

About Plan International Nepal

Plan International has been working in Nepal since 1978 to help marginalized children, families and communities access their rights to survival, protection and participation.

At present, we run programmes in 23 districts, working with partners to strive for a just world where we are all equal.

Nepal remains a highly patriarchal society and minority groups are especially vulnerable. Girls' and women's access to social, economic and political power is limited and they are subject to harmful social norms and practices.

We tackle the root causes of the challenges and inequalities that children and young girls face. We won't stop until we are all equal.



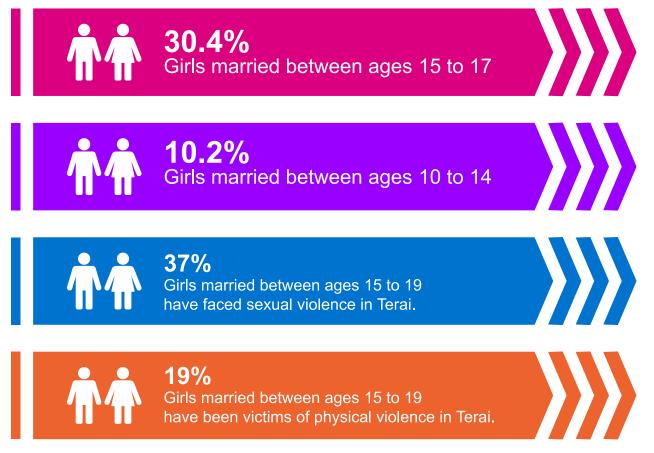
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1. Project Context and Background:

Nepal ranks third among South Asian countries with the highest rates of child marriage. Statistics show that 30.4% of adolescent girls are married between the ages of 15 and 17, while 10.2% are married as early as 10 to 14 years old (NPHC, 2021). Similarly, a report reveals that 37% of girls married between the ages of 15 and 19 in the Terai region have faced sexual violence, and 19% have been victims of physical violence. Although Nepal's law deems child marriage illegal, adolescent girls are disproportionately affected by this practice.

The root causes of child marriage in Nepal include poverty, lack of education, ignorance of the law, absence of health awareness, dowry practices, and the selfishness related to household work. Another significant factor is harmful social traditions. In Nepali society, continuing and adhering to distortions and anomalies that have persisted for centuries is still considered virtuous. The belief that performing a daughter's marriage (*Kanyadan*) at a young age leads to heavenly rewards has also perpetuated child marriage. In Nepal's Terai region, alongside religious beliefs, dowry is also a major cause of child marriage. The practice of marrying off daughters at a young age to give a smaller dowry, coupled with the commercialization mindset of demanding and providing higher dowries as age increases, has fueled the prevalence of child marriage.



National Population and Housing Census, 2021

2. Project Objectives and Goals

Plan International Nepal has been implementing five years Girls Get Equal (GGE): Preventing Child, Early and Forced Marriage project since 2020 in 10 local governments of Bardiya, Kalikot and Jumla district. The overall goal of this project is to reduce the prevalence of Child, Early and forced Marriages (CEFM) in Bardiya, Kalikot and Jumla of Nepal.

This is designed to be achieved through a comprehensive approach that seeks to increase the agency of adolescent girls and boys to protect themselves and to exercise choice about their futures through education, economic empowerment, increased knowledge of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and life skills.

The project is designed to support families with daughters at high risk of CEFM to increase their income so they can avoid child early marriage. The project has addressed the underlying causes of CEFM through mobilizing communities to embrace norms that value the girl child and support girls and boys to delay marriage. Lastly, the project has advocated and strengthened laws and policies related to child protection and their implementation.

This project aims to achieve this overall objective by:

- 1. Keeping girls in school
- 2. Access to quality information on SRHR
- 3. Economic empowerment for youths who are out of school
- 4. Engaging girls and boys to challenge discriminatory social norms
- 5. Promoting efficient and sustainable child protection mechanisms

3. Multi-Stakeholders Collaboration and Youth-Friendly Campaigns

3.1 Activism of change agents

The project has mobilized local youth by building their capacity to lead campaigns against child marriage. Through adolescent change agents, efforts have been made to expand appropriate knowledge on sexual and reproductive health rights among their families and communities. Various programs conducted by the project have provided a total of 41,886 adolescents across three districts with the opportunity to become well-informed about sexual and reproductive health.



