

POSITIONING THE ISSUE OF CHILD MARRIAGE AND EARLY UNIONS (CMEU) IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN: THE CASE OF UNICEF DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

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Positioning the issue of Child Marriage and Early Unions (CMEU) in Latin America and the Caribbean: the case of UNICEF Dominican Republic 2016-2022

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

C4D – Communication Strategy for Development (Estrategia Comunicación para el Desarrollo)
CMEU – Child Marriage and Early Unions
CONANI –National Council for Children and Adolescents (Consejo Nacional para la Niñez y la Adolescencia)
CPD – Country Program Documents
DR – Dominican Republic
DR-CO – Dominican Republic Country Office
ENHOGAR-MICS – National Multipurpose Household Survey (Encuesta Nacional de Hogares de Propósitos Múltiples – Encuesta de Indicadores Múltiples por Conglomerados)
FLACSO – Latin America Faculty of Social Sciences (Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales)
GANA – Cabinet of Children and Adolescents (Gabinete de Niñez y Adolescencia)
IJM – International Justice Mission
KAP - Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices
KOICA – Korea International Cooperation Agency
LAC – Latin America and the Caribbean
LACRO – Latin America and the Caribbean Regional Office
NGOs – Non-Governmental Organizations
OAS – Organization of American States (Organización de los Estados Americanos)
OHCHR – Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
PPA - Policy for the Prevention and Attention to Early Unions and Adolescent Pregnancy (Política de Prevención y Atención a las Uniones Tempranas y el Embarazo en Adolescentes)
PREA – Pregnancy Reduction Plan (Plan Nacional para la Reducción de Embarazos en Adolescentes)
PROSOLI – Progressing with Solidarity Program (Progresando con Solidaridad)
QCA – Qualitative Comparative Analysis
SBC – Social Behaviour Change
SDGs – Sustainable Development Goals
SEM – Socio-Ecological Model
SUPÉRATE – Social Protection Program Supérate
UNFPA – United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF – United Nations Children's Fund

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



In 2015, the United Nations established a target to eliminate child marriage and early unions (CMEU) by 2030. The Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) region currently has the third-highest rate of CMEU globally. If rates of CMEU remain stagnant in the LAC region, LAC is set to surpass rates of CMEU in Asia and become the region with the second highest prevalence, behind only Sub-Saharan Africa. CMEUs contribute to cycles of violence that harm well-being, indicating the importance of legislative and policy changes to combat this complex phenomena.

In recent years, legislative and policy changes regarding CMEU have been implemented in the Dominican Republic, signifying its importance as a case study for observation and learning. This study examines the role of the UNICEF Dominican Republic Country Office (DR-CO) in positioning the problem of CMEU in public and government agendas by tracing policy processes, documenting lessons learned and best practices/strategies, and providing recommendations to strengthen programs against CMEU in the LAC region

Process tracing, enhanced by interviews and focus groups, revealed key actors and critical junctures that assisted in advancing the issue of CMEU on public and government agendas. The most substantial contributions to the policy process were legislative changes surrounding the legal age of marriage and the introduction of the Prevention and Attention to Early Unions and Adolescent Pregnancy (PPA) policy plan.

Studying challenges faced by UNICEF DR-CO in positioning the issue of CMEU in agendas revealed that difficulties occur not only within UNICEF and civil society organizations, but at regional, national, institutional, and policy implementation levels. Challenges include but are not limited to: (1) Issues with prioritizing action against CMEU; (2) Structural and systemic causes of CMEU; (3) Limited political strength and capacity to address CMEU; (4) Lack of coordination amongst inter-sectoral actors; (5) Lack of operational and strategic planning; and (6) Lack of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

Regardless of challenges faced, several strategies proved to be effective in positioning the issue of CMEU in public and government agendas in the Dominican Republic, including: (1) Knowledge building; (2) Formation of alliances; (3) Advocacy and awareness building; (4) Targeted communication strategies; and (5) Effective implementation of policies and programs to combat CMEU beyond legislative changes.

The greatest contribution of this research is the framework for replicating success in advancing issues on public and decision-making agendas. This framework, developed in consideration of insights from process tracing as well as learnings observed from challenges and effective strategies, documents and systemizes UNICEF DR-CO advocacy efforts to assist other LAC countries in initiating legislative and policy changes regarding CMEU or other similar issues.

The framework, later accompanied with recommendations, is comprised of the following steps:

Step 1: Build a solid knowledge foundation and strong partnerships. Contextualizing the problem is important, and this step communicates the importance of comprehending a problem's characteristics, extent, causes, consequences, risks, amongst other factors.

Step 2: Advocate and communicate. Once a knowledge base is established, actors should share this knowledge with other actors and the general public, with the goal of raising awareness and target relevant stakeholders through advocacy and communications.

Step 3: Identify and leverage political allies. Actors need to understand the other stakeholders implicated in the issue, requiring stakeholder mapping at the beginning of the policy process. Following this mapping, actors can build partnerships and exchange expertise, resources, and influence to expand transformational potential.

Step 4: Push for strong legal foundations. Depending on the jurisdiction, actors will have different paths for legal transformation. Even though laws cannot solve social problems in their entirety, they are important pillars in actioning long-term change.

Step 5: Efficiently design and implement policy. In this last step, actors should lay the foundations for the proper development of projects and public policies aimed at tackling the problem.



INTRODUCTION

The Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) region currently has the third highest prevalence of child marriage globally (UNFPA, UNICEF and UN Women, *Child Marriage and Early Unions in Latin America and the Caribbean in Humanitarian Crisis Settings*, 2018) though it is significantly underrepresented in literature and is the only region that presently does not receive funding from the United Nations Population Fund/United Nations Children Fund (UNFPA/UNICEF) Global Program to End Child Marriage. If the same progress is continued, Latin America and the Caribbean will have the second-highest prevalence of child marriage and early unions by 2030, behind only sub-Saharan Africa (UNICEF, *A Profile of Child Marriage and Early Unions in Latin America and the Caribbean*, 2019, p. 4). The multicausal problem of child marriage and early unions (CMEU) must become more visible in LAC to leverage greater resources to prevent child and adolescents from falling victim to CMEU. This report supports the development of a regional strategy to raise the issue and reduce rates of CMEU in all LAC countries. UNICEF's LAC Regional Gender Team is committed to making this issue more visible to leverage more resources for programming in the LAC region. This report will support the development of a regional action strategy for the coming years that is in line with the UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund)-UNICEF Global Program to End Child Marriage.

The purpose of this study is to systematize the policy process of raising the issue of CMEU on the governmental agenda in the Dominican Republic, as well as identify the main actions that UNICEF and other key actors carried out, including potential best practices for the future. These findings are produced following our study of the Dominican Republic (DR) policy process from 2012 to 2022 that put the issue of Child Marriage and Early Unions as a central issue of its social policies. We process trace the origins of the national Policy for the Prevention and Attention to Early Unions and Adolescent Pregnancy (PPA), the different stakeholders involved in its creation, funding, and support over time with the end objective of identifying the pivotal features of policy and legislation design on CMEU to replicate success in other Latin American countries. This study was conducted from September 2022 to April 2023, and was funded by the University of British Columbia.

The report begins by presenting a review of the literature about CMEU, its determinants, and its consequences. The second section explores the issue and the efforts to combat it in LAC and the Dominican Republic. Then, the report discusses the research design, objectives, methodology, and research participants consulted. The research design centers on the DR as a case study analysis to present a visual timeline and description of key events that lead to establishing CMEU as a priority in the public agenda. Next, the report considers the Dominican Republic's strategies, lessons learned, and challenges advocating for the eradication of CMEU. Lastly, the report provides a framework and recommendations for the LAC Region to effectively proceed with its efforts to combat CMEU and help children and adolescents who are victims of this harmful practice.

SECTION I: BACKGROUND

Child Marriage and Early Unions (CMEU)

Child marriage, as defined by Taylor et al (2018) as “any formal marriage or informal union involving at least one person below [18 years of age]” (p. 45), is a human rights violation and a harmful practice that “disproportionately affects women and girls, preventing them from living their lives free from all forms of violence” (OHCHR, n.d.). CMEU occur worldwide, and affect 21% of women and girls, (OAS, 2022, *Hemispheric Report on Early and Forced Child Marriages and Unions in the States Party to the Convention of Belém do Pará. Organization of American State*) especially vulnerable women and girls, including rural and indigenous populations (OAS, 2022). The definition of child marriage includes early unions, as this practice “often involve[s] cohabitating... as if married” (Taylor et al, 2018, p. 46) and similarly ignores “full, free and informed consent” (OHCHR, n.d.). According to a report from the UNFPA and UNICEF, “the issue of child marriage [and early unions] has gained considerable global momentum in the past two decades, with a target for the elimination of child marriage by 2030 in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)” (Malhotra et Elnakib, 2021, p. 7) as child marriage contributes to “gender inequality, poverty, insecurity, and the lack of economic and social opportunities for girls” (Girls Not Brides, n.d.). According to Girls Not Brides (n.d.), bringing an end to child marriage requires development actors working across the SDGs to prioritize girls and the root causes of child marriage.

The Determinants of Child Marriage and Early Unions

CMEU is a complex and multifactorial phenomenon reflecting systemic problems. Among the main causes are gender norms and stereotypes, sociocultural practices and representations, multidimensional poverty, lack of access to quality education and development opportunities, lack of access to comprehensive sexual education, and gender-based violence. The consequences, which feedback on the causes, are early exposure to sexual activity, teenage pregnancies, school dropout, gender-based violence, limited personal and professional development, sexually transmitted diseases, and health problems, among others (UNFPA, UNICEF and UN Women, 2018; UNICEF DR-CO, Vicepresidenta de la República & PROSOLI, *El matrimonio infantil y las uniones tempranas Estudio de conocimientos, actitudes y prácticas en seis municipios de la República Dominicana*, 2019; GANA, CONANI, UNFPA & UNICEF DR-CO, *Política de Prevención y Atención a las Uniones Tempranas y el Embarazo en Adolescentes (PPA)*, 2021; OAS, 2022). In Malhorta and Elnakib’s (2021) study with the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage on the evolution in the evidence base of child marriage from 2000-2019, they analyze the context of CMEU with regional focuses including the LAC context and present the correlates and determinants of child marriage. Other authors including Greene (2019), Wiedemann (2021), Mahhumita (2021), Kidman (2017), Taylor (2018) and Mahato (2016), further contextualize the following determinants from a Latin American and Caribbean lens on the following page:

Education

Malhotra and Elnakib (2021) point to the lack of education and educational investment in girls being the most prominent theme in the evidence base on the gendered role of child marriage. This is supported by Greene's study on CMEU in Latin America (2019), which indicates that 51% of women in the LAC region who were married before reaching the age of 18 have no level of education or only primary school education, and only 18% completed secondary or higher education. Access to education is often viewed as an alternative to child marriage, though it is often not a viable option considering the poor availability and quality of schooling for girls, especially at a secondary level. Wiedemann (2021)'s article on the legal progress and socio-economic reflections on child marriage in Latin America further points to how girls' access to education is often denied, and child marriage is looked to as an alternative in securing a stable financial future for girls.

Legal Systems

According to Garcés and Vega (2016), "the incorporation of human rights standards on children and adolescents into national regulations by countries in Latin America and the Caribbean is a process that began with the reform of laws regarding child protection and penal responsibility" (p. 18) with almost all Latin American countries increasing "the legal age of marriage to 16 or 18 years during the last years" (Wiedemann, 2021, p. 1). Wiedemann further notes that despite these widespread legal reforms in LAC, "legislative reforms have not, so far, reduced child marriages" (p. 2), especially since the reforms only have an impact on civil marriages and do not adequately address the nuances of early unions. Malhotra and Elnakib (2021) argue that strengthening legislation around child marriage and early unions is not sufficient to reduce or prevent child marriage and early unions from occurring as "constitutional protections and legal guarantees against child marriage are compromised by loopholes such as the absence of a definition of consent and inadequate penalties and fines for those found in violation" (p. 44).

Socioeconomic Status

Poverty and child marriage relationships are closely linked. CMEU disproportionately affects indigenous populations and girls from rural areas. Malhorta and Elnakib (2021) demonstrate an inverse relationship between socioeconomic status and child marriage through an examination of numerous studies indicating that "girls from poorer households have a higher risk of marrying early as compared to girls from wealthier families" (p. 37).

Financial Burden

CMEU can be perceived as an alternative to reduce financial burdens on families. Marrying girls young shifts the financial burden from the family to the suitor and their family, representing the motivation of parents to allow their children to marry as a means to cope financially, especially in times of vulnerability or economic loss. Wiedemann (2021) acknowledges that "the number of child marriages and early unions varies significantly between more wealthy and poorer sections of the [Latin American] population" (p. 14) where the average rate of CMEU is 25%, but the rate is only 10% in the most prosperous areas and 38% in the poorest areas. This is because, according to the UN, CMEU in "economically weaker parts of the population are linked to the limited alternatives resulting from poverty" (p. 14) and unions are seen as a means to secure financial stability (Wiedemann, 2021).

