Fighting the Odds, Catalyzing Change:
A Strategic Approach to Ending the Global Problem of Child Marriage

UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage
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Front cover (top to bottom): © UNICEF/UN0259714/Dejongh; © UNICEF/UN0536545/Haleem

On the front page (bottom): On 10 October 2021, Aynouf, 10, sits inside her classroom at Jil Al Wahda School in Sana’a, Yemen.

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UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage
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Child marriage context

There are 34.5 million child brides in Bangladesh, 13.4 million of whom were married before the age of 15. Currently, the prevalence of child marriage among girls (marriage before the age of 18) stands at 51 per cent, putting the country among the top 10 countries in the world in terms of child marriage. However, the practice is in decline from previous generations: the prevalence was over 90 per cent around 1970. In order to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) target to end child marriage by 2030, or the national target to end child marriage by 2041, the rate of progress must be 17 times faster or 8 times faster respectively, than what has been observed in the last decade.

Programming context

The COVID-19 pandemic profoundly affected the everyday lives of girls for a second year in 2021, including their physical and mental health, education and the economic circumstances of their families and communities. Globally, up to 10 million more girls are estimated to become child brides by 2030 as a result of the pandemic.

UNFPA and UNICEF Evaluation Offices conducted a joint assessment of Global Programme adaptations to the COVID-19 crisis in 2021. The COVID-19 assessment aimed to:

- Assess relevant contingency planning and implementation and alternative delivery and management arrangements for the Global Programme

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due to the COVID-19 pandemic, taking into account the views of vulnerable adolescent girls, their families, communities and key implementing partners.

- Make recommendations for the immediate to mid-term improvement of the Global Programme response to COVID-19, identify ongoing programme changes and recommending any additional support required to implement those programme changes and shifting priorities.

- Make any recommendations required to adjust the Global Programme Phase II to the new context, including its theory of change and the targets established before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The results of the assessment indicate that:

- It is critical to keep the focus and efforts in reaching the most vulnerable and marginalized adolescents, including those in remote areas.

- Lessons could be taken from experiences using multi-channel and two-way communication approaches, while also being attentive to the digital divide.

- Vulnerable adolescents must continue to have access to education (especially if provided remotely), health and social welfare services.

- It is key to overcome drivers of poverty by leveraging existing social protection schemes.

- Ensuring the use of evidence led programming is important and so too is advocating with governments to keep child marriage prevention and responses on national agendas while continuing to develop legal and operational frameworks to help accelerate the end of child marriage.

These results will inform future adjustments and refinements to the programme. They will help continue delivering in changing contexts and accelerating the pace, during the Decade of Action, of eliminating child marriage to achieve the SDGs by 2030.

### TABLE. Conclusions and recommendations from the COVID-19 assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONCLUSION</th>
<th>RECOMMENDATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Programme advocacy and engagement efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic kept child marriage on national agendas</td>
<td>Advocate with governments to continue developing legal and operational frameworks contributing to ending child marriage with a rights-based and multisectoral focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The COVID-19 crisis underscored the vulnerability of adolescent girls in rural and remote areas</td>
<td>Reinforce efforts to reach the most vulnerable and marginalized adolescent girls, boys and their families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adoption of digital and mass media approaches demonstrated a high potential for sustaining engagement of adolescent girls at scale, although the digital divide should be considered</td>
<td>Develop complementary multi-channel approaches to reach target populations, ensuring that they foster two-way communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COVID-19 restrictions limited adolescent girls’ access to health and social welfare services</td>
<td>Continue technical support and explore the most effective approaches to ensure adolescent girls have access to essential services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The programme theory of change remains valid but poverty and economic drivers need to be stressed further in operational strategies</td>
<td>Further articulate the strategy to leverage social protection schemes such as cash transfers and income generation opportunities for adolescent girls and their families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COVID-19 programme adjustments created a high demand on data and evidence for adopted approaches</td>
<td>Continue adjusting monitoring, data generation and analysis in order to reinforce evidence-based programming</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Key highlights

- 95,592 adolescent girls and 35,513 adolescent boys benefited from life skills training and comprehensive sexuality education using the Standardized Adolescent Empowerment Package (SAEP) in 900 adolescent clubs and 4,883 Kishor Kishori clubs. Among the adolescent girls empowered, 6,294 (6.6 per cent) are living with disabilities.

- Over 5.2 million individuals (boys, girls, women and men) participated in group education/dialogue sessions on consequences of and alternatives to child marriage, the rights of adolescent girls and gender equality.

- 480 girls and boys (half of them girls) were trained as child journalists and produced 51 videos, together viewed 120 million times, and wrote over 100 news reports on child marriage, published on the BDnews24 website, which has 60,000 monthly visits.

- Season two of the adolescent-focused entertainment-education drama-series Icchedana (On the wings of wishes), which addresses issues adolescents face across their life cycle, was re-broadcasted on two TV channels and social media platforms, reaching over 160 million and engaging around 52 million people in conversations around the content.

- The #Raisethebeat4ECM campaign fostering public resistance to child marriage continued through mass and social media during the year, reaching over 164 million people through mass media and engaging over 87 million people on social media.
## Programme performance

**TABLE. Summary of output indicator performance (2021)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INDICATOR</th>
<th>TARGET</th>
<th>RESULT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 1111</strong>: Number of adolescent girls (aged 10-19) who actively participated in life skills or comprehensive sexuality education interventions in programme areas</td>
<td>80,720</td>
<td>96,592</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 1121</strong>: Number of girls (aged 10-19) supported by the programme to enrol and/or remain in primary or secondary school</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 1211</strong>: Number of boys and men actively participating in group education/dialogues that address harmful masculinities and gender norms</td>
<td>64,964</td>
<td>23,177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 1221</strong>: 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</td>
<td>5,700,000</td>
<td>5,203,668</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 1222</strong>: 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</td>
<td>10,602,720</td>
<td>10,004,148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 1223</strong>: Number of local actors (e.g., traditional, religious and community leaders) with meaningful participation in dialogues and consensus-building to end child marriage</td>
<td>35,000</td>
<td>23,409</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 1231</strong>: Number of civil society organizations newly mobilized in support of challenging social norms and promoting gender equality by the Global Programme</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 2121</strong>: Number of primary/secondary/non-formal schools in programme areas providing quality gender-friendly education that meets minimum standards</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 2131</strong>: Number of service delivery points in programme areas providing quality adolescent-responsive services (health, child protection/ gender-based violence) that meet minimum standards</td>
<td>2522</td>
<td>3574</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 2211</strong>: Number of partnerships (both formal and informal) established to deliver adolescent-responsive social protection, poverty reduction, and economic empowerment programmes and services</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 3111</strong>: Number of policies or legal instruments addressing child marriage drafted, proposed or adopted at national and subnational level with Global Programme support</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 3211</strong>: Number of generated evidence and knowledge that focus on what works to end child marriage</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 3212</strong>: Number of generated evidence and knowledge that apply a gender analysis</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 3221</strong>: Number of South-to-South cooperation (conferences, expert visits, peer consultations, study tours, communities of practice) supported</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NA = Not applicable (the country programme does not work on or report on this indicator)
Safe spaces allow children to play while learning of the benefits of education and dangers of child marriage

At age 21, Sultana could easily be married and already a mother, with her educational prospects long behind her. Instead, she is studying to be an accountant while looking after her elderly parents and a young niece and teaching at the Kurmitola Kishor-Kishori club, run by the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs with support from UNICEF, in Dhaka, Bangladesh’s bustling capital.

The adolescent club in a deprived area of Dhaka is one of over 7,000 clubs in the country providing children and teenagers with a safe space where they can learn and play. Many of them have had a tough life, growing up in poverty or living on the streets. Not only do the clubs give them the opportunity to be children again, but they also help spread the word about the dangers of child marriage and the benefits of education.

Since joining in 2011, the Kishor-Kishori (which means youth or adolescence) club has transformed Sultana’s life and aspirations for herself. Now she passes on the lessons she learnt to others. A peer leader since 2018, Sultana teaches classes in the club twice a week to about 30 teenagers on a range of topics – from health, food and nutrition to information and communication technology. She also gets her peers motivated and excited by running activities such as karate, cricket, and dancing.

Though she comes from a sizeable family – with two sisters and three brothers – much of the responsibility falls on Sultana’s young shoulders as the main provider for her parents and niece. To make ends meet, she also works as a tailor and a tutor, helping children with their studies.

When she was still a child, her sisters, who were both married at a young age, would urge her to get married too.

But with the teachings of the club still ringing in her ears, Sultana would tell her mother:

“My brothers are not looking after you. I will not marry an uneducated man like your other daughters and return home divorced. I will study at my own expense, get a job and then marry a good man so that I can take care of you.”

In Bangladesh, more than 50 per cent of women aged between 20 and 24 were married before the age of 18. The country has the highest prevalence of child marriage in South Asia.

Sultana admits she has not always been this strong. Some years ago, she had her heart broken by a boy she fell in love with, who promised to marry her but then left her. She cried a lot and felt depressed at the time, she says.

But things started looking better after she turned to a counsellor in the Kishor-Kishori club where she is now a peer leader. “Sister, I wish to get a bank job, and I need your guidance,” Sultana said, adding that she also wanted to care for her aging parents and help others through the club.

With the counsellor’s guidance, Sultana started charting her own path. She was determined to be independent, have a career, be strong support for her parents, and role model for her niece Pihu, one of her sisters’ daughter, who remarried after divorcing her first husband, leaving Pihu in Sultana’s care.

It has not always been easy, and Sultana gets teased to this day by family and neighbours for “still” not being married at 21.

But she shrugs off such remarks. To prevent Pihu from being forced into child marriage and missing out on an education, Sultana enrolled her in school and is helping her with her studies.
Providing intensive support to marginalized girls

In Bangladesh, UNFPA and UNICEF have shifted towards a systems approach that integrates life skills programming into formal education and non-formal education settings that are regularly assessed and have strong participatory involvement of different stakeholders. UNFPA and UNICEF are working within the programme framework of the 4,883 Kishor-Kishori clubs (adolescent clubs) established by the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs to scale up the reach of life skills training, empowerment sessions and comprehensive sexuality education for adolescent girls. UNFPA and UNICEF are ensuring that no adolescent girl is left behind through a blended modality that utilizes both Kishor-Kishori clubs, which are being established in every union and municipality in Bangladesh, as well as courtyard meetings held in selected villages to specifically reach married girls with restricted mobility.

In 2021, a total of 96,592 adolescent girls, including married adolescent girls and girls living with disabilities, were engaged by the Global Programme through gender-transformative sexual and reproductive health and rights-focused life skills education. Even though schools remained closed until early September 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the adolescent clubs remained operational. They maintained physical distancing with activities conducted outside and with smaller groups where required. It is important to mention that the adolescent clubs in urban slums were specifically established within the slum communities, meaning closures were not a barrier for them. For example, adolescent clubs for girls were set up in the Geneva camp in Dhaka, which is the largest Bihari camp in the capital. The Geneva camp is home to 5,000 Bihari families, who have limited access to education and other basic services and who are separated from the mainstream population because of extreme poverty and hostile local perceptions. Girls generally do not have the ability to go outside the camps and experience regular life. As such, the adolescent girls’ clubs are a lifeline to them by providing much needed sexual and reproductive health and rights knowledge and skills.

Challenges and lessons learned

During March-August 2021, the deterioration of the COVID-19 situation in the country slowed down the programme significantly. The main lesson learned throughout the pandemic is the importance of investing in digital learning platforms to allow for continued engagement even in a context where face-to-face activities are restricted. Hence, in 2021, there continued to be a strong need for supporting innovative learning and education approaches to ensure ongoing interaction with children and adolescents. Multi-sectoral collaboration has produced good results in the launch and continuation of approaches, such as radio programmes for adolescents, caregivers and teachers. The programme has also supported the government and the Directorate of Primary Education in distributing COVID-19 supplies to schools and education centres in Rohingya camps.

A challenge with the utilization of digital platforms continues to be poor internet connectivity in hard-to-reach areas. This led to the interruption of regular online life skills-based education sessions and meetings by child rights facilitators. Digital platforms also continue to be challenging for children and adolescents living with disabilities to access and use. In addition, many of the adolescent girls do not have their own phones and therefore connected via their family’s or a neighbour’s mobile phone. This resulted in delays in conducting programmes and engaging with the girls. Getting already married girls to enrol in virtual, online platforms was also a challenge that was exacerbated during the pandemic.

Enhancing the family and community environment

UNFPA and UNICEF focused on increasing knowledge and changing attitudes through group counselling on positive gender norms and motivating people to adopt positive practices. Activities with fathers’ groups, community leaders and religious actors mostly focused on male caregivers changing their attitudes and acting as overseers around their community. An evaluation found that men as fathers and gatekeepers and as leaders in community dialogues helped to create a more supportive environment.
for adolescent girls to exercise their rights and to challenge gender norms and stereotypes. The evaluation also found that the involvement of women as mothers and gatekeepers and participants in courtyard community meetings have both been critical towards shifting social and gender norms and have been integrated into many community-level approaches.

To ensure comprehensive social and behavioural change programming UNICEF supported the implementation of community engagement interventions in 17 upazilas (boroughs) in eight districts and six city corporations with high rates of child marriage and other harmful practices. These activities engaged over 5.2 million individuals, including adolescents, parents, community members and local leaders and stimulated open dialogues to address cross-sectoral behavioural issues that resulted in 36 upazilas declaring their community free from child marriage. Although face-to-face communication slowed down during the COVID-19 lockdown, community-based radio interactive programmes and mobile-based communication continued as alternative modalities.

Despite the COVID-19 restrictions, the Global Programme supported the orientation and sensitization of 22,609 local leaders and 800 faith-based influencers as community advocates to uphold child rights with a focus on prevention of child marriage and wellbeing of adolescents. UNFPA and UNICEF also used a systems approach that included the recruitment of boys into adolescent clubs (about 30 per cent per club) and integrated specific sessions on positive masculinities within the SAEP for scaling up life skills education delivered through adolescent clubs and schools. The 2021 evaluation of UNICEF’s work for accelerating action towards ending child marriage in Bangladesh found that the incorporation of boys in adolescent clubs and the increased engagement of fathers and mothers were positive actions to encourage a shift in power relations between girls and boys and men and women. However, due to the physical distancing requirements imposed during COVID-19, only 20,639 boys and 2,538 fathers were reached through community engagement activities in 2021.

A total of 10 million individuals in Global Programme targeted areas were reached through social media with key messaging on issues related to gender equality and child marriage. The nationwide multimedia campaign, #Raisethebeat4ECM, is focused on fostering public resistance to child marriage and reached over 164 million people using public service announcements. In total, over 87 million people were engaged on social media. Season two of the adolescent-focused educational drama-series Icchedana (On the wings of wishes) also reached over 160 million people and engaged around 52 million in discussions around the topics covered in the series. In addition, platforms such as U-Report and community media were used to interact and engage with adolescents and their communities.

During the year, UNICEF equipped 480 child journalists (240 girls) with the capacity to generate video content on child marriage, girls’ empowerment, gender inequality and other gender issues that was disseminated on the first-ever children’s online news platform4 linked to Bangladesh’s first internet newspaper5. In addition to this, the child journalists also made news reports on child marriage and participated in multiple events and global advocacy movements linked to issues related to gender equality. Furthermore, their mobile journalism included conducting virtual roundtables, expert interviews and vlogging focusing on COVID-19 prevention, children’s mental health, reopening of schools, etc. One of the child journalists also participated in the real-life video series Coping with COVID-19, which launched its second season in 2021, featuring the lives of girls around the world who stand up against the pandemic and other social injustices in their communities.6 Going forward, the child journalism project will be retained in order to nurture an eloquent pool of child journalists who will amplify issues related to child marriage and gender equality across various platforms.

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4 The news platform can be found here: https://hello.bdnews24.com/
5 The home page of Bangladesh’s first online news outlet can be found here: www.bangla.bdnews24.com
6 Episodes of the show can be found here: www.unicef.org/coronavirus/coping-with-covid-19#season-2
CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

The nationwide COVID-19 related lockdown hampered the implementation of the national and subnational level social and behavioural change interventions. Community engagement through face-to-face dialogues and discussions, meetings with local leaders and peer dialogues were not possible. Alternative measures, such as small group dialogues following necessary COVID-19 precautionary protocols, meeting through virtual and mobile-based platforms and community radio programmes were utilized instead. The capacity enhancement initiative of religious and community leaders was also expedited after the COVID-19 lockdown in the third quarter of 2021.

Other challenges included how the partnership with civil society organizations was phased out due to the transition phase of the country programme, which hampered the implementation of community engagement activities and of reaching marginalized individuals, particularly in remote areas. The strategic shift of partnership modalities of UNICEF with government counterparts from a project-based approach to a scalable approach also slowed down community-based activities.

A key lesson learned was that social and behaviour change as part of an integrated multi-sectoral programme enables better results for adolescents and adults, as it is critical in addressing underlying issues to child marriage. Local-level advocacy and partnerships enlisted the responsiveness of local leaders and community action in preventing child marriage and referral linkages to services. Support to national and local-level partners is essential for building bridges and improving capacities for listening to the voices of adolescents. Innovative social and behaviour change approaches that facilitate reaching and gathering feedback from adolescents and their communities, such as U-Report, need to be scaled up.

Alternative planning and work modalities to deliver results were necessary during the COVID-19 pandemic. To ensure consistent implementation, physical communication activities such as round tables, events and videography were transformed into virtual activations such as Zoom-based live streams and mobile-based filming. The training of child journalists was also changed into a webinar format. Additionally, social media communication was strategically refocused on girls’ digital skills and girl leaders in their communities in light of its relevance during the pandemic. Multimedia and other media also proved to be quite a useful communication channels during the prolonged impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and although new content production was constrained, existing content could be re-broadcasted.

Strengthening systems

In 2021, 108,925 adolescents, including 76,248 adolescent girls, received services from adolescent-friendly health service points in districts targeted by the Global Programme. Accreditation guidelines and tools were developed with UNFPA supporting the establishment of 70 new service delivery points to provide quality adolescent-responsive services. In the Bhola district, a partnership was forged with a local group to overcome challenges created by the pandemic and to support the existing government health system for restoring services. UNICEF also organized a meeting with the government to ensure better coordination among the health and education sectors to respond to issues of gender equality and health among adolescents. A workshop was also held on developing depression assessment tools to ensure the monitoring of mental health wellness of adolescents.

A webinar was organized on psychosocial counselling related to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and child marriage with the participation of adolescent boys and girls nationwide. A website and accompanying app on adolescent health were introduced to 100 adolescents, who will further disseminate the website and app to their peers. These resources aim to help adolescents learn more about SRHR, gender, mental health and nutrition. Analysis of data from the website shows that over 180,000 adolescent girls have received adolescent-friendly health
services, 19,362 married adolescent girls and 55,686 unmarried girls received sanitary napkins, and 41,275 girls received treatment for urinary tract infections, including sexually transmitted infections.

The Global Programme supported the development of a national menstrual health management strategy, and 144 secondary schools were supported to raise awareness and sensitize adolescents on girl-friendly toilets in support of the implementation of the strategy. Though the COVID-19 pandemic slowed down programme activities, a total of 1,288 meetings with 2,254 members of anti-sexual harassment committees were conducted, reviewing complaints received from 277 secondary schools and 45 madrasas (religious schools). Further, UNICEF enhanced the capacity of 3,504 child marriage prevention committees to implement the 2017 child marriage restraint act and the national action plan to end child marriage at a subdistrict level.

CHALLENGES, LESSONS LEARNED AND NEXT STEPS

Access to adolescent sexual and reproductive health and rights information is still a challenge in Bangladesh and needs further exploration of innovative ways to disseminate information. The education system needs to integrate comprehensive sexuality education in the curriculum and mental health and gender-based violence service platforms need to be strengthened and linked with other ministries.

Formal education activities were hugely hampered as all educational institutions remained closed from the onset of the pandemic in mid-March 2020 through to mid-September 2021. Anecdotal evidence suggests that child marriage increased due to the impact of the pandemic on education and economic activities. Since the keeping girls in school programme (see page 16 for more details) and anti-sexual harassment committees are exclusively school-based activities, it was difficult to continue these activities during the year. However, a phone-based initiative was established immediately at the onset of the pandemic and implemented until September 2021, with approximately 60 per cent of the girls in Global Programme targeted areas reached through mobile phones to keep them motivated and for them to continue learning.

Engaging with local-level authorities and civil society partners was critical in improving access for marginalized children in remote-based learning. Moreover, the ability of the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education and other developing partners to quickly adapt to the pandemic was useful in terms of seizing opportunities. As a result challenges of learning through remote modalities and ensuring learning continuity despite the physical closure of schools were focused on. Support by UN systems to the government for the production and dissemination of key evidence was important for high-level advocacy, resulting in the safe reopening of schools in September.

Equipping key child protection service providers digitally for providing remote services to children during the lockdown also helped with the continuation of child protection services. A key learning point is that child protection system strengthening interventions must be targeted at the individual, family, community and societal level. The sustainability of building a strong child protection system in Bangladesh significantly depends on multi-sectoral coordination and the presence of a strong social service workforce. The positiveness and proactiveness of the government should be capitalized on in the shift from a project-based focus to more upstream/system-building workflow. Capacity development of key actors focusing on the diversion and non-custodial measures and accreditation needs to be accelerated.

There is an important need for engaging students and all teachers in sexual harassment prevention interventions in schools. Students in all grades need to be aware of services available to them for reporting and seeking justice for sexual harassment in and around school premises and hence, extensive school campaigns and student engagement activities have been planned for 2022. Moreover, anti-sexual harassment committee members have identified that stronger referral information and/or systems are required to address sexual harassment and
other forms of gender-based violence that fall beyond the committees’ jurisdiction. UNFPA has developed a gender-based violence referral guideline, which includes guidance for the referral of sexual harassment cases to be shared with all committees. Committee members will also be oriented and trained on these guidelines in the future.

**Facilitating supportive laws and policies**

In 2021, an evaluation of UNICEF Bangladesh’s child marriage programme was finalized, giving actionable recommendations to refine activities and partnerships. A mapping of the end child marriage programmes resulted in plans to form a technical advisory group for developing a training module on the Child Marriage Restraint Act from 2017 and its corresponding rules from 2018. Currently, a comprehensive capacity development module on the act and the rules for relevant ministries and stakeholders has been developed and approved by the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs. The Global Programme, the module being rolled out and 23 child marriage prevention committees at the subdistrict level. Members have been oriented on their roles and responsibilities and their knowledge and skills related to the laws strengthened, including the mechanisms of implementing the national action plan to end child marriage.

The Global Programme also leveraged the existing partnership with parliament and advocated for translating government commitments into action while supporting increased and effective public sector budget allocation. A technical report was developed on public sector budgetary planning, allocation and monitoring systems and ways to increase fund allocation to ensure effective implementation of the national action plan to end child marriage. The technical report aims to provide clear and convincing justifications by in-depth analysis of the national budgets and related expenditure of relevant government ministries for further advocacy for effective budget allocation.

Furthermore, guided by a multi-sectoral technical steering committee, led by the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs and supported by UNFPA and UNICEF, the government approved the national adolescent strategy developed in November 2021. The national adolescent strategy follows the national adolescent health strategy for 2017-2030 and looks beyond health to consider outcomes across a wider range of domains in line with the country’s Vision 2041 that seeks to eliminate extreme poverty. The goal of the national adolescent strategy is to empower all adolescents – irrespective of gender, age, class, ethnicity, disability and sexual identity – so they can participate in the developmental process of the country as active agents of change.

**CHALLENGES, LESSONS LEARNED AND NEXT STEPS**

Weak coordination among relevant ministries and a lack of understanding of child protection issues are still major challenges for the implementation of laws and policies in Bangladesh. The Global Programme support towards the development of a capacity development module on the Child Marriage Restraint Act from 2017 and the rules from 2018 is aimed at promoting an understanding of the laws and the implementation of the national action plan to end child marriage.

A key lesson from the year, especially related to the capacity building of the child marriage prevention committees, is the importance of direct engagement between the Global Programme implementing partners with the government. Importantly, from the beginning of the development of the capacity development modules and entrusting the government to lead the process, as this has enhanced ownership and quick implementation at the ground level.

Going forward, support will be provided by the Global Programme towards:

- Developing a monitoring and evaluation framework and costing the national action plan to end child marriage in Bangladesh
- Advocating with ministries and parliamentarians for budget inclusion at the national and district levels to implement the national action plan
• Rolling out a menstrual health management strategy
• Collaborating with government, and relevant stakeholders, to finalize the Rule of Children Act
• Increasing capacity development of duty bearers/committee members at the subnational level
• Developing sexual harassment prevention guidelines for secondary schools to disseminate nationally.

Generating and applying data and evidence

UNICEF implemented an intervention research study to test a life skills and tutoring support model to keep girls in school and reduce child marriage in 2021. The Keeping girls in schools project to reduce child marriage in rural Bangladesh is part of both Education for Adolescents as well as the Global Programme initiatives. A study found that girls were more likely to be married in areas where no action was taken compared to areas where there was. Similarly, school dropout as a result of marriage and learning loss in analytical skills were significantly greater in control areas.

The Global Programme also raised critical awareness skills and girls in areas where the Global Programme was involved were significantly more likely to be able to list the adverse effects of child marriage. Significantly, the study found that girls were more likely to initiate the use of a modern contraception methods before a first birth. It was also found that girls noted increased confidence and trust from parents in terms of their mobility, which included girls being able to go home after sunset and visit friends alone.

UNICEF also conducted a mapping and assessment of child marriage programmes in Bangladesh to consolidate efforts at the strategic level and serve as a basis for knowledge sharing. This was done improve child marriage results, strengthen collaboration/coherence, reduce duplication of efforts and identify promising scalable practices. It also served as a basis for knowledge sharing about ending of child marriage programmes while linking efforts adopted to address COVID-19’s impact on child marriage.

The findings fortify the multidimensionality of programmes to end child marriage and reiterates that multisectoral action is aligned to the wider preventive and responsive measures that are needed to end child marriage. Interactions with key stakeholders helped amply evidence recognition and understanding of what works and what investments are required. The study recommendations are focused on increased advocacy efforts at both national and subnational levels, capacity building of government stakeholders, particularly judges, magistrates and parliamentarians, cross-sectoral collaboration of government departments and further knowledge sharing and documentation efforts of what works and can be scaled and shared among stakeholders contributing to efforts to end child marriage.

Some of the key findings include:

• Ending child marriage is not always a targeted area of intervention for organizations but is often mainstreamed as a part of their wider gender equality and equity promotion goal

• Among international non-governmental organizations and United Nations agencies, programmes were found to be focused on education, capacity development of government stakeholders and promoting youth-led advocacy

• A limited number of programmes were engaged with the issues of birth and marriage registry, while only one programme was found to engage with judges and law enforcement

• Stakeholder consultations revealed the need to scale up programmes that engage with married adolescent girls to develop safe pathways for them to fulfil their potential

• Experiences from COVID-19 and other emergencies suggest that girls and women, particularly the poorest and socially marginalized, will be disproportionately affected.
CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

COVID-19 restrictions continued to delay critical evidence-generation, including the recently completed implementation research. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the research methodology for a planned study among adolescent girls was modified from face-to-face to mobile-based interviews in some parts of the country. Though the study was conducted with a beneficiary group from the most marginalized girls among whom the majority do not have access to digital devices, at least 60 per cent of the targeted sample was interviewed using mobile phones.

Lessons and recommendations from the evaluation of UNICEF’s work in accelerating action towards ending child marriage in Bangladesh

- Incentives and conditional cash transfers seem to have worked well in some parts. This needs to be examined more closely, including lessons on effective approaches to complement cash and in-kind transfers from large scale interventions in countries such as India, Ethiopia and Bangladesh. In case it is found to make a positive impact, a solution to this may be found to provide incentives to girls, perhaps by helping the government to design a suitable scheme.

- UNICEF should work towards providing social protection for vulnerable children and their families for overall poverty reduction. As per the UNICEF definition, “social protection covers the range of policies and programmes needed to reduce the lifelong consequences of poverty and exclusion.” Therefore, future interventions should be ensure that essential services are provided to all vulnerable families to reduce inequality, poverty and vulnerability. This would require working together with other organizations with similar mandates of poverty alleviation, as well incorporating lessons from the evidence on cash plus programmes. This requires complementary interventions e.g., UNICEF Office of Research - Innocenti’s work on GRASSP being included.8

- The existing monitoring system within UNICEF is not designed to collect relevant data on child marriage. The mismatch in monitoring programmes makes collation of relevant data collection very challenging and there is a likelihood of missing out on information that may provide evidence for planning and guiding implementation.

- There is a need for a more robust and user-friendly surveillance system and research to analyse the impact of interventions and to collate information related to an area effectively. It is also important to collect disaggregated data for disadvantaged groups to analyse the impact on vulnerable groups, while complementing quantitative data with qualitative data that capture nuances e.g., shifts in gender transformative change, including perceptions of service providers and staff.

- UNICEF should limit the number of interventions it carries out to address child marriage. Research has shown that programmes with fewer, more strategic interventions reach a larger population and show better sustainability. Therefore, UNICEF may consider focusing on fewer interventions where it has achieved better results and aim at scaling up these pilots.

- UNICEF should limit their focus on skills development programmes because there are organizations that can be more effective in implementing programmes related to skill development. However, UNICEF can extend technical support to identify vulnerable adolescents and develop programmes for soft skills training.

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COUNTRY PROFILE 2021

BURKINA FASO
Child marriage context

There are 2.8 million child brides in Burkina Faso, 548,200 of whom were married before the age of 15. Currently, the prevalence of child marriage (marriage before the age of 18) among girls stands at 52 per cent. This rate is higher than many other countries, and there is little evidence of any progress in reducing the prevalence of child marriage within the last 25 years, despite continued attempts to do so.9

Programming context

The COVID-19 pandemic profoundly affected the everyday lives of girls for a second year in 2021, including their physical and mental health, education and the economic circumstances of their families and communities. Globally, up to 10 million more girls are estimated to become child brides by 2030 as a result of the pandemic.10

UNFPA and UNICEF Evaluation Offices conducted a joint assessment of Global Programme adaptations to the COVID-19 crisis in 2021.11 The COVID-19 assessment aimed to:

- Assess relevant contingency planning and implementation and alternative delivery and management arrangements for the Global Programme due to the COVID-19 pandemic, taking into account the views of vulnerable adolescent girls, their families, communities and key implementing partners.

- Make recommendations for the immediate to mid-term improvement of the Global Programme response to COVID-19, identify ongoing programme changes and recommending any additional support required to implement those programme changes and shifting priorities.

- Make any recommendations required to adjust the Global Programme Phase II to the new context, including its theory of change and the targets established before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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The results of the assessment indicate that:

- It is critical to keep the focus and efforts in reaching the most vulnerable and marginalized adolescents, including those in remote areas.

- Lessons could be taken from experiences using multi-channel and two-way communication approaches, while also being attentive to the digital divide.

- Vulnerable adolescents must continue to have access to education (especially if provided remotely), health and social welfare services.

- It is key to overcome drivers of poverty by leveraging existing social protection schemes.

- Ensuring the use of evidence led programming is important and so too is advocating with governments to keep child marriage prevention and responses on national agendas while continuing to develop legal and operational frameworks to help accelerate the end of child marriage.

These results will inform future adjustments and refinements to the programme. They will help continue delivering in changing contexts and accelerating the pace, during the Decade of Action, of eliminating child marriage to achieve the SDGs by 2030.

**Key highlights**

- 44,825 new adolescent girls – including 257 girls living with a disability – attended community adolescent clubs in 1,235 newly targeted villages by the programme, benefitting from life skills training and education in financial management and sexual and reproductive health and rights.

- 14,070 vulnerable adolescent girls were provided with school materials, had their school fees paid and were supported through case management to stay in school, including through placement in foster families and family mediations of conflicts that may hinder their retention in school.

**TABLE. Conclusions and recommendations from the COVID-19 assessment**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONCLUSION</th>
<th>RECOMMENDATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Programme advocacy and engagement efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic kept child marriage on national agendas</td>
<td>Advocate with governments to continue developing legal and operational frameworks contributing to ending child marriage with a rights-based and multisectoral focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The COVID-19 crisis underscored the vulnerability of adolescent girls in rural and remote areas</td>
<td>Reinforce efforts to reach the most vulnerable and marginalized adolescent girls, boys and their families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adoption of digital and mass media approaches demonstrated a high potential for sustaining engagement of adolescent girls at scale, although the digital divide should be considered</td>
<td>Develop complementary multi-channel approaches to reach target populations, ensuring that they foster two-way communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COVID-19 restrictions limited adolescent girls’ access to health and social welfare services</td>
<td>Continue technical support and explore the most effective approaches to ensure adolescent girls have access to essential services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The programme theory of change remains valid but poverty and economic drivers need to be stressed further in operational strategies</td>
<td>Further articulate the strategy to leverage social protection schemes such as cash transfers and income generation opportunities for adolescent girls and their families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COVID-19 programme adjustments created a high demand on data and evidence for adopted approaches</td>
<td>Continue adjusting monitoring, data generation and analysis in order to reinforce evidence-based programming</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
● 607 community surveillance units were set up in 1,235 villages which have made public declarations on the abandonment of child marriage to ensure these commitments are respected and social dialogues are sustained.
● Over 7 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.
● 342,059 adolescent girls received child protection services, including 10,257 girls with reported cases managed through the revised case management tools.

Programme performance

TABLE. Summary of output indicator performance (2021)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INDICATOR</th>
<th>TARGET</th>
<th>RESULT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 1111</strong>: Number of adolescent girls (aged 10-19) who actively participated in life skills or comprehensive sexuality education interventions in programme areas</td>
<td>103,016</td>
<td>44,825</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 1121</strong>: Number of girls (aged 10-19) supported by the programme to enrol and/or remain in primary or secondary school</td>
<td>9,752</td>
<td>14,070</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 1211</strong>: Number of boys and men actively participating in group education/dialogues that address harmful masculinities and gender norms</td>
<td>45,000</td>
<td>73,560</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 1221</strong>: 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</td>
<td>206,151</td>
<td>346,828</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 1222</strong>: 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</td>
<td>14,500,000</td>
<td>7,300,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 1223</strong>: Number of local actors (e.g., traditional, religious and community leaders) with meaningful participation in dialogues and consensus-building to end child marriage</td>
<td>2,800</td>
<td>6,428</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 1231</strong>: Number of civil society organizations newly mobilized in support of challenging social norms and promoting gender equality by the Global Programme</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 2121</strong>: Number of primary/secondary/non-formal schools in programme areas providing quality gender-friendly education that meets minimum standards</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 2131</strong>: Number of service delivery points in programme areas providing quality adolescent-responsive services (health, child protection/ gender-based violence) that meet minimum standards</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 2211</strong>: Number of partnerships (both formal and informal) established to deliver adolescent-responsive social protection, poverty reduction, and economic empowerment programmes and services</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 3111</strong>: Number of policies or legal instruments addressing child marriage drafted, proposed or adopted at national and subnational level with Global Programme support</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 3211</strong>: Number of generated evidence and knowledge that focus on what works to end child marriage</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 3212</strong>: Number of generated evidence and knowledge that apply a gender analysis</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 3221</strong>: Number of South-to-South cooperation (conferences, expert visits, peer consultations, study tours, communities of practice) supported</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Providing intensive support to marginalized girls

The government adopted a guide for animation in adolescent clubs in 2021, developed with UNFPA and UNICEF support, to provide modular sessions on life skills, gender equality, human rights and gender-based violence. During the year, despite insecurity and the COVID-19 pandemic, 44,825 new adolescent girls – including 257 girls living with a disability – strengthened their life skills and knowledge to protect themselves from child marriage through their participation in activities and training in 3,279 clubs and safe spaces in seven out of the thirteen regions of the country. Tools used include the guide for facilitation in clubs, which was reviewed to take into account COVID-19, a gender-sensitive parenting education module and a module on sexual and reproductive health.

