



TIME TO **ACT!**

A toolkit for youth activists to help end Child, Early and Forced Marriages and Unions in Asia-Pacific

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WELCOME

YOU DID IT!

You took the first step toward being part of a growing youth movement to end Child, Early and Forced Marriages and Unions (CEFMU) in Asia-Pacific just by clicking on this toolkit. We're so glad you're here.

What is this toolkit for?

This toolkit is designed to provide knowledge, tips and tools about how to take action to help end CEFMU in Asia-Pacific. The simple fact is that CEFMU takes away the rights and opportunities for children and young people to make their own decisions about their lives and fulfill their potential. That's not the kind of world we want to live in. Let's change it.

Who is this toolkit for?

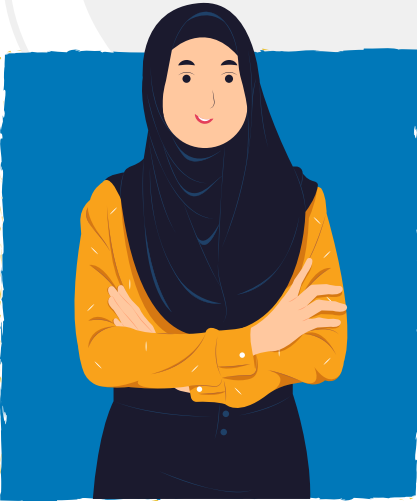
It was created for, and designed with, young people living in Asia-Pacific. Whether you're just getting started as a CEFMU youth activist, well on your way, or somewhere in between, this is a resource for anyone who believes that all young people, no matter their gender, have the right to make decisions about their own lives and shape the world around them.

Who made this toolkit?

This toolkit was created by [Plan International Asia-Pacific](#) in collaboration with the Youth Campaigner Core Group (YCCG) - a group of young people who are working in their communities and online to help end CEFMU.

In Asia-Pacific and around the world, Plan advances children's rights and equality for girls by working with children, families, communities, partners, government agencies, other NGOs and the private sector. Plan is committed to accelerating efforts to end CEFMU by 2030, in line with the [Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#). As part of these efforts, Plan Asia-Pacific is running Storming the Norms, a five year regional campaign that will strengthen and amplify national level campaigning to end CEFMU, align with the global [Girls Get Equal](#) gender equality campaign, and call for more to be done to eliminate CEFMU.

We're in this together!



Together we are bringing this youth toolkit, co-designed by YCCG, to inspire and motivate other young people across the globe to use this youth-friendly and youth-centric tool for collective online and offline action to end Child Early, Forced Marriage, and Unions. I am pleased and thankful to have been engaged to design this toolkit and share the story of a girl campaigner from rural Nepal #StormingtheNorms by fighting against prevalent gender stereotypes to strive for a gender equal world for adolescent girls and young women in Nepal.

Samjhana, 19, Nepal



Alone we can't but together we can storm the norms against Child Early, Forced Marriage, and Unions, which is one of the most prevalent challenges in the Asia-Pacific region. Together, we will work to prevent, reduce, and end CEFMU by 2030 and meet the SDG target!

Muskan, 20, India



We understand what you are going through because we are youth who want all of us be empowered, free from abuse and discrimination, to be protected by our rights as we claim the freedom we deserve! We are the key to reducing child, early and forced marriages through our sense of self-value, decision-making, confidence, resiliency and self-efficacy. Appreciating what we have and all of our experiences, either positive or negative, will help us to be more motivated, inspired and confident to fight for freedom, inclusion, diversity and to have a safe space and TO AIM FOR EQUALITY! YES! For freedom and equality! NO to child, early and forced marriages and unions!

Aivie, 22, Philippines

WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?

A handy reference for the meaning of some terms you'll see in this toolkit.

| | |
|---|--|
| Ally | <i>Someone who provides assistance and support to another person or group as part of an ongoing effort, activity or struggle.</i> |
| Burnout | <i>A state of emotional exhaustion. Someone who is experiencing burnout might not be sleeping well or carrying out their activities like they used to and they might feel impatient and annoyed.</i> |
| Child, Early and Forced Marriages and Unions (CEFMU) | <p><i>Any marriage or informal union, whether under civil, religious or customary law, with or without formal registration, where either one or both people are under the age of 18 and/or where the full and free informed consent of one or both people has not been obtained.</i></p> <p><i>It is a human rights violation, a harmful traditional practice and a form of gender-based violence.</i></p> |
| Child marriage | <i>A marriage in which one or both parties is a child or younger than 18 years.</i> |
| Dowry | <i>A dowry is a payment, such as property or money, paid by the bride's family to the groom or his family at the time of marriage.</i> |
| Driver | <i>Something that has a major impact on how likely something is to occur, in this case CEFMU.</i> |
| Early marriage | <p><i>Marriages or unions where at least one person is under 18 years of age but in a country where they are considered an adult at an earlier age or automatically become an adult when they get married.</i></p> <p><i>Early marriage can also refer to marriages or unions where both people are 18 or older but other factors make them unready or unable to consent to marriage, such as their level of physical, emotional, sexual and psychosocial development or a lack of information about their life options.</i></p> |

| | |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| Evaluation | <i>Evaluation looks at the overall impact of an initiative or campaign to determine whether your objective was reached. It can include things like looking at how many people took the action that you promoted or doing surveys, interviews or group discussions with your target audience.</i> |
| Forced marriage | <p><i>When one or both partners, regardless of age, has not given, or been able to give, their full and free consent to the marriage/union and is unable to leave or end the marriage.</i></p> <p><i>Forced marriage can occur in a variety of circumstances such as human trafficking, mail order marriages, or arranged and customary marriages.</i></p> |
| Gender | <p><i>The characteristics of women, men, girls and boys and other genders that are socially constructed. This means that these characteristics are not objectively true, instead they exist because humans created them and agreed to keep upholding them.</i></p> <p><i>Gender includes norms, behaviours and roles associated with being a particular gender, as well as relationships with each other.</i></p> |
| Gender equality | <i>When people of all genders have equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities.</i> |
| Gender norms | <i>Gender norms are the social norms that define how different genders should act and interact with one another. Gender norms influence how power and resources are distributed in a society.</i> |
| Gender transformative approach | <p><i>Instead of only focusing on trying to reduce gender inequalities in communities, a gender transformative approach aims to address the roots causes of gender inequality in a society.</i></p> <p><i>This approach is all about challenges and unpacks harmful gender stereotypes and norms and actively promotes gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.</i></p> |
| Humanitarian crisis | <i>An event or series of events that poses a critical threat to the health, safety, security or wellbeing of a community or a large group of people.</i> |

| | |
|---|---|
| Monitoring | <i>Monitoring is done when a project is activity is underway. It helps you track progress and adjust if something is not going as planned. It can include things like keeping track of the genders and ages of people joining your events to see if you are reaching the people you hoped to.</i> |
| Patriarchy | <i>A social system where positions of dominance and privilege are primarily held by men.</i> |
| Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) | <i>SRHR encompasses the different human rights related to sexuality and reproduction, such as sexual health, sexual rights, reproductive health, and reproductive rights. Everyone, including children and adolescents, is entitled to SRHR.</i> |
| Social norms | <i>Social norms are what people believe others in the group they identify with think and do. These are often unwritten rules of behaviour that we learn from a young age.</i> |
| Unions | <p><i>Unions are informal marriages or cohabitations that are often not formalized by government or religious authorities.</i></p> <p><i>For example, adolescents, without getting into a formal marriage, might make the decision to live together. As a result, many young girls become pregnant without having planned to, or without having any control of their pregnancy.</i></p> |



TIME TO LEARN

THE BIG PICTURE

Let's take a step back and look at the big picture. We can't jump into learning about CEFMU without thinking about gender.

Here are a few questions to consider about your own experience with gender. There are no right or wrong answers and it's ok not to know:

- How do you define gender?
- What are your first memories of learning about gender?
- How are you expected to behave in your family because of your gender? What about in your community? How do you feel about those expectations?
- If you do not behave according to those expectations, are there any consequences?
- How are gender norms affecting opportunities for girls and women in your community? What about for boys and men and people with other gender identities?

We are all influenced by gender. Gender norms form the basis of gender stereotypes-generalized views or preconceptions about the characteristics and roles of different genders. Because of gender stereotypes, girls and women often experience gender discrimination and are less valued and given lower social status. This reduces their power to make decisions about their own lives. Girls and women don't have the same access to realizing their rights or the same opportunities, protection or resources as boys and men have.

In male-dominated patriarchal societies in many Asia-Pacific countries, assumptions are made that girls' and women's responsibilities are the traditional roles of a caregiver, wife and mother and girls' sexuality is seen as something that must be controlled to preserve their families 'dignity' and 'honour'. This can make a marriage or union seem like the only option.

SO, WHAT IS CEFMU?

Let's start by breaking down the different components of Child, Early and Forced Marriages and Unions:

Child marriage

A marriage in which one or both parties is a child or younger than 18 years.

