

# Breakthrough ACTION Nepal

*Human-Centered Design Implementation to Reduce Child, Early, and Forced Marriage in Madhesh Province, Nepal*



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# Acronyms

<b>CEFM</b>	Child, Early, and Forced Marriage
<b>FCHV</b>	Female community health volunteer
<b>FGD</b>	Focus group discussion
<b>GESI</b>	Gender, equity, social inclusion
<b>HCD</b>	Human-Centered Design
<b>KII</b>	Key informant interview
<b>LCRC</b>	Local Child Rights Committee
<b>NDHS</b>	Nepal Demographic and Health Survey
<b>NGO</b>	Nongovernmental organization
<b>R-CEFM</b>	Reducing Child, Early, and Forced Marriage
<b>SBC</b>	Social and Behavior Change
<b>USAID</b>	United States Agency for International Development
<b>WCRC</b>	Ward Child Rights Committee
<b>WCSC</b>	Women, Children, and Senior Citizens Section

**01**

# **Project Background**

# Project Landscape

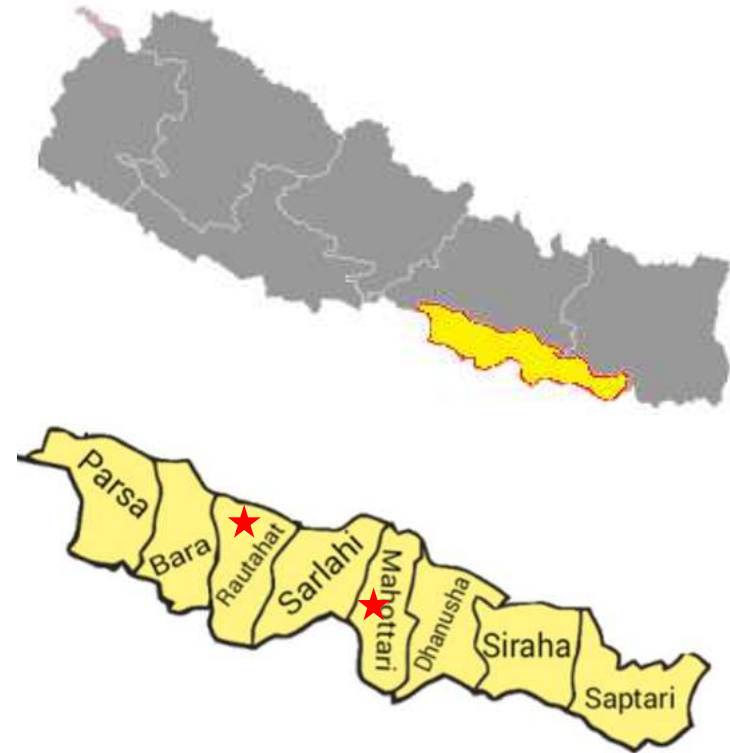
Breakthrough ACTION Nepal, the United States Agency for International Development's (USAID's) global flagship social and behavior change (SBC) project, designed its Reducing Child, Early, and Forced Marriage (R-CEFM) project to strengthen the institutional and technical capacity of the Government of Nepal in six municipalities in Madhesh Province to design, implement, monitor, evaluate, and coordinate effective SBC and child protection system-strengthening activities to reduce child, early, and forced marriage (CEFM). Although the legal age of marriage for men and women in Nepal is 20 years old, the National Population and Housing Census 2021 indicated that Madhesh Province had the highest child marriage rate in Nepal (all marriages under the age of 18). The Madhesh Province government has the political will and commitment to address CEFM, but the local funding and decision-making authority lies with municipalities and wards, which often do not prioritize addressing CEFM. The Breakthrough ACTION project aims to address barriers related to CEFM through a community-based, multi-sectoral, and data-driven lens.

While other provinces in Nepal have demonstrably reduced child marriage in recent years, the change in Madhesh Province has been less pronounced. The Breakthrough ACTION project decided to leverage a different approach with this province, with a focus on strengthening the system's capacity to address the issue. The project utilized human-centered design (HCD) to understand the reasons for child marriage and to identify and refine potential SBC activities to address CEFM in six focal municipalities.



# CEFM Landscape in Madhesh Province Prior to HCD

- Madhesh Province has the highest child marriage rate in Nepal
- Child and early marriage rate is highest in the six project municipalities (Mahottari district-Loharpatti, Matihani, Jaleswhar, Pipara, Rautahat district-Durga Bhagawati,Rajpur)—girls (35-59%) and boys (6%-28%)
- CEFM is considered the norm in communities and across municipalities.
- Since Nepal transitioned to a federalized system, child protection structures are in need of restructuring.
- Child clubs do not exist or are not functional, and CEFM is not prioritized.
- Stakeholders do not acknowledge or internalize the presence of CEFM in all groups regardless of religion, class, education, or place of residence.
- Stakeholders working in the province view CEFM as a cross-cutting issue.
- Stakeholders and community members recognize CEFM as a major cause of dowry and poverty.



# Why HCD for R-CEFM

The HCD process emphasizes the importance of keeping the target audience and intended beneficiaries at the center of research, design, and ideation. In doing so, the process leads to the development of innovative solutions that directly meet their needs and desires. The HCD process is especially relevant for the R-CEFM project because it provides municipal leadership the opportunity to interact with community members at a deep level, such that they gain empathy for those affected by CEFM and design solutions accordingly. The leadership and community are then able to jointly develop, test, and monitor programs by investing municipality resources, including funds.

Notably, the project was designed with an emphasis on systems-strengthening in which the municipalities/wards were engaged throughout the HCD process to build HCD capacity and generate buy-in for the solutions developed. The outcomes of the HCD work and the solutions generated were given to the municipalities/wards for testing, implementation, and monitoring. This approach champions sustainability.

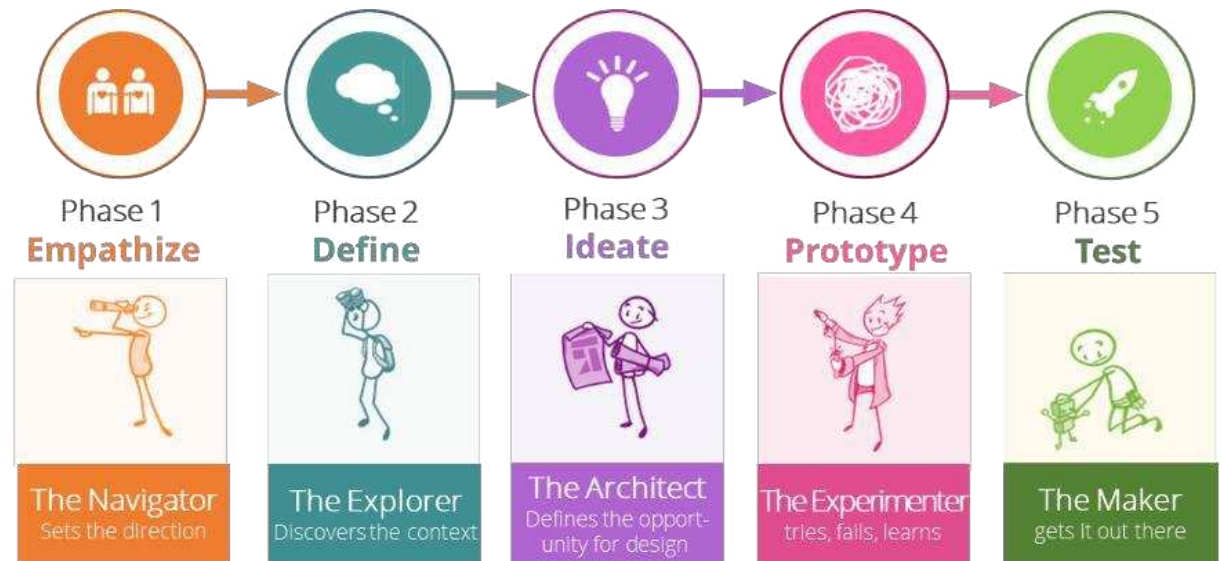


# HCD Approach

HCD is a people-centered, creative, innovative, and iterative problem-solving framework that focuses on a particular challenge. It begins with an understanding of the human and socio-behavioral factors (needs, desires, constraints, situation, and context) surrounding the challenge. HCD requires working directly with the people closest to the challenge to develop new ideas that are contextually desirable, viable, and appropriate.

