

NEPAL

end
child
marriage
A voice. A chance. A future.

COUNTRY PROFILE
2022



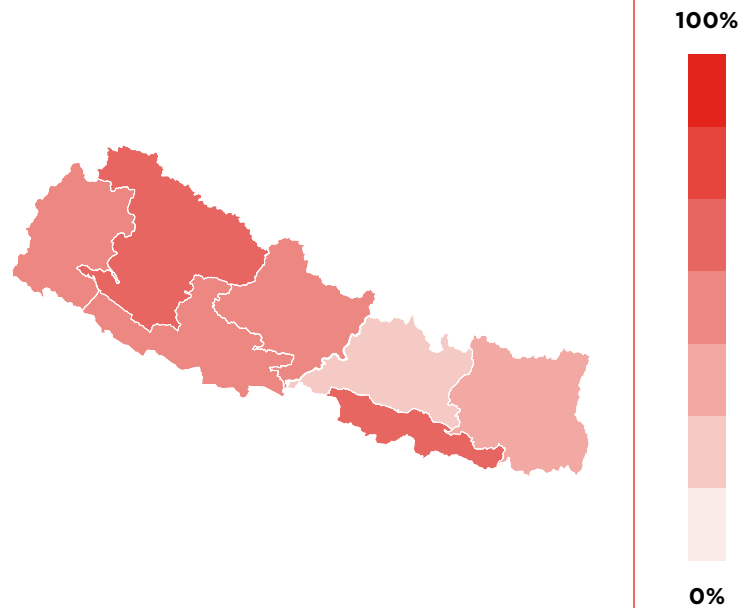
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“ The awareness of small [scale] businesses that I gained from Rupantaran classes assisted me in opening my own tailoring business.”

— 16-year-old from Madhesh Pradesh's Saptari

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FIGURE 1: Percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 18.



Note: This map is stylized and not to scale. It does not reflect a position by UNFPA or UNICEF on the legal status of any country or area or the delimitation of any frontiers.

The global context

Child marriage threatens the lives, the well-being and the futures of girls around the world. Globally, the prevalence of child marriage has declined by around 15 per cent since 2010. Nevertheless, COVID-19, climate change and conflict have had lasting effects on poverty, school dropout and inequality, triggering increases in child marriage. UNICEF estimates that the COVID-19 pandemic alone will have put more than 10 million additional girls at risk of child marriage by 2030.

Ending child marriage is a global priority:

93 governments have signed up to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target 5.3 to end child, early and forced marriage, and 43 countries either have, or are working on, national action plans to end child marriage. Girls' education is a consistent protective factor against child marriage, with child marriage rates among girls who complete secondary school 66 per cent lower than among girls with no education, and 80 per cent lower among those who complete higher education. COVID-19 increased the number of school dropouts, thereby increasing the risk that girls who are out of school will not return. Girls who drop out of school are significantly more likely marry early, and 87 per cent of married adolescent girls are out of school.

Global advocacy and dialogue

In 2022, the international community made key commitments to end child marriage at global and regional forums. On 15 November 2022, the United Nations General Assembly Third Committee resolution on child, early and forced marriage,¹ led by Zambia and Canada, was adopted by consensus. A total of 125 Member States sponsored the resolution (compared to 114 co-sponsors the last time the resolution was put forward in 2020). Countries which sponsored the resolution for the first time included: Antigua and Barbuda, Bangladesh, Bhutan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mauritius, Nepal and Sri Lanka. Several of the countries have a high prevalence of child marriage — and, by sponsoring, demonstrated their political commitment to ending it. The resolution highlights the urgent need to reach the poorest and most marginalized girls and women—while calling upon the international community to increase its efforts to end child, early and forced marriage. It recognizes how global health threats, climate change, conflicts and forced displacement can have a particularly negative impact on women and girls and which, by extension, can also increase child, early and forced marriage. The resolution appreciates the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage and other

1 See *Official Records of the General Assembly, Seventy-seventh Session, Third Committee agenda item 64(a) (A/C.3/77/L.19/Rev.1)*

similar global, regional, and national initiatives, encouraging coordinated and comprehensive approaches across sectors and at all levels.

In March 2022, the Global Programme and partners led a high-level side-event at the sixty-sixth session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), a session which culminated in the CSW66 Agreed Conclusions, calling for action to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the context of policies and programmes on climate change, and environmental and disaster-risk reduction. This session, “No Time to Lose: Child Marriage and the Triple Crisis”, enabled United Nations Member States and other stakeholders to improve their collective understanding of the effects of the triple crisis on child marriage, and what could be done in response.