Early marriage

Marriages or unions where at least one person is under 18 years of age but in a country where they are considered an adult at an earlier age or automatically become an adult when they get married.

Early marriage can also refer to marriages or unions where both people are 18 or older but other factors make them unready or unable to consent to marriage, such as their level of physical, emotional, sexual and psychosocial development or a lack of information about their life options.

Forced marriage

When one or both partners, regardless of age, has not given, or been able to give, their full and free consent to the marriage or one in which one or both parties are unable to leave or end the marriage.

Forced marriage can occur in a variety of circumstances such as human trafficking, mail order marriages, or arranged and customary marriages.

Unions

Unions are informal marriages or cohabitations that are not formalized by government or religious authorities.

For example, adolescents, without getting into a formal marriage, might make the decision to live together. As a result, many young girls become pregnant without having planned to, or without having any control of their pregnancy.

DID YOU KNOW? FACTS ABOUT CEFMU

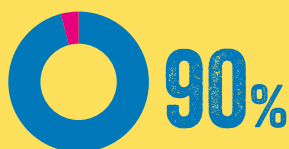
A FEW CEFMU FACTS AND FIGURES



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.



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.



If efforts are not accelerated, more than **150 million girls** are estimated to get married before their eighteenth birthday by 2030.

In the Asia-Pacific, 23 million adolescents aged 15-19 years are currently married or in union; around 80% are girls and 15 million of whom live in South Asia. Across the region, 1 in 8 adolescent girls aged 15-19 years, and 1 in 50 boys, are currently married or in union. (Source: [UNFPA](#)).

- Despite decreasing rates, South Asia is still home to the largest number of girls and young women who are married, with more than 40% of the global total. Bangladesh has the highest rate of child marriage in Asia, which is ranking the 4th highest in the world.
- In Southeast Asia, CEFMU rates are also significantly high however there are fluctuations across the region. In Lao PDR, 35.4 % of women aged between 20 and 24 were married before the age of 18, compared with 11 % in Viet Nam.
- In the Pacific, an estimated 8% of the girls are married by the age of 15 and around 26% of the girls are married by the age of 18.

Only four of the Pacific Island countries have set the minimum age of marriage at 18 (Kiribati, Nauru, Fiji and the Republic of Marshall Islands).

- There is a strong link between rates of CEFMU and rates of adolescent pregnancy. Regions with the highest level of CEFMU also have the highest rates of births among adolescent mothers.

The highest adolescent birth rates can be found in Lao PDR (94 per 1,000), Cambodia (57 per 1,000), Thailand (50 per 1,000), Indonesia (48 per 1,000) and the Philippines (47 per 1,000).

Useful Links to access data on child marriage in your country

Click on the links to access and download your country profile and data on child marriage.

- **Child Marriage Country Profiles** Click [HERE](#) (Source: UNICEF)
- **Child Marriage Atlas** Click [HERE](#) (Source: Girls Not Brides)
- **Country data on harmful practices including child marriage** Click [HERE](#) (Source: UNFPA)

WHY IS CEFMU HAPPENING IN ASIA-PACIFIC?

There are different reasons why CEFMU is happening in Asia-Pacific. It is important to understand the different drivers and root causes of CEFMU since this knowledge helps us figure out how we can act to prevent and reduce CEFMU.

The root causes and key drivers that make CEFMU keep happening are complex and inter-connected but the main ones are:

Gender inequality

When men have most of the power in a society, girls can't realize their rights or get the same opportunities, protection or resources as boys have. Instead, girls' and women's roles are limited to pregnancy, giving birth and caring for children, as well as household tasks like cooking and cleaning.

Adolescent pregnancy and motherhood

You might be thinking, wait a minute - isn't adolescent pregnancy a consequence and not a cause of CEFMU? Actually, it's both. While it's true that after marriage, girls are more likely to have early and risky pregnancies, there has also been an increase in marriages in Asia because of unintended pregnancy. This means that girls are being married because they are pregnant, whether or not they agreed to have sex.

Weak laws and their law enforcement

Sometimes laws against CEFMU don't exist but other times they have conflicting information, like setting the legal age of marriage at 18 but then allowing parents to give consent for marriages at earlier ages, or having different legal ages of marriage for boys and girls.

Or the minimum age for marriage might be considered the same as laws around sexual consent and access to SRHR services, which goes against the rights of young people to access information and make informed choices about their bodies and their futures.

And even when there are clear laws and policies against CEFMU, often there is a lack of awareness among government officials and the public, and weak or consistent enforcement. A lack of awareness and failure to enforce legislation means that some families who marry their young daughters off and against their will are unaware that they are breaking the law.

Society's views on girls' roles

The harmful practice of CEFMU is often the result of the norms, customs and traditions that give lower social status to women and girls than to men and boys within the family, community and society. These inequalities are generally accepted and fueled by patriarchal views about what it means for a girl to be ready for marriage. Girls might not be able to move around and speak freely and the husband or husband's family may be given a dowry (payment or gift) for marrying a girl who is considered a burden to her family.

Traditions and expectations

Traditional and patriarchal beliefs about gender roles, based on social, cultural or religious customs, are another driver of CEFMU. In some societies and communities, families are concerned about the erosion or loss of ‘family honour’, which often leads to CEFMU. These concerns are often rooted in traditions and/or concerns about the sexuality of young people, especially fears about girls becoming sexually active outside marriage and the risk of becoming pregnant.

Poverty

If a family is having a hard time to earn money, CEFMU may be seen as a way for them to cope while also making sure that their child will be taken care of through marriage, especially where there is a lack of options for them to earn a living. Higher rates of child marriage have been found among families with low levels of income.

Humanitarian crises (such as conflict, natural disasters or emergencies)

In times of crisis, families may have to leave their home and the support of their community. They may not have a safe, stable place to live or reliable sources of food or income. Parents often view child marriage as a means of protecting their daughters from the potential harm and challenges of this stressful situation. Cases of gender-based violence tend to increase in humanitarian crises.

Lack of alternatives and opportunities

A lack of alternative roles and opportunities for girls, especially when it comes to education and employment, are major drivers of early marriage. When girls don't have access to the same rights and opportunities as boys and are assumed to have no future beyond caregiver, wife and mother, they are the first to be pulled out of school if the family can't afford it or needs more help at home. They are the first to be married if the family is struggling and needs the dowry or one less person to feed.



WHAT ARE THE CONSEQUENCES OF CEFMU?

High rates of maternal and infant mortality

After marriage, girls are at increased risk of early and risky pregnancies.

CEFMU has resulted in high cases of deaths among mothers and babies in Asia, particularly in Southeast Asia, especially because of limited access to quality sexual and reproductive health services.

Common complications in childbirth 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.

Poor sexual and reproductive health

CEFMU negatively impacts married girls' overall health, and their sexual, reproductive health and rights in particular.

Many adolescent mothers report that the decision to have a child was not made by them, which is a violation of their reproductive rights.

Girls who are married or in a union often face repeated pregnancies with short intervals between each birth, both of which increasing the risks of developing complications. They are also more vulnerable to sexually transmitted infections (including HIV).

Violence

Girls who are married early are more likely to experience violence, abuse and forced sexual relations due to their age and lack of education, combined with their lack of power within the home. This violence is likely to continue into adulthood.

Poor mental health

CEFMU can cause significant risk to the mental health and wellbeing of girls.

Being deprived of their childhood and adolescence, burdened with roles and responsibilities that they aren't prepared for, and being removed from their families and friends, all leave girls struggling with fear, depression and suicide.

Exclusion from education

Girls who are married are unlikely to be in school.

Education, including comprehensive sexuality education, is essential for girls to be able to make informed decisions about their sexual health and well-being.

Going to school gives girls choices and opportunities in life, allowing them to play an active role in their communities and break the cycle of poverty.

If these girls are out of school, they also don't get to access all these opportunities.

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Reduced earning potential

Girls and young women who are married often have no income of their own and are dependent on their husbands.

This is because their education has been cut short, which reduces their opportunities to earn money as adults. This can also reduce their influence and decision-making power in the household.

Generational cycles of poverty

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. This then continues the cycle of poverty from one generation to the next.

No role in shaping communities and societies

CEFMU means that girls and young women cannot engage in activities that will positively shape their communities and societies. They are overburdened with responsibilities and lose their confidence and autonomy.

At the heart of it, CEFMU negatively affects how girls and women’s lives unfold-shortening their childhoods, limiting their education and economic opportunities, and making them vulnerable to isolation and violence.

It sounds like CEFMU is all about girls...

Girls and women are the most affected by CEFMU, it’s true. But that doesn’t mean that this issue doesn’t affect boys and men too.

Many boys and young men face pressures to marry early, or to marry girls who are children.

And boys and men are negatively impacted by one of the root causes of CEFMU-gender inequality. From the expectations placed on them to be tough, emotionless, masculine and heterosexual to the social pressures to be successful breadwinners, physically dominant and “manly”.

Boys and men are essential allies in ending CEFMU. They are part of creating a gender equal world-a world that is better for everyone.

