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## MODULE 7

# CHILD MARRIAGE: WHAT? WHY? AND HOW?

Ready reckoner to initiate child marriage interventions by CSO partners

**“The Adolescent Empowerment Toolkit”**

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Module 7

# CHILD MARRIAGE: WHAT? WHY? AND HOW?

A ready reckoner for child marriage field interventions by CSO partners, which includes facts and figures; issue analysis; causes and impact; possible intervention strategies based on theory of change.



# CONTENTS

<b>About UNICEF</b>	Pg 1
<b>About Breakthrough</b>	Pg 2
<b>Child Marriage: What, Why, And How?</b>	Pg 4
Why the Ready Reckoner on Child Marriage?	Pg 4
Who can use the Reckoner?	Pg 5
<b>SECTIONS</b>	Pg 6
<b>SECTION I - Child Marriage: Setting the Context</b>	Pg 7
<b>SECTION II - Child Marriage: What are the Causes and its Impact?</b>	Pg 10
<b>SECTION III - Child Marriage: What Has Been Done to Address the Issue?</b>	Pg 13
<b>SECTION IV - Child Marriage: How Can Interventions Be Made Effective? Developing a Working Strategy based on the Theory of Change</b>	Pg 18
<b>ANNEXURE</b>	Pg 22
<b>Theory of Change on Addressing Child Marriage* with Assumptions</b>	Pg 23

## LIST OF FIGURES

<b>Figure 1:</b> Programmes and Schemes to Address Child Marriage by Govt. of India	Pg 15
<b>Figure 2:</b> Visual Representation of Theory of Change used to prepare the Theory of Change in Addressing Child Marriage	Pg 19
<b>Figure 3:</b> Theory of Change - Addressing Child Marriage	Pg 24

## LIST OF TABLES

<b>Table 1:</b> District Level Variation in Prevalence of Child Marriage across High Incidence States	Pg 9
<b>Table 2:</b> Significant Features of Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 (PCMA)	Pg 14





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# Child Marriage: What, Why, And How?

## Ready Reckoner for Initiating Child Marriage Intervention for CSO Partners

### Why the Ready Reckoner on Child Marriage?

Child marriage is a serious issue across the world, especially in South Asia, as nearly half the numbers of girls who get married are children<sup>1</sup>. In India, though the mean age at marriage for girls has shown a marginal increase, child marriage continues to be a serious issue. According to the District Level Household Survey (2007–08)<sup>2</sup>, nearly 43 percent of women in the 20–24 age group reported that they got married before the age of 18. Globally, the percentage share of child brides in India is high at 40 percent<sup>3</sup>. Though child marriage impacts both boys and girls, it impacts girls with higher incidence and more intensity.

Over the years, many organisations, researchers, and donors have developed, implemented, and, to a lesser extent, evaluated programmes to delay or prevent child marriage and mitigate its harmful effects on the lives of girls and their families. Concentrated in specific sectors (health, education) and emphasising specific approaches to working with girls (life skills, awareness raising), these programmes bear important lessons for all interventions that seek to prevent, delay, and mitigate child marriage. In addition to the programmes, the availability of national level data in the form of the National Family Health Survey (NFHS)<sup>4</sup> and the District Level Household Survey (DLHS)<sup>5</sup> offer current data (and its interpretations) which provides insights to frame the issue and understand national trends.

The purpose of the ready reckoner is to provide

1. Progress of Children, UNICEF 2007
2. District Level Household and Facility Survey 2007-08 - Fact Sheets - India
3. End Child Marriage Today, UNICEF, New Delhi, 2013
4. NFHS is a large-scale, multi-round survey conducted in a representative sample of households in 29 States of India. Three rounds of the survey have been conducted so far since the first survey in 1992-1993 followed by two more rounds in 1998-1999 and 2005-2006 respectively. The fourth round of NFHS will be released in 2014-15. The survey provides national and state information for India on fertility, infant, and child mortality, the practice of family planning, maternal and child health, reproductive health, nutrition, anaemia, utilisation and quality of health, family planning services, and HIV/AIDS.
5. DLHS is a household survey covering all States and Union Territories of the country to generate national, state and district level information on the reproductive and child health and utilisation of services provided by government health facilities. Three rounds of the survey have been conducted so far since the first round in 1998-1999, followed by two more rounds in 2002-2004 and more recently in 2007-2008 respectively. The fourth round of DLHS (2012-13) has been released for nine states <https://nrhm-mis.nic.in/SitePages/DLHS-4.aspx>



implementers with current data/ information on child marriage, its causes and impact and the range of interventions that have been implemented in India to address the issue. It also provides key considerations for implementers while planning and executing interventions. The utility of the document lies in its synthesis of a complex social issue and in being a 'go to document' to understand child marriage and plan interventions to address its complexity.

## Who can use the Reckoner?

The reckoner can be used by representatives of NGOs, CSOs, and CBOs in planning strategies, key entry points, and activities to address child marriage in their intervention areas. The reckoner is divided into five sections: Section I provides an introduction to the issue by setting the context; Section II provides specific data pertaining to India which signifies the prevalence and complexity of the issue. Section III analyses the factors that underlie child marriage, its causes and consequences while Section IV provides a summary of interventions (policy and programmatic) in India that have been implemented to address the issue. Section V as the concluding section provides recommendations/ possible entry points which can be effectively used by implementers to plan and execute interventions on child marriage based on a 'Theory of Change'.





