



GHANA

COUNTRY PROFILE



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The country context

Ghana is home to 2 million child brides. Of these, 600,000 married before age 15. The prevalence of child marriage in Ghana – 19 per cent of all young women married before their 18th birthday – is among the lowest in West and Central Africa (regional average 39 per cent). Child marriage in Ghana has declined over the last three decades, from 34 per cent in 1993. However, this is not enough to meet the ambitious goal of ending the practice by 2030, as set out in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). If progress is accelerated, the prevalence of child marriage could drop to 12 per cent by 2030 and to 5 per cent by 2050.¹

However, even with accelerated progress, the COVID-19 pandemic put girls in Ghana and around the world at increased risk of child marriage. Recent data show that over the next decade, 100 million girls are at risk of becoming child brides, according to pre-COVID-19 projections. Over the past decade, the proportion of young women globally who were married as children decreased by 15 per cent, from nearly 1 in 4 to 1 in 5. This means that, over the last 10 years, the marriages of some 25 million girls have been averted. This remarkable accomplishment is now under threat due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Over the next decade, UNICEF estimates that up to 10 million more girls will be at risk of child marriage as a result of COVID-19.²

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) estimates that nearly 24 million children and adolescents, including 11 million girls and young women, may drop out of school due to the pandemic's economic impact.³ Being out of school, or having only primary education, is a major risk factor for child marriage in Ghana. Among girls with no education or only primary education, the prevalence of the practice is 43 per cent, while it drops to 13 per cent among girls with secondary or higher education. The economic impact of the pandemic is also likely to have a negative effect on girls and child marriage in the country. Before the pandemic, the poorest girls in Ghana were about 6 times as likely to become child brides compared with girls in the richest quintile (33 per cent versus 5 per cent).⁴ During the pandemic, girls have also become more likely to engage in forms of work that put them at risk of sexual exploitation and abuse in Ghana. For many, this results in pregnancy. They are then more likely to cohabit with their abuser to secure basic support, or their families may marry them off to avoid the stigma associated with premarital sex and adolescent pregnancy.⁵

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the country saw an increase in the overall amount of violence against children and adolescent girls, sexual and gender-based violence, child marriage and adolescent pregnancies during 2020. A U-Report poll in May 2020 with adolescents and young people indicated a 32 per cent increase in the prevalence of abusive and violent behaviour experienced since March 2020. The pandemic also exacerbated the existing high levels of sexual violence, as indicated by the two national household surveys on the impact of COVID-19 conducted by Ghana Statistical Service with support from UNICEF, the World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). According to the first survey conducted in June,⁶ 12.9 per cent of households agreed that their community had seen an increase in violence between members of the same household and 4.7 per cent of households indicated that at least one member of their household had experienced some type of violence with another household member since 16 March.⁷ As per the second survey conducted by Ghana Statistical Service,⁸ the country saw an increase in the incidence of domestic violence by 3.7 per cent nationally and 7.0 per cent in lockdown districts in Accra and Kumasi.⁹ The situation has been further confounded by the fact that the victims and survivors have not been able to access medical, social welfare and justice services as freely as they could before the COVID-19 pandemic.

Despite these setbacks, the elimination of child marriage by 2030 remains a priority under SDG 5 on gender equality. This monumental task puts pressure on the global community to deliver on effective interventions and policies at scale, generating calls for coordinated efforts and renewed commitments from stakeholders, particularly governments, to invest more to accelerate an end to child marriage.

Key highlights



The partnership support to the Ghana health services scaled up the SafetyNet initiative to 232 health-care facilities, reaching 2,123 pregnant girls and adolescent mothers with gender- and age-appropriate care and prevention services.



Thanks to sustained budget advocacy by the programme and partners using budget analysis and policy briefs, the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection continued to allocate **3 per cent of its recurrent budget to national coordination functions for ending child marriage**. In addition, the Government increased its child protection (including child marriage prevention and response services) budget allocations to metropolitan, municipal and district assemblies from

73 MILLION

cedis in 2019 to

144 MILLION

cedis in 2020.

The programme supported the completion and dissemination of the **National Operational and Monitoring and Evaluation Plan (2020–2021)** to end child marriage. This is part of the **National Strategic Framework to End Child Marriage in Ghana (2017–2026)** and provides an overarching framework for mobilizing cross-sectoral partners around critical strategies for implementing interventions to end child marriage.

Despite the disruptions due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the programme continued partnership with the Ghana education services to provide bursaries and school supplies to

1,029

vulnerable junior high school girls, including sanitary pads and supplementary readers.



Over

27,000

adolescent girls actively participated in life-skills training and comprehensive sexuality education in programme areas. Almost

164,000

girls benefited from life-skills training and sexuality education through complementary funding. In addition to **36 girls living with disabilities** whom were provided life-skills training and sexuality education by the programme, **8,200 'Kayayei' (female porter or bearer) girls** at risk of marriage and abuse during COVID-19 lockdowns were provided dignity kits and transportation to return to their village homes.

2020 Achievements



In total,

32

districts in 10 regions were targeted to support girls to make informed decisions, improve their economic status, and reduce their vulnerabilities to sexual and gender-based violence and its consequences, including child marriage, cohabitation and transactional sex.



In 2020, through community-based safe spaces, about

27,274

adolescent girls at risk of or affected by child marriage were engaged through a minimum package consisting of **31 hours of information and training** in the areas of skills for life, skills for employability, mentorship, adolescent sexual and reproductive health, nutrition, menstrual hygiene management, legal literacy and peer-to-peer learning, to prevent and respond to child marriage, adolescent pregnancies, and sexual and gender-based violence in eight districts of the Northern and Central regions.

Providing intensive support to marginalized girls

Results from a Global Programme-commissioned review that assessed child marriage evaluations published from 2000 to 2019 suggest that targeted interventions that enhance girls' human capital (e.g., schooling, life-skills, livelihood and gender rights training) and their employment opportunities have been the most successful channel for delaying their marriage among programmes evaluated to date.¹⁰ Despite the unprecedented times in 2020, UNFPA and UNICEF continued to use rights-based services packages to reach adolescent girls in Ghana. The packages included integrated information, skills and services through physical and virtual safe spaces to build their agency. They improved girls' access to services in line with support for implementing national policies and frameworks supporting adolescent health and well-being. Partners delivered the packages, including information and services on sexual and gender-based violence, adolescent sexual and reproductive health, livelihood skills, peer education, mentoring, COVID-19 protocols and reporting channels. This was done through innovative strategies such as the use of COMPASS (Creating Opportunities through Mentorship, Parental Involvement, and Safe Spaces), radio, phone messages, jingles, small-group meetings, house-to-house visits, paralegal sessions, walkathons, and distribution of dignity kits and radios. In total, 32 districts in 10 regions were targeted to support girls to make informed decisions, improve their economic status, and reduce their vulnerabilities to sexual and gender-based violence and its consequences, including child marriage, cohabitation and transactional sex.