CALLING ALL YOUTH!

We believe that to eliminate CEFMU, **young people must be recognized as partners and agents of change**. Every child and young person have the right to participate in matters affecting their lives.

Here are 5 reasons why our voices matter:

We make up the majority of the population. Over 60% of the world’s youth (aged 15-24) live in Asia-Pacific. Mobilizing as young people can help achieve large-scale change.

We’re the most affected by CEFMU. Millions of children and youth are married before their 18th birthday each year.

We’re connected. Technology can bridge divides and we know how to use social media and chat groups to connect with our peers.

We can be role models for children and other youth, especially those who may believe that CEFMU is simply a fact of life, such as girls who have already been married. We can inspire others to stand up for their rights and claim a different future.

We’re creative and bold. We know how to think outside the box and get innovative with the ways that we share information. We can attract attention and get decision-makers to pay attention.

I was born in a mid-western rural part of Nepal and I have seen my sisters and neighbours getting married at an early age. I have seen some young girls getting married against their will and some on their own without knowing the consequences.

It always bothered me to see some of my friends dropping out of school to take care of their children even though they are children themselves. CEFMU ruins young people's and their family's lives.

I wanted to do something but I did not know how until I got involved in the adolescent girls club formed with the support of Plan International Nepal. After I became a part of it I learned more about CEFMU and how we young girls can prevent it from happening. I met other enthusiastic adolescent girls like me and together we performed various activities like street dramas, rallies, door-to-door campaigns, and awareness sessions on CEFMU with the support of our local government, local organisations, and Plan International.

Chetana, 19, Nepal

- 1. Let children feel their childhood and build their future instead of forcing them into child marriage.*
- 2. Every child on the planet deserve education not marriage for the safety and the purpose of their life.*
- 3. Child needs love and care child marriage is not the solution to everything for them.*
- 4. To stop the abuse on every child and young girls child marriage needs to stop.*
- 5. Education system should include awareness on gender equality and aspects of child marriage.*
- 6. Giving education to girls is one of the most powerful weapon to end child marriage.*
- 7. Let girls be girls not child brides.*
- 8. Say no to child marriage and take a step forward in educating girls.*
- 9. Child marriage is a losing game for every girl and boy.*

Kanchan, 18, India

Tradition is the product of human thought. A tradition should have good values in it but if it damages the next generation of the nation then that tradition must be changed. Like the tradition of getting married at a young age that occurs in various countries. It's time for this old-fashioned tradition to be changed for greater benefits for children in the future and it all starts with us today to storm the norms, especially for CEFMU.

Selli, 24, Indonesia

LEARN MORE

[Child Marriage Quiz](#)

Freedom United

Seven multiple choice questions about child marriage facts and figures.

[Early marriage](#)

Plan International

Plan's global campaign demanding power, freedom and representation for girls and young women with a section on boys and men as allies.

[Girls Not brides](#)

Girls Not Brides

Girls Not Brides is a global partnership working collectively to ending child marriage so that girls can fulfil their potential.

VIDEOS

[About the Child Marriage Monitoring Mechanism](#)

UNICEF (2:07 mins)

Background information about child marriage and the global partnership for child marriage monitoring.

[Before I am Ready](#)

Plan International (4:43)

The story of Shalini, a girl who fought to stop her own marriage and has helped prevent thousands of children facing the same fate by getting over 2,500 birth certificates issued, raising awareness on child protection issues and advocating for girls to stay in school.

[Cambodia's Trafficked Brides: A Woman's Story of Forced Marriage in China](#)

Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (2:09 mins)

Many Cambodian women in arranged marriages with Chinese men, whether originally consensual or not, report finding themselves in remote areas and abusive contexts. This is an animated story of one woman's experience being trafficked from Cambodia to China.

[Child Marriage Stands in the Way of Girls' Education](#)

No Ceilings Project (4:15 mins)

Stories of girls in India who have been married against their will and efforts to prevent and reduce CEFMU.

[Ending Child, Early & Forced Marriage](#)

Plan International Asia-Pacific (1:45 mins)

An animated video about a conversation between Muna and her friend Thu. Thu was a victim of early marriage, but she refused to let it decide her fate. Thu wanted to inspire Muna and all girls across the region to stand up, raise their voices, and rewrite their stories.

[Girls Advocacy Alliance \(GAA\)](#)

Shadow Puppet Films (5:36 mins)

The GAA in India focuses on systemic and attitudinal changes to stop child marriages and child trafficking by promoting secondary education for girls and job oriented vocational training (JOVT) for young women.

[Going Door to Door to End Child Marriage](#)

UNICEF Nepal (4:50 mins)

In Nepal, 40% of all girls get married in childhood, before they turn 18 years old. Chandani is determined to change that. Through a girls' empowerment programme, she is supporting girls in her community to say no to marriage and advocates with parents to allow their daughters to continue their education.

[I Wonder Why I Got Married So Soon](#)

Human Rights Watch (7:02 mins)

Facts about child marriage in Nepal and the opinions of girls who were married as children.

[Marriage Busters: Child Marriage-Free Zones in Bangladesh](#)

Plan Bangladesh (5:31 mins)

66% of girls in Bangladesh are married under 18. Plan supports a children's organisation that works with local government, community-based organisations and others in the area to create child marriage-free zones to stop early marriage.

[Naila's Law: The Story of a Child Marriage Survivor](#)

Brut Media (4:03 mins)

Naila was engaged at age 8 and married at 13. Now she is fighting to end child marriage in the United States.

[The World We Want: End Child Marriage](#)

Girls Not Brides (2:48 mins)

An animated video looking at the effects of child marriage and how we can work together to make child marriage history and improve the lives of millions of girls around the globe.

[Their Time is Now](#)

Plan International (3:08)

A young girl reflects on the future she wants for herself, the gender discrimination and harassment she experiences and what her future would look like if her parents decided she had to get married. It ends on a hopeful note, emphasizing the benefits of gender equality.

[The Voice of Kirana](#)

Plan Indonesia (29:04 mins)

Two teenagers decide to cover the incident of a missing young person for their journalism assignment. What they discover leads them to the issue of child marriage in Indonesia.

TIME TO ACT: GETTING STARTED

PUTTING THE YOU IN YOUTH-LED ACTION

So now that we've covered the basics about CEFMU, you may be starting to think about what you could do. You might also be feeling a bit overwhelmed. CEFMU is a complicated issue! But that means we need all types of people in all sorts of places to help end it together. The best place to start is by thinking about yourself.

Here are a few questions to consider:

- What matters most to you in your life right now?
- What are 3 things that you think you do really well?
- What are 3 things that you'd like to learn or get better at?
- When you think about volunteer, school or work activities that you've been part of, what kind of tasks did you enjoy the most? Which ones did you enjoy the least?
- What kinds of situations do you feel most comfortable in? (ie: being the centre of attention, leading a team, collaborating with others, spending time alone)
- How do you deal with disagreements and conflicts?
- When you think about "taking action to help end CEFMU", is there anything that scares you? What would you need to know or understand to eliminate or reduce those fears?

Keep the answers to these questions in mind! These insights will help you figure out how you can best contribute to ending CEFMU.

GETTING STARTED

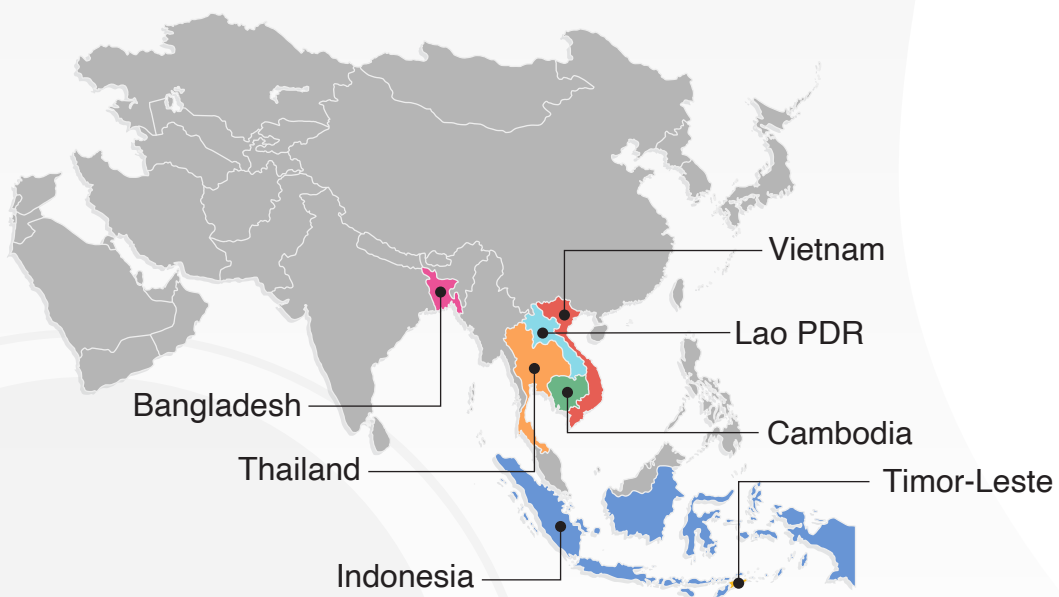


WHAT CAN WE DO TO END CEFMU?

