



## **Report external end term evaluation**

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**avance-**

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## Executive Summary

Her Choice is an alliance of four Netherlands-based organisations: Stichting Kinderpostzegels Nederland, The Hunger Project, International Child Development Initiatives (ICDI) and the University of Amsterdam. Over the past five years these organizations combined their efforts through the Her Choice programme. Together with 27 partner organisations they worked to combat child marriage in ten countries in Africa and Asia: Bangladesh, Benin, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, Mali, Nepal, Pakistan, Senegal and Uganda. The programme has come to an end and it is thus time for a final evaluation. An extensive internal evaluation was done by the University of Amsterdam. The Alliance commissioned Avance-Impact to undertake the external End of term evaluation.

### Relationship between internal and external evaluation

We have taken care to ensure that this external evaluation is tailored to complement the internal evaluation. As the internal evaluation is mainly focussed on exploring the effectiveness and significant changes at outcome and impact level, this external evaluation focusses on relevance, sustainability and overall effectiveness (including output level). In addition, we focus on whether achievements at output and outcome level, meet the targets that were set by the alliance itself. The evaluation questions addressed in this external evaluation overlap to a minimal extent with the research questions of the UvA. Where there is overlap a different level of analysis is chosen. The analysis level in this external evaluation is at a meta level. In this way, we believe that the two evaluations complement each other well.

We highly recommend reading the two reports in conjunction. The UvA impact evaluation can be downloaded [here](#).

### A methodology based on secondary sources

The external evaluation is 99% based on secondary sources. We used research done by the UvA, programme documents, studies etc. We received a plethora of documents from the Alliance. Over 70 files. Ranging from communication material, to raw data of focus groups with the partners.

We collected a limited amount of primary data using two methods:

1. Two focus groups were conducted with partners in December 2020 to validate first findings and insights.
2. A short (voluntary) survey was disseminated among the partners to gain additional information on key subjects which were not sufficiently addressed in the available documentation.

### Evaluation questions

Within this evaluation we looked at the following questions categorized under three subjects:

Relevance	
EQ1	How does the HC Theory of Change and intended outcomes align with the overall SRHR policy of the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the SRHR-partnership programme?
EQ2	In what ways has the HC programme contributed to attaining the SRHR related policy objectives of the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the SRHR-partnership programme?
EQ3	What were the original vision and objectives of HC partners with regard to the needs of target populations?
EQ4	How has the HC programme contributed to addressing needs and/or fulfilling rights of the Her Choice target populations?
Effectiveness	
EQ5	Which output and (intermediate) outcome targets were set at inception of HC programme?
EQ6	Which targets have been achieved?
EQ7	What were facilitating and inhibiting factors for achieving programme targets?

Sustainability	
EQ8	How has the programme sought to ensure sustainability of (intermediate) outcomes and impacts?
EQ9	How has capacity building of local partners within the context of the Her Choice programme contributed to sustainability of the programme and outcomes?
EQ10	What are local partner perspectives regarding sustainability of programme outcomes and impacts?

## Key findings

The key findings for each of the evaluation subjects are shared in the following section.

### Relevance // A highly relevant programme

We explored the relevance of the Her Choice programme from three different angles. 1) a top-down angle using MFA's policy framework as the lens, 2) the urgency of the issue by reflecting on its prevalence and 3) the drivers and needs of the population as a final lens. Through each of these lenses the programme shows a high level of relevance.

#### MFA lens // A near perfect fit with MFA's SRHR policy

The Her Choice programme addresses all four SRHR results areas of MFA's SRHR policy framework, whereas the ministry expected HCs' efforts to at a minimum specifically contribute to two results areas. Both in theory and in practice. The work of the alliance aligns most strongly with results area 1 concerning young people. The Her Choice programme is thus highly relevant from the perspective of MFA's SRHR policy.

#### Urgency lens // Addressing a severe and prevalent issue

Child marriage is a severe issue that clearly merits solving. The Her Choice alliance has chosen to work on solving this issue in ten countries in Asia and Africa. The prevalence of child marriage in these countries is diverse, but generally quite high. In Ghana, the country with the lowest prevalence, still 1 in 5 girls is married before they are 18. The alliance thus seems to work on a relevant issue in relevant countries.

#### Drivers and needs lens // A holistic approach to address a complex phenomenon

Child marriage is a complex phenomenon with a multitude of underlying drivers. The Her Choice alliance has gone through extensive steps to properly map and contextualize the diverse factors that drive the practice. The holistic programmatic approach that was chosen by Her Choice responds to this complexity and ensures that core drivers are addressed. Several strategies are used to address key drivers such as poverty, religion and social/gender norms.

The holistic approach chosen seems very relevant for addressing the core drivers of child marriage.

### Effectiveness // Outcome and impact targets generally achieved – mixed results on output target

In our evaluation we focus specifically on the output and outcome targets that were set throughout the programme and whether they were reached. It is thus more a reflection of the way that the programme's impact was managed than a reflection of the overall effectiveness of the programme.

For the two impact level indicators that had targets and were measured at end line, the targets were reached or nearly reached in the majority of the programme countries. Outcome level targets were set after the baseline study was finished. These targets have generally been reached in the majority of the countries. There are two notable exceptions for the indicators concerning the single girls that feel that they can oppose FGM, and girls visiting SRHR services. Reaching the targets for these outcomes proved difficult in the majority of countries. Notably, for strategy four no outcome level targets were set. It is not clear why these targets were not set.

Targets at intermediate level were only set for one indicator and achieved by the majority of countries. Not setting targets for the other intermediate outcomes seems to be a missed opportunity. Targets at this level would have been useful for actively managing for more impact throughout the implementation of the programme.

Output targets were set yearly in collaboration with the partners. Output targets related the strategies working to increase girls' control in decision-making (1,2,3) were most easily reached throughout the

duration of the programme. For the most of these indicators the majority of countries was able to do so. The output targets that were set for the strategies concerning greater decision-making space for girls within communities (4,5,6) proved more difficult to reach. A smaller share of the countries was able to regularly reach the targets that they had set for themselves. Target setting at output level seems to have been quite ambitious. We see for example multiple moments where targets were not met the first year by a long shot and the targets in subsequently being increased the next year. For future programming it would be relevant to work on more realistic output target setting.

#### Alliance strategies play into key facilitating factors

Four facilitating factors were selected by partners as being key for the effectiveness of the programme:

1. Involvement of the community, including boys and men (82,3%)
2. Exchange of knowledge and experience between partners nationally (56,1%)
3. Involvement of traditional/religious leaders (53,7%)
4. Involvement of (local) authorities (51,2%)

These factors neatly correspond with the strategies/approach of the alliance. Each of these factors was to an extent included in the set-up of the programme from the start.

Particularly for the involvement boys and men we see that the alliance reflected upon this factor around the mid-term and subsequently harnessed it with greater intent and intensity.

#### Key drivers of child marriage as inhibiting factors

Three inhibiting factors were selected by partners as being key for the effectiveness of the programme:

1. Deep rooted traditions
2. Poverty, illiteracy and other social economic issues
3. Insufficient budget

Particularly the first two inhibiting factors were also identified by the programme as key drivers of child marriage. The programme is set up to address these factors, but nevertheless addressing these complex causes remains difficult.

### **Sustainability // Cautious optimism for the sustainability of the programme**

The Her Choice Alliance integrated several sustainability focused tactics in their approach. The investment in the capacity of the partner organizations made it possible to implement these tactics in practice.

#### Strong investment in sustainability

The Her Choice alliance has employed multiple tactics to ensure the sustainability of both the programme's approach and outcomes.

Key elements of the sustainability approach were:

1. A shared ownership of the programme. Not a top-down approach, but rather a close collaboration with strong national partners which leads to an embedded approach.
2. A shared ownership of the outcomes, where not only girls are responsible for the changes, but the entire community is involved.
3. A holistic approach, which (potentially) mitigate some of the diverse drivers that may lead to a reversal of the achieved outcomes.

#### Capacity building key for sustainability

For two key Her Choice' sustainability tactics, namely the holistic approach and a shared responsibility for the outcomes, capacity building was a crucial element for success.

Some partners had a limited comprehension of the importance of a holistic approach for a complex theme such as child marriage. Let alone experience in implementing such a holistic programme. Capacity building helped the team both realize the importance of such an approach and implement specific elements.

Helping communities take responsibility for the change was also a new process for some partners. The trainings helped them, not only bring their message across more forcefully, but truly mobilize the community to take their own actions towards change.

Cautious optimism

Partners recognize that steps have been set throughout the programme to ensure sustainability. Creating sustainable change in such a complex and deep-rooted issue takes time, but they are cautiously optimistic. They are least optimistic of the sustainability of the change realized in boys and young men. The limited time spent working with them is an important cause of this lack of optimism. Partners do see that the effects of Corona may hamper the long-term outcomes of the programme.

Partners recognize that, even though the programme comes to an end, work remains to be done. The majority of the partners will continue the work in some form. Their efforts are often unfortunately limited due to a lack of means.

## 1. Introduction

Her Choice is an alliance of four Netherlands-based organisations: Stichting Kinderpostzegels Nederland, The Hunger Project, International Child Development Initiatives (ICDI) and the University of Amsterdam. Over the past five years these organizations combined their efforts through the Her Choice programme. Together with 27 partner organisations they worked to combat child marriage in ten countries in Africa and Asia: Bangladesh, Benin, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, Mali, Nepal, Pakistan, Senegal and Uganda. The programme has come to an end and it is thus time for a final evaluation. An extensive internal evaluation was done by the University of Amsterdam. The Alliance commissioned Avance-Impact to undertake the external End of term evaluation.

The external evaluation zooms in on several key questions that were not included in the internal evaluation. We focus on the following topics:

1. Relevance // To what extent was the programme relevant from the perspective of MFA and the perspective of the needs of the target populations?
2. Effectiveness // To what extent were the targets that were set by the programme achieved? And which factors were key in achieving them?
3. Sustainability // How has the programme sought to ensure sustainability of (intermediate) outcomes and impacts? How did capacity building play a role in the sustainability of the outcomes? And what are the partners' perspectives regarding the sustainability of the programme?

Each topic is explored in its own chapter. In chapter 2 we zoom in on relevance, in chapter 3 we delve into effectiveness and chapter 4 is spent exploring the sustainability of the programme.

Before reading these chapters, we suggest that you read the following sections to gain some additional context to our evaluation.

### **A methodology based on secondary sources**

Our evaluation is 99% based on secondary sources. We used research done by the UvA, programme documents, studies etc. We received a plethora of documents from the Alliance. Over 70 files. Ranging from communication material, to raw data of focus groups with the partners.

Key documents that we used within the analysis are: the three internal evaluations conducted by the UvA team, the inception report, scoping study, progress reports, annual reports and output overviews. Other documents also provided valuable context and more in-depth information. With the help of a framework matrix, we analysed the available information.

We collected a limited amount of data using two methods:

3. Two focus groups were conducted with partners in December 2020. In the focus group we made use of Mentimeter as a means to ask quantitative questions. The answers were fed-back real-time, and we reflected on them together. Partners unable to join the session were sent a short survey with the questions to ensure that data was collected from all partners, representing all countries.
4. A second short (voluntary) survey was disseminated among the partners to gain additional information on key subjects which were not sufficiently addressed in the available documentation. Primarily these questions concerned sustainability. 18 partners responded to the survey.

### **Relation between the external and internal evaluation**

The Her Choice Alliance, with the UvA on board, has a strong internal scientific research partner. The UvA has been conducting in depth research throughout the run of the program, including an extensive baseline, midterm and end term evaluation. An external evaluation is however mandated from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

We have taken care to ensure that this external evaluation is tailored to complement the internal evaluation. As the internal evaluation is mainly focussed on exploring the effectiveness and significant

changes at outcome and impact level, this external evaluation focusses on relevance, sustainability and overall effectiveness (including output level). In addition, we focus on whether achievements at output and outcome level, meet the targets that were set by the alliance itself.

For answering the questions in this external evaluation, we made use of the raw data and analysis of the UvA. The evaluation questions addressed in this external evaluation overlap to a minimal extent with the research questions of the UvA. Where there is overlap a different level of analysis is chosen. The analysis level in this external evaluation is at a meta level. In this way, we believe that the two evaluations complement each other well.

We highly recommend reading the two reports in conjunction. The UvA impact evaluation can be downloaded [here](#).

### **Summative conclusions**

At the start of each subchapter you will find a textbox which summarizes the conclusions for that particular theme.

We hope that you enjoy reading this report.

The Avance evaluation team



## 2. How relevant was the Her Choice programme?

Relevance is one of the key questions in this external evaluation. Relevance, in our view, lies in the eye of the beholder. A different perspective may lead to a different assessment. To take this into account we have chosen to use different angles to answer the question: to what level was the Her Choice programme relevant? We will explore this question from three perspectives:

1. MFA Policy // A top-down view is used in the first perspective. We reflect on the relevance of the HC programme from the perspective of MFA's SRHR policy;
2. The overarching issue: Child Marriage // A second perspective on the relevance of the programme is found by shortly reflecting on the prevalence of child marriage in programme countries;
3. Drivers and needs // Another crucial, and third way to assess the relevance of the programme is on the basis of needs of the target populations as assessed by the alliance. We use the core drivers that were identified through literature and contextualized by the alliance, in order to reflect on the six Her Choice strategies.

In this chapter we will subsequently move through these different assessments.

### 2.1 An MFA policy perspective

#### **A near perfect fit with MFA's SRHR policy**

The Her Choice programme addresses all four SRHR results areas of MFA's SRHR policy framework, whereas the ministry expected HCs' efforts to at a minimum specifically contribute to two results areas. Both in theory and in practice. The work of the alliance aligns most strongly with results area 1 concerning young people. The Her Choice programme is thus highly relevant from the perspective of MFA's SRHR policy.

SRHR, including HIV/aids, has been a top priority for the Dutch international cooperation and development policy for close to 3 decades (Policy Framework, 2016). SRHR is one of the themes where the investments by the ministry paid off, as can be seen in the evaluation by IOB (2012).

In 2015, the ministry announced that they would continue to fund the work on SRHR through so-called SRHR partnerships, following the example that was set in the Dialogue and Dissent partnerships. The ministry made 215 million euro's available for the period of January 2016 to December 2020 (Policy Framework, 2016). The Her Choice Alliance is one of the partnerships funded through this approach.

The partnerships follow the Dutch SRHR policy framework, which focusses on the following four results areas:

1. Young people have more knowledge about and are therefore better equipped to make healthier choices about their sexuality;
2. More people have access to and are able to use contraceptives, condoms, aids inhibitors, and other essential resources for sexual and reproductive health;
3. Public and private clinics offer sexual and reproductive health care of good quality, that is used by an increasing number of people;
4. Winning more respect for sexual and reproductive rights of groups who are currently denied these rights.

The SRHR partnerships focus specifically on results area 1 and 4. The ministry expects to reach results in areas 2 & 3 through collaboration with other actors (Policy Framework, 2016). As results area 1 and 4 are the core results areas we'll delve a bit deeper in what they actually entail.

Results area 1 concerns the rights of young people. The ministry argues that young people are often active or will become active sexually. However, young people have limited knowledge of sex and sexual health and limited access to SRHR services. This leads to many issues such as teenage pregnancies. Therefore, the following sub themes that need addressing are identified: (Policy Framework, 2016).

- a) Access to sexual education
- b) Increase access to high quality youth friendly SRHR services

- c) Provide young people with the opportunity to have their voices heard
- d) Counter child marriage and child prostitution

Results area 4 concerns sexual and reproductive health rights of key populations and vulnerable people. The Netherlands focusses on the following key areas:

- a) Stimulate compliance with the human rights of particular groups such as sexual minorities, drug users and sex workers
- b) Provide access to services to these specific groups
- c) Advocate sexual self-determination of girls and young women
- d) Promote a rights-based approach to SRHR in policy and legislation

So, to what extent does the Her Choice programme address the 4 results areas set by MFA? In the following sections we will dive into this question.

### Results areas and the programme

In this section we will shortly address each MFA results area and evaluate to what extent the Her Choice approach aligns with the results area in theory, and in practice. For reference the Her Choice strategies can be found in the textbox on the right.

#### Results area 1: youth

The work of the Her Choice Alliance most strongly aligns with this results area and the underlying sub themes. Each of the sub themes is addressed in theory and in practice through at least one of the HC strategies.

The alliance provides access to sexual education (results area 1a) through strategies 1 and 2. This has worked out in practice; Every year, on average 59.007 girls and young women have received sexual education directly from the partners involved in the programme. And this paid off, as the impact evaluation by the UvA found that the degree of knowledge on SRHR among these girls and young women significantly improved in 8 out of the 10 Her Choice programme countries (Koster, Miedema et al., 2021).

Through strategy 3 the alliance aimed to increase the access to high quality youth friendly services (results area 1b). In practice we see, for example, that the alliance worked in most countries to train health care workers to provide services to young people (Koster, Miedema et al., 2021). On average 2.242 health care workers were trained per year (output overview). In all countries furthermore referral systems were created between schools and health facilities. This has been effective, the 2019 progress report for example shows that: *"As a result of (refresher) training of health workers to provide youth friendly health services, workers in all programme countries have been found to show more generous and positive attitudes in their service delivery towards young people, and have more understanding for the challenges they face"*

Strategy 5 of the HC alliance includes an element of stimulating participation and activism of young women for the transformation of social norms. This is directly in line with results area 1c. One could furthermore argue that investing in girls as was done through strategy 1 (indirectly) helps girls and young women to exercise their rights and raise their voices. We see outcomes in this results area in practice. For example, the UvA study found that the share of communities speaking out increased in 8 out of the 10 countries. The countries that didn't see an increase (Senegal and Nepal) already saw young people speaking out in all communities at the time of the baseline (ceiling effect) and could therefore not improve for the better.

Finally sub theme 1d is the 'raison d'être' of the Her Choice alliance. The long-term goal: '...support the creation of child marriage free communities in which girls and young women are free to decide if, when and whom to marry' (inception report) corresponds directly with this theme. All the 6 strategies combined contribute to this goal. In practice the programme reached striking results on this front. One

#### Six Her choice strategies

- 1) Invest in girls, their knowledge, skills related to SRHR and participation in society, thus enhancing their comprehension of the negative effects of child marriage and of alternative options.
- 2) Improve access to formal education for girls, in order to get as many girls as possible to school and minimize drop out.
- 3) Improve access to youth-friendly SRHR-services for girls (and boys) by improving health services and by actively referring girls (and boys) to health workers.
- 4) Improve the economic security of girls and their families, since poverty is an important factor for child marriage, especially in the rural areas.
- 5) Transform social norms that are detrimental to achieving gender equity in education, decision making, and access to services by mobilizing and supporting communities, including boys, men, women and leaders to promote girls' rights and gender equity.
- 6) Create an enabling legal and policy environment on preventing child marriage by supporting traditional leaders and (local) authorities to enforce national policies on preventing child marriage.

of the most impressive results that we want to highlight here is the significant decrease found in the share of 12-17-year-old girls being married between the baseline and end term (Koster, Miedema et al., 2021).