The continuous engagement of girls in the safe spaces, especially during the period of COVID-19 restrictions in Ghana, was critical in providing the needed adolescent sexual and reproductive health support and services to prevent unintended pregnancies – as testified by interviews with some girls for a child marriage documentary. Additionally, the distribution of dignity kits and personal protective equipment (PPE), as well as radio sets to the girls, helped to prevent transactional sex and its effects, while sexual and gender-based violence prevention information and reporting channels provided the critical support systems needed by the girls who were experiencing various forms of abuse due to the restrictions/lockdown effects.

Since 2018, UNFPA and UNICEF have agreed on a joint approach to delivering structured and sustained information and services to a common cohort of adolescent girls in geographical convergence areas. The Promoting Adolescent Safe Spaces (PASS) programme is implemented by two non-governmental partners (International Needs Ghana [INGH] and Norsaac) in collaboration with decentralized agencies such as the Department of Gender, the Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit, the Department of Social Welfare and Ghana Education Service. Focus is on the provision of integrated services for the most marginalized adolescent girls, particularly those living in rural areas, pregnant girls, married girls, girls who are mothers, and those who are out of school. In 2020, through community-based safe spaces, about 27,274 adolescent girls at risk of or affected by child marriage were engaged through a minimum package consisting of 31 hours of information and training in the areas of skills for life, skills for employability, mentorship, adolescent sexual and reproductive health, nutrition, menstrual hygiene management, legal literacy and peer-to-peer learning, to prevent and respond to child marriage, adolescent pregnancies, and sexual and gender-based violence in eight districts of the Northern and Central regions. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the PASS programme used strategic approaches to reach out to the girls in the safe spaces and beyond, including the use of virtual safe meetings using radio (by paying for airtime), community information systems and COMPASS, as well as the production and use of tippy taps (simple and economical hand-washing stations) by the girls to enhance safety protocols. Jingles on child marriage and harmful practices produced by the Department of Gender with relevant gender-transformative messaging for both the girls and community support structures were also played in the communities as part of the sessions.

The Global Programme is also supporting the development of a feature documentary on the PASS programme to capture change and transformation at the individual and community levels. While the PASS programme is implemented in selected geographic locations, it is designed to be a demonstration intervention, supporting the implementation of key systems-strengthening initiatives across related sectors – for example, the case management and integrated sexual and gender-based violence essential services; support to girls' education and school re-entry for pregnant girls and adolescent mothers; uptake of age- and gender-responsive adolescent sexual and reproductive health; mother, newborn and child health and nutrition/iron supplementation services. At the safe space meetings, girls receive reproductive health information and services that help to prevent adolescent pregnancy, a key driver of child marriage in Ghana. They

are empowered to make choices regarding pursuing education, as well as pursuing alternative skills training and other economic empowerment opportunities. Their capacities to recognize, identify and report child marriage and other abuse/exploitation cases is enhanced through linkages and referrals to social welfare and justice service providers. Through the safe spaces, the girls participate in mentoring, leadership and coaching programmes, and are co-creating platforms to express their needs, desires and the support they require from families and community members. They are inspired and motivated to believe in their potential and future aspirations. The programme is accompanied by a solid measurement and documentation agenda, through structured before-and-after knowledge, attitudes and practices surveys conducted on a yearly basis with participation of the girls' cohorts as well as caregivers, community members and key stakeholders in programme areas.

Programme evidence through the PASS end-line survey from 2019 indicates that the safe space programme is effectively supporting adolescent mothers to return to school after delivery; supporting girls to report cases of child marriage and gender-based violence and child abuse to relevant authorities; enhancing knowledge of menstrual hygiene; standing up to menstrual myths and taboos; increasing attendance at adolescent sexual and reproductive health services; developing alternative skills for safe employability; and generally helping girls gain confidence in their future and becoming advocates against practices such as child marriage.

In addition, the adolescent parenting sessions – which are components of the PASS programme aimed at creating an enabling environment for the girls to thrive at home – has facilitated increasing interaction and open discussions on some of the most difficult and culturally sensitive topics in the implementing communities. The sessions have provided a platform for adolescent girls, parents and caregivers to engage on ending child marriage and other harmful practices and negative attitudes that affect and disempower adolescent girls in the communities. Consequently, discussions are focusing more on promoting gender-equitable norms and improved relationships between parents, caregivers, community members and their wards to support a healthy environment for adolescent girls' development.

To empower adolescent girls to be advocates of their own course, UNFPA, under the Shaping Futures programme, also partnered with Purim African Youth Development Platform Ghana to train a cohort of 85 adolescent paralegals in two districts in two regions (Greater Accra and Central) to educate and sensitize their community members on issues of sexual and

gender-based violence and harmful practices, especially child marriage and co-habitation, and identify such cases for redress. The trained paralegals went through the structured paralegal training comprising: problem-tree analysis, understanding human rights, origin and classification of human rights, rights of the Ghanaian child, gender and sex, child marriage and effects on reproductive health, legal issues and ethics of a paralegal, and action planning. As part of their action plans, the paralegals undertook various community sensitization activities during the 16 Days of Activism Against Violence Against Women and Girls in 2020, with some also serving as panellists and studio audience to articulate issues on the Global Programme-supported 'Girlz Girlz Power' talk show television programme.

In the continuous efforts to leave no one behind, UNFPA collaborated with Purim African Youth Development Platform and other state agencies such as the National Board for Small Scale Industries, the Food and Drugs Authority, the Cooperative Society of Ghana, the National Vocational Training Institute (NVTI) and the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection to continue to implement a programme entitled 'Integrated Legal Literacy, Livelihood Skills Training and Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights Services for Female Head Porters (*Kayaye*) in Selected Urban Markets in Five Regions in Ghana'. The intervention has contributed to empowering the vulnerable adolescent *Kayaye* to make informed decisions, improve their economic status and reduce their vulnerabilities to gender-based violence



and its consequences, including forced marriages and co-habitation. Through the programme, about 600 *Kayaye* champions against gender-based violence and Reproductive Health Education and Services for Youth (RHESY) facilitators reached out to their peers, especially those in hard-to-reach communities, to empower them with information on sexual and reproductive health and gender-based violence prevention, mostly during the COVID-19 restrictions period. In collaboration with the district health services, the work of the champions focused on averting unintended pregnancies among the *Kayaye* and other marginalized populations. UNICEF also supported programmes providing 8,200 dignity kits to at-risk adolescent girls and *Kayaye* girls returning to the northern regions due to the lockdown in Accra and Kumasi.

Challenges, lessons learned and next steps

From an education sector perspective, the outbreak of COVID-19 and the total closure of schools since March 2020 has presented challenges in the implementation of a comprehensive package of interventions to support girls in schools. The interim report on a rapid assessment of the impact of COVID-19 on education revealed that school closures have disrupted learning and contributed to pregnancy and childbirth among schoolgirls.

