



HER
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HER CHOICE

BUILDING CHILD MARRIAGE FREE COMMUNITIES



KINDERPOSTZEGELS
voor kinderen door kinderen



International Child
Development Initiatives



Ministry of Foreign Affairs

www.her-choice.org · info@her-choice.org



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1. INTRODUCTION

The HER CHOICE team is excited to see encouraging examples of the programme's holistic multi-strategy approach starting to pay off. An approach that involves not only girls, boys, teachers and leaders, but everyone in the community. As OneFamilyPeople (Sierra Leone) describes it: "The community people become actors of their own development, as they know best what will work for them."

This report provides an overview of what happened within the HER CHOICE programme in 2017. Recapitulating the vast number of activities that have been carried out in more than 1,000 villages in 60 regions in 11 countries represents a challenge. To avoid too much of an abstract summary, we illustrate the descriptions with concrete examples wherever possible. More examples from real life can be found in the attached Human Interest Stories 2017, all showing how big and small steps can have lasting impact on the lives of the girls involved.

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 government of Bangladesh is committed to end all child marriage by 2041. In order to reach that goal, the government has reformed and adopted the new Child Marriage Restraint Act 2017 in February 2017. This act is stronger than the previous law. However, there is widespread criticism about its provision, which allows marriage for girls under 18 in 'special cases'.¹ In addition, the government has begun developing a National Plan of Action to eliminate child marriage. It is found that the government and the people of Bangladesh are increasingly aware of the negative impacts of child marriage, yet investments to end the practice remain limited.



Benin

On 16th June 2017, the government of Benin with the support of UNICEF officially launched the Zero Tolerance to Child Marriage Campaign (CTZ). Benin thus confirmed its commitment to the African Union in the pan-African campaign 'Accelerating action to end child marriage'. On this occasion, pleas were made to the Government for the effective implementation of the texts protecting children and the introduction of comprehensive sexuality education in programmes in secondary school from grade 6.

Under the leadership of the Ministry of Gender, the CTZ partnership includes various development actors who have committed to focus on the eradication of child marriage over a period of 3 years. Benin is the 20th country on the continent to launch a vast campaign against child marriage.

Burkina Faso

The context in which HER CHOICE was implemented in 2017 was marked by the following enabling events:

¹ Section 19 of the Act mentions that child marriage would not be considered an offense if it was for the interest of the underage girl. However, this has to be done in line with the directives of a court, with the consent of the parents, and following due procedure. Critics are concerned about the potential abuse of this provision.

- The adoption by the Council of Ministers on 31st May of the National Strategy for the Promotion and Protection of Young Girls in Burkina Faso 2017-2026 and its Operational Action Plan, and the Operational Action Plan of the National Gender Policy;
- The Multi-Sector Platform on Child Marriage on 20th October, where the First Lady and the wives of ministers called on the Government to make a stronger commitment to ending child marriage by 2025;
- The launch of the regional project 'Empowerment of Women and Demographic Dividend in the Sahel', with a sub-project on addressing child marriage.

Moreover, the combined efforts of HER CHOICE partners together with the national coalition against child marriage and other partners have led to the commitment of the Ministry of Justice for the revision of the Code of Persons and Family (CPF), bringing the minimum age of marriage to 18 for boys and girls.

On the other hand, the fragile security situation in the country remains a threat to the programme.

Ethiopia

At the national level, legislation issued in 2009 has restricted the works of CSOs, especially in the sphere of rights issues including child marriage. At the regional level (Amhara, Oromia and SNNPR) however, governments show a growing commitment to work with CSOs to address child marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM), despite the restrictive law.

As part of this commitment, HER CHOICE activities, including regional workshops, were designed and planned with involvement of regional and local government representatives. Additionally, partners report that local governmental offices (police and justice offices) are stepping in to safeguard girls and to protect them from child marriage through implementation of laws and legal procedures.

However, the political instability that poses unrest throughout the country, especially in Oromia and Amhara, presents a threat to the continuous implementation of the project activities.



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Ghana

The smooth and peaceful transition of power after the parliamentary and presidential elections in 2016 has created an enabling and stable political environment to uphold the rule of law and to ensure continued respect and protection of human rights. This stable political environment held through to 2017 and was experienced in the Eastern and Central regions where the HER CHOICE programme is being implemented.

When the new administration took power in 2017, the president pledged his support and that of his government for the fight against child marriage, thus following the line of policy of the previous administration. This was followed by the launch of the National Strategic Framework on Ending Child Marriage (2017-2026) that had been started by the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection under the previous government where THP-Ghana was very instrumental in its drafting and launching.

Mali

The political context in Mali has changed a lot over the past years. Despite the absence of a specific law against child marriage and FGM, actions to fight these practices have intensified in 2017. A strong lobby against child marriage, focused at the National Assembly, was aimed at informing the members of parliament on the negative effects of child marriage and the importance to change the legal age of marriage from 16 to 18 years. On 28th July, the Minister of Justice submitted a draft bill, by which the minimum age for marriage of girls should be raised to 18.

At the same time, the unstable political and security environment, which prevails since 2012, greatly affects the population and particularly the region of Mopti. In 2017, this region has faced frequent attacks of unidentified armed groups. The majority of these attacks, however, have been perpetrated in the central Delta of the Niger area.

As a consequence, some villages in the HER CHOICE intervention area in the municipality of Sofara have not been accessible from time to time. The other HER CHOICE area in the region of Mopti remained accessible. Yet, the sense of fear that this situation of insecurity has created amongst the population sometimes affects the work of the HER CHOICE project teams in these areas.

Nepal

In 2017, significant changes have taken place in the political system in Nepal, which give more autonomy to the local areas.

HER CHOICE partner CWIN has been approached by the provincial and local level government of their intervention areas to integrate child protection and address child marriage in their local level planning.

Also, the village and municipal councils have approached the local HER CHOICE staff for support and coordination in their local planning process.

Pakistan

The political environment is still not very supportive in terms of women and child friendly legislation in Pakistan. The government issued an order to more than 20 national and international NGOs, including Plan International Pakistan and Action Aid Pakistan, to close their offices. These organisations have appealed against this order. However, the situation is creating hurdles and insecurity among civil society organisations.

Elections are planned to take place in August 2018, but may be held earlier as a number of political parties have joined hands as 'Joint Opposition Alliance' to launch a decisive movement against the current ruling party. The key demand of the Alliance includes immediate dissolution of the national and provincial assemblies.

In the Punjab Government, some parliamentarians are supportive to women- and child-friendly legislation. HER CHOICE partner Bedari is lobbying to engage a growing number of parliamentarians and policy makers on the subject of child marriage. An amendment to the existing Punjab Child Marriage Restraint Act 2015 is being strongly advocated by the civil society.

Senegal

Senegal's level of commitment to the issue of child marriage is improving significantly. The government, CSOs, as well as research structures continue to prioritise this subject and to integrate it in their action plans for the coming years. The action research project 'Justice sociale et inclusion face aux mariages d'enfants: cas du Sénégal et de la Côte d'Ivoire' (Social justice and inclusion in dealing with child marriage: the case of Senegal and the Ivory Coast), which is carried out by academics in collaboration with field actors, will provide some evidence based background to the HER CHOICE programme.

On 23rd – 25th October, Senegal hosted the High-Level Meeting on Ending Child Marriage in Dakar. This meeting was organised and supported by a coalition of international and regional civil society organisations, Girls Not Brides, customary and religious leaders, members of governments, youth activists, the African Union, ECOWAS, ECCAS and diplomatic representations. The event has contributed to the reinforcement of the enabling environment for the HER CHOICE programme.

