

**LEVERAGING LARGE-SCALE
SECTORAL PROGRAMMES TO
PREVENT CHILD MARRIAGE**

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

BCC	behaviour change communication
CBHI	Community-Based Health Insurance
COVID-19	coronavirus disease 2019
DHS	Demographic and Health Survey
DLHS	District Level Household Survey
FGM	female genital mutilation
GBV	gender-based violence
Global Programme	Global Programme to End Child Marriage
IGA	income-generating activities
ISNP	Integrated Safety Net Programme
KP	Kanyashree Prakalpa
LEAP	Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty
MGNREGA	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
MIS	Management Information System
MKUY	Mukhyamantri Kanya Utthan Yojana
NFHS	National Family Health Survey
NGO	non-governmental organization
PRI	Panchayati Raj Institution
PSNP	Protective Safety Net Programme
SABLA	Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls
SAG	Scheme for Adolescent Girls
SAG-KP	Scheme for Adolescent Girls–Kanyashree Prakalpa
SBCC	social and behaviour change communication
SCT	Social Cash Transfer
SPAC	State Plan of Action for Children II
SRHR	sexual and reproductive health and rights
SWAP	sector-wide approach
SWEDD	Sahel Women’s Empowerment and Demographic Dividend
UDISE	Unified District Information System for Education
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WCD&SW	Department of Women & Child Development and Social Welfare

Executive Summary

This report describes and analyses the mechanisms through which large-scale sectoral interventions have contributed to the prevention of child marriage in three settings. It presents case studies from Ethiopia, and from the states of West Bengal and Bihar in India. Its purpose is to highlight the successes and challenges of the approaches taken in each context, and to identify practical ways to embed efforts to end child marriage within existing programming in the areas of education, social protection, economic opportunities, poverty reduction, and sexual and reproductive health. Its audience includes policy-makers in government, and in regional and international organizations, especially those who are working to reduce girls' vulnerability to child marriage.

Criteria for selection of large, single-sector programme:

- Designed to reach the entire target population in a country or state
- Focuses on one main goal and designed to bring about structural transformations that are measurable at the national or state household survey level
- Has adequate and sustainable multi-year funding to ensure the long-term achievement of the programme's main goal
- While narrowly focused on one main goal, the programme's effects can be broader

Synthesis, comparison and analysis

The first chapter in this report examines how each of the three case studies illuminates the importance of investigating the different pathways that affect adolescent girls and child marriage, and the need for empirical research, strong data and clear conceptual frameworks to inform the efforts and impacts of single-sector interventions to reduce child marriage. While all three case studies have a cash transfer component at their core, the programmes differ significantly from each other in terms of their overall aims, design, implementation and delivery modalities, and additional 'cash plus' components. The Protective Safety Net Programme in Ethiopia has been shown to reduce child marriage; both the Kanyashree Prakalpa scheme in West Bengal and the Mukhyamantri

Kanya Utthan Yojana programme in Bihar have shown potential to do so, but have not been evaluated.

The chapter emphasizes the potential of large-scale interventions to reduce child marriage, demonstrating that:

- **The pathways to ending child marriage are complex and differ according to context.** It cannot be assumed that such schemes will automatically have a positive impact on preventing child marriage or addressing gender inequality; to articulate context-specific pathways of change requires context-specific data analysis, research and evaluations, rather than just repackaging existing global or national evidence. Context-specific research has to inform all aspects of programming, not just at the beginning of a programme, but throughout its implementation.
- **What works in one setting will not necessarily work elsewhere.** In all three examples, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) supported piloting to test approaches, to learn how things work and to obtain context-specific evidence to influence large-scale programmes. This type of support is crucial to ensuring the existence, appropriateness and effectiveness of interventions to end child marriage.
- **Government and donor commitment are essential prerequisites for successful leveraging of large-scale interventions.** UNICEF succeeded in adding cash plus components to the design of all three programmes. Similar efforts in other settings offer much promise.
- **State and district plans of action to end child marriage can provide a framework for collaboration across departments and agencies.** Engagement with these types of policies and plans, and the perspectives of departmental staff across sectors offer important opportunities for cooperation that the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage (Global Programme) could capitalize on.

Paramount among the skills, capacities and resources that are required to successfully influence large-scale programmes are: strategic vision, leadership, long-term commitment and continuity; multisectoral collaboration; and experienced, creative and strategic advocacy.

The development and analysis of the case studies yielded key learnings on the effectiveness of efforts to end child marriage via single-sector interventions (see *Table 1*).

Table 1: Key learnings from the development and analysis of case studies

Key steps	Actions	Implications for the Global Programme
1. Analyse the problem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify and understand the drivers of child marriage in a given context Advocate to build political commitment and leadership to tackle child marriage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deepen and refine context-specific analysis of the drivers of child marriage
2. Identify large-scale programmes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify large-scale programmes that could help influence the drivers of child marriage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In promising countries, identify large-scale programmes that can be leveraged to prevent child marriage Develop methodology for identifying such programmes
3. Analyse the pathways	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analyse how different large-scale programmes affect or have the potential to affect the prevalence of child marriage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use data, research and evaluations to analyse the various pathways through which large single-sector programmes can influence child marriage prevalence
4. Invest in understanding how to amplify positive pathways via cash plus additions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify, pilot and evaluate additional components that can amplify the positive effects of large-scale programmes on child marriage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify cash plus components through reviews, piloting and evaluations to amplify the positive effects of large-scale programmes on preventing child marriage Develop methodology for identifying and piloting cash plus activities
5. Advocate and support the inclusion of cash plus components	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use evidence from research, evaluations and pilots to influence the design of large-scale programmes and advocate for the inclusion of cash plus activities to amplify the effects of large programmes on child marriage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop strategies to influence the design of large-scale programmes with the potential to prevent child marriage (in partnership with social policy and education sections) Support the implementation of cash plus activities Promote inter-departmental convergence Strengthen the capacities of service providers and implementers
6. Monitor and evaluate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitor and evaluate large-scale programmes and make further adjustments to amplify their effects on preventing child marriage Share learning and advocate for broader implementation of the cash plus side of the intervention(s) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support programme evaluations Strengthen management information systems of large-scale programmes Advocate for programme revisions in line with findings from monitoring and evaluation Advocate for broader implementation and learning exchange

Case study in Ethiopia

The Government of Ethiopia, with assistance from donors, began supporting a large-scale social protection programme in 2005. The Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP) was originally designed to address the needs of chronically food-insecure households in famine-prone rural areas of the country. As the programme expanded and unfolded, research and analysis in 2017 showed that although ending child marriage was not part of its rationale, the practice did decline in households that participated in the PSNP.¹ Those working to tackle the social and structural drivers of child marriage and to achieve greater social outcomes for children thus saw in the PSNP a strategic mechanism to achieve their goals.

Over the past four years, UNICEF and others have advocated for and influenced the design of the PSNP to optimize its ability to reduce child marriage. Four main approaches have been used iteratively: (1) building evidence of what works to end child marriage and elaborating a conceptual framework of the pathways through which the PSNP can effect change; (2) setting up pilot projects to show how cash plus components, such as case management, can be added to the large-scale social protection programme; (3) building political will and working with national partners to harmonize policies related to child marriage and campaigning to end the practice; and (4) advocating to influence the design of the next iteration of the PSNP (PSNP 5). UNICEF has faced some challenges in these efforts, particularly in relation to advocacy, because of the sheer size, complexity and

1. Hoddinott, John, Tseday J. Mekasha, 'Social Protection, Household Size, and Its Determinants: Evidence from Ethiopia, *Journal of Development Studies*, vol. 56, no. 10, 16 March 2020, 1818–1837.

number of stakeholders in the programme. However, long-standing partnerships and a shared commitment to reducing child marriage have motivated refinements in the PSNP 5, and these will be closely monitored and evaluated in the coming months and years.

Case study in West Bengal, India

In 2013, in response to increasing evidence of the long-term negative impacts of gender inequality in childhood, the State Government of West Bengal launched the Kanyashree Prakalpa scheme. This cash transfer programme aims to incentivize education and thereby offer girls an alternative to child marriage (this was an intentional aim of the programme). The components of the programme, which have evolved and been tweaked over time, are designed to show that the long-term benefits associated with girls' schooling outweigh the opportunity costs of having to pay the often higher dowry associated with older girls. Since the inception of the scheme, UNICEF has worked across sectors to provide technical support in a wide range of thematic and practical areas. Over time, the scheme has evolved and adapted to new evidence and learning. Challenges associated with this work relate to the complexity and sheer size of the scheme, its insufficient budget, a lack of data about the effectiveness of its cash plus components, and challenges in service delivery and quality. Lessons from the implementation of the scheme highlight that cash alone is not enough to prevent child marriage. There remains a need for attitudinal change among parents, teachers, community members and government, and greater convergence between implementing government departments.

A number of studies have shown that the Kanyashree Prakalpa scheme has increased public awareness of child marriage, raised girls' aspirations and provided them with a platform to speak for themselves. However, no formal evaluation of the effect of the scheme on child marriage has yet been made public. A study of this kind is urgently needed in order to ensure that the scheme is making a difference in girls' lives and in relation to child marriage.

Case study in Bihar, India

The State Government of Bihar launched the Mukhyamantri Kanya Utthan Yojana (MKUY) scheme in 2018. MKUY provides financial support and incentives through 23 conditional cash transfers over a girl's life course from birth to 21 years of age. The scheme aims to improve social outcomes for girls and empower them to take advantage of opportunities that enhance their well-being; ensure secondary school completion; encourage tertiary-level education and a career orientation among girls; and prevent child marriage. The MKUY scheme is fully funded by the State Government of Bihar and enjoys strong political support. UNICEF used a pilot child marriage project and the analysis of household survey data to convince the Government of Bihar to tackle the state's high prevalence of child marriage. Since its inception, UNICEF has provided technical, communication and monitoring support for MKUY. It has also supported a review to identify components that could be added to MKUY to strengthen its effects for adolescent girls and gender equality more generally.



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Synthesis, Comparison and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide the broader context of the case studies, explain the methodology employed, outline the structure of the report and provide an overview of the data available on child marriage in each of the three localities.

The UNICEF Headquarters Child Protection team commissioned child marriage case studies from countries representing diverse contexts. The case studies describe and analyse successful and promising large-scale sectoral interventions at national and subnational levels to prevent child marriage.² Each case study identifies practical options for embedding child marriage-focused components in sectors that represent critical pathways for addressing child marriage at scale: education, social protection, economic opportunities, poverty reduction and reproductive health. Most of these large-scale sectoral interventions are being implemented by government departments or by very large non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Some are government funded; others are paid for by international donors, including the World Bank.

Criteria for selection of large, single-sector programme:

- Designed to reach the entire target population in a country or state (e.g., all families below a certain poverty threshold; or all adolescent girls aged 13–18 years).
- Focuses on one main goal and designed to bring about structural transformations that are measurable at the national or state household survey level (e.g., reduction in economic insecurity among poor households; or increase in school attendance and completion among adolescent girls).
- Has adequate and sustainable multi-year funding to ensure the long-term achievement of the programme's main goal.
- While narrowly focused on one main goal, the programme's effects can be broader (e.g., poverty mitigation or girls' education leading to broader social and economic effects).



Child Frontiers was contracted to develop these case studies. Restrictions related to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic meant that it was not possible to conduct visits and in-depth interviews with a wide array of stakeholders in-country. The consultants compiled a list of large-scale sectoral interventions based on Malhotra and Elnakib's review of effective child marriage programmes³ and the annual reports of the Global Programme, and undertook a quick and focused literature review of: the latest evidence of what works to end child marriage; country analyses on the political economy of child marriage in several settings undertaken by the Iris Group;⁴ and literature that examines potential large-scale sectoral interventions in priority countries that have the potential to reduce child marriage (although they may not have been designed with this goal in mind).

The list of potential contexts was narrowed down to identify the most promising programmes based on their scale and reach; evidence of effectiveness in reducing child marriage; governance and politics (government support and political will); and adequate financing. This list formed the basis for identifying the Global Programme countries that were collaborating in promising ways with sectoral programmes in Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Nepal, India and Zambia. To identify specific programmes within these

2. So far, only the PSNP in Ethiopia has been formally evaluated. The evaluation provides evidence of overall effectiveness. The programmes in Bihar and West Bengal have not yet been evaluated. Preliminary indicators of success include the reach of the programmes and increases in girls' school enrolment and completion.

3. Malhotra, Anju, and Shatha Elnakib, 'Twenty Years of the Evidence Base on What Works to Prevent Child Marriage: A systematic review', *Journal of Adolescent Health*, vol. 68, no. 5, 2021, pp. 847–862.

4. All country reports may be accessed here: <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-learning-partners-consortium/country-focus/>.

Member States, the consultants arranged calls with the UNICEF teams in each of the six countries to discuss possible programmes for the development of case studies and to obtain relevant documentation. A review of the documentation and, in some cases, follow-up calls, led to the selection of a final list of three large programmes in Ethiopia (PSNP), Bihar (MKUY) and West Bengal (Kanyashree Prakalpa).

The criteria for including a programme were:

- Large scale and reach
- Potential impact of the programme on child marriage
- Available documentation – ideally reviews, assessments, evaluations
- UNICEF engagement with the large-scale programme
- Responsive country team.

Ethiopia and India are 2 of 12 countries supported by the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage since its inception in 2016. The country programmes implement interventions, in collaboration with key governmental and non-governmental agencies, that focus on five broad outcomes that are aligned to the five outcome areas of the Global Programme:⁵ girls' empowerment and life skills; social and behaviour change in communities; prevention and protection services; legal and policy frameworks; and data and evidence.⁶

Limitations:

Given the limited evidence on leveraging large-scale programmes to end child marriage, two case studies were selected from the same country (India). While both incentivize girls' education, they are being implemented in two different states and have different design elements, histories and durations. The Ethiopia case study, on the other hand, represents a cash-for-work programme to reduce household economic insecurity – prevention of child marriage was not among the programme's original objectives. The consultants were not able to identify other large-scale programmes in the Global Programme countries that have been harnessed to end child marriage, including large-scale sexual and reproductive health (SRH) programmes, sector-wide approaches (SWAP) in the education sector, or large-scale income-generation programmes for adolescent

girls and young women. Anyone with insight and information about such efforts is asked to kindly reach out to the Global Programme so that it can continue to explore and learn from these approaches as they are manifested in different parts of the world.

While the three case studies are described in this report following the same outline, the content of each case study reflects differences in the design and history of each programme, as well as the availability of research, evaluations, monitoring data and other programme documentation for each. These case studies are designed to provide food for thought for those interested in tackling the social and structural drivers of child marriage through large-scale sectoral interventions. The detailed case studies are aimed particularly at Global Programme and partner staff considering whether and how they want to work with large-scale sectoral interventions to tackle child marriage in their country contexts.

Common framework for analysing the three case studies:

The following framework was developed to examine the three case studies and to ensure that they – despite their differences – are analysed and presented in similar ways. The framework examines six key elements that contribute to the successful leveraging of large-scale sectoral interventions to end child marriage, namely: (1) problem analysis and leadership; (2) identifying large-scale sectoral programmes that have the potential to contribute to ending child marriage; (3) analysing the pathways by which large-scale programmes prevent child marriage; (4) identifying additional cash plus components that can amplify the positive effects that the large-scale programmes are having on preventing child marriage; (5) advocating for and supporting the inclusion of cash plus components in the large-scale programmes; (6) monitoring and evaluation. Each of these elements is important in its own right, yet overall impact requires all six to work together to create an enabling environment for change. The specifics of each programme, and their iterations over time, are discussed within this broader conceptual frame. For each of the elements, the framework identifies key actions that were taken in each setting (see *Table 2*).

5. The UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme focuses on the same outcomes but frames them differently (by merging the first two so that there are four outcomes in all).

6. Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE), Ministry of Women, Children and Youth, *National Costed Roadmap to End Child Marriage and FGM/C 2020–2024*, FDRE, Addis Ababa, 2019.

Table 2: Framework for child marriage case studies

Key steps	Actions
1. Analyse the problem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify and understand the drivers of child marriage in a given context Advocate to build political commitment and leadership to tackle child marriage
2. Identify large-scale programmes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify large-scale programmes that could help influence the drivers of child marriage
3. Analyse the pathways	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analyse how different large-scale programmes affect or have the potential to affect the prevalence of child marriage
4. Invest in understanding how to amplify positive pathways via cash plus add-ons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify, pilot and evaluate additional components that can amplify the positive effects of large-scale programmes on child marriage
5. Advocate and support the inclusion of cash plus components	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use evidence from research, evaluations and pilots to influence the design of large-scale programmes and advocate for the inclusion of cash plus activities to amplify the effects of large-scale programmes on child marriage
6. Monitor and evaluate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitor and evaluate large-scale programmes and make further adjustments to amplify their effects on preventing child marriage Share learning and advocate for broader implementation of the cash plus side of the intervention(s)

Country contexts of the case studies

This section presents some key indicators for Ethiopia and the Indian states of Bihar and West Bengal (and for India as a whole) in order to place the three case studies within a broader context. Table 3 shows some of the similarities and differences between the three case study settings. All three political entities have

large populations, ranging from 115 million in Ethiopia to 104 million in Bihar and 91 million in West Bengal. The child marriage rates across all three contexts are very similar at 40–42 per cent. Although the Indian states outperform Ethiopia in rates of completion of upper secondary education for girls, women’s labour force participation rates are much lower than that of Ethiopia. Marriage-related transfers in Ethiopia consist of bride price paid by the family of the groom to the family of the bride, while the Indian states practise dowry payments that flow in the opposite direction.



Table 3: Socioeconomic indicators related to child marriage⁷

Indicators	Ethiopia	West Bengal	Bihar	India
Population in millions ⁸	115	91	104	1,380
Gross domestic product per capita ⁹	\$856	\$1,600	\$698	\$2,100
Child marriage rate ¹⁰	40%	42%	42%	27%
Average age of marriage (females) ¹¹	21.3	20.9	21.1	21.4
Fertility rate ¹²	4.2	1.6	3.2	2.2
Adolescent fertility rate (births per 1,000 females 15–19 years) ¹³	63	81 ¹⁴	77	11
Women's labour force participation rate ¹⁵	73%	18%	19%	21%
Upper secondary education completion rate of girls ¹⁶	14%	NA	NA	46%
Upper secondary education completion rate of boys ¹⁷	11%	NA	NA	40%
Marriage-related cash and in-kind transfers	Bride price	Dowry	Dowry	Dowry

NA, not available

Table 3 also reveals some inconsistencies. Whereas the overall fertility rates are lower in the Indian states than in Ethiopia, the adolescent fertility rates are higher in Bihar and West Bengal than in Ethiopia, and much higher than in India as a whole. The figures for West Bengal should be interpreted with caution: West Bengal has the highest rate of child marriage and the lowest average age of marriage in India, but also one of the lowest fertility rates in the country. All of these figures are averages for large populations – they do not reflect the variations and diversity within Ethiopia, Bihar and West Bengal.

This brief comparison of data highlights the need to take a close look at key indicators for each location and to understand what they mean and how they affect trends

and decisions related to child marriage at subnational and district levels. The data demand explanations and further analysis that would improve our understanding of pathways of change and inform the design of policies and programmes to end child marriage. For example, crises affect the economic decisions made by households. Recent research has shown that the COVID-19 pandemic is likely to have led to an increase in child marriage in areas practising bride price, while child marriages may have been postponed in localities practicing dowry payments.¹⁸ The decline in the birth rate in West Bengal over the past decade may affect the ages of brides and grooms, and the economics of dowry payments. These and many other questions call for answers based on empirical research that can, in turn, inform government policies and programmes.

7. The three programmes and the case studies are arranged in order of their inception.
8. United Nations Children's Fund, *The State of the World's Children 2021: On my mind: promoting, protecting and caring for children's mental health*; and 2011 Census of India.
9. *The State of the World's Children 2021*.
10. *The State of the World's Children 2021* for Ethiopia and India; Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, and International Institute for Population Sciences, *National Family 2019–20 Health Survey (NFHS-5): Key indicators*, Government of India, New Delhi, 2019–2020 for Bihar and West Bengal.
11. United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, *World Marriage Data 2019* (POP/DB/Marr/Rev2019) for Ethiopia and India; National Family 2019–20 Health Survey (NFHS-5) for Bihar and West Bengal.
12. *The State of the World's Children 2021* for Ethiopia and India; India NFHS 5 of 2019/20 for Bihar and West Bengal.
13. Data from United Nations Population Fund, World Population Prospects: <<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.ADO.TFRT>>.
14. *National Family 2019–20 Health Survey (NFHS-5)*.
15. *The State of the World's Children 2021*.
16. *The State of the World's Children 2021*.
17. Ibid.
18. United Nations Children's Fund, *Towards Ending Child Marriage: Global trends and profiles of progress*, UNICEF, New York, 2021.

Comparing case studies

The PSNP in Ethiopia is a cash-for-work programme aimed at reducing economic insecurity. Its original design did not include ending child marriage as an objective, although since 2016 the PSNP has included a greater focus on gender equality. In contrast, both

MKUY in Bihar and Kanyashree Prakalpa in West Bengal were specifically designed from the outset to improve the status and well-being of girls and to end child marriage. Table 4 compares the three programmes in terms of various dimensions.

Table 4: Comparison of case studies

Dimensions	Ethiopia	West Bengal, India	Bihar, India
Name of programme	Production Safety Net Programme	Kanyashree Prakalpa	Mukhyamantri Kanya Utthan Yojana
Year launched	2005	2013	2017
Target population	Poor households	Adolescent girls aged 13–19	Girls from birth to age 21
Reach	8 million households	7.5 million adolescent girls aged 13–19 years	>800,000 girls
Implementing agencies	Government departments	Government departments	Government departments
Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Multi-donor funding Periodic replenishment of funding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> State government funding controlled by the ruling party Funding allocations tend to be highest at the beginning of a scheme and then decline over time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> State government funding controlled by the ruling party Funding allocations tend to be highest at the beginning of a scheme and then decline over time
Type and original purpose/design of programme	Cash-for-work programme to reduce poverty	Cash and other incentives for adolescent girls to remain in school and extend their education	Umbrella programme for different cash transfers to support girls from birth to age 20
Main aim of large-scale sectoral intervention	Reduction of poverty and chronic food insecurity	Increase the value of girls, empower adolescent girls and keep them in school	Increase the value of girls, empower adolescent girls and keep them in school
Did original design aim to prevent child marriage?	No	Yes	Yes
Size of cash transfers to households	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Payments are large enough to prevent chronic poverty and negative coping mechanisms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Size of payments is largely symbolic (except for secondary school graduates) Payments paid into bank account of adolescent girls 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Size of transfers depends on level of education reached and other factors
Cash plus components	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Based on research, piloting, evaluation and advocacy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Part of the original design Based on additional assessment and advocacy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Part of the original design Based on additional assessment and advocacy
Evaluations and assessments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluation of pilot 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assessment of cash plus components, but no evaluation yet 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assessment of cash plus components, but no evaluation yet

Investing in evidence building, piloting, advocacy, monitoring and evaluation to leverage large programmes to end child marriage

1. Analyse the problem

Over the past decades, international development has become much more data and evidence driven. UNICEF has been at the forefront of gathering, analysing and disseminating household survey data through the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS). The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has also done so through the Demographic and Health Survey (DHS). In India the DHS is called the National Family Health Survey (NFHS). Both MICS and NFHS/DHS are vital for providing data for secondary analysis on child marriage. Recent years have also seen a sharp increase in research on child marriage and on adolescent girls. Ethiopia and India are the two countries with the largest number of studies on child marriage.¹⁹

In Ethiopia, primary research and evaluations have informed the PSNP as well as efforts to influence the design of additional cash plus components of the PSNP 5. Ethiopia has been a country favoured by international donors. The emphasis on evidence-based programming reflects the standards and requirements of international development actors.

While PSNP is largely donor funded, MKUY and Kanyashree Prakalpa are entirely government funded. An analysis of household survey data and international best practices in the design of social protection programmes, and efforts to end child marriage shared by UNICEF, influenced the design of the cash transfer schemes. The state governments use existing evidence selectively but have not carried out primary research to inform the design of the schemes. Both programmes have yet to be evaluated.

Although the Indian Government routinely collects data through household surveys (NFHS) and the census, and through administrative data systems, not enough is being invested in further analysis of the data and in qualitative studies to answer specific questions that are relevant to policy and programming. The development, child protection and gender discourses in India are largely driven by domestic priorities and interpretations. International agencies do not have the same degree of influence over these discourses as in Ethiopia.

2. Identify large-scale programmes

The fact that the PSNP has had a mostly positive impact on reducing child marriage does not mean that all cash transfer programmes are automatically good for reducing child marriage. Evaluations of the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) programme in Ghana and of the Social Cash Transfer (SCT) programme in Zambia did not find a reduction in child marriage.²⁰ These findings beg the question: 'What determines the positive effects of social protection programmes in different contexts?' There are many possible reasons – such as: differences in contexts and target groups, and in the design of programmes – which require careful study to understand. Ethiopia also has a much higher rate of child marriage than Ghana or Zambia. It is possible that the PSNP works for a certain demographic or for reducing child marriage from 60 to 40 per cent by reducing marriage below the age of 15, but not for girls aged 16 to 18. Additional interventions

19. Greene, Margaret E., and Manahil Siddiqi, 'Detailed Study Protocol for Systematic Scoping Review of Research on Child Marriage, 2000–2019', *BMJ Open*, vol. 11, no. 3, 18 March 2021, e043845.

20. Republic Of Ghana Ministry Of Gender, Children And Social Protection, Ghana LEAP 1000 Programme: Endline evaluation report, UNICEF, New York, 2018; Natali, Luisa, Fidelia Dake and Amber Peterman, *Exploring the Potential of Cash Transfers to Delay Early Marriage and Pregnancy among Youth in Malawi and Zambia*, UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, Florence, 2019.

may be needed to further reduce child marriage. Furthermore, cash transfer programmes could have changed after they have gone through an evaluation. They are often adapted in response to evaluation findings and it is possible that more recent studies will find more positive effects on reducing child marriage. However, these are all speculations – only empirical research can provide insight into what is happening in a specific context.

