

Girls' sexuality and child, early, and forced marriages and unions: A conceptual framework

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WEBINAR

Girls' sexuality and child, early, and forced marriages and unions:

A conceptual framework

*Presented by
the CEFMU and Sexuality
Working Group*



TACKLING THE TABOO:

Sexuality and gender-transformative
programmes to end child, early and
forced marriage and unions

Full Report



The CEFMU and Sexuality Working Group and Collaborators



EngenderHealth
for a better life



International Alliance
for Sexual and Reproductive
Health, Rights, and Justice



Girls First Fund



GIRLS
NOT
BRIDES

The Global Partnership
to End Child Marriage

GLOBAL FUND FOR
WOM=N
Champions for Equality.

GreeneWorks
Social change for health & development



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FOR RESEARCH ON WOMEN
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fighting for feminist futures



nirantar trust
A centre for Gender and Education



Ideas. Evidence. Impact.



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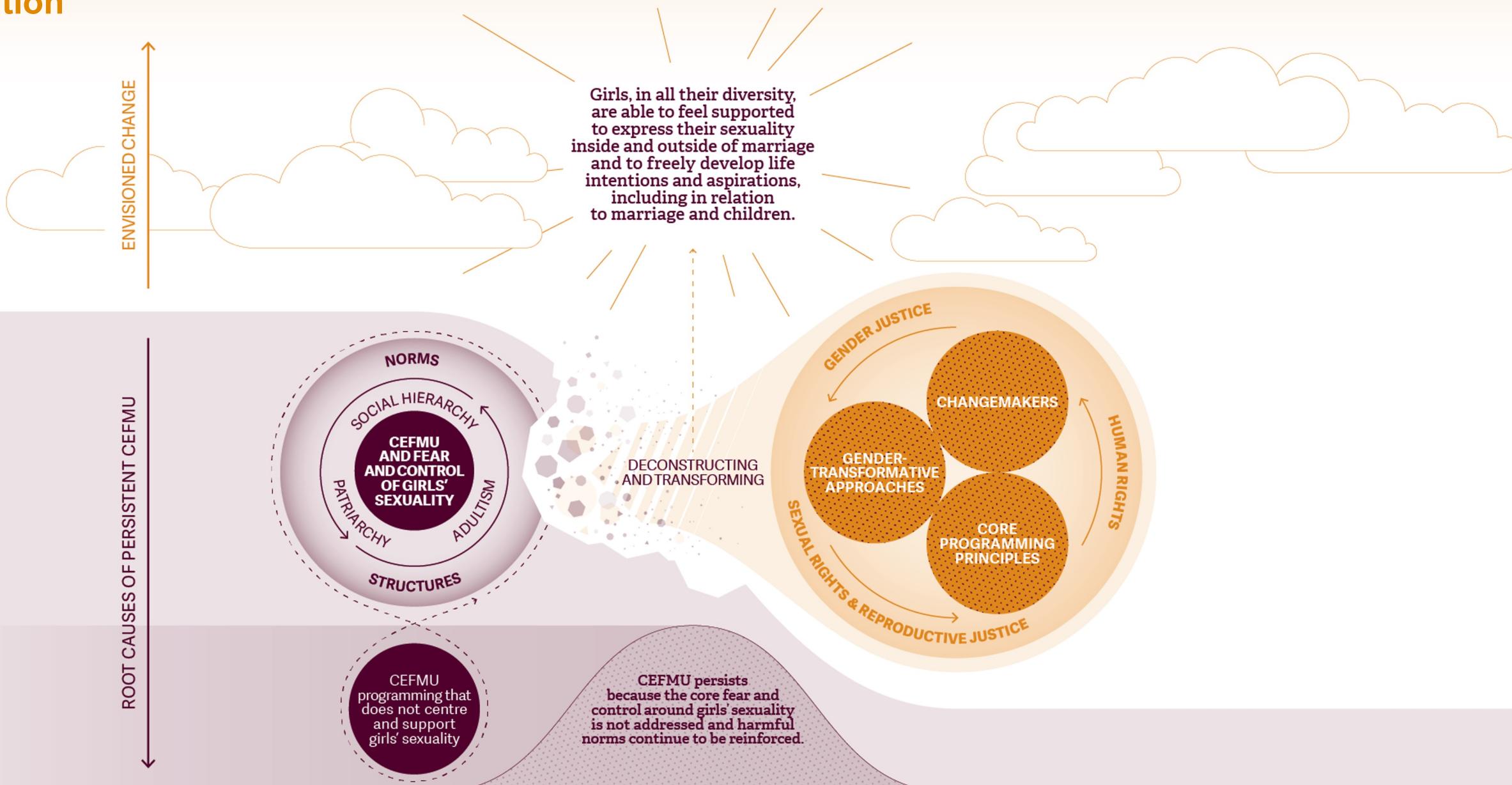
UNFPA