#### **Results area 4: SRHR of vulnerable people**

The work of the Her Choice alliance aligns with results area 4 of MFA in several ways.

The alliance directly addresses results area 4c 'Advocate sexual self-determination of girls and young women'. They do this by working to transform social norms as well as creating an enabling legal and policy environment (strategies 5 and 6). In practice results are visible in this area. When it comes to social norms, for example, the UvA impact study found that in 9 out of 10 countries (excluding Senegal) girls felt they could find support to negotiate questions concerning marriage with their parents.

Secondly, the definition of vulnerable people in this results area is quite broad and includes "girls in Africa" (Policy Framework, 2016). The alliance works with girls in 7 African countries and thus the work, particularly concerning access to SRHR services (strategy 3), fits this results area well. Furthermore, in the inception report the alliance indicated that *"special attention will be given to girls hiding at home, disabled girls, children of minorities and the poorest of the poor who are socially or self-excluded from programme interventions"*. These groups are usually difficult to reach and are not represented in official statistics. Her Choice used different strategies and instruments to ensure their inclusion. For example, in Ethiopia, visually impaired girls and boys are provided with special scholastic materials like audio books, braille and white canes by ESD. ESD also facilitates regular discussions with girls and boys with and without disability. In Uganda THP partnered with Uganda National Association of the Deaf (UNAD), to reach out to deaf people. They reached out to young deaf people about SRHR issues and the importance of remaining in school. Also, they trained health workers basic sign language so they can provide youth-friendly services to deaf adolescents (Progress Report, 2017).

Results area 4d furthermore addressed specifically by strategy 6, which includes promoting a rights-based approach in policy and legislation in the programme countries.

#### **Results area 2: access to services and resources**

Not a focus area specifically addressed by the partnerships. Nevertheless, this results area is addressed through HC strategy 3. The alliance aims to make services and corresponding resources more easily available to young people. The results for example in the use of contraceptives are "nuanced". In 3 out of 5 countries (Mali, Burkina Faso and Benin) the UvA study found a significant increase in the share of single girls who used contraception. For the other 2 countries where this was studied the change was not statistically significant.

#### **Results area 3: quality and accessibility of health care clinics**

Also, not a focus area of the partnerships. Nonetheless this results area is addressed by the HC alliance. The accessibility for young people is improved by training health care workers and by actively setting up referral systems. In practice we see for example that throughout the programme more than 11.000 health care workers were trained in youth friendly approaches.

Indeed, in the final evaluation we find indications that the quality and accessibility of health care clinics has increased. We, for example, see a clear increase in girls' use of SRHR services and clinics. Girls furthermore have a more positive perception of the available SRHR services.

#### **To conclude the MFA perspective:**

The findings and analysis described above show that: from MFA's SRHR policy's perspective the Her Choice programme is highly relevant. The programme aligns with the two focus results areas of the partnership, as well as the secondary results areas. Tangible results have been achieved in each of the four results areas. On the basis of the available information, we cannot indicate whether MFA was able to learn new lessons from the Her Choice Programme.

## 2.2 An overarching perspective on child marriage

### Addressing a severe and prevalent issue

Child marriage is a severe issue that undoubtedly needs to be solved. The Her Choice alliance has chosen to work on this issue in ten countries in Asia and Africa. The prevalence of child marriage in these countries is diverse, but generally quite high. In Pakistan, the country with the lowest prevalence, still close to 1 in 5 girls is married before their eighteenth birthday. The alliance thus seems to work on a relevant issue in relevant countries.

### Severity of the issue

The severity of the effects of child marriage become clear from the scoping study. Insights from external literature on the effects of child marriage on individual girls clearly shows its' negative impact:

- Child marriage denies young girls their childhood, their education and, in turn, their futures (UNFPA, 2012; Engebretsen and Kabore, 2011).
- Adult roles are posed before a girl is physically, psychologically and emotionally prepared (UNFPA, 2012).
- Child marriage "denies girls the opportunity to fully develop their potential as healthy, productive and empowered citizens" (UNFPA, 2012).
- In many cases child marriage leads to social isolation from family and friends (Edmeades and Hayes 2014; Warner 2013; UNFPA 2012).
- Child marriage often leads to very early pregnancy. Often girls feel unable to negotiate delaying childbearing with their husbands and in-laws (Lindstorm et al., 2009; Gipson and Hindin, 2007).
- Early pregnancy and childbirth are the main cause of death for 15–19-year-olds in developing countries (UNFPA, 2012).

On the basis of this plethora of negative effects it is evident that this important issue needs to be addressed.

### Prevalence of child marriage

So, to what extent is the issue prevalent in the countries in which the programme was implemented? The visual below shows the prevalence of child marriage in each of the programme countries (Girls not Brides Atlas, 2021).



The extensive prevalence of the issue in the countries becomes immediately clear. In the country with the lowest prevalence (Pakistan) still 1 in 5 girls is married before the age of 18 (Inception Report, 2016).

From a global perspective we see that 6 out of 10 countries in the programme are ranked in the top 20 of countries with the highest prevalence of child marriage. 3 of the countries (Burkina Faso, Mali and Bangladesh) rank in the top 10 of countries with the highest prevalence.

Four countries are included in the programme but are not countries with globally speaking the highest prevalence. These are Benin, Senegal, Pakistan and Ghana. In Benin and Senegal, the prevalence is nevertheless high – 1 in 3 girls are married before they are 18. And although the prevalence in Pakistan is limited (still close to 1 in 5), the absolute numbers are staggering. Close to 2 million girls are married before they are 18. In Ghana, we see a relatively low prevalence of child marriage. Nevertheless still 1 in 5 girls is married before they are 18.

#### **Experience as a precursor for relevance**

You could ask the questions why certain countries with a higher prevalence of child marriage were not included? Why not work in the top 10 countries with the highest prevalence if you want to address the issue?

The programmatic choice for the countries is of course based on multiple factors. A key factor includes the experience of the alliance or individual alliance members in the country (inception report). In each of the programme countries the alliance had an extensive track record and experienced partners prior to the Her Choice programme. In the inception report the Alliance argues that their experience and strong local partners enables them to be more effective.

The evaluators agree that experience is an important factor to take into account. Not only the size of the issue matters when reflecting on the relevance of a programme, but also the capacities and experiences of the organization/alliance. Are you the right organization for the job? The choice to work in countries where the alliance had an extensive track record speaks to this point. Furthermore, it is commendable that the alliance reflected on whether the underlying assumptions concerning their experience actually materialized. A clear example can be seen in Sierra Leone. Even though ICDI had a longstanding relationship with the local partner when concerns arose about its capacity the alliance chose to end the programme (Koster, Miedema et al., 2021).

**Conclusion:** Even in the programme countries with the lowest prevalence child marriage is still commonplace (1 in 5). The alliance smartly chose to build on their experience in countries where the issue of child marriage is prevalent. Building on existing networks, knowledge of the context etc. The Her Choice Alliance furthermore coordinated with the other child marriage alliances to ensure that there is no overlap in the work or geographical area (Inception Report, 2016).

The Alliance evidently addresses a relevant issue, but are the strategies that are utilized relevant? In the remainder of this chapter, we will address that question.

## 2.3 Underlying drivers' perspective

### A holistic approach to address a complex phenomenon

Child marriage is a complex phenomenon with a multitude of underlying drivers. The Her Choice alliance has gone through extensive steps to properly map and contextualize the diverse factors that drive the practice. The holistic programmatic approach that was chosen by Her Choice responds to this complexity and ensures that core drivers are addressed. Several intermingling strategies are used to address key drivers such as poverty, religion and social/gender norms.

The holistic approach chosen seems very relevant for addressing the core drivers of child marriage.

The programme has gone to extensive measures to properly understand the issue within the diverse local contexts. In the scoping study conducted by AISSR (Hodgkinson et al., 2016), literature was used to deconstruct child marriage as a global phenomenon and identify which factors are drivers of this practice. In the inception phase the alliance collaborated with its partners in the programme countries to add a local perspective to this analysis.

The following key factors were identified in the process described above. In our analysis we have further grouped and categorized them:

1. Unequal gender and social norms
2. Poverty and economic factors
3. Influence of religion
4. Laws and their enforcement
5. Conflict and humanitarian circumstances

This list is not exhaustive. It is important to realize that these drivers are strongly interrelated and influence each other (Hodgkinson et al., 2016). It is not just one factor that pushes a girl or a boy into child marriage, but multiple interacting factors.

Below we shortly delve into these different drivers and highlight in what way they play a role within the programme countries. For each factor we will reflect on how they are addressed by the Her Choice programme, in theory and in practice. It is important to note here that the Her Choice programme utilizes a holistic approach, as the 6 Her Choice strategies are intertwined and heavily interact with each other (Koster, Miedema et al., 2021). However, for this analysis we have somewhat artificially separated them. At the end of the chapter, we will shortly reflect on the holistic approach.

#### Unequal gender- and social norms

In the scoping study (Hodgkinson et al., 2016) it is noted that *"unequal gender norms are often considered the prime reason for the prevalence of child marriage... Greater value is hereby attached to males than females, the desirable role and behaviours girls should play in life are prescribed and, in turn, the benefits of investing in girls' development and futures are discounted."*

Examples of unequal gender norms that can potentially lead to child marriage are, amongst others:

1. Fathers utilize child marriage to transfer their patriarchal rights to their daughter over to another man (Walker 2012 and Yarrow et al., 2015).
2. A young girl is considered more obedient and respectful and therefore a better wife in various contexts. This in turn makes it attractive to marry a girl at a young age (Yarrow et al., 2015; Samuels and Ghimire, 2014);
3. A female's role and responsibility lie within the private sphere. With a focus on reproduction and domestic chores. Physical and biological factors can thus determine when a girl is ready to marry (instead of their mental maturity) (Engebretsen and Kabore, 2011);
4. Several traditional practices such as kidnapping in Mali and Guinea (context analysis inception report) are manifestations of underlying unequal gender norms as they solely affect girls and women;
5. Women and girls are supposed to remain sexually inactive until marriage. The older a girl gets the slimmer her chance of her remaining sexually inactive (Hodgkinson et al., 2016).

In each context this inequality manifests itself in diverse ways (Inception Report, 2016). The Her Choice programme in theory addresses the underlying issues, or drivers, through multiple strategies- either directly (strategy 5) or indirectly.



First of all, strategy 5 has as a core goal to influence social norms that are negatively affecting girls in the programme countries. The programme aims to achieve this by mobilizing and supporting communities, including boys, men, women and leaders. In all the programme countries awareness raising activities took place such as training village leaders and peer educators.

In the UvA impact evaluation we can see that the programme quite successfully addressed this driver through this strategy. The programme was clearly able to mobilize communities. In more communities than before community members organized activities addressing the negative effects of child marriage (all countries), Young people spoke out more in public against child marriage (8 out of 10 countries – in the other two young people already reported speaking out). Furthermore, the UvA study demonstrates that more leaders spoke out against child marriage than at baseline and that girls felt more openness to discuss SRHR issues and child marriage with others (Koster, Miedema et al., 2021).

It is important to note here that the UvA impact evaluation focused on the measurement of outputs and higher outcomes related to strategy 5. The intermediate indicator concerning the 'community level rejection of child marriage' was not measured in the UvA's final evaluation. We can thus not assess the effects of this strategy on the broader community.

We argue that several other Her Choice' strategies indirectly address this driving factor around social norms as well. The first three strategies of the Her Choice Programme focus on strengthening individual girls. Girls who are better educated and grow up with more knowledge and skills can more easily stand up for themselves and develop to their potential. From the end evaluation by the UvA we learn that this is indeed the case. Girls did not only change their own behaviour but spoke out more during community meetings. In 7 out of 10 countries a significant increase was seen in the number of girls that spoke out for their rights. It seems that speaking out also had an effect. The UvA for example noted that a synergy can be seen between girls speaking out more and community leader's awareness of children's rights and the negative effects of child marriage (Koster, Miedema et al., 2021).

Strategy 6 considers laws, policies and specifically their implementation and enforcement. Laws may be useful for changing social norms, but their immediate positive influence is not always clear-cut. ODI (2015) studied the use of laws as tools for changing gender norms. They noted a number of key insights that are relevant when assessing the relevance of this strategy for addressing social norms:

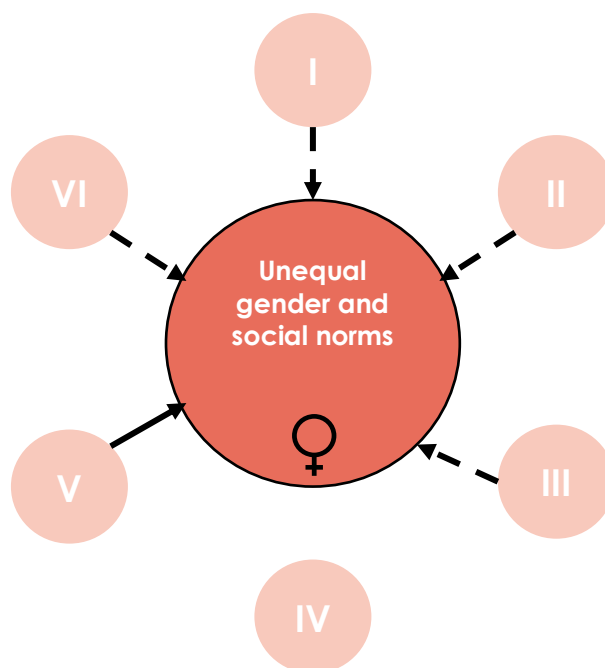
1. The effectiveness of law reform is increased when it builds upon changes in attitudes and behaviours that are already starting to occur. The laws can then be used to: "help people defy deep-rooted norms, help shape new norms (such as universal school attendance) and set standards against which actors can be held to account" (ODI, 2015).
2. Broad spread awareness of the laws and belief that the law will be upheld are key for the laws to have an effect on social norms. This in turn means that next to active law enforcement, education and awareness raising is necessary. Not only amongst local officials, but also among other stakeholders
3. Finally, if a robust law is used to undermine a norm that is still strongly embedded in society the actions that reflect this norm (such as child marriage, but also FGM) may be driven underground.

Taking these three lessons into account we feel that the use of strategy 6 by the Her Choice Alliance can indeed affect existing norms. The fact that this strategy is embedded in a broader holistic approach which works on changing norms, addresses the first insight explained above, and potentially makes the work on laws more effective. In the implementation of this strategy there is a focus on increasing the awareness of laws of different stakeholders, including girls themselves. This directly addresses the insights brought forth in point two above. The focus by the Alliance on by-laws helps ensure that the laws are locally embedded and fit the local context. This addresses the third insight. We thus feel that the Her Choice approach to working on laws potentially makes this strategy relevant for addressing social norms. On the basis of the available information, we however cannot conclusively indicate whether this is the case in practice.

To conclude:

*In theory*, multiple strategies are relevant for addressing unequal gender- and social norms as a driver for child marriage. The visual on the right shows the strategies and their theoretical influence on this driver. A dotted line indicates an indirect influence an uninterrupted line a direct influence.

*In practice*, we see several changes that indicate that the combined interventions of Her Choice have had some influence on the social norms about child marriage. However, on the basis of the available data, we cannot assess the exact scope of the change, since the collected data focusses on specific communities, while a change in social norms takes place at a societal level.



### Poverty and economic factors

The economic context is the second biggest driver of child marriage, as identified in the scoping study and the subsequent context analyses:

1. Child marriage can be seen as a way to alleviate the economic burden and pressure on the family (Pereznieto and Tefera, 2014; Yarrow et al., 2015).
2. Marrying off a daughter at a young age can be a way to save money in the case of a dowry or make more money in the case of the bride price (Yarrow et al., 2015).
3. Marrying off a daughter to a man of means can be a way for families to secure the future of their daughter in an insecure environment (Pereznieto and Tefera, 2014; Yarrow et al., 2015)
4. Families may be able to create important economic ties between families through marriage (Pereznieto and Tefera, 2014; Yarrow et al., 2015)

The importance of this driver is reflected in the context analyses done with the partners during the inception phase. Poverty and economic factors are shown as driving forces behind child marriage in all the programme countries (inception report). The Girls not Brides Atlas shows that in multiple programme countries (8 out of 10) studies have been done which show the negative association between the level of poverty of the family and the prevalence of child marriage (Girls not Brides Atlas). The exact way in which poverty influences the practice of child marriage differs between contexts.

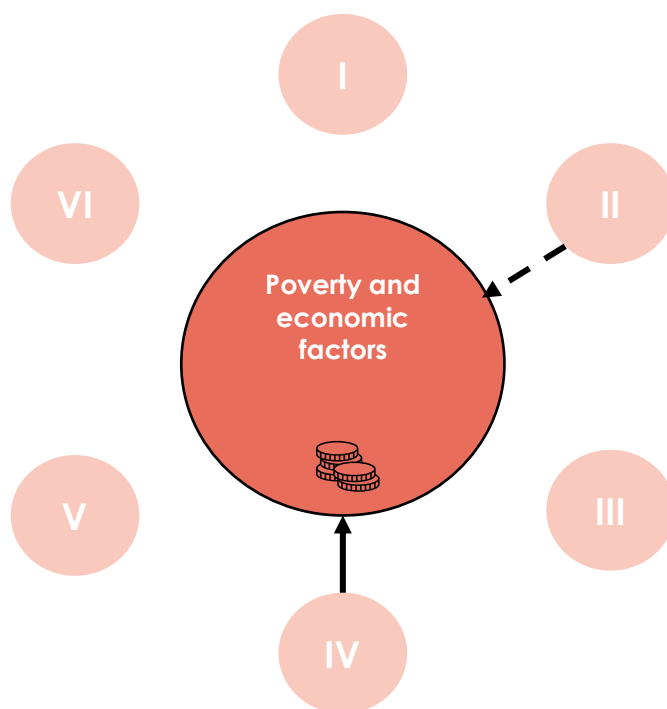
The Her Choice programme in theory addresses poverty through multiple strategies.

First of all, strategy 4 has as a core goal to improve the economic security of girls and their families. This intervention strategy has explicitly been put in place to address this key driver. Within this strategy the *“activities focus on improving the economic security of girls and their families through creating or strengthening self-help groups, providing micro-finance loans, training of (mostly female) small-scale entrepreneurs on financial literacy, entrepreneurship, local market information and improved agricultural practices”* (Inception Report, 2016). It is thus a strategy focused on economic empowerment of the families involved in the programme.

In practice we see that the activities within this strategy have received increased attention during the course of the programme. In 2018-2019 more partners provided this kind of support compared to earlier in the programme (Koster, Miedema et al., 2021). It seems that this increase was due to an increased interest and awareness of the effectiveness of this approach (Progress Report, 2017). In the midterm evaluation we see some indications of positive developments on the basis of this strategy, for example a high share of the households involved in the income generating activities organized by the programme indicated that the household budget had increased (Koster, Miedema et al., 2019). Unfortunately, the data collected through the UvA study was not sufficiently robust to allow for firm conclusions at the end of the programme concerning the effects of this strategy (Koster, Miedema et al., 2021). The progress reports do show multiple examples of anecdotal evidence of the positive effects of the intervention under strategy 4 an indication of larger change.



