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GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE ACCELERATOR: NEPAL COUNTRY REPORT
UNFPA-UNICEF GLOBAL PROGRAMME TO END CHILD MARRIAGE

GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE ACCELERATOR

Nepal Country Report



The Gender-Transformative Accelerator Tool of the Global Programme to End Child Marriage was produced by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) headquarters' offices in collaboration with Collective Impact LLC. We would like to thank Collective Impact members Alana Kolundzija and Meena Sharma for their leadership in facilitating the GTA process in Nepal.

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INTRODUCTION

A gender-transformative approach aims to intentionally address the underlying root causes of gender inequality. It is grounded in girls' and women's agency and empowerment and emphasizes the importance of shared control over resources and decision-making. Gender-transformative approaches actively examine, question, and address rigid gender norms and imbalances of power that advantage the majority over marginalized groups, men/boys over women/girls and other diverse genders, and people who adhere to other minority identities. Integrating gender-transformative approaches into programmes is a crucial strategy to not just address the results of gender inequality, but also to shift the underlying root causes so that outcomes for girls and young women improve across a variety of sectors and lead to a significant reduction in child marriage.

The Gender-Transformative Accelerator (GTA) tool has been developed to facilitate a process for the Global Programme to End Child Marriage to identify concrete actions for country office programmes to become more gender transformative. The gender equity continuum provides a framework to analyse each of the gender-transformative core components and encourages critical reflection and awareness to understand how programmes are addressing the unequal distribution of resources between genders, consider how roles and responsibilities are allocated between different genders and identities, and assess how power secures higher status and privilege for some people.

During Phase II, the Global Programme, supported by Collective Impact, developed, tested and rolled out a new Gender-Transformative Accelerator (GTA) tool for use both in a virtual and in-person workshop setting in eight 'trailblazer' countries: Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Mozambique, Niger and Nigeria. The GTA tool has been updated for Phase III, integrating participatory values clarification activities to create an active learning environment for programme staff and partners to go deeper into the foundational concepts and principles of gender-transformative programming: power, agency, bodily autonomy, unconscious bias, empathy, allyship, and gender norms. Each core element of the gender-transformative approach of the Gender-Transformative Accelerator Tool of the Global Programme to End Child Marriage (GPECM) has been paired with a participatory values clarification activity to help workshop participants deepen their understanding, analysis and discussion of the underlying values for gender equity.

The GTA process consists of initial priority-setting conversations, preparatory work, and a workshop that focuses on the core elements of a gender-transformative approach. The workshop reviews key concepts related to gender through an iterative process that brings staff and partners together to analyse their work and develop a shared understanding of their progress, challenges and opportunities related to gender equality, aligned to the Global Programme contextualized theory of change. The main output of the workshop is that staff and partners co-create a prioritized road map of actions to guide their work towards gender transformation. Several follow-up conversations/consultations are usually necessary to finalize the details and secure buy-in from all relevant stakeholders of the road map.

The GTA tool begins with an overview of the core components of a gender-transformative approach and asks participants to reflect about where their current programming falls on the Gender Equity Continuum (see Figure 1). Days 1-3 focus on the following core elements: 1) Girls' skills and agency, 2) Engaging men and boys, 3) Communities and families, and 4) Services. On Day 4, participants map out current work, opportunities and programmes across the socioecological framework. On Days 4-5, participants undergo a prioritizing exercise to identify areas of focus to develop an action plan with concrete activities to implement to progress towards gender-transformative programming.

THE GENDER CONTEXT IN NEPAL

Child marriage is still prevalent in Nepal. In 2021 one in five women aged 20-24 had married before the age of 18, and more than one out of every eight teenage girls (14%) is a mother. 1.8 million married women of reproductive age lack access to family planning services, and at least one in four (26%) ever-married women have experienced physical, sexual or emotional violence from their spouses. Sixty-six per cent of women who experience violence do not seek assistance due to patriarchal norms, stigma, and structural barriers.

