

# **Contents**

	List of abbreviations	3
1.	General information	4
2.	Introduction and summary	4
3.	Results and learning	5
	3.1 Direct reach	5
	3.2. Impact	5
	3.3 Project outcomes	9
	Outcome 1: Retention of Girls in School	9
	Outcome 2: Knowledge of Sexual and Reproductive	
	Health and Rights among Adolescents	12
	Outcome 3: Economic Opportunities for Girls and Families at High Risk of CEFM	15
	Outcome 4: Communities Embrace Norms that Value the Girl and Support	
	Girls and Boys to Delay Marriage	17
	Outcome 5: Improved Child Protection Policies and Implementation that Affect CEFM	20
	3.4 Significant deviations from the latest approved application and/or plan	23
	3.5 Risks	23
	3.6 Cost-efficiency	27
	3.7 Sustainability	27
	3.8 Lessons learned	29
4.	Evaluation and reviews	32
5.	Financial report and audit	33
6.	Results achievement for the Civil Society Support	33

## List of abbreviations

CAY Children and Youth

CBCPM/C Community-Based Child Protection Mechanism/committees

**CEFM** Child, Early, and Forced Marriage<sup>1</sup>

COC Champions of Change
CSO Civil Society Organization
FGD Focus Group Discussion

**GEMS** Gender Equality Movement in Schools

GGE Girls Get Equal

**GTM** Gender Transformative Marker

IEC Information, Education, and Communication

IGA Income Generating Activities
KII Key Informant Interview

MHM Menstrual Health and Hygiene Management
SEAH Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment

**SOYEE** Skills and Opportunities for Youth Economic Empowerment

SRHR Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

VSLA Village Savings and Loan Association

WASH Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH)

YEE Youth Economic Empowerment

# **General information**

1.1 Name of grant recipient: Plan International Norway
1.2 Norad's agreement number: GLO 0742 QZA-19/0254

1.3 Norad's agreement title: Girls Get Equal: Preventing Child, Early and Forced Marriage

3

**1.4 Total grant amount:** NOK 246 400 000

1.5 Support period of the agreement: 01.01.2020 - 31.12.2024
 1.6 Reporting period: 01.01.2020 - 31.12.2024

1.7 Countries of implementation: Bangladesh, Malawi, Nepal, Niger, Tanzania, Uganda

<sup>1</sup> CEFM refers to all forms of early/forced marriages or unions that occur where at least one of parties is under the age of 18.

# l. Introduction and summary

This Report presents the results for the five-year Grant Agreement between Plan International Norway and Norad for the Girls Get Equal (GGE) Programme. The Report describes progress towards achieving the Programme's objectives and analyses its qualitative and quantitative results from 2020 through 2024.

The Report provides an overview of the results at an aggregated level, with selected examples based on disaggregated data from the country-specific projects. Please note that when this Report refers to the "Programme," it focuses on the consolidated achievements in all countries combined, whilst when the Report refers to a "Project," it focuses on a specific country. When the report uses the term "rights-holders," it is referring to project participants. More detailed results at the Output level can be found in the consolidated Results Framework. The country-specific Results Frameworks and reports are available upon request.

The monitoring data suggest that between 2020 and 2024, the rates of child marriage declined in all the districts where the Programme was implemented. That is, the proportion of women aged 20-24 who were married or in a union before age 18 and those who were married before 15 was lower by the end of 2023 than in 2019 (See Table 1 below). The Programme also exceeded its overall targets by reaching 351,251 children - (10.5% above target) 195,955 girls and 155,296 boys, 752 communities (135% of the set goal), and 734 schools, underscoring strong collective progress across all areas. Outcome 1, which centred on girls' retention in school, saw primary school dropout rates decline from 8.25% to 2.65% and secondary dropout rates from 7.77% to 2.41%, with re-enrolment efforts successfully re-engaging 15,632 children. Under Outcome 2, initiatives to boost sexual and reproductive health and rights knowledge resulted in 86.19% of adolescents

demonstrating comprehensive understanding, in comparison to 19.94% while the Programme reached 134,464 participants with SRHR information. Outcome 3 focused on expanding economic opportunities for girls and high-risk families; although the number of youths sustaining their own income reached 4,535 (below target), employment outcomes were notably strong with 84.90% of trained youth securing employment, and family-level interventions led 2,499 vulnerable families to decide against early marriage. Outcome 4 contributed to a shift in community norms by reaching over 2.5 million people, engaging 7,123 key community advocates, and achieving 85.38% support among boys for girls' education and delaying marriage, as opposed to 32.7% at baseline. Finally, Outcome 5 advanced the strengthening of child protection policies and practices through the establishment and growth of community-based protection committees and enhanced engagement of youth and civil society, setting an important foundation for ongoing efforts in child protection.

The Results Report proceeds as follows. Section 4 assesses the project's contributions to the impact and outcome levels and discusses significant deviations from the 2024 annual plans and the Programme's risk management, including negative effects on Norad's cross-cutting issues, cost-efficiency, sustainability and lessons learned. Section 5 provides an overview of evaluations and reviews. Section 5 comments on and justifies significant deviations between actual costs and the latest approved budget, and Section 6 includes the 2020-2024 financial report and audit. Finally, Section 7 provides a quantitative overview of the number of local civil society actors that the Programme reached and strengthened from 2020 through 2024.



# 2. Results and learning

#### 3.1 Direct reach

During its five years, the Girls Get Equal (GGE) Programme reached 351,251 children (195,955 girls; 155,296 boys), 752 communities, and 734 schools directly. This means that the Programme overachieved the end-of-agreement target of 317,868 children by 11%. The Programme also exceeded the target of 556 communities by 35% and was less than 1% away from achieving the target of 741 schools.

#### 3.2. Impact

The overall impact goal of the Programme is to contribute to a reduction in the prevalence of Child, Early and Forced Marriage (CEFM). This is operationalized by measuring the proportions of girls who are married or in a union before the ages of 15 and 18. The Results Framework opted for the indicator that is thematically most relevant for the Programme's overall ambition, even though the timeframe does not allow complete attribution and capturing of changes for various age groups. The indicators' age categories were chosen to be consistent

with the national statistics measured through the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) Program and cover the proportion of women aged 20-24 who were married or in a union before age 18 (women aged 15-19 married before age 15, respectively). The latter is better able to show changes throughout the duration of the Programme, as the former includes a lag of at least two years from reaching 18 until they are measured, and the exposure duration differs for each age cohort. However, based on the detailed raw data from the random survey of women in a continuous age range of 15-24 in the targeted communities that included approximately 500 women on average per country, we are able to estimate the impact of the Programme in a more precise way for the timeframe in which the Programme could have positively affected the communities and district population. Below are the proportion of girls and women in the implementation districts who report being married before age 18 and 15 at baseline and year 4, per country.

Table 1. Proportion of child marriage; under 18 and 15 in the Programme district

	Proportion of women aged 20-24 who were married or in a union <b>before</b> <b>age 18 2019</b>	Proportion of women aged 20-24 who were married or in a union before age 18 2023	Proportion of girls and women aged 15-19 who were married or in a union <b>before age</b> 15 2019	Proportion of girls and women aged 15-19 who were married or in a union <b>before age</b> 15 2023
MALAWI	42 %	33 %	16 %	3,2 %
TANZANIA	25 %	8%	4,7 %	0,75 %
NIGER	87 %	65 %	29 %	18 %
NEPAL	40 %	12 %	4 %	0 %
UGANDA	45 %	33 %	3%	2,4 %
BANGLADESH	56 %	31%	17 %	5 %

Overall, the data show a reduction in child marriage in the districts where the Programme was implemented in all six countries. Although we cannot directly attribute these reductions to the Programme. The results outlined by the outcome indicators (described in section 2.3 Project Outcomes) suggest that several of the known drivers of child marriage were addressed positively within the project period. For example, the project's monitoring data shows that school completion amongst girls increased, the number of critically poor families

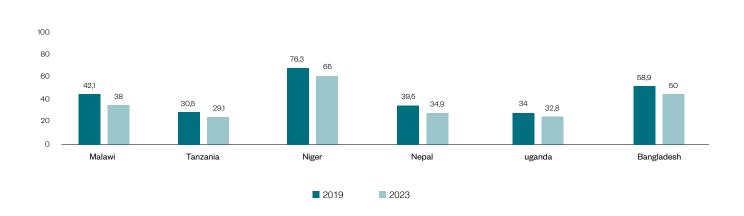
deciding NOT to marry their girls increased and there was increased support amongst community leaders and families for gender equality and equal opportunities for girls and boys.

Furthermore, if we compare the national rates of child marriage (under 18) in each of the project countries, we also see that the decline in child marriage rates is higher in the project districts. This can be seen by comparing Figure 1 and Figure 2 below. Given that there was

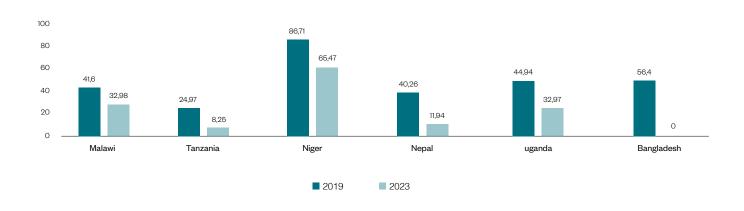
a greater reduction in child marriage rates in the project districts than at the national level, it might suggest that the GGE program has had a positive effect on reducing the rates of child marriage. For example, in 2023, the Bangladesh project collected child marriage data in implementation sites and compared them to four non-intervention sites –

the findings showed that child marriage rates in non-intervention sites were double that of intervention sites. Thus, despite not being able to directly attribute a reduction in child marriage based on our M&E data, the results indicate positive trends.