Inevitably, the COVID-19 pandemic affected the capacity of implementing partners to engage girls in community-based settings following traditional 'safe space' modalities. This caused implementation delays, but also provided an opportunity to re-assess the girls' needs and circumstances, identify new risk factors and adjust programmatic interventions accordingly. For example, mass media, radio and community public address systems were preferred due to the changed circumstances and safety/social distancing concerns. Small-group activities and house-to-house visits replaced large gatherings and school-based activities, while strictly observing COVID-19 protocols. PPE was purchased and distributed to all partners and front-line workers to ensure strict adherence to safety protocols. Smaller groups were formed and more frequent activities were carried out with the girls; radio and phone were explored as alternative modes of communication; and girls were provided with sanitary pad supplies to reduce the risks they often face of sexual exploitation to cover their basic needs.

For UNFPA, provision of dignity kits to support the hygiene and safety needs of girls and radio sets to ensure participation in virtual programmes attracted and sustained the interest of the girls in the safe spaces even when in-person meetings were not possible. However, some targets by the partners – such as the number of girls who accessed adolescent sexual and reproductive

health services – could still not be met since some of the adjusted initiatives could not meet the criterion of 31 minimum contact hours.

Virtual programmes, such as e-workshops, attracted several adolescents, including a cohort that is usually not a target audience, but that faces various abuses all the same as other girls. For its ability to reach more girls with structured messaging, e-platforms such as e-workshops and podcast messages will be further adopted as approaches for Global Programme implementation.

Enhancing the family and community environment

Significant progress continued to be made in 2020 with the scale-up of community engagement and advocacy sessions with structured toolkits and facilitation manuals targeting various community and identifiable groups to facilitate change in attitudes and to address violence, abuse and exploitation of children and youth, especially adolescent girls. The sessions were rolled out via the use of interpersonal communication approaches, mass media and digital platforms, reaching 10 regions of Ghana through both direct support from the Global Programme, as well as complementary funding support.

The purpose of the community engagements and reflections, which are implemented in partnerships with the Government and non-governmental organizations, is to share information and knowledge on the negative consequences of child marriage and adolescent pregnancy, increase awareness on legal provisions against child marriage and other sexual and gender-based violence issues, and stimulate intergenerational dialogue around child protection, equitable gender norms, investments in adolescent girls, and the importance of delaying marriage and supporting girls' education. The strategies and tools developed for community engagements provide an opportunity for participants to reflect and discuss in a non-judgemental, non-prescriptive manner some of the deeply rooted social and gender norms, practices and stereotypes prevalent in their contexts.

In 2020, through direct Global Programme support, at least 41,719 people in five regions (Bono East, Bono, Upper West, Western North and Western) and 13 districts were reached through community engagements and dialogues specifically on child marriage, adolescent pregnancy, sexual and gender-based violence, and gender equality. UNFPA, in collaboration with the Department of Gender, updated the Child Marriage Advocacy Toolkit based on lessons learned and feedback from engagement sessions in Phase I. The updated toolkit with new components (e.g., traditional proverbs, adages and songs that communities can identify with)

also has more illustrations to aid facilitation and sustain the interest of community members. The updated toolkit was used, together with the UNFPA framework for engaging men and boys, mainly in the second half of the year, after COVID-19 restrictions were eased, to engage about 7,800 groups in structured sessions that included follow-up meetings to track the results of the action plans of the groups.

Emerging changes documented via programme reports indicate that increased awareness of the causes and effects of child marriage, sexual and gender-based violence and other forms of violence, abuse and exploitation, is triggering communities to challenge harmful practices and initiate by-laws and actions to prevent their occurrence. Community members in programme areas are increasingly becoming advocates for the protection of the rights of children and adolescent girls. In many instances, they have formed community child protection committees, parenting networks, and men and boys mentorship circles to oversee the implementation of community-level plans drawn to prevent, address and report violence, abuse

and exploitation of children and adolescents in the community, including child marriage. In addition, an innovative approach known as 'Breaking the Silence Forum' has been introduced to create a platform for the discussion of sensitive and taboo topics such as menstruation, rape and coercion, to demystify such issues and highlight how the drivers can be addressed. More and more families in programme areas are sharing testimonies of significant changes - for example, in terms of more equitable gender roles within the household, acceptability of girls marrying later and caregivers supporting girls' education and re-entry of adolescent mothers, and silence being broken around issues of sexual and gender-based violence.

Out of 24 boys' mentorship circles across the 10 regions, about 3,080 boys have been engaged to challenge toxic masculinities and behaviours that perpetuate imbalances of power between boys and girls in their homes, communities and various sectors of the national economy. With quotes such as "girls are not less intelligent as I thought previously, helping them to become a better version of themselves is the way to go",



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by a *Keke* (tricycle) rider in the Upper West Region who is a mentee of a circle, the boys are following through and reporting on activities from their action plans to representatives of the Department of Gender for technical guidance during their monthly circle meetings. In addition, UNFPA supported an annual Male Advocates Conference that brought together 58 male champions, representatives from men's clubs and male advocates from UNFPA implementation areas, for a knowledge and experience sharing session that facilitated the review of their plans and actions, and highlighted best practices. An imam from the Northern Region stated that "I did not officiate a marriage after finding out that the bride was below age 18, and that resulted in a lot of problems for me as an imam, but I persisted." The conference recommended the production of various information, education and communication materials, especially posters and leaflets, in the local dialects to aid their advocacy work. Two major sessions were also held with He-for-She Advocates in the Upper West and Western Regions to mobilize the support of mainly middle-level professional men to advocate for gender equality and the empowerment of girls, and to re-activate the He-for-She campaign in Ghana since it was launched by the President in 2018.

Recognizing the critical role of traditional leaders in shaping and affecting social norms, in 2020, UNICEF supported the engagement of 38 religious and traditional leaders (chiefs, queen mothers, pastors, imams) on the Ghanaians Against Child Abuse (GACA) social drive platform at national and regional levels, with a focus on promotion of the safety and well-being of children during the COVID-19 pandemic. The traditional and religious leaders recorded child protection and COVID-19 prevention messages via videos and voice recordings in English and various local languages that are being shown and played on television and radio stations, reaching about 5.5 million viewers and 10.5 million listeners each day.¹¹ The traditional and religious leaders have also taken pledges to be GACA champions and are expected to advance this influence among their colleagues.

Furthermore, in 2020, about 25 advocacy sessions were held with around 1,200 traditional and religious leaders and members of parents' networks that facilitated their role as community change leaders on issues of child marriage and other harmful practices, and connected them to relevant institutions that they need to refer issues to, such as the police and the social welfare sector.

In addition, UNICEF supported the Ghana Community Radio Network in 10 regions to run messages related to COVID-19 and to the prevention of violence against women and children under the banner of GACA, with young people playing an active role in the programmes.