Early Sexual Relationships and Early Pregnancy

Several studies (for example, studies completed by Malhorta et Elnakib, Wiedemann, Taylor et al., and Mahhumita) indicate that parents' motivation to marry their daughters is to prevent them from engaging in extramarital relations, as marriage is the only recognized framework to explore intimate relationships. According to Mahhumita (2021), "societal expectations of women dictate that they be modest, innocent, chaste, nurturing, passive, self-sacrificing, and family-centered" (p. 1), signifying the impacts of societal expectations surrounding sexuality. Girls engaging in sexual relationships and or experiencing early pregnancy act as catalysts for early child marriage, as arrangements are created to "preserve family reputation and honour" (Malhorta et Elnakib, 2021, p. 35). Beyond engaging in sexual activity, those that enter early marriage or unions often experience undue pressure to have children soon after marriage due to gendered norms and identities.

Ethnic Affiliations and Beliefs

Wiedemann (2021) points to the significance of group-specific social norms and traditions and how they influence rates of child marriage and early unions in Latin America. There is an "increased number of child marriages in certain ethnic groups" (p. 16) and this can be "read in conjunction with the spread of poverty in these groups and the more traditional social norms in rural areas" (Wiedemann, 2021, p. 16). According to Wiedemann, "women who belong to indigenous population groups or who have African roots marry more often before the age of 18 years than women from other population groups" (p. 16), though the phenomena of CMEU still pervades all ethnic groups.

CMEU are complex problems that exacerbate adverse outcomes including gender inequality, poverty, insecurity, and less opportunity for women and girls. The intersections of the determinants above contribute to creating increasingly vulnerable conditions that perpetuate the prevalence of CMEU in the LAC region. Malhorta and Elnakib (2021) argue that "the research on the determinants [of CMEU] is overabundant" and that moving forward, "it is equally important to assess the common structural factors that reduce or eliminate child marriage" (p. 91). Based on the above determinants, it can be concluded that CMEU is multicausal, and its reduction and prevention require addressing its root causes in prevention and implementation strategies.

The Harms of Child Marriage and Early Unions

According to Malhorta and Elnakib (2021), the determinants and consequences of child marriage "emphasize gender inequality as the fundamental dynamic underlying child marriages, with much higher rates for girls than boys, as well as the uniquely gendered negative outcomes for girls" (p. 24-25). Such consequences are discussed on the following page and include but are not limited to:

Sexual Reproductive Health

A negative association exists between fertility-related outcomes and child marriage (Malhorta et Elnakib, 2021). The negative outcomes include "early and unintended childbearing, lower contraceptive use, high fertility, and rapid repeated childbirth and pregnancy termination." (Malhorta et Elnakib, 2021, p. 52) Wiedemann (2021) further indicates that "girls learn that they obtain acceptance in society through marriage and motherhood" (p. 11) and "grow up with the belief that their task is to serve their husband" (p. 11), contributing to concerns around sexuality and control. Current data shows that in Latin America and the Caribbean, the majority of women who were married during their childhood gave birth before their 18th

birthday; 8 out of 10 did so before their 20th birthday (UNICEF, A Profile of Child Marriage and Early Unions in Latin America and the Caribbean, 2019, p. 4).

Domestic Abuse and Gender Based Violence

According to Kidman (2017), rates of physical or sexual intimate partner violence are 1.4 times higher for women married before 18 compared to those married later. These rates indicate higher vulnerabilities for girls married before the age of 18 and are often attributed to “the fact that girls married young tend to have older husbands and to reside with in-laws, in situations with diminished agency and control over decision-making” (Malhorta et Elnakib, 2021, p. 56). Issues around power dynamics and decision-making are observed in Malhorta and Elnakib’s analysis, which highlights the influence of “women’s sexuality, agency, gender dynamics, and patriarchy” (p. 33) on CMEU, and such power dynamics lead to disproportionate harms for women and girls as they are “embedded in family, marriage, and economic systems” (p. 34-35).

Social Isolation

Malhorta and Elnakib (2021) and Taylor et al (2018) highlight that CMEU can also increase the risk of social isolation. This harm, according to Mahato (2016), is often attributed to “forced early childbearing” (p. 701) resulting in “child brides drop[ping] out of school” (p. 701) and moving into homes where they are more susceptible to domestic violence and abuse, a lack of economic independence, and reduced decision-making authority. The forced pregnancies can also result in girls devoting themselves mostly to care work, impacting their education, labor earnings, and development opportunities (Working group of the Joint Inter-Agency Programme to End Child Marriage and Early Unions in Latin America and the Caribbean, 2022, p. 20-21).

Financial Dependence

A negative association exists between financial dependence and CMEU due to the dynamics of gender-based violence and power imbalance, with Wiedemann (2021) noting how child marriage often contributes to a “lack of school education” and “social expectations [being projected] onto women as housewives and mothers” (p. 15), often leading to women not pursuing employment and securing their own financial freedom, thus increasing dependence on husbands and partners.

Boys and CMEU

While the above determinants and consequences largely focus on the determinants of CMEU for women and girls, “many boys and young men too face pressures to marry early, or to marry girls who are children, and play a key role in embodying and reproducing harmful gender norms that drive child marriage” (equimundo, n.d.). According to Malhorta and Elnakib (2021), boys in some contexts also marry as children, meaning “some of the imperatives of child marriage – control of the decision-making by the older generation or the prioritization of family labour, reputational, [and] procreation means, can also apply to boys” (p. 34). Among boys, the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean have some of the highest rates of child marriage in the world. Of the 10 countries that have data on this, 9 are above the world average (UNICEF, A Profile of Child Marriage and Early Unions in Latin America and the Caribbean, 2019, p. 4).

Child Marriage and Early Unions in Latin America and the Caribbean

The LAC region has the third highest rate of child marriage internationally, preceded only by Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. In the region, on average, 25% of women and 60% of those in the most severe poverty quintiles marry or live in informal unions before age 18 (UNFPA, UNICEF and UN Women, 2018). The percentage of women in this situation varies between countries; in Jamaica, it affects less than 10% of women, while in Belize, Honduras, Nicaragua, and the Dominican Republic, it affects more than 30% of women (UNICEF, *A Profile of Child Marriage and Early Unions in Latin America and the Caribbean*, 2019, p. 6). CMEU has decreased 15% globally in the last ten years, while statistics for the LAC region are stagnant (Greene, *A hidden reality for adolescent girls. Child, early and forced marriages and unions in Latin America and the Caribbean*, 2019). UNICEF estimates that if public policies on this issue are not transformed in the region, by 2030, it will become the region with the second highest prevalence of CMEU (Pradelli, *Child, early and forced marriages and unions. Harmful practices that deepen gender inequality in Latin America and the Caribbean*, 2021).

In recent decades, there have been significant advances in laws to prohibit and inhibit child marriage; the age of marriage has been raised to either 16 or 18 for both women and men; judicial exceptions have been eradicated; the influence of parents and legal guardians has been reduced; and progress has been made toward equal treatment between women and men. However, judicial approvals in "exceptional" cases persist and laws to prohibit and inhibit child marriage do not adequately address the problem with early unions (which predominate over formal child marriages) as legal reforms are restricted to the context of formal child marriages (Wiedemann, 2021).

Child marriage is "currently prohibited in nine countries in Latin America and two in the Caribbean," with the Dominican Republic being the most recent country to enact this ban (Pradelli, 2022, p. 25). LAC is the region "with the most progress in increasing protection against child marriage between 2015 and 2017" where "the share of girls not protected under the law decreased from 36.6% in 2015 to 22.7% in 2017" (Wodon et al, 2017, p. 3).

In 2017, the UNICEF LACRO, UN Women, and UNFPA launched the Inter-Agency Regional Program to Accelerate Actions to End CMEU to "promote regional and national actions looking to end CMEU through a holistic and comprehensive response" (UNFPA, UNICEF and UN Women, 2018). This program was implemented in Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, and the Dominican Republic, where UNICEF and other agencies collaborated closely on strategies led by their respective governments to reduce rates of child marriage and support the empowerment of women and girls. The strategy aims "to accelerate the achievement of girls' and adolescent girls' equality in the region" by satisfying four outcomes: aligning national legislation with international frameworks; promoting policies and service areas; promoting the empowerment of girls and promoting more equal relationships; and generating a regional platform of allies. (UNFPA, UNICEF and UN Women, 2018). Despite global momentum surrounding the issue of child marriage, rates of CMEU in the LAC region have remained stagnant and the issue remains hidden, resulting in difficulty with mobilizing stakeholders, resources, and strategies to combat this complex problem. Despite the high prevalence of CMEU, the LAC region is the only region that does not receive funding from the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Program to End Child Marriage.

In December 2019, UNICEF along with its partner organizations convened a strategy meeting with civil society organizations and multilateral institutions. As a result, the Aliadas (a multi-stakeholder platform to end child marriage in the LAC region, which includes civil society organizations, feminist movements, adolescent organizations, international organizations, and United Nations Agencies) platform “Girls and adolescents free from unions in Latin America and the Caribbean” was established to activate a broader response, with greater impact, backed by evidence, alliances, and political will, through exchanges between key actors. Some of the work done by Aliadas includes advocating with ministries of women around LAC to include child marriage rates as an indicator on the Regional Gender Observatory for LAC, which has been achieved and can be followed in CEPAL’s Gender Equality Observatory (CEPAL, Child marriage. Gender Equality Observatory, 2022). Work done in the CMEU space ultimately contributes to SDG #5 - Achieve gender equity and empower all women and girls.

Child Marriage and Early Unions in the Dominican Republic Context

The Dominican Republic (DR) has the highest rates of CMEU in the LAC region with 32% of women marrying before the age of 18, and 9% of women aged 20-24 were marrying before they turned 15 years old (Ministry of Economy, National Statistics Office & UNICEF DR-CO, *Informe General ENHOGAR-MICS 2019: Encuesta Nacional de Hogares de Propósitos Múltiples, con la metodología de Encuestas de Indicadores Múltiples por Conglomerados, sobre la situación de niños, niñas, adolescentes y mujeres en la República Dominicana*, 2019). CMEU in the DR is impacted by many of the same determinants as the overall LAC region, with one key determinant being the perception of CMEU as a cultural practice and its positioning as a societal norm for many years. This cultural practice is recognized as patriarchal machismo/misogynist culture, whereby men in the LAC region exert control over anyone considered socially below them (Campillo Chalas, C. A., 2019). Within these relationships, men also expect complete subservience. Such social practices often result in men not showing respect towards women and/or treating them as inferior. One of the consequences of this perception is the fact that 60% of girls in early unions are with men that are at least 5 years older than them, and 23% of girls are with men ten years or older than them (UNICEF DR-CO, Vicepresidenta de la República & PROSOLI, 2019, 10). Considering these age gaps, younger girls may be coerced into entering predatory relationships where men can more easily exert their control.

As can be observed in the greater LAC region, the DR-specific context indicates similar themes where groups primarily affected by CMEU are young girls in poverty. In fact, 60% of women in the lowest economic bracket in the DR marry young (Ministry of Economy, National Statistics Office & UNICEF DR-CO, 2019). As stated in the determinants section previously, a combination of reasons including lack of education, lack of employment opportunities, cultural expectations and pressures, teen pregnancy, etc., contribute to high rates of CMEU in the DR. Relative to teen pregnancy, the DR has one of the highest rates in the LAC region and in the world. In fact, 77 out of 10,000 women will become pregnant in their teenage years (UNFPA, UNICEF and UN Women, 2018). This number only exacerbates the rate of CMEU as girls marry or enter relationships to avoid the social stigma of single motherhood.

Such cultural expectations and societal pressures related to CMEU, as well as the fact that it was not included on many feminist agendas in the region, left the issue unrecognized for many years. However, in the 2010s, perception of and recognition towards CMEU began to change. Work amongst non-governmental organizations (NGOs) brought attention to the issue and contextualized it not as a cultural practice, but as a crime.

Public awareness campaigns and research on the topic were carried out, contributing to a shift in public opinion on the acceptance of CMEU.

Though the Dominican Republic is still combatting this issue, major goals have been achieved. The Dominican Republic Government has worked alongside UN Agencies and some NGOs to create legislation that prohibits child marriage (in 2021) and a country-wide policy program to help educate and protect young girls from CMEU.

