

Stories of Educational Change in Madhesh Province, Nepal

Findings from a Most Significant Change assessment following the R-CEFM Project's remedial education program

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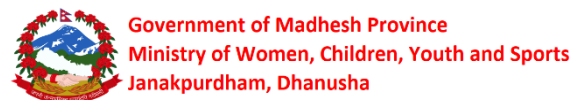


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Acronyms

CEFM	Child, Early, and Forced Marriage
FGD	Focus group discussion
GON	Government of Nepal
KII	Key informant interview
MSC	Most Significant Change
NDHS	Nepal Demographic and Health Survey
R-CEFM	Reducing Child, Early, and Forced Marriage
SBC	Social and behavior change
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

Executive Summary

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and Breakthrough ACTION Nepal's Reducing Child, Early and Forced Marriage (Nepal R-CEFM) Project aims to strengthen the institutional and technical capacity of the Government of Nepal (GON) in Madhesh Province to design, implement, monitor, evaluate, and coordinate effective social and behavior change (SBC) activities and child protection (CP) system strengthening for reducing CEFM through a community-based, multi-sectoral, data-driven lens. This report focuses on R-CEFM Project activities designed to increase learning outcomes for adolescent girls (with the inclusion of boys) through non-formal education.

The R-CEFM Project designed and implemented a robust program that engaged students, parents, and teachers to increase learning outcomes for adolescent girls, as well as boys, through non-formal education. The remedial education program was implemented over a period of approximately four months (December 2021 to April 2022) in 83 schools operating in nine municipalities of two districts in Madhesh Province (48 schools in Mahottari and 35 schools in Rautahat). The program focused on underperforming students from grades six, seven, and eight belonging to marginalized communities who were deemed likely to drop out of school in the near future. This report describes the design and implementation of a locally led, complexity-aware method, known as Most Significant Change (MSC), to identify local level changes following the R-CEFM Project's remedial education activities.

The R-CEFM Project used the MSC approach to contribute answers to the following evaluation questions, which are related to the remedial education activities as well as the overall project:

- In what ways have key partners and community members described important changes in their attitudes, perceptions, behaviors, or norms or structural/system changes related to education or preventing CEFM since the start of the Nepal R-CEFM Project?
- To what extent did these identified changes exceed or fall short of the R-CEFM Project's objectives?
- How effective and sustainable were the R-CEFM Project's intervention strategies?
- How can the R-CEFM Project's intervention strategies be improved?

MSC stories identified not only changes, but also the processes that led to change, who was involved in the change, what barriers were overcome, and what these changes meant to community members and key informants as well as to program staff.

The R-CEFM project followed the following steps in implementing MSC: 1) selection of municipalities and schools, 2) finalization of tools, 3) study orientation, 4) participant recruitment, 5) story collection, 6) story development, 7) story vetting and selection, and 8) analysis.

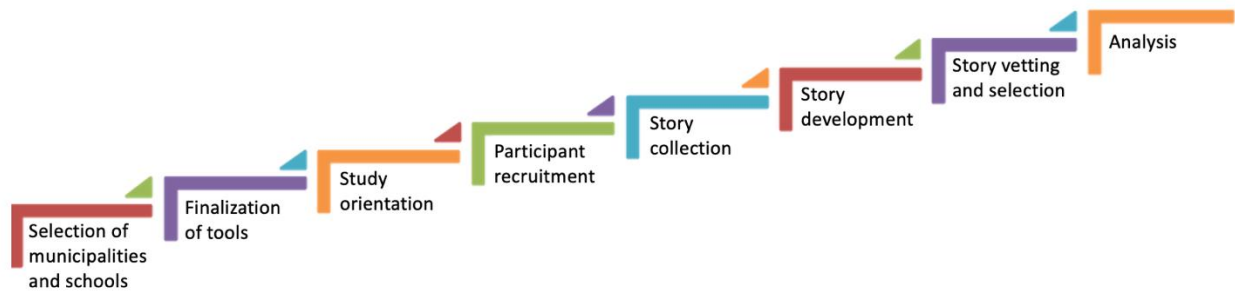


Figure 1. Steps followed by the R-CEFM project in their implementation of MSC.

Through a multi-step process, qualitative stories were gathered, summarized, and vetted internally and externally through participatory selection workshops. Following these steps, 36 initial stories were gathered, with 22 stories reviewed during selection workshops conducted in Rautahat and Mahottari. A final set of 10 stories of change were selected during these selection workshops as “most significant” stories of change to be disseminated at the community level and with key stakeholders at the local, provincial, and federal levels.

In addition to identifying the 10 Most Significant stories of change, the R-CEFM Project then conducted a secondary thematic analysis of the complete set of MSC stories to identify cross-cutting themes related to the changes shared by key informants. This thematic analysis was guided by the ideational model of behavior.

Stories of Change: Emergent Themes

Changes following the remedial education activities were related to both education and the prevention of child marriage and were identified at multiple steps along the pathway to behavior change. These changes are summarized in the figure below, which illustrates the relationship between the remedial education program and the subsequent effects described by participants in key information interviews (KIIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs). Following remedial education activities and receipt of materials, participants identified changes in individuals’ interest, motivation, self-confidence in school, conceptual understanding, as well as the importance placed on education and the reduction of child marriage. These changes in ideational factors were noted not only for students, but also for parents. According to participants, these changes led to more studying, improved school attendance, and better COVID-related hygiene. In turn, these behaviors ultimately contributed, according to participants, to a key outcome of this intervention: improvements in students’ educational performance.

This figure reflects the central role, highlighted in orange, that shifting ideational factors played in leading to the behavioral and learning outcomes identified in participants’ stories of change.

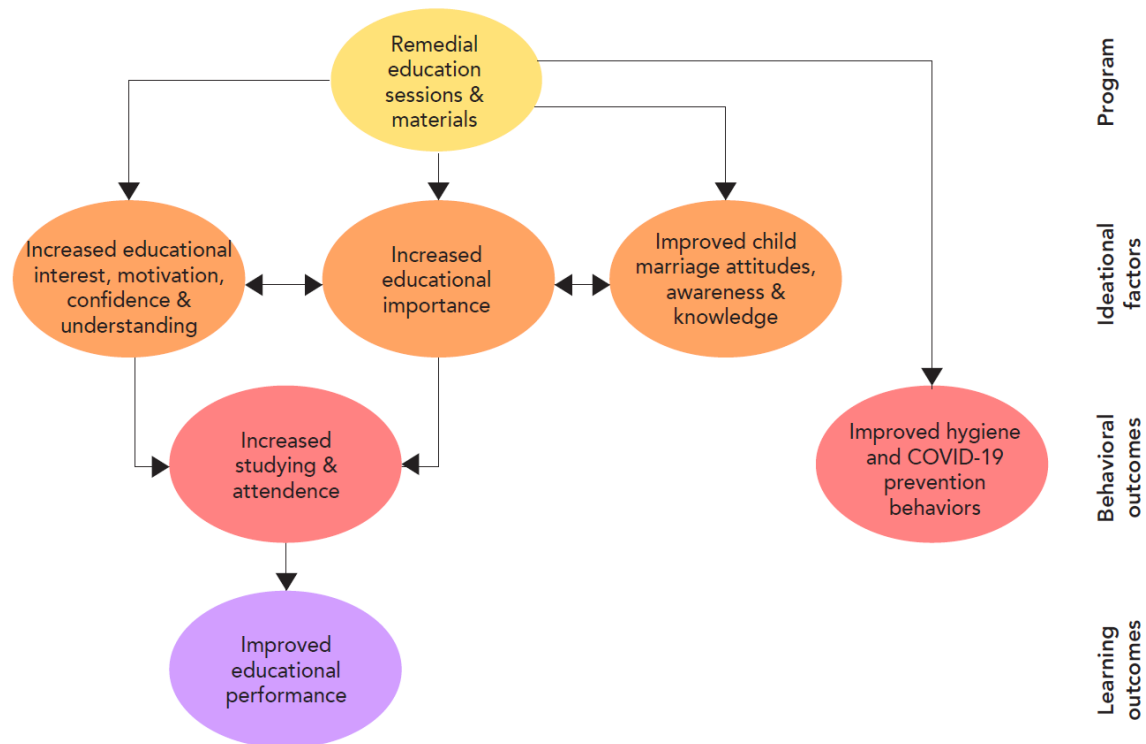


Figure 2. Visual representation of program activities (yellow) and associated changes in ideational factors (orange), behaviors (red), and learning outcomes (purple).

“Most Significant” Stories of Change

Among 36 initial stories gathered through KIIs and FGDs, a final set of 10 stories was selected by local stakeholders across both selection workshops and identified as the “most significant” according to participants.

The final selected stories came from multiple participant types: three from teachers, one from a head teacher, three from students, and three from parents. Emergent themes described above were consistent with those stories identified by community members and stakeholders as “most significant.”

Of note:

1. **Importance of ideational factors in most significant change stories:** Eight of the ten stories selected highlighted both changes in ideational factors, such as increased motivation or confidence, and changes in key behaviors of interest, such as increased frequency of studying or better attendance at school.
2. **Educational interest, motivation, understanding, and importance were key:** Among stories citing changes in ideational factors, most common were stories describing changes in educational interest, motivation, understanding, and importance.