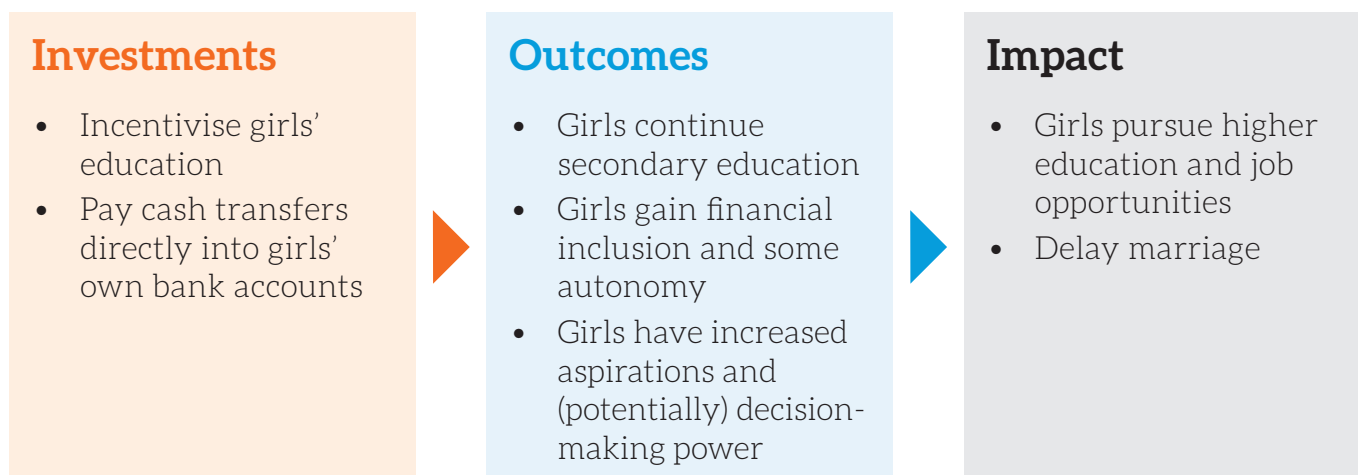
3. Analyse the pathways

Each of the three programmes creates different pathways that affect adolescent girls and child marriage. The PSNP in Ethiopia is the only one of the three case studies for which these pathways have been researched empirically and articulated in a conceptual framework (see Figure 6 in Case Study 1: Productive Safety Net Program in Ethiopia). While the PSNP was not originally designed to end child marriage, research showed that the programme did contribute to a reduction in child marriages among participating households. UNICEF carried out research to understand in detail the pathways of impact on child marriage. The conceptual framework developed based on the research shows that improved

household economic security leads to an increase in household demand for labour. In turn, this may either decrease child marriage, or decrease schooling and subsequently increase child marriages. The conceptual framework also looks at cash plus components such as increased investment in education and improved knowledge on marriage. This type of analysis is critical for evidence-based policy and programme design.

For MKUY and Kanyashree Prakalpa, which have not been evaluated, pathways of change in relation to child marriage are hypothesized in this report and based on general assumptions regarding the impact of cash transfers on girls' education and subsequently on child marriage. Figure 1 is based on a review of existing Kanyashree Prakalpa programme documents. An evaluation of the programme would likely show more complex pathways. However, no detailed studies are available on the shifting marriage markets and the complex interplay between age, education, caste and other factors, such as migration, in West Bengal. The recent decline in birth rates in West Bengal is likely to lead to a shortage of brides and additional effects on child marriage, including an increase in migration of brides to West Bengal from neighbouring Bihar and Bangladesh. In the limited time available, it was not possible to find much published or grey literature on this topic.

Figure 1: Hypothesized pathways of impact of the Kanyashree Prakalpa scheme on child marriage in West Bengal



The Kanyashree Prakalpa case study indicates that in West Bengal child marriage does not decline automatically as a result of higher levels of girls' education or of improved household economic security. A decline in child marriage requires first an increase in the autonomy and empowerment of adolescent girls and young women.

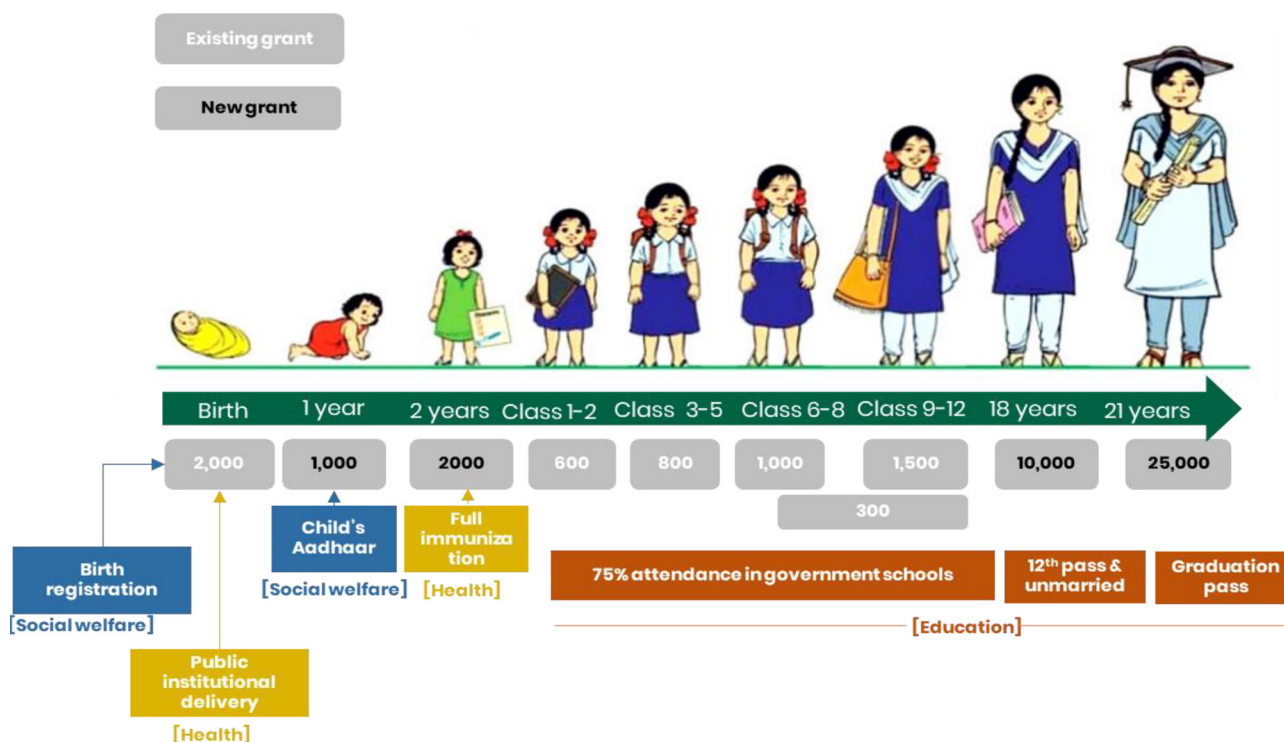
India supports a nation-wide public works guaranteed income scheme called the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA). Like the PSNP, this scheme has improved household economic security on a national scale. While no studies have looked at the effects of MGNREGA on

child marriage, there is empirical evidence that shows that cash-for-work for women are by themselves insufficient to make a difference in gender equality.²¹ It has to be pointed out that there is a strong norm in India for women to stay at home and not to work in public. As a result of growing economic prosperity, the percentage of women's labour force participation has declined – especially among middle-income households in India.

Figure 2 shows various MKUY cash transfers and other social service inputs along the life course of a girl from birth to age 21. The figure equates attaining 12 years of schooling and reaching age 18 with remaining unmarried.

21. Chopra, Deepta, Institute of Development Studies, 'Gendering the Design and Implementation of MGNREGA', UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti, 6 November 2019, <www.unicef-irc.org/article/1934-gendering-the-design-and-implementation-of-social-protection-programmes.html>, accessed 24 January 2022; Chopra, Deepta, 'Taking Care into Account: Leveraging India's MGNREGA for women's empowerment', *Development and Change*, vol. 50, no. 6, November 2019, pp. 1687–1716.

Figure 2: Mukhyamantri Kanya Utthan Yojana cash grants and milestones along girls' lives from birth to 21 years in Bihar²²



The message is that context matters, and poverty is not the only driver of child marriage – it can also be driven by factors such as social norms.²³ Do not make assumptions about the pathways of change of any initiative to end child marriage. Do high-quality research to show empirically how different investments affect girls and child marriage.

4. Invest in understanding how to amplify positive pathways via additional cash plus components

The three large-scale programmes showcased in the case studies have had proven or implied positive impacts on reducing child marriage. By adjusting the design of the programmes, the positive effects on child marriage can be amplified. In Ethiopia, UNICEF supported the piloting and evaluation of cash plus components for gender equality and service access in the PSNP. In Bihar and West Bengal, UNICEF commissioned reviews of cash plus options for gender transformation. The organization used the results of the pilot and of the reviews to influence the design of the three large-scale programmes.

5. Advocate and support the inclusion of cash plus components

UNICEF used evidence from research, evaluations, reviews and pilots to advocate for the inclusion of additional cash plus components and to amplify the effects of the PSNP in Ethiopia, MKUY in Bihar and Kanyashree Prakalpa in West Bengal on child marriage. Following the successful advocacy, UNICEF supported the implementation of cash plus components, strengthened the capacities of service providers and implementers, and promoted inter-departmental convergence to improve the efficiency of programme delivery.

6. Monitor and evaluate

In Ethiopia, UNICEF supported evaluations to generate evidence that was used for advocacy and for changes in the design of the PSNP. While evaluations of the large-scale schemes in Bihar and West Bengal have not yet been conducted, UNICEF supported programme monitoring and the development of management information systems (MIS). Evaluation and monitoring generate essential evidence to inform and advocate for revisions of large-scale programmes.

22. From: Concurrent assessment of Mukhyamantri Kanya Utthan Yojana, 8 September 2020, <www.sscbankgk.in/2020/09/mukhyamantri-kanya-utthan-yojana-bihar-icds-registration.html>, accessed 24 January 2022.

23. Palermo, Tia, and Maja Gavrilovic, Webinar on exploring the potential for social protection in reducing child marriage, 2021.

Challenges to case study selection

The consultants spent considerable time trying to identify case studies from other countries, especially from low-income and smaller Global Programme countries. The failure to find suitable programmes for case studies is in itself instructive. There were a number of promising initiatives in some Global Programme countries; however, they were not selected for various reasons, as described below.

Bangladesh: UNICEF has been supporting primary education in Bangladesh for decades. However, work on secondary education is fairly recent. The organization works more at strategy level to strengthen the quality of education in the long run, rather than on access to education, which could have more immediate effects for adolescent girls. Until recently, UNICEF's large-scale programmes in Bangladesh had focused mainly on younger children. The focus on adolescents is relatively new and so are partnerships and efforts to leverage large-scale interventions aimed at adolescents. UNICEF is also supporting Alternative Learning Pathways, a programme that includes vocational training and strategies to reduce school drop-out among adolescents. However, this initiative is in the early stage of implementation and there are no results to be reported yet. The education SWAP is another large-scale policy and programming initiative that was a potential candidate for a case study. However, UNICEF's focus has been on developing a framework for the life skills curriculum and on textbook development. While potentially being at large scale, life skills would have to be part of the regular school curriculum for several years before its impact on a significant social process like child marriage could be assessed. None of the candidate programmes met all the criteria for inclusion: large scale, implemented, demonstrated results, etc.

Burkina Faso: The Sahel Women's Empowerment and Demographic Dividend (SWEDD) is a large-scale programme covering seven Sahelian countries. The overall goal of the programme is to accelerate the demographic dividend and to empower women and girls in the Sahel region. The SWEDD initiative receives financing from the World Bank and technical assistance from UNFPA and other partners. UNFPA has overall project coordination responsibility. It is also implementing sub-projects for the economic empowerment of women and schooling for young girls. However, the economic empowerment

component is relatively modest. Burkina Faso has a programme to end child marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM) and there are links with SWEDD, but none of the activities in the Government's programme document are related to economic empowerment. SWEDD was not included as a case study for the following reasons: the programme consists of a wide range of separate activities, rather than representing a unified, single-sector approach; the economic and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) components are separate; programmes, funding streams and partnerships are not sufficiently aligned to impact efforts to end child marriage; documentation is dispersed; and UNICEF has not been much involved in the programme. In brief, SWEDD is not the kind of large-scale, single-sector programme that lends itself to a case study on ending child marriage.

Nepal: Various programmes were considered for inclusion as a case study: Girls' Access to Education, Multi-Sector Nutrition Plan and Beti Padhau Beti Bachau. At first, the latter looked promising, not least because the Overseas Development Institute had just completed a review of the scheme. After reviewing the programme documentation, however, the consultants concluded that the scheme, although interesting, would not be a good fit for a case study because it is multi-faceted rather than single-sector; its documentation states clearly that there is no evidence yet of its success (in part because it is new); and some components of the scheme are not yet up and running.

Zambia: The most developed large-scale intervention is the unconditional SCT programme that reaches 600,000 ultra-poor households. The SCT is a government-run initiative that has received funding from a series of donors since its inception in 2003. An add-on top-up bursary for keeping adolescent girls in school has been in place since 2015, as has an initiative to support rural women's livelihoods; an emergency top-up was also provided for the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic. The SCT programme as a whole has been fairly well documented up to 2017. An evaluation based on data from before the recent spin-off initiatives (2011–2013) showed that the scheme had had a significant impact on household functioning but no impact on reducing child marriage. Country office staff were unavailable to support a case study due to competing commitments during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Conclusions and implications for the Global Programme

This section presents key elements of successful leveraging of large-scale interventions based on what we have learned through this case study exercise. These recommendations should inform and inspire the Global Programme country engagement with

large-scale interventions (see Table 5). Support for these efforts is critical to ensuring that interventions are not only tailored to specific settings but are nimble enough to refine and adjust their approaches across time and circumstance.

Table 5: Implications for the Global Programme

Key steps	Implications for the Global Programme
1. Analyse the problem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deepen and refine context-specific analysis of the drivers of child marriage
2. Identify large-scale programmes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In promising countries, identify large-scale programmes that can be leveraged to prevent child marriage • Develop methodology for identifying such programmes
3. Analyse the pathways	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use data, research and evaluations to analyse the various pathways through which large single-sector programmes can influence child marriage prevalence
4. Invest in understanding how to amplify positive pathways via cash plus add-ons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify cash plus components through reviews, piloting and evaluations to amplify the positive effects of large-scale programmes on preventing child marriage • Develop methodology for identifying and piloting cash plus activities
5. Advocate and support the inclusion of cash plus components	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop strategies to influence the design of large-scale programmes with the potential to prevent child marriage (in partnership with social policy and education sections) • Support the implementation of cash plus activities • Promote inter-departmental convergence • Strengthen the capacities of service providers and implementers
6. Monitor and evaluate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support programme evaluations • Strengthen MIS of large-scale programmes • Advocate for programme revisions in line with monitoring and evaluation findings • Advocate for broader implementation and learning exchange

1. Analyse the problem

Deepen and refine context-specific analysis of the drivers of child marriage. Success is predicated on a deep understanding of the context. The drivers and decisions affecting child marriage differ according to context. There is a need for the Global Programme to develop a deep appreciation and understanding of the context in each locality and how child marriage is framed and understood. Country-specific theories of

change are too generic to provide detailed insights into the mechanics of marriage-related decision making and how to influence them. The pathways diagram developed for the PSNP (see Figure 6 in Case Study 1: *Productive Safety Net Program in Ethiopia*) is a good example of the level of understanding that has to be achieved in order to effectively target interventions. This type of challenging and detailed work should be a focus of Global Programme country technical support and leadership. Engagement with large interventions needs to be premised on this level of analysis.

Evidence is essential. To articulate context-specific pathways of change requires context-specific data analysis, research and evaluations, rather than just repackaging existing global or national evidence. Context-specific research has to inform programming – not just at the beginning of a programme, but throughout its implementation. Analysing state- and district-level data enabled UNICEF to support and influence the Government of West Bengal to accept that child marriage was a problem and had to be tackled. UNICEF Ethiopia has collaborated with some of the world's leading research institutes; this research has produced high-quality evidence to influence the Government of Ethiopia and donor agencies.

2. Identify large-scale programmes

Large-scale interventions can make a significant impact on ending child marriage. The case studies show that there is significant potential in large-scale sectoral interventions to reduce child marriage. In order to achieve large scale, these interventions need to have a clear programmatic focus and employ a limited set of strategies. In Ethiopia, the PSNP aims to improve household economic security through cash for work. Kanyashree Prakalpa in West Bengal and MKUY in Bihar use small cash grants to incentivize education and keep girls in school longer.

In promising countries, identify large-scale programmes that can be leveraged to prevent child marriage. The Global Programme should build on these experiences to leverage sectoral interventions that have country-wide reach and coverage in other Global Programme countries. Focusing on a few high-yield objectives would accelerate change in ending child marriage. For example, we know that one of the best ways to reduce child marriage in most settings is to keep girls in safe, accessible schools that teach what they and their families think is important and useful. We also know that social protection interventions that target education have been effective at keeping girls in school in many settings. The Global Programme is well placed to engage with partners and colleagues in education, social protection, health and other sectors to operate effectively at large scale. It should also develop a methodology for identifying large programmes that can be leveraged.

3. Analyse the pathways

Use data, research and evaluations to analyse the various pathways through which large single-sector programmes can influence child marriage prevalence. The pathways to ending child marriage are multi-faceted, complex, and differ according to context. Large-scale sectoral interventions affect these pathways in various ways – some positively, others negatively. Large programmes may have unexpected results and unintended consequences on child marriage. The Global Programme needs to ensure that it is attentive to these considerations in all of its work, and is capable of

monitoring how pathways unfold over time and across settings. These efforts are critical to programmatic effectiveness and success. The work done to unpack the pathways of change of the PSNP in Ethiopia is exemplary and should be the yardstick for other countries aiming to move beyond the broad programme and policy frameworks of country-level theories of change and plans of action for ending child marriage.

4. Invest in understanding how to amplify positive pathways via additional cash plus components

Identify cash plus components through reviews, piloting and evaluations to amplify the positive effects of large-scale programmes on preventing child marriage. There is no guarantee that large-scale sectoral interventions in education or social protection will automatically have a positive impact on preventing child marriage or on gender equality. Accordingly, the design of large-scale sectoral programmes has to be adapted to amplify the programme's contribution to ending child marriage. The case studies show two different approaches to identifying cash plus components: in Bihar and West Bengal through reviews of existing documentation, and in Ethiopia through piloting and evaluation. Adding new components broadens a programme's impact while maintaining the original programmatic focus and core delivery mechanism (e.g., cash for work in Ethiopia; incentives for girls' education in India).

Piloting is crucial. We have seen from the work on developing these case studies that what works in one setting does not necessarily work elsewhere. This relates to the evidence on the effectiveness of cash transfers for reducing child marriage (differences between the PSNP in Ethiopia, LEAP in Ghana and SCT in Zambia); evidence on causes of child marriage; effective approaches to ending child marriage; and the suitability and success of cash plus interventions. In all three case studies, UNICEF supported piloting to test approaches, to learn how things work and to obtain context-specific evidence to influence large-scale programmes. This type of support is crucial to ensuring the existence, appropriateness and effectiveness of interventions to end child marriage.

5. Advocate and support the inclusion of cash plus components

Develop strategies to influence the design of large-scale programmes with the potential to prevent child marriage. Advocacy is an essential component of success. Evidence-informed advocacy has been key

in Ethiopia, Bihar and West Bengal. As the case studies show, government and donor commitments were essential prerequisites for successful leveraging of large-scale interventions. UNICEF succeeded in adding cash plus components to the design of the PSNP, MKUY and Kanyashree Prakalpa programmes. Similar efforts in other settings offer great promise.

Promote inter-departmental convergence and cooperation to ensure programme efficiency and sustainability. State and district plans of action to end child marriage have provided a framework for collaboration across departments and agencies in Ethiopia, West Bengal and Bihar. Engagement with these types of policies and plans, and the perspectives of departmental staff across sectors offer important opportunities for cooperation that the Global Programme could capitalize on.

6. Monitor and evaluate

Support programme evaluations. While the Government of India is supporting regular household surveys and West Bengal is generating department-specific administrative data through MIS, not enough is being done to carry out further analysis to answer specific questions – for example, why the child marriage rate is so high in West Bengal, what the impact of Kanyashree Prakalpa is on girls and child marriage, what effects the decline in birth rates have on age of marriage of brides and grooms and on dowry payments, and so on. This is an area where UNICEF needs to provide greater support and leadership.

Strengthen the monitoring of large-scale programmes. UNICEF is playing an important role in strengthening government monitoring systems (integrated MIS); supporting implementation research and evaluation; and the building of evidence that is being used to make adjustments to the MKUY.

Capacities and resources required to influence large-scale programmes

The case studies have revealed a series of skills, capacities and resources that are required to successfully influence large-scale programmes. Paramount among them are:

Strategic vision, leadership, long-term commitment and continuity. Influencing large social protection (and other) programmes takes a great deal of effort and time for research, demonstration projects, evaluations and advocacy. UNICEF's support for social protection in Ethiopia spans 10 years. Without this track record it would have been even more difficult to influence the design of the PSNP. Long-term partnership between UNICEF (social policy section) and key government departments and donors working on social protection formed a foundation of trust upon which collaborations in relation to ending child marriage have been built.

Working as one team. Multisectoral collaboration between UNICEF programme sections is critical. The social policy team played a key role in data analysis, research, MIS and advocacy to influence large-scale programmes such as the PSNP, MKUY and Kanyashree Prakalpa. This teamwork ensured not only the effectiveness of the organization's efforts to end child marriage, but also improved collaboration between UNICEF sections and an improved understanding of areas of convergence across the organization's diverse portfolio of work.

Advocacy. To have a seat at the table of government and donor decision-making requires experienced and creative staff. UNICEF's effectiveness depends on staff who understand 'how the system works' and how to influence senior decision makers; have the creativity to propose effective mechanisms that strengthen inter-departmental convergence; and are committed to following these processes over the long term. Cultivation of this way of working is integral to building the kind of partnerships that are needed to tackle child marriage in different contexts.



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Case study 1

Productive Safety Net Program in Ethiopia

Key messages

The following messages can be drawn from UNICEF's experiences of influencing the Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP) in Ethiopia. They may be relevant for other countries considering leveraging large-scale social protection programmes to accelerate a decline in child marriage.

Aspect	Key Learnings
Problem analysis and leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poverty is a major driver of child marriage in Ethiopia. • Economic development and poverty reduction strategies are not enough. By themselves, they are unlikely to affect long-term changes in deep-rooted gender norms, attitudes and behaviours related to child marriage, and thus need to be accompanied by complementary efforts related to girls' empowerment, community engagement, awareness raising and legal measures. • The PSNP is politically complex and is not primarily concerned with ending child marriage. The programme brings together many different stakeholders and interests. This makes it difficult for UNICEF to influence it. • Context-specific evidence is critical. Research had to be carried out to understand how the PSNP affects child marriage in Ethiopia and to design additional interventions that amplify the programme's positive effects on child marriage and mitigate the negative effects.
Programme design for cash plus activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ending child marriage was not an original objective of the PSNP. This large-scale social protection programme was not specifically designed to end child marriage. Evidence showed that the programme was having positive effects on preventing child marriage, but in other cases it had the unintended consequence of increasing child marriage. • In Ethiopia, it is more strategic to leverage large-scale social protection programmes than to provide small-scale financial and livelihood support. Social protection is an important component of efforts to end child marriage, as it can mitigate poverty and influence the economic drivers of child marriage. Large government-run social protection programmes, aside from their broad reach, may also receive higher-quality technical support than small-scale livelihood activities run by NGOs. • The potential results of influencing the PSNP far exceed what child protection and SRHR actors are able to achieve on their own in terms of impact on the poverty drivers of child marriage. • Implement demonstration or pilot projects (such as the Integrated Safety Net Programme) to show how large-scale social protection programmes can be modified and enhanced through cash plus components. • Use practical evidence from demonstration projects to influence decision makers (government and donors). • Cash plus components can amplify the impact of social protection programmes on preventing child marriage. Adding certain cash plus components to a programme (e.g., complementary services in the areas of health, social welfare, education, legal services, social and behaviour change, etc.) provides a means of ensuring that the most marginalized groups are reached.
Implementation: Cash plus components and convergence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration with government departments on ending child marriage has complemented UNICEF's work with social protection actors to make the linkages between the PSNP and the National Costed Roadmap to End Child Marriage and Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting.
Monitoring and evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High-quality research makes a difference. UNICEF Ethiopia has collaborated with some of the world's leading research institutes. This research has produced high-quality evidence to influence the Government of Ethiopia and donor agencies.

Key messages in relation to UNICEF's capacities and the resources required to influence large-scale social protection programmes:

Influencing large social protection programmes such as the PSNP is hard. The whole process takes a lot of effort and time for research, demonstration projects, evaluations and advocacy.

A varied social protection approach at large scale requires long-term support and engagement. UNICEF's 10-year technical support has been

instrumental in improving the design of the PSNP through various phases.

Cross-sectoral collaboration between UNICEF programme sections is critical to the success of efforts to date. The social policy team has played a key role in research and advocacy to influence the PSNP.

This case study of Ethiopia's efforts is based on a number of documents shared by UNICEF Ethiopia; a group discussion with staff working in different sections of UNICEF Ethiopia;²⁴ a web search for further documentation; and additional information and comments provided by the UNICEF Ethiopia team.

