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

GHANA
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. 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

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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>
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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 girls, boys and their families</td>
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<td>in rural and remote areas</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adoption of digital and mass media approaches demonstrated a high</td>
<td>Develop complementary multi-channel approaches to reach target populations, ensuring that they foster two-way communication</td>
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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 ensure adolescent girls have access to essential services</td>
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<tr>
<td>social welfare services</td>
<td></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 as cash transfers and income generation opportunities for adolescent girls and their families</td>
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<td>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</td>
<td>Continue adjusting monitoring, data generation and analysis in order to reinforce evidence-based programming</td>
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<td>for adopted approaches</td>
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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>
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<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>18,690</td>
<td>19,376</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>1,030</td>
<td>1,094</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>3,265</td>
<td>4,392</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>80,000</td>
<td>85,301</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>450,000</td>
<td>1,051,599</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>706</td>
<td>2,116</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>12</td>
<td>1</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>6</td>
<td>7</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>996</td>
<td>634</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>6</td>
<td>8</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>0</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>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicator 3212: Number of generated evidence and knowledge that apply a gender analysis</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</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>5</td>
<td>4</td>
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</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

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**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.
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...
‘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.
end child marriage