Child marriage country context

There are 4 million child brides in Nepal, 1.2 million of whom were married before the age of 15. In 2019 the prevalence of child marriage among girls stood at 33 per cent, which represents a decline from 58 per cent in 1994. However promising, this progress is not enough to meet the SDG target to end child marriage by 2030. If the progress observed over the past 10 years continues, the prevalence will be 27 per cent by 2030. If the reduction is doubled, the rate will 18 per cent in 2030 and 6 per cent in 2050.



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Key highlights in 2022



More than
57,000 adolescent girls participated in **life-skills or comprehensive sexuality education (CSE)** in programme areas.



10.2 MILLION individuals (boys, girls, women and men) were reached by **traditional and social media messaging** on child marriage, **the rights of adolescent girls** and gender equality.



More than
48,000 boys, girls, women and men participated in **group education/dialogue sessions** on the consequences of, and alternatives to, child marriage, the rights of adolescent girls and **gender equality**.



8,339 adolescent girls were supported by the programme to **enrol and/or remain in** primary or secondary **school**.



264 service delivery points in programme areas provided good quality adolescent-responsive health, **child protection or gender-based violence (GBV) services** that meet minimum standards.

Overall programme performance

TABLE 1: Summary of output indicator performance (2022)

Summary of output indicator performance (2022)		
Indicator	Target	Result
Indicator 1111: Number of adolescent girls (aged 10–19) who actively participated in life-skills or CSE interventions in programme areas	35,000	57,011
Indicator 1121: Number of girls (aged 10–19) supported by the programme to enrol and/or remain in primary or secondary school	7,908	8,339
Indicator 1211: Number of boys and men actively participating in group education/dialogues that address harmful masculinities and gender norms	11,500	11,158
Indicator 1221: Number of individuals (boys, girls, women and men) who participate in group education/dialogue sessions on consequences of and alternatives to child marriage, the rights of adolescent girls and gender equality	55,000	48,617
Indicator 1222: Number of individuals (boys, girls, women and men) reached by mass media (traditional and social media) messaging on child marriage, the rights of adolescent girls and gender equality	1,708,396	10,231,573
Indicator 1223: Number of local actors (e.g., traditional, religious and community leaders) with meaningful participation in dialogues and consensus-building to end child marriage	320	1,178
Indicator 1231: Number of CSOs newly mobilized in support of challenging social norms and promoting gender equality by the Global Programme (cumulative)	3	1
Indicator 2121: Number of primary/secondary/non-formal schools in programme areas providing quality gender-friendly education that meets minimum standards	150	350
Indicator 2131: Number of service delivery points in programme areas providing quality adolescent-responsive services (health, child protection/ gender-based violence) that meet minimum standards	132	264
Indicator 2211: Number of partnerships (both formal and informal) established to deliver adolescent-responsive social protection, poverty reduction and economic empowerment programmes and services	8	13
Indicator 3111: Number of policies or legal instruments addressing child marriage drafted, proposed or adopted at national and subnational level with Global Programme support (cumulative)	2	1
Indicator 3121: Number of subnational plans with evidence informed interventions to address child marriage	6	9
Indicator 3211: Number of generated evidence and knowledge that focus on what works to end child marriage (cumulative)	2	1
Indicator 3212: Number of generated evidence and knowledge that apply a gender analysis (cumulative)	4	3
Indicator 3221: Number of south-to-south cooperation events (conferences, expert visits, peer consultations, study tours, communities of practice) supported	1	0

Providing intensive support to marginalized girls

The Global Programme in Nepal has adopted and implemented a strategic approach to leaving no one behind and, indeed, to reach the farthest behind first. The programme primarily targets adolescent girls who face limitations on autonomy, mobility and access to means of communication. Vulnerability assessments were carried out in collaboration with

CSOs, community actors and local government to identify children and adolescents at risk of child marriage, as well as those who are already married, in a union or separated. The programme targets marginalized girls not only to meet their individual needs, but also in efforts to create or strengthen an environment that allows the most marginalized girls to be included as leaders and champions of change in their society. Many young girls who attended courses run by Nepal Rupantaran, a CSO which offers them an empowering social and financial skills

package, have been appointed as local leaders/mentors/champions, making their voices heard through effective advocacy to end child marriage.

UNFPA and UNICEF have continued to use the Rupantaran training and, in total, 11,011 marginalized girls were reached through the in-person group sessions during 2022. The girls participating in the sessions, including the peer leaders, have displayed positive changes in knowledge, skills and attitude. Based on pre-test and post-test results, 92 per cent of peer facilitators reported an increase in knowledge and an enhancement of skills to deliver the gender-transformative Rupantaran life-skills sessions. The number of respondents who reported an understanding of gender-based violence (GBV) increased by 40 per cent, while the number of respondents who reported an understanding of child marriage increased by 14 per cent between the pre- and post-tests.