Figur 1: Child marriage rate at national level, per country 2019 vs 2023



Figur 2: Child marriage rate at district level, per country 2019 vs 2023



In addition to the numbers, an external impact assessment, conducted by KPMG in  $2024^2$  revealed a number of plausible contributing factors to the impact result – both at the individual and the community level. As the data in the assessment is based on qualitative Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews (KII), it provides insights and interpretations directly from the communities that

were reached by the program. The below section highlights some key programme impacts observed in the assessment report.

Overall, the impact assessment provided evidence that the different components/program outcome areas of the GGE Programme have worked together to decrease child marriage - i.e. educational support,

8

<sup>2</sup> KPMG (2025) Impact Assessment of the Girls Get Equal multi-country program to prevent child, early, and forced marriage

SRHR programming, economic empowerment, and child protection. In particular, engaging men and boys and traditional and religious leaders was found to be an important strategy for driving impact-level results. The gender-transformative approach of the Programme helped families and communities to challenge traditional gender norms and there was evidence of communities placing greater value in girls as a result.

The program has contributed to the development and enforcement of laws and policies against child marriage and violence against children. This includes community by-laws against child marriage and violence and collaboration with traditional and religious leaders to enforce these laws. In all the GGE targeted communities, there has been a reported increase in the reporting of child marriages and other forms of abuse, likely facilitated by strengthened referral systems and greater awareness of laws and bylaws. The GGE Programme has focused on improving child protection systems, structures, and policies/legislation that protect children from CEFM and other harmful practices. The assessment also found that initiatives aimed at keeping girls in school were closely linked to the perceived reduction in child marriage. For example, the focus on menstrual health and hygiene and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities, a reduced level of violence in school, better relationships with teachers and an improved attitude of teachers to adolescents' SRHR were linked to increasing school attendance amongst girls.

"There is an improvement in their teaching method, their confidence and their own understanding of gender rights. Teachers are the more critical link in this project, who work with students and parents in shifting norms and values in the community as a whole." - Government stakeholder in KII, Taltoli Upazila, Bangladesh (KPMG, 2025)

Specifically, those strategies that empower girls and adolescents and increase access to economic resources were deemed an effective means of delaying and preventing CEFM. The increased earnings amongst women and girls fostered not only independence and empowerment but increased their participation and decision-making power within the household and their communities. There was an overall improvement on the value placed on women and girls' potential in the community/society.

The increased level of SRHR knowledge amongst youth and their communities also led to increased, more open and easier communication around SRHR between adolescents and their caretakers, including early pregnancy and how to prevent it. The impact assessment showed that communities also observed a decrease in early unintended pregnancies.

"The project has changed the concept of child marriage in our society. Earlier there used to be many child and early marriages but now it has drastically reduced, those taking places are marriage by eloping. Now boys and girls are treated the same at home for household chores. Door-to-door campaigns have been the most effective in changing the norms." - PTA Member in FGD, Kalikot, Nepal (KPMG, 2025)

"Regarding early marriages, there have been significant social changes. Now, everyone sees it as completely inappropriate for school-going children to marry. This has had a great impact. We are all now advocates against early marriages because of the awareness that GGE raised" – VSLA member in FGD, Mulanje, Malawi (KPMG, 2025)

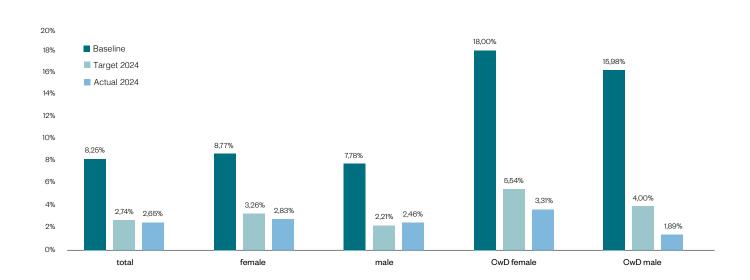
### 3.3 Project outcomes

#### **OUTCOME 1: RETENTION OF GIRLS IN SCHOOL**

Increasing girls' retention in school has been a cornerstone of the Programme, aimed at delaying child marriage and fostering life-long skills. Indeed, the impact assessment suggested that increases in educational retention and enrollment were linked to reduced marriage rates. In primary education, overall dropout rates in target communities dropped remarkably from 8.25% at baseline (2019) to 2.65% in 2024 - surpassing the target of 2.74%. For instance, in Tanzania

several activities were instrumental in reducing the dropout rates to just 0.33 % against a target of 1.49%. High levels of community engagement were established through Parent-Teacher partnerships (PTPs) and school management committees that ensured close follow up of students as well as coordinating food collection for school feeding programs.

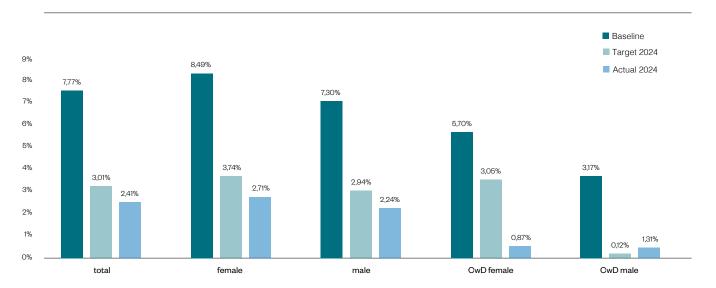
Figur 3: % of students dropped out before completing targeted primary school



In secondary education, the Programme also saw a decline in dropout rates from 7.77% at baseline to 2.41% in 2024, surpassing the target of 3.01%. Notably, Nepal achieved a significant turnaround for male students—reducing dropout from 7.78% to 2.46%. This success was driven by interventions that addressed seasonal migration through local government engagements and community surveys, ensuring timely re-enrollment. However, it is important to note that secondary school dropout rates for girls continue to be heavily impacted by cultural norms and child marriage, underscoring persistent contextual chal-

lenges despite the overall positive trend. This shows the importance of including interventions which specifically address negative norms which discourage girls from pursuing education. Capacity-building efforts in countries like Niger also played a role in creating safer, more inclusive learning environments. Raising awareness on negative stereotypes among students and teachers and working with communities to challenge harmful gender norms and power imbalances has also been a central component of the program.

Figur 4: % of students dropped out before completing targeted secondary school

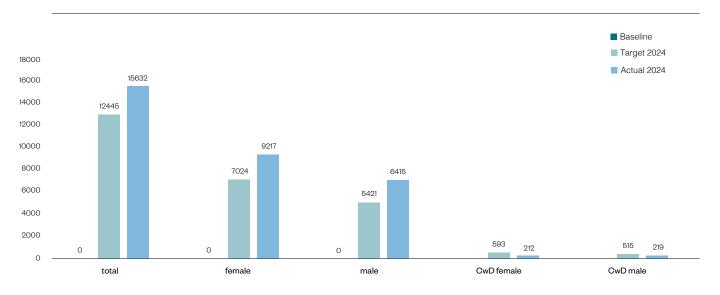


The Programme's impact extended beyond retention within schools by successfully re-engaging out of school children. Numbers surged from 2,388 re-admissions in 2021 to 15,632 in 2024. Uganda, for example, demonstrated remarkable progress—moving from 375 re-integrated children to 3,261 as Programme strategies were refined and community mobilization intensified. Similarly, in Malawi, re-admission

policies complemented by accelerated basic education classes and remedial interventions enabled 7,568 children to re-enter the education system against a target of 3,143, highlighting the importance of combining effective policy implementation with grassroot support.

11

Outcome 1.2: # of out-of-school children brought into schools



Progress was also made within disability inclusion. Overall, dropout rates among male students reached 2.46%, while targeted interventions for female students with disabilities saw their dropout rate decline dramatically—from 18.43% in baseline to 3.31%. Enhanced capacity building for teachers, including training in inclusive methodologies and child protection, has been central to increasing the reach among disabled students. Although efforts to reintegrate out-of-school children with disabilities fell short of targets—illustrated by Uganda's shortfall for girls with disabilities—these targeted strategies have significantly improved the educational experience for vulnerable learners.

Overall, the success of the GGE Programme in boosting school retention demonstrates the strength of coordinated interventions that combine teacher training, improved school governance, and community engagement. While challenges remain—such as addressing the deep-rooted cultural factors affecting girls' education and mitigating the disruptions caused by seasonal migration—the Programme's multifaceted approach has led to improvements at both primary and secondary levels.