The project started the HCD work with a design challenge (next slide) and leveraged the five design thinking phases to address that challenge:

- **Empathize:** Determine the stakeholders involved in the challenge of focus and learn about them.
- **Define:** Clarify and further define the challenge of focus.
- **Ideate:** Brainstorm solutions for the identified challenge, rooted in a deep understanding of the end user(s) and related stakeholders.
- **Prototype:** Create a low-fidelity model of the selected solution(s).
- **Test:** Receive feedback on the prototype(s).





# Design Challenge of Focus

*How might we strengthen the capacity of municipality-level systems to support local structures to reduce CEFM?*



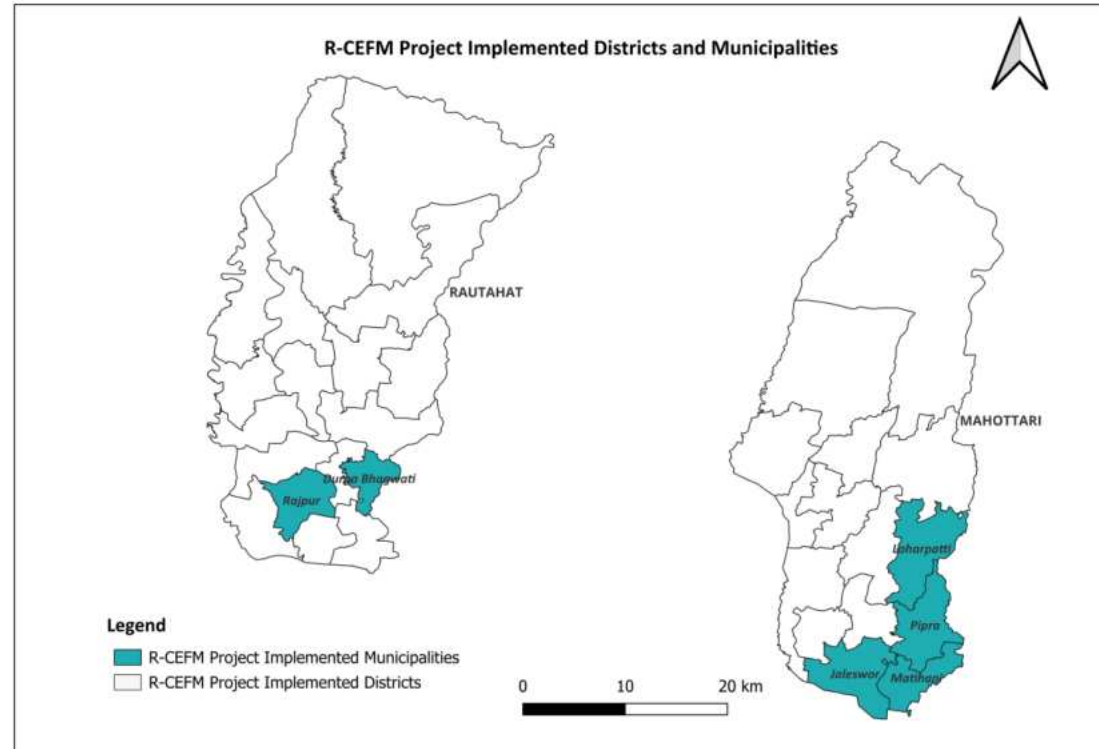
# Geographic Scope: Madhesh Province

## Rautahat District

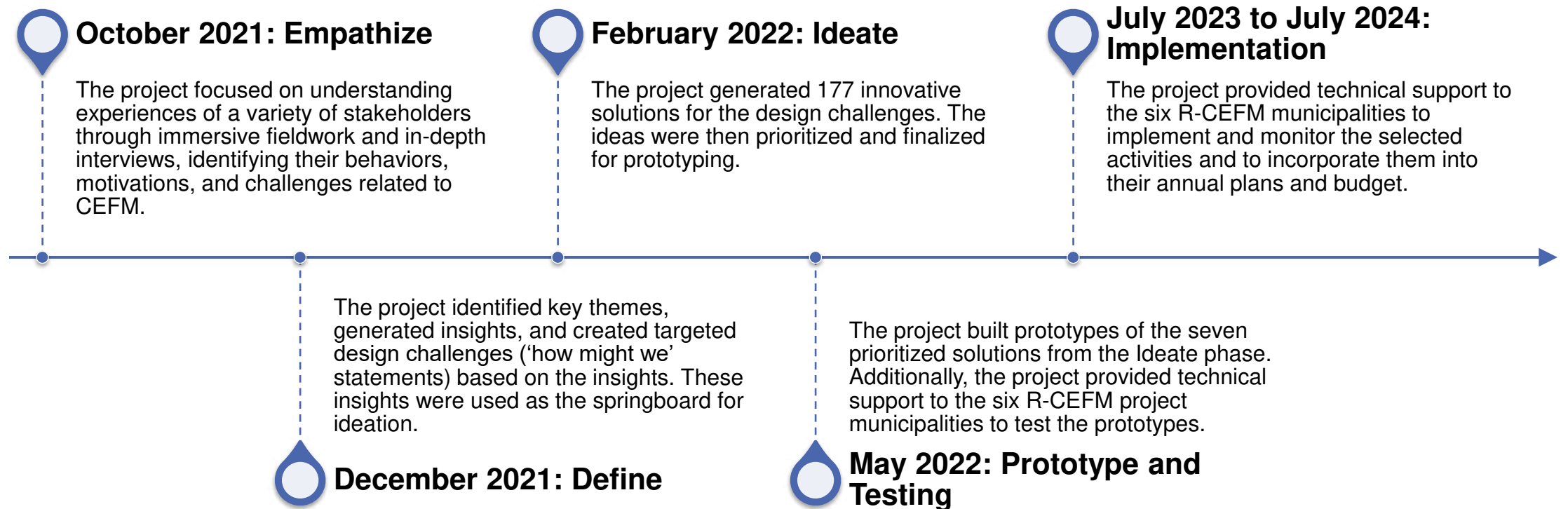
- Rajpur Municipality
- Durga Bhagwati Rural Municipality

## Mahottari District

- Matihani Municipality
- Jaleswar Municipality
- Loharpatti Municipality
- Pipra Rural Municipality



# HCD Timeline







# 02

## Our Process

# Design Teams

## Stakeholder Types Included in Each Municipality Design Team

Each of the six municipalities had its own design team. This structure helped support independent decision-making power and to foster buy-in, as each municipality would ultimately be responsible for activity budgets, implementation, and monitoring. Throughout the HCD process, design teams were responsible for operationalizing each phase to ultimately generate solutions for the design challenge. To do that effectively, the project provided capacity building for the design teams in HCD research and activity practices, research ethics, and HCD as a tool for SBC.

Leaders	Government Staff	Community Workers	Community Members
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mayor/chairperson</li> <li>• Deputy mayors/vice-chairpersons</li> <li>• Executive members</li> <li>• Ward chairs</li> <li>• Religious leaders</li> </ul> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women, Children, and Senior Citizens Section (WCSC) chiefs</li> <li>• Education coordinators</li> <li>• Health coordinators</li> <li>• Social Development Division chief</li> <li>• Planning officers/information technology officers</li> <li>• Ward secretary</li> <li>• Health service providers</li> </ul> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Female community health volunteers (FCHVs)</li> <li>• Teachers</li> <li>• Local nongovernmental organization (NGO) staff</li> </ul> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents</li> <li>• Adolescents</li> <li>• Marriage brokers</li> <li>• Child club members</li> <li>• School management</li> <li>• Local Child Rights Committee (LCRC) members</li> </ul> 

# Empathize Phase: Background



During the Empathize phase, the project worked with the six municipality-specific design teams to understand the lived experiences of the intended audience and key stakeholders. This was done through immersive fieldwork, including in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs), identifying stakeholder patterns of behavior, motivations, and challenges related to CEFM.