Remember the root cause and drivers of CEFMU? There are specific action areas that can help to reduce it, prevent it and ultimately end it. To make these easier to remember, we can use the acronym **IT'S TIME**.

| ROOT CAUSES & DRIVERS OF CEFMU | ACTION AREAS |
|---|--|
| <p>Gender inequality Weak laws and their enforcement Society's views on girls' roles Traditions and expectations Poverty Humanitarian crises Lack of alternatives and opportunities</p> | <p>I - Influence - Advocate for changes to laws and policies.</p> <p>T - Transform - Challenge harmful cultural and societal beliefs related to gender.</p> <p>S - Services - Help set up or improve accessible, quality services.</p> <p>T - Take charge - Opportunities for girls' empowerment, leadership and activism.</p> <p>I - Intervene - Protection from violence.</p> <p>M - Money - skills and opportunities for girls to earn a living.</p> <p>E - Education - Access to education for girls.</p> |

Let's take a look at an example of a specific youth-led initiative or campaign for each action area to give you a better idea of what each one can look like in practice.



| ACTION AREAS | ACTION |
|--|---|
| <p>I - Influence - Advocate for changes to laws and policies.</p> | <p>In Bangladesh, youth networks campaigned for repealing CEFM legislation alongside mobilizing people against gender inequality and lobbying parliamentarians to introduce legislation to combat sexual harassment.</p> |
| <p>T - Transform - Challenge harmful cultural and societal beliefs related to gender.</p> | <p>The regional Storming the Norms digital campaign challenges and overturns harmful gender norms related to CEFMU.</p> <p>In Lao PDR, Thailand and Timor-Leste, sexual reproductive health and rights are at the heart of peer-to-peer discussions.</p> |
| <p>S - Services - Help set up or improve accessible, quality services.</p> | <p>In Bangladesh, young people are using community scorecard and facility scorecard at governments' Adolescent Friendly Health Service Centers since 2020 to ensure quality and increase accessibility specially among girls and young women. Quality services have been ensured, supplies are ensured to be replenished, and government monitoring are increased.</p> |
| <p>T - Take charge - Opportunities for girls' empowerment, leadership and activism.</p> | <p>In Thailand, girls are training as youth leaders to disseminate knowledge about sexual reproductive health and rights, focusing on raising awareness about child marriage among other children and youth.</p> |
| <p>I - Intervene - Protection from violence.</p> | <p>In Indonesia, a youth organisation reports cases of child marriage and violence against children to the local authorities.</p> |
| <p>M - Money - skills and opportunities for girls to earn a living.</p> | <p>In Vietnam, young people are providing youth who drop out of school with concrete opportunities for economic empowerment.</p> |
| <p>E - Education - Access to education for girls.</p> | <p>In Cambodia, youth groups engage in peer-to-peer education to motivate youth who drop out of school to restart their education.</p> |

SAFETY FIRST: TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF AND OTHERS

Speaking out against an issue as widespread and deeply rooted in beliefs, traditions and customs as CEFMU can cause pushback. You might find yourself disagreeing with government officials or religious leaders, community elders, even your own family and friends. That can be hard to navigate and it's ok to feel sad, discouraged, angry - or any other feeling that might come up.

Taking care of yourself and your collaborators helps protect your mental, emotional and physical health and well-being. This includes thinking about what kind of risks you might encounter and how you can avoid or manage them.

| POTENTIAL RISKS | | WAYS TO AVOID OR MANAGE THE RISKS |
|-----------------|-------------------------|--|
| TO ME | Burnout | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Keep up with the activities that make you feel peaceful and relaxed (spending time with friends, playing a sport, drawing etc.). You might think that these kinds of activities should be the first to go if you become busy and stressed but in fact they are vital to your overall health and well-being. |
| | Isolation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Connect with Plan's online Regional Youth Action Platform to find out what other young people in Asia-Pacific are doing to end CEFMU and opportunities for you to join in. Reach out to your local Plan office to find out if there are other young people in your area working on this issue. |
| | Pressure to get married | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> If it's a safe option, talk to your parents about your plans for the future and share examples of what other girls and women have achieved. Share information with them about the dangerous consequences of CEFMU and the laws against CEFMU, if these laws exist in your country. If you cannot change your parents' mind and feel that you will be forced into marriage, contact a person you trust who does not agree with CEFMU - this might be a relative with influence in the family, friend or mentor, NGO, government official. Some countries also have hotlines that you can call to receive assistance. |

| POTENTIAL RISKS | | WAYS TO AVOID OR MANAGE THE RISKS |
|--------------------|-------------------------------------|---|
| TO ME | Personal information becomes public | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact the person or site where your personal information has been shared and ask for it to be removed. • If that doesn't work, consider contacting the authorities. Some countries have laws against online harassment and bullying and this can include sharing personal information without permission. • If you're becoming overwhelmed with online or in-person messages as a result of the personal information that was shared, take some time away from social media or spend some time in a different community with family or friends, if possible. |
| TO MY GROUP | Lack of motivation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choose a fun activity that you enjoy doing together to help strengthen the bonds of the group. • After the fun activity, have a check-in where everyone shares how they're feeling. Asking about 'highs' (things each person is proud of or excited about) and 'lows' (things each person is struggling with or feeling discouraged about) can be helpful. Celebrate the 'highs' and discuss possible solutions for the 'lows'. Maybe some people want to take on different tasks or try a different kind of activity. • Do a round of appreciation where each person recognizes a positive contribution from someone else in the group. • Reflect on why you wanted to work together to help end CEFMU. What first inspired or motivated you? How can you keep that inspiration at the front of your minds? |
| | Group conflict | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognize that there is a conflict and suggest coming together to talk about it with ground rules for the discussion (ie: no interrupting, no insults, no yelling). |

POTENTIAL RISKS

WAYS TO AVOID OR MANAGE THE RISKS

- Take turns explaining your thoughts and feelings about the situation. Focus on how you personally think and feel instead of guessing or assuming what others are thinking and feeling.
- Make sure you all agree on exactly what the conflict is about.
- Take turns sharing possible solutions.
- Agree on a solution and make sure everyone is clear on next steps.
- Check back in with the group later to make the solution is working as you hoped. Some adjustments might be needed.
- Remember that conflicts happen and resolving them builds your communication and collaboration skills and helps make your group stronger.

Lack of communication and information

- Have a group conversation about the most convenient ways to communicate with one another and share ideas and resources.
- Consider asking one person to take the lead on communications within the group to make sure information gets posted where everyone can see it in a timely manner. This role could rotate between different group members.

Lack of coordination

- Choose one person in the group to be the leader to make sure the activity/campaign you're working on stays on track. The leader can change from project to project.
- Make sure tasks and roles are clearly defined and written down where all the group members can see them.

| POTENTIAL RISKS | | WAYS TO AVOID OR MANAGE THE RISKS |
|--|--------------------------------|--|
| | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider using an online project management tool to track progress and see who has completed which tasks. If that's not possible, meet regularly in-person or online to keep people accountable for the tasks they agreed to take on and ask someone in the group to take notes so there is a record of what was agreed on. |
| | Lack of strategic planning | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Your group's plans are strategic when you have short and long-term goals, a list of priorities and a clear direction that you want to go in. Dedicate at least one meeting to do strategic planning and share some questions for the members to think about ahead of the meeting about priorities and goals. Remember to plan further ahead than just the next activity or campaign. Think about the next year or even the next three years. Make sure someone takes notes so you have a record of what was discussed and come back to your strategic plan each time you plan a new activity or campaign to make sure there is alignment. |
| FROM THE PEOPLE I'M TRYING TO REACH | Online harassment and bullying | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ignore or block accounts that send hateful, offensive messages. Try to post content to social media under the name of a group rather than under your own name. Check your privacy settings to make sure you're not accidentally sharing more information than you want to be. Be especially careful about sharing details like your address, email, and phone number. |

POTENTIAL RISKS

Verbal or physical attacks in the community

WAYS TO AVOID OR MANAGE THE RISKS

- Choose your venues carefully. You may need to use public places where your activities will be visible so potential attackers will feel too conspicuous. Or you may need to choose private spaces where you can control who enters for the safety of the organizers and participants.
- Work together with other established groups so there is power in numbers.
- Inform public safety authorities in advance of any large events so there is a security presence, if you live somewhere where the police are allies.



REASONS WHY



Some of the major reasons for not taking action against CEFMU are limited authority in the family, a lack of proper knowledge and resources, safety issues, and lack of support from the government and NGOs. We, the youth, are change agents in society and we have the potential to bring transformational change. We require capacity building on such issues so that our voices can be heard. We need support from the government and NGOs for active volunteers and groups of youth while ensuring their safety.

