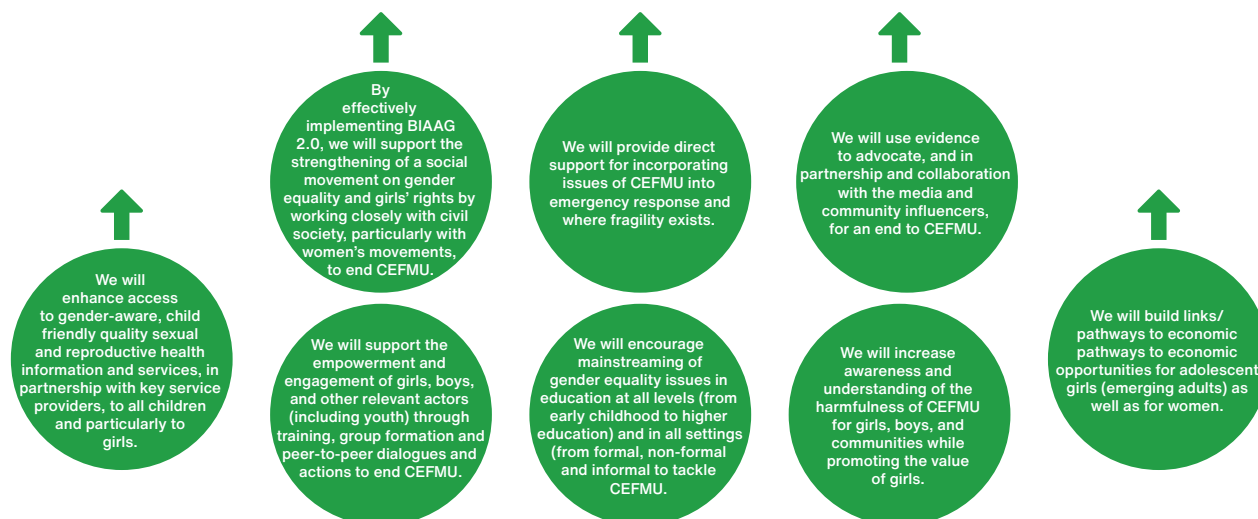
Policy Framework and Budgets

- Governments at different levels implement and enforce overarching legal and policy framework to stop CEFMU (customary law superseded)
- Governments at different levels make specific budget allocation for tackling CEFMU across all relevant ministries
- Judiciary implements and re-enforces legal and policy framework
- Civil Society Organisations strengthen partnerships, structures, and networks to influence (1,2,3)
- Girls influence legal and policy framework and budgeting (tracking too) through the amplification of their voices in all sectors

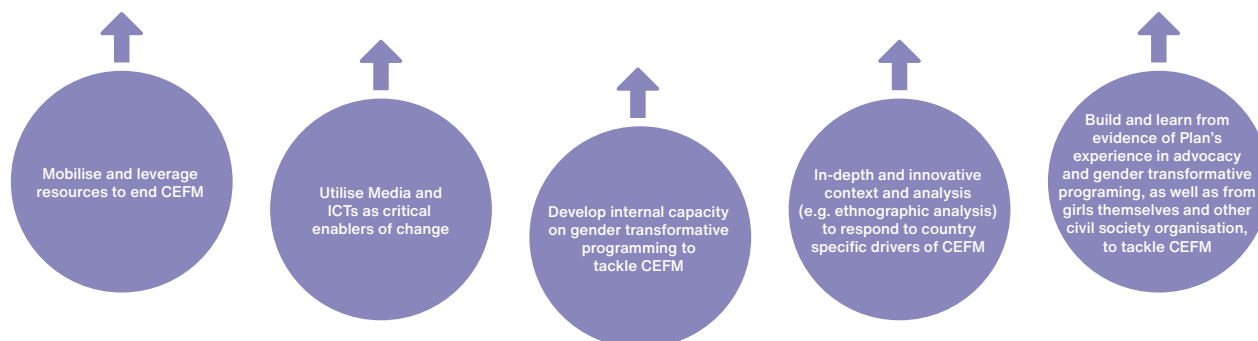
Social and Economic Resources and Safety Nets

- Parents (fathers and mothers) and relevant family members (both men and women) allocate resources for girls' alternatives to marriage, strive for equal participation of men and women in decision-making processes, and have peer support available for doing so.
- Private/public sector/NGOs advance and make economic opportunities accessible to women and girls (employment, credit, saving, etc.)
- Community volunteers and leaders empower girls with psychological/legal/CSE/skills/info
- Girls (married & unmarried) have and utilise skills (CSE, education, vocational, etc.) and benefit from continuous peer support to stand up against CEFMU
- Service providers provide gender-aware, child-friendly quality services (SRHR, education, protection, etc.)

We will take 3 PATHWAYS TO LASTING IMPACT



Programme Strategies



Organisational Strategies

CEFM DIAMOND

Programme and Influencing Priority Strategies
to Eliminate Child, Early and Forced Marriage and Prevent Adolescent
Pregnancy and Voluntary Unions in Asia-Pacific
Priority Levels

TOP
level priorities

Girls-led Youth **Activism** to
eliminate CEFMU

Campaigning
to prevent and end CEFMU

Use of **digital technology**
and online solutions
as accelerators to end
CEFMU and prevent
adolescent pregnancy

Accessible and quality
gender responsive
services (including SRHR
and Child Protection)

*All equally
precious!*

Engaging traditional and religious
leaders, parents and communities,
men and boys

Gender Transformative **Research**
and Knowledge Management

MEDIUM
level priorities

Documenting
promising practice
for replication and
scale-up

Innovations and
new approaches to
eliminate CEFMU

*All interacting
with each
other...*

Law and policy reforms and
enforcement

Regional and National Forums to
initiate action-oriented dialogue
and policy change

LOW
level priorities

Periodic UNCRC and
CEDAW **reporting**

*All shining
and sparkling
together!*

Continuous
Education

Economic
Empowerment

Protection from
violence

Sexual
Reproductive
Health and Rights

Working in
partnerships

Evidence based

Scalable and
replicable

Tackling social
norms, attitudes
and behaviours

GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACH

UNDERLYNG THEMATIC STRATEGIES AND APPROACHES



This framework has also been articulated through three key ‘dimensions of change’ or pathways, each with its own specific objectives to guide Plan’s work on CEFMU. The first dimension relates to changing harmful social norms, attitudes, behaviours and relations. Here, it is of crucial importance to empower girls to make their own choices about if, whom, and when they may get married. It is also essential to engage men and boys in this work, as well as families, teachers, religious and traditional leaders and civil society organisations. The aim is to raise awareness of the detrimental impact of CEFMU and to equip stakeholders with the skills and knowledge required to curb this harmful practice.

Within the second dimension, or pathway, there is a focus on building and strengthening social and economic resources and social ‘safety nets’. This can help create an enabling environment for ending CEFMU. As part of this dimension, interventions, such as resource mobilisation and advocating for supportive public services, are implemented. Plan also works with the public and private sectors to make economic opportunities accessible and available to girls and young women, for instance, by working with corporate and private sectors to create expanded employment opportunities for young women, while also equipping girls with educational and vocational skills. Importantly, there is also work to be done to encourage service providers to deliver gender-responsive, child-sensitive support services. As such, girls and young women can be empowered to claim their rights through education – including on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and protection from violence.



The third dimension, or pathway, relates to efforts to bring about change to legal and policy frameworks and budgets. Here, Plan International works to ensure that governments at different levels implement and enforce legal and policy frameworks to stop CEFMU. This includes but is not limited to the passing of legislation to set a minimum age of marriage. It also involves influencing and advocacy work to get government actors at different levels to make specific budget allocations needed for reducing and eliminating CEFMU across all relevant ministries and sectors. Under this dimension, the enforcement of laws and policies is also crucially important, hence, Plan also engages with judicial and other law enforcement actors to make sure they fulfil their duties.



In regard to Plan International's work on eliminating CEFMU in the Asia-Pacific region, this work spans more than a decade, and is led by Plan International Asia-Pacific Regional Hub (Plan APAC). While it is informed by, and closely linked to, the Global 18+ framework and related Theory of Change, the work in Asia Pacific has evolved into its own, distinctive set of approaches under the regional platform **Time to Act!**. It utilises comprehensive programmatic and influencing interventions and processes to effect change, anchored in extensive knowledge and expertise developed over the years. In the wake of the global COVID-19 pandemic, the interventions in Asia Pacific have been guided by the **Time to Act! COVID-19 and Girls in Asia-Pacific Strategic Framework**, which reflects the regional ambition to see CEFMU reduced in Asia by 50 per cent in the next five years, leading towards its eventual elimination by 2030, in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Strategic Framework outlines the predicted harmful impact of the COVID-19 crisis on CEFMU, and proposes a set of combined interventions designed to minimise the detrimental effects. The Strategic Framework is based on the initial assumption that long periods of disruption to education may cause many girls not to return to school afterwards. Second, it is assumed that economic hardships will further exacerbate the lack of opportunities for girls to get decent jobs and gain economic independence. Third, repeated social distancing regimes will cause gender-based violence to increase, and unwanted adolescent pregnancies to soar because girls and young women will have less access to necessary goods and services. This framework implies increased investment in four areas: continuous education, economic empowerment, protection from violence, and sexual reproductive health and rights, further reinforced by girl-led youth activism. The vision behind this framework aims to achieve the transition of girls in Asia Pacific to adulthood in societies that protect their rights, invest in their development and wellbeing, promote their self-determination and foster gender equality.



Plan International's regional work in Asia Pacific is informed by its **CEFMU DIAMOND**, which presents programmatic and influencing strategies to eliminate CEFMU allowing for their prioritisation in three levels of urgency. The DIAMOND model was updated in 2020 to respond as efficiently and impactfully as possible during the critical time of the COVID-19 outbreak. It reflects Plan APAC's agreed regional priorities and proven effective strategies to eliminate CEFMU, as well as to prevent and reduce adolescent pregnancies in Asia Pacific. Accordingly, the key priorities for the Time to Act! Initiative, as of 2020, which are outlined in the CEFMU DIAMOND, are strengthening youth activism, engagement and involvement to eliminate CEFMU in Asia, engaging traditional and religious leaders, campaigning to prevent and end CEFMU, and the use of digital technology, cyber platforms and online solutions, as well as promoting accessible and quality gender responsive services.



TIME TO ACT! COVID-19 AND GIRLS IN ASIA-PACIFIC: STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

VISION	Girls in Asia transition into adulthood in societies which protect their rights, invest in their development and wellbeing, promote their self-determination and foster gender equality			
IMPACT	Child, early, forced marriage is eliminated and adolescent pregnancies reduced by 2030 despite COVID-19			
LONG-TERM OUTCOMES ↑	Girls have diversified options and choices in life based on their education status	Girls ceased to be married off early as a negative coping strategy in response to economic recession	Girls live lives of dignity and respect in the safe families and societies	Girls assume ultimate decision-making on their bodies and lives
INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES ↑	Girls complete secondary education and their decisions whether and when to marry are delayed and reflect their own choices	Girls attain economic independence that create opportunities and choices other than being supported by someone else	Girls are safe and protected and enjoy their autonomy unharmed, empowered and spared from gender-based violence	Girls decide for themselves whether, when and whom to marry and have a final say in their family planning and child-bearing
THEMATIC INTERVENTION APPROACHES AND PILLARS ↑	Continuous education Distant home-based learning will be provided throughout the crisis, followed by full return of girls to school, supported by policy and campaigning	Economic empowerment Vocational trainings will be delivered to equip girls with entrepreneurship skills for decent jobs, and connect them to resources to find work and other livelihoods opportunities	Protection from violence Continuum of care and protection will be ensured through gender sensitive reporting mechanisms and essential services providing GBV protective measures	Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights Access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights to reduce adolescent pregnancies and minimise risks from CEFMU as a social protection mechanism
OVERARCHING STRATEGY ↑	Eliminating CEFMU requires long-term and well-resourced efforts. Any backwards movement on CEFMU due to COVID-19 in the coming months and years could slow down and obstruct the elimination of this harmful practice for decades. Plan International will boost investments to uphold a holistic approach by combining interventions across its thematic areas of programme and influencing with a particular focus on continuous education, economic empowerment, protection from violence and access to gender-responsive sexual and reproductive health services over the next two years.			
PROBLEM	The COVID-19 emergency will expose millions of girls across Asia to CEFMU when families use CEFMU as a negative coping strategy to respond to interrupted education, economic hardship, early pregnancy and increased gender-based violence. This threatens to reverse a decade of progress in preventing, reducing and eliminating CEFMU unless positive mitigation strategies are deployed at scale.			



TIME TO ACT! COVID-19 FRAMEWORK reflects the regional ambition to see CEFMU reduced in Asia by 50% over the next five years towards its eventual elimination by 2030 (in line with the SDGs). It outlines key aspects of the predicted Covid-19 crisis impact on CEFMU and offers a vision supported by combined interventions to minimise its detrimental and regressive effects

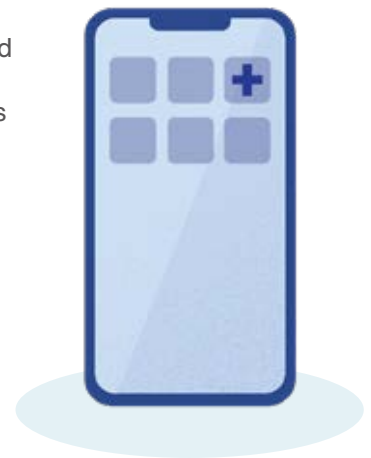
SUPPORTING ACTIVITIES	1. CONTINUOUS EDUCATION	2. ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT	3. PROTECTION FROM VIOLENCE	4. GENDER RESPONSIVE SRHR SERVICES
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Consult girls and boys about suitable distance learning measures for their contexts; assist them deliver their recommendations to power holders; 2. Invest in capacity building and upskilling for teachers on the use of relevant technologies; 3. In coordination with education authorities focus support on girls who are preparing to sit exams; 4. Support provision of unconditional cash for vulnerable households including refugees, IDPs, female headed families who are currently out of school 5. Gender-Transformative Back to School Campaigns 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Conduct a rapid market scan assessment to determine employment opportunities; 2. Adjustment on the curriculum of life skills; 3. Transition to digital methods of skills development and learning to avoid social physical contact; 4. Partnership with the private sector to help ensure flexible working arrangements especially for young people and women will be granted through the course of the pandemic 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provide online psychological support through helplines, social media groups, online platforms; 2. Lobby for cash transfers to vulnerable families, particularly female headed households to improve health, protection and wellbeing; 3. Work with Child Protection Services to strengthen child-sensitive and gender-responsive reporting mechanisms and referral pathways and to provide timely and effective gender-responsive services and assistance for most vulnerable children; 4. Continue to work with the health and protection sector to sustain quality and access to services for survivors of GBV, including reproductive health, clinical management of rape, mental health and health and psychosocial support. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identifying alternative service delivery mechanisms and information sources; 2. Provision of critical supplies including contraception, pregnancy tests, menstrual health and hygiene kits; 3. Shifting service locations to mobile clinics, pharmacies and local shops, phone messages, internet-based messages, IEC materials, etc. 4. Continue to work with the health and protection sector to sustain quality and access to services for survivors of GBV
SUPPORTING STRATEGIES	<p>Are addressing multiple root-causes of CEFMU and further reinforcing the anticipated impact of the thematic pillars interventions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Holistic and gender-transformative Interventions builds on all gender-transformative programme and influencing thematic areas tackling multiple root-causes and creating replicable and effective models to bring about gender transformation ▪ Girls-led youth activism supports girls and youth to identify and pursue actions and solutions based on their own perspectives and choices ▪ Evidence-based Orientation implements activities informed by research and proven to be promising and/or successful in achieving significant impact to scale ▪ Scalability and Replicability designs and implements interventions which can be scaled up and replicated across Asia through peer-learning and exchange. 			
ASSUMPTIONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Long periods of disruption to education will cause many girls not to return to learning; ▪ Economic hardships will reduce opportunities for girls to get decent jobs and gain economic independence; ▪ Repeated social distancing regimes will cause gender-based violence to increase; ▪ Unwanted adolescent pregnancies will increase because girls and young women have less access to necessary goods and services; ▪ Education, economic opportunity, protection and control over reproduction have proven effective interventions to reduce CEFMU in the past so their negation as a result of COVID-19, will cause an increase in CEFMU in the future, if no corrective action is taken 			

1. UNPACKING CHILD, EARLY AND FORCED MARRIAGE AND UNIONS IN ASIA PACIFIC

A review of the programmatic interventions implemented by Plan International Country Offices in Asia Pacific highlights that the **most commonly implemented combined thematic interventions** consist of a complex, holistic mix, bringing together the thematic areas of education, Youth Economic Empowerment (YEE), Child Protection (CP) and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR). Underpinning the context specific interventions to address CEFMU in Asia Pacific are the principles of gender equality mainstreaming and girls' empowerment, strengthening of services, and the promotion of positive social norms. Other common strategies underpinning the interventions in the region include strengthening of girls' agency for their own protection, girl-led youth engagement, supporting youth forums, engagement of youth through sports, engaging men and boys, as well as initiatives to work with religious leaders, match-makers and marriage solemnisers and parents. Plan's interventions in Asia Pacific place an important emphasis on economic empowerment and an increased duty-bearers response to prevent and react to CEFMU, strengthening of SRHR and basic services, protection from violence, community-based child protection committees, and law enforcement. In addition, Plan works to strengthen civil society networks, and engages in participatory action research, while also utilising digital and online solutions as one of the key accelerators.

In terms of **fostering coordination between different actors**, Plan APAC engages media, encourages intergenerational dialogue, establishes and strengthens partnerships. It moreover strives to raise awareness through 'bell-sounding' and similar measures, and conducts training with fathers, religious leaders, local/tribal chiefs, teachers, police officers, legal counsellors and others. It also uses helplines/hotlines and promotes a strong child marriage tracking system and birth registration. In terms of Plan International's **key influencing** approaches and **'asks'** in the Asia-Pacific region, it covers several influencing clusters:

- **Calling for adequate child protection:** Plan works to promote a functional national Child Protection system that addresses sexual exploitation and GBV in the form of CEFMU.
- **Enabling and promoting SRHR and gender equality education:** Plan also advocates for the mainstreaming of SRHR and gender equality education in formal/informal schools and madrasas.
- **Demanding an enabling environment:** It calls for an enabling environment and policy for girls' economic empowerment, and works toward villages free of child marriage to be declared.



This work is carried out through a variety of **influencing strategies**, including but not limited to:

- **Evidence-based influencing strategies** for child protection, SRHR, participation and gender equality.
- State-level advocacy and national campaigns asking for the effective implementation of acts/policies related to CEFMU, revision of marriage laws and minimum age of marriage, including through national campaigns on CEFMU and adolescent pregnancies, as well as advocating with national education departments to incorporate child protection mechanisms in all social welfare residential schools.
- **Lobbying of corporate platforms/corporates** to ensure they prioritise their investments in favour of young women's opportunities.
- Popular mobilisation and campaigning to ensure that citizen voices calling for an end to child marriage reach lawmakers and power holders.

SECTION 2

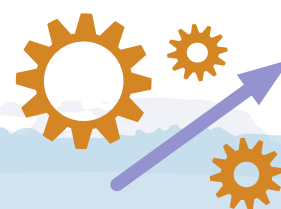
KEY PRINCIPLES AND CONCEPTS





SECTION 2

KEY PRINCIPLES AND CONCEPTS



You've now been equipped with background information about CEFMU in the Asia-Pacific region, which you can use as part of your awareness raising and influencing work.

The next step is to start thinking about your programming intervention, and the underlying principles and concepts that need to guide it.

Because of the multiple societal and systemic barriers preventing CEFMU from being eradicated, as development practitioners, we need to ensure our programmes address these structural barriers. To tackle the gender inequality and discrimination that are at the very root of CEFMU, we need to integrate and apply a gender-transformative approach.

Keep reading to find out more!

ADOPTING A GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACH

A gender-transformative approach aims to promote gender equality. This approach tackles the root causes of gender inequality and aims to reshape unequal gender and power relations to achieve the full realisation of girls' rights and equality between all children, young people and adults regardless of their gender.

When designing a project to address CEFMU, a gender-transformative programming and influencing approach requires you to improve the condition of girls and women while advancing their position and value in society, and support girls and women to be able to make informed choices and decisions and to act upon these free from fear or threat of punishment. Our approach encourages critical reflection, questioning and challenging of gender norms. It also challenges the distribution of resources and roles based on a person's gender. It fosters an enabling policy, budgetary and institutional framework for gender equality, that adequately protects girls' and women's rights, tackles the barriers they face and meets their particular needs. It requires working at all levels (as individuals, and within, families, relationships, communities, institutions and societies) and across a person's life course. It involves

2. KEY PRINCIPLES AND CONCEPTS

active listening and continuous engagement with power holders, with girls, boys, women, and men, and people of other gender identities.

A strong gender-transformative programming and influencing approach includes the following six elements that can help us to accelerate change and tackle the root causes of gender inequality.

1. Addressing gender norms throughout the life-course.
2. Strengthening girls' and young women's agency.
3. Advancing both the condition and position of girls, young women, and women.
4. Working with boys, young men, and men so that they embrace gender equality and exercise positive and diverse masculinities.
5. Responding to the needs and interests of girls and boys in all their diversity.
6. Fostering an enabling environment for gender equality and girls' rights.

These elements are interconnected and applicable in development and humanitarian work, although they may require adaptation and flexibility may be required. Bearing in mind, of course, that such a process is complex, highly context-specific and takes time. Gender equality cannot be achieved by one intervention, project or programme. There is no one-size-fits-all approach.

TOP TIPS: TRANSLATING THEORY INTO PRACTICE!



We've listed some illustrations below of the ways in which gender-transformative approach elements are presented throughout the toolkit:

1. Addressing gender norms throughout the life-course: In Section 2 of this toolkit, you will be encouraged to carry out a needs assessment and situation analysis to understand the needs of the girls and women and the communities they are a part of. Investing in formative research and data mapping is critical to designing effective interventions, in order to understand specific contexts, including beliefs and social norms, existing legal and policy frameworks, other organisations working in the area, and stakeholder interests. The needs assessment will either confirm the suitability of the initial project idea or point to adjustments that should be made. Moreover, intervention cluster B of the toolkit demonstrates how awareness raising helps to transform negative behaviours and social and gender norms. This will help you to design and implement appropriate and much-needed interventions.
2. Strengthening girls' and young women's agency: In Section 2 of this toolkit, you will find tips for girls to lead youth engagement. You will be encouraged to include girls and youth in your work that will bring transformational change, as it will result in effective project strategies. It is a chance to develop well informed and carefully designed projects. You are encouraged to use media and social media platforms to implement leadership programmes, enabling girls and women to make their own decisions. Engaging and sensitising men and boys is also a way to allow women and girls to make their decisions, as discussed further below. Interventions that target educating and economically empowering girls will also give them agency over their lives and decisions. Empowerment will include skills development and training.
3. Advancing both the condition and position of girls, young women, and women: The toolkit encourages interventions to understand social systems, norms, values and behaviours, in order to change them. To enable change on a day-to-day basis, interventions should aim to provide safe spaces in schools,



SRHR-related education, and access to opportunities. Interventions focused on developing skills should also be taken to communities to demonstrate the capability of girls, displaying actual behavioural changes towards girls and women. This will subsequently change community behaviour and gender norms, leading to changes in the status and position of women and girls.

4. Working with boys, young men, and men so that they embrace gender equality and exercise positive and diverse masculinities: Under Section 2.6, the toolkit emphasises the need to engage and involve men and boys as part of a gender transformative approach. An effective gender transformative approach will not be reached if only women and girls are involved in discussing and addressing gender inequality. Mobilising men and boys will be very helpful in mobilising peers and developing positive masculinities. Interventions can also consider engaging fathers to promote gender equality in the house to prevent early and child marriages. Campaign and curriculum amendments to educate men and boys in these subjects must also be considered.
5. Responding to the needs and interests of girls and boys in all their diversity: The toolkit time and again iterates the need for involving all relevant actors from the start of design through to implementation of projects. The toolkit mentions interventions that are inclusive, and address needs and interests of different groups, such as men and boys, girls and women of different age groups and marital status, rural and tribal girls, girls in urban settings, girls in and out of schools, the most marginalised, and so on.
6. Fostering an enabling environment for gender equality and girls' rights: The toolkit encourages interventions in which different stakeholders work together to support achieving gender equality. For example, in the Designing and Preparation stage, the toolkit encourages assessing the relevance of potential ideas through consultations with relevant stakeholders. It also suggests carrying out a validation process with key stakeholders and considers how one can engage them at different levels and stages of the project cycle. In the toolkit, before explaining each intervention, there is a list of the key stakeholders to be considered.

Wondering about the potential positive outcomes that a gender-transformative approach can bring? Take a look at these results supported and witnessed by Plan International:

- **Girls and young women are increasingly making decisions about their bodies, lives and futures** after receiving knowledge and information about their sexual and reproductive health and rights.
- **Girls and young women are becoming agents of change** in their communities, with many joining – and some leading – local CEFMU-focused campaigning initiatives and activities.
- **Adolescent boys are increasingly taking responsibility for how their decisions affect others**, in particular after they receive education on gender equality, and sexual and reproductive health and rights.
- **Boys and young men are actively engaged in campaigns** against CEFMU.
- **Girls and young women have greater economic opportunities** after attending vocational training and workshops on entrepreneurship.
- **Gender norms in communities are challenged in a constructive manner**, in particular when engaging with traditional, religious and community leaders, and undertaking campaigns with young people to provide alternative narratives challenging traditional and customary attitudes and norms to child marriage, including control of female sexuality.

SPOTLIGHT ON PLAN INTERNATIONAL'S GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE MARKER



You will need to assess the extent to which your CEFMU intervention strategies are contributing to gender-transformative change, going beyond improving the condition of women and girls to improving their social position and ensuring the full realisation of their rights.

A useful tool is Plan International's Gender Transformative Marker (GTM),⁵⁹ which helps to give an indication of how gender transformative and inclusive a project is. You can use the GTM as a **project design guide** and diagnostic tool to identify areas that you can strengthen to increase the potential of a project to contribute towards gender transformative change, where feasible.