The Empathize phase had the following three objectives:

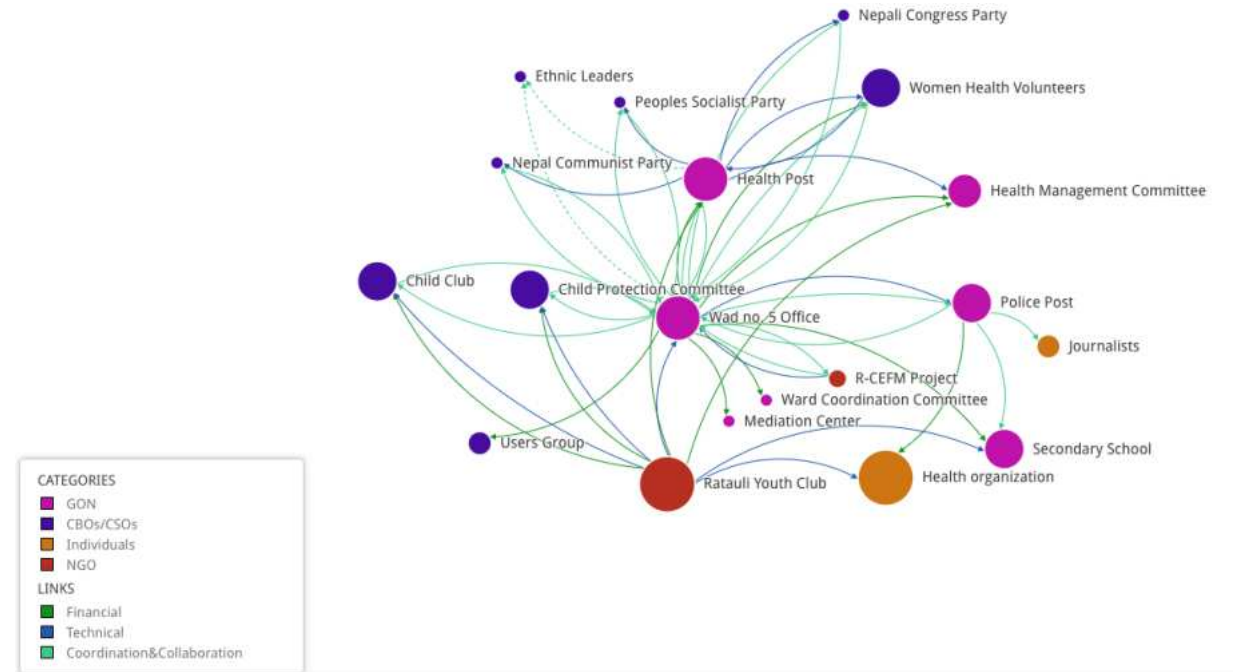
- Explore multi-level factors that influence CEFM at the local level.
- Explore what may facilitate the reduction of CEFM at the local level.
- Describe opportunities and challenges that exist in developing programs to reduce CEFM at the local level.



# Empathize Phase: Key Stakeholders

The six design teams identified the following stakeholders as central to the design challenge (*How might we strengthen the capacity of municipality-level systems to support local structures to reduce CEFM?*) and engaged them accordingly through in-depth interviews and FGDs:

- Adolescents
- Parents
- Ethnic leaders, religious leaders, and marriage mediators
- Government officials
- Police personnel
- Local NGOs working toward R-CEFM
- Health service providers and FCHVs
- School Management Committee members and teachers
- LCRC members
- Ward Child Rights Committee (WCRC) members



# Empathize Phase: Field Work

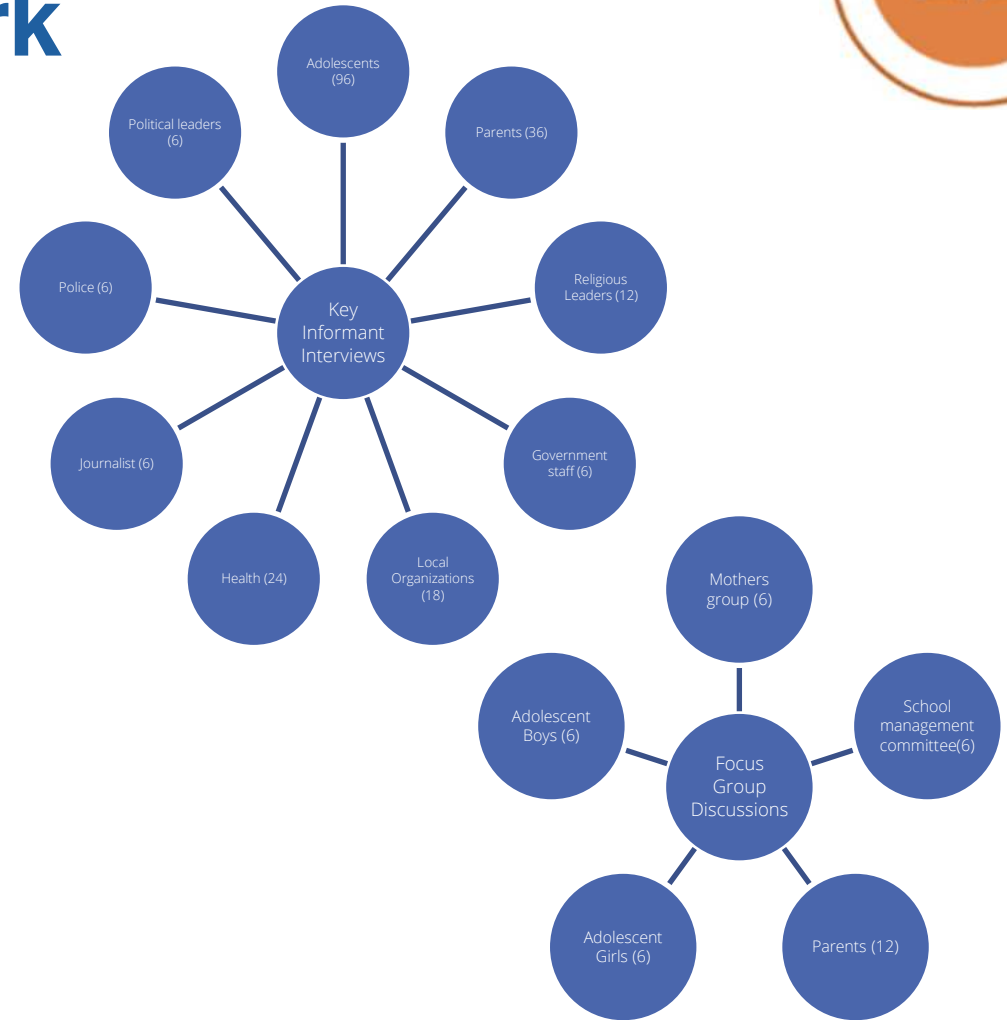


**Key informant interviews (KIIs):** The design team used open-ended questions and scenarios that gave the interviewee freedom to explore topics and perspectives that were important to them and their communities.

- The project conducted 210 KIIs.

**FGDs:** The design team sought to gather information about social norms and community-level practices. Facilitators sparked conversation with open-ended questions and gave the group members freedom to explore topics and perspectives they identified as important.

- The project conducted 36 FGDs.





# Empathy Phase: Key Questions for IDIs and FGDs



- What are the most important problems or social issues that need attention in order to improve the community?
- What is the typical life journey of a girl in your community?
- How common is early marriage (<18 years) in the community?  
How common is early marriage (<20 years) in the community?
- What are the benefits to the community if early marriage remains?
- How common is elopement in you community?
- Should child or early marriage be prevented or reduced? Why?
- Whose responsibility is reducing CEFM, in your opinion? Why?



