



Country fact sheet: Nepal

Over the past 12 months, the government of Nepal with the support of UNICEF and *Girls Not Brides* Nepal, developed a multi-sectoral national strategy to address child marriage. The strategy is currently being finalised and endorsed by the government.¹

Child marriage prevalence and context

- 41% of Nepalese women aged 20-24 years were married before they turned 18; 29% of girls 15-19 were married.²
- Approximately 10% of women aged 20-24 were married before age 15.³
- Child marriage is highly prevalent throughout the Terai region bordering India, as well as in the Far and Mid-Western regions.
- The legal age of marriage for girls and boys is 18 years with parental consent and 20 without. Awareness of the legal age of marriage is low and the practice is rarely viewed as a punishable crime, its acceptability perpetuated by a raft of deeply embedded social norms and values.
- In certain regions and communities the dowry system, trafficking and other harmful social norms and practices are intrinsically connected to the practice.

Background of the strategy development

- The Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare (MoWCSW) initiated the process to tackle child marriage in early 2014 motivated by continuing high prevalence rates of child marriage in the country and a growing global momentum to end the practice.
- It was linked strongly to the South Asia Initiative to End Violence Against Children (SAIEVAC), of which ending child marriage is one of five thematic working areas. In early 2014 SAIEVAC developed a Regional Action Plan to End Child Marriage in South Asia (2015-18) that provided strong motivation for the MoWCSW (the implementing body for the Nepal chapter of SAIEVAC) to link Nepal's work with work at the regional level.
- The strategy development was substantially supported financially and technically by UNICEF and facilitated by *Girls Not Brides* Nepal.

Strategy development process

- From March 2014 until January 2015 the government led a process to develop a multi-sectoral national strategy to end child marriage which focused on mobilising and coordinating interventions across sectors and actors at all levels. The steps of the process included:
- In April 2014, the launch of the process by the MoWCSW supported by UNICEF, UNFPA, and the *Girls Not Brides* Nepal network in Kathmandu. The meeting brought together

¹ Given the recent earthquake in Nepal it is uncertain as to when the strategy will be finalised as the government will now be focused on reconstruction efforts for the country in the near future.

² Demographic and Health Survey, Nepal 2011

³ Percentage of women aged 20-24 who were married or had entered into union before the age of 15, as cited by UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children* 2015

stakeholders from across sectors – government representatives (including ten line ministries from district and national level), adolescents, civil society, academia, religious leaders, UN agencies, media and development partners – with the goal of identifying priority intervention areas in the strategy’s development within a multi-sectoral and participatory process.

- Establishment of an inter-ministerial Steering Committee to oversee strategy development and a Technical Working Group to provide expertise.
- Formative research on drivers of child marriage in six districts with high child marriage prevalence rates.
- Consultations at national and district levels to identify the most effective strategies for tackling child marriage. It also prioritised building on interventions that evidence showed to work, and strengthening existing structures and mechanisms, for example strengthening Child Marriage Free Village Development Committees (proven examples of institutional positive deviance preventing child marriage).

Throughout the process the government reiterated the complex nature of child marriage to stakeholders and the need to tackle it from beyond a legal perspective to address the deeply entrenched social norms and traditions that perpetuate the practice. This helped to ensure the strategy’s interventions extended to engaging and considering sometimes overlooked stakeholders like married adolescent girls, and to boys.

Strategy overview

- The Nepali strategy has a comprehensive approach in terms of multi-sectoral engagement and recognition of the complex drivers of child marriage, which are often context-specific.
- The underlying foundation of the strategy is to empower the girl child and increase her value in Nepali society to contribute towards achieving gender equality. It is also directed by Nepal’s pledge made at the Girl Summit in London in July 2014 to strive to end child marriage by 2020.
- A Theory of Change to end child marriage was developed as part of the national strategy that outlines six strategic directions that form the basis of the strategy, including:
 - (a) Empowering girls (including economic empowerment);
 - (b) Providing quality education for girls;
 - (c) Engaging men and boys;
 - (d) Mobilising families and communities;
 - (e) Strengthening and providing services; and
 - (f) Implementing laws and policies.

Next steps

- The strategy is currently being finalised and endorsed by the government, to be followed by a costed National Plan of Action for implementation of its strategic directions. This will also include a rigorous monitoring and evaluation framework to monitor implementation progress.
- The prospects for implementation will be reliant on strengthening the evidence base on scalable child marriage interventions, resource allocation across sectors, and commitment to strengthen governance structures, systems and services so as to reach those girls most at risk of child marriage at the grassroots level.