unicef
for every child

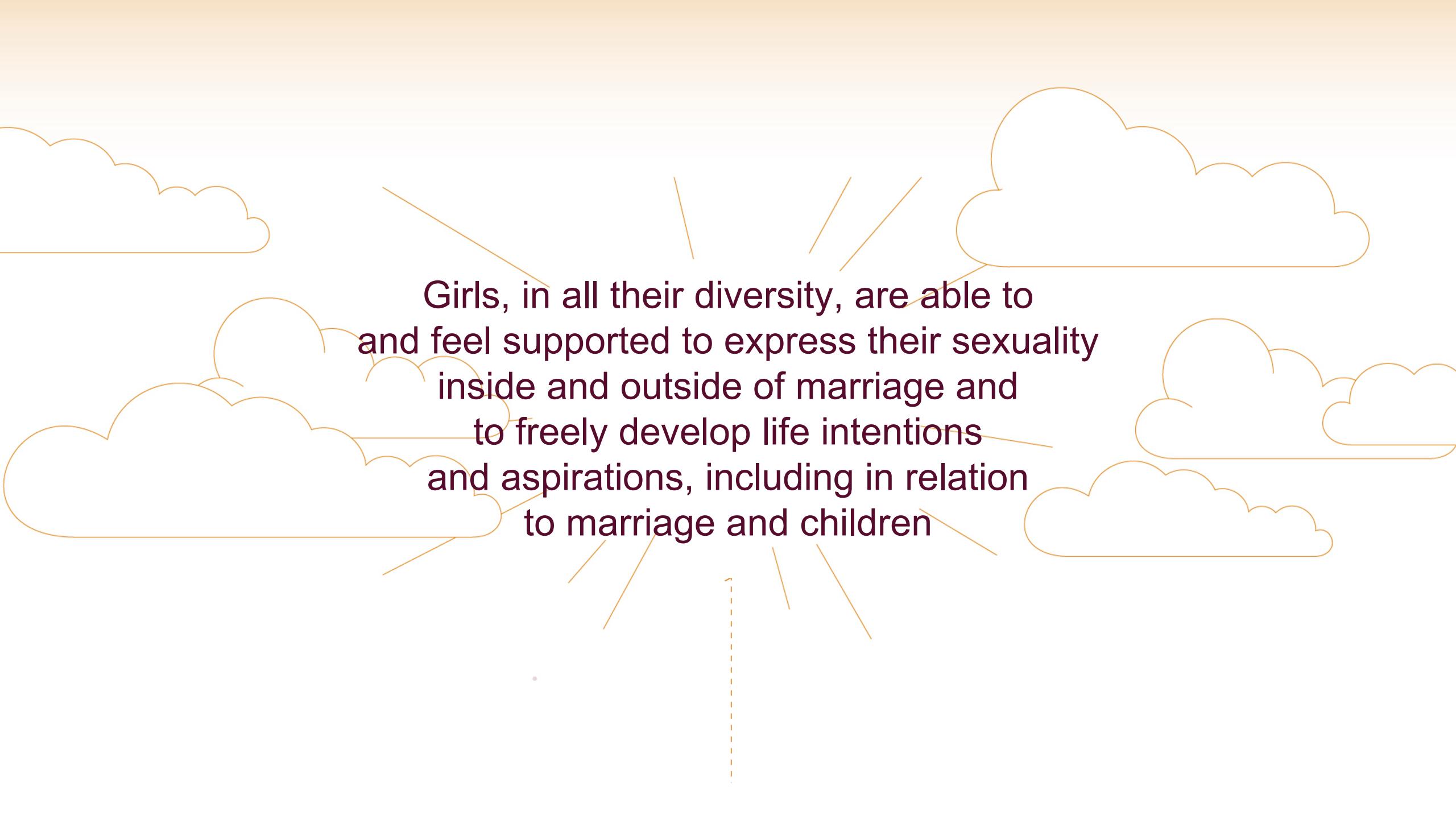


Control of girls' sexuality is a driver of CEFMU; Gender-transformative approaches can be a solution