The programme supported 27,953 girls to remain in school and awarded 14,070 vulnerable adolescent girls direct support in terms of scholarships and school supplies to facilitate their enrolment in school. Another 3,865 adolescents had their knowledge and skills strengthened through the implementation of communication activities on topics related to family planning, unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV/AIDS, as well as child marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM). In addition, 2,686 adolescents and young people (aged 10 to 24) were tested for HIV and other STIs, of whom 921 adolescents aged 15 to 19 required treatment for STIs.

The response to the pandemic provided an opportunity to innovate and build back better by positioning young people at the center of solutions to accelerate the prevention of child marriage. Young people were considered as the best agents of change for improving their lives. For instance, UNICEF innovated the approach via the creation of two training sessions, via SMS, on HIV/AIDS and on the prevention of child marriage and FGM. Using offline technology to engage young people, several live chats were organized to bring together U-Reporters and experts to respond to questions that mattered to young people.

To ensure youth engagement in the programme, UNICEF, in partnership with the Spotlight Initiative Africa Regional Programme, launched a seed fund with the African Union Youth Reference Group. This was done in order to test youth innovative ideas that promote mental wellbeing of children and young people affected by child marriage in their communities. The ideas were meant to work as drivers to reimagine an Africa without harmful practices with funding for the youth to implement innovative approaches that will help survivors of harmful practices cope with the psychosocial consequences and create awareness of the impact of harmful practices on mental health. The projects are expected to empower and support girls affected by harmful practices, work more directly with youth peers and communities and advocate for laws and policies to support girls’ rights.

CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

The programme adapted its strategies and interventions by collaborating with the government to review the animation guide for adolescent clubs to integrate COVID-19 requirements and protocols. This will contribute to the dissemination of information on the behaviour to be adopted to prevent the spread of COVID-19 among adolescents.

The importance of keeping girls in schools appeared to have gained more acceptance by the population through social mobilization. However, parents still have real concerns about early pregnancies in schools. It is crucial to tackle issues related to adolescent girls comprehensively by proposing proactive preventive actions to parents. Strengthening self-protection capacities of adolescents and the involvement of boys/men in terms of positive masculinity are important factors in changing norms to ensure the dignity of girls and women. Strengthening the capacity of community-based health agents creates opportunities for the communities’ involved in prevention, identification and care of survivors of violence, abuse and exploitation – these are key when combined with other empowerment approaches.
Forced marriage of young girls as well as many other forms of gender-based violence are current issues in Burkina Faso. Due to negative social norms and cultural practices, 11.3 per cent of girls aged 0-14 have undergone female genital mutilation. Also, 51.3 per cent of women aged 20 to 24 and 8.9 per cent of women under 15 entered their first sexual union before the age of 18 (EMC 2015). In the Plateau-Central and Centre-Nord regions, UNICEF and the Association for Community Development and the Promotion of Children’s Rights (ADC/PDE) work in partnership to end child marriage through the Global Programme to End Child Marriage.

This project covers 400 villages in the two regions, 200 of which have declared an end to FGM and 200 others for which the challenge remains making a public declaration on the abandonment of FGM.

Fatima*, 17, lives in Forgui, a village located 15 kilometers from Kaya in the Centre-Nord region.

“My parents promised my hand in marriage to a man I did not love, meanwhile I already had a boyfriend. To avoid this, my boyfriend and I ran away to Côte d’Ivoire.”

However, this elopement was short-lived, as a few days later, Fatima’s father, who was very unhappy with the situation, went looking for them. He found them thanks to several relatives living in Côte d’Ivoire. When they returned to Forgui, the family atmosphere was no longer the same. “My parents were very upset with me and there was almost no communication between us”, notes Fatima.

A few weeks later, Fatima found out that she was pregnant with her boyfriend’s child, and this only made the situation worse, because until then she was still due to marry the man chosen by her parents.

Determined to escape the planned marriage, Fatima went to report her case to the Directorate of Social Action in Piboré, from where she was referred to the Association for Community Development and the Promotion of Children’s Rights (ADC/PDE). Thanks to the mediation conducted by ADC/PDE agents, calm and understanding was gradually restored between Fatima and her parents. Her parents eventually ended up accepting her choice. Currently, Fatima and her boyfriend are dating without any parental pressure or objections.

Brice also followed up with Fatima’s family at home to ensure that she was not a victim of any form of violence.

According to Fatima, the failure of the forced child marriage has given her a new outlook on life: “I am very happy that the marriage did not work out. Living with someone you did not choose is probably a heavy burden. I would like to live in a world without forced marriage because every woman has the right to choose freely with whom she wants to marry and live. Now I am happy, and my wish is to start a business and provide for my child, giving him or her every chance to live in better conditions”, she concluded.

Wendkonte, Fatima’s father, listened to these words with great enthusiasm and hope. Wendkonté is a farmer based in Côte d’Ivoire. According to him, he was not involved in the attempted marriage of his daughter. “In our tradition, my own daughter does not belong to me, she belongs to my elders and brothers. On the subject of the marriage, they are the ones who decided for me, and therefore they were the ones who committed Fatima”, he says.

Wendkonté and his daughter previously lived in Côte d’Ivoire. They returned to Forgui in 2020, and this ordeal started upon their return. “As soon as we arrived in Forgui last year, my brothers quickly told me that they had found someone for my daughter. I did not mind and I accepted”. Initially, Wendkonté was in favour of the planned marriage. However, with the interventions and awareness raising of the ADC/PDE, he finally understood that it was a bad decision to impose someone on his daughter. “I now realise the consequences this could have had in my daughter’s life. I am happy to see her and her boyfriend blossoming, and I wish them all the best”.

* Name changed to protect her identity.
Enhancing the family and community environment

346,828 people (188,697 females) engaged in community discussions and awareness campaigns to end child marriage during the year. In addition, 73,560 men and boys (23,665 of them adolescents) were reached by the programme’s interventions through adolescent clubs, husbands’ schools and the so-called ‘Thanks to me’ initiative. Analysis of the national context shows that gender inequalities persist, among other things, due to the pervasiveness at community level of social systems based on patriarchy, the trivialization of gender-based violence as a social norm, the low involvement of men and boys as agents of change, the collapse of social protection mechanisms and norms regulating behaviour and weak law enforcement, especially when the perpetrator is the husband or a relative of the husband.

In order to strengthen the impact of the so-called ‘Don’t Call Me Madam’ campaign against child marriage, the campaign headline was revised and continued to be broadcast on social media, reaching a total of 584,300 views on UNICEF’s digital platforms since it was first broadcast. Also, during the youth caravan in the country, which mobilized more than 62,500 teenagers and young people in eight regions of Burkina Faso, the artist SMARTY, UNICEF National Goodwill Ambassador in Burkina Faso, continued raising awareness by singing in chorus with the audience on his flagship song Ombre de la Nuit. The video has reached more than 556,000 people on social media (410,000 views on Facebook and 146,000 views on YouTube). In Tenkodogo, young people also trained more than 100 peers on reproductive health and child marriage.

The miniseries Vaillante was launched during the 2021 FESPACO film festival in Burkina Faso, during which UNICEF also premiered two additional movies (Triumph and Les Yeux Ouverts) aiming to support sensitization to end child marriage. Vaillante is a UNICEF fictional three-part series set in West Africa, which aims to offer a platform for the representation of survivors of child marriage, as well as being a starting point for discussion and change.

12 Ne m’appellez pas madame: Abandon du mariage des enfants www.unicef.org/burkinafaso/ne-mappelez-pas-madame
13 The video can be found here: www.facebook.com/unicefburkinafaso/videos/437692190405848
14 Posts relating to this can be found here: www.facebook.com/unicefburkinafaso/posts/2919282051657708
15 The miniseries can be found here: www.unicef.org/wca/vaillante
18 LES YEUX OUVERTS: Court-métrage Sur Le Mariage Des Enfants. www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=0zkLye1K93Q&feature=youtu.be
Through the series, the Global Programme aims to raise awareness and spark conversations on child marriage to better seek solutions for young girls and women. The programme also funded the *Fitini* show, which is one of the largest youth festivals in Burkina Faso. More than 30,000 children (including 3,750 displaced children) were able to attend awareness-raising skits, playbacks and choreographies on child marriage through the festival. The videos published from the event reached more than 67,100 people through social networks.19

Strategic alliances have been forged with local media, amplifying messages against the practice of child marriage to ensure the promotion of its abandonment. The efforts of TV, radio, print, online and institutional media have raised awareness about child marriage amongst more than 7.3 million people in the country. The programme also raised awareness and engaged 6,428 community and religious leaders in villages. The engagement of religious leaders in villages allowed the start of marriage registration in 455 new villages, bringing the total number of villages systematically registering religious marriages in dedicated registers to 1,524.

The impact of these different activities has resulted in public declaration ceremonies of the abandonment of child marriage in 1,235 more villages. To ensure the effectiveness of their post-declaration actions, 607 monitoring units from villages that have already made declarations in the Eastern, Boucle du Mouhoun, Centre and Centre-Nord regions benefited from capacity-building sessions. These units support the fulfilment of commitments at the community level and continue social dialogue in favour of positive behaviours. The establishment and revitalized monitoring units serve as a basis for the involvement of community leaders in the promotion of social norms favorable to the rights of the child.

**LESSONS LEARNED**

A key lesson is that preventive measures are essential in reducing the perpetration of violence against children and adolescents. In addition it was seen that young people must be considered as agents of change and their participation permanently promoted to achieve the objectives of change. To that end, UNFPA and UNICEF supported – and will continue to support – young school children (including U-Reporters) to participate in sensitization sessions on topics such as child marriage, birth registration, FGM and gender-based violence. The mobilization and empowerment of community organizations or structures is a strategic and innovative approach to achieve results for the benefit of children and the engagement of customary and religious leaders is essential. The impacts of this not only help address social norms that are harmful to children’s rights, but also support advocacy efforts towards the end of child marriage. In the same vein, strengthening community feedback mechanisms (interactive broadcasts and community dialogues) has made it possible to bolster the participation of affected populations in the humanitarian response and increased the accountability of humanitarian actors. Community relays have made it possible to ensure the perpetuation of awareness-raising actions in the villages, including the improvement of geographical accessibility.

**Strengthening systems**

The provincial directorates in charge of women, national solidarity, family and humanitarian action in the 45 provinces of the country, as well as the communal social services, have been equipped to integrate gender considerations into their activities. The programme provided pedagogical support for the training of all community support technicians and the 5,147 community actors who are members of community cells (including 1,322 women) that are involved in awareness-raising activities. The involvement of state technical services at the communal and provincial levels, including child protection networks at all levels of the national child protection system, has made it possible to provide multisectoral services including psychosocial support, family mediation, alternative care and sexual and

reproductive health services. Through these networks, 437 child marriages were cancelled, with 14 cases brought to court, in 2021.

**CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED**

In 2021, child protection needed to be increased due to the security situation exacerbating the already precarious conditions, including a resurgence of child marriage and FGM in communities previously engaged in the process of abandonment. Difficulties with programme integration other development activities has limited the possibility of meeting the holistic needs of girls and may lead to low adolescent participation over time. Another challenge is that adolescents living with disabilities are not considered in the development of child marriage and FGM prevention messages.

Community engagement is an important element for the provision of child protection services and for building peace and social cohesion in development and humanitarian contexts. Strengthening the technical and operational capacities of community actors is therefore essential, not only to address the lack of institutions in hard-to-reach areas, but also to stimulate social norms change among the population.

Interventions during 2021, especially in emergency-affected regions, demonstrated that the engagement with community-based child protection structures and local associations makes it possible to provide services to remote communities where there is a high demand for child protection services. Thus, the mobilization and empowerment of community organizations or structures is a strategic and innovative approach to achieve results for children, creating an opportunity for the community’s anchoring in prevention, identifying and caring for survivors of violence and ending abuse and exploitation. The involvement of affected populations (local youth volunteers), the recruitment of a local workforce and the implementation of a mobile strategy enabled continuity of the programme and the scaling up of interventions, while facilitating greater ownership and sustainability of child protection responses.

The involvement of education actors makes it possible to monitor, document and prevent the occurrence of child marriages. When teachers are sensitized, they monitor and investigate the reasons for the absence of students and can alert the competent technical services to cases of risk of marriage involving a student. During 2021, 1,018 primary, post-primary and secondary schools helped to monitor affected and/or vulnerable girls for their retention in school.

**Facilitating supportive laws and policies**

The national platform coordinated by UNFPA and UNICEF held an annual review of the Global Programme and the UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme on the Elimination of FGM in Burkina Faso in 2021. The purpose of which was to take stock of results and map a way forward. The results of the 2019-2021 operational work plan were validated during the session and indicated an overall rate of financial implementation of 87 per cent and technical achievement of 76 per cent. The members of the review recommended a rapid adoption of the revised Personal and Family Code and the development of a specific action plan for the prevention and response to child marriage in humanitarian contexts. They also agreed to give more space for documentation and increased visibility of civil society’s interventions to tackle child marriage.

The strengthening of the political-legal framework has seen a major result through the adoption of the budgeted operational action plan of the national strategy to end child marriage for 2022-2024. The analysis of the action plan shows alignment with the Global Programme and aims to strengthen the interventions planned by the second phase and those already underway at country level. In addition, a review of the National Gender Strategy 2020-2024 and its operational action plan highlights the consideration of the issue of child marriage and proposes relevant interventions to accelerate progress towards the end of child marriage. Regarding legislative reform, the revised Personal and Family Code was discussed at a Council of Ministers in 2021 with reservations and
referred back for better consultation with stakeholders. The disputed but not exhaustive provisions concern aspects relating to polygamy and the age of marriage for girls and boys.

The programme worked with a women’s rights organizations, the Voices of Women, and a youth-led organization, the National Youth Council to keep the issue of abandoning harmful practices on the government’s agenda. The partnership with Voices of Women has enabled high-level advocacy with leaders of customary and religious organizations on the rights of women and girls, including child marriage and FGM. The advocacy meeting, chaired by the First Lady of Burkina Faso, renewed the commitment of the leaders of customary and religious organizations to continue raising awareness in their communities to respect the rights of the girl child against all forms of gender-based violence including child marriage. During the meeting, the leaders signed a declaration renewing their commitment to ensure the protection and protection of the rights of girls and women.

**Generating and applying data and evidence**

During 2021, UNICEF finalized a multi-country formative evaluation of the programme for the promotion and protection of the rights of the child (2017-2019) which included Burkina Faso as a country of focus.

The results of this evaluation indicate that:

- The programme is aligned with Burkina Faso’s national priorities, plans and strategies. The theory of change for the child marriage programme is coherent and aligned with subnational programmes and targets.

- Awareness in all its forms (clubs, talks, visits) has been effective, gradually contributing to changes in social norms and acceptability of the refusal of norms considered harmful both by parents and by customary and religious leaders.

- Even if certain beliefs or practices may suggest that the total abandonment of child marriage and FGM is still an ideal to be achieved, the health, social action and law enforcement authorities are the first, not only to recognize changes in the attitude and social norms of populations (public and community refusal of child marriage and FGM, public denounce of practices, monitoring of marriage registers), but also to note an apparent decrease in child marriage and FGM practices.

**CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED**

The failure to complete the Demographic and Health Survey during the year meant that there was no new evidence produced to measure progress at the national level on the issue of child marriage abandonment.

The evaluation of the programme interventions confirmed the relevance of strategies used and demonstrated concrete results for children and communities. This has shown a levitating effect of interventions, generating results beyond promoting social norms conducive to the abandonment of FGM, child marriage and child abuse.
Child marriage context

There are 17.3 million child brides in Ethiopia, 7.5 million of whom were married before the age of 15. Currently, the prevalence of child marriage (marriage before the age of 18) among girls stands at 40 per cent which is a 30 per cent reduction since 1991: giving evidence to that even in countries where the prevalence of child marriage is high, progress is possible. However, in order to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) target to end child marriage by 2030 progress would have to be greatly accelerated from where it is now. If it the rates of reduction remain as they are the prevalence will be 9 per cent by 2050 and if doubled the prevalence will reach 2 percent by 2050.

Programming context

The COVID-19 pandemic profoundly affected the everyday lives of girls for a second year in 2021, including their physical and mental health, education and the economic circumstances of their families and communities. Globally, up to 10 million more girls are estimated to become child brides by 2030 as a result of the pandemic. UNFPA and UNICEF Evaluation Offices conducted a joint assessment of Global Programme adaptations to the COVID-19 crisis in 2021. The COVID-19 assessment aimed to:

- Assess relevant contingency planning and implementation and alternative delivery and management arrangements for the Global Programme due to the

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COVID-19 pandemic, taking into account the views of vulnerable adolescent girls, their families, communities and key implementing partners.

- Make recommendations for the immediate to mid-term improvement of the Global Programme response to COVID-19, identify ongoing programme changes and recommending any additional support required to implement those programme changes and shifting priorities.

- Make any recommendations required to adjust the Global Programme Phase II to the new context, including its theory of change and the targets established before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The results of the assessment indicate that:

- It is critical to keep the focus and efforts in reaching the most vulnerable and marginalized adolescents, including those in remote areas.
- Lessons could be taken from experiences using multi-channel and two-way communication approaches, while also being attentive to the digital divide.
- Vulnerable adolescents must continue to have access to education (especially if provided remotely), health and social welfare services.
- It is key to overcome drivers of poverty by leveraging existing social protection schemes.
- Ensuring the use of evidence led programming is important and so too is advocating with governments to keep child marriage prevention and responses on national agendas while continuing to develop legal and operational frameworks to help accelerate the end of child marriage.

These results will inform future adjustments and refinements to the programme. They will help continue delivering in changing contexts and accelerating the pace,

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<td>Programme advocacy and engagement efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic</td>
<td>Advocate with governments to continue developing legal and operational</td>
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<tr>
<td>kept child marriage on national agendas</td>
<td>frameworks contributing to ending child marriage with a rights-based and</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>in rural and remote areas</td>
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<tr>
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<td>potential for sustaining engagement of adolescent girls at scale,</td>
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<tr>
<td>although the digital divide should be considered</td>
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<tr>
<td>COVID-19 restrictions limited adolescent girls’ access to health and</td>
<td>Continue technical support and explore the most effective approaches to</td>
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<tr>
<td>social welfare services</td>
<td>ensure adolescent girls have access to essential services</td>
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<tr>
<td>The programme theory of change remains valid but poverty and economic</td>
<td>Further articulate the strategy to leverage social protection schemes such</td>
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<tr>
<td>drivers need to be stressed further in operational strategies</td>
<td>as cash transfers and income generation opportunities for adolescent girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COVID-19 programme adjustments created a high demand on data and</td>
<td>and their families</td>
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<tr>
<td>evidence for adopted approaches</td>
<td>Continue adjusting monitoring, data generation and analysis in order to</td>
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<td></td>
<td>reinforce evidence-based programming</td>
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</table>
during the Decade of Action, of eliminating child marriage to achieve the SDGs by 2030.

Furthermore, in Ethiopia, the ongoing conflict in the northern part of the country has impacted programme implementation, with the Tigray region, all targeted woredas (districts) in the Afar region and six out of 16 woredas in the Amhara region being affected by the conflict, which meant that these areas were inaccessible for over three months during the year, leading to disruptions in community activities and school closures due to a declaration of a state of emergency at federal and regional levels. The knock-on effect was that child marriage interventions were deprioritized in favour of attempts at maintaining peace and security. The country was also affected by an ongoing drought, making families more vulnerable.

**Key highlights**

- The child marriage programme is a flagship programme for both UNFPA and UNICEF in Ethiopia, benefitting significantly from the coordination and accountability of multiple sectors and the leveraging of support from various counterparts among government and non-governmental partners for the common target of ending child marriage by 2025.

- 49,449 adolescent girls and 6,366 adolescent boys benefited from life skills training, sexual and reproductive health information and comprehensive sexuality education. Among the adolescent girls empowered, 170 are living with disabilities.

- 7,413 adolescent girls received support to continue their education despite the repeated school closures due to the ongoing conflict in some areas of the country.

- Half a million individuals (boys, girls, women and men) participated in group education/dialogue sessions on consequences of and alternatives to child marriage, the rights of adolescent girls and gender equality.

- Over one million individuals (boys, girls, women and men) were reached by mass and social media messaging on child marriage, the rights of adolescent girls and gender equality.

- 22,497 religious and other community leaders were mobilized to champion change towards ending child marriage.

- Close to 1,622 women development groups and youth groups were mobilized to conduct community surveillance to identify child marriage arrangements, negotiate with families and provide referrals for adolescent girls to protection and care services. 16,003 child marriage arrangement cases were identified and reported by anti-harmful traditional practices committees and community surveillance mechanisms during the year.

- Government and non-governmental actors increased funding to implement the roadmap for the elimination of harmful practices (2020-2024) based on the expenditure tracking exercise that was supported by the Global Programme in 2020.

- In 2021, the Ethiopia country office implemented the Gender-Transformative Accelerator (GTA) tool together with government and civil society partners to review and reflect on gender-transformative approaches to end child marriage. This three-day process resulted in concrete actions to support pathways for power shifts and gender equality to be implemented from 2022 onwards.

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# Programme performance

**TABLE. Summary of output indicator performance (2021)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INDICATOR</th>
<th>TARGET</th>
<th>RESULT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 1111:</strong> Number of adolescent girls (aged 10-19) who actively participated in life skills or comprehensive sexuality education interventions in programme areas</td>
<td>105,772</td>
<td>49,449</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 1121:</strong> Number of girls (aged 10-19) supported by the programme to enrol and/or remain in primary or secondary school</td>
<td>39,000</td>
<td>7,413</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 1211:</strong> Number of boys and men actively participating in group education/dialogues that address harmful masculinities and gender norms</td>
<td>32,968</td>
<td>41,031</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 1221:</strong> 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</td>
<td>540,267</td>
<td>504,626</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 1222:</strong> 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</td>
<td>13,000,000</td>
<td>1,026,690</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 1223:</strong> Number of local actors (e.g., traditional, religious and community leaders) with meaningful participation in dialogues and consensus-building to end child marriage</td>
<td>1,322</td>
<td>22,497</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 1231:</strong> Number of civil society organizations newly mobilized in support of challenging social norms and promoting gender equality by the Global Programme</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 2121:</strong> Number of primary/secondary/non-formal schools in programme areas providing quality gender-friendly education that meets minimum standards</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>370</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 2131:</strong> Number of service delivery points in programme areas providing quality adolescent-responsive services (health, child protection/ gender-based violence) that meet minimum standards</td>
<td>759</td>
<td>670</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 2211:</strong> Number of partnerships (both formal and informal) established to deliver adolescent-responsive social protection, poverty reduction, and economic empowerment programmes and services</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 3111:</strong> Number of policies or legal instruments addressing child marriage drafted, proposed or adopted at national and subnational level with Global Programme support</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 3211:</strong> Number of generated evidence and knowledge that focus on what works to end child marriage</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 3212:</strong> Number of generated evidence and knowledge that apply a gender analysis</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 3221:</strong> Number of South-to-South cooperation (conferences, expert visits, peer consultations, study tours, communities of practice) supported</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Providing intensive support to marginalized girls

To prevent, respond to and meet the needs of adolescent girls during the COVID-19 pandemic and during the conflict in the northern part of the country, UNICEF contracted VIAMO and adapted the use of interactive voice recording (IVR) (over telephone) and radio programmes. This was done to provide training and facilitate learning sessions on life skills, awareness-raising about sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and other available services to enhance the resilience of girls at risk and survivors of child marriage, so as to ensure continuity even in these challenging contexts. As a result, the Global Programme managed to reach 49,977 adolescent girls through transformative life skills and SRHR sessions and comprehensive sexuality education. Girls are increasingly influencing decisions on marriage by seeking legal services to end marriage arrangements which are against the law and that violate their rights. During the reporting period, 2,051 child marriages were cancelled as a result of girls running away and seeking support from child protection services.

In addition, the Global Programme is leveraging humanitarian response programmes by integrating messaging on child marriage in ongoing initiatives and testing the delivery of life skills sessions using radio, supplemented with structured listener groups for those who regularly interact in the exchange of lessons from the sessions.

The programme also specifically targets vulnerable areas and populations affected by the humanitarian context. For example, in the Gambella region, the organization Norwegian Church Aid strengthened four safe spaces during the year in the Jewi refugee camp and in Gambella town.

An innovative approach: Interactive Voice Recording (IVR) in collaboration with VIAMO

COVID-19 challenged the regular way of implementing some activities, yet it allowed the programme to explore new ways of working despite challenging humanitarian contexts. One of the innovative approaches adopted was the use of telephones in providing training for girls, through interactive voice recording (IVR). This approach has shown huge potential in reaching adolescent girls and in customizing life skills training sessions and community conversations.

The approach was tested in two regions during the year, Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples’ (SNNP) and Amhara. In SNNP, 195 adolescent girls participated and completed the training over four months, which covered 16 topics. In addition, refresher training was provided to 143 community conversation facilitators using IVR. Both target groups (girls and facilitators) benefited from the training and noted that the platform was user-friendly as they could follow and listen to the sessions when it was convenient during their own time. It also does not require them to move outside of their villages or homes. Training provided using IVR employs an interactive approach by engaging girls through question and answer methodologies as part of each session and gathering feedback on the sessions.

Based on the learning sessions, efforts were initiated to scale up the girls’ empowerment component across seven targeted regions in 2022, reaching 4,500 girls. To increase the level of exposure and access to the content, all content developed will be shared on additional platforms such as school-based mini-media channels and social media platforms such as Telegram and WhatsApp. Going forward, the approach will also be combined with face-to-face reviews and exchange sessions and various follow-up mechanisms to track progress among the targeted girls, in addition to planned midline and endline surveys.

Of note is that one of the limitations of the IVR approach is that only those who have their own mobile phone or have access to a phone through a family member can access the training opportunities.
schools, organizing peer education and providing information around SRHR for unmarried and married girls. Further, gender clubs led by adolescent girls reached 815 individuals (390 girls, 255 boys, 138 women and 32 men) with different messages around SRHR and child marriage. In the Amhara region, unmarried, out-of-school girls were identified and selected with 20 out-of-school girls’ clubs established in four woredas (five clubs in each woreda). 103 trainers (65 female and 38 male) were trained on life skills development to support the girls in these clubs. Unmarried girls participate in monthly discussion meetings on issues linked to puberty, SRHR, consequences of child marriage, assertiveness, communication, peer pressure and other topics.

In 2021, 7,413 girls also received support to continue their education. The programme targeted disadvantaged female students who were at risk of dropping out due to the lack of education materials, including exercise books, pens, pencils and other materials as their families would not have otherwise been able to cover these costs. An additional 2,513 girls received similar school material support with funding from other sources during the year. 15 schools were also provided with tutorial programmes to support the girls to stay in school through the Global Programme in 2021. The tutorials focused on selected subjects, such as chemistry, physics, mathematics and English. In addition to improving the academic ability of the girls to prepare them for their final exams, the tutorial programme further helps develop the girls’ self-confidence.

CHALLENGES, LESSONS LEARNED AND NEXT STEPS

The closure of schools due to the conflict in some areas of the country impacted the life skills training for girls and boys normally taking place within the education system. It also negatively impacted the finalization of the out-of-school girls’ empowerment and boys’ engagement manuals due to a delay in gathering data to inform a formative assessment for the manuals – which meant that they were delayed. Girls in SNNP, Sidama, Afar and Oromia regions were targeted as listener groups for the radio programme (a talk show) implemented in collaboration with the Population Media Centre.

Based on learning from this programme the out-of-school girls’ empowerment manual and implementation guide have now been developed and will be rolled out in 2022, including continuous training of facilitators and mentors engaged in the programme. The manual is designed in a way that the skill delivery is interwoven with a set of other interventions aiming to end child marriage. This is to be done over a period of four months which gives time for practice and internalization of the learning and gives the girls full access to mentorships through this extended period. Going into 2022, as the manual is rolled out, it is meant to significantly enhance the girls’ sense of self-worth and efficacy, including negotiation skills to delay child marriage and knowledge of where to receive essential services in the case of a child or forced marriage.

A key lesson learned through the programme is that just completing the training by the adolescent girls may not fully guarantee the desired change to end child marriage. Adolescent girls need to be engaged with various other interventions, including refresher training and continuous engagement as part of clubs. Hence, the programme has been targeting girls with a mix of different initiatives to reinforce messages and enable them to practice the knowledge and skills gained. This includes involving them in community outreach activities, club leadership and participation in the training delivered through mobile and the IVR system to encourage girls to share what they have learned with their peers. This has helped to increase resilience and adaptability of the interventions in humanitarian contexts. In addition, the use of a mix of approaches contributed to strengthening the quality of the interventions overall.

Enhancing the family and community environment

One of the critical achievements observed at the community-level is the change in the child marriage practice from using community resources. This is witnessed through anecdotal evidence, such as field-level discussions and testimonies from more than 60 per cent of the communities in the targeted regions by the programme and declaring their readiness to abandon both
child marriage and FGM. This is a result of five years of community mobilization and learning from experiences. UNFPA, UNICEF and the Bureau of Women and Social Affairs (BoWSA) commissioned a structured community readiness assessment to verify the status of the community to end child marriage and the efficacy to bring and maintain sustainable results.

The community testimonies captured through the assessment from both community members as well as representatives at the woreda and kebele (municipality) administration-level show a reduction in the incidence of child marriage, a proactiveness in implementing prevention and response mechanisms. These include thorough tracking and reporting of child marriage arrangements, an increased value put on girls’ education and careers and a willingness to financially support vulnerable girls due to the economic status of their family. Meanwhile, five other communities have done their own assessment, with a brief checklist, and raised green and white flags to signify that their community members are committed to ending the practice. This has created a positive competitive spirit among communities to commit to ending child marriage and to promote alternative life options for adolescent girls. These results will be further validated with the social and behaviour change baseline-midline-endline survey initiated through a partnership between the Global Programme and John Hopkins University and the International Committee for the Development of Peoples (CISP).

The programme engaged 504,986 (262,647 female and 242,339 male) community members in dialogues concerning child marriage throughout the year. Men and women of different age groups, community leaders, religious leaders, boys, girls and iddir (savings groups) members believe that community conversations are key interventions in contributing to changes in attitudes and practices as they focus on collective reflection and

24 For example, Abba Gadaa’s.
examine unquestioned assumptions around child marriage, unequal gender dynamics affecting gender roles and lower support for girls’ education.

These community conversations encourage joint action to abandon child marriage through discussions, individual and group awareness-raising activities, tracking child marriage arrangements and provision of access to support services for survivors. Moreover, religious leaders are encouraged to reflect on theological sources, build consensus and educate their followers using various platforms, such as Sunday school, Friday or Jumaa prayer and other congregations.

A recent field mission by the programme to Sidama and a discussion held with Christian and Muslim leaders and their followers has shown that their engagement facilitates a change in attitudes and practices. As a result of community conversations targeting religious leaders and institutions, 22,497 (14,055 male and 8,442 female) community members have been mobilized to champion change in ending child marriage in their respective communities. Furthermore, in the Gambella region, Norwegian Church Aid engaged an additional 259 (164 female and 95 male) religious leaders and other community leaders through awareness-raising and capacity building around child marriage, gender equality and SRHR to promote adolescent-friendly health services in their communities. In the Amhara region, the Bureau of Women, Children and Youth Affairs organized a high-level advocacy workshop for 274 (200 male and 74 female) religious leaders in 2021. Of these, 120 were selected from the Muslim community and 154 from the Christian community.

The main discussion points focused on the relationship between religion and marriage, family formation, the preaching of the Holy Bible or the Qur’an and child marriage and its consequences. After thorough discussions, the religious leaders unanimously agreed on the following directives to their congregations, church/mosque leaders, priests and sheikhs: (1) all church and mosque leaders, priests and sheikhs must discourage child marriage and should not bless any child marriage; (2) before blessing any marriage they should get a marriage approval from the relevant religious or government institution; (3) followers and parents should be educated through churches and mosques on the consequences and impacts of child marriage on their children; and (4) followers and parents must have marriage approval from the relevant institution before bringing their children to the priest or sheikh for marriage.

LESSONS LEARNED AND NEXT STEPS

One lesson learned is that strategic documents used to implement child marriage interventions need to have a gender-transformative lens to instill an effective social and gender norm change process. As a result, the manuals and implementation guides, including the community conversation toolkit, have been redesigned and enriched to promote gender equality effectively.

This has been done by promoting inter-generational dialogues to examine and challenge beliefs, stereotypes and myths that support the practice of child marriage and reinforce the lower position of women in society. For example, the out-of-school girls’ empowerment manual and the boys’ and men’s engagement intervention package, which is under finalization, are designed in such a way as to facilitate social and gender norms in addition to skill-building for both girls and boys.

“I had been given up for marriage to one of the men in my tribe by my family in line with our cultural traditions. However, due to training received on the dangers of child marriage, I escaped from our home, managed to ask for support and protection from the [anti-harmful traditional practices] committee led by the Bureau of Women, Children and Youth, who coordinated with the police, and I was provided prompt support, thus preventing a case of child marriage.”

From an adolescent girl being rescued from a planned child marriage in Oromia region, thanks to the strong protection network supported by the programme.
To develop the boys’ and men’s engagement intervention package, the programme also leveraged the experience of the programme in Uganda with regards to male engagement. Hence, the roll-out of these interventions will significantly contribute to the effectiveness of the programme. Similarly, there is a plan to support the standardization of community bylaws without losing the principle of being context-specific and to apply a sensitive agenda to local contexts.

### Strengthening systems

The formal and non-formal systems that guarantee girls’ protection against child marriage and support their empowerment to thrive in their lives have been strengthened in Ethiopia. This has been done through successful and need-based capacity building that the programme has provided to key actors. As a result, 16,003 cases of child marriage arrangements were identified and reported by both formal and non-formal structures during the year, compared to 3,749 child marriage cases reported in 2020. This is a 327 per cent increase in reporting in 2021. Of these, 3,005 cases were successfully annulled during the reporting period.

The major reason behind an annulment of a child marriage is because of the girl rejecting it due to her knowledge around the adverse effects of the practice, as well as their confidence and ability to exercise their rights. Furthermore, community structures are also positively contributing to the increased reporting and nullification of child marriages. Community surveillance mechanisms, Women Development Groups and anti-harmful traditional practices committees present at the community level also continue to follow-up cases of cancelled child marriages to ensure that girls rescued do not face the risk of being pressured to enter similar marriage arrangements going forward.

For increased access of girls to prevention and protection services there needs to be a deliberate attempt to build the capacity of service providers through training on how to dispense quality, adolescent-friendly and timely services to their clientele. Therefore, the Global Programme has introduced the Social Analysis and Action (SAA) approach, as part of supporting a gender-transformative change, in collaboration with CARE Ethiopia. This approach includes training for justice, social service and health sector personnel, who provide essential prevention and response services related to child marriage.

This new training approach has shifted the traditional training method of service providers related to child marriage. The SAA builds the workforce capacity, makes participants clarify and examine their own attitudes and values and ensures consistency with the programme objective of ending child marriage by addressing gender inequality, stereotypes and biases, while providing services to girls rescued, at risk or survivors of child marriage. This initiative is jointly implemented through the Global Programme and a Canada-funded initiative to eliminate FGM in Ethiopia.