We furthermore would argue that strategy 2, which concerns the education of girls indirectly and in the long term addresses this driver. A better education is generally associated with higher workplace participation. The alliance notes in their inception report that “Each additional year of schooling improves a girl's employment prospects, increasing future earnings by about 10%, and reducing infant mortality by up to 10%”. This is not always the case as job opportunities, specifically in rural areas, can just be very limited (UNFPA, 2012; Yarrow et al., 2015; Edmeades and Hayes, 2014). There is thus not a one-on-one translation of education to poverty. In the long term it generally does seem to be a positive factor. In practice it is too early to show whether the work done through this strategy in practice has an influence on poverty as a driver of child marriage.



To conclude:

*In theory* we see that strategy four is directly, and in the short term, relevant for addressing poverty. Strategy two is indirectly, and in the long term, relevant. This is shown in the visual on the left.

*In practice*, the alliance has implemented many and diverse activities within strategy 4. Multiple examples of anecdotal evidence showing effects strategy 4 interventions, were collected throughout implementation. For example, families indicated that due to their improved economic situation they were able to send their daughters to school. Unfortunately, the broader effects on the economic situation of the beneficiaries were not measured within the internal evaluations, as the indicators proved unsuitable for measuring the intended change. We can thus not reflect on the extent to which the programme was able to address this factor in practice.

### Influence of religion

Religion is another important driver of child marriage that was identified in the scoping study. The study found that religion is considered both a major driver of child marriage and also a justification for the phenomenon (Walker, 2012; Sah, 2008; Equality Now, 2014; Warner, 2013; World Vision UK, 2014).

From the literature we observe several ways in which this driver can lead to child marriage:

1. Sense of religious obligation from religious laws and customs dictates that girls should be married early (Equality Now, 2014; Hashemi, 2007; Maswikwa et al., 2015; World Vision UK, 2014). Religious laws and local customs give parents not only the impetus, but sometimes the right, to marry their daughters below the minimum age prescribed by national law (Scoping Study, 2016).
2. Religious norms are used as justification for marrying children at an early age, while other drivers may underlie that choice (Walker, 2012, 2013).
3. Unmarried girls above a certain age may be seen as a threat to the honour of the family and thus marriage at a young age is a way of preventing shame for the family (Samuels and Ghimire, 2014).
4. Strong chastity norms, particularly for girls, translate to a loss of honour and shame in the case of pre-marital relationships/sex/pregnancy. Marriage can be seen as a way to recover some of that lost honour. (Samuels and Ghimire, 2014; Civil Society of Pakistan, 2009; Bantebya, Muhanguzi and Watson, 2014).
5. Even if laws prohibit marriage under a certain age a religious wedding may still be performed by religious leaders (ICRW, 2015; Yarrow et al., 2015).

In the context analysis most partners indicated that religion played an important role as a driver for child marriage. Furthermore, during a facilitated focus group discussion, traditional religious norms were noted by many partners as one of the key inhibiting factors for change.

The Alliance in their programme design has chosen not to focus one specific strategy on religion. However, religion as a driver is addressed integrally through multiple strategies.

Strategy 5 concerning social norms and traditional practices addresses the driver. Local (often religious) leaders are noted as one of the key stakeholders to influence through this strategy. The alliance aims to do this by training them, amongst other things, on the negative consequences of child marriage (Inception report). From the information provided it is not clear whether the strategy to influence religious leaders differs from other traditional leaders.

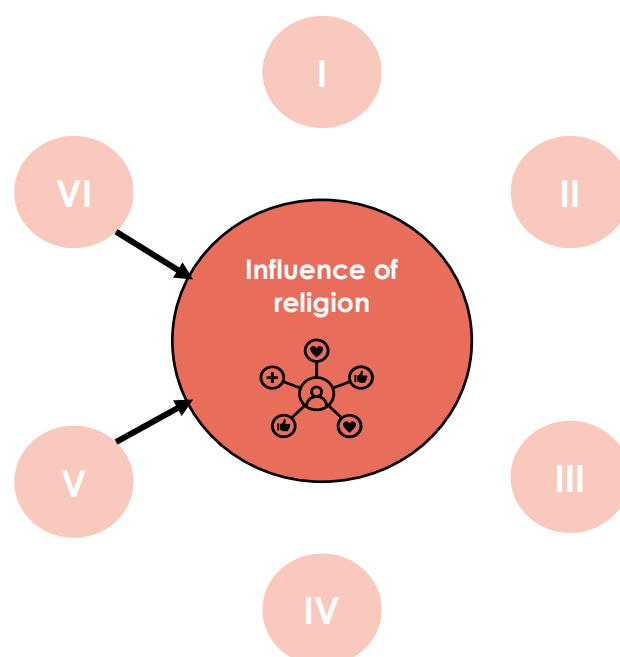
On the basis of the final evaluation, we can see that a large number of community leaders have been sensitized on the issue. We also see an increase of leaders who spoke out against child marriage. In the indicators used to measure these changes no distinction is made in type of community leader. We can thus not say how many religious leaders spoke out or were sensitized (Koster, Miedema et al., 2021). From anecdotal evidence we see that involving religious leaders has been an important element in the effects of the Her Choice approach in different contexts. Involving religious leaders was an important route to broader changes in the community. For example, in Mali, Nepal and Pakistan, religious leaders preached about the consequences of child marriage and harmful practices. In Pakistan religious leaders mobilized communities and managed to stop 70 marriages in the target community (Progress Report, 2019).

Strategy 6 is furthermore relevant for addressing the influence of religion. This strategy focusses on working with traditional leaders to develop and implement by-laws, taking a next step.

Concluding:

*In theory*, the strategies implemented by the alliance clearly reflect the importance of religion as a driver for child marriage.

*In practice*, from anecdotal evidence we see that changes on the level of religious leaders have been achieved. Religious and other community leaders have spoken out against child marriage. The exact scope of this change concerning religious leaders is not clear from the data collected through the internal evaluation as the focus of the evaluation was at community change – not specifically religion.



### Laws and their enforcement

Not so much a driving factor, but rather a possible driver for change or for maintaining the status quo. In each country's laws are in place concerning the age of marriage. We've gathered the information from the context analyses in the inception report below. The colours indicate the extent to which CM (as defined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child) is illegal in the countries. Green signifies illegal, orange legal under circumstances and red signifies legal in all circumstances.

Country	Laws	Illegality of CM
Bangladesh	Legal age of marriage: 18 for girls and 21 for boys (but danger of lowering legal age for girls to 16).	Green
Benin	Legal age of marriage: 18 years for both girls and boys. Exceptions are granted	Orange
Burkina Faso	Legal age of marriage: 17 for girls and 20 for boys	Red
Ethiopia	Legal age of marriage: 18 for both girls and boys	Green
Ghana	Legal age of marriage: 18 for both girls and boys. But marriage from age 16 with consent of parents is allowed	Orange
Mali	Legal age of marriage: 16 for both girls and boys. But marriage from age 15 with consent of parents is allowed	Red
Nepal	Legal age of marriage: 20 years for both girls and boys. But marriage from age 18 with consent of the guardians is allowed	Green

Pakistan	Legal age of marriage: 16 for girls and 18 for boys	
Senegal	Legal age of marriage: 16 for girls and 18 for boys. However, some documents mention 18 for girls	
Uganda	Legal age of marriage: 18 years for both girls and boys	

As can be seen child marriage is illegal in four countries. Illegal with exceptions in two countries and legal, from usually the age of sixteen, in four countries. Furthermore, note the gender disparity in half of the countries. Interestingly all countries have committed to international agreements to ban child marriage (Inception report), but not all programme countries' policies comply with the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). This is thus not always translated to national laws. The development of such laws can be a difficult political process due to the strong influence of conservative and religious groups.

A key issue that remains, even when laws are in place, is the implementation of the laws. From the context analyses done during the inception of the programme it becomes clear that true enforcement of laws leaves something to be desired (Inception Report, 2016). It becomes even clearer when looking at the numbers. Even in countries where laws are in place the prevalence of child marriage remains high. In Bangladesh for example child marriage is illegal, nevertheless the prevalence of CM is close to 60%.

The alliance has a clear strategy to address this driver of child marriage; strategy 6. The work of the alliance through this strategy is focused on different aspects at the local level;

1. Support district departments to better enforce existing laws;
2. Facilitate district level stakeholder consultations;
3. Facilitate development (by)-laws at a local level that help enforce/complement national laws.

The work of the alliance generally is focused on the key issue of implementation and enforcement of laws at a local level. In the case that the national laws do not yet conform with international standards the alliance helps develop by-laws that do, so that locally the standards set forth in the CRC are adhered to.

In all the countries the alliance played a role in national lobby. "In all programme countries advocacy and round-table discussions on child marriage, FGM and child rights with government officials, law enforcing bodies and related stakeholders have been conducted to improve relationships and sensitize them to implement laws on halting child marriage." (Progress Report, 2016). The exact role played at a national level differed per country and partner within the country, but in multiple countries the Her Choice partners took a leading role in the lobby efforts (Track record, 2020)

Progress as a result of the intervention to support district departments to better enforce existing laws could only be measured in four countries, because in 6 out of the 10 countries district officials already reported at baseline that they had sufficient means available to enforce the laws. In the other countries we do see an increase in the number of districts that have the means to enforce the laws, as reported by district officials (Koster, Miedema et al., 2021).

The same can be said about the district level stakeholder consultations involving law enforcement, non-governmental and civil society actors. In 5 out of 10 countries we see in the baseline that these consultations already took place in all districts. In the other countries we do see an increase in the number of districts where these consultations take place. (Koster, Miedema et al., 2021).

The development of by-laws seems to be the most relevant sub strategy implemented by Her Choice. We see that in Senegal and Uganda by-laws were already in place in the districts included in the study. In all the other countries we see an increase in the number of villages that have or are developing by-laws between BL and EL (Koster, Miedema et al., 2021).

To conclude:

The alliance focused its work on enabling legal environment at the local and national level through strategy six. *In theory*, this is very relevant to address the issue of laws not sufficiently being enforced or in place.

*In practice*, we see that the Alliance has been able to make a difference at a local level by facilitating the development and enforcement of by-laws. It is too early to study the long-term effects of these new by-laws.

### Conflict and humanitarian circumstances

A final driver that is strongly linked to child marriage are conflict and humanitarian circumstances. In the scoping study several examples of how this occurs are highlighted:

- In uncertain circumstances the risk of sexual violence increases
- Conflict and humanitarian circumstances lead to an increase in financial uncertainty (UNFPA, 2012; Walker, 2013; Warner et al., 2013).

Other drivers such as poverty and religious honour are amplified due to the circumstances. In the scoping study several examples are given where a conflict or natural disaster led to an increase in the prevalence of child marriage. For example, as a result of the floods in Pakistan, the tsunami in Sri Lanka, Indonesia and India and the civil war in Uganda and increase in the prevalence of child marriage could be seen (UNFPA, 2012).

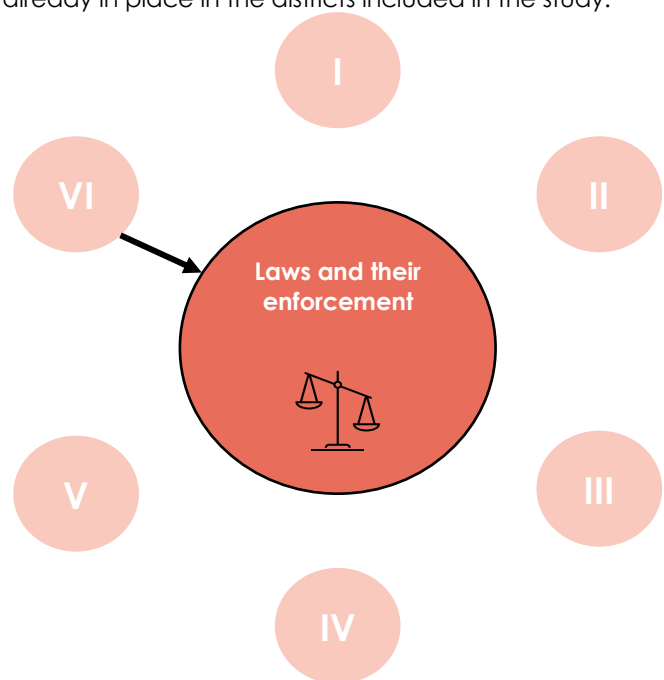
These circumstances can of course not be addressed through a programmatic strategy. However, these circumstances do affect the programme. For example, in Ethiopia political instability in the intervention district caused delays in the programme implementation. The partners were flexible and consistently discussed and negotiated with officials in order to mobilize the necessary support from government structures (Progress Report, 2016).

### Conclusion

Child marriage is a complex phenomenon with a multitude of underlying drivers. The Her Choice alliance has gone through extensive steps to properly map and contextualize the diverse factors that influence the practice. The holistic programmatic approach that was chosen by Her Choice responds to this complexity and ensures that many of the drivers are addressed. Several indivisible strategies are used to address key drivers such as poverty and social/gender norms.

The underlying drivers are most directly influenced by strategies four, five and six. Strategies one and two strengthen the girls and young women themselves to, at an individual level, work on change. The strategies facilitate them to better stand up for themselves. Strategy three helps provide conditions for girls to take better care of themselves.

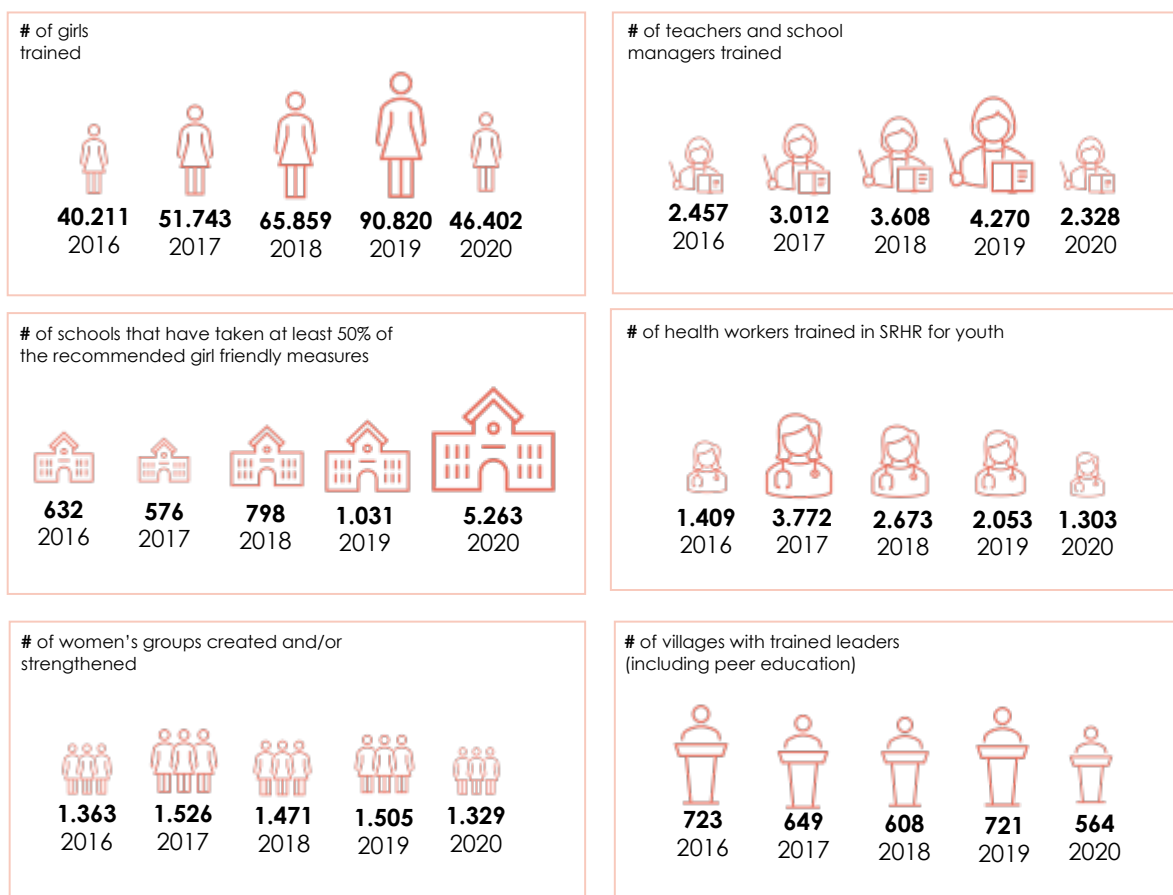
Overall, the holistic approach chosen seems very relevant for addressing a multitude of drivers of child marriage.



### 3. How effective was Her Choice in reaching their goals?

#### 3.1 Overview of key outputs

The overview below provides some insights in the outputs at programme level (output overview provided by Alliance) and the number of girls, teachers, health workers and others reached throughout the programme.



The programme has clearly reached a large number of outputs. But to what extent were the targets set at output (and outcome) level reached? In this chapter we will delve into this question.

## 3.2 Reflecting on targets

In our evaluation we focus specifically on the output and outcome targets that were set throughout the programme and whether they were reached. It is thus more a reflection of the way that the programme's impact was managed than a reflection of the overall effectiveness of the programme.

For an in-depth insight in the impact of the programme we refer you to the extensive impact evaluation of the UvA, which you can find [here](#).

We will start off with a short overview of the outcome targets that were set during the primary phase of the programme. Subsequently we will reflect on whether these outcome targets and the corresponding output targets were achieved.