The envisioned change

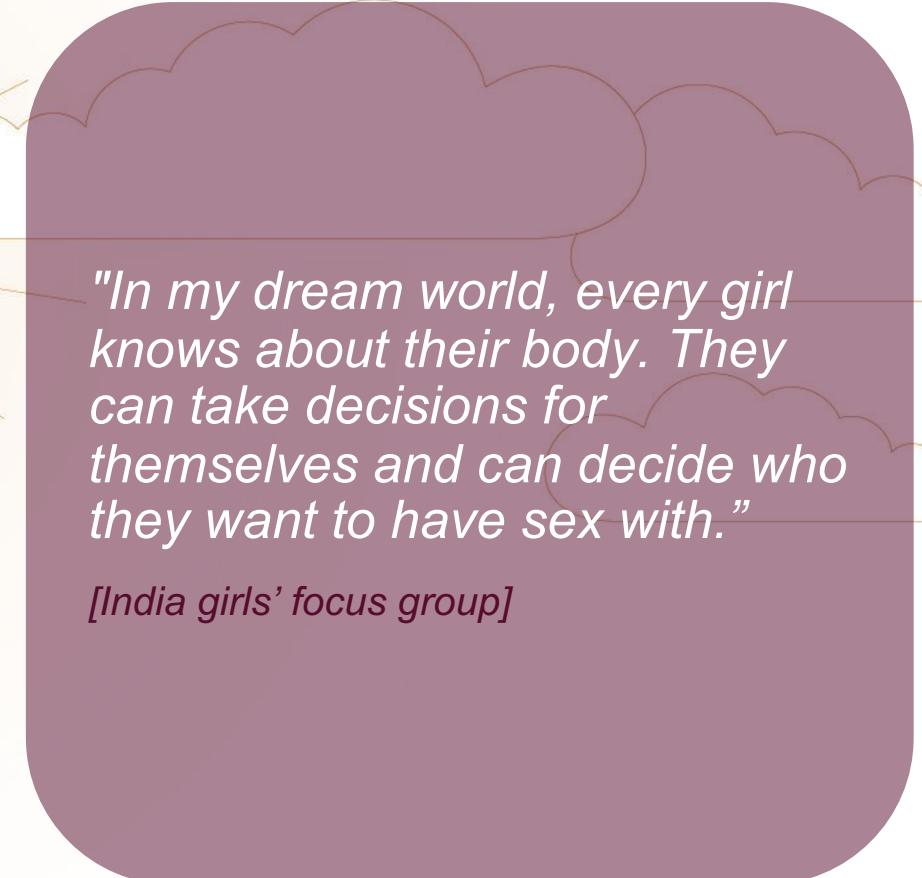




Girls, in all their diversity, are able to
and feel supported to express their sexuality
inside and outside of marriage and
to freely develop life intentions
and aspirations, including in relation
to marriage and children

Individual level

- Girls feel positively about their sexuality, have information to make decisions, enjoy equitable relationships.
- Girls decide if, when, and whom to marry.
- LGBTQI and gender-nonconforming young people supported to express/enjoy their identity and sexuality.
- Girls free, safe to wear what they want, go where they want, voice their opinions.

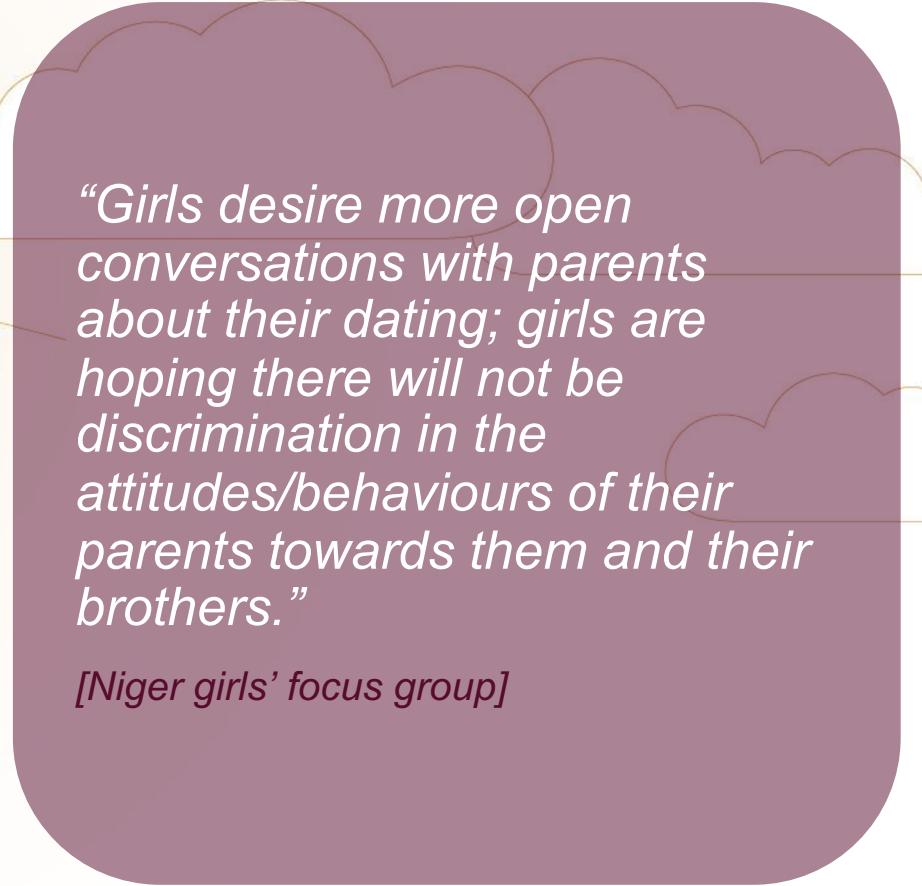


"In my dream world, every girl knows about their body. They can take decisions for themselves and can decide who they want to have sex with."