Gender-Transformative Accelerator Tool: Ethiopia Report

“...It was noted that to make meaningful change in discriminatory gender norms in the communities, it is important to integrate gender-responsive and gender-transformative approaches to already existing manuals and activities of government workforces (in particular health, justice and social service). To make this happen, the attitudes and values regarding gender equality, including child marriage, of these service providers need to be aligned with the objectives of the programme. Limited knowledge of stakeholders on the topic of gender and policies alike leading to lower commitment have been identified as a challenge. Therefore, capacity-building and values clarification on gender and social norms should be given to these service providers (health, justice, and social service workforce) for the programme to be gender-transformative through approaches such as the Social Analysis and Action (SAA) approach.”


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LESSONS LEARNED

One positive lesson learned relating to working with grassroots organizations and community structures is their ability to ensure continuity of the mobilization and case tracking efforts regardless of challenging contexts. As such organizations are primarily composed of community members, grassroots organizations and community structures, they are perfectly familiar with the social and cultural context, which enables them to take timely and prompt action should the need arise.

These community structures also played a critical role in reporting child marriage arrangements when schools were closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic and are playing an essential role during the prolonged conflict in the northern part of the country. For this reason, the programme will further strengthen this engagement modality and continue to support these efforts at scale.

Facilitating supportive laws and policies

In 2021, the Global Programme made a strategic shift on examining, demonstrating and advocating budget tracking of allocation and utilization of funds to end child marriage in Ethiopia. The government and key development actors have moved from rolling out the national costed roadmap to the implementation of key interventions at different levels, to simultaneously track expenditure and assess performance. UNICEF has supported the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs in conducting a systematic tracking exercise after the first year (July 2020–June 2021) of implementation of the roadmap, covering federal level partners and two target regions (Somali and SNNP). This exercise shows the government’s willingness to measure the extent to which political commitment is translated into concrete action, assessing allocation and utilization of budget, progress against key performance indicators and holding key stakeholders accountable.

The analysis and report are undergoing finalization and are expected to be completed in 2022. The initial findings suggest that the budget allocation and expenditure dedicated to activities preventing harmful practices from both governmental and non-governmental sources has increased. In addition, the rate of achievement on key performance indicators for the first year has moved from 80 per cent to more than 100 per cent, despite Ethiopia’s current challenging context, thus showing relatively good progress. The expenditure tracking and implementation assessment will inform planned evidence-based advocacy for increased budget allocation and strengthening of accountability mechanisms in the country.

Although expenditure is increasing in nominal terms over the years, the budget in real value terms is not increasing as much due to higher inflation. In addition, the federal source of financing is highly skewed towards development partners, which can create a problem with sustainability. Therefore, the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs needs to devise a strong and sustainable financing mechanism and advocate to maintain the promise of a 10 per cent annual increase of the government budget to child marriage interventions. However, looking back on the progress made since the start of Phase II of the programme (in 2020), great progress has been made regarding government commitments to end child marriage
both at the federal and regional levels. As a result, the roll-out of the costed roadmap, which is the national plan coordinating and streamlining the efforts of different actors, is underway across the country.

CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

The effort to support the endorsement of family law in Afar and Somali regions has been challenging due to the sensitivity of this issue, which attracts attention among the constituents of the Islamic population. Among the sections of the law that is sensitive and divisive is the age of marriage accepted in the Islamic faith. Other areas being contested include polygamy, rights of an adopted child, irregular unions and the determination of paternity using a DNA test.

Another challenge is the shift in focus both at the regional and federal level due to the prevailing conflict and the deprioritizing of some interventions, such as the endorsement of this law, due to the focus on the large-scale life-saving humanitarian response. However, a consultation organized at the beginning of the year noted that the law needs to have articles framed in a way that consider international human rights standards while responding to the concerns of community leaders.

To this end, a taskforce composed of legal experts from the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs, the Ministry of Justice, UNICEF, UN Women and Save the Children has been established to provide technical support in the articulation of the specific articles, making sure they align to national and international human rights standards. The programme has also benefited from various learning and exchange opportunities, such as with Sudan and Egypt, focusing on lessons towards developing and endorsing personal or family laws, including on the age of marriage and other women rights issues in dominantly Muslim communities.

Generating and applying data and evidence

In 2021, UNFPA and UNICEF engaged CISP Ethiopia and John Hopkins University to assess the extent of change in knowledge, attitudes, intent to change practices and norms around child marriage and FGM among adolescents, caregivers and key influencers in seven regions in Ethiopia over a four-year period (2021-2024). This was done so as to inform social and behaviour change and related programming initiatives. This is a first-time strategic shift towards working directly with a university for the Global Programme in Ethiopia. John Hopkins University brings a wide range of expertise and previous experiences of working with other communities in systematically measuring social norms change in a structured manner of establishing baselines, midlines and endlines, which are seen as critical in evaluating progress and change.

In the Amhara region, the Bureau of Women, Children and Youth Affairs provided training to 13 (nine male and four female) experts of the District Office of Women, Children and Youth Affairs on data collection processes at district-level home-to-home visits. These 13 trained experts then went back to their respective districts and trained 327 (171 male and 156 female) data collectors at kebele level while conducting home-to-home visits. After the training, data collecting tools were prepared and distributed to the trained data collectors. The data collecting tool included key indicators about family, age, education status, marital status and FGM status. Currently, data on 28,141 girls has been collected from all 142 kebeles entered into the database.
The prevailing security situation in the Tigray, Afar and Oromia regions made active participation and input from relevant stakeholders in these regions challenging with regards to evidence generation. Thus, most deliverables were submitted behind deadlines, which impacted the timeframe of interventions dependent on those evidence generation efforts. For example, the finalization, validation and rollout of the out-of-school girls’ empowerment manual was earlier projected to happen in the last quarter of 2021, but it was then pushed back to the first quarter of 2022. **CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED**

One of the lessons learned in getting data from the current context is that it requires extensive expertise in gathering data using virtual platforms. However, even the online data collection process requires securing an ethical clearance for data collection, which is worth paying attention to and giving proper planning for, including the Institutional Review Board mechanism, which is relevant for different research initiatives.

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**Partnership in focus: Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE)**

GAGE is a member of the National Alliance and supports the national effort to end child marriage through different assessments and evidence generation initiatives on topics such as adolescents’ well-being and COVID-19, data and evidence from which the Global Programme has benefitted. UNICEF is a strategic partner to GAGE as it technically and financially supported GAGE through the workplan of the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs to develop an assessment and verification tool for community readiness for the abandonment of harmful practices. Furthermore, UNICEF has supported GAGE with relevant documents such as the ACT framework on social norms change[^26], the indicator bank developed by the UNICEF Middle East and North Africa Regional Office and other tools, informing the assessment and verification tools currently rolled out in Ethiopia and widely used by child marriage actors. GAGE is also a member of the Global Programme technical advisory committee that was established to support strategic initiatives, such as the social and behaviour change baseline-midline-endline study, the redesigning of community conversations and the development of manuals and intervention packages for out-of-school girls and male engagement.

Child marriage context

There are 2.2 million child brides in Ghana, 662,200 of whom were married before the age of 15. Currently, the prevalence of child marriage (marriage before the age of 18) among girls stands at 19 per cent and is among the lowest in West and Central Africa (the regional average is 37 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 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.


Programming context

The COVID-19 pandemic profoundly affected the everyday lives of girls for a second year in 2021, including their physical and mental health, education and the economic circumstances of their families and communities. Globally, up to 10 million more girls are estimated to become child brides by 2030 as a result of the pandemic.28

UNFPA and UNICEF Evaluation Offices conducted a joint assessment of Global Programme adaptations to the COVID-19 crisis in 2021.29 The COVID-19 assessment aimed to:

- Assess relevant contingency planning and implementation and alternative delivery and
management arrangements for the Global Programme due to the COVID-19 pandemic, taking into account the views of vulnerable adolescent girls, their families, communities and key implementing partners.

- Make recommendations for the immediate to mid-term improvement of the Global Programme response to COVID-19, identify ongoing programme changes and recommending any additional support required to implement those programme changes and shifting priorities.

- Make any recommendations required to adjust the Global Programme Phase II to the new context, including its theory of change and the targets established before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The results of the assessment indicate that:

- It is critical to keep the focus and efforts in reaching the most vulnerable and marginalized adolescents, including those in remote areas.

- Lessons could be taken from experiences using multi-channel and two-way communication approaches, while also being attentive to the digital divide.

- Vulnerable adolescents must continue to have access to education (especially if provided remotely), health and social welfare services.

- It is key to overcome drivers of poverty by leveraging existing social protection schemes.

- Ensuring the use of evidence led programming is important and so too is advocating with governments

TABLE. Conclusions and recommendations from the COVID-19 assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONCLUSION</th>
<th>RECOMMENDATION</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Programme advocacy and engagement efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic</td>
<td>Advocate with governments to continue developing legal and operational frameworks contributing to ending child marriage with a rights-based and multisectoral focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kept child marriage on national agendas</td>
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<tr>
<td>The COVID-19 crisis underscored the vulnerability of adolescent girls in</td>
<td>Reinforce efforts to reach the most vulnerable and marginalized adolescent girls, boys and their families</td>
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<td>rural and remote areas</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adoption of digital and mass media approaches demonstrated a high potential</td>
<td>Develop complementary multi-channel approaches to reach target populations, ensuring that they foster two-way communication</td>
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<td>for sustaining engagement of adolescent girls at scale, although the</td>
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<tr>
<td>COVID-19 restrictions limited adolescent girls’ access to health and</td>
<td>Continue technical support and explore the most effective approaches to ensure adolescent girls have access to essential services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>social welfare services</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The programme theory of change remains valid but poverty and economic</td>
<td>Further articulate the strategy to leverage social protection schemes such as cash transfers and income generation opportunities for adolescent girls and their families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>drivers need to be stressed further in operational strategies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COVID-19 programme adjustments created a high demand on data and</td>
<td>Continue adjusting monitoring, data generation and analysis in order to reinforce evidence-based programming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>evidence for adopted approaches</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
to keep child marriage prevention and responses on national agendas while continuing to develop legal and operational frameworks to help accelerate the end of child marriage.

These results will inform future adjustments and refinements to the programme. They will help continue delivering in changing contexts and accelerating the pace, during the Decade of Action, of eliminating child marriage to achieve the SDGs by 2030.

Programme performance

**TABLE. Summary of output indicator performance (2021)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INDICATOR</th>
<th>TARGET</th>
<th>RESULT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 1111</strong>: Number of adolescent girls (aged 10-19) who actively participated in life skills or comprehensive sexuality education interventions in programme areas</td>
<td>18,690</td>
<td>19,376</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 1121</strong>: Number of girls (aged 10-19) supported by the programme to enrol and/or remain in primary or secondary school</td>
<td>1,030</td>
<td>1,094</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 1211</strong>: Number of boys and men actively participating in group education/dialogues that address harmful masculinities and gender norms</td>
<td>3,265</td>
<td>4,392</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 1221</strong>: 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</td>
<td>80,000</td>
<td>85,301</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 1222</strong>: 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</td>
<td>450,000</td>
<td>1,051,599</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 1223</strong>: Number of local actors (e.g., traditional, religious and community leaders) with meaningful participation in dialogues and consensus-building to end child marriage</td>
<td>706</td>
<td>2,116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 1231</strong>: Number of civil society organizations newly mobilized in support of challenging social norms and promoting gender equality by the Global Programme</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 2121</strong>: Number of primary/secondary/non-formal schools in programme areas providing quality gender-friendly education that meets minimum standards</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 2131</strong>: Number of service delivery points in programme areas providing quality adolescent-responsive services (health, child protection/gender-based violence) that meet minimum standards</td>
<td>996</td>
<td>634</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 2211</strong>: Number of partnerships (both formal and informal) established to deliver adolescent-responsive social protection, poverty reduction, and economic empowerment programmes and services</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 3111</strong>: Number of policies or legal instruments addressing child marriage drafted, proposed or adopted at national and subnational level with Global Programme support</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 3211</strong>: Number of generated evidence and knowledge that focus on what works to end child marriage</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 3212</strong>: Number of generated evidence and knowledge that apply a gender analysis</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 3221</strong>: Number of South-to-South cooperation (conferences, expert visits, peer consultations, study tours, communities of practice) supported</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Key highlights

● 19,376 adolescent girls were reached with life skills training or comprehensive sexuality education, including 15 girls living with a disability. In addition, 2,816 boys were also engaged by the programme.

● 1,094 adolescent girls who are most at risk of child marriage were provided with support towards completion of junior high school, including funds to cover their school tuition, boarding fees and school materials.

● 9,145 children (5,009 girls and 4,136 boys) in need of protection across 14 metropolitan, municipal and district assemblies (MMDAs) benefitted from case management services through the social welfare sector.

● Over 1 million individuals (boys, girls, women and men) were reached by mass and social media messaging on child marriage, the rights of adolescent girls, and gender equality.

● A total of 518 health and 116 child protection service delivery points were supported with training of service providers to provide quality adolescent-responsive services.

Providing intensive support to marginalized girls

The Global Programme in Ghana continued to strengthen partnerships with civil society partners for the implementation of the Promoting Adolescent Safe Spaces (PASS) programme and other safe spaces, such as the SISTAs clubs in 2021. 19,376 adolescent girls were reached with structured engagement in order to empower them with knowledge and skills to make informed choices on the matters affecting them.

UNICEF launched a Back-to-School campaign in five districts in 2021, with the overall goal of ensuring all school children, especially adolescent girls, would return to school upon their reopening after the COVID-19 induced school closures. The campaign targeted over 300 hard-to-reach communities with over 1,000 printed promotional materials on education, adolescent pregnancy, safe schools and psychosocial support. The Global Programme targeted 1,094 adolescent girls at high risk of child marriage and provided them with support towards the completion of junior high school, including covering school tuition, boarding fees and school materials.

In addition, UNICEF partnered with the non-governmental organization Muslim Relief Association of Ghana to promote engagement of traditional and religious leaders in campaigns to create demand for education in the most marginalized communities. 680 Muslim leaders (231 females and 449 males) were trained in the targeted communities to initiate campaigns promoting education among adolescent Muslim girls. The focus of the campaign included the support for continuous schooling of pregnant adolescent girls and the re-entry of young mothers who had dropped out of school due to childbirth.

CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

A challenge that emerged during the year was the revelation that in many communities, the idea of girls staying in school was not seen as an issue of interest. In some instances, supporting girls to continue their education is seen as pointless since girls are not expected to be able to use their learning for any good. These communities, where the value put on girls’ education remains very low, continue to be the focus of structured community engagement to reinforce the importance of schooling for girls and the value education brings to their lives and to the community.

Furthermore, meaningful engagement with traditional and community leaders and parents, sharing information with them on project activities and contents used to educate adolescent girls is a key step towards getting and retaining their support for the programme in the face of opposition from other actors who may not agree with the interventions being delivered in the communities.
Enhancing the family and community environment

Extensive efforts were made in scaling up and strengthening interventions aimed at promoting a supportive and gender equal environment to advance adolescent girls’ rights in 2021. A total of 900 boys were mobilized and engaged through I am for girls groups to create dialogue and raise awareness on gender inequality and its negative consequences for women, men, girls, boys, the economy and society as a whole. 300 men from the model gendered households initiative were also engaged in dialogues as local champions and influencers to demonstrate positive attitudes towards and investments in adolescent girls.

These interventions were complemented by community engagement activities with the use of Child Protection Community Facilitation toolkits to stimulate community dialogues and foster change towards investing in girls

I am a heroine of change

“My name is Kondoon Victoria. I am 18 years of age. I come from Bankamba. I am the first of 18 children. Growing up my father vowed that he will never educate a female child. He was of the view that girls do not have any benefit to the family, and he felt it is a waste of resources to educate a girl because girls are meant for the kitchen. So, he had all his male children in school and the girls were always at home. Fortunately, on my part, my auntie who got married to a man in Bankamba adopted me, so I was not living with my dad anymore. She did well by sending me to school. She however never cared about providing me with basic needs. I sometimes help people on their farms to raise some money to cater for my needs.”

In Ghana, there are many more girls like Victoria, who find themselves in situations where there is poor parenting and no value placed on the education of girls. Studies show that more girls are enrolled in basic schools whilst fewer girls make it through the basic education examination. This is often due to their requirement to work, for example, by engaging in transactional sex, to provide for their own basic needs, including sanitary pads and underwear, being burdened with care work at home and searching for menial jobs in bigger cities amongst other issues.

“I was a victim of myths behind menstruation in the first year of the PASS project, where I was helped to overcome the myths. Before the intervention of the PASS project, I missed out on a lot of contact hours in school, I lacked proper nutrition due to inadequate food during my period and faced stigma that would have made me to perform badly in school. But thanks to the sessions on menstrual hygiene and related topics through the safe space meetings, I am now better equipped with information on how to manage my period and still go to school and have a normal life. Fortunately, I excelled in my Basic Examination and gained admission to Bolgatanga Girls Senior High School. Through support from Norsaac with educational kit, I now have the opportunity to go through secondary education successfully, as I will use the books and the bag to support my academic work. I am a heroine of change.”

Victoria is currently studying at Bolgatanga girls’ senior high school, and when she is on break, Victoria uses her peer-to-peer interactions at home to speak to other girls to take their education seriously. “I believe girls’ education is as important as that of boys and nothing should stop us from achieving our dreams,” she notes.

The safe space programme has different modules that holistically work to support adolescent girls: Victoria is a clear example of how these modules play out to improve the lives of girls. After mentoring her and working with social welfare actors to sensitize her family on breaking menstrual myths, Victoria accessed the programme’s empowerment module through the safe space meetings to increase her knowledge on reproductive health, sexual and gender-based violence and children’s rights after which she accessed the financial module whilst on break from school, which has helped her boost her small temporary business to support her finances to go to the next level of the academic ladder.

For girls like Victoria, who are forced to become independent due to poor parenting, holistic modules such as this, will help them pursue their dreams. Going forward, Norsaac continues to monitor Victoria until she completes school and mentors her to make good career choices for her tertiary education. Currently Victoria hopes to become a nurse in future.
and promoting positive gender norms. The integrated social services initiative, which has been scaled up to 100 metropolitan, municipal and district assemblies (MMDAs) to provide integrated services for vulnerable children and adolescents, entails community mobilization activities as one of the key components. 37,266 people (12,146 women, 7,467 men, 9,150 girls and 8,503 boys) were engaged in dialogues and awareness raising sessions on alternatives to child marriage (e.g., education), the rights of adolescent girls and gender equality. These engagements have triggered some individual, family and community level actions that promote a protective and gender equal environment for adolescent girls.

The innovative Child Marriage Free Community Alert Campaign (CMFCAC) was launched in June 2021 in 30 communities in six districts. The campaign was designed in collaboration with young people and community members, including traditional leaders and elders, to ensure its perception as a community-driven and locally owned action. The objective of the campaign is to promote the engagement of community members to proactively take action for the prevention of child marriage, using child marriage alert flags, wherein a flag is hoisted at a visible site within the community. If and when there is any indication of a case of child marriage, co-habitation or adolescent pregnancy the flag is lowered to half-mast and all relevant stakeholders are alerted to intervene. The flag only flies fully again after the successful rescue of the adolescent girl. In addition, community-level chiefs signed pledge cards to indicate that all the members of their communities are committed to supporting the wellbeing of adolescent girls and preventing child marriages/co-habitation. Since the launch of the campaign, no community has reported any incidence of child marriage.

UNFPA supported the Department of Gender in eight of the ten traditional regions to engage existing men’s and boys’ clubs and form new boys’ mentorship circles to strengthen the activism of 3,192 men and boys against inequalities and harmful practices. Their main objective was to ensure the members of the clubs and mentorship circles worked to support girls’ rights and promote gender equality by engaging in activities that build and enhanced positive masculinities and inclusion.

Their activities helped to sensitize community members to support the development and well-being of adolescent girls often through the use of slogans such as ‘men and boys for positive change’, ‘men and boys for action’ and ‘boys stand for change’. The members of the clubs and mentorship circles used their platforms to hold discussions about the potential constructive involvement of men and boys in the promotion of gender equality, ending child marriage and sexual and gender-based violence.

“I personally welcomed the idea of the Child Marriage Free Alert Flag in my community because I am woman, a chief and a mother of my people. If I am a chief today, any of my girls can become a doctor, teacher, lawyer or even president tomorrow. But it has been part of us (our culture) and common in this community to marry our daughters off early. And these days, early pregnancy too has been increasing. If we do not do anything substantial now, many of our girls will drop out of school and be married off. So, together with my elders and the assemblyman, we have accepted and mounted the flag right at the entrance of the community and the signed pledge card is also here at my palace. Everyone who comes here will see it, and I will tell them about it myself. I have also met the schoolteachers and parents, and I have warned them that I do not want to see any girl pregnant and dropping out of school.”

Female community chief on the Child Marriage Free Community Alert Campaign initiative
Another significant and successful initiative was the men and boys peer to peer outreaches that facilitated interactive sessions with men and boys as an opportunity to deal with gender stereotypes and misconceptions related to sexual and gender-based violence and offered comprehensive sexual education. With their capacity built, most of the boys’ mentorship circles are now able to design activities for the boys’ peer to peer outreach sessions, including recorded ones for mosques, churches, schools and community *durbars*.

UNFPA and UNICEF supported the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection in launching Season 3 of the *Girlz Girlz Power TV Talk Show* in 2021. This is seen as a platform for adolescent girls, boys, parents, caregivers and service providers to highlight key developmental and protection issues affecting adolescent girls in Ghana. 11 episodes were aired on the national television channel GTV and on GHOne TV. It is estimated that the shows reached audiences of between 800,000 to seven million viewers respectively per episode.

The episodes discussed several topics with titles such as Getting to the basics: understanding gender norms/roles and its effects on national development, Building back better after COVID-19: adolescents’ perspectives and involvement in curbing the spread of COVID-19 pandemic, Rise in adolescent pregnancy: what is missing in our interventions and Breaking the silence to end sexual and gender-based violence: the need for adolescents to speak up. The show’s social media pages were also active with 62,099 views of the episodes and 6,091 likes on Facebook alone.

During the year, a national *durbar* of so-called ‘queen mothers’ (female local leaders) was held with the aim of ending child marriage and sexual and gender-based violence. It was held in partnership with the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection and brought together 95 ‘queen mothers’ from all the 16 regions of Ghana, including two highly regarded ones from the North-East and Upper-East regions.

**In focus: The men’s and boys’ club in Yikurugu**

According to members of the men’s and boys’ club in Yikurugu, a community in Bawku West district of the Upper East region, the community used to record high numbers of teenage pregnancies and child marriage, but since the men’s and boys’ club was formed, members have taken it upon themselves to educate schools, churches, women and youth groups about the prevention of teenage pregnancy and child marriage.

The group has formed an adolescent platform in the community whereby they invite a health professional to teach them about adolescent sexual health. They have also been able to counsel and support two adolescent girls who were pregnant and dropped out of school to return to education. When they started, the people in the society were unaware that such an opportunities existed for girls who are pregnant, but during their training as a club, they were exposed to the re-entry policy by the Ghana Education Service.

It was organized in the form of a training where facilitators designed various approaches to equip the ‘queen mothers’ to help them serve as advocates against a range of inequalities and harmful practices. These included sexual and gender-based violence, child marriage, female genital mutilation (FGM), witchcraft accusation and human trafficking.

The programme also provided an opportunity for the ministry to have a dialogue with the ‘queen mothers’ using the National Queen Mothers Platform to help direct policy in addressing issues of harmful practices. A memorandum was outlined on how the ministry could collaborate and draw on the experience, knowledge and creativity of the

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31 Local courts or official events.
‘queen mothers’, within a rights-based framework. The goal was to develop innovative strategies that would enhance gender equality and equity and promote the wellbeing and welfare of vulnerable adolescents across the country. In addition, in 2022, a National Framework for Engaging Traditional and Religious Authorities on Harmful Practices is being finalized for launch, which will guide the work of traditional and religious leaders and help standardize modes of engagement.

LESSONS LEARNED AND NEXT STEPS

Informed by recommendations following an evaluation of the Government of Ghana and UNICEF Child Protection Programme (2012-2019), UNICEF will conduct a review of its community engagement programmes. In light of the findings of the knowledge, attitudes and practices aspect of the study decisions as to how UNICEF can most effectively address entrenched social norms and attitudes that continue to accept the practice of child marriage have been made. Following recommendations from the evaluation, UNICEF included a gender analysis of community engagement interventions in the Global Programme workplan for 2022-2023. This will help nurture an understanding of the complex linkages between child marriage and discriminatory gender norms. The office is exploring the possibility of adhering to the Gender-Transformative Accelerator (GTA) tool developed by the programme for the analysis.

Progress reports show that there have been gradual changes in understanding gender roles within communities that support gender equality and equity, such as shared responsibility in housework and unpaid care work with equal importance being attached to both educating both boys and girls. Based on these results, there will be a continued focus on working with male clubs, mentorship circles and networks in advocacy and education on gender equality. In 2022, UNFPA will also support the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection in developing a national toolkit for engaging men and boys as a means of standardizing the approach for all stakeholders nationwide.

Feedback from community members engaged in various activities suggests that working with Muslim religious leaders has proven to be particularly effective at raising the perceived value of adolescent girls and creating demand for education among hard-to-reach communities. The non-governmental organization Muslim Relief Association of Ghana created an opportunity for the Ghana education service to open a dialogue with religious leaders in five selected districts. This avenue will be further utilized in 2022 to reach more adolescent girls and community members.

An innovative approach: Child marriage murals

The Art for Advocacy to End Child Marriage campaign in Ghana uses murals to depict the effects and consequences of child marriage. The colourful wall paintings attract public attention to the issue of child marriage, elicit public discourse and garner community support in order to end the practice. The unveiling of the murals, which is preceded by a caravan campaign, is used to demand action from relevant stakeholders to improve services for adolescent girls. In 2021, two photo murals were produced in the Volta and Western regions that called for an end to child marriage and improvements in development outcomes for adolescent girls.
Strengthening systems

In 2021 the Global Programme in Ghana contributed significantly to the scaling up of ongoing sector-wide initiatives to ensure vulnerable adolescent girls and their families have access to critical services, including health, education, gender-based violence, child protection, social welfare and sexual and reproductive health services. Through the direct support from the Programme, 9,145 children (5,009 girls and 4,136 boys) in need of protection across 14 MMDAs benefitted from case management services through the social welfare sector. 153 survivors (111 girls and 42 boys) were reached by sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) response services.

This is part of the scale up of a flagship initiative, the Integrated Social Services (ISS), including the Social Welfare Information Management System, to 100 (out of a total of 260) MMDAs in the country. With complementary funding, a total of 2,644 social service providers (1,062 females and 1,582 males) across health, education, law enforcement, human rights, legal aid, health insurance, civil society and religious and traditional bodies received training on the Inter-sectoral Standard Operating Procedures (ISSOP) for child protection and family welfare. This has contributed to strengthening working relationships, intersectoral collaborations and referrals between social welfare and other social service providers at the MMDA level. As a result, 30,423 children (16,393 girls and 14,030 boys) were reached with multi-sectoral case management services in 2021.

Furthermore, with direct funding from the Global Programme, the Safety Net initiative led by the Ghana Health Service has been expanded to include 532 health facilities in four regions that reached 21,205 pregnant girls and adolescent mothers with gender- and age-responsive prevention and care services. These included maternal services, new-born and postnatal care and SGBV response services. In addition, a total of 56,597 adolescent girls in the four regions were reached with age-appropriate sexual and reproductive health information and services. These achievements were part of a larger effort to expand the Safety Net initiative to all 670 districts in all four regions.

The programme also supported the Ghana Health Service to further improve the delivery of adolescent-friendly and gender-responsive health services through the
development of a Facilitators Guide for Training Service Providers in Adolescent Health and the Operational Guidelines and Standards for Engaging Young People in Health Service Delivery, including the Training Guide for Young People to Provide Peer Support Services. The facilitators guide was intended to improve the quality of the training programme designed for adolescent health service providers by providing a set of standardized training methodologies, learning materials and assessment methods. The operational guidelines were developed to promote engagement with young people and enhance the capacity of health service delivery, including life skills, peer counselling, sexual and reproductive health and menstrual hygiene.

Lastly, the Global Programme supported the non-formal education division and complementary education agency of the Ministry of Education in reviewing and updating the national manuals/curriculums, known as ‘readers’. The readers have been used to enhance the functional literacy skills of out-of-school youth through informal education and vocational training facilities. In 2021, gender, sexual and reproductive health and SGBV modules were incorporated into the readers to increase the agency of marginalized youth, amplify their voices and improve their ability to make informed choices on issues affecting them. As part of the review processes, about 60 cross-sectoral stakeholders were engaged in a national consultative meeting to build consensus on the elements and topics required to update the existing modules and those to be introduced, to enhance ownership and effective dissemination. The Global Programme will continue to support the ministry in 2022 to build strategic alliances with all informal and vocational associations in the country to promote the adoption of the updated readers.

**CHALLENGES, LESSONS LEARNED AND NEXT STEPS**

A key focus of the ISS initiative is ensuring sustainable delivery of child protection and social services at the decentralized level. One of the conditions of receiving support from ISS is the commitment from MMDAs to allocate a percentage of their own funding to the Department of Social Welfare and Community Development.

During 2021, reports from government partners revealed that departments in 60 ISS districts were able to leverage GHS 3.2 million in allocations from their assembly budgets on top of the GHS 2 million provided by UNICEF via the ISS. However, monitoring efforts suggest that actual figures may vary at the district level due to delays in disbursement. Thus, there is a need for closer analysis of actual social service budget implementation at the MMDA level to assess variances in allocation and expenditure, along with closer engagement of key national-level counterparts in the various MMDAs to hold assemblies accountable for timely allocation and release of funds to the Department of Social Welfare and Community Development.

Although the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, the Ministry of Finance and the Office of the Head of Local Government Service are providing technical support for the implementation of the ISS, there is a need for them, especially the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, to demonstrate motivation and ownership of the ISS. The Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development sends the funds to the MMDAs and should follow up to make sure that the MMDAs are implementing the programmes according to the agreed plans. Additionally, the Regional Coordinating Councils also seem to be distancing themselves from the implementation despite the for them to be engaged in playing a supervisory role.

Currently, SGBV survivors continue to be forced to bear the majority of costs associated with access to socio-legal services after an incident (e.g., cost of police medical reports, medical fees, transportation for police and, at times, even for the accused perpetrator). This is a significant contributing factor to the attrition of cases in the criminal justice system. Advocacy efforts are ongoing with key ISS stakeholders to address this issue, and there appears to be strong motivation among politicians to invest
in physical infrastructure rather than soft skills or social services with the aim of providing more advocacy efforts to ensure increased investments in this area.

Evidence suggests that referrals of child marriage and teenage pregnancy cases from health, criminal justice and education systems to the Department of Social Welfare and Community Development at the district level remain low. As part of the ISS initiative, over 2,604 social service staff (914 females and 1,690 males), mainly from the government, were provided training and on-site coaching on case management, community mobilization, case referrals, and the Social Welfare Information Management System (SWIMS). This has contributed to strengthening working relationships, intersectoral collaborations and referrals between social welfare and other social service providers at the district level.

In 2021, 1,900 cases of children were referred by the Department of Social Welfare and Community Development to other services. There were over 1,200 referrals from Ghana Health Services and the police’s Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit to the department of which approximately 25 per cent were SGBV cases. UNFPA and UNICEF will continue to prioritize actions to increase the frequency of referrals between these services and systems with the aim of improving service delivery for adolescent girls at risk of and affected by child marriage.

**Facilitating supportive laws and policies**

In 2021, the Global Programme continued its support to the Domestic Violence Secretariat for national coordination in implementing the National Strategic Framework on Ending Child Marriage 2017-2026. In particular, the Programme invested heavily in evidence generation and learning activities. A total of three studies, research and evaluations in critical areas of heightened vulnerability for adolescent girls in Ghana were conducted with the aim of providing new knowledge and evidence. The purpose of which was to inform the design and adjustment, when required, of programmatic interventions within the framework, as well as the development of a new Operational and Monitoring and Evaluation Plan (2022-2023).

The Legal Instrument (L.I. 2016) of the Domestic Violence Act 2007 was adopted in 2020 with direct support from the Global Programme. In 2021, the Domestic Violence Secretariat was supported in engaging key stakeholders at national and subnational levels drawn from the judiciary, health, protection and gender sectors at a regional stakeholder meeting in the Volta and Oti regions. The instrument was widely disseminated to raise awareness among the 139 participants (66 females and 72 males) about the legal requirements related to sexual violence against children and child marriage and to ensure that key stakeholders at all levels are well informed about their roles in providing the required services to survivors of violence, including child brides. This intervention will eventually contribute to Ghana’s achievement of relevant targets under SDGs 5 and 16.

Notably, the Global Programme in Ghana provided both technical and financial support to Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection to initiate a review and update of the National Gender Policy. 90 representatives
from 20 national-level institutions participated in the national consultative process to discuss the current situation with the updated data, reflect on challenges and learn from key lessons from the implementation and to agree on key priorities, including emerging issues, such as online sexual abuse and exploitation.

UNICEF successfully advocated for child protection-related SDG indicators in the district assembly’s performance assessment tool and the performance contracts of all 260 district assemblies for 2020-2021. The assemblies’ compliance and performance against these mechanisms are used to allocate funding from the District Assemblies Common Fund. However, advocacy efforts will need to continue since the overall allocation of government resources to the child protection programme still remains low, though the situation has improved slightly in 2021. UNICEF also supported local government services in conducting a performance assessment of all 16 regional coordinating directors and 260 district assemblies against the 2020 performance contracts. The top ten assemblies that spent a higher percentage of their internally generated funds on child protection related priorities were awarded in 2021. Budget briefs were developed and shared with relevant government ministries to advocate for the sustained and increased allocation of resources for prevention and response to sexual violence, including child marriage. UNICEF’s support to 100 district assemblies was part of the 2021 national budget guidelines and the budget statement was read out by the Minister of Finance at the time of the presentation of the budget to parliament.

CHALLENGES AND NEXT STEPS

National budget allocation, disbursement and expenditure in a timely manner remains a challenge to effectively support the implementation and enforcement of laws and policies aimed at realizing the rights of adolescent girls, especially at decentralized level. There is a need for sustained advocacy for allocation of resources to support the implementation of the relevant laws and action plans, especially at the decentralized level. In 2022, the Global Programme will prioritize strengthening coordination structures at all levels (national, regional and district) by leveraging existing and ongoing initiatives, such as ISS and the national and regional child protection review meetings.

Generating and applying data and evidence

To better understand the dynamics around child marriage and strategize programmatic approaches in Ghana, several data analysis and evaluation initiatives were conducted in 2021. Evidence suggests that considerable progress has been made in improving the normative framework and service provision and there has been a significant improvement in attitudes and practices across a range of issues confronted by adolescent girls.

There has been, however, less of a change in attitudes regarding child marriage in rural and less educated communities. Community engagement and mobilization, capacity building for the social service workforce and referrals between services remain a challenge and require additional investment and more targeted interventions, especially in the regions showing slower progress. Furthermore, data analysis looking at the causality between education, teenage pregnancy and child marriage showed that there is a positive correlation between child marriage and absence from education. It is key to increase the focus on supporting at risk adolescent girls to stay in schools for the prevention of child marriage and adolescent pregnancy.

As a result of these findings, it is clear that efforts need to be intensified to facilitate school re-entry and to engage with out-of-school girls with training and vocational opportunities. With respect to these tasks, understanding about how this can be done is being informed from a variety of evidence from different programmes and policies, including the new Government of Ghana-UNICEF country programme for 2023-2027.

With direct funding from the Global Programme and with technical support from the data and analytics section in UNICEF headquarters the report Protecting and Empowering Adolescent Girls in Ghana - A statistical
snapshot was produced. The main purpose of the statistical snapshot was to fill data gaps related to critical areas of heightened vulnerability for adolescent girls in Ghana, including early pregnancy, violence and time spent on household chores. The report was written to inform decision-making processes, especially the formulation and implementation of evidence-based policies, advocacy efforts and programmes and improve resource allocation for adolescent girls.

