



HER
CHOICE

ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT 2016

HER CHOICE

BUILDING CHILD MARRIAGE FREE COMMUNITIES

MAY 2017





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1. INTRODUCTION

This Annual Progress Report gives an overview of the efforts and accomplishments, which have been achieved during the first year of implementing the HER CHOICE programme. 32 implementing partners and 4 Netherlands based alliance members, unified within the scope of the HER CHOICE Alliance, realised the programme in 11 countries in Africa and Asia in 2016.

The content of this report mainly focuses on changes that have occurred during 2016 with regard to the planning of the Inception Report (July 2016), and on progress that has been made towards expected results through the six outcome strategies. Although (intermediate) outcome results will not be measured before the midterm evaluation in 2018, a preliminary description of results as well as a qualitative reflection on the progress so far is being given. Also, this report gives an impression on the progress in regard to collaboration, inclusion of vulnerable groups, research, communication, and on challenges and lessons learned.

In the individual country reports, partners have elaborated on an impressive quantity and quality of activities implemented within the scope of the six strategies. This report can only give a glimpse of what actually has been done, and therefore cannot do justice to the actual efforts of all those involved. Together with the Human Interest Stories (attachment), which shows examples of the real impact that the programme has already had on the lives of a substantial number of girls and their relatives, we hope that this reports will nevertheless give an impression of what has been achieved so far.

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

Bangladesh is first in Asia and third in the world in terms of child marriage prevalence¹. 66% of the girls are married earlier than 18 years of age in Bangladesh². The median age at first marriage for females aged 20–24 is 16.4 years³. In some implementation areas of the HER CHOICE programme, the prevalence of child marriage was estimated to be even much higher. Despite the fact that Bangladesh has made significant progress in poverty reduction, female literacy level and their participation in economic activities, and use of information technology, child marriage in the country continues unabated. There are fairly strong legislative and legal frameworks in place in Bangladesh to combat child marriage and protect girls' and women's legal right. Alongside, the government has taken different initiatives such as digital birth registration, a scholarship programme for girls, the Access Enhancement Project (SEQAEP) and mobile courts by local administrations to stop child marriage and prevent early school dropout. However, the parliament has recently accepted the new Child Marriage Restraint Act, which contains a provision to allow marriages for girls under 18 in

¹International Center for Research on Women (ICRW)

²Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey in 2007

³National Institute of Population Research and Training, Mitra and Associates, and Macro International, 2010, p.78

“special cases” or for “the greater good of the adolescent”. The Act does not define what types of “special cases” make child marriage acceptable. Additionally, bad governance within the judiciary system and government functionaries make it difficult for women and girls to enjoy their rights and have access to opportunities. Moreover, the political situation in Bangladesh has been deteriorated because of shrinking democratic space, emerging religious extremism and criminalization of politics. The religious extremist groups try to roll back gains made by women in society. Further deterioration of this situation may hamper the implementation and realisation of the objectives of the HER CHOICE programme.

Benin

In Benin, 1 out of 10 girls are married before 15 years and 3 out of 10 before 18 years. With the enactment of the Children's Code Act in December 2015, the country has made significant progress in the protection of the rights of the child. Henceforth, child marriage is a violation of human rights in Benin. Through this act, the State puts an end to the impunity of the instigators of this practice. The Ministries of respectively Family and Justice guarantee the protection of victims and the prosecution of offenders of child marriage in accordance to the law. However, it is still important to encourage the population to abandon this practice through the popularisation of texts and by communicating a change in behaviour. This is what the HER CHOICE programme, amongst other activities, is working on in Benin.

Burkina Faso

A growing involvement of civil society in action against child marriage exists in Burkina Faso. Moreover, the government increased its efforts to integrate the subject of SRHR, including child marriage and FGM, in education curricula. The one-year programme ‘Suddenly not a child anymore’, upon which the HER CHOICE programme has been built, has contributed to this effort. Additionally, the National Strategy for the Promotion and Protection of Young Women in Burkina Faso has been finalised, several articles on the rights of women and children have been included in the new constitution, and the Code of Persons and Family (CPF) has been revised, which will also revise upward the age of marriage.

At the local level, poor rainfall has contributed to poor harvests in the provinces of Sourou, Yatenga, Bam and Sanmatenga, resulting in a decline in household income, which in turn might increase school dropout and child marriage.

Ethiopia

Ethiopia faced unrest throughout the country in 2016, especially in the Oromia and Amhara provinces and in pocket areas of the Southern Nations. Therefore, it took additional time to get government officials’ approval and have the programme officially registered. Although the legal framework does not allow NGOs in Ethiopia to directly work on early marriage and female genital mutilation, the efforts to embedded SRHR and other efforts for the improvement of education are well appreciated and got support from the government. Ethiopia has made a commitment during the London 2014 Girls Summit to end FGM and Child Marriage by 2025, which has created room for HER CHOICE partners to cooperate with (local) governments and communities to work towards the set goals.

At national/regional levels, policy frameworks, legal frameworks and the Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP), specific targets have been set to reduce child marriage and FGM. In addition, the Ethiopian Women’s Development and Change Package targets the elimination of all harmful traditional practices in collaboration with the local governmental



and NGOs, as well as with various cultural structures and religious leaders. Out of necessity and practicality, HER CHOICE partners achieved maximum impact by working closely with local government bodies at the field level.

Ghana

Ghana went to the polls in December 2016, resulting in the election of a new government and a smooth transfer of political power. The consolidation of democratic governance in Ghana has created an enabling environment to uphold the rule of law and continued respect and protection of human rights, including the rights of children. Also, the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection developed a National Strategic Framework for Ending Child Marriage in Ghana. These political developments and national strategic policy initiatives therefore provided a conducive environment for the realisation of the objectives of the HER CHOICE programme in Ghana.

Mali

In Mali a good and constructive working relationship exists between the relevant government institutions, civil society stakeholders, and development organisations in ending child marriage. Indeed, the Ministry for the Promotion of Women, Children and Family, with the support of the National Coalition of NGOs, started a policy to promote and defend the rights of girls through the JUPREC (Justice Prevention Reconciliation) project, which provides leadership training, a series of experience sharing exchange meetings and reflection on a national roadmap for the adoption of a law against gender-based violence, including FGM. This process has been strengthened by the establishment in 2016, at the initiative of the HER CHOICE Programme, of the National Network to End Child Marriage in Mali. The main goal of the lobby and advocacy activities of the new network is to raise the legal age for marriage for girls from 16 to 18 years. These facts present opportunities for HER CHOICE and positively contribute to the realisation of the goals of the programme.



Nepal

The government of Nepal endorsed and ratified the National Strategy to end Child Marriage in Nepal by 2030. This strategy has a multifaceted approach on ending child marriage, which includes empowering boys and girls, providing quality education, providing services, engaging men and boys in women's issues, involving religious and community leaders, and changing legal procedures to combat child marriage.

The legal age of marriage has been increased from 18 to 20 with or without the consent of parents.