In 2022, 10 per cent of the Rupantaran participants were surveyed via the KOBO platform, using questions from the Global Programme indicator reference manual to assess the knowledge, skills and attitudes of participating girls and boys, parents and other adult stakeholders. This survey was carried out in addition to the programme's regular pre- and post-testing to assess change. Some 64 per cent of girls aged 15-19, and 24 per cent of 10-14-year-old girls, who participated in the programme reported increased confidence in their ability to negotiate and delay early-marriage, and they feel comfortable speaking without fear.

Similar changes have been observed among other adolescent girls participating in the programme. In a community-based, cross-sectional, case/control

assessment process on the empowerment scale developed by the programme in 2020, participants of the Rupantaran course yielded significantly higher empowerment outcomes than the control group, according to the measurement tool, which uses data from the beginning and end of the social and financial skills sessions. These findings suggest that Rupantaran participants have higher empowerment outcomes than those from similar demographic backgrounds who did not complete the programme.

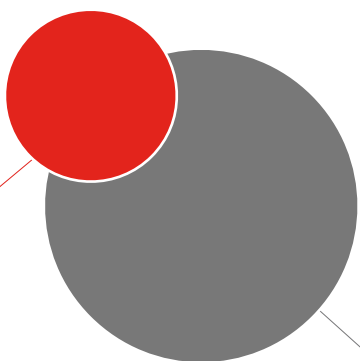
The programme has influenced life decisions around, for example, education and marriage, allowing the girls to also become change-agents in their communities. Many of the success stories depict significant changes in the lives of the Rupantaran adolescents, such as gaining access to their rights through birth registration and receiving formal education. The programme has had an impact, not only on the lives of adolescents, but also on the lives of families and communities.

“I am assisting these adolescents in my community in becoming more empowered and successful. My group has 22 teenagers, and I feel more responsible for them. “Rupantaran” has also altered my life.”

— A Rautahat district facilitator in Madhesh Pradesh

Furthermore, participants have reported an overall change in themselves and have demonstrated strong leadership skills. Some of them, in Sudurpaschim, Karnali, Lumbini and Madhesh provinces, for example, have participated in the Government's planning,

**1.2
MILLION**
married
before
age 15



4.1 MILLION
married
before age 18

Nepal is home to over **4 million child brides**; **1 in 3** young women were married in childhood.

FIGURE 2: Number of girls and women of all ages who were first married or in union before ages 15 and 18.

budgeting, and monitoring platform and have been successful in ensuring the inclusion of activities with budget allocation for addressing child marriage.

Some of the older girls (aged 15–19 years) find it hard to re-enter formal schooling due to a long gap away, and due to the difficulty in catching up with the curriculum and their peers. In response, economic empowerment activities for girls in the Rupantaran programme are carried out in collaboration with local government and women's cooperatives/women-led organizations. Some 200 girls in Madhesh province are being given cash assistance by local governments to take part in these activities, depending on specific criteria. In another province, girls who have completed Rupantaran social and financial skills-training are linked with a women's cooperative for income and skills development. In 2022, 563 girls received livelihood training and support from women's cooperatives.

In addition, 1,378 out-of-school girls who attended Rupantaran social and financial skills sessions received assistance to facilitate their enrolment/re-enrolment in formal school. Coaching classes, uniform/stationery support, facilitating admission procedures in school, engagement with parents to increase their understanding of the importance of girls' education, and mentorship support were all provided. All the girls who received educational

assistance stayed in school. The implementing partners' outreach workers closely monitor their performance and provide continuous support as needed.

Non-formal girls' access to education (GATE) classes were supported in the same way as in previous years to provide out-of-school girls with literacy and numeracy skills and to facilitate their enrolment in formal school. Some 1,022 girls were enrolled in GATE classes, with two dropping out in the middle, and 95 per cent (968 out of 1022) successfully enrolling/re-enrolling in formal school. The programme continued to provide mentorship to assist the girls completing the GATE classes to remain in school. The mentorship assistance also included coaching classes to help girls catch up to age-appropriate educational levels, and this support reached 5,932 girls who had been mainstreamed into formal schools in 2021.