3.2 Meaningful steps of the child club

The child clubs formed in various schools have been actively raising awareness on issues such as child marriage, gender and caste discrimination, and ensuring children's rights through week-long programs in schools and door-to-door campaigns at the community level. Additionally, they have been equally proactive in enrolling out-of-school children into education through enrollment drives. With the aim of providing educational opportunities to underprivileged children, the child clubs have also organized fundraising campaigns and provided financial assistance. After receiving training and sensitization at different stages, the children have become capable of leading such campaigns.



3.3 Efforts of youth involved on the civil society network

The project has supported the internal governance and capacity building of civil society networks led by local youth, enabling them to advocate on policy issues. These organizations are also active in identifying various problems faced by children at the community level and drawing the attention of relevant stakeholders to address them. Over 500 representatives from 10 active civil society network across 10 municipalities in 3 districts are involved in this campaign. Among the many creative efforts by the civil society networks, one of the main initiatives is the "One Day a Week" campaign against child marriage. Under this initiative, they organize meetings in communities with high rates of child marriage to raise awareness and engage the community in addressing the issue.



3.4 Engagement of religious leaders and traditional healers

Religious leaders and shamans have taken the lead in the child marriage prevention campaign within their communities. Religious leaders have started the practice of requiring a government-issued certificate, such as a birth certificate, citizenship, or age verification, to ensure that only individuals who are 20 years or older can get married. They advise against child marriage for those under 20, suggesting that marriage should not take place if the person is too young, and are actively working to prevent child marriage. A total of 1,554 religious leaders from 3 districts are involved in the child marriage prevention campaign with the project.

Interfaith networks have been established in every local municipality where the project is implemented. Every religious leader affiliated with the network is committed to not participating in any activities related to child marriage. Under the project's initiative, operational guidelines for religious networks have been developed in each local municipality. Local municipalities have made it mandatory to obtain a recommendation from the ward office before marriage. Religious leaders have started the practice of seeking the ward office's recommendation from those wishing to marry. These guidelines have legally bound religious leaders, leading to a positive impact in reducing Child, Early, and Forced marriage.



3.5 Collaboration of all stakeholders in schools

The school environment has been made inclusive, accessible, and especially adolescent-friendly, with significant roles played by teachers, the school management committee, and the teacherparent committee. Every school has developed a child protection policy, and separate codes of conduct have been created and implemented for teachers, students, parents, the school management committee, and visitors. Awareness and orientation training have made parents realize their responsibility to act in the best interests of their children. Teachers have demonstrated a transformation in their behavior towards students and teaching methods. In schools, additional classes focused on raising awareness have been organized to support the campaign against child marriage, including weekly extracurricular activities such as public speaking, essay writing, and drawing.



3.6 Creative initiation of local cooperatives

Focusing on the high risk of child marriage among adolescent girls from poor families, the project has collaborated with local savings and credit cooperatives to promote entrepreneurship. Six savings and credit cooperatives have joined the project and are playing a significant role in promoting local employment and entrepreneurship. The policy adopted by these cooperatives is that loans will only be granted once the families of adolescent girls sign a commitment letter stating they will not engage in child marriage. This approach has made a significant contribution to both promoting employment and entrepreneurship, as well as the campaign to prevent child marriage.



3.7 Collaboration with mass media

The project has raised awareness through various programs, audio-visual materials, articles, and posters. By disseminating these materials through local radio, online platforms, and print media, the awareness campaign has gained a broader reach. The mass media has prioritized communicating legal provisions related to child marriage, the negative impacts of child marriage, gender and caste discrimination, and children's rights. Through these various campaigns, over 1.05 million rural people have had the opportunity to become aware of issues such as gender equality, child protection, children's rights, and the negative impacts of child, early, and forced marriage.



4. Partnership with Local Government

The project has carried out all activities in coordination and collaboration with local governments. At the ward level, child rights committees have been formed under the leadership of ward chairpersons to address issues related to child marriage prevention, child rights, and child protection. Similarly, at the municipal level, child rights committees have been established under the leadership of deputy mayors and are actively functioning. All 10 municipalities covered by the project have passed a 5-year strategy to end child marriage and have prioritized programs in line with this strategy. The project has played a direct role in helping local governments develop more than 24 policy frameworks related to child marriage, child rights, and child protection systems.

