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

NEPAL
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. 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 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. 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.

**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 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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<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>
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<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>
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<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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<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>
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However promising, this progress is not enough to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) target to end child marriage by 2030. However promising, this progress is not enough to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) target to end child marriage by 2030.

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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**

- 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>
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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 Dajuvai (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 Dajuvai 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 Chhori ko 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.
end child marriage