A multi-country evaluation of community engagement to end child marriage in West and Central Africa, with Ghana as one of its focus countries (alongside Guinea, Mali, the Niger and Nigeria), was also conducted within the Global Programme in 2021. The purpose of the evaluation was to build a credible, robust evidence base for community-based interventions to reduce child marriage, in order to deliver improved, effective programming and shed light on some potential corrective actions that need to be explored in the future. A final draft of the evaluation report is complete, and the report will be widely disseminated once finalized.

Additionally, UNFPA developed a data monitoring toolkit to support implementing partners’ work plan formulation, evaluation and reporting during the year. The toolkit aims to respond to the major gap where indicators to measure progress of some of the interventions are not well aligned with the ones in the Global Programme results framework. Thus, to bridge the gap and improve reporting, data tools were contextualized from the results framework to guide implementing partners on effective monitoring and reporting. The tools were tested in two regions (Volta and Central regions) by implementing partners as part of the validation process, monitoring its effectiveness in capturing the required data. The validation was done with a cross-section of beneficiaries and partners who make up the target populations of interventions at the community level.

In addition, UNICEF supported three pieces of evidence informing the child marriage programme during the year using complementary funding. These included a data report on the situation of adolescents in Ghana, a formative and summative evaluation of the government and UNICEF child protection programme between 2012 and 2019 and a knowledge, attitudes and practices study among communities related to child protection issues. Key findings and recommendations from these studies, as well as from the child marriage statistical profile from 2020, were disseminated at various meetings to stakeholders at national and subnational levels, such as the annual national stakeholders’ review meeting on ending child marriage, organized by the Domestic Violence Secretariat.

LESSONS LEARNED

Recognizing the importance of strengthening the national capacity for data and evidence generation, UNICEF built a roster of national researchers who have extensive experience and in-depth knowledge in the areas of child protection, gender, child marriage and adolescent programming. It enabled the office to conduct a small-scale, but well-designed, while reducing the costs. This not only facilitated the effective and efficient management of research but also contributed to increasing the capacity of academic partners in the country through capacity building and technical guidance throughout the research design and management.
Child marriage context

There are 226.3 million child brides in India\textsuperscript{32} which accounts for a third of the global total. While it is illegal for girls under the age of 18 to marry in India, estimates suggest that at least 1.5 million girls under the age of 18 get married in the country each year and around 16 per cent of all adolescent girls aged 15–19 are currently married. Recent evidence, though sparse, highlights the persistence of family-arranged marriages without meaningful consent and there is little evidence to suggest that India will be capable of ending the practice by 2030 as set out in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Programming context

The COVID-19 pandemic profoundly affected the everyday lives of girls for a second year in 2021, including their physical and mental health, education and the economic circumstances of their families and communities. Globally, up to 10 million more girls are estimated to become child brides by 2030 as a result of the pandemic.\textsuperscript{33}

UNFPA and UNICEF Evaluation Offices conducted a joint assessment of Global Programme adaptations to the COVID-19 crisis in 2021.\textsuperscript{34} The COVID-19 assessment aimed to:

- Assess relevant contingency planning and implementation and alternative delivery and
management arrangements for the Global Programme due to the COVID-19 pandemic, taking into account the views of vulnerable adolescent girls, their families, communities and key implementing partners.

- Make recommendations for the immediate to mid-term improvement of the Global Programme response to COVID-19, identify ongoing programme changes and recommending any additional support required to implement those programme changes and shifting priorities.

- Make any recommendations required to adjust the Global Programme Phase II to the new context, including its theory of change and the targets established before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The results of the assessment indicate that:

- It is critical to keep the focus and efforts in reaching the most vulnerable and marginalized adolescents, including those in remote areas.

- Lessons could be taken from experiences using multi-channel and two-way communication approaches, while also being attentive to the digital divide.

- Vulnerable adolescents must continue to have access to education (especially if provided remotely), health and social welfare services.

- It is key to overcome drivers of poverty by leveraging existing social protection schemes.

- Ensuring the use of evidence led programming is important and so too is advocating with governments to keep child marriage prevention and responses on national agendas while continuing to develop legal and operational frameworks to help accelerate the end of child marriage.

**TABLE. Conclusions and recommendations from the COVID-19 assessment**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONCLUSION</th>
<th>RECOMMENDATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Programme advocacy and engagement efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic kept child marriage on national agendas</td>
<td>Advocate with governments to continue developing legal and operational frameworks contributing to ending child marriage with a rights-based and multisectoral focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The COVID-19 crisis underscored the vulnerability of adolescent girls in rural and remote areas</td>
<td>Reinforce efforts to reach the most vulnerable and marginalized adolescent girls, boys and their families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adoption of digital and mass media approaches demonstrated a high potential for sustaining engagement of adolescent girls at scale, although the digital divide should be considered</td>
<td>Develop complementary multi-channel approaches to reach target populations, ensuring that they foster two-way communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COVID-19 restrictions limited adolescent girls’ access to health and social welfare services</td>
<td>Continue technical support and explore the most effective approaches to ensure adolescent girls have access to essential services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The programme theory of change remains valid but poverty and economic drivers need to be stressed further in operational strategies</td>
<td>Further articulate the strategy to leverage social protection schemes such as cash transfers and income generation opportunities for adolescent girls and their families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COVID-19 programme adjustments created a high demand on data and evidence for adopted approaches</td>
<td>Continue adjusting monitoring, data generation and analysis in order to reinforce evidence-based programming</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
These results will inform future adjustments and refinements to the programme. They will help continue delivering in changing contexts and accelerating the pace, during the Decade of Action, of eliminating child marriage to achieve the SDGs by 2030.

Key highlights

- Over 2 million girls actively participated in life skills and comprehensive sexuality education interventions
- Close to 85,000 adolescent girls at risk of child marriage were supported to enrol and/or remain in school
- Close to 20 million community members have been equipped with information and galvanized to take action against child marriage and promote adolescent empowerment
- 131 district action plans to end child marriage are presently approved for implementation in 175 districts across ten states
- A roadmap and recommendations from the Gender-Transformative Accelerator (GTA) tool roll-out in India have been developed/identified and are now being implemented with earmarked resources and specified timelines.

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Programme performance

**TABLE. Summary of output indicator performance (2021)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INDICATOR</th>
<th>TARGET</th>
<th>RESULT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 1111:</strong> Number of adolescent girls (aged 10-19) who actively participated in life skills or comprehensive sexuality education interventions in programme areas</td>
<td>3,413,602</td>
<td>2,041,980</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 1121:</strong> Number of girls (aged 10-19) supported by the programme to enrol and/or remain in primary or secondary school</td>
<td>325,000</td>
<td>84,983</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 1211:</strong> Number of boys and men actively participating in group education/dialogues that address harmful masculinities and gender norms</td>
<td>1,000,000</td>
<td>951,126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 1221:</strong> 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</td>
<td>8,293,000</td>
<td>9,328,524</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 1222:</strong> 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</td>
<td>23,600,000</td>
<td>19,833,878</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 1223:</strong> Number of local actors (e.g., traditional, religious and community leaders) with meaningful participation in dialogues and consensus-building to end child marriage</td>
<td>17,745</td>
<td>67,634</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 1231:</strong> Number of civil society organizations newly mobilized in support of challenging social norms and promoting gender equality by the Global Programme</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 2121:</strong> Number of primary/secondary/non-formal schools in programme areas providing quality gender-friendly education that meets minimum standards</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 2131:</strong> Number of service delivery points in programme areas providing quality adolescent-responsive services (health, child protection/ gender-based violence) that meet minimum standards</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>438</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 2211:</strong> Number of partnerships (both formal and informal) established to deliver adolescent-responsive social protection, poverty reduction, and economic empowerment programmes and services</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 3111:</strong> Number of policies or legal instruments addressing child marriage drafted, proposed or adopted at national and subnational level with Global Programme support</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 3211:</strong> Number of generated evidence and knowledge that focus on what works to end child marriage</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 3212:</strong> Number of generated evidence and knowledge that apply a gender analysis</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 3221:</strong> Number of South-to-South cooperation (conferences, expert visits, peer consultations, study tours, communities of practice) supported</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NA = Not applicable (the country programme does not work on or report on this indicator)
Providing intensive support to marginalized girls

Multiple approaches were employed to reach adolescent girls with information and life skills training, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic when schools were closed, such as working with teams of volunteers and civil society organizations to facilitate continuity of learning and use of digital platforms for life skills education. However, due to second and third waves of the pandemic affecting all states in the country, the prolonged school closures and a gender digital divide, the Global Programme only reached 2 million adolescent girls with life skills training during the year (compared to the target of 3.4 million).

UNFPA implemented the Umang36 (life skills curriculum) in 9,228 state board schools and 2,520 private schools covering all 52 districts of Madhya Pradesh in 2021. Life skills education was institutionalized in the education system for approximately 1.8 million students (years 9-11) in the state. During the lockdown the initiative adapted to an innovative approach by using an online medium to host virtual talk shows, videos and animations, which received nearly 2.6 million views on YouTube and generated more than 600,000 responses from students through feedback forms. The Umang life skills curriculum was converted into episodes that were telecast on the state-run TV channel and received more than 400,000 responses from students and nearly 53,000 responses from teachers during the year. In the state of Assam, WhatsApp groups created by teachers during the pandemic engaged 1,149 adolescents (848 girls and 301 boys) and were used to disseminate information regarding COVID-19 safety measures, as well as reporting child rights violations from their communities, particularly violence against children and child marriage.

In Chhattisgarh, UNICEF in partnership with the Bharat Scouts and Guides launched the Tarunya Varta (adolescent talk) programme which aims at improving awareness and behaviours around health, nutrition, life skills and protection of adolescents in the state. Close to 400 guides have been trained as facilitators or trainers with a target of reaching 3 million adolescents in the first phase. UNICEF also set up community learning centres and safe spaces with trained young volunteers from the neighbourhoods in the states of Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh, providing children with an opportunity to continue their studies during the school closures.

A digital platform called Seekh was initiated as part of the interventions, which helped reach around 12,500 girls with education support, particularly during the peak of the pandemic. Support was also provided to develop a special training package to improve the quality of classroom practices in special training centres for out-of-school children in the states of Odisha, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. Furthermore, technical assistance was extended by engaging multiple stakeholders in identifying and tracking out-of-school children and bolstering community mobilization in several states to reduce the number of out-of-school children and prevent dropouts from the most disadvantaged communities. Overall, 84,983 out-of-school children were mainstreamed back into education by providing access to formal and alternative education and engaging with families and community members across eight states.

Special emphasis was put on reaching those left furthest behind with life skills education. To enable the engagement of adolescents living with disabilities, UNFPA leveraged funding to develop user-friendly learning tools and training manuals, braille and tactile books and models (allowing for people with visual impairment to read), video files with sign language interpretation and scrolling text, as well as other communication materials to impart life skills education in 155 special schools in the state of Odisha. Life skills education was also extended to 1,157 tribal residential schools (reaching 52,081 adolescent girls) to ensure engagement of marginalized communities.

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36 The Unified Mobile Application for New-age Governance is a mobile app, a digital India initiative of the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, by the Government of India for access to central and state government services.
CHALLENGES, LESSONS LEARNED AND NEXT STEPS

The digital divide has left marginalized communities and girls from low-income households with a lack of access to digital technology which continues to be a serious impediment to equitable outreach. To this end, a gender digital divide campaign which will have tailored resources and engagement with gatekeepers in families, communities and schools to proactively address this issue will be launched soon. Advocacy around the issue of the gender gap in digital spaces has also been undertaken.

Key learning from the year includes using digital platforms for amplifying outreach and leveraging adolescents’ abilities as digital natives. It has also highlighted the need to continue to develop and disseminate content in accessible formats to increase outreach to adolescents living with disabilities.

Enhancing the family and community environment

To advance the agenda of gender-transformative programming capacity building and curriculums on positive masculinities are being rolled out in several states across the country (including Assam, Rajasthan, Gujarat and West Bengal). In addition, UNFPA advocacy on the ADVIKA (I am unique programme), which is an adolescent empowerment programme in the Odisha state, has led to the inclusion of boys as a key target group in ensuring the shift of social norms and break gender stereotypes that prevent girls from reaching their full potential.

In Rajasthan UNICEF supported the development of a resource kit on promoting positive masculinities among adolescents and advocated for the inclusion of boys and men as a key target group in the draft state strategy for the prevention of gender-based violence and harmful practices.

In Gujarat and the West Bengal states, UNFPA and UNICEF leveraged partnerships with adolescent and youth networks (like the Kanyashree clubs, Seekh Mitras, the National Service Scheme (NSS), Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan (NYKS), Bharat Scouts and Guides) and district platforms to mobilize out-of-school boys and engage them in discussions on gender and positive masculinities, including defining their role in child marriage prevention.

In Assam state UNICEF advocacy led to the implementation of a multi-layered approach on positive masculinities programming in tea garden communities to target men and boys and engage them in reducing child marriage and school dropouts.

UNFPA and UNICEF were able to ensure that a significant number of community members were reached through multiple platforms despite most face-to-face interactions being hampered by the multiple outbreaks of COVID-19 throughout the country. To actively respond to sexual and reproductive health needs among community members during COVID-19 pilot initiatives were supported, conducting training of grassroots cadres and young people for sharing information related to sexual and reproductive health and rights and COVID-19 during home visits at Ratri Chaupal (evening sessions in village common places using an audio-visual mode) and Nav Dampatti Samaroh (felicitation of newly married couples).

In Odisha over 13,000 individuals, including parent-teacher association members and school management committee members, representing over 1,650 tribal residential schools, joined virtual workshops about ensuring the safety and well-being of students during the COVID-19 pandemic. The workshops were designed to push for the prevention of child marriages, teenage pregnancies and school dropouts in their communities.

In Assam, 888 edutainment shows, folklore performances and social and behaviour change campaigns were carried out on issues like child marriage, reaching close to 200,000 adolescents (77,052 boys and 122,907 girls).

New communication packages and platforms were leveraged to promote adolescent issues 2021. For instance, in Uttar Pradesh, mobile episodes of Tara Hai Tayyar, which are disability-friendly, were widely used by child protection actors across the state. Through Naubat Baja, a missed call-based edutainment channel and an
initiative launched by UNFPA in collaboration with the state of Rajasthan, technical support was provided to develop communication materials such as radio jingles and advertisements especially during local festivals when a large number of child marriages are likely to be solemnized. Over 32,000 calls were registered on the edutainment channel during the launch.

In the state of Jharkhand, more than 53,500 families, communities, traditional and religious leaders, self-help group members, front line workers, Panchayati Raj institutions (village-level governance institution) and members of legislative assemblies were engaged in dialogues. This was done as a capacity building exercise in order to better inform the people about the harms of child marriage and what are alternatives could be promoted as alternatives.

Traditional and religious leaders, local leaders, including frontline workers, and self-help groups were leveraged through training, community discussions and collaboration, community events and mentorship and networking opportunities to address the issue of child marriage. This ensured enrolment and retention of girls in schools, reduced dropouts and set up Meena Manch in schools (platforms for girls to speak up) for girls’ empowerment through life skills education, sending congratulatory messages on behalf of the Panchayats to families where daughters were born. This also helped with creating awareness about schemes to help and the entitlements for girls, while mobilizing communities for supporting girls’ education, health and nutrition.

In West Bengal state, a partnership between UNICEF and the Amanat Foundation helped with engaging 56,266 religious leaders and other community influencers in dialogues. These dialogues were set up to encourage participation in addressing child marriage, promote positive social norms and influence parenting practices in a positive way.

CHALLENGES, LESSONS LEARNED AND NEXT STEPS

Several learning points and recommendations have come from the roll-out of the Gender-Transformative Accelerator (GTA) tool in India, as well as the country-level gender programme review which UNICEF conducted in 2021. One concrete recommendation from the GTA process is the development of a checklist for curriculum development for partners and stakeholders, which will be useful to build and roll-out gender-transformative resources and training.

States like Assam, Rajasthan, West Bengal, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra have initiated or streamlined programmes focusing on gender-transformative interventions, such as mainstreaming positive masculinities and gender sensitization in schools and communities. Partnerships with women’s collectives and youth-led organizations to mobilize the voices of adolescents and communities, challenge harmful social norms and promote gender equality have also been established and have been useful tools to reach the most marginalized communities.

Working on positive masculinities requires technical expertise, is resource intensive and is not easily replicable without initial investment in capacity building. Hence the requirement to scale up these approaches is a challenge. Socio-cultural contexts across communities and states also influence strategies for engagement with men and boys in different localities.
Community engagement activities were affected during the outbreak of COVID-19 as they often require face-to-face interactions with the adolescents and community groups. Given the restrictions related to physical interactions and the issue of the digital divide, blended approaches of engagement involving digital platforms, community radios and physical interactions (where and when possible) were needed to support programme implementation. For example, UNICEF leveraged a partnership with 19 community radio stations to broadcast interactive programmes on child marriage, reaching out to more than two million people. WhatsApp groups were also leveraged to effectively reach adolescents and their parents. Radio campaigns and weekly sessions on child marriage were amplified. Initiatives like peer group phone check-ins were also useful for reaching those without access to smartphones.

Partnerships and programmes in collaboration with civil society organizations that work in humanitarian settings have been useful to widen programme reach in the context of COVID-19. UNFPA and UNICEF mobilized 60 women- and youth-led organizations to build their capacities for preventing and responding to gender-based violence and harmful practices and challenge discriminatory social norms. Through the collaboration with Partners in Law and the Centre for Women’s Development Studies, 13 feminist research and advocacy organizations were mobilized to advocate for a rights-based approach to address harmful practices against women and girls, including child marriage during the year.

Mobilizing adolescents and youths and enabling their agency as change makers is a powerful tool towards empowerment. It is critical to review and do course corrections to support adolescent and youth participation and to mainstream this as a systemic strategy. In some states, like Madhya Pradesh, the programme has been successful with this model to a large extent, including participation of adolescents and youth in mainstream structures. Collaboration with non-traditional partners such as networks of faith-based organizations, small scale factory and informal sector workers, workers

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More often than not, an instrumental approach has been adopted for engaging men and boys and addressing toxic masculinities in almost all government programmes. One clear indication emphasizes the need to look for more opportunities to work with men and boys with the largest focus on the core areas of the content, approaches and methodologies. Areas that emerged from the further reflection that are currently missing include:

- Questioning patriarchy power and privilege at all levels
- Demystify gender construct and need to understand gender equality within such a framework
- Sharing power and dismantling it at all levels of the relationship.

I wish we could have done this face-to-face. It would have been so much more impactful, but having said that it is quite good what we have arrived at eventually.

Thank you so much everyone for the engaging workshop. Great learning.

India GTA workshop participants

associations (e.g., domestic workers associations and cooperatives) also needs to be tapped into along with the traditional stakeholders.

**Strengthening systems**

As part of UNFPA’s efforts to improve young people’s access to sexual and reproductive health services, 3,072 nursing faculty workers, doctors and nurses were trained at the national level in providing adolescent-friendly health services. UNFPA also provided technical support to strengthen the implementation of the School Health Programme through inclusion of gender-sensitive life skills education components.

A 22-module capacity enhancement e-learning course was developed to provide accessible quality training to counsellors of the National Adolescent Health Programme (Rashtriya Kishore Swaasthya Karyakram (RKSK), with 428 medical doctors taking the course and improving their capacity to provide comprehensive adolescent-friendly health services in 314 Ujala (an adolescent-friendly health programme) clinics, with 147,788 adolescent girls and boys seeking services from these clinics in Rajasthan state.

In Madhya Pradesh, mentoring and technical support was provided to 832 service providers from 102 Umang (an adolescent sexual and reproductive health programme) clinics for the provision of comprehensive adolescent-friendly health services, with 152,965 adolescent boys and girls seeking services from these clinics. In Odisha, 22 adolescent-friendly health clinics were set up in the Gajapati and Rayagada districts, rising significantly from just three in 2018. Over 6,000 adolescents visited these clinics in 2021, accessing services such as clinical check-ups, group counselling and free medicines. In addition, the attendance of adolescents in village health and nutrition days improved outreach to 50 per cent of all adolescents in the villages that participated (approximately 2,000 adolescents) in 2021, up from 13 per cent in 2018 in the same districts.

Technical support was provided by the Global Programme to states in designing, implementing, reviewing and monitoring social protection schemes, like Mukhyamantri Rajshree Yojana, Shiksha Setu, Mukhyamantri Kanya Utthan Yojana and Kaushal Saamarthya Yojana Mukhyamantri Sukanya Yojana, to ensure access to education and employment opportunities for marginalized adolescent girls at risk of child marriage.

The programme also supported efforts to mitigate the risk of child marriage during the pandemic by facilitating access to cash transfer and social protection schemes for girls. 3.8 million girls have been linked with various cash transfer and social protection schemes using flagship programmes such as the Mukhyamantri Kanya Sumangla Yojana scheme, Kanyashree Prakalpa and private sector scholarships (Hindustan Aeronautics Limited paid for 450 girls’ beautician training) in Uttar Pradesh, Odisha, West Bengal and Assam. Furthermore, policy recommendations were provided to the government (e.g., to increase the number of instalments in cash transfers for every girl, single registry to improve delivery and outreach of schemes especially in vulnerable communities) for horizontal and vertical expansion of existing cash transfer schemes to respond to the pandemic and support vulnerable families.

**LESSONS LEARNED**

Working with self-help groups, Panchatayati Raj Institutions, teachers and frontline workers helped to prevent adolescents, particularly girls, from discontinuing education and getting married. Partnerships with women’s collectives, Vikas Mitra, and other government programmes helped to reach adolescents especially from marginalized communities. Adolescent empowerment and participation issues were enhanced and successfully advocated in many states through YuWaah’s programmes and campaigns.

UNICEF continues to work to bring synergy among flagship programmes and departments such as Mahila Shakti Kendra, Beti Bachao Beti Padao, the police, the 181 helpline and other child protection structures and services. To further develop the work on gender-transformative programming, partnerships with civil society organizations with expertise on positive masculinities and on gender-based violence
“I have seen the difficulties they face now because of the lack of education. I do not want other girls to fall into this trap,” says 20-year-old Shreya, who witnessed her two elder sisters being married off when they were minors.

Shreya is a student based in Jaipur, Rajasthan, the largest state in India by area. She is a part-time volunteer with Jeevan Ashram Sansthan (JAS), a non-governmental organization. JAS is the implementing agency of Naubat Baja Missed Call Radio, a cloud telephony-based radio channel that addresses issues of adolescents’ well-being, empowerment and health. The Naubat Baja project, conceived by UNFPA, is a joint initiative of the Directorate of Women Empowerment, Government of Rajasthan, the Rural Electrification Corporation (REC) Foundation and UNFPA.

As a social volunteer, Shreya knew about the Naubat Baja’s mission and the number of a child helplines that it relayed. In June 2021, she got to hear that Sapna*, a minor, was to be wed to a 30-year-old man. Sapna’s father had taken a loan from the man’s family. When he could not repay it, the lender – the would-be groom’s father – said he would write off the loan if Sapna married his son.

Shreya called the helpline and the police swung into action, stopping the wedding. Sapna was taken to a shelter for two months but is now back home and has re-joined school.

According to the National Family Health Survey (2019-21), underage marriage in India accounted for 23.3 per cent of marriages. Though prohibited, the practice continues in many states in India, including Rajasthan. Launched on International Women’s Day in 2019, Naubat Baja relies largely on the strength of mobile phones, which have penetrated the most remote corners of India. The initiative banks on the fact that the cell phone is the youth’s favourite mode of communication, particularly in areas where people have little access to television, cable connections or the internet.

On giving a missed call to the number 7733959595, the user gets a call back with a 15-minute capsule of free infotainment, peppered with Hindi film songs and short stories and plays themed around social issues including child marriage narrated through comedy or satire. There is news about employment opportunities, general knowledge facts and information about government welfare schemes aimed at youth.

“The initiative is one of the innovative strategies employed by UNFPA and partners involved to ensure young people are aware of their rights and the opportunities available to them, have access to accurate information and services regarding their health and well-being and are able to participate and contribute to addressing social issues that affect them,” says Sriram Haridass, UNFPA Representative India at the time.

The Naubat Baja programme has received a positive response from listeners. The programme, overseen by UNFPA representatives, is produced in studios with the help of a content team of researchers and presented by professional radio jockeys, and the content is regularly updated. Messages on themes, such as child marriage, domestic violence, adolescent girls’ health, menstrual hygiene, gender sensitization, financial awareness and COVID-19 protocols are conveyed through mini radio dramas.

“It is a new and innovative way of spreading socially relevant messages to the youth,” says Umar Deen Khan, district magistrate, Jhunjhunu, a region where child marriage exists.

The programme is marketed and popularized through social media, graffiti and awareness campaigns in rural and urban areas by volunteers, community leaders, members of Panchayats (rural governing bodies) and Anganwadi (rural childcare centres) and accredited social health activist (ASHA) workers. Volunteers and adolescent group leaders associated with Naubat Baja are called champions. Shreya is one such champion.

* Name changed to protect her identity.
were additionally strengthened. Partnerships with private sector actors such as ABITA and *Bharatiya Cha Parishad* (BCP), have led to mainstreaming positive masculinities interventions in tea gardens of Assam.

Linkages of vulnerable adolescent girls to social protection services, especially cash plus schemes (where cash transfers are coupled with referrals to social services or dialogue sessions), have been severely constrained in the pandemic. The Global Programme is working closely with the UNICEF social policy team in the country to address this challenge and find sustainable ways of improving such linkages.

State government structures continued to remain key partners for the work on systems strengthening within the Global Programme both in education and health sectors. UNFPA also worked closely with the media on enhancing the value of women and girls. UNFPA’s partnerships with research institutions and civil society coalitions were critical for purposes of evidence generation and research-backed policy advocacy to advance the discourse on ending child marriage and other harmful practices against women and girls.

**Facilitating supportive laws and policies**

UNFPA and UNICEF used multiple approaches to support the review, development and strengthening of guidelines and policies at the state level, such as rapid policy assessment tests to identify gaps and amendments required to improve state action plans addressing child marriage, advocacy with key stakeholders using data and evidence to address discriminatory laws and policies and capacity building of key stakeholders aimed at improving the review and modification of policies and strategies.

In Odisha, UNFPA and UNICEF provided technical support to the state government in developing draft guidelines for declaring villages/*gram panchayats* child marriage free. The process of declaration of a child marriage free village created momentum in the state with over 10,000 villages and 400 wards in Odisha declaring themselves as child marriage free.

At the federal government level, the Prohibition of Child Marriage (Amendment) Bill, 2021, was introduced in parliament, envisaging the increase of the age marriage from 18 to 21. UNICEF supported initiatives like increasing...
the numbers and improving capacities of Child Marriage Prohibition Officers to strengthen the implementation of the Prohibition of Child Marriage Bill. UNFPA in collaboration with Partners in Law for Development convened a meeting of the National Coalition Advocating for Adolescent Concerns (NCAAC) in December 2021, with the participation of 13 newly mobilized civil society organizations, to discuss the draft Uttar Pradesh Child Marriage Rules, 2021, and the proposal to increase the minimum legal age of marriage for girls and provide feedback from a rights-based perspective.

Concerted support by UNFPA and UNICEF was extended to the national and state governments of India to support district action plans in 175 districts for adolescent empowerment, continuation of girls’ education, linkages to career guidance opportunities, school-to-work transition and social protection programmes and for improving social protection services. Furthermore, policy recommendations were provided to the government (e.g., to increase the number of instalments of cash transfers for girls, implement a single registry to improve delivery and outreach of schemes, especially in vulnerable communities) for horizontal and vertical expansion of existing cash transfer schemes to respond to the pandemic and support vulnerable families.

In Maharashtra, UNICEF supported the state government in publishing the Gender and Child Budget Statements FY 2021-22 for the second consecutive year and in producing an improved GN-7 plan document on child and gender budgets. Analysis of the child and gender budgets showed the inadequacy of investment for ending gender-based violence in the state. High-level advocacy around this led to the development of an action plan for gender equality and child rights, which outlined actions, monitoring indicators, responsible departments and resource allocation mechanisms.

**Challenges, Lessons Learned and Next Steps**

The severity of pandemic in India in 2021 led to increased involvement of district and block administrations in COVID-19 prevention and response, including vaccination. This led to limited government attention to the systematic implementation of the state and district action plans to end child marriage and its regular review. Hence, this will be a major priority for state-level advocacy in 2022. While the ongoing pandemic response will continue to take precedence, UNFPA and UNICEF state offices will engage with respective state government to address the loopholes in reviewing state and district action plans.

Consultative meetings bringing together multiple stakeholders of government departments and civil society organizations have paved the way for inter-sectoral convergence in the district. This is required at the state level and will be further pursued. With the activation of a task force and its meaningful participation of stakeholders, capacity building through training of trainers and orienting stakeholders have been able to engage actively. Bilateral discussions with each state department have been useful to guide them in linking their programmes and schemes for prevention and response to child marriage and adolescent priorities.

The approach of developing local resource groups of so-called ‘Master Trainers’ from line departments that have an outreach to the community and/or children and adolescents is emerging as good practice since it capacitates a locally available resource. While there are clear challenges in developing such a group, investment in the capacity building of District and Block Resource Groups has been beneficial to the programme and has brought visibility to the adolescent concerns and strengthened prevention and response mechanisms.

**Generating and applying data and evidence**

A qualitative assessment was undertaken during the year based on data compiled by UNICEF implementing partners (ActionAid, MAMTA and CRY) from the CHILDLINE India Foundation and government data reports on child marriage. The assessment alluded to a rise in domestic violence and a trend of adolescent girls likely to drop out of school. Furthermore, UNICEF implementing partners reported
that containment measures due to COVID-19 may have given parents the opportunity to utilize the secret social space that emerged to give in to economic pressures, leading them to arrange child marriages for their daughters to reduce their economic burden, at a low cost (savings in dowries and other associated wedding ceremony costs).

UNFPA and UNICEF collaborated on two critical pieces of evidence in 2021, first, looking at child marriage through the lens of compulsory marriage, which advocates for life-cycle empowerment approaches to make accelerated progress towards ending child marriage, and second, the development of a policy paper on age of consent and statutory rape laws in India from a child rights perspective. Together with other United Nations agencies, the programme also worked jointly on a technical paper providing input to the discussion on raising the legal age of marriage for women from 18 to 21, highlighting the consequences of such an increase. This paper was submitted to NITI Aayog, the apex public policy think-tank of the Government. In addition, UNFPA and UNICEF supported studies in Rajasthan state to understand the impact of COVID-19 on adolescent girls and parenting. The report is currently being finalized.

UNFPA and UNICEF undertook an analysis of the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) and disseminated the findings at the national and state level, advocating for policy commitments on child marriage and concerted action on child marriage in states like Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Maharashtra, and West Bengal. In Telangana, the state commission for protection of child rights used the data analysis for district level reviews, which resulted in integrating child marriage issues into district level review meetings, field visits and in advocating district collectors to strengthen ongoing programmes addressing child marriage. In Andhra Pradesh, the data analysis on child marriage, teenage pregnancy and other adolescent issues resulted in meaningful advocacy around child marriage issues.

In Assam, evidence-based policy advocacy and knowledge generation has been intensified with government and civil society partners. The state has commissioned two assessments to understand the dynamic context vis-à-vis child marriage and gender-based violence, and a situational analysis has been initiated by State Resource Centre for Women and the Indo-Global Social Service Society with technical inputs from UNICEF. In Bihar, a baseline study was conducted to assess the inter-linkages between migration and adolescent vulnerabilities, including child marriage. In collaboration with its partner WaterAid India, UNFPA generated four key pieces of evidence on menstrual hygiene management to inform national and state policy and advocacy. These related to addressing menstrual hygiene management needs of women and girls during emergencies, menstrual hygiene management needs of women and girls with disabilities, understanding knowledge, attitudes and practices of women and girls around menstruation and menstrual hygiene products and understanding the supply chain and procurement practices for menstrual products.

CHALLENGES, LESSONS LEARNED AND NEXT STEPS

The absence of standardized management information system platforms and the lack of administrative data from government sources in addressing adolescent programmes is a constraint on programmes addressing child marriage. UNFPA and UNICEF are in the process of developing a programme-specific management information system for capturing data collected manually from available government sources. Both agencies are also working with state government structures in the development and implementation of relevant management information systems. The support to strengthen the management information systems at state and district levels will facilitate the availability of administrative data disaggregated by sex, disability, caste and other socio-economic factors for more effective programming.

Furthermore, there is need for data and evidence to understand the specific reasons and regional factors that contribute to an increase in child marriage. The need for subdistrict level data that can provide specific insights on the prevalence of child marriages has also been raised by some district collectors and state governments.
Child marriage context

There are 4.4 million child brides in Mozambique, 1.6 million of whom were married before the age of 15. Currently, the prevalence of child marriage (marriage before the age of 18) among girls stands at 53 per cent. Projections for the elimination of the practice in the country are not possible as the country has not shown any evidence of progress in reducing the prevalence of child marriage among girls in recent decades.

Programming context

The COVID-19 pandemic profoundly affected the everyday lives of girls for a second year in 2021, including their physical and mental health, education and the economic circumstances of their families and communities. Globally, up to 10 million more girls are estimated to become child brides by 2030 as a result of the pandemic.

UNFPA and UNICEF Evaluation Offices conducted a joint assessment of Global Programme adaptations to the COVID-19 crisis in 2021. The COVID-19 assessment aimed to:

- Assess relevant contingency planning and implementation and alternative delivery and management arrangements for the Global Programme due to the COVID-19 pandemic, taking into account the views of vulnerable adolescent girls, their families, communities and key implementing partners.

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• Make recommendations for the immediate to mid-term improvement of the Global Programme response to COVID-19, identify ongoing programme changes and recommending any additional support required to implement those programme changes and shifting priorities.

• Make any recommendations required to adjust the Global Programme Phase II to the new context, including its theory of change and the targets established before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The results of the assessment indicate that:

• It is critical to keep the focus and efforts in reaching the most vulnerable and marginalized adolescents, including those in remote areas.

• Lessons could be taken from experiences using multi-channel and two-way communication approaches, while also being attentive to the digital divide.

• Vulnerable adolescents must continue to have access to education (especially if provided remotely), health and social welfare services.

• It is key to overcome drivers of poverty by leveraging existing social protection schemes.

• Ensuring the use of evidence led programming is important and so too is advocating with governments to keep child marriage prevention and responses on national agendas while continuing to develop legal and operational frameworks to help accelerate the end of child marriage.

These results will inform future adjustments and refinements to the programme. They will help continue delivering in changing contexts and accelerating the pace, during the Decade of Action, of eliminating child marriage to achieve the SDGs by 2030.

**TABLE.** Conclusions and recommendations from the COVID-19 assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONCLUSION</th>
<th>RECOMMENDATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Programme advocacy and engagement efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic</td>
<td>Advocate with governments to continue developing legal and operational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kept child marriage on national agendas</td>
<td>frameworks contributing to ending child marriage with a rights-based and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>multisectoral focus</td>
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<tr>
<td>The COVID-19 crisis underscored the vulnerability of adolescent girls</td>
<td>Reinforce efforts to reach the most vulnerable and marginalized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in rural and remote areas</td>
<td>adolescent girls, boys and their families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adoption of digital and mass media approaches demonstrated a high</td>
<td>Develop complementary multi-channel approaches to reach target</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>potential for sustaining engagement of adolescent girls at scale,</td>
<td>populations, ensuring that they foster two-way communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>although the digital divide should be considered</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COVID-19 restrictions limited adolescent girls’ access to health and</td>
<td>Continue technical support and explore the most effective approaches to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>social welfare services</td>
<td>ensure adolescent girls have access to essential services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The programme theory of change remains valid but poverty and economic</td>
<td>Further articulate the strategy to leverage social protection schemes such as</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>drivers need to be stressed further in operational strategies</td>
<td>cash transfers and income generation opportunities for</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>adolescent girls and their families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COVID-19 programme adjustments created a high demand on data and</td>
<td>Continue adjusting monitoring, data generation and analysis in order to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>evidence for adopted approaches</td>
<td>reinforce evidence-based programming</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Key highlights

- In 2021, more than two million men, women, adolescents and children were reached through the integrated package of messages on essential family practices with a specific focus on child marriage.