The South Asian Alliance against violence against children (SAIVAC) has been actively working with SAARCLAW and the Asian Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development to adopt and implement the Kathmandu Call for Action (KCA). HER CHOICE implementing partner CWIN has been taking part in the meetings in SAIEVAC through the National Alliance of Coordinating Groups (NACG) for child marriage.

The Women and Children Departments of the Nepal Government in districts have prioritised issues of child marriage in their interventions and collaborate with us at the district level and village level efforts.

Pakistan

General Elections are going to take place in 2018; as it is, the political environment is not much supportive in terms of women and child friendly legislation in Pakistan. The current government has been tightening its grip on the movement and activities of NGOs. However in the Punjab Province the situation is slightly better but not on satisfactory level. In the Punjab Government there are few parliamentarians who are supportive for women and child friendly legislation. The existing law of the Punjab Child Marriage Restraint Act 2015 contains flaws and needs improvement. HER CHOICE implementing partner Bedari has been advocating for the engagement of parliamentarians and policy makers on the improvement of legislation on child marriage. At the same time, Intelligence Agencies visit NGOs repeatedly, demanding documents and interrogating the staff. This situation has created obstacles for NGOs to work in their full capacity.

Senegal

The national context has been very positive for the HER CHOICE programme. The year has been marked by the launching of the National Campaign to End Child Marriage. The latter was held in June and brought together stakeholders from civil society, governmental and UN agencies. The launch was followed by a workshop to develop a communication plan around child marriage. As part of the campaign, UNICEF and UNFPA in a joint programme have been funding a study on the social determinants of child marriage, which will lead to the development of a plan of action for the African Union. Senegal joined the 13 country members of the mentioned campaign. This again offers an enabling environment to succeed the HER CHOICE programme. Finally, HER CHOICE implementing partner Enda Jeunesse Action has been initiating a national partnership of Girls Not Brides in collaboration with Girls not Brides Global.



Sierra Leone

Even though the government has established legislation to improve the existing situation, there is still a lot left to be done for its enforcement and for the change of traditional and social norms. The government of Sierra Leone is also working with strong effort through the office of the First Lady to eradicate child marriage. Pledges have been made not only by the office of the First Lady but also by ministries and NGOs. OneFamilyPeople (OFP) has established an alliance with institutions that have wider interest in the combat against child marriage. These concerted efforts form a starting point by which the issues related to child marriage will be addressed in the coming years.

Uganda

The decentralization policy in Uganda, which devolved power to the districts and sub county levels, has presented opportunities for partnerships between CSOs and lower government institutional arrangements (NDP, 2010).

Family ties and cultural values that previously prevented young girls from being exposed to teenage pregnancy and child marriage have been eroded. This has led to increased incidences of child marriage, which are in many cases perpetuated by the families who were traditionally charged with the responsibility of looking after the young girls until they had fully matured and become ready for marriage.

The Government has created a positive environment for women's empowerment as a result of gender main streaming across different government functions, as encompassed in the

1995 Constitution: The National Gender Policy, National Action Plan on Women, National Strategy to End Child Marriage and the National Strategy for Girl Child Education. The Children's act was also amended in 2016 to further deepen child protection policy and legal environment.

3. ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

In this chapter we give 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.

The HER CHOICE programme's long-term goal and expected results contribute to result area 1.d: Combatting child marriage. The six strategies of the programme also contribute to the other three sub-topics under result area 1: 'Ensuring that young people know more and are thus equipped to make healthier choices about their sexuality':

- a) Providing access to SRHR education (especially through strategy II);
- b) Enhancing access to high-quality SRHR services geared to young people (especially through strategy III);
- c) Giving young people opportunities to make their voices heard and stand up for their rights (especially through strategies I, IV, V and VI).

Furthermore, HER CHOICE contributes indirectly to result area 4: 'Winning more respect for the sexual and reproductive rights of groups who are currently denied these rights', especially to 4.d: Promoting a rights-based approach in policy and legislation in the programme countries.

Below, we summarise the progress that has been made in 2016 through the six strategies.



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.

Outcome results:

- Girls have an increased knowledge on negative effects of CM/FGM⁴ and knowledge and skills to claim their SRHR
- Girls increasingly show self-confidence in expressing their views in community meetings/rallies

Awareness raising and training sessions for girls and boys on their rights, SRHR, effects of early marriage and life skills have been conducted in **all programme countries**. Sometimes through girls- or youth clubs, adolescent empowerment centres, in combination with sports or excursions, with the help of video screenings, focus group discussions, speech competitions and other participatory and interactive modules, these sessions contributed to the dissemination of information on SRHR and child marriage, life skills, and on the promotion of safe sexual behaviors. On some events, successful role models shared and

⁴ In countries where FGM is practiced.

discussed their own experiences on (escaping) child marriage, continuing their education and following their dream.

Trainings included the provision of skills in self-awareness, communication, negotiation, and leadership, which help young people and girls in particular to become more proficient in the contemporary world and increase their capacity on self-visioning, decision making, and commitment. In **Sierra Leone** such trainings were also provided to girls with disabilities, who are extra vulnerable and marginalized. In **all countries**, boys were deliberately involved as SRHR champions alongside their female counterparts.

In **Benin, Ethiopia and Sierra Leone** community volunteers and students have been trained to provide peer education on SRHR and life skills, and have put these skills into practice.

The training of girls and boys in acting and theater performance in **Benin, Burkina Faso and Sierra Leone** proved to be useful to continue awareness raising on the effects of child marriage through theatrical performances within communities (see also Strategy V).

During the implementation of this strategy it was noted that:

- In **Pakistan** issues like SRHR and Child Marriage are very sensitive and must be approached from general health issues, using terminologies that are culturally acceptable. Also, key influential persons like village chiefs have been taken in confidence, who might provide support in the event that problems arise.
- In **Uganda** the existing policy restricts SRHR activities in schools. Therefore, certain components of SRHR were not covered in some training sessions. It is anticipated that this situation will improve, as different influential actors are currently addressing this policy guideline.
- **In general** it was noted that a large number of young people (including married girls) had a very poor knowledge of the SRHR topics addressed.



Progress towards results: In all programme area`s girls have gained comprehensive knowledge on SRHR and effects of child marriage. In **Benin, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, Mali, Nepal, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Uganda** it has been observed during meetings, religious gatherings, debates and radio broadcasts, that girls manage to overcome their shyness and speak out in public. In front of their parents, teachers and/or other members of the community, they were able to claim their right to say no to child marriage and FGM, and to continue their studies. These girls are working toward becoming leaders within their environment. In **Ethiopia** cases have been reported of denunciation of child marriage by girls themselves.

In **Benin, Ethiopia, Mali, Sierra Leone** girls in youth clubs manage to do peer education around SRHR and FGM comfortably.

In **Ethiopia** instances have been evidenced where schoolgirls started protecting their baby sisters from FGM.