# Empathize Phase: Golden Quotes

*"People with specific caste and ethnicity have access to decision-making levels, while other castes, ethnicity, and poor people are left back, so the child marriage[s are] not decreasing."*  
—Religious leader, Rajpur

*"Child marriage is prevalent in all the castes and ethnicit[ies]."*  
—Government officials, Durga Bhagawati

*"The local representative of the village should understand their responsibility because society follows them. They have the main role in stopping child marriage."*  
—School Management Committee

*"I am determined [to] marry my children after 20 years of age, but other people in my community don't do so."*  
—Father, Jaleshwar

*"I want to get married only after I start earning on my own, but my parents will not wait till then."*  
—Unmarried adolescent girl, Loharpatti

*"Society thinks that if the girl gets married at an older age, there must be something wrong with the girl."*  
—Adolescent boy, Rajpur

*"Who will guarantee to arrange my daughter's marriage if I don't get a suitable boy due to the allegations she could face for waiting 20 years for marriage?"*  
—Parents

*"Political leaders talk about child marriage in their speeches, but they do not have any concrete strategy to reduce child marriage. They have taken the child marriage issue lightly."*  
—School teacher

*"The elders of the society can stop child marriage if they want."*  
—School Management Committee, Jaleshwar

*"Ward chairs are promoting child marriage, increasing girls' [ages on their] birth certificate[s]."*  
—Police, Loharpatti

*"There is no use educating girls. After all, a girl has to do household work whether she is educated or not."*  
—Parent, Loharpatti

*"Giving much education preference to a girl is ultimately ruining self-prestige."*  
—FCHV, Durga Bhagawati

*"Being skilled in household work is more important for a girl than education; we engage our daughters in household chores so that they can fulfill the desires of the family when married."*  
—Mother of an unmarried girl, Jaleshwar

*"Child marriage takes place because of the societal pressure that their daughter won't get an appropriate partner if [the girl gets] older."*  
—Religious Leader, Matihani

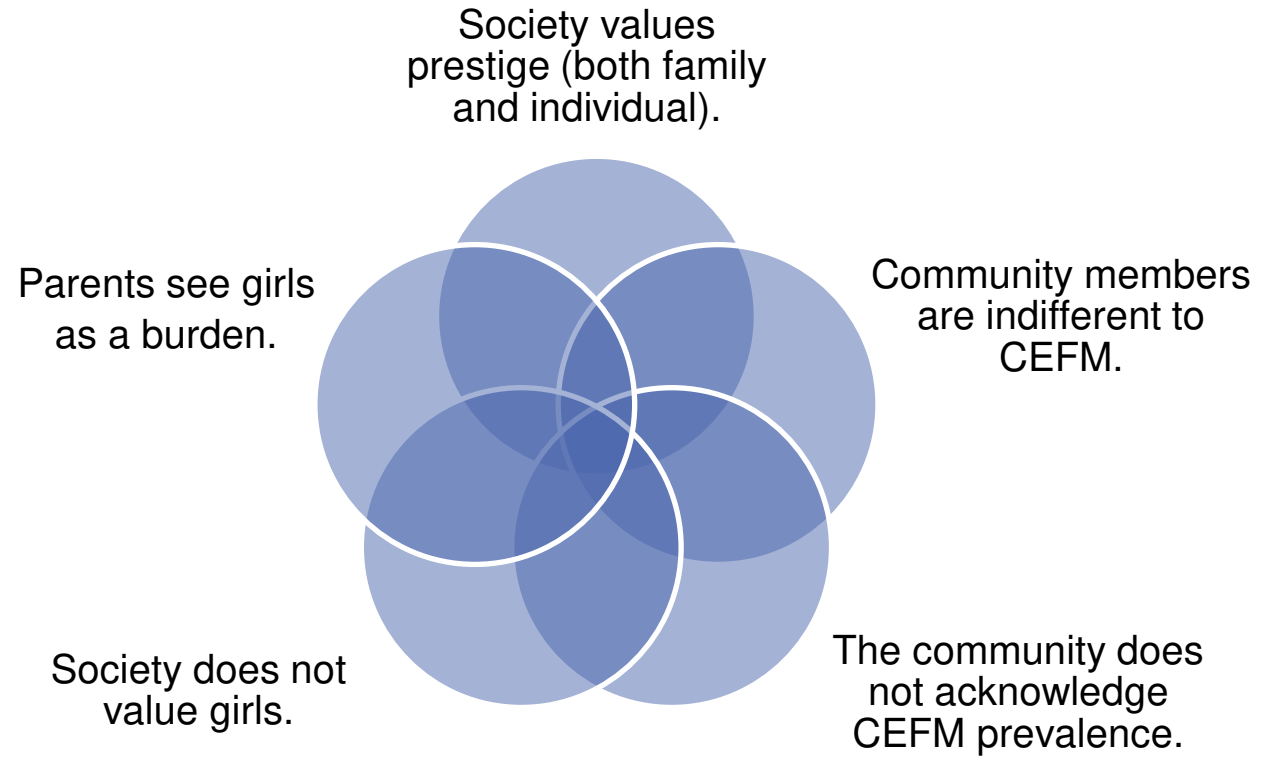
# Empathize Phase: Photos



# Define Phase



In a workshop setting during the Define phase, the six design teams reviewed research notes, observation forms, and photos collected during the Empathize phase to gain a comprehensive understanding of the design challenge and the stakeholders involved. Through this process, six distinct, yet interconnected themes emerged. The themes were further analyzed by the design teams and the project to identify five key themes (next slide).



# Key Insights



Theme: The community does not acknowledge CEFM prevalence

Key Insight: Stakeholders do not acknowledge or internalize the presence of CEFM in all groups regardless of religion, class, education, or place of residence.

Theme: Community members are indifferent to CEFM

Key Insight: People who are willing to work against child marriage have not been able to come together.

Theme: Society values prestige (both family and individual)

Key Insight: Parents marry off their daughters at an early age because they are concerned about both damage to family reputation and their daughter facing allegations related to her character.

Theme: The community does not acknowledge the prevalence of CEFM

Key Insight: Influential civil society members are not proactive in reducing CEFM.

Themes: Parents see girls as a burden & Society does not value girls

Key Insight: Parents do not prioritize their daughter's education. Daughters then perform poorly in their studies, leading to them losing interest. They then marry off their daughters to fulfill their responsibility and save money.



# “How Might We” Statements

The six design teams developed one “how might we” statement for each key insight. These “how might we” statements were then used for solution ideation in the subsequent phase of the process.

Stakeholders do not acknowledge or internalize the presence of CEFM in all groups regardless of religion, class, education, or place of residence.	• How might we meaningfully engage the local leadership in formulating effective programs to reduce child marriage?
People who are willing to work against child marriage have not been able to come together.	• How might LCRCs/WCRCs and informal child rights structures reduce CEFM?
Parents marry off their daughters at an early age because they are concerned about both damage to family reputation and their daughter facing allegations related to her character.	• How might we increase the social prestige of parents who marry their daughters only after 20 years of age and, in doing so, help make their daughters be more self-sustaining?
Influential civil society members in society are not proactive in reducing CEFM.	• How might we help affluent and influential people understand the power they have and encourage them to take concrete steps to reduce child marriage?
Parents do not prioritize their daughters’ education. Daughters then perform poorly in their studies, leading to them losing interest. The parents then marry off their daughters to fulfill their responsibility and save money.	• How might we convince parents to value girls as able to contribute to a family, especially if they marry later?

# Define Phase: Photos



# Ideate Phase



In a workshop setting during the Ideate phase, the six design teams generated many ideas in response to the “how might we” statements, challenging assumptions and going beyond the obvious for determining possible solutions. In total, they generated **177 ideas!**

The 177 ideas were prioritized in two rounds—in round one, by using an effort/impact matrix, and in round two, by using a prioritization and selection check list. This check list enabled evaluating the relevance, potential impact, delivery channel, cultural acceptability, potential for sustainability, GESI (gender, equity, social inclusion), and potential for feasibility of each idea. Ultimately, **14 ideas** were prioritized.