3. **Changes in study habits and attendance were critical to improved learning outcomes:** Among stories citing changes in education-related behaviors, most common were stories describing changes in study habits, followed by changes in attendance. Subsequently improved educational performance was cited by participants in three distinct stories of change.
4. **Education-related changes were prominent in stories of change, but child marriage and other health-related changes were also considered significant:** While the majority of changes identified by participants were related to education, a subset of stories emerged that described changes in child marriage awareness and knowledge and changes in COVID-19 prevention and personal hygiene.

Discussion and Recommendations

This report emphasizes emergent changes deemed “most significant” by communities where the remedial education activities were implemented. They can also contribute and complement other evaluation approaches of the project, including the more quantitative assessments of learning outcomes among students also conducted by the R-CEFM Project.

Across these stories of change, our selection workshops and secondary thematic analysis showed that:

1. **Ideational factors were critical changes noted by participants in most significant change stories.**
2. **Changes in behaviors described by participants were primarily educational, rather than related to child marriage.**
3. **Changes in learning outcomes were consistent with quantitative findings.**
4. **Engaging both parents and children into remedial education activities was critical for the success of the remedial education program.**
5. **As has been demonstrated in previous studies, education – particularly for girls – remains critically entwined with preventing child marriage.** While most stories of change focused on education-related changes, those that spotlighted changes in attitudes and knowledge about preventing child marriage made the clear connection between education and child marriage.
6. **Community members recognized and valued changes related to COVID-19 and other personal health and hygiene practices.**

Building on these learnings, future programs designed to be implemented at the local level to improve students’ learning outcomes could:

1. **Continue to invest in activities that address ideational factors.**
2. **Identify opportunities to move beyond the individual level.**
3. **Explore ways to better integrate child marriage-related topics into remedial education activities.**
4. **Continue to engage in multi-level interventions.**

Together, the R-CEFM Project used the MSC approach to facilitate a participatory process wherein community members' perspectives on the remedial education activities were gathered and changes documented. The stories of change featured in this report spotlight those changes deemed most significant from the perspectives of students, teachers, and parents from schools where the remedial education program was implemented. These changes, which ranged from shifts in attitudes about education to increased studying and improved learning outcomes, illustrated the process through which the R-CEFM Project's remedial education program influenced ideational factors, which in turn affected education-related behavioral and subsequent learning outcomes. This approach should be built upon at the local level to ensure that they form a strong, sustainable foundation for students in these communities in the future.

Introduction

While the legal age of marriage for men and women in Nepal is 20 years,¹ child, early, and forced marriage (CEFM) remains a common practice in many regions of Nepal. According to the 2016 Nepal Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS),² 40% of women aged 20-24 were married before the age of 18. While other provinces in Nepal have demonstrated reductions in child marriage in recent years, such change has been less pronounced in Madhesh Province.

Within the context of federalism, Madhesh Province has emerged as a frontrunner in public commitments to address and reduce CEFM. The provincial government has recently demonstrated increased political will to address the issue of child marriage and girls' education. In addition to increased enforcement of the age of marriage laws, many local governments have supported the effective implementation of federal initiatives to retain girls in school and discourage CEFM. While these efforts are laudable, much remains to be done in Madhesh Province to address the underlying causes of CEFM and reduce CEFM, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Globally, child marriage is linked with the lack of educational opportunities.³ Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, 91% of the children who were in school had their schools closed due to the pandemic.⁴ These school closures have been estimated to increase the risk of marriage by 25% per year.³ Save the Children and UNICEF report that once taken out of school, girls are less likely to return, facing a higher risk of marriage throughout their childhood. Girls from financially insecure backgrounds are also more likely to drop out of school compared to those from more financially stable households.

In Nepal, the COVID-19 pandemic caused schools to close across the country. Following stay-at-home restrictions from the local government, schools closed in March 2020 and did not reopen for nine months. School closures and the resulting loss of educational opportunities made adolescent girls in particular more likely to drop out of school permanently, putting them at a potentially increased risk of CEFM.

¹ In 2017, the legal age of marriage was changed from 18 to 20 years.

² Nepal Ministry of Health, New Era, and ICF. (2017). *Nepal demographic and health survey 2016*. Kathmandu, Nepal: Ministry of Health, Nepal.

³ UNICEF. (2021). United Nations Children's Fund, COVID-19: A threat to progress against child marriage, UNICEF, New York. <https://data.unicef.org/resources/covid-19-a-threat-to-progress-against-child-marriage/>

⁴ Save the Children. (2020). Covid-19 places half a million more girls at risk of child marriage in 2020. Retrieved from <https://www.savethechildren.net/news/covid-19-places-half-million-more-girls-risk-child-marriage-2020>

Overview of the Breakthrough ACTION R-CEFM Project

The USAID and Breakthrough ACTION Nepal's Reducing CEFM (R-CEFM) Project aims to strengthen the institutional and technical capacity of the Government of Nepal (GON) in Madhesh Province to design, implement, monitor, evaluate, and coordinate effective social and behavior change (SBC) activities and child protection (CP) system strengthening for reducing CEFM through a community-based, multi-sectoral, data-driven lens.

The project aims to:

- Build the capacity of newly elected ward, municipal, provincial officials, civil servants, and other community actors to advocate, design, and budget for local activities to reduce CEFM.
- Support the implementation of municipal and provincial-level activities and initiatives to reduce CEFM.
- Increase learning outcomes for adolescent girls (with the inclusion of boys) through non-formal education.

This report focuses on R-CEFM Project activities designed to increase learning outcomes for adolescent girls (with the inclusion of boys) through non-formal education. This third aim of the project was added to the project scope in response to the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on education. In particular, the R-CEFM Project designed a robust program that engaged students, parents, and teachers to increase learning outcomes for adolescent girls, as well as boys, through non-formal education. In this report, we refer to this program as the "remedial education program" or the "remedial education activities," and they included remedial classes as well as life-skills sessions, positive parenting sessions, and teacher-parent events.

Remedial education activities were conducted in close coordination with GON's education system. The remedial program focused on underperforming students from grades six, seven, and eight belonging to marginalized communities who were deemed likely to drop out of school in the near future. The program aimed to support adolescent boys and girls to retain in school that ultimately contributed to delaying child marriage.

Remedial Education Program

The remedial education program was implemented in 83 schools operating in nine municipalities of two districts in Madhesh, i.e., 48 schools in Mahottari and 35 schools in Rautahat.

The R-CEFM Project first conducted a baseline learning assessment in November 2021 across students in schools in these municipalities to:

1. Inform the design of programmatic activities
2. Identify eligible students for participation
3. Establish a baseline of students' subject-specific learning competencies at the beginning of project activities

A total of 10,621 students took the baseline learning assessment to determine eligibility for the program. Of them, 7800 underperforming students enrolled in grades 6 to 8 were identified and enrolled in the remedial classes. Teachers were trained on how to run the remedial classes. Other facilitators were trained in life skills, positive parenting and how to facilitate teacher-parent sessions.

Prior to starting remedial classes, the project signed agreements with subject teachers to ensure their responsibility and accountability. Similarly, meetings were held with parents for their consent to enroll their children in remedial classes and to send them to classes regularly. Likewise, students were requested to attend classes and participate actively in the learning process.

Remedial classes in Nepali, English, math, and science were conducted at their respective schools before the usual academic hours along with classroom sessions on life skills education and need-based counseling services. Remedial classes started in the first week of December 2021 and ended in all schools by the third week of April 2022.

The remedial classes were implemented along with several other non-formal education intervention components:

- Bursary support for all selected students included a bag, school dress, self- learning materials and stationery items (e.g., exercise books, drawing books, pencils, sharpeners, ball pens, erasers, geometry box)
- Psychosocial first aid orientation with need-based counseling support
- Life skills sessions for the students, which included sessions on CEFM, hygiene (including COVID-19 prevention), among other topics
- Positive parenting interactions (in schools)
- Parent-teacher interactions (in schools)

Then, following the completion of the remedial education activities and associated life skills trainings, positive parenting sessions, and parent-teacher interactions, a follow-up learning assessment was administered to students participating in the remedial program to examine changes in students' subject-specific learning competencies from the beginning to the end of remedial education activities.

Effects of the Remedial Education Program

The R-CEFM Project examined quantitative changes in learning outcomes from baseline to follow-up to examine the effects of the remedial education program. This quantitative portion of the endline assessment enabled the project to examine changes in scores in English, Nepali, science, and math. Quantitative results ([Please see Remedial Education Endline Assessment Report](#)), indicated that the students' learning outcomes increased significantly overall as well as across subjects for girls and boys in grades 6, 7, and 8.

The average score of students in grades 6 to 8 increased from 19.8 marks at baseline to 50.9 marks out of 100 full marks at endline after attending remedial classes. This difference was statistically significant ($p < 0.001$).

Analysis by gender also showed similar improved learning outcomes for boys and girls. While the average score of boys increased from 20.1 to 50.0, girls' scores increased from 19.6 to 51.4 out of 100 full marks after attending the remedial classes. All differences were statistically significant from baseline to endline ($p < 0.001$).

In addition to the quantitative assessment, the R-CEFM Project also collected 10 success stories ([please see Qualitative Learning Documentation Report](#)), based on students who participated in remedial education activities. These students were purposively selected by the R-CEFM Project, and while they reflected some of the changes catalyzed by the remedial education program, they did not necessarily capture the diversity of experiences of students in the remedial education program.

