

UNFPA-UNICEF
Global Programme to
End Child Marriage

Protecting girls
from child marriage
during COVID-19
and always
Stories of change



**end
child
marriage**
A voice. A chance. A future.



”

One day we will definitely end child marriage

The quote is by Sandhya Saroj, an 18-year-old child rights activist from India, from the high-level side event hosted by the Governments of Canada and Zambia in partnership with the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage in September 2020, on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly.

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#EndChildMarriage

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Maina Dey in India was 16 when she escaped the marriage her parents had arranged for her in 2019, thanks to the help she received through a child marriage support telephone hotline.



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Note: This map is stylized and not to scale. It does not reflect a position by UNFPA or UNICEF on the legal status of any country or area or the delimitation of any frontiers.

INTRODUCTION

We work to end the practice of child marriage. We promote the right to delay marriage. We care for those already married. We do whatever it takes to give girls and boys a voice, educate them, offer them opportunities, and keep them safe and healthy. And we never give up.

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) – United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) Global Programme to End Child Marriage is implemented in 12 countries with a high prevalence and/or high burden of child marriage: Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Mozambique, Nepal, the Niger, Sierra Leone, Uganda, Yemen and Zambia.

The Global Programme focuses on five strategies for increased impact:

- 1. Create and expand opportunities for the empowerment of adolescent girls**
- 2. Promote a supportive and gender equal family and community environment**
- 3. Strengthen governance to prevent child marriage**
- 4. Enhance sustainability and impact of child marriage programmes**
- 5. Build partnerships.**

Through these strategies we aim to make sure that adolescent girls at risk of and affected by child marriage are effectively making their own informed decisions and choices regarding marriage, education, and sexual and reproductive health; that relevant sectoral systems and institutions effectively respond to the needs of adolescent girls and their families; and that there is enhanced legal and political response to prevent child marriage and to support pregnant, married, divorced or widowed adolescent girls.

For all girls, a voice, a chance and a future.

The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, which began as a health crisis, quickly became a child rights crisis. The pandemic, and measures put in place to limit its spread, have had adverse socioeconomic impacts on communities around the world, and risks progress on the Sustainable Development Goals – which the global community has committed to achieving by 2030 – including to end child, early and forced marriage under target 5.3. Recent data show that an additional 10 million girls risk becoming child brides in the next decade as a result of the pandemic. Hence, it is more important than ever that we reimagine approaches to protect girls and accelerate action to end child marriage, supporting interventions that address the context of the current crisis and build the resilience of girls and their families to respond to future potential crises – in line with the Sustainable Development Goals during this Decade of Action.

This publication highlights stories of some of the girls who have been reached by various interventions supported by the Global Programme to End Child Marriage during COVID-19 in 2020. The stories show how the Global Programme has continued to:

- Empower girls to know their rights, be educated and speak up in their communities
- Ensure the protection of girls through telephone helplines and outreach of social workers
- Provide girls with access to sexual and reproductive health information and services
- Enhance the legal and policy environment to protect girls’ rights

To learn more about the Global Programme, visit [our website](#), follow us on Twitter and Instagram ([@GPChildMarriage](#)) or contact [GPChildMarriage@unicef.org](#).

THE GLOBAL PROGRAMME HAS CONTINUED TO
EMPOWER GIRLS TO KNOW THEIR RIGHTS, BE
EDUCATED AND SPEAK UP IN THEIR COMMUNITIES

“

Every
time I found
myself feeling a failure
or feeling down, I would
think about the activities of
the Adolescent Club and what
they taught me: ... always lift
my head up. I am happy that I
am now raising my voice and
taking the initiative to stop
child marriage in my
community.

**Bina Akter, 18, is part of the Harjya Bari Adolescent Club in
Islampur, Jamalpur, Mymensingh, Bangladesh**

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Empowered, and agent for change in her village

Subharti* from Borapada village of Dhenkanal district of Odisha, India, was 16 years old in 2016 and studying in the intermediate class.

One day, she found out that her parents were going to solemnize her marriage against her will due to pressure from relatives and the poor economic condition of the family.

However, Subharti stated her aspirations to her parents: that she wanted to become a lawyer and did not want to give in to their pressure to marry. After a series of arguments and attempts to explain to her parents the harmful effects of getting married at such an early age, Subharti was able to convince them to not make her marry at age 16.

Subharti says that her inspiration to say no came from initiatives by UNICEF and ActionAid on the need to end child marriage and empower adolescents, the Balya bibaha pratirodh manchnow programme which is working towards ensuring that girls stay in school and get married only after they have reached the minimum legal age.

Subharti is today an active member of the programme in her home district of Dhenkanal, participating in different training activities and meetings on adolescent empowerment and child marriage. Currently, she is involved in creating awareness among adolescents not to marry at an early age, that they should understand the importance of education and, more importantly, higher education. She is creating awareness on the effects and legal consequences of child

marriage within her locality, and is a true champion, inspiration and role model for many adolescent girls.

Subharti is continuously working to increase awareness on sanitation, physical distancing and wearing of masks to prevent COVID-19. "I am actively involved in the COVID-19 response work," she says. "I got relevant information from the Anganwadi [rural childcare centre in India] worker of my village about the importance of hand washing, social distancing and the use of masks, and basic information about the virus. I feel privileged to be a part of this work and serve my village and I feel happy to see that the villagers are giving a positive response. I have also been supporting the 'preschool kid to learn' through Ghare Ghare Arunima programme. I feel proud and happy when I see the smiles on the faces of children while reciting songs and telling stories during my engagement in the programme. The local community has greater acceptance of me and of my leadership as I belong to their own community."

*** Name changed to protect her identity.**

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https://www.yunbaogao.cn/report/index/report?reportId=5_20159

