

# Strengthening critical systems to end child marriage

*UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to Accelerate Action  
to End Child Marriage*

*Issue 8, June 2019*

## News & Highlights

According to the evidence, legal reforms setting the minimum legal age for marriage at 18 or higher without parental or judicial exceptions, must be accompanied by a wide range of additional policies and interventions to be effective in ending child marriage. Many governments are now adopting national strategies to end child marriage, but what is even more important is the adoption of action plans with clear interventions to delay marriage and increase investments in the poorest and most marginalized girls.

Thus, the Global Programme works closely with health, education, child protection and social protection systems to strengthen quality and cost-effective services that meet the needs of adolescent girls. Strengthening these critical systems, and scaling up government-led interventions, enables the programme to reach millions of adolescent girls and have a meaningful impact on girls' lives, including delaying marriage and improving their health outcomes. This month's newsletter is focusing on case studies that show how the Global Programme has contributed towards systems strengthening.

### HEALTH

#### **Increasing uptake of health services among adolescent girls in Uganda**

As adolescent girls increasingly gain more knowledge about their rights and the sexual and reproductive health services available to them, health systems need to be strengthened to meet the increased demand for services. In 2018, the [Empowerment and Livelihood for Adolescents](#) (ELA) clubs in Uganda referred over 9,600 girls to health facilities to receive protection, counseling and care services. Training of health providers and peer educators on adolescent-friendly health service delivery and advocacy, technical and financial support to health facilities contribute to making the facilities and services more adolescent girl-friendly and respond to the girls' needs.

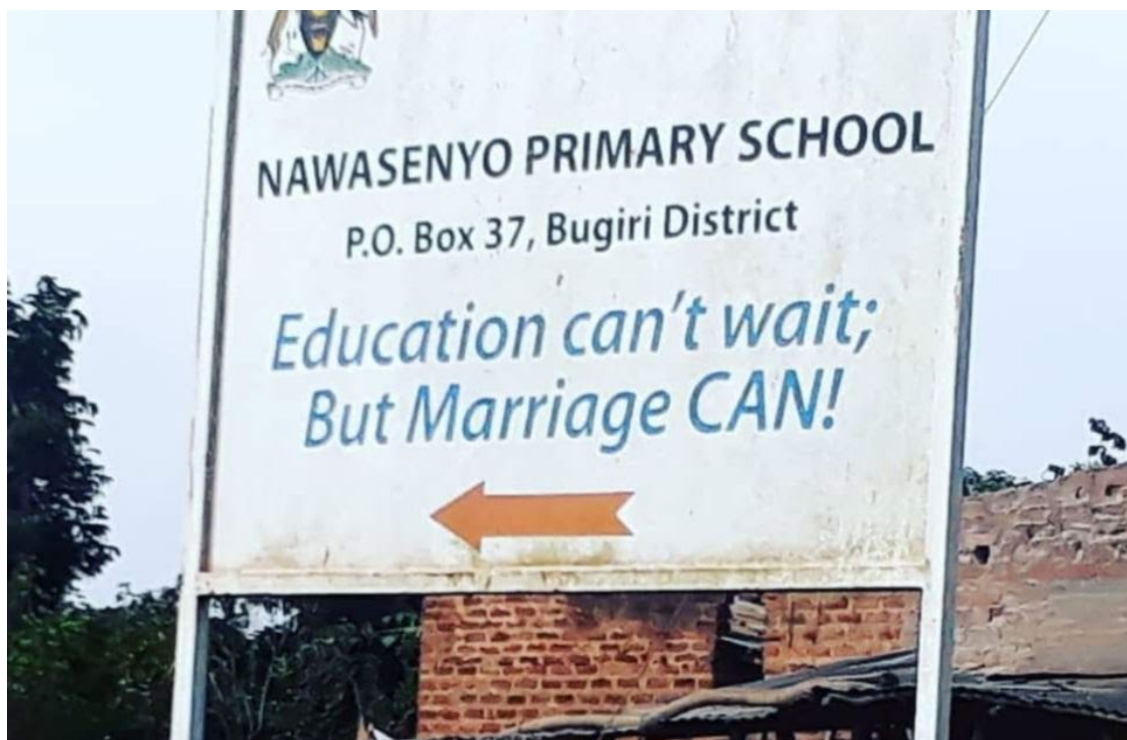
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## **Mobilizing service providers and communities for girls' access to health services**