Unanswered questions

The findings from the quantitative results and success stories were critical to providing initial insights into the results of the R-CEFM Project's remedial education program. They identified changes in learning competencies and highlighted examples of how students' educational outcomes had changed. However, there remained a significant need to draw on *rigorous* qualitative methods to understand *systematically* how the remedial education program contributed to the quantitative learning outcomes we documented. Furthermore, there remained an urgent need to center community perspectives in identifying those changes that were most meaningful to them as a result of the remedial education program.

To do this, the R-CEFM Project aimed to implement a rigorous, participatory qualitative assessment to triangulate findings from the quantitative results and the success stories described above. The goal of this activity was to understand in greater depth the factors that influenced improved learning outcomes brought about by the remedial education program.

Overview of the Report

This report focuses specifically on local perspectives of changes that took place in their communities following the implementation of remedial education activities. The R-CEFM Project used a participatory, complexity aware methodology, Most Significant Change (MSC), to conduct key informant interviews and focus group discussions with key collaborators and community members to uncover intended and unintended changes that occurred during and following program activities. The R-CEFM Project

implemented this MSC activity to gain a deeper understanding of the factors that contributed to the significantly improved educational outcomes described above. This approach was designed to gather data to triangulate evidence from quantitative surveys and success stories documented at the end of the project. Through the rigorous implementation of this participatory methodology, the R-CEFM Project aims to contribute to the body of knowledge of the impact of this remedial education program and facilitate successful replication in the future.

In the following sections, we describe the MSC methodology used; highlight major findings; and spotlight important learnings and recommendations that emerged from this methodological approach.

Methodology

Introduction to the Most Significant Change (MSC) Approach

The Most Significant Change (MSC) approach is a flexible, qualitative, and participatory method of monitoring and evaluating a project or program. The MSC approach is flexible, allowing for each project to adapt the methodology to address the context and needs of the project. It is qualitative, drawing on methods such as key informant interviews or focus group discussions to gather information about programmatic effects. Finally, this participatory approach involves project stakeholders both in identifying the changes that have emerged in their communities and in synthesizing, analyzing, and prioritizing the data collected.

The MSC approach involves the collection of significant change stories as shared by the beneficiaries and key stakeholders in group discussions and key informant interviews. Key informants are asked a set of open-ended questions about significant changes they have noticed or identified during or following the program. Following each interview, stories of change highlighted by participants are summarized in short one-page summaries. The stories are collected through asking simple questions such as:

- In your opinion, what have been some of the changes that have taken place after the Remedial Education Project?
- Why do you think this change is significant?

The R-CEFM Project's MSC Approach

The R-CEFM Project used the MSC approach to contribute answers to the following evaluation questions related to the remedial education activities as well as the overall project:

- In what ways have key partners and community members described important changes in their attitudes, perceptions, behaviors, or norms or structural/system changes related to education or preventing CEFM since the start of the Nepal R-CEFM Project?
- To what extent did these identified changes exceed or fall short of the R-CEFM Project's objectives?
- How effective and sustainable were the R-CEFM Project's intervention strategies?
- How can the R-CEFM Project's intervention strategies be improved?

MSC stories identify not only changes, but also the processes that lead to change, who is involved in the change, what barriers are overcome, and what these changes mean to community members and key informants as well as to program staff.

Figure 3 below presents the steps followed by the R-CEFM project in implementing MSC. This included 1) selection of municipalities and schools, 2) finalization of tools, 3) study orientation, 4) participant recruitment, 5) story collection, 6) story development, 7) story vetting and selection, and 8) analysis.

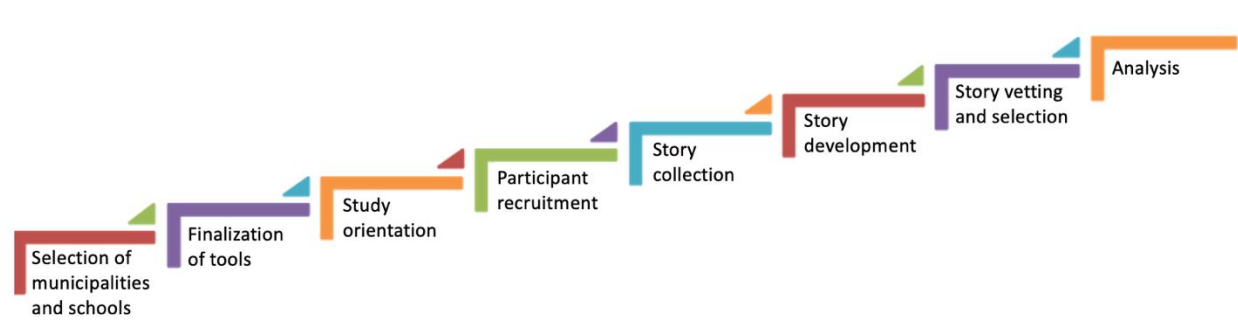


Figure 3. Steps followed by the R-CEFM project in their implementation of MSC.

Step 1. Selection of municipalities and schools

Participants were recruited in the following nine municipalities across Mahottari and Rautahat districts where the Remedial Education Project was implemented:

- **Mahottari district:** Jaleswor, Loharpatti, Manara Siswa, Balwa, and Mahottari
- **Rautahat district:** Gaur, Katahariya, Rajdevi, and Yamunamai

One school was selected purposively from each municipality for this assessment based on the team’s knowledge of activities in each school, availability of school teachers in consultation with the stakeholders from the municipalities, and school performance. Schools were selected to ensure representation from three groups: those with perceived low performance, those with perceived satisfactory performance, and those with perceived good performance, according to the program team.

Step 2. Finalization of tools

The facilitation guide used to guide these key informant interviews and focus group discussions can be found in Annex 1. The guide includes questions that assess participants’ knowledge about the project, their perceptions of the changes that have taken place in their community to which the project has contributed, and the change that is most significant to them and why. Tools were first drafted in English and translated to Nepali for data collection. Tools were pilot tested in the field prior to beginning data collection.

Step 3. Study orientation

The R-CEFM Project research team conducted an orientation for the field team prior to data collection, which included background about the remedial education program of R-CEFM project, an overview of MSC and its objectives, a review of the interview guides with hands-on experience, research ethics, and story writing tips. a review of the sampled municipalities and schools. The field team included two men

and two women who were recruited from Rautahat and Mahottari. Field team selection criteria included knowledge of the local context, culture, and language and prior experience conducting qualitative research, with particular attention paid to ensure representation by gender and by study district. All field team members were locals from Madhesh Province who belonged to other Madheshi/Terai caste/ethnic groups.

Step 4. Participant identification

Participants for the study were those who were exposed to the remedial education activities, as follows:

- **Students:** Eligible if they had been part of the remedial education classes. An equal number of girls and boys were recruited for participation, with recruitment conducted to ensure variation based on caste/ethnicity.
- **Parents:** Eligible if they were parents of students participating in remedial sessions and had been exposed to the R-CEFM parent interaction sessions or teacher-parent interactions.
- **Teachers and head teachers:** Eligible if they were a teacher or head teacher in a school where the R-CEFM education activities were ongoing, had received training to conduct remedial classes, and worked in a school that had been selected for the MSC activity.

First, the team approached head teachers at the selected schools, and together with the head teacher, eligible teachers were identified for KIIs. Teachers as well as head teachers were used as key informants to identify potential students for recruitment.

Oral informed consent was obtained from all adult participants (i.e., head teachers, teachers, and parents). Parental permission was secured prior to obtaining oral informed assent from students as they were under the age of 18.

Step 5. Story collection

Stories were collected between August 3 and August 13, 2022. Field team members were assigned to their respective districts in pairs, with one facilitating each interview/focus group discussion and the other recording and taking notes during the discussion. Members from the larger study team and the R-CEFM Project were also present during interviews to monitor and ensure quality of data collection and to provide immediate feedback. A total of 36 MSC stories were collected through 9 KIIs and 27 FGDs.

Table 1 presents the number of KIIs and FGDs by municipality, participant type, and school.

TABLE 1. SUMMARY OF KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS (KIIs) AND FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS (FGDs) CONDUCTED ACROSS PARTICIPANT TYPES AND SCHOOLS IN RAUTAHAT AND MAHOTTARI.

Municipality	Teacher			Parents			Students		
	Male	Female	No. of KII	Male	Female	No. of FGD	Male	Female	No. of FGDs
Rautahat									
Shree Secondary School, Gaur	1	0	1	5	0	1	5	5	2
Shree Secondary School, Bhasedwa Katahariya	1	0	1	5	0	1	5	5	2
Shree Basic School, Pathara Rajdevi	1	0	1	5	0	1	5	5	2
Shree Yamunamai Secondary School Yamunamai	1	0	1	5	0	1	5	5	2
Mahottari									
Shree Janta Secondary School, Praul, Balwa	1	0	1	5	0	1	5	5	2
Shree Janta Secondary School, Manra Sisawa	1	0	1	0	5	1	5	5	2
Shree Saraswati Secondary School Jaleswor	1	0	1	0	5	1	5	5	2
Shree Ramdarsh Secondary School Mahottari	0	1	1	5	0	1	5	5	2
Shree Rambatu Jagdab Prabidhil Namuna Secondary School Loharpatti	1	0	1	0	5	1	5	5	2

Step 6. Story development

Following each interview, stories of change (hereafter called MSC stories) highlighted by participants were summarized in short one-page summaries. Each MSC story was drafted following the format.