THE IMPORTANCE OF MENSTRUAL HEALTH AND HYGIENE MANAGEMENT (MHM) FOR FARIDA MAMA - NIGER Farida Maman, a 14-year-old student in Ourafane, Niger, experienced missing out on school due to fear and shame around menstruation. Like many girls, she lacked knowledge and resources to manage her period. Through the 'Girls get Equal project, Farida received menstrual hygiene education and kits including soap, underwear, and sanitary pads. This transformed her understanding of menstruation, helping her manage it confidently and continuing to attend school. She now educates her peers and sisters, breaking taboos and promoting menstrual health. The project, active in 31 schools, has also shifted community attitudes—mothers now openly discuss menstruation, and sanitary pads are available in local shops. Farida's story highlights how access to menstrual hygiene education and resources empowers girls to stay in school and advocate for change in their communities.

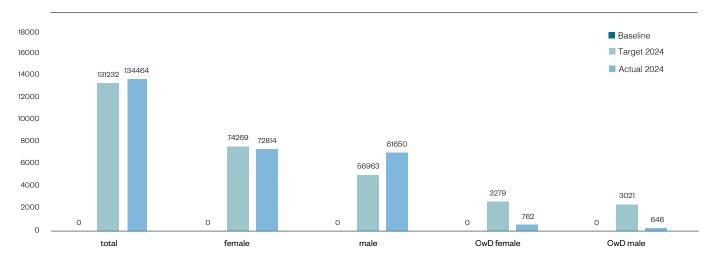
# **OUTCOME 2:** KNOWLEDGE OF SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS AMONG ADOLESCENTS

In order to achieve outcome 2, the project sought to reach adolescents and their communities with targeted, fact-based information on SRHR. As outlined in the Programme's theory of change, it was assumed that with greater knowledge of their own sexual and reproductive health and rights (beyond simply biological functions), adolescents will be better able to reduce risky sexual behavior and make choices aligned with their own wants and needs. For example, avoiding unintended early pregnancy is thought to help reduce a major driver of child marriage. Furthermore, engaging parents and communities in adolescents' SRHR was thought to reduce stigma and shame and thus prevent early marriages as a means of controlling adolescents' sexuality. Indeed, the impact evaluation suggests that in the areas in which GGE was implemented, communication and knowledge of SRHR was improved in communities, and there was a perceived reduction in teenage pregnancies. Where possible, the program contributed to the development and/or improvement of the national curriculum for SRHR education. Adolescents in and out of school were targeted with information, peer-to-peer learning was encouraged, and teachers and leaders were trained to deliver SRHR information in a contextually appropriate manner. To create an enabling environment for adolescents to safely attain knowledge on their sexual and reproductive

health and rights, parents, community leaders and policy makers were targeted with sensitization and awareness raising on the importance of adolescent SRHR.

By the end of the Programme, a total of 134,464 adolescents received SRHR information - surpassing the target of 131,232. This achievement underscores the program's deliberate targeting and strategies to deliver quality SRHR content. For example, Niger's intensive training of teachers and awareness campaigns in schools along with post-training follow ups with community groups such as Village Saving and Loan Associations, led them to drastically exceed their outreach target by more than threefold. Similarly, Malawi's strategic use of Youth Community Distribution Agents (YCBDA) allowed them to surpass their target. In contrast, other countries were unable to reach their targets. For example, in Uganda, where 31,932 adolescents were reached against a target of 55,000 target. Such numbers may illustrate opportunities to further enhance community engagement strategies but also point to a very restrictive context regarding the delivery of comprehensive SRHR information.

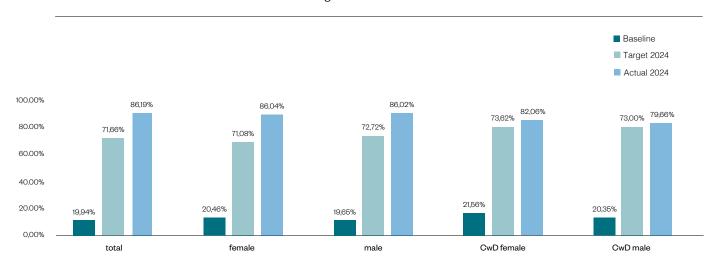
Intermediate Outcome 2.1: # of adolescents received information in SRHR



In order to assess the level of SRHR knowledge amongst program participants, a sample of more than 6000 adolescents in the 6 targeted countries were asked 9 questions regarding SRHR. The results showed that in comparison to a baseline of 19.94% in 2019, 86.19% of adolescents attained a sufficient level of SRHR knowledge in 2024. This was well above the target of 71.66%. The marked improvement reflects effective dissemination of age and context-tailored SRHR curricula. For example, in Bangladesh the implementation of a new government curriculum (Gender Equality Movement in Schools, which Plan co-developed) appears to have significantly boosted the number of students with a sufficient understanding of SRHR (from

11.24% in 2019 to 97.34% in 2004). By providing locally developed and contextually tailored comprehensive sexuality education, teacher training curriculum to MHM focal points and female teachers in Nepal, the number of participants with sufficient SRHR knowledge reached 98% (compared to a target of 70%). In addition, targeted and dynamic community engagement strategies and peer-to-peer information sharing methods- for example via the Champions of Change methodology allowed countries like Uganda to drastically improve knowledge rates (from 11.89% in 2021 to 81.90% in 2024) despite underachieving on total reach in numbers (as described above).

Outcome 2: # of adolescents that demonstrate knowledge of SRHR



The Programme also made considerable progress in increasing the percentage of male adolescents that demonstrate SRHR knowledge. After early underachievement amongst males—partly due to the prioritization of SRHR information amongst girls—targeted adaptations, such as integrating SRHR content into science lessons and adjusting curriculum delivery, boosted the knowledge level amongst males to 86.02% in 2024 against a target of 71.08%. For example, efforts by teachers to integrate SRHR into classroom lessons and guidance sessions on especially science, helped to improve knowledge amongst boys in Uganda. In Bangladesh, enhanced facilitation and deliberate curricular adjustments reversed low participation trends for boys. The Programme has also been successful in increasing the percentage of adolescents with disabilities that demonstrate knowledge on SRHR. By the end of 2024, 74% of female adolescents with disabilities

and 73% of male adolescents with disabilities demonstrated SRHR knowledge, meeting the targets. In Tanzania, the combination of regular SRHR quizzes, talk programs, tailored Information, Education, and Communication (IEC materials) along with onsite mentorship and supervision sessions with district educational teams facilitated the delivery of more accurate and accessible SRHR information. Malawi's use of multiple outreach channels such as YOBDAs and the youth led TIMVENI radio channel is likely to have extended information reach to children with disabilities as well as those not in school.

The Programme's results collectively demonstrate that investing in quality SRHR education and targeted outreach results in an increased level of knowledge amongst adolescents.

#### SRH CLUBS EMPOWERING RUKWA GIRLS TO AVOID UNWANTED PREGNANCIES - TANZANIA

In Tanzania's Rukwa Region, where teenage pregnancy and child marriage are prevalent, Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) clubs in schools have become a transformative force. Established through the Girls get Equal Programme, with the support of local partners such as YESTZ and the government, these clubs provide safe spaces for girls to learn about their rights, reproductive health, and the value of education. Girls like Saada Juma now confidently reject early marriage, understanding how to protect themselves and prioritize their futures.

The clubs have led to a dramatic drop in teen pregnancies—from eight cases in 2020/21 to just one in 2023 in Sumbawanga District. Teachers trained in life skills and SRH education have helped students recognize and report abuse, while also engaging parents and communities. Cultural practices like the Chagulaga tradition, which once fueled early marriages, are being challenged through awareness efforts.

With the growing demand to expand SRH clubs to all schools, the initiative has proven that education, community engagement, and youth empowerment can drive lasting change—ensuring girls stay in school and thrive.

Read the full story: https://www.thecitizen.co.tz/tanzania/magazines/success/how-srh-clubs-are-empowering-rukwa-girls-to-stay-in-school-4772488

# **OUTCOME 3:** ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES FOR GIRLS AND FAMILIES AT HIGH RISK OF CEFM

Poverty is a strong driver of child, early, and forced marriage (CEFM). Therefore, the purpose of Outcome 3 is to bolster economic opportunities for girls and poor families at high risk of marrying off their daughters, while also challenging negative norms and elevating the status of girls through skills training and sensitization. The Programme sought to provide youth, especially girls, with vocational and entrepreneurship training, and access to capital and market linkages. In addition, families at risk of child-marriage were supported through income generation activities and/or direct financial assistance. Data from the impact evaluation strongly suggested that increased access

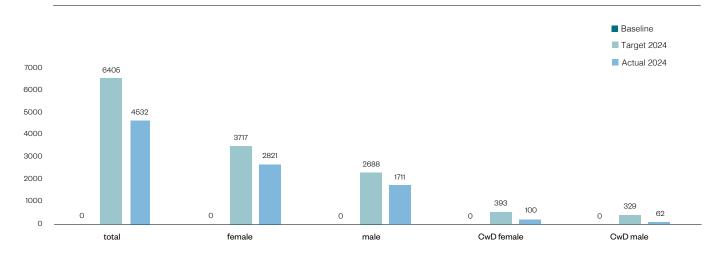
to economic resources was an effective means to delay and prevent CEFM. By the end of 2024, the Programme trained 14,794 participants in vocational skills, entrepreneurship skills and life skills as part of the Youth Economic Empowerment package.<sup>3</sup> By 2024, 85% had gained employment, surpassing the target of 70% (IO3.1). In Tanzania the employment rate reached 93% (against a target of 70%). Participants mostly gained access to employment through self-employment in agriculture production or by forming small-scale businesses, for others, the Programme facilitated employment in governmental construction projects. Most of the participants also gained access to