# SECTIONS

# 1

# Child Marriage: Setting the Context

Child Marriage is a worldwide phenomenon but is most prevalent in Africa and Southern Asia and although its practice has decreased somewhat in recent decades, it remains common in, although not only confined to, rural areas and among the most poverty stricken groups of people<sup>6</sup>. Despite domestic laws and international accords banning child marriage, the tradition persists in communities. Prevention and elimination programmes which are providing alternatives to marriage such as, by keeping girls in school, providing them with cash transfers and/or regulating birth and marriage registrations etc. are unable to curb the menace.

India has the largest population of adolescents in the world and faces critical challenges in meeting their basic survival and development needs. Adolescent girls are an especially

vulnerable group who face discrimination with respect to fulfilment of fundamental rights to health, nutrition, education, and protection. The state of adolescent girls in the country can be gauged by the fact that 47 percent are underweight and 56 percent are anaemic<sup>7</sup> and many of them are devoid of elementary or secondary education. In many parts of the country, girls tend to be perceived as a 'burden' and from a very young age are 'conditioned' for marriage. The perception of women's role in society, the value given to girls, structural and economic factors combined with social and religious practices around marriage- all interact as determinants of child marriage. The consequences of child marriage for girls are multifarious including child pregnancies, inter-generational transfer of nutritional deprivation, limited opportunities for education and economic empowerment leading to an adverse impact

6. State of World Population 2005, UNFPA

7. State of the World's Children 2011, Adolescence – An Age of Opportunity, UNICEF



on psychological well-being. In addition, there is increasing evidence to suggest that girls who marry before 18 are more likely to experience domestic violence than their peers who marry later.<sup>8</sup>

**On 25 September 2013, the United Nations Human Rights Council passed an important resolution (see [http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage\\_e.aspx?si=A/HRC/24/L.34/Rev.1](http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage_e.aspx?si=A/HRC/24/L.34/Rev.1)) to strengthen efforts to prevent and eliminate early, child and forced marriage, thereby, recognizing all the three issues collectively which not only violate human rights but also act as violence propagators. It may also be safely inferred that approaches to eliminate child marriage, forced marriage and child marriage can be designed to be very similar in nature. In this document early and child marriage has been used interchangeably and consistently.**

Legislation to stop the practice of child marriage has been in existence for over 80 years in India, but with limited effect. The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (PCMA) was passed in 2006 to address the issue, but local enforcement still remains a challenge. A number of programmes and schemes implemented by the government and civil society organisations attempt to prevent child marriage. Though these efforts have been noteworthy, given the magnitude of the problem and its impact on girls and their life opportunities, there is much to be desired and much more that needs to be done.

Efforts to end this practice need to be continued, strengthened, and focused. Two interrelated reasons form the central rationales to work towards ending the practice of child marriage: one by upholding the rights of girls; and two by achieving health and development goals. Investing in developing social and economic assets

for girls, ensuring they have access to secondary school education and health services, and ensuring that they can postpone their marriage until 18 years may translate into greater dignity for women. It also means healthier families and higher levels of gender equality. This in turn makes for stronger societies and more vibrant economies. Hence, investment in delayed marriage for girls signifies investment in development for everyone.<sup>9</sup>

One of the key indicators used globally to measure the incidence of child marriage is the percentage of currently married women in the age group of 20-24 years who were married before the legal age of 18 years. As far as India is concerned, the data from three rounds of NFHS portrays a declining trend, yet the rate of decline has been very slow- less than one percentage points per year. As per the DLHS 2007-08 data, the percentage of women getting married below 18 years continues to be very high in major states of India. 48 percent of currently married women in the age group of 20-24 years (who got married before 18 years of age) reside in rural areas and 29.4 percent in urban areas. Although the gap between urban and rural areas has almost halved from 30.2 percentage points in 1992-1993 (NFHS) to 18.6 percentage points in 2007-2008 (DLHS), currently married women in rural areas are twice more likely to be child brides than their urban counterparts.

State-specific data in India shows that the north-eastern state of Bihar has the highest incidence of child marriage, at 68 percent, while Himachal Pradesh has the lowest incidence, at around 9 percent. The east-west corridor—spanning Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, and West Bengal—has the highest incidence of child marriage, ranging from 53.8 percent to 68.2 percent (Table 1). In each of these states, at least one in two currently married women in the 20-24 age group is a child bride.<sup>10</sup>

8. Child Marriage: A Harmful Tradition, UNICEF, 2005

9. Margaret E Greene, Ending Child Marriage: What research is needed, Greenworks, January 2014

10. Ibid – Fact Sheet on Forced Marriage, UNFPA

Table 1: District-Level Variation in Prevalence of Child Marriage across High Incidence States

State	Women aged 20–24 married before age 18 (%)	Districts above state average (%)
Bihar	68.2	54.1
Jharkhand	55.7	50.0
Madhya Pradesh	53.8	51.1
Rajasthan	57.6	56.3
Uttar Pradesh	54.9	44.3
West Bengal	54.8	52.6

Source: District level variation in high incidence states, DLHS 2007–2008

The median age at marriage across key social groups also indicate disparities. Both boys and girls from marginalised social groups tend to marry two years earlier than those in other groups. The median age at marriage for Scheduled Castes (16.5 years), Scheduled Tribes (16.7 years), and Other Backward Castes (16.8 years) groups is significantly lower than the median age at marriage for other general social groups (18.7 years)<sup>11</sup>. In addition, the data reveals that the median age at marriage is inversely related to the household economic condition. In households in the lowest income quintile, women in the 25–29 age group get married at least five years earlier than women aged the same in households in the highest quintile. The economic situation of the family is a significant influencer, as parents with limited economic resources may see marriage as a solution to reduce family costs, to pay lower dowry, to save on education and health, etc.<sup>12</sup>