A story includes a beginning, middle, and end, and should end by explaining why the storyteller believes it to be of significance (see Figure 4, below). Changes are significant based on the perspective of participants and may be small or incremental, and linked with or related to project objectives.

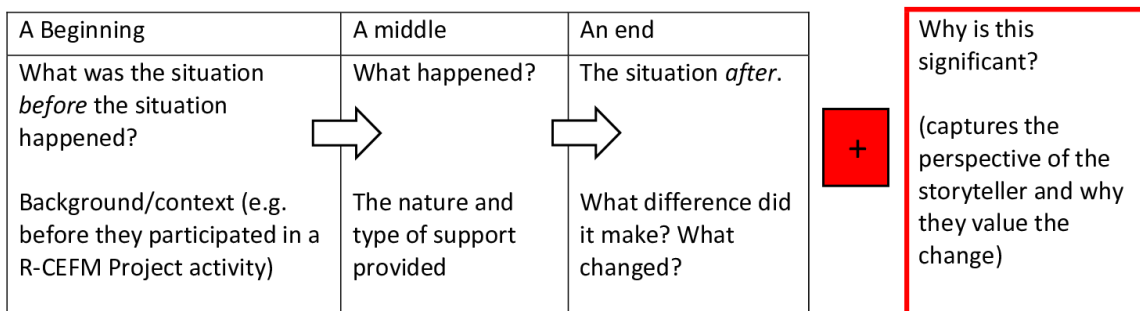
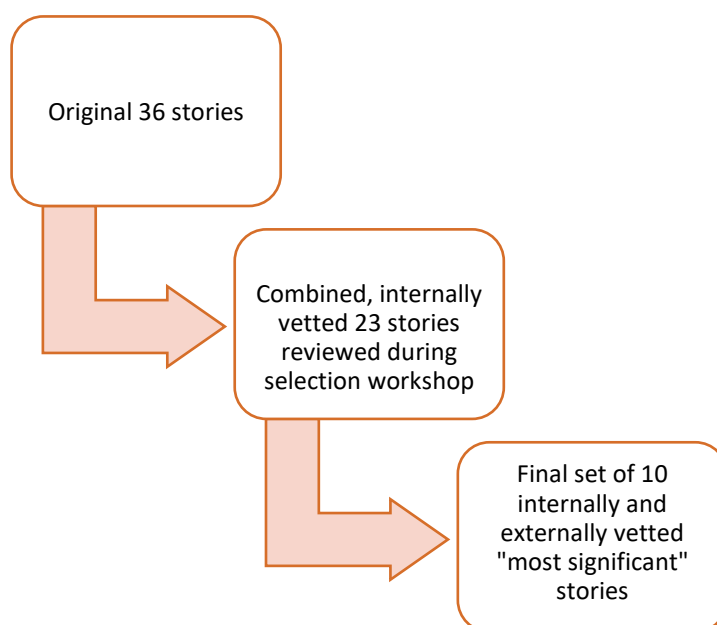


Figure 4. Visual depiction of the MSC story template.

Step 7. Story vetting and selection

The 36 collected stories were reviewed and internally vetted by the R-CEFM project team and research team to assess content, redundancy, and presentation of stories. To address redundancy, stories spotlighting similar changes were combined into a single story of change, with all sources for the story of change referenced in the story.⁵ Following this internal vetting process, a final set of 23 stories were finalized for external vetting and story selection in a community level process.



These refined 23 stories were then systematically reviewed and scored by community stakeholders to select a core set of 10 “most significant” change stories. This set of community stakeholders included teachers, parents, students, and representatives from focal municipalities where activities had been implemented. Two workshops were held: one in Mahottari and one in Rautahat. In Rautahat, six

⁵ These stories are shown as “merged” with other stories in Annex 4.

teachers, four students, four parents, and five municipality representatives participated in the selection workshop. In Mahottari, seven teachers, five students, five parents, and four municipality representatives participated.

Participants in each workshop used a common set of criteria to rank and evaluate each story gathered. Scoring criteria finalized by participants are listed below.

- Validity of change
- Significance of change
- Level of change
- Sustainability of change, and
- Change among marginalized or gender equity and social inclusion (GESI) group

Each story was first read and discussed in small groups. Then, participants scored the stories using these agreed-upon criteria. Each story was assigned a score of 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest). The scoring sheet used is shown in Annex 2 of this document. The study team collected and compiled scores for further analysis and finalization of the core set of 10 “most significant” stories of change.

Step 8. Analysis

In addition to identifying the 10 Most Significant stories of change, the R-CEFM Project then conducted a secondary thematic analysis of the complete set of MSC stories to identify cross-cutting themes related to the changes shared by the key informants.

This thematic analysis was guided by the ideational model of behavior. The ideational model of behavior recognizes there are numerous factors that influence individuals’ behaviors. While knowledge and skills are critical to individuals practicing a particular behavior, they are not sufficient. Ideational theory emphasizes that people are more likely to practice a particular behavior if they not only know about it, but if they have other characteristics as well such as if they have good attitudes about the behavior, if they feel good about doing it, or if they talk to other people about it. Some of these factors are cognitive – knowledge, attitudes, perceived severity and susceptibility, response efficacy, descriptive norms -- as well as emotional (e.g. self-efficacy) and social (e.g., social influence and interpersonal communication). Ideational theory highlights how these ideational factors are influenced by people’s knowledge and the environment around them, which in turn affects whether they intend to practice a behavior and, ultimately, if they practice it.⁶

The R-CEFM Project drew on the ideational theory of behavior to explore the factors associated with the changes in learning outcomes identified in quantitative assessments. While having the classes and

⁶ HC3. (2015). Ideation: A research primer. Available at <https://www.healthcommcapacity.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Ideation.pdf>.

programs available were important, they were, after all, the same teachers that these students had before. What drove them to show up for class, pay attention, and do their class work at home? The ideational theory of behavior helps us to identify potential factors that may have been critical. Furthermore, it helps us to posit that someone with more of these factors (e.g., greater knowledge, positive attitudes, and motivation), may be more likely to change their education-related behavior.

While supplemental thematic analyses like this one are not necessarily always conducted when implementing an MSC activity, the research team used this approach to triangulate the findings from the quantitative assessment and success stories already conducted. Furthermore, this analysis enabled the research team to examine the similarities and differences between the themes identified in the full data and the final set of “most significant” stories selected by participants.

For this thematic analysis, all 36 stories of change were read by the study team, and coded using the codebook shown in Annex 3 with a qualitative analysis software called Dedoose. These codes were informed by the ideational theory of behavior and included codes such as knowledge, attitudes, confidence, motivation, and behaviors related to education. Additional codes were added to the codebook inductively during the coding process if new topics emerged for which an existing code did not apply. First, two stories of change were coded with the preliminary codebook by one member of the study team, with another team member reviewing the coding and identifying differences in the coding application as well as gaps in the existing codebook. Differences in coding were discussed, and the team revised the codebook to then be used to code the remaining stories of change. The final codebook used is shown in Annex 2. Following the coding process, an in-depth review of each code, and associated quotations, was conducted.

A summary of the key themes associated with each code was drafted, with exemplary quotations from participants’ stories of change used to illustrate emergent themes. These key themes are described in distinct sub-sections in the Results section.

In addition, as many stories of change featured multiple themes, the research team examined which themes clustered together most. For example, with what other codes did confidence overlap, or with what other codes did child marriage-related codes overlap? These connections between themes were then visualized in a diagram with lines to represent the relationships that emerged in participants’ stories. This diagram is included in the Results section below.

Data management

All KIIs and FGDs were recorded with the permission of participants and interviewers, who noted down the key points during the discussion. After the completion of the interviews/discussion, interviewers prepared the transcript of the interviews in the Nepali language. All transcripts were sent to the core study team within a day of transcription for the purposes of analysis.

Core evaluation team members were responsible for checking the completeness of transcripts against recordings, removing any identifiers in the interview, and translating the interviews/discussions into the English language. All translated transcripts were used to develop MSC stories.

Key Findings

The results of this MSC assessment are described in this section. Highlighted first are participants' reflections on the context surrounding students' education prior to beginning remedial education activities. Then, summaries of the emergent themes are outlined across stories and spotlight the changes considered most significant at the local level. Finally, changes in ideational factors as well as behavioral and learning outcomes are described by participants in stories of change.

Throughout this section, illustrative stories of change deemed "most significant" by community members are featured in blue call-out boxes.

Pre-Intervention Context of Students' Education

Prior to the remedial education program, there were numerous challenges that influenced students' education. Many students lacked interest in school, according to participants, and often skipped class and did not prioritize their studies. This led to poor performance in subjects such as math, science, and English. As one girl in a focus group with girls in Jaleswor municipality said,

"At the start, we were very poor in our studies and most often could not recognize the letters in the book. Thus, we did not know how to read the book. Our performance was so poor that we were not confident in our studies and classes."

According to all, these educational challenges were further exacerbated by the COVID-19 lockdown. The lockdown led to the closure of schools, causing students to often be more focused on play rather than work. In addition, poverty prevented families from being able to afford school fees⁷ and educational supplies. Parents were less motivated to send their girls to school. Instead, parents expected girls to complete household chores and get married at a young age.

