



HER
CHOICE

APRIL 2020

ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT 2019

HER CHOICE

BUILDING CHILD MARRIAGE FREE COMMUNITIES



KINDERPOSTZEGELS
voor kinderen door kinderen



International Child
Development Initiatives



Ministry of Foreign Affairs

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1. INTRODUCTION

This Annual Progress Report shows that the joint efforts of local implementing partners and (Netherlands based) alliance members of the Her Choice Alliance are leading to promising results. Activities have been carried out as scheduled, young people, teachers, traditional leaders and many other stakeholders have been equipped to carry out decisive steps to obtain sustainable impact of the Her Choice programme by the end of 2020.

The compilation of reports of 30 partners from 10 countries, of which this report is an extract, shows that immense progress has been made in the field of amplifying voices of girls and boys, of consolidating cooperation with local leaders and of maintaining and strengthening relationships and advocacy with (local) governments. This is also reflected in chapters 9 and 10, where examples are shown of ways to mitigate challenges and of lessons learnt during the past year.

Now that we seem to be heading for a solid finale in this closing programme year, Her Choice, like the rest of the world, is hit by the Covid-19 pandemic. Although this is certainly a setback of as yet unknown proportions, the effect of the programme's extensive training and capacity building seems to be that partners, young people and many other stakeholders take control and act proactively - needless to say, in full compliance with local rules and leadership. Despite the crisis we therefore believe that we will be able to continue our work in an adapted, resourceful manner, and with much compassion for those affected.¹ Whether we will be able to fully achieve the aimed objectives under these circumstances, however, remains a concern. This concern also includes meeting the deadline for the Endline and End of Term Evaluation. In the coming month we plan to consult the ministry about this in order to come to an adjusted plan.

Strengthened by the hands-on experience of implementation in barren and remote areas in vulnerable states, we feel equipped to continue our work - which seems to gain even more urgency in the coming years. We are grateful to our partnership with the Ministry that has enabled the achievements described in this report. We very much hope to continue this successful collaboration in the future.



2. CONTEXT ANALYSIS

This chapter gives an overview of the enabling environment and larger context for NGOs addressing child marriage in all programme countries: to what extent the (political) situation has changed and which developments have taken place in the 'room to move' for the implementing partners.

Bangladesh

The previous government has regained its power after a violent election process in December 2018. Since then the political situation has worsened because of shrinking democratic space, the breaking down of the rule of law and a high prevalence of corruption across the country. Despite a fairly strong legal and policy framework dealing with early and forced child marriages, due to this situation child marriage is not decreasing as expected. Besides socio-cultural factors, it has been observed that other factors encourage child marriage, such as: corruption of local marriage registrars, lack of monitoring by local government administration, tampering with (girls') ages in birth registration index, late marriage registration and inadequate implementation of legal measures. In the Her Choice intervention areas, efforts to combat such situations continue. Positive outcomes have been produced through strengthening civil society and raising voices against child marriage. However, further deterioration of the political situation may eventually

¹ See also our letter to the Ministry of 2 April 2020, in which we propose the continuation of our work in times of Covid-19.

effect the programme's objectives. A contingency plan is being prepared to deal with disruptions caused by political instability.

Benin

In 2019, measures taken by the state against sexual abuse in schools resulted in the publication of the number of pregnancies registered in schools and the suspension of teachers who were involved in sexual abuse. Furthermore, the institutional environment for the protection of children's rights has been consolidated by the establishment of the National Partnership to Combat Child Marriage with support of the Dutch Embassy. This Partnership now leads the technical and financial partners of the Gender and Social Protection Group, THP-Benin being a member of its Gender-Based Violence Sub-Group. The pilot phase to introduce Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) into the formal education system has started with the teacher training coordinated by *l'Institut National d'Ingénierie, de Formation et de Renforcement des Capacités des Formateurs (INIFRCF)*, a department of the Ministry of Secondary Education. This pilot will continue in 2020 and will include experimenting CSE in extracurricular settings.

Burkina Faso

The recognition in May 2019 of the National Commission on Child Marriage in Burkina (CONAMEB) as the national chapter of Girls Not Brides, represents a major step in joint efforts against child marriage in Burkina, and strongly galvanises the efforts of actors in their work. Another important milestone was the declaration against child marriage, the 'Fatwa of Al-Azhar', by a highly respected Islamic leader during the African Summit against Child Marriage in Dakar, in June 2019. Because of a more pro-active response of the government, there has been a slight improvement of the general safety situation in Burkina compared to 2018. However, the safety situation is far from being under control. Pockets of resistance in the Sahel and the eastern regions remain to be worrisome and the provinces of Sanmatenga and Sourou have been targets of terrorist activities. Mitigation measures have been implemented by Her Choice, such as continuing community activities through focal points in villages and by relocating training to safe places or to other regions.

Ethiopia

The major political development in the country that brought about a more enabling environment for the proper implementation of the programme, is the coming to power of the new prime minister and the subsequent revision of the civil society agency (CSA) law. This revised law enables CSOs to develop and implement rights-based programming. Another major development is the progress in the development of the National Road Map and Strategy addressing Child Marriage. This strategy was developed and finalised for its implementation by the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs in close participation and consultation with the Her Choice programme partners. Recently, Ethiopia has embarked on an educational reform programme, known as the Ethiopian Education Development Roadmap. The implementation of the programme will involve immediate stakeholders in the education sector, from pre-school to higher education level, to boost girls' education in the country. If this Roadmap is properly implemented, it will enable girls to stay in school and reduce child marriage rates. As a result of NGOs advocacy efforts, including those of Her Choice partners, the Ministry of Education has made the important decision to integrate CSE within the official curriculum. This will add to the sustainability of delivering CSE in schools by the Her Choice programme. Increased efforts of the local government structures, especially women and children's affairs offices, resulted in their mandate to directly intervene, mobilise and coordinate on the livelihood improvement of women, girls and children. This enabling environment supports a smooth implementation of the Her Choice programme. In the Sidama Zone, people will soon vote on forming a new regional state. Due to protests and riots in Sidama, the Her Choice work in that region was negatively affected as the schools and government structures and offices were closed.



Ghana

The political situation in Ghana was very peaceful during the year, which resulted in a smooth implementation of project activities in the Her Choice working regions. The government, through the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, brought stakeholders together in two major meetings to discuss budgetary allocation on child marriage, as well as reviewed the national implementation plan on ending child marriage.

Mali

The presentation of the National Programme for the Abandonment of Gender-Based Violence (PNVBG) on July 3, 2019 presented an opportunity for Her Choice programme implementation. This Programme will allow, on the one hand, to better coordinate interventions and, on the other hand, propel actions in favor of the law on Gender Based Violence. The launch of the SPOTLIGHT initiative by the United Nations Trust Fund on the Reduction of Sexual and Gender-based Violence presents an additional opportunity for implementation of the Her Choice programme. The country continues to deal with political unrest and insecurity, especially in the northern and central region of Mali. As a result, hundreds of thousands of persons have been internally displaced. Educational strikes by teachers asking for better labour conditions continue to take place. Besides these strikes, there have hardly been circumstances in the programme areas that hampered implementation. If necessary, community members, including religious leaders, health extension workers, teachers, school principals and young people, involved in organising alternatives.

Nepal

During 2019, the country was in a stable socio-political situation with governments that are supportive of policies benefiting vulnerable and marginalised groups and that is conscious of issues concerning women and girls. The Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizens (MOWCSC) has declared 2019/20 the Year Against Gender-Based Violence (GBV). In collaboration with civil society, the Ministry has organised various events in all 7 provinces to create public awareness on issues faced by women and girls. In addition, the Ministry of Youth and Sports has declared the year 2019/20 the Youth Mobilisation Year, with special focus on girls; the Federal Government has declared 16 Jestha (usually May 31st) as National Women's Day, which this year was celebrated in a grand way, including massive participation from stakeholders; the Federal Parliament has amended the Regulation on the Fund for Elimination of GBV; and the MOWCSC has endorsed the Costed Implementation Plan to End Child Marriage throughout the nation. Due the Her Choice programme, the Nepalgunj Municipality of Banke District has endorsed the Strategy to End Gender Based Violence, as well as the Action Plan to Eliminate Child Marriage 2018/19 – 2023/24; the Bakaiya Rural Municipality of Makwanpur District is in the process to declare it a child friendly rural municipality; and the Government of Province no. 1 has launched a focused programme with the objective to end all forms of child marriage in the province by 2025.

Pakistan

The current government has made education, child protection, population control and inclusion of persons with disabilities (PWDs) its policy priorities. Her Choice partner Bedari is utilising this window to collaborate with the government on addressing Child Marriage and on Child Protection. A new and promising governmental initiative is the provision of loan facilities for marginalised groups including women and PWDs. The bill to raise the age of marriage to 18 is passed by the law committee and will soon be tabled for enactment in the provincial assembly of Punjab. The strict stance of the government towards NGOs and INGOs in the recent years still has significant impact on civil society. Especially NGOs working on women's issues, SRHR and human rights are facing serious challenges. Good news, however, is that in January 2020 the government finally signed the MoU for Bedari after a long process of lobbying at all levels.



Senegal

The year 2019 was marked by the presidential elections held on 24 February 2019. Subsequently, Senegal has integrated the issue of child marriage into its child protection policy as well as into the Emerging Senegal Plan II. A workshop to develop a National Action Plan on Child Marriage was organised from December 16 - 19 by the Ministry of Women, Family, Gender and Child Protection (MFFGPE). Finally, Senegal hosted the 1st African Summit on Female Genital Mutilation and Child Marriage under the umbrella of the MFFGPE and in collaboration with UN Women, The World Bank, UNFPA, Safe Hands for Girls and the African Union, which brought together 17 African countries. These events have enhanced the enabling environment for the Her Choice programme.