## Idea Selection: Check List

Design Challenge	Criterion 1: Relevance	Criterion 2: Potential Impact	Criterion 3: Existing Delivery Channels/Structures	Criterion 4: Cultural Acceptability	Criterion 5: Innovation	Criterion 6: Potential for Sustainability	Criterion 7: GESI	Criterion 8: Potential Feasibility	Total Score
	<i>How many key barriers does it address? (See Barrier Mapping Sheets)</i>	<i>How impactful have similar interventions proven to be in the past?</i>	<i>Are there reliable/feasible delivery channels available to deliver this intervention?</i>	<i>Is this intervention appropriate given the cultural norms and values in Zambia?</i>	<i>How innovative, new, or exciting is this idea?</i>	<i>Would it be possible to sustainably implement this intervention at scale beyond a pilot test?</i>	<i>Does it address Gender Equity and Social Inclusion?</i>	<i>Is it possible to implement this intervention within the B-A project (timeframe, budget, resources, capacity)?</i>	
	0 = Addresses 0-1 barriers 1 = Addresses 2-4 barriers 2 = Addresses 5 or more barriers	0 = No impact/no evidence base for similar interventions 1 = Evidence of impact in other contexts 2 = Evidence of impact in CEFM/Nepad districts	0 = No delivery channels /need to create channel 1 = Existing delivery channels in some districts 2=Existing delivery channels nationwide (or in most districts)	0 = Not cohesive with cultural norms 1 = Culturally relevant/appropriate	0 = Not innovative before but not in this context 2 = This idea sounds new or exciting!	0 = Not cost-effective at scale AND lacks political will to implement 1 = maybe cost-effective 2 = Cost-effective at scale AND likely to have political support	0= Doesnot address either Gender Equity or Social Inclusion 2= Addresses Gender Equity and Social Inclusion	0 = Not within scope 1 = We could maybe do this 2 = We could definitely do this!	



# Ideate Phase: Photos





# Solutions by “How Might We” Statement

**How might we meaningfully engage local leadership in formulating effective programs to reduce child marriage?**

1. Mobilization of influential religious leaders who have significant public support at the local level to reduce CEFM
2. Formation and engagement of all-political party committees at the ward and municipality levels for reducing CEFM
3. Municipality honors and publicly acknowledges the ward chairperson and secretary of the ward with the most progress towards reducing CEFM in the current fiscal year within the municipality

**How might LCRCs, WCRCs, and other community-level informal child rights structures reduce child marriage?**

4. Strengthen and mobilize the existing formal and informal structures at the local level for CEFM reduction
5. Felicitate adolescent girls who actively prevent CEFM and advocate against it

**How might we increase the social prestige of parents who marry their daughters only after 20 years of age and, in doing so, help make their daughters more self-sustaining?**

6. Organize an annual award program to honor parents who arranged the marriage of their daughters after the age of 20 years
7. Ward/municipality provides a discount or support for agricultural equipment, fertilizers, seeds, or irrigation equipment for agriculture-based parents who arranged the marriage of their daughters only after reaching the age of 20
8. The municipalities will provide the families who wait to marry off their children until they are at least 20 years old with certain subsidies on services and facilities such as electricity and drinking water and prioritize them when providing services from public agencies
9. Various committees at the local level or ward level will include members of the families who wait to have their children marry until they are at least 20 years old.
10. Organize collective wedding ceremonies without dowry funding on a fixed date to support families who keep unmarried daughters of marriageable age at home.



# Solutions by “How Might We” Statement

How might we help affluent and influential people understand the power they have and encourage them to take concrete steps to reduce child marriage?

- 11. Formation and mobilization of influential civil society members committee at municipality and ward levels

How might we convince parents to value girls as able to contribute to a family, especially if they marry later?

- 12. Support marketable skills development of unmarried girls who have passed 10th grade or studied up to 12th grade or dropped out from higher education
- 13. Promote role model families who get their children married after 20 years of age
- 14. Ward/municipality arrange scholarships for girls and boys to continue their higher education (11th and 12th grades)

# Prototype Phase

During the Prototype phase, design teams built out the 14 solutions and developed detailed activity and implementation plans with associated monitoring indicators. With support from R-CEFM staff, municipalities further prioritized seven innovative prototypes to move forward for testing.

The activities selection was based on the following criteria:

- Budget limitation and individual municipalities' budget allocation for R-CEFM this year
- Municipality willingness to implement the activities
- Aspiration of the people in the municipalities observed during the Empathize phase research
- Time period available for implementation
- New - not an idea that was adapted for CEFM from within the current system. (Note: the other seven activities would be implemented but not as rigorously monitored)



These seven prototypes focus on creating an enabling environment for R-CEFM through advocacy and engagement of local leadership. They also link the critical aspect of parental prestige with R-CEFM as important for social normative changes. Collaborative monitoring was done to assess the feasibility, acceptability, appropriateness, fidelity and preliminary effects of these prototypes over time.



# Prototype Phase: Photos



**02**

# **Prototype Design Concepts**

# Innovative Prototypes

Prototype	Description
1. Mobilizing religious leaders to transform CEFM social norms*	Religious leaders and other individuals who perform marriage rituals will be enlisted by the local government, which will legislate that marriage rituals may only performed by them. The government will mobilize religious leaders and other individuals who perform marriage ceremonies to discourage child, early and forced marriage and transform existing social norms.
2. Mobilize an all-political party committee	Form ward- and municipality-level all-political party committees and mobilize them to gain political support for reducing child marriage gaining political support.
3. Award ward chairs and ward secretaries*	Municipality honors and publicly acknowledges the chairperson and secretary of the ward with the best R-CEFM progress within the municipality in each fiscal year.
4. Award parents	Organize an award program annually to honor parents who marry off their daughters after the age of 20.
5. Form and mobilize a committee of the influential civil society members for R- CEFM*	Form and mobilize a committee of influential civil society members at the municipality and ward levels to work together to support activities that reduce CEFM.
6. Provide subsidies	Provide subsidies on services and facilities such as electricity and drinking water, as well as provide special priority for services from public agencies, to families who wait to marry off their children until they are at least 20 years old.
7. Involve families in local committees	Engage families, who wait to marry off their children when they are at least 20 years old, as members in local committees formed by the municipalities and wards, as a sign of respect and recognition.

# Collaborative Monitoring

Definition: Collaborative monitoring is a small-scale, rapid qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis approach as well as an iterative review of program documentation to assess the feasibility, acceptability, appropriateness, fidelity, and preliminary effects of R-CEFM approaches being implemented at the local level, which was leveraged for HCD solution monitoring.

- Monitor process indicators for each of the activities to get updates on their implementation.
- Review the outcome-level indicators listed in provincial procedure to declare an area free of CEFM for analyzing the result of the activities.
- Conduct regular supportive supervision and monitoring visits from municipalities to the wards and settlements during activity planning and implementation.



# Prototype One: Mobilizing Religious Leaders to Transform CEFM Social Norms



# Prototype One: Mobilizing Religious Leaders to Transform CEFM Social Norms

**Description:** Religious leaders and other individuals who perform marriage rituals will be enlisted by the local government, which will legislate that marriage rituals may only be performed by them. The government will mobilize religious leaders and other individuals who perform marriage ceremonies to discourage child, early and forced marriage and transform existing social norms.

**Implementation status:** This activity was tested in 2023 by 16 wards in five municipalities. After testing, all wards are continuing this activity in 2024 and expanding the number of associated events.

**Expected outcomes:** Religious leaders will discourage child marriage and transform existing social norms because they are a key influencer for parents when making decisions regarding their daughters' marriage.

**Collaborative monitoring\* findings:** More than 272 religious leaders are engaged in preaching to discourage CEFM, and they are proactively asking the ages of girls and boys before they perform marriage rituals. Despite notable changes in attitudes towards child marriage seen from the pre and post intervention intersect survey, the average number of such marriages before and after the intervention remained steady, although parents' inclination to support child marriage, especially daughters, under 20 decreased. Further recommendations include customizing messaging for preaching occasions and engaging the Muslim community for effective anti-child marriage efforts.