### Setting targets

In 2017, the UvA finished the baseline study in all (at that moment) 11 countries. On the basis of the findings the Alliance set outcome level targets for the remainder of the programme. The alliance chose 17 indicators for which they set 20 fairly ambitious targets. For 3 indicators on the level of girls themselves the alliance set distinct targets on the basis of marital status. The indicators and the targets set at an outcome level are shown in the table below. We have organized them by strategy

Indicator	Target	Measured by UvA
<b>Impact</b>		
1.1: Share of single girls who feel they can exercise control over if, when and whom to marry	Increase per country of at least 10 %	Yes
1.2: Mean degree of control of single girls	Increase per country of at least 0.5 point for mean degree	Yes
2: Share of women aged 20-24 in studied households who were married before age 18	You would like to see some decrease (maybe 5%) in this after 5 years; on the other hand, you cannot expect that much here, due to the relatively small number that will have matured in the five-year project period (Her Choice)	Indicator dropped in end-term evaluation
3: Share of women aged 20-24 in studied households who were married before age 15	Decrease per country of at least 5%	Indicator dropped in end-term evaluation
4: Share of girls (ever) married/in union, by current age	Decrease per country per age group (15 years and older; below this age percentages are already very low in each country) of at least 5%	Yes, but measured for 17-year-olds
<b>Strategy 1: invest in girls</b>		
29: Share of girls trained on SRHR, by marital status	Increase of at least 10% per country, both for single and married girls	Yes, but small N married girls
6.1: Share of single girls who feel they can oppose CM	Increase of at least 5% per country	Not measured at end-line
6.2: Share of single girls who oppose FGM	Increase of at least 5% per country	Yes
<b>Strategy 2: access to education</b>		
20: Share of girls enrolled in formal education, by marital status	For single girls, at least 5% increase per country	Yes
	For married girls, at least 5% increase per country	Very small number of respondents

10: Share of girls regularly attending school, by marital status	For single girls, at least 5% increase per country	Yes
	For married girls, at least 5% increase per country	Very small number of respondents
<b>Strategy 3: access to youth friendly SRHR services</b>		
11.1: Share of girls who know of SRHR services, by marital status	For both single and married girls an increase of at least 5%	Yes, but small number of married respondents
11.2: Share of girls who knew of SRH services and visited a clinic for SRHR services, by marital status	For single girls increase of at least 10%	Yes
	For married girls at least 5%	Very small number of respondents
<b>Strategy 5: transform social norms</b>		
15.1: Share of girls who feel supported in decision making on SRHR, by marital status	For both single and married girls an increase of at least 5%	Yes, but small number of married respondents
15.2: Share of single girls who feel supported in decision making on CM	Increase of at least 5% per country	Yes
15.3: Share of uncircumcised girls who do not want to be circumcised who feel supported in decision making on FGM	Increase of at least 5% per country	Not measured at endline
<b>Strategy 6: Create an enabling legal and policy environment</b>		
16.1: Share of girls who know about protective laws on CM	Should really be set per country, with the very low scoring ones maybe have a goal of 10% increase, whilst the higher scoring strives for 5% (Her Choice text)	Yes
16.2: Share of girls who know about protective laws on FGM	Same as the above	Yes

### A few reflections on the targets at outcome level

A few points stand out when studying the targets that were set at outcome level:

- Indicators dropped // Five indicators were dropped in the end-line evaluation. Three impact level indicators. For one impact indicator an alternative indicator was introduced to measure the effect considering girls under 18 married at this moment in time. Two outcome indicators that proved to be too difficult to measure were not included in the end line as well. We will not reflect on whether these targets were reached. The UvA writes the following about dropping indicators; *"In the course of the study, we had to delete a number of the indicators originally developed at the start of the programme. In some cases, we discovered that our data collection tools did not generate reliable data (see specified in strategy IV) or that the indicator values at BL were already very high across countries. An example of the latter was indicator 22, which relates to the share of health facilities that provide services to unmarried young people, according to health staff. The programme had assumed, based on anecdotal information, that not all young people have access to SHRH services. As of the baseline, nearly all health staff report that their health facility was offering such services to all young people, married and single, including school-going young people. This indicator was removed given no improvements could be expected as a result of the Her Choice programme (Koster, Miedema et al., 2021)"*
- No outcome level targets for strategy 4 // what stands out is that no outcome targets were set for the strategy addressing the poverty level of families, this may be due to the indicators proving to be insufficiently effective.



### Output level targets

Yearly targets were set per partner at an output level. The targets were set in collaboration between the alliance members and the alliance partners. The output levels were monitored by the partners themselves.

## 3.3 To what extent were targets achieved?

### Outcome and impact targets generally achieved – mixed results for output targets

For the two Impact level indicators that had targets and were measured at end line the targets were reached or nearly reached in the majority of the programme countries. Outcome level targets were set after the baseline study was finished. These targets have generally been reached in the majority of the countries. There are two notable exceptions, namely the indicators concerning girls that feel that they can oppose FGM, and the share of girls that visit SRHR services. Reaching the targets for these outcomes proved difficult in the majority of countries. Notably, for strategy four no outcome level targets were set.

Targets at intermediate level were only set for one indicator and achieved by the majority of countries. Not setting targets for the other intermediate outcomes is a missed opportunity. Targets at this level would have been useful for actively managing for more impact throughout the implementation of the programme.

Output targets were set yearly in collaboration with the partners. Output targets related the strategies working to increase girls control in decision-making (1,2,3) were most easily reached throughout the duration of the programme. For the most of these indicators the majority of countries was able to do so. The output targets that were set for the strategies concerning greater decision-making space for girls within communities (4,5,6) proved more difficult. A smaller share of the countries was able to regularly reach the targets that they had set for themselves.

Target setting at output level seems to have been quite ambitious. We see for example multiple moments where targets were not met the first year by a long shot and the targets in subsequently being increased the next year. For future programming it would be relevant to work on more realistic output target setting.

In the following sections we will reflect on whether the targets that were set at both output and outcome level were achieved. A few things to keep in mind when reading this chapter;

1. In our analysis we reflect on a programmatic level. We combine targets and actuals of all countries. For each indicator we reflect on the differences between countries.
2. We have organized this chapter on the basis of the six strategies. We will thus reflect on the achievement of output and outcome targets per strategy. In the conclusion we will share an overview of all the strategies against the Theory of Change.
3. The output level data considered comes from output overviews shared with us by the Alliance. At output level we have received actuals for each year of the programme and targets from 2018, 2019 and 2020. We will therefore focus our analysis on the extent to which targets were achieved on these years.
4. The output indicators are formulated slightly differently between monitoring and the internal evaluation. The monitoring focusses on absolute numbers reached, while in the evaluation the focus lies on relative share of the population (in the study locations). As the output targets for the programme are set on the basis of the monitoring data we will focus on these absolute values.
5. Outcome level data comes from the evaluations conducted by the UvA team. This data considers the studied communities selected to reflect the broader programme. We have verified with partners whether their work in the treatment villages reflect their broader work within the programme. Generally, partners confirm that the treatment villages, comparison



villages and the villages that were not specifically studied are comparable in terms of the strategies that were implemented and the level of cooperation of the community. One important exception is the programme in Senegal. The focus on Tambacounda makes it appear that Senegal stands out in a negative way. In the impact evaluation the following explanation is provided; “only one of the three regions was included in the country-level analyses (Tambacounda). There are two reasons for this: i) Sedhiou region was only added to the study at midline, meaning no baseline data are available for this site, and ii) in both Sedhiou and Kolda region, for unknown reasons, the local partner unfortunately did not implement programme activities in the comparison sites after midline data collection”. The more positive changes that were seen in these other treatment sites thus were not included in the analysis. This does not mean that no positive changes were achieved. Where this stands out, we will highlight this.

6. The sample sizes for married girls at the end of the programme were very small (ranging from 0 to 40, but most countries under 10) and are therefore too limited to properly calculate % change. It is relevant to note that at baseline the numbers of married girls were much higher. Nevertheless, the low numbers at the end of the programme make it impossible to properly reflect on whether the target was met. In our reflections on targets focus on the single girls.

## Strategy 1: Invest in girls, their knowledge, skills and participation in society

For the following indicators on outcome and output level, targets were set.

Output	29 # of girls who received SRHR related education
Outcome	6.1 Share of single girls who feel they can oppose CM
	6.2 Share of girls who oppose FGM
	29 Share of girls who received SRHR related education

Targets were set for indicator 29 at both output and outcome level. At outcome level – and in the UvA study - the share of girls was considered. At output level the number of girls who received SRHR related education were considered. We will utilize this same distinction when analysing this data at the different levels.

### Output:

#### Indicator 29 # of girls who received SRHR related education

All the countries combined, the targets for both single and married girls, are met in 2018 and 2019. Also, an increase is shown in the number of single and married girls that were trained.

The overview below shows the programme level target, programme level actuals and share of countries that met the target set in the beginning of that year.

		2018	2019	2020
	Total target	58.629	54.442	54.718
	Total actuals	65.859	90.820	46.402
29 # girls who received SRHR related education	Share of countries target achieved	90 %	90 %	70 %

Generally, we see that the targets were reached. In both 2018 and 2019 one country was unable to reach their target (Senegal in 2018 and Benin in 2019). Due to corona, we see that more countries had this difficulty in 2020. Three countries (Burkina Faso, Ethiopia and Pakistan) were unable to reach the target that was set, and understandably the overall target was not reached.

The targets on the level of single girls proved slightly easier to reach in most countries. In 2018 and 2019 eight out of ten countries were able to achieve the targets set. Compared to seven out of nine when it comes to married girls. In 2020 this disparity grew; Reaching married girls proved difficult in times of COVID. Only four out of ten countries were able to reach their target. Compared to six out of ten countries that were able to reach the targeted number of single girls.

Not all countries show large decreases in the numbers as might be expected because of COVID. Nevertheless, the overall target that was set was not reached in 2020.

Taking a closer look at the different countries, we see the following:

- The numbers of single girls reached were very high (above 10.000 in 2019) in Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, and Uganda.
- The number of single girls reached each year was quite low (under 500) in Benin, and Sierra Leone.
- In the following countries there was an increase in the number of single girls reached every year: Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Pakistan, and Uganda until 2019. The numbers in 2020 are lower for all these countries.
- In some countries, no targets were set for married girls, but nevertheless married girls were reached. This was the case in Bangladesh, Ghana (in 2018), and in Uganda (in 2018).
- In Benin in 2019 no girls were trained at all, and the target of 40 was not met. The following explanation was given in the 2019 country report from Benin: *"This year, the planned CSE trainings for girls could not be organized since the CSE of young people in and out-of-school is now regulated by an authorization from the Ministry of Secondary Education. The duration of the process of obtaining this authorization, including the obligation for THP-Benin to organize the validation of the training manual and the training of trainers by the INIFRCF, contributed to the postponement of the CSE training activities to 2020. It is, however, an important result and recognition for Her Choice that THP-Benin has obtained the needed authorization and approval of the CSE manual. Nevertheless, sensitizations have been organized in the epicentres for girls on contraception and the risks associated with sexual transmitted infections."*

## Outcomes

We will shortly go deeper into the outcome indicators, the targets that were set and whether they were achieved.

### Indicator 29: Share of girls who received SRHR related education

Indicator 29 is both an output indicator, and an outcome indicator. The outcome level target concerns the share of girls reached. The share of girls was calculated sole for the study sites of the UvA

The target set for indicator 29 on outcome level is an increase of at least 10% per country of the share of girls reached both single and married girls. The UvA study shows that there has been such an increase in the percentage of girls that received SRHR in the study locations in all countries, bar Uganda. In Uganda the share of girls reached in the studied location remained more or less stable from baseline to end line (Koster, Miedema et al., 2021). Interestingly, the output results in Uganda show that throughout the programme an increasingly high number of girls was reached. It could thus be that the limited outcome is related to the specific sites.

BA	BE	BF	ET	GH	MA	NE	PA	SE	UG
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### Indicator 6.1: Share of single girls who feel they can oppose CM

For indicator 6.1 the Alliance targeted an increase of 5% per country.

The indicator was measured at baseline and midline but dropped as an individual indicator at end line. The indicator is measured as one of the composites of the impact indicator. In the midline the following is written about this indicator: *"The indicator 'girls feel able to oppose marriage against their wish' (IND6.1), does not actually measure that they can refuse marriage once they are faced with the situation (Koster, Miedema et al., 2019)."* The indicator thus did not measure the change that the programme was aiming for. We thus do not have the data available to indicate whether the target was reached at the end of the programme.

What we can say is that the results were ambiguous at midline. In Mali, at midline, the share of girls who reported feeling able to oppose a marriage increased strongly in the treatment sites from baseline and was much higher when compared to comparison sites. Similarly, in Ethiopia, this share had increased and was higher in treatment than in comparison sites. However, in other countries the outcome was less

positive; for example, in multiple countries there was hardly any increase at ML compared to BL and there was even a decrease in Senegal (Koster, Miedema et al., 2019).

#### Indicator 6.2: Share of girls who oppose FGM

This indicator was only measured in the African programme countries as Asian partners reported that the problem did not exist in their context. The target was an increase of 5% in the share of girls that feel they can oppose FGM. A high bar as the UvA study shows that in most programme countries (apart from Mali), the majority of the girls already opposed FGM at baseline (Koster, Miedema et al., 2017).

The UvA impact evaluation found that in 5 countries the already high share of girls increased further. With such a high baseline it however not surprising that even though an increase was achieved in the majority of the countries, the target was only partly met. We see that the target was met in three (out of seven) countries. In Mali we see an enormous increase of more than 70% (from 21.4% to 93.94%). In Burkina a smaller, but significant increase of more than 7% (from 79.27% to 86.59%). In Senegal (t) an increase of 5% is seen (Koster, Miedema et al., 2021).

In Ethiopia and Ghana, we see a slight decrease of the share of girls who oppose FGM/C (+/- 5%)

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For more insight in the results at outcome and impact level that were reached through this strategy please refer to chapter 4.2. of the UvA [impact evaluation](#).

## Strategy 2: Improve access to formal education for girls

For the following indicators on outcome and output level, targets were set.

Output	30.2 # of interviewed teachers trained to give SRHR related education
	31 # of schools taken girl friendly measures, according to school principal
Outcome	10 Share of girls regularly attending school in the last year
	20 Share of girls enrolled in formal education

#### Output:

#### Indicator 30.2 # of teachers and school managers trained

This indicator is divided on the basis of gender. Targets are set for the number of teachers trained; male, female and total.

The overview below shows the programme level target, programme level actuals and share of countries that met the target set in the beginning of that year.

		2018	2019	2020
	Total target	3.066	2.937	1.960
	Total actuals	3.608	4.270	2.328
30.2 # of teachers and school managers trained	Share of countries target achieved	60%	60%	60%
	Males target	1.646	1.764	1.098
	Males actuals	1.941	2.277	1.296
	Share of countries target achieved	70%	70%	60%

Females target	1.420	1.173	862
Females actuals	1.667	1.993	1.032
Share of countries target achieved	50%	60%	50%

At programmatic level the combined target of all the countries is reached on all three indicators for 2018, 2019 and 2020. However, there is quite some diversity between countries. The share of countries that were able to reach their targets yearly fluctuates between the 50-70%.

We see that several countries exceed their targets. In 2018 and 2019 the programme in Bangladesh and Pakistan strongly surpassed their targets. The programme in Nepal had strikingly limited targets (+50) and surpassed them yearly (between 132 and 713 people trained). The high performance in these countries compensated for other countries where targets were not reached.

Reflecting on the data we see that each year more male than female teacher were trained. Although the total target of female teachers trained is reached, we see that a more limited share of the countries is able to reach the (more limited) targets. Looking at the gender focus between countries the following jumps out:

- More males were trained yearly in: Bangladesh, Benin, Burkina Faso, Mali, Senegal
- More females were trained yearly in: Nepal, Pakistan, Uganda.
- In the following countries it fluctuated: Ethiopia, Ghana.

Some explanations for these differences were given in the output documents provided by the Alliance. In Benin more males were trained because there are few female teachers and school managers currently present in the education sector. In Uganda the programme focussed on female teachers in the first years. Later they realized the importance of involving male teachers, so the balance shifted. For the other countries we do not have similar explanations available.

#### **Indicator 31 Number of schools that have taken at least 50% of the recommended girl friendly measures.**

This indicator is divided on the basis of education level. Targets are set for the number of schools; primary, secondary and total.

The overview below shows the programme level target, programme level actuals and share of countries that met the target set in the beginning of that year.

		2018	2019	2020
31 # of schools that have taken at least 50% of the recommended girl friendly measures.	Total target	569	778	894
	Total actuals	798	1.031	889
	Share of countries target achieved	80%	90%	60%
	Primary school target	377	565	456
	Primary schools' actuals	375	740	673
	Share of countries target achieved	70%	90%	60%
	Secondary school target	192	213	438

Secondary schools' actuals	423	291	216
Share of countries target achieved	70%	100%	50%

The targets were met each year on all the sub-targets that were set. Generally, the majority of countries were able to reach the targets set. Targets that were not met were often just not met.

We see that in practice a focus is at times put on a specific educational level. This is not necessarily connected to the targets that were set.

The pandemic made it difficult to reach secondary schools in 2020. Several countries that surpassed their targets in the years before, saw negative effects from the pandemic. This is particularly clear in Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Mali, Ethiopia and Uganda.

## Outcomes:

### Indicator 20: Share of girls enrolled in formal education, by marital status.

The targeted outcome for this indicator was an increase of at least 5% per country in comparison to the situation at baseline for both married and single girls.

#### Single girls:

The end evaluation found that in all the countries, except Nepal, the percentage of single girls enrolled in formal education increased from BL to EL. In Nepal strikingly a significant decrease was found. The partner organisation and researchers explained that the apparent decrease in enrolment was possibly due to some girls reflecting on the enrolment during COVID times, while the question pertained the pre-COVID period (Koster, Miedema, et al., 2021).

The increase between baseline and endline was significant and larger than 5% in all countries, except from Senegal. The increase in Senegal was not significant, however it was larger than 5%. The only country that did not reach the target was Nepal.

BA	BE	BF	ET	GH	MA	NE	PA	SE	UG
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#### Married Girls:

The share of married girls who were enrolled in formal education remained low; the number of married girls included in the study being too small to draw conclusions about changes in enrolment (Koster, Miedema et al., 2021).

### Indicator 10: Share of girls regularly attending school, by marital status.

For this outcome indicator the alliance targeted an increase of at least 5% per country for the share of both married and single girls enrolled in school who regularly attend. Regular attendance is defined as at least four days a week (Koster, Miedema et al., 2021). This indicator further deepens the findings considering enrolment (ind20) and acknowledges that enrolment does not necessarily mean attendance.

#### Single girls:

At BL already, in 6 out of the 10 countries still included in the programme, over 90% of enrolled (single) girls reportedly regularly attended school. The four countries that showed a more limited attendance rate were Ethiopia, Uganda, Pakistan and Senegal (T) (Koster, Miedema et al., 2017). An increase of 5% in countries where the attendance rate is already above 90% is an ambitious target.

At the end of the programme, we see that the target for single girls was met in five countries. Three of these countries concern the countries that at baseline had a more limited attendance rate (Ethiopia, Senegal and Pakistan). The other countries where we see an increase of more than 5% are Benin and Mali.

BA	BE	BF	ET	GH	MA	NE	PA	SE	UG
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For more insight in the results at outcome and impact level that were reached through this strategy please refer to chapter 4.3. of the UvA [impact evaluation](#).

### Strategy 3: Improve access to youth friendly SRHR services for girls

Output	32.1 Share of health centre staff who received training on SRHR during the previous year
	33 Share of schools with referral mechanisms in place between school and health service
Outcome	11.1 Share of girls who know of SRHR services
	11.2 Share of girls who knew of SRHR services and visited a clinic for SRHR services

#### Outputs:

#### Indicator 32.1 # of health workers trained in SRHR for youth (males/females/total).

This indicator is disaggregated by gender. Targets are set for the number of health workers trained; male, female and total.

The overview below shows the programme level target, programme level actuals and share of countries that met the target set in the beginning of that year.