The GTM is primarily aimed at the review of individual projects during the project design, implementation, and final review stages, and assesses potential for contribution to gender equality, girls rights and inclusion in projects across the following areas:

1. Use the Situation Analysis to identify gaps in services and legislation, and rights violations and inequalities within the thematic focus of a project.
2. Understand and address how **gender norms** influence children throughout their life course, from birth through to adulthood.
3. Work to strengthen **girls' and young women's agency** over the decisions that affect them, as well as by building their knowledge, confidence, capacity, skills and access to and control over resources.
4. Work with and support **boys, young men and men** to embrace positive masculinity and to promote gender equality, while also achieving meaningful results for them.
5. Consider girls, boys, young women and young men **in all their diversity** when identifying and responding to their needs and interests.
6. Improve **the conditions** (daily needs) and **social position** (value or status) of girls and young women.
7. Foster **an enabling environment** where all stakeholders work together to support children and youth on their journey towards gender equality.
8. Monitoring and evaluation data
9. Project risks
10. Participation
11. Technical expertise
12. Resources



The GTM is based on analysing the **potentiality** to contribute to change, with four levels ranging from no potential to high potential.

The GTM review and scoring tool automatically translates the potentiality score into the four project levels of Gender Unaware, Gender Neutral, Gender Aware and Gender Transformative.⁶⁰

1. Gender Unaware:

the project does not recognise gender issues and tends to aggravate inequalities; it does not contribute to gender equality and inclusion.

2. Gender Neutral:

the project recognises gender issues, but does nothing about them; it has no or little potential to contribute towards gender equality and inclusion.

3. Gender Aware:

the project tries to improve and address practical gender and exclusion issues; however, it does not try to transform gender and power relations; it has medium potential to contribute to gender equality and inclusion.

4. Gender

Transformative:

the project explicitly aims to transform unequal power relations; it has high potential to contribute to gender equality and inclusion.

The GTM is used to review the project at these stages of the project/programme cycle:



1. The Design Phase

reviews the project concept, proposal or design document at the early development stage.



2. During Implementation

reviews information and reports available to understand whether the intent of the design is being implemented in practice.



3. Final Result: reviews

information and evidence available from monitoring and evaluation (M&E) to understand what concrete changes related to the six elements of gender-transformative change and support were achieved.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For gender transformative programming during the COVID-19 pandemic, Plan International's briefing paper, *Living up to Our Commitment: Gender Transformative Programming and Influencing During COVID-19* from 2020 is a useful resource.⁶¹

The briefing paper highlights unique features that are important to consider in times of the COVID-19 pandemic. A gender transformative approach can support and inform planned responses to the pandemic by providing a framework that considers the intersectionalities and multi-dimensional marginalisation and discrimination that puts specific groups at risk.



KEY PRINCIPLES

Wondering about the potential positive outcomes that a gender-transformative approach can bring? Take a look at these results supported and witnessed by Plan International:

1. WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' RIGHTS ARE HUMAN RIGHTS

The international community has repeatedly emphasised and agreed on the universality and indivisibility of human rights. Women's and girls' rights are integral to all human rights enshrined in regional and international human rights instruments. These will include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and all other core human rights treaties and instruments. Women's and girls' rights are also integral to a rights-based approach to development, and CEFMU programme design and interventions must recognise this as an important and inherent outcome in itself. Furthermore, the UNCRC recognises children and young people, including girls, as rights holders with evolving capacities to make decisions themselves.

2. AFFIRMATIVE ACTION IS REQUIRED TO REDRESS GENDER IMBALANCES

Affirmative action is an initiative (it could be a policy, law, scheme, or programme) that targets a specific group of people to provide them with opportunities. An example of this is where a person's nationality, gender, sex, ability or caste is taken into account when the person is being considered for an employment or educational opportunity. The idea behind affirmative action is to increase the opportunities available to underprivileged or underrepresented people. This is enshrined in the constitutions of many countries and is also set out in Article 4 of CEDAW. It is considered to be a legitimate short-term strategy for redressing and reducing gender imbalances. Affirmative action is one part of gender-transformative interventions – the token inclusion of women and girls should not be understood to be the end result. This principle highlights the importance of girl-led youth activism and engagement as part of any CEFMU intervention.

3. ADDRESSING INTERSECTIONALITY

Intersectionality in the context of gender inequality refers to a person falling under several other demographic categories that increase their exposure to inequalities of various kinds. For example, gender inequality can intersect with other inequalities such as caste, age, race, ethnicity, disability and sexuality to further marginalise certain groups of girls and women and increase their vulnerability. Intersecting identities contribute to unique experiences of oppression and varying access to justice, rights and opportunities, making women's experiences very different from one another. The design of CEFMU interventions must acknowledge how intersectionality creates multiple forms of discrimination. Programmes and projects should respond to different types of inequality so that they can meet the needs of women and girls placed in varying situations. Any interventions must work at all levels to support the people and systems around the target programme participants, including families, peers, communities, service providers and government duty bearers. This is of particular importance for CEFMU prevention and elimination, given its multiple and interlinked root-causes.

4. LISTEN TO WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' VOICES

Participatory research that includes the voices of girls and women must be used to understand what works to empower them, learning from girls' and women's experiences on the ground. What is applicable in one place will not necessarily work in another setting, as there is no universal approach. Women and girls, for whose development the programme intervention is designed, must be given the opportunity and support to express what kinds of activities will transform their lives and so lead them to become agents of their own empowerment. The programming must also aim at making specific efforts to ensure the target group can raise their voices, and safely and meaningfully participate and lead in development.

5. CONTEXT MATTERS, THERE IS NO ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL APPROACH

Interventions, of course, should not be just the automatic application of a preconceived strategy. Although rights are universal, people's needs will differ from place to place, and from one person to another. It is essential to design interventions based on different settings and contexts through consultative approaches and careful analysis of particular local contexts. For example, CEFMU could be a culturally induced practice in some places, and a form of religious practice in others. Specific strategies should be used to address the issue in different contexts. Therefore, this toolkit needs to be viewed through the lens of each practitioner's own specific context, as we shall see in the following sections.

6. PROTECTION OF TARGET PROGRAMME PARTICIPANTS AGAINST BACKLASH: DO NO HARM

In some countries and cultures, the empowerment of women and girls is still in its early stages as societies and communities gradually open up to positive change. There is still a long way to go – the possibility of empowered girls and women being exposed to risk of harm is not completely ruled out in certain contexts. Discrimination against women and girls is a feature of national legislatures in several countries. In such contexts, programming and interventions should identify potential risks for the girls and young women involved and take appropriate steps to eliminate and minimise or at least mitigate such risks. Interventions that aim to address CEFMU must not put girls and women at additional risk, either in terms of their own personal safety or the wellbeing of their families.⁶² Additionally, interventions must not unintentionally reinforce or exacerbate stigma of specific groups in communities or harmful social and gender norms that fuel gender and social inequality e.g., pregnant and parenting young people.



SPOTLIGHT: THE 'DO NO HARM' PRINCIPLE



'Do No Harm' is a basic ethical principle that means that in the implementation of any programme activities, the implementer will not, intentionally or otherwise, harm the communities in which the work is being implemented. It means that your actions should not cause injury or injustice to people, and in its strictest sense, it can also be applied to inactions.

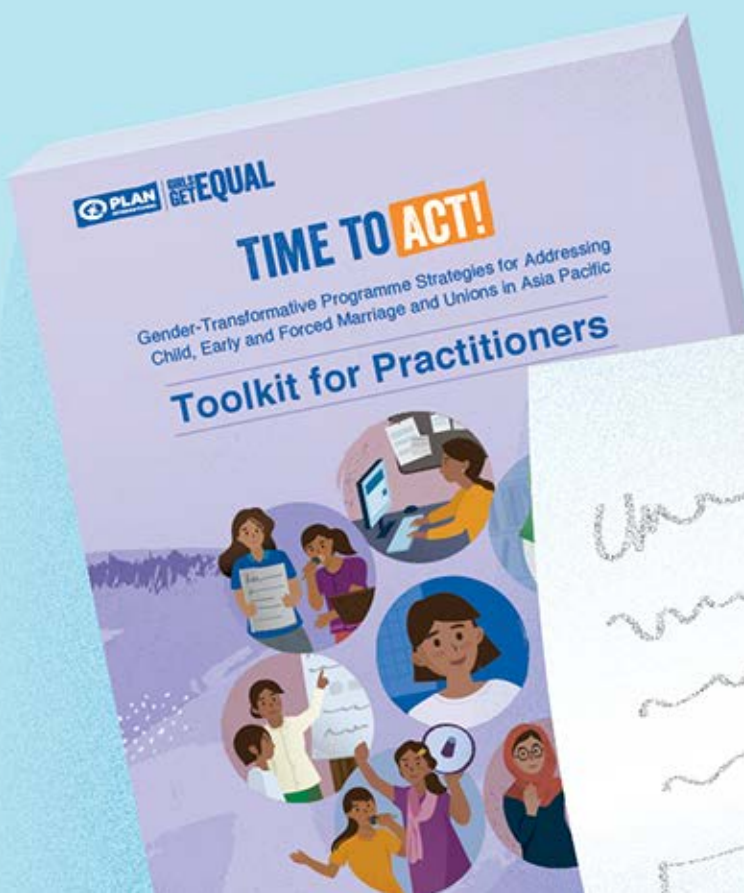
As part of your CEFMU interventions, you must, therefore, ensure you adopt strategies to identify, minimise and overcome harm – potential or actual – and ensure that there are consequences for anyone who does not comply with the standards or related codes of conduct.

SPOTLIGHT: CHILD AND YOUTH SAFEGUARDING



When working with children and youth, it is crucial to conduct a very careful risk assessment, and have a child and youth safeguarding and 'Do no Harm' framework in place. We need to place the protection and safeguarding of the communities you are working with at the heart of any intervention.

Plan International's Child and Youth Safeguarding Policy ([Global Policy on Safeguarding Children and Young People | Plan International \(plan-international.org\)](#)) provides you with some useful ideas and tips about what to include in your organisation's own policy, if you do not yet have one in place.



SECTION 3

TAKING ACTION TO ADDRESS CEFMU





SECTION 3

TAKING ACTION TO ADDRESS CEFMU



Having covered the important underlying principles that should guide your CEFMU work, and having looked at the importance of meaningfully engaging girls and youth, it's finally time to get started on designing your intervention!

This section provides non-prescriptive guidance on the standard key stages of a project cycle. While these stages are fairly common to many development organisations, make sure to adopt them with a CEFMU-specific lens in mind.

Ready? Let's go!



DESIGNING AND PREPARING

OVERVIEW OF THE DESIGN AND PREPARATION PHASES

The Project Cycle Procedure used by Plan International in designing and implementing its projects provides a useful model for us to use as a starting point as we think about effective project design for your CEFMU intervention. Needless to say, feel free to follow your own preferred model instead if you have one.

Plan's project cycle is based on the principle of 'togetherness'. It highlights the importance of designing, preparing, implementing, measuring and reporting together with the communities and anyone impacted by the programming.

The minimum requirements for project design, as outlined in the Project Cycle Procedure, are identifying project ideas, identifying funding opportunities, designing the project, securing the funding, preparing for activities, and – finally – formal approval and signing the contract.

Let's look at this project cycle in a bit more detail, just in case it might come in handy!

1. IDENTIFYING CEFMU PROJECT IDEAS

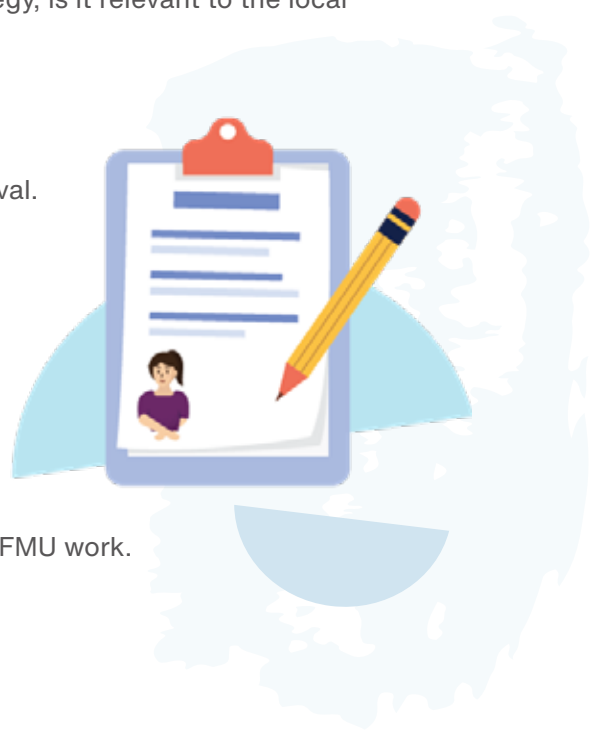
- Identify ideas, research topics and advocacy entry points throughout the project cycle.
- Assess the relevance of potential ideas through consultations with stakeholders engaged in CEFMU-related interventions.
- Analyse rights gaps, root causes, and needs in line with Plan International's global 18+ Theory of Change and Regional Strategic Framework Time to Act! or, for instance, by looking at the Girls Not Brides' Theory of Change.
- Ensure that ideas are informed by data, evidence and knowledge gained from current or previous CEFMU projects.
- Consider potential partners who are also working on CEFMU, or some related thematic areas, and engage them as early as possible.

2. IDENTIFYING FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

- Map out potential donors interested in supporting CEFMU elimination and proactively communicate with key stakeholders to identify funding opportunities.
- Assess whether the funding opportunity should be pursued based on the nature of the potential project (e.g., does the project contribute to the country strategy, is it relevant to the local context, is it realistic?)

3. DESIGNING THE PROJECT

- Appoint a designated team and a project design lead.
- Develop a realistic schedule and send it for review and approval.
- Refine the intervention logic.
- Develop a monitoring and evaluation framework.
- Complete a risk assessment.
- Complete the narrative project design documentation.
- Develop a project budget.
- Finalise and submit project design documents.



4. SECURING FUNDING

- Submit the project proposals to donors with an interest in CEFMU work.
- If proposals are successful, negotiate contracts.

5. PREPARING FOR ACTIVITIES

- Start initial project activities while awaiting funding.
- Create a project charter that outlines key roles and responsibilities, and describes project objectives.
- Create a project file with all relevant project documents.

6. FORMAL APPROVAL AND SIGNING THE CONTRACT

- Follow any relevant approval process that applies to your organisation.
- Sign contracts with partners and donors.

All right, now it's time to delve deeper into the preparatory phase. What comes next?

The following section sets out a number of critical steps that are important for selecting and preparing the most appropriate CEFMU intervention for your context.

CARRY OUT A NEEDS ASSESSMENT / SITUATION ANALYSIS

Learn about the CEFMU situation, and the girls and communities you will be working with

WHAT?

The gender-focused needs assessment process will help identify the most pressing CEFMU-related problems and causes that are current and that the intervention will aim to address. The needs assessment should be carried out before the project implementation starts, in order to help inform the development of the most appropriate intervention to prevent, reduce and eliminate CEFMU. It will include an assessment of the resources available, opportunities for action, and the population's ability to meet those needs.



WHY?

A needs assessment at the first stage of project design is important to understanding the needs of the girls and women and the communities they are a part of. Investing in formative research and data mapping is critical for designing effective interventions, because these activities will identify key populations and individuals at risk of CEFMU, and reveal the drivers of CEFMU in a community. This research is necessary in order to understand specific contexts. This includes mapping out existing legal and policy frameworks, other organisations working in the area, stakeholder interests, and understanding beliefs and social and gender norms; the latter of which must be addressed throughout the life-course of a gender-transformative intervention, as mentioned earlier. The needs assessment will either confirm the suitability of the initial project idea or point to adjustments that should be made.

The needs assessment should help practitioners to better understand:

- The prevalence of CEFMU, as well as its key drivers and consequences;
- Whether and why inequalities, differences and disadvantages exist across the population in regard to CEFMU;
- The specific needs of women and girls, and their access to resources, capacities and power;
- Existing barriers to participation in the project;
- What specific actions/services are required to meet the needs of married girls and women and unmarried girls equitably.

HOW?

The needs assessment can include a desk review, surveys, focus groups and interviews to help gather data and evidence regarding CEFMU in the specific context. It is important that the correct questions are asked in order to determine the scale of the problem and what the current priorities are for the girls and women involved. Plan International's Index of Risk of Child Marriage Acceptability is a useful tool for anticipating how likely a community is to be accepting of the practice of child marriage, based on a range of environmental factors. The index assesses levels of risk of CEFMU and can also help determine appropriate interventions and be used to measure changes over a period of time.

You should try to find out about most of the following aspects:

➤ **Girls:**

- Disaggregated data on sex, age, education and marital status.
- Girls' needs and access to information and services relating to protection from violence, psycho-social support, education, and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR).
- Girls' mobility, decision-making power and participation rates.
- Views and expectations of girls in the community.

➤ **Family and relationships:**

- Views of gender-specific roles and power relations between sexes.
- Views and expectations of caregivers/partners/husbands/in-laws on gender-specific roles and responsibilities.
- Families' level of access to realising needs

➤ **Community norms and attitudes:**

- Community organisation and social cohesion, including participation of women and girls.
- Social and gender norms and cultural practices.
- Presence and reach of community-level services.

➤ **Service providers and enabling environments**

- Availability, capacity and quality of services.
- Capacity of your organisation or team, relevant to a CEFMU intervention.
- Capacity of other actors relevant to a CEFMU intervention.
- Policies, customary laws and governance pertaining to CEFMU.
- Existing education and protection services.

The types of data sources you can use for your needs assessment can include:

- National surveys.
- Data from relevant government ministries e.g., MICS/DHS.
- UNICEF country data.
- Different organisational research or project implementation reports.
- An analysis of local resources – for example, to understand the capacity of local organisations.
- An analysis of evaluations and research studies – there may be examples of best (or promising) practices in your context that are similar to what you want to do.

WHO?

As highlighted earlier, a participatory approach should be used across all stages of the project design. This means that needs assessments should be carried out in consultation with local actors. It is important to understand the needs and priorities of at-risk and married girls and women in order to design an effective intervention. Where it is possible and safe, girls, boys, women and men should be meaningfully engaged and consulted. This can include, for example, training young people as researchers and engaging them to gather qualitative information from their peers and communities about CEFMU trends, drivers and social norms. Participation is not only a right, it is a crucial prerequisite if incorrect assumptions that can limit project reach and impact are to be avoided.



DEVELOP INDICATORS

Decide on measurable information that is meaningful and accurate

WHAT?

Once the draft project design has been developed and the components including activities and expected outcomes of the intervention have been planned, quantitative and qualitative indicators should be developed so that the effects of the interventions can be measured. Indicators must be gender and socially inclusive to be appropriate and effective for CEFMU programmes, and should, moreover, be clear, precise, realistic and feasible.

WHY?

Indicators will help you evaluate if the project is moving in the right direction and will help you measure change, progress made and outcomes in relation to eliminating CEFMU and preventing and reducing unions. Measuring changes for women and girls and capturing changes in behaviour and attitudes is also important to reflect changing gender norms.

HOW?

Practitioners should set indicators that specifically target the progress and intended outcomes of the project. Disaggregated data is important to ensure that reporting is accurate and complete. You may also want to use surveys to monitor shifts in attitudes and behaviours related to CEFMU.

The range of indicators deployed for a project or programme is necessarily specific in order to allow you to measure changes as a result of your intervention. Longitudinal research and evaluation may be employed to measure impact over a longer period.

Suggested indicators for CEFMU programmes include:⁶³

- Indicators that directly measure the prevalence of child marriage:
 - Percentage of women aged 20–24 years who were married or in a union before age 15.
 - Percentage of women aged 20–24 years who were married or in a union before age 18 (commonly broken into two age groups: from 12–15, and 15–18).
- Broader development indicators:
 - Education: Upper secondary completion rate, female (per cent of relevant age group).
 - Economic empowerment: Share of youth not in education, employment, or training, female (per cent of female youth population).
 - Protection from violence: Proportion of women subjected to physical and/or sexual violence in the last 12 months (per cent of women aged 15–49).
 - SRHR: Percentage of adolescents and young women aged 15–24 who have their need for family planning satisfied with modern methods.



Bear in mind that some indicators can be used at different levels from the programme and project level to the national level.

Why not take a look at Girls Not Brides' Menu of Recommended Indicators? This resource provides a range of suggested CEFMU indicators to use at multiple levels.

ADDITIONAL TOOLS



- **Girls Not Brides' Menu of Recommended Indicators:** Girls Not Brides has developed a Menu of Recommended Indicators, which is intended as a tool for civil society organisations, providing an initial set of options to consider when looking for indicators to track progress, learn from successes and challenges, ensure that the work is focused effectively, and to support advocacy. While it is not intended to be a definitive guide, it serves as a useful starting point. The list of potential indicators is organised into three main parts: 1. Indicators that directly measure the prevalence of child marriage; 2. Indicators that are useful for overall planning and advocacy purposes; and 3. Indicators that capture progress toward desired outcomes. You can use these indicators in different ways: the first section might be helpful to understand the situation of child marriage in different countries; the second set of indicators is particularly useful for strategic planning and advocacy work; while the third set can be helpful in strengthening monitoring and evaluation frameworks.
- **Plan International's Index of Risk of Child Marriage Acceptability:** This index was developed in order to 'score' communities according to the presence/absence of indicators associated with norms and attitudes about when a girl's marriage is necessary, desirable, acceptable or unacceptable. The index can be used to measure changes over time in a given community, regarding the presence of structural/underlying environmental factors associated with child marriage acceptability.
- **UNICEF's comprehensive child marriage data base:** Obtain the latest data on child marriage from UNICEF's comprehensive data base.

CONDUCT A BASELINE STUDY

Develop a picture of CEFMU within your own context

WHAT?

The baseline assessment will provide information on the current CEFMU situation your intervention aims to change and will help measure progress and incremental improvements. Data should be segregated by gender, disability, and other relevant categories to show the intersectionality of vulnerabilities.

WHY?

Conducting the baseline study is an important step that will allow you to measure change and assess impact. The baseline is distinct from the needs assessment. The needs assessment establishes the context for the project, providing a 'big picture' perspective by gathering a wide range of social, economic and political information. The baseline study focuses on indicators and study metrics at the start of a project will enable practitioners to document and demonstrate progress over the project timeline.



Baseline data helps:

- Set realistic goals and measure progress towards them.
- Maintain accountability by demonstrating the changes the project is making.
- Provide evidence to donors and policy makers on why the CEFMU intervention is necessary.



HOW?

A baseline assessment involves collecting accurate information, including disaggregated data, before the project begins. Much of the information from your needs assessment can be used for developing the baseline study. Depending on how detailed the needs assessment is, a decision can be made to conduct a 'light' or more rigorous and in-depth baseline study. Baseline information should be identified and gathered in such a way that the same data can be collected after the intervention.



When carrying out a baseline study, practitioners must:

- Identify what they expect the project to achieve.
- Carry out the baseline study near the start of the project.
- Ensure that the target groups identified in the needs assessment are properly represented in the baseline.

WHO?

As mentioned before, a participatory approach is, once again, key. As with the needs assessment, engaging girls, boys, women, community members and local organisations should be actively encouraged, where possible, to help shape and contextualise the project design.

TAILORING YOUR INTERVENTION

WHAT?

Now that you have a deeper understanding of your context and have a clear goal in mind, it's time to tailor your interventions accordingly. You should start with deciding the core components of your intervention – what are the big 'buckets' or 'building blocks' you want to focus on?

WHY?

In order to ensure your project makes the biggest impact, it's important that the project is targeted by addressing key needs within the selected population.

HOW?

If your assessments have found:

- High rates of informal unions – then you may want to focus on the empowerment of girls, economic empowerment, and/or access to employment/livelihood opportunities.
- High rates of CEFMU – then you could include legal and policy focussed interventions such as amending child marriage laws, changing social norms and/or providing access to SRHR services.
- High rates of violence, with linkages to CEFMU and unintended pregnancy – then you could include GBV prevention and response, access to SRHR services, or empowerment initiatives.
- High rates of adolescent pregnancy within CEFMU – consider including interventions on access to comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) and SRHR, and on access to school for married girls.⁶⁴



ANALYSE RISKS AND ASSUMPTIONS

WHAT?

At this stage major risks and assumptions in implementing a CEFMU intervention should be identified, and mitigation and control measures articulated and defined. A risk is any area of uncertainty that could be a threat to the project, its intended outcomes and to the communities you plan to work with. To manage and mitigate risks, they must first be identified and assessed.

WHY?

For interventions focused on girls' and women's empowerment, practitioners must identify potential risks and how they can be mitigated. This important step helps rule out interventions that carry risks too severe to manage or justify pursuing. Assessing risks and mitigations early on will inform the project design in time to allow for an opportunity to make adjustments accordingly. A thorough risk assessment is, of course, particularly important in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which poses health risks to individuals and communities alike, both among the implementers of the intervention and within the target communities. In line with the overarching principle of 'doing no harm', a robust risk assessment needs to be done in this regard.

HOW?

A risk analysis should address the following questions:

- What are the risks?
- Who is at risk?
- What is the likelihood or probability of the risk(s) occurring?
- What would be the impact on the project, its intended outcomes, and the communities you'll be working with if the risk event(s) occurred?
- What steps can be taken to mitigate the risk(s)?



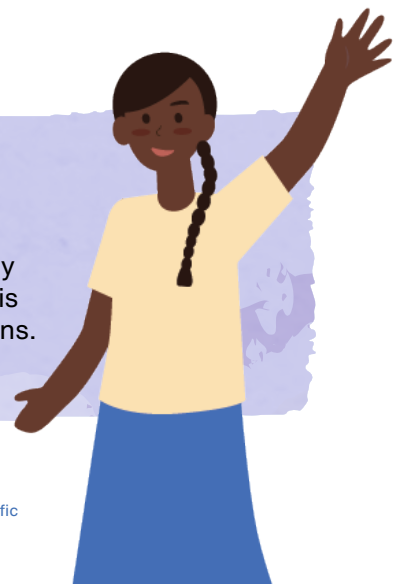
Assumptions are things that are accepted as true before they have been proven or demonstrated. When designing your project, you should be careful not to make assumptions, as doing so can skew the project outcomes. This is also why it is critical that the context for each intervention is fully understood at the needs assessment stage. The assessment stage should include an analysis of stereotypes and structural barriers that prevent the full participation of women and girls (or men and boys), and how the project will deal with these challenges. There should also be an assessment of any gender-related bottleneck that may reduce the effectiveness of the intervention.