**Next steps:** Municipalities and wards are continuing this activity and have included it in the action plan for CEFM-free municipalities.

# Prototype Two: Mobilize an All-Political Party Committee



# Prototype Two: Mobilize an All-Political Party Committee

**Description:** Form ward- and municipality-level all-political party committees and mobilize them for reducing child marriage. CEFM is not adequately addressed by social and political leadership because they perceive it to be an issue related to only marginalized and disadvantaged groups. The issue is not generally acknowledged to affect all communities. Despite political leaders being aware of harmful practices of CEFM, they often downplay it to avoid alienating voters. Political parties can also misuse the issue against opposing parties to gain influence over their constituents for whom CEFM is a norm.

**Implementation status:** In 2023, this activity was tested by 25 out of 51 wards across five municipalities. In 2024, 31 wards across six municipalities are implementing this activity.

**Expected outcome:** Engaging political leaders is expected to lead to increased political support for R-CEFM. These leaders have many followers and can thus play vital roles in reinforcing existing CEFM laws.

**Collaborative monitoring findings:** More than 247 political leaders from both the ruling and opposition parties are actively supporting wards and municipalities to implement R-CEFM activities. They are regularly conducting rally and community visits together with religious leaders, LCRCs, WCRCs, child clubs, and role model parents and girls. The collaborative monitoring found a positive reception to forming an all-party committee, with participants expressing interest and motivation for future involvement. However, sustainability concerns suggest the need for regular budget allocations, consistent meetings, and increased political diversity in order to enhance efforts against CEFM.

**Next steps:** The wards will continue to mobilize this committee, and the activity is included in their action plan declaring CEFM-free municipalities.

# Prototype Three: Award Ward Chairs and Ward Secretaries



# Prototype Three: Award Ward Chairs and Ward Secretaries

**Description:** Municipalities organize a ceremony to award the ward chair and secretary who have successfully implemented R-CEFM activities with allocation of budget through annual planning process and whose ward has the lowest CEFM rate in a fiscal year.

**Implementation status:** In 2023, this activity was tested by one municipality, although it was planned in three municipalities. Initially, only the chair of the ward having the lowest CEFM rate was going to be awarded, but during implementation, the WCRC suggested that both the ward chair and ward secretary should be recognized for their equal commitment and contribution. In 2024, this activity is planned for implementation in four municipalities.

**Expected outcome:** This activity is expected to increase the prestige of the chairperson and secretary of the ward that made the most progress in reducing CEFM within the municipality. It is also intended to encourage continuation of their excellent work. This could inspire and motivate the leadership in other wards to lead and support efforts to reduce CEFM in their wards.

**Collaborative monitoring findings:** Only one municipality tested this activity and incorporated it into their annual assembly where they announce their annual policy and programs at the end of last fiscal year. After the initial open session of the event where the awards were publicly announced, the municipality had a closed session of the assembly and did not allow interviewers into the hall where the assembly was conducted due to confidentiality, so the project could not gather additional data.

**Next steps:** Four municipalities have planned to implement or continue this activity, as it inspires ward chairs and secretaries to implement R-CEFM activities effectively and compete with other wards in reducing CEFM.

# Prototype Four: Award Parents



# Prototype Four: Award Parents

**Description:** An award program will occur annually to honor parents who marry off their daughters after the age of 20. Parents who have provided higher education to their daughters are given certificates of appreciation in a special ceremony with invitees such as Chief District Officer, Superintendent of Police, mayor, other provincial stakeholders, and respected community members from the municipal level.

**Implementation status:** This activity was tested by 10 wards across three municipalities in 2023. In 2024, the event is planned to take place in 24 wards across three municipalities.

**Expected outcome:** To increase parents' social respect and prestige and make them feel proud of delaying marriage for their daughters until after the age of 20. The hope is that this honor will help motivate other parents.

**Collaborative monitoring findings:** Participants showed interest in future participation and reported a shift in perspective on child marriage; however, parent participants support for program continuation was moderate, suggesting the needs to address logistical barriers during planning and implementation and to refine activities to align with community preferences such as venue and timing of the events to enhance enthusiasm for future implementation. Feedback from the community indicated that this event needs to be held in a venue where the community can more easily participate or in the public places.

**Next steps:** This activity is one of the most effective activities to increase the prestige of the parents and encourage other parents to delay their daughters' marriage. The municipalities are continuing this activity for the upcoming fiscal year and have included it in the action plan developed to declare CEFM-free municipalities.



# Prototype Five: Form and Mobilize Committee of Influential Civil Society Members for R-CEFM



# Prototype Five: Form and Mobilize Committee of Influential Civil Society Members for R-CEFM

**Description:** Form and mobilize committee of influential civil society members at the municipality and ward levels to work together to support activities that reduce CEFM. The influential civil society members are the key persons who can support parents, creating an enabling environment so that the parents do not feel alone when they wait to marry off their daughters after the age of 20 years.

**Implementation status:** This activity was tested by three wards in one municipality in 2023. The influential civil society members developed an action plan and implemented activities for R-CEFM using their own resources. All three ward-level committees actively designed and implemented community-level R-CEFM activities. In 2024, 11 wards across three municipalities are implementing this activity.

**Expected outcome:** The positive influence of civil society members creates an enabling environment in the community that supports parents who want to wait to marry off their daughters after the age of 20 years.

**Collaborative monitoring findings:** The committee of influential civil society members plays a vital role in addressing issues of CEFM. While the formation of the committee has shifted community perspectives, sustainability relies on securing funding and ongoing support from municipalities. Enhancing communication, empowering members, and fostering collaboration are crucial for long-term success. Recognizing member contributions can bolster commitment to the cause.

**Next Steps:** This activity is key to changing social behavior related to CEFM, so wards and municipalities are continuing this activity in the coming fiscal year and have included it in their action plan developed to declare CEFM-free municipalities.

# Prototype Six: Provide Subsidies



# Prototype Six: Provide Subsidies

**Description:** Providing subsidies on services and facilities such as electricity and drinking water, as well as providing special priority for services from public agencies, to families who wait to marry their children until they are at least 20 years old.

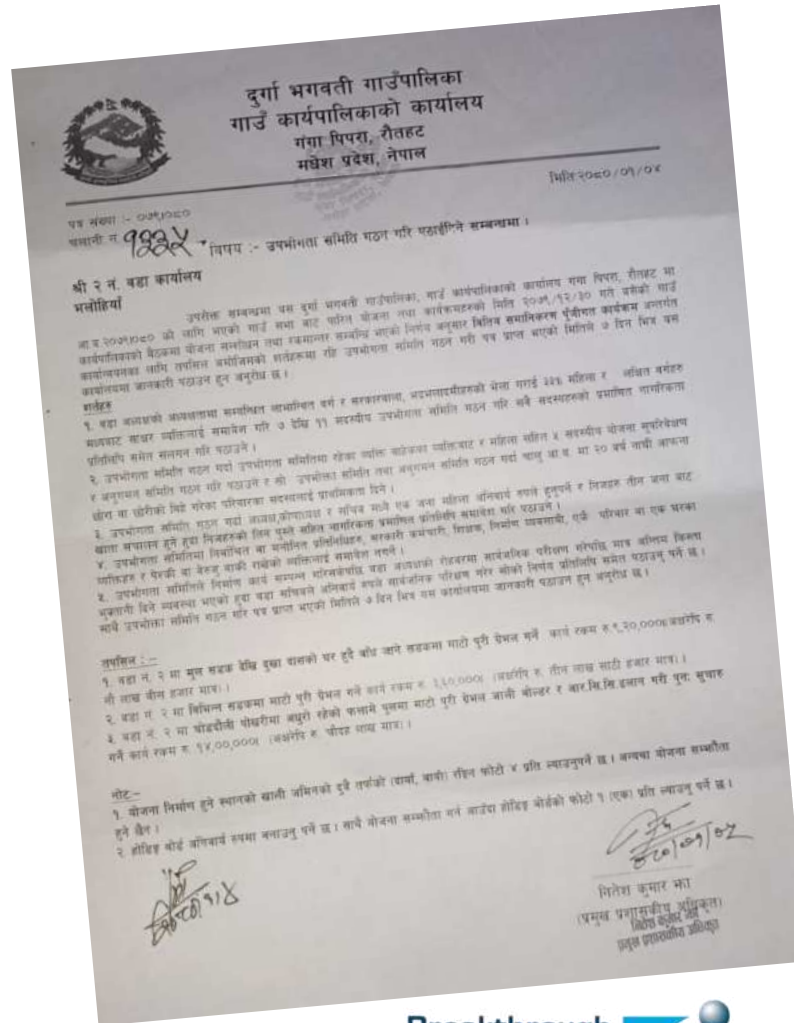
**Implementation status:** This activity was selected by three municipalities but none of them were able to test it. This activity requires multi-year planning and a lot of cross-sectoral collaboration, agreements, and process documentation, which municipalities currently prefer not to operationalize. Municipalities prefer implementing activities that are planned as one-time events. Therefore, in the year 2024, none of the municipalities have planned to implement this activity.