In **Ethiopia, Mali, Nepal, Sierra Leone** life skills of schoolgirls in the implementation areas have resulted in girls refusing unwanted sex proposals and using contraceptives.

Halima, age 16, from Sujapur village in Bangladesh, was to be married off to her cousin. She refused, and received help from the HER CHOICE youth club in her village. Read Halima's story in *Human Interest Stories*, page 4.



3.2. Strategy II

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

Outcome results:

- Increase in % of girls 12-<18 enrolled in primary and secondary school
- Increase in % of girls regularly attending formal education

In **Bangladesh, Benin, Ghana, Pakistan, Senegal** and **Uganda** community sensitisations to promote girls' education have been implemented. Additionally, parental skills trainings and interventions for teachers, parents and students to increase awareness and capacity on school enrollment, prevention of drop-out, the provision of safe transportation, and on the importance of secondary education were conducted. In **Burkina Faso** grass-root organisations and school officials collaborated to reintegrate school dropouts and to interfere in cases of unwanted pregnancy and (intended) child marriage, which helped to maintain girls in school. In **Mali** attention was generated to the provision of equal opportunities for girls and boys, e.g. bicycles for transportation to and from school, and less involvement in domestic work or child labour, in order for girls to have more time for schoolwork at home. In **Nepal** the programme has helped young people to be less involved in child labour and to remain in school.

In **Ethiopia** and **Sierra Leone** scholastic materials and in **Pakistan** transportation budgets were provided to selected families with very low income. In **Sierra Leone** girls with disabilities received bursary support for assistive devices for disabilities and tutorial classes for those with learning difficulties.

Additionally, income-generating activities for families, in particular for mothers, were conducted in most countries to help address families' financial constraints that stand in the way of school enrollment (see also Strategy IV).



Sintayehu Asres (17) from Aember, in Amhara regional state, Ethiopia: “Due to economic problems my mother requested me to support the family. However, the school director and SRHR club leader advised me to continue, after I dropped out of school for two weeks.” Read how Sintayehu’s story continues in *Human Interest Stories*, page 12.



Outcome result:

- Increase in % of schools that are girl-friendly

In **Bangladesh, Benin, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, Pakistan, Senegal** and **Uganda** advocacy activities to make schools girl friendly, aimed at institutional actors in the field of education and local community leaders, have been performed. Facilitators, including teachers, youth leaders and the young male population, were installed to monitor the safety of the girls in schools and to protect them from different sorts of assault.

In **Ethiopia** and **Senegal** facilities are being created in schools, where counseling sessions can be delivered and where girls have safe access to sanitation facilities. Girls learn to produce sanitation pads in collaboration with their mothers and no longer have to be absent from school as they now have regular access to proper hygienic facilities. Moreover, schoolgirls have been encouraged to participate in sport activities and thus increase their joy of attending school. In **Mali** female staff have been appointed as focal point, who take care that girls in need of information or assistance are referred to and/or accompanied to nearby health posts. In **Senegal** an update of the existing education policies was made to integrate chapters addressing the needs and protection of girls. In **Sierra Leone**, in order to improve access and to remove barriers to education for girls including those with disabilities, water wells were constructed in collaboration with the communities. This not only provides hygiene facilities for girls at schools, but also reduces the risk of being attacked when leaving their house at night to fetch water at distanced wells.



Outcome result:

- Teachers are increasingly able to teach about SRHR

In **Benin, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, Mali, Pakistan** and **Senegal** teachers, school directors, inspectors and other school staff have been trained and sensitised on comprehensive SRHR, effects of early marriage, FGM⁵, and children’s rights, and have commitment to educate and support their students on these themes. Scholastic materials have been created to support the education on SRHR and children’s rights. In **Senegal** these activities were carried out with the support of the departmental inspectorate of the Ministry of Education. This has enhanced the involvement and commitment of the teachers to this subject.

⁵ In countries where FGM is practiced.

In **Benin**, debates and discussions on SRHR related subjects were organised with teachers, students and other young people, including pregnant girls and young married couples.

Progress towards results: In **Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Mali, Pakistan** and **Senegal** the majority of teachers trained are able and comfortable in the teaching of SRHR and effects of child marriage and know to respond to questions of children. Teachers provide counselling and guidance on SRHR related subjects to schoolgirls and boys. In most countries, these subjects have been integrated in the official curriculum. The quality of the teachings is monitored during follow-up and supervision visits of trained teachers. Teachers refer students for more information and support on SRHR-related issues to the health facilities.

During the implementation of this strategy it was noted that:

- in **Mali**, the number of girls attending school has increased in the year 2016. They are significantly less victims of school dropout. More girls than boys are enrolled in primary school.⁶
- high schools are often further distanced from family homes than primary schools. Parents prefer to send only boys to high schools because they can move on bicycles and through public transport. They cannot afford extra expenses for safe transportation for girls.
- in **Pakistan** it was very difficult to engage teachers from government schools in trainings on SRHR and otherwise. As the current government is not in favor of NGO activities, schools have been notified by the Punjab Government to not allow NGO interference with any kind of activity in schools.



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

⁶ According to the Centre d’animation pédagogique, responsible for monitoring the quality of education of primary and secondary schools, and the School Management Committees.

Outcome results:

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

In **all countries** trainings of health workers on the provision of youth friendly SRHR services have taken place, in order to adapt local health facilities to become youth friendly and to sensitise girls and boys to assess these facilities. In **Ethiopia**, also material support (like mattresses, bed sheet, blankets etc.) has been provided to selected health centres.

In **Bangladesh, Burkina Faso and Nepal** lobby and advocacy meetings with governmental health institutes have taken place with the aim to improve the provision of youth friendly health services.

In **Benin, Ethiopia, Pakistan, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Uganda** youth focus groups and/or open days for communities were organised to raise awareness on SRHR subjects and to provide information on where to access such services. In some cases there was free provision of contraceptives and communication of toll-free numbers to access information and services related to SRHR.

In **Pakistan** consultation on SRHR issues has been provided through the Bedari Helpline and included counseling, legal aid, and referring of cases to other service providers. Girls started to be more open and share their problems with the helpline staff.

In **Sierra Leone** sensitisation activities were implemented for SRHR service providers to take into account the special needs of girls with disabilities. Sign language interpretation techniques were used to transfer SRHR knowledge to girls with speech and hearing impairment.



During the implementation of this strategy it was noted that:

- In all programme countries, issues related to SRHR used to be or still are taboo. Although progress has been made, still much needs to be done to achieve results.
- In **Ghana**, the Ghana Health Service (GHS) also plans to train health workers in SRHR and Youth Friendly Health Services. Due to funding constraints, this plan had not yet been realised. In view of this, the GHS has shown keen interest to take advantage of the training opportunities provided under the HER CHOICE programme. As a result, the number of trained health workers has significantly increased.
- In **Pakistan** trainings on SRHR issues had to be conducted separately for girls and boys, due to the cultural sensitivity of the subject. However, it was reported that these trainings proved to be a blessing for the young people in question, because they received answers to questions they never had an opportunity to ask before.
- It is often reported that young people do not dare to visit health centres because of the taboo around sexuality and the fear and shame to be stigmatised as licentious. In **Pakistan**, mothers will visit the centres for their daughters and even married women will come accompanied by mothers or husbands.
- Many health facilities are struggling with material shortage, such as contraceptives.