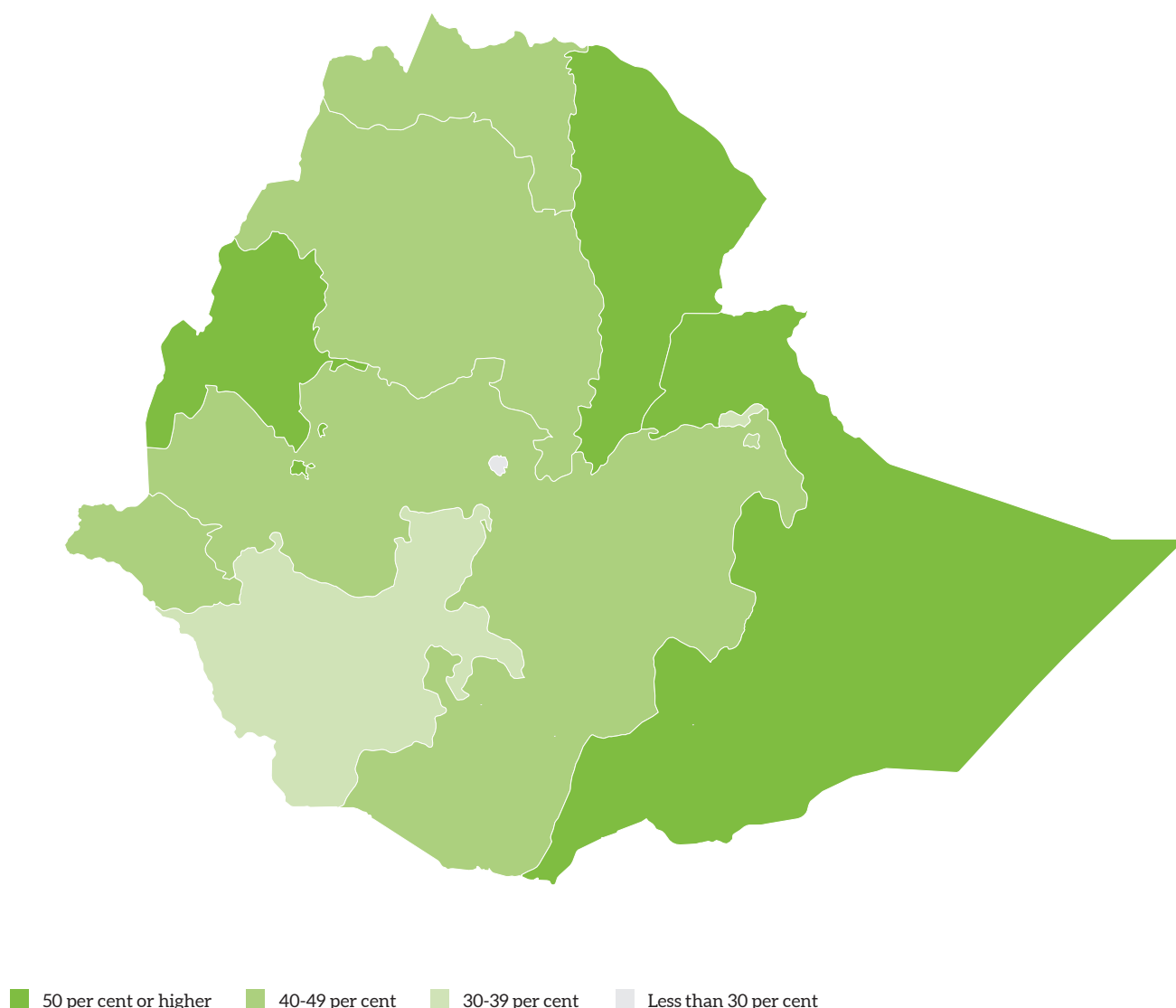
24. Bernard Batidzirai (education); Celine Herbiet (child protection); Getachew Berhanu Kebede (social policy); Karin Heissler (child protection); Samson Muradzikwa (social policy); Tiye Feyisa (education); and Zemzem Shikur (child protection).

1. Child marriage in Ethiopia

Ethiopia has a population of about 115 million.²⁵ The law sets the legal minimum age of marriage at 18. In recent years, the country has made significant progress in reducing child marriage rates. According to the 2016 DHS, the percentage of women aged 20–24 years who were first married or in union before the age of 18 decreased from 59 per cent in 2005 to 40 per cent in 2016 (*Figures 3 and 4*).²⁶ These national figures mask

significant variability across the country – according to the most recent data, less than 10 per cent of young women were married in childhood in Addis Ababa compared to 50 per cent or more in Afar, Benishangul-Gumuz and Somali regions. Age of marriage increases with improved levels of education and wealth. The drivers of child marriage in Ethiopia include poverty, and social, religious, cultural and gender norms.²⁷

Figure 3: Percentage of women in Ethiopia aged 20–24 years who were first married or in union before age 18, 2016

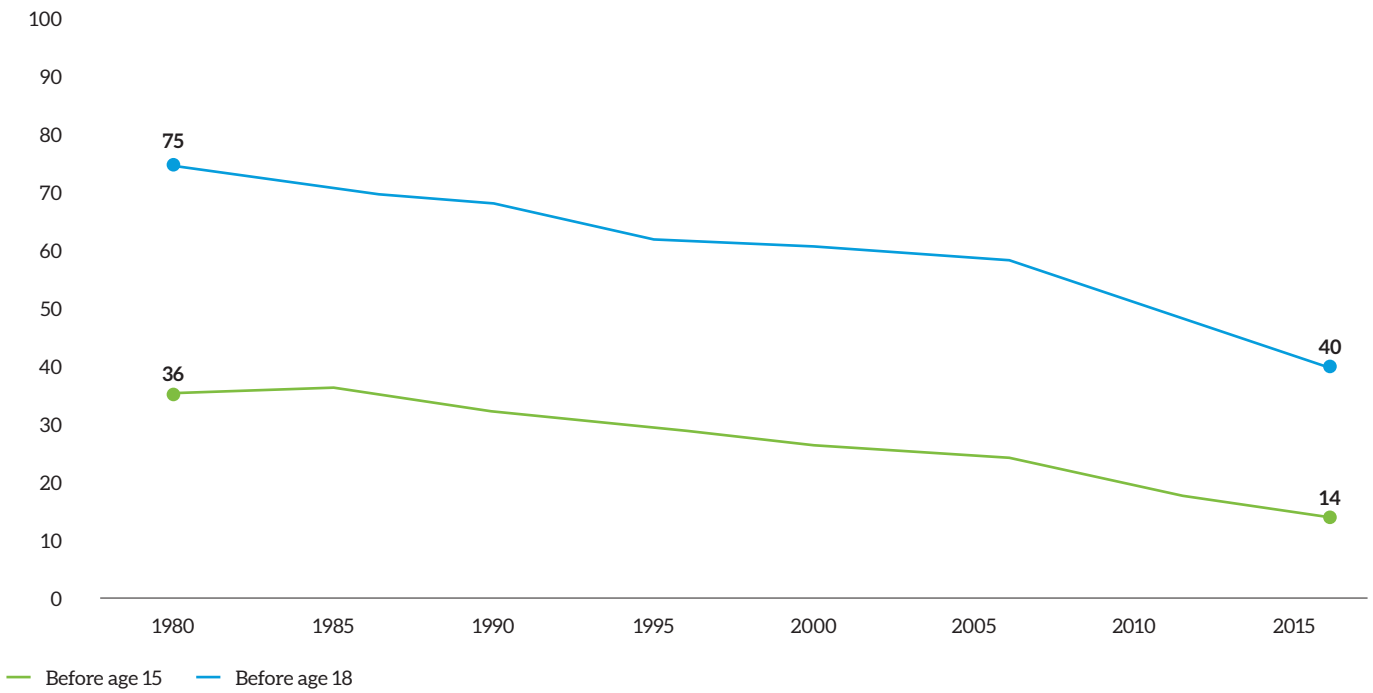


25. World Bank, 'Population, total – Ethiopia', <<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=ET>>.

26. Central Statistical Agency (CSA) [Ethiopia] and ICF, *Ethiopia Demographic and Health Survey 2016*, CSA and ICF, Addis Ababa and Rockville, 2016.

27. United Nations Children's Fund, *Ending Child Marriage: A profile of progress in Ethiopia*, UNICEF, New York, 2018.

Figure 4: Percentage of women in Ethiopia aged 20–24 years who were first married or in union before age 18, 1980–2015



Despite this recent progress, however, child marriage remains a huge challenge in Ethiopia due in large part

to entrenched positive attitudes towards girls being married before age 18.²⁸



28. United Nations Children’s Fund, *Impact Evaluation of the Integrated Safety Net Programme in the Amhara Region of Ethiopia: Baseline report*, UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, Florence, 2020.

2. Child marriage programming

The Ethiopian Government has taken a very strong stand against both female child marriage and FGM as the most important harmful practices affecting women and children. The country is a signatory to the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, the 1998 Organisation of African Unity Addis Ababa Declaration on Violence Against Women, and the 2008 United Nations Interagency Statement on Elimination of FGM; it was also Party to the 2008 United Nations and UNICEF joint initiative against FGM in 17 African countries. In 2011 the African Union summit in Addis Ababa called for a resolution at the Sixty-sixth United Nations General Assembly banning FGM.

Ethiopia is committed to achieving Sustainable Development Goal 5.3 to end child marriage and FGM by 2030.²⁹ Its End Child Marriage Programme seeks to respond to the multidimensional drivers and consequences of the practice and contribute to the national goal of ending child marriage and FGM by 2025. The programme is led by the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs with contributions from line ministries, civil society, NGOs and United Nations agencies. It builds on the country's Constitution and a strong legal framework to promote and protect the rights of girls and women. See Figure 5 for some key actions taken against harmful practices in the country. The programme is aligned with the National Strategy and Action Plan on Harmful Traditional Practices against Women and Children in Ethiopia and its three pillars: prevention, protection and service provision.³⁰

The End Child Marriage Programme has reached more than 4.5 million girls, families and community members. A human rights and gender equality approach is at the heart of the programme, which relies on the following evidence-based strategies:³¹

- **Increase girls' capacities and empowerment:** Girls are reached through initiatives providing life skills, legal literacy, and information and services related to menstrual hygiene, health and SRH. These initiatives equip them with the knowledge and skills to access services and to negotiate and influence decisions at household and community levels. As agents of change, girls are supporting awareness-raising efforts and, in some cases,

stopping the practice by reporting potential child marriage arrangements to school officials and law enforcement. Evidence shows that economic support to vulnerable households through income-generating activities helps ensure that girls remain and progress in school.

- **Enhanced knowledge, attitudes and practices of families and communities:** Families of adolescent girls and community actors (including women's development groups and religious and community leaders) are mobilized through community dialogues and awareness raising at public gatherings and through the media. To support such grassroots-level efforts, a national campaign was launched in 2017. As a result of previous efforts, as well as the campaign, 987 kebeles (villages) across seven regions have declared themselves free of child marriage.
- **Capacity-building, enhanced-quality and adolescent girl-friendly service delivery:** Efforts are under way to ensure that learning, health and other services for adolescent girls are accessible and meet their needs. Attention to these issues has been shown to contribute to their retention and progression in school, as well as improved physical and mental health and well-being.
- **Enhanced coordination:** The National Alliance to End Child Marriage and FGM comprises key stakeholders from line ministries, civil society, faith-based organizations, NGOs and United Nations agencies. Through its Secretariat, the Alliance takes the lead in coordinating national efforts, convening actors involved in data and research, organizing national events such as the annual National Girls' Summit, and supporting the development of a costed plan to end child marriage and FGM.
- **Evidence generation:** Key initiatives include the analysis of trends and patterns in high-prevalence districts and regions, research on the drivers of child marriage, and documentation of good practices. Such evidence informs programme strategies and the identification of target districts and regions. Relevant indicators on key interventions to end child marriage have been included in the checklist used by parliamentarians for monitoring.

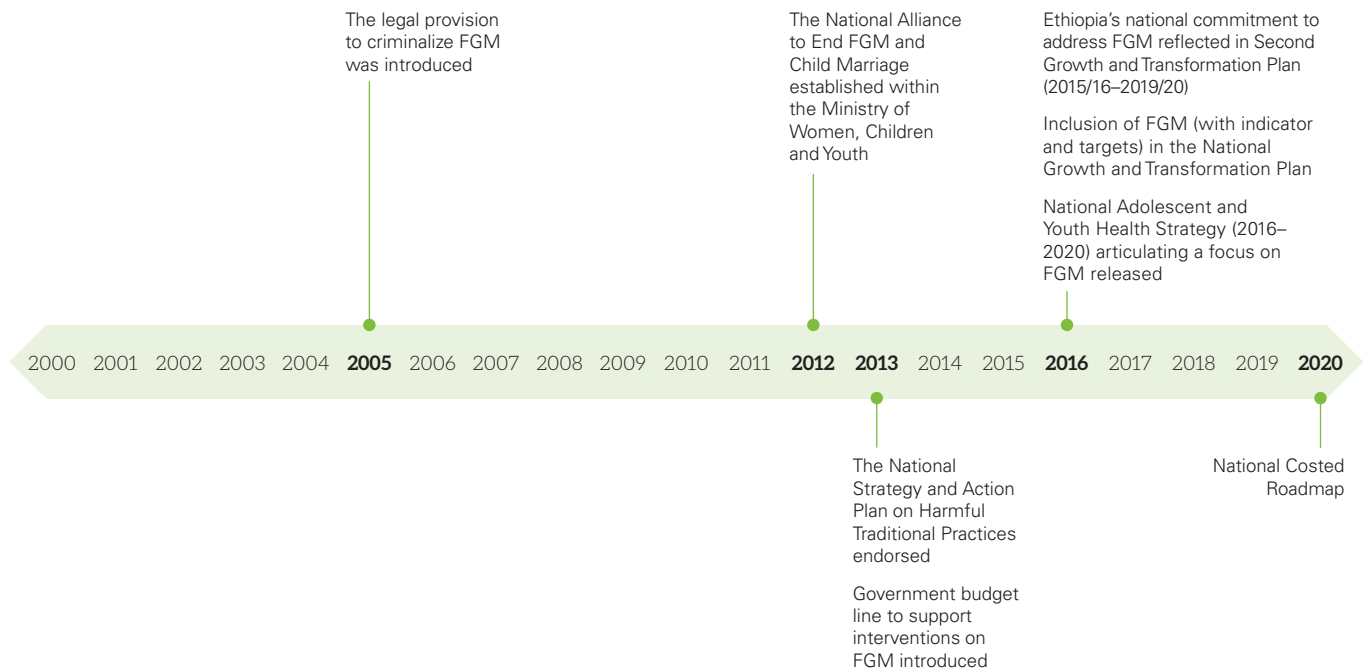
29. *Ending Child Marriage.*

30. Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) Ministry of Women, Children and Youth Affairs, *National Strategy and Action Plan on Harmful Traditional Practices (HTP) against Women and Children in Ethiopia*, FDRE, Addis Ababa, 2013.

31. *Ending Child Marriage.*

Figure 5: Timeline of key initiatives and actions against harmful traditional practices in Ethiopia³²

Timeline of key initiatives and actions in Ethiopia



Global Programme to End Child Marriage in Ethiopia

The Global Programme has supported the Government of Ethiopia's efforts to end child marriage through policy work (e.g., the National Costed Roadmap 2020–2024), coordination through the National Alliance to End Child Marriage and FGM, programme implementation in regions with a high prevalence of child marriage, and through evidence building and research to inform programming and policy work. Until 2017, the Global Programme provided direct economic support to girls in need of assistance.

Building evidence on what works to end child marriage: A 2016 UNICEF study on evidence of what works to end child marriage identified social protection and livelihood support as important components of an effective approach to ending child marriage in Ethiopia.³³ The study also identified interventions with potential for leveraging, including the PSNP, the adolescent nutrition programme and the WASH-in-schools programme targeting water, sanitation and

hygiene. Based on research findings that suggested a link between social protection, girls' continuation in school and delayed marriage, a decision was made, together with the UNICEF Office of Research, to further explore the risks and protective factors in the PSNP. This evidence generation and other efforts aimed to influence the design of the next phase of the PSNP (PSNP 5). The objective of the study was to use evidence to leverage the large-scale social protection programme to reach vulnerable households and, in turn, seek to promote girls' education and, by extension, delayed marriage.

Strategic shift in Global Programme livelihood component: In 2017, UNICEF phased out direct economic support to girls in need of financial and material assistance since available resources were inadequate to cover the large number of girls needing support.³⁴ Economic support was costly and could not be taken to scale.³⁵ Even though the intervention was discontinued, UNICEF Ethiopia acknowledged the need for economic support, in particular for girls and their families living in drought-prone and economically vulnerable areas.

32. United Nations Children's Fund, *Gender Equality Strategy: Accelerating action to end female genital mutilation in Ethiopia*, UNICEF, Ethiopia, 2021; *National Costed Roadmap*.

33. Jones, Nicola, 'What Works to Tackle Child Marriage in Ethiopia: A review of good practice', Overseas Development Institute, 31 March 2016, <<https://odi.org/en/publications/what-works-to-tackle-child-marriage-in-ethiopia-a-review-of-good-practice/>>, accessed 25 January 2022.

34. Scaled-down support continued to be provided to the most marginalized girls and families and those left out of the PSNP as a result of its distribution criteria.

35. UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage, *Country Profiles, Phase I (2016–2019)*, UNFPA and UNICEF, New York, 2020.

The **National Costed Roadmap 2020–2024**³⁶ identifies five strategies around which to coordinate efforts to eliminate child marriage and FGM/C:

1. Empowering adolescent girls and their families
2. Community engagement (including faith and traditional leaders)
3. Enhancing systems, accountability and services across sectors
4. Creating and strengthening an enabling environment
5. Increasing data and evidence generation, and use.

Based on these strategies, five outcomes were developed:

- **Outcome 1:** Adolescent girls at risk of and affected by child marriage and FGM/C are empowered to express and exercise their choices, and families are empowered to protect their children from child marriage and FGM/C.
- **Outcome 2:** Increased social action, acceptance and visibility around investing in and supporting girls, and generating shifts in social expectations relating to girls' education and elimination of child marriage and FGM/C.
- **Outcome 3:** Enhanced systems, accountability and services across sectors that are responsive to the needs of girls at risk of or affected by child marriage and FGM/C.
- **Outcome 4:** Enhanced enabling environment that protects the rights of girls and supports national efforts to end child marriage and FGM/C.
- **Outcome 5:** Increased generation and use of a robust data and evidence base on girls for advocacy, programming, learning and tracking progress.

The National Costed Roadmap to End Child Marriage and FGM/C (2020–2024) identifies poverty as one of the drivers of child marriage. Outcome 3 and output 3.3 were designed to tackle the economic drivers of child marriage, as follows:

- **Output 3.3:** Improved economic services and opportunities for families of vulnerable adolescent girls to engage in income-generating activities (IGA) and access employment opportunities, and providing alternative livelihoods for circumcisers.
- **Output indicator 3.3.1:** Number of families of vulnerable adolescent girls referred to economic services/support programmes.
- **Definition and method of calculation:** Number of families that have adolescent girls in all the target intervention areas that are referred to the PSNP, IGA programmes. Disaggregated by: Type of service referred to and by region.

Building political will with the National Alliance Steering Committee

In partnership with the Ministry of Women, Children and Youth, and working within the National Alliance to End Child Marriage and FGM, the Global Programme was able to influence the national roadmap on ending child marriage and FGM to adopt the major elements of the results frameworks, strategies and interventions of the Global Programme and the UNFPA-UNICEF

Joint Programme on the Elimination of FGM. This achievement advanced the national-level alignment and increased national ownership of the programmes.³⁷

Campaigns against harmful practices have been strongest in urban areas, where government, media and NGO activity has been important, and case material from Hawassa confirmed that popular discourses have been shaped by these interventions. There were also regional differences in the focus of the campaigns, with the drive against female child marriage stronger in the north, particularly in Amhara, and the drive against female circumcision stronger in the south, particularly in Oromia.³⁸

36. National Costed Roadmap to End Child Marriage.

37. UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage, *2018 Annual Report: Turning commitments into solid actions*, UNFPA and UNICEF, New York, 2019.

38. Boyden, Jo, Alula Pankhurst and Yisak Tafere, *Harmful Traditional Practices and Child Protection: Contested understandings and practices of female child marriage and circumcision in Ethiopia*, Young Lives, London, 2013.

3. Productive Safety Net Program

The Government of Ethiopia, with assistance from major donors, has been supporting the PSNP since 2005. The large-scale social protection programme was originally designed to address the needs of chronically food-insecure households in famine-prone rural areas of the country (see Box 1). While ending child marriage was not part of the initial rationale of the PSNP, subsequent evidence demonstrated that

child marriage did decline in households participating in the programme. This chapter describes how and in what ways the PSNP has impacted child marriage and analyses its successes and challenges. It also describes how UNICEF Ethiopia has used research, demonstration projects and advocacy to influence the design of the PSNP to achieve greater social outcomes for children, including ending child marriage.

Box 1: Productive Safety Net Program in Ethiopia

The PSNP is one of the largest social protection programmes in sub-Saharan Africa. It reaches an estimated 8 million beneficiaries through its public works and direct support streams, to address chronic food insecurity and improve health and nutrition outcomes through:³⁹

1. The predictable provision of adequate food and cash transfers to targeted beneficiary households (mostly cash for work), thus allowing effective consumption smoothing and avoiding asset depletion.
2. The creation of productive and sustainable community assets that contribute to the rehabilitation of severely degraded areas, build resilience to climate-related impacts, and increase household productivity. The programme also contributes to improved access to social services, such as education and health.
3. Direct cash transfers to labour-constrained households.
4. The use of risk financing mechanisms to allow the programme to scale up in times of transitory crisis.

Over the years and the different phases of the PSNP, additional health, nutrition and education components have been added to it, in large part due to advocacy efforts by UNICEF and other agencies. The organization is currently supporting the Government of Ethiopia to implement a pilot Integrated Safety Net Programme (ISNP) in the Amhara region. The ISNP provides integrated nutrition and health interventions, facilitates the enrolment of PSNP clients in the Community-Based Health Insurance (CBHI) scheme and strengthens access to social services among PSNP clients.

Over the past decades, Ethiopia has been affected by periodic droughts that have led to widespread food and nutrition crises. The international community responded by launching some of the world's largest humanitarian relief operations in the country. For example, a major drought in 2002–2003 left 13 million people reliant on emergency food aid. While the massive feeding programmes averted famine, they did little to make Ethiopia's population or its social protection systems more resilient and to prevent recurring food and nutrition crises.⁴⁰

In order for Ethiopia and its population to become more sustainably resilient to these and other shocks, the Government launched the PNSP in 2005 with support from major international donors, including the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, USAID and the World Bank. Operating in eight regions, the PSNP benefits about 8 million people with a budget of approximately US\$500 million dollars each year.⁴¹

The PSNP finances labour-intensive public works and social services infrastructure. Cash is paid for up to five days of work per month per household member, for six months a year, until the recipient households graduate from the programme by accumulating an asset and income level that enables them to meet 12 months of food needs and to withstand modest shocks. In addition, about 20 per cent of the participating households with members who are unable to work receive unconditional cash or food transfers. The programme's risk financing mechanism and contingency budget help to protect the income and assets being built up by beneficiaries through the programme from being eroded by recurring shocks, particularly droughts. Complementary components of the PSNP are delivered through the ISNP and include behaviour change communication (BCC) sessions, interaction between PSNP clients and community social workers, and co-responsibilities in education.⁴²

39. United Nations Children's Fund, *Child Marriage and Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Program: Analysis of protective pathways in the Amhara region – Summary of report findings*, UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, Florence, 2020.

40. World Bank, *Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP) Integrating Disaster and Climate Risk Management*, World Bank, Washington, D.C., 2013.

41. Hoddinott and Mekasha, 'Social Protection, Household Size, and Its Determinants'.

42. Gavrilovic, Maja, et al., *Child Marriage and Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Program: Analysis of protective pathways in the Amhara region, Final report*, UNICEF, New York, 2020.

The PSNP is managed by the Government of Ethiopia and is largely donor funded, with the Government's contribution mainly in the form of civil servant costs. Currently, 10 development partners are supporting the PSNP: Danish International Development Agency, Department for International Development, Global Affairs Canada (formerly Canadian International Development Agency), the European Union, Irish Aid, the Netherlands, Swedish International Development Agency, USAID, World Food Programme and World Bank.⁴³

UNICEF's support for social protection in Ethiopia

UNICEF has been involved in social protection in Ethiopia for the past 10 years. The initial focus was on using cash transfers to strengthen nutrition and

food security, and on preventing droughts and other natural disasters from turning into famine. Over time, UNICEF's interest in the PSNP and other large-scale social protection programmes broadened to include nutrition, education, child protection and, more recently, promoting gender equality and ending child marriage.

The substantial investments in social protection systems by donors and the Government of Ethiopia have built strong foundations for the more recent work on gender equality and ending child marriage. Without these foundations – laid over the course of more than 10 years – it would not have been possible to achieve the kinds of results attained in relation to child marriage and social protection.

Table 6 provides a timeline of social protection and end child marriage programmes, policies and research. These processes have long run in parallel, but there have been intersections between social protection and child marriage, which this case study aims to document.

Table 6: Timeline of key research, programmes and policies related to social protection and child marriage in Ethiopia⁴⁴

	Social protection (Government of Ethiopia; donors)	Social protection (UNICEF, Government of Ethiopia)	Child marriage (UNICEF, Government of Ethiopia)
2005	PSNP 1		
2006	PSNP 2		
2007			
2008			
2009			
2010			
2011	PSNP 3 Community-based Health Insurance	Tigray Social Cash Transfer Pilot Programme	
2012			
2013			
2014		National Social Protection Policy	
2015		Improved Nutrition through Integrated Basic Social Services and Social Cash Transfer Pilot Programme in Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's Region and Oromia Region	
2016	PSNP 4		Evidence study of what works to end child marriage
2017			
2018		Integrated Safety Net Programme in Amhara and Addis Ababa	National Roadmap on Ending Child Marriage
2019			National Alliance to End Child Marriage and FGM
2020		(Including 2019 impact evaluation that generates evidence to influence PSNP 5)	National Costed Roadmap to End Child Marriage and FGM/C 2020–2024
2021	PSNP 5		
2022			
2023			
2024			
2025			

43. Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP) Integrating Disaster and Climate Risk Management.

44. Social Protection and Labor Global Practice Africa Region, Report No: ICR00003659: Implementation completion and results report, World Bank, Washington, D.C., 25 May 2016; Slater, Rachel, and Dharini Bhuvanendra, Scaling up Existing Social Safety Nets to Provide Humanitarian Response: A case study of Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Programme and Kenya's Hunger Safety Net Programme, The Cash Learning Partnership, Oxford, 2014; Berhane, Guush, et al., Evaluation of Ethiopia's Food Security Program: Documenting progress in the implementation of the Productive Safety Nets Programme and the household asset building programme, IFPRI, Washington, D.C., May 2013; Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) Ministry of Agriculture, Productive Safety Net Programme: Phase IV Programme Implementation Manual, FDRE, Addis Ababa, December 2014.



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The following sections describe and discuss efforts to influence the PSNP to increase its impact on ending child marriage. This was achieved in five main ways: building evidence of what works to end child marriage; setting up demonstration projects at subnational level to show how cash plus components can be added to a large-scale social protection

programme; working with national partners on harmonizing policies related to child marriage and campaigning to end the practice; and advocating to influence the design of the PSNP 5. This was an iterative process over several years that allowed for flexibility and adaptations in the approaches to influence the PSNP.