In Nepal, two women die every day while giving birth, leaving behind families and communities devastated by loss. The impact of maternal mortality goes beyond individual lives. It also has significant economic and social consequences,

affecting the health and well-being of entire societies. When mothers die, families lose caregivers, breadwinners and role models, which can lead to intergenerational poverty, malnutrition, and poor health outcomes for their children.

The current census reveals that the overall female population in Nepal surpasses that of males. However, the gap in the male-to-female ratio is widening, especially among those under 19 years old, and there is a low preference for girls within families. The sex ratio at birth between baby boys and baby girls increased from 107 to 114 between 2011 and 2021. Baby boys outnumber baby girls beyond biological norms indicating an increase in gender -biased sex selection, which continues to be a concern, especially in Madhesh (118) and Sudur Paschim (116).¹

The COVID pandemic has expanded the reach of mobile phones in many parts of the country; however, information dissemination to the adolescent population is largely limited to urban settings only. Internet penetration is around 84 per cent in Nepal, but network connectivity remains a significant issue, hindering the connection between rural and urban areas.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM VALUES CLARIFICATION ACTIVITIES

In the first exercise participants reflected individually on their **personal values** and then discussed their shared values and reflections in small groups: many participants discovered that they shared a desire to live up to their values in both their personal and professional lives, and discussed how that influences their approach to their work. Participants then moved on to an activity where facilitators read out statements from UNICEF and UNFPA programme documents and policies. They had to cross a line if they agreed with the statement or stay in place if they disagreed. For instance, this statement from the UNFPA Gender Equality Strategy “The social norms that support gender discrimination, gender-based violence and harmful practices must be transformed.” Most policy statements supporting gender equality received unanimous agreement, so questions like “Marriage should always be illegal in

all circumstances for people under the age of 18” were included to elicit more discussion and a range of opinions.

The **gender norms** activity was used to get participants thinking about what norms are, where we learn them from and how they impact our lives. Participants were asked to reflect on what it means to be a man or a woman, where they learn how they are supposed to behave, and how these rules are reinforced. Finally, participants explored how norms function at all levels of society (i.e. individual, family, community, institutions, laws and policies) and discussed examples of how particular norms related to child marriage impact their programming.

An activity on power mapping and identifying different **patterns of power** helped participants identify where power lies in their communities and who holds power in areas where they are implementing their programmes. It also helped them see who has power over adolescent girls’ decisions and choices.

RANKING ON GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACH COMPONENTS

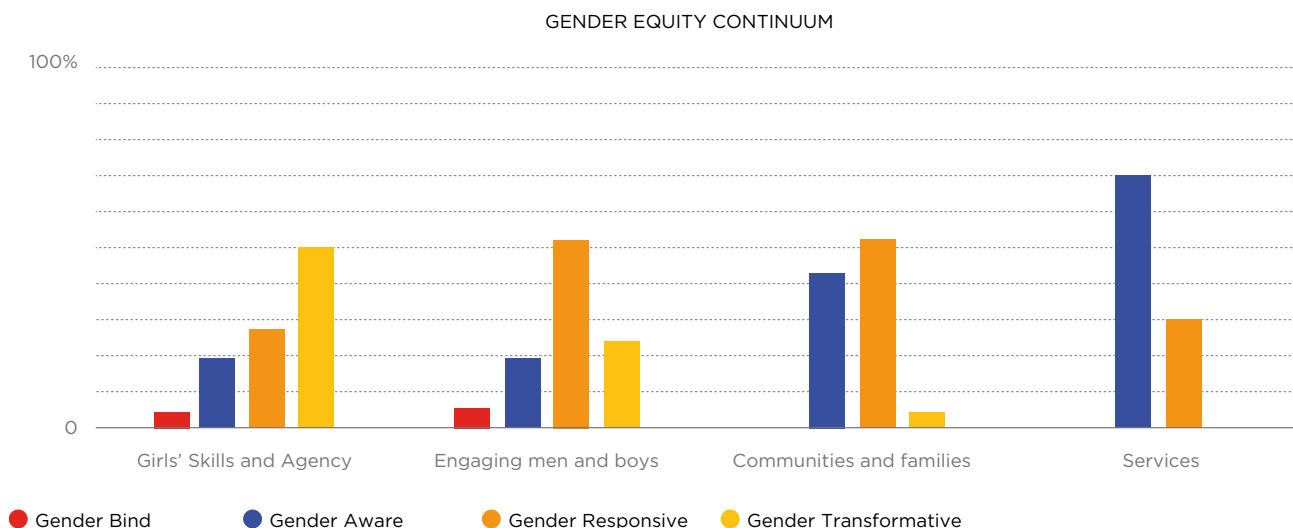
Participants reached an overall consensus that the Global Programme has made significant strides in adopting a gender-transformative approach. However, in some cases in Nepal, the outcomes and engagements have not progressed beyond gender responsiveness and in others the delivery of programmes does not quite achieve the gender-transformative approach integrated into the project goals and design. For example, in the Madhesh Province, the team continues to grapple with raising awareness about how gender inequality impacts child marriage in many of the communities where traditional norms about marrying early are deeply imbedded and normalized.