Progress towards results:

- In **Ethiopia, Benin, Mali, Nepal, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Uganda** health centres in the programme areas are committed to provide youth friendly services and are evaluating their current youth service provision.

- In **Ethiopia** trained health workers feel confident and devote their time and effort to create awareness for young people.
- In **Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia** and **Senegal** collaboration between health centres and schools has resulted in information centres and/or referral systems to health facilities in schools. Health workers at their turn make young people feel at ease and offer them the needed support.
- In **Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Mali, Nepal, Pakistan, Senegal, Sierra Leone** and **Uganda** the majority of girls in the programme areas know where SRHR services are available. There is an increase in the attendance of health facilities by young people. Girls have a positive perception of the services offered to them because of the hospitality and confidentiality during the consultations. Some girls adopt family planning methods.

Beena (Pakistan) recalls: “I was merely 14 years old when my parents decided to arrange my marriage. My husband did not have a job, and we struggled to deal with the problems that our marriage brought.” Read how Beena continues to tell how Bedari advises her on family planning and referred her to a local health centre for support in Human Interest Stories, page 19.

1.1. 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.



Outcome results:

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

In **Bangladesh, Benin, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, Mali, Senegal, Sierra Leone** and **Uganda**, members of women’s organisations and mothers of disadvantaged families were selected, often in coordination with local leaders, to receive training in income generating activities, in order to be able to manage their business, their savings and self-help credit effectively, with the aim to provide the necessary means to keep their children in school. Skills development trainings have been provided on various trades, such as tailoring, processing and conservation of local products, animal breeding and fattening techniques and agricultural production. In some cases also technical and market oriented professional capacity building was provided, such as computer vocational training. Small amounts have been provided for start-up support (seed money). The members of self-help groups meet weekly to collect savings and share experiences.

In **Benin, Nepal** and **Uganda** training has been provided to girls in setting up entrepreneurial activities and make a business plan. Some girls spontaneously formed (saving) groups to continue exchanges at the village level by impacting their peers and strengthening group solidarity.

In **Benin** advocacy has been conducted towards local and religious authorities for the establishment of a mechanism that facilitates women's access to land in settings where the

majority of women are engaged in agricultural activities. In Bangladesh, although participants mentioned that these trainings focused on handy crafts help them to contribute to increase their family income, recent research conducted by the Balika project (funded by Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands) highlighted that other types of skills could more easily find a place in the labour market⁷. Partner organisations in Bangladesh are now exploring the opportunity to provide training in photography, mobile phone servicing and basic first aid.

Progress towards results:

- In all countries where Strategy IV is implemented (all countries except for Pakistan) savings of self-help groups are increasing. A growing number of women is engaged in small businesses and start to generate some profit to improve livelihood and to support their daughters' education. Knowledge and statuses of women have been developed. Women also reported that, as a result of these activities, they could invest in their own health and are more independent now.

Specific examples:

- In **Uganda** a group of women used seed money to grow cabbage and tomatoes. After a few months the group harvested and sold vegetables with great profit, which they used to diversify and venture into other profitable crops like nuts and also increased the size of land they are farming on.
- In **Sierra Leone** a self-help group collected waste to keep their environment clean and make money out of it. Waste collection carts were constructed and two young men were hired to collect the waste. The same group also engaged in vegetable farming. After some time, the group was able to send five child brides back to school with the income generated from their businesses. The group members now also look after the babies while their mothers are at school.



1.2. 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.

Outcome results:

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

In **Bangladesh, Benin, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, Mali, Pakistan, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Uganda** awareness raising meetings with government officials, representatives from the administrative level, local and religious leaders and notables have been conducted on SRHR issues, child marriage, FGM and the importance of education, in order for officials and leaders to become sensitised on these issues.

⁷ <http://www.popcouncil.org/research/balika-bangladeshi-association-for-life-skills-income-and-knowledge-for-ado>

In **Bangladesh** and **Mali** trainings for women leaders (in Mali including midwives and circumcisers) have been conducted to develop further leadership skills and organise courtyard meetings on SRHR, child marriage and other rights-based issues.

In **all programme countries**, awareness-raising campaigns, community mobilization, debates, walks, sports events, theater shows and dissemination through local media on the effects of child marriage, SRHR issues and laws for the protection of children against early or forced marriages have been organised.

In **Bangladesh, Benin, Ethiopia** and **Pakistan** awareness of boys and men was raised on SRHR and on the role of women in family and in society, to help increase women's decision making and to reduce gender discrimination.

Progress towards results:

- In **Benin, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia** and **Mali** local authorities and traditional and religious leaders are increasingly aware of the negative impacts of early marriage and FGM. They are being engaged as change champions (alongside volunteers and trained youth) to tackle the scourge of child marriage.
- In **Benin, Nepal, Pakistan** and **Senegal** toll-free numbers have been publicly disclosed for the anonymous denunciation of child marriage or cases of violence against women in general.
- In **Benin** a mini documentary on the HER CHOICE programme has been realised and will be finalized in 2017.
- In **Ethiopia, Nepal** and **Pakistan** community based child protection committees were established, composed of representatives of communities and/or government institutions. These committees create awareness on child rights, child marriage and gender-based violence and develop community surveillance mechanism to deal with incidents of violence and abuse.
- In **Mali** more and more parents support their daughters in their decision and give them the possibility to decide at what age and with whom to marry. In some target villages mothers accompany their daughters to health centres in case of SRHR related problems and for contraception. In some villages, pressure groups against child marriage and FGM exist. Most of the women reached by the programme recognize that FGM is detrimental to the health of the girl, and reject the practice. However, the influence of men still weighs heavily on the abandonment of the practice.
- In **Pakistan** and **Benin** theatre performances have been used to raise awareness of issues related to child marriage. In Pakistan, thirty performances of the play 'Yeh Shadi Nahi Hosakti' (This marriage cannot happen) were conducted at bus stands, parks, fields and other public places. A drum was beaten before each performance, and when many people gathered, the play started. At the end, feedback from the community was taken about the play. Huge gatherings from communities and towns enjoyed these performances and by the way gained knowledge on the consequences of early marriages. In Benin, girls and boys have been trained in acting and theater performing and were invited by a professional theatre group to participate in the production 'Destin Dechainé' (Raging Destiny) on the effects of child marriage. Spectators of all ages and social categories were informed and sensitised by this performance on the disastrous consequences of child marriage. Theater seems to be a very effective tool for raising awareness among illiterate people.



- In **Sierra Leone** a musical awareness raising album has been recorded with the title ‘Stop making your living at the expense of girls’. The album is about to be released. Community events were organised (sports, music) in which a large audience attended. These events were used - in collaboration with schools, police, and local authorities, to raise awareness and inform the public on the HER CHOICE programme and child marriage related issues.