In 2018, over 70,000 adolescent girls in Bangladesh were referred to health and protection services through the Global Programme. The Global Programme strengthens service delivery points and sensitizes parents and decision makers to improve girls' access to and uptake of health services. Service providers (including doctors, nurses, Family Welfare Visitors and Community Medical Officers) are trained on implementing guidelines for adolescent girl-friendly health services and peer educators are oriented on adolescent-friendly health services to improve awareness and referral linkages. Further, training sessions are organized for parents and community gate keepers and decision makers at Union Health and Family Welfare Centers as well as Community Centers to support the girls' access to the services.

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## **EDUCATION**



A sign outside Nawasenyo primary school in Bugiri, Uganda, supported by the Global Programme.

## **Improving girls' access to education through investments in menstrual hygiene management**

To strengthen gender-responsive education in Burkina Faso, several interventions are supported by the Global Programme, which in combination have great potential to improve girls' access to and regular attendance in schools. Technical support has been given to the Ministry of Education to harmonize menstrual hygiene management (MHM) communication tools across implementing partners. To scale up

the MHM initiative, the Global Programme introduced it into the basic education curriculum and finalized a teacher training module on MHM. Through a new partnership with vocational training schools in the Sahel region, adolescent girls are also trained as local manufacturers of reusable sanitary pads to meet growing local demand with cost-effective products.

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### **Getting girls back in education in Zambia**

The Global Programme supports the Ministry of General Education in Zambia to develop strategies and interventions for equitable access to, retention in and completion of education for girls. Specifically, a strategy to reach out-of-school children and a national action plan on school-related gender-based violence are being developed, with a data collection tool being rolled out to 1,450 primary and secondary schools in five provinces in 2018 to track out-of-school children. During the year, out-of-school girls benefited from newly established open learning and transit schools, where the mentors have been trained by the programme, providing second-chance education for the girls in a girl-friendly environment. 88 percent of the girls enrolled met the requirements in literacy and numeracy for reintegration into the formal education system. Further, 131 head teachers and school health and nutrition focal points in 60 schools were trained on counseling and to support girls' education, resulting in a reduction in adolescent girls' dropout rates.

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## **PROTECTION**

### **Preventing, monitoring and following up cases of child marriage**

Through advocacy and engagement with the government, child protection systems are strengthened in India, with nine states establishing child-friendly courts at the district level and seven states setting up child-friendly police stations in all their districts in 2019. In Bihar, the Global Programme supports the sensitization of Child Marriage Prohibition Officers (CMPOs), Deputy Superintendents of the police, female police personnel and District Welfare Officers on child marriage and dowry prevention, with an emphasis on how to strengthen administrative structures, and task forces across all districts. This has resulted in an increased awareness generation and an increased number of reported child marriage cases. Policy dialogue and technical assistance led to improvements in information management systems, monitoring and oversight mechanisms in twelve states. In Bihar, regular monitoring of cases before the Juvenile Justice Board through the effective use of information management systems led to a 34 percent decrease in the processing time of cases.

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## Strengthening the police force to handle cases of child marriage

To sustain impact of interventions in the protection sector, the Global Programme in Ghana provides extensive training for in-service fresh recruits of the Ghana Police Service on the child-friendly policing initiative, developed with support of the programme. The initiative covers handling of child offenders, victims and witnesses. In 2018, close to 1,700 additional police officers (of those, almost a third are female) received the training, following the Standard Operating Procedures for child offenders, victims and witnesses. Further, 71 protection service points improved case management for better handling of cases concerning children.