Uganda

The current civic space on SRHR service delivery has remained fragile since May 2018, when the Government of Uganda through the Ministry of Education and Sports launched the National Sexuality Education Framework. Since then, heated debates have taken place, with religious leaders at their forefront, on the effects of the national framework in terms of upholding what are referred to as Ugandan values and morals. Uganda's society holds very traditional values based on its religious and cultural belief system, which are clearly reflected in the current policies and laws. This environment has presented a significant bottleneck in implementing the Her Choice programme, especially regarding Strategy I, II and III. To resolve this issue, THP has engaged and trained religious and cultural leaders and institutions, some of which have become change champions in ending child marriage. However, during the ICPD conference in Nairobi (November 2019), President Museveni of Uganda reiterated Uganda's commitment to uphold and support gender equality and fulfill the ICPD targets set out in Cairo 25 years ago. The president further announced Uganda's commitment to promote universal access to all methods of family planning, complemented by increased financial support for reproductive health and commodities. Finally, the president announced that Uganda will operationalise a national sexuality education policy framework, by providing a national formal direction for age-appropriate and culturally sensitive education in Uganda's schools.



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3. ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

This chapter shows a summary of the progress towards objectives of the two main goals of the partnerships: result area 1 and/or 4 of the Dutch SRHR policy, on the basis of the outcome indicators of the six strategies of Her Choice.

*Under **Progress towards results**, an indication is given of achieved results in 2019 of each strategy, based on observations of implementing partners (country reports) and on output results (see **Output results 2019**).*

*Under **Changes to the original planning**, budget deviations of more than 25% per strategy are explained.²*

3.1. Strategy I

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.

Implementation

In **all programme countries**, life skills and leadership training for girls and boys, as well as regular meetings of adolescent clubs (girls, boys or mixed) have been carried out, in order to strengthen knowledge and skills in the field of SRHR, to provide information on the (negative) effects of child marriage (and if relevant FGM), to improve self-confidence and to provide skills in peer education and counselling. THP **Bangladesh**, for instance, realised a powerful documentary screening, a holiday camp and a Vision Commitment and Action workshop for youth units for this purpose. In **Ethiopia**, targeted adolescents have completed their CSE 'Meharebe' sessions and realised a youth-led exhibition by in-school and out-of-school communities. The essence of friendship, communication, and future goals were among the highlighted topics raised and discussed. As a strategic measure, THP **Uganda** put special effort in supporting peer educators in the various Her Choice programme schools - as a sustainable mechanism but also to prepare them for collaboration with youth-led and youth servicing organisations.



Changes to the original planning (see Annex I – Financial Report)

Overspending:

- Based on the results of the mid-term evaluation, which identified gaps in the knowledge of SRHR for girls in **Senegal**, training activities under Strategy I were topped up to fill in those gaps and enhance girls' knowledge. This led to an additional investment of 102% compared to the original budget.

Progress towards result

- **Girls increasingly show self-confidence in expressing their views in community meetings/rallies**

All implementing partners report that the number of adolescent girls and boys who show confidence and self-esteem has increased significantly in 2019. They have gained influencing and negotiation skills and improved their problem-solving capacity. Young people are actively participating in community meetings, processions and rallies, and are able to confidently express themselves and raise awareness on negative impacts of child marriage, FGM and other SRHR and gender issues. They express their opinion in clear messages, address SRHR issues among peer groups, siblings and parents, and support peers who are victims of harmful practices. Girls and

² For countries where more than one alliance member is involved, the member is mentioned to which this applies.

boys organise and manage events at village level, initiate door-to-door campaigns, and express themselves through sport competitions, street & marketplace shows, drama, poems and other creative means. They address decision makers at local, regional and even at national level during events like international Women's and Girls' days.

In **Burkina Faso**, the national conference of youth club members that took place in December and brought together over 160 girls and boys, was a strong example of the girls' (and boys') drive, and their ability to speak out fearlessly and claim their rights in public. Through their engagement with the **Nepalese** governmental campaign against gender based violence, Her Choice partner CWIN gave visibility to its National Integrated Adolescent Girls' Forum, which has been included in the organising committee. The Adolescent Adolescent Girls' Forum submitted a 30-point demand paper to the Minister of Women, Children and Senior Citizens, Ms. Tham Maya Thapa. In **Pakistan**, the training on the Children as Observers (or Youth-led research) method raised the confidence of girls. They are now speaking up for their rights and convince parents that child marriage is not the best option for them. They also manage events on their own. Girls presented their research findings to local opinion makers and district managers who vowed to provide support for addressing these issues, and to policy makers including the governor of Punjab. In **Uganda**, Her Choice had the opportunity to test its strategy, when one of its peer educators moderated the National Girls Summit 2019 and another was a panellist for the ICPD youth satellite event in Kampala. This demonstrated how the programme has nurtured girls to build their confidence and claim their rights, even at (inter)national level.

"We can also organise and manage the event very well. We the girls must come forward and make our space"

"No one can identify the children's issues but only us, thus we should highlight our issues and present them to the adults"

Shazia (17) from Vehari and Talal (15) from Chakwal, Pakistan



- Girls have an increased knowledge on negative effects of CM/FGM³ and knowledge and skills to claim their SRHR

In all programme countries, partners report that the trained girls and boys have increased their knowledge and awareness of the negative effects of child marriage, early pregnancy, FGM (if applicable), and of the legal conditions for marriage. Girls have improved skills to claim their SRHR as shown in the examples below, also in public spaces.

Standing up against marriage

Partners from **all programme countries** report that a growing number of girls and boys are capable of taking the decision if, when and whom to marry. They are increasingly confident to oppose child marriage and to protect themselves and peers from it. Sometimes they do this by reporting cases to schoolteachers, project officers, child helplines and local police, or by seeking refuge at counselling centres or social welfare services. In **Bangladesh**, for instance, Dalit reports that their youth community team collaborates with law enforcing agencies in reporting incidents of any (forced) early marriage. And THP reports that a total of 257 child marriages has been halted through actions by youth units and community, including trained girls who were able to halt their own arranged marriages. Additionally, a significant number of girls and boys took oath not to marry before 18.

³ In countries where FGM is practiced.

Claiming their SRHR and refusing unprotected and unwanted sex

Partners from **Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, Mali, Pakistan** and **Senegal** report that girls' skills in claiming their SRHR are enhancing. Moreover, girls are better in promoting their SRHR, and strengthen each other through discussion sessions with peers. An increased number of adolescents and married girls visit health facilities for family planning services and treatment of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), sometimes accompanied by their mothers or partners (see also Strategy III). THP **Ghana** reports that girls and boys in the programme areas visit adolescent corners at least once a month to learn about adolescent issues SRHR and how they can protect themselves. They can access services on contraceptives and any health challenges they face. Partners from **Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Mali, Ethiopia, Nepal** and **Senegal** report that an increasing number of girls feels more confident to oppose sexual harassment, and to protect themselves from unwanted and unprotected sexual relations. Also, young people in general are increasingly standing up against sexual abuse, and refer such cases to teachers, counsellors and/or police. Additionally, partners from **Ethiopia** report an improvement of health and wellbeing of girls in programme areas because of Her Choice.

Claiming their right to education

Partners from **Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Ghana, Mali** and **Pakistan** report that an increased number of girls, including married and divorced girls, claim their right to (continue their) education. In **Mali**, for instance, girls encourage the reintegration of their out-of-school peers. They denounce cases of school dropouts and mobilise for their return to school.

3.2. Strategy II

Improve access to formal education for girls, in order to get as many girls to school and minimise drop out.

Implementation

In **all programme counties**, a range of activities has been carried out to improve girls' and boys' access to school and to minimise their dropout. Strategies to motivate girls, boys and their parents to seriously invest in schooling may include: providing insight on the long-term benefits of education through girls' clubs and parent meetings; deployment of inspiring role models; providing scholarships for the poorest families; dropout monitoring; sexual harassment prevention committees/teachers patrolling against eve teasing; providing alternative education spaces to reinforce students in risk of dropping out and/or to reintegrate students. Partners in **Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, Mali, Nepal, Pakistan, Senegal** and **Uganda** have been training teachers to improve their comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) skills, and have been working on the improvement of girl-friendliness of schools.

Changes to the original planning (see Annex I – Financial Report)

Overspending:

- In **Pakistan**, last year's savings (caused by exchange rate fluctuations) were utilised to additionally invest (28%) in the most successful activities of Strategy II.
- To obtain the authorization of the government in **Benin** to provide CSE in and out-of-school, staff has spent more time on this strategy than expected. Furthermore, based on the lessons learnt from the linking and learning meeting in June, THP Benin decided to evaluate the girl-friendliness of schools by making use of the visualization tools. This resulted in an additional investment of 58% compared to the original budget.

Progress towards result

- Increase in % of girls 12-<18 enrolled in primary and secondary school



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- Increase in % of girls regularly attending formal education

Partners from **all programme countries** report that enrolment and regular attendance of girls in primary and secondary schools has significantly increased. Additionally, improvement of academic results of the targeted students, sometimes as a result of tutorial support to low performing students, has been noticed. THP **Bangladesh** reports that activities to increase enrolment and retention resulted in reduced dropout rate by 24% of girls compared to 2018 according to the annual school survey. In addition, 590 girls who previously dropped out returned to school. In **Burkina Faso**, awareness-raising activities helped to increase primary school enrollment rate by 35% compared to 2016. However, a drop-down of 9% was experienced in the areas of Touguan, Kougoussi, Ouahigouya and Kaya due to the security situation. THP **Ghana** reports that sensitisation through the Her Choice school clubs instilled motivation in girls and boys to make schooling their outmost priority. Several countries report that safe transportation for girls to (secondary) school improved by girls travelling by bicycle. Bedari (**Pakistan**) reports that girls attending school by bicycle now has become the benchmark. Many parents are purchasing bicycles for their daughters as a result of their promotions. THP **Bangladesh** reports that 4.142 girls now go to school by bike!

- Increase in % of schools that are girl-friendly

In the implementation areas of **all programme countries**, schools have increased girl-friendly measures such as: clean, separate toilets, safe spaces for girls to rest and freshen up, water points, dignity toolkits containing relevant information materials, sanitary pads, installation of suggestion boxes, and SRHR counselors or focal points. In order to improve girl friendliness, partners in **Benin, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Mali, Pakistan and Senegal** have successfully implemented the Her Choice visualisation tool 'Assessing Girl Friendly Schools'⁴, which was developed for this purpose by Alliance members UvA and ICDI, in collaboration with implementing partners. In **Nepal**, in addition to the programme's interventions, the Ministry of Social Development of Province 3 (Makwanpur) has endorsed the legal procedure to distribute sanitary pads in all schools.