Needless to say, we also need to be guided by child safeguarding policies and codes of conduct at all times when working with children. Here is a link to Plan International's Safeguarding Policy: [Global Policy on Safeguarding Children and Young People | Plan International \(plan-international.org\)](https://www.plan-international.org/global-policy-on-safeguarding-children-and-young-people) which you may use for inspiration in case you want to develop a policy for your organisation.

FINALISE THE PROGRAMME DESIGN

Now you are ready to finalise your project design!

You may want to consider carrying out a validation process with the key stakeholders you consulted and worked with in the design process. This process could include prioritising different approaches and interventions. The project could then be refined using a series of iterations.



IMPLEMENTING STRATEGIC CEFMU INTERVENTIONS

IMPLEMENTING STRATEGIC CEFMU INTERVENTIONS

ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

EDUCATION

INFLUENCING POLICY,
LEGAL AND ACCOUNTABILITY
FRAMEWORKS

AWARENESS RAISING
AND TRANSFORMING
NEGATIVE NORMS

ACCESSIBLE
AND QUALITY
GENDER-RESPONSIVE
SERVICES

GIRLS EMPOWERMENT,
LEADERSHIP AND ACTIVISM

PROTECTION FROM VIOLENCE





IMPLEMENTING STRATEGIC CEFMU INTERVENTIONS

Now that you have carried out a needs assessment or situation analysis, conducted a baseline study, developed indicators, and analysed risks and assumptions, it's time to implement the planned key interventions to end CEFMU.

As discussed in Section 1, the root causes and consequences of CEFMU in the Asia-Pacific region are certainly diverse and are combined in a myriad of ways in different countries, districts and communities across the region. Therefore, as highlighted in Section 2, each programmatic intervention you design must be based on the specific local needs assessment and tailored according to the specific causes and consequences of CEFMU in your own context.

To re-cap, you'll find a table below, which outlines the main root causes and consequences of child marriage in the Asia-Pacific context, as well as seven key clusters of strategic interventions to consider.

ROOT CAUSES OF CEFMU	CONSEQUENCES OF CEFMU	STRATEGIC INTERVENTION CLUSTERS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Gender inequality that subordinates and controls girls, and deprives them of their rights and entitlements. ➤ A view of girls that prioritises their reproductive roles over their sexual and reproductive rights and autonomy ➤ Family expectations and traditions, including religious beliefs that focus on family interests and alignments. ➤ Economic scarcity and the pressures this places on families to have their daughters marry, especially when payments are exchanged between families. ➤ Conflict and instability and the impact these have on family decision-making regarding marriage. ➤ Lack of alternatives for girls other than marriage. ➤ Weak legal frameworks, lack of enforcement of laws on age at marriage, and plural legal systems. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Health: Early pregnancy and childbearing. Poor physical health. ➤ Mental Health: Depression, anxiety, lowered self-esteem. Self-inflicted injuries, suicide. ➤ Violence: Physical and sexual violence by their husband/partner. ➤ Education: School dropout. Effect on their children's development and on their own development. ➤ Economic impacts: Labour force participation and earnings. ➤ Physical development and growth: Stunting. ➤ Fertility and intergenerational effects of early childbearing: Higher fertility rates. ➤ Girls' wellbeing and social and civic participation: Few opportunities and self-determination. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Influencing policy, legal and accountability frameworks. B. Awareness raising and transforming negative behaviours and social and gender norms, as well as harmful traditional beliefs and religious misconceptions C. Education D. Economic empowerment E. Girls empowerment, leadership and activism F. Protection from violence G. Accessible and quality gender-responsive services

In order to effectively tackle CEFMU, interventions must be holistic and have a multi-sectoral and diverse approach. As we can see from the table above, the drivers and consequences of CEFMU are multifaceted, therefore, the interventions to prevent and stop CEFMU must include engaging with a range of critical sectors, such as education, health, child protection and economic empowerment/poverty reduction, SRHR and other services. As well, there must be interventions that include awareness raising and campaigning focused on norms change, cultural practices and legal frameworks that are detrimental to girls and children in general and to achieving gender equality in particular.

ARE YOU READY TO MOVE TO THE NEXT STAGE? LET'S GET STARTED AND CHOOSE OUR INTERVENTIONS!

In the following sections, you will find detailed overviews of effective and promising intervention strategies, organised into seven key clusters. Each intervention thread featured in the toolkit comes with key considerations and practical tips that Plan International, as well as other organisations, has used in the Asia-Pacific region and other parts of the world to address the complex issue of CEFMU in different contexts. You should, of course, bear in mind that the different clusters and themes are often closely interconnected, and many of the interventions are inter-related in practice.

All of the interventions set out in this section are important. That being said, it is not expected that all interventions will be applicable to every context or project. The list encompasses diverse programmatic areas and reflects suggestions and examples from practitioners working in very different contexts across the Asia-Pacific region and beyond. An intervention that is relevant and appropriate in one context may not be in another.

Each programme implementer, therefore, needs to decide which interventions to utilise as part of their strategy, depending on their specific country or local context. This would largely depend on factors such as:

- What data and evidence are available to indicate the nature of the structural barriers to eliminating CEFMU in the country or local context, including humanitarian or emergency settings and COVID-19 pandemic response and recovery and 'what works';
- Your organisation's on-going work and comparative advantages;
- National policies and priorities/opportunities and entry points for progress;
- Existing and potential resources of your organisation, expertise and partnerships necessary to address the issue effectively and at scale.

A multi-sectoral and holistic approach necessarily involves working with a range of different stakeholders. To help you think through ways of involving and targeting the right actors, you will find a list of relevant stakeholders at the beginning of each intervention cluster below.



1. INTERVENTION CLUSTER A

INFLUENCING POLICY, LEGAL AND ACCOUNTABILITY FRAMEWORKS



A critical factor of CEFMU perpetuation across the Asia-Pacific region is found in the weak legal frameworks, and/or in the lack of enforcement of laws and regulatory frameworks on age of marriage and other relevant aspects, and/or the co-existence of plural legal systems. It is crucial therefore, to incorporate interventions addressing the legislative and policy frameworks as part of your programming and, more particularly, influencing.

The adoption and implementation of laws and policies, and the creation of an enabling legal and policy framework should be at the heart of efforts to address CEFMU. In the following sections, you will find promising interventions tried and tested by practitioners, with key considerations to bear in mind, as well as concrete examples and useful tips.

KEY STAKEHOLDERS TO CONSIDER IN INTERVENTION CLUSTER A

While there is a range of actors who need to be involved in our efforts to address CEFMU, the following stakeholders are considered the main protagonists, with the highest potential and powers to bring about lasting, positive change:

- Parliamentarians
- Policy makers
- Advocacy groups
- Media outlets and journalists
- Police
- Law enforcement officials
- Civil society organisations (CSOs)
- Youth leaders
- Girls and young women who are married, wherever possible and safe

1.1 ANALYSIS OF LAWS, POLICIES AND THEIR IMPLEMENTATION AS A BASIS FOR ADVOCACY



ABOUT THE INTERVENTION

The creation of an enabling legal and policy framework that tackles root causes should be at the heart of government efforts to address CEFMU. Any such framework must be underpinned by appropriately resourced state support structures to ensure effective implementation.⁶⁵ An enabling framework means that laws and policies are effectively implemented and enforced. Effective legislation will also allow further strategies to be designed which address the systemic and underlying factors that allow CEFMU to persist.

Laws and policies can contribute to changes at different levels, from fostering informal change through community engagement, to enabling evidence-based lobbying and advocacy with government stakeholders at the national and sub-national levels.⁶⁶ Effective advocacy can bring about improvements in legislation, policies, and strategies, which in turn can help to shift social and gender norms away from supporting discrimination and gender inequality, while also enhancing accountability and protection for girls at risk of CEFMU.



KEY CONSIDERATIONS

As mentioned throughout the toolkit, the need for holistic interventions is key. An important piece of this is the legislative and policy environment. The needs assessment you will have carried out at this stage will provide a snapshot of the legal and policy landscape in your specific context. You should now consider where (or if) it is relevant to include policy and legal measures in your intervention. In some contexts, existing laws and policies are inadequate and may not align with international laws and standards, therefore, as a first step you may want to conduct an analysis of current laws.

Where existing laws are adequate, you may want to raise awareness of these laws and provisions, and work towards their enforcement in order to create an enabling environment for change (including via consistent reporting of attempted or actual cases of child marriage). Along similar lines, you can advocate for government ministries to develop and implement additional national policies and strategies, and advocate for the repeal or amendment of an existing policy which contains provisions contributing to CEFMU. As mentioned before, efforts aimed at fostering an enabling environment for gender equality and girls' rights are core elements of gender-transformative approaches to CEFMU programming.

The criminalisation of child marriage makes child marriage illegal and attaches prosecution and/or sanctions to the offence. This shift in emphasis from justice to punishment may lead to unintended negative consequences, such as the practice being driven underground or girls being subjected to social stigma for being perceived as having put family members in prison. The main point to consider is that laws should complement other interventions rather than undermine them.

Having effective CEFMU laws not only indicates that a government is committed, and willing, to take action to prevent this harmful practice, but also allows advocates to demand resources to be unlocked to support ending CEFMU. Advocates can make specific recommendations to governments calling on them to make available financial and other resources in order to realise their commitments in practice.

Guiding questions to gather more information about the national legal and policy context include:

- What laws and policies have been introduced to end CEFMU and do they align with international laws and standards? Is the minimum age of marriage both for boys and girls 18 years? What is the age of consent for sex?
- How are the laws around CEFMU being implemented? Are they in the best interests of adolescents or are they being criminalised instead? What are the laws which contradict CEFMU laws causing confusion regarding the minimum age of marriage?
- What are other existing religious or customary laws/policies in relation to age of marriage? How are these being implemented?
- How are existing anti-CEFMU laws/policies implemented and enforced?
- Are the provisions in the existing policy in CEFMU consistent with rights-based and gender-transformative principles?
- Do national legal and policy frameworks on CEFMU consider the direct and indirect impacts on gender norms, roles, responsibilities and relations?
- Does the country/state/district/village already have a CEFMU strategy or action plan? If yes, where and how do laws and policies feature?
- Have there been any campaigns launched by the government/local authority/civil society to end CEFMU that focus on raising awareness of laws or policies?
- Is the government part of the South Asia Initiative to End Violence Against Children (SAIEVAC) and was it involved in ASEAN's regional forum to raise awareness on ending CEFMU in Southeast Asia?⁶⁷
- Has the government supported any United Nations resolutions to end CEFMU or ratified the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC), which stipulates the minimum age of marriage as 18 years?
- What is the broader political landscape? Are there upcoming national or local elections that you can leverage to build new relationships or identify entry points for breakthroughs?
- Have there been previous efforts by other organisations or groups to push for a CEFMU policy? How did this turn out?
- What are the existing policies on children and women's protection?
- What are the existing education policies and programmes by the government, and what do these policies say about access for all children and youth?
- What are the existing policies on family and marriage?
- Are there policies on the prevention of teenage or adolescent pregnancy, and what do they say about early marriage?



Key parts to creating an enabling legal and policy framework you may want to tackle in your intervention include:⁶⁸

- Advocacy (see 'Advocacy with parliamentarians, policy makers' section on page 56 in this toolkit).
- Awareness raising: It is important to sensitise key government officials, judiciary members, law enforcement officers and policy makers as well as the broader public, children and community on the laws relating to gender equality and human rights. Government officials and service providers should also be trained so that they can support the effective implementation of the laws and related policies.⁶⁹ For example:
 - Where adequate CEFMU laws exist but they are not well known by members of the judiciary, police, government, or general public, you may want to launch an awareness raising or training campaign.
 - Raise awareness among the community and religious leaders, ensuring that all groups, including the vulnerable and marginalised, are included.
 - Raise awareness among children and youth, especially among girls and young women, about the existence of the policy to empower them with knowledge about their rights and the services they can access or protection mechanisms they can take advantage of.
 - Ensure you make the most of available data, evidence and learning derived from current or previous CEFMU projects to strengthen your influencing work. Hence, whatever gains you make through your interventions can be used as evidence in your advocacy and policy work.
- Enforcing the registration of vital civil statistics, including births and marriages: this will assist with implementation and accountability measures on the minimum age of marriage.
- Improving data and monitoring mechanisms relating to child marriage.
- Strengthening local reporting systems to ensure attempted or actual cases of early marriage are being reported to the relevant authorities. A successful example of this is the 'Wedding Busters', a children's group supported by Plan International in Bangladesh. Determined to end the practice of CEFMU, the group has adopted strategies such as informing parents about the illegality of the practice, conducting plays on child marriage against dowry and child abuse, and informing the authorities wherever necessary.⁷⁰



PROMISING PRACTICE EXAMPLES



- **Awareness raising of CEFMU laws in India:** Plan International India's campaign to raise awareness of the Child Marriage Prevention Act 2006 focused on raising awareness of the law among government officials, youth, key community members, and other influencers. The aim of the campaign was for a number of the village Panchayats to be declared child marriage free. The campaign included a number of communications activities, such as puppet shows and the publication of posters, as well as meeting with community leaders, holding community meetings and peer-to-peer education. Plan International India partnered with the Department of Women and Child Development, which helped to elevate the campaign to the national level and ensured the engagement of government officials. Children and young people were actively engaged in the campaign and were seen as role models in their communities. As a result of the campaign, 131 village Panchayats have resolved to become child marriage free.
- **Additionally, Plan India has helped with the policy reforms on child marriage in the state of Telangana,** where they worked with the National Law University on implementing the child marriage laws. Although child marriages in Telangana were registered, even prior to the intervention of Plan, the intervention made it compulsory to register Child Marriages using the Aadhar Card,⁷¹ which made the process much more authentic.⁷²
- **Youth-led campaigning and policy advocacy in Indonesia:** Yayasan Plan International Indonesia's campaign aimed to empower girls and boys to be change agents in their communities by advocating to the national and subnational governments to accelerate policy implementation on child marriage prevention. The project included a number of tactics, such as holding policy dialogues and developing policy briefs, alongside a public communications push. The project succeeded in securing commitments from the national government and subnational governments to synchronise regulation and law enforcement on child marriage prevention at the district and village levels. Also, youth-led and girl-led movements on ending child marriage were formed through the project.
- **Working with champions in Timor-Leste:** Plan International Timor-Leste is running an initiative involving the First Lady to end CEFMU, early pregnancy, and violence against women and girls. Victims and survivors contact the First Lady to share their experiences and highlight possible solutions. There is also a possibility for them to have a meeting with the First Lady, who has significant leverage to influence the government to create policies and laws that will help ensure that girls are free from violence. To influence public opinion against child marriage, and to call for change, partnerships with eminent personalities can greatly benefit campaigns and interventions, like in the above example.
- **Working with high-profile individuals in India:** In 2012, a group of eminent Indians from across sectors, including government, law, arts, business and civil society committed to support ending child marriage in India. This was in partnership and collaboration with the Chair of the initiative The Elders (<https://theelders.org>), an independent group of global leaders founded by Nelson Mandela, working together for peace, justice and human rights.



USEFUL TIPS



- ▶ Promote girl-led youth engagement on policy and advocacy work where possible, and ensure that it is safe, meaningful and in line with the 'Do No Harm' principle.⁷³ This should be coupled with capacity building to develop the skills of the youth involved in the work.
- ▶ Working with partners that share your advocacy goal is an effective way to speak with a louder, stronger voice. National human rights institutions, for example, have an important role to play in promoting and protecting human rights, including awareness raising.⁷⁴
- ▶ Public or private? Think about whether it makes sense to amplify your communication efforts across various media. Highlighting children and young people's voices, writing case studies, and working with champions are all good ways to raise the profile of your campaign and carry out impactful advocacy. You may want to consider engaging in the United Nations Human Rights Council, CRC and CEDAW reporting mechanisms ([OHCHR | Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women](#)) by working with civil society, children, young people and communities to gather perspectives on progress and gaps in ending CEFMU, and amplifying these voices and perspectives in the global space. However, sometimes political sensitivities may mean that quieter 'closed door' advocacy, such as holding private briefings, will be more appropriate.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



- ▶ Advocacy Toolkit: Key Result for Children 6: Ending Child Marriage (UNICEF, 2021)
- ▶ Table 2: Roles and responsibilities in legislative reform - Child Marriage and the Law: Technical Note for the Global Programme to End Child Marriage (UNICEF, 2020)
- ▶ Ending child marriage in West Africa: Enhancing policy implementation and budgeting (Save The Children, 2021)
- ▶ Married by Exception: Child marriage policies in the Middle East and North Africa (Save The Children, 2021)
- ▶ Child, early and forced marriage legislation in 37 Asia-Pacific countries (World Health Organization & Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2016)

ADD YOUR OWN NOTES, IDEAS AND GOOD PRACTICE HERE



1.2 ADVOCACY WITH PARLIAMENTARIANS AND POLICY MAKERS



ABOUT THE INTERVENTION

No effort towards the elimination of CEFMU can be sustained unless it is legally enforceable. Important stakeholders are the decision-makers, policy makers, influencers (who may include donors), and international development agencies. As a part of government, parliamentarians and policy makers are very well placed to harmonise existing laws, and ensure their implementation and enforcement, while also supporting the passing of new laws to address CEFMU. They can play a crucial role in allocating adequate budgets across relevant government ministries, such as those administering departments of health, education, and women and children/family affairs. They can also make efforts to bring national legislations in line with international human rights instruments, such as the CEDAW and CRC.⁷⁵

Advocacy refers to activities aimed at influencing those with power to change policy or practice, or those with the primary duty to ensure that the rights of all its citizens are promoted, respected and fulfilled. To include advocacy in your project, you should develop an advocacy strategy, as well as a supporting communications strategy. These strategies will set out your advocacy objectives (which should be SMART: specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound). The strategies should also specify your key targets (policy makers, judiciary, etc.), your tactics, advocacy messages, activities, and key moments for influence. See the resources section below for toolkits to assist with your advocacy planning.

In some countries, the role of youth parliaments in keeping voices of youth heard is of significant importance. Giving youth a voice helps afford them the opportunity of playing an important role in decisions affecting them. For instance, Thailand witnessed the establishment of the Young Parliamentarians Caucus in 2020, which aimed to mobilise awareness and promote youth inclusiveness in public affairs, while welcoming intergenerational dialogue among young and senior members of parliament.⁷⁶ Another example from the region is that of the Bangladesh Model Youth Parliament that instils youth with an understanding of parliamentary processes and provides them with the opportunity to influence the country's policy through direct dialogue between them and policy makers⁷⁷.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS



- Advocate for a law setting the minimum age of marriage at 18 years for girls and boys; this should also address consent and be aligned with international human rights standards.
- Address conflicts or inconsistencies in the law; for example, there could be exceptions to the law that allow the marriage of girls with parental consent, or the law could be disproportionately punitive with draconian measures in place that could be counterproductive.
- Advocate for the review and amendment of other related discriminatory family and marriage laws, all of which is integral to the protection and empowerment of girls and women; for example, laws relating to land, inheritance and/or divorce, and other harmful practices such as female genital mutilation/cutting and other forms of sexual gender-based violence (SGBV).
- Advocate for improved access to justice for married girls and women or girls at risk of CEFMU.

- Support youth advocates to meaningfully engage in the development or periodic review of legal and policy frameworks.
- Advocate for specific budget allocations across all relevant ministries and sectors for reducing and eliminating CEFMU.
- Support advocacy groups that can carry out in-depth research to build a robust evidence base on CEFMU and its related harmful impacts on children and adolescents.

PROMISING PRACTICE EXAMPLES



Yayasan Plan International Indonesia is publishing action research along with policy recommendations for policy makers on the implementation of CEFMU policies. This will be supported by national policy dialogues to advocate on the issue, as well as efforts to lobby decision makers in other relevant government departments, such as the Ministry of Home Affairs, Ministry of the National Development Planning, and Ministry of Women Empowerment and Child Protection, in order to synchronise national policies. Plan Indonesia also works with the local government to encourage problem solving for CEFMU at the grassroots level. This campaign is being carried out with civil society as well as with relevant agencies, youth members and partners.

Another example is the **'World Youth Parliament for Children'**, a platform for young people around the world from all strata of society, that allows children to raise their collective voice to members of the highest policy making bodies, including governments, NGOs and civil society. Ending CEFMU and allowing the youth to voice their rights are important aspects of youth parliaments⁷⁸.

USEFUL TIPS



- Organise parliamentary briefings where children and youth are invited to speak and engage, or even co-facilitate!
- Develop relationships with parliamentary champions – invite them to visit your projects so that they can better understand the interventions.
- Build relationships with youth champions in parliament and encourage them to advocate on CEFMU.
- Build new partnerships with various sectors, and put in place the enabling conditions for civil society to partner with governments to ensure a multidisciplinary approach to addressing child marriage.
- Foster dialogue with local authorities in their constituency in order to understand the local drivers and responses to child marriage.⁷⁹



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



- The Role of Parliamentarians in Ending Child Marriage (Girls Not Brides, 2015)
- Child, early and forced marriage legislation in 37 Asia-Pacific countries (World Health Organization & Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2016)
- Orientation of the members of Panchayati Raj Institution on Child Marriage (UNICEF Rajasthan and Antakshari Foundation)
- An Advocacy Toolkit: The Education We Want (Plan International, 2014)
- Parliamentary Good Practices for Effective Implementation of Laws and Policies for Prevention of Child Marriage (The Asian Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development, 2016)

ADD YOUR OWN NOTES, IDEAS AND GOOD PRACTICE HERE



2. INTERVENTION CLUSTER B



AWARENESS RAISING AND TRANSFORMING NEGATIVE BEHAVIOURS AND SOCIAL AND GENDER NORMS, AS WELL AS HARMFUL TRADITIONAL BELIEFS AND RELIGIOUS MISCONCEPTIONS

It is widely known that a critical root cause of CEFMU in the Asia-Pacific region is found in the deeply rooted gender inequalities that subordinate girls and deprive them of their rights and entitlements. Moreover, in many locations across the region, there are engrained views of girls that prioritise their sexual and reproductive roles. These are all reflected in negative,

regressive and discriminatory social norms that have been deeply embedded in the societal fabric. In some countries, and in specific pockets within countries in the Asia-Pacific region, there is, moreover, a prevalence of harmful traditional beliefs and misconceptions or misinterpretations of religion acting as drivers and enablers of CEFMU.

Incorporating processes to identify and analyse deeply embedded discriminatory gender norms, and awareness raising activities and interventions are among the first critical steps within projects to prevent and reduce CEFMU. These can also contribute to the changing of social and gender norms and behaviours, whilst challenging traditional beliefs and religious misconceptions. In this section, you will find plenty of suggested interventions to consider, with selection dependent on the specifics of your context.

In addition, don't forget that we've included some useful information about CEFMU in Section 1, which might come in handy for your awareness and advocacy work too!



KEY STAKEHOLDERS TO CONSIDER IN INTERVENTION CLUSTER B

While there is a range of actors who need to be involved in our efforts to address CEFMU, the following stakeholders are considered the main protagonists, with the highest potential and powers to bring about lasting, positive change:

- Parents
- Men and boys
- Community leaders, including traditional and religious leaders
- Police
- Schools
- Media outlets and journalists
- Marriage registrars
- Marriage solemnisers
- Match-makers
- Community-based child protection committees
- Government-sponsored state/district/village child protection committees
- Girls and young women who are married, wherever possible and safe

2.1 WORKING IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES TO BRING ABOUT ATTITUDINAL AND BEHAVIOUR CHANGES SO THAT PEOPLE, IN PARTICULAR THOSE IN POSITIONS OF POWER AND INFLUENCE, STOP SUPPORTING CEFMU



ABOUT THE INTERVENTION

The majority of child marriage cases take place due to the patriarchal system and existing harmful gender norms and stereotypes in societies that discriminate against girls and women. From celebrating the birth of a boy child to investing more in the son's education, gender inequalities and stereotypes exist at every step, and put women and girls in disadvantaged positions. As social and gender norms are highly context-based, it is important to explore and clearly define the prevailing harmful or negative gender norms in a particular project context/site as well as sanctions and rewards associated with behaviours. Being explicit about these central gender norms will aid the development of core messages to counter these harmful/negative norms and develop tailored approaches to change.⁸⁰ It is also of utmost importance that all CEFMU projects consider involving the local communities, particularly their leaders and power-holders, sensitising them and generating awareness around the harmful impacts of CEFMU. It is important to sensitise not only the leaders but also the general public to ensure that everyone is aware that women and girls have equal rights.

It is also important to work with parents to foster effective communication with the children on gender norms, sexual and reproductive health and rights, and the importance of continuing education. This requires working with community-based child protection mechanisms (CBCPMs) to deliver parenting classes to parents in the communities, with attendance highly encouraged or

incentivised. These parenting classes ought to focus on parent-child communication, how to educate adolescents on the risks associated with informal unions, teach sons alternative and positive forms of masculinity, how to promote the value of girls, and how to support their children, including in their SRHR. Additionally, educating parents will help to break the intergenerational cycle of CEFMU, allowing their daughters to continue education and participate more fully in society.⁸¹

KEY CONSIDERATIONS



- Prevention, reduction and elimination of child marriage require bringing about changes in cultural and societal attitudes that perpetuate harmful norms and gender inequality. It also requires engaging local government officials and community leaders, including traditional and religious leaders, to ensure long-term success and sustainability of the initiatives. It is necessary to develop holistic activities that attempt to shift the norms, attitudes and behaviours of young men and women, their families and communities.
- Consider a multi-sectoral response, engaged in diverse partnerships and mobilised service providers, police, religious leaders, media and communities. Efforts could include street drama and public hearings, work with journalists, and village child protection committees. Refer to a useful example from Save the Children for further inspiration.⁸²
- The underlying goal and motivation behind this strategy is to create an enabling environment to delay the marriage age of girls in the community. This can be achieved by getting across to the community elders and families the harmful consequences of child marriage. It attempts to change social norms and make the environment more supportive and less punitive for girls and families who are willing to bring about that change. Interventions use strategies that include one-on-one meetings with parents as well as community leaders to gain support, group and community education sessions on the consequences and alternatives to child marriage, information/education/communication campaigns, public announcements, and pledges by influential leaders, community members and family heads.⁸³
- Effective ways to involve communities for the long-term success and sustainability of CEFMU interventions include using the local context and local languages in communications, and engaging local networks of girls and boys, and women and men to reach out to their neighbours, families, officials and village leaders to highlight the negative effects of CEFMU and adolescent pregnancy. Interventions should also include raising awareness of how keeping girls in school can benefit the whole community.⁸⁴
- Utilising existing research may prove useful as a convincing awareness-raising strategy, as it will be based on facts and strong and proven evidence. However, it is important to ensure that this information is communicated in a simple, clear and listener-friendly manner, and accompanied by practical examples that resonate with the respective community.
- Community-based child protection mechanisms can be effective at challenging gender norms. In particular by engaging with traditional, religious and community leaders, and undertaking campaigns with young people to provide alternative narratives challenging traditional attitudes to child marriage.
- There is a need to promote gender-equitable norms, attitudes and behaviours that have a positive impact on health among both married and unmarried children and youth.