The Policy for the Prevention and Attention to Early Unions and Adolescent Pregnancy, also known as the PPA, was launched at the beginning of 2021. It begun its implementation in 20 out of the 158 municipalities in the Dominican Republic. The PPA unifies and fortifies two previous documents: the Plan for the Reduction of Adolescent Pregnancy 2019-2023 (PREA, Spanish acronym for Plan Nacional para la Reducción de Embarazos en Adolescentes) and the Plan for the Reduction and Elimination of Child Marriage and Early Unions (the second of which was an unpublished plan by the Dominican Government brought to light by the interview participants in this research). Choosing municipalities to pilot the PPA was based upon prioritizing the acceleration of reducing early unions, child marriage, and teenage pregnancy; therefore, the municipalities with higher population density, higher percentages of nationally registered births to mothers 19 years of age or younger, existing infrastructure to implement the program, and socioeconomic characteristics favorable to CMEU were selected (GANA, CONANI, UNFPA & UNICEF DR-CO, 2021, p. 85). The policy established the objectives and strategies to prevent, reduce, and address early unions and adolescent pregnancies until 2030. Through the Childhood and Adolescence Cabinet, the policy promotes and coordinates the actions between different public institutions and other actors, including: the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Women, Youth Ministry, Supérate Program, and the National Council for Children and Adolescents also known as CONANI (Spanish acronym for Consejo Nacional para la Niñez y la Adolescencia). The following table shows the relevant stakeholders involved in positioning the problem of CMEU in the public and government agendas, as well as those involved in the creation and early implementation of the PPA.

Research Design

Objectives

This report has three primary objectives:

1. Study the policy process through which UNICEF Dominican Republic Country Office (DR-CO) managed to bring the problem of child marriage and early unions to the public and government agenda in the Dominican Republic and uncover best practices and lessons learned for other Latin American countries undertaking similar processes and programs.
2. Support the UNICEF regional program against child marriage and early unions in Latin America and the Caribbean with learnings and best practices from the Dominican Republic context.
3. Contribute to improving the design and implementation of the UNICEF program against child marriage and early unions in the Dominican Republic and the LAC region.

Methodology

The research design relies on Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) for public policy (Thomann, 2019) which creates a logical sequence of the different processes and actors involved in the policy process. QCA starts by understanding the problem and the process of agenda setting, then the policy formulation and adoption, followed by further implementation and/or termination (Thomman, 2019, p. 257-258).

QCA can be conducted either as a condition-oriented approach where a single element of policy is analyzed in different contexts and settings, or through a case-oriented approach where the central objective is to analyze a particular case deeply and understand the logic behind its performance (p. 261). In-depth case study analysis was the method of choice to analyze CMEU policy process in the Dominican Republic.

The Dominican Republic was chosen as a case study for analysis because of UNICEF DR-CO's key role in raising the issue in the national governmental agenda, which was recognized by UNICEF LACRO as a model to be reproduced regionally. The public, political, and technical advocacy implemented by UNICEF DR-CO based on the high rates of CMEU in the Dominican Republic drove the issue up the country's agenda, resulting in legislative changes and in the creation of a robust and extensive program that has been adopted by 20 municipalities as a pilot program to be expanded in 2023. The DR's strategy for combatting CMEU presents essential context and learnings for understanding how other countries may design and implement processes to start combating child marriage and early unions.

The research team followed a two-pronged combined methodology: Process tracing and in-depth interviews and focus groups. In both cases, field research was key to perform stakeholders' analysis as well as to confirm and validate the process tracing of the key events and critical junctures that marked the success of CMEU as a public agenda priority.

Process tracing

Process tracing relies on a combination of analysis of available documents, archives, and available minutes. It also relies on semi-structured interviews with decisionmakers that took part in setting the agenda and building the policy, to understand the rationale and motivations behind supporting the program and how decision-makers have been involved (Mahoney and Thelen, 2015; Jaramillo, 2020).

Process tracing informed the research process by mapping how CMEU became part of the public policy agenda, and increased understanding of how ideas, agencies, and stakeholders came together to cement the positioning of CMEU as problematic and build the PPA policy. The research process built the timeline by analyzing academic studies, DR official documents and reports, background information provided by UNICEF LACRO and UNICEF DR-CO and by conducting interviews with decision-makers that took part in setting the agenda and building the policy.

Interviews and Focus groups

An analysis of stakeholders was conducted, employing interviews with key stakeholders, focus-groups discussions, observational research, and observation in planning meetings. Interviews were conducted with senators, congress representatives, public servants from CONANI, Supérate, and the Womens Ministry, international organizations including UNICEF, UNFPA, Plan International and Save the Children, as well as academics researching child marriage and early unions. In addition, one focus-group discussion was conducted with officials of UNICEF DR-CO to establish a timeline of events contributing to CMEU rising on decision-making agendas. Interview participants were selected using snowball sampling as the UNICEF LACRO team and UNICEF DR-CO team recommended potential interviewees to the research team based on their knowledge of relevant actors in the CMEU space. During the interviews, participants were asked about the history of advocacy around CMEU in the LAC region, key factors in legislative changes and initiative implementation, and best practices and lessons learned.

Among the key research questions asked of participants were the following:

1. How did the issue of CMEU reach the political and government agenda of the Dominican Republic? What advocacy efforts occurred?
2. Who were the stakeholders involved in positioning CMEU in the Dominican Republic's agenda, including those who pushed for advocacy and implementation strategies?
3. What was UNICEF DR-CO's role regarding CMEU in the Dominican Republic and what were the main components and strategies in influencing the policy process?
4. What lessons and best practices can be learned from the creation of the UNICEF DR-CO program against CMEU in the Dominican Republic? How can successes be replicated?
5. How can these lessons and best practices be applied to the regional context as well as potential future programs in the Dominican Republic and other Latin American countries?

Twelve interviews and the timeline-reconstructing focus group were held during the field work period from November 7, 2022, to November 18, 2022. Four additional interviews were held virtually following the fieldwork period with UNFPA and UNICEF representatives in December 2022 and January 2023. Interviews lasted 60 minutes to 90 minutes each. Interviews were primarily conducted in Spanish by two of four members of the research team. These two researchers had the advantage of being Latin American, and their ability to conduct interviews in Spanish contributed to more fruitful conversations as participants could engage in their first language.

Following the field-work period, the interview responses were transcribed and translated into English by the Spanish-speaking members of the research team, then the other two researchers coded the information in NVivo according to the following themes: Context, Timeline Establishing, Best Practices, Lessons Learned, Challenges, Stakeholders Involved, Progress Made, UNICEF Involvement, UNICEF DR CO, UNICEF LAC RO, and Potential Recommendations.

The methodology matrix (see Table 1 in the appendix) provides a summary of the methodology used, allied with the research questions and objectives of the project.

Ethical Considerations

The research team exercised high ethical standards under the guidance of the University of British Columbia Office of Research Ethics, having obtained approval from the Behavioural Research Ethics Board prior to the commencement of data collection and interviews. This approval process required the submission of a detailed project proposal outlining the background, objectives, research design and methodology, and researcher positionality, as well as interview questions in advance of commencing the fieldwork period. Each of the four researchers has also completed a certification process with the Government of Canada Panel on Research Ethics on ethical research for research involving humans and submitted their certificates to the University of British Columbia Office of Research Ethics for verification. This research, in compliance with the University of British Columbia Office of Research Ethics and Government of Canada Panel on Research Ethics, respects the dignity and diversity of its participants, as well as their right to self-determination and fair representation.

Prior to commencing each interview, participants were presented with an interview consent form (in Spanish) identifying the research team, project sponsor, interview purpose, study procedure, confidentiality measures, and signature lines to provide consent to participate in the study and to record the audio of the interview. In addition, participants were notified that they may decline to participate or withdraw their consent at any time. Information collected for the purpose of this study will only be used in the completion of corresponding University of British Columbia coursework and in collaboration with UNICEF, and participants' identity will remain confidential to ensure the prevention of damage to individuals. Audio recordings, transcripts, and translations of interviews are stored on a password-protected, Canadian-licensed data storage platform and will be erased on April 30, 2023.



SECTION II: FINDINGS

Major Stakeholders in the Fight Against CMEU

The fight against CMEU is complicated and multifaceted, thus it requires the participation of a variety of stakeholders. These stakeholders range from government ministries to NGOs and show the all-encompassing importance of the issue of CMEU. To provide clarity throughout the rest of the report, stakeholders are presented in the following visuals and defined by their affiliation, role and level of power/participation. This information was collected through interviews conducted during a field work period in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. This section responds to the question regarding stakeholders involved in positioning CMEU in the guiding questions of the “Interview and Focus Groups” section of this Report.

Major Stakeholders Visuals

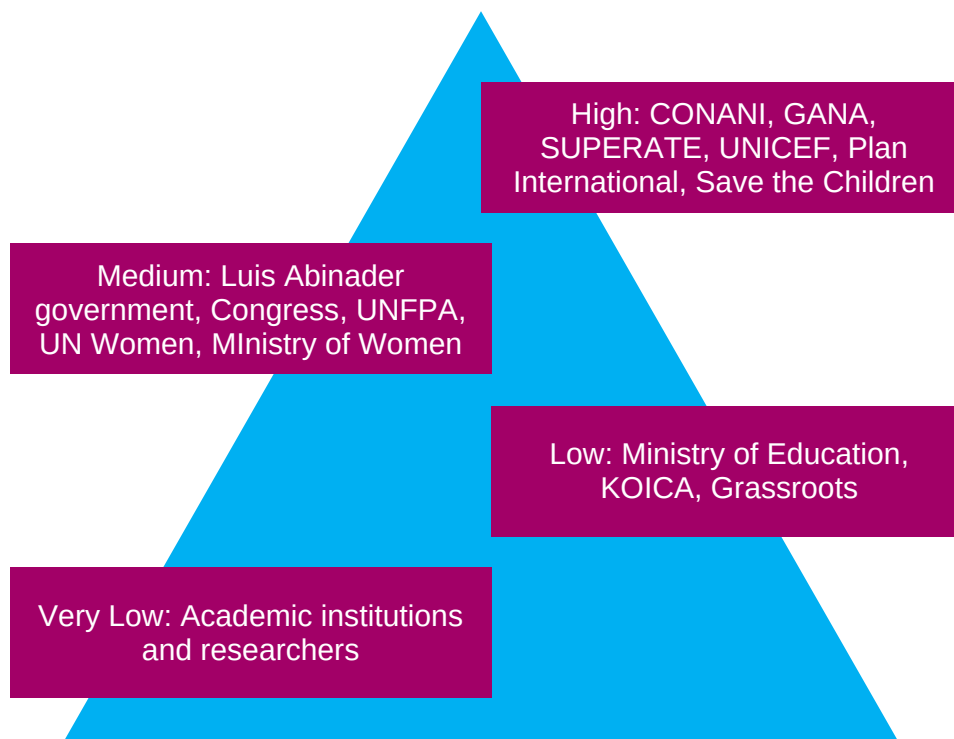
Actor	Role	Power/ Participation
Luis Abinader government and Raquel Arbaje [Government]	The Executive power worked to eliminate CMEU since the beginning of Abinader’s administration (2020). The president talked with representatives of the Congress from all political parties to incentivize them to advance changing legislation to prohibit child marriage. Since then, Raquel Arbaje, the First Lady, has been highly involved in the coordination of programs for children and adolescents. In 2021, she was appointed the president of the Cabinet of Children and Adolescents (GANNA, Spanish acronym for Gabinete de Niñez y Adolescencia).	Very High / Medium

<p>Congress [Government]</p>	<p>In the years prior to legislation changes, progressive representatives of the Congress tried to prohibit child marriage through two main strategies: 1) modifying the Civil and Penal Code and 2) creating a new law. Congress representatives like José Horacio Rodríguez and Gloria Reyes Gómez were highly committed to these changes and other human rights causes. However, there was a significant resistance from most of Congress, who, as the rest of the Dominican society, normalized the practice. It was intergovernmental organizations and civil society actors, who pressured the Congress to pass the Law 1-21.</p>	<p>Very High / Medium</p>
<p>Cabinet of Children and Adolescents (GANA) [Public institution]</p>	<p>GANA was created by CONANI in 2021 to coordinate the inter-institutional efforts for the design and implementation of programs and policies related to children and adolescents, including the PPA. For the policy design, GANA articulated the collaboration of relevant actors, such as the Ministry of Women, the Ministry of Education, UNICEF, UNFPA, and other civil society actors. Since the launched of the PPA, GANA continues its work of inter-institutional coordination; for example, through the facilitation of spaces for sharing advances and lessons learned.</p>	<p>High / High</p>
<p>National Council for Children and Adolescents (CONANI) [Public institution]</p>	<p>CONANI has been the public institution in charge of the design and implementation of programs and policies related to children and adolescents, protecting their general wellbeing and human rights.</p>	<p>Medium / High</p>
<p>Social Protection Program SUPERATE /PROSOLI [Public institution]</p>	<p>SUPÉRATE (previously called Progressing with Solidarity Program or PROSOLI, a Spanish acronym for Progresando con Solidaridad) has been an essential actor to reach Dominican families and has contributed to addressing, preventing, and decreasing CMEU through its social programs. For example, in 2018, SUPÉRATE collaborated with UNICEF in a study about knowledge, attitudes, and practices (KAP) regarding CMEU by implementing a survey.</p>	<p>Medium / High</p>