- Teachers are increasingly able to teach about SRHR

Teachers and sometimes school leaders **in all programme countries** have worked on the improvement of their comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) skills and to provide an adolescent-friendly environment. This includes awareness of the responsibility to provide quality CSE, including all information on SRHR, in order to enable students to make their own informed decisions. But also, to support students to continue their studies, to ensure that their rights are respected and protected, and to prevent abuse and harassment. In a number of cases, teacher support groups or counsellors, with whom students can share their concerns confidentially, have been established in schools. In **Burkina Faso**, monitoring visits to Her Choice schools by multidisciplinary teams, consisting of Her Choice partners, SRHR experts and representatives from the Ministry of Education, resulted in capacity building of teachers, especially in regard to methods of communication with children on sexuality, which has always been a very sensitive issue in project intervention areas. In **Ghana**, an assessment on how teachers handle CSE lessons in schools revealed that teachers have appreciably increased in knowledge, skills and approaches in teaching CSE. In **Senegal**, all trained teachers in Kolda, Tambacounda and Bounkiling improved their CSE skills, using the training manual built on joint materials and experience from the four Francophone Her Choice countries. In **Uganda**, Her Choice focal teachers were trained on the national sexuality education policy framework. This enabled them to show the facts around these issues and thus helped to break the myth created by the media that the framework was about promoting immorality in schools.



⁴ http://www.her-choice.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/GFS-Tool_FINAL-1206-new-author-contact.pdf

3.3. Strategy III

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.

Implementation

In all programme countries, implementing partners have collaborated with health centres, clinics and local governments in order to refresh training and further sensitise health workers on the provision of counselling and guidance on SRHR issues to young people, while respecting their safety, confidentiality and privacy. Referral systems to health centres within schools and communities, as well as links to teachers and local leaders, have been further established and strengthened. Partner organisations from **Benin, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Mali, Pakistan** and **Senegal** used the Her Choice visualisation tool ‘Assessing Youth Friendly Health Services’⁵ to assess and improve the quality of the services. Activities under Strategy III are implemented in different ways, depending on the local context. In order to build awareness on early pregnancy, contraception and family planning of young mothers in communities in **Bangladesh**, THP arranged court-yard meetings in collaboration with government health service providers. And Dalit reports that young people make use of community and upazila health services, which facilitate family planning methods and raise awareness on SRHR and healthy life-style. In **Benin**, after health workers had been strengthened on provision of youth-friendly SRHR services, health centres received support which allowed them to offer free SRH services in all epicenters. As a result of the reforms in the education system, SRH counsellors have been identified in schools to coordinate the referral system between schools, health centres, and Centers of Social Promotion. In **Ethiopia**, in addition to strengthening the referral links between schools and health institutions, health institutions that could offer youth friendly SRHR services for adolescents were supported with first aid kits and IEC materials, which resulted in a conducive collaborative environment. In **Senegal**, in addition to the existing health facilities, SRH centres called Suudu Nafoore (girls’ huts) were established, which provide information, emergency care and referral services, and which regularly facilitate discussions on SRH with girls and boys. In **Uganda**, in compliance of global standards of operating youth friendly health services, big and visible posters indicating availability of such services have been erected in all epicenter health facilities designated as youth corners.



“We admire the health staff of the adolescent corners. They keep the things that we discuss with them as a secret.”- Girls from THP Epicenter in Ghana.

Changes to the original planning (see Annex I – Financial Report)

Overspending:

- Based on the lessons learnt from the linking & learning meeting in June, THP **Benin** decided to evaluate the health centres by making use of the visualisation tools. Because this was not planned at the beginning of the year, it required an additional investment in this strategy of 38% compared to the original budget.

Underspending:

- 31% of the planned budget for the training of health workers in **Senegal** did not have to be used because the health centres turned out to be functioning relatively well already.

⁵ <http://www.her-choice.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/YFHS-Tool-FINAL-1206-new-author-contact.pdf>

Progress towards result

- Increase in % of health facilities that offer YFHS services to unmarried and married girls and boys
- Increase in % of girls accessing SRHR services

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. As a result of this and of the establishment of referral mechanism in schools, married and unmarried adolescent girls and boys have increased access to youth friendly health services, where they receive support, confidential counselling and information on SRHR. This includes girls and young women from marginalised groups, like for instance the Dalit in Bangladesh. Additionally, **countries in Africa** report an increased use of contraceptive methods among young people. For instance, the fact that the government of **Ghana** has added contraceptives to the list of drugs that are accessible on health insurance has significantly increased the access of married and unmarried girls and boys to SRHR services. THP Ghana reports that young people are now visiting adolescent corners at least once a month to learn about health challenges that adolescents face and how they can protect themselves. In **Pakistan**, the government also takes initiatives to control population growth, through which the enabling environment for Her Choice Strategy III is improving. Mothers are more sensitised and aware, and don't feel shame while bringing their daughters to the health centers as they did before. In **Senegal**, service delivery increased through Suudu Nafoore (girls' huts) SRHR centres, where girls could access SRHR services without stigma, as the culture doesn't allow unmarried youth to acquire services from official health posts.

3.4. Strategy IV

Improve the economic security of girls and their families, since poverty is an important factor for child marriage, especially in the rural areas.

Implementation

Under this strategy, partners in **all programme countries** except for Pakistan⁶ have supported self-help groups (SHGs) consisting of women from poor families, to initiate income-generating activities (IGAs) like petty trading and farming business in order for them to provide for their families and to keep their children in school. Members for the SHGs have been identified as belonging to the most economically disadvantaged and most marginalised families of the target communities. The IGAs they have received training on and practice include: jewellery making, beautification, block batik, tailoring, bakery, processing and conservation of local products, livestock breeding, fisheries, tree plantation, etc. Members of SHGs have also been trained in financial management, development of small enterprises and marketing of products, and often receive small loans to start up their businesses. Members have been shown the benefits of reinvesting in their group and have received recognition when they succeeded to save. Finally, SHGs have been encouraged to initiate a basic mutual help system to meet the social needs of their members. Additionally, THP **Bangladesh** has arranged participatory action research workshops, reflection meetings and linkages with government service agencies to empower members of SHGs to effectively run their businesses, to do savings and to carry out self-help credit. As an additional result, many SHGs were newly formed. Marginalised women supported by Dalit are involved in advocacy with the Upazila administration to receive loans and training on IGAs and, as a result, are gaining access to the decision-making process. They announced that their vision is to shift their role from corner of the home to leading the family. In **Uganda**, survivors of child marriage, school dropouts, girls heading families and deaf girls were provided with capacity

⁶ Strategy IV is not implemented in Pakistan under Her Choice.



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building on various skills, such as producing liquid soap, jewellery and shaggy carpets. Small-scale women farmers were also trained to improve agricultural practices and to increase their yields.

Changes to the original planning (see Annex I – Financial Report)

No changes to the original planning were made on Strategy IV.

Progress towards result

- %? Women generate greater income for use in household /for education
- %? Increase in households with improved economic status

Partners from **all programme countries** report that through activities under Strategy IV, the savings of SHGs have increased and the economic security and status of the majority of participating households has improved. Apart from sufficient food for the family, also school fees could be paid and educational materials purchased, by which the school attendance of girls has improved. Additionally, extra income has been invested in the development of living standard and livelihood variation, in order to assure a better future. Partners from **Ethiopia** report that members of SHGs, in addition to being able to send their children to school, were performing exemplary actions like supporting orphans to attend school, mobilising others to address child marriage and FGM, and promote the use of SRH services in the community. Additionally, women's participation in household decision making was enhanced and husbands were more inclined to assist their wives in IGA business, realising that it benefits the whole family. Finally, it was noticed that these activities helped to strengthen social and economic relationships among group members, which enhances the probability for sustainable implementation of this strategy. In **Mali**, at the start of the 2019-2020 school year, a large number of girls received school kits from SHGs as a result of the income obtained from their IGAs. In Tambacounda, **Senegal**, women developing IGAs also participate in supporting and running the Suudu Nafuore (see Strategy III).



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3.5. Strategy V

Transform social norms that are detrimental to achieving gender equity in education, decision making, and access to services by mobilising and supporting communities, including boys, men, women and leaders to promote girls' rights and gender equity.

Implementation

Activities under Strategy V are aimed at mobilising communities and raising awareness, through testimonials and by educating leaders and other community members on gender equity and on negative effects of child marriage and FGM. Awareness-raising has been realised through campaigns and events in public places and places of worship, and through radio and television broadcasts. Additionally, in **Benin**, a survey was conducted to collect more in-depth information on harmful practices in all epicenters. The results of this survey enabled a closer examination of the causes, in order to improve advocacy and to avoid perpetuation of these practices. In **Uganda**, men and boys were trained on gender transformative approaches to work as change agents, mobilising communities to address norms that are detrimental to achieving gender equity. Also, a 4-month radio campaign was run on major radio stations in all programme areas, complemented with spot messages and jingles on ending child marriage.

Changes to the original planning (see Annex I – Financial Report)

Overspending:

- The 2019 regional linking & learning meeting for Asia was held in **Nepal**, for the organisation of which CWIN received additional budget. This overspending of 37% could be financed from the compensation of the underspending in the previous year.

Progress towards result

- Traditional and religious community leaders increasingly active in condemning CM

Partners in **all programme countries** report that, due to training and other programme interventions, traditional and religious leaders are increasingly standing up against child marriage and other harmful traditional practices and contribute to building child marriage free communities. Due to awareness of the Child Marriage Restraint Act 2017, and to the announcement of the Upazila Legal Aid Committee that they will award prizes to those who take measures to extinguish child marriage, traditional and religious leaders in **Bangladesh** have taken up their role in the community to prevent child marriage. Additionally, Union Parishad representatives have committed publicly that they will not attend in marriage functions which are identified as child marriage according to the law. In **Ethiopia**, 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 canceling 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. In **Ghana**, traditional and religious leaders have become change agents in their communities. They used every community gathering to talk about child marriage and declared their support in addressing child marriage. In **Mali, Nepal and Pakistan**, religious leaders preach about the consequences of child marriage and harmful practices in their religious speeches. As a result, religious leaders in Pakistan mobilised communities to ban child marriages and managed to stop 70 of such marriages within the target communities.