4. Pathways of change

Although child marriage prevention was not an explicit objective of the PSNP's original design, a 2017 study in the Amhara region found that the programme delayed the migration of adolescent girls aged 12–17 years from PSNP households, with potential spill-over effects on delaying their marriage.⁴⁵ However, the pathways and design features by which the PSNP may influence child marriage outcomes were not established. To address this knowledge gap, researchers at the UNICEF Office of Research, in collaboration with Frontieri, UNICEF Ethiopia and the University at Buffalo, carried out a study to explore whether and how the PSNP can reduce child marriage. The study draws on data from an ongoing impact evaluation of the ISNP pilot in the Amhara region and confirms that integrated social protection programming – such as the PSNP plus complementary interventions – can reduce child marriage through three main pathways:⁴⁶

Economic pathway: The study showed that the cash component of the PSNP has been effective in reducing financial pressures to marry off girls, while simultaneously increasing girls' school enrolment and investments in their human capital through better food and health care. It also suggests that increased demands on adult labour as a result of PSNP participation cause adolescents, particularly girls, to be drawn into PSNP public works activities. These changes in labour demands may indirectly reduce the outmigration of adolescents (for marriage or employment) by encouraging parents to keep them at home as 'helping hands'.⁴⁷ At the same time, the heightened work burdens placed on girls may interfere with their participation in school and negatively impact learning outcomes.⁴⁸

Education pathway: The research found that by supporting households to send girls to school, the PSNP and its complementary components are contributing to an enabling environment where girls have access to information, skills and support

networks, and are empowered to seek legal protection and build their capacity to remain in school and resist pressures to marry. The programme achieves this in three main ways: First, at school, girls have access to the information, life skills and support networks that empower them to voice and exercise their choices regarding education and marriage. Second, through girls' clubs and teacher-led awareness raising and information sharing about the risks of marriage and pregnancy in adolescence, and by enhancing awareness of penalties and in-school mechanisms to report and seek support to resist child marriage.⁴⁹ Third, in areas where there are social workers, girls are able to receive support related to school attendance and to access prevention services when at risk.

Improved knowledge and attitudinal shifts

pathway: The complementary components of the PSNP (delivered through the ISNP) have played an important role in shifting parental and girls' attitudes and beliefs around child marriage. BCC sessions and interactions between PSNP clients and community social workers were found to be effective in promoting the importance of girls' education, encouraging delays in marriage and pregnancy, and fostering commitments towards gender equality and positive gender roles and relations more broadly.⁵⁰

Based on the results of the research, UNICEF developed a conceptual framework (*see Figure 6*) that identifies three pathways for reducing child marriage in Ethiopia: Improved economic security; increased investment in girls' education; and improved knowledge of and attitudes towards child marriage. Various contextual and operational factors were also found to potentially moderate the PSNP's effects on child marriage outcomes: Programme design features; household composition; sociocultural context; ongoing interventions to prevent child marriage; and the availability and quality of services and socioeconomic opportunities.⁵¹

45. Hoddinott and Mekasha, 'Social Protection'.

46. UNICEF has supported the Government of Ethiopia to implement, within the PSNP framework, two pilots aimed at promoting the development of an integrated system of social transfers and basic social services, including access to health care, education and health insurance. The Improved Nutrition through Integrated Basic Social Services with Social Cash Transfer pilot project has run from 2015 to 2018, while the ISNP was launched in 2019 in the Amhara region. Building on the PSNP 4 innovations, the ISNP pilot focuses on an expanded and strengthened case management approach to link PSNP clients to essential services in health, nutrition, education and child protection through social workers and implementation of co-responsibilities. Gavrilovic, et al., *Child Marriage and Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Program*.

47. For additional data and information see: *Impact Evaluation of the Integrated Safety Net Programme in the Amhara Region of Ethiopia*.

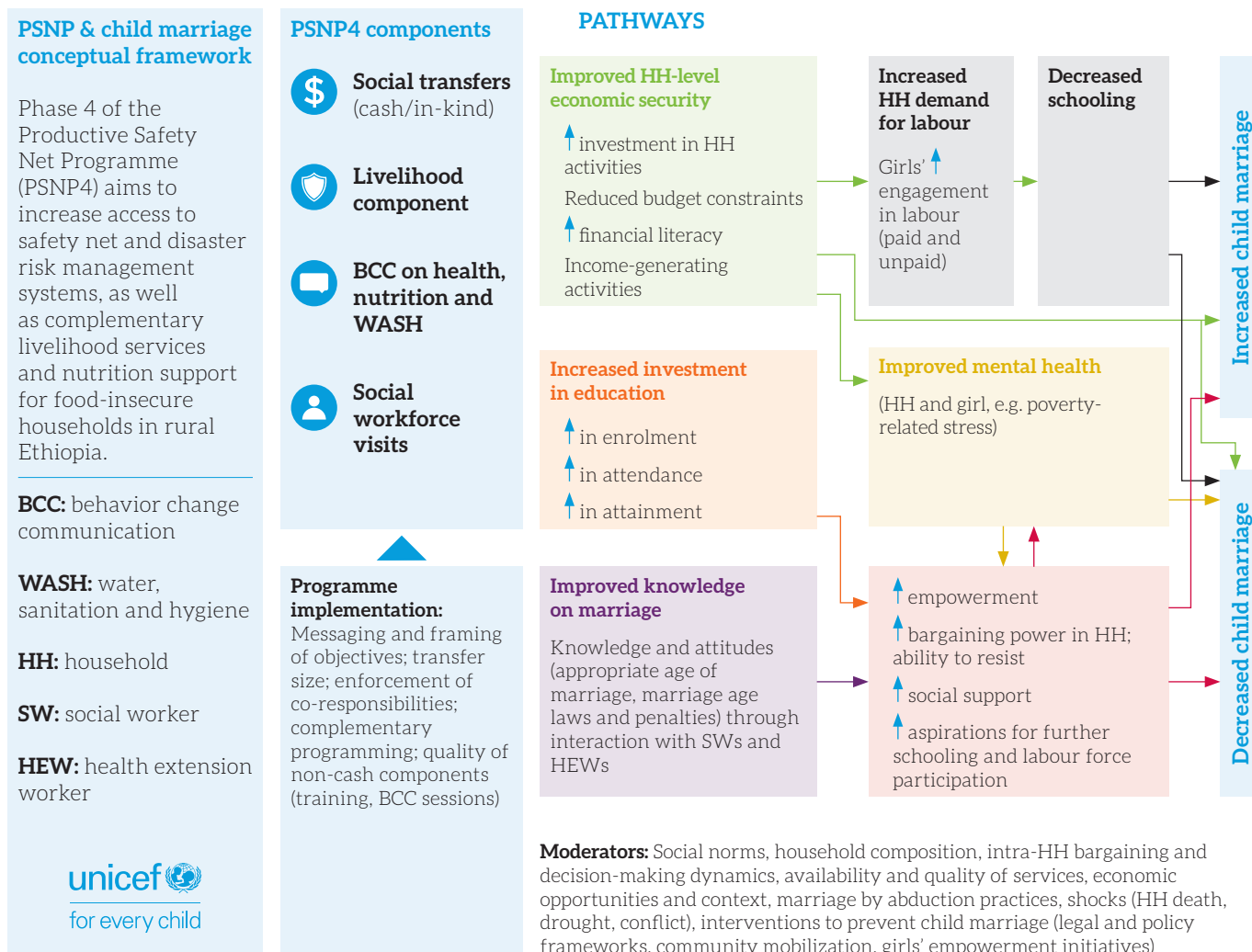
48. Gavrilovic, et al., *Child Marriage and Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Program*.

49. Ibid.

50. For additional data and analysis, see Ibid.

51. *Child Marriage and Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Program... Summary of report findings*.

Figure 6: Conceptual framework of pathways of impact of the Production Safety Net Programme (PSNP) on child marriage



Unintended effects of PSNP on child marriage:

While the effects of the PSNP on child marriage are largely positive, the research also identified some unintended effects. The additional income from the PSNP may be used to cover wedding costs for child marriages; and greater financial security of a household can enhance a daughter's prospects of receiving marriage proposals. This finding shows that generalized economic strategies by themselves are unlikely to affect long-term changes in deep-rooted norms, attitudes and behaviours related to child marriage, and thus need to be accompanied by complementary efforts related to girls' empowerment, community engagement, awareness raising and legal measures – to transform deep-rooted social and gender norms and attitudes that perpetuate child marriage in many settings.⁵²

Enhancing the effects of the PSNP on child marriage: The findings of the study highlight the opportunity to leverage the reach and scale of the

PSNP to address the high prevalence of child marriage in Ethiopia. The research identified the following strategies to more effectively link the design of the PSNP to child marriage objectives:

- improve girls' retention in school by providing additional economic incentives such as cash top-ups to vulnerable PSNP households to increase their demand for education for girls;
- expand social worker case management support to vulnerable PSNP households and provide information on the importance of girls' education, and risks of child marriage and early childbearing, and to facilitate referrals to child protection case management for vulnerable girls and corresponding legal, health and counselling services; and
- integrate modules on child marriage prevention and gender equality into existing BCC curricula at the community level.⁵³

52. "Support is also found for some of the unintended effects on child marriage resulting from improved economic security, as hypothesized in the conceptual framework. It was reported that, in some communities, extreme poverty may act as a barrier to the marriage of girls where parents are unable to meet social expectations for a dowry. The additional income from PSNP may enable families to accumulate the resources (cash and/or assets) needed to cover the costs of a wedding and dowry (or bride price). Likewise, the financial security resulting from regular participation in a safety net programme such as the PSNP can enhance daughters' prospects of receiving marriage proposals." Gavrilovic, et al., *Child Marriage and Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Program*, pp. 58–59.

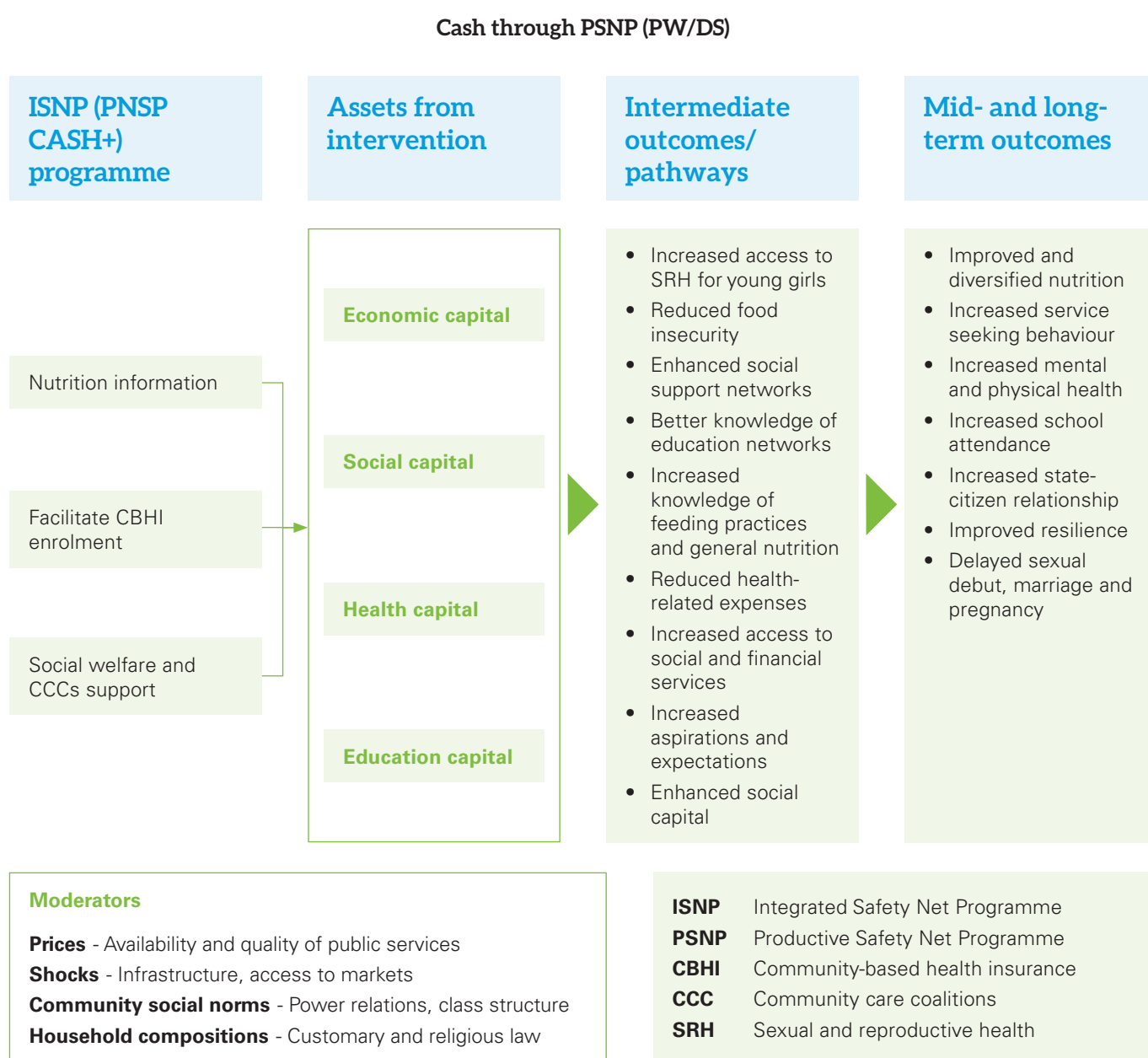
53. Gavrilovic, et al., *Child Marriage and Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Program*.

5. Cash plus components

ISNP: UNICEF is currently supporting the Government of Ethiopia to implement a pilot ISNP in the Amhara region. The ISNP provides integrated nutrition and health interventions, facilitates the enrolment of PSNP clients in the CBHI scheme and strengthens access to social services among PSNP clients (see Figure 7). Social workers involved in the programme promote school enrolment, monitor school attendance, and provide information and guidance to PSNP households on a range of issues. The ISNP aims to generate synergies by integrating

social protection policies and programmes and “is a test of a strategic principle of the National Social Protection Policy of 2014. According to the principle, actors in the social protection space should be enabled to work collaboratively and effectively on social protection programmes through shared commitment, sufficient within-budget funding, strong partnership with ministries and other stakeholders, enhanced coordination and implementation capacities, and the availability of adequate systems and tools.”⁵⁴

Figure 7: Conceptual framework of the Integrated Safety Net Programme (ISNP)



54. Impact Evaluation of the Integrated Safety Net Programme in the Amhara Region of Ethiopia, p. 13.

Several new components were added to the fourth phase of the PSNP: The provision of social services in health and nutrition; an increase in the duration of the monthly transfers among direct support clients to 12 months a year; the expansion of household programme responsibilities beyond public works, strengthening the focus on gender equality; and the introduction of extra responsibilities among pregnant and lactating women and caretakers of malnourished children. In line with the new gender, social development and nutrition provisions of the PSNP 4, the ISNP includes a comprehensive case management system implemented by social workers, who form the crucial link between front-line workers and clients in communities. The three ISNP components being delivered to PSNP clients are:

- BCC on nutrition, health, child marriage, gender equality and adolescent SRH.
- The facilitation of CBHI enrolment and exemptions among PSNP direct support clients on the payment of enrolment premiums.
- Case management by social workers to support the links between PSNP clients and health and social services, inform clients of their extra programme responsibilities – including children’s school enrolment and attendance and health service visits, monitor compliance with the new responsibilities and provide follow-up advice or support in cases of non-compliance.⁵⁵

Impact evaluation (2018–2022): UNICEF commissioned a baseline as a first phase of a

five-year impact evaluation process to assess and document the added value of the cash plus components implemented through the pilot ISNP, including information on enrolment in the CBHI, case management and enhanced access to basic services among PSNP clients. The conceptual framework guiding the impact evaluation shows the various components of the ISNP relative to the PSNP, identifies the relevant individual and household indicators and suggests potential pathways of impact.

Findings from the impact evaluation baseline:⁵⁶ The evaluation baseline emphasizes the relevance of the ISNP design (final evaluation results are due in 2023):

- The BCC sessions on feeding practices, child discipline and early marriage are critical.
- Facilitating participation in PSNP livelihood groups would help income strengthening and diversification.
- Health extension workers, social workers and community volunteers are important for case management of malnourished children and monitoring school enrolment.
- The development and deployment of a MIS to provide timely data about PSNP households would help strengthen case management and monitoring.
- A steering committee to facilitate institutional coordination between the CBHI and the PSNP would ensure the harmonization of standards and adequate funding to eligible households.



55. Ibid.

56. Ibid.

6. Advocacy and programme support

The scale and reach of the PSNP for poor people in Ethiopia underscores its importance as a focus of UNICEF's work related to health and nutrition, food security, education, social protection, child marriage, child protection and gender equality. UNICEF supported a number of advocacy initiatives to influence the design of the fifth phase of the PSNP. This information is useful for other country offices involved in advocacy efforts:

- UNICEF presented the ISNP evaluation findings to key stakeholders through various consultative and validation workshops and to PSNP task forces, technical committees and the National Social Protection Platform. This helped to ensure government ownership of the evaluation.
- UNICEF was also involved in the design process of the PSNP 5 through various technical working groups. The organization used available evidence to advocate for strengthening linkages between the PSNP and existing social, justice and legal services (e.g., for cases of child marriage and GBV), health, nutrition and education, as well as an integrated social protection system with social workers playing an integral role.
- UNICEF prepared advocacy points based on the evidence and advocated for inclusion of the lessons into the PSNP 5 on the PSNP Donor Working Group and other platforms.
- UNICEF advocated for PSNP 5 social behaviour change communication (SBCC) sessions to be revised, and incorporated modules on gender, GBV and child marriage.

Country reflections: The complementary social services and interventions of the cash transfer programme have been key to addressing child marriage in the country, and the pilot that was reviewed in the Amhara region will now inform the full national roll-out of phase 5 of the PSNP. Advocacy to influence policy change is also crucial as a complement to the cash transfer programme and social services, as well as integrating child marriage as an issue in the policies and in SBCC initiatives to address social norms drivers.⁵⁷

Changes in the PSNP 5 as a result of UNICEF's advocacy: The evidence suggests that advocacy played a significant role in the development of the PSNP 5 because it fed into the desire of the Ethiopian Government to be seen as a leader on gender equality in the region.⁵⁸ Sustained advocacy by UNICEF had a number of effects on the PSNP 5:

- The PSNP 5 incorporates links to social services and recognizes the role of social workers in reaching the most vulnerable adolescents and women. This also gives ample opportunity to expand their role in disseminating information, and in identifying girls at risk and linking them with services.
- PSNP 5 SBCC includes modules on health, nutrition, gender and GBV.
- The PSNP can use its multiple information sharing and communication mechanisms – including BCC sessions – as a platform for raising awareness to improve social service seeking behaviour. Services include ensuring linkages to available social services, including responses to GBV, and justice or legal services (e.g., for cases of child marriage and GBV); psychosocial support and counselling services can also be included.

The PSNP 5 design document⁵⁹ acknowledges a number of shortcomings of the PSNP 4, including:

- Targeting the chronically food insecure excluded some of the extremely poor rural populations.
- There has been slow progress on harmonizing the PSNP and humanitarian food assistance systems and effective programme monitoring and reporting.
- Linkages to social services were weak in the PSNP 4; therefore, the PSNP 5 will allocate specific responsibility and emphasis to ensuring client linkages to social services receive adequate attention and are developed more effectively, especially for the most vulnerable.
- Accountability for effective programme delivery and management was inadequate in the PSNP 4.

57. Legasu, Bereket Akele, Social Policy Specialist, UNICEF Ethiopia, 'Ethiopia Webinar: Exploring the evidence on child marriage and social protection'.

58. Iris Group, *Child, Early, and Forced Marriage: A political economy analysis of Ethiopia*, Iris Group, Chapel Hill, 2020.

59. Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) Ministry of Agriculture, Food Security Coordination Directorate (FSCD), *Productive Safety Net Program Phase 5 (PSNP 5) 2020 – 2025 Design Document*, FDRE, Addis Ababa, 2020.

7. Challenges

This section summarizes some of the challenges UNICEF has faced in its research, evaluation, programming and advocacy efforts to influence the PSNP to place greater emphasis on child marriage and gender equality.

Problem analysis and leadership

Advocating for policy change in a large, multi-faceted programme with many stakeholders has been challenging:

- The PSNP is a complex programme that involves many government stakeholders and more than 10 donor agencies. Each of these development partners has their own agenda and interests. Child marriage is not a government or donor priority in relation to the PSNP, and it has been difficult for UNICEF to influence the PSNP in relation to child marriage.
- Different UNICEF sections have worked together to influence the design of the PSNP through investments in research, evaluations, demonstration projects and advocacy. This is an ongoing process that is taking many years.

Programme design for cash plus components

Focused research is needed to fill gaps in understanding and data to elaborate on context-specific programming: Limitations of the UNICEF study on child marriage and the PSNP include:⁶⁰

- Using self-reported age at marriage may underestimate the actual child marriage rates, as some respondents may have reported a later age at marriage because of social desirability bias or fear of legal penalties.
- Qualitative findings are only indicative and cannot be applied to other settings. Further research is needed to confirm the pathways proposed in the conceptual framework.
- More research is needed, especially given the huge contextual variations in child marriage across different ethnic groups and regions in Ethiopia.

Implementation: Cash plus activities and convergence

*Delivery, quality and access to services has been uneven.*⁶¹

- Clients are not always aware of their rights and available grievance mechanisms. Social exclusion, limited public participation, and work burdens hinder the mobility of rural women and limit their access to information about their rights and about grievance mechanisms related to the PSNP.
- Inclusion of the most marginalized groups remains a challenge for the PSNP.
- The PSNP has been a major vehicle for improving food security and livelihoods. However, it has had limited impact on improving the access and utilization of basic services, especially among its poorest clients. To improve the demand for and access of PSNP households to basic services, the PSNP 4 promotes the transition to an integrated system of social transfers and linkages with basic social services. To achieve this, it aims to strengthen existing coordination between key front-line agencies, and to establish processes and tools for integrated planning, targeting and monitoring of relevant interventions.



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60. Gavrilovic, et al., *Child Marriage and Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Program*.

61. *Impact Evaluation of the Integrated Safety Net Programme in the Amhara Region of Ethiopia*.

8. Lessons

As this case study shows, leveraging programmes of the size and importance of the PSNP requires significant capacities, resources and time, which only some of the larger international agencies have and are willing to invest. UNICEF Ethiopia's efforts to leverage the PSNP offer some valuable lessons for the Global Programme to End Child Marriage.

Problem analysis and leadership: The PSNP is an ambitious and large-scale social protection programme that aims to overcome periodic food and nutrition crises and Ethiopia's chronic dependency on international humanitarian feeding programmes. Each phase of the PSNP brings new innovations and adaptations to make the programme more relevant and more effective for the client population. Alignment and coherence of stakeholder agendas, full government commitment and consistent multi-donor support has allowed it to grow larger and stronger since 2005.

UNICEF Ethiopia has engaged with the PSNP for the past decade, initially on social protection, nutrition and food security; later adding health and education; and, most recently, including the prevention of child marriage and the promotion of gender equality. The Global Programme has benefited from and built on the existing partnerships that different UNICEF sections have fostered with the PSNP over the past 10 years.

Programme design for cash plus activities:

UNICEF's approach to influencing PSNP government and donor stakeholders has been multi-faceted, including: Research on the (unplanned) effects of the programme on child marriage; the ISNP pilot programme, baseline and evaluation to demonstrate integration between social transfers and social services; and advocacy with government and donors on integrating relevant evidence in the design of the latest phase of the PSNP. This has been a long-term process where trust has been built and agendas converge over time.

Implementation: Cash plus activities and convergence:

Consistent and long-term engagement and significant investments in evidence generation, piloting and stakeholder engagement have been key and will have to continue into the future to harness the full potential of a large-scale programme such as the PSNP.

Monitoring and evaluation:

Long-term research partnerships have been critical. The UNICEF Office of Research has been a strong partner. Research by the Overseas Development Institute has also been invaluable to improving and deepening understanding of child marriage in different parts of Ethiopia. These are all pieces that contribute to the success of the research, programming and advocacy work of UNICEF and its partners in Ethiopia. All of these require long-term and consistent investments and partnerships.

9. Way forward

Successful implementation of the PSNP 5 requires continued investments in programme implementation, monitoring, evaluation and evidence-based adaptations. UNICEF Ethiopia is committed to continuing the multisectoral engagement over the long term. This includes further evaluations and evidence generation.

UNICEF is currently supporting the Ethiopian Government to revise the SBCC component and aims to include issues related to ending child marriage as part of gender and social development, and for

combating GBV. As part of this work, it is also revising the *Mainstreaming Gender and Social Development Guideline* and *Nutrition Training Guide*.

The ISNP pilot will be used as a trial of an integrated system of social cash transfers and the promotion of linkages with basic social services, to promote nutrition and health-related outcomes for the PSNP client households. The Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs is mapping existing service providers for GBV and social services, and developing a PSNP GBV training guide.

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Case study 2

Kanyashree Prakalpa in West Bengal, India

Key messages⁶²

The following messages can be drawn from the experiences of influencing the Kanyashree Prakalpa scheme in West Bengal. They may be relevant for other countries considering leveraging large-scale social protection programmes to accelerate ending child marriage.