Challenges, lessons learned and next steps

The Rupantaran programme has been enormously successful in empowering adolescent girls to make informed decisions about their sexual and reproductive health and rights and about preventing child marriages. However, maintaining contact with these girls and young people outside secondary school



education or Rupantaran classes has proved difficult. One of the programme's key challenges is the need for ongoing engagement with girls, families and communities even after the Rupantaran sessions and other activities are completed, to achieve long-term and sustainable change in the communities. It is not possible to extend the sessions in the same communities while leaving other vulnerable communities without assistance. To address this, the programme has begun experimenting with an exit strategy in some municipalities by developing a handover/programme continuity plan which is carried out with the technical and financial support of local governments. This approach is proving to be quite effective, particularly in terms of making local governments more accountable, and will be promoted in all the targeted municipalities.

Managing the families' expectations, particularly regarding livelihood support from the programme and local governments, is another challenge. The girls are expected to begin earning as soon as they are trained and linked to a women's cooperative. The girls cannot be linked to economic activities without strong mentorship and support; lack of proper guidance is a challenge as they progress in their economic empowerment journey. Partnerships with local governments and holding them accountable is critical to ensuring sustainability and expanding coverage. The programme has been successful in many target municipalities in integrating the child marriage programme into the Government's annual plans and budget through evidence-based advocacy and coordination.

Political intervention in hiring GATE facilitators, political manipulation of bursary assistance eligibility requirements, school retention, and expectations from families for long-term support are some of the difficulties encountered in the work with supporting girls' education. It is crucial to maintain contact with local political leaders and increase their accountability for the programme to reduce the impact of political interference. Additionally, mobilizing political leaders has been shown to be a successful tactic in persuading families to send their daughters to school. Creating a standard operating procedure (SOP) is crucial to eliminate conflicts of interest and other potential harmful impacts from community or political leaders. As an example, in 2022, the Cash Plus Programming SOP for partners was developed.

The COVID-19 pandemic was largely responsible for the global shift towards e-learning and online education and service delivery, including in Nepal. Recognizing the need to diversify learning platforms,

the programme is now converting the Rupantaran social and financial skills-training package into a mobile learning app to meet the growing demand for e-learning materials. The curriculum for Rupantaran will be digitized to achieve

- an efficient path to scale
- a resilient system capable of continuing service delivery in emergency situations
- delivery of the programme with greater long-term cost efficiency.

Enhancing the family and community environment

The programme works with a diverse group of stakeholders, including adolescent and young boys, to improve their knowledge and attitudes so that they can demonstrate more gender-equitable attitudes and become community advocates for girls' rights. Intergenerational dialogues on toxic masculinities, how masculinity influences boys' and men's attitudes and behaviours, and the impact of toxic masculinities on their overall development are held between young boys and adult men. The intergenerational dialogue platform has provided a safe space for 11,158 boys and men to discuss issues that they would otherwise find difficult to share. The programme's interactive tool has further aided in igniting healthy discussions and developing gender-transformative attitudes that promote positive masculinities and gender equality.

Some 48,617 parents and guardians of girls enrolled in Rupantaran have completed three days of parenting education through the Rupantaran adult package. This version has, among other things, helped parents improve their understanding and knowledge of gender, harmful practices, changes during adolescence, parenting skills, consequences of child marriage, GBV and financial literacy. The parenting programme has helped to bridge the gap between parents and children and has become a way for adolescents and parents to learn together. This has helped create a safe and supportive environment for adolescents and their families. Parents who attended the sessions reported positive changes in their interactions with their children. They believe that, after attending the training, they will be able to communicate, interact and listen better to their adolescent children. Prior to the training, they would never involve or ask the children's opinions on any matters concerning their lives. Some of them also mentioned imposing

restrictions and controls, such as not obtaining birth certificates or citizenship, to keep their daughters under their control. They stated that, after the training, they realized the value of education and are comfortable sending their daughters to school; they also realized the importance of providing a safe space for children to express their thoughts and feelings. Similarly, they have recognized the significance of having proper documentation, such as birth registration and citizenship. Pre- and post-test assessments among programme participants revealed increased understanding and gender-equitable attitudes. The pre-test and post-test involves the same set of 12 questions and, on average, a 25 per cent point increment was reported between pre-test and post-test.

Religious leaders are another important group engaged by the programme. Leaders from various faith groups were trained to lead community dialogues on issues such as harmful social norms, gender, child rights and the negative consequences of child marriage. The engagement with religious leaders aims to reduce the prevalence of harmful social norms and practices such as child marriage, which have been ingrained in the traditions of many Nepali communities for generations, through discussion and debate. Religious leaders wield moral authority in their communities and thus play an important role in granting social approval to marriages. More than 1,100 religious leaders, representing various religious groups, were trained using a standard training package.