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## Recent Research & Reports

### Understanding the Relationships Between HIV and Child Marriage: Conclusions from an expert consultation (May, 2019)

*Suzanne Petroni, et al.*

Research on child marriage from the early 2000's was often mistakenly interpreted to suggest that child brides face a higher vulnerability to HIV acquisition than girls and women who marry later. This [commentary](#) makes recommendations for practitioners and researchers based on new findings, suggesting a more nuanced relationship between child marriage and HIV. Many factors associated with child marriage and HIV acquisition among adolescent girls overlap. However, rarely do programmes address the adolescent girl as a whole, recognizing the multiple underlying vulnerabilities a girl face, although programmes such as the Global Programme have begun to do so. To most effectively advance the health and well-being of adolescent girls, policies and programmes need to target not only girls vulnerable to HIV and child marriage, but also change attitudes, behaviors and norms of those individuals, communities and systems that perpetuate the conditions that contribute to girls' vulnerability. Further, there needs to be a greater attention to the fact that adolescent girls are not a homogeneous group, and a better understanding of the relationship between HIV and child marriage in diverse contexts, to more effectively end both child marriage and the transmission of HIV and to promote the overall health and well being of girls.

### The Long-Term Impacts of Girl-Friendly Schools: Ten-year evidence from school construction in Burkina Faso (April, 2019)

*Harounan Kazianga, Leigh Linden, Ali Protik and Matt Sloan*

This [study](#) evaluates the long-term effect of a 'girl-friendly' primary school programme in Burkina Faso. The programme has constructed primary schools and implemented a set of complementary interventions, including separate latrines for boys and girls, school canteens, take-home rations for girls, textbooks and community engagement activities, making the schools 'girl-friendly'. Ten years after the programme began, the evaluation finds that implementing the girl-friendly school programme had a double positive effect: it had raised girls' academic outcomes and simultaneously reduced early marriage and child bearing. Among girls



19–22-year-old in the selected villages, the programme increased the completion of primary school and the transition to secondary school by four and five percentage points, corresponding to an increase of 33.8 and 32.8 percent relative to the non-selected average around the threshold. It also had substantial effects on learning. The programme reduced early marriage and childbearing by 9.80 and 5.90 percentage points, respectively. The programme did not affect boys' marriage and fertility outcomes. The impacts on boys' academic outcomes were substantial, although smaller than those of girls.

**Social Norms and Child Trafficking: A springboard for social workers to facilitate community-based child protection interventions (February/March, 2019)**

*Ajwang Warria and Cyndirela Chadambuka*

This [paper](#) (starting on page 16) provides a brief overview of the legal, practical and theoretical framework around social norms and different forms of child trafficking, including child and forced marriage. The paper emphasizes that social work interventions need to consider the importance of socio-cultural, economic and political contexts to be effective. The paper notes that social norms which overlook violence against children may be publicly or tacitly shared by the professionals who are tasked to assist victims and protect children, risking reproducing harmful norms in the communities. Community-based interventions are not one-size-fits-all and cannot be governed by a set of guidelines or a checklist to be followed. It is vital for practitioners to build on community needs and assets and start where the communities are, i.e. “bottom up” community child protection interventions. The social worker should not be there as an expert, but rather a facilitator to invite to a dialogue in the community around different options, decisions and actions.

## From the Field



**A teacher standing up for girls' right to education**

When [Roumanatou Mamane Taweye](#), 27, was 16 years old, she was the first girl in her town of Matameye, Niger, to successfully challenge child marriage. Girls in Niger are often taken out of school to get married, but Roumanatou, who liked school, refused to leave her studies when her marriage was arranged for her when she was 16. She took the case of her arranged marriage to the local court, and she won. Roumanatou is today a teacher and passionate about helping girls stay in school instead of getting married as a child. "By studying you will have a lot more choice in life. [...] When you let a girl study, she can become someone who help others: their parents, their brothers, and later in life, their children."