Aspect	Key Learnings
Problem analysis and leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is important that child marriage is recognized as a problem. Initially, government officials and the population at large did not consider child marriage to be a problem in West Bengal. • Girls lack opportunities to pursue alternative life paths. Child marriage in West Bengal is driven by the low status of girls and a lack of education and economic opportunities for girls and women. • Global evidence can be influential. UNICEF shared global evidence on what works to end child marriage with the Government of West Bengal. Given the size of India, development strategies are often ‘home-grown’ and not always aligned with global best practice. UNICEF has a strategic advantage in accessing global evidence. • Data analysis can show gaps in policy and service provision. Analysing state- and district-level data enabled UNICEF to support and influence the Government of West Bengal to accept that child marriage was a problem and had to be tackled. • Data analysis is needed to address specific questions. While the Government is supporting regular household surveys and generating department-specific administrative data through MIS, not enough is being done to carry out further analysis to answer specific questions (e.g., why the child marriage rate is so high in West Bengal; what the impact of Kanyashree Prakalpa is on girls and child marriage, etc.). This is an area where UNICEF could provide support.
Programme design for cash plus activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incentivizing education as a means of reducing child marriage. The Kanyashree Prakalpa scheme was designed to end child marriage by increasing the value and agency of girls and by incentivizing education as an alternative to early marriage. • Universal cash grants for girls’ education. The core of the scheme consists of cash grants for girls aged 13–19 who attend school. All girls aged 13–19 in school qualify for the cash grants, irrespective of their family’s income. • Financial inclusion of girls. Girls aged 13–18 who are in school receive an annual scholarship of 1,000 rupees (approximately US\$14). While the amount is relatively small, it is paid directly into every adolescent girl’s bank account to foster their financial inclusion and autonomy. It sends a strong message to community members and to banks that girls have the right to be financially independent. • Government financing. Kanyashree Prakalpa is fully funded by the Government of West Bengal and has reached 7.5 million adolescent girls since its inception. The scheme is popular and funding levels have remained high since its launch in 2013. • Scale of the scheme. The scheme is reaching more than half of all girls in the 13–19 age cohort and is much larger than any programme supported by NGOs. • Raising awareness. Due to its reach, Kanyashree Prakalpa has raised awareness among large numbers of families of the negative effects of child marriage. The media is reporting cases of child marriage and some adolescent girls are taking action to stop child marriages. • Raising aspirations of girls. The scheme has raised the aspirations of adolescent girls who now expect more than small annual cash payments. Cash plus activities have been added, but it takes time to scale them up. Additional efforts are needed to expand higher education and economic opportunities for girls and young women. • International recognition. The high-profile Kanyashree Prakalpa received recognition nationally and internationally; the State Government designated 14 August as ‘Kanyashree Divas’ with the publication of a performance ranking of districts according to their achievements for girls’ education and other indicators. This created incentives and peer pressure among districts. • Pilot programmes. UNICEF supported pilot programmes to end child marriage in two districts. The pilots provided UNICEF with context-specific experiences that could be used for advocacy at the state level. • Cash plus interventions. UNICEF commissioned a review to identify cash plus elements that could be added to the Kanyashree Prakalpa scheme.
Implementation: Cash plus components and convergence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoting convergence. Convergence between departments remains a challenge. Mechanisms to bring different departments and other stakeholders together include task forces, committees, an adolescent cell for coordination, and monitoring. Simplifying the administration of Kanyashree Prakalpa would make it easier for school staff to implement the scheme – and in turn improve coordination between the School Education Department and the Department of Women & Child Development and Social Welfare (WCD&SW).
Monitoring and evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Measuring outcomes. In the absence of an evaluation, it has been difficult to measure the outcomes and impact of the scheme on adolescent girls and on child marriage. More girls are enrolled in school and education statistics have shown some improvements in girls’ education. The last household survey was done too soon after the scheme’s inception to show a decline in child marriage.

62. This case study is based on documents shared by the UNICEF India and West Bengal teams (see references at the end of the document); a Zoom call with Paramita Neogi and Swapnodipa Biswas from the child protection team at UNICEF Kolkata and with Sanghamitra Ghosh, Secretary, Department of Women & Child Development and Social Welfare. The child protection team and Prabhat Kumar (social policy specialist) provided additional information and clarifications on various drafts of the case study.

Key messages in relation to UNICEF’s capacities and the resources required to influence large-scale social protection programmes:

- **Partnerships are important.** Over the years, UNICEF has become a trusted partner of the WCD&SW of the Government of West Bengal, providing support as

necessary. This has enabled the agency to influence the scheme’s direction.

- **Multisectoral collaboration is key.** The different programme sections at UNICEF in West Bengal have worked as one team. The social policy team played a key technical role related to social protection, data analysis, monitoring and MIS.

1. Child marriage in West Bengal

With a population of 91.3 million (2011 Census), West Bengal is one of the largest states in India. The level of education in the state is higher than the average for India as a whole. More girls than boys are enrolled in primary to upper secondary schools.⁶³ In terms of higher education, young women are about to overtake men in enrolment rates.⁶⁴ West Bengal has the lowest fertility rate in all of India at 1.6 births per woman,⁶⁵ meaning that every year fewer babies are being born than in the previous year.⁶⁶ Surprisingly, however, at

41.6 per cent, West Bengal has the highest rate of marriage in India (on par with Bihar, the poorest state in the country). The prevalence of child marriage declined from 54 per cent (NFHS 3, 2005–2006) to 41.6 per cent (NFHS 4, 2015–2016), but remained stagnant at 41.6 per cent at the last household survey (NFHS 5, 2019–2020).⁶⁷ The average age of marriage among women is 20.9 years. Childbearing in adolescence is reported by 16.4 per cent of girls aged 15–19 (down from 25 per cent in 2005–2006) (see Table 7).

Table 7: Child marriage and adolescent pregnancy rates in West Bengal

	NFHS 3 2005–2006	NFHS 4 2015–2016	NFHS 5 2019–2020
Women aged 20–24 years who were married before reaching the age of 18 years (%)	54%	41.6%	41.6%
Childbearing reported by girls aged 15–19 years (%)	25%	18.3%	16.4%
Adolescent fertility rate (births per 1,000 females aged 15–19 years)			81

Marriage negatively affects the ability of adolescent girls to make decisions about their own lives. Among married girls aged 15–19, just 61 per cent participated in everyday decisions, only 50 per cent had a bank account, 50 per cent held attitudes justifying marital violence, and 18 per cent had

experienced sexual or physical violence perpetrated by their husband.⁶⁸

Girls’ participation in education in West Bengal is above the national average and enrolment of girls is higher than that of boys in all grades (see Figure 8).

63. Ministry of Education, *Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+) 2019–20*, Government of India, New Delhi, 2019–2020.

64. Ministry of Education, *Higher Education Profile 2019–20*, Government of India, New Delhi, 2019–2020.

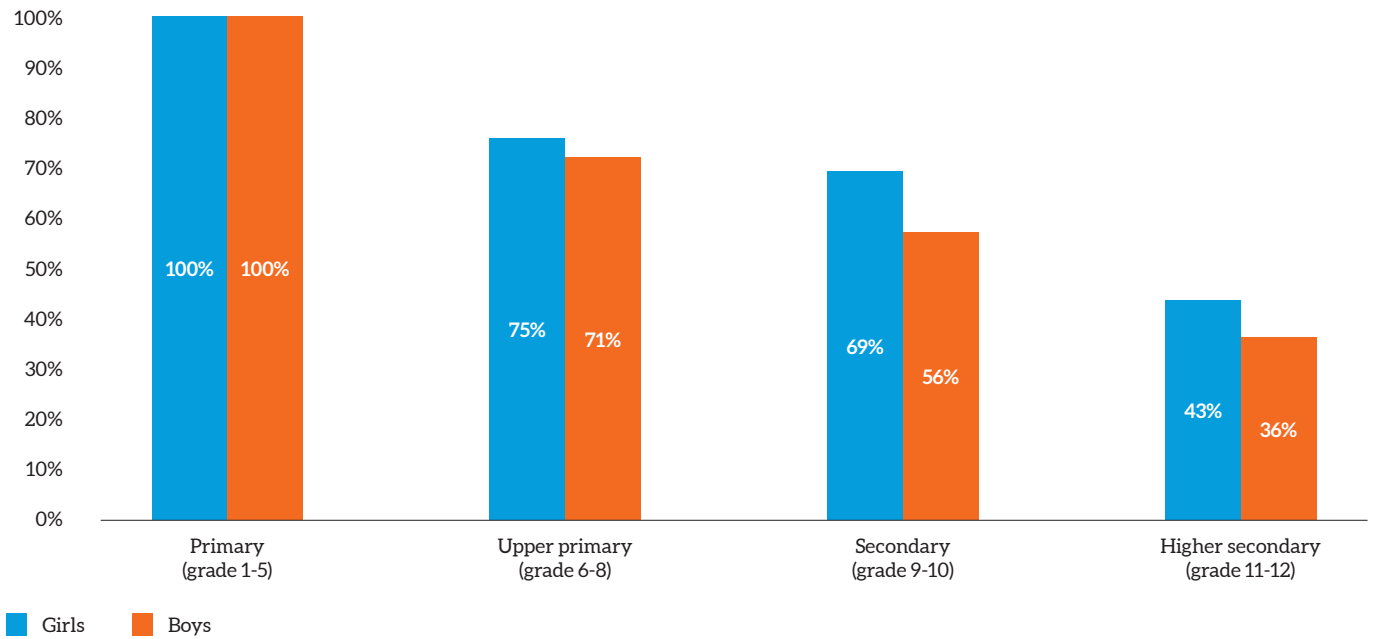
65. ‘Indian States by Fertility Rate & Birth Rate’, Find Easy, 18 July 2021, <www.findeasy.in/indian-states-by-fertility-rate/>.

66. In comparison with sub-Saharan Africa, the overall fertility rate in India is relatively low at 2.3 births per woman, and adolescent fertility is similarly low. These low fertility rates are, at least in part, the result of decades of successful (and sometimes coercive) family planning policies by the Indian Government.

67. *National Family 2019–20 Health Survey (NFHS-5)*. Variations in child marriage prevalence rates are showing that districts where UNICEF has been programming for several years are showing an improvement in child marriage rates.

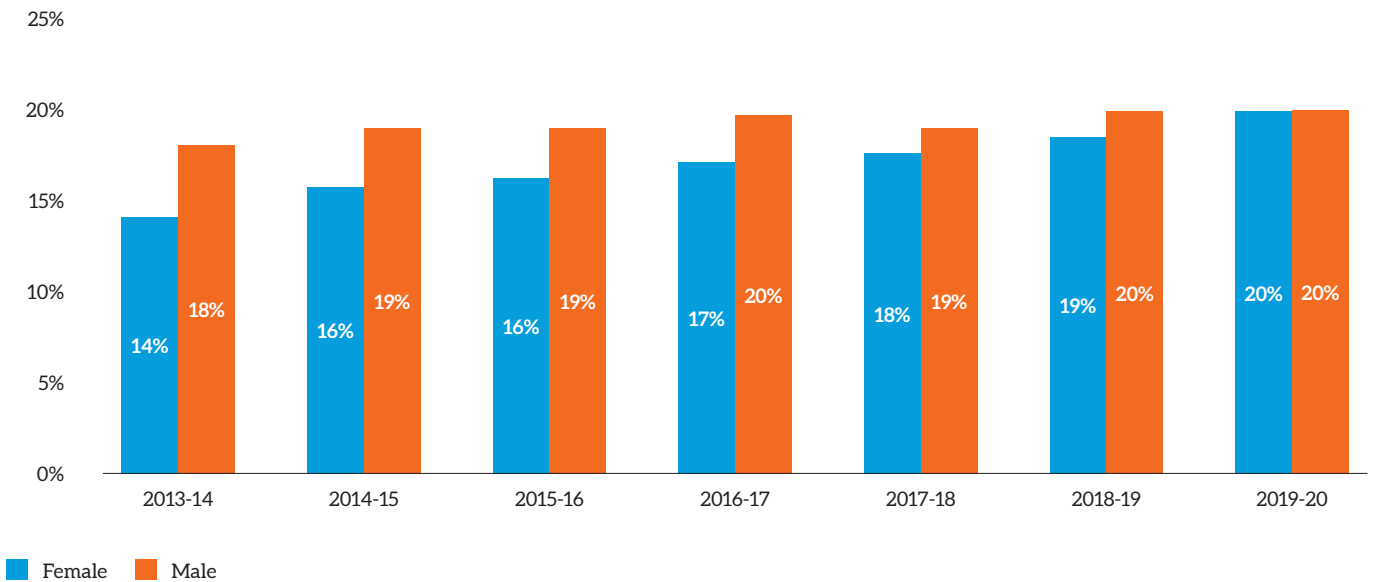
68. Jejeebhoy, Shireen, *Promising Directions for Empowering Adolescent Girls through Cash Plus in West Bengal*, UNICEF India, New Delhi, 2019.

Figure 8: Net enrolment rates in West Bengal (2019–2020)⁶⁹



In higher education, female students are closing the gap on male students (see Figure 9).

Figure 9: Gross enrolment ratio in higher education in West Bengal⁷⁰



West Bengal poses a puzzle and no single factor explains why child marriage rates have remained so high. Some possible factors are described in Box 2.

UNICEF is planning to carry out research to gain a better understanding of the drivers of child marriage in the state.

69. UDISE+.

70. Higher Education Profile.

Box 2: Factors that may contribute to West Bengal's high rate of child marriage⁷¹

- West Bengal has a high rate of migration. Migrating families marry their daughters early to ensure their 'safety' and prevent them from pre-marital sexual relations and as an attempt to protect them from sexual violence during migrations.
- West Bengal ranks high in terms of rates of other protection issues, including higher rates for child labour, child trafficking, and violence against children and women. This indicates that vulnerabilities go beyond economics. The state is also prone to frequent natural disasters, which exacerbate other vulnerabilities.
- While West Bengal performs quite well on some gender indicators, the state scores worse in terms of women's asset ownership and internet access. These factors require further study.
- The evidence shows that cash transfers alone are not sufficient to prevent child marriages in West Bengal. The economic empowerment of girls requires greater investments in services that facilitate girls' school-to-work transition and provide young women with economic opportunities as an alternative to early marriage.
- A comparison between districts should help narrow down the factors that drive, or alternatively prevent, child marriage.



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71. Information from Tannistha Datta, Child Protection/ADAP Specialist, UNICEF Delhi.

2. Child marriage programming

UNICEF began supporting child marriage prevention activities in the Purulia district of West Bengal in 2006. Between 2006 and 2009, 60 girls resisted their own marriage in West Bengal and one girl received an award from the President of India for her courageous actions. These isolated actions raised attention about child marriage in the state and triggered a movement of girls to stop child marriage.⁷²

In 2009, UNICEF expanded its child marriage activities to Malda, the district with the second highest rate of child marriage in the state.⁷³ The evaluation of this European Union-funded 'Value of Girls' project in Malda concluded that it was not enough to have a child marriage prohibition law and girls protesting against their marriages – there was a need for sustained community mobilization and for long-term

interventions at community level to promote change in gender norms.

Initially, the attitude of the State Government was that child marriage existed in other states but was not a problem in West Bengal. To change this official position, UNICEF worked with the WCD&SW to analyse 2007–2008 District Level Household Survey (DLHS) data to highlight the child marriage situation at state and district levels.⁷⁴ This evidence was presented in 2009 at the first state consultation on child marriage. The consultation was attended by state-level departments and led the Government to acknowledge that something had to be done. Following the consultation, every district designated a child marriage prohibition officer and the State Government ranked districts based on the reported incidences of child marriage as per the DLHS.

3. Kanyashree Prakalpa programme

In 2011, West Bengal elected a new government led by Mamata Banerjee. Mamata Banerjee is an Indian politician who has served as the ninth and current Chief Minister of West Bengal since 2011 – the first woman to hold the office. The new government decided it had to do more for girls, and specifically to support girls' schooling as a way to prevent child marriage. This policy shift led to the conception of the Kanyashree Prakalpa scheme in 2013. The responsibility for the scheme was given to the WCD&SW, which requested UNICEF's support in the design of the scheme.

Kanyashree Prakalpa⁷⁵ was launched in 2013 and is entirely funded by the Government of West Bengal. The scheme aims to reduce child marriage and increase the education and employability of girls.⁷⁶ UNICEF provided technical support, including the design of a communication strategy, a baseline study, as well as support for state- and district-level monitoring of the performance of the scheme. Throughout this process, the Government was open

to inputs and to constructive criticism from UNICEF. From 2013 to 2019 the scheme continued to evolve and to adapt to new evidence and learnings. Initially designed as a conditional cash transfer scheme, it was changed to a universal scheme accessible to all girls, irrespective of their family's income status.⁷⁷ Grievance mechanisms were put in place for girls facing difficulties in accessing the scheme.

Throughout this process, UNICEF provided support to district task forces; the documentation of good practice case studies; technical guidelines for Kanyashree clubs in schools, where girls learned how to make decisions, among other topics;⁷⁸ capacity-building of district staff; and promoting the scheme at state level and in districts. By designating 14 August as 'Kanyashree Divas' and publicizing performance ranking of districts based on their achievements in girls' education and other indicators, the State Government created incentives and peer pressure among districts. The scheme received national and international recognition.

72. 'WB: Prez awards girls for opposing child marriage', Press Trust of India, 8 December 2011, <www.news18.com/news/india/wb-prez-awards-girls-for-opposing-child-marriage-426235.html>.

73. As per the NFHS 4, Malda had highest prevalence (56.8%) but improved to fourth position (49.1%) as per the NFHS 5.

74. DLHS 3 was conducted in 2007–2008 and revised data were released in July 2010.

75. 'kanya' means girl in Bengali.

76. Dutta, Arijita, and Anindita Sen, *Kanyashree Prakalpa in West Bengal, India: Justification and evaluation*, International Growth Centre, London, 2020.

77. Family income criteria for the eligibility of Kanyashree Prakalpa was withdrawn in 2018–2019.

78. Kanyashree Club Guidelines were approved and released by DWCD&SW in 2020.

The main responsibility for the Kanyashree schemes lies with the WCD&SW, whose new Secretary since 2017 has taken a great deal of interest in the prevention of child marriage and the development of adolescent girls.⁷⁹ Although the scheme's main focus is on schools, the School Education Department's involvement is limited to a seat on the steering committee at state level and some involvement at district level.⁸⁰

The UNICEF West Bengal team worked multisectorally. The child protection team led the work on Kanyashree at district level and particularly on collectivizing girls through Kanyashree clubs, building their life skills, engaging girls through sport (Kanyashree Football Tournament) and community radio programmes (Kanyashree Betar Sabha). This work is being funded by UNICEF and implemented at district and community level by NGOs and consultants. The social policy team worked on advocacy at state level along with Child Protection, and the Communication for Development team worked on the design and the 2013 communication strategy, which was revised with inputs from the child protection team in 2017.

UNICEF's comparative advantage was to provide best practices in child marriage programming and the latest evidence from around the world, and to support the documentation of the Kanyashree scheme. According to the Secretary of the WCD&SW, the Government of West Bengal focused on implementing the scheme and on moving forward – rather than looking at the past, reviewing and documenting the programme.

Following UNICEF advocacy, the State Plan of Action for Children II (SPAC), released in 2019, included various adolescent indicators across all sectors, including child marriage. As per the SPAC, the State set time-bound targets for reducing the prevalence of child marriage. Developed with support from UNICEF and partners, the SPAC also includes child marriage and the Kanyashree Prakalpa scheme. This policy framework is fully budgeted by the State and more than 4.3 million girls have benefited from the scheme that is implemented through this framework. The timeline of evolution of the scheme is summarized in Table 8.

Table 8: Evolution of Kanyashree Prakalpa

Year	Actions taken by Government of West Bengal	Actions taken by UNICEF
2006		Child marriage prevention in Purulia district
2009	Presentation of evidence at the first state consultation on child marriage	Expansion of child marriage activities to Malda district
2010	Launch of Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls (SABLA)	
2011	West Bengal elects a new government led by Mamata Banerjee	
2013	Launch of Kanyashree Prakalpa as a conditional cash transfer scheme	
2015	Convergence scheme launched for SABLA and Kanyashree Prakalpa	
2017	Government of India rebrands SABLA as the Scheme for Adolescent Girls (SAG)	
2018	SAG programme and the Kanyashree Prakalpa programme are merged into the SAG-KP convergence programme	Advocated for an adolescent cell in WCD&SW at state level
2019	Kanyashree scheme is extended to all districts in West Bengal and covers all girls aged 11–18 years	Cash plus assessment commissioned
2020	Adolescent cell is established, but COVID-19 delayed actions	

79. Sanghamitra Ghosh was appointed as Secretary of DWCD&SW in October 2017.

80. Limiting the role of the Education Department in the scheme was the decision of the Government of West Bengal, presumably to protect the core mandate of the Education Department to deliver education, and for Kanyashree not to be seen just as an education scholarship (information provided by UNICEF West Bengal team).

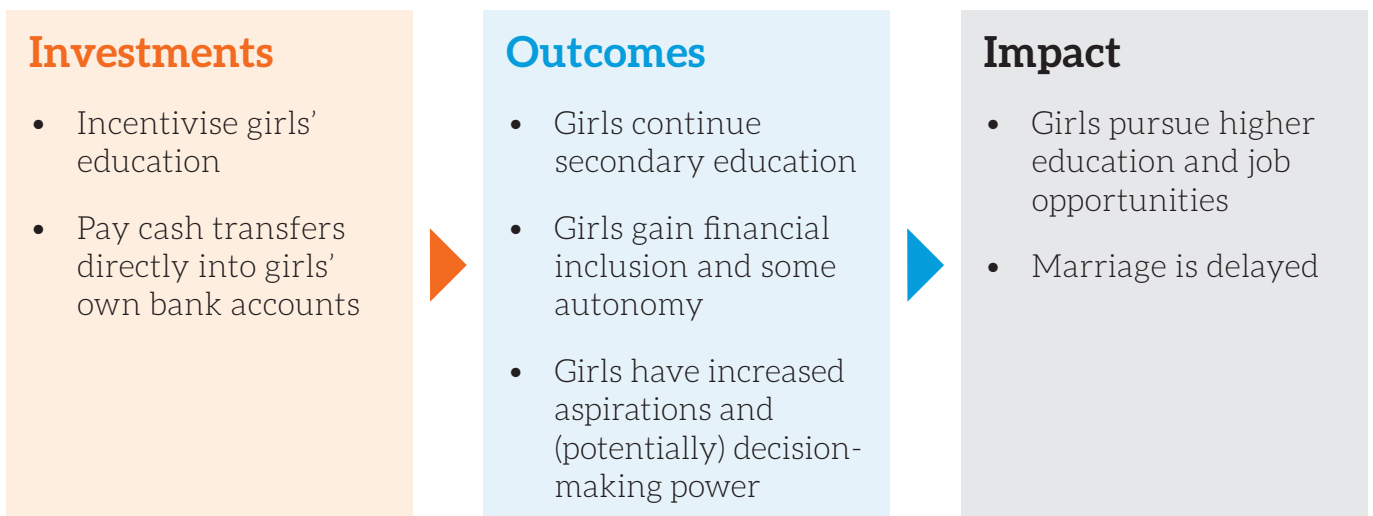
4. Pathways of change

In order to create a solid conceptual basis for the Kanyashree Prakalpa scheme, UNICEF commissioned an evidence review of cash transfer schemes with a focus on India. This review informed the work of the steering committee to design the Kanyashree Prakalpa scheme and to establish milestones. UNICEF provided technical support throughout the design process by drafting guidelines for the scheme. The Government opted for fewer milestones

(indicators) in order to streamline the administration and monitoring of the scheme.

Figure 10 presents the hypothesized pathways through which the Kanyashree scheme is contributing to ending child marriage. The figure is based on a review of existing Kanyashree Prakalpa programme documents, rather than on an empirical study of the programme.

Figure 10: Kanyashree Prakalpa pathways (hypothesized)



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5. Cash plus components

This section is based on the cash plus assessment commissioned in 2019.⁸¹

Kanyashree Prakalpa focuses on valuing girls and changing attitudes about and aspirations for adolescent girls. The annual stipends provided to participating girls are small and largely symbolic. As the scheme evolved, feedback from adolescent girls highlighted the need to provide more than cash transfers.

Towards a comprehensive cash plus programme

UNICEF commissioned a rapid assessment on the efficacy of the SAG-Kanyashree Prakalpa (SAG-KP)

convergence scheme in line with the theory of change developed for West Bengal (as part of the Global Programme). Of the 12 strategies included in the theory of change (described in the shaded boxes below), the SAG-KP convergence programme had already included five. However, the review concluded that the cash transfer component is being affected by implementation limitations and that the most vulnerable and marginalized girls are most likely to be excluded. Moreover, the assessment found that the strategies under the SAG component (life skills education, introduction of role models, enhancing the reach and quality of facilities, services and entitlements, and preparing girls for livelihoods) appear to be superficial and may not result in strong effects. The assessment's recommendation was to build on the foundations that have been laid and invest technical and financial resources to strengthen these components.⁸²

Five strategies identified as promising in the theory of change have been incorporated into the SAG-KP convergence programme model:

1. Leveraging social protection programmes, notably conditional cash transfers.
2. Building girls' agency and empowering them to exercise informed life choices through: (a) the provision of information, some attention to 'lifestyle' changes, and exposure to rights and entitlements; (b) provision of a safe space for girls to form peer networks; and (c) attention to nutrition, anaemia and menstrual hygiene-related information.
3. Providing access to positive role models.
4. Facilitating the school-to-work transition by supporting girls aged 15–18 to obtain livelihood skills.
5. Enabling access to entitlements, such as, for example, nutritional supplementation and anaemia monitoring, and access to menstrual hygiene products.

Three additional strategies (keeping girls in school, reaching boys, and reaching parents) were not part of the SAG-KP convergence programme. The assessment proposed to include these in a broader

cash plus programme, since excluding them could limit the achievement of the objectives of the SAG-KP convergence programme.

Strategies not proposed under the SAG-KP convergence programme that are backed by India/global evidence, respond to need, and may be aligned with the programme and incorporated into a cash plus programme include:

1. Keeping girls in school and ensuring that all complete secondary school.
2. Enhancing boys' understanding and support for gender equality, and addressing the needs of vulnerable boys.
3. Supporting more gender-equal families.

The assessment concluded that the remaining four strategies (influencing communities, reaching married girls, enhancing the implementation of available legal frameworks, and harnessing the media) did not fit

well in an expanded SAG-KP convergence programme. The assessment suggested that these strategies be pursued through other programmes.

81. Jejeebhoy, *Promising Directions*.

82. *Ibid.*

Strategies not proposed under the SAG-KP convergence programme that present a more difficult fit with SAG-KP and need to be implemented under platforms other than the SAG-KP convergence programme include:

1. Sensitize influential community members.
2. Address the vulnerability and social isolation of married adolescent girls and pregnant adolescent girls.
3. Enhance implementation and knowledge of laws concerning gender equality, and notably child marriage.
4. Harness the potential of the media to promote gender equality.

6. Advocacy and programme support

West Bengal is currently implementing the SAG-KP convergence programme. This programme merges the SAG (formerly SABLA) and the Kanyashree Prakalpa schemes. The merging of SABLA and Kanyashree is an

example of policy integration. The following sections describe both the Kanyashree Prakalpa and the SAG-KP convergence schemes (see Table 9).