Challenges, lessons learned and next steps

Despite various efforts, ensuring the participation of fathers and male family members in the Rupantaran parenting training sessions remains a challenge. The strategy of the intergenerational dialogues of having discussion forums for men only is proving to be an effective way of getting them involved. As a result, in 2023, the programme intends to test the same strategy of having a men-only group for the parenting sessions.

A standard tool for orienting religious leaders was also felt necessary and, as a result, an orientation manual was created and adapted from previously created tools. This has ensured the engagement's effectiveness.



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Strengthening systems

Through advocacy and technical assistance, 222 child rights committees were formed, and 219 child welfare officers were appointed, as required by the Act Relating to Children 2018, contributing to strengthening the child protection system (which also covers child marriage). The National Child Rights Council was given financial assistance to adapt and test the child protection information management system for effective case management of vulnerable children and adolescents. This tool has aided the harmonization and consolidation of data on child protection issues, including child marriage, to provide effective and timely services and referrals. In addition, Nepal police's Women, Children, and Senior Citizens Directorate received technical assistance in publishing a yearly analysis of data on violence against women and children, including child marriage. A total of 1,097 justice and security officials have increased their skills and knowledge on justice for children, including data management, gender/child-friendly investigation, prosecution, adjudications and diversion, through orientations and training. Through the community and school outreach programme, 34,689 people

have learned of legal provisions concerning violence against women and children, including child marriage, as well as available services to improve accessibility.

The programme has supported age-appropriate and gender-appropriate health service provision for adolescents, particularly girls, by training health service providers on this, as well as equipping facilities with adolescent-friendly materials, and certifying adolescent-friendly service (AFS) sites. Similarly, six adolescent-friendly information corners have been established in schools near the AFS sites to promote service uptake. Some 84,795 adolescents (42,596 girls and 42,199 boys) were reached through these services in 2022. The activities related to health service provision were supplemented by community-wide awareness-raising initiatives to address gender-related and age-related biases. The training for service providers also covered sexual and reproductive rights, and there has been a shift in their attitudes as a result. Previously, they reported being hesitant to provide contraception to young girls and would ask for their marital status, in violation of the policy. During a joint monitoring visit with the health office and municipal team, 10 AFS sites were pre-certified using quality improvement tools for AFS certification. Even though all sites received scores of more than 80 per cent, the team discovered some gaps. In addition, 65 health service providers from five programme districts received a five-day training on adolescent sexual and reproductive health.

The programme provided technical assistance to the Centre for Education and Human Resource Development (CEHRD) in developing:

- the complaint response mechanism protocol implementation plan
- visual complaint response mechanism training materials
- a training manual for gender focal points
- monitoring tools for tracking the use of the complaint response mechanism.

Capacity-building activities targeting municipal officials and head teachers were carried out in 100 municipalities across the four Global Programme implementation provinces of Madhesh, Lumbini, Karnali and Sudurpaschim in 2022. They were also trained on gender issues, such as GBV and child marriage, in addition to the complaint response mechanism guidelines. Gender focal points have been appointed in 500 schools, and networks for girls and inclusive education have been established

in these municipalities. The programme has also provided technical support to CEHRD in developing a five-year strategic plan for the federal, provincial and local level networks for inclusive education. Continued advocacy and technical assistance were provided to ensure the appointment of gender focal persons in the 61 municipalities' schools.

Challenges, lessons learned and next steps

Although policy documents call for the establishment of a complaint response mechanism in all public schools, not all local governments have invested equally in training and coordination. As a result, continued advocacy is required with local governments for financial support to achieve this.

Having a safe and confidential platform for children to express their concerns has greatly aided the improvement of the learning environment in schools. Even though the majority of the complaints are about infrastructure improvements, addressing all the concerns can be difficult due to limited resources. In such cases, schools can work with local governments to gain the necessary support. On issues of violence and discrimination, action must be taken right away. In schools where the school management committee and gender focal person are very active, issues are handled immediately and confidentially, highlighting the need for improvements to the function of the school management committees and of the gender focal persons.

Many AFS sites have been difficult to certify and/or strengthen due to a lack of space within existing health facilities. Many health care facilities only have 2-3 rooms, which are mostly already in use. Many health office staff and local government focal persons are not fully sensitized to the importance of the adolescent sexual and reproductive health and rights programme, or the role of the certification process in improving the quality and standard of health service delivery. To address this issue, the programme has continued to work closely with health care workers to improve their knowledge, skills and sensitivity, as well as their understanding of the certification process.