Available data also indicates a strong correlation between education and child marriage, and provide a key entry point for interventions that seek to address the issue. Around 72 percent of females (in the 20–24 age group and married before 18) and 56 percent males (in the 20–25 age group married before 21) had not received any education. Only 13 percent of females and 16 percent of males who married before the legal age had completed at least 10 years of education. Women with no education are six times more likely to marry than those with 10 years or more of education. Therefore, the data convincingly suggests that education may act as a strong deterrent against child marriage.<sup>13</sup>

11. Median age at first marriage by social groups, NFHS 2005–2006  
 12. Child Marriage in India: An Analysis of available data, UNICEF 2012  
 13. Gender disparities in age at marriage by level of education, NFHS 2005–2006

## Key Points to Remember!

- Though child marriage is a global phenomenon, it is concentrated in Africa and South Asia; India accounts for 40 percent of all child marriages worldwide.
- Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal have the highest incidence of child marriage within the country. Patterns around marriage, patriarchy, and gender norms are possible determinants of the geographical distribution.
- Out of the total number of women in the 20–24 age group in India, more than 23 million continue to be child brides.
- Though child marriage affects both boys and girls, it impacts girls more. Adolescent girls make up a particularly vulnerable group.
- The incidence of child marriage is greater in rural areas than in urban areas.
- Boys and girls from marginalised social groups are more vulnerable and tend to marry two years earlier than those that belong to other groups.
- Girls from poorer households get married at least five years earlier than their counterparts from high income households.
- Women with no education are six times more likely to get married than those with 10 years or more of education.

## 2

# Child Marriage: What are the Causes and its Impact?

Child marriage is not only a violation of human rights; it also undermines progress towards basic development goals. Evidence suggests that child marriage perpetuates the cycle of poverty, undernutrition, and illiteracy, and thereby affects India's progress and development.<sup>14</sup>

The practice of child marriage is rooted in unequal gender norms, characteristic of a patriarchal society. The underlying causes of child marriage can be summarised as the following:

- Prevailing unequal gender norms and gender practices place a low value on women's role and contribution to society, which lead to the continued practice of child marriage. Women are seen mainly to have a reproductive and domestic role, and therefore not worth "investing in" in terms of education and other opportunities. There is limited incentive to keep daughters unmarried for long because of the perception that girls are a burden to the household. This is based on the long-held practice of daughters ceasing to be members of their family on marriage (often referred to as *paraya dhan*) and thus do not contribute financially to the household.
- Patriarchal values translate into controlling women's and girl's reproductive and sexual rights. The fear of family "dishonour" through sexual assault on a daughter or an elopement often contributes to seeing child marriage as a means to "protect" the girl's chastity and, consequently, the family's honour.
- Poverty or the financial condition of a family is also a key determinant. Evidence shows that girls in the poorest households marry as early as at age 15, and at least five years earlier than women in the wealthiest households.

14. End Child Marriage, Change Perceptions and Beliefs, UNICEF 2013

- Although the system of dowry is legally prohibited, it continues to perpetuate child marriage. As the dowry amount increases with the girl's age and education, parents, especially from poorer households, tend to marry their daughters off as children. For instance, in some states, due to the high cost of wedding ceremonies, families marry all their daughters off in a common marriage ceremony, regardless of age.
- Skewed sex ratio has translated into fewer girls in communities. The shortage of women may reinforce gendered female roles such as reproduction, domestic work, and care work. Women would have little agency of their own and could indeed suffer a deterioration in their equity prospects. It is equally possible that as female security gets compromised, with an excess of men vying for them, parents may withdraw unmarried girls from school or higher education, or restrict them from taking up employment before marriage. As safeguarding the virginity of a woman before marriage remains important in India, child marriage may be seen as the solution. Thus, many of the gains made by women in recent decades may be in danger of being reversed. Several scholars argue that scarcity in women may indeed be at greater risk.<sup>15</sup>

Child marriage constitutes a violation of human rights and severely limits the life options and choices of those married as children. The existence of legislation prohibiting child marriage over more than two decades illustrates that child laws alone cannot address an issue that is embedded in social customs and traditions. It is imperative to change unequal gender norms that perpetuate such customs and practices. Changing the attitude and beliefs of communities that uphold such norms and beliefs is critical in addressing the issue. The impact of child marriage on children, particularly girls, is manifold.

- Girls who marry as children are physically, mentally, and emotionally not ready for child care and motherhood. Child marriage is associated with health-related risks for both the mother and baby during teenage pregnancies. In India, one in six girls in the 15–19 age group begin bearing children. One baby in two born to women younger than 20 years dies at birth, compared to about one in three in women in the 20–39 age group.<sup>16</sup> They are also more likely to experience delivery-related complications than those in the 30–34 age group.
- Children of young mothers are less healthy. Children under five years of age born to mothers married before 18 years of age run a higher risk of under-nutrition. Frequently, these young mothers suffer from poor nutrition.
- The indicators on the freedom of movement of women<sup>17</sup> outside their home indicate the limited mobility options available to women, and especially to married girls in the 15–19 age group. Adolescent brides have limited mobility, particularly to public places. One in six girls can venture outside the village/ community alone, while one in five girls is able to visit health facilities alone. Only one in three girls goes alone to the market.<sup>18</sup>
- Child brides also are more likely to be exposed to domestic violence, abuse, and HIV/AIDS. Nearly 13 percent of married women aged 15 to 19 experience sexual violence by their husbands compared to 10 percent of women aged 30 to 39 years.
- Younger women have less decision making power at home. In case of major household purchases, only one in four girls (15–19 years) is able to contribute in decision making as compared to one in two older women (15–49 years). One in three girls (15–19 years) contributes towards decisions on the purchase of