Stories of Change: Emergent Themes

Changes following the remedial education activities were related to both education and the prevention of child marriage and were identified at multiple steps along the pathway to behavior change. These changes are summarized in Figure 5, which illustrates the relationship between the remedial education program and the subsequent effects described by participants in KIIs and FGDs. Following remedial education activities and receipt of materials, participants identified changes in individuals' interest, motivation, self-confidence in school, conceptual understanding, as well as the importance placed on education, and child marriage. These changes in ideational factors were noted not only for students, but also for parents. According to participants, these changes led to more studying, improved school

⁷ The specific nature of these school fees was not explained. It is possible they were referring to private schools, private tutoring, or other associated costs related to sending a child to school. Charging fees is illegal in community schools in Nepal.

attendance, and better COVID-related hygiene. In turn, these behaviors ultimately contributed, according to participants, to a key outcome of this remedial education program: improvements in students’ educational performance.

Figure 5 (below) reflects the central role, highlighted in orange, that shifting ideational factors played in leading to the behavioral and learning outcomes identified in participants’ stories of change.

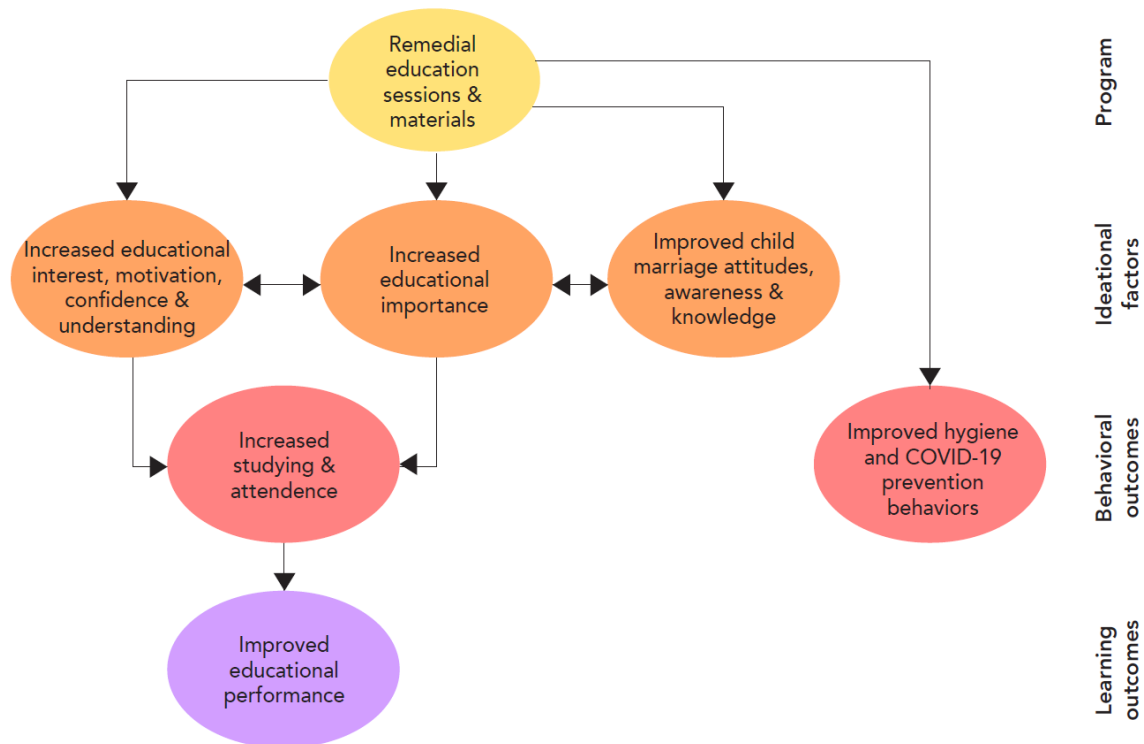


Figure 5. Visual representation of program activities (yellow) and associated changes in ideational factors (orange), behaviors (red), and learning outcomes (purple).

“Most Significant” Stories of Change

Among 36 initial stories gathered through KIIs and FGDs, a final set of 10 stories was selected by local stakeholders across both selection workshops and identified as the “most significant” according to participants. These stories are summarized below in Table 2 and featured throughout the results section to illustrate emergent themes in participants’ stories. Annex 4 includes the full results from the selection workshops, with details included for all stories of change.

Final selected stories came from multiple participant types: three from teachers, one from a head teacher, three from students, and three from parents. Emergent themes described above were consistent with those stories identified by community members and stakeholders as “most significant.”

Of note:

- 1. Importance of ideational factors in most significant change stories:** Eight of the ten stories selected highlighted both changes in ideational factors, such as increased motivation or confidence, and changes in key behaviors of interest, such as increased frequency of studying or improved attendance at school.
- 2. Educational interest, motivation, understanding, and importance were key:** Among stories citing changes in ideational factors, most common were stories describing changes in educational interest (4 stories), motivation (3 stories), understanding (3 stories), and importance (3 stories).
- 3. Changes in study habits and attendance were critical to improved learning outcomes:** Among stories citing changes in education-related behaviors, most common were stories describing changes in studying habits (5 stories), followed by changes in attendance (4 stories). Subsequent improved educational performance was cited by participants in three distinct stories of change.
- 4. Education-related changes were prominent in stories of change, but child marriage and other health-related changes were also considered significant:** While the majority of changes identified by participants were related to education, a subset of stories emerged that described changes in child marriage awareness and knowledge (1 story respectively) and changes in COVID-19 prevention and personal hygiene (1 store respectively).

TABLE 2. FINAL SET OF 10 “MOST SIGNIFICANT” STORIES OF CHANGE FOLLOWING INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL VETTING.

Name/s of School	Municipality	Informant/Group	Rank	Key changes in ideational factors	Key changes in behaviors and outcomes
Yamunamai secondary school	Yamunamai rural municipality	Teacher	1 st	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Education interest 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Education studying
Shree secondary school	Gaur municipality	Head teacher	2 nd	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Education motivation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Education attendance
Shree basic school, Pathara	Rajdevi municipality	Teacher	3 rd	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Education familiarity and understanding ● Education motivation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Education attendance ● Education studying ● Education performance
Shree secondary school	Gaur municipality	Students	3 rd	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Education importance ● Education interest 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Education attendance ● Education studying
Janata secondary school	Balawa municipality	Parents	3 rd	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Education importance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Education performance
Saraswati secondary school	Jaleshwor municipality	Parents	3 rd		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Education studying
Saraswoti secondary school	Jaleshwor municipality	Teacher	1 st	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Education familiarity and understanding ● Education interest ● Education motivation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Education attendance ● Education performance

Janata secondary school	Manra Siswa	Students (Boys)	2 nd	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Education familiarity and understanding ● Education importance ● Education interest 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Education studying
Ramawati Jagdev technical school	Loharpatti municipality	Students (Boys)	2 nd	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Child marriage awareness ● Child marriage knowledge 	
Ramawati Jagdev technical school	Loharpatti municipality	Parents	3 rd	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● COVID prevention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Personal hygiene

In the following sections, we draw on findings from the final set of “most significant” stories of change as well as the full set of stories to describe changes in ideational factors and behavioral and learning outcomes in depth.

Changes in Ideational Factors

In this section, we first highlight ideational factors where students, parents, and teachers identified changes following implementation of remedial education activities. We present these changes by:

1. Those ideational factors related specifically to education in the orange bubbles above: educational interest, educational motivation, educational confidence, educational understanding, and educational importance
2. Those ideational factors related to prevention of child marriage more broadly in the orange bubbles above: child marriage knowledge, child marriage attitudes, and child marriage awareness

Improved Educational Interest and Motivation

Before remedial education activities, lack of interest in school was a major issue among students according to parents, students, head teachers, and teachers. However, students said that they found the remedial classes interesting to attend and noted that their interest towards school in general increased due to the remedial education program. Students and teachers said that the bursary support as well as the organized, disciplined environment that resembled private schools made it more interesting. Participants explained how this has caused students to improve their attendance, attention, and performance in school. Classes were more interactive due to the limited number of students in the class (not more than 30), which allowed teachers to provide individualized responses to students and gave students the opportunity to learn very basic reading and writing skills. Typically, classes are overcrowded and can have more than 60 students in one room. Students were also considered to be more interactive in class and more interested in devoting time to study, which was evident in one most significant change story from girls in Gaur Municipality.

Education is valued

According to girls from Gaur municipality, there were vital things learned at the remedial class conducted by the R-CEFM project. They understand that education not only boosts self-confidence, but also makes people self-sustainable.

Students (girls) from the Shree Secondary School, Gaur Municipality have further acknowledged that this project has increased their interest in studies, and as a result they attend school more regularly and pay full attention in class. They have started focusing on their studies and completing their homework on time.

They have appreciated the classes and expect more of similar activities for themselves and their parents. *“Due to this change people have realized that education makes them independent and brings a good impact in the society”* as mentioned by the students (girls) from grades 6, 7, and 8 of Shree Secondary School, Gaur Municipality.

- Girls, Shree Secondary School, Gaur

The interactive design of the remedial classes has led to shifts not only in individual interests, but also improved interactions and more positive dynamics within the classroom. According to a teacher from Jaleswor, the limited number of students in class was highly effective for developing close teacher-student interactions. This was also described by a teacher and girls from Yamunamai Municipality in the story below.