The commitment of government agencies and the willingness of development partners to implement programmes across all seven provinces adds significant momentum to achieve gender-transformative programming. There is still more that can be done to integrate more gender-transformative approaches into programmes.

¹ UNFPA Nepal, ‘Speech by the UNFPA Representative at the National Conference on Population and Development 2023’, nepal.unfpa.org/en/news/speech-unfpa-representative-national-conference-population-and-development-2023

Figure 1: The Gender Equity Continuum

This chart shows how participants classified each of the core areas on the gender continuum.



Girls' skills and agency

Out of the four core elements prioritized in this workshop, girls' skills and agency received the highest gender-transformative ranking on the gender equity continuum. Half of participants indicated that programmatic interventions are working with girls in a gender-transformative way. A key example of such interventions is Rupantaran which support young adults in understanding existing gender discrimination and guide them in intervening to redefine their roles and power within families and communities. The Rupantaran activities are crafted to enhance choices, skills and opportunities for adolescent girls through multifaceted approaches. Traditional methods of addressing gender norms are being challenged, and communities readily embrace various implementation strategies.

The Global Programme is also engaging with local partners and the government agencies which are implementing programmes that empower girls and women with education, life skills and economic opportunities. Some of these programmes involve mobilizing young people against child marriage and providing platforms for them to express their views and actively participate in community initiatives.

Participants acknowledged that girls and boys play distinct roles in their homes and communities, and efforts are made to address these gender inequalities. However, the explicit inclusion of girls is yet to be introduced. In many instances, communities perceive that adolescent girls are not specifically addressed, as the programme focuses on children, youth, young adults and women, leading to the exclusion of adolescent girls specifically in various cases. Participants also explained that the engagement of

adolescent girls is also challenged by gender norms and traditional cultural practices and the agency of girls is not well established. Parents still hesitate to involve girls in outdoor events or programmes. There is a pressing need for more adolescent girls-centred programmes.

Addressing masculinities and engaging men and boys

Engaging men and boys is crucial for creating a more inclusive and equitable society, and initiatives in Nepal continue to evolve to address the complex dynamics of gender norms. Three out of four participants ranked this element as gender-responsive or gender-transformative and indicated that programmes that engage men and boys promote positive and equitable expressions of masculinity while challenging harmful gender norms. Initiatives in this area provide training to build the capacity of men and boys to become advocates and foster a more inclusive and gender-equitable society.

Participants highlighted several key strategies in current programming efforts to promote positive masculinities. The Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizens has initiated programmes and events encouraging men and boys to embrace positive traits such as empathy, compassion and respect for diversity while challenging traditional stereotypes that associate masculinity with aggression or dominance. Fatherhood and caregiving initiatives are also under way in a few areas encouraging men to participate actively in caregiving responsibilities and continue to dismantle the expectation that caregiving is solely a woman's responsibility. Discussions highlighted the positive impact of involved fatherhood on children and families. Some gender-based violence (GBV) prevention work has also engaged men and boys in efforts to prevent and address GBV and promote

healthy relationships, and raise awareness about the importance of consent. Social behaviour and communication work is also ongoing, advocating for positive portrayals of men and boys in the media.