15. Leela Dube, Misadventures in Amniocentesis, *Economic & Political Weekly*, 18 (8), 1983

16. Child childhood mortality rates by mother's age at birth, NFHS 2005-2006

17. Freedom of movement includes movement to three different places - the market, the health facility, and to places outside the village or community

18. Percentage of married women allowed to visit public places alone, NFHS 2005-2006



daily household needs or visit to family/relatives, compared to three in five in the case of older women (15–49 years). Only two in five girls (15–19 years) participate in decisions on seeking health care for themselves, compared to three in five women (15–49 years). Across all the decision making categories, girls in the 15–19 age group contributed the least to the decision making process.<sup>19</sup>

- Many girls who are married off as children are forced to drop out of school. Drop-out rates seem to be associated with trends in child marriage. In India, one student in two drops out before completing Grade 10 with the rate significantly higher among Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, where child marriage is more common.<sup>20</sup>

Beyond the immediate implications highlighted above, child marriage denies girls the opportunity to fully develop their potential as healthy, productive, and empowered citizens. The cumulative effects of reduced school attainment, maternal morbidities, and mortality, and the long-term impact of child marriage and child-bearing on children are serious and need immediate attention. The matter becomes more serious when the child brides are forced to produce sons than children leading to repeated pregnancies and child births.

## Key Points to Remember!

- **Child marriage is embedded in unequal gender norms and patriarchal values that place a low value on girls and women and undermine their value and contribution to society.**
- **Social values and beliefs, low status of women and girls, the prevailing system of dowry, and economic constraints of families are the key triggers of child marriage.**
- **Child marriage is a violation of human rights and has an adverse impact on the health, well-being, and life choices of girls. Children of young mothers are less healthy; young mothers themselves suffer from nutritional deficiency, thus resulting in inter-generational transfer of nutritional deprivation.**
- **Child brides are more likely to be exposed to domestic violence, sexual abuse, and HIV/AIDS.**
- **Younger women have fewer skills, less decision-making power at home, and limited mobility to public places. They are also economically vulnerable, and have less access to financial resources than older married women.**

19. Percentage of married women involved in household decision making, NFHS 2005-2006

20. School drop-out rate Grade 1 to X by sex, social groups, SES MoHRD 2007-2008

# 3

## Child Marriage: What Has Been Done to Address the Issue?

A combination of policy measures, government programmes and schemes, and community-led interventions by civil society have been used to address the issue of child marriage. India has ratified two international conventions—the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)—relevant to child marriage. The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961 prohibits the giving and taking of dowry, and the Right to Education Act, 2009 mandates compulsory schooling for all children in the 6–14 age group.

**In terms of legislation, the age of marriage is regulated through two Acts:**

1. The Hindu Marriage Act (1955) or the Special Marriage Act (1954). To be eligible for marriage, the minimum age limit is 21 for males and 18 for females.
2. The Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1929 (CMRA) was one of the first pieces of legislation aimed at preventing the incidence of child marriage. A new Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 (PCMA) was brought in to bring about significant changes in the earlier law. The PCMA defines child marriage as marriage in which either the girl or the boy is under-age, i.e., the girl is under 18 years of age or the boy is younger than 21 years.

## Key National Frameworks

### National Policy for Children, 2013

With the Ministry of Women and Child Development as the nodal Ministry, the policy seeks to strengthen the overall child protection framework and provides for tracking, rescuing and rehabilitating out-of-school children, including married children, and ensuring them access to their right to education.

### National Strategy on Child Marriage

This strategy is in the process of being formulated. It reflects the commitment of the Government of India to curb child marriage. It suggests ensuring linkages with the Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS) structures and statutory bodies to ensure detection and prompt referral of cases that

require care and protection. One of the strategic directions is in cases where children have already been married; they should not be discriminated when accessing services such as health, nutrition, education, and employment programmes. Other strategic directions include stricter law enforcement at the central and state level, improving access to quality education and other opportunities, changing mindsets and norms through media and stakeholder participatory methods, empowering adolescents through creating safe spaces for them, forming groups and developing their life skills, providing for better knowledge and data to increase evidence based interventions, and, finally, developing indicators for such interventions, which

can be monitored.

### The National Plan of Action on Prevention of Child Marriage

National Plan of Action on Prevention of Child Marriage, which is in the process of being finalised, proposes strategic interventions to be implemented using a convergent model. The long-term goal is in making girls and boys in India free from child marriage, and in making them realise their full potential and live a life of dignity. The plan covers seven objectives and specific strategies, each of which is important in its own right, but which also complement and reinforce each another to address the issue of child marriage.