### 3 quick questions for Dhuwarakha Sriram, Child Protection Specialist, UNICEF India

*The Global Programme in India supports large scale government systems and programmes in several sectors. What are the benefits of this systems strengthening approach?*

The overall strategy consists of advocacy, system strengthening and referral services with intense support in highly affected areas through community-based interventions. We are advocating with the government systems to work with other critical stakeholders including civil society and the private sector on a common agenda and strengthening inter-sectoral linkages within government structures. The strategies include system strengthening; improving budgetary governance; leveraging resources; development and specialization of the workforce; community dialogue and behavioral change; generation of data and evidence; advocacy and public engagement; and a focus on adolescent girls and boys as agents of change.



If the social welfare system is effectively implemented, adolescent girls and boys, parents and communities will seek out and utilize relevant services to prevent and address issues, hold government and non-governmental service providers increasingly accountable and take greater responsibility.

Working with national, state, district and sub-district government ministries/departments has led to greater government accountability and commitment for priorities of adolescent girls and boys. We have leveraged government schemes by building capacity of functionaries at various levels to deliver quality programming at the state/district levels, resulting in impact at scale. This mobilized investment in/for adolescents from the government. Some of the results and benefits of this engagement are: (i) state governments and key influencers increased commitment to improve adolescents' well-being, (ii) state government and key stakeholders possess capacity/skills to promote/deliver quality services and prevention programmes, and (iii) community structures have the capacity/skills to engage adolescents, parents and community influencers. The state governments in Bihar and Jharkhand have translated their commitment to end child marriage into actions through costed and funded action plans, and this work is in progress in six additional states. This is beneficial to ensure focus on strategies to end child marriage, allocation of necessary

resources and translation of strategies into district work plans. We are now supporting more than 100 districts to operationalize their plans in 2019-2020.

Through research we did with JPAL, our advocacy with state governments to design or redesign their cash transfer programmes, reaching millions of girls, has led to state governments working towards integrating complementary services through a cash transfer “plus” programme; bringing together all critical services with elements of adolescent empowerment and community engagement. This will ensure that millions of adolescent girls benefit from cash grants along with linkages to life skills, career guidance, skill development programmes, market opportunities and tangible workforce chances.

From our short experience, the at-scale programmes have provided high coverage with strong political commitment, government ownership and allocation of resources. The plans, advocacy and social behavior change communication package and workforce strengthening will now not only be implemented by us but by national government schemes and state governments, district administrations, local governments and CSO alliances. We have looked at large-scale, multi-state technical partnerships with state governments and district administrations to work with adolescent girls and boys, parents, community structures and frontline workers. This is the evolving role of NGOs from direct implementation to working as technical partners of the government and bringing together the CSO alliance. This has drastically reduced the costs for us and increased the coverage from 12 districts in 2017 to more than 100 districts in 2019.

We are supporting state governments and partners to (i) carry out budgetary analysis and development of costed and resourced plans of action (for example, through the budget analysis in Bihar, we identified 65 adolescent programmes across 17 line departments worth more than USD 274 million), (ii) establish coordination mechanism at state and district level for inter-sectoral coordination, (iii) develop packages of interventions to support the district administration to operationalize the plans, including planning, budgetary analysis, costing, budgeting, capacity building, advocacy and communication packages, adolescent participation and monitoring and learning, and (iv) strengthen the workforce of not only child protection but that of allied systems and services and CSOs at community level.

Government systems and programmes are being leveraged to (i) form and engage adolescent girls' and boys' groups through building knowledge and skills, (ii) mobilize and engage of parents and communities through multi-media initiatives using local governance mechanisms and community structures including self-help groups, (iii) provide formal and explore flexible education programmes, (iv) provide life skills and career guidance, (v) create linkages with skilling and employment opportunities, and (v) foster partnerships with multiple stakeholders such as CSOs, academia, the private sector, faith-based organizations, media and parliamentarians.