The policy frameworks created at the municipal level under the project's coordination are as follows:

- i. Five-year strategy to end child marriage
- ii. Child protection policy
- iii. Operational guidelines for civil society networks
- iv. Operational guidelines for interfaith networks
- v. Local child grievance handling guidelines

Each local government has not only shown commitment to the necessary policy frameworks based on ending child marriage and child protection but has also allocated the required budget for the effective implementation of these policies. Through collaboration with the project, the local governments have made significant progress. As a result of the joint efforts between the project and local governments, in the 10 municipalities covered by the project have already been declared child marriage-free.

5. Partnership with Provincial Government

The Girls Get Equal: Preventing Child, Early and Forced Marriage project has assisted in the development of a strategy to end child marriage in the Karnali Province. In alignment with the Government of Nepal's goal of declaring the country free from child marriage by 2030, an 8-years strategy has been drafted and in the process of approval to make Karnali Province a child marriage-free region. The strategy was created through the direct involvement of the project, gathering inputs from all districts and local municipalities within the province. The provincial government will play a role in policy and budget management, while all 79 local municipalities within the province will be responsible for implementing the strategy to end child marriage.

6. Policy Initiatives at the Federal Level

The strategy against child marriage 2072 (2015-2016) 6.1.

The federal system of governance in Nepal, and the revised Strategy Against Child Marriage 2081 has been prepared. Led by the Ministry of Women, Children, and Senior Citizens, with financial and technical support from the project, the strategy is in the process of being certified by the Cabinet. The need for a revised strategy arose to ensure the timely implementation of international and regional commitments, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, and the Sustainable Development Goals, to which Nepal is committed. The revised strategy aims for strong cooperation and coordination among the federal, provincial, and local governments, development partner organizations, civil society network, and all stakeholders to achieve the specified goals.

Revision of the national census questionnaire and publication of statistical 6.2. report on children

The project played a crucial role in incorporating specific questions into the data collection questionnaire of the National Census 2021 to gather more detailed and systematic data related to children. Out of the 18 questions recommended by the project, 11 were included in the questionnaire. Based on the data collected, the project has published a statistical report on children. This report is expected to significantly contribute to the formulation and implementation of policies and plans related to child marriage, child rights, and child protection at the federal, provincial, and local levels.

Agenda on child marriage and child rights in political party manifestos 6.3.

To enhance the effectiveness of the project, coordination and collaboration were also established with local political parties and their representatives. Through the initiative of the project, an archival effort was undertaken to document the issues related to children included in the political manifestos of parties participating in the local elections held in April 2022 (Baisakh 2079). Additionally, the project provided contextual support, feedback, and necessary recommendations on how political parties could further refine and strengthen their policies and plans related to children. At the local, provincial, and federal levels, political parties have started prioritizing the issues of child marriage, child rights, and child protection in their manifestos.

Measurable Achievements 7.

Project achievement summary:



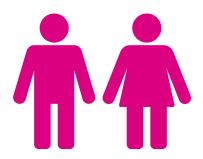
112 schools covered 746 out of school children rejoined the school



98.38% of total Adolescents of project areas have proper SRHR knowledge



1223 has trained on Equity and Inclusive teaching learning practice1030 members of PTA and SMC has been trained



41,886 adolescents received the opportunity to become informed about sexual and reproductive health rights

479 school teachers were provided with comprehensive sexuality education training



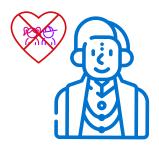
486 children received the opportunity to access accelerated learning and alternative basic education



107 youths received opportunities to become entrepreneurs or secure employment



184 marginalized families were provided with investment support to strengthen their economic conditions



1,554 religious leaders were engaged in campaigns to prevent child marriage



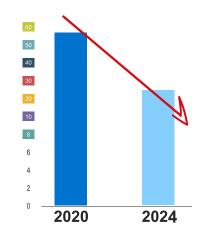
Over 1,000 representatives from 16 civil society networks participated in this campaign



10,5200 people has been sensitized through different campaigns



Assisted local governments to draft over **24 policy** frameworks focused on child marriage, child rights, and child protection systems