<p>UNICEF Dominican Republic Country Office [Intergovernmental organization]</p>	<p>UNICEF DR-CO has been a key actor in positioning the issue of CMEU in the public and government agenda and contributed to the design and implementation of the PPA using their experience and institutional leadership in defence of children and adolescent rights. During the process of positioning the issue, UNICEF DR-CO knowledge and evidence about CMEU, raised awareness, advocated for legal reform, and supported the coordination between all relevant stakeholders. Following the introduction of the PPA, UNICEF DR-CO has focused their efforts on the provision of technical advice and inter-institutional and inter-sectoral coordination, collaboration in the implementation of educational and empowerment programs to prevent early unions, and has worked to strengthen the capacities of public servants and public institutions.</p>	<p>Medium / High</p>
<p>International non-government organizations (Plan International and Save the Children) [International non-government organization]</p>	<p>In addition to UNICEF DR-CO's advocacy, these actors were key positioning the issue of CMEU through research, advocacy and communication campaigns, and the provision of technical advice to public actors. Many of the mentioned activities were developed in collaboration with each other, UNICEF DR-CO, and government institutions. Other actors recognize the role of International non-government organizations in raising awareness about CMEU through campaigns (such as posters all around the capital and #18NoMenos (#18NoLess)).</p>	<p>Medium / High</p>
<p>United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and UN Women [International cooperation]</p>	<p>These organizations, like UNICEF, are international actors working for the defense of human and women's rights. They brought international knowledge and lessons learned for addressing CMEU, provided technical assistance, and supported raising awareness. Their most significant contribution was the "UN Women, UNFPA and UNICEF Joint Programme to End Child Marriage and Early Unions in Latin America and the Caribbean" (2017).</p>	<p>Medium / Medium</p>
<p>Ministry of Education (MINERD) [Public institution]</p>	<p>Prior to the positioning of CMEU in the public agenda, the role of the Ministry relative to addressing this issue was limited. Sex education was vague and rarely enforced in schools. Now with the PPA, the Ministry is implementing educational programs to prevent early unions and promote gender equality.</p>	<p>Low / Low</p>
<p>Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) [International cooperation]</p>	<p>KOICA gained prominence in this space more recently, after the Law 1-21 and the PPA were launched. They have contributed to preventing early unions through their utilization of technical and financial resources, educational workshops, and collaboration in the implementation of programs. Among these contributions, KOICA was instrumental in addressing this problem through their creation of the Center for the Promotion of Integral Health of Adolescents (Centro de Promoción de Salud Integral de Adolescentes).</p>	<p>Low / Low</p>

<p>Civil society organizations and community leaders</p> <p>[Civil society]</p>	<p>Civil society and grassroots organizations have historically fought for social causes long neglected by the government. They have advocated for the transformation of laws and the creation of public policies, provided services to marginalized populations, and implemented development projects. In the case of positioning the issue of CMEU, these organizations played a secondary role, though their participation was important in influencing a legal transformation that prohibits child marriage. International Justice Mission (IJM) and other organizations advocated against Article 144, which was discriminatory to girls as it allowed for them to get married at a younger age than men. Moreover, the non-governmental organization (NGO) Coalition for Childhood (Coalición de ONGs por la Infancia - República Dominicana) also helped to raise awareness about the problem of CMEU and assisted in pressuring the State.</p>	<p>Low / Low</p>
<p>Academic institutions and researchers</p> <p>[Civil society]</p>	<p>Even though these actors have a key role in the generation and sharing of knowledge, they had a low involvement in the positioning of CMEU in the public and government agenda. Scarce literature on the subject, indicating limited involvement. More recently, academic institutions like the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences (FLACSO, Spanish acronym for Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales), are increasing their participation.</p>	<p>Very Low / Very Low</p>

The following figure presents the level of participation of stakeholders involved in the positioning of CMEU in the public and governmental agendas, considering the actions described in the table above, and the data collected through the fieldwork:



The Process of Making CMEU a State Policy in the Dominican Republic

The prevalence of CMEU in the Dominican Republic drove the issue up the country's agenda, requiring response through policies and political commitments. The Prevention and Attention to Early Unions and Adolescent Pregnancy (PPA) and commitments made by the President and First Lady of the Dominican Republic were catalysts in enacting legislative changes and mobilizing strategies to combat CMEU. Kingdon (1995) suggests that when a problem, policy, and political commitment are linked, "the probability of an item rising on a decision agenda is dramatically increased" (p. 202). The timeline and description below demonstrate initial actions and progress in addressing the problem of CMEU, policy and legislative changes, and the importance of political receptivity in driving change. This uncovers how the issue of CMEU rose on the political and policy agenda, and what actions and strategies were undertaken. This section responds to questions regarding how CMEU reached the political agenda and the role of the DR-CO in the guiding questions of the "Interview and Focus Groups" section of this Report. This is done by presenting the timeline and then describing the actions taken in depth.

The events described in the timeline, and timeline description are drawn from the data collected during the fieldwork period in the Dominican Republic, particularly the interviews conducted with relevant stakeholders and a focus group conducted with UNICEF DR-CO staff.

CMEU Policy & Law Timeline

2012-2015

- UNICEF DR-CO Progress in economy and reduction of poverty
- NGOs began to discuss a National Development Strategy that would reform the civil and penal code, as well as make the marriage age equal for boys and girls
- First official and international standardized statistics on CMEU are produced in the DR using a national survey and robust methodology, conducted in collaboration between the National Office of Statistics and UNICEF DR-CO
- SDGs are established by UN, including measurement and targets for CMEU

2016

- World Bank study on the economic impact of CMEU and the release of report: "Child marriage and adolescent pregnancy perpetuate poverty"
- Meetings with the Dominican Republic Government are held by UNICEF DR-CO to discuss CMEU
- UNICEF DR-CO develops a Strategic Advocacy Plan to position the issue of CMEU and work against it

2017

- UNICEF LACRO launches Regional Program against CMEU
- The UNICEF DR-CO establishes the goal to position the CMEU issue on the agenda. For that, the team begins to create content for social awareness:
- La Peor Novela (a soap opera to show the difficult realities of CMEU) is created by UNICEF DR-CO
- Girls not Mothers campaign is launched (a collaboration between UNICEF DR-CO, Plan International & Save the Children which included posters, billboards and online content to shock people about the harms of CMEU)
- "Economic Impact of Child Marriage and Early Unions" is published by UNICEF DR-CO

2018

- UNICEF DR-CO and Plan International collaborate on the publication of "Planteamientos" which exposed the complex reasons behind CMEU from a local context
- Launch of the 3rd National Plan for Gender Equality as well as the creation of the Country Program Document (CPD) which prioritized CMEU and was a cooperation plan between UNICEF DR-CO and the DR government (2018-2022)
- NGOS and UN agencies drafted a proposal to legislate the prohibition of child marriage
- UNICEF DR-CO begins to work with Superate to design and implement interventions against CMEU
- Twittazo campaign is created and supported by NGOs and the public (a strategy that used twitter to influence the banning of CMEU)
- Study is published by UNICEF DR-CO in partnership with the Vice President and Superate "Child marriage and early unions. Study of knowledge, attitudes, and practices in six municipalities of the Dominican Republic" to highlight societal perceptions

2019

- DR Government launches the Teenage Pregnancy Reduction Plan (PREA).
- SDGs Global Session puts CMEU in discussion globally
- "10 Reasons +1 to legally end child marriage in the Dominican Republic" is published by UNICEF DR-CO
- UNICEF DR-CO begins to work with the DR Ministry of Education to design and implement tools to teach high school students about CMEU
- Soap operas continue to be shown and used as communication strategy in all channels of communication (TV, movie theaters and social media)
- Collective construction of Socio-Ecologic Strategy based on Social Behavior Change theories by UNICEF global and applied by UNICEF regional and country offices

2020

- DR government changes, Luis Abinader is elected the new president and starts his mandate. This president and his wife become great allies in the fight against CMEU
- IJM (International Justice Mission) filed an action of unconstitutionality before the International Court that declared marrying minors was unconstitutional
- A direct lawsuit of unconstitutionality against the Civil Code's article that allowed CMEU is filed by NGOs
- UNICEF DR-CO and NGO alliances in Congress are secured, pushing forward the bill that proposed the criminalization of CMEU
- UNICEF DR-CO launches C4D (Communication Strategy for Development), a development communication strategy to prevent CMEU, based on the socio-ecologic model developed in the years before
- Launch of the Strategic Plan for a Life Free of Violence by the Ministry of Women, which listed out public policies to achieve gender equality

2021

- The prohibition of child marriage is the first law passed in 2021 (Ley 1-21)
- The DR government creates several cabinets and programs that impact work against CMEU:
- The Cabinet of Violence Prevention Against Women and Adolescents is created
- The Cabinet for Children and Adolescents (GANA) was created and presided by the first lady. It involves multiple governmental and non-governmental institutions
- The PPA is created particularly to address CMEU, and a pilot program is implemented in 20 prioritized municipalities are chosen (described further in the following section).
- CMEU officially becomes a government priority
- 459 girls participate in the first cohort of Girls' Club strategy that was implemented as a joint effort between government and UNICEF DR-CO as a direct action against CMEU with adolescents.
- UNICEF DR-CO and Ministry of Education form an alliance on a CMEU awareness and prevention project

- Second Twitazzo campaign occurs among NGOs and publics, exposing members of Congress voting against the prohibition of CMEU, generating pressure towards advancing the bill
- President Abinader holds a private meeting between political parties to urge them to pass the Bill and permanently prohibit child marriage
- 2nd official and international standardized statistics on CMEU are produced in the DR using the national survey and robust methodology conducted in collaboration between the National Office of Statistics and UNICEF DR-CO

2022

- UNICEF DR-CO collaborates with Superate, on "Dueñas de mi futuro" a digital communication platform which helps empower girls to build life plans disconnected from CMEU
- KOICA project begins in collaboration between UNICEF DR-CO and the South Korean Embassy to promote gender equality and target CMEU
- Pilot projects for the PPA begin to be expanded to other locations

The Dominican Republic CMEU Timeline: A Story of Success

2012-2015

In the early 2010s, progress towards advancing CMEU on public and government agendas was limited. Many people did not recognize it as a problem, and instead viewed it as something that primarily happened in Africa and Asia; however, during this time period, the DR was experiencing progress in its economic sector, bringing issues related to poverty to the forefront of policy. This created interest in building a knowledge-base around CMEU and the first national multipurpose household survey, ENHOGAR-MICS (Spanish acronym for Encuesta Nacional de Hogares de Propósitos Múltiples – Encuesta de Indicadores Múltiples por Conglomerados), was conducted. This study was one of the first to frame CMEU as an issue in the cultural consciousness. In addition, early advocates against CMEU urged the creation of a national development strategy to reform the civil and penal code and make the legal marriage age the same for girls and boys; however, reforming the civil and penal codes in the DR would require significant efforts and was regarded as too difficult a task. This would later be revisited when in 2015, the Sustainable Development Goals were passed by the United Nations, and eliminating CMEU was indicated as a priority in achieving gender equality. This created pressure for the DR to act as it had the highest rates in the LAC region, thus resurfacing questions around civil and penal code reform.

2016

In 2016, The World Bank and UNICEF commenced the first study on the economic impact of CMEU in the DR and the results were published one year later. This helped to frame CMEU not just as a human rights issue, but as an issue that negatively impacted the country's economy and citizens. At this time, UNICEF DR-CO took on a major advocacy role against CMEU and began to meet with the Dominican Republic government to push for legal advances on the issue of CMEU. In addition, UNICEF DR-CO began to work internally to create a Strategic Advocacy Plan that they could deploy to combat CMEU within a localized context.

2017

In 2017, UNICEF LACRO launched its first CMEU-specific regional program. This program provided initial frameworks and recommendations for national branches to apply within their countries and contexts. During this period, UNICEF DR-CO began to create plans to raise social awareness on the issue of CMEU in the DR, and enacted these plans throughout the remainder of the year. One of their most impactful strategies was the creation of "La Peor Novela" which told the stories of girls suffering from the realities of CMEU. These stories were situated within a mini soap-opera structure, as this style of media is popular in the LAC region. This increased public awareness of CMEU and helped viewers to recognize its consequences. Following this strategy, an additional campaign, *Girls Not Mothers*, was initiated through the joint work of UNICEF, Plan International and Save the Children. The purpose of this campaign was to shock citizens about the topic of CMEU using harsh imagery and language. This campaign included posters, billboards, and online content to further reflect the dark realities of CMEU. A study was also published alongside these efforts: "Economic Impact of Child Marriage and Early Unions" which attempted to show how CMEU affected the DR's economy.