Table 9: Schemes for adolescent girls⁸³

	SABLA	Kanyashree	SAG (SABLA)-KP convergence scheme
Launched	2010	2013	2015 ⁸⁴
Funded by	Government of India	Government of West Bengal	Government of West Bengal and Government of India
Target groups	Girls aged 11–18 ⁸⁵	Girls aged 13–18	Girls aged 11–18, including out-of-school girls
Focus area	Community	School	Community and school
Aims and description	Promote the self-development and empowerment of adolescent girls to improve girls' nutrition and health status	Conditional cash transfers to promote school continuation among girls and to prevent child marriage	Combines SABLA and Kanyashree Prakalpa
Components	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supplementary nutrition, including iron and folic acid • Health check-ups and referrals • Nutrition and health education • Guidance on family welfare, adolescent SRH, child care practices and home management • Life skills education and accessing public services • Vocational training for girls 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual scholarship (K1) of 1,000 rupees for all unmarried girls aged 13–18 years who are enrolled in grade levels 8–12- • One-time grant (K2) of 25,000 rupees for girls aged 18–19 years and enrolled in education or training 	<p>Both schemes complement each other to improve the well-being of adolescent girls. The convergence programme extends SABLA services to Kanyashree Prakalpa beneficiaries.</p> <p>Empowerment of adolescent girls and prevention of trafficking and other forms of violence include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued education of girls • Prevention of anaemia and malnutrition • Teaching of life skills • Enhancing the value of girls in the household and community • Improving livelihoods through vocational skills

83. Dutta and Sen, *Kanyashree Prakalpa in West Bengal, India*; Pratiche Institute, *Assessment of Kanyashree Prakalpa*, Pratiche Institute, Kolkata, 2017; UNICEF West Bengal Field Office, *Rapid Assessment of SABLA Kanyashree Prakalpa Convergence Programme April – 2018*, UNICEF, Kolkata, 2018.

84. Launched in 2015 in seven districts (though non-operational in one); resumed in 2018 and scaled up across the state in 2019 with newer modalities, including a multisectoral District Level Coordination Committee.

85. Changed to 11–14 from 2017 under SAG.

Kanyashree Prakalpa scheme

The Kanyashree Prakalpa scheme was launched in 2013 by the WCD&SW. The scheme aims to prevent child marriage and to improve the status and well-being of girls from socioeconomically disadvantaged families. Kanyashree Prakalpa provides conditional cash incentives for girls to continue their education and complete secondary or higher secondary education, or equivalent technical or vocational training. Benefits are paid directly into the girls' bank accounts in order to give girls control over money and to promote their financial inclusion and empowerment. The scheme also includes a BCC strategy.⁸⁶

The scheme has two components (see Table 9).⁸⁷

- a. **An annual scholarship (1,000 rupees) paid to girls attending school (K1).** Eligibility criteria include: Girls must be aged 13–18 and unmarried; and they must be enrolled in grade level 8 (or higher) and regularly attending educational institutions in West Bengal that are recognized by the Government.
- b. **A one-time grant (25,000 rupees) paid to girls aged 18–19 (K2).** Eligibility criteria include: Girls must be aged 18–19 years (as verified by a birth certificate, unless they reside in a home registered under the Juvenile Justice Act); unmarried (parents must provide a certificate, certified by a Competent Authority); enrolled in grade level 8 or above in a formal school, madrasa or equivalent open school course, in a college or equivalent open university course, a vocational training centre, technical training centre or industrial training centre, or a sports training institute (certificate from the Head of Institution is required).

The scheme requires girls to open a zero-balance savings account in a bank. The money is directly transferred into these accounts, which ensures that the system has very little leakage. Application forms are available in schools and the enrolment and opening of bank accounts is also facilitated by the school. The application, scrutiny and sanctioning is done through an e-portal and this minimizes paperwork and reduces the response time at each stage. It also ensures transparency, efficiency and zero leakage. The awareness is spread through schools, mass media, celebrity endorsements and Kanyashree Melas (fairs) and street theatre.⁸⁸

SAG-KP convergence scheme (formerly the SABLA-Kanyashree Prakalpa convergence scheme)

Recognizing that the overall aims of SABLA (60% funded by the Government of India) coincided with the objectives of the Kanyashree Prakalpa (funded by the State Government of West Bengal) and covered the same target group, the West Bengal Government decided to integrate SABLA with Kanyashree Prakalpa to achieve synergistic results.⁸⁹ In 2015, it began to implement the SABLA-Kanyashree Prakalpa convergence programme in seven districts. This combined programme expanded the age range of eligible girls to 11–18 and included out-of-school girls. Aside from the schooling benefits of Kanyashree Prakalpa, this combined programme focused on building leadership skills of all girls and encouraged those who had dropped out to return to school. It also extended the nutrition and non-nutrition services under the SABLA programme to Kanyashree Prakalpa beneficiaries.

In October 2017, the Government of India rebranded SABLA as the Scheme for Adolescent Girls (SAG) and reduced eligibility to girls aged 11–14 years. The following year, the SAG and Kanyashree Prakalpa programmes were merged into the SAG-KP convergence programme and extended to all districts in West Bengal in 2019. The convergence programme covers all girls aged 11–18 years and is implemented by NGOs.⁹⁰

Reach and outputs of Kanyashree Prakalpa

According to the 2011 Census, West Bengal's population of 13–18-year-old girls was 5,285,268. Kanyashree Prakalpa has reached very large numbers of girls, as illustrated in the cumulative and annual output figures depicted in Tables 10–12 and Figure 11.

86. *Rapid Assessment of SABLA Kanyashree Prakalpa*; Jejeebhoy, Promising Directions.

87. Jejeebhoy, *Promising Directions*.

88. Dutta and Sen, *Kanyashree Prakalpa in West Bengal, India*.

89. Kadence International, *Rapid Assessment of Kanyashree Prakalpa 2016–17*, unpublished.

90. Jejeebhoy, *Promising Directions*.

Table 10: Cumulative reach of Kanyashree Prakalpa since inception⁹¹

Registered institutions	18,106
Enrolled applications	24,751,754
Sanctioned (approved) applications	24,030,247
Unique beneficiaries ⁹²	7,501,692

Table 11: 2019–2020 Kanyashree Prakalpa targets and achievements⁹³

	Annual Scholarship	One-Time Grant
Target	2,820,436	481,017
Complete application received	2,651,048	446,315
% of target achieved	94%	93%
Sanctioned application	2,647,268	442,914
% of target achieved	100%	99%

Table 12: Kanyashree Prakalpa performance data⁹⁴

Scheme type	Annual Scholarship (K1)	One-Time Grant (K2)	Total
2013–2014	1,844,990	138,965	1,983,955
2014–2015	1,963,982	295,384	2,259,366
2015–2016	2,171,439	329,348	2,500,787
2016–2017	2,289,220	344,825	2,634,045
2017–2018	2,423,771	392,662	2,816,433
2018–2019	2,647,267	442,914	3,090,181
2019–2020	2,668,214	490,536	3,158,750
2020–2021	2,583,920	500,150	3,084,070
2021–2022	1,579,405	434,665	2,014,070
Total	20,172,208	3,369,449	23,541,657

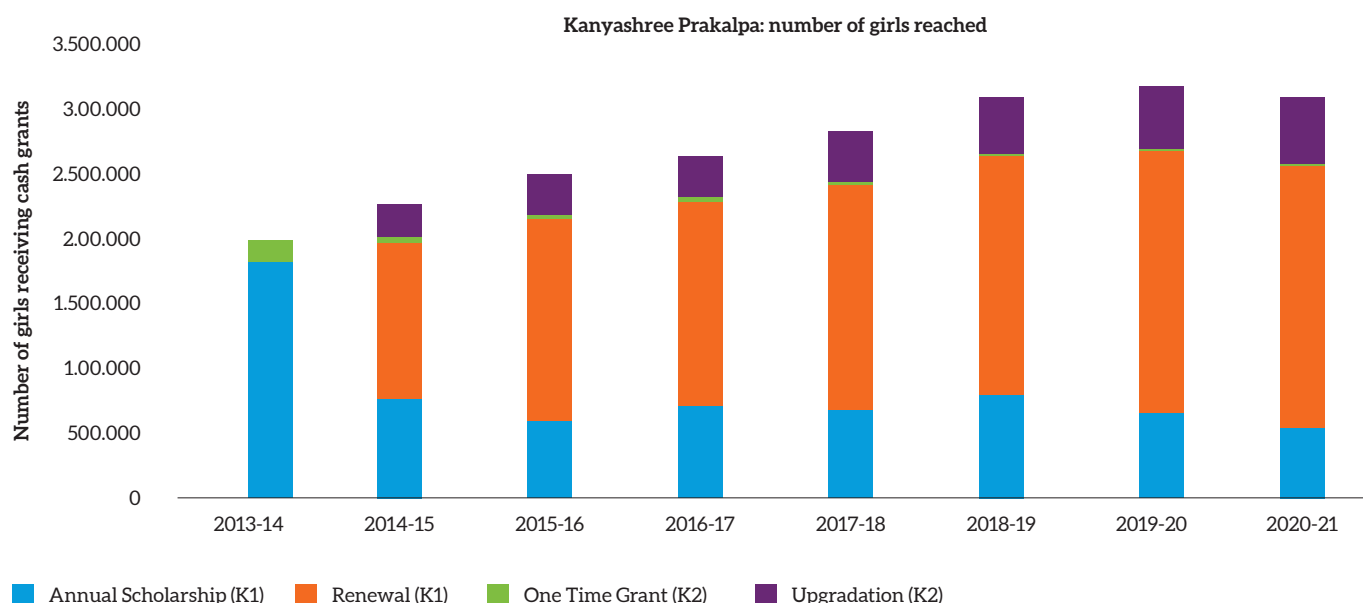
91. Kanyashree Online 5.0: <https://wbkanyashree.gov.in/kp_4.0/index.php>, accessed 10 December 2021.

92. Not counting beneficiaries each time they receive an additional scholarship.

93. Department of Women & Child Development and Social Welfare, *Kanyashree Prakalpa Annual Report 2019–20*, Government of West Bengal, Kolkata, 2021.

94. Coverage data by year are available on the Kanyashree Online 5.0 portal: <www.wbkanyashree.gov.in/kp_4.0/dashboard.php>.

Figure 11: Jayashree Prakaalpa outputs⁹⁵



Percentage of girls ages 13–19 years who have benefited from Kanyashree

While the Kanyashree programme is producing up-to-date statistics on the number of girls reached, it has been more difficult to calculate an accurate percentage of girls benefiting from the scheme (see *Challenges section*). Based on the Kanyashree output figures in Table 12 (nominator), and on the population (2011 Census) and school enrolment figures from the Unified District Information System for Education (UDISE) (denominator),⁹⁶ it is possible to arrive at a rough calculation of the percentage of girls reached by Kanyashree in the state. According to these figures, about 56 per cent of girls aged 13–18 have benefited from the annual scholarships (K1) and about 30 per cent of all girls aged 18–19 have received the one-time grant (K2). Of the girls enrolled in school, about 75 per cent participate in K1 and about 70 per cent in K2. While these are rough calculations, they give a sense of the scale, reach and importance of the Kanyashree scheme in West Bengal.

Outcomes of Kanyashree Prakaalpa

No decline in child marriage: As mentioned above, the rate of child marriage has been unchanged at 41.6 per cent in the 2015–2016 and 2019–2020 household surveys. According to the WCD&SW, the reference period for the NFHS 5 are the years 2014 to 2016. Those were early days for Kanyashree and too early to relate survey data to the performance of the scheme. The NFHS 6 should show whether Kanyashree Prakaalpa has had an impact on child marriage rates. In the absence of an evaluation, it is not possible to provide definitive answers about the effects of the Kanyashree programme on child marriage.⁹⁷

Incentivizing education and reducing drop-out: The main aim of the scheme is to incentivize education and thereby offer girls an alternative to marriage. According to a 2017 report by the Pratichi Institute, between 2014 and 2016, the enrolment of girls aged 13–18 years increased by 10 per cent from 80 to 90 per cent.⁹⁸ The improvements in girls' education were particularly pronounced in rural areas that tend to have lower rates of girls' education than urban areas. Other assessments suggest an increase in girls aged 13–18 attending school or college, and that many girls aspire to go to college and have a career.

95. K1: Adolescent girls can apply for the annual scholarship (K1) as soon as they turn 13 years of age and are studying in class VIII. The annual scholarship is renewed in the following academic sessions for those girls who were previously enrolled in K1 and continue their studies. K2: Adolescent girls who have reached 18 years of age, are unmarried and continue studying, and who were previously enrolled for K1, are upgraded to K2. However, some girls enrol only for the K2 one-time grant on attaining 18 years of age, but were not previously enrolled for the K1 annual scholarships.

96. UDISE+.

97. A 2021 research paper uses NFHS data to calculate that "the probability of the attainment of secondary/higher education of girls has increased by 6 percent and child marriage has reduced by 6.7 percent." Dey, Subhasish, and Tanisha Ghosal, 'Can Conditional Cash Transfer Defer Child Marriage? Impact of Kanyashree Prakaalpa in West Bengal, India', *Warwicks Research Papers*, March 2021, p. 34.

98. *Assessment of Kanyashree Prakaalpa*.

In West Bengal, more girls than boys are enrolled in school. The drop-out rate among girls is also lower than that of boys in the state.⁹⁹ While the Kanyashree scheme has been implemented at large scale and has reached large numbers of adolescent girls in West Bengal, state-level outcome indicators for girls also show positive trends. Available education MIS data indicate that drop-out rates

of girls declined to zero at the primary level. At secondary level, drop-out rates have also declined for girls, and the transition rate from secondary to higher secondary level has been increasing (see *Table 13*). While these figures are positive and correlate with the years of implementation of the Kanyashree scheme, causality cannot be inferred without hard statistical evidence.

Table 13: Female drop-out and transition rates (UDISE)

School year	Drop-out rate for girls after grade 8 (at upper primary level)	Drop-out rate for girls at secondary level	Transition rate for girls from secondary to higher secondary level
2014–2015	3.1%	19.8%	69.3%
2015–2016	2.9%	19.1%	64.2%
2016–2017	6.7%	27.3%	74.2%
2017–2018	0.0%	15.1%	78.0%
2018–2019	0.0%	19.6%	73.9%
2019–2020	0.0%	13.6%	76.2%

“The implementation of [the] Kanyashree project in the last few years and sustained campaigns by the state and central governments for girls’ education in rural areas have contributed to the success,” said an official of the syllabus committee formed by the state School Education Department, reported Deccan Herald. “The importance given to girls’ education by families in Bengal across social strata and campaigns against child marriage have helped achieve this.”¹⁰⁰

The following outcomes data are based on a number of different surveys and assessments using different methodologies and sample sizes. According to the Secretary of the WCD&SW, Kanyashree Prakalpa has had the following achievements:

- **Raised awareness about child marriage:** The scheme has increased public awareness and the media covers more stories on the prevention of child marriage. By reaching 7.5 million girls (more than 50 per cent in the 13–19 age cohort), the scheme is having an effect on large numbers of family members. Apart from Kanyashree’s stated objectives, the scheme gives adolescent girls a platform to raise their own aspirations. Girls speak for themselves, report impending child marriages, and are the eyes and ears of the scheme. This is one unanticipated achievement of the programme.
- **Raised aspirations:** Kanyashree Prakalpa has elevated the status of girls in West Bengal and has raised their educational and job-related aspirations.
- **Financial inclusion of adolescent girls:** The scheme promotes financial inclusion among adolescent girls. According to the 2017 Pratiche Institute report, 85 per cent of girls aged 13–21 years had individual bank accounts.¹⁰¹

99. Navin, Nishi, ‘West Bengal Girls Outnumber Boys in Primary, Secondary Schools: Survey’, *The Logical Indian*, 16 July 2021, <<https://thelogicalindian.com/education/west-bengal-school-education-girl-students-minority-students-29662/>>, accessed 25 January 2022.

100. Ibid.

101. Assessment of Kanyashree Prakalpa.

Box 3: Findings from a 2018 survey of adolescent girls benefiting from the Kanyashree Prakalpa

- **Awareness of the scheme:** All 725 Kanyashree beneficiaries interviewed for the survey were aware of the programme and services provided, and had received the scholarships.
- **Education:** Kanyashree beneficiaries thought that the scheme enabled them to continue their education, opened new employment opportunities and empowered them. Some girls thought that Kanyashree Prakalpa helped overcome social conservatism and restrictions on adolescent girls, while motivating their communities to support girls' education and thereby prevent child marriage.
- **Financial literacy:** Girls learned to manage the direct Kanyashree Prakalpa transfers into their bank accounts and to learn how a bank works.
- **Attitudes towards child marriage:** According to the survey, attitudes have begun to shift against child marriage; girls know the minimum age of marriage and where to seek advice in case of a planned child marriage.
- **Knowledge about the scheme:** SABLA-Kanyashree had positive effects on the education and health of girls in school; however, few out-of-school girls knew much about the two schemes.



7. Monitoring and evaluation

MIS: The Government of West Bengal gathers and publishes output data related to the Kanyashree Prakalpa scheme on an online dashboard.¹⁰² UNICEF provided technical support for the design of a MIS for the scheme. The MIS generates periodic reports for different governance levels and is managed by the National Informatic Centre. MIS data can be accessed on the Kanyashree dashboard and are available by year and by district. Programme monitoring goes beyond cash reporting. Monitoring data are being gathered at block level (a block is a district sub-division and

can contain more than 100 villages) to track progress against targets in schools and to verify applications (quality assurance).

Assessments, reviews and evaluations: UNICEF supported rapid assessments of Kanyashree by Kadence International, but the Kadence report was never made public.¹⁰³ UNICEF also supported an assessment on the SAG-KP convergence and a review of possible cash plus components to be added to the Kanyashree scheme.¹⁰⁴

8. Challenges

While Kanyashree Prakalpa has achieved considerable popularity and success, the scheme faces a number of challenges.

Problem analysis and leadership

Limited inter-departmental convergence:

- Kanyashree Prakalpa was designed for girls in school, but it is being implemented by the WCD&SW with limited involvement of the School Education Department. This weakens the communication between the department and teachers. This issue has to be addressed at the policy level.

Inadequate budget:

- The scheme requires additional financial resources for cash plus activities, including menstrual hygiene management and skills training. Resources for cash plus activities are being allocated to the respective nodal departments.

Implementation: Cash plus components and convergence

Lack of clarity of purpose:

- Community members often regard the annual cash payment as a school stipend, rather than as an incentive to prevent child marriage. “Many parents enrolled their girl child in this scheme because they considered that the [one-time grant] could help cover the cost of their daughter’s marriage.”¹⁰⁵ There is also an expectation that the recipients of the Kanyashree scheme will receive preferential access to government and other jobs.

Cash plus components:

- While the cash transfer components are solid, it is too early to assess the results of the cash components. Further investments are needed in life skills education, access to services and to skills training. The challenge is that cash plus components are more complex and multi-disciplinary, and hence more difficult to execute than cash components.

102. Kanyashree Online 5.0: <www.wbkanyashree.gov.in/kp_4.0/index.php>.

103. *Rapid Assessment of Kanyashree Prakalpa 2016-17*. According to documentation from UNICEF <www.wbkanyashree.gov.in/readwrite/notice_publications/000225.pdf> and the Government of West Bengal <www.wbkanyashree.gov.in/readwrite/publications/000239.pdf>, “Three rapid assessments of Kanyashree Prakalpa will be conducted by Kadence International in 2016 as intensive, qualitative inquiries using triangulation, iterative data analysis, and additional data collection to develop an understanding of the scheme from the perspective of its beneficiaries as well as those who implement it on the ground. The findings of these rapid assessments will be regularly presented to the Government for the ongoing enhancement of scheme features and to boost its efficiency & effectiveness.”

104. Jejeebhoy, *Promising Directions*.

105. *Assessment of Kanyashree Prakalpa*, p. x.

Application process:

- Applicants to the scheme often face delays without knowing where the bottlenecks are. In the early years of the scheme, the online application portal received a high volume of applications and provided no feedback to applicants. The grievance redressal mechanism improved the situation, but the application process is still not working perfectly and needs further improvements. Documentation required to verify eligibility is cumbersome and deprives the most marginalized from accessing services.¹⁰⁶ Other hurdles include incorrect information provided by schools and difficulties in opening zero-balance bank accounts.¹⁰⁷

Declining impact and high drop-out rate:

- Initially, Kanyashree led to a significant increase in school attendance. However, over the years, this impact seems to have weakened and the drop-out rates after grade 8 remain high. There are several possible reasons for this: the K2 payment has remained unchanged at 25,000 rupees and may be insufficient;¹⁰⁸ an increase in self-initiated marriages among adolescents; and the poor quality of education in government schools that requires additional private tutoring, which poor families cannot afford.¹⁰⁹

Monitoring and evaluation

Data:

- While the Kanyashree programme is producing up-to-date statistics on the number of girls reached, it has been more difficult to calculate an accurate percentage of girls benefiting from the scheme. The MIS for Kanyashree Prakalpa and for the education system are not linked. As a result, target figures have to be estimated and an accurate calculation of the percentage of girls reached has not been possible. The change in eligibility criteria further complicates the generation of statistics.¹¹⁰

Evaluation:

- There is a need to carry out an evaluation in order to quantify the achievements of the Kanyashree scheme. An earlier evaluation did not meet minimum quality standards and was not made public. UNICEF could enlist the services of a world-class research firm and assure the quality of the evaluation.



106. *Assessment of Kanyashree Prakalpa.*

107. *Rapid Assessment of Kanyashree Prakalpa 2016-17; Jejeebhoy, Promising Directions.*

108. Girls get married before completing secondary school because: (a) parents want to avoid extra-marital sex and unwanted pregnancy; (b) younger girls require less dowry and are cheaper to marry off; (c) girls' roles are seen mainly as mothers and wives, rather than having a career (low labour force participation rate).

109. Dutta and Sen, *Kanyashree Prakalpa in West Bengal, India.*

110. Information from Prabhat Kumar (UNICEF) and the WCD&SW Secretary.

9. Lessons

Implementation: Cash plus activities and convergence

Agency of adolescent girls:

- Girls receive their benefits. The annual scholarships are deposited on time in the girls' own bank accounts.
- Collectives of girls are important to increase the confidence and self-efficacy of girls, to provide mutual support and to address risks and prevent child marriage.
- Some girls are able to resist child marriage, but many do not. It is not fair to put the onus on adolescent girls to stop their marriages, especially not in the Indian context, where marriages are arranged by parents and families.

Secondary school completion:

- While school enrolment and attendance of adolescent girls has increased in line with the Kanyashree programme's objectives, large numbers of girls continue to drop out of school upon completing the lower secondary level. This indicates that even a substantial cash incentive of 25,000 rupees has not been sufficient to overcome the multiple barriers that prevent many girls from transitioning to upper secondary level.

More than cash:

- Cash alone is not enough to prevent child marriage in this context. There is a need for a change in attitudes of parents, teachers and community workers; capacity enhancement of health and Anganwadi (rural child care) workers; and of government officials.
- There is a need to do more cash plus activities. Kanyashree Prakalpa has raised girls' aspirations

and expectations. They now look for opportunities beyond the annual scholarships to realize their aspirations, including higher education, skills training and employment opportunities.

- The Kanyashree scheme has to provide more than cash transfers to nurture girls and their aspirations.

Life skills:

- Life skills education for adolescent girls is very important, and not just to prevent child marriage. When girls are empowered through life skills, they are more aware of their rights and are better able to respond to the risks they are facing.

Economic opportunities:

- An expansion of economic opportunities for women is needed to create an incentive for girls to complete their education rather than to marry early. This goes beyond the scope of the Kanyashree scheme.
- There is a need to form linkages with additional departments responsible for higher education, skills training and employment. UNICEF could look at synergies with government departments (jobs and higher education for girls).

Multisectoral and interdepartmental convergence:

- There is a need for multisectoral interventions to end child marriage.
- Sustaining inter-departmental convergence is very challenging and requires government leadership to maintain the momentum.
- Kanyashree Prakalpa is the number one scheme for the WCD&SW, but not for the School Education Department. There is a need to simplify the processes and make it easier for school staff to administer the scheme. Simplifying the administration of Kanyashree would make it less onerous for school staff to implement the scheme and would improve inter-departmental convergences.

10. Way forward

Greater convergence between implementing departments will be promoted through the adolescent cell set up under the WCD&SW in 2020. This unit facilitates communication and coordination between different government departments providing services for adolescents.

District action plans were rolled out in 2021 to engage panchayats and other community-level stakeholders to promote Kanyashree Prakalpa and end child marriage. The plans aim to harmonize the objectives of Kanyashree Prakalpa and those of ending child marriage. Developed with UNICEF support, the plans promote gender-transformative approaches and have embedded a system of regular child marriage reporting and tracking of progress against key results at district and state levels.

Strengthening of vocational training for girls aged 16 as part of the cash plus components is recommended.

The state scheme for vocational training and skills development (Utkarsha Bangla under the Technical Education Department) has been working with the WCD&SW through 'Swapnabhor', a special initiative aimed at adolescent girls. UNICEF is also supporting the department to strengthen this component by developing appropriate content (digital and financial literacy, career counselling, etc.). In 2021, UNICEF supported a mapping of existing content which the department plans to send to all girls' platforms.

Assessing effects on adolescent girls is necessary. In the absence of an impact evaluation, UNICEF and the WCD&SW will explore options for assessing the difference that the Kanyashree scheme is making in girls' lives and in relation to child marriage. This includes analysing the trends in teenage pregnancy, menstrual hygiene management, adolescent anaemia and girls' drop-out rates.



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Case study 3

Mukhyamantri Kanya Utthan Yojana in Bihar, India

Key messages¹¹¹

The following messages can be drawn from the experiences of influencing the MKUY scheme in Bihar. They may be relevant for other countries considering leveraging large-scale social protection programmes to accelerate ending child marriage.