Improved learning environment in class

During Covid-19, students in grades 6-8, with poor performance in their studies, were provided extra classes in four subjects: Nepali, English, math, and science. Each subject was allocated a syllabus for 150 hours. The students were also provided with study materials such as books, note copies, pencils, pens, and bags as support. *As a result of these classes, “students are now focused on their studies more and want to give time to study, became interactive in the classroom, which has made teachers happy as well. This resulted in an improved learning environment in the classroom”* as mentioned by a teacher from Yamunamai Secondary School, Yamunamai Rural Municipality.

Suggestions: The remedial classes, if made technology-friendly, would have been much better. The sessions if delivered by a projector would have been much more effective and the students could also learn about the technology at the same time.

- A teacher and students (girls) from Yamunamai Secondary School, Yamunamai Rural Municipality

Not only did participants describe students' increased interest in school, but they also noted a shift from interest to motivation and action. Parents, teachers, and head teachers highlighted increased motivation outside of school to focus on studying as well as more motivation to improve their performance in school and attend class regularly. The remedial education activities, as well as the educational materials that were distributed to students were noted by parents, teachers, and head teachers as major contributors when it came to motivating student attendance. One teacher from Rajdevi Municipality explained below.

Increased punctuality and diligence in studies

Students from Basic School Pathara, Rajdevi Municipality said that before the remedial classes, they were not even clear on general topics covered in school and subjects like mathematics, science, and English became even harder to study. As a result, students lost interest and used to skip classes regularly. *According to the Science teacher from Basic School Pathara, Rajdevi Municipality, "after the implementation of remedial program, students became clear on the subjects they were weaker at. This developed enthusiasm in them and now consequently they started becoming regular in the classes". This further motivated them to dedicate more time to their studies.* The most important change a teacher who conducted classes in the remedial program was that the punctuality and diligence of students have improved, and it was all attributed to those remedial classes.

"Their regularity in classes has increased. Reading and writing skills have been developed and they have understood in a way that was not possible in normal classes" stated a Science teacher from Basic School Pathara, Rajdevi Municipality.

- Science teacher, Basic School Pathara, Rajdevi Municipality

Improved Confidence

Students shared that they became more confident in subjects they were previously weak at, such as math, science and English. Some students felt more confident in their reading abilities, as well as their writing and speaking abilities, and even in front of the entire class. One group of girls from Loharpatti Municipality noted this confidence by stating that now, as a result of the program, "we have developed confidence in speaking in front of everyone in the class."

Improved Educational Understanding

Before the remedial education program, students had a hard time understanding basic concepts in math, science, English and Nepali, such as the fundamentals of their classes. However, the classes contributed to improved competency and knowledge, allowing them to grasp challenging topic areas and improve their performance and grades. This was noted by students in Manara Siswa Municipality in the following story of change.

Academically poor students have improved their studies

In our community, many students were not regular to school in the earlier days. In addition, the schools were closed during the countrywide lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This further deteriorated their academic performance and made them more vulnerable to losing interest in their study. When the R-CEFM project started, academically poor students of grades 6, 7, and 8 from the Shree Janata Secondary School of Manara Siswa Municipality were enrolled. The project conducted remedial classes where the students got the opportunity to take the missed classes that helped in improving and increasing interest in their studies. *“Previously it was very difficult to understand even the basic concept but the remedial classes really helped us in understanding it and we started to realize the importance of studies. Nowadays we give more time to studies.”* The most significant change due to the project for students at Shree Janata Secondary School of Manara Siswa Municipality is the improvement in the study of those who were academically poor as per the students.

-Students, Shree Janata Secondary School of Manara Siswa Municipality and English teacher from Shree Ramdasash Sarvodaya Higher Secondary School of Mahottari Municipality

School Retention to Prevent Child Marriage

Increased Importance Given to Education

The importance of education was a critical change noted in both parents and students. Students made the connection between the importance of going to school and the prevention of child marriage as shown in Figure 5. Parents noted that their perspectives on educational importance shifted as well, especially in terms of the significance of education in preventing child marriage.

Parents were described by participants as committed to increasing educational opportunities for their children by prompting children to attend school and by helping them in their studies. Students across multiple municipalities noted these shifts among their parents as highlighted by students in Manara Siswa Municipality:

“This session changed the parents' perspectives on the importance of children going to school and the importance of education and also understanding of the role of education in the prevention of early marriage. Now, parents have started providing opportunities for their children to go to school and focus on their studies.”

Changes in parents' perceptions of educational importance were particularly salient for girls. Although previously girls were expected to focus on completing household chores and getting married young, after the sessions, parents increasingly supported educational opportunities for girls noting the importance of educating daughters to reduce child marriage. Parents did this by sending their daughters to school, helping them in their studies, and allowing them to focus on schoolwork. This was particularly mentioned among students who noticed these changes in their parents, as explained by students and parents in the story of change below.

Change in the parents' perspective toward the girls' education

Students (girls) and their parents mentioned that the community often lacks the motivation to send their daughters to school due to certain socio-cultural and economic reasons. Rather, they prioritize getting them married early. Girls are expected to give more priority to household chores. The project conducted interaction sessions between parents and teachers on the importance of creating a study environment at home for their children. *The most significant change, due to the project as stated by the parents of Shree Janata Secondary School of Balwa Municipality, and students (girls) from Shree Janata Secondary School of Manara Siswa Municipality, is the change in parents' perspectives toward their girls' education. Now, the girl child is also given the opportunity to study, and parents have started giving them more time to focus on their studies.* In addition, girls' children are not given many household chores like before.

The interaction sessions made the parents aware of the importance of education and motivating their kids for their studies. "If parents are involved to facilitate their children's education, this improves the students' performance" mentioned by the parents of the students from Shree Janata Secondary School of Balwa Municipality.

A girl mentioned that "these interaction sessions were very helpful to motivate our parents to send us to school and to give us more time to study rather than only doing the household chores."

- Students (girls) and their parents from Shree Janata Secondary School of Balwa Municipality as well as students (girls) from Shree Janata Secondary School of Manara Siswa Municipality

Improved Child Marriage Attitudes

Although less commonly mentioned, students and teachers in Yamunamai, Katariya, and Mahottari municipalities in particular described changes in students' and parents' attitudes and perspectives about child marriage as a result of the remedial education program. Lessons focused on the importance of education, including the prevention of child marriage through continued education, and the negative consequences of child marriage. Students noted that their increase in understanding of the consequences of child marriage caused them to change their perspective on it. In addition, they noted that their parents now wanted to marry their children after they are 20 years old. For example, students in Yamunamai Municipality said:

"The change was also seen among parents now as they are seen as more concerned about their children's education and making their child capable, even if it is a girl child. They now want to marry their child only after 20 years of age."

Improved Child Marriage Awareness and Knowledge

According to participants, awareness of child marriage as a local issue improved due to the life-skills sessions and parent-teacher interactions that included a discussion on child marriage. Parents were noted to appreciate the efforts of the program to improve child marriage awareness, which in turn helped improve their knowledge of child marriage. Students also reported appreciation for the

incorporation of child marriage awareness into the remedial education program, some even noting that it was the most important change that resulted from this remedial education program. A parent from Mahottari Municipality emphasized these points, saying:

“When this project decided to involve parents/guardians, they called upon the participation of female guardians. This was a positive aspect of the project. Female guardians mostly insist their daughters get married early and give pressure on the community as well, so when they are involved in such awareness programs, they make all others aware, and gradually there will be a change.”

As mentioned by students, parents, and teachers across multiple municipalities, both parents and students became more knowledgeable about specific issues related to child marriage as a result of the remedial education activities. Due to the lessons, they were able to understand the negative effects of child marriage, the legal consequences of child marriage, how to prevent child marriage, and when girls should get married. Students from Loharpatti municipality noted that they also learned more about topics such as dowry, which often play a major role in child marriage. The increase in child marriage knowledge was noted by students in Mahottari Municipality in particular, who said:

“In the community, either the girls are forcedly married and become mothers soon after the marriage, the community is not aware of the consequences of child marriage. Now, we are aware and discuss with our parents, family members and friends about preventing child marriage.”

Increased awareness of child marriage and its consequences among students

As per the students from Shree Rambati Jagdev Janta Prabidik Namuna Vidhyalaya of Loharpatti Municipality *“during the time of the COVID-19 lockdown, students had lost track of education, and at that time, the project provided great support to encourage the continuity of their studies”*. The project-oriented students on how to maintain personal hygiene and protect themselves and society from the Coronavirus pandemic. *Most importantly, the orientation classes provided awareness of other prominent social issues such as child marriage and the dowry system and its negative impacts too. Students consider the increased awareness among students about child marriage is the most important change due to the project. Now, students understand that marriage done before the age of 20 years is considered child marriage in Nepal and it has several negative repercussions on the health, education, and financial status of the family. Similarly, there is increased awareness among students about dowry as another social malpractice in the community.*

-Students Shree Rambati Jagdev Janta Prabidik Namuna Vidhyalaya, Loharpatti

Changes in Behavioral and Learning Outcomes

This section spotlights changes in behaviors and learning outcomes highlighted by participants.

Improved study habits

The remedial education classes contributed to an increase in study hours among students, which was noted by students, parents, and teachers across multiple municipalities. As students were able to develop interest and understanding of school topic areas, they felt further motivated to dedicate more time towards studying, which in turn led to them engaging in this important education-related behavior.

Even outside the classroom, students found themselves working on their studies at home, rather than spending time playing. One factor that contributed to this was the educational materials that students received, allowing them to be able to have the supplies they need to study well at home. A parent from Jaleshwor Municipality noted this change below.