Enabling environment

More than 90 per cent of participants ranked this core element as gender aware or gender responsive. Participants explained that interventions are designed to involve family, religious groups, community, and peer groups since they are key reference groups that shape and uphold gender norms. The Global Programme is collaborating with local NGOs, government agencies and international organizations to pool resources and expertise, yet more could be done to reach the gender-transformative stage and increase the perceived value of girls in communities and create an enabling environment to end child marriage in Nepal to improve the quality of and scale up interventions.

Current community mobilization efforts often revolve around building partnerships with community leaders, religious institutions and other influential parties to gain community trust and support. The local implementers at the provincial level are facilitating inclusive and intergenerational community dialogues to discuss the implications of child marriage. They are engaging community leaders, parents, religious leaders, adolescents and youth in conversations to challenge and change social norms supporting child marriage. The intergenerational dialogues generally emphasize the importance of empowering girls and the promotion of girls' education as a key strategy for delaying marriage. To be gender-transformative they could go a step further beyond raising awareness about the importance of educating girls to promote elevating the perceived value of girls in their communities and encourage families to support girls to expand their options by making informed decision-making about their lives and pursue options beyond motherhood and caretaking.

There are several initiatives that aim to educate communities about the harmful effects of child marriage through various campaigns using traditional communication channels and social media platforms to reach a broad audience. These campaigns challenge social norms supporting child marriage and share success stories and positive examples of communities that have successfully abandoned the practice.

Services and systems

This element ranked the lowest on the Gender Equity Continuum with 70 per cent of participants indicating that work on strengthening systems and services is currently gender aware. The education

sector seems to be doing more to promote gender equality than other sectors such as health and social protection. There is substantial programming to provide quality educational opportunities for adolescent girls and empower them with skills and knowledge to make informed decisions about their lives. Youth participation is also encouraged, including and amplifying the voices of adolescent girls in decision-making processes, ensuring their active participation in the design and implementation of programmes.

More of an effort can be made to collaborate on programmes that enhance adolescent girls' access to health-care services and comprehensive sexuality education, including menstrual hygiene, family planning and sexual health. Strengthening the linkages between the education system and quality health-care services will help to address the unique needs of adolescent girls. Social protection schemes that improve the socioeconomic status of families and reduce the perceived need for early marriages is another strategy to bolster.

Continuing to support inter-agency and multisectoral coordination will promote a unified and holistic approach to address adolescent girls' issues. Further collaboration can leverage data collected through national systems needs assessments to identify the specific challenges faced by adolescent girls in Nepal. Established platforms for knowledge-sharing among United Nations agencies and other stakeholders can be used to disseminate best practices and lessons learned within and across different sectors and programme interventions.

PRIORITY FOCUS AREAS AND RELATED ACTION PRIORITIES

The dialogue highlighted helped in prioritizing areas for work over the next 12-18 months. Based on the discussion during the workshop and the pillars for Phase III of the Global Programme in Nepal, the following priority areas were selected:

- 1. Girls' empowerment**
- 2. Family and community**
- 3. System strengthening**
- 4. Law and policy**

These priority focus areas create a synergistic and sustainable impact on the lives of adolescent girls in Nepal, addressing their unique challenges and fostering positive social change. The road map based on these priority areas is shown below.