Sierra Leone

Since Sierra Leone launched the African Union Campaign to End Child Marriage in Africa, child marriage has gained increasing momentum on the national development agenda. The governmental effort to end the practice, which affects 44% of girls nationwide, has increased. Traditional chiefs in many districts, including the HER CHOICE intervention areas Moyamba and Kambia, have publicly condemned child marriage and instituted punishment for perpetrators.

According to Sierra Leone's First Lady, stated during the High-Level meeting in Dakar (see Senegal), her efforts to end child marriage led to the signing of a MOU by traditional leaders at district level,



which culminated into the passing of byelaws that now await approval by the Sierra Leone Parliament.

The Law Reform Commission conducted a regional consultation to validate the report compiled by the Sub-Committee In Abolishing Child Marriage.

Uganda

The term of office for the current government will run until 2021. As there will be no general elections or anticipated political turmoil, an enabling environment can be envisaged for the next three implementation years of the HER CHOICE programme.

The Government of Uganda, through the Ministry of Education & Sports (MoE&S), has developed a National Sexuality Education Framework where different stakeholders including CSOs provided input. In the meantime, the MoE&S has directed all SRHR school-based interventions to be implemented based on the Presidential Initiative on AIDS Strategy for Communication to Youth (PIASCY) curriculum. This includes a listing of topics such as Family Planning, LGBTI and Masturbation as no-go areas for sexuality education in schools.

This situation has prompted a number of CSOs, lead by the Centre for Health, Human Rights & Development (CEHURD), who are also members of the SRHR Partnership at the Netherlands Embassy, to file the court case 'Comprehensive Sexuality Education' at the High Court in Kampala, for which the ruling is yet to be made.

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.

*Under **Progress towards results**, an indication is given of achieved results in 2017 of each strategy,, based on observations of implementing partners (country reports) and on output results (see **Output results 2017**).*

*Under **Changes to the original planning**, budget deviations of more than 25% per strategy are explained. In paragraph **3.7 Overview of changes in implementation per country**, deviations of more than 10% per country are explained. These changes correspond to page 2 - 3.: Realisation vs budget per country of **Annex I Financial Report**.*

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 training for girls (and boys) and 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 and to provide information on the negative effects of child marriage. These activities were also focused on improvement of confidence and leadership, on positive body image and positive self valuation as girls, on girls learning how to claim their SRHR and to have a strong voice in the decision if, when and whom to marry. As THP **Uganda** reports, the girls' clubs have provided a safe and secure space for girls to discuss critical issues that are central in their well being.



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In a number of HER CHOICE countries, particularly in **Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Nepal** and **Sierra Leone**, girls have been participating in outdoor sports and rallies to learn the fundamentals of teamwork, and to appreciate and tolerate differences. HER CHOICE partner CWIN (**Nepal**) reports that they continued to use mixed gender sports (judo and korfbal) as a tool to break down gender stereotypes. In **Sierra Leone**, HER CHOICE girls have taken part in the 2017 Western Area female football tournament. In i.a. **Bangladesh**, girls have also taken part in knowledge-based competitions like quizzes and debates. In **Benin**, young people participated in the performance of several theatre plays and debates on the subject of child marriage.

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

- As *Strategy I* is a cornerstone of the programme, and based on the learnings of 2016, partners in **Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Mali** and **Senegal** have decided to put extra emphasis (and budget) on this strategy by setting up and strengthening girls' clubs in order to train girls' leadership skills and empower them to defend their rights to education. Once the girls' clubs have been well trained, they will play an important role for the other outcome strategies in the coming years. Additionally, in **Mali** the intervention area moved to new villages where the setting up of girls' clubs was also a priority. This resulted in an over-spending of 35% (Burkina Faso), 33% (Ethiopia), 107% (Mali) and 88% (Senegal) on this strategy.
- Under this strategy, the organizing of girls' and boys' camp meetings in **Ghana**, and the training in sign language of health workers in **Uganda** were implemented as extra activities, which resulted in an overspending of 31% (Ghana) and 28% (Uganda) on this strategy.
- **In total**, this resulted in a **overspending of 29%** on *Strategy I*.

Progress towards result

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

The **majority of implementing partners** report that girls have become more confident and vocal to speak in public and to participate in meetings and rallies in their community. They are able to express their views and some are able to educate their peers and parents on the negative consequences of child marriage.

- **Girls have an increased knowledge on negative effects of CM/FGM² and knowledge and skills to claim their SRHR**

Standing up against marriage

HER CHOICE partners from **Bangladesh, Burkina, Ethiopia, Ghana** and **Mali** report that girls in their implementing areas have become champions to protect themselves and others from child marriage. Girls have increased bargaining and negotiation power to determine their future. Partners from **Mali** and **Ethiopia** tell us that, as a result of schoolgirls reporting child marriage issues and other SRH concerns to their teachers, members of child protection committees or local administrators, a substantial number of child marriage cases were cancelled in 2017. ESD Ethiopia even reports about the cancellation of 80 arranged marriages by law enforcing bodies and community task forces through the active involvement of girl students (see also results under *Strategy V*).

Claiming their SRHR and refusing unprotected and unwanted sex

From the country reports and output results (see attachment), we can see that in **most countries** visits of girls to health centres have increased, even in **Pakistan** where in 2016 this issue was reported to be extremely sensitive. In **Bangladesh**, girls gained confidence to stand up against eve-teasing and other forms of sexual harassment. In **Mali**, an increasing number of girls refuse to have

² In countries where FGM is practiced.



unwanted sex and, in case they are sexually active, increasingly use condoms. In **Senegal**, the acquired knowledge of the functioning of the human body and the support of the community referencing system for self-protection has resulted in a slow but growing decrease of unwanted pregnancies.

In the region Ségou in **Mali**, more and more schoolboys and girls who have no birth certificate turn to the municipal authorities to claim their right to such a certificate (right to identity).

Claiming their right to education

As a result of the activities under *Strategy I*, partners also report that girls have become more aware of the importance of education. HER CHOICE partner Bedari (**Pakistan**) reports that most of the girls involved in the programme have initiated to talk with their parents about getting admission to secondary school after completing their studies at the village school (see also *Strategy II*).



“Before the marriage Rina was a dreamer and wanted to help her family and her society. She was sincere to her studies, a regular school goer and a lending hand to her family. Her marriage ruined her spirit and shattered all perspectives to Rina’s dreamed future.”

Read how Rina from **Bangladesh** got help from her friends and managed to return to school on page 4, Human Interest Stories 2017.

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 countries**, 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 include: providing insight on the long-term benefit of education through girls’ clubs and parent meetings; deployment of inspiring role models; providing scholarships for the poorest families (**Nepal**); identifying non-attending children by special committees (**Pakistan**); providing alternative education spaces to reinforce students in risk of dropping out and/or to reintegrate students (**Senegal**). Partners in **all programme countries** have been working on the improvement of girl-friendliness of schools and on training teachers to improve their SRHR teaching skills.