Muskan, 20, India

IF YOU THINK...

You don't have enough authority in your family or community to be taken seriously

You don't know enough about the issue of CEFMU to speak out against it

REMEMBER...

- You can focus on talking about CEFMU with your friends and peers.
- You can review your rights and the laws in your country related to marriage, child protection and gender equality and use that as the starting point for conversations with family members and local leaders.
- You can reach out to other youth activists to find out how they have made their voices heard.

- You don't have to be an expert in CEFMU to speak out about how it is taking away the rights and freedoms of young people. There is enough information in this toolkit for you to get started!
- You can talk with people in your community, country or region who know more about CEFMU, especially about the trends in your country. This includes other youth activists!
- You can read about campaigns and projects that other young people have done to see what messages and facts they used.
- You can form a youth forum to discuss, debate and learn together about CEFMU.

IF YOU THINK...

REMEMBER...

You don't have any resources to take action to end CEFMU

- You don't need to have money or other resources to take action against CEFMU. Even conversations between your friends, your family, your neighbours can help.
- You can join a campaign or project being run by another organisation or youth group.
- You can share information on social media or in chat apps about CEFMU (videos, infographics, articles) that has been posted online by organisations like Plan International.

You don't think local leaders will support you if you speak out against CEFMU

- You can review the rights and the laws in your country related to marriage, child protection and gender equality and use that as the starting point for conversations with local leaders.
- You can reach out to government officials or NGOs at the local or national level working on child protection and gender equality. They are the most likely allies and could help you connect with supportive people locally.

You're worried about your safety online or in the community if you speak out against CEFMU

- You can reach out to trusted people to discuss the activities you are considering and get their advice on how to stay safe.
- You can join free sessions or access free resources online about staying safe online.
- You can inform the local authorities in advance if you are planning a public event.
- You can be aware of how the different online platforms you use share your data.

LEARN MORE

[Diverse and Empowered Girls Toolkit: The risks we face as activists](#)

Plan International with girls from around the world

Concrete tips for avoiding burnout and protecting yourself in the community and online.

[Girls Get Equal Youth Toolkit: How to manage risk to yourself, others and your campaign](#)

Plan International with youth activists from around the world

Internal and external risk and provides links to more resources.

[Girls Get Equal Youth Toolkit: Self-care and collective care: How to avoid burn out](#)

Plan International with youth activists from around the world

Links to self-care and collective care resources from around the world.



TIME TO ACT: A ROADMAP

Whether you're planning to take action in your community, spread the word online or act as an advocate calling for changes to laws and policies, making a plan is key.

Below are 6 steps to follow to create your roadmap or strategy for your initiative or campaign. You can find a roadmap template in the Templates and Resources section that you can download and complete.

We recommend working together with other individuals and/or organisations who can offer diverse perspectives, skills, resources and experience. There is strength and safety in numbers and it gives your activism efforts more credibility and power.

Make sure that girls are taking the lead in the design of your initiative and campaign with boys as partners and allies.

The steps below should be completed together with your group members, partners and allies.

STEPS TO PLAN YOUR CEFMU INITIATIVE OR CAMPAIGN

STEP 1: LEARN

- Search for information related to CEFMU in your community, country or region such as statistics, reports, relevant laws and policies on child marriage, access to education, access to sexual and reproductive health information and services, gender inequality.
- Check for other organisations or individuals already working to end CEFMU in your area.
 - What approaches are they taking?
 - What have they achieved so far?
- Talk with girls and women, both married and unmarried, about their needs and interests.
- Talk with boys and men, both married and unmarried, about their views on CEFMU and their views and expectations of girls and women.
- Based on what you have learned, which IT'S TIME action area do you want to focus on? Think about what came up most often in your discussions, especially from girls and women.
- Identify your stakeholders. These are the groups who have power over your issue or are affected by it. They could be potential partners, target audiences (that's coming in the next step!) or groups you need to watch out for because they might try to derail your efforts or put you at risk.
 - Which ones agree with you? Which ones disagree?
 - Which ones have a lot of power? Which ones have little power?

STEP 2: DEFINE

- Define your objective and make sure it's SMART!
- Identify your target audience, based on your objective.
 - Choose a group that has the power to act in a way that will help prevent or reduce CEFMU and also a group that you feel safe interacting with.
- Find out about your target audience's knowledge, attitudes and behaviours related to the CEFMU action area you are focusing on.
 - You can check for existing reports and/or have some 1-on-1 or group conversations with members of your target audience. What do they know about this issue? How do they feel about it? What are their current behaviours that either prevent or promote CEFMU?
- What do you want your target audience to do? This is your call to action. It should be clear, relevant and doable.
 - Make sure the action is measurable. If you can keep track of how many people have taken the action you promoted, this is a great way to assess the impact of your initiative or campaign.
 - It can be a small action like signing a petition, attending a rally, creating a video for a digital campaign.
 - Make sure that the action, however small, contributes to ending CEFMU by aligning it with on the IT'S TIME action areas.

Make your objective SMART!

S - Specific

M - Measurable

A - Achievable

R - Relevant

T - Time-bound

Example:

Action area: Transform - Challenge harmful cultural and societal beliefs related to gender.

Too vague

We want to run a social media campaign about harmful gender norms related to CEFMU.

SMART

Between July-December 2025, we want to run a social media campaign to challenge and transform harmful gender norms related to CEFMU with 10,000 engagements and 50 pieces of user-generated content from young people across Bangladesh.

STEP 3: DESIGN

- Include members of your target audience in the design process. This will help make sure that the design decisions are informed by them and therefore more likely to be effective.
- Identify the best way to communicate with your target audience.
 - Who do they trust for information?
 - What types of media do they regularly use?
 - Based on the answers to those questions, how will you reach your audience? (ie: radio, community events, schools, posters, radio, social media).
 - Think about ways to make your communication with your audience interactive. Opportunities for interaction are more likely to keep people engaged (ie: Q&A, games, quizzes).
- Develop the key messages that you want to communicate to your target audience.
 - Aim for 3-5 key messages and keep them short, easy to understand and connected to your objective.
 - Think about connecting with your audience's heads (facts and figures) and hearts (stories).
- Think about the risks associated with what you are planning and how you can avoid or manage them.

Questions to consider about risks:

- What are the risks?
- Who is at risk?
- How likely is each risk to occur?
- What would the impact be (on the initiative/campaign, on the community) if the risk occurred?
- How can we avoid or manage each risk?



STEP 4: CREATE & TEST

- Create the materials and/or content.
 - Be mindful of the visuals and language that you use. Think about who is being shown and what they are doing or saying. Are you including diverse people? Are you challenging harmful gender norms?

- Test your messages, call to action and materials with your target audience to make sure they find them appealing, relatable, understandable, believable and motivating. Check out the How to test your messaging and materials under Templates and Resources.
- Make your dissemination plan.
 - Remember what you identified in Step 3 about the best ways to communicate with your target audience.
 - Think about opportunities to leverage other holidays, national or international days for related issues, or community gatherings. This will help amplify your efforts.
 - Try to reach your audience in a variety of ways (ie: not only posters around the community but also street plays and workshop in schools). The more often people see information, the likelier they are to actually pay attention to it.



Mark your calendars!

Planning your activities to coincide with international and national days related to CEFMU can help draw more attention to your efforts because:

- It creates opportunities for collaboration with other organisations or groups;
- The issue will already be getting attention and many different organisations will be creating and sharing messaging and content that you can link to;
- Media outlets may be looking for stories related to the issue. Media coverage helps amplify your efforts and raise awareness of CEFMU;
- Governments will be looking to highlight existing commitments or announce new initiatives.

Here are a few relevant international days supported by the United Nations:

- **January 24** - International Day of Education
- **March 8** - International Women's Day
- **August 12** - International Youth Day
- **October 11** - International Day of the Girl Child
- **November 20** - World Children's Day

Which of those international days receive attention in your country?

What national days or weeks could also help draw attention to the issue of CEFMU?

STEP 5: DELIVER & MONITOR

- Clarify who is doing what among your group and partners to make sure implementation goes smoothly.
- Decide how you will track progress and how you will deal with any challenges that arise during implementation.
- Implement your activities and disseminate your materials/content!
- Decide on how you will monitor your activities during implementation and who will take on which tasks.
 - Create the tools that you need to keep track of your data. This could be a simple spreadsheet to track how many people came to each one of your events with a breakdown by gender and age.

Isn't monitoring and evaluation something only big organizations do?

Monitoring and evaluation might make you think of big research studies with equally big budgets but these activities can take many forms, from the simple to the complex. Surveys, interviews, focus group discussions, polls and quizzes can all be tools for monitoring and evaluation.

Even if you're new to monitoring and evaluation, it's important to make it part of your activism because it's an essential way to learn and improve with every initiative or campaign that you run.