**Table 2: Significant Features of Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 (PCMA)**

Enforcement	Punishment	Restitution
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All offences to be cognisable and non-bailable</li> <li>Appointment of Child Marriage Prohibition Officers (CMPOs) with power to prevent and prosecute the solemnisation of child marriages and create awareness</li> <li>District Magistrate can stop and prevent mass child marriages by issuing injunctions and notifications through CMPOs and can take preventive measures.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rigorous imprisonment of up to two years or with a fine up to Rs 100,000 rupees or both for male contracting party</li> <li>Similar punishment for anyone who performs, conducts, directs, or abets any child marriage. This includes anyone who promotes, permits, or negligently fails to prevent the solemnisation of such a marriage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintenance and residence for the girl until her remarriage from the male contracting party or his parents</li> <li>Annulment can be sought with District Courts within a period of two years after the child who was a party to the marriage has attained majority<sup>21</sup></li> <li>Appropriate orders for custody of any child born out of the marriage</li> </ul>

Source: Briefing Paper Series: Innovations, Lessons and Good Practices. Community based interventions on Child Marriage, UNICEF 2011

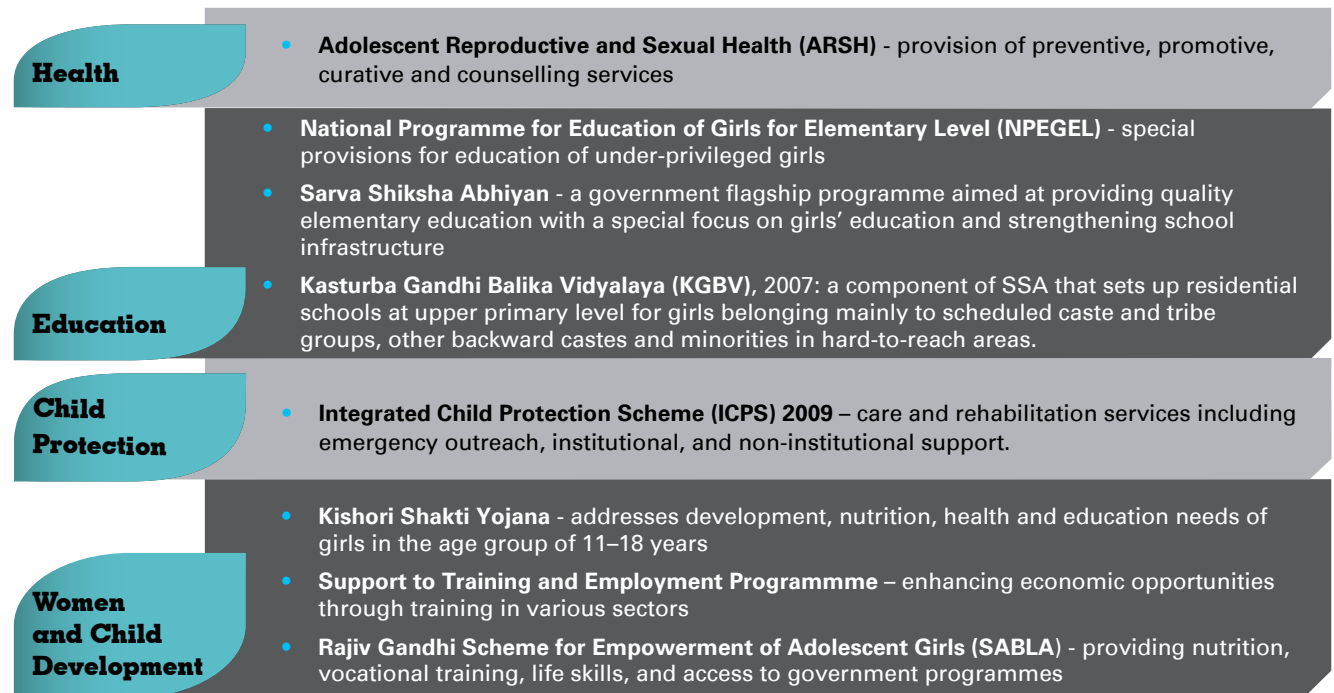
21. Adolescent brides have to wait till they reach 18 years of age to apply for annulment. Also, adolescent mothers cannot apply for maintenance for living and raising their children from minor husbands. In such cases, the onus of applying for annulment and raising children becomes the responsibility of adolescent girls.

However, loopholes in the law, poor implementation, and poor conviction rates have plagued implementation. Moreover, social norms have overruled legal norms. Law enforcement officers are often unable to resist long-held traditions, as they are part of the very same community. The weak enforcement of the Dowry Prohibition Act (deterrence to practice of dowry) and the PCMA has resulted in few prosecutions. Enforcement is often dependent on Frontline Workers who are part of the

local community and may not be willing to report on neighbours.<sup>22</sup>

In addition to the legal and policy initiatives, the Government of India has launched and implemented several programmes and schemes to address child marriage at the national level. Some of the key government programmes/schemes include the following.

**Figure 1: Programmes and Schemes to Address Child Marriage by Government of India**



22. End Child Marriage: Change perceptions and beliefs, UNICEF 2013

Source: Briefing Paper Series: Innovations, Lessons and Good Practices. Community based interventions on Child Marriage, UNICEF 2011



Apart from these national level initiatives, there are various government schemes at the state level that support girls by providing cash incentives. These schemes support marriages above the legal age when conducted singly (e.g. Kunwarbainu Mameru in Gujarat or Mukhya Mantri Ladli Lakshmi Yojana in Jharkhand) or in groups (e.g. Saat Phera Samooh Lagna, Gujarat). The criteria and process for applying under these schemes and programmes are outlined by the local government.

Several CSOs supported by various donors have also been at the forefront of efforts to address child marriage by undertaking community level interventions. In Maharashtra, in partnership with the HALO Foundation, UNICEF works with communities, especially women and adolescent girls, along with local school authorities to change the perception of key stakeholders at the village level to address the issue of child marriage. In Rajasthan, it has partnered with the state government to create awareness on the harmful effects of marrying girls at an early age by helping develop messages and materials for the initiative. In Bihar, UNICEF supports girls' education as one of the major areas of intervention. It also supports efforts to build the capacity of local faith-based leaders and kathavachaks (story tellers) on child marriage and creating a fleet of yuvacharyas (young scholars) to act as door messengers at the village level. In Assam, UNICEF partnered with management associations of tea estates, such as the Assam Branch of the Indian Tea Association (ABITA) and the Bharatiya Cha Parishad (BCP), which control a large part of tea estates in the states, as part of its efforts to reach out to the marginalised communities employed on-site. Through these partnerships, it broadened its mandate to include the agenda of child marriage, and also made efforts to sustain change and ground it in community structures by helping create Child Protection Committees. These committees comprise important stakeholders: representatives from tea estate management; self-help groups (SHG);

and government health and education staff members responsible for monitoring cases of child marriage and taking appropriate action against it.