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

- Parallel to the training of teachers (*Strategy II*), partners in **Mali** realised the training of health workers (*Strategy III*), which resulted in under-spending of 35% on *Strategy II* for Mali.
- In **Pakistan**, extra means were deployed on *Strategy II* because intensive lobby and awareness raising activities led to the creation of bicycle schemes for girls. Additionally, previously postponed meetings with parliamentarians took place in 2017. This led to an over-spending of 32% for Pakistan on this strategy.
- As a result of intensive monitoring by ICDI it was concluded that due to low capacity and staffing issues at OneFamilyPeople (**Sierra Leone**) it has become increasingly difficult to meet programme goals in three regions. Therefore, the decision has been made to drop the Moyamba and Kayamba regions and to consolidate programme activities in Freetown only, which led to an under-spending of 31% for Sierra Leone on this strategy.



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Progress towards result

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

Programme partners from **Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, Mali, Nepal, Pakistan, Senegal, Sierra Leone** and **Uganda** report that activities focused on enrolment and keeping girls (and boys) in school, usually realised through close collaboration between programme partners, school management and (sometimes) district offices, start to show results. Girls are increasingly motivated to receive education, which is shown by the growing number of girls enrolled in primary and secondary school. Partners report that the number of girl dropouts and absentees in the target areas are significantly declining, and, because of their regular attendance since the start of the programme, their academic performance is improving. **Ethiopian** partner LIA reports that girl dropouts in Doisha (SNNPRS) decreased to zero in the reporting year.

A few girls in Vehari, Punjab, convinced their parents that they should travel to school by bicycle. In this way, they assured them, they would be able to do household chores besides attending school. As Bedari provided the girls with bicycles, the social norm in the community started changing. Before this initiative, bicycle riding by girls was not acceptable. Now more and more girls start to cycle.

Girls who are getting traveling support from Bedari from Lahore met with parliamentarians in the Punjab Assembly during their exposure visit. The girls were much excited to meet with the legislators and the visit boosted their confidence. They drafted their demands for getting travel facilities for school attendance and for ending child marriage, and presented their resolution before the parliamentarians. The legislators signed this resolution and promised their commitments for the cause.

"I had to borrow a bicycle from my neighbour to pick and drop my daughters. Now there's no need to do it. Both my daughters will go to school independently by riding cycle themselves".
Tahir Iqbal, father of Zarina



- Increase in % of schools that are girl-friendly

Most partners report that the environment in favour of girls both inside and outside of schools is improving, and that, as a result, the attendance of girls in school is rising.

In order to provide a clear definition of aspects that contribute to the qualification of a truly girl-friendly school, HER CHOICE local partners, coordinators and researchers have collected relevant criteria, and assembled a list of standards. In the reports for 2017, partners mostly mention the following criteria to describe the improvement of schools towards girl-friendliness:

- The school applies a zero tolerance approach (appropriate disciplinary methods) to sexual harassment in schools, whether by pupils or teachers
- A suggestion/complaint box is available in school, which is regularly checked, and a protocol is in place how these complaints are being handled
- Schools inform girls about their rights, girls can express their thoughts and feelings freely
- Existence of a functioning water point at school
- Existence of separate sanitary facilities (toilets) for girls and boys, with sufficient privacy within, and sufficient distance between the facilities
- Existence of 'safe rooms for girls' (where girls can change their clothes and menstruation pads when they have their monthly period, wash their hands, take a rest and discuss SRHR issues amongst themselves in private)
- The availability of a first aid kit and sanitary napkins

- Existence of a teacher counsellor on SRH and gender sensitivity issues (trained teacher on SRH issues and gender sensitivity)
- School and/or parent-teacher association promotes measures to enable girls to safely reach school, e.g. community volunteers safeguarding the road, children travelling in groups etc.

For the full list of standards, see Annex III Girl-Friendly Schools Tool.

In **Uganda**, members of parents teachers associations, school management committees and school head teachers have been oriented on their role in promoting a girl-friendly school environment. Teachers are more responsive and conscience of girls' SRHR concerns and issues like menstrual hygiene. THP Uganda tells us: "Successful role models have spoken, motivated and inspired girls to remain in school, including girls with disabilities. Through various activities, school has been made fun and enjoyable to girls." ESD (**Ethiopia**) reports that the provision of sanitary pads has contributed to a decrease in dropout rate of girls. In their project area, girls are self-reliant and self-confident, due to the knowledge and skills they acquired on menstruation management.

- **Teachers are increasingly able to teach about SRHR**

In the target areas of **all programme countries**, the training on SRHR of teachers and principals of primary and secondary schools has enabled them to acquire the necessary skills for integration of these themes in the educational package. Teachers are increasingly confident and able to teach pupils on SRHR-related subjects. These subjects include: family planning methods, child protection policy, harmful effects of child marriage and FGM³, adolescent-friendly approach, and support of girls' (and boys') clubs. Some of the trained teachers have been assigned to provide counselling to students on SRHR-related subjects.

In **Burkina Faso** a large number of teachers has been trained on SRHR through a programme implemented in collaboration with HER CHOICE partner ADEP and the Ministry of Education. The evaluation showed that as a result of this training 95% of trained teachers were able to easily translate knowledge on SRHR to their daily teaching practice. **Ghana** reports that the support that teachers have provided to adolescent girls on menstrual hygiene has helped to reduce truancy among girls during their time of menstruation. By the end of 2017, all target schools of the HER CHOICE programme in **Mali** had a SRHR counsellor, who also act as a referent to the nearby Health Centre. Sometimes implementing partners use creative techniques to reinforce the practice of SRHR teachings in schools. Like in **Benin**, where a debate conference allowed teachers to practice animation techniques around the topic of SRHR in their schools.

In **Uganda** and **Pakistan** the teaching of (certain) SRHR topics in schools is prohibited. Although this situation leaves limited room to act, partners still find ways to realise this strategy. In Pakistan for instance, teachers are providing SRHR education informally during the teaching of another subject.



"In 2017, Oumou's parents accepted the request of a man who wanted to marry her, and wanted to force her to end her studies. Fortunately Oumou was well aware of the issues connected to child marriage, thanks to some training of the HER CHOICE programme in her village. She contacted the teacher and the director of her school and requested them to talk to her parents." Read more about Oumou from **Mali**, and how her story continues on page 10, Human Interest Stories 2017.

³ Only in countries where FGM is practised.

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 train and sensitise health workers on the provision of counselling and guidance on SRHR issues to young people, respecting their safety, confidentiality and privacy. Additionally, referral systems to health centres within schools and communities and links to teachers and local leaders have been established or strengthened.

Activities under *Strategy III* are implemented in different ways, depending on the local context. In **Senegal**, collaboration is realised either with health workers in health centres, or, alternatively, with trained health relays, the so-called Badjénou Gokh (local godmothers) who hold confidential consultations in local 'health huts'. In **Ghana**, the collaboration with nurses who were trained on youth-friendly SRHR and counselling resulted in the creation of adolescent corners in all HER CHOICE epicenters, where one on one consultation is provided to young people.

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

- SKN partners in **Burkina Faso** identified an extra need to focus on training activities under this strategy, which resulted in an over-spending of 45% in Burkina Faso under this strategy.
- With THP **Benin** and THP **Ethiopia**, some training under *Strategy III* has been delayed and will be conducted in 2018, which resulted in an under-spending of 31% (Benin) and 26% (Ethiopia) under this strategy.
- In **Senegal**, the additional attention on *Strategy I* (see explanation above) resulted in a slight decrease of activities on *Strategy III* and *IV*. Additionally, these activities could be carried out more cost-effectively than foreseen and resulted in an under-spending of 75% under this strategy.
- As a result of intensive monitoring by ICDI, it was concluded that due to low capacity and staffing issues at OneFamilyPeople (**Sierra Leone**) it has become increasingly difficult to meet programme goals in three regions. Therefore, the decision has been made to drop the Moyamba and Kayamba regions and to consolidate programme activities in Freetown only. This resulted in an under-spending of 28% under this strategy in Sierra Leone.