		2018	2019	2020
Indicator 32.1 # of health workers trained in SRHR for youth	Total target	1610	1770	1504
	Total actuals	2673	2,053	1303
	Share of countries target achieved	70%	90%	40%
	Males target	603	601	447
	Males actuals	967	731	414
	Share of countries target achieved	60%	50%	40%
	Females target	1,007	1,169	1,057
	Females actuals	1,706	1,322	899
	Share of countries target achieved	70%	70%	40%

When looking at all the countries combined, the targets are met for male, female and total number of health workers in 2018 and 2019. Generally higher targets were set for the number of females. It is therefore not surprising that in total more female health care workers were trained. The outperformance of the target was also higher for female health workers than male health workers.

We see as strong drop off in the number of health care workers reached in 2020. The overall target was not reached, and we see a decrease in the share of countries that were able to reach the target that was set. This is of course the effect of COVID. The targets were set before the pandemic broke. It is impressive, that even during the pandemic, the programme came close to reaching their targets.

### Indicator 33 # of referral mechanisms in place between school and health service.

The overview below shows the programme level target, programme level actuals and share of countries that met the target set in the beginning of that year.

		2018	2019	2020
Indicator 33 # of referral mechanisms in place between school and health service.	Total target	695	585	1.177
	Total actuals	1.051	1.116	2.217
	Share of countries target achieved <sup>1</sup>	62,5 %	71 %	62,5 %

Some countries did not set targets every year, these were Benin (2019 and 2020) and Ghana (2018 and 2019). These countries did report results on this indicator. It is not clear why targets were not set. Nepal did not set any targets and did not get results. Both Mali (all years) and Bangladesh (2018, 2019) greatly exceeded the set targets and compensate for the other three countries where the target was only just not met.

#### Outcomes:

#### Indicator 11.1 Share of girls who know of SRHR services.

For this outcome indicator the alliance targeted an increase of at least 5% per country for the share of both married and single girls who know of available SRHR services.

The impact evaluation from UvA found that single girls' knowledge of the availability of SRHR-related services increased strongly between base- and end line in 8 out of 10 countries. The best performing country saw an increase of close to 60% (Mali) and the lowest positive performer saw an increase of 10% (Benin). The two countries where an increase was not seen was Senegal and Uganda. In Senegal (T) the share of girls with knowledge of SRHR services became lower. It is important to realize that *"the results for Kolda and Sedhiou regions, which are not included in the Senegal country data, show strong increase in the knowledge of girls on the availability of SRHR-related services: BL-EL in Kolda from 43.3% to 96.6% and in Sedhiou ML 13.8% to EL 67.0%"*. In Uganda girls were already knowledgeable at and this remained the same in the end evaluation (Koster, Miedema et al., 2021).

BA	BE	BF	ET	GH	MA	NE	PA	SE	UG
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#### Indicator 11.2 Share of girls who knew of SRHR services and visited a clinic for SRHR services.

Indicator 11.2 deepens the findings of indicator 11.1 and zooms in on the translation of knowledge to behaviour. The alliance set two targets for this indicator: For single girls an increase of at least 10% and for married girls an increase of at least 5% in the share of girls who visited SRHR clinics.

##### Single girls

In 4 countries the target set for single girls was reached, these were Ethiopia, Uganda, Mali, and Bangladesh. The increases that were reached here are quite large; in Bangladesh we see an increase of more than 30%, in Mali an increase of over 40%, and in Uganda an increase of close to 20%. The increase in Ethiopia is just over 10%.

The following countries showed a limited increase (under 10%); Ghana, Benin, Burkina Faso, and Pakistan. In Pakistan the target was nearly met with an increase of over 9%.

A decrease between baseline and endline was seen in Senegal (T), and Nepal.

BA	BE	BF	ET	GH	MA	NE	PA	SE	UG
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<sup>1</sup> In 2018 and 2020 on the basis of eight countries for whom targets were set. In 2019 on the basis of 9 countries for whom targets were set

For more insight in the results at outcome and impact level that were reached through this strategy please refer to chapter 4.4. of the UvA [impact evaluation](#).

## Strategy 4: Improve the economic security of girls and their families

For the following indicator on output level targets were set. No targets were set for any indicators at outcome level.

Output 34 Share of households with female entrepreneurs supported, reported by HH heads

### Outputs:

#### Indicator 34 Share of households with female entrepreneurs supported, reported by HH heads.

This indicator is divided on the basis of type of intervention. Targets are set for individual support of individual female entrepreneurs and of women's groups.

The overview below shows the programme level target, programme level actuals and share of countries that met the target set in the beginning of that year.

		2018	2019	2020
Indicator 34 Share of households with female entrepreneurs supported, reported by HH heads.	Women's groups target	975	794	1.125
	Women's groups actuals	1.471	1.505	1.329
	Share of countries target achieved <sup>2</sup>	60%	70%	50%
	Female entrepreneurs target	5.111	4.501	7.393
	Female entrepreneurs' actuals	7.608	6.078	8.681
	Share of countries target achieved <sup>3</sup>	50%	60%	60%

#### # of women's groups created and/or strengthened

The number of women's groups strengthened in Nepal was very high in 2018. The numbers in 2019 and 2020 were much lower. At the start of the program the choice was made not to implement strategy 4 in Pakistan, thus logically no targets were set.

In 2018, 2019 and 2020 the programme level targets were met. In Burkina Faso, Bangladesh, Ghana the targets for this indicator were met and exceeded in all three years. In Benin targets were met every year. In Ethiopia targets were set, but not met. In Mali and Nepal, the target was met in 2018 and 2019 (with high number), but not in 2020. In Senegal this was the other way around. 2020 was the only year when the target was met. In Uganda, only the target was met in 2019, in 2020 there were no results at all.

#### # of female entrepreneurs' mothers of school-going children) supported:

Targets for this indicator were set for all countries, bar Pakistan where strategy 4 was not implemented.

<sup>2</sup> On the basis of nine countries for whom targets were set

<sup>3</sup> On the basis of nine countries for whom targets were set



In 2018, 2019 and 2020 the programme level targets were met.

The targets were met (and exceeded) every year in Bangladesh, Mali and Nepal. In Benin the targets that were set were only reached in 2020 (with high numbers), in 2019 there were no results at all.

For more insight in the results at outcome and impact level that were reached through this strategy please refer to chapter 4.5. of the UvA [impact evaluation](#).

## Strategy 5: Mobilize communities to transform social norms that are detrimental to achieving gender equity

For the following indicators on outcome and output level, targets were set.

Output	35 Traditional and religious village leaders, peer educators, etc trained
Outcome	15.1 Share of girls who feel they can consult any source on SRHR issues Share of girls who feel they can consult any source on SRHR issues 15.2 Share of single girls who feel supported in decision making on CM 15.3: Share of uncircumcised girls who do not want to be circumcised who feel supported in decision making on FGM

### Outputs:

#### Indicator 35 Traditional and religious village leaders, peer educators, etc trained

This output indicator is translated quite broadly into several sub-indicators.

1. Traditional and religious village leaders, peer educators, etc trained (# of village leader, # of peer educators, and total # trained)
2. # of villages with trained leaders (including peer educators)
3. Change agents in villages mobilised and trained: # village members who organise activities against CM, FGM\*\* and to promote education of girls (# of males, females and total trained).

The overview below shows the programme level target, programme level actuals and share of countries that met the target set in the beginning of that year.

		2018	2019	2020
Indicator 35 Traditional and religious village leaders, peer educators, etc trained	# of village leaders and peer educators* trained target	5.334	4.910	5.619
	# of village leaders and peer educators* trained actuals	14.283	15.566	5.392
	Share of countries target achieved	70%	70%	50%
	# of villages with trained leaders target	813	597	646
	# of villages with trained leaders actuals	608	721	564

Share of countries <sup>4</sup> target achieved	50%	66,67%	62,50%
# village members who organise activities target	7,498	14,973	18,894
# village members who organise activities actuals	14,503	9,852	7,501
Share of countries <sup>5</sup> target achieved	77,78%	66,67%	33,33%

#### **Traditional and religious village leaders, peer educators, etc trained (# of village leader, peer educator, and total trained).**

The programme level targets were met for this indicator. This is mostly due to a high performance in reaching village leaders. The programme level targets that were set for training peer educators were not met in any of the studied years. In 2018 and 2019 close to 10.000 village leaders were trained above target. This indicates that perhaps the target was set on the low side. It seems that this high performance largely stems from Bangladesh. Here targets were set around 100 village leaders (2018) and below (2019 & 2020). However, around 10.000 leaders were reached in 2018 and 2019. In 2020 we see that the high performance of training village leaders is hampered and only 41 village leaders above target were reached at a programmatic level. In this year Bangladesh only exceeded the target by about 1.000.

Comparatively, a large number of village leaders and peer educators were trained in Bangladesh. Their reach makes up close to 60% of the overall reach. This gives a bit of a distorted picture of the achievements of the other countries.

#### **# of villages with trained leaders**

For this indicator targets were set for all countries, except Uganda. In 2020 furthermore no targets were set in Benin. It is not clear from the available documentation why these targets were not set.

The programme level targets for this indicator were met in 2019. In 2018 and 2020 the targets were not achieved. The target was set slightly lower in 2018 and we see a strong performance in several countries including Ghana, Mali and Pakistan.

#### **# village members who organise activities against CM, FGM\*\* and to promote education of girls (# of males, females and total who organise activities).**

Targets on this indicator were set for all countries but Nepal. Nepal nevertheless did reach results. It is not clear from the available documentation why no targets were set on this indicator.

The programme level targets are exceeded broadly in 2018, nearly doubling the target numbers. This is mostly to a high number of village members mobilized in Ethiopia, Bangladesh, Ghana and Mali. In the subsequent years the target is increased to match the high performance in 2018, but the actuals remain closer to the target set in 2018.

#### **Outcomes:**

#### **Indicator 15.1 Share of girls who feel they can consult any source on SRHR issues**

The alliance set the following target for this outcome indicator: for both single and married girls an increase of at least 5%.

<sup>4</sup> On the basis of nine countries for whom targets were set

<sup>5</sup> On the basis of eight countries in 2018 and nine countries in 2019 and 2020 for whom targets were set

For single girls:

In 8 out of 10 countries an increase of 5% or more could be seen between BL and EL in the share of girls who feel they could consult any source on SRHR issues if they had questions. The results range between an increase of 65 percentage points in Mali to 6 percentage points in Benin.

Only Uganda and Senegal did not show any positive development in the studied areas. In Uganda the share of girls remained stable and high throughout the different measurements. In the studied community in Senegal, we see a small decrease. It is however important to note that in the other Senegalese regions, a large increase can be seen, with levels of over 80% of girls feeling they could consult someone on SRHR issues (Koster, Miedema et al., 2021)

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#### Indicator 15.2 Share of single girls who feel supported in decision making on CM.

For this outcome an increase of at least 5 percentage points per country in comparison to baseline was set. This target was reached in 8 out of 10 countries. *"The largest increase was found in Pakistan, followed by Nepal (C), and Mali, these also being countries where arranged marriage has been found to be a common practice"* (Koster, Miedema et al., 2021).

In Uganda the share of girls increased, but the increase was smaller than 5 percentage points, thus not meeting the target. It was furthermore not statistically significant. For Senegal a limited decrease in the share of girls was seen.

BA	BE	BF	ET	GH	MA	NE	PA	SE	UG
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#### Indicator 15.3: Share of uncircumcised girls who do not want to be circumcised who feel supported in decision making on FGM.

An increase of at least 5 percentage points per country was set as a target by the alliance. During the midterm it was found that in many communities the share of girls who felt supported in their decision appeared to have decreased. The evaluators indicated that further research was needed to explain this (Koster, Miedema et al., 2019). However, the indicator was not included in the end line evaluation (Koster, Miedema et al., 2021). We can thus not reflect to what extent the target was reached.

For more insight in the results at outcome and impact level that were reached through this strategy please refer to chapter 4.6. of the UvA [impact evaluation](#).

## Strategy 6: Create an enabling legal and policy environment on preventing child marriage

For the following indicators on outcome and output level, targets were set.

Outcome	16.1 Share of girls who know about protective laws on CM
	16.2 Share of girls who know about protective laws on FGM
Output	37.1 # of communities (that have no by-laws yet) in the process of developing by-laws on CM
	37.2 # of communities (that have no by-laws yet) in the process of developing by-laws on FGM
	38 Share of districts (or other local administrative level) that have established means to enforce laws on CM (and FGM)
	39 Share of districts with consultation and informational meetings between (local) government agencies and civil society institutions related to SRHR

### Outputs:

#### Indicator 37.1 # of villages (that have no by-laws yet) that are in process of developing by-laws on CM

The overview below shows the programme level target, programme level actuals and share of countries that met the target set in the beginning of that year.

		2018	2019	2020
	Total target	356	405	1.006
Indicator 37.1 # of villages (that have no by-laws yet) that are in process of developing by-laws on CM	Total actuals	439	605	448
	Share of countries target achieved <sup>6</sup>	55,56 %	55,56 %	60%

Targets were set yearly for all countries, bar Benin. It is not clear from the available documentation why no targets were set for Benin in 2018 and 2019. They did set a target in 2020 but did not achieve any results.

The overall target for this indicator were reached in 2019 and 2018. In 2020 the target was nearly doubled. Although the # of villages that were in the process of developing by-laws were significantly higher than in previous years the target set in 2020 was not met. The increase in overall target was largely due to a large increase in target in Bangladesh, from 31 to 588 villages. The newly set target in Bangladesh was missed by more than 500 villages.

The programme in Nepal met the target each year but set a lower target of 3 villages each year. The programme in Uganda met the target in 2018 and 2019, but in 2020 did not report any villages. Uganda's actuals in 2018 and 2019 were very high and compensate for some of the other countries who were unable to reach their target.

<sup>6</sup> In 2018 and 2019 the basis of nine countries for whom targets were set. In 2020 targets were set for all countries

### Indicator 37.2 # of villages (that have no by-laws yet) that are in process of developing by-laws on FGM\*\*

The overview below shows the programme level target, programme level actuals and share of countries that met the target set in the beginning of that year.

		2018	2019	2020
Indicator 37.2 # of villages (that have no by-laws yet) that are in process of developing by-laws on FGM**	Total target	247	292	324
	Total actuals	175	249	166
	Share of countries target achieved <sup>7</sup>	0 %	60 %	40%

Targets for these indicators were set for half of the countries. Specifically, in the countries where female genital mutilation (FGM) is already part of the SRHR package (for Kinderpostzegels: Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Mali, Senegal, for THP: Burkina Faso). The three Asian countries did not set any target as FGM/C is not an issue in those countries. No targets were set in Uganda and Benin, even though FGM/C remains a relevant issue there.

The targets that were set for this indicator at a programme level were not met in the three years included in this analysis. In 2018 none of the countries was able to meet their target. Ghana and Senegal were able to meet the targets that were set in the subsequent years. Ethiopia met the target in 2019 but fell slightly short in 2020. Burkina Faso and Mali were not able to meet the target in any of the years.

### Indicator 38 # of districts (or other local administration level) that have established means to enforce laws on CM and FGM\*\*

The overview below shows the programme level target, programme level actuals and share of countries that met the target set in the beginning of that year.

		2018	2019	2020
Indicator 38 # of districts (or other local administration level) that have established means to enforce laws on CM and FGM**	Total target	70	97	203
	Total actuals	83	144	128
	Share of countries target achieved	50 %	60 %	50%

At a programme level the target was met in 2018 and 2019. In 2020 the overall target was not met. This was mostly due to a large increase in the target set in Mali. The target increased with close to 40 compared to the previous year, while the actuals in practice decreased. The target set was thus quite unrealistic.

In 2018, 2019 and 2020 5/6 countries were able to reach their target. The countries where the target was not met generally did come close to reaching the target.

<sup>7</sup> On the basis of five countries for whom targets were set

### Indicator 39 # of districts with consultation and information-sharing meetings between (local) government agencies and a wide range of civil society institutions related to SRHR

The overview below shows the programme level target, programme level actuals and share of countries that met the target set in the beginning of that year.

		2018	2019	2020
Indicator 38 # of districts (or other local administration level) that have established means to enforce laws on CM and FGM**	Total target	141	289	274
	Total actuals	122	139	225
	Share of countries target achieved <sup>8</sup>	33,33 %	33,33 %	66,67%

Targets for this indicator were set for all countries, bar Uganda in 2018 and 2019. It is not clear from the document why a target was not set. In 2020 there was a target in Uganda, but no results.

At programme level the targets were not met in any of the years that are included in this study. The number of countries that were able to reach their set target did increase strongly in 2020. In part this is due to more realistic targets, for example the target in Nepal in 2019 was set at 90 districts and zero were met. In 2020 the target was set at 3 and this was exceeded.

#### Outcomes:

#### Indicator 16.1 Share of girls who know about protective laws on CM.

The target set for this indicator differed between countries. Very low scoring countries at baseline had a 10 percentage points increase as a goal, whilst the higher scoring countries at baseline aimed for a 5% increase. In the available documentation it is not clearly indicated which country is considered in which category. Nevertheless, the target is reached for all countries. All countries showed a large increase in the share of girls who knew about the existence of laws protecting against child marriage. The programme achieved statistically relevant results in all countries, ranging from an 11-percentage point increase in Bangladesh to a whopping 85%-point increase in Mali (Koster, Miedema, et al., 2021)

BA	BE	BF	ET	GH	MA	NE	PA	SE	UG
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#### Indicator 16.2 Share of girls who know about protective laws on FGM.

The target for this outcome indicator was set at an increase of 5%-points. This indicator on its target is only relevant in the African programme countries.

All African countries showed an increase in the share of girls who aware of laws protecting against FGM/C. For 5 out of 7 countries, this increase was larger than 5%. For Uganda and Mali this was not the case. Percentages in these countries remained very low (8.7% and 6.4%). The low numbers in Mali may be explained by the fact that there is no national protective law on FGM/C (Koster, Miedema et al., 2021)

BE	BF	ET	GH	MA	SE	UG
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For more insight in the results at outcome and impact level that were reached through this strategy please refer to chapter 4.7. of the UvA [impact evaluation](#).

<sup>8</sup> On the basis of nine countries for whom targets were set

## Impact indicators

For the following impact indicators targets were set:

### Indicator 1.1 Share of single girls who feel they can exercise control over if, when and whom to marry

The target that was set by the alliance was an increase of 10% per country in comparison to baseline.

Most countries showed an increase of more than 10%, except from Benin and Pakistan. The percentages in de endline are noticeably lower in the Asian countries than in the African countries.

BA	BE	BF	ET	GH	MA	NE	PA	SE	UG
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### Indicator 1.2 Mean degree of perceived control of single girls over marriage decisions

The target that was set by the alliance was an increase per country of at least 0.5 point for mean degree

Indicator 1.2 was measured by asking girls three questions about the degree of their perceived control over the decision of 'if, when and whom to marry'. The mean score of this indicator significantly increased from BL to EL across all the countries (Koster, Miedema et al., 2021).

The increase was larger than 0.5 points for nearly all countries. Only Pakistan showed a smaller increase than 0.5.

BA	BE	BF	ET	GH	MA	NE	PA	SE	UG
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The alliance did set targets for impact indicators 2, 3 and 4, but these were not measured in the endline evaluation (2 & 4) or measured in a different way (3). We can thus unfortunately not reflect on whether these targets were achieved.