Céline from the village Soglonouhoué in the epicenter of Klouékanmè, Benin, was herself married off at the age of 13. Now she is engaged in preventing child marriage as a community volunteer for HER CHOICE. Read her story in the *Human Interest Stories*, page 7.



1.3. 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.

Outcome results:

- 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
- 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** advocacy and round-table discussions on child marriage, FGM and child rights with government officials, law enforcing bodies and related stakeholders have been conducted to improve relationships and sensitise them to implement laws on halting child marriage.

In **Bangladesh**, legal instruction to form sexual harassment prevention committee in each school is rarely followed by school authorities. Therefore, youth units have been formed who advocate with school authorities to form the sexual harassment committees and make them functional in their school.

In **Burkina Faso**, trainings have been conducted for imams to set up a reference system for the organisation of marriages in the mosque and to stop harmful practices. Some leaders have made a solemn pledge to bring these insights into practice.

In **Pakistan** trainings on the impact of child marriage were delivered for media professionals in Lahore, as the local media have a great role in awareness raising on any specific subject.

In **Senegal** progress has been made at the national level, as it was the fourteenth country to join the African Union campaign to end child marriage in 2016. HER CHOICE partners played an influential role and seized the opportunity to present the programme.

Progress towards results:

- In **Ghana** law enforcement agencies pledged their support and cooperation in the fight against child marriage.
- In **Ethiopia** and **Mali** the majority of communities have developed or are in the process of developing/reviewing their own by-laws on the prohibition of child marriage and FGM.
- In **Ethiopia, Mali, Nepal** and **Senegal** birth registration is improving after sensitisation meetings with the district sectors and the employment of birth registrars. In **Mali**, thanks to the programme, all births were registered in 2016.
- From **Ethiopia, Ghana** and **Mali** it was reported that an increasing number of schoolgirls feel they have trusted staff in their schools to which they can report cases and in whom they have confidence that effective measures will be taken.
- In **Mali** and **Pakistan** sub-prefects, town councilors, imams and village chiefs have stated their support against harmful practices. Therefore, girls know that they can contact them and ask their support and protection in case of violation of their rights.
- In **Mali** and **Nepal** an increasing number of girls know the laws that protect girls against harmful practices, thanks to the programme's awareness sessions.
- In **Nepal** the government has taken HER CHOICE's effort to end child marriage in districts positively and has been supportive in carrying out the activities. Many activities have been carried out in joint banner with the government and cases of child marriage have been jointly intervened.



1.4. Analysis of results

During the first year of implementation of the programme activities, much time and capacity has been invested in the baseline study (see also chapter 8) by all alliance members as well as by the implementing partners. All implementing partners have received training and capacity building by the UvA/AISSR and local researchers, and have subsequently taken on an active role in the data collecting process for the baseline study. Carrying out this process in such an inclusive way is a new experience to all parties involved, and turned out to be more time consuming than expected. As a result, the start of the implementation of activities under the six strategies has in most cases been somewhat delayed. Consequently, choices have been made in some cases to prioritise and to focus on activities that are essential for the start, and to (partly) delay the implementation of others.

In most countries implementing partners have chosen to put extra emphasis on strategy I: 'Invest in girls, their knowledge, skills related to SRHR and participation in society', as this strategy forms the basis for most other strategies.

Strategy III: 'Improve access to youth-friendly SRHR-services for girls (and boys)' concerns a new field of work as well as a new target group for many partners in the programme countries. Therefore, a number of partners chose to first invest in assessing the work field and in preoperational activities, and to focus on the actual implementation of this strategy in 2017. The same goes for strategy IV: 'Improve the economic security of girls and their

families', as this presents a relatively new field of work for partners of Kinderpostzegels and ICDI. Investments needed to be made in preparatory activities, and in the selection of families that qualify for participating in this strategy.

In Burkina Faso and Senegal, additional capacity building for implementing partners has been carried out.

In Ethiopia and in Nepal the political situation was unpredictable during 2016, and demanded extra effort and improvisation skills of local partners. For this reason, some activities had to be rescheduled for 2017.

We expect that by the end of this year, all activities planned for 2017 including the belated ones for 2016 will be carried out according to plan.

2. ANALYSIS OF PARTNERSHIPS

2.1. Added value of working as an alliance

During the first year of HER CHOICE, the alliance members as well as the implementing partners have noted the additional value of working as an alliance. Partners experienced the Alliance as a strong entity, which helped to strengthen its members' capacity through workshops, trainings, resources and report sharing and creating an overall framework, and by avoiding duplication. The alliance's communication strategy and materials enabled members to work together towards increasing brand recognition and reputation enhancement, and increased engagement. Stakeholders, including governmental bodies, NGOs and researchers, were reached through a bottom-up approach to share outcomes and impact of the programme. Working as alliance also increased capacity to mobilise resources and to share knowledge among partners. Finally, HER CHOICE provided local partners with the opportunity to engage with international partners.

Local partners report that the technical support of the UvA/AISSR contributed greatly towards the successful conduct of the baseline study and the M&E framework. It was much appreciated that the baseline trainings formed a platform for joined learning and designing of the baseline tools, and reinforced the understanding of the theory of change.



2.2. Dutch alliance members & local implementing partners

HER CHOICE supports communities to take full responsibility for ending child marriage. Local ownership is the key factor to achieve sustainable results. Local organisations, community networks, women's groups, schools and SRHR-services are the implanting actors who ensure that strategies are locally embedded. International and local partners work side by side to generate knowledge and good practice, to support networks and to build on local assets.

In their reports, local partners state that that the collaboration with the Dutch country coordinators and other members of the HER CHOICE team is cordial and helpful. A few quotes from local partners on this collaboration are: 'The advice and guidance in planning helps with the effective implementation of the programme' (Bangladesh). 'The partnership and collaboration has been very productive, with a friendly approach to partners, and timely

facilitated programme agreements and fund transfer' (**Ethiopia**). 'The HER CHOICE Impact Broker in the Netherlands was very supportive and provided critical information on the programme on timely basis which made the actual implementation of the programme enjoyable. There was sufficient communication and technical support from the Netherlands from time to time' (**Uganda**).

2.3. Partnership with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Netherlands Embassies

The HER CHOICE programme is implemented in partnership with the 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. In September 2016 a delegation of representatives of the Ministry and the three Child Marriage Alliances paid a joint visit to Pakistan on invitation of the Netherlands Embassy in Islamabad. The delegation had meetings with the Dutch Ambassador and other representatives of the Embassy, with different stakeholders, government officials, and representatives of civil society organisations in Islamabad and Lahore. In December a joint presentation of preliminary findings of the baseline studies of the three alliances has taken place at the Ministry (see also chapter 8).