2018

2018 marked the beginning of an official CMEU collaboration plan between UNICEF DR-CO and the Dominican Republic Government set to last until 2023. This resulted in the Launch of the National Plan for Gender Equality, as well as the creation of the Country Program Document (CPD), which prioritized the issue of CMEU in advancing gender equality as per SDG #5. During this period, UNICEF DR-CO continued to conduct research regarding cultural perceptions of CMEU, collaborating with Superate and the Vice President on "Child marriage and early unions. Study of knowledge, attitudes, and practices in six municipalities of the Dominican Republic" and then with Plan International on "Planteamientos", which contextualized CMEU locally by exposing its determinants. Another proposal was made to create a new law prohibiting child marriage, this time with greater tangible legal advancements. A Twitazzo campaign (twitter campaign to raise awareness) was started in support of the proposed legislation to engage the general public and persuade politicians to vote in favour of the proposed legislation. The government did not act immediately in response to the campaign, but pressures surrounding addressing CMEU were rising.

2019

In 2019, the government began to target CMEU-related issues by launching the Teenage Pregnancy Reduction Plan (PREA), though this strategy did not address the root causes of teenage pregnancy (and CMEU's role as a catalyst). The government remained unwilling to change legislation, though issues pertaining to CMEU were discussed at the UN SDGs Global Session, increasing pressure to act. UNICEF Global launched the "Collective construction of Socio-Ecologic Strategy based on Social Behavior Change" theories which were applied by UNICEF regional and country offices. In the DR, the UNICEF DR-CO was unrelenting and continued to reinforce communication strategies by publishing "10 Reasons +1 to legally end child marriage in the Dominican Republic". UNICEF DR-CO also began to collaborate directly with the Ministry of Education to create and implement a program to teach high school students and their families about the issues and realities of CMEU. Alongside these new strategies, "La Peor Novela" continued to be shown in classrooms and online as it was still functioning as an extremely popular and successful tool.

2020

In 2020, following years with no luck in changing legislation surrounding child marriage, a new head of state was elected, reinvigorating hope in advancing the CMEU prevention agenda. Luis Abinader was elected as president, and he and his wife both showed great interest and commitment towards addressing CMEU. Alongside this change in government, UNICEF DR-CO was able to create better alliances in Congress, and began pushing forward the bill to criminalize child marriage. Attempts at filing lawsuits of unconstitutionality against the Civil Code of the DR and the UN international court (in reference to CMEU) remained unsuccessful, though conversations surrounding the topic continued with government. In response, a second Twitazzo campaign was launched to shed light on which members of Congress were voting against the prohibition of CMEU. This generated even greater pressure to advance the bill, leading President Abinader to hold a private meeting between political parties and urge them to pass the bill. Alongside political shifts, UNICEF launched C4D, a development communication strategy to prevent CMEU, and produced further statistics on the issue of CMEU. The Ministry of Women also launched the Strategic Plan for a Life Free of Violence at this time, which gave policy recommendations to achieve gender equality.

2021

At the beginning of 2021, the law for the prohibition of child marriage (Ley 1-21) was finally passed. The government began to make addressing CMEU a priority in their agenda and created several new cabinets and programs to target the issue: The Cabinet of Violence Prevention Against Women and Adolescents ('Gabinete de las Mujeres, Adolescentes y Niñas'), The Cabinet for Children and Adolescents ('Gabinete de la Niñez y la Adolescencia – GANA'), The PPA and Girl's Club ('Clube de Chicas'). The PPA was created specifically to address CMEU, it combined and strengthened two previous public policies, and a pilot program was initially put into action in a pilot project involving 20 municipalities. The creation and initial implementation of the PPA involved government institutions, as well as the actors that advocated for years to address the problem of CMEU. From this point onwards, the government demonstrated a clear priority toward advancing education and girls' empowerment through programs such as "Girls Club" and high school awareness workshops. UNICEF DR-CO worked in collaboration with the government (such as the Ministry of Education) on these processes and offered technical assistance.

2022-Present

Since the passage of Ley 1-21, the DR has continued to take steps forward in combatting the issue of CMEU. UNICEF collaborated with Superate on "Dueñas de mi futuro" (which translates to "Owner of my future"), a digital communication platform which empowers girls to build life plans disconnected from CMEU. Additionally, the South Korean Embassy and UNICEF DR-CO began to collaborate on KOICA, a project to promote gender equality and target CMEU. Finally, the initial pilot projects introduced by the PPA began expanding to other municipalities.



UNICEF Dominican Republic Strategies for raising CMEU in the Governmental Agenda

The strategies described in this section are drawn from the data collected during the fieldwork period in the Dominican Republic. Not all strategies mentioned are described in full in this section, only those highlighted by a majority of interviewees as important to the process in raising the issue of CMEU in the DR's governmental agenda. This selection of the strategies was done through a qualitative analysis of the data collected during the interviews and coded by the team using the themes provided in the methodology section of this Report. The most common strategies found between different actors were selected and systematized in this section.

Before analyzing these strategies, it is important to understand the Theory of Change behind UNICEF's approach to CMEU in the Dominican Republic. This allows the reader to comprehend the motivation of the decisions made in this policy process and adapt future recommendations according to each context or nation.

The first Theory of Change is presented in the C4D communication strategy, based on the socio-ecologic model (SEM) of Social Behaviour Change (SBC) theory adopted by UNICEF globally. The SEM understands that different levels of interaction (individual, interpersonal, community, institutional, and political) with factors and knowledge influence processes of social transformation, either by facilitating or obstructing change (UNICEF DR., 2019b). Therefore, UNICEF's approach is based on the "understanding that change processes do not depend only on individuals, since practices such as the CMEU are rooted in social norms that result from a complex network of factors determined by their family, sociocultural and political context. Thus, to bring about positive change, it is essential to address change simultaneously at the individual, family, community, institutional, legal, and political levels" (UNICEF DR., 2019b, p. 8).

The second Theory of Change guiding the approach to CMEU in the DR is attached to the PPA, and it is inserted in the vision for the policy: "In the year 2030, within the framework of the full exercise of rights, the Dominican Republic has significantly reduced early unions and adolescent pregnancy, through an inter-institutional and intersectoral response, with comprehensive strategies for prevention, care and response, protection, prosecution and political advocacy that, with emphasis on the population in a situation of greater vulnerability, promotes progressive autonomy, participation and suitable access for girls, boys and adolescents to opportunities for their integral development" (GANA, CONANI, UNFPA & UNICEF DR-CO, 2021, p. 51).

The following sections explain the main strategies identified and responds to the question lessons and best practices in the guiding questions of the "Interview and Focus Groups" section of this Report. This is done by attaching lessons and best practices for each strategy selected.

Knowledge Building

A crucial step taken by UNICEF DR-CO was building a strong knowledge foundation on the topic of CMEU. The data and information informing UNICEF LACRO and UNICEF DR-CO prior to building this foundation were based on the experiences of other regions in the world. These regions, such as South Asia and Africa (where formal marital unions are often established), have different contexts and determinants, resulting in difficulties in extrapolating this information and applying it in the LAC region.

One of the major differences between the LAC regions and other regions is the prevalence of informal unions in LAC; therefore, a database of both quantitative and qualitative information, had to be built to inform future strategies with this context in mind. The building of this strong knowledge foundation allowed UNICEF DR-CO to provide information that empowered policy professionals, government, allies, and the population to push for change in the LAC and DR context. This data allowed for strategies to be properly contextualized and assertive, and assisted in better allocating resources and efforts to achieve goals and support through well-grounded, evidence-based communication.

To build this knowledge base, studies were done by UNICEF DR-CO and other organizations including the World Bank and Plan International to provide information on the economic and social impacts of CMEU, as well as qualitative and quantitative evidence on CMEU in the DR:

- Economic impacts: In 2017, a study published by UNICEF DR-CO and the World Bank (“Impacto Económico Del Matrimonio Infantil Y Las Uniones Tempranas - Resumen Para La República Dominicana”) indicated the economic consequences of CMEU, demonstrating how CMEU can influence negative outcomes in population growth, health, nutrition, violence, educational attainment, poverty, and childhood development goals.
- Social impacts: In 2019, a study published by UNICEF DR-CO and the Dominican Republic Government (“El matrimonio infantil y las uniones tempranas - Estudio de conocimientos, actitudes y prácticas en seis municipios de la República Dominicana”) showed that the child marriage was socially normalized, and the lack of information and recognition of CMEU as an issue drastically influenced family dynamics, girls’ perspectives, and even government employees understanding. This study provided information on CMEU in the country and demonstrated its social impacts and consequences by analyzing CMEU in six Dominican Republic territories. In addition, the study provided recommendations based on qualitative and quantitative data to support communication and advocacy strategies, and inform the direction for government policies and programs such as the PPA.
- Quantitative evidence: In 2014, UNICEF and the Statistical Body of Government published the MICS Study, providing evidence on incidence rates of CMEU in the Dominican Republic. The study brought to light the high percentage of CMEU in the country. In addition, this joint publication shows how successful advocacy efforts were from the start of the process to reframe CMEU, especially with high-ranked politicians.

Alliances

The UNICEF DR-CO team created relationships with political allies in government, congress, and non-governmental organizations, such as Plan International and Save the Children. The process was supported by the Resident Representative, the Vice-President (from 2012 to 2020) and, more recently, the President and First Lady of the country. Highly motivated members of Congress were also engaged, which proved to be instrumental in the legal reform process to make child marriage illegal in the country. The formation and presence of these alliances have proven pivotal in addressing CMEU in the DR, and such changes could only happen alongside the involvement of these actors and allies as changes were being made on all fronts, from programming, to policy, to law.

These alliances were leveraged by UNICEF DR-CO during their efforts to raise the issue of CMEU on governmental agendas at different stages, including:

- **Communication:** Partnerships with Plan International, governmental bodies, and other institutions resulted in the formation of an array of strategies that allowed for communication with different audiences through multiple channels (ex. twittazo was implemented by multiple actors, and achieved incredible numbers).
- **Resource Allocation:** Partnerships and alliances with existing institutions allowed for resources to address CMEU to be leveraged in more effective and efficient ways. UNICEF DR-CO partnered with the World Bank for Research, Plan International for data and advocacy, and with the Government for reform and implementation, as well as with other agencies for different pieces, demonstrating the importance of recognizing where partnerships can be best utilized. This process of relationship-building, in addition to advancing progress, created unity amongst partners and aligned actors around common goals. This aligns directly with the PPA theory of change, by implementing from the beginning a intersectoral approach to the issue.

Advocacy

Before 2015, CMEU was not identified as a pressing issue in the DR. This created the need to advocate both politically and socially in order to create awareness among key actors and the public. As indicated in the section above, UNICEF DR-CO built close relationships with important political actors that proved crucial in advancing changes regarding the perception and legality of CMEU. This was made possible in part in the DR due the legitimacy and respect that comes alongside the UNICEF name as a recognized United Nations body, and the fact that children's rights are usually acknowledged in both the progressive and conservative agendas.

An array of advocacy strategies were utilized to achieve support and recognition from each sector engaged in this issue in the DR. In combination with the strong knowledge foundation and the creation of strong partner and allyships, UNICEF DR-CO was able to advocate specifically against CMEU with a localized context.

The main advocacy strategies adopted by UNICEF included:

- **Political Advocacy:** Since 2016, UNICEF DR-CO has been establishing relationships with a variety of political actors. In addition, the same year the Resident Representative of UNICEF in the Dominican Republic, hosted the first official meeting with national politicians and anthropologists to discuss CMEU, its normalization, and the need to reframe it as a problem.
- **Use of Language and Reframing:** The DR (and the LAC region as a whole) has a predominantly religious population, which often links to their political representation and preference toward traditional and or conservative policies. This impacts issues pertaining to gender as the population and its political representatives pushback against progressive policies. To address this difficulty, CMEU was reframed to situate it as an issue that impacts children and children's rights, rather than women and women's rights, to pivot beyond conversations about gender equality. This assisted in situating the item on conservative agendas as conservative politicians were able to better align with the policy without having to compromise their ideological beliefs. Pushback remains on topics regarding sexuality and sexual education, though incremental steps towards ending CMEU have triumphed due to this reframing.
- **Social Advocacy:** The public's awareness on CMEU has been bolstered through an array of communication strategies and advocacy campaigns including Twitazzo campaigns, novela-style television, programs including "Club de chichas" and school programs, and other media including posters and billboards. Building public awareness and outrage toward the legality of child marriages proved instrumental in pushing political agendas.

Communication

Communication strategies were a crucial aspect of UNICEF DR-CO's success in addressing and reframing CMEU in the DR. These strategies were adopted in alignment with SBC theories and the SEM with an objective to change the societal understanding of CMEU, and utilized culturally appropriate distribution channels and materials. As shifting these perceptions required involvement from a multitude of sectors and the public, each strategy was designed with the target audience in mind. One of the most important audiences targeted by these communications was members of Congress, as they held decision-making authority surrounding the legality of child marriages. The success of the strategies demonstrates the importance of communication being contextualized for local cultures and contexts, including how to engage different audiences. More generalized approaches to communication, especially those without a strong evidence-base, are a misallocation of resources when considering their inability to change perception and achieve objectives.