- Support parent-child communication initiatives to build parents' knowledge and confidence on child rights, gender, SRHR and tackling harmful practices so that they are able to support their children. These initiatives should include extra efforts to engage fathers as key caregivers for children and to support gender equitable parenting and role modelling.
- In addition to gaining a deeper understanding of issues related to CEFMU, its impacts, laws and redressal mechanisms, it is necessary that district level officials and supervisors are introduced to communication tools that would enable them to gain community trust and, thus, exert positive influence.
- Focus on changing attitudes of community members and gatekeepers, in particular, so that they take action to prevent child marriage, voluntary unions and teenage pregnancies.
- Have a strategy in place around measuring progress towards change in gender norms, beliefs and behaviours relating to CEFMU through practical methodologies. This is important to build evidence of what's working and not working while changing social/gender norms.

PROMISING PRACTICE EXAMPLES



Plan International Timor-Leste provided parenting sessions for fathers in the community to discuss the important role they can play in their children's care and development, as well as the problems of setting out gendered roles and expectations within the family. Through these weekly parenting sessions, men have also been trained to work as community pre-school teachers, to demonstrate that men can be warm and responsive caregivers and teachers for girls and boys.⁸⁵

The National Multimedia Campaign launched in 2017 in Bangladesh is an example of a campaign that uses mass media and digital platforms to rally together to raise voices against child marriages and to report child marriages. It was developed by UNICEF and the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs.⁸⁶

Another example is the '**Just A Child**' campaign in India, which was launched in mid-2021 in response to a steady rise in child marriages as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and related problems such as the closure of schools, deaths in families, financial hardship, and a host of other related problems. The Ministry of Women and Child Development, along with UNICEF have lent support to this initiative. This campaign utilises social media and digital creatives to promote the idea that girls under the age of 18 should be encouraged to stay in school, and not be married.⁸⁷

USEFUL TIPS



- Enable the participation of local community leaders so that projects are 'owned' by the communities and continue even after the intervention has ended.
- Opt for the creation of peer-to-peer support groups and school-based youth clubs, which are open to both girls and boys.
- Youth forums at the local level to play an active role in their communities through rallying, daily surveillance, campaigning and conducting court-yard awareness-raising sessions.
- Share case studies or stories to encourage women and girls to speak out against marriage for their daughters early and against their will.⁸⁸

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



- Long-Term Evaluation Of The Tostan Programme In Senegal: Kolda, Thiès And Fatick Regions, (UNICEF, 2008)
- Community Engagement to End Child Early Forced Marriage – Experiences in Selected South Asian Countries, (Ferreira et al, 2017)
- Towards Ending Child Marriage, (HAQ Centre for Child Rights, 2018)
- Effectiveness of a community-based intervention to delay early marriage, early pregnancy and improve school retention among adolescents in India, (Mehra et al, 2018)
- Early and Child Marriage in India A Landscape Analysis, NIRANTAR TRUST, 2015 <http://www.nirantar.net/uploads/files/EM%20Report%20-%20English%20%5BSummary%5D.pdf>
- Adolescent pregnancies, child marriage and social norms in Zambia (Centre for International Health, University of Bergen, 2020)
- CSE with parents (Plan International, 2022) In development to be launched soon
- Coping with COVID parenting package (Plan International)
- Uprooting our beliefs: examining social norms contributing to VAWG, including child marriage (Oxfam, 2020)
- Measuring changes in social and gender norms (Plan International, 2021)

ADD YOUR OWN NOTES, IDEAS AND GOOD PRACTICE HERE



2.2 EDUCATE AND ENGAGE PEOPLE IN THE COMMUNITY WHO ARE DIRECTLY INVOLVED IN THE MARRIAGE PROCESS, SUCH AS REGISTRARS AND MARRIAGE SOLEMNISERS



ABOUT THE INTERVENTION

As well as sensitising the community and the duty bearers on their respective roles to support the elimination of CEFMU, it is crucial to work closely with the individuals who are directly involved in concluding marriage ceremonies such as registrars, match-makers and marriage solemnisers. In many countries, there are legal requirements to register a marriage with the government appointed civil registrar, with the intention to provide a mechanism for enforcing statutory minimum age for marriage. Registration requirements do not always prevent the occurrence of under-age marriages, as they sometimes take place outside procedural requirements. Nevertheless, registration is a place where some under-age marriages can be identified and stopped. However, some registrars fail to investigate the legal minimum age of the parties.⁸⁹

Therefore, working with stakeholders involved in monitoring and registering marriage is important to ensure that child marriages are not registered, and that authorities are able to deny validity of such marriages. This cohort needs to be equipped with the knowledge and tools to allow them to intervene and prevent suspected cases of CEFMU, so that the ages of brides and grooms can be verified before marriages, and cases of fraud can be detected.⁹⁰ For example, Plan International's research in Pakistan revealed that there were cases where marriage officiators registered under-age marriage using false documents or failed to require parties to prove their ages (false ages were recorded to be in compliance with the law).⁹¹

KEY CONSIDERATIONS



- Individuals concluding marriage, such as the marriage registrars, can directly stop child marriages from taking place and inform the local authorities of any suspected or attempted cases of child or forced marriages. While they are not the only ones who can stop child marriages from happening, they are uniquely placed to stop a marriage ceremony from taking place and can deny registration. Therefore, it is important to educate and train this cohort to identify under-age marriages by recognising the use of false documents or requiring the parties to offer further proof of age in cases of doubt.⁹²
- Birth registration and certification is important to prove a legal marriage age and can help in counteracting child marriages.⁹³
- It is necessary to digitalise the registration of marriages to prevent child marriages to enable verification of age of prospective brides and grooms.



- Community-based child protection systems and reporting mechanisms are necessary. These should be able to be activated quickly and effectively.
- It is important to create clear referral pathways and make them known to all the community members.
- Good collaboration with local authorities and coordinated action between them will increase chances of preventing attempted cases of child marriage.
- Thorough community-based monitoring and surveillance mechanisms should be in place to prevent a risk of girls being married in other faraway communities due to avoidance of local vigilance and reporting. This should be approached with inherent sensitivities in mind, as the surveillance might be misused as the control of the mobility and sexuality that girls and women face in South Asia. Encouraging and promoting the agency and choice of women should be kept at the centre of such mechanisms. Also, unintended harm needs to be carefully considered and prevented. In some cases, harm could be inflicted on women who face violence within their own families or who enter into self-initiated marriages to escape poverty and discrimination.

PROMISING PRACTICE EXAMPLES



In 2014 and 2015, Plan International and Coram International undertook a study in Pakistan, Bangladesh and Indonesia as part of the **'Asia Child Marriage Initiative' (ACMI)**. The study suggested carrying out capacity building of relevant stakeholders including marriage registration bodies.⁹⁴ Another example of such intervention is the **'Integrated Digital Birth Registration'** programme in Pakistan. An initial assessment on the existing registration process revealed an absence of uniformity, as well as limited awareness on civil registration and its importance. In response to this problem, registrars were asked to use simple mobile devices to share first-hand information of new-borns to the concerned officials in their area. The process involved building capacity of all involved individuals in all levels of registration to provide efficient birth registration services.⁹⁵

Another relevant example is the **'Child Marriage-Free Zone project'** implemented in Pakistan by Theirworld and a local organisation. The project started in 2014 when almost 40 per cent of the girls were getting married before the age of 18 in Matiari, a part of Sindh Province, where the project it was piloted. Interventions included training marriage registrars on how to deal with underage marriages, filling in marriage certificates, as well as teaching registrars more about local laws. By 2016, the project had benefited over 900 girls and women, and had reached out and had an impact on more than 3,000 community members.⁹⁶

USEFUL TIPS



- Provide those involved in the marriage ceremonies with the necessary technologies to verify the age of boys and girls and detect cases of manipulation or fraud.⁹⁷
- Ensure the effective sensitisation and awareness raising of the marriage registrars and solemnisers along with law enforcement officials, police and community leaders.
- Involve these persons in online campaigns and discussions on the elimination of child marriages, where they can share their experiences of hindering child marriages from taking place.
- Introduce a rewards mechanism and affirmative action to praise and promote marriage registrars and solemnisers who refuse to administer child marriage as champions of the cause.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



- State Strategy and Action Plan for Prevention of Child Marriage Towards creating a child marriage free Rajasthan (Government of Rajasthan, 2017)
- Speak Out – Be Protected: Your guide to reporting all forms of violence against children (Plan International, 2021)
- OpenCRVS is a **digital public good** designed for those it serves: to make civil registration easy. The functional documentation that could be accessed via <https://www.opencrvs.org> aims to tell you how OpenCRVS works for its users and how it can work for you. It includes an overview of the functional architecture and then explores each functional area along with videos to demonstrate this functionality in action. The examples you will see are OpenCRVS as configured in Zambia and Bangladesh. To use OpenCRVS in your country, see [Configuration](#)

ADD YOUR OWN NOTES, IDEAS AND GOOD PRACTICE HERE



2.3 MEDIA AND SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGNS, AND THE USE OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY



ABOUT THE INTERVENTION

Media and social media campaigns are amongst the most effective ways to reach a large population in a timely manner. This impact can be further amplified by engaging celebrities and other influencers who can draw attention to and foster greater interaction on social issues.

Different types of media can be used to reach mass scale and generate impact in eradicating child marriages and informal unions. This can be done through strategies such as broadcasting frequent messages on ending child marriage, staging public debates, and showcasing young adolescent girls raising their voices against CEFMU.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS



Some key considerations to be kept in mind while using media and communications for the elimination of child marriage include the following:

- Since the media informs people about important issues and helps shape how child marriage is spoken about and understood by the general public, the media needs to be mobilised as an important contributor to preventing and reducing CEFMU. It can often act to call decision-makers to account and remind them, through both positive acknowledgment and constructive critique, to fulfil their responsibilities.
- For example, a media outlet can praise the government's actions when it does good things for girls, such as increasing the minimum age of marriage or adopting a national strategy on child marriage, but it can also call them out for a lack of action.⁹⁸
- The media has a very important role to play in portraying girls as resourceful, resilient and responsible.
- Consider working with partner organisations and selected media groups to produce a series of programmes on human trafficking, child marriage, and the rights of girls and ethnic minorities that will be broadcast on various media platforms.⁹⁹





PROMISING PRACTICE EXAMPLES

Plan International Nepal ran the project **‘Preventing child marriage in Nepal,’** with the aim of empowering girls (under age 18) to avoid child marriage and to ensure all local government units were implementing programmes to end child marriage. The project has conducted several national-level policy dialogues, and recommendations were made to the government. Despite COVID-19 pandemic-related restrictions, the awareness campaigns were successfully implemented through TV and radio messaging. Key achievements include the involvement of adolescent girls in campaigning by raising their voices using social media. The government stakeholders have committed to and allocated a separate budget to reduce child marriage.

In Cambodia, Plan International has a project focusing on the elimination of early and child marriage and early pregnancy among indigenous adolescents. The key objectives of the project are to provide indigenous adolescents with safe and youth-friendly, particularly girl-friendly, information and reporting mechanisms on CEFMU and early pregnancy during the COVID-19 pandemic. This was done by partnering with a media organisation called Cambodian Center for Independent Media (CCIM), which helped to train 10 girls and young women to improve their reporting skills so that they could cover stories and issues related to CEFMU. This was a means to bring out girls’ voices and share them on media and social media platforms.¹⁰⁰

In Bangladesh, the **‘#Raisethebeat4ECM’** communications campaign was carried out by UNFPA and UNICEF to foster public opposition against child marriage. The campaign reached over 147 million people and the youth-centred entertainment-education drama series “Ichchedana” complemented the campaign with cross-sector behavioural and norms messages, reaching more than 67 million people.¹⁰¹

USEFUL TIPS



- Smart phones or web applications can be utilised in programming and awareness raising. This can be done on Facebook, Twitter and other social media channels, while digital spaces can be used to produce and broadcast CEFMU animations and YouTube materials.
- Conduct workshops to sensitise the media agencies on key issues related to child marriage.
- Foster the participation of young boys and girls in virtual discussions on child marriage, the need to eliminate it and awareness raising on the harmful impacts of getting into early marriages and unions.
- Take the opportunity to provide online psychological support through social media groups and other online platforms as a part of broader protection programming.
- Social media can be used to support digital campaigns that intend to reach girls and young women with targeted messaging on topics such as gender-based violence, SRHR and the risks of CEFMU.
- Provide online information and resources on how young people can reduce their exposure to child marriage and reduce their risk.¹⁰²
- Develop child marriage specific content for stakeholders, including parents, teachers, religious and community leaders.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



- Can entertainment media trigger change on child marriage? (Girls Not Brides, 2015)
- National Multimedia Campaign for Ending Child Marriage (UNICEF, 2018)
- African Union launches its first-ever campaign to end child marriage (Girls Not Brides)
- Eradicating child marriages in Southeast Asia: Protecting Children, Challenging Cultural Exceptionalism (Penang Institute, 2021)
- Child, Early and Forced Marriage Resource Guide (USAID, 2015)

ADD YOUR OWN NOTES, IDEAS AND GOOD PRACTICE HERE



2.4 USING DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY TO ADDRESS CEFMU



ABOUT THE INTERVENTION

Using digital technology could be one of the key accelerators of the efforts to end child marriage in the Asia-Pacific region.¹⁰³ With a continued move of everyday life to online space, not least as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic, online platforms could be beneficial to tackling the issue. Individuals, governments and organisations have become increasingly dependent on digital technologies, which can pose certain challenges, but also presents new opportunities for interventions addressing CEFMU.¹⁰⁴ Organisations should consider how they might effectively leverage digital technologies in these efforts, for instance publishing information about support schemes which incentivise parents for delaying a child's marriage, providing online vocational skills to financially empower girls, disseminating SRHR learning materials, and ensuring continued information delivery to remote locations where face-to-face interaction is difficult.¹⁰⁵

Digital technologies, including apps, have the potential to contribute to prevention and ending of child marriage, and can help improve educational outcomes, empower youth economically, protect young people from violence and improve dissemination of information on sexual and reproductive health. By using digital technology, a range of relevant activities can be supported, including age verification of a prospective bride and groom prior to concluding a marriage, as well as sharing information related to new regulations at the national/district level. It can also be used to raise awareness of CEFMU-related risks, including in humanitarian contexts, and to run CEFMU prevention via online campaigns more broadly. Digital technologies can, moreover, be leveraged to strengthen reporting and referral mechanisms and pathways, to provide information on SRHR for adolescents, and to raise awareness of rights and support services. Needless to say, the digital space is also a useful place to roll out girl-led youth advocacy and assert pressure on policy makers to join efforts to address CEFMU.



KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Using digital space to help girls and boys, and women and men to understand and claim their rights, access support services, and raise their voice for positive change is a key intervention strategy to contribute to and accelerate efforts towards eventually ending CEFMU. There are several key considerations to keep in mind when designing such interventions and programming.¹⁰⁶ These include:

- Engage young girls and boys during the development of digital/online tools, in particular providing feedback on structure, content and platform.
- Invest time and resources towards developing child friendly and minority-oriented design and content, and keep it inclusive.
- Enhance and re-use existing solutions that have seen signs of positive impact, for instance, OpenCRVS and the age verification mobile application in Bangladesh.¹⁰⁷
- The impacts of existing digital technologies in reducing and eliminating CEFMU must be measured and clearly understood before replicating or expanding them.
- Engage relevant national and local agencies.
- Consider capacity building of local partners, in particular specialist skills such as online content development and moderation.

- Regarding the use of digital technologies¹⁰⁸ and social media applications, while these have been effective in reaching a wide audience, more work is required to understand the composition of the audiences reached, the effect that it has on awareness raising, and whether these efforts result in any noticeable changes in behaviour. This needs to be done through on-going audience monitoring whilst analysis of audience data should also be considered.
- Actors should look for ways to adapt and enhance existing digital solutions instead of developing new ones from scratch. This will ensure the effective use of resources for maximised impact.
- You need to have a well-articulated problem to help guide the selection or development of a digital technology.
- Clearly defining impact objectives at the beginning of the technology development process can improve the design of the technology, and more effectively align it to generate the intended impact.
- There is a need to strengthen partnerships between development actors, private sector players and technological giants to create new technologies to further accelerate efforts in ending child marriage.¹⁰⁹

PROMISING PRACTICE EXAMPLES



An example of an intervention using digital technology is Plan International's flagship project 'EMPoWR' (Ethnic Minority Girls, Boys, Young Women and Men Use the Digital Space to Understand and Claim Their Rights, Access Support Services and Raise Their Voice Towards Policy Makers) in Viet Nam. A key focus of this project is to improve levels of digital literacy and online safety skills through a training package and educational videos that can be shared online and also used in face-to-face training. While the internet is an exciting place that offers extensive information and knowledge, it also poses potential risks for children and youth, and Plan International, to address this, is running online digital literacy courses to equip them with the skills to protect themselves, while also motivating them to access online resources. The training packages enable girls, boys, and young people to have greater digital literacy skills and access to more opportunities, increase knowledge and understanding of human trafficking and child marriage, whilst supporting them to advocate for their rights. Key learnings from the project concluded that the platform can be a valuable tool not just for raising awareness of CEFMU and human trafficking, but also other issues such as education opportunities, economic empowerment and safe migration.

USEFUL TIPS



- Online campaigns by adolescent girls and boys can be carried out, where they raise their voices against CEFMU.
- Mobile applications that facilitate two-way communication need to be used in projects that focus on CEFMU elimination. Applications such as WhatsApp, LINE and Facebook messenger can be used to coordinate during CEFMU-response efforts such as victim support, or to disseminate critical information related to policies and regulations.
- Develop training packages and educational videos, which can be shared online.
- Consider capacity and confidence building of local NGO partners to develop and sustain online platforms to encourage dialogue, information, and exchanges on girls and women's rights.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



- Girls' Parliaments to end child marriage in the DRC (Girls Not Brides)
- Mobile App Stops 3,700 Child Marriages, (Plan International, 2018)
- Smashing Gender Stereotypes With 'SHEBOARD' App (Plan International)

ADD YOUR OWN NOTES, IDEAS AND GOOD PRACTICE HERE



2.5 ENGAGING RELIGIOUS AND TRADITIONAL LEADERS



ABOUT THE INTERVENTION

Since cultural perceptions and social and gender norms are often fuelled by ancient traditions and religious beliefs, or misinterpretations around marriage and child marriage, they remain major challenges when working to eliminate CEFMU. Engaging religious and traditional leaders has proven to be an effective way to address such perceptions and accepted social and gender norms at the community level.

Given the level of influence and power these leaders exert among communities, parents, teachers, youth and health professionals, they can easily mobilise the community members to not engage in CEFMU by discussing the ill-effects of early marriage and unions, including but not limited to gender-based violence, poverty, lack of employment, teenage pregnancy, and other associated health and development risks. However, this first requires sensitising religious leaders because in many communities child marriage is still concluded under customary, traditional or religious laws, which can take precedence over statutory legislations. Therefore, it may not always be easy to gain the support of religious and traditional leaders in eliminating child marriages, as it may be seen as an upheaval of the existing traditional social, cultural and gender norms.



KEY CONSIDERATIONS

With respect to the amount of power and respect the religious and traditional leaders hold over their communities, there cannot be a better influencing agency than these leaders. The influence of religion permeates daily life in most countries in the Asia-Pacific region. Faith-based groups and organisations help define the values of families and communities. Their commitment to programmes eliminating child marriage can be an important factor in promoting changes in local understanding and practices. At the same time, traditional and religious leaders can, of course, also be amongst our fiercest opponents, which makes any influencing work particularly challenging yet crucially important.

For example, in Viet Nam, there are localised customary laws, practices and traditions that allow young girls to marry with parental consent.¹¹⁰ Age of marriage differs in national contexts, and sometimes is only regulated by religious laws and traditions that may allow child marriages. In some instances, there might even be a conflict between traditional laws and state laws, and conservative forces have used religious arguments to oppose state legal reforms. For example, in Pakistan, in 2016, the Council of Islamic Ideology demanded the withdrawal of a bill to raise the minimum age of marriage, considering it blasphemy.^{111 112} It is sometimes necessary to look beyond religious leaders and consider other traditional leaders with different levels of influence in the community. For example, Sisters in Islam, in Malaysia, engaged with a former Mufti and a local chief judge to make contact with a traditional conservative religious political party and make sure the message was heard.¹¹³ In remote or rural areas that witness high rates of CEFMU, interventions are focused on engaging with tribal influencers and leaders for advocacy of community-specific advisories against child marriage. For example, in Odisha, India, the government engaged with relevant departments to ensure continuation of education of tribal girls through engagement with local tribal influencers and leaders for advocacy against child marriage.¹¹⁴

A few considerations that need to be kept in mind are:

- Working with religious and traditional leaders in order to promote positive social and behavioural change (including a focus on adolescents to end child marriage and improve school enrolment and retention) can encourage social and behaviour change; improve maternal and child health, exclusive breastfeeding, early childhood care and child protection; and prevent violence.

- Engaging with religious leaders may not always be easy, as some consider social change introduced by secular organisations as an affront to religion and to their position within the community. This can result in reluctance to disseminate messages.¹¹⁵
- Consultations with the traditional leaders can also be difficult, as this kind of advocacy challenges their beliefs and practices. Many elders, at first, were reluctant to support this movement and it took several meetings to convince them to discuss it with the presence of community members.
- In cases where convincing the elders of a community became difficult, these influential leaders have proved to be of great help. Tensions and disagreements encountered were resolved through the help of traditional leaders who support the idea.
- Since marriage ceremonies are often administered by religious or traditional leaders according to customary laws and practices, rather than statutory law, it is important to include and sensitise these leaders to ensure that children aren't married.

PROMISING PRACTICE EXAMPLES



The 'BLOOM' project in Indonesia engaged with Islamic and Catholic Religious leaders in Nagekeo, Sikka and Lembata. At the village level, the project engaged with the traditional and community leaders to involve parents in forums/meetings to discuss risky behaviours and CEFMU issues in order to build mutual understanding and interpretation. In Sikka, the Catholic religious leaders used project curriculum '**Choose A Future**' as their guidance in pre-marital courses in church at the district level, while others became spokespersons in youth discussion sessions and/or other activities at the village level.

In the Philippines, Plan has engaged with indigenous communities (Mangyan leaders) in Occidental Mindoro on the prevention of early marriage. The campaign started in 2016 during the celebration of International Day of the Girl. The campaign did not engage with religious sects or congregations present in the area, but rather with traditional the Indigenous People structure. It also involved legislative members and various department heads from the local government units in advocacy activities, which were mostly integrated with other child protection activities such as trainings and orientations.¹¹⁶

USEFUL TIPS



- Identify, support and train traditional, religious and other community leaders, making sure to engage with them in a respectful and constructive way to gain and strengthen trust!
- Remember that religious leaders are not a homogenous community.
- Engage traditional and religious leaders in the project implementation at the local level. Once again, it's important to engage with the leaders at early stages of the project to ensure they are on board for the implementation stages, too.
- Engage leaders to develop and deliver messages on the value of educating girls, the negative consequences of child marriage and its detrimental effects, including on early pregnancy and violence.
- Influence cultural and religious leaders to transform men's and boys' perspectives on gender equality.
- Disseminate messages related to CEFMU and the rights of children (especially girls) in religious sermons, radio shows and community dialogues.¹¹⁷

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



- Channels of Hope, Project Model, World Vision Guidance for Development Programmes (World Vision, 2016)
- Working with Religious Leaders to address Child Marriage (Girls Not Brides, 2019)

ADD YOUR OWN NOTES, IDEAS AND GOOD PRACTICE HERE



2.6 ENGAGING MEN AND BOYS



ABOUT THE INTERVENTION

As one of the most important principles of the gender-transformative approach, it is imperative to involve men and boys in the initiatives to end CEFMU. Gender equality is not just a women's and girls' issue, but also concerns and requires the full engagement of men and boys. An effective gender transformation is not possible if only women or girls are involved in discussing and addressing gender inequality.¹¹⁸ Since in many communities it is still mostly men who are involved in the decision-making positions necessary to implement the solutions, recognising them as agents of change and fostering increased engagement can be very helpful in mobilising peers and developing positive masculinities. For example, by refusing to marry under-aged girls, boys and men can contribute to boycotting the practice consistently.

Working with men and boys, particularly with fathers, can be integral to an intervention, especially in challenging gender stereotypes.¹¹⁹ This also helps in sensitising men and boys to respect the rights of women and girls, and allows them to make decisions for themselves. Such engagement of men and boys can be of great use in exposing gender-blind policies and practices that exist in society, and will not only achieve gender equality within the CEFMU context but will also achieve gender equality and justice more broadly across different areas.



KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Gender equality tends to be perceived as primarily a women's and girls' issue because it directly affects them, and they suffer disproportionately from gender inequality. However, it also concerns and requires the full engagement of men and boys since gender norms can have negative impacts on men and boys as well. These impacts include being seen as the 'provider' of the family, having toughness or 'macho' behaviours, or being shamed for appearing emotional or sensitive – to name but a few. At the same time, men and boys are also placed in a position to challenge these norms because of the greater decision-making powers they are bestowed with. Hence, ending child marriage requires the thoughtful engagement of men and boys to improve their own wellbeing, socially attributed gender norms, and the treatment meted out to girls and women. The following considerations should be kept in mind:

- Men and boys should be drawn in as leaders and active participants, and not dismissed or marginalised as potential opponents to change.
- Initiatives ought to give opportunities to men and boys to rethink issues related to masculinity.
- Behaviour change and learning environments should be created for men and boys.
- Programmes need to allow men and boys to develop a greater personal stake in gender equality to see how their lives may change in beneficial ways.
- Men and boys should be encouraged to boycott CEFMU, thus directly contributing to discontinuing this harmful practice.
- Programmes should empower women and girls while also drawing in men and boys in gender-transformative ways.¹²⁰

PROMISING PRACTICE EXAMPLES



A good example of involving men and boys in gender equality projects is that of Plan International Timor-Leste's **'Say no to gender-based violence'** project, which has engaged men and boys in providing education and training in schools, encouraging the youth to become community role models (champions of change), and facilitating intergenerational community dialogue on gender-based violence.¹²¹

Another example is Save the Children's **'Choices curriculum'** project that was piloted in children's clubs in Nepal. The project used trained facilitators to implement the activities, and results showed that the programme promoted gender equitable attitudes and behaviours among participating girls and boys.¹²²

CARE's **'Tipping Point'** programme in Nepal and Bangladesh has the aim of better understanding the groom's side of child marriage and preferences of men and their families, and works to build knowledge and skills in leadership, self-awareness, gender, power and interpersonal communication.

Another good example engages fathers to promote gender equality in the house to prevent early and child marriage and is part of the MenCare campaign **'Programme P curriculum'**, adapted by World Vision and Promundo in India. The curriculum was designed to encourage men, their partners and daughters to reflect upon norms that devalue girls and that present barriers to men's participation as caring and involved fathers.¹²³

USEFUL TIPS



- Mobilise men and boys to campaign for change in government policy, legal justice systems and corporate practices that are unjust towards women.
- Engage fathers, and other prominent male family figures of authority, of adolescent boys and girls, so that they can help advance gender equality within their families and societies.
- Remember that boys also marry as children, which results in their school dropout, lower educational attainment and lesser employment opportunities, while also being forced to become the breadwinners for their new families.
- Provide opportunities for groups of men and boys in 'safe spaces' to engage in critical reflection on gender roles, toxic masculinities and gender-based discrimination and injustice.¹²⁴

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



- Male Engagement in Ending Child Marriage (Girls Not Brides, 2018)
- Technical Note On Partnering With Men And Boys To End Child Marriage In The Global Programme To End Child Marriage (UNICEF)

ADD YOUR OWN NOTES, IDEAS AND GOOD PRACTICE HERE



2.7 BEHAVIOUR CHANGE PROGRAMMING



ABOUT THE INTERVENTION

Eliminating child marriage requires the understanding of social systems, norms, values and behaviours, which takes time and intensive efforts to change. As we have seen elsewhere in this toolkit, child marriage is rooted in gender inequality and the belief that girls and women are inferior to boys and men. Important work, therefore, needs to be done with communities, men and boys, families and various other stakeholders to challenge attitudes and behaviours on issues of masculinities and to promote positive gender norms.

Norms and beliefs that support CEFMU, specifically, must also be addressed and shifted, fostering change in the behaviours of individuals, families and communities, with a greater awareness of the detrimental impacts of CEFMU. Such behaviour change work is an important part of CEFMU interventions in enabling the promotion of positive social and gender norms, and supporting the delay in the age of marriage. Other activities aimed at shifting attitudes and behaviours that are supportive of child marriage and adolescent pregnancy include the provision of sexual and reproductive health services as well as contraceptive devices, access to economic opportunities for girls' and women's earning and education, access to training on entrepreneurship, and the provision of space for children and youth to express their opinions and share ideas to solve issues related to SRHR.¹²⁵

KEY CONSIDERATIONS



- In order to eliminate CEFMU, it is necessary to first understand the systems, norms and behaviours that drive it, and what works to reduce and eliminate this harmful practice in different contexts around the world.
- It is then necessary to implement social behaviour and communication interventions to promote gender transformation. Achieving behavioural change of families and communities is of critical importance, with a strong need for greater awareness of the detrimental impacts of CEFMU. For example, there should be a change in attitude about the alternatives to marriage and it should result in a reduced acceptance of child marriage among those who influence decisions on the course of girls' lives.¹²⁶
- At the community level, eliminating CEFMU requires investing in behaviour-change work, including awareness raising through sectoral structures at the community level (for example, education, health and communication for development) to make communities ready and aware of national and subnational initiatives.
- Necessary programme interventions can include developing behaviour change communications (BCC) and materials, and implementing BCC activities on early marriage in ethnic minority areas; improving services and access to information on behaviour change; building and improving the capacity of government officers to work more efficiently on the issue; and promoting the role of key partners to mobilise the community in eliminating early marriage.
- A very important aspect of behaviour change at the community level requires the engagement of men and boys to support positive masculinities and impact decision-making regarding child marriage. Pathways to change for men and boys include learning, practising attitude and behaviour changes, and internalising new attitudes and norms including gender-equitable, nourishing, supportive and non-violent attitudes.¹²⁷
- Changing norms, values, attitudes, behaviours and practices takes time and requires intensive facilitation, assistance and involvement. This requires the CEFMU focused campaigns to be mainstreamed through popular communication channels and digital media so that it can reach a larger audience.



PROMISING PRACTICE EXAMPLES

The Population Council's **'BALIKA project'** in Bangladesh employed three types of intervention strategies for girls: education, gender rights awareness training, and livelihood skills training, which proved effective for delaying marriage. In addition to developing skills, it ensured that girls demonstrated to community members the value of what they learnt and accomplished. This approach helped to empower girls, as well as promote norm change at the community level because girls demonstrated actual behavioural changes.¹²⁸

Plan International Thailand implemented the project **'Teen Power for Better Life'** from 1 July 2018 to 30 June 2021, with the key objective to build the capacity of girl youth volunteers and parents as change agents, driving solutions to child marriage and adolescent pregnancy issues. As such, the project aimed to shift attitudes and behaviours supportive of child marriage and adolescent pregnancy by providing access to sexual and reproductive health services, as well as contraceptive devices, access to economic opportunities for their earning and education, access to training on entrepreneurship, proposal writing and project management, and the establishment and management of saving funds and community enterprise groups. The project also worked to provide space for children and youth to express their opinions and share ideas to solve issues related to SRHR. In order to achieve the goals, key activities included providing training on SRHR and gender equality to volunteers, community members, community leaders and key stakeholders. In terms of the key achievements, the total number of youth volunteers increased from ten to sixteen villages in 2020. Moreover, the sub-district administration granted a budget to four youth volunteer groups to train community members on child marriage and teenage pregnancy.

USEFUL TIPS



- Behaviour change campaigns need to be based on local contexts and prevalent gender norms.
- Invest in anthropological research to better understand local customs and beliefs, both positive and harmful ones, in order to adapt accordingly, with resources created to tackle their root causes.
- Strengthen national and local evidence bases on gender-equitable norms, behaviours and attitudes.
- Create indicators and invest in monitoring and documenting behaviour change, and use examples of progress made to encourage and stimulate similar efforts at scale.
- Consciousness-raising group education can change individual attitudes and behaviours.
- Address the need to adopt positive attitudes and behaviours towards investing in and supporting the education of adolescent girls.
- Design skill training interventions for girls that can help them demonstrate actual individual behaviour change and promote social norm change at the community level.¹²⁹
- Behaviour-change communication tools like billboards and flyers could be used to relay important messages.
- Maximise the use of social media platforms and digital campaigns, such as channels of communication for social and behaviour change, to directly engage with large audiences.
- From the beginning, design and build in mechanisms that will contribute to sustainable change, as behaviours might move in a regressive direction over time.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



- Time to Act! Accelerating Efforts to Eliminate Child, Early and Forced Marriage in Asia (Plan International Asia, 2018)
- Child Marriage in India: Achievements, Gaps and Challenges Response to Questions for OHCHR Report on Preventing Child, Early and Forced Marriages for Twenty-sixth Session of the Human Rights Council (HAQ Centre for Child Rights)
- STRENGTHENING CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEMS, (Save the Children, 2019)
- A Theory of Change on Child Marriage, (Girls Not Brides, 2014)
- Challenging Gender Discrimination: A How-to Guide (Plan International)
- Can laws change attitudes and behaviours around child marriage in the absence of strict enforcement? Experimental evidence from Bangladesh (VoxDev, 2021)

ADD YOUR OWN NOTES, IDEAS AND GOOD PRACTICE HERE



3. INTERVENTION CLUSTER C



EDUCATION

We know that a serious consequence of CEFMU is directly related to lack of access to education,¹³⁰ including comprehensive sexuality education (CSE), and school dropout across the Asia-Pacific region. At the same time, CEFMU can often mean the end of a girl's education, which of course has a lasting effect on her life chances and opportunities. In crisis settings, CEFMU increases the likelihood of dropping out of school even further.¹³¹ Along these lines, the discontinuation of schooling due to the COVID-19 pandemic increases the risk of CEFMU for girls in the region. Following such long periods of disruption, it is less likely that girls will return to school and this increases risks of them getting married early.

Indeed, in some countries in the region, children who do not have a chance to attend formal schooling become interested in marriage, and this increased further during the COVID-19 pandemic. During this time, children across the region might use social media, where they meet and fall in love, and subsequently, try to marry. Therefore, it is important to adopt interventions that support girls' continued education, including education for pregnant and parenting adolescents, as part of your CEFMU programme strategy. In this section, you will find multiple approaches relating to girls' education to consider and draw ideas from.

KEY STAKEHOLDERS TO CONSIDER IN INTERVENTION CLUSTER C

While there is a range of actors who need to be involved in our efforts to address CEFMU, the following stakeholders are considered the main protagonists with the highest potential and powers to bring about lasting, positive change:

- Young girls and boys
- Parents
- Teachers
- School authorities
- Community leaders, including traditional and religious leaders
- Policy makers
- Government departments
- Youth volunteers
- NGOs
- Girls and young women who are married, wherever possible and safe

3.1 ENCOURAGING AND EMPOWERING GIRLS TO CONTINUE WITH THEIR EDUCATION



ABOUT THE INTERVENTION

As poverty can drive parents to not invest in girls' education but rather have them get married early, so that the family can cut down on their expenses, it is of crucial importance to include interventions on continuous education for girls.

Efforts aimed at ensuring girls' access to continuous education is crucial, as first, it can be a powerful tool for delaying unintended adolescent pregnancy and early childbirth. Second, ensuring girls' access to quality education and removing barriers that prevent pregnant girls and young mothers from completing their education is essential in addressing some of the harmful consequences of CEFMU.¹³² Moreover, education, including CSE, equips girls with skills they need to develop and maintain healthy relationships in life. In line with a gender-transformative approach to CEFMU programming, efforts aimed at advancing both the condition and position of girls, young women and women is imperative, as previously mentioned.



KEY CONSIDERATIONS

- Promote girls' access to high-quality education and CSE, including tailored reintegration programmes for girls who are forced to drop out of school owing to marriage and/or childbirth.
- Recognise the direct correlation between low levels of education and increased rates of child marriage.
- Call on the government to invest more in providing access to quality primary and secondary education for young girls and boys, including in situations of emergencies and displacement.
- Train teachers to provide education on gender equality and SRHR to school children.
- Bear in mind that, in families with limited resources, parents prefer to educate the son rather than the daughter, and this is a major reason for girls being left behind when it comes to education. In addition to lowering the costs of education, it may be helpful to increase the immediate benefits that households face when deciding to educate their children, especially girls.
- Incentivise education for girls in the form of fee waiver, distribution of free textbooks or school uniforms, or any other kind of monetary incentive to help keep the girls in school for longer.
- Sensitise parents and community leaders on how education can help girls to play a leadership role in their communities and society at large.
- Collaborate with relevant government ministries, such as Ministry of Education, Ministry of Skill Development, and the Ministry of Women and Child, as this is required to bring about policy changes highlighting the value of educating and empowering girls, while also delaying their marriage.
- Recognise that isolation and domestic responsibilities have interfered with girls' ability to keep up with distance learning while schools and colleges have been closed.¹³³
- Address the need to keep tabs on schools or teachers who may pressure pregnant girls to drop out of school and punish those found doing so. This requires the involvement of the local administration in keeping a watch over the schools.



PROMISING PRACTICE EXAMPLES

‘Girls get equal: Preventing child, early and forced marriage’ is a project implemented by Plan Bangladesh in Barguna, and one key outcome of the project is retaining girls in school. The project set out to reach 26,000 children and youth in Barguna, with planned interventions to reduce CEFMU across five areas. In addition to working with girls on SRHR education, and supporting girls and families with economic opportunities, the project also aims to increase the responsiveness of duty bearers at national, district and sub-district levels to prevent and respond to child rights violations, particularly CEFMU. Additionally, a module on Inclusive Pedagogy for teachers has been developed, and basic education packages are being provided for out-of-school children, whilst Gender Equity Movement in Schools (GEMS) packages are prepared for students. Teacher training, renovations and social audits of schools, the assurance of safe drinking water, and the establishment of youth clubs are other positive outcomes aimed to ensure that girls continue their education.

Plan Viet Nam’s **‘GR4F’ project** aims, amongst other things, to ensure that girls at risk of CEFMU benefit from improved educational opportunities and are empowered to make positive choices in a gender equitable and supportive environment. As part of this project, Plan Viet Nam works with duty bearers and other influential stakeholders who have accountability and ability to support girl’s education, economic participation and leadership in public and private spaces. It, moreover, produces parenting materials on girls’ education, and trains parents on the same, whilst also ensuring teacher training on girls’ rights and ending CEFMU. Programme evidence gathered through these interventions is used to call for the adoption and implementation of adequate girls’ education standards and policies.

Plan Bangladesh’s **‘Empowering adolescent girls to end child marriage in Bangladesh’** project is another example that worked to ensure schools provide an enhanced, safe, inclusive and girl-friendly environment, among other things. Activities included creation of girls’ common rooms in project schools so that girls had friendly spaces. These efforts contributed towards the continuation of education for the project schools and established girl-friendly spaces.

In the state of Uttar Pradesh, Plan India formed a cycling group and provided cycles to school-going girls so that they could prevent instances of public sexual harassment, which caused a lot of girls to drop out of school. They were also provided with martial arts training as a self-defence mechanism, which brought about a significant difference in their confidence, and enhanced their ability to question wrongdoings and violence perpetrated against them.¹³⁴

USEFUL TIPS



- **Address girls’ financial barriers to education, including costs, such as primary and secondary school fees and materials, uniforms and sanitary pads; tutoring and educational support; and even university tuition.**
- Provide food vouchers, school meals, books and uniforms to incentivise girls to continue their education.¹³⁵
- Consider offering cash rewards or other incentives to households, usually to the parents, when their children attend or perform well in school.¹³⁶
- Offer a waiver of school fees or allot subsidies to the parents for enrolling and keeping their daughters in school.
- Use success stories of empowered girls and women to motivate parents to keep their daughters in school.
- Offer assurances of livelihood opportunities, including skills training, savings clubs, and jobs or job placement services, as these can help delay marriage.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



- Are economic incentives enough to prevent child marriage? Findings from Haryana, India (Girls Not Brides, 2016)
- Investing in girls: Cash incentives help promote gender equality in India (UNFPA, 2016)
- Knot Ready: Lessons from India on Delaying Marriage for Girls (ICRW, 2016)
- Child, Early and Forced Marriage - Care's Global Experience (Care International, 2018)

ADD YOUR OWN NOTES, IDEAS AND GOOD PRACTICE HERE



3.2 SENSITISATION AND TRAINING OF TEACHERS



ABOUT THE INTERVENTION

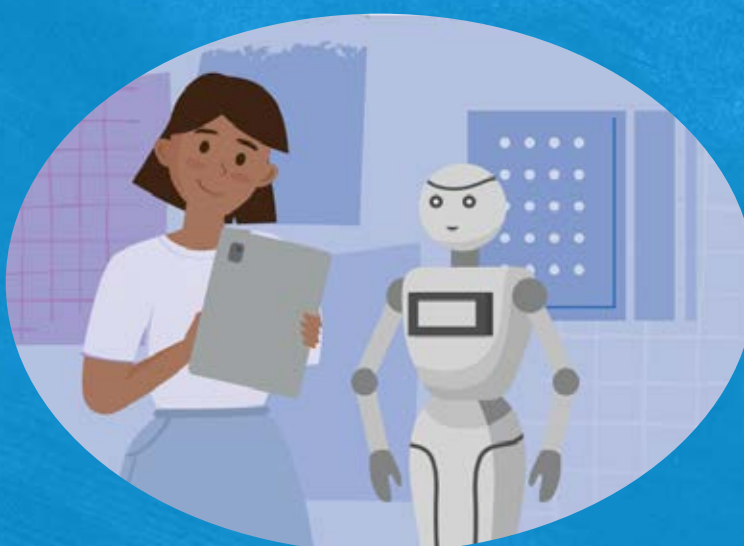
Relevance and quality of education that children receive in school is a very important factor that will determine if education brings about change or transformation in their lives. In addition, teachers have an important role to play in supporting children to learn about child rights, harmful gender stereotypes, violence including sexual harassment, healthy life choices, SRHR and adolescent pregnancy, and CEFMU.

In some countries across the Asia-Pacific region, there are on-going efforts to introduce and deliver comprehensive sexuality education (CSE). However, in certain other countries, it is either non-existent or inconsistently applied at the school level, meaning that discussions surrounding SRHR are completely missing for school children. While children are taught about reproductive organs and their biological functions, there are hardly any lessons on family planning or contraceptives, relationships, gender, consent, nor on the harmful consequences of CEFMU and adolescent pregnancy. Because children spend a considerable time at school, teachers can be an effective medium to help raise children's awareness of their own bodies and sexual reproductive health and rights. However, first that requires teacher training, which is another important CEFMU intervention thread.



KEY CONSIDERATIONS

- There are several challenges to ensure quality and access to education in several countries in the Asia-Pacific region. These include a shortage of teachers, especially female teachers where the culture, practice, and social and gender norms require gender segregation; and low training levels of teachers which impact the quality of education that is imparted. You can engage in advocacy work to call on the government to allocate sufficient resources to education, staffing and infrastructure.
- Inform teachers about the risks associated with adolescent pregnancy and CEFMU. Also equip the teachers with the skills to help children learn about human rights, relationships and consent, harmful gender stereotypes, violence including sexual harassment, and healthy life choices, as well as adolescent pregnancy and CEFMU.¹³⁷
- Adapt any teacher training contents to local contexts and communities, while not diluting the key messages.
- In line with the scalability commitment, design projects to enable governments to scale them up in other regions to reach teachers nation-wide.



PROMISING PRACTICE EXAMPLES



Plan Bangladesh's project '**Combatting Early Marriage in Bangladesh**' spanning between 2018-2023, in two districts, Bhola and Jhalakati, included outcomes where teachers were trained on CEFMU protocols among other protocols. '**Girls get equal: Preventing child, early and forced marriage**' is another project implemented by Plan Bangladesh in Barguna, which has a key outcome related to increasing knowledge of SRHR rights among adolescents. The project has developed a module on inclusive pedagogy for teachers, including teacher training.

Additionally, the '**Gender Equity Movement in Schools (GEMS)**' programme from India trained teachers to identify their own gender biases before leading both male and female students, ages 14 to 16 years, in 24 sessions related to gender, violence, bodily changes, child marriage and SRHR over the course of two years. The project had a wide scope to focus on strengthening the capacity of teachers, and increasing the hiring and training of female teachers, as a way to incentivise girls' attendance in schools.¹³⁸

USEFUL TIPS



- ▶ Ensure that there is an adequate supply of qualified teachers who attend school regularly and engage students.¹³⁹
- ▶ While designing policies, schools should consider including entry requirements and remuneration that will encourage best candidates to apply for the position, while also allowing a good mix of diversity based on the location of the school.¹⁴⁰
- ▶ Schools should consider on-the-job training, and incentives for teachers to take a leading role in sensitising children on matters relating to CEFMU.
- ▶ Ensure awareness raising of teachers not only on child marriage, but also on the harmful consequences of teenage pregnancy and entering into informal unions, which can thereafter be imparted to the students.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



- ▶ A toolkit for NGOs / Community Workers and Teachers: Elimination of Early Marriage (Breakthrough, n.d)
- ▶ Towards Ending Child Marriage (Centre for Child Rights, 2018)
- ▶ Putting the C in CSE: Standards for content, delivery and environment for comprehensive sexuality education (Plan International, 2020)

ADD YOUR OWN NOTES, IDEAS AND GOOD PRACTICE HERE



3.3 ADDITIONAL EDUCATION RESPONSES IN THE COVID-19 CONTEXT (HOME-BASED/ONLINE LEARNING)



ABOUT THE INTERVENTION

With the onset of COVID-19 and the subsequent lockdowns, the discontinuation of schooling continues to increase the risk of CEFMU for girls in the region. Following such long periods of disruption, it is less likely that girls will return to school and this increases risks of them getting married off early.

Education is one area that continues to require considerable attention in terms of investment. Children need to be consulted about suitable remote learning measures for their contexts and need to have the necessary infrastructure provided, while also investing in the capacity building and upskilling of teachers on the use of relevant technologies.



KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Key considerations for stakeholders involved in education-related interventions during the COVID-19 pandemic include:¹⁴¹

- The impacts of COVID-19 risk the undoing of already achieved progress in reducing CEFMU over the past decade. Many girls face disruptions to accessing education, livelihoods, health care and other support services, which puts them at risk of CEFMU.
- Education providers should be encouraged to adopt the use of digital and online learning solutions, and support each other through sharing advice and materials on online learning.
- Existing legislation or regulatory frameworks on testing and evaluation of competencies should be amended temporarily to suit the needs of remote/digital classes.
- Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) providers can set up additional remote teaching and IT support services for teachers and staff, while also maintaining regular contact with students.¹⁴²
- Consider new initiatives to support countries in the recovery phase with a focus on three areas: providing comprehensive support to children through the education system, addressing learning losses, and accelerating digital learning including efforts to close the gender digital divide.¹⁴³
- Support the enhancement of local digital learning systems.
- Ensure access to distance and online learning opportunities, especially for the most marginalised.
- Make sure that the content includes SRHR-related information.
- Develop comprehensive plans to ensure a return to school in a post-pandemic setting.
- Support the development and implementation of gender-responsive school reopening and contingency planning.¹⁴⁴
- Specific online safety measures need to be addressed, to ensure children are not exposed to any additional risks while taking part in online education.

PROMISING PRACTICE EXAMPLES



A useful example is the **'Christmas Calendar Project'** in Bangladesh, which aims to retain girls in school through sensitising parents about the consequences of CEFMU and the benefits of delayed marriage. This campaign has been conducted online, during the COVID-19 pandemic, and is still on-going. The key message this campaign intends to deliver is that daughters are no less worthy than sons, and can still earn money, and care for their parents if they get the opportunity to be educated. The online awareness-raising campaign messages have been shared with over 200 parents, and there are discussions set around these messages. There are 20 learning centres that are being run during the pandemic to engage children, specifically girls, in education, aiming to reduce school dropout.

In rural areas of Cambodia, where children did not have access to proper education during the COVID-19 pandemic, Plan International Cambodia, its partner organisation Wathnakpheap (WP), and the Provincial Department of Education, Youth and Sport distributed educational materials and personal protective equipment to the parents of preschool children in 2020.¹⁴⁵ Parents in these locations largely stepped up and supported their children to learn when schools were closed temporarily. This was highly necessary for the development, learning and stimulation of the children.

USEFUL TIPS



- ▶ Ensure that boarding options are provided for those who live far from the school or that safe and convenient transportation services are provided for those who live at a distance from school or who have travel restrictions imposed by caregivers.
- ▶ Consider the use of additional cash transfer programming during the enforcement of COVID-19 restrictions that are preventing parents and girls from being able to work; at a minimum, ensure the continuation of their existing level of financial assistance and aid.
- ▶ Both individual counselling and group social activities need to be provided to girls, and these need to be linked to other services such as vocational or employment services, or made available through school counsellors when girls return to the classroom.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



- ▶ Resources to help during COVID-19: Impact on girls in South Asia (Girls Not Brides, 2020)
- ▶ Breaking the Chain: Empowering girls and communities to end child marriages during COVID-19 and beyond (World Vision, 2021)
- ▶ Averting Child Marriage during COVID-19: A Factsheet and Action Plan (Aangan, Protecting Vulnerable Children, 2021)
- ▶ Bangladesh: COVID-19 knowledge, attitudes, practices & needs. Responses from three rounds of data collection among adolescent girls in districts with high rates of child marriage (Population Council, 2020)
- ▶ Global girlhood report 2020: How COVID-19 is putting progress in peril (Save The Children, 2020)

ADD YOUR OWN NOTES, IDEAS AND GOOD PRACTICE HERE



4. INTERVENTION CLUSTER D

ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT



Given that one of the most significant drivers of CEFMU, in all settings, is poverty, strategic interventions addressing economic empowerment are crucial. It is well known that socio-economic conditions often drive families to marry off their daughters in order to obtain a dowry, or to simply reduce the number of dependents within the household. Moreover, the practice is driven, and perpetuated, by cycles of poverty, with 54 per cent of girls from the most economically disadvantaged families being married off before they turn 18 years old, compared to 16 per cent from the wealthiest families.¹⁴⁷

Moreover, data shows that girls living in poorer, rural areas are more likely to be married off when they are young than their peers from wealthier, urban settings.¹⁴⁸ Across the Asia-Pacific region, economic scarcity and the pressures this places on families to marry off their daughters early are, thus, common root causes of CEFMU, especially when payments are exchanged between families. In order to address this challenge, it is essential to implement economic empowerment activities as part of your CEFMU programming strategies.

KEY STAKEHOLDERS TO CONSIDER IN INTERVENTION CLUSTER D

While there is a range of actors who need to be involved in our efforts to address CEFMU, the following stakeholders are considered the main protagonists, with the highest potential and powers to bring about lasting, positive change:

- Education institutions (including formal schools and vocational training centres)
- Girls and young women, including girls and young women who are married, wherever possible and safe
- Decision-makers
- Policy-makers
- Parents
- Media outlets
- Men and boys
- CSOs

4.1 SKILLS TRAINING FOR GIRLS FOR ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT AND LIVELIHOOD OPPORTUNITIES FOR FAMILIES



ABOUT THE INTERVENTION

The empowerment of girls at-risk, and those who are already married, needs to include a strong emphasis on activities that support girls' financial independence and livelihood and entrepreneurship skills, so as to counter any perceptions within their families that they would constitute a 'burden'. To this end, it is important to make the girls and young women realise the importance of having career aspirations and make them aware of their own capabilities and strengths.