In **Bangladesh, Benin, Ethiopia, Ghana, Mali, Pakistan, Senegal and Uganda**, the HER CHOICE implementing partners have met with representatives of the Embassy and shared information about the HER CHOICE programme. Partners are invited for events and meetings aimed at collaboration with partner NGOs. The partners, in turn, keep the embassies updated with regular information on the progress of the HER CHOICE programme and are invited for special events or on occasional of field visits. Most embassies have offered to support the implementation by offering a platform to promote (aspects of) the programme, when appropriate. In **Burkina Faso** and **Nepal** no Netherlands Embassies exist.



Examples of collaboration between local partners and Netherlands Embassies:

In **Ethiopia** collaboration with the Embassy has taken place on several occasions and events, with the Embassy having a strong advisory role in terms of the content and scope of the programme.

In **Ghana** the embassy has facilitated cross learning between the HER CHOICE programme and other child rights initiatives funded through the Embassy. The Embassy has also assured to use its political influence to leverage government support for the programme.

In **Mali** the Netherlands Embassy participated in the joint launch event of the HER CHOICE- and the More Than Brides alliance on October 13. Also, exchange meetings have taken place with the Embassy's secretary in charge of health issues. Finally, HER CHOICE has been invited for a discussion meeting on challenges, opportunities and strategic lines on the situation in Mali, on the occasion of the visit of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

In **Uganda**, HER CHOICE partner THP is part of a collaboration framework between the Embassy and other implementing partners, which has been important for enabling joint efforts and actions at the national level. This partnership fostered debate on inequality,

discrimination and influenced national policies on SRHR. The HER CHOICE programme directly benefited from this partnership by collaborating with key players in the SRHR sector in Uganda like Rutgers and Reach a Hand Uganda in terms of information sharing and resource materials, which has improved the quality of work.

2.4. Implementing partners and other child marriage alliances

In the majority of the 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.

Examples of collaboration within national alliances:

In **Bangladesh**, THP Bangladesh founded the National Girl Child Advocacy Forum (NGCAF) and hosts its secretariat. This forum was recently engaged in advocacy against the Child Marriage Restraint Act 2016.

In **Burkina Faso** local partner ADEP is coordinator of the National Coalition against Child Marriage, and is currently engaged in setting up a national Girls Not Brides partnership.

In **Mali** HER CHOICE partner ENDA has founded The National Network to End Child Marriage in Mali, which is in the process of becoming the national Girls Not Brides chapter and which includes more than 50 stakeholders in the prevention of child marriage in Mali. In October a joint event was realised to launch the HER CHOICE and the More Than Brides programmes. Following this event, the two Alliances have jointly participated in a number of national events and campaigns.



3. GENDER AND INCLUSIVENESS

3.1. Engagement of boys and men

Although boys and men are already engaged in most programme activities in all HER CHOICE countries, partners become increasingly conscious of the necessity to engage boys and men and to explore their role in the change process as well.

Local partner Bedari reported that in **Pakistan** without engaging men and boys they will not be able to get the required support and results in the communities. In every community the first key contact has been a male influential person. When they give value and importance to him he ensures to provide his support to them.

In **Bangladesh** a student's committee consisting of 30 students of which at least 30% - 40% boys is formed in each school, which is playing a key role to make schools safe for girls. Already 206 of such school committees have been formed.

In the scope of the HER CHOICE programme, an UvA Master student has conducted research on child marriage and masculinity in **Nepal**. His research focuses on pressures on, and expectations of, young men and is expected to provide valuable insight on men's roles within

marriage and families, and the implications thereof in terms of married (young) women's wellbeing.

Based on these experience and insights the HER CHOICE team will reflect on additional ways to involve boys and men in the programme implementation.

3.2. Engagement of disadvantaged groups

Disadvantaged groups - such as girls hiding at home, disabled girls, children of minorities and the poorest of the poor – are being consciously involved in the activities implemented through the HER CHOICE programme. In the following examples, extra emphasis has been laid on the inclusion of disadvantaged groups.

Because in **Bangladesh** implementing partner Dalit works with minority communities who are socially excluded from their basic rights, the organisation has a mechanism to reach them. Intensive courtyard meetings and discussions were the key to include marginalized and disadvantaged groups in all programme activities.

In **Ethiopia** intensive planning has taken place to identify sections of community that include disadvantages groups through door-to-door visits. Trainings were executed for key community members on how to enhance inclusion of people with disability in project planning and implementation. Watch groups have been established to point out girls at risk to the project team. Surveys are underway to identify how many girls are hiding at home, where and why and what ages. Attempts have also been made to conduct peer-to-peer group discussions with girls being kept at home.

In **Nepal** the majority of targeted groups under HER CHOICE are girls and young women from Dalit and disadvantaged communities, who are mostly not in school. Life skills education for this group of girls and young women is being provided during their availability in the daytime. CWIN has an organisational policy for gender and social inclusion and it systematically prioritises marginalised and disadvantaged groups, including disabled girls and the poorest of the poor. The Adolescent Empowerment Centre has become a means to reach these groups. CWIN staff makes regular home visits to counsel their parents, raise their awareness and involve them in programme activities. When needed, CWIN also provides extra support to girls (logistic, financial, and material) from these groups and employs principles of positive discrimination in order to ensure their participation and protect their best interest.

In **Sierra Leone** implementing partner OneFamilyPeople, is an activist organisation that works on behalf of marginalized and most disadvantaged groups, including those with disabilities. OFP identifies girls in communities through community-based social workers and volunteers who are aware of the realities that occur in everyday life. Social inclusion, and the right to participate are high on the HER CHOICE Sierra Leone agenda. OFP recognises the need to design and implement social protection systems according to the principle of social inclusion, underlying the particular need to include persons with disability in the informal and formal economy. In working with girls and women's groups in the communities, attention was given to girls with disabilities, which helped them overcome barriers to education, employment and social mobility.

While THP in **Uganda** is deliberately targeting disabled girls in the programme implementation process, increased future efforts will be made to also include other marginalised and minority groups such as girls who are house-hold heads, girls who are in object poverty and girls who are single mothers.



4. REFLECTION ON THE THEORY OF CHANGE

During the implementation of the programme in 2016, the validity of the Theory of Change has been confirmed. At the point where we stand now, all partners agree that the 6 strategies seem to be effective to reach the intended objectives.

The only remark that was made by several partners alike is that the programme focuses on the prevention of child marriage and thus does not pay enough attention to those who have become victims of child marriage. Therefore we want to explore possibilities during the coming period to include girls who are already married – and their children.

5. RESEARCH

Between March and May 2016, the UvA/AISSR delivered a series (5) of baseline training workshops for all country teams and local researchers. The nine preliminary research tools that were developed by the UvA/AISSR team (structured questionnaires and focus group discussion topics guides) were pretested and finalised during these workshops, and agreements were made to ensure the research was done in an ethical manner. Following these workshops and, where necessary, approval of the research by (local) authorities and/or ethics review committees, baseline data was collected by local implementing partners, supported by a local research coordinator, in all 11 countries between June and September 2016. Overall, the target sample sizes were met (see table with number of tools administered per country).



