



Addressing Child Marriage in Nepal through Behavior Change Communication and Social Mobilization

About Chunauti

The goal of the Chunauti (which means “challenge” in Nepali) project, which was supported by USAID and implemented by CARE, was to decrease the harmful practices of child marriage and gender-based violence in three districts of Nepal - Dhanusha, Mahottari, and Rupandehi - and strengthen the enabling environment at the national and district levels to combat child marriage and other forms of gender-based violence through behavior change communication and social mobilization in Nepal.

BACKGROUND

Nepal, a mostly Hindu country of 30 million people, is an ethnically and culturally diverse society in which patriarchy aggravates the difference in status between men and women. Social, political, cultural and religious norms determine the nature of relationships within Nepali society and enforce rigid divisions and clear hierarchies. Women in Nepal are often economically and politically marginalized, they are made increasingly vulnerable to gender-based violence.

Of the many forms of GBV, child marriage is the most harmful, depriving young women of their basic rights and rendering them vulnerable to physical and psychological abuse. The young age of child brides and their limited power in decision-making (sexual, financial, or otherwise) leave them financially and socially insecure. Their limited access to contraception and reproductive health services predisposes them to health hazards; pregnant children under 15 years of age are five times more likely to die than women over the legal marriage age of 20 years. Despite these risks, more than two-thirds of Nepalese girls and women are married by age 20 [source: Nepal Adolescent and Young Adult Survey 2000].

OBJECTIVES

The *Chunauti* project had **three specific objectives** for achieving its overarching goal:

1. Transform community norms underpinning child marriage through peer educators, formal and non-formal leaders, community-based organizations, the school system, and a widespread behavior change communication campaign
2. Scale-up promising practices
3. Advocate for the establishment and enforcement of laws and policies that address child marriage and other forms of GBV

Program Name:	Chunauti
Program Country:	Nepal
Timeframe:	Oct 2008 – Sept 2011
Budget:	US\$ 1,499,515
Donor:	USAID

Knowledge on harmful effects of child marriage increased significantly as a result of the Chunauti project.

Knowledge about legal age for marriage increased among:

- Parents: from 21% up to 84%
- Adolescent boys: from 11% - 55%
- Adolescent girls: from 21% to 88%

Percentage of adolescents reporting that they discuss the effect of child marriage with family and neighbors increased from 32% to 66%



Impacts and Outcomes



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Attitudes towards child marriage changed.

More than 97% of both adolescent and parent respondents reported that they either “disagreed” or “strongly disagreed” with the child marriage practice.

Less than 2% respondents were in favor of child marriage practices by the end of the project.

The percentage of adolescents reporting that they discuss the effects of child marriage with family and neighbors increased from 32% to 66% by the end of the project.



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STRATEGIES

The project strategies included (a) Behavior Change Communication, (b) Social Mobilization, and (c) private sector engagement

Behavior Change Communication

The behavior change communication strategy took a multi-channel communication approach with equal emphasis on mass media, local or other types of media (including traditional and modern communication aids) and inter-personal communication by peer educators. The project team involved eminent personalities such as local or national celebrities as “brand ambassadors” endorsing the messages and themes at national and district level as well.

The behavior change communication strategy also took capacity building into account and provided ongoing support to peer educators. Peer education was one of the most critical interventions in achieving behavior change outcomes and sustaining efforts beyond the project life. Peer educators went through counseling and were taught effective inter-personal communication skills. Each peer educator reached about 30 households every month.

Social Mobilization

Social mobilization initiatives increased awareness, created an enabling environment that promoted and rewarded families delaying age at marriage, and contributed to developing young female leaders in the community. The success of social mobilization depended on the participating peer educators, child marriage eradication committees, anti-gender based violence forums and children’s clubs. These different groups raised awareness at the family and community level and advocate for law reinforcement at the district and national level.

Private Sector Engagement

The project included innovative private sector engagement in preventing child marriage. Peer educators and child marriage prevention committees worked private companies providing wedding services such as caterers and bands to boycott child weddings, advertise their commitment to preventing child marriage, and introduce codes of conduct focused on prevention of GBV, dowry and child marriage. Augmenting the work with private companies, project volunteers also worked with influential members of the community such as religious leaders and match-makers to speak publicly about preventing child marriage, dowry and gender-based violence.

RESULTS

Specific outcomes of the project include:

- i.) An increase in the number of men and women in the community able to identify harmful effects of child marriages and willing to work to stop child marriages
- ii.) Child marriage and GBV issues are mainstreamed in social mobilization and behavior change communication efforts of other seven CARE-Nepal projects
- iii.) Key stakeholders at district and national levels identify with the issue and advocate publicly for stopping child marriages
- iv.) Law enforcement mechanisms activated