## Conclusion

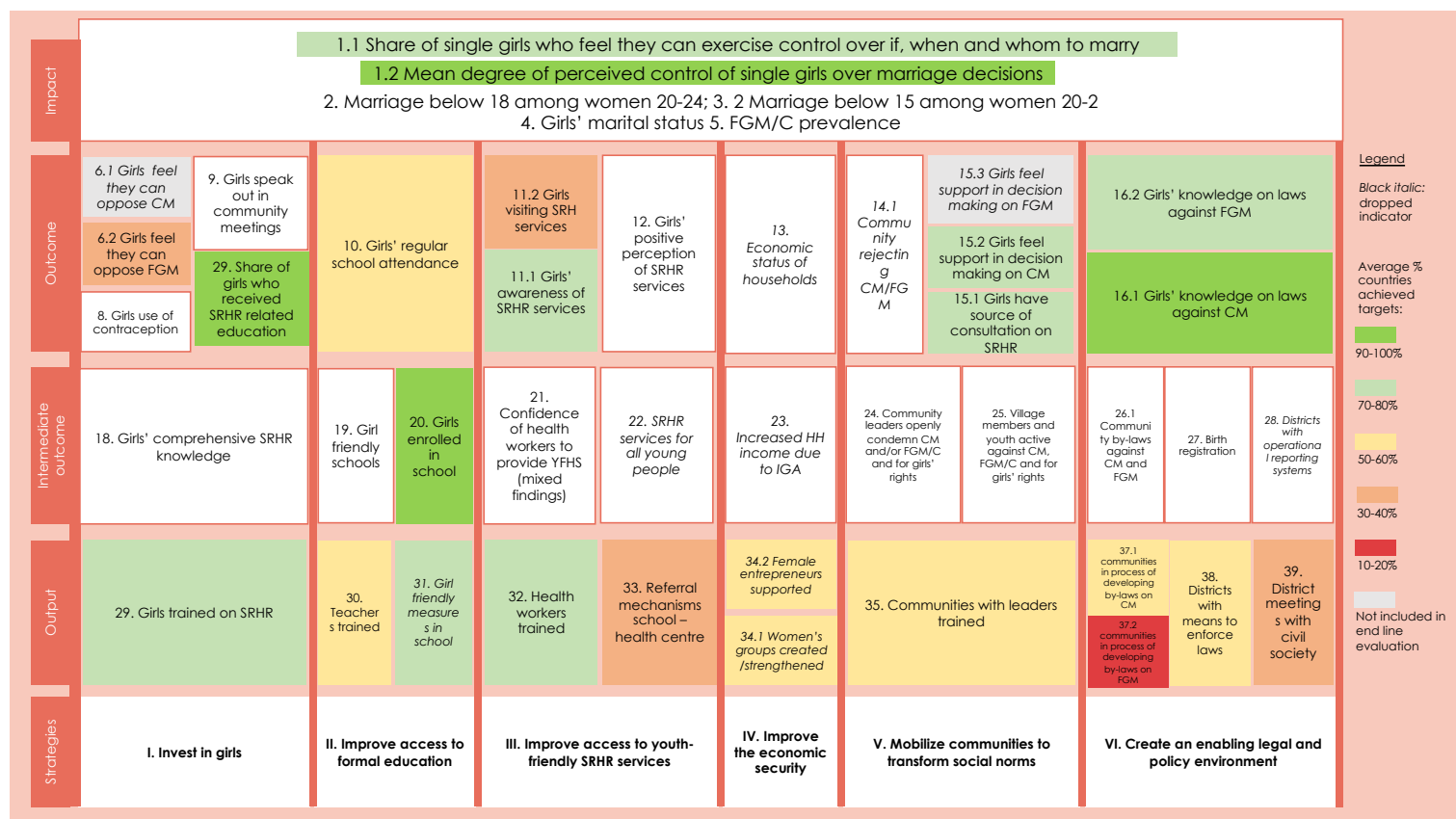
For the two Impact level indicators that had targets and were measured at end line the targets were reached or nearly reached in the majority of the programme countries. Outcome level targets were set after the baseline study was finished. These targets have generally been reached in the majority of the countries. There are two notable exceptions for the indicators concerning the single girls that feel that they can oppose FGM, and girls visiting SRHR services. Reaching the targets for these outcomes proved difficult in the majority of countries.

Targets at intermediate level were only set for one indicator and achieved by the majority of countries. Not setting targets for the other intermediate outcomes seems a missed opportunity. Targets at this level would have been useful for pro-actively managing for more impact.

Output targets were set yearly in collaboration with the partners. Output targets related to the strategies working to increase girls control in decision-making (1,2,3) were most easily reached throughout the duration of the programme. For most of these indicators the majority of countries was able to do so. The output targets that were set for the strategies concerning greater decision-making space for girls within communities (4,5,6) proved more difficult to reach. A smaller share of the countries was able to regularly reach the targets that they had set for themselves.

In these concluding pages we will delve deeper into the nuances of these overarching conclusions. Starting off with an overview of the targets that were reached on the basis of the Theory of Change. Subsequently, we will share a set of overarching reflections and zoom in on each strategy individually.

The theory of change below provides an overview of the chapter that supersedes it. It shows what share of the programme countries was able to reach which targets set. The colours provide an insight in the % of countries that were able to achieve the targets. At outcome and impact level this is based on the difference between baseline and endline from the UvA evaluations. At output level this is based on the average % of countries (where targets were set) that was able to achieve the target in 2018-2019-2020 based on the output overviews provided by Her Choice. In the visual we have included the indicators where no targets were set to provide a fuller picture. Indicators that do not have a target have been left white. It is important to realize that whether or not targets were set does not necessarily reflect whether change was achieved.





## Strategy specific conclusions:

- **Strategy 1:** The Alliance was generally effective in reaching the targets set for the output indicator within this strategy. The majority of the countries (70-80% yearly) was able to reach the target set concerning the training of girls on SRHR. The influence of COVID proved to be an issue for some countries in 2020. The target set for the outcome indicator directly connected to the activity – share of girls trained – was easily met in the majority of the countries. The outcomes that are somewhat further outside of the alliance direct sphere of control proved more difficult. The baseline levels concerning 6.2 FGM were diverse. In countries where the baseline level was already high it, understandably, proved difficult to reach the targets that were set, while in the context where the baseline was lower it proved easier to reach the targets. Indicator 6.2 was unfortunately dropped and could not be reflected upon.
- **Strategy 2:** At a programme level, the Alliance was able to reach the overall targets that were set at output level. At country level the extent to which output targets were met differ, but countries that were not able to reach the targets were usually not far off. It does not seem that the achievement of targets at output level were hampered by the pandemic. At (intermediate) outcome level we see that targets concerning enrolment were met in nearly every country, but that attendance proved more difficult. In many contexts' girls indicated that this was due to poverty (f.e. Uganda, Benin & Senegal). In the context of Bangladesh and Pakistan girls indicated that this was due to marriage (Koster, Miedema et al., 2021). An important element to continue to focus on in future programming.
- **Strategy 3:** In several countries it proved quite difficult to set up referral mechanisms in schools. Furthermore, reaching health workers during a pandemic proved, understandably, complex in several countries. At an overarching programmatic level, the alliance was able to reach the overall output goals set for this strategy. However, these goals could only be reached because several countries exceeded their targets on these outputs. At outcome level we see mixed outcomes. Girls' awareness of SRHR services improved significantly in the majority of the countries and met the targets set. The translation of that behaviour proved more difficult. In only a 4 out of 10 countries we see that the target set for this indicator was reached.
- **Strategy 4:** The alliance did not set outcome targets for strategy 4. At an output level we see that each year a subset of countries was unable to reach the targets that were set. The combined output level goal in the years before 2020 were met. Partly because several countries exceeded their targets.
- **Strategy 5:** The share of countries that was able to do reach their output level target under this strategy differed strongly year to year. It is also clear that the pandemic was of influence in 2020. We see that the combined programme level target was often not reached. Interestingly, the outcome level targets were reached in a larger share of the countries. It could perhaps be that multiple strategies fed into these outcomes. One could argue that the work through the strategies focused to increase girls control in decision-making (1, 2 and 3) also have an effect on these outcomes. It seems furthermore that other activities were in place as well that were not monitored – think for example of parent-child dialogues (Progress Report, 2019). These could have been of influence on the outcomes reached.
- **Strategy 6:** Output level targets proved difficult to reach under this strategy. For each of the indicators no more than 60% of the countries was able to reach their target. For two indicators (37.2 & 39) the combined target was not reached in any of the analysed years. For the two other indicators (37.1 & 38) we see that 2020 proved to be a difficult year due to the pandemic. Interestingly the outcome targets were reached for the majority (>70% of the countries). It seems that multiple strategies fed into these outcomes. There is for example a strong link with strategy 1 concerning the increased knowledge of girls.

## Overarching conclusions

- **Generally able to bring about change – even if not all targets were reached**  
An important point to start this overarching conclusion: the programme has been able to achieve change. The UvA study found at overarching programme level that on nearly all outcome-level indicators progress was made. Even if that change did not always meet the target that was set by the Alliance itself.
- **Outcome and impact targets generally reached – output target mixed**  
Interestingly, it seems that the Alliance had more success reaching outcome and impact targets that were set (and to the extent to which they were measured), than the output targets that were set yearly. We cannot find a clear-cut reason for this. It could be that the strategies combined are more than the sum of its parts. Or that the continuous process of setting targets led to more ambitious output targets than the outcome and impact targets that were set at the beginning of the programme.
- **Multiple strategies lead to individual outcomes**  
Strikingly, for strategy 5 and 6 we see that a larger percentage of countries was able to meet their outcome targets than their output level targets. We feel that this can be explained through the synergy within the programme. Multiple strategies together lead to the outcomes achieved. However, it is striking that the outcome level indicators for these two strategies are focused on the experience and knowledge of girls themselves. Take for example indicators 16.1 and 16.2. These indicators concern girls' knowledge of laws. In our view strategies 1 and 2 are more directly connected to this increase in knowledge then perhaps the development of community by-laws and functioning of the legal system. In a future Theory of Change it would be relevant to provide further reflection on the interaction between divergent strategies and outcomes.
- **Girls easier to reach than other actors**  
Targets set directly related to the girls were most easily reached throughout the programme, especially at outcome level. We see several reasons for this: first, the work with community leaders, authorities and community members is more complex than the more work with the girls. The work with communities is further outside of the sphere of control of the alliance and more factors can be of an influence for the change. Secondly, many of the partners seem less experienced in local advocacy work. Multiple partners in our survey reflected on the importance of the trainings that they received on this. They gained knowledge and capacity and experience through the programme and its capacity building.
- **Room to improve target setting**  
The output targets that were set yearly proved difficult to reach. For quite a number of output indicators we see that multiple countries were unable to reach the targets that were set for subsequent years. We feel that this points to the targets being perhaps (over)ambitious. We see several examples where targets were not met, but nevertheless increased significantly in the subsequent year. For future programming it would be relevant to work on more realistic output target setting.
- **Barely targets set at intermediate outcome level**  
What becomes very clear from the visual is that nearly any intermediate outcomes were set. A missed opportunity, as these give most room for managing proactively for more impact as they fit in the sphere of influence of the alliance.

## 4. Facilitating and inhibiting factors

Different components influenced the work of the alliance. Both in positive and negative ways. We call these components facilitating and inhibiting factors. On the basis of the treasure trove of programme documents we have pinpointed factors that were crucial for achieving change.

In a focus group discussion, we presented identified factors to the programme partners. They helped us further prioritize the factors that from their perspective had a key influence on the effectiveness of the programme. In these focus groups partners from nearly all programme countries were present. Through an additional survey similar information was collected from missing partners so that the analysis reflects the complete programme with in total 51 respondents.

In the following sections we highlight the findings and concentrate on the crucial factors. How was the power of facilitating factors harnessed? And how were the risks of negative factors mitigated?

### 4.1 Spotlight on facilitating factors

#### Alliance strategies play into key facilitating factors

Four facilitating factors were selected by partners as being key for the effectiveness of the programme:

- 1) Involvement of the community, including boys and men (82,3%)
- 2) Exchange of knowledge and experience between partners nationally (56,1%)
- 3) Involvement of traditional/religious leaders (53,7%)
- 4) Involvement of (local) authorities (51,2%)

These factors neatly correspond with the strategies/approach of the alliance. Each of these factors was to an extent included in the set-up of the programme from the start.

Particularly for the involvement of boys and men we see that the alliance reflected upon this factor around the mid-term and subsequently harnessed it with greater intent and intensity.

The following facilitating factors were mentioned often in diverse programme documents:

- Exchange of knowledge and experience between partners nationally
- Exchange of knowledge and experience between partners internationally
- Involvement of (local) authorities
- Involvement of the community, including boys and men
- Involvement of traditional/religious leaders
- Economic situation of target group
- Political developments
- Facilitating laws and policies

In the focus group, partners were asked to select three factors that they saw as crucial for achieving impact. The following four facilitating factors were selected by the majority of the respondents (51):

- 1) Involvement of the community, including boys and men (82,3%)
- 2) Exchange of knowledge and experience between partners nationally (56,1%)
- 3) Involvement of traditional/religious leaders (53,7%)
- 4) Involvement of (local) authorities (51,2%)

When looking at this list of key factors it is interesting to see that they to a large extent mirror the initial set up of the programme. Two of these factors (1 and 3) are accommodated under strategy V: changing social norms. What we see throughout the roll-out of the programme that in many countries both boys and men and leaders were more broadly and actively involved. The second factor is included in the basic set up of the alliance with sufficient room for exchange. The involvement of local authorities is assured through strategy 6. In the following sections we will dive deeper into each of these factors.

### **Involvement of the community, including specifically boys and men**

Over 80% of the partners indicated that the involvement of the community and specifically boys and men had proven to be a crucial facilitating factor for achieving change. Boys and young men are seen as crucial allies for change (Focus Group, dec 2020).

Interestingly, the involvement of boys, men and the broader community was part of the programme set-up from the inception (Inception Report, 2016). Progress reports reflect their involvement in programme activities. In the 2017 progress report we find the following: *"In all HER CHOICE countries, boys and men are engaged in most programme activities. All partners are conscious of the fact that boys and men are key players in changing social norms in favour of girls' and women's rights and gender equality."* The exact phrasing is used to describe the involvement of boys and men in the 2018 report as well.

The level of engagement of men and boys in the programme seems to differ between country, activity and importantly within the timeline of the programme. In the reports we see a plethora of roles taken by boys and young men that can be organized on a continuum. From passive to very (pro)active.

On the passive side of the continuum, we see for example men function as an entry point to engage women in Pakistan (Progress Report, 2017) or boys participating in awareness raising activities in Mali (Progress Report, 2017). On the active side of the continuum, we see that boys are actively involved in partner activities: In Ethiopia for example partners reported that boys were producing sanitary pads together with girls and become supportive rather than teasing girls during menstruation (progress report, 2018). Or even boys leading community meetings on girls' rights. Hence, we see a broad diversity of roles, with men and boys generally playing a more passive role, especially in the first years of the programme. In the focus group it was mentioned that men were at times resistant to the message of the programme. It took time for the message to really sink in.

One of the recommendations from the midterm evaluation by the UvA was to further enhance the involvement of boys and men (Koster, Miedema et al., 2019). The programme partners took this recommendation to heart and subsequently enhanced the role of boys and men in the programme. This reinvigoration of the involvement of boys and young men was reflected in our focus group. The partners indicated that the involvement of men and boys was very useful, but also fairly recent. The stronger focus on boys and men is also reflected in the progress report that followed the midterm evaluation, which notes that: *"Boys and men are structurally involved in each programme activity."* Partners also start reporting on the participation levels of boys and men in their activities and we see the type of role shifting on the continuum. More and more an active role is given to boys and men. More and more becoming change agents themselves (Focus Group, December 2020). In Bangladesh for example, boys and men became true allies and role models. Male and female teachers worked together to turn schools girl friendly. Groups of students, consisting of 30 – 40 % of male students, helped to keep schools safe and the learning environment pleasant for everyone (Progress Report, 2017).

The Alliance thus actively identified this facilitating factor for change at the start of the programme, reflected upon it and subsequently harnessed it with greater intent and intensity.

### **Exchange of knowledge and experience between partners nationally**

Over half of the partners noted that the exchange of knowledge and experience at a national level was a key facilitating factor for the success of the programme.

In the focus group the partners noted the following ways in which this exchange of knowledge and experience at a national level was key:

- Working with partners active in the same context made for easy exchange of ideas
- Exchange of tools and approaches and experiences
- By collaborating the partners had a more powerful voice and could organize more effective actions at a regional/national level

Although not applicable for all countries, as not in all countries multiple partners were part of the programme, exchange at a national level was selected by the partners at a far higher rate than international exchange.

The Alliance actively played a role in harnessing this facilitating factor by regularly organizing (inter)national linking and learning sessions and stimulating collaboration. At a national level, mostly

activities were organized with partners and other stakeholders around days of international significance (Progress Report, 2019).

#### **Involvement of traditional/religious leaders**

Traditional and religious leaders are power holders in the community. The scoping study shows that, particularly religious leaders, can play a key role in the perpetuation of child marriage, even when laws prohibit the practice. Engaging these powerholders and mobilizing them to play a role in the programme proved a key facilitating factor. Over half of the respondents in the focus group chose their involvement as a key factor for the success of the programme. The involvement of these leaders was part of the initial programme plan as developed during the inception (inception report) and has also materialized, as described in chapter 3 where we for showed that more and more villages have leaders that speak out against child marriage.

Nevertheless, during the implementation of the programme the importance of involving community leaders and how to do this became increasingly clear. For example, the importance of early involvement of the community leaders was one of the key lessons learned during programme implementation in 2016. Involving leaders earlier and more actively led, according to partners, to a higher willingness of community leaders to support programme objectives (Progress report, 2017).

An example of the importance of involving community leaders is given by THP Ghana, where a sub-chief of the Dwerebease Epicenter intervened when Mercy (16) fell pregnant by Daniel (20). The chief was able to educate Mercy's' parents to cancel the arranged marriage and made Daniel's family pay a monthly allowance to Mercy for her upkeep (Progress Report, 2017).

The UvA study shows that the programme was largely successful in involving community leaders. On average about 12.000 village leaders were trained every year. At the endline study in eight countries all studied communities had leaders that spoke out against child marriage. In Uganda and Benin, a community remained where this was not the case, nevertheless a clear increase of leaders that speak out against child marriage is visible in these countries as well.

#### **Involvement of (local) authorities**

The last facilitating factor that was selected by a large group is the involvement of local authorities. This facilitating factor was selected by over 50% of the partners.

The alliance does not necessarily work on holding them accountable but works with them as a partner for change. We see that their involvement is important in several ways.