Aspect	Key Learnings
Problem analysis and leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is important that child marriage is recognized as a problem. Initially, the Government of Bihar did not consider child marriage to be a problem in the state. Child marriage was considered a norm in Bihar and the Government feared that challenging this norm would be unpopular and result in backlash from its voting base. • Girls lack opportunities to pursue alternative life paths. Child marriage in Bihar is caused by a combination of social, cultural, economic and systemic factors. • Data have the power to enact change. A presentation of the district-wide analysis of child marriage data and of the child marriage prevention programme supported by UNICEF led the Chief Minister (Head of Government) to acknowledge that child marriage was indeed an issue that had to be tackled. This pivotal moment of change took the cooperation between UNICEF and the State Government to the next level and led to the mass mobilization of the 14,000-kilometre human chain to end child marriage. • Global evidence can be influential. UNICEF shared global evidence on what works to end child marriage with the Government of Bihar. UNICEF has a strategic advantage in accessing and disseminating global evidence. • Data analysis is needed to answer specific questions. By analysing state- and district-level data, UNICEF was able to support and influence the Government of Bihar to accept that child marriage was a problem and had to be tackled.
Programme design for cash plus activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Umbrella scheme. The Government of Bihar launched the MKUY scheme in 2018. MKUY is an umbrella scheme that provides financial support and assistance in the form of 23 conditional cash transfers over a girl's life course from birth to 21 years of age. • Enhancing the well-being of girls. The goals of the scheme are to improve social outcomes for girls and empower them to take advantage of opportunities that enhance their well-being. Key objectives are to eliminate gender-biased sex selection and the distortion of the sex ratio; address key health concerns such as immunization and menstrual hygiene; ensure secondary school completion; encourage tertiary-level education and a career orientation among girls; and prevent child marriage. • Government funded. MKUY is fully funded by the Government of Bihar and has reached more than 800,000 girls since its inception in 2018. • Conditionalities. While MKUY is universal rather than means based (it is not focused on the poorest families), it comes with various conditionalities (birth registration, school attendance, not getting married before age 18). • Leaving no one behind. MKUY may exclude the most vulnerable, out-of-school girls. • Pilot programmes. UNICEF supported pilot programmes to end child marriage in three districts. The pilots provided UNICEF with context-specific evidence that was used for advocacy and programme design at the state level. • Gender transformation. Cash transfer schemes without additional components do not maximize investments for gender transformation. • Cash plus interventions. UNICEF commissioned a review to identify cash plus elements that could be added to the MKUY scheme.
Implementation: Cash plus components and convergence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The importance of outcomes. Line departments focus on reaching targets, rather than outcomes that would make a transformation in the lives of women and girls. • Convergence between line departments is challenging and faces resistance. Technology is helping to strengthen inter-departmental convergence. For example, digitizing birth registration records streamlined the provision of social welfare benefits and facilitated inter-departmental coordination. • State plan of action and district plans of action. These plans of action to end child marriage and dowry payments provided a framework for collaboration across departments and agencies to end child marriage. • Capacity development is important. UNICEF developed a training package to build the capacity of seven departments and ensure that their staff know their roles in preventing child marriage.
Monitoring and evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring is essential to programme improvement. Line departments are resisting an integrated MIS. Monitoring is key to improving programme delivery, learning about what works and what does not, and strengthening the accountability of service providers and decision makers. • Maintaining funding levels is an ongoing challenge. It remains to be seen whether the political will and initial allocations of public funds will be maintained over the medium and long term. • Monitoring and evaluation. UNICEF is playing an important role in strengthening government monitoring systems (integrated MIS) to support implementation research and evaluation, and to build evidence that is being used to adjust the MKUY.

111. This case study of Bihar's efforts is based on a number of documents shared by the UNICEF India and Bihar teams; a Zoom call with Sayed Mansoor Umar Qadri and Gargi Saha from the child protection team and Urvashi Kaushik, the social policy specialist at UNICEF Patna; key informant interviews with Prabhat Ghosh and Barna Ganguly from Asian Development Research Institute (partner agency for social policy and child budget work in Bihar), Abhijit Mukherjee from Plan India, and Saurabh Kumar from ActionAid Bihar; and additional information and comments provided by the UNICEF Bihar team on the case study.

Key messages in relation to UNICEF’s capacities and the resources required to influence large-scale social protection programmes:

- **Partnerships are important.** Over the years, UNICEF has become a trusted partner of the Government of Bihar, providing support as necessary. This has enabled the organization to influence MKUY’s direction.

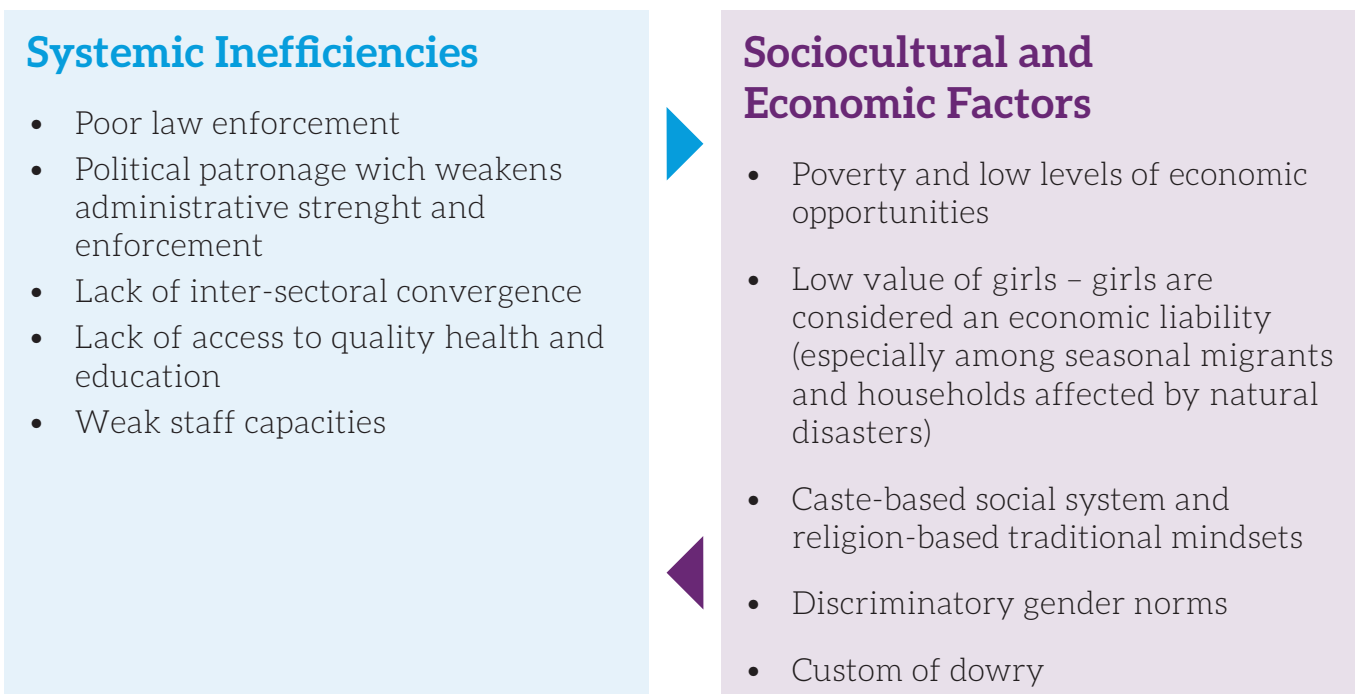
- **Experienced and creative staff make a difference.** UNICEF’s effectiveness depends on staff who understand ‘how the system works’ and how to influence senior decision makers; have the creativity to propose effective mechanisms that strengthen inter-departmental convergence; and are committed to following these processes over the long term.
- **Multisectoral collaboration is key.** The different programme sections at UNICEF in Bihar have worked as one team. The social policy team played a key technical role related to social protection, data analysis, monitoring and MIS.

1. Child marriage in Bihar

Bihar is a state in northern India with a population of about 104 million people.¹¹² According to 2016 household survey data, 60 per cent of women in Bihar were married before reaching age 18. By the time of the 2019/2020 survey, this rate had declined

to 42 per cent.¹¹³ Despite this decline, Bihar remains the state with the highest rate of child marriage in India. Child marriage is caused by a combination of social, cultural, economic and systemic factors (see *Figure 12*).

Figure 12: Factors contributing to the high prevalence of child marriage in Bihar¹¹⁴



112. Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India, 2011 census data, <https://censusindia.gov.in/2011census/population_enumeration.html>, accessed 25 January 2022.

113. Percentage of women 20–49 first married or in union by age 15 and 18, *National Family 2019–20 Health Survey*. In the previous survey, Bihar’s child marriage rate stood at 60 per cent.

114. Adapted from Jain, Megha, *Process Documentation: Campaign for ending child marriage and dowry in Bihar*, UNICEF, New York, 2021.

2. Child marriage programming

Until 2017, the Government of Bihar was reluctant to acknowledge that child marriage was a problem and to take decisive action to end the practice. This reluctance was at least in part based on the fact that child marriage and dowry are deeply entrenched social norms in Bihar and have not changed much despite legal prohibitions reaching back decades.¹¹⁵ Ruling political parties may also have felt that they had little to gain from tackling these issues and expending financial and political capital on promoting gender equality in a deeply conservative and highly patriarchal state.

Forging strategic partnerships: Between 2009 and 2011, UNICEF supported its first child marriage prevention pilots in Gaya, Nawada and Vaishali districts. The organization partnered with the district administration, the local government Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI)¹¹⁶ and the Art of Living (a faith-based organization) to generate large-scale awareness and build capacities of stakeholders at district, block and village levels related to the prevention of child marriage. This partnership marked the beginning of a dialogue with district administrations and subsequently with the state-level government, paving the way for government and popular recognition that child marriage had to be tackled in Bihar. Successful advocacy and engagement strategies included the formation of a cadre of young community mobilizers; capacity-building of the PRI (local government) and key departments at all levels; and work with law enforcement agencies. This led to the initiation of a dialogue with multiple stakeholders and improved convergence at the ground level to prevent child marriage. UNICEF also forged a new partnership with the Women Development Corporation at the state level to host interventions to prevent child marriage.

Building political support: Between 2015 and 2017, UNICEF supported additional initiatives to engage the Government of Bihar to bring about a change in its approach to child marriage. This work included support for community engagement and awareness raising through the Ministry of Human Resource Development's Mahila Samakhya programme; however, the cut in central government funding for the programme brought this work to a halt in 2017. Subsequently, UNICEF supported the Government's analysis and discussion of data from the 2015–2016 National Family Health Survey (NFHS 4), particularly in relation to anaemia among adolescent girls, female literacy rate, violence against women, and other related indicators.

Pivotal moment of change: Evidence-based advocacy was a critical catalyst for change. At the March 2017 periodic review meeting of the Directorate of Social Welfare, a presentation was made of the Child Marriage Prevention Programme supported by UNICEF. At the meeting, the Chief Minister (Head of Government) acknowledged that child marriage was indeed an issue that had to be tackled. This was a pivotal moment of change that took the cooperation between UNICEF and the State Government to the next level. Following the review meeting, the Bihar Government launched a campaign to prevent child marriage and dowry. UNICEF acted as a technical partner for the government campaign.

In 2017, political will was ignited in Bihar to reduce child marriage and dowry. This change in attitude was a result of several factors, some historical and some ongoing. In the same year, a campaign to end child marriage broadcast positive messages via print, electronic and social media, and led to mass mobilization across the state. Some commentators likened the campaign to a social movement. Having high-level political support helped to bring about large-scale change in the mindsets of government cadres from state to district and sub-district levels. It offered an opportunity for the ruling party of Bihar to demonstrate support for women's equality, with the added benefit of consolidating political support among Bihar's young female population.

Human chain: On 21 January 2018, under the leadership of the Chief Minister, the State Government galvanized its entire politico-administrative machinery to form the world's longest human chain to demonstrate public support and solidarity for the campaign against child marriage and dowry. Large crowds estimated at 5.2 million people – including children, elderly people, housewives, students, officials, workers and people from all walks of life – formed a 14,000-kilometre-long human chain across the state, ranging from busy national and state highways to rural roads and narrow village lanes. School students, mainly girls, shouted slogans opposing child marriage and dowry. The programme was recorded by 40 drone cameras with live telecast to connect more people. A movie prepared on the occasion was later shown in 127 cinemas across the state.

115. Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1929: <<https://wcd.nic.in/child-marriage-restraint-act-1929-19-1929>>; Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961: <<https://wcd.nic.in/act/dowry-prohibition-act-1961>>.

116. Panchayati Raj (Council of five officials) is the system of local self-government of villages in rural India: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panchayati_raj_in_India>.

Support to the campaign: With the launch of the campaign, the State Government set mechanisms in place to support the roll-out of critical interventions across all districts and Panchayats (local government units). Task forces were constituted across all administrative units to ensure that messages reached every household. Events such as the human chain and the engagement with PRIs created the momentum and openness towards addressing the issue of child marriage at the community level.

Partnership with civil society: Following the campaign, UNICEF partnered with Action Aid (under the purview of the Women Development Corporation) to form 40,000 adolescent groups among the most marginalized populations in 13 districts. A cadre of facilitators (Vikas Mitras) was trained by UNICEF and the corporation.

Technical working group: A working group was formed, with UNICEF as technical partner, to connect the different strategies in order to achieve greater leverage and quicker results, and build an effective policy environment. The working group discussed a multi-pronged approach, including law enforcement, social protection, and social and behaviour change promotion among elected representatives to address child marriage from a child rights and gender equality perspective, and to support girls' empowerment.

Advancing research and evidence to influence policies: In 2017, UNICEF published *Supporting Adolescent Transition to Adulthood: What works and what doesn't*.¹¹⁷ This study, and especially the policy paths elaborated within it, formed the cornerstone for advocacy for the establishment of MKUY (see Box 4).

Box 4: Policy paths

Delaying marriage

- Use regular and recurring cash or in-kind transfers over a period of time to incentivize girls and families to delay marriage.
- Explore incentives for out-of-school girls to delay marriage and bring them into the education and skills system.
- Account for the decision-making demographic in empowerment programmes.
- Enable women and girls to take a stronger/prominent role in communities and enhance the achievement of their aspirations to contribute to society.

Improving secondary education

- Reduce costs of education.
- Create visibility and knowledge on and linkages with the existing schemes.
- Address barriers that disproportionately affect girls.
- Apply pedagogical solutions to impact learning.
- Understand the challenge of comprehensive impacts.

Facilitating transition to work

- Integrate technical and non-cognitive (life skills) competencies for better transition to work.
- Link training programmes to tangible workforce opportunities.
- Address needs of women to prepare for a stronger workforce.
- Include adolescents in training programmes as potential workforce where appropriate.
- Provide information on market opportunities.

Evidence-based strategies to end child marriage:

Once high-level political will was secured to tackle child marriage, UNICEF was able to expand its collaboration with the Government of Bihar to end the practice. In 2018, UNICEF reviewed the existing evidence and theory of change and identified keeping girls in school as the most effective action the Government could take to prevent child marriage. The organization supported a review of what the Ministry of Education was already doing to keep girls in school and to improve the learning outcomes of adolescent girls. The review mapped existing cash transfer programmes implemented by the Ministry of Education to support the costs of school

uniforms, textbooks, menstrual hygiene for girls, and bicycles for secondary school entrants. UNICEF also commissioned a fiscal space analysis to identify additional areas for investments. Based on these analyses, the organization advocated for universalized cash grants and removal of income criteria; integration of all education grants from grade 1 to grade 12 to strengthen the life-cycle approach; and the creation of a milestone grant for ending child marriage and for completing secondary education.

The next section presents the development and evaluation of an umbrella cash transfer scheme to tackle child marriage and dowry.

117. United Nations Children's Fund and J-PAL, *Supporting Adolescent Transition To Adulthood: What works and what doesn't*, UNICEF, New Delhi, 2017.

3. Mukhyamantri Kanya Utthan Yojana programme

A main component of the Government of Bihar's response was the development of a conditional cash

transfer scheme designed to reduce rates of child marriage and tackle dowry (see Box 5).

Box 5: Summary of Mukhyamantri Kanya Utthan Yojana (MKUY)

- The Government of Bihar launched the MKUY scheme in 2018.
- MKUY is an umbrella scheme that provides financial support and assistance in the form of 23 conditional cash transfers over a girl's life course from birth to 21 years of age.
- The goals of the scheme are to improve social outcomes for girls and empower them to take advantage of opportunities that enhance their well-being. Key objectives are to eliminate gender-biased sex selection and the distortion of the sex ratio; address key health concerns such as immunization and menstrual hygiene; ensure secondary school completion; encourage tertiary-level education and a career orientation among girls; and prevent child marriage.
- MKUY is being implemented by the Departments of Women and Child Development, Education and Health.¹¹⁸

Creating an enabling environment for policy framework: Following the successful mass mobilization, the Government included UNICEF in high-level discussions on how to sustain the gains of the campaign. These discussions resulted in the Chief Minister's launch of a seven-point agenda which included youth employment and skills development, better access to higher education and the empowerment of women, and a quota of government jobs reserved for female applicants. The Government of Bihar released a vision document on investing in the second decade of life, reinforcing efforts to eliminate child marriage and dowry, and ending harmful social practices. The Government also appointed the Managing Director of the Women Development Corporation as 'State Dowry Prohibition Officer' and district welfare officers as 'District Dowry Prohibition Officers'.

Launching the MKUY scheme to fund the State Action Plan for Elimination of Child Marriages and Dowry: Intensified engagement with state legislators and local influencers led to positive policy change for children, including a landmark decision in the state to provide cash incentives in support of newborn girl survival. Following continuous advocacy efforts from UNICEF and NGO partners, the Bihar State Government incorporated 'child marriage and dowry' as a priority agenda point for the State Government in 2018 with a new multi-million dollar scheme launched that provided funding towards the implementation of the state action plan.

Promoting gender equality: The MKUY scheme aims to promote women's empowerment and improve the health, education and social status of girl children. The scheme provides a financial incentive to parents who keep their daughters in school through graduation, thus enabling the delay in marriage.

Box 6: UNICEF interventions in collaboration with the Government of Bihar's strategy to end child marriage and dowry

- **Policy level:** Policy advocacy, legislative reform and support for MKUY social welfare scheme. This work is being led by UNICEF's social policy programme.
- **Plans of action:** State plans of action and district plans of action to end child marriage and dowry payments.
- **Capacity development:** Training package developed by UNICEF for seven key line departments responsible for the implementation of MKUY (health, education, Panchayati Raj, tribal, social welfare, etc.). This has been used for a cascade training so departments and their staff know their roles in preventing child marriage.
- **Community mobilization:** At scale with a focus on changing gender norms.
- **Evidence building:** Supporting evidence-building pilots before they are being scaled up by the Government.
- **Monitoring and evaluation:** Support for implementation research, integrated MIS, monitoring and evaluation.

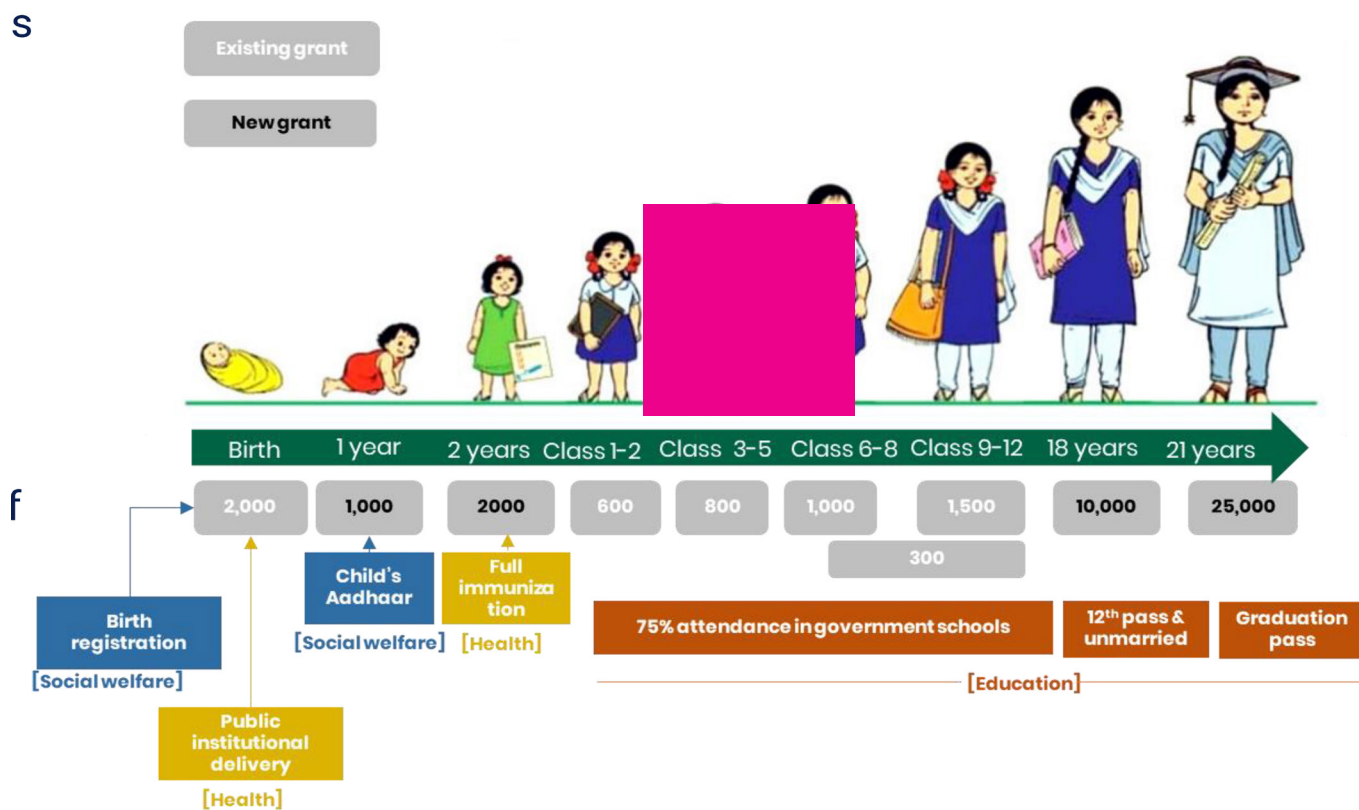
118. Kaushik, Urvashi (UNICEF), and Preksha Golchha (EPRI), 'Moving Towards an Integrated System for Social Protection: Development of a social registry,' abstract for Social Protection Research and Policy Conference: From Evidence to Action in Asia and Pacific.

4. Pathways of change

Providing client-tailored services: With support from the UNICEF social policy section in Delhi, the UNICEF Bihar team explored options for consolidating existing schemes under a new umbrella cash transfer scheme for adolescent girls in Bihar.¹¹⁹ The review found that Bihar supported 23 separate transfer schemes to keep girls in school and that the implementation of these schemes was fragmented across different line

departments. None of these schemes had received sustained funding over many years. It is common for new government schemes to receive large budget allocations at the outset, with rapid fall-offs in available resources in subsequent years. Following the review, the Government of Bihar, with technical support from UNICEF, considered seven schemes for inclusion under the umbrella of a new scheme, MKUY (see Figure 13).

Figure 13: MKUY cash grants and milestones along girls' lives from 0 to 21 years¹²⁰



119. *The Bihar State Action Plan for Elimination of Child Marriages and Dowry in Bihar* by Lahiri (2017; updated 2019) is the only action plan from the Global Programme that includes a review of existing large-scale government programmes related to adolescent girls.

120. From: OPM presentation: Concurrent assessment of Mukhyamantri Kanya Utthan Yojana.

5. Cash plus components

Promoting gender equality: While cash transfers are important and, if large enough, may play a significant social protection role, they alone are not sufficient to enable adolescents to make a successful transition into adulthood. For this to happen, a multisectoral approach is needed that supplements cash transfers with programmes that address the vulnerabilities that young people – and particularly girls – face.¹²¹ UNICEF commissioned a review to identify evidence on what works to end child marriage in India and to adapt the Global Programme theory of change to the context of Bihar. The review identified components that could enhance the effectiveness of cash transfers and strengthen the effects of MKUY on social and gender transformation.¹²²

The evidence-based review found that:

- MKUY is not addressing gender-based discrimination
- Line departments are focusing exclusively on cash transfers
- Cash transfer delivery is not accompanied by community education activities

- Implementation of MKUY faces operational limitations
- The most vulnerable and marginalized girls risk being excluded from MKUY.

The review identified five evidence-informed strategies to enhance the social transformational potential of MKUY (see Table 14): Keeping girls in school; building gender-transformative life skills in school and community settings; encouraging the school-to-work transition; engaging boys; and engaging parents. These strategies were identified as fitting well with MKUY and the public sector platforms that deliver the programme. Five additional strategies were identified that present a more difficult fit with MKUY: Reaching married girls; engaging influential community members; engaging law enforcement authorities; improving the quality and reach of facilities and services; and using the media. While these strategies can help reduce the drivers of marriage for girls, they go beyond the current design, scope and operational capacity of MKUY and may need to be pursued through other platforms.

Table 14: Enhancing the social transformational potential of MKUY – cash plus components¹²³

Good fit with MKUY	More difficult fit with MKUY
Keeping girls in school	Reaching married girls
Building gender-transformative life skills in school and community settings	Engaging influential community members
Encouraging the school-to-work transition	Engaging law enforcement authorities
Engaging boys	Improving the quality and reach of facilities and services
Engaging parents	Using the media

Commitment to gender equality: The Women Empowerment Policy of 2015 defines the obligations of the Government of Bihar to promote gender parity, quality nutrition, health and sanitation, literacy and education opportunities for women and adolescents; measures to prevent violence against women; livelihood and employment opportunities for women; and inclusion of women in political decision making. The Government of Bihar reserves 50 per cent of all elected local government head positions for women. A total of 33 per cent of higher education places are reserved for girls. The Government also implements the flagship rural employment guarantee scheme, which provides equal wages for women and men and ensures that 55 per cent of the workers are women.

Promoting accountability and participation: The review noted the need to explore collaboration between platforms such as the Departments of Social Welfare, Education and Health, and the Women Development Corporation that are currently delivering the MKUY programme, with others, such as the Department of Youth Affairs and Sports, and the Skill India Mission, as well as with civil society organizations that have experience implementing gender-transformative life skills programmes, and building provider capacity. Based on the recommendations of the review, UNICEF worked with the Bihar Department of Social Welfare to develop the MKUY Plus programme. Plus components will be piloted in 22 of Bihar's 38 districts. The Women Development Corporation is particularly keen on strengthening digital and financial literacy for adolescents.

121. Rationale provided in the child marriage evidence review: Jejeebhoy, *Ending Child Marriage in India: Drivers and strategies*, UNICEF India, New Delhi, 2019.