- Close to 5,000 boys and men actively participated in group education/dialogues that address harmful masculinities and gender norms.

- More than 150,000 individuals (boys, girls, women and men) participated in group education/dialogue sessions on consequences of and alternatives to child marriage, the rights of adolescent girls and gender equality.

- 102 primary, secondary or non-formal schools in programme areas were supported to provide quality gender-friendly education that meets minimum standards.

- In 2021, the Mozambique country office was part of the trailblazer countries that rolled out the Gender-Transformative Accelerator (GTA) tool. A GTA workshop was held in May 2021 with the active participation and engagement technical staff from UNFPA, UNICEF, government and civil society organizations, resulting in concrete actions to support gender-transformative approaches to end child marriage.
# Programme performance

## TABLE. Summary of output indicator performance (2021)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INDICATOR</th>
<th>TARGET</th>
<th>RESULT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 1111</strong>: Number of adolescent girls (aged 10-19) who actively participated in life skills or comprehensive sexuality education interventions in programme areas</td>
<td>56,533</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 1121</strong>: Number of girls (aged 10-19) supported by the programme to enrol and/or remain in primary or secondary school</td>
<td>1,740</td>
<td>384</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 1211</strong>: Number of boys and men actively participating in group education/dialogues that address harmful masculinities and gender norms</td>
<td>3,100</td>
<td>4,875</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 1221</strong>: 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</td>
<td>148,616</td>
<td>150,754</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 1222</strong>: 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</td>
<td>2,500,000</td>
<td>2,213,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 1223</strong>: Number of local actors (e.g., traditional, religious and community leaders) with meaningful participation in dialogues and consensus-building to end child marriage</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>663</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 1231</strong>: Number of civil society organizations newly mobilized in support of challenging social norms and promoting gender equality by the Global Programme</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 2121</strong>: Number of primary/secondary/non-formal schools in programme areas providing quality gender-friendly education that meets minimum standards</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 2131</strong>: Number of service delivery points in programme areas providing quality adolescent-responsive services (health, child protection/ gender-based violence) that meet minimum standards</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 2211</strong>: Number of partnerships (both formal and informal) established to deliver adolescent-responsive social protection, poverty reduction, and economic empowerment programmes and services</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 3111</strong>: Number of policies or legal instruments addressing child marriage drafted, proposed or adopted at national and subnational level with Global Programme support</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 3211</strong>: Number of generated evidence and knowledge that focus on what works to end child marriage</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 3212</strong>: Number of generated evidence and knowledge that apply a gender analysis</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 3221</strong>: Number of South-to-South cooperation (conferences, expert visits, peer consultations, study tours, communities of practice) supported</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NA = Not applicable (the country programme does not work on or report on this indicator)
Providing intensive support to marginalized girls

Supporting access to education for girls and young women has proven to be an essential tool for empowering girls and women to make sound decisions about their sexual and reproductive health and rights, including decisions about their marriage. The Global Programme in Mozambique has included in its action plan the process of identification of out-of-school girls, their reintegration back into schools and the provision of scholarships for vulnerable girls, including girls in situations of early marriage. During 2021, the programme together with civil society organizations and the government sectors of education and human and social affairs supported the integration of 384 adolescent girls who had dropped out of school to return to school in six districts in the Nampula and Zambezia provinces.

A new programme component on economic empowerment was also introduced in the Global Programme in 2021, which targets girls and young women. The Global Programme in partnership with a local civil society organization, Fundação para o Desenvolvimento da Comunidade, piloted the economic empowerment intervention in the Angoche district in Nampula province, focusing on three core areas that include training girls and young women in financial literacy, the provision of start-up kits for small businesses and the creation and support of saving groups. 150 girls and young women have benefited from the partnership that has so far created seven community saving groups.

Enhancing the family and community environment

Preliminary results from the social norms baseline study of the Global Programme show that the proportion of individuals who demonstrate a willingness to change harmful practices has increased by 37 per cent thanks to community dialogues. As a result of community awareness campaigns, an additional 40 per cent of individuals feel the urgent need to change some of the practices of initiation rites for girls that are described as a step to adulthood and acquisition of gender and sexual identities, and an additional 16 per cent of individuals can now cite at least three benefits resulting from delayed marriage.

In Nampula province, over 2,600 community dialogue events were held during 2021, led by 71 community leaders and with 50,854 community members participating. Alongside these dialogue events 239 cases of child marriage and abuse were identified and reported to local authorities for resolution, and 215 child marriages were cancelled and the perpetrators sanctioned by the community.
Girls and young women in Mozambique are change agents in ending child marriage

“My mum kept telling me ‘I do not have the means to keep you in school. You need to get married to have a man who will take care of you’”, shared Marta*, an adolescent girl participating in the interventions of the Global Programme in Mozambique.

Marta is not the only adolescent in Mozambique that has heard a similar statement from family members. Mozambique is home to 4.4 million child brides. Of these, 1.6 million were married before age 15. Marta would have been one of these girls as her mother attempted to have her married off at the age of 13. However, Marta had heard from the Rapariga Biz programme that child marriage is a crime and she refused to go along with her mother’s plans, knowing that the law, community leaders and the government were on her side. She was subsequently ejected from her house.

The Rapariga Biz programme is a girls empowerment programme receiving catalytic funds from the Global Programme with mentorship at the heart of its approach to reducing child marriage and unwanted teenage pregnancy in the two most affected provinces of Mozambique, Nampula and Zambezia.

On the night she was ejected, Marta went to her mentor Marieta’s house for help. As a trained mentor, Marieta knew to present Marta’s case to their community leader who then took the girl to the District Women, Child and Social Action Offices. Through the intervention, Marta’s parents were convinced to drop their attempts to marry their daughter off.

Because of the support she received through the Rapariga Biz programme in terms of increased knowledge, skills and agency, Marta is now a 17-year-old unmarried student. “We helped her mother understand it was not right to marry a 13-year-old girl to a 73-year-old man. Her mother agreed, and [Marta] is still in school today”, stated Suraia Ministro, also a mentor within the programme. “I have seen the difficulties they face now because of the lack of education. I do not want other girls to fall into this trap,” says 20-year-old Shreya, who witnessed her two elder sisters being married off when they were minors.

* Name changed to protect her identity.
The Global Programme support towards the dissemination of community engagement guides and capacity building of 330 community leaders from 81 communities to mobilize families resulted in 13,807 families being declared as model families in communities on issues related to child marriage and civic engagement. Additionally, the programme’s capacity building efforts of 175 religious leaders and 158 traditional leaders resulted in dialogues with close to 140,000 individuals. Through the use of multiple platforms that included live talk shows, participatory community theatres, engagement of key influencers, SMS Biz/U-Report, youth engagement and social media more than 2 million individuals were also reached. The integrated messaging centred on essential family practices with a specific focus on ending child marriage.

The Global Programme funded the production of 20 storylines of the popular entertainment-education radio drama Ouro Negro targeting adolescents with messaging related to child marriage, sexual abuse, HIV prevention, adolescent sexual and reproductive health, teenage pregnancies, nutrition, gender-based violence as well as specific content on young people living with disabilities. The episodes were broadcast twice a week through 115 radio stations in Portuguese and several local languages. In addition, a new live radio talk show Ouro Negro da Malta, produced by adolescents, was launched to increase discussions and exchange of information among teenagers and young people on themes addressed in the radio drama.

**CHALLENGES**

The programme faces resistance from communities and local leaders to host the boys’ mentorship programme. The mentorship programme involves several individuals and areas of interest as mentors must be selected based on a previously designed and existing profile. One of the key criteria for the successful selection of mentors is the involvement of community leaders from where these boys are involved. Unfortunately, in some of the districts there was interference from local governments in the selection of mentors, thus not complying with the established criteria. As a result, there was some resistance from the communities in welcoming the programme as well as in recognizing its benefits.

There are also trust issues among parents and community members towards programmes that target boys due to the ongoing insecurity in Northern Mozambique, where boys and young people are being recruited to be part of the conflict. At the community level parents, guardians as well as community leaders are resistant to allow their children to be part of mentorship groups. Furthermore, the current security situation does not provide a conducive environment for mentored youth at the family level. Mentoring sessions were initiated prior to community engagements and dialogues with community leaders and parents, and as a consequence, boys did not initially find a welcoming environment within families to implement the lessons learned from the sessions, let alone any ability to influence their parents in behaviours showing positive masculinities.

**Strengthening systems**

UNICEF’s approach to creating a conducive environment for gender-responsive education includes supporting the Ministry of Education to disseminate the violence against children in schools operational plan. This was done by enhancing the capacity of provincial and district level officials to coordinate implementation of referral mechanisms for cases of violence against children in schools. Training to develop gender and school health focal points on the violence against children referral mechanism and operational plan to provide skills and knowledge to implement these tools at a school level was also supported.

Overall, 165 gender and school health focal points (111 female) from 90 schools were trained and supported to establish criteria and methodologies for the creation, revitalization and standardization of school clubs in all three target districts in the Zambezi province. In addition, supervision visits were conducted within district services and twelve schools to monitor and evaluate the status of
gender-related activities (based on indicators, such as girls’ retention in school, early unions, gender-based violence and the role of School Councils). The objective as to stimulate the involvement and participation of children of both sexes in the prevention and fight against child marriage, violence in schools and the so called ‘silence culture’.

UNFPA and UNICEF supported the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Action in improving the infrastructure of service delivery points for integrated service delivery including health, child protection and gender-based violence services and the multi-sectoral coordination mechanism at the district level. During 2021, 18 service delivery points were established to provide gender-based violence services targeting in- and out-of-school adolescents. UNICEF continue to support the child helpline with the opening of a new office and call centre in Cabo Delgado to facilitate easier access for children in the north of the country and by providing technical and financial support to the Linha Fala Criança. This was done with the aim of responding to children in need of care and protection with over 114,530 calls received through the centre; a significant increase from 85,737 in the previous year.

UNICEF in partnership with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) continued to make major steps in strengthening a multi-sectoral response mechanism for violence against children and child marriage nationally and in the targeted provinces of the Global Programme and of the European Union-United Nations Spotlight Initiative on ending violence against women and girls. The reference group’s coordination mechanism at national and subnational levels is chaired by the prosecution office and co-chaired by the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Action. During 2021, 27 (ten female) members of the reference groups were trained on the operations and responsibilities of the groups. Following the training four coaching and mentoring visits were conducted. In addition, the approval of reference group protocols (which included violence against children, child marriage and child trafficking) and Trainer of Trainers packages were finalized and sessions were conducted, reaching 50 (23 female) members of the reference groups.

An innovative approach: Unstructured Supplementary Service Data application

UNFPA and UNICEF, together with the Ministry of Gender and two non-governmental organizations (Fundação para o Desenvolvimento da Comunidade and Kamba) started in 2021 a partnership to develop a mobile network Unstructured Supplementary Service Data (USSD) application for reporting and referral of child marriage cases. The USSD application is as award winning solution. It was identified in a national Child Marriage Hackathon organized in 2020 with Global Programme support. The idea behind the USSD application was first showcased in the Ministry of Gender’s technical coordination meeting and received clearance to proceed to piloting. This USSD system is to be used by the general public and survivors for reporting child marriages cases, and, at the same time, it will link survivors with relevant service providers. The aim is to have the USSD fully developed and up and running by mid-2022.

CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

Mozambique went through many challenges at the beginning of the year, including natural disasters (cyclone Eloise), the ongoing conflict in the northern provinces of the country and COVID-19 and the restrictions that came with the pandemic. This has led to an increase in violence against children and an increase in vulnerabilities faced by adolescent girls. UNICEF strengthened the capacity of the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Action to reach the most marginalized children through fostering the coordination of child protection partners and by establishing a monitoring and reporting system. These actions were taken specifically so that it would be possible to follow up identified cases of harmful practices, especially girls at risk of child marriage.
It is clearly necessary to strengthen coordination among all other actors working to end child marriage. The lack of coordination amongst various actors shows that even though there has been an increase in awareness with more people coming forward to report cases. However, the lack of coordination between civil society organizations has been causing overlaps that are making it difficult to unify key messages, for example through the creation of a joint database. It is also important to understand how institutions advocate amongst themselves to foster better coordination among the different groups.

It is crucial to carry out comparative research on the efficiency of shelters for girls at risk of child marriages or rescued survivors, to analyze whether shelters constitute an advantage or a risk for the girls, further explore where shelters should be located and roll out mechanisms needed to make them sustainable.

**Facilitating supportive laws and policies**

During the year, UNFPA and UNICEF jointly supported the government in the evaluation of the National Strategy to Prevent and Eliminate Child Marriage 2016-2019 and in the drafting of the Terms of Reference for the development of the next strategy that builds on the lessons learnt and achievements of the current strategy. Furthermore, UNICEF supported the development of district plans to include child marriage and violence against children as priority areas in six districts in two provinces.

UNFPA and UNICEF together with the Ministry of Gender and Girls Not Brides in Mozambique (CECAP) hosted a national high-level round table conference on the dissemination and legal enforcement of the child marriage law. The conference convened in May 2021, with high-level government and regional representation, reviewed the analysis of progress and challenges encountered in implementing the child marriage law and the prioritization of actions leading to effective operationalization of the law, including the compilation of a national mapping of child marriage interventions. The conference included speakers such as Mama Graca Machel, UNFPA and UNICEF representatives, Silvia Comissário, a judge at the Judicial Court of Maputo City and Ernesto Mueha, Chief Judge of the Judicial Court of Manica Province.

Additionally, the Global Programme provided technical and financial support to two national conferences on child marriage on the International Day of the Girl on 11th of October, one in each Global Programme province. One event was hosted in Zambezia by the State Secretariat of Youth and Employment together with the National Youth Council, while the second event was hosted in Nampula by Fundação para o Desenvolvimento da Comunidade.
CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

The evaluation of the national strategy to end child marriage has been delayed on the side of government, partly due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and subsequently, the Ministry of Gender and Social Affairs is also facing a delay in the development of a new strategy to end child marriage that the Global Programme has planned to support.

The perception that civil society partners should be the ones responsible for the monitoring of the child marriage, violence against children and gender-based violence indicators is a challenge to the enforcement of laws. The district dialogue is supposed to empower local authorities to have more control over perpetrators that are harmful to children and young girls in order to prevent these issues from happening. However, the district government’s ownership of this new approach remains a challenge.

Generating and applying data and evidence

In 2021, Mozambique was part of the countries within the Global Programme that rolled out the Gender-Transformative Accelerator (GTA) tool. A GTA workshop was held in May 2021 with the active participation and engagement of technical staff from UNFPA, UNICEF, the government and civil society organizations. The tool assessment reviewed six elements of the Mozambique programme including girls’ skills, agency and empowerment, addressing masculinities and engaging men and boys, enabling environment and community mobilization, information and services, structural change and institutional partnerships and gender norms. Five levels of the socio-ecological model (i.e., individual, interpersonal, community, systems/institutions and policies/legislative) were used when assessing the extent to which the programme interventions are being implemented in a gender-transformative manner.

Three priority focus areas were identified for the Mozambique Global Programme namely girls’ agency, skills and empowerment, masculinities and engaging men and boys and enabling environment and community mobilization. For example, a lot of work has been done through community dialogues and forums discussing sexual and reproductive health and rights and involving parents, boys, girls and leaders. Nevertheless, the work done so far has not been challenging the harmful masculinities and power dynamics in gender relations and, therefore, has not contributed to an enabling environment for girls to fully exercise their rights at the community level.

UNICEF supported a study on violence against children in Mozambique that found that 3 in 10 females and 4 in 10 males aged 18 to 24 years experienced violence while growing up. In response to the study findings Global Programme funding was used for the development of district level plans of action to respond to violence against children and child marriage. Furthermore, support was provided towards the review and revision of protocols and procedures used by social workers in management of cases of child marriage and violence against children.

“I think many initiatives that we have been doing for years now are thought to be gender-transformative, also we started with male engagement and positive masculinities work… but on this last issue, we do not have much experience, so we need support to start the initiative on male engagement through a gender-transformative approach from the beginning. Also, at the level of services this is work in progress.”

Mozambique GTA workshop participant

Child marriage context

There are 4.1 million child brides in Nepal, 1.2 million of whom were married before the age of 15. In 2019 the prevalence of child marriage (marriage before the age of 18) among girls stood at 33 per cent which is down from 58 per cent in 1994. However promising, this progress is not enough to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) target to end child marriage by 2030.42 If the progress observed over the past 10 years continues, the prevalence will be 27 per cent by 2030. If reduction is doubled, the rate will be 18 per cent in 2030 and 6 per cent in 2050.

Programming context

The COVID-19 pandemic profoundly affected the everyday lives of girls for a second year in 2021, including their physical and mental health, education and the economic circumstances of their families and communities. Globally, up to 10 million more girls are estimated to become child brides by 2030 as a result of the pandemic.43 UNFPA and UNICEF Evaluation Offices conducted a joint assessment of Global Programme adaptations to the COVID-19 crisis in 2021.44 The COVID-19 assessment aimed to:

- Assess relevant contingency planning and implementation and alternative delivery and

management arrangements for the Global Programme due to the COVID-19 pandemic, taking into account the views of vulnerable adolescent girls, their families, communities and key implementing partners.

- Make recommendations for the immediate to mid-term improvement of the Global Programme response to COVID-19, identify ongoing programme changes and recommending any additional support required to implement those programme changes and shifting priorities.

- Make any recommendations required to adjust the Global Programme Phase II to the new context, including its theory of change and the targets established before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The results of the assessment indicate that:

- It is critical to keep the focus and efforts in reaching the most vulnerable and marginalized adolescents, including those in remote areas.

- Lessons could be taken from experiences using multi-channel and two-way communication approaches, while also being attentive to the digital divide.

- Vulnerable adolescents must continue to have access to education (especially if provided remotely), health and social welfare services.

- It is key to overcome drivers of poverty by leveraging existing social protection schemes.

- Ensuring the use of evidence led programming is important and so too is advocating with governments to keep child marriage prevention and responses on national agendas while continuing to develop legal and operational frameworks to help accelerate the end of child marriage.

**TABLE. Conclusions and recommendations from the COVID-19 assessment**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONCLUSION</th>
<th>RECOMMENDATION</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Programme advocacy and engagement efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic kept child marriage on national agendas</td>
<td>Advocate with governments to continue developing legal and operational frameworks contributing to ending child marriage with a rights-based and multisectoral focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The COVID-19 crisis underscored the vulnerability of adolescent girls in rural and remote areas</td>
<td>Reinforce efforts to reach the most vulnerable and marginalized adolescent girls, boys and their families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adoption of digital and mass media approaches demonstrated a high potential for sustaining engagement of adolescent girls at scale, although the digital divide should be considered</td>
<td>Develop complementary multi-channel approaches to reach target populations, ensuring that they foster two-way communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COVID-19 restrictions limited adolescent girls’ access to health and social welfare services</td>
<td>Continue technical support and explore the most effective approaches to ensure adolescent girls have access to essential services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The programme theory of change remains valid but poverty and economic drivers need to be stressed further in operational strategies</td>
<td>Further articulate the strategy to leverage social protection schemes such as cash transfers and income generation opportunities for adolescent girls and their families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COVID-19 programme adjustments created a high demand on data and evidence for adopted approaches</td>
<td>Continue adjusting monitoring, data generation and analysis in order to reinforce evidence-based programming</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However promising, this progress is not enough to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) target to end child marriage by 2030.
These results will inform future adjustments and refinements to the programme. They will help continue delivering in changing contexts and accelerating the pace, during the Decade of Action, of eliminating child marriage to achieve the SDGs by 2030.

**Key highlights**

- In 2021, over 75,000 adolescent girls (aged 10-19) actively participated in life skills or comprehensive sexuality education in programme areas.

- 2.6 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.

- Over 46,000 individuals (boys, girls, women and men) participated in group education/dialogue sessions on consequences of and alternatives to child marriage, the rights of adolescent girls and gender equality.

- 7,691 girls (aged 10-19) were supported by the programme to enrol and/or remain in primary or secondary school.

- 106 service delivery points in programme areas provided quality adolescent-responsive health, child protection or gender-based violence services that meet minimum standards.
### Programme performance

#### TABLE. Summary of output indicator performance (2021)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INDICATOR</th>
<th>TARGET</th>
<th>RESULT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 1111</strong>: Number of adolescent girls (aged 10-19) who actively participated in life skills or comprehensive sexuality education interventions in programme areas</td>
<td>33,000</td>
<td>75,062</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 1121</strong>: Number of girls (aged 10-19) supported by the programme to enrol and/or remain in primary or secondary school</td>
<td>11,908</td>
<td>7,691</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 1211</strong>: Number of boys and men actively participating in group education/dialogues that address harmful masculinities and gender norms</td>
<td>11,500</td>
<td>1,262</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 1221</strong>: 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</td>
<td>45,000</td>
<td>46,229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 1222</strong>: 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</td>
<td>1,508,396</td>
<td>2,600,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 1223</strong>: Number of local actors (e.g., traditional, religious and community leaders) with meaningful participation in dialogues and consensus-building to end child marriage</td>
<td>3100</td>
<td>836</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 1231</strong>: Number of civil society organizations newly mobilized in support of challenging social norms and promoting gender equality by the Global Programme</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 2121</strong>: Number of primary/secondary/non-formal schools in programme areas providing quality gender-friendly education that meets minimum standards</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 2131</strong>: Number of service delivery points in programme areas providing quality adolescent-responsive services (health, child protection/ gender-based violence) that meet minimum standards</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 2211</strong>: Number of partnerships (both formal and informal) established to deliver adolescent-responsive social protection, poverty reduction, and economic empowerment programmes and services</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 3111</strong>: Number of policies or legal instruments addressing child marriage drafted, proposed or adopted at national and subnational level with Global Programme support</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 3211</strong>: Number of generated evidence and knowledge that focus on what works to end child marriage</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 3212</strong>: Number of generated evidence and knowledge that apply a gender analysis</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 3221</strong>: Number of South-to-South cooperation (conferences, expert visits, peer consultations, study tours, communities of practice) supported</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NA = Not applicable (the country programme does not work on or report on this indicator)
Providing intensive support to marginalized girls

Due to local COVID-19 restrictions, girls’ empowerment through life skills training was delivered partly through face-to-face interaction and partly through radio programme sessions during the year. Overall, 72,062 girls received gender-transformative social and financial life skills education through the Rupantaran package. The face-to-face sessions targeting out-of-school adolescent girls were delivered by trained community facilitators while in-school training sessions were delivered by trained peer leaders every Friday during the extra school curriculum period. The radio sessions were delivered through trained radio presenters, and in some communities, out-of-school adolescent girls formed radio listener groups supported by outreach workers who reinforced the content delivered through radio.

Observations from the study on Child Marriage in Humanitarian Settings in South Asia covering Nepal aimed at providing life skills has been a crucial part of the programme even during COVID-19. They also showed that providing life skills training, as well as empowering girls and boys during times of crisis, can delay and distract from marriage at an early age.

In the current COVID-19 context, with an aim to provide knowledge on sexual and reproductive health services during humanitarian situations, orientation on the minimum initial service package for sexual and reproductive health in emergencies was provided to 546 Rupantaran facilitators. The minimum initial service package for sexual and reproductive health in emergencies was a coordinated set of priority activities designed to prevent and manage the consequences of sexual violence. This aimed to prevent avoidable maternal and new-born morbidity and mortality, reduce HIV transmission, reduce unintended pregnancies and to plan for comprehensive reproductive health services beginning in the early days and weeks of an emergency.

To enhance the social and financial skills gained through Rupantaran package, UPSHIFT training was introduced to support about 400 girls who graduated from Rupantaran, helping them develop transferable skills including problem-solving, critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication and leadership skills. The UNICEF UPSHIFT programme blends learning approaches for youth and adolescent development with social innovation and social entrepreneurship. With the additional training on social innovation and social entrepreneurship, participating girls are empowered to identify challenges in their communities and create entrepreneurial solutions to address these challenges.

The girls were further supported through linkages with women’s cooperatives to implement their ideas for solutions. As a result, training was introduced for girls who choose not to continue formal education due to varying issues, such as age, long absence from school, lack of opportunities for higher education in their communities or because basic education does not guarantee employment, which is the main source of income and a pathway out of poverty.

The Global Programme support towards adolescent girls’ enrolment and retention in school, through the girls’ access to education programme, offers basic numeracy and literacy skills to out-of-school adolescent girls as well as follow up sessions with graduates from non-formal schools for coaching and mentorship sessions to sharpen their numeracy and literacy skills. A cohort of 7,691 adolescent girls was supported to attend non-formal classes during 2021, with 5,932 girls mainstreamed or enrolled back into formal schools. Furthermore, the programme conducted a motivational back-to-school campaign targeting parents with support from local teachers and elected local representatives which included coaching classes for girls to catch up to age-appropriate educational levels.

In-kind and financial support including scholarships, stationery and school uniforms was also provided for 300 out-of-school girls, orphans, girls living with disabilities and financially dependent adolescents. Local governments were made responsible for delivering the in-kind and financial support through commitments to jointly collaborate on ending child marriage. All the adolescent girls targeted by the interventions have now joined school and continued their journey for formal education.
At age 20, Haru Bhatt is preparing for her wedding. She understands how this event will bring many changes in her life, and this very understanding gives her the confidence to look forward to her married life.

In her hometown of Melauli Municipality-6, Baitadi, Haru has witnessed many of her peers getting married at a very young age, often when they were minors. She has seen many girls suffer as they have no agency to decide whether they want to marry or when they are treated merely as a household help at their husband’s home.

“I knew child marriage was a social evil, but it was only after participating in the training I conjured up the confidence to stand against it,” Haru says, being selected to be a facilitator in the Rupantaran social and financial skills package training.

Now, with the help of friends who also participated in the training with her, Haru is determined to take concrete steps to end these harmful practices in her community. “We have now launched a campaign against child marriage in the village,” she says. “Each week in the Rupantaran class, we discuss the effects of child marriage. This has helped us a lot in preventing child marriages in our community."

Narayan Chand, head of the health section of Melauli municipality, also agrees that Haru’s initiatives in the village have stopped many child marriages. But Chand acknowledges that it was not an easy journey for Haru. Belonging to the same community, she was once too pressured by her family to marry young. With weak economic status, families are eager to marry off their daughters while they are still teenagers or even younger to unburden themselves of the girl’s livelihood responsibilities.

But Haru was not someone who would give up on her dreams. She wanted to continue her studies, despite the pressure from her family. However, the poor financial situation of her family made it difficult for Haru to continue her education. Haru had to drop out of school because her family could not afford her studies. Yet, instead of succumbing to child marriage, Haru decided to participate in the Rupantaran training and it changed her life for the better. Being able to get back to and now study at the undergraduate level she says “I used to think about how I can continue my studies. But now, the Rupantaran class has made this possible for me. I am investing my resources in education and my knowledge to change society.”

Haru started her campaign by making her friends aware of the harmful consequences of child marriage. But she did not stop there. Now she has also started visiting parents in the community to make them aware of how child marriage can ruin their daughter’s lives. But she recognizes that individual efforts are not enough to uproot this harmful custom. “To get rid of child marriage completely, people’s representatives also need to campaign, or even better, local level programmes or action plans need to be brought together by wards and municipalities,” she says.

The local people’s representatives are also positive about Haru and her movement to end child marriage. Ward Chairperson of Melauli Municipality Ward No. 6, Parmananda Bhatta, appreciates the hard work of teenagers and adolescents like Haru, who has been campaigning for a better society. “This initiative by young people in our community is something we all need to stand behind and support. They have my full support,” he says.

Haru has experienced that having a dialogue and clear communication with parents and guardians have been the best means of changing their mindset and subsequently changing this deep-rooted tradition. “Many parents are convinced after we laid out the adverse impact child marriage can have, from health issues to economic empowerment,” says Haru.

Haru is a representative force in preventing child marriage. The Rupantaran programme has produced many facilitators like her across the country and they are now taking the initiative to end child marriage in their district.
CHALLENGES, LESSONS LEARNED AND NEXT STEPS

The second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic and the nationwide lockdown and restrictions of movement and travel continued to disrupt programme implementation in 2021 somewhat. However, as the programme adapted implementation modalities and tools in 2020, it did continue to operate relatively smoothly with no major disruptions.

Interactions with adolescents demonstrated that life skills content delivered through radio only has limitations as the medium because it lacks a means of two-way engagement. Hence, it is essential to continue to monitor and engage with adolescents to take stock of their views and the programme’s impact. Based on feedback on the radio programmes, this modality was complemented with face-to-face interactions by trained facilitators across the programme areas. In 2022, depending on the COVID-19 context, the programme will implement a life skills programme using a face-to-face sessions with radio content used as a backup.

In school settings, trained girls and boys are paired together to deliver social and financial skills training for other students in mixed gender group settings. The programme realized that the girl/boy combination of delivering skills training is more effective, with more dynamic discussions on gender roles and the effects of negative masculinities among boys. Based on this point, the programme will adopt a similar strategy in community locations in conjunction with family discussions and buy-in.

Coordination and mobilizing local political leaders to convince families to send girls to school, as well as continued coordination and engagement with schools and school management committees, was able to yield the desired results. However, there are expectations from families and schools for a monetary incentive to enrol out-of-school girls, despite the government subsidizing free education for all.

The programmatic approach of connecting out-of-school adolescent girls with local women’s cooperatives has a positive impact, highlighting the need for closer collaboration with these groups in 2022. In several programme locations the capacity of local women’s and youth groups is limited, which can bring challenges in forming strong collaboration and partnerships. It is crucial for the success of the programme to invest in capacity building to enable the formation of strategic partnerships and sustained engagement.

Enhancing the family and community environment

The Global Programme continued to deliver the Rupantaran parents’ package to enhance knowledge and improve gender equitable attitudes among parents of girls participating in the programme. Intergenerational dialogue sessions and digital platforms were used to generate discussions to encourage positive attitudes to address child marriage. 120 people across generations including deputy mayors, ward chairs, government and non-governmental officials, senior citizens, adolescents and programme peer educators were engaged in the intergenerational dialogue sessions, discussing harmful practices and the implications of these on families and communities. Over 46,000 parents were reached through radio which was then supported by follow up sessions from outreach workers and 1,589 parents through three-day facilitated face-to face-sessions. Currently, only 8 per cent of the parents responding to exit interviews think that marrying their daughter/female household members before age 18 is the best option, and 55 per cent can identify sanctions (punishments) and benefits (rewards) associated with child marriage abandonment.

Due to continued COVID-19 restrictions, face-to-face interactions were restricted in some programme areas and the Global Programme reached boys mostly through radio programmes with messaging around positive masculinities. However, in some school settings, the programme engaged both boys and girls in dialogues including training on a combination of social skills to improve their competency in facilitating dynamic discussions on gender roles and the effects of negative masculinities among boys.
The Global Programme established a strategic partnership with *Hami Dajuvi* (also known as Nepali Brothers), a feminist organization particularly focused on men and masculinities, along with intersectionality and inclusion, youth engagement and feminist leadership. The programme in partnership with the government and others collaborated with *Hami Dajuvi* to organize the Second Feminism and Men Conference between 12-18 November 2021 which created a platform to learn and share ideas for effective approaches and innovative strategies to end gender-based violence through the meaningful and active participation of men and boys. The conference reached in excess of 500,000 viewers through social networks.

Multiple interaction and orientation sessions were held with youth networks and women’s organizations working on child marriage, gender-based violence and other harmful practices in order to ensure continuous support to end child marriage. Youth networks, including youth living with disabilities, are targeted with capacity building on local planning processes. They were supported by the programme to influence local plans and budgets allocated for youth, including in relation to sexual and reproductive health and child marriage. A partnership with the women-led organization AAWAAJ-Surkhet was established in the Karnali province to operationalize a child helpline, and referral services. Partnership with the youth-led organization BAS-Nepalgunj was established to implement *Rupantaran* through training and mobilizing youth for collective action.

The Global Programme adopted multiple digital and multimedia approaches to engage with families, communities and local leaders in 2021. Public service announcements on harmful practices were improved using data led content from helplines, administrative data and other online sources with scripts translated in multiple languages to ensure reach. Furthermore, the same content was modified and aired through five radio stations with a combined listenership of over 2 million people. Two short videos on child marriage were also developed and aired through social media channels during the commemoration of the International Day of the Girl. The two videos reached 194,000 viewers, with more than 94,000 views on Facebook with 780 comments and 33 shares.

Digital platforms were used by the programme to engage local influencers and religious leaders to address child marriage. Two webinars were organized on *The Role of Religious Leaders to Reduce Child Marriage and Youth Engagement and Initiative to Reduce Child Marriage* with the objective of bringing the voices of the two groups to the public, while raising awareness. The webinars were used to spread key messages on the negative impact of child marriage and the importance of girls’ education through established change makers from various fields. They helped in understanding the embedded reasons for the continuation of child marriage, identifying the prevalence, changing paradigms and patterns, and sharing good practices and initiatives. The webinar videos were shared through social media, reaching 23,000 and 14,000 viewers respectively. Additionally, the programme was designed for capacity building, and as a result 250 local religious leaders were informed about the negative impact of child marriage, their role in preventing such marriages and promoting child rights, including the right to education, and gender equality. Religious leaders attending the programme appreciated the child marriage campaign and consequently developed an action plan with commitments to prevent child marriage in their communities.

**LESSONS LEARNED AND NEXT STEPS**

Having men on board to speak about male privilege and their journey of understanding and changing perceptions, attitudes and behaviour greatly impacted male peers. This clearly demonstrates the importance of safe spaces and platforms for men to share personal stories and reflect on inequality in society over the dialogues being produced solely by women.

The effectiveness of community discussions and intergenerational dialogue depends on the capacity of the organizer/organizing partner and their understanding of gender roles, patriarchy, power relations and other related harmful social norms. In order to maintain high-quality dialogues a standardized tool/guideline will be developed in 2022.
Strengthening systems

The Global Programme supported the government in strengthening key elements of adolescent-friendly health services. Joint supervision visits with the government health team pre-certified 13 district adolescent-friendly sites using the government’s quality improvement tools that were developed. Furthermore, 109 health service providers were given training on adolescent sexual and reproductive health during a five-day course that focused on behavioural and skills-focused competency-based outcomes. 455 service providers (298 females and 157 males) from 93 gender-based violence one-stop centres were also trained on child-sensitive gender-based violence service provisions.

Greater partnership between women’s organizations and the health sector led to enhanced recognition of the impact of gender-based violence (GBV) on children as dependents of GBV survivors and as survivors themselves. Orientation on adolescent sexual and reproductive health and child marriage was provided through the programme to 625 female community health volunteers, schoolteachers, school management committee members, parents, peer educators, health mother groups, journalists, community and religious leaders and disaster management committee members. To reduce hesitancy in accessing services, orientation visits to health service points were organized for girls and parents participating in programme interventions. During 2021, 77,354 (37,852 boys and 39,502 girls) visited health service points in the programme districts, with 11 per cent (8,509) of them accessing family planning services.