[India girls' focus group]

Relationship level

- Parents understand adolescent SRHR, how to be supportive of adolescent girls' desires and dreams. They model equitable relationships.
- Boys engage in, are supportive of equitable relationships across genders, understand the SRHR of girls.
- Adolescent girls have a community of peers who support each other's desires and dreams.



"Girls desire more open conversations with parents about their dating; girls are hoping there will not be discrimination in the attitudes/behaviours of their parents towards them and their brothers."

[Niger girls' focus group]

Community level

- Schools, health services provide SRHR info and services to all girls, especially unmarried girls
- Girls are respected as complete human beings with equal rights and potential, beyond marriage and motherhood.
- Institutions see girls as rights-bearers rather than an economic burden or extractive source of income.
- Institutions address all forms of GBV in survivor-centred ways.
- Norms are supportive of girls' sexuality, and girls are not shamed.

"Where the community cares about my rights and supports my dreams. Where they give priority to my dreams no matter how ridiculous they are. Where they give us comprehensive education. Where we are not singled out. Where we are cared for and educated. Where they take care of us and protect our rights, [and] support our studies instead of marriages. Teachers and service providers care about and address the specific and priority needs of girls, adolescents and young women."

[Guatemala girls' focus group]

Societal level

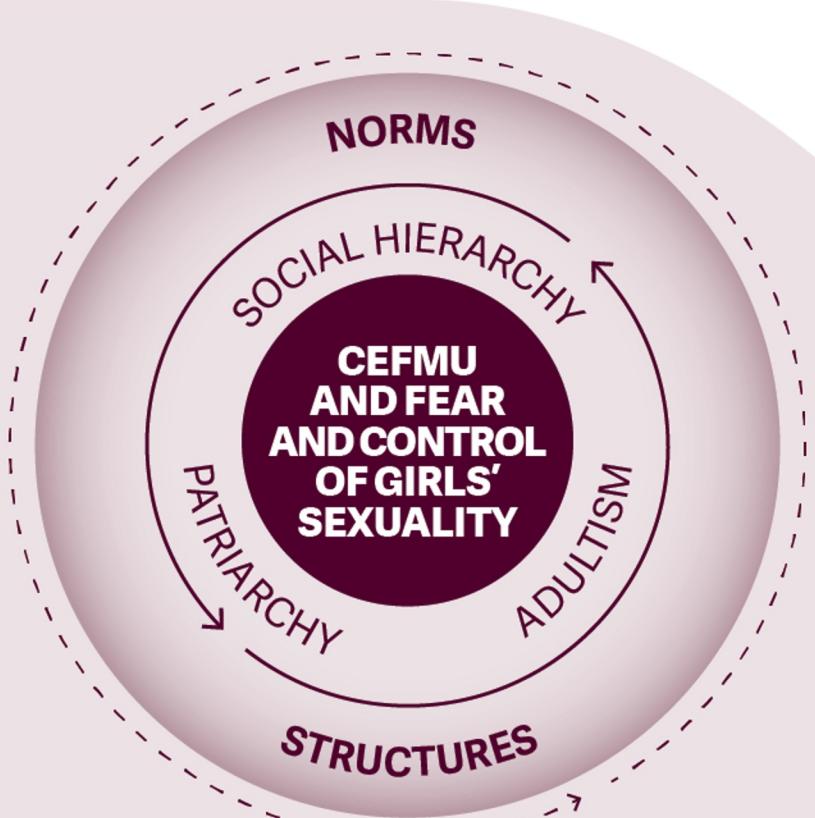
- Power structures, institutions and service providers no longer uphold inequitable gender norms.
- Laws and institutions support all consensual sexual and affective relationships between adolescents, including outside of marriage.
- Violence against women and girls viewed as unacceptable, survivor-centred services are available.
- Girl-friendly services across health, education, etc. support girls' bodily autonomy and choices.

"Institutions provide quality, comprehensive sexuality education in all the spaces where we develop and also provide the necessary tools [for us] to know our sexuality in a responsible way... As if it were normal... We hope that as girls and adolescents they listen to us... most of the time men are treated better by the laws. They don't give importance to these kinds of issues; we want them to listen to us!"

[Guatemala girls' focus group]

Root causes: Norms

ROOT CAUSES OF PERSISTENT CEFMU



CEFMU
programming that
does not centre
and support
girls' sexuality

CEFMU persists
because the core fear and
control around girls' sexuality
is not addressed and harmful
norms continue to be reinforced.