122. Jejeebhoy, *Ending Child Marriage in India*.

123. Based on: Jejeebhoy, *Ending Child Marriage in India*.

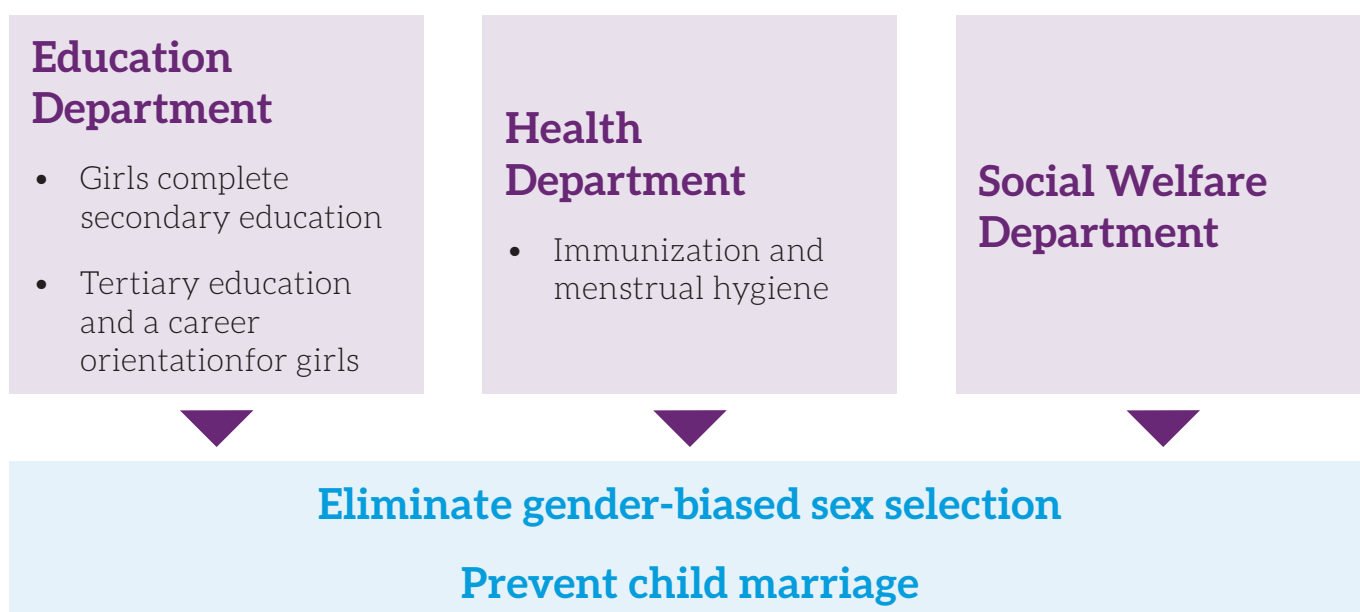
6. Advocacy and programme support

Promoting accountability and participation:

Implementation of MKUY involves the Departments of Social Welfare, Health, and Education (see Figure 14).¹²⁴ UNICEF has been providing technical advice to

the Government of Bihar on the design of the scheme and has commissioned research on various aspects to optimize roll-out.

Figure 14: MKUY outcomes and responsible departments



As of May 2021, the cumulative number of girls receiving benefits was 814,298. Prior to the launch of MKUY, the total expenditures for similar cash transfer schemes amounted to US\$180 million per year. After the introduction of the new programme, the overall government commitment increased to US\$320 million – 1 per cent of the state budget in 2021. Although this is a significant amount, it will be important to see if this level of financing will be maintained in subsequent years. Moreover, allocations and expenditures for MKUY have remained significantly lower than the published budget figure. UNICEF is planning to conduct a public expenditure review in order to generate new evidence related to outcomes and the level of government spending on MKUY (see Table 15 on performance and spending of the programme).

Reducing inequities and ensuring no one is left behind: MKUY aims to benefit 16 million girls a year

by threading other stand-alone cash grants together into a single, unified cash transfer scheme that is universal and does not require means testing (as it once did). It provides top-up payments for girls beyond the amounts paid for boys. However, MKUY is available only to girls attending school; out-of-school girls are excluded. Transfers are also limited to the first two girls per family, in support of the Government's effort to reduce birth rates. Birth grants require birth certification, but only 65 per cent of births are registered in Bihar and no cash grants are paid for the births of unregistered girls. In addition to school attendance and birth registration, MKUY applicants are required to be immunized and to own an Aadhar ID card.¹²⁵ This card is being used to integrate access to all government services and transfers, including emergency assistance. As a result of these conditionalities and criteria, the implementation of MKUY requires considerable operational capacity.

124. Government of Bihar and UNICEF Bihar, *Mukhyamantri Kanya Utthan Yojana Monitoring, Learning, Cash Plus and Evaluation*, 2019, unpublished; Women Development Corporation and United Nations Children's Fund, *Integrating Universal Girl Child Cash Transfers–Mukhyamantri Kanya Utthan Yojana, Bihar, India*, UNICEF, New Delhi, 2019.

125. An Aadhaar card is a unique number issued to every citizen in India and is a centralized and universal identification number. The Aadhaar card is a biometric document that stores an individual's personal details in a government database, and is fast becoming the Government's base for public welfare and citizen services. The priority of the Government is to give women access to Aadhaar cards and to welfare services and transfers.

Table 15: MKUY performance and spending¹²⁶

Department	Scheme	Total beneficiaries	Transfer amount in rupees	Transfer amount in US dollars ¹²⁷	Per beneficiary
Department of Social Welfare	Mukhyamantri Kanya Utthan Yojana	726,114	699,940,000	9,099,220	
Department of Education	Mukhyamantri Kanya Utthan Yojana – Mukhyamantri Balika (Graduate) Protsahan Yojana	313,583	1,935,875,000	25,166,375	
State Health Committee	Mukhyamantri Kanya Utthan Yojana – Institutional delivery	243,035	284,344,000	3,696,472	
State Health Committee	Mukhyamantri Kanya Utthan Yojana – Complete vaccination	60,188	120,174,000	1,562,262	
Total		1,342,920¹²⁸	3,040,333,000	\$39,524,329	\$29



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126. MKUY outputs as of 10 December 2021 from the National Informatics Centre: <<https://ekalyan.bih.nic.in/>>.

127. Exchange rate on 10 December 2021: 1 USD = 75.60 INR.

128. Cumulative number – no double-counting of beneficiaries.

7. Monitoring and evaluation

UNICEF supported the Government's monitoring system to measure the performance and assess the effectiveness of MKUY, as well as to develop an instrument for transparency and accountability. The organization adapted the Global Programme's theory of change to the context of Bihar to form the basis for monitoring the implementation of MKUY. However, no baseline was carried out before the implementation of MKUY was begun.

Integrated MIS: UNICEF Bihar is working with the Directorate of Social Welfare to develop an integrated MIS as a common gateway for tracking the effects of cash transfers. Specifically, the organization aims to integrate health, education and child protection MIS to measure the effects of cash grants on girls longitudinally (over the years). In order to link different departmental MIS, UNICEF commissioned a review of integrated MIS. However, efforts to create an integrated MIS faced a number of challenges: MIS are siloed by line departments and these government departments are not interested in an integrated MIS for education, health and social welfare. Moreover, until recently, education data were not digitized and not centralized in one education MIS. However, over the past 18 months, the data of 18 million children were digitized (including payment information, parent information, etc.).¹²⁹

Concurrent monitoring and process evaluation: Building on the integrated MIS, UNICEF proposes to conduct quarterly monitoring surveys to assess the reach of the scheme and identify which groups of beneficiaries are excluded. The monitoring surveys

will be complemented with more in-depth methods, including interviews and focus groups with accredited social health activists, Anganwadi workers, adolescent girls, parents, community leaders, government officials and other key stakeholders to understand what is working well and where the main bottlenecks exist in rolling out the scheme to all eligible beneficiaries. These interviews will also assist with the development of a grievance redressal system, easier cash-out options and the design of the 'plus' components.¹³⁰

Evaluation: UNICEF Bihar is now working with the UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre on a randomized controlled trial of MKUY in order to learn more about the effects and effectiveness of the scheme in Bihar. UNICEF proposes to assist the Government of Bihar to design a rigorous evaluation to track and guide the implementation of the MKUY cash transfer programme and to illuminate which of the cash plus components (menstrual hygiene management in schools, parenting programmes, life skills education and/or any other complementary service designed to increase the effectiveness of the cash transfer) are most effective for keeping girls in school and out of wedlock during different stages of adolescence. The organization proposes a two-step approach to ensure the programme is operating efficiently and achieving the desired impact: Concurrent monitoring and process evaluation during the early stages of the programme; and a 'proof-of-concept' impact evaluation to determine which of the plus components are most effective in enhancing the reach of the cash, for which girls, during which stage of the life cycle.¹³¹

129. For more information see: Kaushik and Golchha (EPRI): 'Moving Towards an Integrated System for Social Protection'.

130. Balvin, Nikola, *Evaluation of MKUY, 2017*, unpublished.

131. Ibid.

8. Challenges

This section explores various challenges related to the different priorities and interests of the Government of Bihar (politicians), line departments (service providers) and UNICEF (international technical organization).

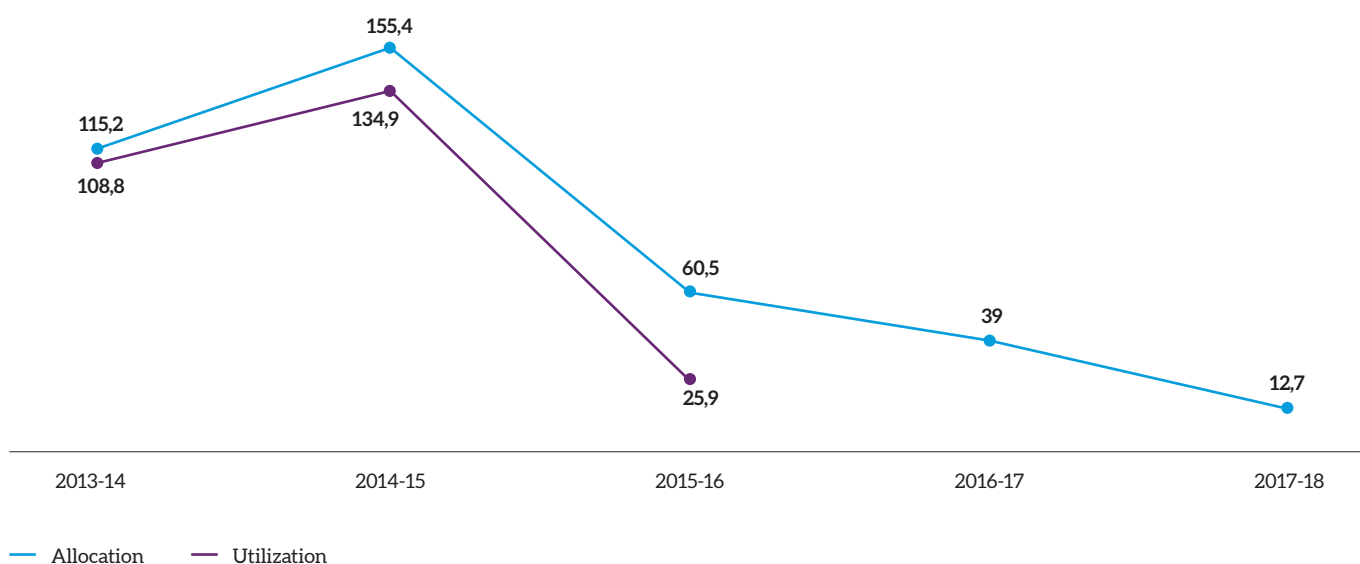
Problem analysis and leadership

Rapid scale-up versus piloting for effectiveness: The Government of Bihar is keen to rapidly scale up cash plus, while UNICEF is in favour of piloting the approach in a few districts to ensure the interventions are effective before going to scale. The

Government's rush to scale up is based on a common political calculation, where cash transfers and other government hand-outs are seen as a political dole-out. According to this rationale, the highly mediated launch of a new scheme, followed by rapid roll-out, translates into political dividends for the ruling party at the next election.

This approach has several downsides. Most importantly, interventions are often scaled up without having been proven to be effective. Another concern is that the programme will follow the common pattern involving high initial government spending during the first few years of a scheme, which is then followed by a rapid decline in expenditures. This way of working is depicted in Figure 15.¹³²

Figure 15: Financial allocations and utilization of MKUY (in 10 million rupees)



The line departments responsible for the delivery of cash transfers and services are acutely aware of this political calculation. Knowing that budget levels may decline after the first few years of implementation of a new scheme, line departments have not shared the politicians' level of enthusiasm for the roll-out of MKUY. Although political will at the highest level

has driven the roll-out of the cash transfer scheme, the same degree of urgency has not yet materialized across implementing departments. This situation is also evident from the budgetary allocations against the target numbers. Lower allocation amounts result in low demand generation and the 'go slow tactics' used by the administration.

132. Lahiri, *Evaluation of MKUY*.

Programme design for cash plus components

A study based on key informant interviews and on programme data from the first round of process monitoring of MKUY conducted in two districts found that, despite stated policy commitment towards integration, the programmatic approach remains conceptual and not operational. The programmatic identity is superseded by that of disparate constituent transfers. The budget provisioning remains siloed and guidelines leave implementation modalities to individual departments. The lack of a common enrolment gateway implies duplicative administrative burden on both beneficiaries and front-line cadres. An integrated MIS that could have enabled tracking over the life cycle and consolidated monitoring of the programme is a work in progress. The outreach materials across departments are not uniform, diluting the programme's intent, for the messaging does not reflect the life-cycle approach of supporting transitions across key stages of a girl's life. Acute staff shortages and limited training – combined with the imbalanced focus on achieving targets – reinforce the same gendered attitudes the programme intends to change.¹³³

Typically, line departments work in isolation from each other, which makes it difficult to coordinate across those working in health, education and social welfare. Line departments focus on achieving targets (e.g., number of girls receiving cash payments), rather than on outcomes that require convergent interventions from different departments. As already mentioned, these deeply entrenched structures and attitudes have hampered the development of an integrated MIS. They have also made coordination between departments difficult, since no single unit is responsible for oversight, budget allocations and disbursements. As a result, the Health Department makes payments at district level, the Social Welfare Department at state level, and the Education Department at school level. Moreover, at district level, each department has its own mechanisms for supervision and quality control, which are not linked with those of other departments.

Additional challenges include the lack of a reliable banking system, and unreliable connectivity. As a result, cash transfers are not made in a timely manner, zero-balance accounts are not permitted and accounts are being penalized if they do not contain a cash balance. Also problematic is the fact that field-level functionaries have not been oriented about MKUY and how it differs from programmes they had implemented earlier. Front-line workers are responsible for verifying that conditions have been met in order for health-related transfers to be made, but verification is irregular.

Implementation: Cash plus components and convergence

One year after the programme began, UNICEF commissioned a review of MKUY. The review highlighted a number of operational challenges, including:¹³⁴

- **Awareness of the scheme and its entitlements is limited.** Among officials, at community and family level, awareness is limited, resulting in relatively small numbers of people who fulfil the enrolment requirements for MKUY benefits. There is a need for more awareness generation at all levels. It is worth noting that there is a clear correlation between the supply and demand for the services – and the low level of awareness could be considered a fault in the design of the scheme.
- **The process of verifying whether conditions have been met is unclear.** Conditions include a minimum of 75 per cent attendance over the school year and non-marriage before age 18.
- **It is difficult for the most marginalized to access the scheme.** The application process is needlessly complicated and the demand for documentation becomes more onerous as the size of the cash rewards increases. This makes it difficult for the most marginalized sections of society to access the scheme. Income certificates are the hardest to obtain and may delay an application for months. The online application is challenging for those not familiar with information and communication technology. The Government already has much of the requested information through the ration card application process (e.g., on income status).¹³⁵
- **Progress made is difficult to assess.** It has been hard to assess progress over the year during which the programme has been operational because there is currently no mechanism for systematic data gathering that follows a girl through various transfers to which she is eligible. An MIS is being developed to address these monitoring challenges.

Monitoring and evaluation

According to the review commissioned by UNICEF, there is a need to better understand the effects of the MKUY programme on keeping girls in school, and whether the provision of cash transfers is sufficient on its own, as well as whether the transfer amount reaches the beneficiary, is a sufficient incentive for keeping girls in school, and enables access for the most marginalized girls.

133. Kaushik, Urvashi (UNICEF), and Madhumitha Hebbar (formerly Oxford Policy Management), *Integrate But How? Lessons from a lifecycle conditional cash transfer programme in Bihar, India*, abstract for the Social Protection Research and Policy Conference: From Evidence to Action in Asia and Pacific.

134. Jejeebhoy, Shireen, *Cash Transfers Plus: Promising directions for the Mukhyamantri Kanya Utthan Yojana (MKUY)*, Bihar, 2019, unpublished; Jain, Process Documentation.

135. Interviews with Saurabh Kumar, Action Aid, and with Abhijit Mukherjee, Plan India.

9. Lessons

MKUY is part of a broader campaign to end child marriage in Bihar.¹³⁶ These efforts have been successful in engaging adolescents in policymaking and giving them a voice and a decision-making role. Moreover, engaging with adolescent girls through menstrual hygiene management programmes in schools has enabled broader communication and public dialogue on child marriage and dowry. Young people's initiative and engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrates that investing in youth brings dividends in terms of direct impacts on their social and economic development and well-being.

The following lessons apply to MKUY (and some to the broader End Child Marriage campaign in Bihar).

The Bihar model for eliminating child marriage and dowry draws on learnings from past initiatives aimed at creating a more equitable environment for women and girls. MKUY is an unprecedented initiative that demonstrates the significant commitment of the State Government. The model is unique in Bihar for having been adopted as a state-wide initiative, rather than solely restricted to pilots in a few localities.¹³⁷

Key lessons

- Although MKUY is universal rather than means based (not focused on the poorest families), it comes with various conditionalities to ensure adherence to the programme's goals of promoting girls' continued education.¹³⁸
- MKUY may exclude the most vulnerable, out-of-school girls; these are the often the girls most vulnerable to child marriage.
- Cash transfer schemes without additional components do not maximize investments for gender transformation.
- It remains to be seen whether the political will and initial allocations of public funds will be maintained over the medium and long term.
- Convergence between line departments is critical to programme effectiveness, yet it is challenging to undertake and faces significant resistance.
- Line departments focus on reaching targets, rather than outcomes.
- Line departments are resisting an integrated MIS, which would enable programme refinement and improvements.
- While the main actors driving MKUY have different priorities and interests, they have come together and in so doing have contributed to the success of the programme.

Problem analysis and leadership

Complete political ownership and leadership are key. Political will has made all the difference in making the End Child Marriage campaign a success. The highest level of political engagement from the Chief Minister ensured that the entire state machinery was mobilized. There has been an attitudinal change among government decision makers and administrators, and an acknowledgement that child marriage and dowry are widespread social ills that require strong actions. UNICEF has made government officials aware of the provisions of MKUY and has made them accountable.¹³⁹ The Child Protection Specialist from UNICEF Bihar says – "People meant business. It was not just talk. Everyone was speaking the same language. The bureaucracy was aligned to the political will."

MKUY has been a game changer. The scheme enjoys complete ownership by the ruling party in Bihar. The design of MKUY is based on the proposition of

a continuum of care, which is universal in reach and incremental in nature. The scheme targets adolescent girls and aims at mobilizing families and communities to treat girls as assets rather than liabilities.

Investments in awareness generation across line departments and the general public have led to an increase in reporting of cases and serious intent to take action to stop child marriage. Sensitization trainings played a big role in orienting officials at various levels, clarified their responsibilities, and helped them understand what they have to do and how.

Ruling parties are gaining political dividends from government schemes. In the context of Bihar, these schemes yield large political dividends since votes are divided by caste, class, religion and gender. For example, the 33 per cent reservation of government jobs for women was a major turning point for the ruling party and enabled it to hold on to power for a second term.

There is a risk of declining financial commitments. Since the support for MKUY is based on

136. Jain, *Process Documentation*.

137. Ibid.

138. Conditionalities include: Birth registration, school attendance, not getting married before age 18, etc.

139. Interview with Saurabh Kumar, Action Aid.

consideration of political dividends, as the political dividends of MKUY decline with each passing year, there is a risk that the budgetary allocations for MKUY will decline over time.

There is a need to balance populist and evidence-based approaches. Political parties prefer to continue doing what has worked for them in the past (e.g., cash transfers as patronage that will be repaid at the next election). Accordingly, MKUY retained many design elements of its constituent schemes – even those that were flawed. UNICEF has an important role to play to share select evidence with the Government in order to make government interventions more effective over time.

Evidence-based advocacy is important. UNICEF's initial data analysis showing that Bihar was lagging behind most other Indian states in reducing child marriage convinced the Chief Minister that child marriage had to be tackled more forcefully. Once the Government was committed to investing more in women's empowerment and ending child marriage and dowry, a high-profile media campaign, including the human chain, helped to broadcast the Government's ambitious plans and to mobilize large numbers of people. UNICEF's subsequent investments in generating evidence of what works to end child marriage informed the design of MKUY. The cash transfer plus review helped to strengthen the gender-transformative dimensions of MKUY.

Evidence presented by UNICEF informed some government decisions. However, other government decisions were driven more by political and election considerations, rather than evidence. In other words, the Government used evidence selectively.

Implementation: Cash plus components and convergence

Inter-departmental convergence is hard to achieve. MKUY combines existing sectoral schemes to promote gender parity, a continuum of care and equal opportunities for all girls. Each scheme is linked to services provided by its respective sectoral department, and funds continue to be allocated under sectoral budgetary headings for which respective departments are accountable. So far, vertical schemes receive priority over the universal MKUY scheme in Bihar. Each department supports its own vertical programme. Schemes are still fragmented, which affects the management of cash transfers in Bihar. Efforts to tackle operational challenges and improve the management of MKUY have been limited.

Technology on milestones is helping to strengthen inter-departmental convergence. For example, digitizing birth registration records streamlined the

provision of social welfare benefits and facilitated inter-departmental coordination.¹⁴⁰

Investment in education and ensuring transition of girls to higher classes remains challenging. While the Government is committed to setting high schools across all Gram Panchayats to ensure retention of children in higher grade levels, the issue of having qualified teachers, infrastructure and quality education remains a major challenge. The success of the scheme lies in the number of girls receiving benefits as they move up the educational ladder.

In the absence of demand generation, uptake to the scheme is still low. The launch of MKUY consolidated government commitment and efforts to empower girls. However, awareness of the scheme at grassroots level is low. To make MKUY a success, there is a need for sustained awareness raising about the programme across schools, all levels of local government, and through the State Rural Livelihood Mission, which is the primary agency in promoting rural self-help groups in Bihar. Some of these bottlenecks are yet to be addressed in the third year of MKUY's operation.

Ensuring fidelity, quality, and ensuring that no one is left behind are harder to maintain during rapid scale-up. India has a great deal of experience in taking schemes and systems to scale; however, any new scheme or system has to contend with the priorities and budget decisions of the political leadership and also with the established departments and administrative structures responsible for the roll-out. Navigating competing departmental interests and promoting greater inter-departmental convergence requires UNICEF staff who understand 'how the system works' and how to influence senior decision makers; have the creativity to propose effective mechanisms that strengthen inter-departmental convergence; and are committed to following these processes over the long term.

Monitoring and evaluation

It is important to have detailed, disaggregated data to inform programmes, but this information is missing at the community level. Monitoring is key to improving programme delivery, to learn about what works and what does not, and to strengthen the accountability of service providers and decision makers. Regular monitoring and periodic reviews show whether MKUY is staying on target and is achieving its intended outcomes. From the beginning, efforts were made to create a unified database to track the continuity of services in the lives of girls ages 0–21 years. Up to 2019, some government departments were still using paper-based monitoring. The systemic impact of introducing data systems has been significant and will only increase over time.¹⁴¹ UNICEF has an important role to play to strengthen monitoring systems and to build evidence that is being used to adjust MKUY as necessary.

140. Interview with Abhijit Mukherjee, Plan India.

141. There is a need for more detailed community-level data in order to interpret trends and patterns and provide feedback to implementing agencies and motivate government departments. Interview with Prabhat Ghosh and Barna Ganguly.

10. Way forward

UNICEF and its implementing partners are proposing a number of ways to take MKUY forward.

Extend the right to higher education: These include the completion of higher education and of graduate courses and skills development in MKUY to enable adolescents to have better access to livelihood and job opportunities.¹⁴²

Simplify or abolish the application process: Turn MKUY from a scheme that requires an application to a universal legal right and automatic entitlement (similar to ration cards that are seen as a right and are provided automatically). The onus should be on the Government to deliver the right, rather than on the rights-holder to apply for a benefit (rights-based approach).¹⁴³

Allocate dedicated funds for plus activities to end child marriage and empower adolescents: Although scheme-related funds for supporting girls and women are available under MKUY and various other programmes, additional funds are required at district and sub-district levels to conduct awareness activities, support community-level programmes, and hire dedicated staff at sub-district levels to end child marriage and promote adolescent empowerment.¹⁴⁴

Change the strategy and narrative: Change the narrative from 'ending child marriage' to focusing on 'holistic adolescent empowerment and ending all forms of violence against children and adolescents'.

Work with key stakeholders: Key stakeholders include the police, the Crime Investigation Department, Department of Labour and Social Affairs, district and high courts, to unify their approaches to preventing child marriage and other forms of violence against children.

Strengthen the adolescent cell: The adolescent cell can be used as a mechanism to foster greater sectoral convergence and strengthen an accountability framework at village, block, district and state levels.¹⁴⁵

Support adolescent girls to promote change in their communities: Develop the agency of adolescent girls by ensuring they complete their secondary education and have access to higher education and to skills and employment opportunities, and by creating safe and violence-free environments at home and in schools. Create a cadre of adolescents and young persons and highlight role models among those who were successful in preventing their own marriage or that of their peers.

Reinforce SBCC activities: Reinforce these activities at grassroots levels to build greater awareness and understanding of the MKUY scheme and other girl child-related government programmes, and to reach migrant labourers (to leave no one behind).

Implement a gender-transformative policy in Bihar: Implement this in partnership with the Women Development Corporation – an independent wing under the Department of Social Welfare – which would lead to increasing the value of girls and greater engagement of boys and men.

Actively involve boys and men: Men should be engaged in issues on child marriage, dowry, violence against children, gender equality and the development of adolescent girls.

142. Interview with Abhijit Mukherjee.

143. Interview with Saurabh Kumar.

144. Jain, *Process Documentation*.

145. Ibid.

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