STEP 6: EVALUATE & REFLECT

- Decide how you will evaluate your overall initiative or campaign.
 - Go back to the call to action that you developed in Step 3. Make sure that you will have access to the data to see if people are taking the action that you are promoting (ie: if you're promoting a hotline number to report cases of CEFMU, will the organisation who runs that hotline share how many calls they received on average before your campaign compared to during and after?)
 - Consider other evaluation methods like surveys, interviews or focus groups with members of your target audience about what they remember, how they intend to use that information and how they feel about CEFMU after taking part in your initiative or seeing your campaign materials.
- Gather with your group and partners at the end of the initiative/campaign and reflect on how it went using your monitoring and evaluation data and insights. Check out the Time to Reflect section for some useful questions to ask during this reflection session.

- Decide what needs to be done to wrap up and who will do which tasks (ie: returning any borrowed or rented items, thanking people who helped out).
- Identify next steps. Based on what you have achieved and any challenges or opportunities that arose, what should happen next? It's good to take time to recharge but having a plan can help keep the momentum going.



Careful planning is very important to take our campaigns to the next level as careful planning reduces the chances of being misleading with the message we want to spread in our community. Careful planning will increase the pace of our campaign and our voice will have a greater pitch as by careful planning we can also anticipate future consequences for us and our community.

Bhwana, 18, India

TOP 10 TIPS FOR TAKING ACTION TO END CEFMU

- 1. Make sure the voices of girls and women are at the forefront** - Because gender inequality is a big part of why CEFMU keeps happening, making sure that girls are in positions of leadership is a fundamental part of how we can shift harmful gender norms and help end CEFMU.
- 2. Include boys and men** - Boys and men are also negatively affected by gender inequality, including being pressured to marry young or to marry girls who are children. And in an unequal world, they hold majority of power and resources. They are essential allies and partners to end CEFMU.
- 3. Tackle the root cause and drivers of CEFMU** - Align your initiative or campaign with one of the IT'S TIME action areas.
- 4. Build a network** - Not only will working together with other individuals and organisations bring in more skills, resources and ideas, it will also allow you to reach more people and sustain your activism.
- 5. Be specific about your objective** - Even though the big goal is to end CEFMU, each campaign or initiative that you undertake should have its own specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound objective that you can track.
- 6. Be specific about the people you want to reach** - It can be tempting to say we want to reach 'everyone' when planning a campaign or initiative to end CEFMU. But identifying a specific target audience based on the context you're working in means that your efforts will be more effective because you'll be focusing on their needs and interests. No one event, campaign or piece of content is going to connect with everyone.

7. **Involve influencers** - People are more likely to pay attention to information coming from people they know and trust who have influence over their decisions. This doesn't have to mean celebrities. It might be parents, religious leaders, community leaders, teachers etc.
8. **Connect with heads and hearts** - Make sure your campaign or activity includes information that connect to people's heads (facts and figures) as well as their hearts (personal stories).
9. **Include a call to action** - Through your activism, you'll be helping more people understand and care about CEFMU and they're going to want to know what they can do. Even small actions like signing a petition or participating in an awareness event are important. Having a clear call to action that you can track gives you a way of measuring the impact of your initiative or campaign.
10. **Take care of yourself and others** - Pushing for change can be mentally, physically and emotionally exhausting. Practicing self-care and collective care is crucial. Celebrate each success, however small, and work through challenges together.

LEARN MORE

[Advocacy Toolkit: The Education We Want](#)

Plan, A World at School, Global Education First Initiative Youth Advisory Group

Tips and guidance on researching an issue, identifying stakeholders, building a team, working with the media.

[Girls Get Equal Youth Toolkit: Campaigning basics](#)

Plan International with youth activists from around the world

Links and tips on campaign essentials, objectives, messaging, stakeholder mapping, systems analysis, strategies, working with others and managing risks.

[Girls Get Equal Youth Toolkit: Let's take action](#)

Plan International with youth activists from around the world

Ideas for activities and calls to action for your target audience and stakeholders.

[The World's Best Youth Campaigns - And Why They Worked](#)

Plan International

Four youth-led environment and social justice campaigns that made an impact.

[Youth Guide to End Online Gender-Based Violence](#)

UN Women Asia-Pacific 30 for 2030 Youth Network

Information about online opposition to gender equality, online gender-based violence, its consequences and ways to report, along with tips for dealing with online gender-based violence, preventing it and understanding feminist and gender-transformative technologies.

TIME TO ACT: IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Because CEFMU is happening in communities all across Asia-Pacific, putting your activism into action at the community level where you can engage people face-to-face can be an effective way of helping to change social and gender norms.

This might be the right type of action for you if:

- You like working in a group.
- You enjoy coming up with creative ideas for activities.
- You have strong networks in your community of people you can partner with (school, clubs, sports teams, youth groups etc.)
- You feel comfortable talking about CEFMU in person.
- Running activities face-to-face doesn't put you or others at risk.

WHO: KEY STAKEHOLDERS

These people have the highest potential and power to bring about lasting, positive change when it comes to face-to-face engagement in the community:

- Girls and young women who are married, wherever possible and safe
- Boys and young men
- Parents
- Community leaders, including traditional and religious leaders
- Police
- Teachers
- Media outlets and journalists
- Matchmakers
- Marriage officials (registrants, solemnisers)
- Community and civil society organisations working on child protection and/or gender equality
- Youth leadership groups
- Government state/district/village committees, agencies or departments working on child protection
- Creatives (artists, performers, musicians)

WHAT: KEY CONSIDERATIONS

- Conversations are powerful! Training volunteers, including girls at risk of being married before they're ready and against their will, can help reduce CEFMU. Check out the tips from UNICEF India in the Learn more section below for four strong messages to include in your conversations.
- If possible, consider sharing cases where legal action has been taken against CEFMU to prove that this issue is being taken seriously by officials.
- Think about your target audience and where they spend time in the community to figure out where to hold your events and/or share materials.
- Partner with organisations and government agencies/committees/departments who are working on child protection and/or gender equality.
- Involve boys and men and help them understand how gender equality benefits everyone and how CEFMU is a harmful practice grounded in gender inequality.
- Encourage, recognize and celebrate leaders and influencers in the community who are speaking out against CEFMU.
 - The people who perform marriage ceremonies are the last line of defense against CEFMU before a marriage actually takes place. Think about how you can involve them.
- Consider how you can support or strengthen community reporting of suspected or actual cases of CEFMU in a safe way.
- Prioritize the safety of yourself and others. Working in the community can come with increased risk because people who oppose what you are trying to do will know who is part of your group. Plan events in private spaces if needed, rather than public ones.

HOW: ACTION IDEAS

Run a door - to - door campaign to challenge traditional attitudes to child marriage and/ or promote how education can help girls play a leadership role in their communities and society.

Raise awareness about how keeping girls in schools benefits the whole community by creating posters, flyers, stickers and/or organizing public talks.

Work with local networks of girls and boys, and women and men to reach out to their neighbors, families, officials and village leaders to highlight the negative effects of CEFMU and adolescent pregnancy.

Support discussions between parents and their children to build parents' knowledge and confidence on child rights, gender, SRHR and tackling harmful practices.

Set up peer-to-peer support groups and/or school-based youth clubs that are open to both girls and boys to share information about CEFMU, SRHR rights and services and opportunities for youth who have left school to restart their education and/or access employment opportunities.

Perform a street play or role play where people often gather depicting the harms of CEFMU and modeling the kind of actions people can take to help end it. Consider ways for the audience to get involved in the play rather than just watching.

Organize a public rally against CEFMU where a diversity of people from the community, including girls and boys, women and men, can speak about the harms of this practice and promote ways of reporting.

Offer skills training for girls that can help them build their own capacity and confidence and challenge gender norms in the community by demonstrating their new skills.

Organize public screenings of videos about CEFMU with a discussion or Q&A. If possible, have local officials or NGO staff available to help answer questions.

Work with local officials or an NGO to help collect research data about CEFMU. The findings can be used in other outreach activities.

Train young people about how to talk to their family and friends about CEFMU. You could ask for help with this from a government agency or NGO.

LEARN MORE

[UNICEF Guide: What can I do to help stop child marriage?](#)

UNICEF India

Tips for reporting child marriage, talking about it with family and friends and raising your voice in your community.

TIME TO ACT: ONLINE

Sharing information through social media is one of the most effective ways to reach many people in a short time, especially when gathering in person is difficult or risky.

This might be the right type of action for you if:

- You have reliable access to the internet and feel comfortable using social media and/or sharing information in chat groups.
- You enjoying creating content or can work with people who do.
- You prefer working from your own space on your own schedule.
- You want to be part of the movement to end CEFMU but you may not have allies in your community.
- It is safe for you to be sharing information online that might go against current customs, laws, beliefs and practices in your country.

WHO: KEY STAKEHOLDERS

These people have the highest potential and power to bring about lasting, positive change when it comes to online activities and campaigns:

- Girls and young women who are at risk of CEFMU.
- Girls and young women who are married.
- Boys and young men.
- Parents.
- Public and private sector organisations or individuals with big followings online who have taken action before on issues related to gender equality and/or child protection (ie: media, youth groups, civil society organisations, artists, musicians).
- Cultural and religious influencers, or gatekeepers, who play a role in setting, shaping and maintaining social norms (ie: religious leaders, community leaders, youth leaders, parents).