The programmes covered all 16 regions and reached a target audience of more than 10 million listeners. At the peak of the pandemic in Ghana, UNFPA supported the Department of Gender to embark on a two-pronged social media campaign that engaged and reached approximately 5,800 girls with advocacy messages, fliers and audio clips under the campaign slogan 'Your Voice, My Voice, Together Against Child Marriage'. Throughout the year, the GACA campaign maintained a very active social media presence on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube. Since the launch of the campaign in November 2017, over 15 million impressions have been recorded, with content related to several issues, including child marriage and gender equality.

Funding from the Global Programme was complemented by other funding streams to support a wider scale-up of community engagements. Informed by the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic and its potential to erode the gains made over the years, UNICEF provided guidance to the Government and non-governmental partners to enable them to deliver child protection and sexual and gender-based violence prevention and referral services, including awareness-raising on COVID-19.¹² These activities were delivered via community-based engagements using both mass media channels and interpersonal communication approaches while observing the COVID-19 prevention protocols. Under the Canada-funded joint United Nations Adolescent Girls' Programme, UNFPA screened 16 episodes of the adolescent girl-focused television show called 'Because I want to be'.¹³ The show featured various celebrities and other influencers who discussed topics linked to adolescent development, including physical and emotional changes during adolescence, manners and etiquette, menstrual hygiene, adolescent health, gender roles, equality and vocation. With real-life examples, the discussions provided in-depth information for girls on how to circumvent some of the challenges of adolescence in order for them to be who they want to be, especially during the closures of schools when such life-skills topics could not be discussed in school.

Also through complementary funding, an estimated 1,096,719 individuals (204,510 girls, 187,044 boys, 367,942 women and 337,223 men) were reached face to face in 1,457 communities within 81 districts across Ghana. Of these, at least 37,729 adolescent girls and 27,993 boys were reached in community-based settings specifically with information around adolescent sexual and reproductive health, adolescent pregnancy, child marriage, sexual and gender-based violence, services and referrals in six regions through non-governmental partners. The engagements equipped the audiences with relevant information on how to prevent violence against children and adolescents, plus available hotlines to

report and seek support for suspected COVID-19 cases, sexual and gender-based violence, child marriage and adolescent pregnancies, and online safety concerns.

Challenges and lessons learned

Although there were delays in the implementation of some community-based activities targeting adolescent girls and boys due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it also created an opportunity for adjustment of approaches in order to reach the most vulnerable beneficiaries. Most of the partners adopted a combination of mass media channels (television, radio) and house-to-house or door-to-door approaches to reach out to the targeted audience.

Strengthening systems

Within the context of key government policies that create an enabling environment for girls' health, protection and education, in 2020 the Global Programme continued to support the implementation of key national guidelines and standard operating procedures for the provision of age- and gender-responsive health, protection and education services to vulnerable adolescent girls and their families in programme areas.

The Global Programme continued to invest in strengthening linkages across various social services. It focused on promoting integrated programming to reach adolescent girls at the subnational level. The aim was to ensure that programming was effectively and holistically responding to the multiple, concurrent and interconnected needs that girls face. This was done through both coordinated support to systems-strengthening work across sectors, as well as specific implementation of the integrated initiatives. Stronger emphasis was placed on facilitating partnerships and exchange between government and civil society partners, and on ensuring that more synergies are built, for coherence and sustainable implementation on the ground.

During the year, the programme leveraged ongoing sector-wide initiatives to reach adolescent girls at scale with critical health, child protection, social welfare, social protection and reproductive health services. Through the 'Integrated Social Service' model, social welfare workers' capacity in eight districts improved in integrated social services and case management related to violence against children. This improvement benefited an estimated 3,767 girls and boys aged 10-17 years. The initiative is part of a much larger sector-wide support targeting 60 districts supported through complementary funding. An estimated 180 social service providers were trained, and 24,484 girls and boys were reached through the complementary funding in 52 districts. Strategic



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engagements in planning and budgetary dialogues at decentralized levels is ongoing to support an increase in resource allocations for service provision to child marriage and other child protection cases; the scope of service delivery is expected to expand to reach more adolescents. Furthermore, the Ghana Health Service SafetyNet initiative was scaled up to 232 health-care facilities and reached 2,123 pregnant girls and adolescent mothers with gender- and age-responsive prevention and care services, including maternal and newborn health care and sexual and gender-based violence services. This intervention is part of the wider sector initiative covering an additional 748 facilities in six regions, reaching 106,316 pregnant girls and adolescent mothers in 2020 through complementary funding.

In view of the associated challenges that confront adolescent schoolgirls while they continue to stay at home, UNICEF collaborated with the Ghana Education Service to promote the 'Guidelines to Reduce Teenage Pregnancy and to Facilitate the Re-entry of Teenage Mothers into the Ghanaian Education System' and the prevention of gender-based violence in a safe schools initiative through the back-to-school campaign in December 2020. This activity was implemented to promote the safe return to school of children, especially girls, including pregnant schoolgirls and young mothers, when schools reopen in January 2021. In addition, national institutions that provide vocational and technical education were engaged to include reproductive health education in their curricula with tailored versions for marginalized out-of-school girls.

UNFPA supported the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection through its national Department of Gender and the Domestic Violence Secretariat to review, update and disseminate a number of critical national policies and frameworks aimed at providing guidelines for the work on eradicating all forms of sexual and gender-based violence and harmful practices, and ensuring gender equality. These included review of the implementation of the National Domestic Violence Policy and Plan of Action (2009–2019). This review remained a key milestone achieved in 2020. Reflections from the review process generated consensus among stakeholders across various sectors on key focus areas for developing the new domestic violence policy, which will articulate an overarching vision for eradicating all forms of sexual and gender-based violence and harmful practices, and ensuring gender equality. In all, 85 partners across various sectors discussed (in detail) and agreed that the new policy should reflect critical trends such as setting up systems to facilitate linkages for data collection and reporting, merging documentation/data of survivors for easy accessibility to underpin prosecution of perpetrators, establishment of a resource directory

and systems to coordinate research, and development of a curriculum and incorporation of the Domestic Violence Act in training of law enforcement agencies.

In 2020, some 3,320 law enforcement officials were trained on the standard operating procedures for handling child victims, witnesses and offenders, and the gender-based violence training manual for judges and court staff. Service providers within the law enforcement sector – such as all staff of the Domestic Violence and Victims Support Unit in 112 locations and all staff of the judicial service working in the 10 child-friendly gender-based violence courts – were supported with face masks, gloves and other PPE to enable them to continue to provide services during the pandemic. This support was informed by the increase in the number of cases reported to the Domestic Violence and Victims Support Unit during the pandemic, amidst the limited availability of services during the lockdown months. An estimated 1,627 children (1,578 girls and 49 boys) benefited from law enforcement services in 2020, with the majority being survivors of sexual violence. Nine ascertained cases of child marriage were officially reported and investigated by the Domestic Violence and Victims Support Unit of the Ghana Police Service during the year. These children were supported through the child-friendly policing initiative by the police, including the cybercrime unit, and gender-based violence specialized courts.¹⁴

In partnership with the Ghana Health Service and civil society organizations at both national and subnational levels, the Global Programme continued to promote access to inclusive adolescent-friendly sexual and reproductive health services, including to adolescents with disabilities. Some 143,519 adolescents (110,540 girls and 32,979 boys) were reached with age-appropriate adolescent sexual and reproductive health information and services, including in youth-friendly formats at 1,250 adolescent- and youth-friendly health-care facilities and corners. The provision of the services was congruent with national operational guidelines and standards that have been updated through Global Programme support, such as the Training Manual on Adolescent Health and Development and the National Guidelines and Standards for Peer Support Services.