To address the discriminatory gender norms which continue to impact the lives of girls and women in e.g., child marriage, school-drop outs, selective abortion and GBV two girl-focused social protection programmes were set up by the provincial governments. The Beti Padau Beti Bachau Programme in Province 2 and the Bank Khata Chhoriko Suraksha Jivan Variko Programme in Karnali province both aim to provide girls with a bank account for their financial security. A review of the two girl-focused social protection programmes was supported by UNICEF in 2021. The review’s aim was to provide recommendations to the organizations implementing the scheme, UNICEF and other social protection partners to support provincial governments to strengthen the design and implementation of the two programmes. The study specifically aimed to analyze the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats/challenges of the programmes so that the former can be leveraged, and the latter addressed. They also aimed to develop a long-term vision, propose key design components and develop a roadmap for UNICEF’s subsequent engagement to strengthen design and implementation.

During the year, training was provided on the GBV information management system for 106 (73 female and 33 male) police officers. A harmonized and systematic GBV information management system was rolled out in all districts across Nepal, enabling the police to analyze data related to GBV, including child marriage. The police published the first multi-year analysis of the data in 2021, which revealed that 62 per cent of GBV survivors are children. Of the 77 districts in Nepal, 27 districts did not report any cases related to child marriage. This indicates that initiatives related to child marriage and reporting cases to formal security/justice authorities needs to be prioritized in these districts.
In collaboration with the Center for Education and Human Resource Development (CEHRD), a partnership was established to promote girls’ education. Its aim is to end GBV in schools, seek equality in education by establishing a complaint response mechanism in schools and establish girls’ education networks and gender focal points with local government participation and collaboration.

The activities were conducted in partnership with the CEHRD, provincial governments, local governments, provincial education training centres and schools in 2021. Girls’ education networks were formed in 15 new municipalities during the year, bringing the number of functional networks to 34. The networks are responsible for supervision and monitoring of the complaint response mechanism and for supporting girls’ access to and retention in school. New network members received orientation on the complaint response mechanism and the role and responsibility of the network to minimize GBV and promote equity in schools.

The CEHRD also took the lead in organizing a one-day virtual orientation for political authorities and education officers from 37 local governments in four provinces. This orientation focused on gender equality, social inclusion and psychosocial support. It linked the girls’ education networks and the gender focal points to help mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on girls’ and marginalized children’s learning outcomes and to influence school reopening guidelines. In partnership with local governments, a one-day virtual orientation was also organized targeting head teachers in 25 local governments. A complaint response mechanism guideline, training manuals and eight types of learning continuity-related information, education and communication materials were distributed in 37 municipalities in Province 2, Lumbini province, Karnali province and Sudurpashim province reaching approximately 1,500 school children. In coordination with the municipalities, 537 head teachers and gender focal teachers from 13 municipalities were trained on the complaint response mechanism.

In order to ensure there was sufficient access to COVID-19 vaccinations for out-of-school adolescent girls from the programme, partners mobilized outreach workers and volunteers to support information dissemination and supported coordination with local governments to prepare the girls registered for vaccination. The programme also supported female participants without birth registration certificates to obtain registration by coordinating with ward officials and the relevant municipalities.

**CHALLENGES, LESSONS LEARNED AND NEXT STEPS**

Convincing municipality officials and local political leaders to come onboard at the planning and design phases of interventions while working with government systems is critical. Facilitating discussions between service providers and adolescents in addressing some of the key barriers (mostly related to hesitancy) for service uptake is essential (access to various services remained a key challenge for girls in 2021, as reported through the monitoring and incident reporting system). This includes continuing to support health (including sexual and reproductive health), GBV and child protection systems in implementing guidelines, protocols and standards for adolescent-friendly and gender-responsive coordinated quality services.

There are several community-based mechanisms for child protection, such as child clubs, youth groups, women’s groups and women’s cooperatives, which all play a vital role in identifying cases related to violence against children and referring to appropriate service providers. However, while useful, the mechanisms are informal with limited authority. Despite the Act Relating to Children 2018, stating there should be a child welfare officer in each municipality, this is not implemented in many municipalities.

**Facilitating supportive laws and policies**

UNFPA and UNICEF jointly provided technical support to two provincial governments in developing provincial level policies for gender equality and social inclusion. The programme also supported the development of strategies and action plans to set up mechanisms and approaches and to guide provincial and local governments in addressing child marriage. Provincial level strategies were developed...
in close coordination with key stakeholders, such as child clubs, adolescent group networks, youth clubs, local non-governmental organizations, parents, teachers, religious leaders, elected leaders, members of provincial parliaments and divisional offices of the Ministry of Social Development in two provinces. In line with the provincial level strategies, district action plans were developed by district assemblies in 12 local governments and two local governments developed strategies appropriate for municipalities.

Capacity building workshops, that were organized in all municipalities, were aimed at enhancing the capacity engagement of locally elected officials, justice and security officials and key bureaucrats. Participants came from sectors, such as education, health and social development and topics covered included gender equality, girls’ education, the negative consequences of child marriage, legal provisions and accountability in enforcing and upholding laws and policies and promoting a gender equitable society. The programme also supported the development of the juvenile justice training curriculum to build capacity of key justice and security officials on the legal provisions associated with child marriage.

CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

Government efforts to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 impacted movement and assemblies which required a readjustment of the training modality. In 2020, efforts were made to hold virtual training which was not very effective. In 2021, training sessions were conducted face-to-face, limiting the number of participants and maintaining COVID-19 safety protocols.

Some of the laws, policies and legal provisions in Nepal are contradictory, leaving space for service providers to manipulate provisions according to their own interest. While aligning the laws and policies it is critical for building the capacity of girls and their families on key legal provisions and reporting mechanisms to ensure utilization of the existing legal framework.

Many subnational government structures have a real interest in developing subnational plans based on the national strategy and action plan. However, monitoring the implementation of these strategies/action plans has been inadequate and requires additional support from the programme.

Participation and engagement of local women’s groups and youth groups to develop subnational plans are critical for the inclusion of the many nuanced issues faced by adolescent girls and to hold local government accountable for the implementation of action plans.

Generating and applying data and evidence

A protection monitoring and incident reporting (PMIR) system was developed post-COVID-19 with the aim of determining if and how the current COVID-19 situation has created new protection risks and/or intensified pre-existing protection issues. The protection monitoring system has enabled protection actors to identify key protection issues and needs and to advocate with the broader humanitarian community and the authorities for the continuation of priority protection activities. It also helped with the adaptation of protection sensitive policies and practices in the current context as well as highlighting issues that should be addressed in the post-COVID-19 era.

Implementation of the PMIR tool is integrated within the child marriage programme and its partnerships, whereby data is collected systematically by trained volunteers, including from girls attending Rupantaran sessions. Child marriage has been consistently reported as one of the major protection concerns by both girls and boys. In 2021, around 13 per cent of the reported cases through the incident reporting tool were related to child marriage.

CHALLENGES AND NEXT STEPS

The restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic adversely affected research, monitoring and evaluation activities. The programme will continue to implement the protection monitoring and incident reporting system as an integral part of monitoring the situation affecting children and women and their right to protection.
Child marriage context

There are 4.8 million child brides in the Niger, 2 million of whom were married before the age of 15. Currently, the prevalence of child marriage (marriage before the age of 18) among girls stands at 76 per cent, which is the highest in the world by far. There are no signs of progress in eliminating the practice to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) target to end child marriage by 2030 and the projected prevalence will remain the same as today’s levels until there are signs of improvement.  

Programming context

The COVID-19 pandemic profoundly affected the everyday lives of girls for a second year in 2021, including their physical and mental health, education and the economic circumstances of their families and communities. Globally, up to 10 million more girls are estimated to become child brides by 2030 as a result of the pandemic.

UNFPA and UNICEF Evaluation Offices conducted a joint assessment of Global Programme adaptations to the COVID-19 crisis in 2021. The COVID-19 assessment aimed to:

- Assess relevant contingency planning and implementation and alternative delivery and management arrangements for the Global Programme due to the COVID-19 pandemic, taking into account the views of vulnerable adolescent girls, their families, communities and key implementing partners.
- Make recommendations for the immediate to mid-term improvement of the Global Programme response to COVID-19, identify ongoing programme changes

and recommending any additional support required to implement those programme changes and shifting priorities.

● Make any recommendations required to adjust the Global Programme Phase II to the new context, including its theory of change and the targets established before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The results of the assessment indicate that:

● It is critical to keep the focus and efforts in reaching the most vulnerable and marginalized adolescents, including those in remote areas.

● Lessons could be taken from experiences using multi-channel and two-way communication approaches, while also being attentive to the digital divide.

● Vulnerable adolescents must continue to have access to education (especially if provided remotely), health and social welfare services.

● It is key to overcome drivers of poverty by leveraging existing social protection schemes.

● Ensuring the use of evidence led programming is important and so too is advocating with governments to keep child marriage prevention and responses on national agendas while continuing to develop legal and operational frameworks to help accelerate the end of child marriage.

These results will inform future adjustments and refinements to the programme. They will help continue delivering in changing contexts and accelerating the pace, during the Decade of Action, of eliminating child marriage to achieve the SDGs by 2030.

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<td>The programme theory of change remains valid but poverty and economic drivers need to be stressed further in operational strategies</td>
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<tr>
<td>COVID-19 programme adjustments created a high demand on data and evidence for adopted approaches</td>
<td>Continue adjusting monitoring, data generation and analysis in order to reinforce evidence-based programming</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The interactive session resulted in concrete actions to deliver gender-transformative approaches to end child marriage.

Key highlights

- Over 43,000 adolescent girls (aged 10-19) actively participated in life skills or comprehensive sexuality education in programme areas.
- Over 16,000 boys and men participated in group education/dialogue sessions, specifically addressing harmful masculinities and gender norms.
- 1,649 girls (aged 10-19) were supported by the programme to enrol and/or remain in primary or secondary school.
- Over 6.9 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.
- Over 73,000 individuals (boys, girls, women and men) participated in group education/dialogue sessions on consequences of and alternatives to child marriage, the rights of adolescent girls and gender equality.
- In 2021, Niger was one of the trail-blazer countries that rolled out the Gender-Transformative Accelerator (GTA) tool. A GTA workshop was held in June 2021 over three-days with the active participation and engagement technical staff from UNFPA, UNICEF, government and civil society organizations. The interactive session resulted in concrete actions to deliver gender-transformative approaches to end child marriage.
Programme performance

**TABLE. Summary of output indicator performance (2021)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INDICATOR</th>
<th>TARGET</th>
<th>RESULT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 1111:</strong> Number of adolescent girls (aged 10-19) who actively participated in life skills or comprehensive sexuality education interventions in programme areas</td>
<td>41,200</td>
<td>43,009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 1121:</strong> Number of girls (aged 10-19) supported by the programme to enrol and/or remain in primary or secondary school</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td>1,649</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 1211:</strong> Number of boys and men actively participating in group education/dialogues that address harmful masculinities and gender norms</td>
<td>14,040</td>
<td>16,130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 1221:</strong> 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</td>
<td>76,880</td>
<td>73,943</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 1222:</strong> 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</td>
<td>1,245,625</td>
<td>6,910,617</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 1223:</strong> Number of local actors (e.g., traditional, religious and community leaders) with meaningful participation in dialogues and consensus-building to end child marriage</td>
<td>606</td>
<td>772</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 1231:</strong> Number of civil society organizations newly mobilized in support of challenging social norms and promoting gender equality by the Global Programme</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 2121:</strong> Number of primary/secondary/non-formal schools in programme areas providing quality gender-friendly education that meets minimum standards</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 2131:</strong> Number of service delivery points in programme areas providing quality adolescent-responsive services (health, child protection/ gender-based violence) that meet minimum standards</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 2211:</strong> Number of partnerships (both formal and informal) established to deliver adolescent-responsive social protection, poverty reduction, and economic empowerment programmes and services</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 3111:</strong> Number of policies or legal instruments addressing child marriage drafted, proposed or adopted at national and subnational level with Global Programme support</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td><strong>Indicator 3211:</strong> Number of generated evidence and knowledge that focus on what works to end child marriage</td>
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<td><strong>Indicator 3212:</strong> Number of generated evidence and knowledge that apply a gender analysis</td>
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<td><strong>Indicator 3221:</strong> Number of South-to-South cooperation (conferences, expert visits, peer consultations, study tours, communities of practice) supported</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NA = Not applicable (the country programme does not work on or report on this indicator)
Providing intensive support to marginalized girls

Educational talks organized through the Community Approach to Child Protection and the implementation of Cycle 6 of the Illimin initiative empowered 43,009 adolescent girls, including 140 girls living with disabilities, providing them with knowledge on human rights, sexual and reproductive health and life skills. Among the girls, 496 of them became correspondents for protection leaders after the empowerment programme and continued to raise awareness and share their experiences and learning among their peers through door-to-door visits and participatory community workshops, reaching an additional 992 adolescent girls in their communities. The correspondents for protection leaders are also members of child committees and as such participated in community activities that mobilized 1,649 adolescent girls to re-enrol in school.

Boys have also been targeted by the Community Approach to Child Protection, focusing on the same learning content that was given to the girls. In 2021, 3,639 boys strengthened their knowledge on topics related to human rights, reproductive health, hygiene, gender-based violence and child marriage. These boys were targeted as older brothers and future husbands to aid in developing gender equal behaviours. In many situations, it has been observed that the older brothers engaged in the programme supported their sisters when they were at risk of child marriage.

UNFPA and the Ministry for the Advancement of Women and Child Protection have forged new partnerships with the private sector to facilitate the integration of girls into trainee and professional courses. Under Cycle 6 of the adolescent empowerment Illimin initiative, 43 safe spaces have been set up at vocational and technical training centres to provide vocational training to adolescent girls who are out of school. Around 1,000 adolescent girls are involved in the vocational training, including 300 in model styling in Niamey and Zinder with 300 in the manufacturing of cosmetics and simple sewing in the Tahoua region, 100 in sewing in Illéla, 100 in the manufacturing of beauty products and 200 being trained in tele-irrigation in Tessaoua, where a plot of four hectares (40,000m²) has been made available to them by the head of the canton commune.

To ensure youth engagement in the programme, UNICEF in partnership with the Spotlight Initiative Africa regional programme launched a seed fund with the African Union Youth Reference Group to test youth innovative ideas that promote mental wellbeing of children and young people affected by child marriage in their communities. The ideas are meant to work as drivers to reimagine an Africa without harmful practices and will be funded for the youth to implement innovative approaches that will help survivors of harmful practices cope with the psychosocial consequences, as well as create awareness on the impact of harmful practices on mental health. The projects are expected to empower girls and support girls affected by harmful practices, work more directly with youth peers and communities and advocate for laws and policies supported of girls’ rights.

CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

The empowerment approaches being implemented are generating enthusiasm among adolescent girls, some of whom want to go back to school and others whom want to do vocational training, but the resources available do not always cover their needs and wishes because education possibilities in local villages are often limited and of low quality. Furthermore, most villages do not offer vocational training outside areas or capacities traditionally seen to be suitable for girls (sewing, catering, knitting), and even if girls want to pursue other training, the social context does not allow them to do so.

An understanding that emerged from a participatory workshop organized by adolescent girls in their village was that the introduction of a WhatsApp application in 90 villages has promoted the networking of adolescent protection correspondents. Through WhatsApp they can share their achievements and challenges they face,

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48 A technique allowing for remote control of irrigation, as well as real time monitoring of meteorological and hydrological data through one’s mobile phone.
further strengthening their leadership and ability to influence other adolescent girls.

**Enhancing the family and community environment**

Multiple approaches were employed to engage boys and men in dialogues that address harmful masculinities and gender norms. These include husbands’ schools (*Ecole des Maris*), future husbands’ clubs (*Clubs des futurs maris*) and the community-based approach to child protection. Leveraging the frameworks of the Sahel Women’s Empowerment and Demographic Dividend Project and the and the *Illimin* adolescent initiative, the programme exploited the rainy season, which tends to keep migrant boys and men at home in programme target areas (in the Zinder region), to engage more than 16,000 boys and men in dialogues related to gender equality, human rights, sexual and reproductive health, hygiene and sanitation and harmful practices. In 219 villages, men and boys took part in public declarations committing to abandon harmful practices and supporting the enrolment and retention of girls in school and to ban all attitudes and behaviours that constitute violence against girls and to delay marriage with their suitors until they are above 18 years old.

Community facilitators provided community members with the knowledge and skills needed to self-diagnose their practices, attitudes and behaviours and identify those that are harmful to the health and wellbeing of women and girls, using non-coercive approaches. Throughout the year, 1,722 community dialogue sessions were convened on topics including girls’ schooling, forced and child marriage, early pregnancy, family planning, the girl child and her human rights, gender-based violence and responsible kinship which is at the heart of the new national population policy. These community dialogues reached 73,943 people, including 43,066 females and 30,877 males.

UNFPA organized a symposium of traditional leaders during the year through the Association of Traditional Chiefs of Niger. The symposium focused on the demographic transition in the Niger, focusing on the theme traditional leaders as agents of change. 772 traditional leaders recognized the commitment and political will of the government to capture the demographic dividend in the Niger for the acceleration of its economic and social development and pledged not to take girls under the age of 18 as wives and to fight to prevent child marriage and invite other authorities to follow suit. Furthermore, traditional leaders committed to make child marriage alerts and monitoring systems operational in collaboration with all religious leaders in their respective communities.

The media was also used to mobilize people around themes of child marriage and girls’ rights. Radio broadcasts were organized and through the community radio stations, and nearly 7 million people were reached with messaging on child marriage, the rights of adolescent girls and gender equality. Additionally, the miniseries *Vaillante* was launched by UNICEF in 2021. *Vaillante* is a UNICEF fictional three-part series set in West Africa, which aims to offer a platform for the representation of survivors of child marriage as well as being a starting point for discussion and change. Through the series, the Global Programme aims to raise awareness and spark conversations on child marriage to better seek solutions for young girls and women. In 2022, the series will be screened through Canal Olympia in the country for increased reach.

**CHALLENGES, LESSONS LEARNED AND NEXT STEPS**

There is lack of follow up of the commitments made during public declarations in communities and villages. Currently, the child protection services unit in charge of monitoring and following up public declarations are understaffed and under-resourced. This is also affecting the implementation of village action plans to end child marriage.

Positive masculinity terminology is a poorly perceived concept in the context of the Niger, which was seen during the GTA tool workshop, which brought together different partners in the country. However, once boys are convinced about its meaning, they have proven to be great advocates and protectors of their sisters against child marriage.
**Strengthening systems**

In 2021, the government of the Niger issued a decree institutionalizing communal and village committees as formal child protection committees. 528 new child protection committees were set up, bringing the total number of functional child protection committees to 1,755 (since 2019). These committees, which have 6,336 members, carry out protection activities in the villages and manage child protection-related cases. In 2021, a total of 15,120 cases were managed by these committees, including 717 cases of child marriage that were cancelled, 1,649 adolescent girls who were returned to school and 79 cases of rape reported to higher authorities.

In support of institutionalizing life skills and comprehensive sexuality education in schools, the Minister of National Education and the Minister of Public Health, Population and Social Affairs signed an order (No. 0316/MEN/MSP/P/AS dated November 2, 2021) on the creation, attribution, composition, organization and functioning of school health clubs. Furthermore, teacher training schools have integrated comprehensive sexuality education into the teacher training curriculum at the graduate level, which is a step towards institutionalizing comprehensive sexuality education in the Niger. Training modules have been improved with the support of an expert from the UNFPA regional office and are expected to support the training of secondary school teachers in comprehensive sexuality education.

**CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED**

In 2021, the education system experienced disruptions due to the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change (floods and a heatwave burning huts and schools) and the ongoing conflict in the country. However, the restructuring of the ministries in charge of education and the education repositioning within the government have been an opportunity for collective awareness raising on the need to reinvent the Nigerien education system to face multiple challenges and expectations of the population. In this perspective, UNICEF supported the government through the Public Policy Analysis and Government Program Evaluation Unit (CAPEG) to conduct a study to understand people’s perceptions and aspirations on distance education and the integration of innovations into the education system. This study reinforces the research on social demand in education carried out in 2020, the results of which will enrich the Nigerien Education System Reform Law (LOSEN).

Though the government has institutionalized school health clubs in all schools, most of them do not have adequate supplies and equipment to provide services to the students. The clubs of Lycée Kassai, ISSA Korombé, and...
Mariama, Balleyara and Agaba de Tahoua schools benefited from medicines and technical equipment from the programme during the year. As for the school health clubs of Balleyara, Kassai, Korombé, Mariama and CES Tahoua, they received sound equipment, cameras and radio cameras to carry out awareness-raising activities. Orders for computer equipment, furniture and communication equipment are being issued for an additional fifteen schools in humanitarian zones. However, there is also a challenge with availability of space in the schools to house the clubs.

Facilitating supportive laws and policies

The Global Programme is supporting the evaluation of the current National Strategic Action Plan to End Child Marriage which is in its final year of implementation. Preparations are underway, following the evaluation and learning from the findings, to support the development of a new action plan that is aligned with the government’s Economic and Social Development Plan 2022-2026.

The Global Programme supported the government to host the third African Girl Summit during the year. The summit, held in November 2021, was an opportunity to bring the issue of child marriage to the highest level of the political agenda. It served as a framework to reiterate commitments to end child marriage and create a strong partnership with donors to invest more in protecting girls’ rights. The pre-summit, which took place face-to-face at the Mahatma Gandhi International Conference Centre in Niamey, brought together more than 300 participants from different regions of the Niger and other African countries including Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, Ethiopia, Gambia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Uganda and Zimbabwe more than 70 per cent of whom were aged 10 to 25. This pre-summit offered young people and youth organizations a platform to share their concerns, experiences and challenges in protecting children’s rights in their different countries and contexts. They were able to make relevant and consensual recommendations on how to address the challenges identified, including:

- Allocate a substantial budget to the elimination of harmful practices to support the implementation of related programmes, action plans and strategies
- Develop and implement an extensive communication programme to deconstruct gender stereotypes using creative arts
Establish zero tolerance for violence in schools

Create platforms that meaningfully engage young people, especially girls, in programmes and decision-making processes that aim to end child marriage and other harmful practices

Strengthen interventions to empower girls with appropriate services, skills, knowledge and resources.

LESSONS LEARNED

Engaging all partners throughout the evaluation process of the National Strategic Plan to End Child Marriage 2019-2021 allows for better synergy of stakeholders. These same stakeholders will also be more effectively involved in developing the new plan and monitoring its implementation thanks to the engagement.

Generating and applying data and evidence

In 2021, the Niger was one of the countries that rolled out the GTA tool. A GTA workshop was held on 28 June 2021 with the active participation and engagement of technical staff from UNFPA, UNICEF, the government and civil society organizations. The discussions focused on identifying one or two priorities, or catalytic opportunities, within the Nigerien context to focus on during the GTA process. Country leads were asked to identify crucial areas within their existing workplan where gender-transformative approaches can have both an immediate and potentially amplified impact because of the GTA process. As a result, two promising priorities emerged: (1) improvement in the understanding of how to reinforce positive masculinities at all levels of the socio-ecological model and the strengthening of a gender-transformative approach within service delivery to increase girls’ use and (2) demand for sexual and reproductive health services (including access to family planning services, access to and quality of education, such as comprehensive sexuality education, in schools and gender-transformative child and social protection systems). The Niger team prioritized participatory discussion and ranking of three elements as most relevant to the priority focus areas: (1) Girls’ skills, agency and empowerment; (2) Information and services; and (3) Addressing masculinities and engaging men and boys. Participants prioritized three types of actions to move ahead within their areas of focus: (1) Strengthening existing work through incremental improvements; (2) Scaling existing interventions and promising practices; and (3) Testing new interventions to directly address gender norm transformation.

CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

There are difficulties in finding expertise at the national level to carry out surveys, in addition, attempts with the National Institute of Statistics have not been successful because of the very high cost that the institute proposed to help collect, process and disseminate data on gender-based violence annually (as part of the Spotlight Initiative). Nevertheless, with funds from the Spotlight Initiative, UNFPA supported a survey on the extent and determinants of gender-based violence in the Niger using the same methodology as the Demographic and Health Survey. The use of non-governmental organizations’ staff working on gender-based violence-related issues to conduct the survey was a good experience since these staff have expertise in caring for survivors and listening to them and could ensure that the data collected is of good quality.

“Through the GTA exercise, we realized that gender norms transformation starts from within. We cannot design and implement gender-transformative approaches if we are not all at the same level of understanding of what this means, and if we are not willing to challenge ourselves and our own biases. This means prioritizing internal advocacy and capacity-building for both our teams and implementing partners.”

Elsa Burzynski, UNFPA Niger
Child marriage context

There are 776,000 child brides in Sierra Leone, 253,600 of whom were married before the age of 15. Currently, the prevalence of child marriage (marriage before the age of 18) among girls stands at 30 per cent, compared to 51 per cent in 1994. However, the average annual rate of reduction would need to be 30.6 per cent, compared to the observed 4.2 per cent in the last decade to be able to eliminate the practice by 2030 as set out in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).\(^5\)

UNFPA and UNICEF Evaluation Offices conducted a joint assessment of Global Programme adaptations to the COVID-19 crisis in 2021.\(^5\) The COVID-19 assessment aimed to:

- Assess relevant contingency planning and implementation and alternative delivery and management arrangements for the Global Programme due to the COVID-19 pandemic, taking into account the views of vulnerable adolescent girls, their families, communities and key implementing partners.
- Make recommendations for the immediate to mid-term improvement of the Global Programme response to child marriage.

Programming context

The COVID-19 pandemic profoundly affected the everyday lives of girls for a second year in 2021, including their physical and mental health, education and the economic circumstances of their families and communities. Globally, up to 10 million more girls are estimated to become child brides by 2030 as a result of the pandemic.\(^5\)

\(^{50}\) UNICEF, 2022, Child marriage country profiles: Sierra Leone, https://data.unicef.org/resources/child-marriage-country-profiles/


to COVID-19, identify ongoing programme changes and recommending any additional support required to implement those programme changes and shifting priorities.

- Make any recommendations required to adjust the Global Programme Phase II to the new context, including its theory of change and the targets established before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The results of the assessment indicate that:

- It is critical to keep the focus and efforts in reaching the most vulnerable and marginalized adolescents, including those in remote areas.

- Lessons could be taken from experiences using multi-channel and two-way communication approaches, while also being attentive to the digital divide.

- Vulnerable adolescents must continue to have access to education (especially if provided remotely), health and social welfare services.

- It is key to overcome drivers of poverty by leveraging existing social protection schemes.

- Ensuring the use of evidence led programming is important and so too is advocating with governments to keep child marriage prevention and responses on national agendas while continuing to develop legal and operational frameworks to help accelerate the end of child marriage.

### TABLE. Conclusions and recommendations from the COVID-19 assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONCLUSION</th>
<th>RECOMMENDATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Programme advocacy and engagement efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic kept child marriage on national agendas</td>
<td>Advocate with governments to continue developing legal and operational frameworks contributing to ending child marriage with a rights-based and multisectoral focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The COVID-19 crisis underscored the vulnerability of adolescent girls in rural and remote areas</td>
<td>Reinforce efforts to reach the most vulnerable and marginalized adolescent girls, boys and their families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adoption of digital and mass media approaches demonstrated a high potential for sustaining engagement of adolescent girls at scale, although the digital divide should be considered</td>
<td>Develop complementary multi-channel approaches to reach target populations, ensuring that they foster two-way communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COVID-19 restrictions limited adolescent girls’ access to health and social welfare services</td>
<td>Continue technical support and explore the most effective approaches to ensure adolescent girls have access to essential services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The programme theory of change remains valid but poverty and economic drivers need to be stressed further in operational strategies</td>
<td>Further articulate the strategy to leverage social protection schemes such as cash transfers and income generation opportunities for adolescent girls and their families</td>
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<td>COVID-19 programme adjustments created a high demand on data and evidence for adopted approaches</td>
<td>Continue adjusting monitoring, data generation and analysis in order to reinforce evidence-based programming</td>
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</table>
These results will inform future adjustments and refinements to the programme. They will help continue delivering in changing contexts and accelerating the pace, during the Decade of Action, of eliminating child marriage to achieve the SDGs by 2030.

**Key highlights**

- Over 11,000 adolescent girls (aged 10-19) actively participated in life skills or comprehensive sexuality education in programme areas.
- Over 350,000 individuals (boys, girls, women and men) were reached by traditional or social media messaging on child marriage, the rights of adolescent girls and gender equality.
- Over 112,000 individuals (boys, girls, women and men) participated in group education and dialogue sessions on consequences of and alternatives to child marriage, the rights of adolescent girls and gender equality.
- Over 2,593 vulnerable girls (aged 10-19) were supported by the programme to enrol and/or remain in primary or secondary school.
- Over 4,800 boys and men participated in group education or dialogue sessions on harmful masculinities, gender equality and on addressing harmful gender norms.
### Programme performance

**TABLE. Summary of output indicator performance (2021)**

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<td>25,500</td>
<td>11,058</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 1121:</strong> Number of girls (aged 10-19) supported by the programme to enrol and/or remain in primary or secondary school</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>2,593</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 1211:</strong> Number of boys and men actively participating in group education/dialogues that address harmful masculinities and gender norms</td>
<td>10,750</td>
<td>4,870</td>
</tr>
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<td><strong>Indicator 1221:</strong> 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</td>
<td>14,950</td>
<td>112,009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 1222:</strong> 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</td>
<td>300,000</td>
<td>352,089</td>
</tr>
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<td><strong>Indicator 1223:</strong> Number of local actors (e.g., traditional, religious and community leaders) with meaningful participation in dialogues and consensus-building to end child marriage</td>
<td>775</td>
<td>980</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

NA = Not applicable (the country programme does not work on or report on this indicator)

### Providing intensive support to marginalized girls

UNFPA and UNICEF supported the mapping of adolescent girls most at risk of child marriage in intervention areas. Working with implementing partners, 80 communities in hard-to-reach areas were mapped. In collaboration with grassroots groups and civil society organizations, and engaging different community
stakeholders, a total of 67 safe spaces were then established within the 80 mapped communities.

Within the safe spaces, girls’ clubs were formed (with a maximum of 25 girls participating in each club). In addition, 20 clubs were established in school settings and 20 were established for out-of-school girls in the Koinadugu district, and 20 girls’ clubs were established in the Kambia and Pujehun districts. 87 mentors and ten volunteers were identified and approved by community stakeholders to work in each safe space. They were then trained as trainers on life skills, including subjects, such as sexual and reproductive health and rights, gender-based violence and family planning.

The mentors have delivered life skills training on a weekly basis in the safe spaces, helping the girls build their knowledge and skills, making informed choices about their lives, health and sexuality and promoting empowerment and resilience. Mentors serve as key drivers for the desired behaviour change for the most at-risk girls in their communities and can create a lasting impact in the strive to end child marriage. A total of 192 life skills sessions were held in schools in the Koinadugu district, reaching a total of 17,495 adolescents (11,058 girls and 6,437 boys).

A UNICEF survey among 2,305 adolescent girls that have actively participated in the adolescent safe spaces prior to 2021, showed a 22 per cent increase in the proportion of girls who expressed that they felt an increased sense of self-efficacy and confidence in their ability to negotiate and delay marriage and felt comfortable speaking without fear, from 58 per cent before engaging in the safe spaces, to 80 per cent currently. Likewise, the proportion of girls aged 15-19 years who think that children should have the final say in deciding when to get married has increased from 41 per cent to 80 per cent, and the proportion of girls aged 15–19 years who make their own informed decisions regarding sexual relations, contraceptive use and reproductive health care has increased from 33 per cent to 75 per cent.

While the government provides free education for all primary, junior and senior high school children the Global Programme helped address some of the barriers to school enrolment and retention for marginalized adolescent girls at risk of child marriage, such as providing scholastic, hygiene and sanitary materials. UNFPA supported the provision of hygiene and sanitary packs at the safe spaces in the Pujehun and Kambia districts. A total of 1,755 girls were provided with packs including toothpaste and a toothbrush, bathing soap, face masks and sanitary pads to support hygiene management and COVID-19 protection. Among the 1,755 girls supported, 802 adolescent girls from vulnerable families were also provided with school bags, copy books, pens, pencils, erasers and rulers to remain in school. Meanwhile, UNICEF supported 838 vulnerable out-of-school girls to enrol in school and provided them with educational materials (uniforms, bags and footwear) in the Kono and Kambia districts. Parents, community leaders and adolescent girls expressed gratitude as the education support relieved them of the burden of providing (and possibly failing to provide) these materials, and hence reducing the girls’ risk of dropping out of school due to lack of basic educational materials. Since the distribution of educational materials, there have been no reported cases of school dropouts in any of the communities with established a safe space in the four targeted districts.

“These engagements have improved the ability of young people to avoid risky sexual behaviour and have also influenced their skills to interact effectively with their peers. It has also helped in building self-confidence of these adolescent girls and boys, building a certain comfort level that have helped them to develop greater self-confidence and broader interests, developed leadership skills focusing on the development of teamwork, having higher aspirations and greater motivation and, most importantly, allowing girls to be themselves in an environment where they feel safe to express themselves and engage in an open and safe exchange of ideas.”

Family Support Unit Officer (police) in charge of the Kondembaia community
CHALLENGES, LESSONS LEARNED AND NEXT STEPS

Business continuity capabilities of most of the implementing partners were disrupted by COVID-19, resulting in delays in meeting the requirements to renew or extend their formal partnership agreements with the Global Programme. This in effect delayed the implementation of the programme work plans and ultimately the ability of the programme to meet its annual target: less than half of the targeted adolescent girls were reached with life skills and comprehensive sexuality education during the year.

The often short-term nature of safe space programming and attempts to address a very complex issue have led to conversations on how to improve strategies while scaling up and sustaining efforts to create a more meaningful, as well measurable, impacts when it comes to life skills training in the country. The newly developed standardized approach including minimum standards, standard operating procedures and regulations is expected to get partners on the same page and allow the government to better track results nationwide.

Even though the government of Sierra Leone has eliminated school fees for children, there are still barriers to girls’ full participation and retention in schools. Additional support and comprehensive sexuality education are essential. Hence, the programme will support the government to implement comprehensive sexuality education in selected schools in 2022. Girls missing school sessions during their menstruation is also a challenge that needs to be further addressed. Although the Global Programme provides disposable sanitary pads in hygiene and sanitation packages, disposable pads are not sustainable in the long run, neither economically nor environmentally. Production and distribution of reusable pads could be a more sustainable input into the programme. Reusable pads would help relieve monthly costs for girls and help them stay in school and actively attend classes during their periods. However, changing the programme interventions to include the procurement and distribution of reusable pads will require additional funds.

Enhancing the family and community environment

In 2021, UNICEF completed a survey on social and behavioural drivers of child marriage whose findings show that:

- While a majority of respondents said they themselves think child marriage should be abolished, children under age 18 would prefer not to be married and that marriage of their own children was not practiced (possibly reflecting social desirability bias). The overarching perception is that many parents in the communities are still practicing child marriage and would ultimately opt to marry their children before the age of 18 given the opportunity.

- Perceptions and attitudes around parents making child marriage decisions seem to be shifting, but it seems like children are still subject to expectations of early marriage and judgement for promiscuity if they are not married by a particular age.

- While respondents acknowledged that parents would be respected if they chose not to marry their daughters before 18, they simultaneously felt that girls who remained unmarried after the age of 18 would suffer reputational harm and reduced marriage prospects. This indicates that social consequences for girls themselves could be a significant barrier to eliminating child marriage, even if its negative effects are well understood.