WHAT: KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Think about your target audience and what kind of apps and online platforms they have access to and use regularly.

Think about how you can make your campaign interactive. Reactions and comments are helpful indicators of engagement but consider user-generated content, polls or contests to get your target audience more involved and help you understand their knowledge, attitudes and behaviours.

Identify the public and private sector organisations who are active on social media in your country and who have taken action before on issues related to gender equality. They might be potential partners.

Partnering with an organisation that already has a big following can give you a head start rather than starting to build an online following from scratch. And it helps keep you safer online because you can post under the organisation's account instead of your own.

Use a dedicated hashtag so you keep track of your posts and see who else shares your content.

HOW: ACTION IDEAS

Hold virtual discussions with girls and boys on child marriage, the need to eliminate it and awareness raising on the harmful impacts of getting into early marriages and unions.

Run campaigns targeting girls and young women with messaging and content on topics such as gender-based violence, SRHR, the risks of CEFMU and how to report.

Run campaigns targeting boys with messaging and content about gender equality, resisting pressure to marry young or marry a girl under 18 and calling on them to be allies to end CEFMU.

Run campaigns targeting parents with messaging and content about the harm that CEFMU is doing to their daughters and sons and the alternative future that young people want for themselves.

Provide online information and resources on how to report suspected and actual cases of CEFMU.

Partner with media organizations to feature young people speaking out against CEFMU on their digital platforms.

Participate in regional or global campaigns on ending CEFMU or related gender equality issues, like Storming the Norms!

Share success stories of empowered girls and women to motivate parents to keep their daughters in school.



I realized young people follow misleading pages and profiles, again spreading irrelevant information. To tackle the incorrect information, I started to share the information I received during trainings and workshops with #SayNoToChildMarriage.

If someone approached me for additional information, I used to share the link to Plan International Nepal's social media handles. I have also faced hate speech and negative comments. It sometimes stresses me out. But

I share my experience on Girls Out Loud Nepal private FB group moderated by Plan International Nepal to check if this is only happening to me or if other young activists are also facing the same. We received an online workshop on digital literacy and handling negative comments on social media pages. These workshops supported me to understand that in the pool of mis/disinformation online, I am spreading correct and relevant information.

Rebina, 22, Nepal

Storming the Norms

What is it?

A youth-led digital campaign focused on identifying, questioning and ultimately overturning the cultural and societal beliefs and practices that fuel CEFMU across the region. It's about not accepting the status quo and working together to end CEFMU.

How does it work?

Using the Regional Youth Action Platform, youth activists will identify harmful gender norms that relate to CEFMU, suggest tactics for how to challenge these norms (ie: exhibitions, dance challenge, posters etc..) and put those tactics into action. At each step, youth activists will be able to vote on the ideas they like they best and share their User Generated Content (UGC).

What are some examples of harmful gender norms that fuel CEFMU?

Here are some that YCCG members came up with. Do you see these gender norms in your own community? Do other ones come to mind?

- Girls over the age of 18 are unwanted.
- Marriage is the ultimate goal for girls.
- Girls are a burden on their families.
- Girls are dependent on boys.
- Technology is not for girls.
- Girls don't have the right to higher education.
- Girls are sensitive and weak

LEARN MORE

[Finding Digital Stories: A Youth Reporter Toolkit](#)

Plan International

Key concepts, tips, and activities on taking photos and videos, creating digital content, writing for social media, and inclusive reporting.

[How to build a social media campaign](#)

Plan International

Youth activists Kim and Maya explain how to build a successful social media campaign with a short video and article.

[How to create a social media campaign in 9 easy steps](#)

Adobe Express

Steps to plan a social media campaigns with links to learn more.

[How to stay safe online](#)

Plan International

Links to additional resources and explanations of online abuse/harassment and online gender-based violence.



TIME TO ACT: AS AN ADVOCATE

Weak or non-existent laws and/or a lack of enforcement of laws on the age of marriage and other related issues like sexual harassment and violence against children are a big part of why CEFMU continues to happen across Asia-Pacific. Advocating for strong laws and policies, and their enforcement, is vital to ending CEFMU.

This might be the right type of action for you if:

- You enjoy reading and diving into the details of laws and policies.
- You like building networks of youth and adult activists across the country, region and world to collaborate with and coordinate advocacy efforts.
- You like speaking in front of people, including people who hold a lot of power.
- You have the ability to speak persuasively.
- You feel confident talking about why CEFMU needs to end and remembering facts, stories, laws and policies that you can reference.
- It is safe for you to be publicly calling on authorities for change.

WHO: KEY STAKEHOLDERS

These people have the highest potential and power to bring about lasting, positive change when it comes to making changes to laws and policies and the way they are enforced:

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

WHAT: KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Analyse the national legal and policy situation in your country with these guiding questions:

- 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?
 - Are there laws that contradict CEFMU laws and cause confusion about the minimum age of marriage?
 - How are the laws around CEFMU being implemented and enforced?
 - Are there contradictions like girls being able to marry before the age of 18 with parental consent?
 - Are there religious or customary practices that are common but go against what is written in the law?

Have there been any campaigns launched by the government/local authorities/civil society to end CEFMU that focus on laws and policies?

- What did they achieve?

What are the existing laws on the issues below and do they include anything about marriage? Are these laws being enforced?

- Children and women's protection
- Access to education for all children and youth
- Prevention of teenage or adolescent pregnancy
- Birth registration and certification

Consider establishing a group of adults and youth from different sectors advocating together for the implementation of laws and policies on child protection and gender equality.

Reach out to NGOs working on child protection and gender equality to find out about training, learning and collaboration opportunities.

HOW: ACTION IDEAS

If there are adequate CEFMU laws but not many people know about them, raise awareness about these laws and how to report attempted, suspected or actual cases of CEFMU.

Call for change to conflicts or inconsistencies in the law; for example, there could be exceptions to the law that allow the marriage of girls with parental consent.

Advocate for a law setting the minimum age of marriage at 18 years old for girls and boys; this law should also address consent and be aligned with international human rights standards.

Advocate for improved access to justice for married girls and women or girls at risk of CEFMU.

Advocate for the review and amendment of other related discriminatory family and marriage laws, for example, laws relating to land, inheritance and/or divorce, and harmful practices such as Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV).

Advocate for specific budget allocations across all relevant ministries and sectors for reducing and eliminating CEFMU.

Help gather data with organizations who are carrying out research on CEFMU. More evidence helps make advocacy efforts more effective.

Advocate for universal birth registration and certification to prove a legal marriage age.



Under Plan International Nepal's Girls Get Equal; Preventing CEFMU campaign, we were able to declare our rural municipality a child marriage-free zone. It took us almost four years to campaign and lobby with local government and stakeholders.

Nearly two years back, I and my team members from the adolescent girl club had to fight against parents who proposed reducing the age for marriage to 16 by the local government. All the adolescent girl clubs from my district came together to draft a memorandum to counter the proposed age for marriage from parents.

We submitted the memorandum to the District Administration Office in the presence of the mayor at a press meeting. The issue got the limelight and the local government denied the proposal made by parents. Instead, they started working with the respective adolescent girl clubs to prevent CEFMU.

In 2021, in coordination with the local government, parents, teachers, stakeholders, civil society organisations, and Plan International Nepal we were able to declare our rural municipality a child marriage-free zone.

To date, 55 wards out of 81 in my district are declared as child marriage-free zones. I am glad that the local government is taking the initiative to declare all wards child marriage-free zones.

Chetana, 22, Nepal

LEARN MORE

[An advocacy Toolkit: Equal Access to Education](#)

Plan International

Tips on finding the evidence to support your advocacy, developing your messages and choosing your actions, lobbying policymakers and decisionmakers, leveraging media and communications, campaigning and mobilising.

TIME TO REFLECT

Maybe you've just finished your first initiative or campaign as a CEFMU youth activist or maybe you've just finished your 10th - no matter where you are in your activism journey, it's important to take time to reflect.

Reflection helps us learn about ourselves, about our group, and about our efforts to end CEFMU. The insights we gain through reflection help us grow as individuals, work better together, and plan more effective initiatives and campaigns.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

We recommend reflecting first by yourself and then gathering as a group. You may also want to ask stakeholders for their feedback, such as partners and members of your target audience.

Here are a few questions to use for reflection:

By yourself

Now that it's over, what are my first thoughts about our initiative/-campaign? Are they mostly positive or negative?

What did I learn about myself? About others? About CEFMU?

What role did I play in the group? How did I feel about that role?

Would I change anything about how I work with the group next time?

With your group

How do we feel overall about our initiative/ campaign? What were our 'highs' and 'lows'?

What challenges did we encounter and how did we deal with them? Would we change anything for the next time to avoid or better manage those challenges?

What did we learn about CEFMU (either facts or the way people feel/act about the issue) that we need to remember for the next time?