A review of programmes and interventions in India suggest that a multi-layered programme that addresses key stakeholders at various levels makes for an effective intervention<sup>23</sup> UNICEF has been pursuing the issue of child marriage across different states in partnership with state governments as well as other agencies. The key elements of UNICEF's overall interventions are described below.

- a. **Changing norms and behaviours:** This is a central component of the strategy that is implemented mainly at the community level. It aims at influencing attitudes and behaviours to reach collective consensus and action to delay and prevent child marriage. It is proven that in the case of child marriage, the decisions of individuals (in this case, parents) to marry off a girl child (daughter) are highly influenced by existing community norms and practices and by the fear of being excluded from the community if they break with its long-standing traditions. This component of the strategy relies on intensive community-based advocacy and support to community leaders, so that they can influence collective opinion, community dialogue and mobilisation of the entire community through community mobilisers (NGOs, frontline workers, teachers, youth volunteers).
- b. **Empowering girls:** Interventions to empower girls aim at building their confidence, self-efficacy, and decision making skills in all dimensions of life. Girls' groups are the main space and channel for life skills development, dissemination of knowledge, and development of self-esteem. It is within these groups that girls acquire the courage to become role

23. Knot Ready: Lessons from India on delaying age for Marriage, ICRW, 2008

models in changing social norms and resisting their own marriage and their peers'. Special attention is placed on girls, given their vulnerability and the little respect they have in society, but boys are becoming an increasingly more important target. In particular, fostering of inter-gender dialogue is an area that will receive more attention in the future.

- c. Strengthening implementation of laws and policies:** Strengthening systems as well as the role of the duty bearers in preventing and addressing child marriage occurs at several levels. This includes capacity building of child protection functionaries, police, women and child development officials, and CMPOs. Linkages with the protection structures and support to planning processes and state and district levels are also taking place.
- d. Ensuring continued and quality education for girls:** Only one in two girls complete secondary school in India. Girls tend to drop out of school after grade VIII, which is usually when they marry. Ensuring girls are in school will contribute to the delaying child marriage. Some of the interventions include campaigning and advocacy for elementary and secondary school attendance, linkages with bridge schools for inclusion of drop-out girls, advocacy for safe schools, and safe transport to school. Life skills development, dealing with gender issues, and child marriage within schools are also promoted.
- e. Fostering social protection:** One of the main determinants of child marriage is poverty. Identifying vulnerable families (e.g. more than one daughter, school drop-outs, illiteracy, presence of child labour, previous child marriages) and connecting them to existing social protection mechanisms may contribute to delaying child marriage, particularly if efforts

contribute to girls' education. While existing schemes have not proven effective at outreach, research shows that they do contribute to enhancing the value of girls within families. Support to different levels of government needs to be channelled for these schemes to become effective tools for raising the perceived value of girls and empowering them.

- f. Creating linkages with other services:** While anaemia and maternal and child mortality are positively influenced by child marriage, the linkages between health and nutrition services to prevent child marriage need to be strengthened. These services become an important entry point to address the risk of being married young, in addition to ensuring the well-being of married girls. One of the ways in achieving this is the active inclusion of Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) representatives such as Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA), Anganwadi Workers (AWW), and Auxiliary Nurse Midwives (ANM).

The interventions are being aimed at largely through communication, capacity building, and change retention. These interventions are being planned in a format that has been tabulated below:

- 1. Mass Media at state /district level** – To mould public opinion to create an enabling environment as well as influence behaviour change among primary audiences i.e. adolescents and parents.
- 2. Advocacy** – To ensure that “structural issues” are addressed, such as stronger implementation of the laws and welfare schemes.
- 3. Community Mobilisation & Mid-Media Activities** – To promote collective action towards resolution of the issue at the community level.

- 4. Interpersonal Communication at household / school / community levels** – To support children, parents, and other relevant stakeholders in their attempts towards the adoption, practice, and maintenance of positive behaviours.

## Key Points to Remember!

- “Investing in girls” is a key strategy to consider while planning interventions on child marriage.
- Changes in gender norms, enabling policy and legal frameworks, as well as positioning child marriage as a key development issue are critical areas of action for programme implementers.
- It is important to address child marriage directly and hence have specific objectives and outcomes related to the practice in programme design.

## 4

# Child Marriage: How Can Interventions Be Made Effective?

## Developing a Working Strategy based on the Theory of Change

Based on the key programmatic framework considerations, a working strategy can be developed that includes the important stakeholders, the required change in their behaviour and perceptions, along with the appropriate activities that enable the change to happen. A “theory of change” provides a convenient working model for planning the working strategy. It is an explicit representation of the assumptions about how changes are expected to happen within any particular context and in relation to a particular intervention. A theory of change maps out which actors have to do what to achieve and sustain a vision of success, and identifies the major linkages between them.

