COUNTRY PROFILE 2021: UNFPA-UNICEF GLOBAL PROGRAMME TO END CHILD MARRIAGE

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>
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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>
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<td>kept child marriage on national agendas</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 adolescent</td>
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<td>in rural and remote areas</td>
<td>girls, boys and their families</td>
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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>
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<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</td>
<td>Further articulate the strategy to leverage social protection schemes such as</td>
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<td>drivers need to be stressed further in operational strategies</td>
<td>cash transfers and income generation opportunities for adolescent girls and</td>
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<tr>
<td>COVID-19 programme adjustments created a high demand on data and evidence</td>
<td>their families</td>
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<td>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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• 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>
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</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>103,016</td>
<td>44,825</td>
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<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>9,752</td>
<td>14,070</td>
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<tr>
<td>Indicator 1211: 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>
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<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>206,151</td>
<td>346,828</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>14,500,000</td>
<td>7,300,000</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>2,800</td>
<td>6,428</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>9</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Indicator 2111: 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>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>50</td>
<td>14</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>3</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>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicator 3211: 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>Indicator 3212: Number of generated evidence and knowledge that apply a gender analysis</td>
<td>2</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>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
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</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.

Dima Brice, a social worker at ADC/PDE, was one of the key players during the mediation between Fatima and her parents. In addition to numerous mediation sessions, Dima 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,12 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.13 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.14

The miniseries Vaillante15 was launched during the 2021 FESPACO film festival in Burkina Faso16, during which UNICEF also premiered two additional movies (Triumph17 and Les Yeux Ouverts18) 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’appeliez 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?v=OzKLyet1K93Q&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

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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 denouncement 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.
end child marriage