Table 1: Number of tools administered by study population and by country

Study population	Eth	BF	Ma	Se	Pa	Ne	Ba	S L	Gh	Ug	Be	Total
Girls	745	970	914	314	304	300	604	297	262	327	300	5337
Households	596	529	470	166	201	235	524	162	212	167	160	3422
Villages	20	16	13	4	4	4	4	4	3	4	4	80
Health Centres	20	13	14	4	3	4	4	4	3	2	4	75
SRHR Staff	20	15	24	3	4	4	8	8	4	2	4	96
Schools	20	16	14	4	4	5	4	4	4	4	4	83
Teachers	26	32	27	?	4	7	6	8	4	4	8	126
Districts	11	8	7	2	2	3	2	3	4	1	4	47
Students* (# FGD)	40	32	28	8	8	12	8	12	8	4	8	168

* female and male secondary school students

The UvA/AISSR designed a series of manuals and tools to further guide the process of data collection, documentation, entry, basic analysis and reporting. The local research coordinators entered the data in EpiData (user-friendly and free software programme) templates that had been developed by the UvA/AISSR. They then transferred these EpiData files into SPSS for data analysis and quality control by AISSR. The local research coordinators also summarised the focus group discussion findings in matrices provided by AISSR. Finally, local research coordinators developed country-level baseline reports, which were reviewed by the UvA/AISSR before finalisation. The UvA/AISSR will develop the synthesis baseline report once all data has been submitted and all necessary quality control has been completed. By December 2016, most local researchers had sent the EpiData and SPSS files, and the FGD summary matrices, as well as scanned and sent at least 10% of the filled questionnaires to UvA/AISSR for quality control.

The status of submitted (draft) country reports as of end 2016 is as follows: 1 final regional report (Part of Ethiopia); 5 draft reports with comments by AISSR sent back to local researchers (Bangladesh, Mali, Nepal, Pakistan, Uganda); 6 country teams still to submit draft. In December some preliminary baseline findings were presented during a meeting at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

In the meantime the UvA/AISSR has prepared an outline for the 11-country baseline report. When UvA/AISSR receive the raw data from the country teams, further quality checks and data analysis are carried out and the resulting country data is entered into the report. Analysis and reporting in this baseline report will be conducted at country level and at regional level within a country where applicable.

One UvA/AISSR Research-Master student is conducting her final thesis project related to HER CHOICE in Kolda Region, Senegal and has now completed her fieldwork. The study objectives were to: 1) Explore views of young girls and boys around marriage, family, education and sexuality; and 2) Identify in what ways (if any) young girls and boys exercise their agency to decide if, when, and who to marry. The thesis is due to be submitted in June 2017. Three UvA/AISSR Master students have written a research proposal within the framework of the HER CHOICE programme, and will conduct their fieldwork in Nepal during the first quarter of 2017, engaging with, respectively, abortion, SRHR-related education and masculinities.

The process of recruiting two PhD students within the HER CHOICE programme has been completed. Two female candidates, one from Nepal and one from Pakistan, will start their PhD trajectory on 1st March 2017.

The research groups of the three 'child-marriage alliances' have met twice in this period (September and December). They are planning a day for researchers to discuss baseline processes and findings and common research agenda.



6. COMMUNICATION

HER CHOICE has chosen for 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 7 Anglophone and 4 Francophone countries.

The communication strategy and approach are described in more detail in the HER CHOICE Communication Plan.

The following communication tools have been developed and introduced in 2016:

- A logo and a corporate style for HER CHOICE has been designed: an image of a girl's face and a blooming flower in one. She keeps her head up, looking slightly towards the sky, as a symbol for strength, for her potential to grow, and for her (dreams for the) future.

- A HER CHOICE brochure in English and French. The English brochure has two cover versions: one with an African girl and one with an Asian girl on the cover.
- A website www.her-choice.org has been built, in English and French language. It contains a page about child marriage in general; a page describing the HER CHOICE programme; a page about the alliance partners; and a page on research. It also has a 'news' section, to share the latest developments about HER CHOICE and news on child marriage related developments. More than fifteen stories and blogs about our work in the different countries have already been shared.
- A HER CHOICE Twitter-account and a Facebook page are active on social media, which are both connected to the HER CHOICE website and are being used for sharing news items from the website, but also updates from our partner organisations in the eleven countries.
- An image library has been created with photos from the different countries to be used on the website and social media. Country coordinators share their pictures from their trips and the communication coordinator is filing them.

These activities are managed by a communication coordinator, appointed to this task from within one of the alliance partners (ICDI).

Joint communication of the three Child Marriage Alliances in 2016

The three Child Marriage Alliances, supported under the SRHR partnership by the Netherlands' Ministry of Foreign Affairs, i.e. More than Brides (lead organisation Save the Children), HER CHOICE (lead organisation Stichting Kinderpostzegels Nederland) and Yes I Do (lead organisation Plan Nederland) 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.

In 2016, the three Alliances found the opportunity for joint communication on the founding of Girls Not Brides the Netherlands. Together we published a full page opinion letter in a Dutch National Newspaper, released a joint press statement and we managed to create a lot of free publicity around the topic of child marriage, the three alliances and Girls Not Brides the Netherlands.



7. CHALLENGES

During the implementation of the first programme 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 most important examples of such challenges are summarised.

In **Ethiopia** political instability in the intervention districts has caused a number of delays in the programme implementation. Permissions for implementation of activities were difficult to get, due to overburdening of government offices. Because of the legal framework of the country, which does not allow partners to directly work on rights issues, relationships with officials had already been established and were used to consistently discuss and negotiate in order to mobilise the necessary support from government structures. The instability also resulted in a delayed start of the school year. Partners solved this situation by investing in preparatory tasks and rescheduling activities that were not related to schools. The national

workshop on Child Marriage, which was scheduled to be organised in collaboration with the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, had to be delayed to 2017.

In **Nepal** the target group is an underdeveloped and very poor community, which in itself presents a challenge for the programme implementation. Both male and female community members are involved in heavy labour during many hours every day, which makes it challenging to reach them and engage them in activities. As most of the adolescents are also involved in work in the field and in household chores, they too can hardly manage time for training and other activities. It is difficult to pledge cases against child marriage. Often parents agree to file the case initially, but later withdraw when it comes to legal procedures and cases might become hostile. To overcome these challenges, regular field visits are carried out for rapport building with the community people and to create understanding for the objective of the programme and the overall benefit they might get from it in the future.

In **Pakistan** the current government has a stringent policy towards NGOs, making their movements more restricted. Local partner Bedari has faced challenges in engaging government officials in their activities and meetings. Officials in the different government departments were frequently transferred. The only way to engage teachers of government schools and female health workers in their trainings was through personal relations of the Bedari staff. Also, Bedari has not yet succeeded to obtain the No Objection Certificate (NOC) from the Government, although they started this process already in 2015 and submitted hundreds of copies of required documents in all the relevant field districts. Another serious challenge is presented by the frequent visits of intelligence agencies to Bedari offices, during which they interrogate the Bedari staff, asking very personal questions.