A schematic representation of the “Theory of Change: Addressing Child Marriage” has been provided in the Annexure. Figure 2 (in the next page) explains how the

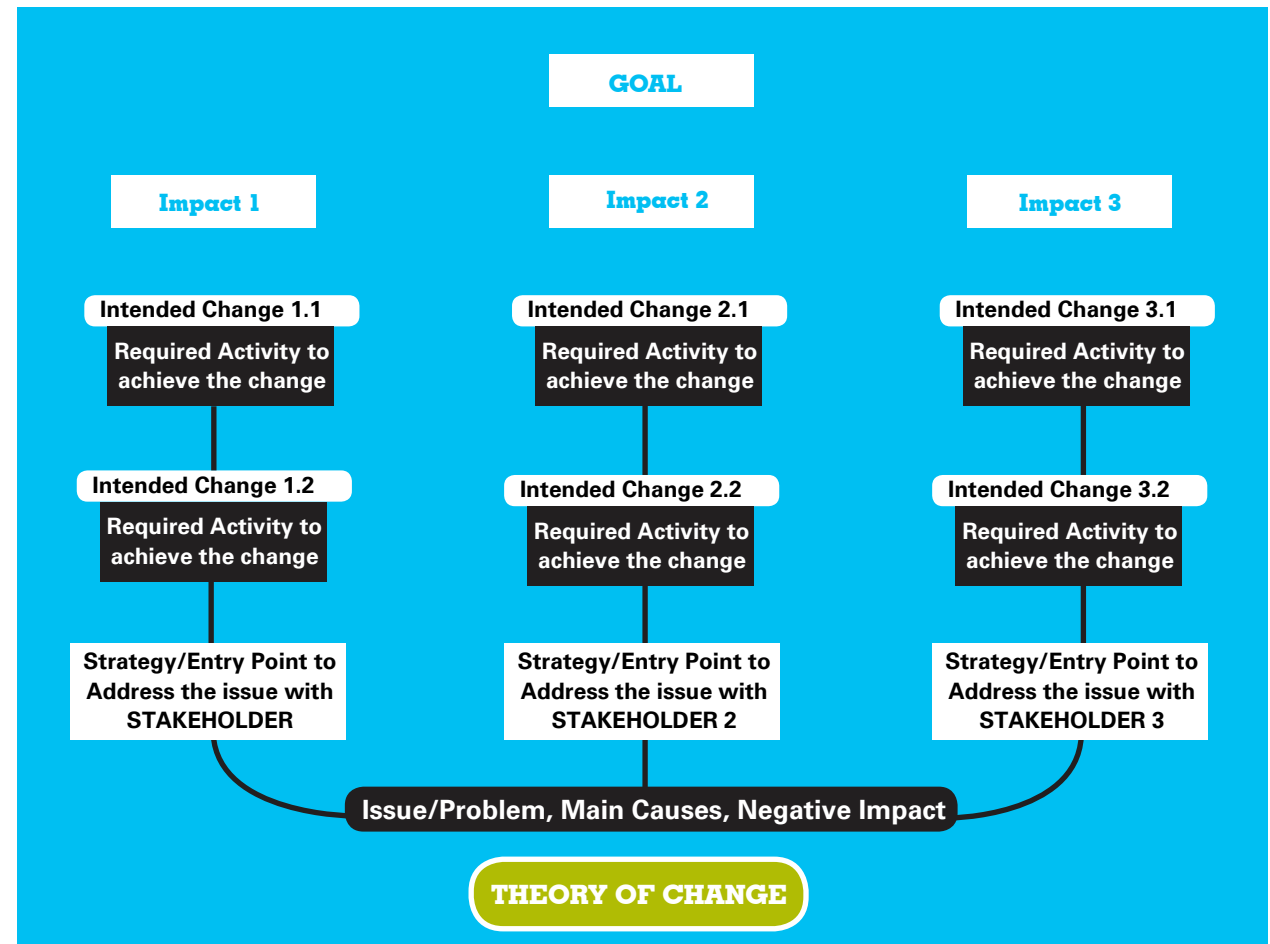
theory is organised to address the issue/problem, which is kept at the base of the schematic diagram.

- As a first step, “strategies” and “entry points” are identified to work with the stakeholders based on certain “assumptions”.
- Next, a series of “intended change” is drawn out, which leads to the “impacts”. It is interesting to note how one change leads to the other.
- Simultaneously, “activities” are established in support of the “intended change” in the stakeholders.
- If these “activities” are carried out, the “intended change” unfolds as desired, provided the “assumptions” hold valid at each level.
- Interestingly, there are “linkages” between certain “intended changes” where they are inter-dependent.



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**Figure 2: Visual Representation of Theory of Change Used to Prepare the Theory of Change in Addressing Child Marriage**



Source: Briefing Paper Series: Innovations, Lessons and Good Practices. Community based interventions on Child Marriage, UNICEF 2011

To illustrate the above explanation, CSO partners choose to work with frontline workers<sup>24</sup> (see extreme right of the theory of change diagram in the Annexure) because they are well-connected in the community, mandated to share information on child marriage, and are capable of training and sensitising the community.

- The first levels of “intended change” are in terms of their becoming aware of the gender discrimination and identifying it within their community by connecting to the issue personally.
- To make this possible, the CSO partners need to build frontline workers’ awareness (Activity 1) and train them (Activity 2).
- The next level of “intended change” is for frontline workers to generate discussion with the community and ensuring birth registration at the community level. Discussions may lead to specific needs in training of young girls and boys.
- To support their efforts in training adolescents, CSO partners need to provide them with training content (Activity 3) and talking points to frontline workers for discussing the issue with parents (Activity 4).
- The highest level of envisaged change is in the form of their sustaining the earlier changes and proactively reporting matters to a child marriage committee/ forum such as gram sabhas, school management committee (SMC) meetings, etc.
- These changes will “impact” in the form of increased safety and security of girls in the community, and lead to improving their mobility, higher education and participation, which contributes to the final desired “goal”—the reduction in the marriage of girls younger than 18 years.