- Gender norms lag behind attitudinal shifts around child marriage, from attitudes about domestic violence to believing a father should have the final say in his children’s marriage decisions. Further work on the meta-norms that underlie the constructs of child marriage may be a way to continue to progress the elimination of this practice. Though the consequences of child marriage are well understood, the cultural context of Sierra Leone may continue to implicitly support the practice until there is progress on this aspect of the equation.
Based on results of the advanced analysis of the study, demographic factors (namely age and gender) and environmental factors (specifically income and education level) bear most heavily on decision-making around child marriage in Sierra Leone. In particular, there is a correlation between the desire to end child marriage and men, older people, higher income levels and higher education levels.

In an effort to engage boys and men through a gender-transformative approach, UNFPA supported the identification, training and engagement of 60 male advocacy peer educators (MAPES) and 40 out-of-school boy club members in the efforts to end child marriage. The boys further reached out to 16 communities in the Moyamba and Kambia districts, where they engaged 587 people, including 76 community stakeholders and 12 people living with disabilities. Their efforts led to enhanced knowledge of the consequences of child marriage and violence against girls and women. In all these engagements, female participation was very high and most of the engaged stakeholders pledged to be actively involved in reporting cases of child marriage and violence using the correct channels as well as ensuring that the cases are addressed.

The Global Programme focused on social change using key community advocates to address gender inequality as a root cause of child marriage through school debates, radio programmes and social media campaigns. Representatives from schools and communities were supported to participate in radio shows on ending child marriage and engage other community members in focus group discussions to help identify community actions to be taken on issues related to child marriage and other harmful practices. Students were, at the same time, engaged in debates on the topic of my body, my right with a total of 1,256 students and 14 teachers engaged in the awareness raising sessions.

Through nationwide engagements by religious leaders affiliated with the Interreligious Council of Sierra Leone, girls and boys were given a platform to freely express their views, share experience and demand action from local authorities through intergenerational dialogues on ending child marriage and other forms of abuse, including barriers to higher education and protection services. Similarly, women and men were engaged through regular positive social and gender norms messages through religious engagements in their communities. This approach has allowed for a scale up of the programme’s reach, and it has been reported that the audience generally accepts the messages that child marriage is harmful and that children, especially girls, should remain in school.

LESSONS LEARNED AND NEXT STEPS

Striving to do gender-transformative work, it is important to engage boys as well as girls to challenge existing gender norms and promote positive change. The programme has engaged boys to participate in the discussions around issues that adolescents, particularly girls, face in their communities and their rights to make their own choices regarding their sexual and reproductive health and to access appropriate services.

The male engagement component must be well incorporated with the girl-focused interventions. In 2022, the programme will strengthen coordination between interventions at the community level. There will also be sustained engagement of community decision makers to address harmful power relations and gender norms within safe spaces and communities to ensure improved agency for girls’ club members and their peers. By strengthening linkages between the safe spaces and quality sexual and reproductive health and protection services, girls will be empowered to enrol and remain in school and have increased economic potential.

Strengthening systems

UNFPA worked closely with the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education to develop teaching materials for comprehensive sexuality education at the primary and junior secondary level. In order to ensure that the materials were culturally appropriate and in line with the International Technical Guidelines on Sexuality Education, a technical group of key stakeholders including key staff
from the ministry, the Teaching Service Commission and development partners was established.

UNFPA, in partnership with the Ministry of Gender and Children’s Affairs, supported setting up four adolescent and youth sexual and reproductive health hubs in four hard-to-reach communities in the Koinadugu district, which has been piloted for easy access to services for adolescent girls who participate in the safe space programme. The hubs are within walking distance of the safe spaces to enhance the referral pathways to services. The four hubs were refurbished with laptops, desks, examination couches, cabinets and chairs.

UNICEF provided technical assistance to the Family Support Unit to train 100 officers (74 male and 36 female) on the revised sexual and gender-based violence standard operating procedures and 50 court monitors and police prosecutors of the legal and justice department (25 male and 25 female) on crime data collection and management. In addition, support was provided towards the operation of a toll-free hotline for reporting and referral of gender-based violence cases.

As of September 2021, 140 cases were reported and recorded at the call centre and were referred to services, including at one-stop-centres. However, efforts must be made to strengthen case management, including information management and timely and effective responses. During the year, UNFPA supported the production of national clinical guidelines for the management of survivors of sexual and gender-based violence. These guidelines will help improve the quality of clinical care provision to survivors of gender-based violence.

**Facilitating supportive laws and policies**

In 2021, UNICEF supported the Ministry of Gender and Children’s Affairs and other stakeholders to make progress in implementing legal and policy reform. Revision of the Child Rights Act, which started in 2020, continued in 2021 and resulted in a comprehensive analysis report with recommendations from nationwide multi-stakeholder consultations, including UNFPA. Consultations culminated in a two-day national validation workshop which helped endorse key recommendations, such as promoting the independence of the National Commission for Children, ensuring explicit mention of female genital mutilation and child marriage as unlawful harmful practices and prohibition of corporal punishment in all settings.

UNFPA and UNICEF continued to support the National Secretariat for the Reduction of Teenage Pregnancy (NSRTP) for the coordination of the implementation of the National Strategy for the Reduction of Adolescent Pregnancy and Child Marriage (2018-2022), including at subnational levels. The strategy was developed to guide the prioritization of all evidence-based interventions to address adolescent pregnancy and child marriage in the country. With six main pillars, the strategy sets out a national goal and the objectives to achieve this goal are priority strategies to achieve the stated objectives, guiding principles to inform implementation of the strategies, the coordination mechanisms, a monitoring and evaluation framework and a costing framework for 2018-2022. The NSRTP coordinates the work of six line ministries as well as civil society partners to implement the strategy.

With support from UNFPA, Women in Crisis Movement and Kids Advocacy Network Sierra Leone hosted the
National Girls’ Empowerment Forum in celebration of the International Day of the Girl in 2021. A total of 137 girls aged 14-25 years from across the 16 districts of Sierra Leone were mobilized to participate in the forum. Awareness and demand for action on issues affecting the welfare of adolescent girls were raised with senior professionals from government, ministry and private sectors. The three-day event for girls’ empowerment utilized a variety of different methodologies, such as a series of lectures and a talent exhibition to build the capacity of participants on key areas including advocacy and leadership. Professionals from around the country delivered impactful sessions including a keynote statement delivered by the Minister of Gender and Children’s Affairs who gave a commitment to end child marriage and protect girls from cyberbullying. As a result of the forum, girls developed advocacy plans to take back to their home districts for ending harmful practices and campaigning for the enactment of the Gender Bill into law.

CHALLENGES, LESSONS LEARNED AND NEXT STEPS

During the revision of the Child Rights Act, it became evident that a lack of timely direct engagement with the Law Reform Office and its absence from consultations hindered the full reflection of the recommendations produced in the first draft of the bill. With UNICEF support, a new set of consultations were carried out in 2021, where both the senior leadership from the ministry and the Law Reform Office were constantly present and provided significant inputs. The outcome proposed intended to increase the chances of producing and passing a draft which will better address the current gaps and reflect the recommendations from key stakeholders.

Supporting the youth-led network to engage adolescent girls in enhancing their voices and build their capacity to advocate and engage duty bearers, has brought about a positive change in the attitudes and perspectives of adolescent girls. In 2022, UNFPA will support participants from the National Girls’ Empowerment Forum to undertake advocacy programmes in their districts and to engage other adolescent girls who are outside the programme districts.

Generating and applying data and evidence

UNFPA and UNICEF supported the mapping of adolescent girls most at risk of child marriage in intervention areas. Through the exercise, a total of 17,960 underserved marginalized adolescent girls were identified in 80 communities between the two agencies. As for UNFPA, data collectors were trained on the specific assessment design and administration coupled with basic research concepts and ethics, as well as COVID-19 mitigation measures. Questionnaires were administered using tablets and extensive efforts were undertaken to ensure robust data quality using remote and on the spot supervision for real time data quality assurance, monitoring of coverage and error management. The mapping generated disaggregated data on girls, by age and disability and other factors related to risks of child marriage.

UNFPA and UNICEF have worked jointly on initiating the establishment of a gender-based violence information management system in Sierra Leone. With technical support from UNFPA and UNICEF at the global, regional and national level and government leadership from the Ministry of Gender and Children’s Affairs, the information management system will be rolled out in 2022. UNFPA, UNICEF and the ministry are also collaborating with other partners, including the Directorate of Science, Technology and Innovation, the Ministry of Social Welfare, the Family Support Unit of the Sierra Leone Police and Rainbow Initiative, among many others, invested in addressing gender-based violence on this work.

LESSONS LEARNED

Cross-sectoral collaboration with education, health, nutrition and social and behaviour change sections within UNICEF have been key in evidence-generation initiatives. The school-related gender-based violence action research initiative, the formative research on adolescent health and the survey on social and behavioural drivers of child marriage are three products of such cross-sectoral collaboration. Of note, major success can be seen in the enhancement of the inter-ministerial collaboration between relevant ministries and government actors.
Child marriage context

There are 4.7 million child brides in Uganda, 1.3 million of whom were married before the age of 15. In 2016, the prevalence of child marriage (marriage before the age of 18) among girls stood at 34 per cent. The practice has become less common in the last 25 years, with the percentage of young women aged 20–24 who were married before age 18 years old dropping from 52 per cent in 1991 to 34 per cent in 2016. However, this rate of progress is not rapid enough to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) target to end child marriage by 2030. Even if the rate observed over the past decade was doubled, 18 per cent of all girls will still be married in childhood by 2030 and 8 per cent by 2050.

Programming context

The COVID-19 pandemic profoundly affected the everyday lives of girls for a second year in 2021, including their physical and mental health, education and the economic circumstances of their families and communities. Globally, up to 10 million more girls are estimated to become child brides by 2030 as a result of the pandemic.

UNFPA and UNICEF Evaluation Offices conducted a joint assessment of Global Programme adaptations to the COVID-19 crisis in 2021. The COVID-19 assessment aimed to:

- Assess relevant contingency planning and implementation and alternative delivery and
management arrangements for the Global Programme due to the COVID-19 pandemic, taking into account the views of vulnerable adolescent girls, their families, communities and key implementing partners.

- Make recommendations for the immediate to mid-term improvement of the Global Programme response to COVID-19, identify ongoing programme changes and recommending any additional support required to implement those programme changes and shifting priorities.

- Make any recommendations required to adjust the Global Programme Phase II to the new context, including its theory of change and the targets established before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The results of the assessment indicate that:

- It is critical to keep the focus and efforts in reaching the most vulnerable and marginalized adolescents, including those in remote areas.

- Lessons could be taken from experiences using multi-channel and two-way communication approaches, while also being attentive to the digital divide.
Vulnerable adolescents must continue to have access to education (especially if provided remotely), health and social welfare services.

It is key to overcome drivers of poverty by leveraging existing social protection schemes.

Ensuring the use of evidence led programming is important and so too is advocating with governments to keep child marriage prevention and responses on national agendas while continuing to develop legal and operational frameworks to help accelerate the end of child marriage.

These results will inform future adjustments and refinements to the programme. They will help continue delivering in changing contexts and accelerating the pace, during the Decade of Action, of eliminating child marriage to achieve the SDGs by 2030.

**Key highlights**

- Over 200,000 adolescent girls (aged 10-19) actively participated in life skills education or comprehensive sexuality education in programme areas.
- Over 3 million individuals (boys, girls, women and men) reached by traditional and social media messaging on child marriage, the rights of adolescent girls and gender equality.
- Over 100,000 individuals (boys, girls, women and men) participated in group education or dialogue sessions on consequences of and alternatives to child marriage, the rights of adolescent girls and gender equality.
- Launch of the National Child Policy which aligns with Uganda national development strategy (Vision 2040).
- Launch of a nationwide campaign to prevent defilement, teenage pregnancy, child marriage and to promote positive parenting.

**TABLE. Conclusions and recommendations from the COVID-19 assessment**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONCLUSION</th>
<th>RECOMMENDATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Programme advocacy and engagement efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic kept child marriage on national agendas</td>
<td>Advocate with governments to continue developing legal and operational frameworks contributing to ending child marriage with a rights-based and multisectoral focus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The COVID-19 crisis underscored the vulnerability of adolescent girls in rural and remote areas</td>
<td>Reinforce efforts to reach the most vulnerable and marginalized adolescent girls, boys and their families.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adoption of digital and mass media approaches demonstrated a high potential for sustaining engagement of adolescent girls at scale, although the digital divide should be considered</td>
<td>Develop complementary multi-channel approaches to reach target populations, ensuring that they foster two-way communication.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COVID-19 restrictions limited adolescent girls’ access to health and social welfare services</td>
<td>Continue technical support and explore the most effective approaches to ensure adolescent girls have access to essential services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The programme theory of change remains valid but poverty and economic drivers need to be stressed further in operational strategies</td>
<td>Further articulate the strategy to leverage social protection schemes such as cash transfers and income generation opportunities for adolescent girls and their families.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COVID-19 programme adjustments created a high demand on data and evidence for adopted approaches</td>
<td>Continue adjusting monitoring, data generation and analysis in order to reinforce evidence-based programming.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Programme performance

TABLE. Summary of output indicator performance (2021)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INDICATOR</th>
<th>TARGET</th>
<th>RESULT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indicator 1111: Number of adolescent girls (aged 10-19) who actively participated in life skills or comprehensive sexuality education interventions in programme areas</td>
<td>181,690</td>
<td>200,407</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicator 1121: Number of girls (aged 10-19) supported by the programme to enrol and/or remain in primary or secondary school</td>
<td>25,174</td>
<td>14,144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicator 1211: Number of boys and men actively participating in group education/dialogues that address harmful masculinities and gender norms</td>
<td>41,000</td>
<td>10,120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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</td>
<td>118,000</td>
<td>101,924</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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</td>
<td>2,081,872</td>
<td>3,005,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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</td>
<td>1,681</td>
<td>37,602</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicator 1231: Number of civil society organizations newly mobilized in support of challenging social norms and promoting gender equality by the Global Programme</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicator 2121: Number of primary/secondary/non-formal schools in programme areas providing quality gender-friendly education that meets minimum standards</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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</td>
<td>274</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicator 2211: Number of partnerships (both formal and informal) established to deliver adolescent-responsive social protection, poverty reduction, and economic empowerment programmes and services</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicator 3111: Number of policies or legal instruments addressing child marriage drafted, proposed or adopted at national and subnational level with Global Programme support</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicator 3211: Number of generated evidence and knowledge that focus on what works to end child marriage</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicator 3212: Number of generated evidence and knowledge that apply a gender analysis</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicator 3221: Number of South-to-South cooperation (conferences, expert visits, peer consultations, study tours, communities of practice) supported</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NA = Not applicable (the country programme does not work on or report on this indicator)

Providing intensive support to marginalized girls

Vulnerable girls, at risk of violence or gender-based violence, and their families, including in humanitarian contexts, accessed information on gender-based violence, violence against children, gender equality and economic opportunities during 2021. This was done through the adolescent life skills initiative using rights-based training.
 manuals for in- and out-of-school girls. It enhanced the girls’ knowledge and understanding of human rights and developed their confidence to seek and demand services, make informed decisions, report incidents of child marriage and strengthened their resilience to withstanding the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Following the closure of schools due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the approach to upskilling adolescents shifted from in-school to out-of-school community-based club engagement. This approach enabled them to acquire enhanced knowledge of life skills and an understanding of risk factors on violence against children in schools, gender issues, HIV, sexual and reproductive health and rights, prevention of teenage pregnancy and child marriage. 170 peer educators have been trained to deliver life skills sessions with support of UNICEF’s partner Straight Talk Foundation. The peer educators have in turn trained and mentored a further 200,407 girls and 88,998 boys using the out-of-school club platforms and the community dialogue sessions.

The Global Programme also supported the establishment and strengthening of 30 new adolescent clubs which empowered adolescent girls with knowledge and skills related to decision making on issues related to sexuality, reproduction, marriage and risky behaviours. The empowerment of adolescent girls was further strengthened through the girls empowering girls mentorship programme, supported by peer educators and para-social workers who conducted home visits and referrals to services during COVID-19.

The launch of the Guidelines for the Prevention and Management of Teenage Pregnancy in School Settings by the Ministry of Education and Sports, which provides for the re-enrolment of adolescent mothers into schools. The re-entry guidelines created momentum for the return of pregnant girls and teenage mothers to school and for them to remain in school. To support this, all District Resident Commissioners have been instructed through the office of the president to work with the District Education Officers to mobilize girls that became pregnant during the lockdown to go back to school. In addition, task forces have been formed at district level to implement the directive from the First Lady’s office. Relatedly, the Ministry of Education and Sports launched guidelines for senior male and female teachers to strengthen their role with mentoring and referring adolescent girls to protection and health services as required.

Although schools were closed for an extended period since March 2020 across the country, the Global Programme aligned with the government strategy and modalities that supported home-based distance learning and community-based, non-formal education to ensure continuation of schooling. Support for the delivery of home- and community-based learning in partnership with civil society organizations resulted in 14,144 adolescent girls being better prepared for the transition to secondary school.

The promotion of digital technology and virtual learning also contributed to sustained learning during the prolonged school closures, although there were with challenges on reach and scale for under-served and marginalized adolescent girls, especially in hard to reach communities that did not benefit maximally from these modalities. In addition to the digital learning approaches, the programme, together with partners, also supported 1,784 young people (1,020 girls and 764 boys), including 7 adolescents (2 girls and 5 boys) living with a disability who are currently out of school to attain literacy and numeracy skills sessions facilitated by commercial officers. Provision of livelihood materials was also considered based on a market survey and 23 empowerment club members were provided with tailoring equipment, five received bead making materials and two received bakery start up items to support their economic empowerment.

**CHALLENGES AND NEXT STEPS**

The ability of Global Programme implementing partners to reach all categories of vulnerable adolescent girls with life skills and comprehensive sexuality education, for example girls in hard-to-reach communities, was curtailed under the COVID-19 lockdown measures as restrictions of
movement and girls’ limited access to virtual platforms and issues of the digital divide impacted how the programme could reach them. Prolonged school closures also affected the implementation of school-based interventions, leaving only space for community- and home-based interventions, which had implications on the quality of interventions, their reach and scale and the ability to monitor and report.

The adapted approach also impacted the budget required in terms of both human and financial resources. The shift in focus to health interventions, home schooling and the revitalization of the economy to address the impact of COVID-19 additionally resulted in limited attention and de-prioritization of the government for the implementation of adolescent-friendly interventions, such as comprehensive sexuality education and life skills sessions, especially at subnational levels.

Most child marriages involve girls from poor families, marginalized groups, and those in poor and remote areas. COVID-19 has put these vulnerable groups at even greater risk. The pandemic has exacerbated several risk factors that drive child marriage and, at the same time, created new threats. As a result, the priority going forward will be to tackle underlying causes of child marriage and help to create alternative life options for girls and boys. Adaptation of existing programmes and new innovations will be required to address the drivers and advance progress in reducing child marriage, including new and alternative approaches to engage with girls, boys, families and communities and new strategies to reduce the risk of child marriage related to prolonged school closures.

The Global Programme will strengthen partnerships and collaboration for an integrated package of services and broaden reach to hard-to-reach adolescent boys and girls. Particular attention will be paid to supporting adolescent girls and boys who are unable to return to formal education to consider non-formal education through the provision of vocational skills training, literacy classes and access to employment opportunities, including access to start-up loans.

**Enhancing the family and community environment**

The implementation of gender-transformative approaches as a key strategy for addressing child marriage demonstrated great potential for changing negative gender and social norms, beliefs and attitudes that drive child marriage. The men’s and boys’ engagement for social change and girls’ empowerment, community mobilization through religious and cultural institutions and multi-media campaigns with messages on gender-based inequalities, harmful gender norms and power imbalance inherent in patriarchal societies promoted open discussions on negative gender and social norms, beliefs and attitudes on child marriage. These interventions built a critical mass of male activists, community leaders and stakeholders who lead discussions on a deeper analysis of men’s power over women and challenge the practice of child marriage resulting in an appreciable change in attitudes and practices related to child marriage among the target population.

In 2021, the country witnessed the unusual commitment of religious leaders through the Inter-Religious Council of Uganda supporting several sexual and reproductive health and rights services that have previously been considered contentious. Religious leaders are now increasingly playing leadership roles through engagement and conversations with adolescents on sexuality and meaningful decision-
making, including on marriage. The religious leaders committed to join the national campaign to end child marriage and teenage pregnancy. In addition, during the 16 Days of Activism, the forum of cultural leaders from eight institutions in the Bugisu, Busoga, Buganda, Acholi, Karamoja, Bunyoyo, Tyanga Dhora Lango and Lugbar districts made a joint statement and commitment to end teenage pregnancy and child marriage and denounced other harmful practices, including female genital mutilation. The programme supported the leadership of seven main religious denominations (the Roman Catholic Church, the Church of the Province of Uganda, the Uganda Orthodox Church, the Uganda Muslim Supreme Council, the Seventh-day Adventist Uganda Union, the Born Again Faith in Uganda and the National Alliance of Pentecostal and Evangelical Churches in Uganda) to mobilize communities for gender-based violence prevention, ending child marriage and demand sexual and reproductive health and gender-based violence services through commonly agreed messaging at the level of the Inter-religious Council of Uganda and utilization of religious structures for community dialogues and mass media communication. Through media communication, mainly radio talk shows, 1,300,000 individuals (782,000 males and 1,518,000 females) were reached with messages that contributed to building consensus on alternatives to child marriage and enhanced knowledge on the rights of adolescent girls and gender equality.

Furthermore, a total of 1,389 men and boys were engaged through Male Action Groups and through Accountable Practices (EMAP) in the programme areas, as champions for change on gender norms. This approach empowered men and boys to play active leadership roles in mobilizing and engaging other men and boys in open discussions and dialogues that address harmful masculinities and promote gender-transformative results.

The Global Programme support to civil society organizations (Action Aid and IRC) ensured the identification, training and monthly meetings of the trained male champions and built their capacity as change agents. The male champions further identified and reached fellow men and boys including fathers, clan and cultural leaders, young men, religious leaders, village health team members, senior male teachers, political leaders and opinion leaders in their respective communities. Through the men’s and boys’ engagement sessions, a total of 10,120 men and boys engaged with a variety of information, such as sexual and reproductive health and rights for girls and women, gender-based violence, child marriage and other harmful practices and on changing behaviours and power dynamics both in homes and in the community.

Complementary interventions such as the Spotlight Initiative also supported a critical mass of community leaders and stakeholders to gain skills to lead discussions on deepening analysis of men’s power over women and to challenge the silence around child marriage and harmful masculinities. The Spotlight Initiative supported the SASA! Together community mobilization training, engaging 918 community activists, which was cascaded to 137,078 people in rural communities, which in turn increased their understanding of the nexus between power, violence and gender equity. The silence around gender relationships and harmful masculinities, violence against women and harmful practices, such as child marriage, has gradually been broken as open discussions continue to take place at community level amongst different social networks.

Building on previous years’ interventions, the programme continued to mobilize and work with women- and youth-
led organizations including BRAC, Action Aid, RAHU, ACORD, Girl Up Initiative and Reproductive Health Uganda to support the challenging of social norms and the promotion of gender equality. Through community-led interventions including intergenerational dialogues, Male Action Groups and SASA! methodologies, social media advocacy campaigns and peer-to-peer activities provision of critical services to girls and women were strengthened, including livelihood empowerment and access to sexual and reproductive health services, which contributed to preventing teenage pregnancy and child marriage among vulnerable adolescent girls, including in refugee communities and in hard-to-reach locations. The youth-led organizations focused on building the capacity and agency of adolescent girls to enhance their voices for meaningful participation and decision making. The organizations also addressed gender inequalities and empowered women and girls to become advocates of human rights while enhancing their self-esteem, autonomy and self-worth.

CHALLENGES, LESSONS LEARNED AND NEXT STEPS

The concept of male involvement and leadership in open discussions that challenge deep-rooted gender issues and harmful masculinities and that promote gender equality and transformation is alien to the culture and tradition of the patriarchal Ugandan society. Therefore, changing gender dynamics and decision-making roles using gender-transformative approaches is a gradual process that will gain gradual acceptance. Opposition from religious and cultural institutions entail careful identification of allies and support networks at all levels. In 2022, in-depth analysis of gender-transformative approaches will be conducted to generate evidence and better understand the approach for evidence-informed planning and implementation.

Working with families, communities, traditional and religious leaders and other influencers to build consensus on alternatives to child marriage will have an impact in the long term. However, these interventions need to
happen in tandem with efforts to tackle structural drivers of child marriage to make a significant impact on reducing the risks of child marriage. These interventions must be accompanied by other support systems and services, such as social protection, saving and loan programmes and access to education for all girls and boys.

Civil society organizations have continued to play a lead role in advancing the rights of women and girls, including challenging negative social norms, gender-based violence and holding duty bearers accountable in line with international standards. Recently, the ability and commitment of civil society organizations have been met with restrictive legal provisions such as the Public Order Management Act, the amended Non-Governmental Organization Act and the Anti-Terrorism Act which impacts civil society-led interventions. Reported incidents of name calling and branding of non-governmental organizations as supporters of homosexuality, agents of foreign interests and enemies of national security has also curtailed the activity of some organizations, keeping the civil society organizations at a crossroad as national policies continue to narrow their operational space thus limiting their potential as advocated for the rights of vulnerable girls and women.

**Strengthening systems**

By strengthening national protection systems at a national and decentralized levels, enhanced capacity for the delivery of coordinated, multi-sectoral quality services to adolescents and their families was achieved, among actors, such as USAID, Save the Children and the Spotlight Initiative, under the leadership of the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development. For example, dissemination and implementation of the national child policy in 50 districts, including the establishment of district-level child wellbeing committees and a social care and support technical working group, contributed to improved coordination, collaboration and leveraging of resources between development partners and civil society organizations within the humanitarian context. In addition, nine districts were supported enforce a sustainable and integrated child protection system through the training of 402 (209 male and 193 female) justice, health and social workers on case management, case referral and coordination, providing multisectoral protection services to 16,403 adolescent girls. The implementation of policies, frameworks and guidelines, such as the adolescent girl multisectoral framework, the revised guidelines on the prevention and management of teenage pregnancy in school settings and the menstrual health management guidelines for in-school adolescents provided further clear guidance on multisectoral roles and responsibilities for integrated service delivery to meet the needs of adolescents.

The Global Programme and partners utilized the opportunity of the school closures to train 832 teachers from 216 schools on comprehensive sexuality education using the Presidential Initiative on AIDS Strategy for Communication to Youth (PIASCY) curriculum to deliver sexuality education sessions to young people at the community level. The teachers then mobilized young people aged 10-14 and 15-19 respectively to attend the sessions. A total of 121,839 young people acquired information and deepened their knowledge on sexual and reproductive health, HIV and AIDS, prevention of gender-based violence, relationships, life skills and menstrual hygiene through the sessions.

Key results were also achieved through support for policy development and institutional capacity strengthening, which contributed to strengthening the resilience of the education system at a very difficult time. Support from the Ministry of Education and Sports contributed to the approval of the Revised Guidelines for the Prevention and Management of Teenage Pregnancy, which is key in creating an enabling environment for the safe return of vulnerable adolescent girls to school. Support for the printing and distribution of essential schoolbooks and materials for the different categories of students also supported home-based/distance learning during the school closures.

The Global Programme supported integrated outreach on sexual and reproductive health and rights, in line with the Ministry of Health’s COVID-19 control guidelines.
These were designed to respond to the needs of different groups of young people, including those in hard-to-reach communities, which facilitated their access and referral to different sexual and reproductive health services. Community mobilization and dialogues generated demand for services, for example, through radio talk shows led by district leaders and small group community meetings organized by civil society organizations. The Global Programme also supported a total of 204,247 girls and boys to access HIV and other sexually transmitted infections testing, ante- and post-natal care, HPV vaccines for adolescent girls (10-14 years), comprehensive information and counselling on adolescent and youth growth and development, sexual and gender-based violence response services, services for pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections prevention and sexual and reproductive health and rights education.

The Global Programme additionally supported the Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs in providing legal services to survivors of violence and gender-based violence, with a special focus on child marriage. 143 individuals from the justice, law and order sector institutions, including technical teams, high court judges, registrars, deputy registrars, assistant registrars, chief magistrates, the police, the Office of the Director of Public Prosecution, Uganda prisons, the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development and advocates from private practice were trained to strengthen their capacity. This was done to support survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, including children, women, refugees, internally displaced persons and people living with disabilities to access justice. In addition, media was utilized to intensify sensitization about the on-going sexual and gender-based violence court sessions and the key roles of the judiciary, the Office of the Director of Public Prosecution, probation and social welfare officers and the community in promoting justice for adolescent girls and women. During the year, a total of 682 sexual and gender-based violence cases were handled out of the total of 771 cases, meaning an achievement of 88 per cent clearance of the listed cases.

**CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED**

The pandemic introduced a new era of use of technology to accelerate learning. Schools adapted the use of computers for online learning, and other platforms, such as radios, to promote distance learning, although with limited access and reach especially to rural populations. The challenge of the digital divide between urban and rural populations, and especially for marginalized adolescent girls, continued to be an issue in reaching all girls and boys.

Reprioritization of programmatic approaches were contextualized to accommodate the limited availability of the health structures to implement sexual and reproductive health interventions due to the priority on addressing the COVID-19 pandemic. The child protection structures were, to a large extent, overwhelmed with a high prevalence of cases of violence against children, especially sexual violence resulting in teenage pregnancy. This situation resulted in the implementation of community-based interventions using more of a social and behaviour change approach to promote a gender-responsive service environment.

There is a need to integrate adolescent-friendly services into health, gender-based violence and child protection emergency preparedness and response plans to ensure continuum of services and care for adolescents, especially girls, during public health emergencies. The current COVID-
The 19 pandemic clearly highlighted a huge gap in the delivery of quality adolescent-friendly sexual and reproductive health services to vulnerable adolescent girls.

Facilitating supportive laws and policies

At the national level, the Global Programme supported the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development in the development and implementation of adolescent-friendly policies, frameworks and instruments that are based on international human right principles. Example of such policies are:

- The National Child Policy which aligns with Uganda’s national development strategy (Vision 2040). The policy demonstrates the government’s commitment to ensuring the well-being of all children, including adolescent girls. The policy is structured around four broad categories of children’s rights: survival, development, protection and participation, plus system strengthening to anchor and sustain effective and coordinated implementation in the short- and long-run, providing services for all children in Uganda, including refugees in accordance with international and national legislation.

- The National Strategy to End Child Marriage and Teenage Pregnancy is also aligned with national development frameworks and international human rights standards with a focus on ending child marriage. The overall goal of the strategic plan is to ensure that measures are in place to prevent, protect and respond to violence against children in schools.

- Support to the Ministry of Education and Sport to contribute to the development and implementation of a school re-entry framework which offers second chance opportunities for disadvantaged adolescents and pregnant girls to return to school.

- The Revised Guidelines on the Prevention and Management of Teenage Pregnancy in School Settings provides guidelines to support prevention and management of teenage pregnancy in schools, making reference to the Draft National School Health Policy and Sexuality Education Framework, and specifically to: 1) outlining modes of service delivery within a learning institution setting that enable prevention of pregnancy among girls; 2) propose linkages for a minimum care package for prevention and management of teenage pregnancy in learning institutions; and 3) outline steps and services that should be in place to re-integrate adolescent mothers into learning institutions.

In 2021, the Global Programme intensified its high-level advocacy for an integrated government approach, supporting leadership and political will to address child marriage and teenage pregnancy, especially in the context of COVID-19. The launch of a nationwide campaign to prevent defilement, teenage pregnancy and child marriage and to promote positive parenting under the leadership of the First Lady and co-championed by the Vice President and Prime Minister galvanized national action and cross-sectoral commitment of all stakeholders including ministries, departments and agencies, parents/guardians, political leaders, religious, cultural and community leaders, civil society organizations, academics, media and children to address child marriage and other related issues affecting adolescents. The launch of the one-year national campaign is aligned to the key strategy of the Global Programme which is based on a three-pronged approach (prevention, protection and evidence generation and knowledge
management) and provides a platform for collaboration, strengthened partnerships and engagement for re-enforced actions to end child marriage at all levels. The campaign has been embraced by civil society organizations in Uganda, resulting in a pledge by the Vice President, regional female political leaders and other high-level political representatives to lead the campaign at national and regional level. The high-level advocacy also ensured that child marriage and teenage pregnancy were reflected as critical issues in the 2021 Uganda State of Population Report, thus providing key information to policymakers and planners across the country for prioritizing investments to address child marriage.

The Global Programme supported the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development to undertake a mid-term evaluation of the National Strategy to End Child Marriage and Teenage Pregnancy. The evaluation aimed at determining the extent to which the five-year strategy targets were achieved, documenting major achievements, lessons and emerging issues with recommendations to guide programme development and implementation on ending child marriage.

At subnational level, five Global Programme-implementing districts were supported to develop ordinances on child marriage and cultural institutions supported to review their customary laws. An additional eight districts were supported to develop and implement costed district development plans which integrate child marriage and gender-based violence as thematic issues with implementation strategies for addressing the issues. In addition, cultural institutions were also supported to develop and implement child marriage related protocols that align with international standards and national and subnational guidelines. For example, Acholi Cultural Foundation developed marriage protocols with a prohibition on child marriage to guide marriages in their culture.

**CHALLENGES, LESSONS LEARNED AND NEXT STEPS**

The Global Programme has supported the development of several policies that are in line with international human rights standards aimed at preventing child marriage, protecting those at risk and addressing the needs of those affected in Uganda. Going forward, efforts should focus on popularizing and implementing the policies and laws to contribute to an enabling environment for ending child marriage.

Unfortunately, the implementation of interventions to facilitate laws and policies was slowed down by the onset of the second wave of COVID-19 in Uganda. Interventions around capacity building of government focal persons were initially suspended and then reduced to not more 20 persons at a time, which drastically impacted on resources required and timelines planned for the interventions. In addition, there is a general apathy to initiate development of policies and enactment of laws which affected the achievement of programme targets.

A further challenge was the limited understanding and conceptual clarity on gender-transformative approaches and subsequent programmatic issues among implementing partners that have impacted the development of multisectoral plans, especially at subnational level. Evidence generation and multisectoral capacity building on gender-transformative approaches is key to the development and implementation of a budgeted multisectoral plan as a key strategy for addressing gender equity and negative social norms fuelling the practice of child marriage.

**Generating and applying data and evidence**

Enhanced knowledge and skills of the government and civil society partners under the Global Programme recognized and identified a knowledge gap on the impact of COVID-19 on harmful practices and on adolescents. Hence, the Global Programme supported the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development to assess the impact of COVID-19 on harmful practices, with a focus on child marriage and female genital mutilation, to deepen the understanding of how the pandemic has impacted risks and vulnerabilities of girls in selected districts and refugee communities. The results of this assessment will
provide evidence for the development of a new national strategy to end child marriage and teenage pregnancy as well as strategic programme direction, planning and implementation that address critical knowledge gaps on the impact of COVID-19 on harmful practices.

The Global Programme further supported the Uganda Bureau of Statistics to incorporate, generate and use indicators on gender-based violence and sexual and reproductive health and rights in community information management systems in 14 districts. During the reporting period, data was collected in the Arua, Tororo and Kampala districts.

Data generation to show the cost of inaction on teenage pregnancy was also conducted during the year. The findings of this study were presented at the national launch of the campaign to address teenage pregnancy and child marriage with theme Protect the Girl, Save the Nation. Going forward, evidence from this study will be utilized in policy dialogue to call for investments in adolescent health and well-being. The evidence will also guide engagement with leaders (religious, cultural and political, among others) at a regional level for a call to action to address the high incidence of teenage pregnancy and child marriage in the three most affected regions of Busoga, Buganda and Bukedi.