Patriarchy Social Hierarchy Adultism

Norms

Purity and family honour

- Girls' sexuality, sexual activity and/or pregnancy outside of marriage reflects negatively on the girl
- Dependent on a girl's purity and virginity

Protection and family responsibility

- Marriage = protection
- Parents must ensure their daughter is married adulthood
- Girls must obey their parents' decision on timing/choice of marriage partner



Norms

Motherhood and adulthood

- Marriage and motherhood are inevitable for girls
- Marriage is the path to adulthood
- Girls' primary role is within the home/domestic sphere

Heteronormativity and marriage

- All girls are heterosexual
- All girls want to marry



Norms

Sexual harassment and violence

- Interactions between adolescent girls and boys are always romantic/ sexual.
- Girls at fault if sexually harassed.

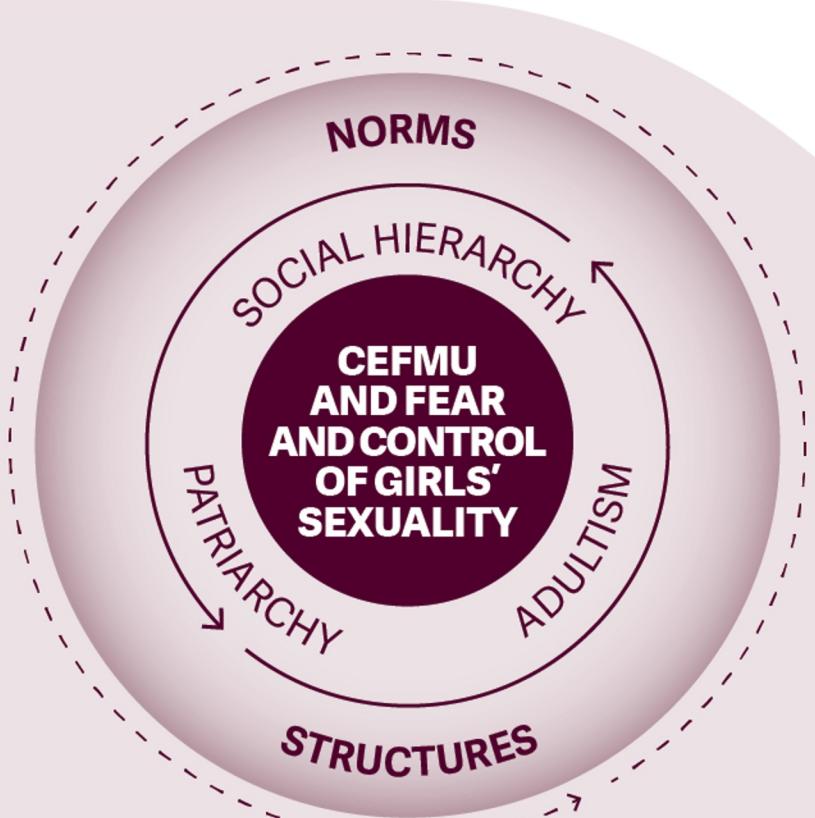
This framework shows the powerful influence of patriarchal gender norms on a girl's autonomy, on her freedom to express and enjoy sexuality.

And how this lack of freedom can itself be a powerful driver of child marriage.



Root causes: Structures

ROOT CAUSES OF PERSISTENT CEFMU



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Laws & Policy Education Health Economic Opportunities

Structures

Reinforce Norms

- Protectionist laws regulate sexual and gender identities, sexual consent, (marital) rape, mandatory reporting of sexual activity, child marriage etc.
- Laws re: CEFMU and sexuality reinforce punitive approaches, punishing young people, limiting access SRH services.
- Laws take away decision-making from adolescents.



Structures

Reinforce Norms

- Poor socio-economic structures limit girls opportunities.
- Parents control girls' mobility, restrict pursuit of education outside their communities - a fear of them entering a relationship.
- CSE not institutionalized in formal curriculum in many countries.



Structures

Reinforce Norms

- Judgmental attitude of the health system, service providers; medical professionals perpetuate exclusionary norms, push girls to adopt unsafe practices.
- Stigma attached to accessing health services, especially based on the marital status.