- Increasing % communities with members active in publicly tackling CM
- Increasing % of communities give greater decision-making space to girls and reject CM/FGM*

In **all programme countries**, community members, often inspired by leaders, have increased their positive attitudes towards the value of girls' education and gender equity, and enhanced their efforts to abandon child marriage. Community members have been active in realising awareness-raising sessions on negative effects and legal implications of child marriage and other harmful traditional practices through community conversations, theatre performances, rallies, radio broadcasts, etc., and on actions to protect girls against it. More opportunity is offered to girls in decision-making and to speak out at community meetings and events. Additionally, parent-child dialogues have been initiated in many programme sites, to give girls more opportunities to participate at the decision-making level within the family. In **Bangladesh**, THP's Village Development Teams (VDTs) comprised of animators, women leaders, youth leaders, faith leaders, local elected representatives and influential individuals have played a significant role in abolishing child marriage and gender based violence. They arranged campaigns, using folk songs, drama, rallies, village meetings, court-yard meetings, door to door visits and counseling, to build positive norms and attitudes among community members towards values of girls' education and negative effects of child marriage. VDTs have declared their villages child marriage free. Additionally, women leaders in Bangladesh play a significant role as change agents to halt child marriage in their community. When they are informed of any planned child marriage in the community, they take over and deal with it. Dalit also reports on the increasing role of male group members to give priority to women in some cases and leaving females to exercise decision making power in the family. If women become victim of domestic violence, group members consult and take measures to resolve such cases. In **Ethiopia**, partners started to create *child marriage free households*, by posting this title at the gate of the households that are willing to commit to not engage in any form of child marriage practice in their community. In order to empower girls and give them a voice, community leaders in **Ghana** started giving roles to girls during festivals and other events to talk



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about issues that affect them, and how they want to be treated. In **Nepal**, community members additionally report cases of child marriage, abuse and exploitation of children to Child Helpline 1098 and local police. Next to youth groups and mothers' groups, also government authorities play a significant role in condemning child marriage. In **Pakistan**, CPC members and children pledging homes against child marriage has been a very motivational activity to create *child marriage free villages*. Theatre performances, followed by strong discussions, have a great impact on the villagers. They internalise the messages and start to question their discriminatory attitudes towards children and in particular girls. The number of parents who want to see their daughters educated and earning a strong place in society is increasing.

3.6. Strategy VI

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.

Implementation

Activities under this strategy include providing information and training for members of local councils and other stakeholders on national and international legislation concerning child marriage, FGM and child protection, and to facilitate discussions on improvement of reporting systems (including birth registration) and bylaws. Such discussions are facilitated at local and at district level. Activities also include awareness-raising for girls and community stakeholders on protective laws and bylaws and on (local) protective frameworks.

Changes to the original planning (see Annex I – Financial Report)

Underspending:

- The planned activities on Strategy VI in **Benin** were linked to the results of the research done under Strategy V. The delay in finalising the research resulted in a 29% underspending on Strategy VI, since some of the activities could not be implemented yet.
- Because of the current political and cultural sensitivity in **Senegal**, activities under Strategy VI had to be limited, which resulted in an underspending of 18%.



Progress towards result

- Increased % of communities in the process of developing by-laws to prohibit CM/FGM
- Increasing % of districts (or other administrative level) have an operational reporting system in place to document breaking of laws concerning birth registration, CM/FGM, sexual assault

In **Bangladesh**, THP has supported Union Parishad to form 55 Union Child Marriage Prevention Committees in all Her Choice unions. All members of these committees have received training on the Child Marriage Restraint Act and other relevant rules, in order for them to play a vital role to enforce the law. One of the results of this action was a mass campaign, involving faith leaders to speak about the negative effects of child marriage during the Friday prayer. Dalit reports that, additionally, the Union Parishad is now strictly following the law on birth registration and is committed to stop false age certification. This has resulted in a drastic decrease of the loophole in child marriage, which is showcasing fake birth registration certificates.

In **Benin**, legislation against child marriage and other harmful practices exists. In order to increase awareness and implementation, THP focusses on facilitating access to these laws and on strengthening local bylaws. The Social Promotion Center and local authorities support these actions, including the promotion of birth registration. The organisation of workshops to capitalise on the results of the Her Choice programme helped to provide the *group sentinelle*, a group of community leaders, with the mandate to monitor the implementation of commitments made at various levels against sexual violence and abuse.

In **Burkina Faso**, of the 105 implementation villages, 49 have finalised the formulation of by-laws and registers to for age check while 69 are in the process of developing them. The improved collaboration with administrative bodies in all intervention municipalities contributed greatly to an adequate handling of violation cases and to set up an effective database. As mentioned in the *Context analysis*, the proofreading of the Personal and Family Code (PFC) that raises the age of marriage to 18 was finalised on 22 December 2019. The next step is the submission of this draft bill for adoption at the next parliamentary session in March 2020.

In **Ethiopia**, the target kebeles have formulated and ratified community by-laws on child marriage and FGM, with active engagement from community members. The project intervention districts have operational systems in place that document and act upon breaking of these by-laws. Vital registration (birth, death and marriage) has started in all intervention kebeles.

In **Ghana**, all Her Choice communities have developed by-laws on child marriage and on all forms of child abuse known to community partners. Because these by-laws are spearheaded by community leaders, they are very much respected by community members and thus have already yielded results. Collaboration with the implementation districts has led to the set up of Domestic Violence and Victims Support Units (DoVVSU) of the Ghana Police Service to handle cases of sexual assault and other forms of child abuse. Birth and death registry desks are present at all epicenter clinics.

In **Mali**, by-laws to abandon child marriage have been established in 36 implementation villages and a committee in charge of birth registration is present in all districts town halls. In the Her Choice intervention areas, reported cases of violence and rights violation are dealt with by official institutions.

As a result of efforts by Her Choice partner CWIN in **Nepal**, the Nepalgunj Municipality of Banke District has endorsed the Strategy to End Gender Based Violence and Action Plan to Eliminate Child Marriage 2018/19 – 2023/24. The Bakaiya Rural Municipality of Makwanpur District is planning to declare it a child friendly rural municipality. The government of province no. 1 has launched a focused programme with the objective to end all child marriage from the province by 2025.

In **Pakistan**, CPC Members have signed a resolution to end child marriage in their village and they have put measures in place to achieve this objective. These measures include facilitation for birth registration marriage registration enrollment in school registration for national identity card interventions to stop child marriage, and for reporting such cases to relevant government departments if they fail to convince the families. Police officials, parliamentarians and media professionals take on their role proactively. Bedari engaged a capacity building expert during a session for legislators, which resulted in the submission of a bill to the assembly.

In **Senegal**, of the 42 intervention villages, 19 have adopted a charter prohibiting child marriage and FGM of which 5 villages also have a charter promoting the education of girls and systematic birth registration. At the national level, the coalition is advocating for the adoption of the Children's Code, which raises the age of marriage for girls to 18 years. Active participation of Her Choice in the first African Summit on FGM and Child Marriage was aimed on translating the decisions of the authorities into concrete actions.

In **Uganda**, in the seven districts where Her Choice is implemented, different mechanisms like the District OVC committees and Sub County OVC committees, bring together all relevant actors such as the director of public prosecution, judiciary, police force, local government officials and non-state actors, to discuss and enforce laws against child marriage. In 6 Her Choice epicenters, communities were mobilised to generate by-laws on ending child marriage. Draft by-laws have been presented to various local government organs at district level, and wide consultations with other stakeholders like religious leaders and CSO partners have taken place. Although they are still in the process of becoming officially endorsed by the government solicitor general, which is a time-consuming process, these by-laws are already strong enough to bring justice to victims of child abuse.



- Increased % of girls who know about protective laws regarding CM/FGM
- Increased % of girls who feel supported by official institutions when they face violation of their rights

In **all programme countries**, girls are increasingly aware of existing protective laws regarding child marriage and other harmful practices – and how to act in case their rights are violated.

In **Bangladesh**, adolescents report child marriage incidents to the law enforcing agencies in the areas. In response, police and Upazila level government officials are providing full support to the effected girls in case of (intended) child marriage or other violations of their rights. In **Ethiopia**, as a result of their involvement in the programme, almost all community members including girls understand the protective laws regarding child marriage and FGM. The number of girls who ask and receive support from legal agencies, district officials and police has increased. These institutions provide (psychosocial) support and help with family reunification if necessary. In **Ghana**, school and out-of-school youth has been educated on the laws that protect children. This involved personnel from law enforcement agencies who interacted with girls and boys on types of violations and on reporting channels. Girls who attended such meetings report that they are now aware of their rights and how to act in case of violation. In **Mali**, imams in different areas no longer perform marriages without the consent of the girls. In **Senegal**, the social media campaign #Teelna (Too early), including two videos produced by Her Choice partner Enda Jeunesse Action and CONAME,⁷ was launched and was broadcasted on national television. This resulted to the subject of girls' rights, especially those related to child marriage and SRHR, becoming a common cause in the country, and contributed to the Senegalese government initiating the elaboration of the National Action Plan on Child Marriage.

3.7. Own contribution

During the Her Choice inception phase, when the Theory of Change was contextualised per country and activities were planned in more detail, it turned out that some implementation costs had been under-budgeted. The same applied to management and administration costs for the lead applicant⁸. Additionally, it was decided that implementation in the Ethiopian Oromia region was to be excluded from funding by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, upon suggestion of the Netherlands Embassy in Ethiopia. For this reason, Kinderpostzegels has contributed additional funding in order to realise a smooth implementation of all essential programme activities.

The Hunger Project was asked to work in Benin by the Netherlands Embassy in the inception phase. The funding there was at a lower level than in other countries, due to this later addition to the programme. THP was able to find another private donor to help fund the activities.

The University of Amsterdam (UvA) put in more hours than budgeted for research and PME activities.