Generating evidence for programme effectiveness, measuring progress and national/state advocacy are built into the programme. It is critical to learn from setbacks and present a strong case for approaches, results for improving the lives of adolescent girls and boys. We are developing a strong monitoring, learning, evaluation and knowledge management framework together with the government and partners.

### *What have been your main learnings in planning, programming and monitoring systems strengthening work?*

I would like to say that the at-scale programme in India is not a blueprint, but rather an onward journey building on experiences, significant achievements and setbacks that force us to reinvent ourselves.

Pilots and models will always be needed but UN agencies cannot keep innovating for a few thousands when the target is millions of people. On the other hand, reaching millions through poorly

designed programmes or one-off events are not a better option if they do not bring about change. It should not be a blind pursuit of scale. In India, we are being thoughtful in the design so that UN agencies and partners do not leave any vulnerable girl or boy behind.

In India, various projects on ending child marriage have been implemented for over a decade. These have direct attribution to UNICEF and UNFPA, with high quality, intensity and strong monitoring mechanisms. However, they were resource intensive and had low coverage with limited government commitment and ownership, and limited potential for scale and sustainability. From this experience and with the support of the Global Programme, based on quantitative and qualitative research in 2014-2015, the idea to scale-up and implement district-level models was developed and tested in 16 districts. In addition, we also tested large-scale interventions such as a multimedia initiative called 'Adhafull' and life skills across schools through adolescent participation platforms called 'Meena Manch'. We found that some of these models were ready for replication and scale. With a robust monitoring, learning and knowledge management, together with consultations with external stakeholders, the at-scale programming was developed for expansion, adaptation and replication.

We are now implementing at-scale programmes through a multi-dimensional approach to deliver quality services, empower adolescent girls and boys through life skills and access to resources and opportunities, and engage parents and communities. We see the sheer number of adolescents in India as an opportunity for our work. Reaching a few thousand adolescents is not a solution. The challenge is that scale-up programmatically have social, systemic and policy implications and we need to find the pathway that is most effective in a given state and sectoral context.

Through our programming experience we acknowledge that change related to child marriage is possible if it is linked to aspirations, informed choices of children and parents and opportunities and not just enforcement of laws. There is a need to challenge and shift the narrative from the 'marriage market' to that of socio-economic empowerment of girls and boys. If not marriage, then what are the opportunities for girls and boys? This is what we are challenged with and address through stronger focus on linkages with alternative/flexible learning opportunities, life skills and tangible opportunities linked with skills training and employment.

It is critical to have political commitment and bring together different stakeholders internally and externally to strengthen the implementation of at-scale programmes. We need to look at inside-out convergence and see what is in it for individuals and sectors, with clear accountability and governance mechanism both internally and externally. The senior management has a critical role in bringing various sectoral teams together to create an enabling environment for cooperation with a common vision and purpose. It is important to move beyond formal processes, rigid accountability matrices and work distribution. For real cooperation and coordination, it must start with co-creation, joint design and, sometimes, joint implementation. This will institutionalize the need to address multidimensional overlapping deprivations of girls and boys. When looking at scale and integrated programmes, it is important to avoid extremes: too much doing without thinking and too much thinking without doing. This is a common programme and policy trap: over-conceptualization and under-implementation, paralysis by analysis.

The UN has a niche role in convening critical stakeholders around a platform that addresses multiple deprivations and supports girls and boys. This is critical as an at-scale integrated programme cannot be achieved by one sector or one stakeholder. Results at scale can only be achieved through partnerships and coordination at various levels, and not just within the government but across non-traditional partners



including CSOs, foundations, the World Bank and the private sector. This is the time to be part of a movement bigger than the UN to make a difference in the lives of girls and boys.