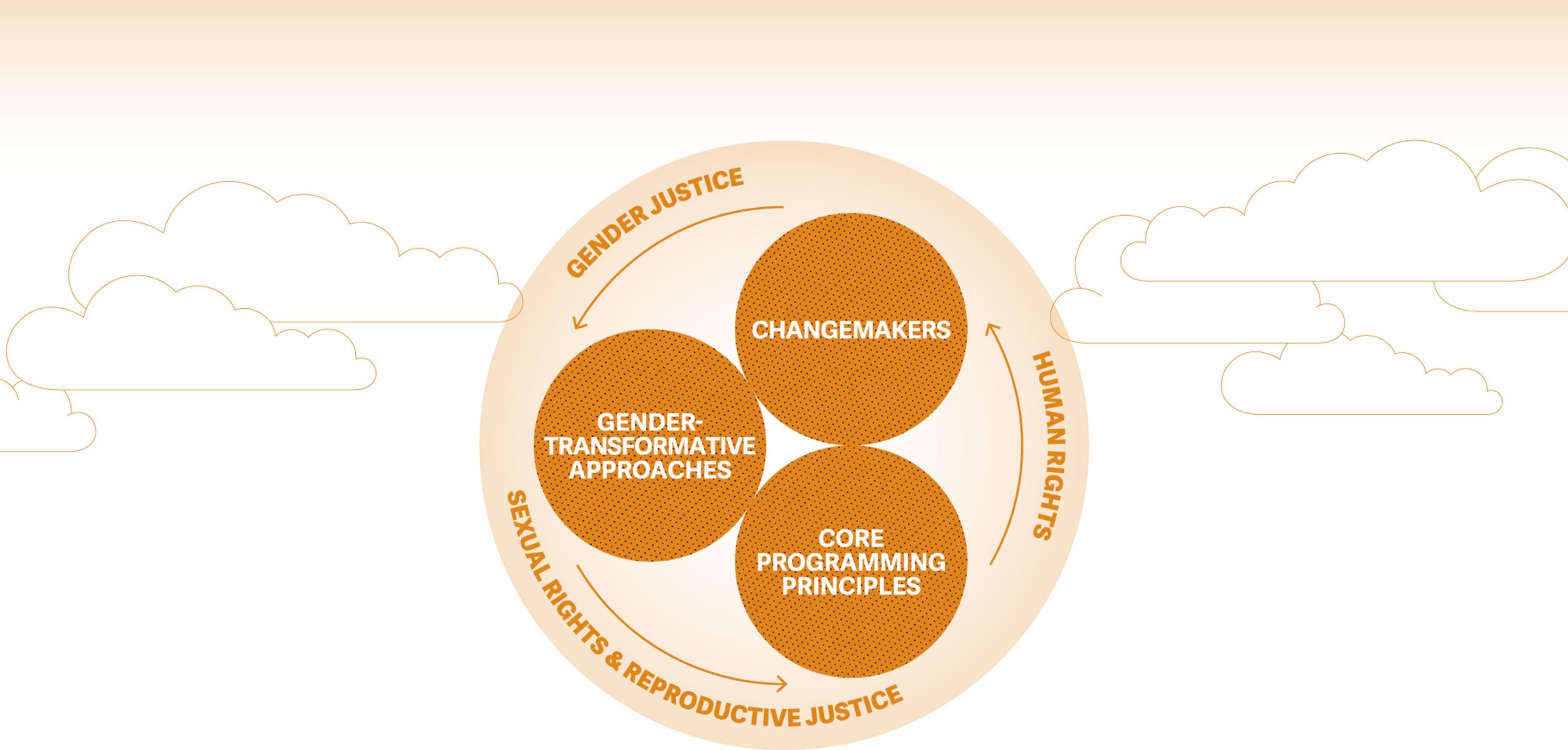
Structures

Reinforce Norms

- Gender social norm confine girls to unpaid work within domestic space; no access to resources, skill development, other growth opportunities.
- Limited access and know-how to digital technology, reduced opportunities for remote learning and networking.



Gender-transformative approaches



What do GTAs do?

Aim to achieve gender equality by:

- Fostering critical examination of inequalities and gender roles, norms, and dynamics
- Addressing unequal power relationships and distribution of resources between women and girls and others in the community
- Seeking to redistribute power and decision-making over all matters of sexuality
- Recognizing and strengthening positive norms that support equality and an enabling environment
- Promoting the relative position of women, girls, and marginalized groups
- Transforming the underlying social structures, policies, and broadly held social norms that perpetuate gender inequalities
- Cultivating a sense of ownership and agency in women and girls for their bodies and rights

How are GTAs different?

- **Gender consciousness:** redefining rigid gender norms
- **Awareness of diversity:** considering intersectional factors
- **Girls and women as agents of change and leaders, and not passive actors**
- **Men and boys contribute to achieving gender equality and the goals and objectives of the women's rights movement**
- **Spaces for gender non-conforming people:** moving away from binary approaches
- **Social movement building for gender equality and women's and girls' rights**



Programming principles and changemakers



In designing and implementing gender-transformative approaches for addressing control of adolescent girls' sexuality and CEFMU, it is important to consider core programming principles.

What are the principles?

- **Centring the voices, needs and aspirations of adolescent girls**

"Let girls be the protagonists of their own process."

[Latin America practitioner focus group]

- **Multi-level and multi-component**

"Change at all levels is essential for girls to have collective support from within their communities."