In total, an additional amount of 402.195 euro was added to the budget by these contributions, which amounts to 10,8 % of the 2019 total budget, see table:



⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=krZGrEhKvHo>

⁸ Management and administration costs of the lead applicant (Kinderpostzegels) are budgeted for 2% of the total costs

Activities that were additionally funded from own contributions in 2019 are:

Alliance member	Country	Activity	Amount in €
Kinderpostzegels (SKN)	Burkina Faso	All activities by partner ADEP in Koudougou, Kaya and MTR meeting	109.068
	Ethiopia	All activities by partners ADAA (Oromia) and ODWaCE (all areas); Additional coordination costs	67.000
	Mali	Enda coordination	18.900
	Senegal	All activities by partner Enda in Bounkiling	40.500
		Managem. & administr. costs	143.231
<i>Total SKN own contribution Her Choice 2019</i>			378.699
The Hunger Project (THP)	Benin	Activities by THP Benin	10.000
<i>Total THP own contribution Her Choice 2019</i>			10.000
UvA		Managem. & administr. costs	13.496
<i>Total UvA own contribution Her Choice 2019</i>			13.496
TOTAL OVERALL OWN CONTRIBUTION Her Choice 2019			402.195



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4. ANALYSIS OF PARTNERSHIPS

4.1. Added value of working as an alliance

Alliance members and implementing partners experience added value in working as an alliance. Through the Alliance, members have access to innovative approaches, in addressing the complexity of child marriage and all that is related to this issue. Problems are being tackled from the roots through the Alliance's broad, community-based approach. Because of the multiple expertise of its members, working as an alliance enables multi-dimensional interventions, including training on innovative methods, capacity building and exchange of good practice. Her Choice social media have shown to be a valuable tool in sharing news, good practices and inspiring stories, and thus connecting programme partners over three continents. Partners confirm that exchanges of views and knowledge contribute to the strengthening of their working strategy.

Collaborating partners have built reference structures in the field of child protection in their respective countries and have teamed up as national Her Choice alliances. At the same time, they have been reaching out for collaboration with other alliances, within countries and beyond, leading to greater influencing capacity of national policy agendas.

The **Ethiopian** Her Choice Alliance is becoming a strong and influential national alliance, being represented by organisations in three dominant regional states (Amhara, Oromia and SNNPR). Its effort is recognised and appreciated by the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs and other national and regional offices. This enables member organisations to operate smoothly with the government actors, as well as having the advantage of knowledge and experience sharing, and joint resource mobilisation. Also, regional knowledge and experience sharing takes place with partner organisations in Ghana and Uganda. This was especially the case during the regional training workshop in November, when partners from **Ghana, Uganda** and **Ethiopia** were equipped to conduct the data collection for the Endline evaluation. In April/May, the Asian regional linking & learning meeting took place in Nepal with partners from **Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan** and **Ethiopia**, and in June, the Francophone regional linking & learning meeting took place in Benin with partners from **Benin, Mali, Burkina Faso** and **Senegal** (see Chapter 6).



“The added learning that we gained as a team during the regional meeting last year, was to specifically target boys and men in our programme. We learned this from our Ethiopian partner organisation FSCE, who showed impressive results from this approach. With insight, we as THP Ghana started organising training for adolescent boys and men on child marriage, gender, SRHR, and children's rights and laws. Their participation was low when we started but after the news spread we have recorded increased participation of men and boys. Recently, some men offered their services to be trained as Women Empowerment Program (WEP) animators in their epicenters.” Team THP Ghana

4.2. Dutch alliance members & local implementing partners

The collaboration between the Dutch alliance members and the local implementing partners is based on the partnership model and is marked by mutual respect. Partners from **Burkina Faso** state that the collaboration with the country coordinator in the Netherlands remains cordial, close-knit and rich in learning. Partners from **Ethiopia** experience the relationship as being mutual, respectful and genuine. They state that the feedback of the Dutch country coordinator is valuable to their continuous effort in enhancing the effectiveness of their activities. Bedari (**Pakistan**) reports that

they receive very timely guidelines, mentoring and support from ICDI. In addition to regular skype meetings around the programme activities, Bedari also receives other strengthening guidelines and support like providing technical assistance in developing project proposals, linking with likeminded other organisations and providing capacity building sessions.

Her Choice believes that local ownership is the key factor to achieve sustainable results. International and local partners work side by side to generate knowledge and good practice to support networks and to build on local assets.

4.3. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Netherlands Embassies

The Her Choice programme is implemented in partnership with the Netherlands' Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The collaboration with the Ministry is marked by an active exchange of insights and expertise and by mutual support and appreciation. Meetings with the contact person of the Ministry and the coordinators of the three Child Marriage Alliances supported under the SRHR Partnership (the More Than Brides, the Yes, I Do and Her Choice Alliance) take place on a regular basis.

Implementing partners in **Bangladesh, Benin, Ethiopia, Ghana, Mali, Pakistan, Senegal** and **Uganda** regularly meet with representatives of the respective Dutch Embassies to share Annual Reports and other information on the Her Choice programme and to exchange opportunities for collaboration. Embassy representatives have been invited by partners to attend special events and field visits. Likewise, partners were invited by embassies to events, workshops and meetings aimed at collaboration with partner NGOs. Most embassies have offered to support the implementation by offering a platform to promote (aspects of) the programme.

The Netherlands Embassy in **Bangladesh** invited THP and Dalit to participate in the SRHR programme, together with Unite Body Rights, Share-Net, Population Council and other organisations. This helped to exchange knowledge, information and best practices and contributed to the improvement of the CSE programme.

The excellent collaboration of THP with the Embassy in **Benin** was evidenced by the Embassy's participation in the Her Choice regional linking and learning meeting in Cotonou in June 2019. In addition, the Embassy facilitated the connection of THP-Benin with the INIFRCF to obtain authorisation to pursue CSE in schools and in extracurricular activities.

Since the opening of the Embassy in **Burkina Faso**, regular courtesy visits and presentations by Her Choice take place. In December 2018, the Chargé d'affaires of the Embassy presided the opening and closing ceremony of the Her Choice review meeting and took part in the national youth clubs conference in December. The coordination team was invited to the Embassy's presentation of its strategic plan, in honor of the visit of the Director General of International Cooperation from The Netherlands.

In **Ethiopia**, the Netherlands Embassy collaborates in organising linking, learning and experience sharing among the Her Choice, YIDA, GAA and GUSO alliances. The Embassy support these alliances to perform surveys and to advocate with the relevant ministries and partners in Ethiopia.

In **Senegal**, the Netherlands Embassy engaged in the funding of the the action plan of CONAME, the national coalition for the abandonment of child marriage, the coordination of which is carried out by Her Choice.

In **Mali**, Her Choice participates in the Netherlands Embassy's regular events. Representatives of partner organisation APSEF met the Embassy's vocal person for SRHR to present the progress of the Her Choice programme and to discuss possibilities for further collaboration.

In **Nepal**, no Netherlands Embassy exists. CWIN's relationship with the Netherlands Consulate is good.

THP **Uganda**'s country director was invited by the Dutch Ambassador to participate in a working dinner on SRHR, women rights and gender equality in honour of Ms Mette Gonggrijp, Ambassador for Women's Rights and Gender Equality of the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs.



“This years’ collaboration was very memorable. We had the ambassador and his team visiting one of the Her Choice epicenters to interact with school children, teachers and community members. The team was full of praise to the Her Choice programme as they witnessed empowered girls and boys contributing to discussions on child marriage and children’s rights issues in Ghana. Her Choice in turn attended stakeholder meetings organised by the embassy for organisations to give updates on their projects supported by the Dutch government. We made a presentation and shared the mid-line evaluation report.” - Her Choice team, THP Ghana

4.4. Other child marriage alliances and Girls Not Brides

Collaboration in the programme countries

In **all programme countries**, alliances have been established between civil society and/or governmental organisations to join forces in addressing child marriage. Her Choice partners often play an active role in such alliances. They meet on a regular basis to organise joint advocacy, review strategic and legal frameworks, realise awareness-raising campaigns, and share their learnings and best practices.

In **Bangladesh**, THP and Dalit have worked closely with the alliances National Girl Child Advocacy Forum (NGCAF) and Girls Not Brides (GNB) to initiate advocacy efforts for promoting girl’s rights and halting child marriage. Best practices, successes and challenges of the Her Choice programme have been shared with these alliances, which worked as a window to promote the intervention at national level.

THP **Benin** is member of the National Zero Tolerance for Child Marriage Campaign and the Group of Technical and Financial Partners of Gender and Social Protection in Benin, including the subgroup on gender-based violence, and has been involved in the actions to set up the National Partnership for the Elimination of Child Marriage.

In **Burkina Faso**, the national Girls Not Brides partnership occupies a prominent place in the activities of the programme. All of its meetings are organised with the participation of Her Choice implementing partners. Her Choice also supported the partnership's follow-up to the review and adoption of the new Personal and Family Code.

In **Ethiopia**, the platform of Dutch funded alliances, Her Choice, Yes I Do, GUSO and the Girls Advocacy Alliance, in collaboration with the Netherlands Embassy, continues to cooperate on experience sharing, to perform surveys, and to practice joint lobby and advocacy.

THP **Ghana** represents Her Choice at the Child Marriage Network of the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection. Here, budgetary allocations and advocacy efforts for child marriage projects were discussed, as well as training on the updated Domestic Violence Acts, evaluation of the progress under the National Strategic Framework to End Child Marriage, and a presentation by the National Population Council that indicated a decline of child marriage prevalence in Ghana. THP participated in the kick-off training workshop on the Girls Not Brides Amplify Change Project. In **Mali**, Her Choice partners continue to work with the More Than Brides Alliance at the national level, as well as at the local level in Segou. Joint advocacy towards religious leaders was carried out. The REPAME network, founded by Her Choice partner Enda Mali, is in the process to be recognised as Girls Not Brides Mali. All Her Choice partner organisations are members of this network, which provides them with the opportunity to collaborate and share information in order to better pursue their common goal. The Her Choice partner organisations also form the Kinderpostzegels Partner Network for the Protection of Girls' Rights and the Comité National d'Actions pour l'Abandon des Pratiques Néfastes (CNAAPN).

Nepal CWIN is founding member of Girls Not Brides Nepal as well as part of its executive board, and actively participates in all its programmes. CWIN supported GNB Nepal in developing its advocacy plan and in integrating issues of child marriage in its local planning process. GNB is



actively involved in national advocacy on the issues of women and girls and also plays a substantial role in formulating the costed implementation plan for the execution of the National Strategy to End Child Marriage.