Several demand-creating activities were implemented during the year through social media platforms, which created awareness of the need to access services and information at the adolescent- and youth-friendly health-care facilities. For instance, adolescent sexual and reproductive health information and counselling sessions were given through various social media platforms, including weekly livestreaming sessions on Facebook with adolescents. Thus, with the closure of schools and

adolescents at home, as a result of awareness created, many adolescents took the opportunity to visit the health-care facilities. In addition, since adolescents were at home due to COVID-19 restrictions, the Ghana Health Service at subnational level used community information channels to give out health information and encourage adolescents to visit the facilities while observing all safety protocols, which contributed to the increased number of visits.

The National Operational Guidelines and Standards, the Training Manual on Adolescents Health and Development, and the National Guidelines and Standards for Peer Support Services were reviewed, updated and service providers trained on their roll-out in 2020. The Adolescent Health and Development Manual is to improve adolescent sexual and reproductive health service provision for adolescents and youth in Ghana, while the Guidelines and Standards for Peer Support Services will ensure that peer support services provided nationwide by young people are standardized and support adolescent participation in planning, implementation and evaluation of health services. In the wake of COVID-19, an e-learning course and web-based platforms were created to provide up-to-date information and referral services to adolescents and to track those accessing services. Meanwhile, health information communication for adolescents was also strengthened with packages such as the You Must Know information package, comprising 'chit chats' on social media and newsletters. In addition, an adolescent health information package was produced and widely disseminated. Overall, 115 health service providers from six UNFPA implementation regions have been engaged or trained on the guidelines.

Finally, through Global Programme funding, 268 health workers in 232 health-care facilities were trained to provide a basic package of services under the Safety Net Programme, which includes sexual and gender-based violence counselling. To improve demand for adolescent health services, a total of 3,409 adolescent girls, 2,422 adolescent boys, 5,000 women and 3,017 men were reached with information and education on adolescent reproductive health and nutrition.

Challenges, lessons learned and next steps

When the pandemic reached Ghana, the Government – like many others – did not have a coordinated national child protection emergency and response plan. This severely impacted its ability to provide services during the pandemic that are critical to preventing child marriage, such as adolescent sexual and reproductive health and rights information and resources. Hence, UNFPA and UNICEF stepped in to support the Government to produce key child protection and sexual

and gender-based violence messages, and special guidance for social workers on child protection case management during COVID-19.¹⁵ The timely provision of guidance to implementing partners on alternative approaches for engaging target audiences in response to the restrictions imposed by measures to curtail the spread of COVID-19 was instrumental to ensure continuation of activities.¹⁶ The prevention services, as well as essential information on where to report and seek support for child protection,¹⁷ sexual and gender-based violence, online safety and COVID-19-related issues, were made accessible to various target audiences for a stronger and improved response.

Delays were experienced in the implementation of community-level activities due to COVID-19 circumstances. For example, health workers experienced difficulties in reaching hard-to-reach communities to follow up on service uptake by girls, boys and women. Innovative strategies were developed to reach hard-to-reach communities and were included in the implementation plan. Security threats (armed robbery) in some communities in Bole district also affected the scheduled home visits to those communities, and the security force was therefore engaged in the implementation of activities.

However, the initial delays in implementation due to COVID-19 restrictions was made up for after the ease of restrictions. Most of the implementing regions were not at the epicentre of the pandemic and health workers were able to provide essential services through the adoption of COVID-19 safety protocols. Furthermore, the monitoring and supportive supervision visit to selected health-care facilities and districts with challenges contributed to this performance.

The disruption in education, with school closures from March 2020, affected the implementation of all school-level activities, including training of teachers and peer leaders, distribution of supplies to schools and direct interventions benefiting most vulnerable girls. This challenge necessitated the adoption of innovative ways to ensure continuous teaching and that learning reached all children. During the closure of schools, UNICEF supported the Ministry of Education and the Ghana Education Service to ensure continuity of services through the initiation of distance learning programmes and delivery of lessons in the four core subject areas (social studies, science, mathematics and English) for learners at the basic school level through radio broadcasting.

Lack of coordinated sexual and gender-based violence services, such as shelters, free medical care and adequate legal aid, and weak law enforcement

continue to hamper holistic protection services for victims and survivors of sexual and gender-based violence and harmful practices, including child marriage. Consequently, there have been reports of backlash in some supported communities which have complained that even though they have been sensitized to access services and report cases, the lack of such services rather increases the vulnerability of survivors and emboldens perpetrators. There are times that such attitudes affect attendance at both sensitization and capacity-building programmes.

Adolescent health and protection issues are highly cross-sectoral and there is a need to further strengthen the collaboration among health, education, child protection, gender-based violence and social protection sectors to ensure that the challenges faced by adolescent girls are addressed holistically and in an integrated manner, to respond to girls' multiple, concurrent and interconnected needs. Since health services are often the entry-point for many adolescents, it is essential for the health sector to strengthen the linkages with and referrals to other sectors. Consequently, support for enhancing service provision should not be done in isolation but be informed by other developments in the sectors to maximize the capacity of service providers to render holistic and well-integrated services.

Addressing poverty

The Global Programme in Ghana continued to explore and invest in strategic initiatives aimed at empowering vulnerable and marginalized adolescent girls and their families to access economic empowerment and social protection services during 2020. Under the overall Shaping Futures Programme, about 8,000 marginalized adolescent girls, including migrant head porters (*Kayayei*) and adolescent mothers, were engaged using human rights-based approaches to enhance their alternative livelihood options, thereby reducing their vulnerability to sexual and gender-based violence, child marriage, co-habitation and transactional sex. Various concurrent strategies were used – including innovative ones such as community 'walkathons' and online marketing – to heighten the interest of the girls in activities aimed at equipping them with integrated reproductive health, empowerment and leadership skills in five regions.