AFC service delivery is tailored specifically to the needs of young people. As a result, the competency-based training curriculum must be updated with new knowledge and include visits to model AFHS sites. Self-assessment on this is performed by trained health service staff using the QI and certification tool for adolescent-friendly SRH service.

Building partnerships

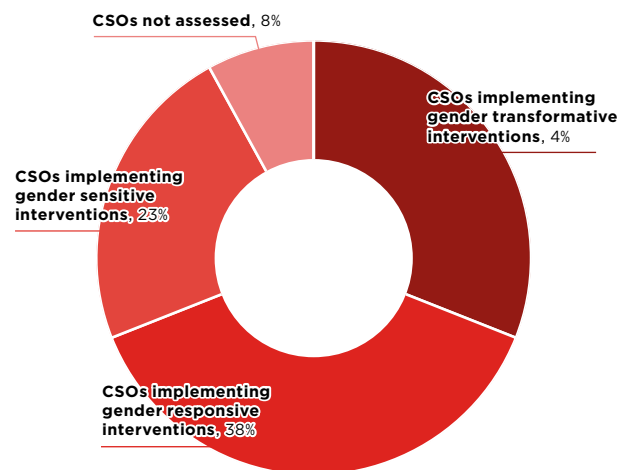
The programme has successfully galvanized strategic partnerships with Government stakeholders across the three targeted provinces, which have been critical in garnering ownership among Government stakeholders. Building and strengthening partnerships with key stakeholders other than implementing partners, such as youth and adolescent networks, women and other community groups, religious and other opinion leaders, human rights defenders, teachers and other networks, has been a key strategy for intensifying efforts to combat and reduce the risk of child marriage. The partnership has been strengthened/established with the national and district-level network of adolescents/youth, as well as the men's and boys' network, to strengthen the evidence-based gender and social norms transformative approach to combat child marriage in Nepal. In 2022, efforts were made to engage with the private sector, particularly banks, in order to promote financial literacy among girls and to link the girls who graduated from the Rupantaran programme to banking/loan schemes for microenterprise development.

A strategic partnership was formed with women's groups, including cooperatives and youth groups, to raise community awareness. This collaboration was successful in mobilizing combined efforts and advocating for girls' rights. Furthermore, orientation and formal agreements with women's cooperatives were conducted in order to support adolescent girls from marginalized families by providing livelihood support in selected programme locations. Similarly, advocacy events were held in collaboration with youth-led organizations, and formal agreements were established to give girls and boys from marginalized communities a voice to challenge harmful social norms, and to promote gender equality.

Investment in and support to youth-led, women-led and feminist CSOs

Partnerships for advancing gender-transformative programming are important and, recognizing this, in 2022, the Global Programme assessed the extent to which the CSOs were implementing gender-transformative approaches - based on the partners identified as focusing on promoting girls' and women's rights from the previous year (13 in Nepal). The assessment aimed to provide guidance to UNFPA and UNICEF on how to better identify and support opportunities to advance gender-transformative approaches within the Global Programme.

FIGURE 3: Assessment of interventions of partner organizations, on the gender equality continuum





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The assessment was conducted by building on information from various online resources, including the CSOs' websites, reviews of available annual reports, analysis of strategy documents, social media pages, descriptions and commentary about the CSOs from external parties (for example funders, coalitions, or networks), and news articles.

Nepal stood out as a country with very gender-positive and gender-transformative CSOs, many of which actively participated in the assessment process. Roughly two thirds of the CSOs assessed in Nepal were ranked as either gender-positive or gender-transformative. LIFE Nepal, a women and youth-led organization, was notable for its impressive approach towards ensuring commitments to child safety. It works to ensure that all its volunteers, vendors and stakeholders are aware of their core mandate and have a good understanding of child protection. All the staff and volunteers are required to show a commitment to child protection and safeguarding by signing a code of conduct. Notably, LIFE also encourages its vendors to commit to child safeguarding. LIFE set a target of creating a gender-responsive and child protection-friendly environment at the local level. To measure progress against this target, it uses an indicator that collects data on child marriage in the targeted areas on an annual basis by mobilizing girl champions to complete a checklist.

NFCC was ranked highly for its gender-transformative approach at the structural level. NFCC believes it cannot work for gender equality if it is mainly a male organization. Therefore, it has created an environment where women, who feel safe and empowered, are leading and working on issues that affect women.

Awaaj, an initiative working against GBV, and discrimination against women and children, is yet another example of a gender-transformative CSO in Nepal, as it actively monitors progress to tackle gender inequality. It has identified its weaknesses and has set strategies to reduce them. It appears that its work contributes towards creating an enabling environment through establishing community support mechanisms addressing VAC and women, and it seeks to bring about lasting change through a participatory process involving men and women, children, families, teachers, local leaders, community groups, the Government and local NGOs, and especially survivors of sexual exploitation in all phases of its work.