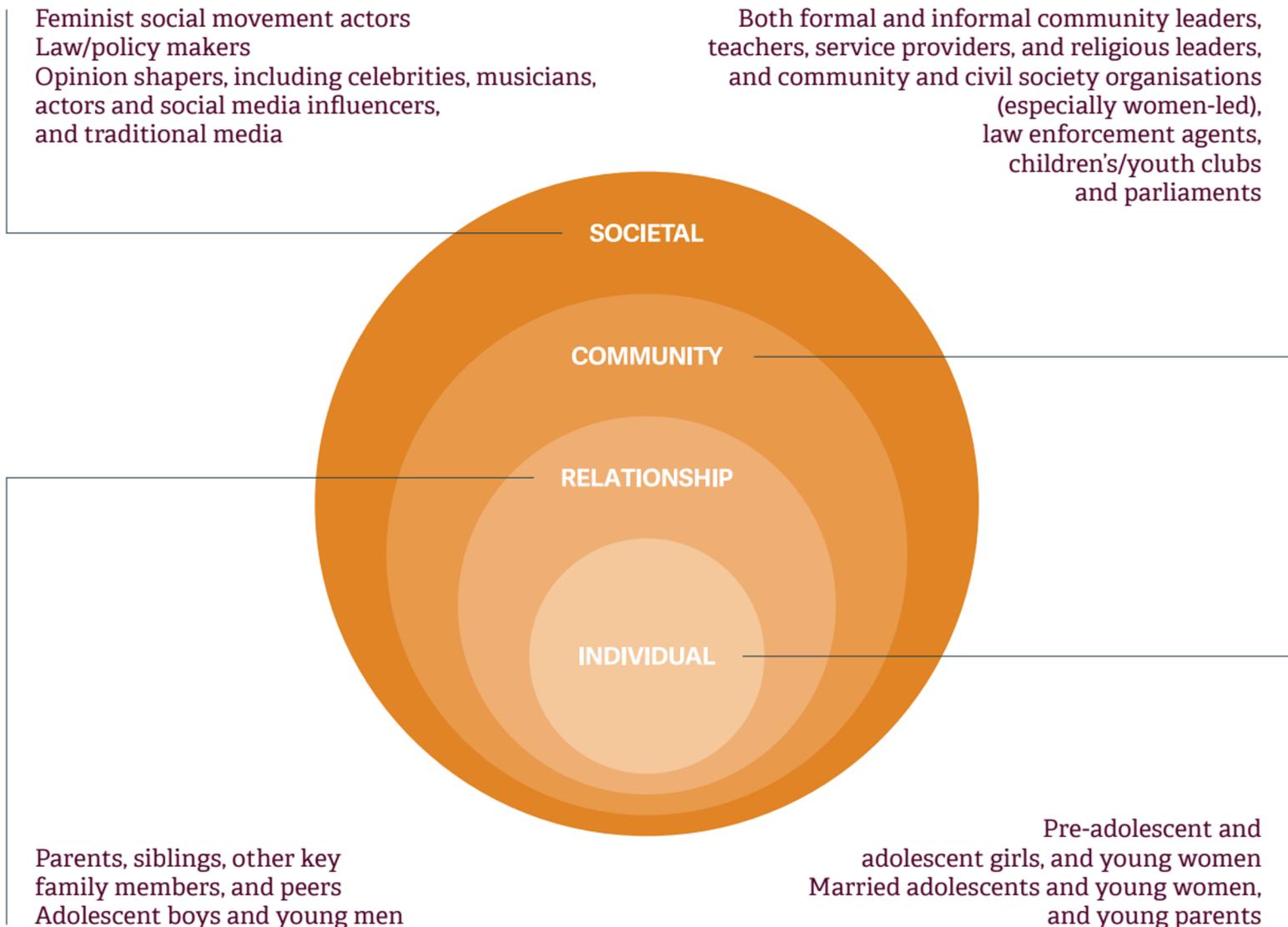
[Niger girls' focus group]



What are the principles?

- **Intersectional and inclusive:**
A girl's unique experience of these multiple oppressions impacts on her access to resources, opportunities and decision-making power. An intersectional lens ensures programming and advocacy do not inadvertently reinforce other oppressive norms in the pursuit of gender equity.
- **Dialogue and reflection based:**
Evidence from both CSE and gender norms change strategies emphasise dialogue and reflection as key to building the critical thinking that makes norms change possible.
- **Age differentiated**
- **Community driven:**
Programming should be driven by a local desire for structural change. Work should be led by or in partnership with locally based movements for women and girls' rights and autonomy.
- **Locally contextualised**