Below is an outline on how UNICEF DR-CO revitalized their communication techniques to contextualize CMEU in the DR:

- **Globally Produced Communications:** The UNICEF DR-CO team originally approached their communications strategy on the topic of CMEU with global communication resources; however, due to lacking regional context and social understanding of the issue, people in the DR were either offended by these campaigns or thought the issue was not present or prevalent in their country.
- **Culturally Appropriate Communication and Contextualization:** In revitalizing their communications strategy to contextualize CMEU as it relates specifically to the DR context, UNICEF DR-CO's Communication Team developed mini soap-operas highlighting the consequences of CMEU, and the prevalence of CMEU in the DR. This form of media is culturally appropriate and relevant to the general public, and was massively distributed across different outlets including in movie theatres, on the internet, and on television. This strategy was continuously highlighted throughout this study's fieldwork period as one of the most successful communication strategies in reframing CMEU and engaging the public in this issue, and also received political support from DR's Vice President (from 2012 to 2020) and other important political figures in the country. Though, the success of this media also came alongside consequences whereby the stories told in the soap-operas led many to perceive that child marriage is a child's mother's fault, requiring course-correction to disprove this perception. Communications must be proactive in determining unintended consequences, further affirming the importance of contextualized, carefully designed strategies.
- **The Use of Social Media:** Another strategy that was continuously highlighted and highly regarded throughout the fieldwork period for this study was the intelligent use of social media. One such example that was frequently referenced was the Twittazo campaigns from UNICEF and Plan International on identifying congress members opposed to reforming child marriage legislation. This strategy applied pressure to make a large difference in political spaces, and was instrumental to legislation reform.
- **Social Behaviour Change Theory (SBC):** The application of SBC and SEM theory throughout the entirety of the communications process was crucial in shifting perceptions. While this application is ongoing and some perceptions have not yet shifted, linking social understanding to scientific data and evidence proved invaluable in shifting political perceptions towards fighting against CMEU, sparking legislation changes and investments in policies and programs to combat CMEU. Government officials and politicians now have a better understanding of how CMEU and poverty are associated, and as a result, gender and social norms are being deconstructed over time, proving the success of this application.

Implementation

Once UNICEF DR-CO had secured social and political support to raise the issue of CMEU in the governmental agenda, they actively participated in the implementation of policies regarding CMEU. In 2018, UNICEF DR-CO began implementing strategies and programs aimed at reducing rates of CMEU, and since 2021, has assisted in the implementation of the PPA. According to experts interviewed throughout the fieldwork process, government stakeholders hold UNICEF DR-CO's technical support pertaining to policy design, oversight, and implementation in high regard. UNICEF DR-CO continues to provide support through their participation in GANA, and by creating strategies with the government to increase the PPA's effectiveness and reach. According to multiple interview participants, UNICEF DR-CO's consideration of existing resources and systems in government was also instrumental to their success as this consideration was integrated into policy design; however, their success has created a relationship of interdependence, which may diminish the government's full ownership over its programs.

Key strategies relative to implementation as identified by interview participants include:

- **Legislative prohibition of CMEU:** As a result of the intense and ongoing communication and advocacy strategies, especially in Congress and with Presidents and Vice-Presidents, the legislation was passed forbidding CMEU. Even though actors agree that changing the law is not sufficient to create change and fully dismantle societal norms, they all agree that it is a necessary step due to the institutionalization of a norm that can provide a stable foundation to further steps towards CMEU elimination.
- **Technical Support on Implementation:** UNICEF DR-CO has provided, since the start of the National Program Against CMEU in the DR, technical support to the government. This has been done through the training of government officials, consultation on strategies of implementation and strategic planning, and through UNICEF DR-CO's role in CONANI.
- **Using Existing Systems and Resources:** Securing the support against CMEU from Government and ensuring that the issue became a priority through using existing resources and systems (and integrating changes into said systems) was crucial. This specific strategy was identified through interviews as one of the main pathways to a successful implementation and to creating policies that the Government could take ownership over.
- **The Creation of an Environment that Allows the Involvement of Different Actors and Constant Opportunities for Alignment:** GANA, a cabinet formed by governmental and non-governmental actors that are part of the policy against CMEU in the DR where UNICEF DR-CO has an important role, created an opportunity for dialogue, alignment, and debate between actors from different institutions. This type of space generated an opportunity to use existing resources in a more effective manner because complementary services can be aligned, and duplicates can be eliminated. Data collection and strategies can also be improved in this space.

The data collected during the fieldwork in the DR allowed for the mapping of most of the strategies adopted by the UNICEF DR-CO in their path toward raising the issue of CMEU in the government agenda. This extensive work led to an important change in legislation and a comprehensive national policy that, according to those interviewed, has the potential to end CMEU in the country. According to UNICEF LACRO, this success is one of its kind in the LAC region, and is the reason why this case was selected to guide the systematization of the policy process documented in this report.

A Framework for Success

This framework, which is based on an analysis of the data collected during the fieldwork and interview period, is not an exhaustive template of all the strategies needed to move an issue up the government's agenda. There is no infallible formula as each issue has its own peculiarities and context.

This template is intended to provide a starting point and guide to raising awareness and advancing items on decision-agendas so that crucial and seemingly small steps are not skipped or forgotten. This is a way that the lessons and best practices laid out in the previous sections can be applied to the regional context as well as potential future programs in the Dominican Republic and other Latin American countries, which answers the final question in the “Interview and Focus Groups” sections of this Report and aims to achieve the objective of supporting the UNICEF regional program against child marriage and early unions in LAC with learnings and best practices from the Dominican Republic context.

After an issue is identified, the following steps can provide a roadmap to securing the Government's acknowledgment and support. This can be applied to CMEU in other countries in LAC, or other issues in the Dominican Republic and LAC.

The Framework

STEP 1

Building a Solid Knowledge Foundation and Strong Partnerships

The foundation built at the beginning of this process will allow the next steps to be done in an informed, efficient manner, avoiding misallocation of resources and efforts.

This step will encompass:

1.1 Building a qualitative and quantitative database demonstrating the issue's existence, the population affected, possible causes, socio-economic consequences, and necessary measures to solve the issue. Partnering with nationally and internationally respected research organizations is key to providing reliable data.

1.2 Collecting data regarding the social understanding of the issue. How do different layers of society perceive the issue, what is the motivation for that perception, and what are the cultural and contextual drivers? Partnering with local organizations, governmental and non-governmental, that have access to those affected and surrounded by the issue is an important step to collecting comprehensive data in this regard. This step speaks directly to the C4D theory of change and the need to consider a multi-level approach to the strategies implemented, by considering all levels of interaction of an individual.

STEP 2

Advocacy and Communication

2.1 The alignment of advocacy and communication strategies, that are culturally relevant and specific to different stakeholders. The use of the data collected in step 1.2 to inform these strategies will reduce the misallocation of resources and energy in generic approaches that might simply not interest the audience.

2.2 Involvement of those affected by the issue. Knowledge empowers, and social awareness is important to create traction and spread communication material and messaging. This is also relevant to achieving change through the Socioecological model adopted by UNICEF in the C4D.

2.3 Members of government and parliament need to be targeted. These actors hold the power to generate change on a large scale, and they are crucial for the next step. Therefore, strategies must be pertinent and tailored to their context. The inclusion of multi-sectoral and interinstitutional actors is a crucial step in the PPA Theory of Change and has shown significant results in raising an issue in the governmental agenda.

2.4 The use of widespread media including social media and television is an asset. Social media, in addition to its involvement of the public, has an unprecedented power to create pressure on decision-makers, and information is spread rapidly. For this reason, communication strategies should take into account possible negative externalities. To avoid these externalities, consultation with representatives of the audience might be an important step.

2.5 Smart use of language and framing is key to avoiding unnecessary pushback.

2.6 Social Behavior Change and the use of strategies connected to the Socioecological model in the C4D will allow for the creation of a connection between social understanding and scientific data, generating a change in the social understanding of an issue through awareness.

STEP 3

Identification of Political Allies

3.1 Nourishing a relationship with political allies in government and parliament plays a huge role in securing a pathway toward a legal framework that generates a solid foundation for policies. These same policies will also have a better chance at stability and reach if they involve governmental organizations.

3.2 Nourishing a relationship with non-governmental organizations can provide allies in all steps of this process, from data collection to implementation. These organizations have proven to be extremely valuable, especially since they are often closer to issues, and have a powerful push in advocacy and communication as well.

STEP 4

Pushing for Legal Foundations

4.1 Even though legislation is not enough to resolve an issue, this will provide stable grounds for policies to be built upon, regardless of the scale of proposed changes. Change in legislation, requires different steps in each jurisdiction, and usually, more than one process can lead to it. It is important to identify all avenues and pursue the one in which more allies can be involved, increasing the chances of success.

4.2 For this step to be successful, communication strategies need to be put in place to put pressure where pressure is necessary. Social media and other forms of mass media are assets that can be used in highly effective manners.

STEP 5

Policy Design and Efficient Implementation

This step is where governmental institutions and non-governmental institutions need to work together to create policies that will improve and engage existing mechanisms and resources, create necessary tools for policy implementation, and oversight and mechanisms for feedback.

5.1 In the policy design, the inclusion of an oversight body (such as GANA) that involves governmental and non-governmental bodies (such as NGOs, international organizations, and grassroots organizations) can increase the legitimacy of policies and improve resource allocation. This speaks directly to the need of multi-sectoral and interinstitutional interaction and alignment to generate change.

5.2 Government ownership needs to be considered. For example, UNICEF DR-CO can act as technical support; however, strategic actors need to have the necessary resources to operationalize policies as part of their structure.

5.3 Even though new policies usually generate the need for new structures and systems, considering the existing systems and using them as part of the policy design will improve resource allocation and increase the chances of support from actors.

5.4 Policies on a national scale will most likely involve multiple levels of government and multiple governmental bodies. These stakeholders must be in constant conversation and communication, to avoid the duplication of efforts and to maximize resources. Strategies must consider the importance of intersectoral perspectives on policies, as well as coordination processes between actors.

These steps need not necessarily be followed in this order. However, step 1 of this framework is essential at the beginning of the process of raising an issue on the government's agenda. Without data pertinent to the context of the jurisdiction, the following strategies will be highly impaired.

UNICEF DR-CO's experience with CMEU is a product of a sequence of strategies very similar to this framework. The DR experience integrated the aforementioned strategies based on continuous analysis and response to current needs, without having a systematic route from the beginning. However, despite this limitation, the strategies implemented were related, closely connected to the adopted theories of change, and supported each other. The best practices and lessons learned from this process may assist other UNICEF LAC country offices in implementing similar processes, and in turn enhance their impact through programmatic strategies that are fully integrated from the outset. Hopefully, with the data provided from the UNICEF DR-CO experience, other UNICEF offices in LAC will be able to mirror their successes without having to create strategies from zero.

UNICEF Dominican Republic Challenges and Lessons Learned

The UNICEF DR-CO has faced several challenges since 2016 in their efforts to position the issue of CMEU on the public and governmental agenda. These challenges have been encountered at local, national, regional, and international levels. Regardless of legislative reform and policy changes regarding CMEU, UNICEF DR-CO continues to face previous and new challenges in its work to reduce incidence rates of CMEU. Below are the main challenges and lessons learned from this process, identified by the DR-CO. The lessons are intended to support UNICEF DR-CO in their continued work, as well as other UNICEF country offices in the region in their work addressing CMEUs. This section responds to the question regarding the application of lessons learned and best practices in the guiding questions of the "Interview and Focus Groups" section of this Report. This is done by presenting the timeline and then describing the actions taken in depth.