Students started sparing time for study at home

Parents of the students from Saraswoti Secondary School, Jaleshwor Municipality reported that their children were less interested in their studies and more focused on other activities at home before attending remedial education activities. In addition, closer of the school during the pandemic also affected the children's study habits at school.

After the remedial education classes, the children started to study at home. The students are now more focused on their studies and spare time for it when at home and this change has been considered the most significant change due to the remedial education program as mentioned by the parents of the students from Saraswoti Secondary School, Jaleshwor Municipality. Students got the opportunity to study even during the lockdown and with free educational supplies. "The children got the opportunity to study even during the lockdown, got educational materials as a gift and they learned to study well even at home" as stated by the parents of the students from Saraswoti Secondary School, Jaleshwor Municipality.

-Parents of students from Saraswoti Secondary School, Jaleshwor Municipality

Improved Attendance

As mentioned by students, parents, teachers, and head teachers across many municipalities, before the remedial education program, absenteeism was common among students. However, the knowledge and motivation they gained from the classes, as well as the distribution of educational resources, contributed to students going to class regularly, which improved students' performance in school. Parents also noted that they helped encourage their children to attend school, improving students' attendance as well.

Girls are motivated toward education after remedial education activities

The head teacher of Shree Secondary School, Gaur Municipality found that girls have shown more enthusiasm and motivation in studies and are now much more punctual in the class and hence the quality of their studies has increased and consider this as most significant change due to the project. Before attending the remedial education activities, “absenteeism of the girl student was noticeably high in the classroom and we noticed their lack of interest towards study” mentioned the head teacher of Shree Secondary School, Gaur Municipality.

In the remedial education activities, the teacher tried to make the classes not only interesting but also valuable and thus motivating students to be regular in school. The remedial education activities also covered content beyond the subject matter such as personal hygiene, COVID-19 prevention, and life skills.

- Head teacher of Shree Secondary School, Gaur Municipality

Personal Hygiene & COVID-19

Lessons on personal hygiene and COVID-19 prevention that were integrated into the remedial education program contributed to improved understanding of these areas for students. Students reported improving their practices of bathing, teeth brushing, wearing clean clothing, trimming their nails, and washing their hands after the remedial education activities. Students also learned about COVID-19 prevention strategies, protocols, and safety measures that could allow for improved protection against the virus. These personal hygiene and COVID-19 sessions and the changes due to them were noted by students, parents, teachers, and head teachers across many municipalities. For example, students from Guar Municipality considered that practicing cleanliness behaviors after attending the life skills sessions was the most significant change. They said,

“Be it during the COVID-19 pandemic or other times, personal hygiene and sanitation must be adopted as an integral part of life. The classes with demonstration sessions were very helpful to understand the importance of personal hygiene.”

Improved COVID-19 prevention practices among both students and parents were also highlighted as important as the story below spotlights.

COVID-19 awareness increased among us

During the peak of Covid-19 time, the majority of schools remained closed and the project started a remedial education program targeting academically poor students. The parents also got an opportunity to attend the orientation sessions on the importance of education and creating a supportive study environment at home for their children. *In addition, the orientation sessions also included information about Covid-19 and its preventive measures. The parents practiced preventive approaches such as wearing masks, regular handwashing, avoiding gatherings and maintaining social distance in their day-to-day life. This helped in the prevention of transmission of Covid-19 and the parents of the students from Shree Rambati Jagdev Janta Prabidik Namuna Vidhyalaya from Loharpatti Municipality consider it most important to them.*

-Parents of students, Loharpatti Municipality

Improved Education Performance

Students, parents, teachers, and head teachers across nearly all municipalities noted academic performance improvements due to the remedial education program. Improvement of student's performance across the subjects of math, science, Nepali, English, reading, and writing was common among students. According to students, parents, teachers, and head teachers, students are now doing better at understanding these challenging topics and scoring higher in areas where they used to struggle. As boys from Balwa Municipality said, "They taught us many things, focusing on the subject matter, so we got higher scores than what we used to get in the regular school class." According to participants, the increased involvement of parents, and the improved attendance and motivation of students may have all contributed to these positive performance changes. It is also possible that these changes are the result of the additional hours of instruction students received from the remedial education program.

Students improve in reading and writing

As mentioned by the Math teacher of Saraswoti Secondary School, Jaleswor Municipality, many students used to have a hard time even solving simple math problems. Students were not sincere towards their studies and were irregular at school. Nonetheless, in this project, the students with poor academic performance were provided an additional remedial education program. Regular assignment and regular feedback to students was provided. *Every week the test was conducted to see their improvement and retake the classes for those who scored poorly. Performance was improved and are better now; they have improved in reading and writing and have increased interest in their studies.*

This project made a change in the behaviors of the students, now they are motivated, sincere, well-behaved, punctual, and regular in classes. This type of program must be continued in our school to help and motivate students to improve their studies. “It was surprising to see students who used to skip classes were sad when the tuition classes remained closed for 10 days during the Covid-19 time” a Math teacher from Saraswoti Secondary School, Jaleswor Municipality.

-Math teacher, Saraswoti Secondary School, Jaleswor Municipality

Participants’ Recommendations for Future Programs

This section concludes with emergent themes related to future directions called for by participants to build on the results of the remedial education program.

Teachers, parents, and students across multiple municipalities noted suggestions they had for the future in order to continue and expand on the benefits of the remedial education program and make it more sustainable over time. Overall, these suggestions focused on continuing this programming within communities and providing follow-up sessions for participants. Teachers, parents, and students felt that with the continuation of more similar sessions, long-lasting, sustainable change in terms of educational motivation, attendance, and performance would occur. A teacher from Balawa Municipality expressed his desire for the continuation of such projects, saying, “

“This also shows that such projects need to be continued in our community to retain the children in the school, to improve their attendance which in turn will improve their academic performance later.”

In addition, recommendations also focused on the cost and implementation modalities of the program. Parents from Katariya Municipality noted the importance of this program being free for students, since it removed financial barriers to participation. In addition, a teacher from Yamunamai Municipality revealed that incorporating more technology, such as using a projector, would enhance students’ learning by allowing them to learn more through technology as well as by exposing them to new technologies.

Discussion and Recommendations

This report describes the design and implementation of a locally led, complexity-aware method of identifying local level changes following the R-CEFM Project’s remedial education activities. Through a multi-step process, qualitative stories were gathered, summarized, and vetted internally and externally through participatory selection workshops. Following these steps, a final set of 10 stories of change were selected as “most significant” stories of change to be disseminated at the community level and with key stakeholders at the local, provincial, and federal levels. The intention of this process and the results presented here are to emphasize emergent changes deemed “most significant” by communities where the remedial education activities were implemented. They can also contribute and complement other evaluation approaches of the project, including quantitative assessments of learning outcomes among students also conducted by the R-CEFM Project.

Key findings

Across these stories of change, our selection workshops and secondary thematic analysis showed that:

1. **Ideational factors were critical changes noted by participants in most significant change stories.** Many changes noted by students, parents, and teachers were ideational including changes in attitudes, knowledge, or confidence. These were identified not just for students, but for parents as well. These ideational factors are critical for subsequent behavioral changes, such as better attendance at school or increased frequency of studying, also noted by some participants. These stories suggest that the implementation of remedial education activities addressed multiple ideational factors with potential to influence people’s educational behaviors in the future.
2. **Changes in behaviors described by participants were primarily educational.** These outcomes included improved attendance or studying, rather than changes in behaviors related to addressing or reducing child marriage. This is a reflection of the content of remedial education activities, which were focused on improving learning outcomes and integrated in sessions to increase students’ awareness of and knowledge about child marriage.
3. **Changes in learning outcomes were consistent with quantitative findings.** Improved learning outcomes described by participants in most significant change stories mirrored those found in quantitative assessments conducted with students participating in the remedial education classes.
4. **Engaging both parents and children into remedial education activities was critical for the success of the remedial education program.** This approach engaged both children and their key influencers. Parent interactions worked to increase parents’ engagement in their children’s education, which helped parents to encourage their children to attend school and study.
5. **As has been demonstrated in previous studies, education – particularly for girls – remains critically entwined with preventing child marriage.** While most stories of change focused on

education-related changes, those that spotlighted changes in attitudes and knowledge about preventing child marriage made the clear connection between education and child marriage. Parents and students described how parents had become increasingly aware of this connection, which motivated them to support their children's learning more intentionally.

6. **Community members recognized and valued changes related to COVID-19 and other personal health and hygiene practices.** While not a central component of the remedial education program, efforts to prevent COVID-19 led to unintended learnings and behavior changes among students related to COVID-19 prevention and personal hygiene.

Recommendations

Building on these learnings, future programs designed to be implemented at the local level to improve students' learning outcomes could:

1. **Continue to invest in activities that address ideational factors.** Such approaches can lead to improvements in education-related behaviors and learning outcomes. Efforts to address ideational factors related to education retention, such as improving interest in education and recognition of the linkages between education and child marriage, have the potential to affect not only educational outcomes, but also child marriage.
2. **Identify opportunities to move beyond the individual level.** Stories of change were centered on individual or household changes. Further efforts could address other education-related factors that influence students' education-related behaviors and learning outcomes. This could include addressing investment in education at the local level as well as addressing root causes, or those structural inequalities within communities that differentially impact marginalized students' access to opportunities and education.
3. **Explore ways to better integrate child marriage-related topics into remedial education activities.** Changes in child marriage awareness and knowledge were cited, but future efforts could move beyond a focus on increasing awareness and knowledge about child marriage and instead empower students, parents, and teachers to engage in specific behaviors to reduce child marriage.
4. **Continue to engage in multi-level interventions.** These approaches can include not only activities with students, but also activities with key influencers such as parents and teachers. Integrate approaches at multiple levels of the socio-ecological model, including remedial education activities as well as efforts to address underlying structural inequalities that lead to differential access to resources at the local level.