Similarly, the following list of key activities has emerged on the basis of the “theory of change” after analysing all the strategies/entry points. These have been mapped

with the child marriage toolkit component (Table 3) provided through the UNICEF-commissioned project.

#### **Key Challenges for Programme Interventions on Child Marriage**

- Child marriage enjoys wide social sanction and is upheld by customary laws and is thus difficult to alter it. Child marriage can often be resisted by families, community, and religious leaders. Instances of backlash from the community are not unheard of. Thus, “preparing” the community to accept this change is critical.
- Though there are legislative safeguards against child marriage, implementations of laws has been poor. Lack of political will and low budgetary allocations against legislations and resistance of office bearers to implement laws have been the key impediment.
- There is low awareness among the community on the protective mechanisms provided under the law against child marriage, particularly among marginalised and rural communities who are more vulnerable to the practice.
- Few child marriage programmes have been evaluated well, and many promising programmes have not been evaluated at all. A number of programmes whose primary goal is to provide education or livelihoods training do not measure child marriage as an outcome. Evaluation challenges include the fact that the programmatic timeframe is sharply limited, making it hard to know whether girls did indeed remain unmarried until age 18, and what the impact of that delay is on their lives. Once girls marry, they often leave their communities, making it very difficult to see the potential contributions the programmes have made to their married lives or to their communities.

24. Frontline workers are ASHAs, AWWs, and ANMs.

25. More detailed Product Descriptions are available on the cover page of the Child Marriage Intervention Toolkit





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- Programme interventions have not directly addressed child marriage. For most programmes, child marriage has been a goal entwined with achieving other health, welfare, or empowerment outcomes for adolescents and youth. It is important for programmes to list and plan specific objectives, outcomes, and activities to address child marriage, and help in scaling up the programme by mainstreaming the issue across other themes and creating linkages across services.
- Behavioural change interventions require time and are labour-intensive. They are often limited in scope, and therefore scaling up, and effective reduction of child marriage, remains a challenge.

## Key Points to Remember!

- Based on the key programmatic framework considerations, a working strategy can be developed, which includes the important stakeholders, the required change in their behaviour, and perceptions along with the appropriate activities, which enable the change to happen.
- A “theory of change” provides a convenient working model for planning the working strategy. It is an explicit presentation of the assumptions about how changes are expected to happen within any particular context and in relation to a particular intervention. A theory of change maps which actors have to do what to achieve and sustain a vision of success, and identifies the major linkages between them.
- Activities in child marriage interventions can also be identified on the basis of a “theory of change”, which helps in designing an appropriate toolkit in implementing child marriage interventions by CSO partners.
- Though there are several challenges associated with implementing programmes to address early marriage, there is increasing evidence to suggest that programmes that “invest in girls” and empower them have lasting impact and are key determinants for delaying the age at marriage.

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# ANNEXURES



# Annexure 1

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## **Theory of Change on Addressing Child Marriage\* with Assumptions**

Please unfold  
the attached  
poster on the  
right to view  
the TOC







## Assumptions in Preparing the Theory of Change on Addressing Child Marriage

1. Adolescent girls and boys are not gender-sensitised at present.
2. Teachers are able to influence the community on child marriage issues.
3. Teachers are not gender-sensitised at present.
4. Teachers are not aware of their own ability to influence the community.
5. Teachers can become interested in influencing the community.
6. The school machinery—infrastructure, people, and networks such as SMCs—can provide support and create spaces for adolescent students in addressing child marriage.
7. Majority of high-impact school-based interventions in child marriage are possible through government schools due to two reasons. First, child marriages have the highest prevalence in rural areas, which have an insignificant percentage of private schools. Secondly, adolescent girls are mostly sent to government schools, where education is inexpensive, because their families do not want to invest heavily in their future.
8. Frontline workers are well-connected within their communities.
9. Frontline workers are usually the first ones to have prior information on child marriages.
10. Frontline workers are mandated to share information regarding child marriage with their community.
11. Frontline workers have low levels of gender sensitisation.
12. Frontline workers are part of the same community and lower down the social ladder than PRI representatives and religious leaders.
13. Frontline workers are women following set norms of the community.
14. Frontline workers are capable of training/sensitising adolescents, men, and women in the community.
15. The Government of India gives PRI representatives power and authority at the community level; therefore, they have considerable influence over decision making in the community.
16. PRI members are the custodian of govt. policies at the gram panchayat level.
17. CBOs and SHGs do not prioritise child marriage issues in their agenda.
18. CBOs and SHGs are capable of influencing the community through peer-to-peer communication.
19. Parents and family members of pubescent girls worry about their safety and security.
20. Parents and family members of adolescent girls who marry them off are poor and inadequately educated.
21. Parents and family members of adolescent girls who marry them off do not value them.
22. Parents and family members of adolescent girls who marry them off feel pressurised to follow the “norms” related to child marriage such as getting their children married on auspicious days, getting girls married before puberty, etc.
23. Parents and family members of adolescent girls feel the responsibility to marry them off.
24. The police and CMPOs are mandated to take action against any occurrence of child marriage in the community.
25. The powers of the police in taking action against occurrences of child marriage are subject to formal reporting of the incident by other stakeholders.
26. There is negligible convergence among various child marriage preventive mechanisms at the district level.

















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