In **Pakistan**, Bedari is member of national and international alliances: the Child Rights Movement (CRM), the Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (EVAWG), the Alliance Against Child Marriages (AACM), the National Humanitarian Network (NHN) and the Caucus of Civil Society Network to address Child Marriages, as well as of MTBA and Girls Not Brides. Bedari is actively engaged and has presented its work to national and international forums through these alliances. Bedari has been co-chair of the EVAWG Alliance in the last two years and has been elected to manage the CRM Secretariat. Furthermore, Bedari leads the GNB partnership in Punjab Province. The plan is to initiate a National GNB Chapter for Pakistan, with provincial sub chapters.

In **Senegal**, Enda Jeunesse Action coordinates the National Coalition to End Child Marriage (CONAME) with the support of the Girls Not Brides Global secretariat. The coalition was invited by the Ministry of Women, Family, Gender and the Protection of Children's Rights to participate in the 1st African Summit on FGM and Child Marriage. CONAME also represented the Senegalese civil society organisations at the National Action Plan on Child Marriage workshop.

THP **Uganda** further collaborated closely with other Dutch funded programmes like Get Up Speak Out (GUSO) and organisations such as Reproductive Health Uganda, which supported the training of health workers to provide youth-friendly services. In 2019, Her Choice was elected to become part of the Girls Not Brides Uganda steering committee. THP-U is also Health Cluster chair for GNB Uganda, the opportunity of which has been used to conduct joint health activities with 36 members working in the sector of health. Additionally, THP-U co-organised the 2019 National Girls Summit, which was co-moderated by Her Choice peer educator Lorina, as well as convened a side event on the role of SRHR services and information on preventing child marriage.

Collaboration with other child marriage alliances and Girls Not Brides the Netherlands

Regular meetings between the three child marriage alliances took place in order to align activities, to share learnings and to organise joint activities.

On April 1st, the event 'Celebrating Girls' Voices' was jointly organised by the three alliances, for the purpose of presenting their midterm evaluations. Other presenters who contributed to the programme were, Mette Gonggrijp, Ambassador for Women's Rights and Gender Equality of the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Anbreen Aijab, Director of Bedari (Pakistan), and Mabel van Oranje, Board Chair of Girls Not Brides.⁹

The Her Choice, Yes I Do and More than Brides Alliances founded Girls Not Brides the Netherlands in November 2016 and, since then, jointly form its Steering Group. The three working groups, namely: a) Child Marriage in the Netherlands; b) Child Marriage in the Global South; and c) Advocacy and Communication on Child Marriage have met regularly during the year. The Global South working group organised a series of lectures, of which Her Choice contributed the following:

- 'Engaging boys & men in promoting gender equality' by Her Choice PhD candidates (AISSR-UvA) in February;¹⁰
- 'How can young people benefit from economic empowerment?' by THP and Save the Children, moderated by THP in September;¹¹
- 'Involving young people in research' by ICDI in December.¹²

⁹ <http://www.her-choice.org/en/her-choice-en/celebrating-girls-voices-our-most-important-findings/>

¹⁰ <https://share-netinternational.org/events-list/lecture-series-engaging-boys-men/>

¹¹ <https://share-netinternational.org/events-list/lecture-series-young-people-benefit-economic-empowerment/>

¹² <http://www.her-choice.org/en/her-choice-en/together-involving-young-people-in-research-about-child-marriage/>



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5. GENDER AND INCLUSION

5.1. Engagement of boys and men

Boys and men are structurally involved in each programme activity. Awareness that they are a vital group to enable gender equality is steadily rising in the countries. As role models, peer educators and the other half of the population they share a responsibility with girls and women for better life perspectives, health, education for girls, and the room to make their own choices. Boys and men gain new roles as leaders in dialogue promoting girls' rights. They call upon local, traditional and religious leaders to follow their lead and change social and cultural norms.

Partners report participation levels between 40 and 60% of boys and men in activities throughout the countries that directly benefit girls and young women. In village committees they co-host events and co-chair meetings to sensitise the population on SRHR. They mobilise villagers and empower girls to attend school, pay regular visits to health centres and create girl-friendly schools. At school, sanitary facilities create a safe haven for girls and comprehensive sexual education increases knowledge, prevents child marriage and promotes healthier social relations between boys and girls with less prejudices and taboos.

In **Ethiopia**, boys participated in the Meharebe CSE training, which was facilitated by trained school teachers. The gender audit platform evidenced the involvement of male and female government employees in these trainings. CWIN in **Nepal** accomplished 2 national level and 3 province level dialogues on men engagement. The organisation coordinates and founded the Men Engage movement in Nepal. As such, it has enhanced government awareness of the need and direct involvement in gender equal promotive activities.

5.2. Engagement of disadvantaged groups

Marginalised and disadvantaged groups are broadly engaged in Her Choice programme activities. The inclusion and acceptance of girls with disabilities, girls kept hidden at home, excluded ethnic minorities or girls from extremely poor households are critical to the success of the programme. These girls run an even higher risk of being forced into child marriage and neglect their sexual and reproductive health rights. As Her Choice mostly implements its activities in remote rural and poor areas with locally based partner organisations, the programme has gained a good insight on the different vulnerabilities that exist. It addresses the adversities with consistent livelihood and education strategies, combined with SRHR interventions that are sensitive to the different needs and realities of disadvantaged groups.

For instance, THP **Uganda** partnered with the Uganda Association of the Deaf (UNAD) in order to reach out to the deaf girls both in school and out of school and give them access to SRHR and other social protection services. Children and young people with different categories of disability, both in school and out of school, participate in Her Choice activities. Disabled persons also engage in sustainable livelihood activities that address hunger and poverty. In **Ghana**, teachers and club patrons have been sensitized to include disabled girls and boys in all club activities. These young people have been given roles to play at club meetings and in schools, so as to stimulate and sustain their interest and to give them the voice they deserve. In **Benin**, health issues of married girls are addressed by a campaign advocating for their free access to local health services. In **Bangladesh**, income generating activities for Dalit girls are realised to raise their living standard.



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6. LINKING & LEARNING and EVENTS

Linking and learning represents a vital component of the Her Choice Programme. Each alliance member complements the others and possesses its own area of expertise. Linking and learning ensures knowledge sharing, learning from practical experience and distilling lessons learnt at local, national and international level. Supportive networks and events allow the Alliance to maximise its learning capacity and adapt its operations accordingly.

In April/May, the Asian regional linking & learning meeting took place in Nepal with partners from **Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Ethiopia**, and in June, the Francophone regional linking & learning meeting took place in Benin with partners from **Benin, Mali, Burkina Faso and Senegal**. Dutch representatives from UvA, Kinderpostzegels and THP participated in both meetings. During the meetings, capacity was strengthened through knowledge and experience sharing and existing cross country (regional) collaboration was consolidated. It was an opportunity for partners to learn from each other's good practices, especially in the field of strengthening voices of young people and other stakeholders at community level and of lobby and advocacy at the national level - and to contextualise these practices for their own situation. Expertise and capacity was strengthened, inter alia in validating the findings of the midline evaluation, conducting youth-led research, working with the Her Choice visualisation tools on Girl Friendly Schools and on Youth Friendly Health Services (see Strategy II and III), strengthening CSE curriculum and developing organisational safeguarding policies.

In each of the programme countries local, regional and national events were organised to favour action-based learning. National Girls Day on the 11th of October allowed Her Choice organisations to join forces with key stakeholders and campaign for SRHR rights of girls. In **Ghana** for instance, the theme of this year's commemoration was 'Girl Force: Unscripted and Unstoppable'. The event highlighted the importance of strong support systems for girls to excel and an essential safety network of community leadership, parents, teachers and peers. A visit from the Ambassador of the Netherlands Embassy allowed for the demonstration of acquired knowledge and empowerment of young community members within their girls' and boys' clubs at the Obusumasua and Akwur-Bana Basci School. The visit evidenced the advantages of girl friendly schools and participatory methods.

Another event of international significance was the Day of the Girl Child on the 20th of November which in various countries gathered important grassroots and non-governmental organisations, media and ministries to agendise child rights and the problem of child marriage with rallies, debate groups and festivities. Press clippings in journals and booklets helped to further socialise the importance of the programme. In **Ethiopia**, a regional workshop on sexual and reproductive health was organised in Debre Markos, Amhara region. It created a platform for stakeholders within the region to address SRHR, child marriage and harmful practices together and benefit from contextual knowledge. In **Mali** an ongoing rally of fifteen days against gender based violence was realised. The campaigns evidenced existing harmful practices and promoted concrete protection measures for girls, focusing on education as a means of awareness raising and protection.

On the 16th of June the Day of the African Child was celebrated by **African Her Choice partners** as an opportunity to learn about the regional vulnerabilities of children and highlight the threat of child marriage to a stable and healthy development.

In **Pakistan**, Bedari chaired a provincial conference with the Lahore College for Women University on ending child marriage. Policy makers, media experts, community activists, young girls, students and other civil society actors attended the event, exchanged good and bad practices and co-formulated an action-agenda.



7. RESEARCH

Final Midline synthesis study report (early in the year)

The draft midline synthesis report was discussed and validated during a workshop with Her Choice Alliance members in the third week of January 2019. During January, partners in the Her Choice countries were also consulted on specific findings for validation purposes. The English language report was then finalised and submitted to the Alliance and the Ministry by 31 January 2019. A French language version was subsequently developed, and the French and English iterations of the report were shared with Her Choice partners.

Presentation and discussion of midline study findings in two Her Choice regional linking and learning meetings

Members of the AISSR team travelled to regional Her Choice linking and learning meetings that were held in Benin (for Francophone HC countries) and Nepal (for South Asian HC countries). During these meetings, the AISSR presented and discussed midline findings with partners, and explored the implications of certain findings for programmes. For example, it was found that among young people in Her Choice communities, exposure to training on SRHR-related issues had increased. At the same time, many girls did not yet have sufficient knowledge about critical SRHR-related questions, leading to examination of ways and means to improve the quality of educators training on SRHR-related education.