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

All partners report that awareness on SRHR issues and access of married and unmarried girls and boys to health centres, including family planning services, has increased.

Similarly as for outcome result 'Increase of girl-friendly schools' under *Strategy II*, HER CHOICE local partners, coordinators and researchers, have assembled a set of standards in order to define the qualification of youth-friendly health services. The standards out of this list that are most frequently referred to by partners to describe the progress of youth friendliness of health services are:

- Health workers have an open and friendly attitude towards youth sexuality, without moralistic or religious judgment;
- All information regarding SRHR issues, including family planning, is available for all youth, married and not-married and/or with disability;
- The health workers of a SRHR service or health centre are familiar with the harmful consequences of child marriage (and FGM) including the health risks of early pregnancy;

- Monitoring is done to ensure adherence to these standards.
For the full list of standards, see Annex IV Youth-Friendly Health Services Tool.

As a result of training of health workers and improved youth-friendliness and accessibility of health centres, CWIN (**Nepal**) reports that adolescents have now started talking and discussing SRHR issue more openly, and have increased their negotiation skills for the use of contraception and unwanted sex. **Ethiopian** partner ESD reports that health workers, after being trained, started providing SRH⁴ education for the school community twice a week in collaboration with the school management. The linkages between school and health centres were strengthened and a MOU was signed. As a result, girls now have better access to SRH services, developed their attitudes and perceptions, and express their feelings freely at health centres or clinics. **Bangladesh** local partner Dalit reports that as a result of the increased youth-friendliness of health centres, girls and women are participating in discussions on SRHR in different platforms such as community meetings, trainings and in classrooms, while showing their confidence to claim it as a right.

HER CHOICE partner Bedari shows that, even under the severe restrictions in **Pakistan**, accessibility of SRHR services to youth can be improved by providing training to health staff. As a result, Ms. Rehana, health worker in Chakwal states: *“It is our responsibility to make the visitor comfortable, whether he or she is married or unmarried”*. Young people who visited the centres provided feedback that discussing SRHR makes them feel confident to talk more freely, share experience with their peers and feel more comfortable to revisit the health centres. As Bedari puts it: *“Although SRHR is a taboo in our society, we see that the first step towards changing attitudes is initiated.”*

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 Pakistan⁵, have supported self-help groups (SHGs) to initiate income-generating activities (IGAs) like petty trading and farming business. Such activities include: purse and jewellery making, production of organic fertiliser and pesticides, processing and conservation of local products, livestock breeding, tree plantation, etc. Members of SHGs have also been trained in financial management, development of small enterprises and marketing of products. Members were shown the benefits of reinvesting in their group and 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

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

- ICDI partner CWIN in **Nepal** has additionally invested in vocational training and income-generating activities for girls and young women, due to increased interest and effectiveness for those activities. This resulted in an over-spending of 32 % under this strategy.
- In **Senegal**, the additional attention on *Strategy I* (see explanation above) resulted in a slight decrease of activities on *Strategy III* and *IV*. Additionally, these activities could be carried out

⁴ In Ethiopia, NGOs are not allowed to practice the ‘rights’ aspect of SRHR. Hence the abbreviation SRH is used.

⁵ Strategy IV is not implemented in Pakistan under HER CHOICE.

more cost-effectively than foreseen, which resulted in an under-spending of 42% under this strategy.

Progress towards result

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

Partners report that through activities under *Strategy IV*, the savings of SHGs have increased and the economic status of the majority of participating households has improved. Apart from sufficient food for the family, school fees and educational materials could be purchased. As a result, the school attendance of girls has improved. Also, the self-esteem and decision making power of women on issues of reproductive health, child education and child marriage have improved.



“Personally, I can say that thanks to the HER CHOICE programme, I became aware of the responsibility of parents in addressing child marriage. I learned that women also must work to ensure their financial autonomy in order to contribute effectively to financial burdens and decision-making in their household. All this gave me confidence to start my own income-generating activity besides my regular rural work.” Read the story of Delphine from **Benin** on page 6, Human Interest Stories 2017.

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 mobilizing communities and raising awareness, through testimonials and by educating leaders and other community members on negative effects of child marriage, FGM and on gender equity. Such awareness-raising has been realised through campaigns and events, in public places, places of worship and through radio and television broadcasts.

Changes to the original planning (see Annex 1 Financial Report)

- In **Senegal** it has been decided to put additional focus on the work with traditional and religious leaders, in order for them to enforce national policies within their communities. This resulted in an over-spending of 39% under this strategy.
- As a result of intensive monitoring by ICDI, it was concluded that due to low capacity and staffing issues at OneFamilyPeople (**Sierra Leone**) it has become increasingly difficult to meet programme goals in three regions. Therefore, the decision has been made to drop the Moyamba and Kayamba regions and to consolidate programme activities in Freetown only. Smaller budgets were allocated to celebrations of the Day of the Girl Child and other one-off annual events, which resulted in an under-spending of 47% under this strategy.

Progress towards result

- Traditional and religious community leaders increasingly active in condemning CM

Implementing partners report that traditional and religious authorities, after gaining knowledge on child rights and legal issues concerning child marriage, committed themselves to end child marriage, FGM and sexual harassment, and to promote gender equity. In **Bangladesh**, traditional and religious leaders formed Village Development Teams together with women leaders, youth leaders and animators, in order to prevent child marriage at their villages and raise awareness on the new Child Marriage Restraint Act 2017. **Benin** reports that the commitment of officials has been materialised by the signing of specially designed canvasses. In **Burkina Faso** traditional leaders call for a parent-child dialogue in order to prevent child marriage. Also, a consensual reference document has been adopted in mosques, aimed at reducing child marriages. Partners from **Ethiopia** report that traditional leaders start to defend the interests of girls and cancel arranged marriages. In **Sierra Leone**, traditional leaders in the intervention areas have signed a MOU to publicly condemn child marriage. In **Uganda**, traditional and religious leaders have teamed up with young people, adults, animators, police and CSOs to discuss, reflect and take collective actions to prevent harmful practices such as child marriage.

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

Partners from **all countries** report that the number of communities that take action against child marriage has increased. In **Ethiopia** and **Mali**, a significant number of arranged child marriages was cancelled as a result of schoolgirls reporting child marriage issues and other SRH concerns to their teachers, members of child protection committees or local administrators. Alone in the implementation area of ESD Ethiopia, 80 marriages were cancelled by law enforcing bodies and community task forces through the active involvement of girl students (see also results under *Strategy I*).

In **Uganda**, young people are passionately speaking in public spaces such as radio stations and rallies, mobilizing communities and other stakeholders to protect and promote children's rights and gender equity. Young people also participate in high-level meetings, asking leaders to take action on their rights and condemn child marriage.

Partners from **Bangladesh**, **Burkina Faso**, **Ethiopia** and **Ghana** report that communities in their intervention areas are open to young girls having more social freedom and increased input in the decision if, when and whom to marry. In **Uganda**, boys and men are increasingly becoming allies and champions against child marriage. In **Pakistan**, local partner Bedari and the Village Child Protection Committees came up with the bold idea to mark the commitment to end child marriage of individual households, by stamping the message on the wall of their homes. Young people go door to door to request placing the stamps. A case in point was how a community chief from the Dwerebease Epicenter in **Ghana**, intervened to stop a possible child marriage of a class 6 pupil who got pregnant with a 20 year old boy in his community. He told us that he was able to do this because of the knowledge he acquired about child marriage and child rights in the recent workshop he attended at the Epicenter.



