

THE POWER OF COLLECTIVE ACTION

FROM NATIONAL TO LOCAL ADVOCACY TO END CHILD MARRIAGE IN NEPAL

Nepal has made important steps to promote gender equality, but the country still has one of the highest rates of child marriage in the world, with 37% of girls married before their 18th birthday.

The reasons are multidimensional: poverty, food insecurity, cultural beliefs, girls' perceived value and a patriarchal system. These put the girls at risk of child marriage, violence, health issues and school dropout. Child marriage varies across the three most affected areas: forced marriage is most commonly practiced in the mountains; in the hilly area, parents decide their daughters will marry at an early age; and early marriage is common due to the tradition of dowry payment in the southern region of Terai.

Child marriage has been a neglected issue in Nepal for a long time. Given its complexity and geographical variation, civil society recognised the need to join efforts and share expertise. *Girls Not Brides Nepal (Balika Dulahi Hoinan* in Nepali) was formed in 2012, and today the national partnership comprises over 20 organisations.

“The local and provincial government officials are now serious about addressing child marriage and are ready to work on it with us.” Shyam Pokharel, Director of Samrakshak Samuha Nepal (SASANE)

“[Working together] has helped us reach our common target and be recognised by the government as a technical entity with expertise in this field.” says Anand Tamang, Director of Center for Research on Environment, Health and Population Activities (CREHPA), and coordinator of the national partnership.

Effective civil society partnership strengthened public commitment to end child marriage

Girls Not Brides Nepal played a central role in developing an inclusive and multi-sectoral national strategy to end child marriage, spearheaded by the Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizen and supported by UNICEF.

The partnership supported more than 50 consultations at the community, district and national levels to understand the issue and gather evidence on how to address it. It was involved in drafting the strategy’s costed action plan, currently awaiting government endorsement. As a result, members were approached by the local government of Kapilvastu district, which has one of the highest child marriage prevalence rates, to help it develop a district-level strategic action plan.

With funding from AmplifyChange, *Girls Not Brides* Nepal began working at the local level – all the more important following government devolution of power to local authorities in 2017. *Girls Not Brides* Nepal carried out an advocacy campaign with 500 government officials, civil society organisations, policymakers and district-level stakeholders in 14 districts and 7 provinces with high rates of child marriage. The campaign raised awareness and secured commitments to fund work to end child marriage.

Working as an effective partnership rather than as individual organisations has contributed to efforts at all levels of government to end child marriage in Nepal, and generated interest from other national and local organisations in joining. The national partnership aims to cover 20% of the country.

“This represents a big advocacy success for us. The local and provincial government officials are now serious about addressing child marriage and [are] ready to work on it with us. They have committed to ending child marriage by 2030.” Shyam Pokharel, Director of Samrakshak Samuha Nepal (SASANE) and secretary of *Girls Not Brides* Nepal.

“[Working together] has helped us reach our common target and be recognised by the government as a technical entity with expertise in this field.”
Anand Tamang, Director of Center for Research on Environment, Health and Population Activities (CREHPA)



GIRLS NOT BRIDES

The Global Partnership
to End Child Marriage