Preparations for the Endline

Following completion of the midline report, and the joint examination of programming implications, the AISSR team began revising the tools required for the endline study. The tools were adjusted to include questions around impact. Additionally, efforts were made to, where possible, reduce the length of existing questionnaires and to improve the formulation of certain questions. The latter 'exercise' drew on insight gained during analysis of midline data and feedback from local researchers on the data collection process. A series of open questions were added in order to generate more qualitative data around questions that do not lend themselves well to quantifying, for example, on different forms of marriage in communities. Most significant changes made to the topic guides for Focus Group Discussions, again with a view to develop better understanding of different forms of marriages, perceptions of girl or child friendliness of schools, and experiences with Her Choice activities.

Towards the end of the second quarter of 2019, the AISSR team started making preparations with local research coordinators in the 10 Her Choice countries. Excluding in one country (Burkina Faso), we were able to retain the same teams that collaborated with us during the midline and/or baseline. The four regional endline training workshops were planned in collaboration with the Her Choice Alliance members, their partners and the research coordinators. In view of the December 2020 deadline for the final endline evaluation report, we sought to conduct the endline training and planning workshops as quickly as possible; the first held in November 2019 in Ethiopia for Her Choice partners from Ethiopia, Ghana and Uganda. The remaining three regional workshops were planned for the period January – February 2020.

Effect of Covid-19 on the Endline

It is crucial to note that the Covid-19 crisis is affecting the Endline study. That is, while we were on track, the current social distancing measures and travel restrictions mean that the Endline study will need to be revised. The alliance is planning to consult the Ministry on suggested adaptations to the Endline.



Contributions to communication

The AISSR hosted a GNB Netherlands event in February focusing on engaging boys & men in promoting gender equality. One of the AISSR Her Choice PhD candidates presented on her work during this very well-attended meeting. In addition, the AISSR took part in the development of articles on HC research activities, for example, a piece on our endline workshop in Ethiopia, a series of HC impact papers and a blog on research findings in Pakistan of the different child marriage alliances. Various MSc graduates who carried out their research in framework of the HC project and the HC PhD candidates were interviewed for Her Choice communication purposes. Finally, the AISSR hosted a Research Alliance meeting and meetings with the other child marriage alliances in view of updating on research activities, planning the endline data collection and a coordinated response to the external evaluation of the three alliances.

Development of Special Issue on child marriage and the notion of choice

During 2019, the AISSR continued its work on the Special Issue (SI) on Child marriage. This SI will be published in the *Journal Progress in Development Studies*, which is read by mixed audience of academics, policymakers and practitioners. The AISSR actively sought authors from the Global South to contribute to the journal given authorship from the Global South remains underrepresented in academic journals.

The completion of the SI took more time than initially foreseen, in part due to the additional support that was required for some of the contributing authors. The AISSR had encouraged authors who had less experience with writing for peer reviewed journals based in the Global North to submit papers. The latter meant that the AISSR team dedicated considerable time to support authors in the development of their papers. The SI is expected to be published in the second half of 2020.

Other developments

The Her Choice AISSR PhD candidates spent 2019 at the AISSR working on analysis and writing up of their dissertations. They presented their findings to various audiences during 2019 and received regular supervision from the AISSR.

Youth-led Research

Youth-led Research (YLR) is an approach that empowers children and young people growing up in difficult circumstances, to better understand their communities and the social values and issues that involve and affect them, and enables them to become active agents of change. Alliance member ICDI has provided training and follow-up on YLR to Her Choice partners through 2018 and 2019. The report 'Youth-led Research' by ICDI, with a summary from their work with partners in Pakistan, Nepal and Ethiopia, was published in August.¹³



¹³ <https://icdi.nl/media/uploads/useruploads/Report%20on%20Youth%20Led%20Research%20in%20Her%20Choice.pdf>

8. COMMUNICATION

Her Choice has chosen a united, coordinated communication approach, which allows alliance members and local partners to communicate a joint message to stakeholders and to the public. This adds to the ownership of the programme, and to the joint commitment as an alliance. Moreover, it gives the programme a clear identity and more visibility to the outside world. Communication tools are designed to serve a practical purpose and to support the implementation of the programme. They help alliance members in the Netherlands as well as partner organisations in the programme countries to provide information on the Her Choice goals, to connect with stakeholders and to communicate relevant messages to the public.

For this purpose, communication tools, based on the needs of the partners, have been developed both in English and in French language, as the programme is being implemented in 6 Anglophone and 4 Francophone countries. Her Choice has a website (www.her-choice.org), a brochure in English and French and an impact pager in English and French (with a separate version for each of the 10 programme countries) with the most important outcomes and challenges of the programme so far.

Country coordinators and local partners share stories and pictures from their activities and trips and the communication coordinator uses these for articles on the website and on the Her Choice socials (Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn). The communication strategy and approach are described in more detail in an updated version of the Her Choice Communication Plan.

In 2019 the Her Choice story has been spread across various platforms:

- Weekly news items were written and posted on the Her Choice website. With short stories, photos, blogs and messages we presented all our activities, results and achievements, and personal stories of girls and boys and other programme stakeholders in the 10 countries where Her Choice is active. Stories are told by the actual protagonists, by which Her Choice gives its champions a voice that directly addresses the audience. While providing realistic statements on the negative effects of child marriage, Her Choice will continue to handle a positive communication style by focusing on strength, resilience and on the power to effectuate change of girls, boys and community members.
- Her Choice was active on social media multiple times a week, on Twitter, LinkedIn and Facebook.
- Four newsletters with the most recent news from the Her Choice programme were sent to alliance members, alliance partners and local partners.
- An impact pager was made with the most important outcomes and challenges of the programme so far (most of them collected from the Midline Study).
- A start was made with a series of interviews with Her Choice researchers; the first one was published in December, the rest is to follow in 2020.
- A start was made with a series of stories about the 6 strategies Her Choice addresses in the field; the first 2 were published in 2019, the other 4 will follow in 2020.
- All these activities were managed by a communication coordinator, appointed to this task from within one of the alliance partners (The Hunger Project Nederland).



Highlights

In 2019, we paid a lot of attention to sharing knowledge and experiences within and outside the Her Choice alliance.

- In April, we presented our main findings of the midline evaluation of the Her Choice programme, carried out by research partner AISSR of the University of Amsterdam (UvA). Mabel van Oranje, chair of Girls Not Brides and Mette Gonggrijp, women's rights ambassador of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, received the research report.

- During a four-day Linking & Learning meeting in Nepal, partner organisations from Bangladesh, Ethiopia, the Netherlands, Nepal and Pakistan participated in interactive sessions in May, in which they shared experiences and learned from each other.
- In June about 50 representatives of 19 partner organisations from Burkina Faso, Mali, Senegal, Benin and the Netherlands met at the Linking & Learning meeting in Benin.
- During the Advocacy Academy of Women Deliver 2019 in Vancouver, Canada, Her Choice coordinator at The Hunger Project discussed with 98 change makers from 49 countries how they would use their power for change.
- THP coordinators from Uganda and the Netherlands participated in the discussion of the treaty at the three-day ICPD25 summit in Nairobi in November. The Uganda coordinator had the opportunity to meet Minister Sigrid Kaag and tell her about the Her Choice activities in Uganda and to thank the Dutch Ministry for its generous support. Director of The Hunger Project Netherlands Evelijne Bruning, gave an interview on Radio 1 about Her Choice's participation in ICPD25 and the progress of the programme.
- Participants of the kick-off workshop on the Endline Study of Her Choice in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, presented by researchers of AISSR, looked back at an inspiring week at the end of the year with a lot of interaction and new knowledge gained. In total there were 34 participants from 11 local partner organisations from Ghana, Ethiopia and Uganda.

Joint communication of the three Child Marriage Alliances in 2019

The three Child Marriage Alliances supported under the SRHR partnership by the Netherlands' Ministry of Foreign Affairs, i.e. More than Brides, Her Choice and Yes, I Do, have agreed that, wherever appropriate and justified, joint communication of a common message will strengthen the overall objective, which is to end child marriage in all programme countries. This was also realised in 2019, for example on the occasions of the event 'Celebrating Girls' Voices' and the international Day of the Girl.



9. CHALLENGES

During the fourth implementation year, alliance members and implementing partners of the Her Choice programme have been confronted with a number of challenges. In most cases, it was possible to take actions to overcome these obstacles.

Below, the main challenges and mitigation measures are summarised. From these examples, we see that mitigation measures often involve engagement of young people and other stakeholders at the grassroots/local level, as well as advocacy and negotiation at the regional and national level, in order to create understanding and a more enabling environment for implementation. During this 4th implementation year, the fruits of effective relationship-building during the previous years could be harvested.

Measures at the grassroots/community level are marked in **purple**, and those at the governmental level in **red**.

CHALLENGES	MITIGATION MEASURES
Bangladesh	
In spite of fairly strong legislative and legal framework to combat child marriage and protect girls' and women's rights, bad governance and corruption within the judiciary system and among government functionaries is a substantial problem that stakeholders face to enforce such laws	Strengthening of grassroots civil society
	Advocating for law implementation towards governmental administration
Bureaucratic complexity is one of the main obstacles to work with government institutions. Timely permission from the respective government departments to carry out interventions is always time consuming and is associated with facing lots of uncertainty	Building personal rapport is the key to solve this issue
Benin	
CSE for young people in Benin is increasingly regulated. Therefore, THP-Benin needed to prove its capacity and know-how in this field in order to obtain authorisation from the Ministry of Secondary Education for the continuation of planned actions in and out of school	The good quality of the already obtained Her Choice programme results made it easier to obtain this authorisation
The capacity building on entrepreneurial activities has been delayed by the difficulty of applying the training on management tools due to their illiteracy	The identification within the communities of a mentor for the coaching of these women and girls has contributed to meet this challenge
The majority of the measures to be taken to make schools girl-friendly require substantial investments that the programme alone cannot meet	Advocacy with local authorities has been organised to integrate this component into their development plan
Burkina Faso	
Turnover of programme staff	Training of new personnel