**Expected outcome:** The incentives are expected to inspire the parents to change their behaviors and delay marriage of their children until they are at least 20 years old.

**Collaborative monitoring findings:** Since none of the project municipalities have implemented this activity, it was not possible to conduct collaborative monitoring.

**Next steps:** This activity was ultimately dropped by the municipalities.

# Prototype Seven: Involve Families in Local Committees



\*Letter circulated by the municipality to parents who marry off their daughters after 20 years of age

# Prototype Seven: Involve Families in Local Committees

**Description:** Families who wait to marry off their children until they are at least 20 years old are engaged as members in local committees formed by the municipalities and wards, as a sign of respect and recognition.

**Implementation status:** This activity was tested by three municipalities. After the testing, it was determined that parents prefer to be acknowledged publicly in a ceremony rather than being included in local committees. Therefore, the municipalities dropped the activity. In 2024, no wards or municipalities have planned this activity.

**Expected outcome:** Committee membership was intended to make parents feel prestigious, as an honor for delaying the marriage of their children until at least 20 years old.

**Collaborative monitoring findings:** The key informant interviews conducted in Durga Bhagwati Rural Municipality, which is the only municipality among six to explore implementation of this activity, revealed that though government recognition could bolster support for marriages after 20, there were concerns about conflicts of interest and oversight issues within the municipality.

**Next Steps:** This activity was ultimately dropped by the municipalities.

# Test Phase



The municipalities tested five out of the seven innovative activities, using collaborative monitoring, KIIs, rapid reaction surveys, or pre- and post-intervention intercept surveys to evaluate the effectiveness, feasibility, relevance, and sustainability of the activities, and ultimately determined them effective in reducing CEFM and are implementing them in 2024.



# Test Phase: Photos







# The Final Five Innovative Solutions!

## Innovations

1. Mobilizing religious leaders to transform CEFM social norms
2. Mobilize an all-political party committee
3. Award ward chairs and ward secretaries
4. Award parents
5. Form and mobilize a committee of influential civil society members for reducing CEFM

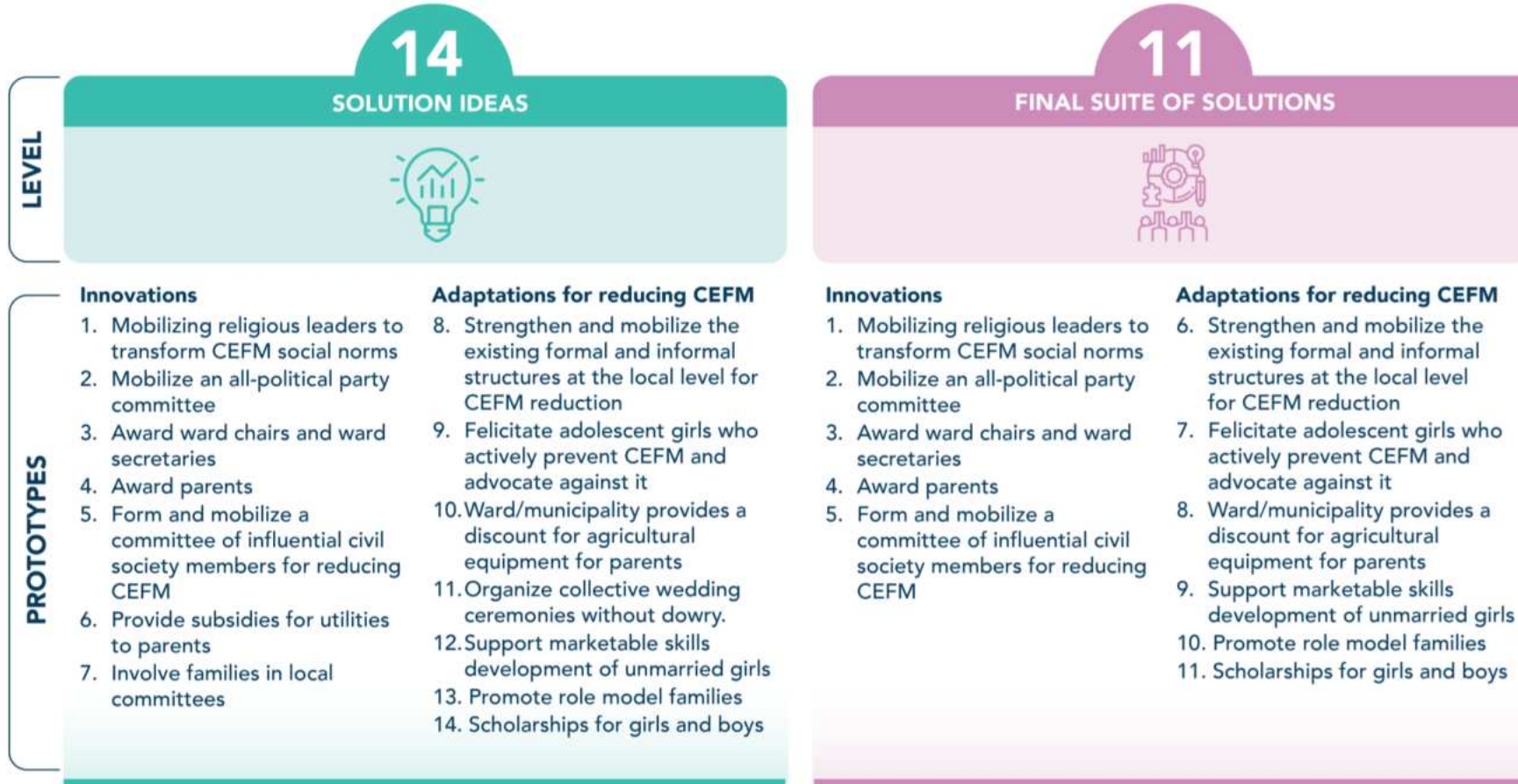
# The Other Seven Adaptations for Reducing CE



Seven activities that were not scheduled for prototype testing and rigorous monitoring because they were exiting programs adapted to address CEFM. These were implemented based on guidelines and the municipalities determined which would be suitable adaptations to have in the guidelines along with the more innovative ideas.