Challenges, lessons learned and next steps

In several programme locations, the diverse capacity of women- and youth-led organizations remains a challenge. As a result, the programme has been investing in enhancing its capacity to strengthen strategic partnerships, which are not only beneficial for achieving programme results but are also important in developing strong community-based organizations capable of advocating with and supporting local governments in promoting gender equality.

The programme has been successful in linking adolescent girls who are not in school with local women's cooperatives that promote economic empowerment. Through this involvement, the community-based women's networks' promise for raising awareness and fostering parent and community involvement has been fulfilled. Based on this, engagement with women's groups will be increased in other initiatives in 2023.

Nepal is an example of where CSOs adopt gender-transformative approaches in a context marred by poverty and patriarchy. Given that many of the CSOs rank highly, there may be value in hosting a workshop with all CSOs that enables them to share ideas, lessons, and challenges, and support one another with strategies to implement gender-transformative approaches in their work.

Facilitating supportive laws and policies

Despite the pandemic and the fluid political situation caused by local, provincial and federal elections, Nepal made significant progress towards ending child marriage in 2022. The programme



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continued to have an impact on national and local policies and plans by providing real-time information, evidence and knowledge, as well as advocacy and strategic engagement with Government, policy communities and partners.

The intense advocacy and success of the results of the Rupantaran training for girls, boys and parents, has led to 74 municipalities and two provincial governments allocating resources (in-kind and approximately US\$150,000 in cash) to expand the programme's reach and provide additional support to the girls.

Inputs were provided by the programme for the new long-term School Education Sector Plan (SESP, 2022-2030), which succeeded the School Sector Development Programme and is the country's first education sector plan developed in full alignment with the country's recently developed federal structures. The plan includes interventions to ensure recovery from learning loss caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as preventing school dropout. The SESP includes specific activities for preventing child marriage and responding to the needs of married girls. Similarly, inputs are being provided to the development of the Multisectoral Nutrition Plan III, where ending child marriage and empowering girls and communities is featured as an independent outcome within the theory of change. This will ensure increased resource allocation for ending child marriage from sectors other than the women and children ministry, such as health, agriculture and education.

During the year, the federal government issued the Children 2022 regulation, replacing the 1995 regulation, which specifies the services available to children who are survivors of violence, abuse or neglect. Given the importance

of this regulation in ensuring child-responsive and gender-responsive service provision, significant technical input was provided.

The public policy maturity model

Elimination of harmful practices such as child marriage requires the integration of strategic approaches, processes, systems and information. UNFPA and UNICEF recognize the role national action plans play in strengthening policy coherence to achieve this. Lessons from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development peer review process emphasize that the plans need:

- political commitment and policy statements
- policy coordination mechanisms
- systems for monitoring, analysis and reporting.

UNICEF has developed and tested a policy maturity model and tools for assessing public policies to end harmful practices and achieve SDG 5.3 by 2030 in 12 countries (Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Lebanon, Mozambique, Nepal, Niger, Sierra Leone, Uganda and Zambia).

The maturity model provides a framework for key national stakeholders to review and assess national policy approaches and systems for

- eliminating and preventing female genital mutilation (FGM) and child marriage
- identifying priorities or critical investments
- building consensus around the interventions.

The model is structured around six intermediate outcomes and different subdomains that are defined by distinct levels of maturity i.e., weak-building; average-enhancing; good-integrating; and excellent-mature (see Figure 4).