1. As a champion of change: an example of this can be seen in Senegal example the support of the embassies as allies in the advocacy process, proved to be crucial to push the state to use rule of law to counter socio-cultural and religious resistance (Progress Report, 2018).
2. As an amplifier: An example of this can be seen in Senegal; There *"the active involvement of academic staff from the Ministry of Education was very beneficial for the development of the teacher training in Senegal. Their involvement enhanced their pedagogical insights."* (Enda Jeunesse Action, Senegal) (Progress Report, 2019).
3. To avoid difficulties: An example of this can be seen in Pakistan. The partner indicated that they always inform authorities about upcoming activities: *"If you will do any activity without sharing early to them, you will be in trouble. They will stop the activity."* (Progress Report, 2016).

## 4.2 Spotlight on inhibiting factors

### Key drivers of child marriage as inhibiting factors

Three inhibiting factors were selected by partners as key for the effectiveness of the programme:

- 1) Deep rooted traditions
- 2) Poverty, illiteracy and other social economic issues
- 3) Insufficient budget

Particularly the first two inhibiting factors are also identified by the programme as key drivers of child marriage. The programme is set up to address these factors, but addressing these causes remains a difficult process.

There are of course also factors that inhibit the effectiveness of the programme. The following inhibiting factors were mentioned often in diverse programme documents:

- High staff turnover
- Insufficient budget
- Inflexible budget
- Limited capacity/knowledge sharing within the organization
- Security issues (manmade or natural)
- (National) laws and policies:
- Political instability and turnover
- Deep rooted traditions:
- Hidden practices
- Poverty, illiteracy and other social economic issues
- Bureaucracy at government

Inhibiting factors that were ranked the most were:

- 1) Deep rooted traditions (75,6 %)
- 2) Poverty, illiteracy and other social economic issues (53,6%)
- 3) Insufficient budget (39%)

In the relevance chapter we explored the key drivers of child marriage. The two key inhibiting factors that were selected most by the partners mirror two crucial drivers of child marriage: unequal social and gender norms and economic factors. The third inhibiting factor reflects the budgetary limitations of the programme.

### Deep rooted traditions

75% of the partners named these traditions as a key inhibiting factor.

The Cambridge dictionary defines tradition as follows:

- A belief, principle, or way of acting that people in a particular society or group have continued to follow for a long time, or all of these beliefs, etc. in a particular society or group -

The definition already makes it clear that it concerns beliefs, principles of behaviour that has been followed for a long time. Often for generations. Changing that can be very difficult. Unfortunately, unequal social and gender norms, one of the key drivers of child marriage, are often strongly reflected in traditions. These traditions reinforce the unequal gender norms at play in society. Marrying girls at a young age can in itself be considered one of these traditions. (Focus Group Avance, 2020). It is exactly these deep-rooted traditions that the programme tries to counter through the different strategies and particularly strategy 5. An example in how partners worked to do this can be seen in the following approach noted in the 2016 progress report: *A number of partners report that the delivery of the programme has become more accepted and integrated by paying regular supportive monitoring visits to community elders, practitioners of traditional practices and community volunteers. Investing in these relationship make community leaders become part of the solution.* From the UvA end evaluation data we see that the programme was able to convince an impressive number of leaders to speak out and join the cause (Koster, Miedema et al., 2021).

### **Poverty, illiteracy and other social economic**

The programme works in contexts where socio-economic issues are a key part of the context. As was shown in the relevance section of this report poverty is a key driver for child marriage in all the programme countries. It is however not only an underlying driver of child marriage, but also a key inhibiting factor for the effectiveness of the programme. Over 50% of the partners selected this as a crucial inhibiting factor (Focus Group Avance, 2020).

We see that poverty affects the effectiveness of the programme in several ways:

1. Implementation of the programme hampered // the level of poverty of the target population can at times make them difficult to reach. In Nepal, for example, community members were involved in heavy labour throughout most of the day. Engaging them in activities proved difficult as they were occupied or very tired (Progress Report, 2016).
2. Implementation of lessons learned hampered // the level of poverty of the target population has at times made it difficult to implement lessons learned. Families do not always have the means to put lessons learned into practice. "It is not like they don't have the knowledge, but because of their financial inability they cannot provide" (Focus Group Avance, 2020).

The work through strategy 4 aims to address poverty directly. Whether this was effective is unfortunately not clear from the data. What however is clear is that the economic work was complex; "No one size fits all solution" (Focus Group Avance, 2020)

### **Insufficient budget**

The final key inhibiting factor was the lack of sufficient budget. It was selected by 39% of the responding partners in the focus group.

The partners indicated that an insufficient budget had the following inhibiting effect on the programme:

1. The perceived limited salaries lead to high staff turnover. A waste for the programme seeing the investment in capacity building (Focus Group, dec 2020).
2. Insufficient budget to properly scale up activities (UvA FG, 2020, Ethiopia, Uganda, Ghana).

We have not been able to verify this issue on the basis of the available data.



## 5. How sustainable is the Her Choice programme?

Sustainability is a key element to assess at the end of a programme, and something to factor in from the start. Reflections on sustainability are always complex. The future is unknown, and we cannot foresee what external factors will influence the progress made. However, we can assess the extent to which the programme has been set-up to ensure the sustainability of results. This is what we will do in this chapter.

In the first part of the chapter, we will assess what approaches were used by the Alliance to ensure and prepare for sustainability. In the second part of the chapter, we delve deeper into the way that capacity building of the partners in the countries played a role in attaining this sustainability. Finally, we build upon the perspectives of the partners to provide an insight in the level of sustainability that was achieved.

### 5.1 Her Choice approach to sustainability

#### **Strong investment in sustainability**

The Her Choice alliance has employed multiple tactics to ensure the sustainability of both the programme's approach and outcomes.

Key elements in the sustainability approach were:

1. A shared ownership of the programme. Not a top-down approach, but rather a close collaboration with strong national partners which leads to an embedded approach.
2. A shared ownership of the outcomes, where not only girls are responsible for the changes, but the entire community is involved.
3. A holistic approach, which (potentially) mitigates some of the diverse drivers that may lead to a reversal of the achieved outcomes

Different tactics and strategies are used by the alliance to ensure the sustainability of the change that has been brought about. In the following sections we will explore several of them. Starting off with the most extensive and crucial road to sustainability used by the Alliance; ownership.

#### **Shared ownership of the programme**

*"We do not speak of implementing partners. The organizations in the country are equal partners in the programme"* Odilia van Manen of Stichting Kinderpostzegels in preparatory discussion

We found that shared responsibility and ownership within the programme is one of the core ways to ensure sustainability. The shared ownership is true of the programme itself and its outcomes.

Next to the alliance members, the Her Choice alliance consists out of 32 partners in 10 countries: Bangladesh, Benin, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, Mali, Nepal, Pakistan, Senegal, and Uganda (Baseline report, 2017). There is a shared ownership of the programme. Partners are seen as equal partners within the programme. In the midline evaluation partners reflected on this. Were partners in the countries able to influence decision making of the alliance? Indeed, the overall majority of partners indicated that for them this was the case. Only a limited number of the partners felt that this could be improved further (Koster, Miedema et al., 2019).

This shared ownership is reflected from the start of the programme. The Dutch based Alliance members provided the broader framework including the six strategies for the programme. The partners in the countries subsequently adjusted the approach to best fit their specific context and experience. Differentiated strategies and instruments were co-designed with the partners and the theory of change was operationalised for each country together with the partners (Inception report, 2016).

We see the results of this in the roll-out of programme activities in different countries. The same broad strategies are followed in all the countries but adjusted to fit the local context. And even if a strategy was seen as irrelevant for a country it could be dropped. This is seen in Pakistan where strategy 4 was not included.

This disparate focus within the strategies is seen in the output targets that are set yearly in each country. The focal point of the approach differs between countries and thus the targets as well.

Is also seen in the actual activities that are implemented. An interesting example of this can be seen in Pakistan;

*"Attending school on bicycle is the most marvellous activity of Her Choice in Pakistan. This activity is a benchmark in breaking the social barrier and eased the girl's mobility. Now the bicycle girls not only attending school on bicycle, but they are also helping their families for bringing things from market and giving pick and drop to their sibling for school.... this activity vanished the dependency of girls to get picked up and dropped off by their fathers/brothers for school" (additional questionnaire, 2021).*

As you can read in the quote the bicycle approach was a great way to break barriers in Pakistan, but for other countries this may not have been of interest. This intervention was thus not implemented in other countries.

The partners in the programme were current partners of alliance members and were chosen because of their track record and experience working on the issue addressed and/or for their work with the key stakeholders (inception report). Partners in other words that were up for the shared responsibility and ownership. In the case this shared ownership proved difficult the alliance took steps to improve the capacity of the partners. The effects of this capacity building on sustainability will be discussed later in this chapter. In one case (Sierra Leone) the choice was made to terminate the programme completely.

The ownership felt by the partners in the countries helps ensure that:

1. The activities and approach are embedded within the partners and therefore can potentially be continued. Even in the programme itself does not. Several factors of course influence whether activities in actuality can continue at the end of the programme. Financial means being a primary factor. We will explore this further later in this chapter.
2. The approach fits the local needs and context and thus there is a better possibility to create ownership of outcomes within the communities themselves. This is what the following sections will explore.

### **Shared ownership of the outcomes**

The Her Choice Alliance aimed to support communities to take full responsibility for ending child marriage and thus for the outcomes of the programme. The entire programme is focused on two areas, namely, increasing girl's role in the decision-making processes regarding issues that shape their lives, and mobilizing relevant community actors as change agents to address underlying factors, beliefs and processes leading to child marriage. Local ownership of the fight against child marriage is seen by the alliance as a key ingredient for sustainability (Inception report, 2016). The double focus ensures in theory that the responsibility for change does not sole lie on the shoulder of girls themselves, but that 'burden' is shared with many other stakeholders in the community. The shared responsibility for the change can be a key factor in the sustainability of change, but was this shared burden seen in practice?

In the data we see that the alliance was indeed able to mobilize a diverse group of stakeholders to actively speak out against child marriage. For example, in 2020 close to 7.500 community members organised activities against child marriage/FGM, even during the pandemic. 564 villages in 2020 had traditional/religious leaders that spoke out against child marriage (output overview). In the studied villages we see that these numbers have increased significantly between baseline and endline (Koster, Miedema et al., 2021).

Then did this lead to a sharing of the responsibility? There are some indications that this is the case. The end evaluation by UvA for example found that in all countries, apart from Senegal, a larger share of girls felt that they would be supported to negotiate with their parents on questions regarding their marriage. Furthermore *"At endline, most community leaders reported they opposed marriage for girls and boys below the legal age. Just a few leaders reported on circumstances under which they would agree to marriage of girls or boys under the legal age"* (Koster, Miedema et al., 2021).

In Ethiopia a nice example of this was seen in practice: *"community and religious leaders were able to shift their community's opinions against child marriage and other harmful practices and to support girls' education and women's well-being. In most target kebeles, leaders took responsibility in cancelling*

*cases of child marriage in consultation with the girls' parents. In some areas, community and religious leaders participate in locally established watch groups that serve as child protection committees and to see to it that girls have safe routes to and from school. And finally, traditional and religious leaders have created a movement to declare communities child marriage free" (Progress Report, 2019).*

It must be said that putting responsibility on the community does take time. And a shared responsibility does not necessarily lead to sustainable change as different factors play a role in the sustainability of outcomes (Focus group UvA). A Burkinabe partner shared that the people who were trained would sensitize others. However, they did expect that the men's attitude about gender equality may go back to like it was before (Burkina Faso). The sustainability of these gradual changes is not yet clear.

#### **A holistic approach for more sustainable income**

One of the factors that influences the sustainability of the outcomes are the broad range of drivers that fuel child marriage. These drivers and the holistic approach of the programme are extensively discussed in the relevance chapter. In that chapter we argue that the programme in theory and to a large extent in practice addressed the diverse drivers that lead to child marriage. This holistic nature of the programme is potentially also influential for its sustainability. The fact that the diverse drivers behind Child Marriage are (to a large part) successfully addressed means that drivers that would potentially reverse positive changes are (in part) already addressed.

The holistic approach was new to several partners. Partners reported in the End evaluation of the UvA that they had learned through the Her Choice programme that such an approach was needed to address the complexities of child marriage and gender norms in general (Koster, Miedema, et al., 2021).

#### **Some other factors that influence sustainability**

Two other factors were found in the set-up of the programme that are of influence for the sustainability of the programme:

- Exit strategy at community level // In the inception report it is noted that in communities where there is a strong community commitment to end child marriage, the alliance will lower the intensity of the work (Inception Report, 2016). It is not clear from the available documents whether this happened in practice.
- National embeddedness // Partners have built reference structures in the field of child protection in their respective countries and have teamed up as national Her Choice alliances. They have furthermore reached out to collaborate with other alliances, within countries and beyond. This has led to greater influencing capacity of national policy agendas. The Ethiopian Her Choice Alliance for example is becoming a strong and influential player (Progress Report, 2019).

## **5.2 Capacity building and sustainability**

### **Capacity building key for sustainability**

For two key Her Choice sustainability tactics, namely the holistic approach and a shared responsibility for the outcomes, capacity building was a crucial element for success.

Some partners had a limited comprehension of the importance of a holistic approach for a complex theme such as child marriage. Let alone experience in implementing such a holistic programme. Capacity building helped the team both realize the importance of such an approach and implement specific elements.

Helping communities take responsibility for the change was also a new process for some partners. The trainings helped them, not only bring their message across more forcefully, but truly mobilize the community to take their own actions towards change.

#### **Investing in capacity building**

At the beginning of the programme, or just before during the preparatory phase, the partners received a capacity assessment. Different tools were used to do this. The exact tool utilized was dependent on the Alliance member who had suggested the partner (e-mail exchange with Odilia van Manen). All the tools used had some basis in the 5c method – whether it was following that exactly (ICDI partners) or an

adapted version such as the PCAT (Kinderpostzegels). In the inception report it is noted that these tools will be used not only as a baseline, but also as a means to monitor the capacity of the partners (inception report). From the documentation that we received it seems that this monitoring has not taken place. We do see that the subjects of trainings and the issues discussed in linking and learning events are aligned with partners to fit their needs (Annual Plans, 2017, 2018, 2019).

The Alliance invested strongly in capacity building in multiple ways:

- Training of individual partners
- Training of multiple partners in a country
- Linking and learning event at a regional level
- Linking and learning events at global level (f.e. final event)

Subjects that were addressed in these learning events are very broad and range from:

- Trainings to increase thematic knowledge, such as SRHR, child protection
- Trainings on approaches, such as lobby and advocacy, microcredit and income generating activities, participatory activity design and Results Based Management
- Trainings for institutional strengthening, such as introduction of tools.
- Trainings focussed on research such as using visualization tools, data collection trainings and working with children as researchers (progress reports, final evaluation, partial training overview ICDI)

### Effects of capacity building

The capacity scans that took place at the beginning of the programme have not been repeated during the programme. We can thus not state on the basis of such assessments whether an improvement has taken place on the overall capacity of the partners.

What does become abundantly clear from both the final evaluation and the limited data collection that was done by Avance is that the capacity building was seen as useful by the partners. The final evaluation notes that partners report an increase in knowledge and skills on a plethora of subjects. From our data collection we see that 89% of the responding partners (18) reported that the investment in capacity building was to a great extent useful to their organisation. 11% of the organizations reported that the investment was somewhat useful.

We asked partners to provide a concrete example of a concrete capacity building activity that was important for them. Their answers as the trainings are broad. A few examples:

Lobby and advocacy training was named by four partners. The training on this subject was seen as crucial for reaching community and religious leaders. A Burkinabe partner noted that *"This allowed us to better organize our communications with community leaders in order to obtain their agreement to support the actions of the project."* A Malian partner noted that the trainings had helped in particular to define advocacy targets and messages. The partner did note that the time for this training was short and the lessons could have been better integrated with more time.

Two organizations named trainings that helped them improve at an organizational level. The tools provide *"allow us to meet requirements of donors"* and helped better formulate plans and expected results.

Several (6) organizations named trainings on thematic subjects such as women's leadership, maternity, and comprehensive sexual education. The organizations noted that the gained on these specific subjects helped them become agents of change. They could transfer the newly gained knowledge to other stakeholders. An example from a Malian partner; *"The team has been strengthened in the management of income-generating activities. In turn, she transferred this competence to the group of poor mothers. The beneficiaries of this training in the villages are in the process of managing their activity well. They take charge of their daughters' school fees with their profit."*

Linking and learning activities and specifically the peer-to-peer exchange was named as very helpful for enhancing practical learning within the alliance.

A final subject that was specifically named by the partners was the research capacity that was gained. Partners played an active role in the data collection for the monitoring and evaluation. Local researchers were contracted to coordinate the research, but members from each partner were actively involved in the research and trained extensively on data collection. Trainings took place surrounding the baseline, midline and final evaluation provided by UvA. Furthermore, more specific research related trainings were given throughout the programme. For example, working with children as

researchers by ICDI. In interviews surrounding the training for the data collection for the final evaluation partners indicated specifically that they had gained knowledge and skills on research. In our survey one partner indicated that they had been equipped with useful skills for monitoring with the help of mobile data. "Primary schools become a source of SRH information".

#### **Capacity building vs. perceived sustainability**

83% of the partners feel that capacity building has helped them to a great extent to reach more sustainable outcomes. 17% believe that this had helped the somewhat.

We see two crucial ways in which the investment in capacity building improved the potential sustainability of the programme. The investment made it possible to truly implement the key strategies to ensure the sustainability of the programme.

#### **Acknowledgment of the importance of a holistic approach**

Not all partners had worked on the subject of child marriage before and/or worked in a holistic fashion. Partners reported to the UvA at the endline evaluation that "They had learned the need for a holistic approach when addressing complex issues such as child marriage" (Koster, Miedema et al., 2021).

The subsequent capacity building efforts included within the programme was a way to ensure that the partners were able to implement the diverse strategies included in this holistic approach. A Bangladeshi partner for example noted that: "My team was capacitated on SRHR by ICDI that helped us to develop a training module for young boys and girls and build our capacity to facilitate the session on that. This contributed to increasing the knowledge of girls and boys."

On the basis of the available data, we cannot confirm with complete certainty to what level of quality the approach was implemented in each of the countries. However, on the basis of the available data we can see that six strategies were implemented in all the countries (except for Pakistan where strategy four was not implemented) (output overview). Furthermore, the UvA impact evaluation shows that to a large extent this has led to positive changes on all 6 strategies for the whole programme. An indication that the quality of implementation was indeed high.

#### **Working towards shared outcomes**

A large number of partners indicated that the trainings have helped them convince other stakeholders of the importance of banning child marriage. Partners noted that they were able to influence local leaders, political leaders and religious leaders due to the trainings on advocacy they received. We see from both the output data and the final evaluation of the UvA that this was effective. A high number of leaders were reached in all the countries (output data) and we saw an increase between baseline and endline in nearly all countries of community leaders that openly condemn CM (Koster, Miedema et al., 2021). Several partners furthermore noted that the trainings they received helped them to train teachers on SRHR.