<sup>3</sup> In Uganda, the project Results Framework included very high targets for number of youths to be trained, causing a divergence from the target figure. Plan International Norway has informed Norad that this is due to a mistake during planning, which means the Programme was not able to train as many youths as targets indicate.

financial institutions - which have been key in providing capital to kick-start businesses and creating opportunities within their communities, 4,532 youth sustained an income through wage or self-employment by the end of the Programme. Despite fairly good progress throughout, the endline goal of 6,405 was not reached. This can be explained by the fact that the threshold used for 'sustaining an income' in the Programme's indicator definition guide was based on country-specific income above the poverty line, which was measured in US dollars. Therefore, drastic increases in the value of the US dollar against

local currencies made the target harder to reach in some contexts. Furthermore, the assets gained from reinvestments were not included in the threshold calculation, thereby missing out a significant portion of earnings made. Thirdly, according to the indicator definition, project participants' incomes for the indicator were only tracked for two years, despite support from the program continuing beyond that. Unofficial tracking suggests income levels in many cases continue to grow after two years.

Outcome 3: # of youth sustaining their own income



Despite these challenges in attaining the income threshold in the Programme, Bangladesh managed to ensure that 1171 households earned an income above the poverty line, defined as at least \$60 per month. These results exceed the project's target by 200 participants. Participants' average monthly income from project-supported activities was \$70. This success can likely be attributed to the 'Family Development Approach' which builds on the skills and resources within the household to generate quick income and thereafter gradually diversifying income streams. This approach fostered economic resilience, also towards climate shocks and stressors. As the project was implemented in a climate vulnerable area, participants also received Household Preparedness training as part of the economic empowerment activities provided for families. When working with girls and young women in particular, families and households needs to be included in activities as their economic resilience is key for realizing girls' rights.

The Programme has provided access to investment capital to facilitate income generation for 17,872 people. Access to capital was mainly through village savings and loans groups (VSLAs), but in many countries the supported VSLAs have also succeeded in accessing government loans and formal financial institutions for products and services. In Uganda, the project had engaged 7,305 participants in 253 VSLA groups by end of 2024. In order to delay CEFM, the project approached at-risk families with activities to boost their income from

small-scale farming and support their inclusion in VSLAs. By end of 2024, 79 vulnerable family groups with 2254 members (over 50 % female) were formed in Uganda. Overall, the Programme has experienced that the VSLA model has proven to be an effective tool for promoting financial inclusion, empowerment, alleviating poverty and building financial resilience that strengthen girls and young women's rights.

The Programme has made significant strides in reducing the number of critically poor families with high risk of CEFM. A total of 10,545 families received support to improve their economic situation and delay marriage (OP 3.3.1). At the end of the Programme, a total of 6,544 families decided not to marry off their girls, surpassing the target of 4,046 families. In Nepal, a total of 153 critically poor families decided not to marry off girls. To secure buy- in from the families, the project engaged with families from the start of the project so as to ensure that Nepali female youth could enroll in the economic empowerment activities. This allowed the youth to submit their written commitments to the project after receiving training. The same approach of written consent was used by the project in Bangladesh, with no reports of intentions being broken.

A recommendation from the impact assessment report was to strengthen and scale up economic empowerment initiatives as it has

a transformative potential in elevating the status of girls. Specifically, building confidence, raising awareness about topics that are central to girls' autonomy, enabling freedom of movement and freedom of choice are important elements to include in economic empowerment initiatives.

An important observation of the Programme is that the youth who succeeded in sustaining their own income often engaged in multiple business opportunities. This diversified their income and increased their monthly capital. It was clear that time was also a crucial factor: it takes time to establish a business and to build the right infrastructure

as well as apply new skills. With time, many youths show greater entrepreneurial skills than in the beginning, and the Programme has seen household income continue to grow several years after the training provided.

As project locations are more vulnerable to climate and environmental shocks and stressors, it's vital to build more resilient pathways to employment. This also includes diversification of income, as for instance seen in Bangladesh, having a positive effect on the participants ability to bounce back.

#### EMPOWERING VULNERABLE HOUSEHOLDS THROUGH VILLAGE SAVINGS AND LOANS (VSLAS) - MALAWI

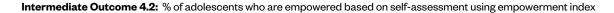
Towera, a mother of five from Phalombe District, faced severe financial hardship that threatened her children's education and food security. In 2018, she joined the struggling Nakhule Village Savings and Loan (VSL) group. By 2020, the group had only 10 members and minimal savings due to mismanagement. However, in 2021, the GGE project revitalized the group with training in financial literacy, business planning, and support like chickens for income generation. The group was also linked to Vision Fund Malawi, receiving loans that helped them grow. Following this intervention by GGE, membership of the VSL group doubled, and savings rose significantly. Towera took a loan of \$28.86 to open a tearoom, earning up to \$34.57 daily—enough to fund her daughters' education. She now owns 35 chickens and four goats, thanks to another loan. With improved income, she can buy fertilizer and seeds, ending food shortages at home. Towera's journey reflects how access to financial tools, training, and support can empower women to transform their families' futures.

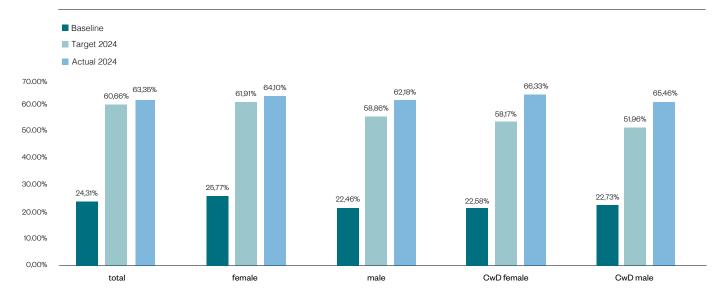


#### **OUTCOME 4:** COMMUNITIES EMBRACE NORMS THAT VALUE THE GIRLS AND SUPPORT GIRLS AND BOYS TO DELAY MARRIAGE

At the Programme end in 2024, 63% of adolescents reported being empowered (using a self-assessment empowerment index). This exceeds the target of 60% and is an impressive increase from the baseline of 24% in 2019. The results are in large part due to the youth's increased awareness of gender equality and child rights, developed through activities such as engagement in Champion of Change clubs.

However, it also suggests a shift in the community norms. To garner community support for norms that value girls and delay marriage, the Programme worked on the individual empowerment of girls whilst in parallel, raising awareness amongst families, communities, gatekeepers and decision makers on the importance of gender equality. Within an enabling environment, youth are both able to feel and exercise their rights.





Leadership engagement was also pivotal for this outcome, as illustrated by the engagement of religious and traditional leaders and government officials. At the end of the project, 7,123 officials showed support for the fight against child marriage: above the target of 5,745. Structured approaches such as interfaith meetings and targeted training sessions with leaders prooved successful - for example in Nepal, former supporters of child marriage were converted into active advocates towards ending the practice. In Bangladesh, a number of matchmakers and marriage registrars have publicly committed to ending child marriage and in Tanzania, an interfaith SRHR coalition was formed because of targeted training of leaders. These actions clearly boost the number of active supporters against CEFM, however the power of traditional norms and values is reflected in contexts such as Niger, where the targeted level of support from leadership was not reached.

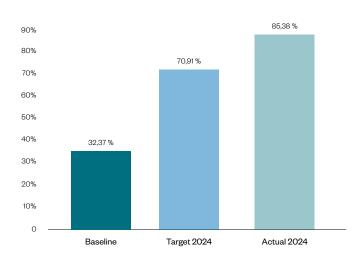
The number of initiators, matchmakers and antimarriage clubs who cooperated to stop child marriage went from 0 at baseline to 1,833,

surpassing its 1,688 target in 2024. Cooperation and communication between actors and groups is an essential element of changing norms. Not only did cooperative action strengthen community networks, but it also dovetailed with impressive progress among youth. For example, in Niger community structures such as Husband Clubs (Ecoles des maris), Future Husband Clubs (Ecoles des futures maris), Listening clubs and Village child protection clubs fostered strong networks of local leaders and enhanced social cohesion and trust in advancing gender equality.

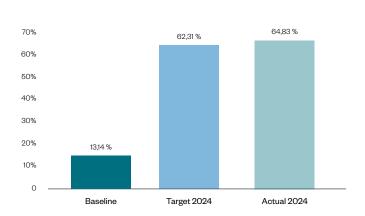
Impressive progress was also seen amongst youth and their families. For example, the proportion of boys who expressed support for girls' education and rejected early marriage soared to 85.38% (up from 32.37% at baseline). This reflects the powerful impact of youth-led initiatives, peer education, and targeted IEC/SBCC efforts to raise awareness of gender equality. For example, in the Champions of Change curriculum, there are specific sessions targeting males to become champions for gender equality. Bangladesh surpassed its target

for boys' support likely due to the comprehensive approach that integrated schools, clubs and family engagement through its champion mothers and champion fathers' clubs. Similarly, in Malawi, positive

parenting sessions are likely to have created more positive home environments and thus reinforced boys' roles as advocates for girls.