“One day he called the village elders to announce his decision to accept my choice to marry the young man from Toulfé. They called me and informed me of the situation. I was overjoyed and then informed my boyfriend.”

Read the story of Tao from **Burkina Faso**, and how she received help to finally marry the man of her choice on page 7, Human Interest Stories 2017.



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 the local council 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 were also facilitated at district level. Activities also include awareness raising for girls and community stakeholders on protective laws and by-laws and on (local) protective frameworks.

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

- In **Benin**, the consultation between government agencies and a wide range of civil society institutions related to SRHR had to be delayed due to non-availability of the key actors. The printing and production of advocacy materials has also been postponed to 2018. This resulted in an under-spending of 80% under this strategy in Benin.
- ICDI partner CWIN (**Nepal**) managed to achieve all goals as planned with less means than anticipated, which resulted in an under-spending of 27% under this strategy in Nepal.
- For political and strategic reasons, partners in **Mali** have given priority to activities under *Strategy V* that are more focused on the local political context, above activities under *Strategy VI* that are more focused on the national level. This resulted in an under-spending of 35% under this strategy in Mali.

Progress towards result

- Increased % of communities in the process of developing by-laws to prohibit CM/FGM

In **Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, Mali, Pakistan, Senegal** and **Sierra Leone** villages have taken initiative to draft local treaties on the abandonment of child marriage. In **Ethiopia**, committees against child marriage have been established and strengthened with referral links to police and other stakeholders. Iddirs (local leaders) who have developed by-laws or have shown interest to revise by-laws to incorporate child marriage are increasing. In **Mali**, members of the Municipal Council have set up a Municipal Committee against child marriage, chaired by the first Deputy Mayor. Although in **Pakistan** villages signed resolutions against child marriage and stakeholders are ready to act, they are also faced with pressure not to take action from some villagers. Child protection committee members facilitate villagers for birth registration and provision of identity cards. They refer domestic violence and child marriage cases to local partner Bedari.

- 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

As a result of the new Child Marriage Restraint Act 2017 in **Bangladesh**, Union Child Marriage Prevention Committees have been formed in more than 50% of the Unions. These committees collaborate with village development teams and student units to build child marriage free Unions. Additionally, the local government is upgrading their system of birth registration.

In **Ethiopia**, the programme intervention districts have an operational system to document and act upon breaking of laws concerning child marriage, FGM and sexual assault.

In **Senegal**, a framework of consultation consisting of all relevant stakeholders (including CSOs) has been formed to follow-up the commitments that have been made by the State of Senegal. Regional structures have been strengthened, which helped the process of adopting charters against harmful practices including child marriage. At the departmental level, the Child Protection



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CHOICE

Committee has the authority to cancel cases of reported child marriages. Mobile court hearings and birth registration make it possible to regularise registration.

The Government of **Uganda** implements a system strengthening approach to child protection including child marriage, by working with both formal and non-formal structures. Issues of detecting child marriage, reporting, referral and response mechanisms are stipulated in the updated Children’s Act and the Strategy to end child marriage and teenage pregnancy.

- 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 **Bangladesh, Ghana, Ethiopia, Mali, Pakistan, Sierra Leone** and **Uganda**, the knowledge of girls on protective laws on child marriage (and FGM) and to which law-enforcement agencies they can refer to in cases of child marriage and violation of their rights has increased in this reporting year. In **Bangladesh**, girls have the phone numbers of the local officials and can ask for legal support. In **Ghana**, girls receive support from teachers, community leaders or animators. In **Sierra Leone** the child protection mechanism improved with the presence of the seating Magistrate and High Court Judge. In **Uganda**, girls participated in high level meetings with members of parliament and have presented their concerns through the National Children’s Parliament to re-anchor the importance of child protection.



“Being the head of a whistle blower committee I have managed to save at least 6 children so far that were on the verge of being married by their parents at a tender age”. Shamila from **Uganda** says she goes to schools and communities sensitising the girls about their rights and the negative effects of child marriage, and often talked to local leaders in various meetings on the need to empower and support the girl child. Read Shamila’s story on page 16, Human Interest Stories 2017.



3.7. Overview of changes in implementation per country

(see Annex I Financial Report)

In **Benin**, fewer activities have been implemented in 2017 than originally planned, due to a delay of activities under *Strategies III* and *VI* (see explanations under the mentioned strategies), which resulted in a total under-spending of 16% in Benin. The activities that could not be conducted in 2017 will be carried over to 2018.

As a result of intensive monitoring in **Sierra Leone** by ICDI, it was concluded that due to low capacity and staffing issues at OneFamilyPeople it has become increasingly difficult to meet programme goals in three regions. Therefore, the decision has been made to drop the Moyamba and Kayamba regions and to consolidate programme activities in Freetown only which resulted in a total under-spending of 29% in Sierra Leone in 2017.

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 like new ways to involve boys and men, 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 multitude of expertise of its members, working as an alliance enables multi-dimensional interventions. Partners from **Burkina Faso** report that the HER CHOICE programme has been the first that offers a holistic response to the social phenomenon of child marriage at the national level.

Through capacity building and organisational development, partner organisations have become reference structures in the field of child protection in the space of two years. Additionally, this has led to better collaboration with other alliances, within the programme countries and beyond, to greater mobilisation of national coalitions, and has led to greater capacity to influence national policy agendas. In **Sierra Leone**, where HER CHOICE is among the leading programmes addressing child marriage, it received an accolade from the President of the Republic for its rights based and bottom-up approach.

Partners very much appreciate the participative manner in which the baseline study has been established and its outcomes shared by the lead researchers of the AISSR. Outcomes of the baseline study have led to improved planning and focus, and to stronger advocacy messages.

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. As CWIN (**Nepal**) reports: "The country coordinator is able to see our strengths and motivates us in building on them, and has been supportive of our innovative ideas in tackling the issue." Partners from **Mali** report that the collaboration between local partners and the programme coordinator in the Netherlands is very satisfactory and is done through e-mail exchanges and monitoring visits, followed by constructive feedback which allows the implementing organisations to improve their performance.

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.

From 31 May – 6 June, a delegation of representatives of the Ministry and the three Child Marriage Alliances paid a joint visit to Malawi. The delegation paid field visits to a number of project sites of



the More Than Brides and Yes I Do Alliance, as well as to an epicenter of THP Malawi⁶, and meetings were held with representatives of UNICEF, UNFPA, Girls Not Brides and the Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare. A report of this visit can be found on <http://www.her-choice.org/en/her-choice-en/joint-visit-malawi/>.

During the Expert meeting and presentation of the baseline studies of the three child marriage alliances on 12th December, the Human Rights Ambassador and the Youth Ambassador of the Ministry contributed with a presentation (see also next paragraph).

Implementing partners in **Bangladesh, Benin, Ethiopia, Ghana, Mali, Pakistan, Senegal** and **Uganda** regularly meet with representatives of the respective Dutch Embassies to share the Annual Report 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 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, when appropriate.