Through the continuous agenda of systems-strengthening, UNFPA and partners over the year engaged national vocational institutes and heads of associations for seamstresses, tailors and hairdressers, who oversee the training of many out-of-school youth to integrate reproductive health information and sexual and gender-based violence prevention content in their

curriculum/meeting agendas. The objective is to ensure that the critical mass of youth, especially adolescent girls who go to these vocational schools or are in apprenticeship training, will have the right adolescent sexual and reproductive health and gender-based violence information to prevent abuse and exploitation, including child and forced marriages. The advocacy sessions with the national heads of the associations have initiated discussions on curriculum review, especially within the ongoing technical and vocational education training reforms in Ghana. In addition, the regional Department of Gender offices partnered with the associations for dressmakers and hairdressers in eight regions to leverage their monthly meeting platforms to educate about 850 female and 220 male apprentices on various sexual and gender-based violence and sexual and reproductive health topics, including the distribution of information, education and communication materials to the associations. The national-level advocacy with these institutes will continue in 2021 for curriculum review and content integration.

Through the implementation of the Integrated Social Service model, the child protection and social protection programme teams of UNICEF jointly provided technical and financial support to various sectors (social welfare, social protection, health, etc.) to strengthen their collaboration for holistic and enhanced service delivery for vulnerable families in 60 districts, with funding from the Global Programme directly supporting eight districts. The model involves testing specific linkages, largely centred around the delivery of social protection programmes and social welfare services.

A major activity carried out during the year was the annual *Kayayei* Business and Leadership Fair. The fair brought together about 730 participants, including approximately 565 *Kayayei* to exhibit the various products from the *Kayayei* Enterprise Development Centers to enhance visibility and marketing of *Kayayei* products. Under the theme 'Leaving no girl behind, through policy, action and amplified voices of marginalized girls', over three days the girls had the opportunity to engage in dialogue, meet mentors, share experiences, exhibit and market their products, and participate in fun activities and a musical concert. The collaboration with relevant state agencies for the organization of the fair has resulted in the registration and standardization of the *Kayayei* products, enhancing their market accessibility, including online marketing. During the pre-fair, the girls also prepared a communiqué that was shared with stakeholders, which highlighted their challenges, success stories and support needs at policy, regional and local levels, to minimize their vulnerability to harmful practices. Considerable sales were made by the girls from the products exhibited, such as cosmetics, leather works, tie-dye fabrics, detergents and

bead works. As a means of showcasing the effectiveness of their products, some of the COVID-19 PPE that were used for the safety protocols at the fairgrounds were produced by the girls themselves. With the open endorsement and registration stamp of the Ghana Food and Drugs Authority (FDA), the national body in charge of standards for products, including confectionery, some major business deals were established with some fuel station shops. Moreover, the artist for the musical concert, Sherifa Gunu, a renowned musician and influencer, also allowed her social media handles, where she has a large following, to be used to advertise the products of the *Kayayej* online to enhance market access.

A major success story shared by Hawa, a girl participating in the Enterprise Development Center, was that during the COVID-19 lockdown, she was approached by the Member of Parliament from her area to produce soap/detergents in large quantities for distribution – which saw her engage additional workers, thus expanding her enterprise and now gainfully earning a living on her own after moving out from co-habitation.

Challenges, lessons learned and next steps

Within the Safety Net Programme, the area of referrals to other services (e.g., the Ghana Education Service, the police, Department of Social Welfare and National Health Insurance Scheme) by the health sector has proven to be the weakest link, and yet essential. For this reason, an assessment of key challenges, gaps, best practices and opportunities to strengthen this area is currently ongoing; key findings are expected to be released during the first quarter of 2021 and will inform Phase II learning and strengthened programming.

A lesson is also that strengthening the implementation of the Safety Net Programme through demand creation will result in better outcomes. The COVID-19 pandemic has presented an opportunity to strengthen the community outreach component of the programme – for example, through increased number of home visits, which has been instrumental in increasing girls' confidence and gaining family support, particularly for pregnant girls and adolescent mothers. Community engagement meetings have made it possible for all key stakeholders to contribute their quota to recognizing the importance of and improving adolescent health, nutrition, protection

and education. Hence, involvement of key community stakeholders in programme implementation guarantees ownership and sustainability.

Facilitating supportive laws and policies

An analysis of longitudinal data on child marriage policies published in 2020 by the World Policy Analysis Center found that the rate of child marriage decreased by an average of 6 per cent in countries that enforced child marriage laws. The same study found that child marriage laws, combined with advocacy efforts surrounding their enactment, foster improvements in gender-equitable attitudes.¹⁸ This is consistent with the hypothesis that gender egalitarian laws positively impact norms regarding women's equality and empowerment at national and subnational levels.¹⁹ In line with the continuous support for the implementation of national policies and frameworks supporting adolescent development and protection in Ghana (e.g., the Ghana National Strategic Framework on Ending Child Marriage 2017–2026 and the National Adolescent Pregnancy Strategy 2018–2022), the Global Programme in 2020 focused on supporting the implementation of national priorities and re-alignment of strategies and approaches in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Despite the global pandemic that delayed programme implementation, the Global Programme made significant strides to advance the piloted initiatives from Phase I, mainly focusing on strengthening the national systems for overall government ownership and sustainability. Major highlights for the year include successful advocacy resulting in the continued allocation of resources to end child marriage by the Government; the review and update of major gender-responsive policy documents and frameworks that facilitated the required enabling environment for women and girls to thrive (including the national policy and plan of action on domestic violence, and the national operational and monitoring and evaluation plan of the child marriage strategy); and strengthened national coordination for effective processes to end child marriage. During the year, more vital partnerships and collaborations with government structures in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic were shown to be crucial – during the lockdown the Ghana Health Service and the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection were on the ground through already established structures, which facilitated continuation of programming.

The sustained budget advocacy for allocation of financial resources for the overall child protection sector and particularly for the implementation of the National Strategic Framework for Ending Child Marriage continued to yield some results in 2020. The Ministry

of Gender, Children and Social Protection continued to allocate 3 per cent of its recurrent budget (goods and services) to national coordination functions for ending child marriage. Similarly, the 2020 child protection budget analysis revealed that the overall child protection-related budget allocations for districts (including prevention and response services to address child marriage) increased from 73 million cedis in 2019 to 144 million cedis in 2020. Budget advocacy will continue to be prioritized in 2021 for timely release of budget allocations to facilitate the implementation of programmes and service delivery.²⁰

The national operational and monitoring and evaluation plan to end child marriage (for 2020–2021) was finalized, printed and disseminated to at least 457 cross-sectoral

stakeholders during the year. This plan is part of the National Strategic Framework to End Child Marriage in Ghana (2017–2026). The operational plan provides an overarching framework for mobilizing cross-sectoral partners around critical strategies for implementing interventions to end child marriage. The Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection organized regional review meetings with stakeholders to track the implementation of the operational plan. This culminated in the annual national stakeholders' review on ending child marriage in Ghana, to track progress made during the year. The annual gathering also looked at the new strategies that need to be adopted to address child marriage during COVID-19. The stakeholders' meeting created a platform for national reflections on progress made towards targets in the operational plan, as well



The COVID-19 pandemic has also presented an opportunity to strengthen the community outreach component of the Safety Net programme – for example, through increased number of home visits, which has been instrumental in increasing girls' confidence and gaining family support, particularly for pregnant girls and adolescent mothers.

as mobilizing key actors around a common vision towards elimination of child marriage by 2030. Further, the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection mobilized major government and civil society partners to review the National Policy and Plan of Action, the operational document that facilitates the effective implementation of the Domestic Violence Act (Act 732) for Ghana. The review highlighted the achievements of the goals and outcomes of the 10-year document and outlined the emerging trends of domestic violence. These included online abuse and forced relationships that needed to be targeted in the updated policy for the protection of women and girls.