Although these challenges created much frustration for Bedari, they succeeded to continue the implementation of the programme activities by organising meetings at provincial and district level and by using the direct relations and contacts which their members have established with staff in provincial and district administrations.

In **Senegal** a challenging situation in the collaboration with implementing partner CNEPSCOFI arose, because they did not comply with the good governance requirement. Even though results were to some extent being delivered, their sustainability was questioned because of the lack of transparency within their organisational structure. When this situation did not improve, even after additional investments in capacity building and training, it was after thorough consideration decided to end the partnership with CNEPSCOFI. Their implementation of activities planned for 2017 have been taken over by local partner ENDA JA.

In **Uganda** the draft school health policy and sexuality education framework forms a challenge for the introduction of SRHR-related subjects in school curriculums. These frameworks provide restrictions of specific information in terms of content and package for various age categories without looking at the information needs of young people. Implementing partner THP worked strategically with district education officers and school inspector to lead in implementing some of these activities.



8. LESSONS LEARNED

We conclude this report with a summary of the lessons learned during the first implementation year of the HER CHOICE programme.

Exchanging with multiple stakeholders at the start

Implementing partners report that orientation events involving multiple stakeholders at the start of the programme has been of great value to them. As THP Ghana states: ‘This workshop gave us the opportunity to have invaluable input into our implementation approaches, which has helped to improve efficiency and effectiveness. It helped us to know what was already being done in the sector, what the challenges were, and how the HER CHOICE Programme could leverage existing initiatives without re-inventing the wheel. The key lesson, therefore, is that involving stakeholders from the beginning of a project is critical to its success.’

Consensus building before training

Partners from Ethiopia, Mali, Senegal and Sierra Leone report that in their view, there must be a common understanding amongst the majority of actors in order to implement a successful programme. After having held discussions and meetings with teachers, girls, school management and other community members, they gained insight in the issues and showed a strong willingness to address child marriage and FGM in their communities. This formed a basis for the implementation of trainings and workshops.

Regular involvement of community elders and local authorities

A number of partners report that the delivery of the programme has become more accepted and integrated by paying regular supportive monitoring visits to community elders, practitioners of traditional practices and community volunteers. Investing in these relationships make community leaders become part of the solution. As partner Enda JA (Senegal) states: ‘Ownership of the programme by chiefs and imams has led to their sponsorship of activities in their villages’.

For the involvement of community leaders, the following practice has been developed by the Enda-Benkadi consortium in Mali, called the Community Dialogue: All decision-makers of the village are invited to participate in a meeting and openly discuss and exchange on issues of importance for the community, like children’s rights, child marriage, FGM etc. The discussion and exchange of opinion take place in front of all members of the community, whereby freedom of expression prevails. During the dialogue each participant gives his or her view of the targeted problem. At the end of the exchange a joint decision is made regarding the issue in question. This approach has proven its value and has given good results in promoting the abandonment of FGM and child marriage.

Child protection mothers

This approach has been developed by APSEF, another partner from Mali, and provides a platform for dialogue between girls and older women. A number of girls selected by the programme are entrusted to older women whom they can trust and with whom they can share their concerns and questions with regard to SRHR issues. These women are designated



as ‘child protection mothers’. They are responsible for support of the girls who are assigned in a specific field (social education, schooling, SRHR issues, visit of health services etc.). This strategy allows good guidance and support of the girls involved, and reduces their risk of early and unwanted pregnancy.

Informing authorities

Some partners state that timely involvement of government officials turns out to be essential. Local partner Bedari (Pakistan) reports that they always inform authorities about your upcoming activities in an early stage: ‘If you will do any activity without sharing early to them, you will be in trouble. They will stop the activity. So, we always share our monthly work plans with them in advance to avoid any unpleasant situation.’

Involve all villages of a commune

According to Enda Mali, the community based participatory approach should involve all villages of the commune where the programme is implemented, and not only part of it, in order to ensure structural change. This is necessary because relationships are not limited to families within one village but in most cases exist between several villages of the commune.

Youth units for safe schools

In THP Bangladesh reports that youth units have been created among existing students to present a established safe schools and to hold the issue in a sustainable mode. These units are a driving force to communicate the message about safety of girls towards the other students. All kinds of campaigns are being initiated with the leadership of these youth units, of which campaigns through video screening have already started.

Introduction of sanitary pads

Partners from Ethiopia report that the introduction and utilization of sanitary pads for girls in schools have an irreplaceable role to build self-confidence, to avoid girls suffering during menstruation and to increase their school attendance. Their introduction also gave the opportunity to address other, more difficult issues regarding SRHR. Also, the pads are produced in special rooms, where besides fabrication also counselling group work takes place and which functions as a retreat for girls when necessary.

Theatrical performances

THP Benin reports that their main lesson learned is that the staging of theatre on a given theme (as in this case is on child marriage) is an important tool to create awareness and mobilise actors on this topic. Thus, the performance of the theatrical play 'Destin Déchainé' (Raging Destiny) performed in all epicentres where HER CHOICE is implemented made it possible beyond expectations to reach the sought effect to a large extent. In Pakistan, Bedari has gained similar effect with their theatrical performances (see also Strategy V)

Engaging the media

Several partners report that media engagement is an important tool to raise attention on programme-related issues. THP Uganda states: ‘Engaging the media was very instrumental in raising the profile of the programme but also generating action by the various leaders in the circle of child protection to fight child marriage. The four HER CHOICE launches were featured on media platforms, such as new vision newspaper (the biggest newspaper in



Uganda), Urban TV, Bukkede TV and Monitor newspaper, where leaders were making commitments to fight child marriage.'

Involving boys and men.

All partners report that they become increasingly conscious of the importance of involving boys and men in the programme implementation. Based on experience of partners and on research in Nepal, carried out within the scope of the HER CHOICE programme, we will reflect on additional ways to involve boys and men in the programme implementation.

Working as an alliance

Working as in alliances in general has been reported to have great benefits. In this sense THP Uganda reports: 'Especially the GNB and the SRHR partnership at the Dutch embassy has enabled us to define and shape our strategic collaboration, enhanced synergies through our various comparative advantages and the collective strength promoted the agenda of child marriage on the policy arena.'

Regarding the HER CHOICE Alliance, alliance members as well as implementing partners state that they benefitted from the synergy that was created by working as an alliance to address child marriage. It was an ideal opportunity for partners to learn from each other, to complement each other and to strengthen each other in joint action.



ANNEX I: Financial Report for 2016

ANNEX II: HER CHOICE Human Interest Stories 2016







HER
CHOICE

HER CHOICE is an alliance of four Netherlands-based organisations: Stichting Kinderpostzegels Nederland (lead organisation), The Hunger Project, 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 combat child marriage in eleven countries. The programme runs from January 2016 to December 2020 and is implemented in partnership with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands.



International Child
Development Initiatives