HER CHOICE partners THP and Dalit in **Bangladesh** participated in the 10th SRHR and Gender Partner's Meeting arranged by the Netherlands Embassy, where they provided a presentation on HER CHOICE successes and challenges. THP-**Benin** presented HER CHOICE at the Embassy, sharing results of the baseline study and of activities in the field. All HER CHOICE partners in **Ethiopia** took part in the experience sharing event of 6 December 2017 organised by The Netherlands Embassy in Addis Abba on SRH issues. Similarly, partners invited the Embassy to attend regional and national workshops conducted in the regions SNNPRS (August) and Amhara (November). THP-**Ghana** participated in a stakeholder review and learning workshop organised by the Embassy where they shared the progress of the HER CHOICE programme. Amongst a number of joint activities with THP-**Uganda** and the Embassy's SRHR department, THP shared an update on the HER CHOICE programme during the joint reflection, learning & networking meeting organised by the Embassy, and hosted an embassy official who visited two HER CHOICE epicenters.

In **Burkina Faso, Nepal** and **Sierra Leone** no Netherlands Embassies exist. However, HER CHOICE partner CWIN met with the Netherlands Consul and informed her on their work, focusing on the HER CHOICE programme. The Consul was enthusiastic, shared ideas and expressed her wish to visit the programme areas.



4.4. Other child marriage alliances and Girls Not Brides

Collaboration in the programme countries

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.

In **Bangladesh**, THP and Dalit have closely worked with the National Girl Child Advocacy Forum (of which THP is co-founder) and Girls Not Brides, where they shared learnings from HER CHOICE and initiated advocacy efforts for promoting girl's rights and halting child marriage.

THP-**Benin** is a member of the ZERO TOLERANCE National Campaign for Child Marriage, and of the PTF Group (Technical and Financial Partners) Gender and Social Protection with whom they are engaged in initiatives aimed at promoting women's and girls' rights and prevention of gender-based violence. THP-Benin also organised a panel for sharing experiences with youth organisations

⁶ Although HER CHOICE is not active in Malawi, Alliance member THP has implemented a number of successful epicenters in this country.

on actions addressing child marriage in Benin, using guidance of the GNB webinar on child marriage in the West and Central Africa sub-region.

In **Burkina Faso** HER CHOICE partners collaborate with the National Coalition Against Child Marriage (CONAMEB), with whom they conduct advocacy activities.

Her choice partners in **Ethiopia** are member (or have applied for membership of the National Alliance to end FGM and Child Marriage. They have also created good working relationships with the Yes I DO and GUSO Alliances, inviting them to participate in relevant events.

THP-**Ghana** is member of the End Child Marriage Network of the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, with which they were involved in the drafting and launch of the National Strategic Framework on Ending Child Marriage – and provided update on the HER CHOICE programme to the Ministry. THP-Ghana is also member of Girls Not Brides Ghana.

The HER CHOICE partners in **Mali** co-founded the national network REPAME (Réseau National pour la Promotion de l'Abandon du Mariage des Enfants). By the end of 2017, the network has been recognised as Girls Not Brides Mali. Partners in Mali regularly participate in activities and training workshops organised by the More Than Brides Alliance and vice versa.

CWIN (**Nepal**) is co-founder of GNB Nepal, member of its Executive Committee, and participates in the international planning team for the GNB Global Meeting in Kuala Lumpur in 2018.

Bedari (**Pakistan**) is Co-Chair of EVAWG (Ending Violence against Women and Girls) Alliance and collaborates with 3 other relevant alliances. Recently, the Center for Communication Programmes Pakistan formed a caucus of CSOs to push a legislative change to raise the minimum age of marriage from 16 to 18.

In **Senegal**, local partner Enda Jeunesse chairs the consortium of CSOs that address child marriage at national and departmental level with the Departmental Committee for Child Protection (CDPE).

In **Sierra Leone**, OneFamilyPeople closely collaborated with relevant ministries and several national networks in addressing child marriage.

As an active member of Girls Not Brides **Uganda**, THP share insights of the HER CHOICE implementation, engaged in advocacy activities, and participated in a video documentary.

Collaboration between child marriage alliances in the Netherlands

Regular meetings between the three child marriage alliances took place in the Netherlands. Also, quarterly meetings with the research institutions (AISSR, Population Council and KIT) to share methodologies used in research and share research findings.

The HER CHOICE, Yes I Do and More than Brides Alliances founded the Dutch chapter of Girls Not Brides in November 2016 and, since then, jointly form its Steering Group. In February 2017, a first meeting for (potential) members was held where themes for 3 working groups were identified, namely: a) Assessment of child marriage in the Netherlands; b) Working on child marriage in countries of the Global South; and c) Advocacy and communication on child marriage. These working groups have met regularly during the year.

On 12th December, the working group Child Marriage in the Netherlands organised a round table discussion for members and stakeholders on child marriage in the Netherlands. This was followed by Girls Not Brides the Netherlands' first Annual Member Meeting.

In the afternoon, the Expert meeting 'Child marriage, exploring choice and agency - latest research, showcasing new perspectives on child marriage and its drivers' was jointly organised by the Working group Global South and Share-Net International, and was hosted by Kinderpostzegels. At this meeting the base-line studies of the 3 child marriage alliances were presented by the alliance researchers. Presenters also included the Human Rights and Youth Ambassadors of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Head of Learning of Girls Not Brides Global and international researchers.



5. GENDER AND INCLUSION

5.1. Engagement of boys and men

In all HER CHOICE countries, boys and men are engaged in most programme activities. All partners are conscious of the fact that boys and men are key players in changing social norms in favour of girls' and women's rights and gender equality. Reports tell us that in 2017 an increasing number of boys and men are becoming true allies and role models in this process. Male and female teachers, for instance, play an equal part in turning schools into girl-friendly places, and groups of students, like the student's units in **Bangladesh**, consisting of 30 – 40 % of male students, help to keep schools safe and the learning environment pleasant for everyone.

In **Mali**, where boys participated in awareness raising activities of Youth Clubs on SRHR issues, a strong message was created that girls should not be the only ones to defend their rights, and that also boys should take responsibility in protecting girls from harmful practices like child marriage and FGM. In **Nepal**, society is patriarchal, and fathers or grandfathers make all family decisions. Involving adolescent boys in trainings, campaigns, meetings, etc. has made them aware of the issue and gave them a perception for positive change in society by which they are now ready to raise their voice against harmful practices.

In **Pakistan**, while doing mobilisation in communities, the first contact person is the influential personality (often male) of the community/village. With the help of this person, other men of the community are approached and are asked to send their daughters, sisters and wives to participate in activities. By now, in most communities very supportive men and boys are working as change agents. As OneFamilyPeople (**Sierra Leone**) puts it: "Involving boys has changed the narrative from drivers of violence to sister's keepers as they are now protecting girls."

5.2. 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, because they are at the highest risk of becoming involved in harmful practices like child marriage. The following are some examples of how extra emphasis has been laid on the inclusion of disadvantaged groups.

In **Ethiopia**, ESD has addressed visually impaired girls and boys by providing special scholastic materials like audio books, braille and a 'Magic Stick' (white cane), and facilitates regular discussions with girls and boys with and without disability. Because of strong effort of OneFamilyPeople (**Sierra Leone**), girls and young women have actively participated in all programme activities. As a result, they have not only increased their self-esteem and are living in solidarity with their peers, but are now serving as role models, life-skill facilitators, advocates, mentors and ambassadors in their communities and for the organisation.