The trainings thus seem to have helped partners reach a broader group of stakeholders for this issue. Furthermore, the trainings helped several partners work in a different way with stakeholders. Truly making them responsible for the effects.

*"Before the activities were done as between teachers and students but through capacity building, we understood that for lasting results we must let the community itself bring out its problem and then propose ways to remedy it, this accountability will be the certainty that even after us they will continue its implementation"* Malian partner, follow up survey

*"We are no longer limited to simply awareness raising – thanks to the training the mobilization of communities is much more real"* Burkinabe partner, follow up survey

We see from the output and outcome data that the partners have indeed been able to mobilize a broad range of stakeholders in the battle against child marriage. We can of course not make a comparison with what would have happened without the trainings. However, on the basis of the answers of the partners it seems that the investment in capacity building played an important role in achieving these shared outcomes.

## 5.3 Partners' perspective on sustainability

### Cautious optimism

Partners recognize that steps have been set throughout the programme to ensure sustainability. Creating sustainable change in such a complex and deep-rooted issue takes time, but they are cautiously optimistic. They are least optimistic of the sustainability of the change realized in boys and young men. The limited time spent working with them is an important cause of this lack of optimism. Partners do see that the effects of Corona may hamper the long-term outcomes of the programme.

Partners recognize that even though the programme comes to an end, work remains to be done. The majority of the partners will continue the work in some shape or form. Their efforts will often unfortunately be limited due to a lack of means.

As has become clear from the previous chapter and the extensive impact study by the UvA a positive impact has been created by the programme. To what extent do partners in the programme feel that the change is sustainable?

In this subchapter we reflect on the perspectives of the partners of the sustainability of the programme. We will reflect on two aspects of sustainability: firstly; we will share partners reflections on the sustainability of the outcomes. Secondly, we will zoom in on the sustainability of the activities. Will the partners continue the work, even as the programme comes to an end?

### Reflection on sustainability of impact

In a focus group facilitated by Avance, partners were asked to estimate how sustainable the effects were on different stakeholders. The partners were asked to score the sustainability of changes on a score from 1-10 for girls and young women, boys and men, and on the community. We also asked them to indicate how sustainable they thought the effects were on child marriage.

Results show that partners estimated that the effects on the girls and young women were most sustainable. The general indication for this high score was that the largest effort had gone in changes for this stakeholder.

The effects on boys and men were seen as the least sustainable. Multiple respondents in the focus groups indicated that they thought that the impact on boys and young men were less sustainable because the focussed work with this group was shorter and less intensive than on girls and young women. They felt that additional work would be necessary for the changes to truly take hold. As indicated in the relevance chapters, boys and young men were included in the programme from the beginning. However, the intensity and prevalence of their role increased significantly on the basis of recommendations in the midterm evaluation.

The expected sustainability of the impact on the community in general and child marriage were seen as cautiously positive.

From focus groups conducted by the UvA several key factors come to the foreground that are seen by the partners as important for the sustainability of the outcomes. For a large part they correspond to the tactics used by the broader programme:

### It takes time to change social norms and behaviour

Some of the partners indicate that they have doubts about the sustainability of the programme. Mostly because they indicate that it takes time to change harmful practices. Time is needed to change norms and attitudes on child marriage (and female genital mutilation).

Partners also mentioned that it takes time to truly cause a behavioural change and multiple factors need to be addressed. For example, some girls who, in theory, do not want to marry, will still do so because of the context they live in, such as extreme poverty.

### Building ownership and participatory approach help sustainability

Part of the programme's general approach on sustainability is built on local ownership. The partners recognize this as an important factor.



They shared several good examples of sustainability where the programme worked with existing structures and community leaders to try and build a sense of ownership.

Partners furthermore mentioned the participatory approach. Working towards self-reliance by involving the community and volunteers. They did note that truly shifting the responsibility in the community does take time.

Several partners indicated that not being able to support the community once the programme ends is difficult; *"It is like you have lighted a fire [of enthusiasm in the community] but then cannot help to keep it going."* (Senegal, Focus Group UvA).

#### **Other aspects**

Some of the structures that are put into place are already autonomously functioning and therefore more sustainable. Examples were given by partners such as hairdressing salons and catering that were set up with (local authorities were involved) in Senegal. Girls' groups, women groups, community workers will stay in place but continue to need support in Mali. In Benin some women's groups are connected to micro-finance organisations and women savings groups that are autonomous. For some of these structures additional financial means are still seen as necessary for their survival.

In the focus group it also came to the foreground that some interventions were more sustainable because the government was involved. Think for example of awareness raising in communities or programmes are institutionalised with local governments (Focus Group UvA).

#### **The negative effects of Corona**

The last year of programme was implemented in the context of the global pandemic. The majority of the partners (72%) feel that the current pandemic will have a negative influence on the long-term outcomes of the programme. Several partners for example reported seeing a strong increase in the number of child marriages in their communities during COVID.

The partners saw several ways in which the pandemic played a negative role for the long-term outcomes:

1. Interventions in the final year of the programme were hampered. Reduced contact made it more difficult to monitor the situation of girls and awareness raising activities were more limited (survey). What does stand out from the monitoring data is that the pandemic notwithstanding a lot of activities were still able to take place.
2. The pandemic, like other humanitarian crises, amplifies the negative drivers for child marriage. The slowdown of economic activities for example increases the economic issues that families face.
3. Schools have been closed for significant periods of time. Partners indicated that this in itself has led to more cases of child marriage. Furthermore, several partners noted that they were doubtful whether girls would go back to school again once schools are reopened.
4. With the closure of society people spent more time at home and an increase was seen of violence against girls and young women. Instances of rape increased as well, which may directly lead to cases of child marriage

On the basis of the answers of the partners, and our overall analysis (chapter 3) it is very likely that the pandemic hampered the sustainability of the outcomes of the programme. The long-term effects of the pandemic cannot yet be seen.

#### **We are in the middle of the journey**

Partners by no means feel that the issues of child marriage have been resolved in their country are quite aware that problems remain (Focus Group UvA).

An Ethiopian partner formulated it as follows *"Considering the high prevalence of child marriage in Ethiopia, there is still a lot to be done. I feel we are in the middle of the journey in our efforts to achieve the four effect or impact areas mentioned above."*

Work thus remains. In the additional survey partners were asked whether they think their organization will continue their work/ the activities they were doing for the Her Choice programme (N=18).



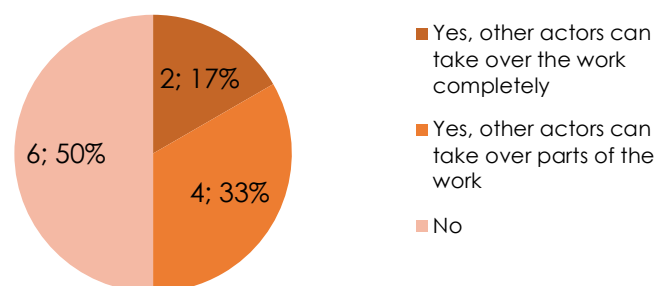
22.22% of the organizations indicated that indeed they would continue the work that they were doing throughout the programme. The way in which they will continue differs:

- Two partners in Bangladesh and Burkina Faso indicate that they have integrated the activities under the banner of Her Choice into their core strategies and will thus continue the work.
- A partner in Uganda indicates that they have made an agreement with the District Local Governments to continue the work on ending child marriage.
- A partner in Ethiopia indicates that they will continue the work in the geographic areas in which Her Choice worked

Two thirds of the partners indicate that they will continue some parts of the Her Choice work. Several of them indicate that the amount that they will be able to do is limited due to budgetary restrictions. The continued work seems to focus on supporting the community structures and youth groups that have been set up during the programme (60% of the organizations). *"Child Protection Committees and youth groups will continue work on their own. Bedari will facilitate them where and where needed."* They indicate that they will continue to visit the locations and collaborate/provide support. Three organizations do not go into specifics of what part of the work they will continue.

Two partners indicated that the work that they had done under the Her Choice banner will not continue. Financial means are the most important reason that the activities will be halted.

We asked the organizations that cannot continue or that will continue some parts of the work whether there are other actors active in their region that could potentially continue the work that has been done by Her Choice. The graph below shows their answers.



Half of the organizations do not see any other actor that could continue their work. A third of the organizations indicate that there are actors available that could take over part of their role. The involvement of other (governmental) actors throughout the programme has been relevant for this. Interestingly the partners that indicated that actors could take over their work mostly concerns partners from Ethiopia. Several examples are provided of actors that could take over part of the role. An Ethiopian partner indicates that a taskforce has been set up at district level. A Pakistani and Ethiopian partner indicate that the community groups and youth groups that were set up may continue their work. One partner indicated that there are other groups active that work to ensure girls' rights.

To summarize – the majority of the partners will to some extent continue the work of the Her Choice Alliance. Multiple partners indicate that the community groups that were set up throughout the programme will be good partners in this or will even continue the work without them. The extent to which partners are able to continue their work is largely subject to the extent of their budget.

## 5. Conclusions

The conclusions have been sprinkled throughout the chapters in textboxes. Here you can read them all.

Within this evaluation we looked at the following questions:

Relevance	
EQ1	How does the HC Theory of Change and intended outcomes align with the overall SRHR policy of the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the SRHR-partnership programme?
EQ2	In what ways has the HC programme contributed to attaining the SRHR related policy objectives of the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the SRHR-partnership programme?
EQ3	What were the original vision and objectives of HC partners with regard to the needs of target populations?
EQ4	How has the HC programme contributed to addressing needs and/or fulfilling rights of the Her Choice target populations?
Effectiveness	
EQ5	Which output and (intermediate) outcome targets were set at inception of HC programme?
EQ6	Which targets have been achieved?
EQ7	What were facilitating and inhibiting factors for achieving programme targets?
Sustainability	
EQ8	How has the programme sought to ensure sustainability of (intermediate) outcomes and impacts?
EQ9	How has capacity building of local partners within the context of the Her Choice programme contributed to sustainability of the programme and outcomes?
EQ10	What are local partner perspectives regarding sustainability of programme outcomes and impacts?

### Relevance // A highly relevant programme

We explored the relevance of the Her Choice programme from three different angles. 1) a top-down angle using MFA's policy framework as the lens, 2) the urgency of the issue by reflecting on its prevalence and 3) the drivers and needs of the population as a final lens. Through each of these lenses the programme shows a high level of relevance.

#### MFA lens // A near perfect fit with MFA's SRHR policy

The Her Choice programme addresses all four SRHR results areas of MFA's SRHR policy framework, whereas the ministry expected HCs' efforts to at a minimum specifically contribute to two results areas. Both in theory and in practice. The work of the alliance aligns most strongly with results area 1 concerning young people. The Her Choice programme is thus highly relevant from the perspective of MFA's SRHR policy.

#### Urgency lens // Addressing a severe and prevalent issue

Child marriage is a severe issue that clearly merits solving. The Her Choice alliance has chosen to work on solving this issue in ten countries in Asia and Africa. The prevalence of child marriage in these countries is diverse, but generally quite high. In Ghana, the country with the lowest prevalence, still 1 in 5 girls is married before they are 18. The alliance thus seems to work on a relevant issue in relevant countries.

#### Drivers and needs lens // A holistic approach to address a complex phenomenon

Child marriage is a complex phenomenon with a multitude of underlying drivers. The Her Choice alliance has gone through extensive steps to properly map and contextualize the diverse factors that drive the practice. The holistic programmatic approach that was chosen by Her Choice responds to this

complexity and ensures that core drivers are addressed. Several intermingling strategies are used to address key drivers such as poverty, religion and social/gender norms.

The holistic approach chosen seems very relevant for addressing the core drivers of child marriage.

## **Effectiveness // Outcome and impact targets generally achieved – mixed results on output target**

In our evaluation we focus specifically on the output and outcome targets that were set throughout the programme and whether they were reached. It is thus more a reflection of the way that the programme's impact was managed than a reflection of the overall effectiveness of the programme.

For the two Impact level indicators that had targets and were measured at end line the targets were reached or nearly reached in the majority of the programme countries. Outcome level targets were set after the baseline study was finished. These targets have generally been reached in the majority of the countries. There are two notable exceptions for the indicators concerning the single girls that feel that they can oppose FGM, and girls visiting SRHR services. Reaching the targets for these outcomes proved difficult in the majority of countries. Notably, for strategy four no outcome level targets were set. It is not clear why these targets were not set.

Targets at intermediate level were only set for one indicator and achieved by the majority of countries. Not setting targets for the other intermediate outcomes seems to be a missed opportunity. Targets at this level would have been useful for actively managing for more impact throughout the implementation of the programme.

Output targets were set yearly in collaboration with the partners. Output targets related the strategies working to increase girls' control in decision-making (1,2,3) were most easily reached throughout the duration of the programme. For the most of these indicators the majority of countries was able to do so. The output targets that were set for the strategies concerning greater decision-making space for girls within communities (4,5,6) proved more difficult to reach. A smaller share of the countries was able to regularly reach the targets that they had set for themselves. Target setting at output level seems to have been quite ambitious. We see for example multiple moments where targets were not met the first year by a long shot and the targets in subsequently being increased the next year. For future programming it would be relevant to work on more realistic output target setting.

### Alliance strategies play into key facilitating factors

Four facilitating factors were selected by partners as being key for the effectiveness of the programme:

5. Involvement of the community, including boys and men (82,3%)
6. Exchange of knowledge and experience between partners nationally (56,1%)
7. Involvement of traditional/religious leaders (53,7%)
8. Involvement of (local) authorities (51,2%)

These factors neatly correspond with the strategies/approach of the alliance. Each of these factors was to an extent included in the set-up of the programme from the start.

Particularly for the involvement boys and men we see that the alliance reflected upon this factor around the mid-term and subsequently harnessed it with greater intent and intensity.

### Key drivers of child marriage as inhibiting factors

Three inhibiting factors were selected by partners as being key for the effectiveness of the programme:

4. Deep rooted traditions
5. Poverty, illiteracy and other social economic issues
6. Insufficient budget

Particularly the first two inhibiting factors were also identified by the programme as key drivers of child marriage. The programme is set up to address these factors, but nevertheless addressing these complex causes remains difficult.

## Sustainability // Cautious optimism for the sustainability of the programme

The Her Choice Alliance integrated several sustainability focused tactics in their approach. The investment in the capacity of the partner organizations made it possible to implement these tactics in practice.

### Strong investment in sustainability

The Her Choice alliance has employed multiple tactics to ensure the sustainability of both the programme's approach and outcomes.

Key elements of the sustainability approach were:

4. A shared ownership of the programme. Not a top-down approach, but rather a close collaboration with strong national partners which leads to an embedded approach.
5. A shared ownership of the outcomes, where not only girls are responsible for the changes, but the entire community is involved.
6. A holistic approach, which (potentially) mitigate some of the diverse drivers that may lead to a reversal of the achieved outcomes.

### Capacity building key for sustainability

For two key Her Choice' sustainability tactics, namely the holistic approach and a shared responsibility for the outcomes, capacity building was a crucial element for success.

Some partners had a limited comprehension of the importance of a holistic approach for a complex theme such as child marriage. Let alone experience in implementing such a holistic programme. Capacity building helped the team both realize the importance of such an approach and implement specific elements.

Helping communities take responsibility for the change was also a new process for some partners. The trainings helped them, not only bring their message across more forcefully, but truly mobilize the community to take their own actions towards change.

### Cautious optimism

Partners recognize that steps have been set throughout the programme to ensure sustainability. Creating sustainable change in such a complex and deep-rooted issue takes time, but they are cautiously optimistic. They are least optimistic of the sustainability of the change realized in boys and young men. The limited time spent working with them is an important cause of this lack of optimism. Partners do see that the effects of Corona may hamper the long-term outcomes of the programme.

Partners recognize that, even though the programme comes to an end, work remains to be done. The majority of the partners will continue the work in some form. Their efforts are often unfortunately limited due to a lack of means.

## 6. Recommendations

### Process level recommendations

The following recommendations concern the monitoring process and implementation of the Her Choice programme. These recommendations are particularly relevant for the alliance members and partners in their future endeavours but may also be relevant for other organizations.

1. Set more realistic output targets by reflecting on the achievements of the previous year.
2. Set targets and monitor progress at intermediate outcome level. This level is closer to your sphere of control and insight at this level provides you with more opportunities to improve your approach during implementation.
3. Replace and refine dropped indicators throughout programme implementation. This is important from a results management perspective.
4. To further validate your strategic framework, ensure that you set targets for all relevant strategies.
5. Capacity building played an important role for the implementation of the sustainability strategy of the Her Choice programme. Where possible and relevant invest in capacity building and continue working with the partners whose capacity was strengthened.

### Good practices

The following four good practices were distilled from the Her Choice programme. These good practices are relevant for any organization or alliance that works to address child marriage.

1. The holistic approach employed by the Her Choice Alliance was crucial for the relevance, effectiveness and sustainability of the programme. For future programmes it is relevant to follow their example by addressing child marriage in a holistic way; strengthening girls themselves, but also referral mechanisms and targeting the significant adults around girls: parents, teachers, community and religious leaders, health workers and authorities
2. Continuously monitor contextual changes and assumptions underlying your strategy, to effectively address developing drivers and mitigate inhibiting factors.
3. Ensure that male community members participate in an active way from the start of the programme. As we've learned from the Her Choice programme, their role is crucial for change.
4. Consider including more than one partner in each country. When it comes to linking and learning in the Her Choice programme, national level collaboration was very highly appreciated.

## Annex 1: References

### Studies conducted by UvA

Title	Year (of publication)	Author(s)
Final baseline report her choice	2017	Dr. Winny Koster, Dr. Esther Miedema, Katie Hodgkinson, Dr. Nicky Pouw, Philippe Meyer
Final Midline evaluation	2019	Dr. Winny Koster, Dr. Esther Miedema, Albena Sotirova, Dr. Nicky Pouw, Philippe Meyer
Group interviews partners (Summary + full reports per region)	2020	UvA
Impact Evaluation Report – On 5 years of 'Her Choice: Building child-marriage free communities'	2021	Dr. Winny Koster, Dr. Esther Miedema, Albena Sotirova, Dr. Nicky Pouw, Philippe Meyer

### Documentation Her Choice alliance & partners

Title	Year (of publication)	Author(s)
Inception report Her Choice Building Child Marriage Free Communities	2016	Odilia van Manen (on behalf of Her Choice Alliance)
Her Choice scoping study final - Understanding and addressing child marriage	2016	Katie Hodgkinson (commissioned by the Amsterdam Institute of Social Science Research of UvA)
Her Choice output results	2017 - 2020	Reported by country partners
Annual Progress Reports	2016 - 2019	Her Choice alliance – based on country reports
Annual Plans	2017 - 2020	Her Choice alliance
Her Choice Track Record	2020	Her Choice

### External literature and sources

Title	Year (of publication)	Author(s)
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Religious Legal Traditions, Muslim States and the Convention on the Rights of the Child: An Essay on the Relevant UN Documentation. Human Rights Quarterly 29(1), pp. 194 – 227.	2007	Hashemi, K.

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