The rate of child marriage in the project areas was reduced from 58% to 23%

7.1 Reduction in the number of school dropouts

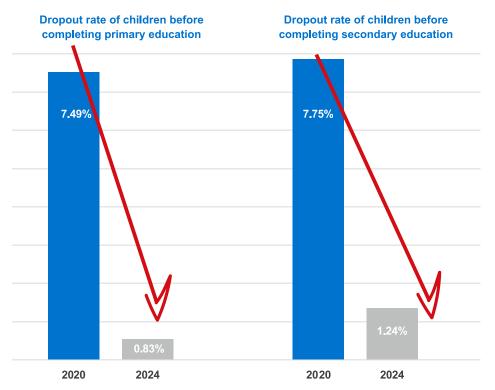


Fig 7.1: Reduction in the number of school dropouts



746 out-of-school children have been provided the opportunity to rejoin formal education.

During the baseline survey conducted by the project in 2020, the dropout rate of children before completing primary education was found to be 7.49%. By 2024, this rate has dropped to 0.83%. Similarly, the dropout rate of children before completing secondary education has decreased from 7.75% to 1.24%. Additionally, through the project's initiatives, 746 out-of-school children have been provided the opportunity to rejoin formal education.

7.2 Expansion of awareness on sexual and reproductive health

Through the project, 41,886 adolescents from 10 local municipalities across 3 districts were directly provided with the opportunity to receive appropriate information on sexual and reproductive health rights. During the baseline survey conducted in 2019, only 38.21% of adolescents in these 10 local municipalities had knowledge of sexual and reproductive health rights. However, following extensive awareness campaigns, the current data shows that 98.38% of adolescents now have appropriate knowledge on the subject.



41,886 adolescents received appropriate information on sexual and reproductive health rights.



10 local municipalities across 3 districts were directly provided with the opportunity to receive appropriate information on sexual and reproductive health rights.

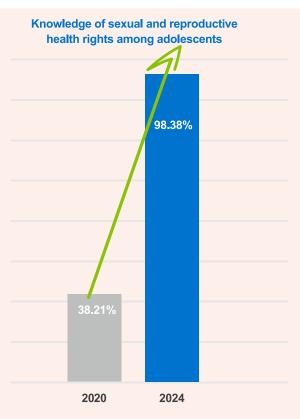


Fig 7.2: Expansion of awareness on sexual and reproductive health

7.3 Progress in reducing child marriage in the project area

% of compartive child and early marriage cy

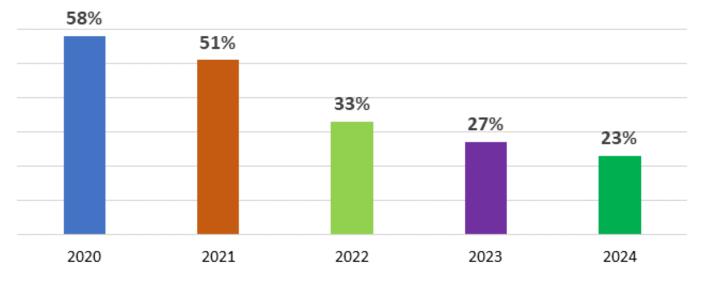


Fig 7.3: Progress in reducing child marriage in the project area

According to the survey, in 2020, the child marriage rate in the area covered by the project preventing Child, Early, and Forced marriage was 58%. After the implementation of the project, this rate has shown a consistent decline. A follow-up survey conducted one year after the project's implementation in 2021 found that the child marriage rate had decreased to 51%. Similarly, in 2022, it dropped to 33%, and in 2023, it was reduced to 27%. Likewise, in 2024 it has been decreased to 23%.

7.4 Progress in preventing child marriage at the municipal level

% of compartive child and early marriage status by year and palikas

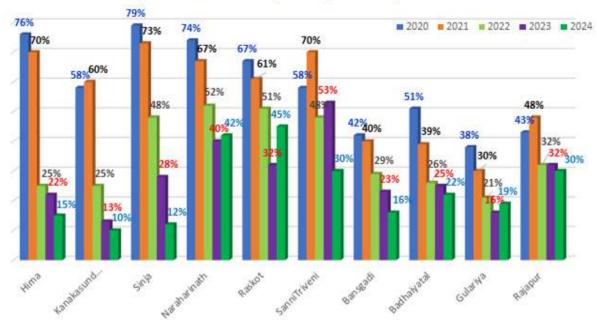


Fig 7.4: Progress in preventing child marriage at the municipal level

After the implementation of Girls Get Equal: Preventing Child, Early and Forced Marriage project, all the local municipalities where the project was introduced have progressed in line with the goal of ending child marriage. The campaign for the prevention of child marriage has made significant progress in all local municipalities.