THP **Uganda** partnered with Uganda National Association of the Deaf (UNAD) to reach out to young deaf people on SRHR issues and the importance of remaining in school, by involving role models such as the Executive Director of UNAD and other female staff who are also deaf. In addition, THP-Uganda trained health workers on how to provide youth-friendly services to deaf adolescents in basic sign language.



6. Linking & Learning and Events

Linking & learning forms an important element of the HER CHOICE programme. Members of the HER CHOICE Alliance all have their own fields of expertise. By working as an alliance they complement each other. Activities to promote linking and learning are organised at local, national and international level in order to share knowledge, experience and lessons learnt and to widen support networks.

2017's regional linking & learning event was realised 10th – 15th November in Bangkok and was hosted by ICDI. Representatives of all Asian partner organisations (**Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan**), from ESD (**Ethiopia**), as well as trainers from ICDI, the alliance coordinator and a representative of the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs participated in the event. The objective of the event was to bring professionals together to build relationships, share experiences, develop strategies and to learn skills in promoting psychological well-being of children who grow up under difficult circumstances. Topics of training and presentations were: children as researchers, multigenerational approach, recovery from trauma and working as an alliance.

"A big revelation for me at this mornings session was discovering that extreme stress of a mother can affect the development of her baby in the womb. Also after what I learned today about how babies learn in the first two years of life I have a new view about how I am fathering my two children aged one and three." Jayanta Kar, The Hunger Project **Bangladesh**.

In **all programme countries**, events have been organised at regional and/or national level, often on days of international significance, like the Day of Zero Tolerance on FGM (6 February), the Day of the African Child (16 June) Day of the Girl (11 October) or the Day of the Child (20 November). These events included festivities, debates, theatre performances, and presentations, in the presence of ministers, ambassadors or other officials and were often broadcasted on radio or television. Some partners also organised actions to contribute to the International 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Based Violence Campaign.

In **Ethiopia**, two workshops at regional level and one at national level were organised by HER CHOICE partners, lead by ODWACE and FSCE, and were jointly hosted by the Amhara National Regional State, the Bureaus of Women and Children Affair of Amhara and SNNPR and the HER CHOICE Alliance Ethiopia. The objective of the workshops was to exchange experiences, best practices and ideas related to SRH, child marriage and FGM, and to strengthen governmental and non-governmental actors' collaboration in addressing these issues in Ethiopia. Participants included faith and community based organisations, school, community leaders, regional government bureaus, Get up speak out (GUSO), Girls Advocacy Alliance (GAA) and Yes I Do Alliance. The workshops were positively welcomed by all stakeholders and perceived as a successful strategy to tackle SRH problems in Ethiopia.

Delegates of HER CHOICE partners from **Mali, Burkina Faso and Senegal** participated in the Regional High-level Summit to End Child Marriage in West and Central Africa, held in Dakar from 22 to 25 October 2017, where they represented their national (Girls Not Brides) partnerships.

In October 2017, Bedari (**Pakistan**) in collaboration with the Potohar Organisation for Development and Advocacy (PODA) and other CSOs organised a Rural Women Conference at national level in Islamabad to mark the International Rural Women's Day. The HER CHOICE beneficiaries (girls) from Chakwal and Vehari attended this conference as their exposure visit.



7. REFLECTION ON THE THEORY OF CHANGE

In 2018, the mid-term evaluation will be conducted for HER CHOICE. For the remaining two years of the programme, resources will be put to the best possible use to achieve maximum results for the target group. The results of the mid-term evaluation will be communicated at the beginning of 2019. This could lead to changes in activities for the remainder of the programme. In case changes occur, these will of course be discussed with the Ministry.

8. RESEARCH

During 2017, the AISSR focused on cleaning baseline study data, compiling an English and French-language 11-country synthesis report (completed in September 2017), reviewing draft country baseline study reports, developing country fact reports, and giving presentations on the baseline findings.

Where possible, the AISSR travelled to HER CHOICE project countries to present country- and local partner-level baseline data and discuss programming implications with HER CHOICE alliance members and local partners. During the first half of 2017, country visits were made to: **Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Ghana, Benin, Burkina Faso, Senegal** and **Uganda**. If and when the AISSR could not visit certain partners – due to time and travel restrictions – detailed power point presentations were shared, and were discussed face-to-face by HER CHOICE partners and their direct alliance counterpart (SKN in the case of Mali, ICDI for Nepal). Alliance members took part in these baseline presentation meetings, further facilitating the uptake of data in programming decisions.

Following completion of the baseline report, preparations for the midline study commenced, including preparations of midline training workshops, where necessary identifying new country-level research coordinators and establishing terms of reference. In preparing for the midline, the AISSR decided to make a number of important changes. First, given the process of baseline data cleaning had been particularly labour-intensive and time consuming, and to improve the reliability of data, the AISSR decided to shift from manual to digital data collection. Second, to improve the quality of qualitative data, it was decided to invest more resources to qualitative data collection and analysis. Third, the baseline tools were reviewed and where deemed necessary and where possible – that is, where comparability would not be affected – tools were adjusted. For example, instead of conducting focus group discussions with cohorts of girls or boys between 12-17, to improve data quality, it was decided to split these groups into two: 12-14 and 15-17 years. The year ended with a schedule for midline training workshops for all HER CHOICE partners to be held between January-March 2018 in four different countries.

The two HER CHOICE PhD candidates, from Nepal and Pakistan, started their work in March 2017. The Nepalese PhD candidate is focusing on engaging men in preventing child marriage and improving the situation of married girls and young women. The Pakistani PhD candidate is concentrating on the roles of families and the influence of government policies on child marriage. Three UvA/AISSR Master students conducted their research within the framework of the HER CHOICE programme in Nepal and successfully defended their master theses in August on, i.a., SRHR-related education and child grooms. In the second half of 2017, two Master students have conducted their fieldwork in Uganda on young people's understanding of child marriage and their perceptions of influence on marriage decisions.

Finally, AISSR conducted two presentations during the Expert meeting on child marriage organised by GNB the Netherlands and Share-Net International on 12th December on: 1) Contextualizing young women's choice and agency related to child marriage and 2) Research ethics and voice.

In 2017, the AISSR/UvA overspent (64%) on the **base-, mid** and **endline review**. This overspending was largely the result of delayed baseline-related payments that were expected to be made in



2016 but – due to late submission of deliverables by research partners – had to be delayed to 2017.

9. 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. HER CHOICE has a website (www.her-choice.org) and a brochure in English and French (the English in an African and an Asian cover version). The HER CHOICE Twitter-account and Facebook page are active on social media. An image library has been created with photos from the different countries to be used on the website and social media. Country coordinators share pictures from their trips and the communication coordinator is filing them. The communication strategy and approach are described in more detail in the HER CHOICE Communication Plan.

In 2017 the HER CHOICE message has been spread across various platforms:

- Weekly news items were written and posted on our HER CHOICE website. With short stories, photos, blogs and messages we presented all our activities, results and achievements in the 11 countries HER CHOICE is active in.
- Multiple times a week HER CHOICE had been busy on social media with tweets, retweets, messages from our website, interesting articles about the topic of child marriage, both on Twitter and on Facebook.
- Special attention for HER CHOICE was created by an exclusive interview on our baseline study in One World: <https://www.oneworld.nl/werelddoeners/her-choice-wil-vijfjarig-programmema-kindhuwelijken-terugdringen/>. Both the researchers from the University of Amsterdam as our HER CHOICE coordinator have been questioned and quoted.
- The Hunger Project talked about child marriage and Her Choice on national television, in 'Koffietijd'.
- The Linking and Learning trip to Bangkok was guided with daily news items on the website, with quotes from attendees, photos and information of the meeting. Several partner organisations attended, as well as a representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

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 2017

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 2017, the three Alliances found the opportunity for joint communication on the expert meeting of Girls Not Brides the Netherlands. In this meeting the baseline studies from the research partners



of the three alliances were presented. The event was covered on all websites and social media of the alliances and their underlying organisations.