Challenges & Lessons Learned

REGIONAL

CHALLENGES	LESSONS LEARNED
<p>CMEU not a priority issue in the region: Unfortunately, CMEU is not a priority issue on the LAC's human rights agenda. This is evidenced by the number of CMEU's remaining stagnant for a decade, regardless of efforts to raise awareness of its consequences with governmental bodies and the general public. Even though there is increasing awareness surrounding CMEU, as well as political willingness and initiatives to tackle it, this has not translated to the mobilization of resources, including funding, from national governments or international actors.</p>	<p>Lesson 1. Generating evidence and raising awareness are core pillars in stakeholder engagement processes: The experience of UNICEF DR-CO shows that in order to encourage action from relevant stakeholders, such as international organizations and donors, evidence must be generated, and awareness must be raised in initial stages of policy reformation. Inaction from actors may signify a lack of understanding of the problem (e.g. Characteristics, extent,</p>

	<p>causes, consequences, and risks), insufficient capabilities or resources to address the problem, and or confusion about clear paths forward to address the problem.</p> <p>In the case of the LAC region, there may be several reasons for inaction toward CMEU, but the generation of evidence and the awareness raised contributed to initiating social transformation. UNICEF DR-CO, as well as other actors advocating for the eradication of CMEU, only had the attention of stakeholders, including public institutions, congress representatives, and executive powers up until counting with the national survey data (ENHOGAR-MICS, 2014/2019) and the knowledge of the social and economic consequences for the country.</p>
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NATIONAL



CHALLENGES	LESSONS LEARNED
<p>Problem rooted in structural causes: CMEU is a problem with structural roots such as poverty, social inequality, gender inequity, gender-based violence, among other things, meaning it primarily affects the most vulnerable populations. Moreover, combatting CMEU requires more than one change in law or in policy, requiring a longstanding commitment to advocacy and solution-implementation. The approach to ending CMEU must be comprehensive and sustainable, and must include a variety of actors at local, regional, and national levels.</p> <p>Transforming social and gender norms deeply rooted in society: Despite the growing social awareness amongst the population, CMEU is a normalized practice that has occurred for several generations in the DR. Even when Dominicans know the consequences associated with CMEU, they still believe that it is a suitable option in instances of teenage pregnancy, low educational attainment, limited employment opportunities, and family violence. In addition to these instances the population still believes that teenagers are mentally and emotionally mature</p>	<p>Lesson II. Grounding policies in theories (such as Social and Behavioural Change Theory (SBC)) assist in better comprehending a problem and thus better tailored solutions: After several years of studying CMEU, UNICEF DR-CO decided to integrate Social and Behavioral Change (SBC) theory into their approach, given the complexity and multicausality of the issue. This theory recognizes that social transformation cannot merely occur amongst individuals, it must also occur in social norms, family dynamics, and sociocultural and political contexts. When problems are structural and or rooted in social behaviours and practices, SBC takes into consideration the actors that must be involved (individuals, interpersonal communities, organizations, and political decision-makers), as well as the time required for transformation, addressing structural barriers. The challenges listed above are monumental and cannot be solved by UNICEF DR-CO or any equivalent organization alone. Nevertheless, the wins achieved today in advancing legislation and policy can be partially attributed to the application of the SBC lens as it has enabled a better understanding of the problem and has simplified the design and implementation of interventions.</p>

enough to assume these commitments and relationships. These circumstances and beliefs are housed in a highly conservative and patriarchal culture that perceives women as inferior to men, thus creating further difficulties in transforming social and gender norms and advancing projects related to gender equality.

Conservatism within the Congress

The conservative and patriarchal culture prevails in all spheres of society in the Dominican Republic, including among deputies and senators in Congress. Regrettably, the Gender Parity Law has taken time to become a reality, and male legislators are still the ones who make most of the decisions about the future of girls, adolescents and women.

INSTITUTIONAL



CHALLENGES	LESSONS LEARNED
<p>Budget and its allocation: Lack of financing for public programs, policies, and institutions creates barriers and challenges in functioning and achieving optimal results. Resources are often limited and may not be used strategically or allocated effectively.</p> <p>Political strength and capacity: Government institutions involved in protecting the rights of children, adolescents, and women (which coordinate and offer services) do not have the capacity to lead social transformations on their own. Their actions have been pivotal in addressing the problem of the CMEU; however, these governmental institutions are overburdened in their work and lack economic, technical, and human resources due to structural deficiencies in the public sector.</p> <p>Temporary and fragmented public policies: Implementing and sustaining public policies in the DR and LAC region is challenging, especially since each time a new government arrives at any territorial level, development plans (planes de desarrollo) change. This results in new governments proposing new action plans from zero or not knowing how to recover the progress made by past administrations. On the other hand, public policies often operate in a</p>	<p>Lesson III. Strong institutions are more capable of leading social transformation: UNICEF DR-CO has witnessed the deficiencies and challenges that public institutions experience, both in recognizing and adopting new social programs and designing and implementing programs and policies to address them. Given that public institutions are the actors with legitimacy, capacity (in terms of infrastructure and resources), and the ability to enforce public policies, their functioning is incredibly important and strengthening their operations should be the goal of any UNICEF program. UNICEF DR-CO has learned that no matter how many actors are involved, or projects are created to tackle CMEU, long-lasting change only happens when governmental actors are part of the equation and committed to the cause.</p> <p>Beyond providing orientation and technical assistance, UNICEF DR-CO contributes to institutional strengthening by training and sensitizing public officials, and by creating tools to facilitate their work in implementing the PPA. For example, UNICEF DR-CO created an educational tool for activities to prevent early unions that facilitators and representatives of the Ministry of Education are using. UNICEF DR-CO mentioned that even while</p>

fragmented manner without coordination among the different institutions, sectors, and relevant territorial levels.

Public servants' rotation, technical expertise, and sensitization:

Given the significant challenges in the public sector, public servants do not always have the necessary knowledge and experience to design, implement, monitor and/or evaluate projects that contribute to reducing CMEU. Additionally, they may also sometimes engage in discriminatory and patriarchal behavior, such as limiting access to services and reproducing gender stereotypes. In addition, the constant rotation of public officials limits not only the progress of collaborative projects but also the creation of alliances, exchange of learning, and installed capacities.

Inclusion of women and girls grassroots organizations

National and local civil society organizations have not played a leading role in positioning the problem of CMEU on the public and governmental agenda. Still, their function has been fundamental in providing care and services to vulnerable populations. These organizations have valuable knowledge about the needs, realities, and consequences of people and communities experiencing CMEU.

public officials' rotation has been a constant challenge, the resources invested in building the alliance and training are not wasted because capacities remain installed and collaboration with officials could continue in other spaces. The creation of tools and documents has assisted in addressing this challenge.

PUBLIC POLICY IMPLEMENTATION



CHALLENGES	LESSONS LEARNED
<p>Management and resources centralization: The coordination and implementation of the national policy against early unions and teenage pregnancies is centralized in the central government, and economic and human resources are concentrated here. Autonomy and space for creativity in policy implementation vanish at the local level. Knowledge about the PPA does not always reach the local level, and when it does, it arrives as a mandate. This has sometimes resulted in programs that are part of the PPA being referred to as "UNICEF projects".</p>	<p>Lesson IV. Local actors are key to a successful implementation: UNICEF DR-CO places significance on the presence of local actors (both from the government and from civil society) since they implement projects and public policies in localized contexts. Local actors are the groups delivering services and interacting directly with target populations, and for this reason, UNICEF DR-CO considers it essential to delve into understanding the roles, dynamics, and articulation at the local level. At the same time, this could be</p>

Inter-institutional and Inter-sectoral coordination and definition of roles:

Inter-institutional articulation was the greatest challenge identified by both the UNICEF DR-CO team and representatives of public institutions. These actors mention the duplication of work and lack of coordination mechanisms and communication channels, not only at the inter-institutional level, but also at the inter-sectoral level and with civil society organizations. Coordination is fundamental, given the holistic nature of the problem.

Access to services:

As mentioned previously in this report, access to education, health, justice, sexual and reproductive health services, among others, are insufficient and sometimes denied, particularly to vulnerable populations. Likewise, unfortunately, the supply of services is guided by an adult-centric vision that struggles to recognize children and adolescents as subjects of human rights.

Monitoring and Evaluation:

The PPA is a new policy, established only in 2021. Although it is still too early for any policy evaluation, strengthening public institutions' monitoring and evaluation tools is central to avoiding past mistakes and adapting to the needs of the target populations.

Government and society appropriation of the PPA and its programs:

Given that the leadership to position the problem of CMEU on the public agenda was in the hands of international cooperation agencies, the recognition and appropriation of this battle by governmental and local actors has been a significant challenge. Unfortunately, this has meant that the fight against CMEU is more strongly aligned to the international agenda rather than the national one, undermining its effectiveness and legitimacy.

integrated into UNICEF's operational plans and guarantee better development of interventions. Secondly, the interaction with local actors must be based on a horizontal association among equals, levelling power asymmetries. Finally, UNICEF should aim to empower these actors, so they take ownership of programs and policies and have the capacity to implement them. The previous example, for instance, can be supported through technical assistance, training, and alliance building.

Lesson V. Articulation between actors determines whether a project/policy achieves its objectives:

Positioning and addressing the issue of CMEU requires intersection among different actors, sectors, and areas of intervention. UNICEF DR-CO has learned the importance of having, at the national level, working groups in charge of articulating the efforts of all the public institutions and other stakeholders implementing the PPA. In the Dominican Republic, CONANI's technical management and planning unit (UTG) performs this task by 1) connecting stakeholders; 2) monitoring the implementation of programs; 3) facilitating spaces to share progress and learnings and identifying areas of collaboration. Articulation ensures better interventions by adding the strengths and areas of influence of each of the actors involved, avoiding duplication of work, and encouraging creativity and motivation. For this reason, UNICEF DR-CO has committed to supporting CONANI and GANA.

CIVIL SOCIETY

CHALLENGES	LESSONS LEARNED
<p>Limited funding and capacity of grassroots organizations: As mentioned above, despite the relevance of civil society actors and organizations at the local level, they have only a fraction of the human and financial resources of international organizations - such as UNICEF, Plan International and Save the Children - which limits their advocacy capacity.</p> <p>Civil society coordination: Much like government actors, civil society organizations (both local and national) and international organizations also have significant articulation/coordination challenges amongst themselves and with the government. This translates into duplication of work and competition, which may limit the impact of their work.</p>	<p>Lesson VI. A strong and organized civil society multiplies the potential for transformation: The positioning of CMEU as a problem in the DR may have been accelerated if there had been a stronger and more organized civil society. As mentioned, grassroots organizations have not played a leading role concerning the CMEU problem, nor has the PPA duly integrated them into its strategy. Nevertheless, UNICEF DR-CO acknowledges these organizations' value, given their direct contact with populations and their knowledge of the local context. The impact of interventions could be multiplied if civil society actors articulated and organized in a more effective manner. For these reasons, UNICEF DR-CO sees the opportunity to approach these actors and create well-thought-out, long-lasting partnerships.</p>

UNICEF DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

CHALLENGES	LESSONS LEARNED
<p>Strategic and operational planning: Country Program Documents (CPD), UNICEF's strategic plans, operate on five-year terms. However, as CMEU is a problem rooted in social and gender norms and structural causes, generating changes and advancements requires medium- and long-term planning. UNICEF DR-CO emphasized the issue of fragmented planning, and indicated that better definition of objectives, strategies, programmatic routes, functions, and intersections between work areas is required.</p>	<p>Lesson VII. Everything must start with good strategic and operational planning: UNICEF DR-CO recognizes that several of these challenges could be addressed through better strategic and operational planning that harmonizes objectives with existing resources, expands the definition of roles and interactions between the different areas of work, considers interactions and alliances with other national and international actors, outlines courses of action, and finally makes room for flexibility and adaptability towards unforeseen situations. The DR-CO team acknowledges that this planning should be integrated into its core long-term theory of change model and the SBC theory of</p>

Funding and international development funding practices:

As with the public sector, the UNICEF DR-CO office faces financing challenges. Its funding comes from the United Nations and other international cooperation agencies. However, obtaining financing is complicated, mainly because CMEU in the LAC region is not a priority at an international level. In addition, donor requirements are very demanding and are not adapted to the long-term nature of the problem.

Internal coordination:

There is a lack of clarity around the functions of each of the areas of work of UNICEF DR-CO, as well as their areas of intersection. Although fulfilling all the office's goals demands collaborative work, it is not always specified what is expected of each team and involved actor.

Coordination with national and local stakeholders (including other agencies):

Coordination with local and national actors is another challenge, given the multiple agendas, roles, and areas of influence of each actor. This often results in two or more actors performing the same activity. In addition, it is worth mentioning that the UNICEF DR-CO team does not have a sufficient understanding of the context at the local level, and its capacity and influence are minimal.

Guidance and coordination with UNICEF LACRO:

UNICEF's regional office provides technical and financial assistance to all LAC country offices and coordinates regional programs on the rights of children and adolescents. Its support has been central to the satisfactory performance of the DR office. UNICEF DR-CO needs the regional office to have specialized knowledge, protocols and methodologies for action, regional and international references and good practices, liaison, and coordination with other international actors, among other things; however, the DR-CO team notes that, at times, this assistance is limited considering the magnitude of the challenges they face, and that the frameworks are often very general or difficult to adapt to the national context. In addition, there are areas for improvement in the communications between the two actors, and the clarification of the roles and nature of the interaction between the two.

change. Moreover, the UNICEF DR-CO team recognizes the need to give more relevance to territorial and local actors in their planning, given that they implement the PPA programs and have different dynamics than those at the national level.

Lesson VIII. Financing practices, as well as monitoring, and evaluation capacities, must be strengthened to assist in funding programs and building institutional memory:

UNICEF DR-CO considers it important to strengthen and reformulate its monitoring and evaluation tools for them to measure societal changes that take long periods of time. International donors and cooperation agencies should also reformulate monitoring and evaluation tools to address the long-term nature of the problem and best identify reasonable outcomes, especially when funding is often contingent on such outcomes. Ideally, internal monitoring and evaluation indicators should be aligned with the ones requested or negotiated with international donors. In relation to the above, UNICEF DR-CO estimates that it will be important to fortify its institutional memory by documenting and systematizing its actions, strategies, and programs to build the best possible indicators. This goes hand in hand with creating more spaces for team reflection and building.