As such, barriers to accessing education, economic opportunities, and livelihoods must be addressed and women and girls must be empowered to exercise agency over their own lives. Moreover, economic empowerment has proven to provide parents with a strong incentive to keep their daughters in school, and to opt out of having their daughters marrying early and against their will. In line with a gender-transformative approach to CEFMU programming, efforts aimed at strengthening girls' and young women's agency is, indeed, imperative, as mentioned in a previous section.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS



Some considerations while designing strategies for integrating child marriage responses on economic empowerment include:¹⁴⁹

- Integrate life skills, vocational education, career guidance, skills-building relevant to entrepreneurship, and different forms of training in schools. Provide other out-of-school alternatives for girls in the community who are not attending school.
- Look for add-ons in schools that can help increase financial and digital literacy, knowledge on savings, insurance, and loan schemes/programmes. As above, also provide alternatives for girls who are out of school.
- Provide facilities and opportunities for job-related networking and job placements.
- Include campaigns and community mobilisation stressing the importance of investing in girls.
- Provide access to subsidised loans/access to resources and information on such services to set up enterprises.
- Engaging men and boys is key in creating enabling environments for empowering girls. Therefore, there is a need to sensitise men and boys, especially fathers and brothers, on the need for girls' skills training for their income generation and economic empowerment.



PROMISING PRACTICE EXAMPLES



Plan International India's project **'Empowering girls through education & pre-vocational and vocational skill building'**, looks at providing financial literacy training and vocational skills for enterprise development. As mentioned above, this project is currently in its initial phase with 495 girls enrolled across 10 learning centres in the target area.

'Girls ready for future', implemented by Plan Viet Nam, aims to enable the realisation of social and economic rights in a gender responsive and safe environment. The activities implemented to achieve this specific goal include the provision of seed grants, dissemination of information about the labour market, and the use of evidence for adoption of economic participation standards and policies.



USEFUL TIPS



- ▶ There are many ways in which economic empowerment can bring positive change to families, and the impact varies in each family, based on the different cultural settings and circumstances. It is helpful to keep track of stories of progress and success in order to document emerging promising practice.
- ▶ Girl-centred programming can redress injustice and also empower girls to be agents of change.¹⁵⁰
- ▶ Pay attention to issues closely linked to poverty and economic empowerment and invest efforts to change attitudes towards those issues. Dowry for example, is a financial burden and concern; an interconnected factor that could perpetuate child marriage.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



- ▶ [Adolescent Girl Initiative: resource guide](#) (Girls Not Brides, 2008)
- ▶ [State Strategy and Action Plan for Prevention of Child Marriage](#) (Girls Not Brides, 2017)
- ▶ [Economic Impacts of Child Marriage: Global Synthesis Report](#) (The World Bank, 2017)

ADD YOUR OWN NOTES, IDEAS AND GOOD PRACTICE HERE



5. INTERVENTION CLUSTER E



GIRLS' EMPOWERMENT, LEADERSHIP AND ACTIVISM

As highlighted earlier in this toolkit, the various key root causes and drivers of CEFMU are often closely interlinked and overlapping, and the harmful consequences multifaceted, which means that solutions to end the practice need to be holistic and multi-layered.

The detrimental impact CEFMU has on girls' overall wellbeing, and on their social and civic

participation and engagement can be addressed by incorporating interventions that enhance the social empowerment of girls in society. Below, you will find some suggested interventions to consider to contribute to girls' empowerment, leadership and activism.

KEY STAKEHOLDERS TO CONSIDER IN INTERVENTION CLUSTER E

While there is a range of actors who need to be involved in our efforts to address CEFMU, the following stakeholders are considered the main protagonists with the highest potential and powers to bring about lasting, positive change:

- Young boys and girls
- Parents
- Men and boys
- Teachers
- Youth leaders
- Community leaders, including traditional and religious leaders
- Healthcare providers
- Frontline workers
- Policy makers
- Media outlets and journalists
- Women's rights organisations
- CSOs
- Girls and young women who are married, wherever possible and safe to do so

5.1 GIRL-LED YOUTH ACTIVISM, YOUTH FORUMS, AND GIRL-FRIENDLY ACTION PLANS IN SCHOOLS



ABOUT THE INTERVENTION

A crucial aspect for the success of CEFMU interventions is the involvement of youth and in particular girls, who are the most affected by this issue. Girl-led youth activism in different forms is an integral element of CEFMU interventions. Advocacy by girls and women can touch upon key concerns related to the norms, attitudes and behaviours that affect girls' autonomy and voice, including gender-based violence and discrimination. Such advocacy can also constitute important opportunities for girls to develop and display leadership skills.

In addition, the establishment of youth clubs in and outside of school settings are important elements to consider as part of your CEFMU intervention strategy. In such clubs, girls and boys, and young women and men can get together and engage in capacity-building activities, while also stimulating discussions and devising action plans around topics such as gender equality, SRHR, protection from violence, gender-based violence, bodily rights, self-determination and decision-making for themselves, and creation of safe spaces for girls.¹⁵¹ Another area of focus should be on building girl-friendly action plans in schools, which can help build the necessary environments, infrastructures and reporting mechanisms for CEFMU.



KEY CONSIDERATIONS

There are some successful strategies that can be taken as reference to implement interventions that involve empowering young people and girls in particular.¹⁵²

- Identify or support the emerging roles that young people self-define. For instance, some girls may want to take up the role of educators; or leaders engaged in changing negative social and gender norms; or citizens with status, striving to reduce inequality and social differences within their broader and intergenerational social networks.¹⁵³
- Girl-led youth engagement offers girls opportunities to contribute to positive changes in their communities. It allows them to be positive change-agents in their own lives.
- Youth engagement involving girls contributes to girls' personal development and leads them to feeling more empowered, motivated and ready to speak out.¹⁵⁴
- Need to create opportunities for women and girl activists to engage in periodic intergenerational dialogues on CEFMU, including with community elders, traditional and religious leaders, and other key decision makers. Facilitate girl-led youth engagement in policy-making mechanisms at sub-national, national and regional levels with defined and agreed follow-up actions. Facilitate direct engagement of relevant CEFMU youth networks with international treaty monitoring bodies, including by providing training opportunities on the most recent alternative reporting procedures.¹⁵⁵
- Working with local women's organisations: Identify and work in partnership with local women's organisations as they are mostly trusted within the community, and are well aware of different groups of women in the target area. They can also engage the various groups in constructive dialogue on the issue of child, early and forced marriage as well as different forms of unions.
- Recognise the role that girls play within activism and in feminist groups while advocating against CEFMU. Leadership in such groups can be a huge boost to the self-belief and confidence of young girls, empowering them to strive for their own life plans.



PROMISING PRACTICE EXAMPLES

A strong example of this strategy is exhibited in the **‘Real Assets through Improved Skills and Education (RAISE) for Adolescent Girls’** project implemented by Plan International in the Philippines from 2014-2017. The project employed a dual strategy of reducing barriers, such as household poverty, gender discrimination and labour-related constraints; and building key social, personal and material assets for adolescent girls through quality formal and alternative education opportunities. The project aimed to ensure that marginalised adolescents (aged 12-19 years), especially girls, developed social and personal assets, and were supported by their communities to make positive life choices.¹⁵⁶

Additionally, Plan Lao PDR has formed student clubs in schools that impart knowledge on the importance of education, SRHR and behaviour traits to adolescent boys and girls. One highlight of this initiative is that it is designed according to the needs of the end users and ensures that their feedback is taken while designing new interventions.¹⁵⁷

USEFUL TIPS



- ▶ Girl-led advocacy can increase girls’ and young women’s capacities and skills for effective engagement and opportunities to contribute to positive changes in their communities, and allows them to be positive agents for change in their lives.
- ▶ Provide a deeper understanding of girls’ and young women’s human rights so they are more likely to voice their concerns and problems, and to make more informed choices.
- ▶ To ensure sustainability of girls’ activism, it is important to identify sources of funding and network with potential donors.
- ▶ Partnerships between NGOs and national governments are another important aspect to facilitate opportunities for girls’ leadership in youth activism. For example, Plan International and the Honiara City Council in the Solomon Islands have been working together to promote gender equality and provide safe spaces for girls to participate in training on various topics, including gender equality, prevention of sexual harassment, and sexual and reproductive health.¹⁵⁸
- ▶ Advocate with governments to invest in adolescent girls’ frameworks and provide supportive frameworks for youth leadership and activism, as well as mechanisms for girls and young women to hold them accountable for gender transformation and social inclusion.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



- ▶ Youth in Action: Leading the movement to end child marriage in East Africa (Girls Not Brides, 2021)
- ▶ Children’s Participation In Ending Child Marriage: Exploring Child Activism In Bangladesh (World Vision, 2019)
- ▶ Their Time is Now – Time to Act (Plan International, 2019)
- ▶ ‘Stand up Speak Out, Girls Not Brides. GNB_Trainer_Manual.pdf (girlsnotbrides.org)

ADD YOUR OWN NOTES, IDEAS AND GOOD PRACTICE HERE



5.2 AWARENESS RAISING ON GENDER EQUALITY, AND SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS FOR GIRLS AND BOYS ENROLLED IN SCHOOLS, AND OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS



ABOUT THE INTERVENTION

One of the key initial steps to preventing and reducing CEFMU is empowering and equipping girls and boys with information on SRHR to strengthen their knowledge, attitudes and confidence. The topics include existing gender and power structures, relationships, issues of consent, sexual and reproductive health rights, discriminatory and harmful practices including CEFMU and unequal power relations in society, that start from family and community. This will enable both girls and boys to make informed choices, translate their newly acquired knowledge into practice, and take the lead on encouraging change in behaviour and attitudes on gender.

An effective way to do this could be by including comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) in the school curriculum as a mandatory subject and in out-of-school activities. This is likely to initiate open discussions around the issue, following which, parents, teachers and the support staff can impart knowledge on the same and encourage young people to raise awareness around these topics among their peers. It is crucial to empower and equip adolescent girls and boys with the knowledge and confidence to make informed decisions about their bodies, lives and futures, effectively engaging with them, understanding their perspectives and empowering them to support positive behaviour change in their communities. By doing so, it can be ensured that adolescents have access to appropriate, accurate and non-judgmental information on sexual and reproductive health and rights, services, and gender inequalities, and harmful power dynamics in society, which will allow them to take the lead on sharing this with their peers too. This is a very important intervention, as it lays the groundwork and leads to girls and boys shaping their own ideas and solutions to counter the harmful negative practices and trends affecting them.



KEY CONSIDERATIONS

- As a part of efforts to prevent CEFMU and limit voluntary unions, it is crucial to place due emphasis on building knowledge and awareness of CEFMU among girls and boys, and empower them to understand the adverse consequences of child marriage, informal unions and adolescent pregnancy on their physical and mental health, and overall development.¹⁵⁹ In addition, educating young boys and girls on SRHR and gender equality builds their confidence to make informed decisions regarding their own bodies and health, and become active agents for positive change themselves.
- Education on gender equality, and sexual and reproductive health and rights, together with information on their rights and responsibilities, can help girls achieve the necessary self-esteem and confidence to decide whom and when to marry, and engage in intergenerational dialogues with adult decision-makers in their families and communities on life choices for their future.
- Respond to the limited discussion on sexuality in the broader discourse on child, early and forced marriage and unions by integrating issues such as consent, relationships, safe and pleasurable sex.
- Certain communities may require the provision of locally managed safety net funds to support girls and boys from vulnerable groups to attend school.¹⁶⁰

- For out-of-school adolescents, mainstreaming of SRHR and GE education is necessary in community resource centres and/or religious schools, and can be done through pamphlets, banners, stickers, posters, story books, videos, jingles, drama clubs, or other methodologies that children and young people respond to.
- Appropriately trained health care providers, teachers and other community-based frontline workers could impart comprehensive sexuality and health education and how to address harmful practices among adolescents.¹⁶¹
- Fostering partnerships with youth leaders in the respective areas, who can gather the out-of-school youths in local clubs to educate them on gender equality and conduct discussions around sexual and reproductive health and other issues related to CEFMU.¹⁶²
- Work with teachers, parents, community leaders and policy makers at the local level to reach out to the out-of-school youths extensively.

PROMISING PRACTICE EXAMPLES



Plan International Cambodia's project '**Reduction of Early Child Marriage and Adolescent Pregnancy for Indigenous Young Women in Ratanakiri province**' aimed to contribute to the reduction of CEFMU and early pregnancy among indigenous adolescent girls and young women in hard-to-reach areas. Towards the end of the project, improved knowledge was recorded among health centre staff, the Commune Committee for Women and Children (CCWC) and members and the District Council for Women and Children (DCWC). Improvements were also made in relation to adolescent sexual and reproductive health (ASRH) and on technical use of the facilitation manual, and information, education and communication (IEC) material in order to conduct awareness-raising activities with adolescent and youth groups in and out of school. From this, 201 youths (out of whom 111 were girls) had increased knowledge on SRH, as well as on to SRH services and contraception for adolescents and youth, and 136 parents with adolescent children obtained knowledge on ASRH rights and gender inequality.

USEFUL TIPS



- Involve family elders, peers and health care staff in spreading awareness on gender equality and SRHR knowledge.
- More programmes should address sexual and reproductive health and rights, including sexual orientation and gender identity, taking a thorough and nuanced approach to understanding consent, as well as adolescent girls' choice, desire and pleasure.
- Peer educators can expand the reach of education on sexual and reproductive health to young people out of school.
- Involve young people in aspects such as research to build the evidence base for CEFMU. programmes, development of outreach materials, media and community education campaigns, and advocacy work with policy makers to give them a comprehensive view of gender equality and SRHR issues.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



- Community experiences with a school-based intervention to delay marriage among girls in Oromia Region, Ethiopia (University of California San Diego, Center on Gender Equality and Health)
- Child marriage, adolescent pregnancy and school dropout in South Asia (UNICEF, 2019)
- Recommendations for action against Child and forced marriages (OHCHR, 2017)
- Ending Child Marriage: What will it take? (Girls Not Brides, 2013)
- Putting the C in CSE: Standards for content, delivery and environment for comprehensive sexuality education (Plan International, 2020)

ADD YOUR OWN NOTES, IDEAS AND GOOD PRACTICE HERE



5.3 EMPOWERING GIRLS TO LEAD



ABOUT THE INTERVENTION

Women and girls are often the first voices and activists to stand up for their rights, and to bring about positive change. Girls around the world are leading and driving change, and are activists and advocates on the frontlines of movements for social equality. Across the Asia-Pacific region, numerous girls-led groups and initiatives conduct innovative actions and campaigns on reaching gender equality.

Some of these groups also focus more specifically on the prevention and eradication of CEFMU. Across the Asia-Pacific region, girls and young women have raised their voices and have participated in activism for gender equality, and such efforts have been rewarding, in a sense that they have proven successful in changing discriminatory attitudes and beliefs related to gender. Such efforts have also included digital activism by young women and girls in creating safe and inclusive digital spaces.¹⁶³



KEY CONSIDERATIONS

To spur real change, government and other relevant stakeholders must not just encourage activism in the public sphere, rather, they must also work to ensure that there is an enabling environment where girls and young women can demonstrate leadership potential; such as giving open and equal spaces for them to exercise their rights and freedom of expression including peaceful assembly and association; and equal representation in all activities that affect them.¹⁶⁴

Despite women's and girls' incredible potential to act as agents of change, they still face numerous and significant barriers and challenges. To enable effective participation of women in decision-making and to achieve complete empowerment, it is essential to take into consideration these pointers while designing an intervention:

- Map out, analyse and assess challenges that girls might face while engaging with key decision-makers claiming their rights.
- Provide a safe and enabling environment conducive to girls' activism with key stakeholders extending support.
- Initiate and enhance collaboration with like-minded CSOs, and existing feminist and women's rights' movements and networks.
- Engage girls in leading information sharing and peer support through social media platforms.¹⁶⁵
- Promote full engagement of women through use of existing spaces to ensure that women are supported, and assisted to utilise existing platforms or forums through which women interact such as self-help and care-groups, and community-level committees. Full participation is vital in ensuring ownership.¹⁶⁶
- Build capacity of girls and young women in order to encourage them to lead change in their families and communities.
- Recognise the need to include boys and men in the discussions to change gender norms.
- Consider mobilising in groups with collective identities and providing mutual support (including using social media, educational platforms and materials).



PROMISING PRACTICE EXAMPLES

In Indonesia, Plan International's **'Youth Economic Empowerment Programme'** economically empowers young women through farming. The project provides training to young women to help them establish farming groups and cultivate fruits and vegetables to be sold in both traditional markets and modern supermarkets, and has benefited 3,000 young women since its inception in 2013.¹⁶⁷

More examples include local women's networks in Nepal that challenge growing threats of violence and trafficking through the provision of hotlines and safe spaces since the earthquake in 2015,¹⁶⁸ and the actions of women's groups in India and Vanuatu the help to mobilise communities and raise awareness about the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁶⁹

Additionally, Plan International's **'Champions of Change'** programme aims to advance gender equality by engaging girls in a process of leadership and empowerment, and by working with men and boys to challenge the dominant masculinities and support girls' empowerment.

Plan International's **'Saksham'** project in India is empowering girls and young women by providing them with vocational skills. With girls making up at least 60 per cent of the participants, the project is equipping these girls with the skills they need to secure decent work, which is essential to help them escape poverty and reach their potential.¹⁷⁰

Other examples include inviting young women and activists to speak at national assemblies and workshops, and share their perspectives on relevant issues. For example, Vietnamese youth were invited to speak at the national assembly and share their perspectives on issues related to girls' rights.

USEFUL TIPS



- Respect girls' and women's ability to find solutions to problems.
- Acknowledge their contribution to family and community advancement.
- Increase efforts to widen girls' participation by making sure that they are included in community dialogues and decision-making, and that girls' voices are heard and acted upon.
- Increase the opportunities for adolescent boys and girls to work together to advance gender and social change, and support the strengthening of their networks.
- Design certain spaces exclusively for girls and women since some of them might not be comfortable sharing their opinions in the presence of men and boys.¹⁷¹
- Encourage women to support and lead campaigns on early and child marriage, domestic violence, education and economic empowerment of women.
- Ensure a positive approach and a belief in the value of young women and girls.
- Consider a rights-based approach.
- Support solidarity among diverse groups, including intergenerational.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



- An Advocacy Toolkit: The Education We Want (Plan International, 2014)
- More Power To Her: How Empowering Girls Can End Child Marriage (ICRW, 2014)
- Diverse and Empowered Girls: A practical guide for girl activists (Plan International, 2020)
- Unlock the power of girls now: Why gender equality is the social and political issue of our time? (Plan International, 2017)
- Girls' choice and voice in child marriage decision-making: Uncovering the critical issues (More Than Brides Alliances, 2021)
- What if girls decide that their marriage is a good choice? 5 tips for practitioners in addressing girls' agency in child marriage programmes (More Than Brides Alliance, 2021)

ADD YOUR OWN NOTES, IDEAS AND GOOD PRACTICE HERE



SPOTLIGHT: GIRL-LED YOUTH ENGAGEMENT



In line with some of the core principles outlined above, we're now going to zoom in on the issue of girl-led youth engagement – an aspect of crucial importance for any CEFMU intervention strategy!

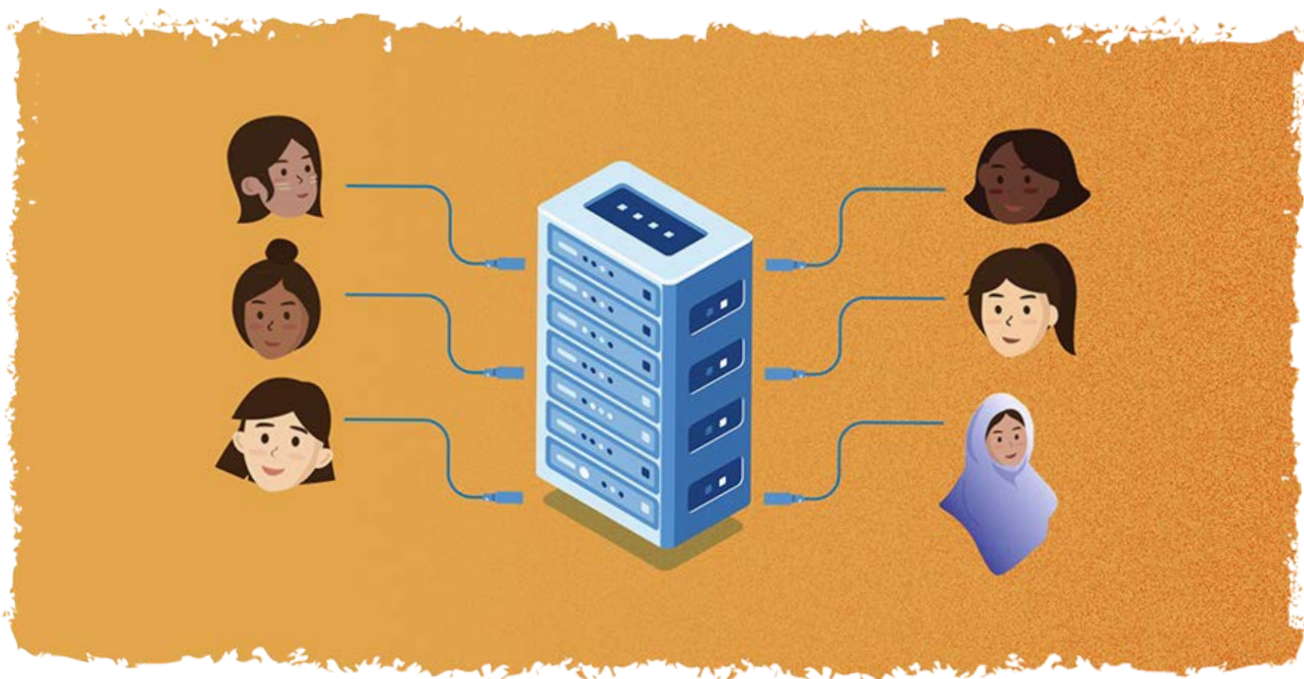
To bring about lasting and transformational change, it is very important that girls and young people are involved in your work from the start – and that this continues throughout all stages of your project or programme intervention. If we fail to involve girls and young people, we risk ending up with ineffective project strategies where resources are not spent wisely in ways that will bring about impact. It can also lead to the implementation of unsafe or inadequate types of activities. When we do engage girls and young people, we have a better chance at developing well informed and carefully designed projects.

By involving girls and youth from the very beginning, you offer them an opportunity to be part of the positive changes taking place in their communities – they can act as active change agents who generate positive changes in their own lives. Young engagement also contributes to girls' personal development and can contribute to their skills, empowerment and motivation to stand up for their rights and speak out.

That said, we need to be cautious not to end up with just a 'box-ticking' exercise. Girl-led youth engagement needs to be meaningful. Here are a few tips to make sure your girls and youth participation is meaningful:

- Adopt robust and comprehensive organisational standards for meaningful and ethical participation and involvement of young people and particularly girls, complemented with a clear, simple and measurable set of indicators and monitoring mechanisms to be consistently used in assessing the levels, quality and effectiveness of youth involvement. Externally, engage in advocacy and influence with national governments and regional bodies for adoption of policies on mandatory youth participation and engagement in matters affecting their development.
- Involve young people consistently and regularly in the design of CEFMU-focused interventions by soliciting their suggestions, ideas and solutions, and including them throughout the implementation cycle, starting with the planning stage. Consider facilitating girl-led youth engagement in monitoring the implementation of existing CEFMU-related action plans, including by clarifying data requirements and jointly defining data collection methods. Furthermore, consistent efforts need to be made to translate youth ideas and solutions into concrete actions, while taking into consideration the support required and ensuring safeguarding measures with appropriate risk analysis.
- Ensure that youth groups currently implementing CEFMU-related project activities develop their own authentic vision concerning the future configuration of their groups, including defining the types and modalities of their engagement beyond the project timeframes. Support cross-generational transfer of knowledge upon the formation of new groups or admission of new members by including 'graduate members' in the orientation phase in order to highlight strengths, limitations, risks and opportunities for engaging in advocacy activities in local contexts and at different levels. Moreover, support youth groups in the preparation of specific strategies to increase sustainability and develop modalities for assessing progress towards meeting higher levels of engagement.

- Promote efforts to include and involve young people from marginalised groups, including children and young people with disabilities, in youth clubs and forums, while ensuring enabling environments by adjusting operational requirements for training and other activities to their specific needs. Create regular opportunities for marginalised and excluded youth to share their perspectives, and influence solutions and intervention frameworks.
- Develop youth-sensitive and user-friendly resource materials for CEFMU awareness-raising activities and campaigns by utilising tools designed in cooperation with young people, tailored to the specific needs of young women and young men, and by providing practical guidance and examples. This includes support to the organisation of training modules aimed at building skills selected on the basis of learning needs identified by members of youth groups, including skills on advocacy, budget monitoring, digital applications, engaging with media, fundraising, monitoring and evaluation, negotiation, and public presentation.
- Strengthen existing youth groups and alliances, and facilitate the creation of new groups to widen the space for advocacy on clearly identified issues. Consider investing in existing youth partners, both individuals and groups, with capacities that were built during previous programmes and that have evolved into effective mobilisers and advocates. Moreover, promote the regular exchange of practices and joint advocacy between similar platforms active in different Asia-Pacific countries. Consider working with both registered and unregistered youth organisations, and consider addressing existing limitations in the normative/policy frameworks governing civil society in policy dialogues with governments and bilateral and multilateral donors.
- Secure additional investments in youth-led innovations and solutions, including by creating digital platforms for monitoring CEFMU incidence and providing young people with adequate opportunities for incubating ideas, creating approaches and experimenting with innovative techniques.