The Domestic Violence Secretariat under the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection was supported by both Global Programme and complementary funds to engage about 160 stakeholders drawn from the judiciary, health, security and gender sectors on their role in the effective implementation of the Domestic Violence Act 2007 as outlined in its Legislative Instrument (L.I. 2016). The Secretariat further disseminated the Domestic Violence Act and the Legal Instrument to the wider public at the regional and national levels with the primary intent of raising awareness on legal requirements related to sexual violence against children and child marriage. This is to ensure that stakeholders at all levels are well informed on their roles to provide the required services to survivors of violence, including child brides.

To support the coordination efforts of the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection to end child marriage and other harmful practices and sexual and gender-based violence, a one-stop-shop database and information portal on child marriage in Ghana has been established with support from UNFPA. The system readily shares information on child marriage, sexual and gender-based violence and related issues in an open-source application accessible with the press of a button. The database and information portal will improve access to accurate and reliable data to inform planning, implementation and advocacy for sustained resource allocation for child marriage and sexual and gender-based violence issues. During the validation with a cross-section of national stakeholders, it was emphasized that a strong editorial board comprising academics, researchers, government and civil society organizations should be constituted to vet information and documents that are uploaded by the Ministry in order to ensure authenticity. The availability of these resources and tools will go a long way to improving coordination and implementation of child marriage and sexual and gender-based violence interventions in Ghana.

In partnership with the National Development Planning Commission, the annual progress reports of 216 out of the 260 municipal, metropolitan and district assemblies (MMDAs) were reviewed to ascertain the progress against integration of child protection and gender-based violence issues. The review found that the majority of MMDAs reported on child protection/gender-based violence commitments. Through the review process, all MMDAs received recommendations and guidance for strengthening child protection systems in their jurisdictions. To further mainstream the inclusion of child protection and gender-based violence interventions into the annual action plans of the MMDAs and their financial allocations, UNICEF successfully advocated for the inclusion of child protection and gender-based violence indicators in the District Assemblies' Performance Assessment Tool (DPAT) and the performance contracts of the MMDAs for 2020, since this constitutes an important entry-point and mechanism used to allocate funding to MMDAs from the District Assemblies Common Fund.²¹

With support from UNFPA, the National Department of Gender, in its continuous efforts to track the implementation of the five-year Adolescent Pregnancy Strategy through its institutional framework, organized three national cross-sectoral meetings in 2020 to assess implementation by various partners. Discussions highlighted challenges with an increase in adolescent pregnancies in some areas, especially during the COVID-19 period. Partners also shared innovative ways through which they were rolling out interventions in spite of the restrictions. Consequently, the Ghana Education Service sensitized 1,377 (786 female and 591 male) Muslim stakeholders as part of the implementation of the national guidelines for management of adolescent pregnancy and school re-entry of adolescent mothers and pregnant schoolgirls through complementary funding from UNICEF. These interventions collectively reflect the commitment of cross-sectoral actors in playing their respective roles in the implementation of the Adolescent Pregnancy Strategy.

Through UNICEF complementary funding support, the Cybersecurity Act 2020²² (with provisions related to online child sexual exploitation, cyberbullying, cyberstalking and sharing of intimate non-consensual images) has been approved by the Parliament and is awaiting presidential assent. The act provides adequate protection to children from sextortion, cyberbullying and cybergrooming, including a mechanism for the identification and removal of child sexual abuse materials. Proposed amendments to the Children's Act, the Juvenile Justice Act and the Criminal and Other Offences Act are still being considered by the Office of Attorney General.

Challenges and lessons learned

Experience often shows that many plans and strategies are not effectively implemented to achieve the stated objectives. Consequently, to ensure that the interventions are effectively implemented and coordinated, strategic and evidence-based advocacy for allocation of resources at both national and decentralized levels remains critical.

Generating and applying data and evidence

The Global Programme in Ghana contributed to evidence generation through investments in the analysis of child marriage data, project baseline and end-lines, and evaluations of broader initiatives linked to child marriage. These activities are intended to support programme implementation, including the review of programme strategies, and inform the design of new projects. This further facilitates evidence-based advocacy and documentation and dissemination of best practices.

In collaboration with the Data and Analysis Team of UNICEF Headquarters, the programme launched a report on 'Ending Child Marriage: A profile of progress in Ghana', based on a trend analysis of child marriage data from Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys, Demographic and Health Surveys and other sources. The analysis presents insights into ways that the Government and other stakeholders can act to strengthen their approach to ending child marriage in the country. One striking result revealed by the report is that progress in reducing child marriage has been uneven across the country, and accelerated efforts are required in regions with more child brides and in those that have made slower progress. The visual presentation of this finding during stakeholder dissemination sessions, particularly at the regional level, triggered a lot of discussions and reflections on what needs to be done, resulting in renewed commitment from stakeholders to intensify efforts and to accelerate progress to eliminate child marriage. In addition, informed by these new data, the Child Protection Programme within UNICEF has been guided in the design of a new country programme, including prioritizing regions with higher concentration of child brides and teenage pregnancies as well as those with slower progress, for investments related to ending child marriage and adolescent programming in general. The data will also inform advocacy for budgetary allocation for districts in the affected regions. Furthermore, the risk of Ghana slipping in the progress documented due to the secondary impacts of COVID-19 was also brought to the fore during the year and generated additional momentum among stakeholders within the space to intensify actions that address the needs of adolescent girls. Two additional updated profiles on the situation

of adolescent girls and child protection in Ghana are currently being finalized and will be launched in the first quarter of 2021.

UNICEF supported two evaluations during the year: one of community-based approaches to ending child marriage as part of a broader evaluation led by the Regional Office for West and Central Africa; and one formative and summative evaluation of the child protection programme covering the period of 2012-2019. These evaluations experienced considerable delays related to COVID-19, and the results are expected to be shared with stakeholders in the first quarter of 2021; the results will inform the Global Programme interventions and the next UNICEF country programme document cycle.

As part of joint technical support to non-governmental implementing partners, UNFPA and UNICEF engaged in technical support to Norsaac and International Needs Ghana in the design of a methodology and tools for conducting baselines and end-lines of the structured and sustained package of information and services benefiting adolescent girls at risk of and affected by child marriage. The tools are expected to support monitoring and, over time, documentation of outcome-level results of both girls-focused and community-based interventions supported through the Global Programme, in line with the programme's indicator guidance. The 2019 end-line report for Phase I by Norsaac showed very encouraging results, with both girls and community-level change. The 2020 baseline for Phase II has been completed and the end-line is currently being conducted; reports will be available in March 2021.