Turnover of state personnel	Resume contact and relaunch advocacy with the new authorities
Turnover of trained teachers	Train new teachers on project themes
Insecurity in the country	React according to local circumstances. In Sourou, for example, community rallies were carried out in a more cautious way; in Bam, part of the training has been suspended and replaced by a training in Manga
Ethiopia	
Frequent and repeated turnover of trained teachers, HEWs and school directors	Hire other teachers who attended the training and/or conduct induction training
Lack of sufficient resources and classrooms in some schools to arrange a separate room for girls' clubs	Mobilise community and government officials to contribute in materials and labour
High turnover of government officials and problems to hand over the started initiatives, links and tasks for their successors	Support officials in their hand-over to successors
Remoteness of project implementation area and poor functioning of internet and telephone network presented a large challenge to deliver project accomplishment data on time	Keep frequent contact with local representatives who are engaged in the programme. Organise multiple simultaneous events when and where possible and arrange transport from other sources
Problem of infrastructures to conduct continuous monitoring and supervision	
Turnover of staff and volunteers	Intensive efforts were made to minimise the created gap. Active new volunteers were replaced in close consultation with targeted school principals, and providing them with backup with information updates
Lack of age(medical) examination equipment on health centers which makes it difficult to know the real age of girls	Improving health services and knowledge on SRHR and child development is an ongoing process
Lack of infrastructures such as water points, separate toilet for girls and boys to provide SRH services at schools	Improving WASH at Her Choice schools is an ongoing process and done in conjunction with authorities, communities and other donors besides the MoFA
Ghana	
During the year, the project did not face any substantial obstacles in its implementation. Planned activities were all executed and partners showed continued interest and support	
Mali	
Educational strikes by teachers asking for better labour conditions continue to take place	Community members, including religious leaders, health extension workers, teachers, school principals and young people themselves, involved in organising alternative (educational) activities



Conservative forces try to weaken SRHR programmes in Mali, particularly by using social media and creating fake letters with non-existing addresses to condemn implementation of CSE and of addressing harmful practices	Coordination with the Netherlands embassy, but especially collaboration between Enda Mali and the Haute Conseil Islamique was very valuable to stop spreading these kinds of fake messages and accusations
Nepal	
Parents from one of the communities in Banke protested and handed over appeal to ward level members, stating that the government should amend the legal age of marriage from 20 to 16	The programme is continuously lobbying and advocating with local governments and other stakeholders, including religious leaders and their networks, to gain their ownership and initiate their involvement in addressing the issues. The programme is also coordinating with stakeholders for local policies and programmes on child marriage and GBV. Regular meetings, gatherings and campaigns are being organised to create social awareness and sensitisation among young people, parents and the larger community. Capacity building and strengthening of local groups like schools, adolescent forums, mother's/parent's groups is another approach that the programme has adopted
Adolescent girls, especially from muslim communities, still hesitate to express their problems related to SRH and marriage, believing that such expressions and acts would be against their religious values	
There are certain seasons for marriage ceremony in Nepal and a massive number of marriages, among which child marriages, takes place in these seasons. Because these child marriages take place within a small period of time, it is very difficult to respond	
Economic hardship of the most vulnerable target groups	
Pakistan	
In the light of priorities of the new government, advocacy efforts had to be redesigned	Consistent follow up with the elected legislators helped in building rapport and collaboration for the desired legislation
Obtaining a No Objection Certificate remained a serious challenge. NGOs are being restricted to continue their work	Bedari managed to complete the Her Choice activities on the basis of personal relations and by engaging a government official in activities as a speaker
In Vehari, the threats Bedari staff faced from conservative communities and local politics for addressing women's rights, SRHR, etc., have been serious and district level activities had to be minimised	Community activities were managed by confiding in the district government. The police department turned out to be very supportive. More than 100 police officials showed up in two trainings held by Bedari.
The Government is very concerned about any research or survey being conducted	Instead of Children as Researchers, the term Children as Observers is used. The management of the technical training institute working under the Social Welfare Department invited Bedari to present the findings of the Children as Observers to motivate other students at this institution. In this way, this activity has been organised at district level with the cooperation of the Social Welfare Department



Frequent transfers of government officials	Frequent visits, sharing information and materials, and engaging every new official in different activities
Senegal	
Reluctance of primary schools to fully integrate CSE	Realise ongoing negotiations with local education authorities until the full integration of CSE in primary schools is a fact
Uganda	
The restrictive policies and laws based on Uganda's traditional religious and cultural belief system presented a significant bottleneck in implementing Strategies I, II and III	To resolve this issue, THP has engaged and trained religious and cultural leaders and institutions, some of which have become change champions in ending child marriage
The ban on comprehensive sexuality education in schools affected the quality of in-school programmes	Collaboration with the District Education Officers (DEOs) to orient teachers, matrons, animators and youth leaders on the current national educational sexuality framework



10. LESSONS LEARNT

We conclude this report with a few inspiring examples of key learnings. Like in the previous chapter, we see that many of the most successful Her Choice activities involve amplification of young people's voices, and advocacy at the local and national level. Examples at the grassroots/community level are marked in purple, and those at the governmental level in red.

- We designed a peer educator training to reduce student's risk-taking behavior, to provide them with facts about sexual and reproductive health, STIs and HIV/AIDS, drugs and alcohol, and to equip them with positive values and life skills to make well-informed and healthy choices about their behavior. This turned out to be very effective. The trained girls contributed hugely to reach more girls, both in school and in the community. They created awareness on SRHR and consequences of child marriage by cascading their learning, using methods of one to one, group and classroom discussions. (THP **Bangladesh**)
- Due to programme interventions, adolescents have gained skills, which enable them to communicate effectively with members of the Upazila administration, including law enforcing agencies. Thus, they proactively address the respective officers and elected representatives by cellphone message, face to face or written complaint regarding child marriage. As a result, the number of (forced) child marriages is decreasing – and everything in a positive mood. (Dalit, **Bangladesh**)
- It is essential to put young people at the heart of the fight against harmful practices and gender-based violence. They have been identified as key actors for change, and are the ones to promote sustainability of the achievements of the Her Choice programme. (THP **Benin**)
- Much was invested in the development of the different training manuals for teachers, to integrate all SRHR themes in the CSE curriculum. But we see that these efforts now start to show results - slowly but surely. (Partners **Burkina Faso**)
- The involvement of boys and men in discussions on SRH and gender contributes to gender equality. Without their engagement, it will hardly be possible to mitigate harmful customary practices that lead women and girls to suffer from social, mental and physical problems.
- Parents' interest in girl's education is increasing. Parents want to foster their daughters' self-reliance and more men prefer to marry educated girls and women.
- Engaging young people in simple action research can help them to proactively assess matters that affect them, identify their issues, engage with wider actors, plan proposed actions in collaboration with other actors, and implementing them accordingly.
- The empowerment of girls and young women to act as role models is crucial for social mobilisation. (Partners **Ethiopia**)
- According to some teachers and parents, girls and boys before the commencement of the Her Choice programme were timid and could not contribute to any discussion about them, even when their rights were abused. The Her Choice programme has empowered these children to be bold on discussing issues affecting their rights.
- According to teachers and health staff, the creation of referral systems between schools and health centers has contributed immensely on how girls and boys access youth friendly healthcare. According to health staff, since students are referred to their facilities by their teachers, they have developed confidence in the system and feel free to discuss any health challenges they face for redress.



- Participation of the general community in the programme has improved drastically after the enrolment of married girls into a vocational training and skills development project. Community members say that, among other things the Her Choice has done in communities, they are especially grateful for this particular intervention since it will release burdens from girls and their families on the short run. This intervention had a direct effect of eliminating poverty and child marriage in communities. (THP Ghana)
- Empowering communities to take responsibility for programme activities promotes ownership of the themes by the communities themselves.
- The synergy between actors working in the same field promotes the success of the actions carried out.
- The establishment of focal persons is a good practice. It allows girls to become more confident and to find answers to all their concerns about their intimacy. It reduces cases of pregnancy and thereby reduces child marriage.
- The introduction of role model couples was effective to set examples of educating children without discrimination and disparity. (Partners Mali)
- Awareness and education focused on parents helps to minimise the rate of child marriage and other harmful traditional practices against girls and women.
- Networking and regular coordination among target groups and community stakeholders bring conceptual clarity, sets clear community agendas and develops collaboration to address the issues in a joint manner. It also enables to increase the level of ownership on the issue among community members and stakeholders.
- Likewise, mobilisation and proactive initiatives taken by faith-based leaders bring visible change in society, particularly on the issues of girls and women. (CWIN, Nepal)
- Our strategy of inviting government officials as speakers in our activities has shown to be our best practice to minimise the hurdles in the absence of the No Objection Certificate.
- Informing the relevant government department prior to the execution of every activity helped us a lot.
- Providing all required information and documents to the agencies involved in verification for MOU and engaging the Bedari male staff in the meetings along with the district in charge has been an effective mechanism to avoid unpleasant incidents.
- Highlighting the issue of child marriage, GBV and children out of school during the meetings with these verifying agencies has been an effective tool for us. Some officials also referred cases to us.
- Putting our efforts for creating synergies and working to strengthen government initiatives helped us to achieve the desired results. (Bedari, Pakistan)
- The active involvement of academic staff from the Ministry of Education was very beneficial for the development of the teacher training, also in the sense that it enhanced their pedagogical insights. (Enda Jeunesse Action, Senegal)
- The Country Office attained a lot of milestones collaborating with youth-led and youth serving organisations, such as: Peer to Uganda - to conduct girls mentorship camps; Uganda Youth Adolescent Health Forum - to conduct young mothers forum in Mbale and engage in joint national level advocacy engagement processes; and Raising Teenage Uganda - to organise leadership workshops for Her Choice peer educators. We have learned not only about the unique added value that these entities bring in SRHR programming for adolescents, but also their voice and credibility in articulating advocacy issues for young people. (THP Uganda)



LIST OF ANNEXES

- Annex I - Financial Report for 2019
- Annex II - Her Choice Human Interest Stories 2019





HER
CHOICE

Her Choice is an alliance of four Netherlands-based organisations: Stichting Kinderpostzegels Nederland (lead organisation), The Hunger Project (THP), International Child Development Initiatives (ICDI) and the Amsterdam Institute for Social Science Research (AISSR) of the University of Amsterdam.

These organisations combine their efforts with 27 local partner organisations to address child marriage in ten countries. The programme runs from January 2016 to December 2020 and is implemented in partnership with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands.