**Outcome 4.3:** % of boys who express support for girls 'education and against CEFM



**Outcome 4.4:** % of youth reporting that the family supports equal opportunities for sons and daughters in education and employment and will not marry their children before they are 18. (20 for Nepal)

Family support for gender-equality was seen by the percentage of youth reporting their families' support for equal education and employment opportunities for sons and daughters and a commitment to delay marriage. This increased from 13% in 2019 to 64% in 2024. In Malawi, youth reported that parents now consistently provide scholastic materials, sanitary pads and food for girls to attend school. Indeed, their ability to do this is also likely to be linked to an improved household economy (as described in outcome 2). Facilitating a shift in individual and household-level values has also relied upon mass media messaging from trusted and reliable sources. During the Programme period, tailored awareness campaigns on gender equality and children's rights reached over 2.57 million individuals. In Uganda specif-

ically, the Ker Alur Kingdom broadcasted a series of radio programs which discussed gender equality and announced revised traditional marriage guidelines regarding dowry as well as sanctions on child marriage across 56 chiefdoms. This culturally resonant messaging has been cited as a key driver in engaging families' support for equal opportunities and underscores the effectiveness of collaborating with community gatekeepers. Collectively, these achievements underscore the transformative potential of an integrated, bottom-up and top-down approach to gender equality and child protection.

#### EMPOWERING YOUTH TO END CHILD MARRIAGE IN PAKWACH DISTRICT, UGANDA

In Uganda's lakeshore communities, where child marriage and risky youth behavior were widespread, the Girls Get Equal (GGE) project introduced the Champion of Change (COC) and Parish Youth Association (PYA) models to empower youth and combat Child, Early, and Forced Marriages (CEFM). Thirty young people per parish, many school dropouts, were trained in leadership, advocacy, and sexual and reproductive health. These youth, once idle and vulnerable to alcohol abuse and exploitation, became change agents. The youth groups conducted peer-to-peer outreach, community dialogues, and collaboration with local leaders and police as a means of raising awareness and campaigning against CEFM in their communities. Their efforts have led to reduced unwanted and early pregnancies and early marriages. Stories like Vicent's, who helped return five children to school, and Faith's, who now confidently rejects coercion, show the program's impact. Former karaoke dancer John transformed his lifestyle after joining COC, embracing savings and community values. By collaborating with local leaders and institutions, the initiative fostered lasting behavioral and social change. These empowered youth now serve as role models, proving that with the right support, transformation is possible—even in the most challenging environments.

# **OUTCOME 5:** IMPROVED CHILD PROTECTION POLICIES AND IMPLEMENTATION THAT AFFECT CEFM

To improve child protection policies, the Programme employed a multidimensional approach: strengthening national frameworks and implementation mechanisms, establishing sustainable community mechanisms, and fostering grassroots advocacy.

The Programme has significantly improved child protection mechanisms at the local level. In addition, the Programme strived to increase the responsiveness of duty bearers (such as government officials and members of Community-Based Child Protection Mechanism/committees) at national, district, and sub-district levels to prevent and respond to child rights violations, particularly CEFM.

Influencing national policies is long-term work requiring close collaboration among civil society organizations and the engagement and leadership of local and national duty bearers. Over five years, through meaningful youth engagement, the Programme has contributed to creating a protective and enabling environment for children and youth (CAY). Some countries have seen significant positive developments in policies and implementation protecting CAYs from CEFM.

The Programme established 94 functional Child Protection Committees in 100 target communities, significantly improving the structure for child protection in these communities. The project also improved the sustainability of Community Based Child Protection Mechanisms (CBCPMs), increasing from 45 in 2019 to 468 by the end of the Programme. In Nepal, the sustained advocacy and increased fiscal commitment from local government helped achieve the 2024 target, demonstrating the impact of robust support structures. Conversely,

frequent turnover among government officials in Bangladesh disrupted committee continuity, resulting in an underachievement (51 realized against a target of 68). These variations highlight the importance of government buy-in in establishing resilient community protection networks.

Overall, the Programme aimed to engage 26,897 CAY in child rights and gender equality advocacy, achieving 66% of this target with 17,683 CAY actively participating. Failure to meet the set target is primarily due to the reported result in Malawi: Here, the threshold for counting targeted youth as "active in movements of change" were set relatively high, contributing to an under-achievement of more than 8600 youth against the indicator target for the country<sup>4</sup>. This accounts for a significant share of the under-achievement at Programme level. In other countries, results are strong and in most countries beyond targets. Tailored local strategies, such as Tanzania's junior councils and community events, boosted youth activism and engagement beyond targeted numbers. In Nepal, strong policy support and stakeholder advocacy empowered CAY in child rights campaigning.

Efforts to engage civil society actors (CSOs) in advocacy also drove change. 147 CSOs have engaged in advocacy related to driving forces for CEFM. These actors have collaborated through capacity-building workshops and community mobilization. Despite several successes in CSO engagement, the Programme fell short of its initial target of 215 CSO engaging in advocacy - achieving 68% of the target. The underachievement is particularly attributed to the shortfall in Malawi. In Malawi, the project collaborated closely with local organizations,

<sup>4</sup> While Plan Norway at the onset of the programme developed indicator definitions to guide who should be counted as "active in movements for change", there was some space for interpretation which in the case of Malawi lead to under-achievement. For example, if all 10,834-youth participating in Plans Champions of Change clubs in Malawi were counted due to their participation in basic local advocacy and awareness raising efforts, which may have been possible in a less strict interpretation of the indicator definitions, the result in Malawi and thereby the programme as a while would have been quite different



youth-led initiatives, and community-based organizations. Although the initial goal was to engage 60 civil society organizations (CSOs), this target proved overly ambitious given the level of effort required to ensure long-term impact and sustainable capacity development. Ultimately, the project successfully established strong partnerships with 24 CSOs, enabling more focused and meaningful support for their growth and resilience. Similarly, achievement was also under the set target in Uganda, where a strategic decision was taken to focus more intensively on lower number of CSOs than initially planned, to ensure stronger impact for a few, promising organizations.

In Malawi, despite underachievement on the indicator as outlined above, strong results were achieved: The project spearheaded advocacy efforts for the revision of the penal code in collaboration with the Ministry of Gender, Community Development, and Social Welfare (MoGCDSW) and the Ministry of Justice (MoJ). CSOs fought for harmonizing child-related laws, including amending the penal code to define a child as anyone under 18 years, not 16. The child parliament, supported by the project, allowed children to deliberate on issues affecting them and present recommendations to the Speaker of Parliament. The penal code was successfully amended in 2023, harmonizing the age definition and removing inconsistencies in national legislation. This legislative change is critical in preserving child rights and preventing CEFM.

In Tanzania, the project aimed to increase government allocation for the National Plan of Action for Ending Violence Against Women and Children (NPA VAWC) and establish operational strategies for child protection committees. Advocacy efforts led to a budget allocation of Tshs 5,014,600 in 2024 for NPA VAWC implementation. Additionally, 82.2% of Child Protection Committees (CBCPCs) in Tanzania developed functional sustainability plans, ensuring their continued operation. The development and approval of 13 by-laws at village and ward levels further empowered local authorities to protect children and women from violence, contributing to CEFM prevention.

In Nepal, the project engaged in various collaboration and advocacy efforts, supporting the drafting of national and provincial strategies to end child marriage which are currently awaiting endorsement. The National Child Policy was endorsed and implemented by the federal government. A parliamentarian caucus on child rights was formed, comprising nine members of parliament, to raise children-related issues at the federal level. Regular advocacy with the National Child Rights Council (NCRC) led to the establishment of local child rights committees and the provision of child welfare officers. The project engaged in the Children as Zones of Peace (CZOP) network, conducting collaborative lobbying, advocacy, interactions, and policy dialogues with local governments to formulate policies and allocate budgets for child protection. The project also contributed to producing a girls-led Conventions on the Rights of the Child report, submitted as an annex to the UNCRC report. These efforts have led to successful national advocacy and policy formulation and implementation at the local level.

In Uganda, the project focused on conducting a legal assessment to identify provisions requiring amendment to improve enforcement against CEFM. This led to the successful tabling of the Marriage Bill in 2024, including provisions to end CEFM. Further efforts with other stakeholders ensured the bill included provisions for ending CEFM in Uganda.

#### STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES THROUGH CHILD PROTECTION INITIATIVES - BANGLADESH

In 2020, the GGE Project helped establish a 13-member Child Protection Committee in Pachankodalia Union, Taltali, Barguna. Masuma Akhter, elected as president, has since led impactful efforts to safeguard children's rights. Under her leadership, the committee has prevented seven child marriages and secured government aid for 19 vulnerable families. Meeting quarterly, the group addresses child abuse, labor, and child marriage through school rallies and community outreach. When needed, they escalate unresolved cases to the Upazila Child Welfare Board and police. Masuma also ensures girls facing social security concerns can safely continue their education. Her dedication earned her recognition from the Upazila Nirbahi Officer. Trained through the GGE Project, Masuma reflects on the committee's journey from early challenges to becoming a trusted community force. "With sustained efforts," she says, "we can combat child abuse, trafficking, labor, and marriage." Her leadership continues to inspire a safer future for children in Barguna.

# 3.4 Significant deviations from the latest approved application and/or plan

While the Girl's Get Equal Programme has remained fundamentally on track throughout the Programme period, some deviations from the latest approved plan have been observed in 2024, prompting a series of targeted adaptations. On the financial and macroeconomic front, adverse economic shocks have been evident. In Bangladesh, for example, Cyclone Remal triggered significant economic disruptions as households were forced to reallocate savings toward urgent recovery efforts. To address this, the Programme expanded financial interventions by disbursing additional security funds, offering cash assistance through phased Family Development Plans, and providing mentoring on market chain creation. In Nepal, socio-economic constraints among marginalized groups resulted in irregular participation in essential sexual and reproductive health sessions. In response, the project intensified its engagement strategies by involving female teachers more directly in content delivery and scheduling additional follow-up sessions to ensure broader, more consistent uptake.

The Programme started and had the first years of implementation during the Covid-19 pandemic. The impact of this has been highlighted in previous reports.

Natural disasters also had direct impacts on the infrastructure that the Programme contributed to. For example, in Malawi, Cyclone Freddy damaged the inclusive WASH facilities and ramps that were constructed in schools. This damage not only disrupted the ability of girls to safely access education but also led to heightened dropout rates. In reaction, the project constructed weather-resilient menstrual hygiene management facilities, installed ramps, and scaled up re-admission policies to reintegrate learners who had been temporarily sidelined. Political and administrative challenges also contributed to deviations from the Programme's plans. In Bangladesh, frequent transfers of government officials and incidents of district-level corruption undermined the regular registration and smooth operation of youth clubs. To mitigate these obstacles, the project reinforced its linkages with local government partners, provided training on financial and administrative management to youth clubs, and strengthened community reporting systems to preserve continuity in child protection and advocacy.

Finally, the Programme continued to see entrenched cultural norms as a barrier to progress. In Niger, longstanding traditional practices and inconsistent community mobilization created resistance to change, compromising efforts to promote positive social behaviors. To counter this, the project intensified its mobilization strategies by conducting targeted inter-village meetings and dedicated awareness campaigns designed specifically to engage traditional leaders and build a more receptive community environment.

Through these adaptive measures, the Programme has been able to address the deviations while keeping key objectives on course, demonstrating a proactive approach to on-the-ground challenges without compromising overall progress.

#### **3.5 Risks**

Throughout the Programme period, the Programme has adhered to Plan International's risk management policies and procedures. This includes Programme and country level risk identification and mitigation. The country offices have analyzed project specific risks using matrices which are the basis for regular monitoring, mitigation and learning both at project and Programme level. Further, procedures for anti-corruption and safeguarding and SEAH prevention are followed. Below is a discussion of risks specifically related to Norad's cross-cutting issues.

#### FINANCIAL IRREGULARITIES, AND SEXUAL EX-PLOITATION ABUSE AND HARASSMENT (SEAH)

The Programme has adhered to Plan International's mandatory policies for Safeguarding Children and Programme Participants, Preventing Sexual Harassment, Exploitation and Abuse Policy and the Anti-Fraud, Anti-Bribery, and Corruption Policy. These policies serve as a means of ensuring a shared responsibility to prevent and report potential breaches, harm and violence through all of Plan's activities. (More detailed description of procedures in paragraphs below.) Plan International also works in accordance with our Gender Equality and Inclusion Policy, Environmental Policy and a Whistleblowing Policy that details the procedure for reporting to Plan International's Global Assurance section.

In the period 2021-2024 Plan International Norway has reported 3 safeguarding cases. Cases were handled in accordance with Plan's internal guidelines and reported to Norad in accordance with contractual agreement.

#### **HUMAN RIGHTS**

All of Plan International's Programmes employ a rights-based approach, with particular emphasis on children's and girls' rights, as outlined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Furthermore, the GGE Programme countries have shown a strong commitment to inclusion, particularly focusing on the rights and participation of people with disabilities, in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Across Programme countries, a clear commitment to upholding human rights has been woven into every stage of project implementation, ensuring that marginalized groups are consistently included. Initiatives in Bangladesh and Uganda have prioritized inclusive participation by engaging community members irrespective of gender, disability, or socioeconomic status, thereby reinforcing accountability and collective responsibility. Meanwhile, Malawi and Nepal have introduced practical measures—such as adapting the Washington Group set of questions and linking identified children with disabilities to government support—to ensure that at-risk communities, including those from Dalit backgrounds, are not overlooked. Similarly, Niger's use of regular risk assessments and tailored mitigation measures has helped safeguard against any unintended adverse impacts, while efforts in Tanzania have combined targeted community awareness with support mechanisms to counteract negative perceptions toward children with disabilities. Collectively, these diverse yet complementary approaches illustrate a robust, rights-based strategy that not only protects individual human rights but also underpins sustainable, inclusive development.

In addition to the efforts to mitigate these direct risks, the KPMG impact assessment noted some unintended consequences of the program which have direct implications on the human rights of the participants. In efforts to protect their daughters from early pregnancy and early marriage, it was found that some families placed increased restrictions on girls' movements including curfews and increased punishments to girls. These actions were likely the result of fear and punishment-based measures which were enacted by community leaders to reduce child marriage. This shows the need to monitor more closely the types of approaches used to ensure that the focus of our programming is on increasing understanding of girls' rights in society as opposed to controlling their behavior and movements in a way which impacts on their freedom of choice, movement and human rights.

#### WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND GENDER EQUALITY

Plan's GGE program aims to drive gender transformative change by challenging entrenched gender norms and ensuring that girls and women fully realize their rights. Concurrently, the program has worked to identify, monitor and mitigate potential risks to women's rights and gender equality. Potential risks identified include resistance from communities and stakeholders that may threaten the empowerment of girls and young women and potentially worsen their situation and lead to increased discrimination. Indeed, the project in Malawi witnessed such a resistance, whereby families were found to marry their daughters across the border in neighboring Mozambique, as a means of avoiding persecution in their own communities. Such rebuttal tactics have a clear implication on the lives of the girls and young women the Programme seeks to serve and thus must be carefully scrutinized and mitigated as we continue to program.

To address these risks, innovative initiatives have been implemented across countries. The program applies a gender transformative approach that includes engaging boys and men, raising awareness, and combating social norms that support child, early, and forced marriage (CEFM) and gender-based violence. Importantly, efforts also involve dialogue with religious leaders, youth engagement, and strengthening community protection mechanisms and referral systems. Supporting the implementation of local protective policies is crucial for mitigating risks and ensuring the program's sustainability. However, considering the example of Malawi above, it may also be necessary to monitor the movement of families in neighboring communities more closely.

In Bangladesh, initiatives promoting shared household responsibilities, girls' participation in sports and alternative modes of transport to school have helped redefine traditional expectations. Malawi's comprehensive approach, which involved engaging men and boys through gender-sensitive training and community awareness activities, has fostered supportive environments and bolstered girls' agency in decision-making. Meanwhile, in Nepal and Niger, targeted actions including awareness campaigns against practices like sex-selective abortion and child marriage, as well as capacity-building activities, have sought to overcome deep-rooted cultural barriers, despite persistent community resistance. Tanzania and Uganda have further contributed by creating champion groups and revising traditional practices, such as enhancing marital guidelines, thereby supporting girls' education and economic opportunities. Together, these integrated efforts demonstrate Plan's commitment to mitigating risks and building sustainable. inclusive transformations that uphold the rights and dignities of all young women and girls.

#### **CLIMATE AND ENVIRONMENT**

Throughout the reporting period, the project countries have faced a range of climate-related shocks - including severe cyclones, prolonged floods, heavy rain, and landslides - that have challenged the Programme's development activities while also spurring innovative mitigation efforts.

In Bangladesh, Cyclone Remal brought catastrophic floods and tidal surges that damaged homes, schools, sanitation systems, and agricultural lands, prompting recovery actions such as financial support for youth economic empowerment and infrastructure repairs, as well as initiatives to improve water management and promote climate-friendly agriculture.

Similarly, Malawi experienced the impacts of Tropical Cyclone Freddy, which disrupted schooling, displaced communities, and damaged vast areas of cropland, leading to community resilience measures and adjustments in local savings schemes.



In Nepal, recurring floods in Bardiya and landslides in Kalikot and Jumla were managed through coordinated mitigation plans with local and provincial authorities, ensuring prompt responses and minimal project disruption, while in Tanzania heavy rains triggered floods that damaged critical infrastructure like bridges and roads, increasing project costs and complicating connectivity.

In Uganda, evolving climatic conditions have urged project partners to work with the district production department to support youth agri-business initiatives through improved soil and environmental conservation practices. These varied responses demonstrate a shared commitment across countries to integrate disaster preparedness, sustainable resource management, and climate-smart interventions into project planning, ensuring that efforts to empower communities also enhance long-term environmental resilience.