ROAD MAP FOR THE NEPAL GLOBAL PROGRAMME TO END CHILD MARRIAGE

ACTIVITIES	ACTION	WHO IS RESPONSIBLE	TIME-FRAME	SUPPORT NEEDED	HOW TO MEASURE SUCCESS
Girls' Empowerment	<p>1. Revise Rupantaran package to integrate more focus on gender norms</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Integrate topics such as mental health, psychosocial well-being, online safety, self-defence <p>2. Provide comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) training the schoolteachers to reach out to a larger number of adolescent girls and boys</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Integrating into Rupantaran activities to increase awareness Teacher training <p>3. Expand Rupantaran programme to reach more marginalized communities (Muslim Madrasas, Dalit, people with disabilities, girls who are not in school)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mobilize Rupantaran graduates as champions of change Start rolling out a digital platform for Rupantaran and more edutainment videos <p>4. Economic Empowerment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Link girls with local initiatives for economic empowerment and career counselling and development 	<p>Ministry of Education and Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizens</p> <p>UNFPA, UNICEF Nepal</p> <p>UNFPA</p> <p>UNFPA and UNICEF</p> <p>UNFPA and UNICEF</p>	<p>Six months</p> <p>October</p> <p>March - ongoing</p> <p>January - ongoing</p> <p>2025</p>	<p>UN agencies, civil society organizations</p> <p>Coordination from Ministry of Education and Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizens and Ministry of Health & population</p> <p>Coordination with provincial and local level government</p>	<p>Revised manual</p> <p>Activity-level indicators</p> <p>CSE indicators</p> <p>Informed decisions by girls on getting married and other life decisions</p> <p>Vulnerability assessments to identify most at-risk girls (UNFPA) who are not in school</p> <p>Career development plan</p> <p>No. of trainings given</p>
Family & Community	<p>1. Family</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue reflective sessions with parents and integrate more positive parenting approach Male facilitators to bring in more male family members - fathers or uncles if the father has migrated Supporting and participating in networks for male engagement <p>2. Community engagement and intergenerational dialogues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review of engagement tool from a gender-transformative perspective for engagement with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Religious leaders - interreligious groups (NIRNI) at the national level and provincial level Engagement with Ward chairs/ Mayors Community committees and declarations Strengthen GTA in peer support mechanisms for adolescent girls and boys at community level to challenge discriminatory harmful practices <p>3. Mobilizing social media to shift gender norms</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Capacity-building for journalists Mobilize media for awareness campaigns Social media and new technologies for wider awareness 	<p>UNFPA UNICEF</p> <p>National Inter-Religious Network</p> <p>UNFPA</p>	<p>July 2024</p> <p>Next 6 months</p> <p>July 2025</p>	<p>Local governments and Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizen</p> <p>Consultant to review packages and revise tools</p> <p>Ministry of Communication and information</p> <p>Media Networks</p>	<p>Government endorsed toolkit for male engagement</p> <p>Gender-transformative approach integrated into engagement tools</p> <p>Training manual for the media</p> <p>Gender-responsive publications</p>

ACTIVITIES	ACTION	WHO IS RESPONSIBLE	TIME-FRAME	SUPPORT NEEDED	HOW TO MEASURE SUCCESS
System strengthening	1. Education	UNICEF	By end of 2024 to 2025	Partnership with local government and religious leaders	At least 80% of Madrasas covered in programme areas
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High prevalence of child marriage among Muslims so need to focus on reaching girls from Madrasas and girls who are not in school 	UNFPA	By Dec 2024 and 2025	Ministry of Education, Science and Technology and local government	AFICs will be established, and functional
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishment of Adolescent Friendly Information Corners (AFIC) in schools More awareness about CSE that has already been integrated into syllabus for 4-10 and 8-12 	National Health Training Centre	End of 2024	Ministry of Health	Number of teachers trained on AFICs
System strengthening	2. Health	UNICEF and UNFPA		Family welfare Division	0% certified AFSC in the working area
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with newly married adolescents to access family planning and widen awareness on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) 			Local government	Health service providers will be placed in the AFSCs
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Certification of more Adolescent Friendly Services Centres (AFSC) and SRHR services at community level and in private and provincial hospitals Providing 5-day trainings for health-care providers, who will be placed in AFSCs for SRHR training 			Consultant to review training packages to integrate GTA	Number of Trainings
System strengthening	3. Justice and security system				Revision of training packages
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Capacity-building packages for lawyers and police - include GTA aspect 				Number of people trained
Laws and policies	1. Advocate for GTA to be integrated into national strategy to end child marriage being reformulated and updated	UNFPA and UNICEF	2025	Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizens	National, Lumbini, Madhesh, Sudur Paschim ECM strategy finalized

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