# Towards the 11 Activities– Both Innovative Solutions and Adaptations for Reducing CEFM

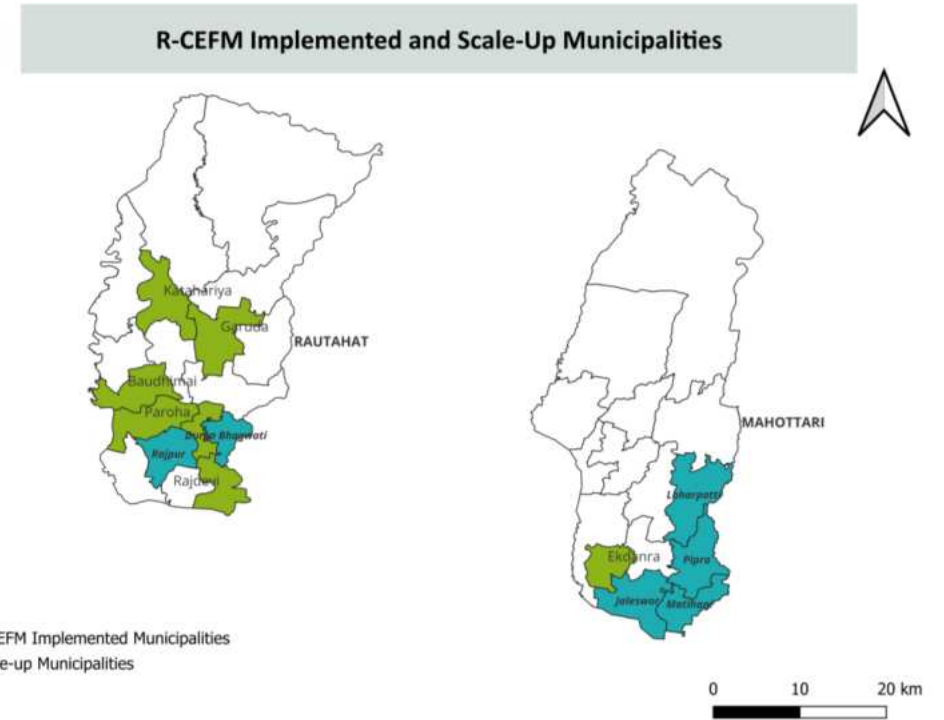


**03**

# **Scale-Up & Sustainability**

# Scale Up & Sustainability

- The 11 activities developed during the HCD process have been incorporated into the six municipalities' fiscal plans, with required budget allocation for implementation from 2021 to 2023. For the fiscal year 2024, the municipalities have developed strategic plans to ultimately declare the six municipalities as CEFM-free. In order to do that, they are continuing implementation of the innovative activities until they reach their goal.
- The 11 activities are incorporated in the Sahayogi Pustika (SBC Capacity-Strengthening Guide for R-CEFM), which is endorsed by the Madhesh Province government. In total, 136 municipalities in the province will be benefiting from the guide for developing, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating R-CEFM activities.
- The 11 selected activities, developed through the HCD process, are being adapted by additional municipalities in Rautahat district i.e. in Paroha, Rajdevi, Katahariya, Garuda, Baudhimai, and Yamunamai. Each municipality incorporated findings and activities recommended by the HCD process into their CEFM-free strategic plans.



# 03

## Conclusion

# Key Themes that emerged from HCD Work

- 1. Society values prestige (both family and individual):** Parents fear that if they expect their children to wait until they are 20 years old to marry, they may elope or face allegations about their character.
- 2. Community members are indifferent to CEFM:** Community members, especially the educated and the influential, think that the CEFM issue is not their problem. Rather, they believe it is the problem of members of the Dalit, Janajati, and other lower castes.
- 3. The community does not acknowledge the prevalence of CEFM:** Some influential civil society members, political leaders, and social leaders do not believe that CEFM exists.
- 4. Society does not value girls:** It is commonly perceived that male family members remain in the family forever, but daughters leave the family and earn for the family they marry into. Therefore, parents do not invest in their daughters compared to their sons. They think they fulfill their responsibility to a daughter by investing in her marriage instead of her education.
- 5. Parents see girls as a burden:** Parents feel that keeping girls in the family or waiting until she is older to marry increases the burden of expenses and the likelihood that relatives will gossip.

# Testimonials

“Before joining this movement, there was discrimination in my family favoring my brother over me. Now, we’re treated equally. My parents also used to say they’d marry me off after I finished 10th grade, but now they encourage me to pursue my education and follow my dreams. I believe this should happen in every family.”

—Najama Khatun, 11th grade

“Now, in every ward there is a provision for a budget...compulsory allocated in each ward for reducing child marriage”

—WCSC Chief

“We all forget about our party's problems and get to focus on (the) child marriage issue.”

—All-party committee member in Durga Bhagwati

“I feel honored to receive such a reward and appreciate the local government’s step for R-CEFM. I believe more parents will now realize the importance of gender equality and follow in our footsteps and discourage CEFM practices.”

—Award-recipient parent

“We have planned to enhance employable skills of local young girls and boys through short-term training in our effort to reduce CEFM. This is part of a set of activities we identified through the human-centered design (HCD) process to reduce early, forced marriage. We coordinated with the provincial government to carry out this program as our ward lacked sufficient funds to conduct this activity this fiscal year.”

—Sona Lal Pandit, Ward Chief, Rajpur Municipality-2



# Successes of the HCD Process

- The “**quest for prestige**” is a **tipping point** to change existing CEFM-related behaviors of the parents, religious leaders, influential civil society members, and political parties.
- Municipalities **owned the activities** that were identified from the HCD process. They selected, prototyped and tested the activities, and ultimately incorporated them into their ward and municipality annual plans and budgets.
- **Municipality CEFM budget allocation is increasing**, and there has been a **shift in the spending culture** in the last quarter compared with the previous one. The budget has increased from \$0 before the project started to \$65,000 to \$152,000 within three years specifically for R-CEFM activities.
- HCD helped municipality design teams **co-design interventions** with community inputs, collaboratively monitor activities and interventions with the help of co-developed indicators and conduct quarterly review meetings with WCRCs and LCRCs.
- HCD helped wards and municipalities (ward chairs, ward secretaries, mayor/chairperson, deputy mayor/vice-chairperson, etc.) **collaboratively work** for R-CEFM.
- HCD strengthened the capacity of wards and municipalities to **test the SBC activities for R-CEFM and determine the effectiveness** of the R-CEFM activities.
- HCD enhanced **the capacity of wards and municipalities to collect and analyze qualitative data** to be used for R-CEFM program design.

# Lessons Learned Through HCD

1. Municipalities learned how to design innovative and effective R-CEFM activities by keeping key intended audiences at the center of research, design, and implementation.
2. Invaluable insights were gained to prioritize and design possible solutions. These insights included the following: prestige (family, self) being desirable, individuals working separately and not effectively on R-CEFM, girls not being valued, influential civil society members being indifferent to CEFM, and local leadership not acknowledging prevalence of CEFM.
3. The ownership by municipalities led to allocating resources to address R-CEFM, as they now had a deeper connection with their community and want to address the issue.
4. The HCD process is time consuming upfront, but it proves to be effective as ideas are thought out and vetted prior to implementation.

# Recommendations for Further Work

- Advocate for collecting both qualitative and quantitative information directly from the community at the beginning of the annual planning process to identify the special needs of the community for reducing CEFM.
- Facilitate municipalities' ability to design a campaign for R-CEFM targeting a variety of audiences for the greatest impact.
- Support municipalities to ensure the planned SBC activities for R-CEFM are incorporated into the annual programs and are entered in SuTRA in a timely manner.
- Encourage municipalities to implement the prioritized SBC activities for R-CEFM during the first quarter of their fiscal year for the most systematic and effective implementation.
- Strengthen the capacity of LCRCs and WCRCs, making them more responsible for their mobilization focusing on R-CEFM.
- Support municipalities to regularly coordinate and monitor the newly formed informal structures, such as the all-political party committee, committee of influential civil society members, and listed religious leaders.
- Continue engaging newly formed informal structures, such as all-political party committee, committee of influential civil society members, and listed religious leaders for strong advocacy against child marriage.
- Support municipalities to regularly use Sahayogi Pustika (SBC Capacity Strengthening Guide for Reducing CEFM) to design, implement, advocate, coordinate, and monitor SBC activities for R-CEFM, and encourage municipalities to adopt the "Procedure Declaring Area Free of CEFM in Madhesh Province."

# Acknowledgements

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