To strengthen administrative data collection related to child protection and gender-based violence at the decentralized level, UNICEF has supported the adoption of Primero as the Social Welfare Information Management System (SWIMS). SWIMS is currently being piloted in six districts. This is a complete child protection and sexual and gender-based violence case management system that will support case tracking, incident monitoring, services tracking and family reunification. The official launch and scale-up to 100 districts across the country are planned for 2021. SWIMS is based on the intersectoral standard operating procedures for child protection and family welfare that cover child sexual abuse, neglect, sexual and gender-based violence, including child marriage and social protection.²³

UNFPA, as part of experience and knowledge sharing among partners, organized the 2020 Partners Learning Forum (PALEF). The objective was to foster shared learning and horizontal collaboration between UNFPA implementing partners and relevant stakeholders, and

provide a platform for networking among partners and other stakeholders involved in policy and programme implementation on maternal health, adolescent sexual and reproductive health, gender equality, and sexual and gender-based violence prevention. On the fringes of the PALEF, an Adolescent Girls Learning Forum (ADOLEF) was held, which brought together 50 girls from UNFPA-supported safe spaces, SISTAs clubs, Kayayei Networks and the PASS programme to share experience and knowledge on the most effective strategies and interventions in their safe space meetings. The interactive session enabled the girls to share best practices through case studies, beneficiary stories, poetry recitals and a 'Cube Convos' session on menstrual hygiene, with the UNFPA child marriage customized sanitary pads serving as an entry-point for discussions on the prevention and management of sexual and gender-based violence and other harmful practices. The first session of ADOLEF attracted the National Director of Gender, who commended the initiative and asked for its scale-up in collaboration with the department to provide an opportunity for adolescent girls to learn from their peers in ways and language they can identify with. ADOLEF will thus be an annual platform to facilitate exchange learning among adolescents. Based on the testimonies of the girls, the different safe spaces were paired for follow-up on the

replication of the new strategies they were going to use to enhance their confidence, assertiveness and agency.

Challenges, lessons learned and next steps

The commissioning of the joint PASS documentary was delayed due the challenges imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Further consultation with the non-governmental partners resulted in the rescheduling of the filming to the fourth quarter of the year, to allow implementation to pick up after the lockdown and easing of some of the COVID-19 restrictions. However, the commencement of the documentary was further delayed by the intense political activities across the country leading up to the general election of the President and Parliamentarians, which further slowed project implementation.

The initial investments made in the design of methodology and tools for the documentation of robust pre- and post-data on the cohorts of adolescent girls benefiting from the structured and sustained package of information and services have proven useful. The emerging evidence generated demonstrates the effectiveness of the approaches and strategies used and further offers very reassuring results on changes both at the individual level of the girls and at community level.

Partnerships and working as one

In 2020, the Global Programme engaged 304 partners across regional and country offices – an increase from 249 partners in 2019. In Ghana, the programme worked with 17 partners in 2020, comprising 11 government bodies, 5 civil society organizations and a national partnership. The multisectoral nature of the programme is shown in the partnerships with government bodies, which cut across the sectors of education, health, social protection, gender, justice and protection, and statistical services. Of the civil society organizations the programme engages with, one is youth-led, four have an explicit focus on women's rights and two of them on children's rights (one has both a women's and children's rights focus).

The use of common approaches by UNFPA and UNICEF for delivery of structured information and services to a common cohort of adolescent girls through the safe space concept in geographical convergence areas has enhanced the consistency in the minimum package of information and services delivered to the girls. Although the context, dynamics and drivers of child marriage are slightly different in some regions, the application of similar approaches helps to bring out the peculiar issues in each region.

The joint support by the two United Nations organizations to key government partners has been valuable. For example, the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection and the Domestic Violence Secretariat was supported to implement strategic initiatives such as the review and dissemination of the operational plan for the National Strategic Framework on Ending Child Marriage, including the annual stakeholders' meeting, and support for the 'Girlz' television talk show series. Consequently, coordination among the organizations and partners has improved, thereby ensuring efficient use of limited resources and avoiding duplication of efforts. In addition, partners benefit technically from the expertise of staff from the two organizations, making them even more effective in programme delivery.

The joint support and recruitment of a national consultant (videographer) to undertake the assignment for the PASS documentary proved cost-effective by harnessing the benefits of joint procurement processes to achieve this common objective. More such joint efforts will be forged to enhance learning and efficient use of resources.

Communicating the need to end child marriage

Throughout the year, the Global Programme ran different communication campaigns linked to the empowerment of adolescent girls, prevention of violence, prevention of teenage pregnancies and ending child marriage. As a means of enhancing visibility on the child marriage campaign through an innovative way that will also respond to the needs of girls, UNFPA produced branded sanitary towels to support girls participating in safe spaces. Based on information from the girls and partners on the critical importance of sanitary towels for girls as a means of reducing period poverty, the branded pads were launched at the national stakeholders' review on ending child marriage and the platform was used to advocate for

the Ministry of Finance to allocate more resources to the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection and other relevant partners to provide sanitary towels to adolescent girls. The advocacy demand will be continued through Cube Convos sessions.

Two news articles on the livelihood empowerment training programme were published during the year, showing the impact of the programme in girls' lives.^{24,25} The non-governmental organization PAYDP also published on Facebook from the *Kayeyei* business fair, to spread the message and further give attention to the businesses of the girls.²⁶

Summary of output indicator performance (2020)

Indicator	Target	Result
Indicator 1111: Number of adolescent girls (aged 10–19) who actively participated in life-skills or comprehensive sexuality education interventions in programme areas	32,987	27,274
Indicator 1121: Number of girls (aged 10–19) supported by the programme to enrol and/or remain in primary or secondary school	1,017	1,029
Indicator 1211: Number of boys and men actively participating in group education/dialogues that address harmful masculinities and gender norms	3,149	4,986
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	125,686	41,719
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	758,864	65,253
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	530	1,200
Indicator 1231: Number of civil society organizations newly mobilized in support of challenging social norms and promoting gender equality by the Global Programme	3	2
Indicator 2121: Number of primary/secondary/non-formal schools in programme areas providing quality gender-friendly education that meets minimum standards	5	3
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	274	256
Indicator 2211: Number of partnerships (both formal and informal) established to deliver adolescent-responsive social protection, poverty reduction and economic empowerment programmes and services	3	4
Indicator 3111: Number of policies or legal instruments addressing child marriage drafted, proposed or adopted at national and subnational levels with Global Programme support	0	1
Indicator 3211: Number of pieces of evidence and knowledge generated that focus on what works to end child marriage	6	0
Indicator 3212: Number of pieces of evidence and knowledge generated that apply a gender analysis	4	0
Indicator 3221: Number of South–South cooperation (conferences, expert visits, peer consultations, study tours, communities of practice) supported	0	1

N/A, not applicable.

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