



HER  
CHOICE



**BUILDING  
CHILD MARRIAGE-FREE  
COMMUNITIES**

CHILD MARRIAGE IS A WIDESPREAD PHENOMENON THAT ENDANGERS THE HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT AND WELLBEING OF GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN ALL OVER THE WORLD. EACH YEAR, 15 MILLION GIRLS GET MARRIED BEFORE THE AGE OF 18.

**HER CHOICE** AIMS TO BUILD CHILD MARRIAGE-FREE COMMUNITIES, WHERE EACH GIRL IS FREE TO DECIDE IF, WHEN, AND WHOM SHE MARRIES. WHERE THIS WILL BE

## HER CHOICE



## FACTS

- Every day 39,000 girls get married
- In low- and middle-income countries one in three girls will marry before the age of 18
- One in nine girls will marry before their fifteenth birthday
- 90% of teenage pregnancies take place within marriage
- Complications during pregnancy and delivery are the second leading cause of death among 15 to 19-year-olds

## IMPACT

The negative effects of child marriage are manifested in many ways. Imagine the life of a girl who gets married at the age of 16, 11 or even 8. She is neither physically nor emotionally ready to become a wife and a mother. She is likely to get pregnant before her body has fully developed, which can result in prenatal complications and maternal mortality. A child bride is at increased risk of suffering domestic violence and of being infected with HIV/AIDS. As a result of school drop-out she has limited career opportunities and is at increased risk to live in poverty. The chances are that she will not be able to provide her baby with adequate care and food. In the future the cycle continues, as her children are likely to face the same fate as she did. **HER CHOICE aims to break this cycle.**

**No society can afford the lost opportunities, waste of talent or personal exploitation that child marriage causes. Girls who marry later attain higher levels of education, fare better economically, have fewer children and raise healthier families.**

## REASONS

Factors that put a girl at risk of early marriage are poverty, gender inequality, lack of safety, and social and cultural traditions. The perception that marriage will provide protection to girls and maintains the family's honour also increases the likelihood of child marriage. Although child marriage is illegal in many countries, traditions and religious laws often overrule national legislation. As a result, child marriage is widely practiced.

**Safe and empowering environments where girls feel supported by their families, their school, their community and the local government, and where joint efforts for sustainable economic improvement are being made, provide girls and young women the possibility to choose for a better future: HER CHOICE.**



## PROGRAMME

**HER CHOICE** is an alliance of four Netherlands-based organisations: Stichting Kinderpostzegels Nederland (lead organisation), The Hunger Project, International Child Development Initiatives (ICDI) and the University of Amsterdam. These organisations combine their efforts with 27 local partner organisations to combat child marriage in eleven countries. The programme runs from January 2016 to December 2020 and is implemented in partnership with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands.



BANGLADESH - BENIN - BURKINA FASO - ETHIOPIA - GHANA - MALI  
NEPAL - PAKISTAN - SENEGAL - SIERRA LEONE - UGANDA

The programme's **LONG-TERM GOAL** (2016-2020) is to support the creation of child marriage-free communities in which girls and young women are free to decide if, when, and whom to marry.



## STRATEGIES

The **6 intervention strategies** are based on evidence, which shows that the most consistent results of targeting child marriages are achieved by fostering information, skills and networks for girls in combination with community mobilisation. Therefore, strategies focus on both areas:

### Increasing girls' control in decision-making

**1 - Investing in girls**, their knowledge, skills related to Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) and participation in society: enhancing their comprehension of the negative effects of child marriage and of alternative options.

**2 - Keeping girls in school**: improving access to formal education for girls by supporting girl-friendly schools and building knowledge through schooling in general, and on SRHR in particular.

**3 - Improving access to youth-friendly SRHR services for girls**: improving health services by actively referring girls to health workers.

### Mobilising relevant community actors

**4 - Strengthening the economic security of girls and their families**: creating and supporting women's self-help groups with training and access to (financial) resources.

**5 - Transforming social norms and traditional practices**: mobilising and supporting communities, including boys, men, women, leaders to promote girls' rights and gender equity, to achieve gender equity in education, decision making, and access to services.

**6 - Creating an enabling legal and policy environment on preventing child marriage**: supporting traditional leaders and (local) authorities to enforce national policies on preventing child marriage.





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## LEARNING AND RESEARCH

Central learning strategies that contribute to the long-term goal and to the strengthening of partner organisations are **comparative and participatory research**, and **capacity building**.

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

**Base-, mid- and endline studies** will be carried out in all programme countries in order to measure results (outputs and outcomes) of the programme. After completion of the baseline study, countries will be selected where further operational research will be carried out.

## LOCAL OWNERSHIP

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

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