7.5 Progress in preventing child marriage at the district level

% of compartive child and early marriage status by calender year and district ■ 2020 ■ 2021 ■ 2022 ■ 2023 ■ 2024 71% 68% 67% 66% 50% 45% 41% 40.3% 39.7% 33% 27% 23.1% 21.6% 12.5% Jumla Kalikot Bardiya

Fig 7.4: Progress in preventing child marriage at the district level

Five years after the implementation of the project, significant progress has been made in the campaign to prevent child marriage in the three districts where the project was introduced. In Jumla, before the project was implemented in 2020, the child marriage rate was 71%. By the end of 2024, this rate had been reduced to 12.5%. Similarly, in Kalikot, the rate decreased from 67% to 39.7%, and in Bardiya, it dropped from 45% to 21.6%.

8. Sustainability and Scalability

The Girls Get Equal: Preventing Child, Early and Forced Marriage project, which started in 2020, was completed in December 2024. However, the initiative has fostered strong community-level partnerships that contributed to the sustainable and effective prevention of child marriage, ensuring child rights, and enhancing the child protection system. The involvement of adolescents, youth, religious leaders, and civil society networks in the community-driven campaign to end child marriage has established long-term leadership for this cause.

With the participation of teachers, journalists, elected representatives, officials, parents, youth, students, and the general public in the project areas, the campaign is gaining traction. This broad engagement suggests that the impact of the campaign will remain even after the project's completion.

Through the technical and financial contributions of the project, the policies and strategies developed at the federal and provincial levels to end child marriage will have a lasting positive impact. At the municipal level, the policies, strategies, and various operational frameworks, along with local child rights committees, ward-level child rights committees, and child helplines, have enabled the long-term addressing of child marriage, child rights, and child protection issues even in the project's absence.

The exemplary impact of the project in Jumla, Kalikot, and Bardiya highlights the success of the initiative. Given that child marriage remains a persistent issue in many districts of Nepal, the positive influence of the project can be adopted as a valuable learning model. Reflecting on the achievements of the project, it is clear that involving the community and advancing with community leadership leads to enthusiastic results and ensures long-term sustainability.







9. Challenges

Although the campaign at the community level has achieved meaningful successes in preventing Child, Early, and Forced Marriage, various factors, including economic, social, and cultural aspects, pose significant challenges to the sustainability of the initiative. While efforts have been made to change harmful social norms and beliefs that encourage child marriage, altering the mindset of rural communities remains a difficult task.

Many families in these communities continue to face economic hardships, which increases the risk of child marriage. Specifically, limited employment and income-generating opportunities at the local level make economic factors a major challenge for the campaign to end child marriage. The inadequate infrastructure of community schools, along with their distance from households, and the lack of a fully gender-sensitive environment in schools, can make it challenging to retain adolescent girls and other children in school.

As the project will be active for a limited period, there is a constant challenge that the active involvement of stakeholders may decrease after the project's duration. Delays, inefficiencies, or lack of prioritization in implementing child protection policies at the local level can also be a challenge. Additionally, the limited capacity of local governments and child protection mechanisms may make it difficult to address all issues related to children effectively.

10. Lesson Learned

10.1 Holistic approaches work best

The project can achieve results if it addresses issues such as education, economic empowerment, awareness expansion on sexual and reproductive health rights, changing harmful social traditions, and necessary policy arrangements through a comprehensive approach in its design and implementation.

10.2 Community engagement is critical

Through the engagement of influential community leaders and parents, harmful social practices can be changed.

Continuous dialogue and orientation are essential for achieving long-term behavioral change within the community.

10.3 Economic empowerment is a key factor

In economically stronger families, the likelihood and risk of child marriage are comparatively lower.

10.4 Education is a protective factor

If adolescent girls can be kept in school, it can significantly contribute to the reduction of child marriage.

The provision of basic educational materials and school uniforms also leads to a notable increase in school enrollment rates.