#### **ANTI-CORRUPTION:**

Across the Programme countries, a clear commitment to combating corruption is evident through robust routines for financial oversight, training for staff and partners, regular audits and enhanced transparency with partners and communities. In Bangladesh, routine internal audits and a collaborative review process with partner organizations have ensured swift corrective actions and maintained strict financial integrity. Similarly, in Malawi, thorough expenditure verifications and regular review meetings have strengthened governance and minimized discrepancies, while in Nepal, strong internal controls complemented by community engagements—such as social audits and publicly shared financial information—have fostered an open environment where even minor issues are promptly addressed. Niger's proactive approach, which included awareness-raising on financial policies and close monitoring of tender processes, further underscores the emphasis on transparency, and Uganda's experience, with no reported instances of corruption, highlights the potential of these diligent practices. In Tanzania, where an audit exposed significant challenges in public financial management, the responsive measures and piloted improvements indicate a determined effort to overcome setbacks and align with anti-corruption principles. Together, these initiatives demonstrate a comprehensive and cross-cutting strategy that not only prevents corruption but also builds trust among stakeholders and sustains the integrity of project funds.

### 3.6 Cost-efficiency

The Programme has effectively utilized the budget to achieve significant results. The total expenditure is 258 228 608. This investment has allowed 351,251 children to take part in project initiatives, making a meaningful difference in their lives.

Generally, the most cost-efficient activities in the Programme are those with the largest reach. For example, the training of student

cabinet members in Bangladesh, which included Theatre for Development and peer orientation sessions on child rights and child protection, reached 44,248 students, which equals NOK 12 per student.

The Programme employed a multi-faceted approach to address the root causes of gender inequality, combining preventive strategies with community engagement. Core interventions -such as awareness-raising and capacity-building—have proven both cost-effective and impactful, contributing to sustainable, long-term change. While the transformative nature of these outcomes is complex to quantify, the Programme's design ensures value for investment.

Outcome 3 on youth economic empowerment was the outcome with the largest budget due to the need for intensive training for a smaller number of rights-holders, such as direct financial support to critically poor families with daughters at high risk of CEFM. But the Programme had successful methods for reducing costs. For example, Malawi used a competency-based approach to deliver vocational skills trainings wherein the Technical, Entrepreneurial, and Vocational Education and Training Authority identified and trained local artisans who in turned trained the enrolled youth. The competency-based approach enabled the training of 349 youths for 798 NOK per youth between 2020 and 2023. If, comparably, the youths were instead enrolled in technical colleges, the cost would have cost around NOK 1,032 per youth.

Plan International's long-standing presence in Programme communities through local partnerships that stretch beyond the individual grant, supported by its sponsorship model, further enhances cost efficiency. This embedded, long-term presence strengthens the integration of interventions into existing community structures—such as local government budget allocations for child protection and the institutionalization of Community-Based Child Protection Committees. Long term partnerships and presence also enable rapid, cost-effective responses to humanitarian needs, and reinforce resilience and sustainability.

### 3.7 Sustainability

Collaboration with local partners has been a critical strategy to achieve the sustainability of the Programme. We have focused on building relationships with a variety of both registered and unregistered civil society organizations and networks, institutions, corporates and other stakeholders that influence the changes we are seeking. Particular attention has been paid to partnerships with organizations for, with and by children and young people and the rights-holders Plan International work with. Several of these organizations have grown from small, loosely connected networks, into formally registered entities with strong dialogue with government counterparts in their local contexts.

The involvement of key stakeholders such as religious and traditional leaders and chiefs in the fights against CEFM has been a key factor for sustainability. According to the Programme impact assessment (KPMG, 2025), "this has helped ensure that new laws and by-laws have custodians who genuinely believe they have a role in defending these laws. The religious networks which were engaged through the program were considered to be active and likely to continue their activities and keep their stance on CEFM in the future. Further, legal documents and by-laws that resulted from the program are likely to stay in place where stakeholders have been engaged. Law enforcement and municipalities have strategies and mechanisms which ensure a degree of sustainability after Plan GGE discontinue their activities in the locations."

The KPMG report further points to integration with programs beyond Plan as a means of ensuring sustainability of results. According to KPMG this was underlined in Uganda, "where synergies between Plan interventions (GGE and other Plan projects), and between Plan and other stakeholders, which ensured a multifaceted response to CEFM". While Uganda is not part of Plan's Norad funded program after 2024, Plans Programmes in the target areas continue with other funding, including from individual donors in Norway. Additional information on the program closure in Uganda is shared separately

Integration with other Plan Programmes facilitates long-term collaboration and partnerships with local entities beyond the extent of a single grant. For example, in Malawi, the project has been implemented in areas and with partners who are also engaged in Plan's sponsorship funded Programmes. The CSOs will continue to work with the structures established by the GGE Programme in order to maintain sustainability of the Programme's effect beyond the funding period.

Working at the local, national, regional and global level is key to realizing the changes that the Programme aims to achieve. The program has supported local level organizations and networks of youth and linked these with both national level civil society bodies to strengthen evidence-based advocacy and government engagement at multiple levels. Advocacy for and support to establishment of local child protection mechanisms is an example of implementation of policy. The KPMG (2025) impact assessment report emphasized the importance of the establishment of such structures for sustainability of results.

In Bangladesh, the project has ensured strategic coordination and collaboration across multiple stakeholders. For example, the project has focused on embedding a new curriculum and teaching approach introduced by the government (Gender Equality Movement in Schools (GEMS) curriculum). This has involved planning and monitoring government-provided training for teachers as well as active dissemination to schools in collaboration with educators and officials from the education department.

In Nepal, local authorities, including wards and municipalities, are taking responsibility for preventing CEFM and are allocating gradually increasing budgets for this purpose. Likewise, the policy documents developed and approved will contribute to ensuring the sustainability of the intervention through government structures.

In Tanzania, following targeted advocacy by the project and its partners, the government has directed schools in the Rukwa region to allocate 2-5% of capitation grants to accommodate Menstrual Health and hygiene Management facilities at schools. This has become mandatory, in parallel with MHM training for adolescent girls and boys.

#### GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE

In relation to sustainability, it is important to note that the Programme has been implemented in alignment with the ambition of creating long-lasting and gender transformative change. The approach includes the following six elements for gender transformative programming (GTP): understand and address gender norms; strengthen girls' and young women's agency; work with and support boys, young men, and men; consider girls, boys, young women, and young men in all their diversity; improve the conditions (daily needs) and social position and foster an enabling environment. To implement this approach, Plan's Gender Transformative Marker (GTM) has been applied. The GTM is a project design and diagnostic tool to strengthen the projects' potential to contribute towards gender transformative change. The GTM is an essential, mandatory tool that is used throughout the project cycle.

In Bangladesh, Gender Equality Movement in Schools (GEMS) sessions and youth clubs, along with Champion Father/Mother initiatives, promoted equally shared household roles and discouraged child marriage, helping reshape expectations for both girls and boys. In Malawi, Plan worked with the Government to develop the National Male Engagement Strategy. This is likely to have played a role in the dramatic rise in boys supporting girls' rights—from 39% at baseline to 97%, thereby highlighting the impact of involving boys in gender equality efforts. In Bangladesh, inclusive interventions supported students with disabilities through tailored plans, ensuring marginalized groups were part of the gender equality movement. And finally, in Uganda, the Alur marriage guidelines provided a legal framework to prevent early and forced marriages, reinforcing community and institutional support for girls' rights.

#### 3.8 Lessons learned

Several lessons were learned across the implementation period. In addition, processes such as the Programme's Mid-term Review (in 2022) and the Impact assessment carried out in 2024/2025, provided insights into common factors which supported and/or prevented the program in achieving its goals. These lessons are outlined below and

will be considered when implementing the program period; GGE2: Realizing Rights and Resilience (2025-2029).

# HOLISTIC AND INTEGRATED APPROACHES AT ALL LEVELS

Child Early and Forced Marriage (CEFM) is a complex and multicausal issue which requires a comprehensive, gender-transformative strategy that simultaneously addresses the various drivers of the practice. The KPMG impact assessment provided evidence that the combination of initiatives addressing adolescents' Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), Inclusive Quality Education (IQE), and Skills and Opportunities for Youth Economic Empowerment (SOYEE) work together to reduce CEFM.

The integrated and holistic approach in the Programme created a supportive environment across households, communities, and national platforms by including a diversity of actors and stakeholders at various levels and from various thematic backgrounds. For example, the combination of efforts within SRHR, gender equality, and youth empowerment resulted in more equal opportunities and education access for girls. In Tanzania, this approach has proven to be one of the best methods to empower adolescent girls and gain support for equal opportunities in employment and girls' education.

However, the breadth and depth of the program approach also required a high level of coordination between program partners, which can be a challenge. For example, in Nepal it was noted that allocating responsibilities to separate partners within the same project area was a challenge. It was suggested that a division in geographic program areas would be easier than a division based on each thematic area (i.e. SRHR vs education).