Sustainability

Central to discussions with participants, and present in multiple stories of change was a focus on sustainability of the changes participants saw after the implementation of the remedial education activities. Participants routinely emphasized their desire for ongoing implementation of the remedial education program to make long-lasting change. This could include activities of a longer duration or the institutionalization of a remedial education program within GON's approaches in education at the local

level. Some teachers highlighted how technology could also play a central role in improving the sustainability of the remedial education program by helping teachers to update their lesson plans. For sustainability, there is a need to include such remedial education programs in annual education plans with dedicated budget line items.

Limitations

The MSC approach is a qualitative methodology, which means that it was not designed for researchers to draw causal claims or generalize these findings to all participants in the remedial education program in Madhesh Province. Instead, this qualitative assessment was implemented to capture individuals' lived experiences of the remedial education classes to complement larger, more generalizable evaluation approaches implemented by the R-CEFM Project. The engagement of community members throughout the process – from data collection to story selection – is a critical step in supporting the confirmability of the findings and the transferability of the themes described here to other settings.

Conclusion

Together, the R-CEFM Project used the MSC approach to facilitate a participatory process wherein community members' perspectives on the remedial education activities were gathered and changes documented. The stories of change featured in this report spotlight those changes deemed most significant from the perspectives of students, teachers, and parents from schools where the remedial education program was implemented. These changes, which ranged from shifts in attitudes about education to increased studying and improved learning outcomes, illustrated the process through which the R-CEFM Project's remedial education program influenced ideational factors, which in turn affected education-related behavioral and subsequent learning outcomes. This approach should be built upon at the local level to ensure that they form a strong, sustainable foundation for students in these communities in the future.

Annex 1: Interview/FGD Guide

If interview:

- MSC key informant interview number:
- MSC key informant’s professional title:
- Participant type:
- MSC key informant location (e.g., Province, Municipality, etc.):

If group discussion:

- MSC focus group discussion number:
- Participant type:
- MSC key informant location (e.g., Province, Municipality, etc.):

Guiding questions for Most Significant Change Assessment

Question	Probe
1. Please tell me what you know about the Nepal R-CEFM Project.	<p>What is the Nepal R-CEFM Project doing in you ward/ municipality/ province? Since when has the Nepal R-CEFM Project worked in your ward/ municipality/ province? Have you participated in any Nepal R-CEFM activities in your ward/ municipality/ province? What were those activities? In your opinion, what could the R-CEFM Project do to improve? What activities would you like to see?</p> <p>Note: The participant may not know the name of the project. If the participant has not heard of the Nepal R-CEFM Project by name, you can rephrase the questions as follows: Have you heard of a project working to reduce CEFM in your community? What have you heard about the project? What is that project doing? How long has the project been working in your ward /municipality/province? Have you participated in any activities related to reducing CEFM in your ward/municipality/province? What were those activities? In your opinion, what could this project trying to reduce CEFM do to improve? What activities would you like to see?</p>
2. In your opinion, what have been some of the changes that have taken place after the Nepal R-CEFM Project [after the project trying to reduce CEFM] came in?	<p>Important probes to construct a complete story: What was the situation like before? How is the situation now? How was this change possible? What were some of the challenges/barriers to make this change happen? How were these overcome? What are the benefits people are experiencing as a result of this change? Who was involved in making this change? Was this change expected or unexpected? Why?</p>
3. Of these changes, what do you think is the most significant one?	
4. Why do you think this is the most significant change?	What makes it significant or important in your opinion?

Question	Probe
5. In your opinion, how do the people in your ward/municipality/province feel about this change?	
6. In your opinion, what should be done to make sure this change is sustained	
7. What are other changes you think are most significant that happened as a result of the CEFM Project?	<p>Important probes to construct a complete story:</p> <p>What was the situation like before?</p> <p>How is the situation now?</p> <p>How was this change possible?</p> <p>What were some of the challenges/barriers to make this change happen? How were these overcome?</p> <p>What are the benefits people are experiencing as the result of this change?</p> <p>Who was involved in making this change?</p> <p>Was this change expected or unexpected? Why?</p>
8. In your opinion, what are some of the unexpected changes that have happened as a result of the program?	<p>Important probes to construct a complete story:</p> <p>What was the situation like before?</p> <p>How is the situation now?</p> <p>How was this change possible?</p> <p>What were some of the challenges/barriers to making this change happen? How were these overcome?</p> <p>What are the benefits people are experiencing as a result of this change? Who was involved in making this change?</p> <p>Was this change expected or unexpected? Why?</p>
9. If I want to learn more about the changes that have taken place in this community, whom do you think I should talk to?	

Annex 2: Vetting Scoring Sheet

Most Significant Change Story-Vetting Scoring Sheet

For each story reviewed during the vetting workshop, each small group assigned a score based on the five criteria below.

Criteria	Your score	Remarks
Validity of the change	1	Least valid: no evidence provided/described during interview, not possible to validate; change described of poor quality
	2	No evidence provided/described during interview to support change, but change could be validated externally; change of mediocre quality
	3	One piece of evidence described during interview to support change, which could be validated externally; change of mediocre quality
	4	One piece of evidence provided shown during interview to support change; change of high quality
	5	Most valid: strong justification (two pieces of evidence provided/described to support change), both easily validated; change of high quality
Significance of the change	1	Least significant to the participant/group
	2	Somewhat significant to the participant/group
	3	Significant to the participant/group
	4	Highly significant to the participant/group
	5	Most significant to the participant/group
Level of the change	1	Individual change: one individual only
	2	Individual change: multiple individuals
	3	Organizational change (within a health facility, non-government organization, specific government office, etc.)
	4	Structural or system-level change (e.g., procedure, policy)
	5	Coordination: change in coordination between multiple organizations/systems
Sustainability of the change	1	Not sustainable: not maintained during the project period
	2	Sustainable, but no evidence of maintenance of change over the project period (evidence will come in the future)
	3	Sustainable: evidence of maintenance of the change for at least one month
	4	Sustainable: evidence of maintenance of the change for at least three months
	5	Sustainable: evidence of maintenance of the change for at least six months
Change among marginalized or GESI group	1	No change among a marginalized or GESI group
	2	Little change among a marginalized or GESI group
	3	Some change among a marginalized or GESI group
	4	A bit more change among a marginalized or GESI group
	5	Large change among a marginalized or GESI group

Annex 3: Codebook

Category	Code	Description
Participant Type	Head Teacher	Participant who is a head teacher
	Teacher	Participant who is a teacher
	Parent	Participant who is a parent
	Unmarried adolescent girl	Participant who is an unmarried adolescent girl
	Unmarried adolescent boy	Participant who is an unmarried adolescent boy
Individual/Community Factors	EDUC-Confidence	Indication of confidence students feel while at school or completing academic tasks
	EDUC-Interest	Indication of students' interest in school
	EDUC-Motivation	Indication of students' motivation towards going to school, completing school tasks, or doing well in school
	EDUC-Familiarity and understanding	Indication of how familiar or how well students understand material in school
	EDUC-Importance	Indication of the importance of education
	EDUC-Studying	Indication of students' studying or completing school related activities outside of school
	EDUC-attendance	Indication of students' attendance in school
	EDUC-performance	Indication of students' performance in school
	EDUC-Challenges	Indication of any challenges that surround education for students
	Personal Hygiene	Indication of personal hygiene activities, behaviors, or knowledge
	COVID prevention	Indication of COVID prevention or strategies aimed at reducing the transmission of COVID
	CM-Attitude	Indication of attitudes surrounding child marriages
	CM-Awareness	Indication of awareness surrounding child marriages
	CM-Knowledge	Indication of knowledge surrounding child marriages
Factors Surrounding Child Marriages	Cultural norms	Indication of any cultural norms that surround child marriages
	Gender norms	Indication of any norms surrounding gender
	EDUC-opportunity	Indication of opportunities for education
	Educational resources	Participant shares a personal experience they have had regarding child marriages
	Future directions	Suggestions for how to continue to combat child marriages in the future
	EDUC-support	Indication of support for education
	Catalyst	Something that causes change (example the play, a training, spread of knowledge, increase in confidence)
Ecological Levels	Individual Change	A change in individual attitudes, beliefs, knowledge, confidence, perceptions experiences, etc.
	Relationship Change	A change in family, partners, or social networks in terms of attitudes, beliefs, knowledge, confidence, perceptions experiences, etc.
	Community Change	A change in neighborhoods, schools, workplaces, social or religious organizations
	Societal Change	A change in social and cultural norms, policies, etc.

Annex 4: Full MSC results

Annex 2 includes the full set of results from the MSC activity. This includes three pieces:

1. The complete set of 36 stories collected
2. The subset of 23 stories presented and reviewed during the selection workshops
3. A summary table that presents the final scores and rankings from selection workshops

These results are available [here](#).