How can we better support and encourage each other during future initiatives and campaigns?

By yourself

What do you feel went well?

What could be improved?

Did you learn anything about CEFMU from our initiative/campaign?

How do you feel about CEFMU after our initiative/campaign?

What, if anything, did taking part in our initiative/campaign motivate you to do?

What do you think our next steps should be to continue to build support for the end of CEFMU?

KEEP THE MOMENTUM GOING

After you finish an initiative or campaign you might have a mix of feelings - proud, exhausted, motivated, discouraged. Taking time to reflect and recharge is important. So is thinking about how you can build on what you've done and move forward. If we want to end CEFMU we need to keep the momentum going!

Remember that change takes time

Shifting social norms and individual attitudes and behaviours is a gradual process. Don't get discouraged if you don't see the big changes you were hoping for. Focus on small, doable, measurable actions and celebrate your progress.

Build your support system

It helps to have people to talk to when you're feeling discouraged, exhausted or uncertain about next steps. Other youth activists can be a great resource, so can the staff of organisations that you partner with who have experience working on child rights and/or gender equality.

Plan sustained activities rather than one-offs

Instead of doing one workshop in a school or running a campaign for a few weeks, think about a longer series of connected activities. Not only will this help create the right environment to slowly change attitudes, behaviours and social norms, but it will also help you focus on the big picture and not get discouraged if one activity doesn't go as well as you hoped.

Document activities and learnings

Taking the time to document what you've done, what worked and what you learned can be useful for reflection and it can also help inspire others. Whether you make a video, do a write-up or tell the story through photos, you'll be creating your own record of your activism and helping others get engaged in ending CEFMU. Think about how you could share what you've put together (ie: social media, media outlets, youth activism platforms like Plan's Regional Youth Action Platform etc.)

Remember your 'why'

When you are in the midst of the logistics of a campaign or event it can be easy to lose track of what made you care about this issue in the first place. Take some time to reconnect with the personal stories behind CEFMU, whether by reading, watching videos or talking with people in your community.

SHARE WHAT YOU'VE DONE!

The [Regional Youth Action Platform](#) is launching soon! It will be a social networking platform to bring youth activists across the region together to share opportunities and take collective action. It's the perfect place to:

Get empowered: Find resources, materials and inspiration to support your activism.

Get involved: Find out about opportunities to participate in events, nominate yourself as a youth speaker, share photos, videos and texts, and build your own project with templates.

Get connected: Create a user profile, highlight your interests and achievements and connect with your peers.

Learning is not the product of teaching, learning is the product of the activity of learners. This always keeps me motivated and inspires me.

Bhwana, 18, India

You only have one life, always keep learning, keep growing to perfect yourself.

Thu Huyen, 22, Vietnam

TIME TO ACT: TEMPLATES & RESOURCES

PROJECT PLANNING ROADMAP

1. LEARN

What can you find out about CEFMU in your community or country? Who is already working on this issue? Who are the stakeholders? What IT'S TIME action area do you want to focus on?

People to talk to/
resources

Facts about
CEFMU

Stakeholders

What I want to focus
on (think about the
IT'S TIME action
areas)

2. DEFINE

Based on what you learned, what is your objective? Who is your target audience and what do you want them to do?

Objective (make sure it's SMART)

Target audience (what are their knowledge, attitudes and behaviours related to CEFMU? What action do you want them to take to achieve your objective?)

3. DESIGN

What are the best ways to communicate with your target audience? Are they interactive? What messages do you need to share with them?

How to reach the target audience

3-5 key messages (short, easy to understand and connected to your objective)

Risks and how to avoid or manage them

4. CREATE & TEST

Create and test your materials/content with the target audience. Then make your dissemination plan!

Materials/content created

Feedback from testing

How and when to share the materials/
content (dissemination plan)

5. DELIVER & MONITOR

Division of talks
(who will do what?)

Tools for monitoring progress
(spreadsheet, checklist)

6. EVALUATE & REFLECT

Tools to evaluate impact (did the target audience follow the call to action? How do you know?)

Lessons learned & next steps

HOW TO TEST MESSAGES AND MATERIALS

Source: FHI 360, Social and Behaviour Change Communication Guidebook

<https://www.fhi360.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/resource-sbcc-guidebook.pdf>

Why?

You need to test messages and materials with your target audience to make sure they find them appealing, easily understandable, believable, relevant to their needs or situation and motivating.

How?

Individual interviews or focus group discussions with 5-8 participants.

Here are some examples of questions to ask:

Appeal

- What do you like about the (material)?
- What do you not like about it?

Understandability

- What do you think the material is saying?
- What else?
- Is there anything that is not clear to you?
 - What is not clear?
 - Why is it not clear?
 - How would you reword what the material is saying so that it is easier to understand?

Believability

- What in the material is believable to you?
- What is not believable?

Relatability

- Do you feel what the material says is speaking to you personally? Why or why not?

Motivation to act

- What will you do after seeing/ reading this material? Why?

Look out for:

- Initial negative reactions that indicate that the material is not appealing or not liked.

- Non-verbal cues (facial and body expressions, body movements, etc.) that either match or don't match what the participants are saying.
- Participants who dominate the discussion. If this happens, try to draw out others' opinions and views.
- Responses that show that participants are expressing what they think the facilitator wants to hear or echoes what others in the group are saying. If this is observed, reiterate that there are no right or wrong answers and that everyone's opinions matter in order to improve the materials.

THE 7 C'S OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Source: FHI 360, Social and Behaviour Change Communication Guidebook

<https://www.fhi360.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/resource-sbcc-guidebook.pdf>



Command Attention

Attract and hold the audience's attention. Use colors, images, key words and design so that the material stands out, is noticed and memorable.



Clarify the Message

Ensure the material conveys the message clearly, with easy-to-understand words and images. There should be one clear, single-minded message. The simpler the better!



Communicate a Benefit (or a Consequence)

Stress how the audience will benefit from adopting the desired behavior or how the current behavior poses personal risks to the Target Audience (conveying a benefit is generally more effective than a negative consequence)



Consistency Counts (for Multiple Materials)

Be single-minded. Ensure that content within and among various materials have the same message and "lock". Repeat messages throughout the materials. Use the same words and phrases. Use the same or related images. This will avoid confusion.

Remember: Repetition of the same message in various materials and media enhances the impact of the message



Create Trust

Well-developed materials encourage the audience to trust the organization or program using them. Trust and credibility allow and encourage the audience to heed the message.



Cater to the Heart and Mind

People are swayed by both facts and emotion. Use both to maximize the material's persuasiveness.



Call to Action

Include a clear "Call to Action" in materials. Tell Target Audience members precisely what they can do.

FREE TOOLS FOR PLANNING, DESIGN AND DISSEMINATION

There are many great online tools to give your activism efforts a boost! We've focused here on ones that offer access to some or all of the content for free. You may need to create a free user account using a valid email address to use these online tools.

ADOBE EXPRESS

Online and mobile design app. Create social media graphics, short videos, web pages and more.

ANIMAKER

A platform to create animation and live-action videos.

BE FUNKY PHOTO EDITOR

An online photo editing tool. It includes templates to create cards, flyers, invitations, etc.

BEAUTIFUL TROUBLE

An international network of artist-activist-trainers helping grassroots movements become more creative and effective.

CANVA

An online graphic design tool that you can use to create social media posts, presentations, posters, videos, logos and more.

IBIS PAINT

An illustration and manga drawing app.

INSHOT VIDEO & PHOTO EDITOR

HD video editor and photo Editor with professional features. Add music, transition effects, text, emoji and filters, blur background

NOUN PROJECT

A diverse collection of free icons and stock photos.

TRELLO

Project management tool.

VN VIDEO EDITOR

An easy-to-use and free video editing app.

WETRANSFER

A simple way to share large files. With the free version you can share files of up to 2GB in size.

CHECKLIST FOR GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE ACTION

Calling for gender equality is fundamental to ending CEFMU and it means pushing back against an unfair world that privileges boys and men over girls and women. We can't ignore the power imbalance between genders - we need to transform it.

A gender-transformative approach challenges and gets to the bottom of harmful gender stereotypes and norms and actively promotes gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

Here's a checklist to help make sure your CEFMU activism is gender-transformative.

1. Have you taken the time to understand the needs and interests of girls and women who are affected by CEFMU in your community or country? Think about the different factors that make their experiences diverse (ie: rural or urban, married or unmarried, in school or out of school etc...)
2. Are you working with boys and men to help them understand and value gender equality?
3. Are you focusing on girl-led actions with boys and men as partners and allies?
4. Are you calling out and debunking harmful gender norms?
5. Are you building and showcasing the diverse capabilities of girls in a safe way?
6. Are you creating safe spaces for girls to access resources and learn more about their rights and available services?
7. Are you building a network of supporters that includes the people who have the power to shape knowledge, attitudes and behaviors about gender equality?

NEED SUPPORT? CONTACT PLAN INTERNATIONAL

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THANK YOU!