6. INTERVENTION CLUSTER F



PROTECTION FROM VIOLENCE

As a key consequence of CEFMU in many countries in Asia Pacific, far too many girls experience different forms of gender-based violence, including physical and sexual violence by their husbands once married. In many contexts, this has tragically increased during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Reducing and preventing CEFMU requires the upholding of human rights to avoid a further perpetuation of any kind of discrimination, abuse, violence, neglect or exploitation towards girls and women. Therefore, it is crucial to consider incorporating interventions relating to

protection from violence as part of your CEFMU programming intervention. In this section, you will find a number of suggested interventions to choose from as you tailor your programme strategy.

KEY STAKEHOLDERS TO CONSIDER IN INTERVENTION CLUSTER F

While there is a range of actors who need to be involved in our efforts to address CEFMU, the following stakeholders are considered the main protagonists with the highest potential and powers to bring about lasting, positive change:

- Parents
- Men and boys
- CSOs
- Healthcare workers
- Police
- Law enforcement officials
- Community leaders, including traditional and religious leaders
- Match-makers
- Marriage registrars
- Child protection committees
- Media outlets and journalists
- Girls and young women who are married, wherever possible and safe to do so

6.1 PROTECTION AND LEGAL SERVICES FOR GIRLS AND WOMEN AGAINST GBV, CHILD MARRIAGE



ABOUT THE INTERVENTION

There are several key issues to consider when it comes to CEFMU and protecting children from violence and the gender dynamics that drive these. Since the outbreak of COVID-19, there has been a dramatic increase in incidence of violence against women and girls. Lockdowns have also meant that some women and girls have been unable to access essential and life-saving services and critical information. Child marriage is a form of GBV and its risk is exacerbated through its manifestation. GBV is also connected with voluntary unions, unintended pregnancy, poor mental health and low SRHR outcomes among other connected risks. Girls often fall through gaps of ill-functioning child protection and GBV systems and, therefore, it is essential that strengthening and investing in gender-transformative child protection systems is prioritised. Also, gender norms that condone the use of violence to carry out harmful practices, or control girls' sexuality must be challenged and changed.

Legal complexities, such as inadequate policies, weak and inconsistent enforcement, insufficient resources and plural legal systems (customary, traditional or religious), also play a significant roles in perpetuating CEFMU, and restricting the efforts to reduce and subsequently end child marriage.¹⁷² Therefore, there is an urgent need to address the issue of limited information and legal protection against child marriage by creating improved legal and policy frameworks, accompanied by improved public services and social 'safety nets'.¹⁷³ It is also necessary to ensure that legal aid is available to the girls and women affected by CEFMU and the availability of inclusive, child-friendly and gender-responsive services. Marriage laws should be amended to remove the legal obstacles faced by girls who seek the enforcement of national laws on child marriage prevention, prohibition or legal remedies; removing unreasonable legal requirements for formally ending a child marriage; and providing access to remedies for those who leave a marriage.¹⁷⁴

In addition to these, specific child protection interventions¹⁷⁵ are a critical part of a multi-sectoral approach to prevent child marriage and reduce voluntary unions, while also responding to the needs of affected children. Protection risks are greater in forced marriages potentially involving abduction, kidnapping and child trafficking, as the interventions must respond to all forms of violence and exploitation. Responses can include the identification of girls at risk and also help to prevent child marriage through child helplines; the provision of comprehensive services to girls who are married, pregnant or mothers such as safety and protection, health and psycho-social care, education, economic support and justice. Child protection interventions can include setting up of child protection systems with complaints and reporting mechanisms, child protection services, and information systems; enhancing access to quality education, SRHR and to mental health services; and promoting and advancing economic security through social protection, livelihood support and youth employment.



KEY CONSIDERATIONS



- Child protection systems must be uniquely adapted to their respective contexts, and given the multidimensional nature of child protection, they should be multi-sectoral.
- When working to ensure robust child protection mechanisms and systems, a gender-transformative child protection should be sought. Such an approach seeks to challenge gender dynamics, and actively confronts gender norms and unequal gender relations that drive violence against children and hinder effective response systems.
- A system strengthening approach that emphasises prevention, protection and response, coordination between sectors, and promotes evidence-based influencing strategies for child protection, SRHR, participation, justice and gender equality is critical.
- Need to work with children's clubs and networks, as well as the communities and local authorities, to establish effective referrals and reporting mechanisms in case of child rights violations.
- Ensure that children are protected from all forms of violence, abuse, exploitation, neglect and harm, including CEFMU.
- Support national child protection systems to deliver timely, and age and gender-appropriate services to children and their families.
- A comprehensive and integrated child protection system should include local government, social services, police, judiciary, the community and family, all of whom act in both prevention and response.
- Address barriers in the availability of and access to child protection services, especially related to children and adolescents, including excluded and marginalised groups.¹⁷⁶
- An effective CEFMU law should also encompass legal remedies and redress for victims of CEFMU. Where there is a customary or religious adjudication mechanism, this should not preclude the victim from accessing the formal justice system.¹⁷⁷



PREVENTION

- Children and young people play a role in their own protection too. Providing age-appropriate information and skills development can empower them to recognise protection risks, build coping skills and adopt behaviours that can help keep them safe. For example, Sticks and Stones is a training manual for facilitators on how to increase and encourage the involvement of children in their own protection. The manual primarily aims to help fieldworkers working with children to help increase their capacities to be involved more in their own protection by being better equipped and placed to protect themselves as well as their peers.¹⁷⁸

○ Awareness raising of risks

- What is GBV (including the different types such as physical, sexual, emotional) and what are its impacts?
- What legal and protective provisions related to GBV are available?
- What services and mechanisms are available for reporting violence, making referrals, providing psycho-social support, and ensuring rehabilitation? (Plan International published a guide to help understand reporting concerns about violence and abuse, and to know the process of reporting thereafter.¹⁷⁹)

- Your intervention may include advocacy for and with children and young people (including children of excluded or marginalised groups) to be meaningfully engaged in community-based child protection mechanisms and committees. Children should be consulted about their own needs and perspectives. As highlighted in the previous section about gender-transformative approaches, responding to the needs and interests of girls and boys, in all of their diversity, is a key element of a gender-transformative approach to CEFMU programming.
- Strengthening child protection mechanisms/committees – including at the community level and in schools by building capacity, raising awareness and supporting reporting and referrals.
- Are there services/campaigns to tackle harmful norms? In order to tackle norms and behaviours, the root causes of GBV, including stereotypical gendered social norms, must be addressed.
- Access to CSE and SRHR information and services are also important to include.
- Roles of the community and family-supportive child protection services should target families and communities to build their knowledge and skills to better protect children, including from CEFMU-related risks.
- Community mobilisation and engagement includes ensuring that the resources of the community are properly utilised, and it also promotes buy-in, sustainability and accountability for the project.
- Are there laws that should be reformed and harmonised with international human rights and child rights standards, for example, laws that allow or tolerate marital rape or marriage to a perpetrator?



RESPONSE

- What child protection services are available, for example: helplines, counselling platforms, safe shelters, access to healthcare information? Where are they located (in cities or rural areas), and how can they be accessed?
- Are existing services trusted/relied upon by women and girls?
- Are there women-to-women only services? If there are none, does that act as a barrier to women and girls accessing services?
- How is the child protection system accountable for implementing existing child marriage policies? Is there regular reporting or performance reviews?¹⁸⁰
- Are child protection professionals trained on gender equality, human rights and CEFMU?
- Lack of transparency can often be an issue – how are child protection resources spent and who decides how resources are spent?
- Are there established and strong gender- and child-sensitive reporting and referral mechanisms? (The guide ‘Speak out, be protected!’ reporting all forms of violence against children, defines reporting mechanisms and spells out ways to engage with such mechanisms, including a brief about their setups. For example, it lays down some key factors that need to be considered while running a reporting mechanism. These include, among other things, the accessibility to all children and adults; reporting that should ensure the safety of everyone, in the sense that it does not place the child or the family in any further danger and information is kept private; and ensure that help reaches where it is needed quickly and properly once reporting is complete; and finally the mechanism should be clear on responsibilities¹⁸¹). Are these being monitored by the Government to allow for improvements to be made?
- Are there effective means to seek justice for redress that are accessible by girls and women who have been married, divorced or widowed? Is there a need for public awareness around the right of the victim to report and access child-friendly and gender-sensitive mechanisms?





PROMISING PRACTICE EXAMPLES

The **'New Generation'** project by Plan Cambodia, formed Village-Based Child Protection Mechanisms (VCBCPMs) and Commune Based Child Protection Mechanisms (CBCPMs) which involved and interacted with the village and commune leaders, and built their capacities on child rights, child protection, gender-based violence, CEFMU and positive parenting. The project formed VCBCPMs in 109 villages with 1,635 members, and CBCPMs in 15 communes with 630 members. These members were successful in ensuring timely interventions in 36 out of 129 cases reported regarding school dropout, CEFMU, child labour, or gender-based violence against children, youth or women.

Plan Timor-Leste's project **'Saying No to Gender-Based Violence'** aimed to create an enabling environment for girls to access their rights to be free from GBV. Men and boys were engaged to learn about gender equality and girls' rights, and the project has contributed to ending violence against children and to protecting the rights of children, particularly girls.

Plan International Bangladesh's project **'Building Better Future for Girls'** supports a district action plan to end child marriage in Kurigram. The expected outcomes include strengthening district- and local-level child protection systems to address and respond to child rights violations (especially child marriage and birth registration) to protect girls from child marriage and other harmful gender norms and practices, increase community value for girl children, challenge gender stereotypes, and take action to stop child marriage. A child marriage tracking system was put in place, and monthly reports are shared with the district administration, whilst religious leaders and matchmakers have been trained to work to prevent child marriage, and local media and community radio stations are being utilised to develop awareness on child marriage and popularising national helpline numbers.

Another good example is the **'Missing Child Alert'** (MCA), a cross border project of Plan International, which responds to the issue of child trafficking and its close link with the intrinsic issue of 'missing and trafficked children' in South Asia. Led by Plan India, Plan International Bangladesh and Plan International Nepal, in coordination with South Asia Initiative to End Violence against Children (SAIEVAC), this project aims to improve cooperation between families, communities, law enforcement officials, governments and service providers to strengthen the national and regional systems that help to reduce the number of missing and trafficking cases of children. The project has formed and strengthened Community Vigilance Groups (CVGs) as protection mechanisms against child trafficking, and has also worked closely with selected Anti-Human Trafficking Units.¹⁸² This provides a very interesting model to also adopt in the context of protection mechanisms relating to CEFMU.



USEFUL TIPS



- ▶ Strengthen collaborative efforts among child protection partners at all levels (school, community, district) to ensure that there is an effective referral and follow-up process. Potential partners to explore working with include the local authorities, Ministry of Social Welfare, Ministry of Education, Child Protection Units, community social workers, NGO, faith-based organisations, and community and parents' groups.
- ▶ Continue to work with the health and protection sectors to sustain quality and access to services for survivors of GBV, including reproductive health, clinical management of rape, mental health and health, and psycho-social support.¹⁸³
- ▶ Ensure there is accurate and efficient reporting to document progress and challenges – documenting this will assist in advocacy efforts.
- ▶ Where there is poverty or a lack of community-based services, the risk of violence against children, and girls in particular, also often increases.¹⁸⁴ Therefore, you may want to consider lobbying for cash transfers to vulnerable families, particularly female-headed households to improve health, protection and wellbeing.¹⁸⁵
- ▶ Consider a mix of offline and online modalities for awareness raising.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



- ▶ Strengthening Child Protection Systems, (Save the Children, 2019)
- ▶ Gender-transformative Child Protection: An Annotated Bibliography, (Plan International, 2018)
- ▶ Strengthening Child Protection Systems, (Save the Children, 2021)
- ▶ UNICEF's Engagements in Influencing Domestic Public Finance for Children (PF4C) A Global Programme Framework, (UNICEF, 2017)
- ▶ Speak out: Be protected! Your Guide to reporting all forms of violence against children. (Plan International, 2021)
- ▶ Sticks and Stones, A Training Manual for Facilitators on How to Increase the Involvement of Children in Their Own Protection. (Plan International, 2013)
- ▶ Gender-Transformative Child Protection: An Annotated Bibliography (Plan International, 2018)



ADD YOUR OWN NOTES, IDEAS AND GOOD PRACTICE HERE



6.2 STRENGTHENING EXISTING CHILD PROTECTION MECHANISMS, WITH A PARTICULAR FOCUS ON CEFMU PREVENTION AND ENSURING BIRTH REGISTRATION



ABOUT THE INTERVENTION

To reduce and eliminate CEFMU, there is a need to promote functional child protection systems that address sexual exploitation and GBV in the form of CEFMU, while also advocating for the registration of births for the purpose of age verification.

In order to achieve this, addressing CEFMU must be integrated within child protection and GBV responses, and identified as an issue within other humanitarian clusters, including education and health, to ensure a comprehensive and multi-sectoral response for both married and unmarried at-risk girls, their parents and their families.¹⁸⁶



KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Child protection interventions are a critical part of a multi-sectoral approach to eliminating and ending the practice of child marriage. While using this kind of an intervention, there are a few key considerations that can be kept in mind.¹⁸⁷

- Ensure that children and adolescents participate in child protection systems, research and programming.
- Render the existing reporting and referral mechanisms gender-responsive and child-sensitive.
- Ensure all interlinked systems and services are covered, including access to civil registration of births.
- Work towards strengthening the legal environment and increasing the capacity of marriage registrars.
- Include campaigns to sensitise parents about the need and importance of a birth certificate.



PROMISING PRACTICE EXAMPLES



The ‘**Child, Early and Forced Marriage Research**’ project conducted by Plan International Philippines promoted protection, education, sexual and reproductive health, economic empowerment, life skills and gender equality, with the participation of adolescent girls, to improve access to services at the local and national levels. The project conducted community mapping to determine the existing programmes and services delivered by national and local government structures to support, protect and respond to the needs of adolescent girls in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM).¹⁸⁸ Participatory group activities were conducted with adolescents aged 12-19, their parents or guardians, and other community gatekeepers (such as religious leaders, community leaders, teachers) to understand the strengths and limitations of the existing child protection system that cares for, supports and protects adolescent girls in each setting.

Plan India, with support from UNICEF, started the project ‘**Sambhav**’ in 2015. This is an adolescent empowerment programme aimed at reducing cases of child marriage and teenage pregnancy, and increasing secondary education in the state of Jharkhand, India. With equal participation of adolescent girls and boys as their allies in 942 villages, the scale and the gender-transformative impact of the project is unprecedented. It worked with 47,000 adolescents between the ages of 14–18 years by establishing a girls and boys adolescent group in each village. Sambhav also worked on forming and strengthening Child Protection Committees (CPCs) at the village and block levels, which worked to identify and address child protection issues in their regular meetings. Parents were oriented and mobilised on child rights issues. Intergenerational dialogues were established to spark conversations at Panchayat and block-level meetings that were pivotal in giving children the opportunity and support needed to voice their concerns. Through these measures, Sambhav and its youth champions prevented 40 child marriages in 6 months.¹⁸⁹

USEFUL TIPS



- Influence donor funding to strengthen multi-sectoral child protection systems and services.
- Compile evidence on what works in different contexts, and share good practices.
- Prevent and respond to abuse, violence and exploitation of children through child protection mechanisms, community dialogue and mobilisation, and social and behaviour change communication.
- Encourage working with national and local child protection actors and service providers to ensure that child protection mechanisms are more gender responsive and child friendly, while also ensuring that they promote social and gender norms change and the empowerment of adolescent girls and young women.¹⁹⁰
- Invest directly in civil registration systems to improve data collection, provide better proof of age and deter child marriages.
- Work with community and religious leaders to ensure that customary and religious laws, justice and mediation conform to international standards and do not violate children’s rights.
- Pay attention to barriers to registration in every context. Sometimes women, particularly single mothers, may not have the same access to registering the child’s birth as men.¹⁹¹

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



- Child Protection Learning Brief #3 (UNICEF, 2021)
- Child Protection And Child Marriage (Girls Not Brides, 2021)
- Safeguarding Children and Young People Report FY 2020 (Plan International)
- Summary Paper On Child, Early And Forced Marriages As A Form Of, Or Pathway To Sexual Exploitation Of Children (ECPAT International, 2020)
- OpenCRVS is a **digital public good** designed for those it serves to make civil registration easy. The functional documentation that could be accessed via <https://www.opencrvs.org> aims to tell you how OpenCRVS works for its users and how it can work for you. It includes an overview of the functional architecture and then explores each functional area along with videos to demonstrate this functionality in action. The examples you will see are Open CRVS as configured in Zambia and Bangladesh. To use OpenCRVS in your country, see [Configuration](#)

ADD YOUR OWN NOTES, IDEAS AND GOOD PRACTICE HERE



6.3 INCREASED USE OF NATIONAL CHILD HELPLINES FOR REPORTING SUSPECTED OR IMMINENT CASES OF CEFMU



ABOUT THE INTERVENTION

Helplines/hotlines are an important tool to detect cases of child, early and forced marriage and unions, and to initiate reporting and referral pathways to protection services. For the reporting of CEFMU cases, a national/regional child helpline is key to promoting a strong CEFMU tracking system and birth registration, so that immediate responses can be provided. An increase in using child helpline services can be promoted through the local media and community radio, which can popularise the national child helpline numbers for early detection and reporting of CEFMU-related issues. These child helplines can be effective in promoting the access of children at risk from CEFMU, or already married, to protection services. The ultimate efficiency will depend on joint and well-coordinated collaborative efforts by the police, law enforcement officers, marriage registrars, healthcare workers and community leaders as well as community members.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS



With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, more girls are exposed to the risk of child marriage, and some places have also reported an increase in child marriages. Hotlines are present in many countries that allow people to report child marriages. When hotlines are used in interventions to address CEFMU, these are a few considerations that can be kept in mind:¹⁹²

- During times of emergency like COVID-19, a percentage of calls might require reaching out and physically intervening with services including nutrition, shelter and medical assistance, as well as to prevent or protect from abuse, violence and exploitation such as abandonment, physical abuse, child labour, child marriage and so on.
- Anyone must be able to call the helpline, and there must be a response within a stipulated time.
- Think about the course of action from there – whether to let the rescued girl go back with her parents – or to counsel the parents thoroughly before letting them take the child back.
- Address issues in the background, like the relationship between the parents and children.
- Empower children and anyone witnessing child marriage to speak up.



PROMISING PRACTICE EXAMPLES



A very relevant example is the **'CHILDLINE 1098'**, a helpline number that spells hope for many children across India. The CHILDLINE India Foundation (CIF) is the nodal agency of the Union Ministry of Women and Child Development and is responsible for setting up, managing and monitoring the helpline service across the country. The agency is also responsible for allied research, training, documentation, awareness raising, advocacy and resource generation.¹⁹³

Similarly, the Bangladesh Government operates a national helpline '109' to prevent violence against women and children, and to act against child marriage and prevent sexual harassment. Initiated in June 2012, the helpline is maintained by the National Helpline Centre for Violence against Women and Children, and has received complaints against domestic violence, child marriage, sexual harassment, physical abuse, dowry, detention, child custody, and other forms of violence and abuse against women and children.¹⁹⁴

USEFUL TIPS



- ▶ Remember that laws differ from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, and therefore we should not rule out the possibility of a child in one jurisdiction being taken to another for child marriage. Take into account these possibilities while designing the intervention.
- ▶ The hotline numbers must be simple, free of cost and easy to reach.
- ▶ If necessary, the helpline should be well placed to immediately connect to the concerned authorities for long-term assistance in case of severities.¹⁹⁵
- ▶ Involve young men and women as the call receivers so that adolescents can be comfortable sharing issues openly.
- ▶ The receivers must be fluent in different languages/slangs/accents.
- ▶ Check the availability of phones.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



- ▶ UNICEF Guide: What can I do to help stop child marriage? (UNICEF, 2020)
- ▶ Preventing child marriage (UNICEF)
- ▶ Voices during the Covid-19 Pandemic: The impact on children, young people and child helplines around the world (Child Helpline International, 2021)
- ▶ Violence against children during COVID-19: Assessing and understanding change in use of helplines (Petrowski et al, 2021)

ADD YOUR OWN NOTES, IDEAS AND GOOD PRACTICE HERE



7. INTERVENTION CLUSTER G



ACCESSIBLE AND QUALITY GENDER- RESPONSIVE SERVICES

There are multiple negative consequences of CEFMU linked to girls' health and wellbeing, including in the context of mental health, where self-inflicted injuries and suicide occur; and in relation to sexual and reproductive health in the context of pregnancy and childbearing. It is, therefore, crucially important to ensure accessible and quality gender-responsive services to respond to girls' needs.

This includes but is not limited to ensuring access to sexual and reproductive health and rights and services to reduce adolescent pregnancies, ensure quality maternal healthcare and minimise risks from CEFMU. In this section, you will find multiple suggested interventions to consider.

KEY STAKEHOLDERS TO CONSIDER IN INTERVENTION CLUSTER G

While there is a range of actors who need to be involved in our efforts to address CEFMU, the following stakeholders are considered the main protagonists with the highest potential and powers to bring about lasting, positive change:

- Girls and young women who are married, wherever possible and safe to do so
- Parents
- Teachers
- Healthcare providers
- Healthcare support staff
- Counsellors
- Psychologists
- CSOs
- Government departments
- Police
- Law enforcement officials
- Crisis centres
- Child protection committees
- Child rights organisations

7.1 MENTAL HEALTH AND PSYCHO-SOCIAL SUPPORT SERVICES



ABOUT THE INTERVENTION

Early marriage and pregnancy can have a negative impact on the physical and mental health of young girls. This is why, in addition to increased bodily autonomy and SRHR services, elimination of CEFMU requires providing girls and young women with more access to psycho-social and mental health support services, so that conditions such as depression and anxiety can be managed. Childhood and adolescence are critical stages of life for mental health; this is a time when rapid growth and development take place, including in terms of various brain functions. Children and adolescents acquire cognitive, social and emotional skills that shape their stable mental health, and are important for assuming adult roles in society.¹⁹⁶

Given the relative prevalence of mental health issues among youth today, it is important to look into the mental health of youth who have experienced CEFMU, and this should be done with the help of professional counsellors or psychologists. Mental health services can be made available in schools and colleges, or they can be provided as part of other mobile services that make frequent visits to the most vulnerable and marginalised localities to provide basic and free health care information and services to adolescents and youth, with IEC materials and items such as sanitary pads and condoms. Such services are crucial for all adolescents and youth, even for those who are working as activists to support victims of CEFMU within their peer group.



KEY CONSIDERATIONS

- While mental health fundamentally shapes the lives of children and youth as they transition from adolescence to early adulthood, it can also be a very delicate issue and, therefore, should be handled carefully in a sensitive manner by CEFMU project implementers.
- Practitioners should be fully qualified to extend this type of specialised support and use a child-centred and gender-responsive approach; parents and communities should be involved to further support the acceptability of such interventions.
- Building trust and fostering relationships with the children and youth involved should be the first step of any mental health related intervention. Children and youth should be approached in such a way that they feel comfortable with the service provider.
- As the practitioner, you should strive to establish mutual trust and respect with the child or young adult. One important factor is to act consistently and communicate clearly at all times.
- Integrate mental health care across sectors: protection; case management; health and nutrition; education; water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH); and shelter systems. Strengthen existing support structures, including functional referral systems.
- Sensitive engagement should be undertaken by the parents, teachers and school authorities with the students for their mental health and wellbeing, and with the aim of preventing situations of anxiety or depression.¹⁹⁷
- Build the capacity of service providers across health care disciplines to provide quality care.
- Create an enabling environment for children and youth so that they can develop confidence, self-esteem, and skills to manage their stress, anxiety and concerns themselves.

PROMISING PRACTICE EXAMPLES



As part of efforts to address critical child rights and protection issues, the Nepalese child rights organisation Child Workers in Nepal Concerned Centre (CWIN) runs '**Child Helpline 1098**', providing legal services, counselling, emergency shelter and medical services. The different parts of their services include rescue, psycho-social counselling, family reunion, social reintegration and follow-up,¹⁹⁸ all of which are conducive to strengthened mental health and wellbeing of children and youth.

In India, the CHILDLINE India Foundation provides an emergency helpline for children in distress. To this end, it has worked closely with the Government, corporations and civil society in India, and has focused on empowering girls, mobilising families and communities, and providing services to those in need. Operating since 1999, the helpline exists to provide assistance to children in need of care and protection with respect to violations of child rights, including child marriage.¹⁹⁹

Plan International Viet Nam provides mental health care services in schools and communities, running about 100 school counselling centres to counsel teachers, children and their parents on CEFMU.

Plan International Nepal's study '**Representations of Women and Girls in Nepal's Cinema**' shows how media representation of girls and young women can be an obstacle to them fulfilling their potential, as it plays a large part in determining how the world views girls and how they view themselves. The study was part of Plan International's '**Girls Get Equal**' campaign, and demonstrates a highly effective way to foster the mental wellbeing and self-esteem of girls. It highlights their leadership qualities, and promotes gender equality while preventing the sexual objectification of young girls in Nepal.²⁰⁰

USEFUL TIPS



- ▶ Being respectful of the concerns of children and adolescents is, of course, important in all kinds of programme interventions, and in particular when delivering services relating to mental health and wellbeing.
- ▶ Be open-minded; people's realities within different sociocultural settings are unique.
- ▶ Be consistent and patient; recognise that change takes time and effort, and practice needs to be part of a long-term process.
- ▶ Help children to help themselves and look for their own solutions. Do not impose solutions upon them, but rather support their self-empowerment and agency to help themselves. This is important for sustained wellbeing and good mental health conditions in the longer run.
- ▶ Communicate in simple languages with empathy and a positive tone when delivering services relating to mental health.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



- Child marriage and health (Girls Not Brides)
- Mental health consequences of child marriages: A narrative review (University College London, 2021)
- Bringing an end to the silence: An investigation into the mental health consequences of child marriage and potential solutions (University College London, 2017)

ADD YOUR OWN NOTES, IDEAS AND GOOD PRACTICE HERE



7.2 WORKING WITH GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN WHO ARE MARRIED OR IN UNION



ABOUT THE INTERVENTION

While seeking to end CEFMU, the children, particularly girls and youth already in a marriage or union and facing its effects should always be taken into careful consideration and must be considered as priority stakeholders.