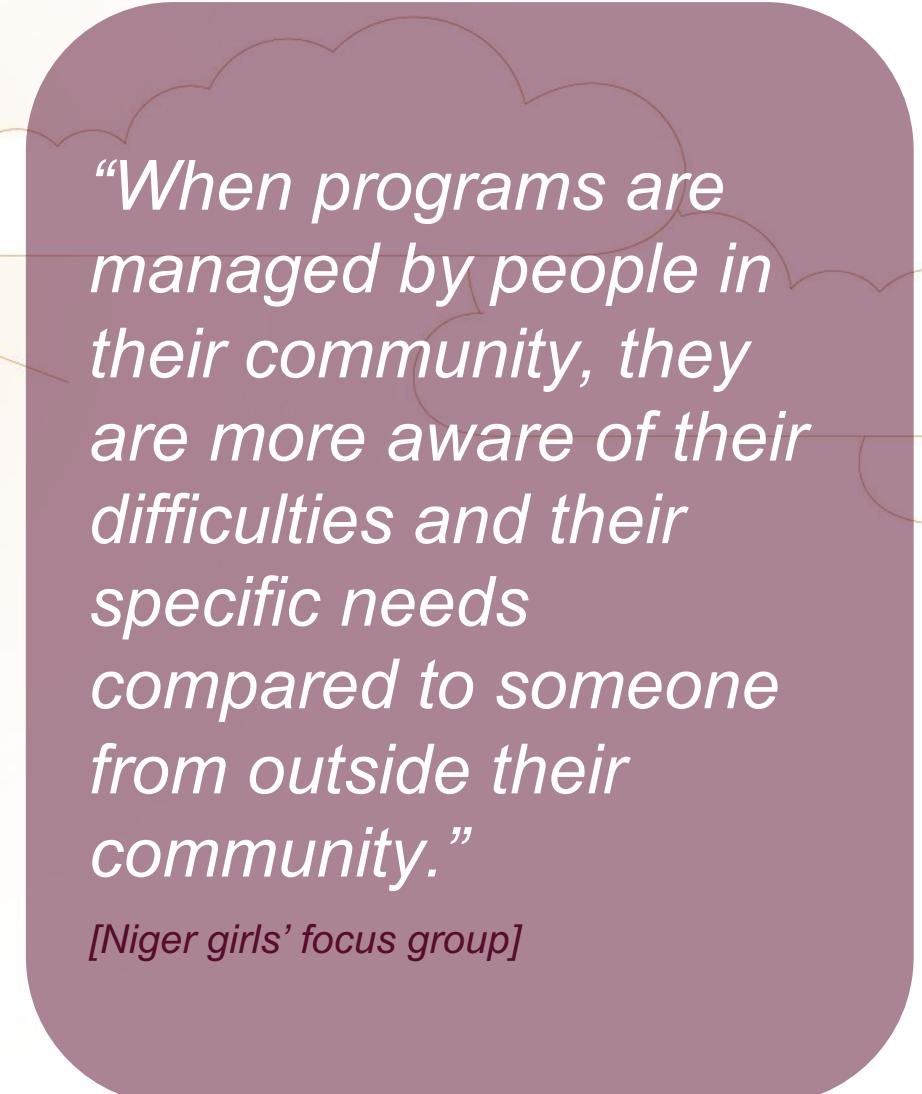
Changemakers: Who can we work with?





As implementers, evaluators and funders, how do we use those principles and this ecological perspective?

Considering that these are principles and actors that are intended to guide our interventions and programs, I believe it is important that we keep them close at each stage of implementation.



“When programs are managed by people in their community, they are more aware of their difficulties and their specific needs compared to someone from outside their community.”

[Niger girls' focus group]

Case study: The YP Foundation

The YP Foundation Programmes

Know Your Body Know Your Rights

Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE)

Promoting critical thinking on gender and power

Building local adolescent sexual and reproductive health and rights (ASRHR) service infrastructure

Encouraging intergenerational dialogues

Political advocacy

Butterfly Project

Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE)

Supporting girl-centered and girl-led collectivism and activism

Expanding educational and economic opportunities for girls

Facilitating public spaces for challenging norms

Expanding mobility in public spaces and access to technology for girls



What does the field need from funders?

For funders themselves and their partners

Invest in ongoing capacity building

Particularly:

- Gender-transformative
- Creating meaningful spaces for practitioners to reflect on sexuality, to strengthen their work.

For funders themselves and their partners

Invest in girl-led and feminist movements and organisations

- Trusting, supporting women's and youth organizations that intrinsically “get it”
- Foster partnerships between thought leaders and other organisations
- Longer-term, flexible funding corresponding to the non-linear process of social change

For funders themselves and their partners

Invest more in addressing structural drivers of norms

- Address structural drivers of norms that perpetuate inequality, including making legal, education, workforce and health institutions safe, accessible and girl-friendly.
- Avoid funding standalone interventions that do not address norms change (i.e. cash transfers alone)

For funders themselves and their partners

Avoid funding siloed CEFMU programming

- Reconsider championing programming that promotes approaches between sectors (e.g., health, education and social protection)
- Siloed approach often address a “symptom” of the larger problem of inequitable gender norms, not the root causes.

For funders themselves and their partners

Monitoring and evaluation approaches that centre girls' voices

- Identify and understand measures of success for gender-transformative CEFMU programming that capture change beyond age of marriage
- Articulate monitoring and evaluation approaches that centre girls' voices and define success from their perspectives.
- Invest in theories of change and other evaluation frameworks developed by adolescent girls and young women



Thank you!