TABLE 2: Snippet of the policy maturity model

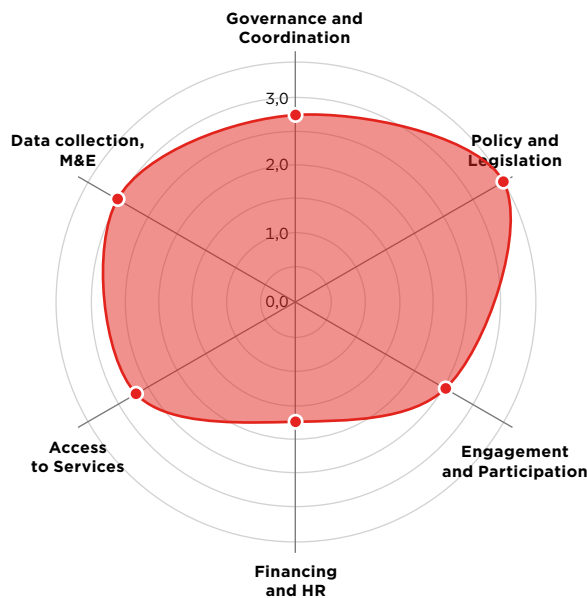
Intermediate Outcome	Sub-Domains	Score
Governance and Coordination	A1: Political Commitment	✓
	A2: Coordination structures	✓
	A3: National Action Plans	✓
Policy and Legislation	B.1: Legislation, policies and implementation mechanisms	✓
Engagement and Participation	C1: Independent complaint mechanism exists for children and women	✗
	C2: Civil Society Engagement, including women and children	✓
	C3: Community based mechanisms for Harmful practices prevention	—
Financing & HR	D1: Financing of harmful practices services	✓
	D2: National budget establishment	—
	D3: National Budget execution	—
	D4: National Budget amount	✗
	D5: National Budget monitoring and review	✗
	D6: Human Resources	✓
Access to Services	E1: Availability of Standard Operating Procedures and/or Protocols for harmful practices services	—
	E.2: Understanding and articulation of harmful practices system	✓
	E3: Modelling testing and scaling of harmful practices services	—
	E4: Availability of harmful practices services, case management and referral systems	✓
Data collection, M&E	F1: Administrative data systems and monitoring to routinely generate data on FGM	—
	F2: Data security and governance	✗
	F3: Research and surveys	—

The benchmarks for each level of maturity have been defined and require certain priorities, processes, and results to be achieved for each subdomain, and can be contextualized by country. Feedback from the testing emphasized the role of the model as:

- a useful advocacy tool
- something that builds Government accountability and action towards elimination of harmful practices
- a tool to review and track the implementation of a national action plan.

On average, overall country ratings on a 4-point scale ranged from 1.8 (weak-building in Bangladesh) to 3.0 (good-integrating in Zambia). Financing and human resources (rating 1.3) emerged as the area where countries were rated the least, while governance and coordination (rating 2.7) were rated highly.

FIGURE 4: Policy maturity assessment for Nepal



Challenges, lessons learned and next steps

The legal age for child marriage was the subject of intense debate in the first quarter of 2022 in legislatures at federal and some provincial levels. One female lawmaker supported lowering the age because she believed it needed to be linked with the laws of India, as there are many cross-border weddings taking place. However, after receiving



considerable opposition from women's rights organizations, the legal community and the health community, this proposal quickly lost steam.

Service providers have room to manipulate provisions in accordance with their interests and convictions because of the inconsistent nature of several laws, regulations and legal provisions. Because of this, underprivileged children and adolescents are sometimes denied access to basic services, including social welfare, birth registration, citizenship and economic empowerment. Initiatives to develop the capacity of service providers should concentrate on gender and sexuality as well as the technical and legal aspects of child marriage, in order to change service providers' attitudes and behaviours.

It is quite challenging for local government to lobby the provincial and federal governments for resource allocation and expenditure monitoring without budgeting or costing their action plans for ending child marriage. It is necessary, and will be stressed through combined advocacy and assistance, to have a budgeted multisectoral gender-transformative plan on eliminating child marriage across ministries and departments at subnational levels.

Generating and applying data and evidence

A study was conducted to identify legal implementation gaps in Nepal relating to child marriage. The study findings were shared with relevant stakeholders, including Government agencies,

and copies of the report were widely distributed. Case studies depicting changes among girls reached by the programme have been documented and shared across multiple platforms, including social media.

The programme continued to generate evidence through pre-testing and post-testing of girls in the Rupantaran programme, using the 'Power In Nepali Girls' scale and the KOBO survey. Furthermore, adolescents from the programme were trained and mobilized in protection monitoring and incident reporting through a KOBO-based survey, to monitor the situation of children and women and report cases of violence, abuse and exploitation.

A study to understand the sexual and reproductive health and rights status of adolescents and youth in Nepal was initiated in 2022, with a draft report set to be finalized in 2023. The study assessed adolescents' and youth's sexual and reproductive health awareness, perceptions, needs, practices, and participation, including their views on the subjects of GBV and child marriage. A total of 2,436 adolescents and young people aged 10–24 years were recruited from three provinces. The study's key findings show that adolescents and youths in Nepal have a basic understanding and awareness of SRH, but their knowledge is still significantly limited. Menstrual taboos continue to exist for adolescents and youths. The work towards eradicating child marriage is progressive, with several prevention interventions initiated for social norm changes; however, there is still a need for advocating and raising awareness about the consequences of harmful practices due to the persistent dominance of patriarchal mind-sets and a low value of girls.

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COUNTRY PROFILE

2022