While it is critical to have political commitment for an at-scale integrated programme, it is also equally important to address implementation gaps. It is important to frame the political commitment through a mechanism to formalize the government's and partners' commitment, ownership and accountability for sustained action. This includes: (i) quantity and quality of human resources; (ii) planning, budgetary analysis, costing and resourcing of not just the public sector but also with CSOs and the private sector; (iii) inter-departmental coordination with the responsibility for coordination at a political and administrative level and not just with one ministry, including a CSO alliance to support the government to accelerate results; and (iv) capacity to monitor progress in real time. We need to have faster feedback loops on whether a programme works or not, to make mistakes and learn faster through documentation, monitoring and review.

Programmes have usually been designed with a logic of intensity, which, at times, was not compatible with scale. Therefore, it is critical to look at which components of a programme that are scalable and which that are not. The implementation of at-scale integrated programmes should focus on working through government systems and existing community structures. UN agencies should also look carefully at the unintended consequences of some large-scale interventions and be mindful of the possible unintentional harm some interventions can make.

Integrated programmes can address broader multi-dimensional issues of health, nutrition, education and protection and ensure adolescent empowerment, especially of girls. While it is important to look at integrated at-scale programmes, it is also critical to identify other best possible entry points or institutional settings for integration of light-touch interventions and look at layering as there is a need for the right balance of structural (supply) and normative (demand) approaches and interventions.

Our journey on at-scale programming has been less than two years and it has been one of learning through implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Some strategies still require modification and incorporation of evidence like the most cost-effective social protection "plus" programmes and some need to be developed and evaluated such as linkages with skills and employment. It is critical to highlight that although we have critical lessons learned from this experience, we cannot copy and paste the model across all states. We have provided state offices with the possible interventions but how they contextualize them is based on state context (politics, prevalence, norms) and available windows of opportunity. Each state is evolving with their own models, whether it is Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal or Jharkhand – there are multiple pathways.

*How do you ensure these programmes, with their great reach, also reach the most marginalized girls?*

While there is a need to accelerate and amplify at-scale programmes, there is a need for differentiated approaches within the country based on prevalence, norms, key drivers, strategies and solutions in a specific context. When looking at scale and big numbers, it should not be at the cost of leaving behind that bottom 20-30% where change never comes. Our programming is present in states and districts that have a high burden of child marriage, focusing on vulnerable households, socially marginalized communities, scheduled castes/tribes and girls who are especially vulnerable to marriage (dropped out of education, never been to school, economically weak families).

For instance, in Bihar, for the first time, 40,000 adolescent groups are being formed, targeting more than 1.2 million adolescent girls and boys from the most marginalized communities among the scheduled castes in Bihar with dedicated human resources – 9,500 front line workers/community facilitators called Vikas Mitras. The groups will be connected with the district administration and local governance mechanisms to strengthen accountability and planning processes and ensure that the voices of the adolescents are heard and amplified through various media platforms.

We have also moved away from only looking at formal education to also recognizing the importance of flexible education, especially for the most vulnerable groups. We are in the process of mapping and providing referrals and linkages to flexible education programmes in five states with the highest burden of child marriage. It is critical to invest in more in flexible education programmes to build foundational and transferrable skills, promoting entrepreneurship and career guidance, targeting children who have dropped out and never been to school. This is of crucial importance to the most vulnerable adolescent girls and boys in India, especially those who are on the move and affected by migration.

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This newsletter is sent from the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage. Our aim is to facilitate information sharing across countries and regions, as well as between partners, to improve programming and policy-making for ending child marriage globally.

The Global Programme promotes the right of girls to not get married as children, but to achieve their aspirations through education and alternative pathways. The Global Programme is implemented in twelve countries with high prevalence and/or high burden of child marriage, and is generously funded by the Governments of Belgium, Canada, the Netherlands, Norway, the United Kingdom and the European Union, and Zonta International.

To provide feedback on this newsletter, or to suggest content to be featured, please contact [GPChildMarriage@unicef.org](mailto:GPChildMarriage@unicef.org).

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