Additionally, leveraging other programmes, the Parliamentary Research Department was supported to produce compelling evidence that is informing evidence-based advocacy, legislation, and budgeting in Uganda. The results of a study on teenage pregnancy conducted in 2020 led to a motion for a resolution of parliament urging government to develop and enforce policies and strategies to protect girls against escalating cases of teenage pregnancy and child marriage during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. The resolution, which was presented and debated in Parliament in April 2021, generated an open discussion on strategic approaches to prevent teenage pregnancy and child marriage and sought parliamentary commitment for a safe policy environment to address teenage pregnancy and child marriage.

CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

The COVID-19 containment measures impacted the implementation of research and the programme’s learning plan, resulting in the postponement of planned research. For example, the baseline study planned at the inception of the current phase of the Global Programme (in 2020) was not possible to conduct due to unavailability of data, while new activities were initiated to respond to upcoming an urgent need for evidence on, for example, the impact of COVID-19 to guide ongoing programme implementation.

A training workshop on harnessing the power of data, conducted by UNICEF through the Spotlight Initiative, deepened the knowledge and skills of government and civil society implementing partners to generate and use data for planning and implementation of programmes to end child marriage and female genital mutilation. Thanks to initiatives such as this, there is an increased recognition and appreciation for the role of evidence in all aspects of programming, from assessment, design, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation to reporting and documentation.
Child marriage context

There are 3.8 million child brides in Yemen, 1.5 million of whom were married before the age of 15. According to data from the Yemen Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) in 2013, 32 per cent of women aged 20–24 had been married before turning 18 and 9 per cent before the age of 15. Despite a reduction in child marriage prevalence from 63 per cent in 1988, the speed of progress is not rapid enough to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) target of eliminating child marriage by 2030. If the observed progress over the past 25 years continues, child marriage prevalence will still be at 21 per cent by 2030; however, if the slightly accelerated observed progress over the past 10 years is doubled, it is estimated that 9 per cent of all girls will still be married in childhood by 2030.

Programming context

The COVID-19 pandemic profoundly affected the everyday lives of girls for a second year in 2021, including their physical and mental health, education and the economic circumstances of their families and communities. Globally, up to 10 million more girls are estimated to become child brides by 2030 as a result of the pandemic. UNFPA and UNICEF Evaluation Offices conducted a joint assessment of Global Programme adaptations to the COVID-19 crisis in 2021. The COVID-19 assessment aimed to:

- Assess relevant contingency planning and implementation and alternative delivery and management arrangements for the Global Programme

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due to the COVID-19 pandemic, taking into account the views of vulnerable adolescent girls, their families, communities and key implementing partners.

- Make recommendations for the immediate to mid-term improvement of the Global Programme response to COVID-19, identify ongoing programme changes and recommending any additional support required to implement those programme changes and shifting priorities.

- Make any recommendations required to adjust the Global Programme Phase II to the new context, including its theory of change and the targets established before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The results of the assessment indicate that:

- It is critical to keep the focus and efforts in reaching the most vulnerable and marginalized adolescents, including those in remote areas.

- Lessons could be taken from experiences using multi-channel and two-way communication approaches, while also being attentive to the digital divide.

- Vulnerable adolescents must continue to have access to education (especially if provided remotely), health and social welfare services.

- It is key to overcome drivers of poverty by leveraging existing social protection schemes.

- Ensuring the use of evidence led programming is important and so too is advocating with governments to keep child marriage prevention and responses on national agendas while continuing to develop legal and operational frameworks to help accelerate the end of child marriage.

### TABLE. Conclusions and recommendations from the COVID-19 assessment

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<tr>
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<td>Programme advocacy and engagement efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic kept child marriage on national agendas</td>
<td>Advocate with governments to continue developing legal and operational frameworks contributing to ending child marriage with a rights-based and multisectoral focus</td>
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<td>The COVID-19 crisis underscored the vulnerability of adolescent girls in rural and remote areas</td>
<td>Reinforce efforts to reach the most vulnerable and marginalized adolescent girls, boys and their families</td>
</tr>
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<td>Adoption of digital and mass media approaches demonstrated a high potential for sustaining engagement of adolescent girls at scale, although the digital divide should be considered</td>
<td>Develop complementary multi-channel approaches to reach target populations, ensuring that they foster two-way communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COVID-19 restrictions limited adolescent girls’ access to health and social welfare services</td>
<td>Continue technical support and explore the most effective approaches to ensure adolescent girls have access to essential services</td>
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<td>The programme theory of change remains valid but poverty and economic drivers need to be stressed further in operational strategies</td>
<td>Further articulate the strategy to leverage social protection schemes such as cash transfers and income generation opportunities for adolescent girls and their families</td>
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<td>COVID-19 programme adjustments created a high demand on data and evidence for adopted approaches</td>
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These results will inform future adjustments and refinements to the programme. They will help continue delivering in changing contexts and accelerating the pace, during the Decade of Action, of eliminating child marriage to achieve the SDGs by 2030.

To date, Yemen remains classified as the worst humanitarian crisis globally. The conflict has added to pre-existing gender inequalities, increasing the barriers to women’s and girls’ access to services, including to education and has increased restrictions of movement and further limited their economic opportunities. This was even prior to the beginning of the spread of COVID-19. With the pandemic, the situation worsened even more, deteriorating the operating environment significantly.

**Key highlights**

- Over 2,000 adolescent girls (aged 10-19) actively participated in life skills or comprehensive sexuality education in programme areas
- Over 11,000 individuals (boys, girls, women and men) participated in group education or dialogue sessions on consequences of and alternatives to child marriage, the rights of adolescent girls and gender equality
- Over 8,600 boys and men actively participated in group education or dialogues that address harmful masculinities and gender norms
- During the year, the national manual on life skills education and community engagement was launched
- Despite the very challenging context, with the ongoing conflict in the country, the programme completed a piece of formative research on the drivers of child marriage in Yemen
Programme performance

**TABLE. Summary of output indicator performance (2021)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INDICATOR</th>
<th>TARGET</th>
<th>RESULT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indicator 1111: Number of adolescent girls (aged 10-19) who actively participated in life skills or comprehensive sexuality education interventions in programme areas</td>
<td>2,508</td>
<td>2,049</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicator 1121: Number of girls (aged 10-19) supported by the programme to enrol and/or remain in primary or secondary school</td>
<td>1,300</td>
<td>736</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicator 1211: Number of boys and men actively participating in group education/dialogues that address harmful masculinities and gender norms</td>
<td>1,700</td>
<td>8,638</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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</td>
<td>13,000</td>
<td>11,392</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicator 1231: Number of civil society organizations newly mobilized in support of challenging social norms and promoting gender equality by the Global Programme</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicator 2121: Number of primary/secondary/non-formal schools in programme areas providing quality gender-friendly education that meets minimum standards</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicator 2211: Number of partnerships (both formal and informal) established to deliver adolescent-responsive social protection, poverty reduction, and economic empowerment programmes and services</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicator 3111: Number of policies or legal instruments addressing child marriage drafted, proposed or adopted at national and subnational level with Global Programme support</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicator 3211: Number of generated evidence and knowledge that focus on what works to end child marriage</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicator 3212: Number of generated evidence and knowledge that apply a gender analysis</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicator 3221: Number of South-to-South cooperation (conferences, expert visits, peer consultations, study tours, communities of practice) supported</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NA = Not applicable (the country programme does not work on or report on this indicator)

**Providing intensive support to marginalized girls**

UNICEF finalized the development of a national manual on life skills education and community engagement with support from the Global Programme in 2021. The manual will help advance adolescents’ life skills and psychosocial support services, build a support system among their peers and gain knowledge on gender-based violence and
child marriage. Using the new manual, 1,579 girls have been reached through life skills in schools and community centers in Aden, Saadhah, Marib, Al-Baydah, Dhamar, Amran and Sana’a. In Saada, a 12-day training of trainers session was conducted for 48 trainers in four schools on the manual. The trainers will now be providing cascaded training to teachers and adolescents in schools.

The Global Programme leveraged community-based components of the Integrated Model of Social and Economic Assistance and Empowerment to target adolescent girls at risk of and survivors of child marriage, including Muhamasheen (the marginalized ones) and girls living in slums. The community-based component of the integrated model has provided capacity building to community-based organizations on essential knowledge on community engagement and social protection. Through these community-based organizations, the Global Programme was able to support 470 adolescent girls with life skills education and employability/entrepreneurship training along with literacy training. 135 of the adolescent girls were also given financial grants to start their projects with marketable products based on a market analysis.

With the worsening conflict in Yemen in 2021 and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the Global Programme focused on providing adolescent girls with access to learning through formal and non-formal settings, especially in regions most affected by the conflict, as determined by the Humanitarian Needs Overview. The programme supported the establishment of 23 non-formal literacy classes in 16 targeted districts and provided learning to 611 survivors of child marriage and girls at risk of child marriage. The classes use special functional literacy techniques. In coordination with the Ministry of Education, 125 girls have been reintegrated into formal education after completing the literacy cycle.

**Enhancing the family and community environment**

Gender-based violence prevention through community engagement and multi-sectoral risk mitigation was prioritized to address gender norms and harmful practices, such as child marriage and female genital mutilation. In the governorates of Marib, Dhamar, Al Bayda, Amanat Al Asimah, Amran and Sana’a 8,638 adolescent boys and 8,991 adolescent girls were engaged in peer-to-peer dialogues within their communities to address issues related to child marriage and child recruitment to the conflict.

**Strengthening systems**

UNFPA and UNICEF continued to provide critical child protection and gender-based violence prevention and response services to adolescent girls and boys who are more vulnerable to significant risks such as child marriage, child labour and recruitment and use by the armed groups or forces.

UNFPA was able to support 3,585 child marriage survivors with multi-sectoral services in 2021, using a survivor-centred approach as per a case management process and through well-trained female caseworkers. 2,668 child marriage survivors were provided with specialized psychological support services through referrals to UNFPA specialized mental health and psychosocial support centres (as well as in shelters and safe spaces for women and girls). 174 child early marriage survivors were provided with emergency legal aid, including legal counseling and representation in courts, through a network of experienced lawyers, and 879 child marriage survivors were provided with medical services, through referrals to major hospitals in targeted governorates that have trained focal points assigned to provide immediate services to survivors.

In Yemen, completing basic, lower and upper secondary education remains a distant dream for many children, especially in rural areas and for girls in poor and hard-to-reach areas of the country. While an estimated 46 per cent of girls and 54 per cent of boys are enrolled in school, secondary-level girls continue to be more likely to drop out due to security issues, lack of female teachers and the lack of appropriate water, sanitation and hygiene facilities.
Community acts!

Rudinah, 14, and Elaf, 15, are cousins living in one of the remote districts in Yemen. Their families agreed to marry them off to their cousins and their weddings were planned for June 2021.

However, the UNFPA district-level coordinator learnt about the marriages from a midwife in the area. Immediately, the coordinator visited the families of the two girls and sat down with the parents to raise the serious consequences that marrying off their daughters at such an early age would have and the negative impact it would have on the girls’ lives going forward. The parents tried to justify their decisions to marry the girls by saying that the two intended grooms (both 17 years old) are living alone and hence need company and someone to take care of them.

As this first mediation was not successful, the UNFPA coordinator was able to mobilize influential community leaders who have previously attended awareness raising sessions on child marriage and its harmful consequences. They volunteered to visit the fathers of the two girls, and convince them to stop the marriages or at least delay them until the girls finish their education. A series of visits to the families also took place from the district midwife to provide information around the consequences of child marriage.

Thanks to sustained engagements, the planned marriages were put on hold, to allow for Rudinah and Elaf to finish school. This will allow them to gain more skills and knowledge to support them in the future, while community leaders continue to be engaged in mobilizing parents’ and community members’ support for the abandonment of child marriage.

UNICEF played an important role in keeping adolescent girls, specially at secondary level, in school through advocacy for recruitment and provision of incentives to female teachers, school rehabilitation and construction and leveraging education support with the existing social protection agenda.

LESSONS LEARNED

Child protection prevention activities need to broaden their reach and child protection response activities need to focus more on adolescent girls and boys who are more vulnerable to significant risks such as child marriage, child labour and recruitment and use by the armed groups or forces for greater impact.

Generating and applying data and evidence

A study report on the drivers of child marriage was completed in December 2021. The study aimed to unpack the drivers of child marriage in Yemen, analyzing the forces that perpetuate the practice as well as those that support its abandonment. The report provided a landscape view of the potential for social and behaviour change, identifying both influences and influencers and assessing respondents’ readiness and inclination to end the practice of child marriage. The findings provide insight into pervasive attitudes and norms surrounding child marriage, with the goal to help UNICEF and its partners to better design programmes and interventions focused on ending child marriage.
Child marriage context

There are 1.8 million child brides in Zambia, 396,500 of whom were married before the age of 15. The practice has become less common, with 29 per cent of all young women aged 20–24 married before turning 18 and 5 per cent before turning 15 in 2018, compared with 47 and 9 per cent, respectively, in 1993. However, the progress observed to date is not enough to eliminate child marriage by 2030 as set out in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). If the observed progress over the past decade continues, child marriage prevalence will still be at 22 per cent by 2030, and if doubled, 16 per cent.

Programming context

The COVID-19 pandemic profoundly affected the everyday lives of girls for a second year in 2021, including their physical and mental health, education and the economic circumstances of their families and communities. Globally, up to 10 million more girls are estimated to become child brides by 2030 as a result of the pandemic.

UNFPA and UNICEF Evaluation Offices conducted a joint assessment of Global Programme adaptations to the COVID-19 crisis in 2021. The COVID-19 assessment aimed to:

- Assess relevant contingency planning and implementation and alternative delivery and
management arrangements for the Global Programme due to the COVID-19 pandemic, taking into account the views of vulnerable adolescent girls, their families, communities and key implementing partners.

- Make recommendations for the immediate to mid-term improvement of the Global Programme response to COVID-19, identify ongoing programme changes and recommending any additional support required to implement those programme changes and shifting priorities.

- Make any recommendations required to adjust the Global Programme Phase II to the new context, including its theory of change and the targets established before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The results of the assessment indicate that:

- It is critical to keep the focus and efforts in reaching the most vulnerable and marginalized adolescents, including those in remote areas.

- Lessons could be taken from experiences using multi-channel and two-way communication approaches, while also being attentive to the digital divide.

- Vulnerable adolescents must continue to have access to education (especially if provided remotely), health and social welfare services.

- It is key to overcome drivers of poverty by leveraging existing social protection schemes.

- Ensuring the use of evidence led programming is important and so too is advocating with governments to keep child marriage prevention and responses on national agendas while continuing to develop legal and operational frameworks to help accelerate the end of child marriage.

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These results will inform future adjustments and refinements to the programme. They will help continue delivering in changing contexts and accelerating the pace, during the Decade of Action, of eliminating child marriage to achieve the SDGs by 2030.

**Key highlights**

- Over 6,100 adolescent girls (aged 10-19) actively participated in life skills or comprehensive sexuality education in programme areas

- Close to one 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

- Over 32,000 individuals (boys, girls, women and men) participated in group education or dialogue sessions on consequences of and alternatives to child marriage, the rights of adolescent girls and gender equality

- On a policy level, in 2021, key achievements included the endorsement of the Children’s Code Bill by the Ministry of Justice Legislative Review, the adoption of the National Prevention and Response Plan to End Violence Against Children and the development of a National Volunteer Policy to support community volunteers during the implementation of the programmes to end child marriage
Providing intensive support to marginalized girls

The mentorship programme conducted through the safe space model has continued to galvanize adolescent girls and boys into a movement of young people willing to pursue a different trajectory and delay marriage and pregnancy. A total of 11,851 (6,108 girls and 5,743 boys) were reached with information on confidence, self-efficacy and positive masculinities through weekly safe space sessions which took place in their communities in 2021. The sessions were facilitated by trained female and male mentors from the community. The content of the

Programme performance

TABLE. Summary of output indicator performance (2021)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INDICATOR</th>
<th>TARGET</th>
<th>RESULT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 1111:</strong> Number of adolescent girls (aged 10-19) who actively participated in life skills or comprehensive sexuality education interventions in programme areas</td>
<td>5,940</td>
<td>6,108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 1121:</strong> Number of girls (aged 10-19) supported by the programme to enrol and/or remain in primary or secondary school</td>
<td>2,169</td>
<td>989</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 1211:</strong> Number of boys and men actively participating in group education/dialogues that address harmful masculinities and gender norms</td>
<td>5,150</td>
<td>8,846</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 1221:</strong> 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</td>
<td>32,739</td>
<td>32,884</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 1222:</strong> 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</td>
<td>300,000</td>
<td>800,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 1223:</strong> Number of local actors (e.g., traditional, religious and community leaders) with meaningful participation in dialogues and consensus-building to end child marriage</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 1231:</strong> Number of civil society organizations newly mobilized in support of challenging social norms and promoting gender equality by the Global Programme</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 2121:</strong> Number of primary/secondary/non-formal schools in programme areas providing quality gender-friendly education that meets minimum standards</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 2131:</strong> Number of service delivery points in programme areas providing quality adolescent-responsive services (health, child protection/ gender-based violence) that meet minimum standards</td>
<td>331</td>
<td>317</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 2211:</strong> Number of partnerships (both formal and informal) established to deliver adolescent-responsive social protection, poverty reduction, and economic empowerment programmes and services</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 3111:</strong> Number of policies or legal instruments addressing child marriage drafted, proposed or adopted at national and subnational level with Global Programme support</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 3211:</strong> Number of generated evidence and knowledge that focus on what works to end child marriage</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 3212:</strong> Number of generated evidence and knowledge that apply a gender analysis</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicator 3221:</strong> Number of South-to-South cooperation (conferences, expert visits, peer consultations, study tours, communities of practice) supported</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
sessions included information on human rights, sexual and reproductive health and rights, menstrual health and similar topics. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the programme was adjusted and implemented using a staggered methodology to conduct meetings with adolescents, while observing COVID-19 regulations. To implement effectively, the meetings took place for 30 minutes in smaller groups of ten people which was a departure from the pre-COVID-19 meetings, which accommodated 25-30 adolescents for a maximum period of two hours. The programme also developed and piloted two virtual safe space models which included e-learning and radio listening clubs. The digitalization model that enabled the integration of sexual and reproductive health and rights content onto digital tablets also provided an interactive platform where adolescents engaged on various topics. This model proved to have worked well because of the integration of visuals that young people easily relate to.

Two chiefdoms in the Katete district (Chieftainess Kawaza and Chief Mbangombe) were trained to implement programme interventions for marginalized adolescent girls and boys in their chiefdoms. Training of chiefdoms targeted 50 traditional initiators (25 male and 25 female) who are considered to have direct influence on adolescents. The trained traditional initiators will ensure that correct sexual and reproductive health information is effectively disseminated to the adolescent girls and boys in the community.

To enhance girls’ knowledge around sexual and reproductive health and rights and raise awareness on available services the mobile platform U-Report was also utilized during the year. Through peer educators, information was disseminated to adolescent girls and young women, helping them make informed choices on issues affecting them, including avoiding pregnancy. Resulting from this, 85 girls (15-19 years old) accessed family planning services through health facilities. The increased knowledge and awareness on adolescent rights also led to some girls beginning to say no to child marriage and some arranged marriages being reported to authorities. The reported cases on child marriage were resolved together with school administrations and implementing partners ensuring that the affected girls stayed in school.

During the year, capacity building activities were conducted to enhance the access to and provision of services to adolescent girls. This included training of 100 peer educators on sexual and reproductive health and HIV, equipped with knowledge and skills to disseminate accurate information to peers in their communities. The educators are comprised of Community Welfare Assistance Committees, mentors, Safe Motherhood Action Groups and peer educators based in health facilities. Equipped with this information, the peer educators were able to conduct community outreach activities, providing information on contraception and on services offered in the health facilities that support young people.

Furthermore, 18 community-based organizations were trained in how to work with adolescents and how to reach them with information on life skills and financial education. The organizations were identified based on their experience in working with young people in communities. This training resulted in the organizations broadening their targeting for adolescent programming to include girls aged 10 and above, as it had been noted that most of the community-based organizations only engaged girls above age 15. The inclusion of younger adolescent girls too will ensure that they are equipped with age-appropriate life skills.

During the year, guidance and counselling materials and radio lessons on prevention of school-related gender-based violence were delivered for use by schools. These schools now have a well-functioning guidance and counselling unit and have been providing personal, social, educational and vocational guidance to students, both through one-on-one and group sessions by 59 guidance and counselling teachers. A total of 1,256 students (477 boys and 779 girls) were provided with guidance and counselling services to enhance retention in school. Career days and motivation talks by invited professionals were also conducted.
Struggling in school, dropping out, but now back and thriving

“I felt I was not smart enough to keep going,” says 18-year-old Jelina Mbewe when she describes the moment she dropped out of school in Grade 8.

Before leaving, Jelina shared her thoughts with her peers in her village in Zambia’s Eastern province and most of them encouraged her to stay quiet.

“I dropped out and stayed home where I helped out with house chores and after that would spend time with my friends in the village… With time, the desire to get married grew as those were the main conversations I had with my friends, seeing that there was nothing else to do,” she says.

That is when Jelina came in contact with the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA). They were enrolling young girls in the village into a safe space programme which focuses on combatting child marriage, issues affecting young girls and menstrual hygiene practices. Jelina was curious to find out more.

“From the teachings during the safe space sessions, I realized that peer pressure was real, and I thought it was best that I return to school: this time I told myself that I will focus and try my best to study hard.”

“Jelina is my first-born child,” explains her mother Selina Phiri. “Whenever she came back from school, she would always complain of how tough school was and her thoughts of not being smart enough to continue with her studies. The complaints where too much and discouraging for me as a mother. It made me feel that I was wasting money taking her to school. Eventually Jelina dropped out of school and the only thing left was for her to get married. However, with the organizations introduced in the village, Jelina was able to join one before she got married. From the lessons, Jelina decided to go back to school. At first, I was not so supportive with the idea as I was afraid of wasting money,” she says.

The opposite happened. Jelina passed her Grade 9 examinations at the first attempt with no need for her to rewrite any subjects. “This was very encouraging for me as a mother and not only that, Jelina set a good record for her younger siblings as the eldest child,” Selina Phiri notes. “I am a proud mother as all my three children are in school and performing well. Jelina and I share a really good relationship and she is able to openly share her school results from every test written in school.”

After successfully completing a mentorship programme with YWCA, Jelina volunteered to become a peer mentor in order to assist in spreading the information she learned with other young girls in the village. Jelina is now in Grade 11 at Kapoche Day secondary school and hopes to study law in the future, once she is done with her secondary education.
Through the support of Community Action Groups, and working closely with schools, 210 girls (57 from Katete and 153 from Senanga) returned to education in 2021. Out of the 57 girls from Katete who had dropped out of school, 20 were due to child marriage whilst 37 were because of teenage pregnancy. The girls were from 27 out of the 40 schools that are implementing Community Action Group activities in the Katete district. In the Senanga district, the 153 girls who were supported to return to school came from 52 of the 71 schools that are being supported to implement Community Action Group activities.

Meanwhile, interventions of Community Welfare Assistant Committees, through community-based case management, demonstrates a positive change. For example, more boys are going to school as opposed to herding cattle – promoting boys to go to school rather than collect cattle for marriage – and girls are empowered to continue their education, even if they have given birth. For instance, six girls in the Katiula ward of the Katete district, who had given birth, went back to school and wrote their grade 12 examinations in 2021 following the interventions made by the committees.

**CHALLENGES, LESSONS LEARNED AND NEXT STEPS**

Some girls are very far from the central business district and reaching them is a challenge because their nearest school or health facility is still far away. To mitigate this

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**The power of community mobilization**

In the words of a 50-year-old father of an 18-year-old daughter who got pregnant in Musamwacelete village (part of the Katiula Community Welfare Assistance Committee area) in Katete:

“I stay in Msamwacale village in Katiula, where the Community Welfare Assistant Committee members are doing a lot of things for the community. The first thing we have learnt from the Community Welfare Assistant Committee was about financial literacy. From that time, me together with the family, are saving, and the children involved in the saving scheme process as well.

The other benefit I have experienced because of the Community Welfare Assistance Committee’s interaction is the issue of school dropouts going back to school. For example, I have a daughter who is 18 years old. She got pregnant and lost interest in school while in grade eight. As parents we equally lost interest and thought it was a waste of time and resources. The option was that she stops school and starts farming, but with the help of a Community Welfare Assistance Committee Member, who visited our family and engaged us over the issue of our daughter, we saw that it was beneficial to give our child a second chance to go back to school.

Our daughter went back to school after delivering a baby and we remained to take care of the baby. She wrote her grade nine exams and made it into grade ten. Right now, I have bought all the school requirements and she is in school at Katiula Day secondary school while we have continued to take care of her child who is our grandchild.

One other issue I have learnt is over cattle herding, my children now go to school while I take care of the cattle. The information is very beneficial, and we appreciate what the Community Welfare Assistance Committee members are doing in our community.”

As a result of the father’s participation in community dialogue sessions organized by the committees, further changes have been observed in his family:

- The children now regularly go to school and only participate in herding cattle during weekends
- Elderly people now herd the cattle during working days, to enable the children to go to school
- Boys in his household now participate in domestic chores, previously perceived to be the work for girls and women
- The children now have a separate field to cater for their personal needs
- His family now budgets together to decide on priority household needs
challenge, local radio programmes were employed and digital platforms were used in safe spaces with the digital platforms also being considered to be used in schools and health facilities to ensure wider reach of services.

Continuous innovations and reprogramming are essential in the context of COVID-19, especially to ensure that the programme is implemented with fidelity and quality. Going forward, digital platforms and radio programmes will be applied in a hybrid modality to ensure two-way communication and the support of mentors in following up on information through one-on-one sessions while adhering to health protocols and guidelines.

Enhancing the family and community environment

32,684 community members, including women, men, girls and boys, participated in gender-transformative dialogues promoting positive gender norms, alternatives to child marriage and gender equality. Of those who participated in the dialogues, 6,486 were boys, 7,184 men, 10,565 women and 8,449 girls. Additionally, 90 local actors (e.g., traditional, religious and community leaders and traditional marriage initiators) contributed with meaningful participation in the dialogues and consensus-building activities to end child marriage.

The social and behaviour change component of the programme has identified traditional leaders as one of the allies in addressing child marriage. The programme has involved traditional leaders in dialogues on child marriage and on norms that underlie the issue. As a result of these engagements, traditional leaders have been able to issue decrees in their chiefdoms banning the practice of child marriage and in some cases issued sanctions to parents where children have been married and also to the children involved in the practice. Traditional leaders have also used platforms such as traditional ceremonies to condemn the practice of child marriage. Having traditional leaders at the forefront of challenging child marriage has really changed the narrative in terms of the practice being seen as undesirable for children’s wellbeing.

One notable achievement from 2021 was the involvement of boys as allies in promoting positive masculinities and in addressing some of the challenges they face as a result of gender roles expected for men and boys. The Global Programme, through the social and behaviour change communication component of the programme, prioritized gender-transformative approaches in engaging boys and men for the promotion of healthy relationships, positive masculinities and gender equality. Using the Coaching Boys into Men tool, 36 community sports coaches were trained as facilitators for the sessions who thereafter engaged 6,117 boys in dialogues that address harmful masculinities and negative gender norms in the two districts of Senanga and Katete.

Radio programmes were also utilized to spread gender-transformative messaging on child marriage, the rights of adolescent girls and gender equality together with COVID-19 awareness messages, reaching an estimated 1 million individuals in the Katete and Senanga districts. Through the awareness raising activities, community members, including parents, are empowered to mobilize themselves to halt and report child marriages and address other gender-based violence issues.
The two districts of Senanga and Katete have cultural practices for the initiation of boys where masculinities are learned and assimilated. The Coaching of Boys into Men initiative faced some resistance in some of the targeted communities, as the initiative was viewed as contrary to the cultural practice of boys’ initiation. However, this challenge was resolved through the engagement of the district social welfare office and community development officers and continues to be managed this way as the initiative is rolled out and encountering the same challenge in new areas. District social welfare officers have a huge presence on the ground through community volunteers of the Public Welfare Assistance Scheme, and hence they are respected and well-known. Their presence and engagement with key community gatekeepers provides a conducive environment for addressing some culturally sensitive issues that seem to challenge traditional male roles.

Though no survey has been carried on potential norm change as a result of community dialogues, review meetings with key stakeholders at district level, such as with Community Welfare Assistance Committees, traditional leaders and relevant government staff have shown a shift in attitudes and practices around some deeply entrenched gender norms. In some wards in the districts there was the involvement of couples to participate together in the dialogues, something deemed effective as they were able to talk about their own household realities in terms of gender roles and responsibilities at household level. Thus, the dialogues provided a platform where, for the first time, couples could talk about how they are impacted by their gender roles. There are also visible signs of change at community level in terms of men taking some of the roles that have been considered for women, such as parenting. For example, it is not uncommon to see men come to meetings while carrying a baby or taking up chores such as drawing water for household use.

**Strengthening systems**

Capacity building activities were prioritized for authorities in the Katete and Senanga districts to take a leadership role in programme implementation, especially in the area of coordination across protection, health and education and in the area of implementing community-based case management and social and behaviour change activities. To ensure that adolescent girls and boys are adequately provided with information and correctly referred to various service delivery points, community volunteers such as community health workers, peer educators, Safe Motherhood Action Groups, community-based distributors and Community Welfare Assistance Committees were equipped with information and skills on harmful social norms and gender equality.

Using the revised tools and training on Community-Based Case Management, which were endorsed by the line ministry, an additional 180 (79 female and 101 male) Community Welfare Assistance Committee members were trained in case management in an additional eight wards in the two districts. The trained committee members were also oriented on the minimum standard guidelines for quality case management and monitoring. Moreover, 303 Community Welfare Assistance Committee service delivery points exist to support vulnerable children and are implementing the guidelines for adolescent girl-friendly health and protection services in two districts. These service delivery points were accessed by a total of 2,716 children (1,436 boys and 1,280 girls) in 2021, referred by committee members, and an additional 250 adolescents were reached with services related to sexual and reproductive health, HIV and gender-based violence through referrals.

The programme supported access to adolescent-friendly reproductive health services in the target districts. Subsequently, 51 health facilities have sustained provision of adolescent-friendly health services, making the two target districts among those with the highest geographical coverage of adolescent-friendly health services in the country. Additionally, community- and school-based
adolescent-friendly outreach services were scaled up to almost all target areas of health facilities with an adolescent-friendly space.

The Katete district was supported with the scale-up of an electronic health information system in 30 of its 33 health facilities to an extent that data completeness, accuracy and timeliness in reporting has improved. Moreover, due to the electronic information system set up (through provision of laptops and software), the district is now able to efficiently generate age and sex disaggregated data which is used to ascertain utilization patterns of essential sexual and reproductive health services among adolescents and young people, ultimately informing programming, including on the reduction of teenage pregnancies (being a precursor for child marriages). 14 health facilities were further reached with more information on adolescent-friendly sexual and reproductive health services. 425 (232 female and 193 male) community health workers were trained in Katete so that they can foster access to services.

**CHALLENGES, LESSONS LEARNED AND NEXT STEPS**

In 2022, community health workers will work together with other volunteers to ensure that adolescent girls and boys are effectively reached with a wide range of information and services at a community-level, building on the training they received in 2021.

COVID-19 has restricted full implementation of community- and school-based outreach activities given that schools were closed, and some COVID-19 control measures meant that community activities were limited. However, school- and community-based outreach have the potential to reach large numbers of adolescents and young people, and to be effective, a stronger referral and linkage system needs to be put in place, which will be the focus of programming going forward.

Attrition of peer educators has been a challenge for continuity of services, although the continuous training has mitigated this challenge. Peer educators offer services that are regarded appropriate and acceptable to adolescents and young people. However, quality assurance during training and supervision and mentorship during their service delivery remains imperative to improve responsiveness to the needs of adolescents and young people.

**Facilitating supportive laws and policies**

The Global Programme made steady progress towards supporting the government to develop policies and legal instruments addressing child marriage. A key achievement was the finalization of the Children’s Code Bill which was endorsed by the Ministry of Justice Legislative Review and a wider Cabinet Review in April/early May 2021. The draft Children’s Code Bill incorporated international and regional human rights standards, including but not limited to, defining the minimum age of marriage to 18 and strengthening the statutory response for children in need of care and protection.

Furthermore, efforts were made to strengthen the prevention and response to violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect through drafting the Child and Family Welfare Framework, adopting the National Prevention and Response Plan to End Violence Against Children as well as drafting the Statutory Case Management Handbook for social welfare officers to respond to cases of children at risk of significant harm, including guidance notes on addressing cases of violence against children and gender-based violence. The National Volunteer Policy was also finalized to support community volunteers who play a critical role in the implementation of activities to end child marriage together with the Social Workers’ Association of Zambia Bill.

At a subnational level, the Katete and Senanga districts continued to implement the developed district plans to coordinate interventions to address child marriage. The districts were supported to develop monitoring frameworks with agreed indicators which will be tracked by all stakeholders at district level. The data from the monitoring tool will be used for decision-making to improve the quality of interventions, when scaling-up the programme to an additional ten districts. They have also developed and implemented a multisectoral package of interventions.
which comprises of education, health, and water, sanitation and hygiene sectors, including social and behaviour change. This has been achieved through the district multisectoral committees responsible for implementing child marriage-related activities. District teams have also been supported with funds to conduct joint monitoring visits to the field, which provides data for further reflection in terms of moving forward.

Furthermore, the new president of Zambia has elevated the Ministry of Gender to his office as a Gender Division, giving it more power to coordinate national gender issues, as well as the integrated action plan on ending child marriage. The introduction of free education at secondary level, together with support towards the development of a national framework on child safeguarding and a school-based child safeguarding policy to prevent violence against children in schools and other settings, further strengthened the environment in the country.

**CHALLENGES AND NEXT STEPS**

Despite the development of joint district plans, sectors still prefer to work in silos, thereby losing the benefit of cross-sectoral leveraging of strengths. In 2022, a key strategic shift will be the focus on building relations between and across sectors so that the challenges experienced in working in silos are addressed.

Another challenge is the over-dependence on the Global Programme to fund all activities in the district action plans. To ensure ownership and sustainability, districts are meant to resource the plans, but this has yet to be materialized. With the commitment of the new government to fiscal decentralization and an increase in development funds, the programme will increase advocacy to influence the allocation of funds towards ending child marriage at subnational levels.

**Generating and applying data and evidence**

Though the programme research agenda did not move much in Zambia in 2021, the programme intends to strengthen evidence generation around child marriage, which will inform advocacy activities. A programme review was held during 2021, focusing on past approaches and their effectiveness in addressing child marriage. Consultations between different United Nations agencies, as well as with the government, were held and as a result, an agreement to use lessons learnt so far for scaling-up the programme to ten more districts was made. In 2022, implementation research will also be embarked upon to further assess how some interventions are working or not working, and measures will be derived to address the gaps arising out of the research. These points of learning will further inform the scale-up of the programme to other districts.

The baseline survey on current gender norms and their impact on child marriage as part of UNICEF’s gender norms research strategy, with technical support from the Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office and the UNICEF Office of Research—Innocenti, will be the baseline for the social and behaviour change component of the programme and the gender-transformative approach across all programme strategies. The survey will take place in the first quarter of 2022 with technical support from UNICEF Innocenti.

A documentary on ending child marriage and some videos have been produced. These will help in decision-making as the programme continues to evolve. Stories have been portrayed on several aspects of the programme, including the role of community volunteers such as Community Welfare Assistance Committees and the efficacy of the mentorship programmes.

**CHALLENGES AND NEXT STEPS**

Bringing stakeholders together to obtain agreement on the research agenda takes time. The process has to be consultative to build consensus on the approach, methodology and data collection tools and to obtain ethical clearance. This may delay the process of implementation of the research on gender norms. To mitigate this, it is expected that the stakeholder consultation process will start early in 2022.
end child marriage