10.5 Flexible and adaptive interventions

For programs to be successful, it is crucial that they are tailored to the local context, addressing specific issues and challenges.

11. Voices from the Ground













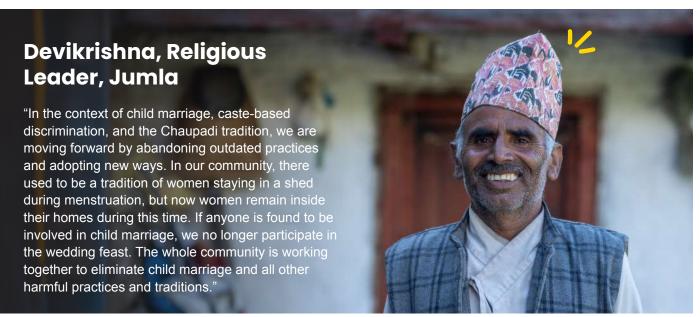


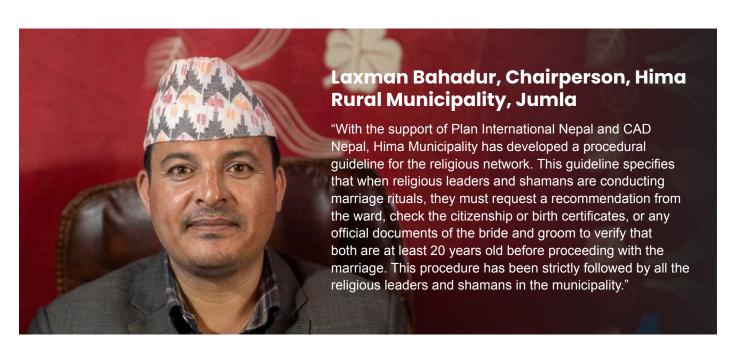
















12. Contribution to Achieving the Targets Set in the National Strategy

The National Strategy for Ending Child Marriage 2072, issued by the Government of Nepal, aims to declare Nepal as a country free from child marriage by 2030. The encouraging achievements seen in reducing child marriage in the project areas suggest that this strategy has made a significant contribution to achieving the targets set. The strategy also envisions contributing to the creation of a child-friendly and gender-equal society. Furthermore, the strategy includes the goal of ensuring child's rights in a child marriage-free environment. The strategy outlines strategic actions such as empowering girls and adolescents, ensuring quality education for them, involving families and communities to end child marriage and ensure gender equality. The project's steps—from families to communities to schools—have contributed to addressing these strategic directions envisioned by the strategy. Additionally, the project's creative efforts in enrolling out-of-school children and ensuring they stay in school align with the strategic direction outlined in the strategy.

By engaging adolescents, religious leaders, teachers, communities, and civil society networks as agents of change, the project has raised awareness about child rights, gender, sexuality, sexual and reproductive health and rights, as well as child marriage. It has contributed to ensuring male and boy participation in ending child marriage, gender inequality, and patriarchal attitudes. Moreover, the strategy highlights the importance of ensuring safe, quality formal and informal education and income-generating opportunities for marginalized and vulnerable communities, especially for girls at risk of child marriage and married girls and women. The project has supported local-level initiatives to promote employment and entrepreneurship, addressing the strategy's goals.

In this way, the Girls Get Equal: Preventing Child, Early and Forced Marriage project has embraced and contributed significantly to achieving the targets, objectives, and strategies outlined in the National Strategy for Ending Child Marriage 2072.

13. Contribution of the Project to Achieving Sustainable Development Goals

At the global level, child marriage has been identified as an obstacle to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and the issue of ending child marriage has been prioritized in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agenda (2016-2030). In December 2013, after the 68th General Assembly of the United Nations passed a resolution on child marriage and forced marriage, programs against child marriage have become a global priority. The Girls Get Equal: Preventing Child, Early and Forced Marriage project has contributed significantly towards achieving this goal, in which Nepal is also a participating country. Additionally, this project has also contributed to achieving Sustainable Development Goal No. 5 (Achieving Gender Equality). Similarly, the project has contributed to achieving the goal of ending inequality as specified in Goal No. 10. Along with this, it has also supported the achievement of Goal No. 16, which focuses on ensuring peace, justice, and strong institutions.





Until we are all equal

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