Girls and young women who are married often lack ownership over their lives, have limited power, and are made invisible. They can experience reproductive coercion, and may not be able to make their own decisions about whether to have children. They may experience pressure to prove fertility from a partner or partner's family, and may not be able to use contraception. This can be exacerbated by health service provider bias, or myths about the impact of contraception on fertility. Young women who are married are also likely to experience rapid, repeat pregnancies. Limited space between pregnancies increases the risk of complications. Adolescent mothers are also less likely to access maternal healthcare than older women – further endangering the health of mothers and their babies. They can experience intimate partner violence throughout their lives, and have no access to essential psycho-social support services.

Finding ways for girls and young women who are married, and girls in various forms of unions, to stay in and return to education until they complete school is important. Providing comprehensive sexuality education for all adolescents – and their parents and families – can be transformative for gender equality and sexual and reproductive health outcomes. Subsequently, this can help them to gain skilled employment and participate in the community and the wider society.

Once a girl has experienced CEFMU, this is often considered to be an end-point and married girls, as well as girls in unions, are therefore seen as 'lost'. For this reason, there has been very few efforts to explore what can be done to reduce the impacts of child marriage and unions on girls. Research has also shown that when married girls gain knowledge and skills, their community views them differently and this may contribute to delaying the age of marriage in the next cohort of young girls.

Noting that girls and young women who are married should be seen as priority stakeholders in our work to address CEFMU, programme implementers ought to involve girls and young women who are married in a wide variety of activities across different kinds of interventions, as a means to provide them with opportunities to be empowered and lead dignified lives. That being said, this must be done with great care, to ensure that girls who have been married as children are not put at heightened or additional risk due to their involvement in activities. Engaging girls and young women who are married as primary stakeholders in our interventions should, therefore, be assessed on a case-by-case basis through a thorough risk assessment guided by the principle of 'Do No Harm' (see page 34).



KEY CONSIDERATIONS



- Bear in mind that the factors that make girls vulnerable to CEFMU make them vulnerable within marriage as well, chronically on an extended and daily basis. These factors should be addressed in a holistic manner.
- Resources can range from the provision of IEC materials and efforts aimed at making schools or other educational services accessible, to supporting adolescent and gender-responsive SRHR services as part of universal healthcare. Resources and support should also be available to married girls to help them leave the marriage if they so choose.
- To mitigate the challenges experienced by girls and young women who are married, programmes should also seek to influence government policy frameworks so that resources are dedicated across ministries that deal with justice, women, children, education, health, social protection, and security to expand opportunities for and extend support to girls and young women who are married and girls in unions.

PROMISING PRACTICE EXAMPLES



Plan India is engaged in raising awareness through a comprehensive sensitisation programme with a legal component to reach out to girls and young women who are married and help families. To this end, Plan is launching the initiative '**Legal awareness of girls and young women in India**', which shall focus on young brides' access to rights and entitlements after their marriage.²⁰¹ Information will be disseminated through field officers, who will go door-to-door, and the programme design has been supported by legal experts, including a Supreme Court Judge and three Supreme Court Lawyers. The programme is expected to be launched on 8 March 2022, which is International Women's Day.

USEFUL TIPS



- Reach out to girls and young women who are married in their own surroundings; in environments that they are familiar with.
- Provide the girls and young women who are married with information on SRHR, legal rights and an overview of the services that are available to them.
- Children and youth should be approached in such a way that they feel comfortable with the service provider, so that they are able to confide in the practitioner and trust the service.
- Support girls and young women who are married in exploring different services and entitlements they can access, and guide them along the way.
- Mobilise communities and existing girl-led groups to support married girls in their reintegration and rehabilitation efforts to reduce stigma attached to their situation.
- Work with families, health service providers and other community stakeholders to build understanding of adolescent SRHR, underpinned by continual values-transformation support.
- Create an enabling environment for girls and young women who are married by taking into account their specific needs, experiences and challenges.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



- Meet Nepal's girls and young women who are married and grooms (Girls Not Brides, 2016)
- Girls and young women who are married, invisible and voiceless: no more! (Girls Not Brides, 2013)

ADD YOUR OWN NOTES, IDEAS AND GOOD PRACTICE HERE



7.3 AVAILABILITY OF AND ACCESS TO SRHR SERVICES



ABOUT THE INTERVENTION

Historically, adolescents have not been recognised as a group with specific sexual and reproductive health needs. They have limited access to education and services.²⁰² This can lead to a number of negative outcomes, including unintended pregnancies, death during childbirth, sexually transmitted infections and sexual violence.

Accessible adolescent- and gender-responsive SRHR services and information are key assets in our work on CEFMU. Girls in remote areas, however, often are not informed of, or do not have access to sexual and reproductive health services that are user-friendly and free from judgement or male supervision. Essential SRHR services must meet the WHO Availability, Accessibility, Acceptability and Quality framework. Critical components of adolescent-responsive services include easy access, integrated services, confidentiality and respectful treatment – these elements are often missing in state-run facilities. Alongside health system strengthening efforts, it is important to reduce stigma related to adolescent sexuality, and build community acceptability of SRH services for adolescents – married and unmarried.

Strategies to achieve this include campaigns and community dialogue on contraception and safe abortion, social and gender norms and attitudes around sexuality, life skills development, and collective action.²⁰³

Enhancing the accessibility, referral mechanism and quality of education and training on adolescent sexual and reproductive health, child protection and gender-based violence for girls is also equally important. This also includes improving the financial support for referral mechanisms between schools and the health system so that girl students can be provided with comprehensive sexual education, including on issues such as contraception, safe abortion, unintended pregnancy and gender-based violence.²⁰⁴

KEY CONSIDERATIONS



- Information dissemination about the availability and access to SRHR services should be at the core of any planned intervention.
- Sexual and reproductive health services should be specifically designed for adolescents. Promotion of youth-friendly health clinics in the vicinity of target populations is a good way to ensure this.
- Comprehensive sexuality education should be introduced into school curricula.
- Peer-led education and monthly health posts/bulletins may be considered.
- Wherever possible, strengthen information on SRHR in schools and develop formal referral mechanisms.



PROMISING PRACTICE EXAMPLES



Developed by Plan International Timor-Leste, **‘Reprodutiva’** is a new smartphone app that is helping combat teenage pregnancy in Timor-Leste by providing teenagers with real-time information and remote access to sexual reproductive health services and information. The app provides young boys and girls with a confidential space where they can have discussions on issues concerning their sexual and reproductive health, and get useful tips and medical consultations from professionals. With this new app, youth can learn about their bodies and the changes that occur during adolescence, and have traditional myths on sexuality debunked.²⁰⁵

Plan International Viet Nam has found effective ways to use social media and media technology to raise awareness of SRHR and create cartoons, logical stories, and video clips on early child marriage depicting a young girl’s story to convey key messages.

USEFUL TIPS



- ▶ Tackle barriers faced by adolescents, including a lack of youth-friendly and comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services at many health facilities, shortage of trained personnel, shortage of information on the services provided, and unfriendly health worker attitudes towards young people and adolescents.
- ▶ It is highly important to provide children and young boys and girls with correct information about sexual and reproductive health, in a way that is non-discriminatory, non-judgemental and gender transformative.
- ▶ SRHR services must respect youth’s privacy and confidentiality, obtain informed consent, and be tailored to the specific needs of young women and girls.
- ▶ Increase access to youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health services, including awareness raising through mediums such as radio talks, community dialogues and mobile cinemas.²⁰⁶

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



- ▶ Child marriage and SRHR (Girls Not Brides, 2018)
- ▶ Helping Young People Access Sexual And Reproductive Health Services (Plan International)
- ▶ Child marriage among boys in high-prevalence countries: an analysis of sexual and reproductive health outcomes (UNICEF, 2019)
- ▶ Age of Marriage vs. Age of sexual Consent (Girls Not Brides, 2019)
- ▶ Prevention and response to CEFM through ASRH and GBV programming in MENA (CARE, 2020)
- ▶ Guide to good and promising practices aimed at preventing and combating female genital mutilation and forced marriage (STEERING COMMITTEE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS, 2017)

ADD YOUR OWN NOTES, IDEAS AND GOOD PRACTICE HERE



7.4 SENSITISATION OF HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS AND PROVISION OF GENDER-RESPONSIVE REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH CARE SERVICES FOR ADOLESCENTS



ABOUT THE INTERVENTION

It is the health care service providers on the ground that are ultimately responsible for ensuring that service delivery leads to improved health. It is, therefore, critical to sensitise health care workers and support staff on how to identify girls who are at risk or are victims of CEFMU, and also keep staff informed on the applicable legislations and prevention and care measures.²⁰⁷

KEY CONSIDERATIONS



- Engage young people in SRHR service planning, delivery and monitoring to contribute to quality improvements, and build trust.
- Support health facilities to apply national policies and WHO standards on adolescent-responsive healthcare. This might include supporting technical training for staff.
- Embed values and attitude-clarification transformation in capability strengthening work – to target all staff from the receptionist to the doctor.
- Emphasise inclusion issues and ensure that services are responsive to young women who are most excluded and vulnerable (for example – in rural areas, living with disabilities, poverty).
- To increase accessibility, interventions should be cost-effective or, ideally, free for service users (for example – free contraceptives for marginalised adolescents).
- Also call upon healthcare providers to offer and promote postpartum and post-abortion contraception to adolescents through multiple home or clinic visits to reduce the chances of second pregnancies/infections among adolescents.





PROMISING PRACTICE EXAMPLES

Plan Lao PDR is implementing a project **'My Body, My Future'** supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland, and one of its four main outcomes is to increase and strengthen improvements in adolescent sexual and reproductive health and a decline in maternal or child mortality. Various stigmas attached to female sexuality and prohibitions on sexual relationships outside of marriage result in sexual and reproductive health services being unavailable, inaccessible, or simply unknown to adolescent girls and young, unmarried women. Therefore, it is necessary to implement training programmes for the ability of the government to implement policy related to girls' SRHR in the Houn District. **'Ethnic Girls Voice'**, another Plan Lao PDR project, also looked at promoting the rights of ethnic minority girls associated with early marriage and pregnancy. Key activities included research on child marriage drivers and access to SRHR services including contraception.

Plan International Thailand has formed partnerships with CSOs to run training programmes to sensitise providers, volunteers and youth leaders, with the aim of increasing access to SRHR information and services. The training takes place at different levels to cover the youth leaders, health care workers, parents, community members, civil society members, and other duty bearers. Plan International Thailand also supports hospitals and health care workers through the local organisations, which are of great help in distributing aid and living closer to the community.

At the Mae Tao Clinic, Plan International Thailand facilitates the provision of medical services and information on issues like family planning and COVID-19 to youth, especially those who are migrants or displaced persons.

USEFUL TIPS



- ▶ Programmes need to address gender- and age-related biases among health care workers so that they fully respect the reproductive desires and issues of both married and unmarried girls.
- ▶ Train health care providers and equip facilities for the provision of youth-friendly healthcare, including psycho-social, HIV/AIDS and maternal health services for adolescents.
- ▶ Train service providers to dispense useful, accurate and unbiased information regarding contraceptives, ensure girls can make fully and freely informed choices regarding family planning, and provide access to services such as safe abortion and post-abortion care.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



- Taking Action to Address Child Marriage: the role of different sectors (Girls Not Brides, n.d)
- Working Together to End Child Marriage (Save the Children, 2018)

ADD YOUR OWN NOTES, IDEAS AND GOOD PRACTICE HERE



7.5 SENSITISATION OF LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICIALS, POLICE, AND CRISIS CENTRES



ABOUT THE INTERVENTION

Given that the effective elimination of CEFMU requires not only the enactment, but also the enforcement of legal and policy frameworks, it is not sufficient to advocate for the passing of legislation that sets a minimum age for marriage. While specific budget allocations are needed across all relevant ministries and sectors, it is also necessary to ensure that duty bearers – police, law enforcement officials and crisis intervention centres – are sensitised on the issue to ensure they fulfil their duties.

Gender sensitisation and understanding of CEFMU needs to be integrated, as police and law enforcement officials frequently operate in the framework of a patriarchal society and normalise CEFMU without taking any action. More robust responses from these duty bearers can go a long way toward preventing CEFMU and gender-based violence, and ensuring the proper functioning of community-based child protection mechanisms and committees, and law enforcement.²⁰⁸

KEY CONSIDERATIONS



- A better-informed and sensitised police force can monitor and enforce the law with respect to CEFMU more consistently, curbing child marriage in rural areas where centuries-old traditions and poverty prevail.
- Integrate CEFMU-focused interventions within government structures and systems to maximise impacts so that issues related to CEFMU such as adolescent pregnancy, gender-based violence and SRHR are given priority by the duty bearers at the local level.
- Participate in government-organised meetings and conferences, and reciprocate by frequently inviting government officials to promotional or advocacy events to maximise chances of interfacing with duty bearers in relation to service provision.
- Training manuals should be created for police, law enforcement departments and crisis centres on the prevention of CEFMU from a gender equality and rights-based perspective. Training manuals should specify roles and responsibilities as well as indicators that these officials need to regularly report on.



PROMISING PRACTICE EXAMPLES



As a part of Plan International India's flagship project entitled '**Girls Advocacy Alliance**', state-level consultations were undertaken with key police officials and other relevant agencies. At the government level, the project relied on close partnerships with the Ministry of Women and Child Development, the Education Department, the State Commission for Protection of Child Rights, the State Women Commission, and the State Legal Service Authority. Engagement with police and other law enforcement officials was important to increase their awareness of CEFMU and related issues, and to support them in implementing relevant national and state level laws and policies relating to child marriage. Plan International India has efficiently worked on filling certain gaps within the legal system to provide support to the survivors of sexual gender-based violence (SGBV) and established a 'Legal Support Unit' that provides counselling services to the victims and manages legal cases.

USEFUL TIPS



- ▶ Train duty bearers (police and law enforcement officials) to be sensitive towards victim-survivors of child marriage and other forms of child rights violations and gender-based violence.
- ▶ Consider providing special training sessions for police and other law enforcement officials on the perils and harms of child marriage, on the importance of laws eliminating violence against women, and regarding the need to enforce relevant child protection laws.²⁰⁹
- ▶ Interventions can put in place a helpline number and set up channels through popular social media apps where reporting of CEFMU can be lodged with the police, helping officials to respond more quickly.
- ▶ Adolescent girls' groups need to be formed through which the youth can interact with police forces and other government officials, and sensitise them on the harmful impacts of CEFMU from the girls' own perspectives.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



- ▶ Ending Child Marriage in India, Drivers and Strategies (UNICEF, 2019)



ADD YOUR OWN NOTES, IDEAS AND GOOD PRACTICE HERE



7.6 ADDRESSING CEFMU VULNERABILITIES IN EMERGENCY AND HUMANITARIAN SETTINGS



ABOUT THE INTERVENTION

War, conflict and generalised violence, as well as natural disasters, have a severe impact on entire communities, with devastating effects on millions of lives. The consequences on girls include multiple adverse outcomes, of which CEFMU is one.²¹⁰ While the impact of humanitarian crises and migration movements linked to climate change on CEFMU is a less researched area where more insight is needed, it is certain that natural disasters exacerbate the situation of women and girls worldwide. By the same token, the recent Ebola and COVID-19 outbreaks have both highlighted and exacerbated the disproportionate and devastating impact of disease outbreaks on girls and women. Measures such as lockdowns and curfews have been found to be linked to increases in domestic and intimate partner violence against women and girls, as well as child neglect and sexual violence.²¹¹ Moreover, disrupted access to education and family planning has had a damaging impact on the health, safety and rights of women and girls.

There has been a surge in cases of CEFMU across the Asia-Pacific region due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Gender equality interventions have been severely impacted by the protracted pandemic, a disastrous setback that could ultimately lead to an estimated 10 million more child marriages taking place globally in the next 10 years.²¹² The pandemic has highlighted the need to be prepared for necessary alterations during times of unprecedented crisis. This includes providing online psychological and medical support through helplines and social media groups; transitioning to digital methods of skills development; collaborating with health care service providers to maintain the quality of and access to services for survivors of gender-based violence; and providing critical supplies, including those for sexual reproductive health such as contraception, pregnancy tests, and menstrual health and hygiene kits to women and girls. As such, to accelerate progress to end child marriage, limit informal unions and support married girls, we need to increase action in humanitarian settings and during emergency settings such as pandemics.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS



- There should be coordinated, multi-sector humanitarian-development programme efforts to tailor programming and asset building for girls and adolescents in all of their diversity.
- Strengthen the existing supportive and resource capacities of families and the community.
- Strengthen the enabling socio-economic and legal environment through structural interventions that can help dismantle patriarchal systems that perpetuate harmful gender norms against women and girls.
- It is necessary to track cases of CEFMU and coordinate interventions in humanitarian and emergency contexts, including in the context of climate change-driven emergencies and migration, at multiple levels. This would involve the mobilisation not only of children, families and communities, but also the local authorities and service providers, as well as case workers, duty bearers and local leaders.
- There should be an increase in focus on nationally led responses to humanitarian crises – including the participation of community-based organisations working on gender equality and child rights – to identify and respond to the needs of girls and women.

- Advocate with humanitarian actors to accelerate the emergency response and action on all fronts, including WASH, education, SRHR, protection and livelihoods.
- Address specific risks and barriers in emergency and crisis situations to prevent gender inequality, gender-based violence, stress, anxiety and other mental health issues.
- Empower children and families with skills to create an enabling environment for themselves.
- Ensure you work with girls, their families and community leaders to address harmful gender norms and promote girls' voice, choice and control. This will complement investments in basic services.
- Use technological innovations and digital devices to deliver basic amenities and child protection services at a faster pace through multi-sectoral programmes.
- Ensure a strong evaluation component so that the sector can increase evidence and learning on what works to prevent child marriage in humanitarian and emergency contexts.

PROMISING PRACTICE EXAMPLES



Plan International Myanmar has an emergency response mechanism in place to respond to the needs of vulnerable children and families affected by natural and human-made disasters. Its efforts in emergency and humanitarian settings in Rakhine State and Kachin State for internally displaced people and children affected by conflict are good examples of interventions that can help reduce the risk of CEFMU for girls in humanitarian settings. The campaign named **'Girls Get Equal'** provides early childhood care, development and protection services, WASH, SRHR services, and caters to the maternal and child health and nutritional needs of the targeted population. In addition, child-friendly spaces are offered to children affected by the on-going conflict in Rakhine State, and the project offers case management, psycho-social support and case referral systems, as well as a safe and protected place for children to play and take part in recreational activities.

Through its **'Child, Early and Forced Marriage Research'**, Plan Philippines conducted a review of evidence and research on the prevention and response to CEFMU in humanitarian settings. The research aims to identify drivers of CEFMU in humanitarian contexts, understand the needs and priorities of adolescents (especially girls who have experienced displacement), and explore existing programmes, services and support mechanisms (child protection, SRHR) available in the communities.²¹³ This was done by establishing an evidence base on the drivers of child marriage in emergency settings, such as in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), and systematically documenting the needs and priorities of adolescent girls and the system of support required to prevent and mitigate risks of child marriage in emergency settings.

USEFUL TIPS



- Establish safe, trusted and confidential channels for children and adolescents to report violence, exploitation and abuse in the contexts of humanitarian settings.
- Ensure the integration of CEFMU in on-going and planned surveys and assessments, such as socio-economic assessments, vulnerability assessments, gender impact assessments, and others.
- Strengthen and support various adolescent-friendly channels for virtual health consultations using helplines, radio and mobile phones, including dedicated helplines.
- Develop flexible learning approaches and appropriate opportunities in future school admissions processes to encourage girls, especially pregnant girls and young mothers, to return to education following the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Integrate child marriage in COVID-19 response and recovery plans to the fullest extent possible.²¹⁴
- Use digital and media engagement to reach young people with messages about COVID-19, child marriage and gender-based violence. Formats include radio programmes and mini-dramas.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



- Thematic Brief: Child marriage in humanitarian contexts (Girls Not Brides, 2020)
- Child Protection And Child Marriage (Girls Not Brides, 2021)
- Strengthening Child Protection Systems (Save the Children, 2019)
- Addressing Data Gaps on Child, Early, and Forced Marriage in Humanitarian Settings (Save the Children, 2020)
- Child marriage in humanitarian settings in South Asia: Study results from Bangladesh and Nepal (Women's Refugee Commission/ John Hopkins University, 2019)
- COVID-19: A threat to progress against child marriage (UNICEF, 2021)



ADD YOUR OWN NOTES, IDEAS AND GOOD PRACTICE HERE



REVIEWING AND REPORTING

You're at the final stage! In this section we will look at what information is important for your project to collect, review, report on and share.

Good measuring and evaluation helps you to chart the success of your project, and in the below sections, you will find some key considerations to bear in mind for your measuring and evaluation work, and checking its sustainability prospects.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR MEASURING AND EVALUATING YOUR PROJECT

- Evaluate the programme intervention by using the baseline developed at an earlier stage and data collected throughout the project cycle implementation. You will now ask the same questions again, and measure changes related to CEFMU over the project timespan.
- Involve community members in identifying criteria for the evaluation, as well as for the collection and recording of data. Seek to involve them in the organisation of workshops to analyse the findings, while also inviting them to be part of the review of evaluation findings to ensure buy-in, responsibility and accountability. This will help to ensure that the outcomes of the intervention will be sustained beyond the programme duration.
- Ensure to use a combination of female and male evaluators.
- Identify the key contributing factors that helped bring about any positive impacts and accomplishments.
- Try to derive an evidence base and data from the project findings, which you can then use to push for legislative and policy changes by advocating and influencing government programmes and policies.
- Consider using various M&E tools such as randomised control trials (RCTs), outcome mapping, key informant and in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, stories of significant changes, and other tools to generate data on norm changes.
- Look at potential changes in women and girls' decision-making power in household matters, including but not limited to the timing and choice in entering into marriage.
- Assess if and how the intervention met the expectations of all key groups affected by child marriage.
- Evaluate the level of community awareness, knowledge levels and engagement on ending CEFMU.
- Assess the extent to which women/girls and men/ boys were consulted during the different stages of the programme development.



3. TAKING ACTION TO ADDRESS CEFMU

- Collect and analyse data that can be correlated to show a reduction in prevalence rates of child marriage incidence. This could include data relating to girls' school completion rates, delayed age of marriage, birth and marriage registration rates, reporting rates of violations in child marriage laws, and improved access to and use of cash-based incentives to increase completion of girls' secondary education.
- All data should be disaggregated by gender, as well as other aspects such as income and by urban/rural setting. Data should also be disaggregated for emergency settings.
- You may also assess any impact your intervention had on indirect programme participants.
- Identify the interventions and strategies that were most impactful and cost-effective.
- Consider whether the most effective interventions could be replicated and scaled up.
- Evaluate the extent to which the programme intervention followed a gender-transformative approach. Reflect on gender gaps, barriers or opportunities that were successfully addressed in the programme intervention, as well as the ones that you were unable to respond to.
- Try to identify any examples of unintended gender-related outcomes, both positive and negative.
- Identify and assess any new unique opportunities which may have come to your attention, to further prevent, reduce and eliminate CEFMU in your country. Assess which opportunities are most promising and/or important to act upon.
- Make sure your evaluation includes concrete recommendations for follow-up initiatives going forward.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPACTFUL REPORTING ON YOUR PROJECT

- It is important to seize the opportunity to document lessons learned as well as best and innovative practices derived from your project. This could include positive aspects of your project design, gender-transformative approach, communications, advocacy or funding.
- With your team, think about how, and to whom, you should be communicating the results of the intervention.
- Key stakeholders might include government authorities, donors, partners, programme participants, media and the general public.
- Make sure to communicate regarding the gender gaps, barriers or opportunities that were successfully addressed in the programme intervention, as well as the ones that you were unable to respond to. It is important to communicate about the gender-transformative nature of your intervention so that it can be shared and used to inform development of new programming by others.
- Offer to help strengthen national child marriage and other protection data information systems (such as data on sexual and gender-based violence) by sharing evidence and knowledge.
- Use innovative technology platforms to communicate and report on the project and to set up community feedback mechanisms as part of the reporting phase.



CONCLUSION

You've reached the end of the toolkit, great work!

Hopefully this practitioners' toolkit on addressing CEFMU in the Asia Pacific region has provided you with a good overview of how to design your interventions, and some new ideas too!

While CEFMU poses tremendous challenges which require long-term and sustained initiatives – and collective and continuous exploration of innovative and more effective solutions – it is heartening and energising to know that there are so many committed practitioners, advocates and activists like yourself out there!

If you have any comments or feedback on this toolkit, please let us know by contacting **Mr. Raša Sekulović**, Regional Head of Child Protection and Partnerships at rasa.sekulovic@plan-international.org.

We would also love to hear from you with an update on your project design using this toolkit, so please do get in touch to share your experience with us.

On that note, we wish you every success with your design and implementation!



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Thematic Briefs

TIME TO **ACT!**

Gender-Transformative Programme Strategies for Addressing
Child, Early and Forced Marriage and Unions in Asia Pacific

Toolkit for Practitioners

Please download this Toolkit here
<https://plan-international.org/asia-pacific/publications/time-to-act-toolkit-for-practitioners/>

The **TIME TO ACT!** Toolkit, developed by the Plan International Asia-Pacific Regional Hub with the involvement of Plan International Country Offices in the region, contributes to accelerating efforts to end child, early and forced marriage and union (CEFMU) by 2030 in line with the Sustainable Development Goals commitments. It is intended to serve as a practical resource for Plan International staff and partners designing and implementing interventions aimed at preventing, reducing and eliminating CEFMU in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond. It is also a useful tool for any other civil society actors to inform and enrich their respective CEFMU programming.

The toolkit reflects local realities, global commitments, conceptual thinking and practice, and builds upon the expertise, innovation and energy of Plan International's efforts to prevent and eliminate CEFMU across the Asia-Pacific region. The practical guidance and ideas are based on emerging effective practices, lessons learned and programme evidence from the region, and promote a gender-transformative, multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder approach to CEFMU programming.

The toolkit is divided into three sections. The first section provides an overview of CEFMU in the Asia-Pacific region, and the second section presents key principles and concepts for a gender-transformative approach to eliminating CEFMU. The third section focuses on the practical dimensions of CEFMU programme design and implementation, and is organized under seven key thematic intervention clusters to address CEFMU in a gender-transformative, holistic and multi-dimensional approach.



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