Lesson IX. Within UNICEF actors, there is vast experience and knowledge that could be shared if interactions are improved:

Regarding the guidance and coordination with the LACRO Office, UNICEF DR-CO believes it would be beneficial to improve the quality and frequency of communication between the regional and country offices, and among country offices. Each office's expertise is very valuable and has served as guidance to the other country's offices. UNICEF DR-CO proposes the creation of physical and digital spaces for sharing best practices and learnings to advance children's and adolescents' rights.

Monitoring and evaluation:

Monitoring and evaluating social transformation and reduction of early unions is difficult as these changes take decades and involve multiple variables. Added to this are the indicators requested by donors that do not necessarily match those established in the operational plans.

Documentation of actions and institutional memory:

Given the workload of the UNICEF DR-CO team, the systematization of actions, strategies, and lessons learned (which constitutes the institutional memory) still needs to be completed and is postponed indefinitely.



CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering the challenges faced by UNICEF DR-CO with raising awareness and initiating changes pertaining to CMEU, the theories of change adopted, and the framework constructed and communicated in this study, the following recommendations aim to guide actors who intend to achieve success in raising an issue in the governmental agenda, especially in the LAC region. The recommendations are built according to each step of the framework and should be considered for all the stakeholders involved, including national government authorities, but especially by international organizations.

STEP 1

Building a Solid Knowledge Foundation and Strong Partnerships

Building a qualitative and quantitative database that encompasses the economic and social causes and consequences of the issue, as well as the social understanding of the problem is crucial. This will inform any strategies of advocacy, communication, formation of alliances, legal changes and implementation.

Recommendations:

- Partner with national and international organizations that have access to the population affected by the issue to facilitate data collection without the need for many additional resources. Data can be collected, for example, by existing government programs and by NGOs that are providing services to the population.
- Partner with respected research organizations to bolster the credibility and the legitimacy of research results, which may in turn increase access to resources and funding.
- Create a space for knowledge sharing, where other countries facing the same issues, especially those in the same region, can improve resource allocation, and data collection. These spaces will allow countries to learn from each other and to avoid the misallocation of resources and will inform donors and stakeholders of the possible outcomes of their efforts to support the causes being discussed. This could also be done in a national environment, regarding local actors.
- Amplify the topics of the research agenda, so evidence can guide the strategic and complementary programming.
- Create a comprehensive stakeholder map in order to identify potential allies. The mapping must take into consideration allies in multiple categories and levels of power and the steps in the strategy in which they would be able to contribute or generate obstacles to achieve the goals established.

STEP 2

Advocacy & Communication

This is a step that will be taken throughout all the other following steps in the framework. An important part of advocacy can be carried out through communication strategies developed in a culturally relevant way for each stakeholder. Successful advocacy and communication strategies will increase social awareness around the issue and stimulate actors to get involved, generating pressure on governmental powers to act.

Recommendations:

- Localize context and communications as global strategies of communication and advocacy do not take into account the specific context of each country or region. Strategies must be informed by the local culture and context, as well as by the knowledge foundation built in Step 1.
- Create advocacy and communications strategies with milestones, including clear indicators and goals coherent with the program's needs.
- Create a mechanism to collect feedback on the process. This must be included in the strategy to allow for adaptation according to social response.
- Involve populations affected by the issue at hand. Communication strategies must target all stakeholders, but involving those affected by the issue is crucial to storytelling and buy-in. Social awareness creates traction.
- Frame the issue using evidence and data, but be cognizant of unintended consequences. The knowledge foundation built in Step 1 must inform the framing of the issue after a risk analysis is done considering the stakeholders' possible reactions.
- Ground communications and advocacy in theories. In instances of raising awareness and shifting perception, SBC theories must be implemented, especially when the issue is not recognized as urgent by the public. Education and social awareness are crucial.

STEP 3

Identification of Political Allies

Establishing a relationship with the government, parliament, and non-governmental organizations will allow institutional change.

Recommendations:

- Utilizing the stakeholders map created through the research provided in Step 1 to build the necessary relationships for supporting the steps in the strategy. For example: for legislation changes, someone in the executive power might be helpful, however, someone in parliament could be extremely valuable.
- Creating a strategic plan to strengthen the relationships with key stakeholders by pursuing goals as a united front.

STEP 4

Pushing for Legal Foundations

Legislation is key to providing stable grounds for policies to be built upon through a legal institutionalized foundation to work on. It is a formal recognition of a problem and makes accountability mechanisms possible.

Recommendations:

- Identify legislation and regulations that need revision.
- Identify all existing mechanisms to change the necessary legislation and pursue the one with the highest chance of success – usually the option in which the greatest number of allies can be involved.
- Use media that generates discussion and awareness amongst the public. The sophisticated use of social media might generate pressure on decision-makers, in addition to granting the public an opportunity to engage with the issue.

STEP 5

Policy Design and Efficient Implementation

Governmental institutions and non-governmental institutions need to be involved and in communication, leveraging existing mechanisms and resources.

Recommendations:

- Appoint a body for implementation oversight. An oversight body, especially in instances that involve multiple stakeholders, increases the accountability and engagement of actors as well as the perceived legitimacy of implemented policies.
- Determine resource allocation prior to implementing policies and programs. Resource allocation must be well defined and enable government ownership, which generates stability and independence.
- Understand and leverage existing resources and systems. Existing resources and systems must be mapped out to achieve efficient results as they assist in ensuring efficient coordination and interinstitutional, cross-sectorial mechanisms.
- Understand opportunities to utilize international actors. For example, international actors such as UNICEF, can provide technical tools, orientation and assistance, training, and capacitation, without jeopardizing local ownership and accountability regarding policy implementation.
- Empower national and local actors to ensure stability and sustainability. Implementations must encompass strategies to empower national and local actors, including capacity building, gradual sensitization on human rights and gender perspectives, and allowing the improvement of inter-institutional and inter-sectoral coordination between actors.

- Develop strong indicators to evaluate progress. Implementation procedures must include strong indicators and mechanisms for monitoring goals to determine when goals are being met and when course-correction is required.
- Conduct evaluations. Performance evaluations require formal evaluations as evidence of quality implementation, by using the indicators formulated; however, they should also include indicators that encompass the measurement of societal changes that take longer periods of time, in order to measure the outcomes related to social behavior and understanding of the issue.
- Include in the policy design a long-term theory of change and logic (SBC/C4D).

Raising an issue in the governmental agenda can be extremely difficult. Institutionalizing the issue as a governmental priority is an enormous success, and that must be recognized. UNICEF DR-CO and its allies achieved that goal, but the results from their effort are still to be seen in the years to come, due to the novelty of the policies implemented in the country.

This report does not aim to evaluate the outcomes of the PPA regarding CMEU, but it does aim to provide thorough documentation of the policy process that happened between 2012 and 2022, and extract from that a pathway to be followed by other countries or for other issues (especially for those in the LAC region). A systemic approach to an issue, encompassing the steps and recommendations provided here, can be a useful mechanism to change policy and public perceptions in LAC, and UNICEF DR-CO should be credited for its creation.

Finally, the lessons learned from the Dominican Republic experience cannot only be utilized for the improvement of the policy process in that country, but also to signal points that require attention from other countries and organizations that intend on applying this framework.

While this study focuses on policy processes and programs implemented on CMEU by UNICEF DR-CO, there are additional utilizations and alternatives that stakeholders implementing the framework may wish to consider, including:

- Seeking and enabling grassroots participation: Even though in the DR context grassroots were not as present as one would expect when considering issues affecting human rights and children's rights such as CMEU, if key stakeholders would identify the need to implement participation mechanisms for this type of organization, the process might have been accelerated and more rooted in the realities of the population affected.
- Refraining from the use of generalist approaches to advocacy and communication: The goal to these recommendations and to the framework provided is to purvey a starting point; however, as seen in the DR experience, every strategy must be molded into the context in which they will be implemented. Generalist approaches might lead to a misallocation of time and resources, and even alienate important stakeholders.
- Building qualitative and social behaviour change evaluation mechanisms into the policy design: Quantitative indicators are often already a mainstream approach to strategies of advocacy, communication and implementation; however, qualitative indicators that measure the effectiveness of the strategies and its impacts into multiple levels of social interaction provide important information to guide necessary adjustments and policy adequacy. Even though this is still a step to be taken further by the DR, it is a key consideration for any country or organization utilizing this framework.

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APPENDIX

Table 1.
Methodology Matrix

This matrix explains what the mixed methods approach in this study encompasses:

Method	Sources	Projective Objective	Related Research Questions	Information Outcomes
Literature Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Peer-reviewed journal articles Edited academic books Articles in professional journals Statistical data from government websites 	<p>Study the policy process through which UNICEF DR-CO managed to bring the problem of child marriage and early unions to the public and government agenda in the Dominican Republic and uncover best practices and lessons learned for other Latin American countries undertaking similar processes and programs.</p>	<p>What was UNICEF DR-CO's role regarding CMEU in the Dominican Republic and what were the main components and strategies in influencing the policy process?</p> <p>Who were the stakeholders involved in positioning CMEU in the Dominican Republic's agenda, including those who pushed for advocacy and implementation strategies?</p>	<p>Contextualize CMEU in LAC and in the DR and its consequences</p> <p>Provide conceptual base and methodological frameworks</p>

<p>Document Review</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legislation • Media releases • Government reports • UNICEF Reports • Other institutional reports • Official press releases 	<p>Study the policy process through which UNICEF DR-CO managed to bring the problem of child marriage and early unions to the public and government agenda in the Dominican Republic and uncover best practices and lessons learned for other Latin American countries undertaking similar processes and programs.</p> <p>Support the UNICEF regional program against child marriage and early unions in Latin America and the Caribbean with learnings and best practices from the Dominican Republic context.</p> <p>Contribute to improving the design and implementation of the UNICEF program against child marriage and early unions in the Dominican Republic and the LAC region.</p>	<p>How did the issue of CMEU reach the political and government agenda of the Dominican Republic? What advocacy efforts occurred?</p> <p>What was UNICEF DR-CO's role regarding CMEU in the Dominican Republic and what were the main components and strategies in influencing the policy process?</p> <p>Who were the stakeholders involved in positioning CMEU in the Dominican Republic's agenda, including those who pushed for advocacy and implementation strategies?</p> <p>What lessons and best practices can be learned from the creation of the UNICEF program against CMEU in the Dominican Republic? How can successes be replicated?</p> <p>How can these lessons and best practices be applied to the regional context as well as potential future programs in the Dominican Republic and other Latin American countries?</p>	<p>Trace a timeline of milestones that contributed to rising the issue of CMEU in the political agenda in the Dominican Republic</p> <p>Document the latest findings and data from institutions involved in the issue</p> <p>Understand UNICEF's approach to CMEU in LAC and in the Dominican Republic</p> <p>Provide information regarding drivers and consequences of CMEU in LAC</p>
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<p>Interviews/ Focus Group</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNICEF Officials • Government Officials and public servants • NGOs • Community Leaders • Academics • Subject Experts 	<p>Study the policy process through which UNICEF DR-CO managed to bring the problem of child marriage and early unions to the public and government agenda in the Dominican Republic and uncover best practices and lessons learned for other Latin American countries undertaking similar processes and programs.</p> <p>Support the UNICEF LACRO program against child marriage and early unions in Latin America and the Caribbean with learnings and best practices from the Dominican Republic context.</p> <p>Contribute to improving the design and implementation of the UNICEF program against child marriage and early unions in the Dominican Republic and the LAC region.</p>	<p>How did the issue of CMEU reach the political and government agenda of the Dominican Republic? What advocacy efforts occurred?</p> <p>What was UNICEF DR-CO's role regarding CMEU in the Dominican Republic and what were the main components and strategies in influencing the policy process?</p> <p>Who were the stakeholders involved in positioning CMEU in the Dominican Republic's agenda, including those who pushed for advocacy and implementation strategies?</p> <p>What lessons and best practices can be learned from the creation of the UNICEF program against CMEU in the Dominican Republic? How can successes be replicated?</p> <p>How can these lessons and best practices be applied to the regional context as well as potential future programs in the Dominican Republic and other Latin American countries?</p>	<p>Fill in the gaps in the literature and document review</p> <p>Document stakeholder's perception of UNICEF's strategies in rising CMEU in the political agenda</p> <p>Identifying key strategies, challenges, solutions, and lessons learned from UNICEF's policy process regarding CMEU in the DR</p> <p>Learn about the context of the PPA and CMEU in the DR and in LAC</p> <p>Document the greatest achievements in the UNICEF strategy in DR</p> <p>Gather data to create a systematized framework for raising an issue in the governmental agenda in LAC</p>
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