10. CHALLENGES

During the implementation of the second programme year, alliance members and implementing partners of the HER CHOICE programme were confronted with a number of challenges. In most cases, it was possible to take actions to overcome these obstacles. Below, examples of such challenges are summarised.

In **Bangladesh**, the project area of Keshabpur Upazila under the Jessore district was affected by serious flooding, which had impact on the implementation of certain activities.

In **Benin**, apart from the fact that gender issues continue to be taboo in rural communities, teachers are sometimes perpetrators of sexual abuse. This even more highlights the need to strengthen actions for the sexual education of children and to officially include SRHR-related topics in the curricula.

In **Ethiopia**, partners were confronted with a delay of project agreement on the government side. To deal with this issue, an accelerated plan to achieve the targets for 2017 was created. Additionally, the unfavourable environment at the federal level forced the national workshop to be organised at regional level (Amhara and SNNP regions), which has created additional expenses. Finally, a challenge was presented by the turnover and transfer of trained schoolteachers and peer educators. To overcome this challenge, additional teachers were trained.

Partners in **Mali** were confronted with the insecurity situation in some parts of the country, in particular in the Mopti region, which hampers the implementation of project activities in some project areas. Another challenge was, that a number of teachers trained by the HER CHOICE programme moved away to areas which are not covered by the programme.

In **Nepal**, changes to the political systems have created confusion because role and scope of work of local governments have not yet been defined. Additionally, the target community was severely affected by flooding. As their houses, livestock, and belongings were swept away, they have become homeless and are staying in shelters or tents. There was a serious lack of food and no schoolbooks, and children stopped attending school. The programme took action by establishing a good coordination with other organisations for the emergency support, and distributed food and tarpaulin in the affected areas. Some education materials were also provided, so children could continue their school.

In **Pakistan** the current government has a stringent policy towards NGOs, making their movements restricted. Local partner Bedari faced challenges in engaging government officials in their activities and meetings. Also, Bedari still not succeed in obtaining 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. In spite of these challenges, Bedari succeeded to complete the second year of the implementation by using direct relations, which their members have established with staff in provincial and district administrations.

In **Uganda**, the current ban on comprehensive sexuality education in schools and the requirement to obtain approval from the Ministry of Education & Sports (MoE&S) caused limitations in the execution of certain activities, because not all topics can be discussed in school settings. The anticipated release of the National Sexuality Education Framework and the court ruling on Comprehensive Sexuality Education will hopefully change this situation. In the meantime, THP Uganda collaborated with offices of district education officers, health officers and school inspectors to provide school based SRHR activities in schools.



11. LESSONS LEARNED

We conclude this report with a few examples of key learnings of 2017, as far as they have not yet been mentioned in Chapter 2.

Safe roads to school

Unsafe roads to school are often a reason for parents to cease their daughters' education. To address this issue, student units established by THP in **Bangladesh** created a social map with spots where girls were sexually harassed and then set up a network with teachers, parents, administration- and community people to create safe roads for girls. Shopkeepers and others in the surrounding areas were asked to be watchful at the time of day that girls travel to and from school. This action has dramatically increased safety for girls.

Sports

Mixed gender sports like judo, korfbal, football and karate have shown to enhance girls' confidence, develop their team spirit and break down gender stereotypes (see also *Strategy I*). When karate coaching for members of the girls' clubs in **Bangladesh** started in October, some of the guardians expressed their concerns that Karate was not a sport for young girls. But Dalit staff was able to convince the community to give it a chance. On Victory Day, the Karate Team won the first and third prize in display at Upazila level.

Inclusion of girls with disability

Because girls with disability are usually caught in a damaging cycle of low expectations, they are often forced into occupations below their potential and early marriage. To address this problem, THP **Uganda** partnered with the Uganda National Association of the Deaf (UNAD) and actively included deaf young people in the programme by conducting a sessions with successful role models, peer education training, and by training health workers in basic sign language to be able to provide SRHR services to this target group. In **Sierra Leone**, OneFamilyPeople, helped many girls with disability to break free from their challenges, and to succeed in fulfilling their potential. For HER CHOICE, they act as role models to inspire other girls with disability to raise their own aspirations.

Theatre performances

Theatre plays are a tool by which sensitive subjects such as sexual harassment and child marriage can be communicated more easily. It is a powerful methodology to enhance the dialogue with community leaders and members and to communicate in ways they understand and address the issues. OneFamilyPeople (**Sierra Leone**): 'In this way, we build on the community's strengths, rather than coming in with fixed ideas about how things should be.'

Suggestion boxes in schools

The provision of suggestion boxes in schools enabled girls and their peers to report about and prevent arranged marriages (ESD, **Ethiopia**).

Creating multi-stakeholders ownership

All partners report that the strengthening of collaboration between community members, leaders, local administration, schools, law enforcing bodies and religious representatives develops a sense of ownership for the programme activities. Examples of multi-stakeholder involvement, like the establishment of a child protection task force composed of members of the woreda women's group, and the children's, education, justice, police and health offices (FSCE, Ethiopia) were found to be very effective. OneFamilyPeople (**Sierra Leone**): 'Establishing trust and making child marriage everyone's business is vital to create community ownership: consult local leaders, support girls, understand their problems and work with them to find solutions, be honest and transparent by sharing all important information, and avoid making promises that cannot be met.'



Involvement of traditional leaders

The importance of involving community leaders from the very start of programme activities was one of the lessons learned in 2016.. As a result of increased emphasis on this involvement, partners report about the willingness of community leaders to support the programme objectives. Such an example is given by THP Ghana, where a sub- chief of the Dwerebease Epicenter intervened when Mercy (16) fell pregnant by Daniel (20). The chief was able to educate Mercy's' parents to cancel the arranged marriage, and made Daniel's family pay a monthly allowance to Mercy for her upkeep.

Adolescent corners

Confidentiality and youth-friendliness are essential for providing effective health services to young people (see Strategy III). Therefore, THP Ghana, in collaboration with Ghana Health Service, created adolescent corners in all eight epicenters under HER CHOICE. Adolescents who visit the corners find it very helpful, feel comfortable to return, and have recommended it to their peers, because health staff handle all issues confidentially and treat their clients with respect.

Comic books

CWIN (Nepal) has been using comic books for the purpose of awareness raising. This tool has been shown useful to inform and sensitise people in the community.

Keeping girls in school

Partners from Mali report that by their experience sending girls to school and keeping them there is the most effective way to put an end to child marriage.

Changing social norms

For positive change to occur, it needs to happen at community level. "Community people need to become actors of their own development, as they know best what will work for them" (OneFamilyPeople). Partners from **Mali** add to this, that awareness raising and changing of social norms regarding child marriage and FGM requires long term engagement. "The success of an action lies in its preparation."



LIST OF ANNEXES

- Annex I Financial Report for 2017
- Annex II HER CHOICE Human Interest Stories 2017
- Annex III Girl-Friendly Schools Tool
- Annex IV Youth-Friendly Health Services Tool







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 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.



Ministry of Foreign Affairs