In addition, although local-level advocacy was perhaps the most directly relevant to the program, local-level efforts alone are insufficient for long-term success. In addition to working with schools, cooperatives, and media, national-level coordination, awareness, and accountability are crucial. For example, in Niger, Plan leads a national advocacy platform against child marriage. In Bangladesh, we have seen that engaging relevant ministries and departments ensures smooth implementation and sustainability of the project activities. Likewise, in Malawi and Tanzania the involvement of government stakeholders at all levels proved a key to successful programming and achieving project goals.

#### COMMUNITY AND STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT

Addressing complex issues like child marriage requires the involvement of multiple stakeholders, at all levels of the socio-ecological model. By engaging individuals, members of families/families and communities, as well as teachers, health care workers and government/law enforcement – the program ensured context-specific interventions as well as long-term ownership and sustainability of the Programme. For exam-

ple, by strengthening partnerships between parents and teachers, the project in Tanzania saw that the communities responded with their own initiatives to increase school welfare; for example, contributing to construct school buildings, providing sanitary pads through VSLA and school feeding programs.

The involvement of community and relevant stakeholders required effective collaboration with local CSOs as well as other existing and trusted community structures. These partnerships provide valuable skills, resources, and local insights which enhance the effectiveness of interventions. For example, in Uganda the partnership with the Ker Alur Kingdom provided unique insight and access to a system which has an extremely strong influence on social norms. The partnership with the Ker Alur kingdom was key in addressing and achieving rapid social norm change with regards to traditional conduct around child marriage.

#### **EVIDENCE-BASED INTERVENTIONS**

Learnings from the GGE Programme demonstrate the importance of using data and evidence to identify areas of high risk and subsequently formulate interventions to effectively target them. For example, in Nepal, a child marriage prevalence survey revealed a high number of self-initiated marriages amongst students in grades 8-10. Interventions were then focused on and suited to these grades, which seemed to contribute to a gradual reduction of child marriages. Similarly, the in-depth qualitative study on the drivers of child marriage in Uganda's West Nile region, revealed the significance of traditional practices and ceremonies around marriage and spurred the successful partnership with the Ker Alur Kingdom (as noted above).

# MARKET INTEGRATION AND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES

Reliance on local markets alone is inadequate for achieving income targets. A well-established national market chain is essential to support sustainable livelihoods and economic opportunities, as seen in Bangladesh. In Uganda we saw that quick financial gains were important for youth and thus it was at times challenging to sustain their interest in long-term Income Generating Activities (IGA) projects. Maintaining youth's interests in appropriate economic activities is a crucial consideration in designing YEE activities so that learners are not tempted to pursue economic opportunities instead of staying in school, re-enrolling in school or participating in accelerated or alternative basic education classes.

However, the importance of ensuring income boosting activities was demonstrated by its effect on the ability of families/mothers to pay for school fees and supplies, thereby keeping girls in school. In addition, considering the need to increase families' resilience to climate shocks and stresses, it is important to diversify the IGAs employed in the program. For youth specifically, it is important to focus on IGAs that do not require a lot of land, as youth rarely have access/ownership to this.



## FEAR-BASED AND VALUE-LADEN METHODOLOGIES

It is vital to ensure that messaging and actions against child marriage are not fear-based and perceived as solely punitive. Rather, it is important that the approach seeks to increase awareness of rights and thus shift values and norms around gender equality. Using solely legislation and communication that highlights negative repercussions for community members runs the risk of causing only short-term change and/or driving the practice underground, rather than leading to sustainable and long-term positive change. For example, the impact assessment by KPMG suggested that the severe punishment and restrictions placed on child marriage by leaders and communities led to restricted freedom/mobility amongst girls, as well as some cases of movement across borders to continue child marriage. These unwanted consequences of the program show the need for focusing communication and dialogue on local understanding and positive incentives as opposed to stigma and punishment. Additionally, it highlights the importance of monitoring risks regularly throughout the programme period to enable adaptation and mitigation of risks and backlash (as highlighted above).

#### **GENDER AND INCLUSION**

In accordance with Plan's gender transformative approach, the Programme saw that it is crucial to implement activities that secure and communicate a focus on boys' inclusion as well as the inclusion of girls at high risk of CEFM. Furthermore, the projects must be informed by

context-specific age, gender and inclusion analysis that enables tailored, contextualized tools and approaches to be used. This approach also supports the Programme's collaboration with government and community stakeholders, also reducing the level of potential resistance from these stakeholders.

In relation to disability inclusion, the Programme showed that to ensure a truly inclusive approach, the allocation of sufficient resources is key, both in terms of funding and planning. The project in Nepal experienced challenges ensuring minimum requirements like ensuring disability friendly, menstruation friendly structures, due to lack of resource and pre-made design of the WASH structures installed. It is key that strategies and plans are informed by disabled persons/disabled persons organizations themselves (DPOs), and that it is sufficiently resourced.

Creating safe and inclusive learning environments through the rehabilitation of WASH facilities, installation of ramps, provision of assistive devices, and MHM materials has proven essential for retaining students—particularly girls and learners with disabilities. In Niger, improved access to latrines, drinking water, and school equipment enhanced hygiene, health, and attendance, while initiatives like school governments contributed to positive behavioral change and reduced school-based violence.

#### **DISABILITY SHATTERING LIMITATIONS - BANGLADESH**

Mohammad Belal Mia, a 20-year-old from Pazharavanga village in Barguna, faced a life-altering setback after completing his Secondary School Certificate when a severe illness led to the amputation of his leg. Once seen as a burden by some family members due to his disability and the financial strain of his treatment, Belal's life took a transformative turn when he joined as a learning center facilitator in the GGE program. Now, he teaches children at the Pazharavanga Youth Club, finding purpose and joy in education. With a monthly stipend of 2,500 BDT, he has begun saving for a future business and dreams of leading social initiatives like reducing child marriage and supporting out-of-school children. Belal's journey from hard-ship to hope showcases the power of opportunity and resilience. "I no longer see myself as disabled," he says, embodying the belief that with support, anyone can thrive and inspire change in their community.

# 4. Evaluations and reviews

Throughout the course of the Programme, in addition to regular monitoring procedures, significant efforts have been made to evaluate its results and to actively learn from Programme experiences.

An impact assessment of the program was conducted in 2024 with the aim of evaluating its effects on society. The assessment was conducted by KPMG Norway and was delivered in June 2025. The assessment focused on how the Programme has contributed to reducing levels of CEFM in the targeted areas. Additionally, it examined the impact of the Programme on the conditions of adolescent girls and boys, and their families, within these communities. The assessment applied guiding principles of a gender transformative perspective and of meaningful youth engagement. The full report has been shared separately, and a number of the findings have been referenced

in this report – for example, in sections 2.2 Impact and 2.3 Programme results. In addition to this, an external mid-term review was conducted in 2022.

The Programme's continuous use of its comprehensive results framework, tool workbook for data collection and analysis, and indicator definition guidelines improved data validity and reliability. Additionally, Plan Norway has hosted an annual "Girls Get Equal Week" for relevant staff across Programme countries (except for the Programme's final year). Cross-country learning sessions, and annual Programme-level meetings have been arranged.

#### MULTI-COUNTRY AND COUNTRY-SPECIFIC STUDIES UNDERTAKEN DURING THE PROGRAMME PERIOD

- «Understanding young women's pathways to economic empowerment & resilience in rural contexts an exploratory qualitative study of rural communities in Ethiopia, Malawi, and Nepal».
- «Young People and Green Skills: Preparing for a Sustainable Future» in Nepal, Malawi and Bangladesh.
- Early marriage patterns and parent-adolescent relationships in Dhanusha, Nepal; (DLL, 2023)
- A child marriage situation analysis in Bangladesh.
- A child marriage prevalence study in Nepal.
- · An assessment of Champion of Change learning modules through student perspectives in Tanzania.
- «Bangladesh Inclusive Digital Future: A baseline survey for vulnerable communities of Bangladesh. The role of social traditional
  norms in child, early and forced marriages and unions (CEFM) in the West Nile region, Uganda (2021) Lastly, Plan Norway
  submitted a proposal to the Norwegian Research Council with University of Bergen and Development Learning Lab in 2022 on
  a randomized controlled trial on parental intervention to prevent CEFM in Nepal, but the proposal did not receive funding.



# 4. Financial report and audit

5.
Results achievement for the Civil Society Support

### Financial report and audit

The Programme's 2024 financial report and audit, including details on significant deviations, are provided in a separate document.

# Results achievement for the Civil Society Support

Outcome 5.2 directly reaches and strengthens civil society, especially youth-led organizations, in the Programme countries, focusing on increasing capacity to advocate on policy issues and/or improving internal governance.

#### Results achievement for civil society support

COUNTRY	NO.REACHED*	NO.STRENGTHENED*
BANGLADESH	66	55
MALAWI	13	6
NEPAL	15	16
NIGER	7	0
TANZANIA	45	39
UGANDA	27	13
TOTAL	173	129

<sup>\*</sup> Each number could include civil society networks that are not registered in the Programme countries (especially in Uganda, where the Project works with community-based organizations), but not Programme groups, such as VSLAs, CoC groups, etc.