Human-Centered Design and Child, Early, and Forced Marriage Programming

Introduction

Child, early, and forced marriage (CEFM), defined as marriage before age 18 or marriage that occurs without the consent of those in the marriage,[1] affects an estimated 15 million girls each year.[2] CEFM is perpetuated by many factors, including but not limited to poverty, conflict, gender inequality, social and cultural norms, religious beliefs, and economic incentives.[3,4] Looking forward, efforts to reduce the number of girls at risk for CEFM will increasingly struggle to keep pace with population growth, leading to virtually the same number of girls at risk for CEFM within the next few decades if actions to end CEFM are not accelerated.[2]

CEFM impacts many aspects of a girl's life, including her self-esteem, education, income, nutrition, social development, and health.[5] Girls who marry young tend to have more children and at a younger age.[4] In a study of 25 countries, three out of four early childbirths came from child marriages.[6] Early pregnancies and childbirth can cause health complications for girls due to biological immaturity, inadequate access to care, and financial insecurity, among other factors.[7] Globally, pregnancy and childbirth complications are the leading cause of death for girls age 15–19.[8]

Along with harming girls, CEFM also places a burden on the societies where it is prevalent. Children born to young mothers are more likely to suffer from health complications (e.g., low birth weight, malnutrition, and late development),[6] as well as lower educational attainment and reduced earning potential.[1] Governments and communities with high levels of CEFM experience economic burdens due to the health costs, welfare needs, and population growth associated with CEFM.[9] Because of these costs, it is estimated that governments could save 5% or more on their annual budgets if they were to invest in efforts to eliminate CEFM.[6]

Young girl sits on a bus and looks out the window. Photo by Darina Belonogova, Pexels.

Evidence increasingly shows that successful interventions to reduce CEFM and improve girls' lives are possible.[10–12] The Child, Early, and Forced Marriage Resource Guide, produced for the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), provides guidance to program designers and implementers on how to integrate CEFM prevention activities and messages into other programs, accompanied by examples of successful programs and tools.

This series of briefs has been created to complement and add additional content to the Resource Guide and propose social and behavior change (SBC) approaches to strengthen the collective effort to reduce CEFM. There are seven topical briefs in the series: Advanced Audience Segmentation; Collective Action; Gender Synchronization; Human-Centered Design; Social Norms Programming; Theories; and Youth Engagement. Breakthrough ACTION developed each brief for an intended audience of program designers and implementers by analyzing successful interventions conducted in many regions of the world. The briefs serve as an "SBC Addendum" to the Resource Guide, providing guidance and examples of how to use SBC to reduce CEFM. Creative, multi-faceted, and innovative interventions and programs that utilize the methods in these briefs are required to address the factors contributing to the prevalence and impact of CEFM.

How Can Human-Centered Design Enhance Efforts to End CEFM?

Human-centered design (HCD) places the people a program will serve and related stakeholders at the center of the design and implementation process. With an emphasis on research, empathizing, ideating, prototyping, and testing, this process seeks to achieve novel solutions to complex problems. While there are different ways to apply an HCD approach, all of them are at their core rooted in empathy: a comprehensive understanding of the population the end result will serve and other stakeholders involved in the challenge at hand. An HCD

process is scalable in duration and depth, from rapid sprints to multi-day collaborative workshops to long-term research.

HCD Principle Definitions

Empathize: Learn about the stakeholders for whom you are designing

Define: Clarify your insights and issues based on learnings

Ideate: Brainstorm and devise solutions for your identified challenge

Prototype: Build a tangible representation of solutions

Test: Quickly test your prototypes with the user group for feedback

When to Incorporate HCD in CEFM Programs

If the program is not seeing expected results and the reasons why are not clear

In instances where CEFM programs have not yielded the desired results, HCD can be leveraged to gain a more nuanced understanding of the underlying drivers preventing change to yield innovative and novel approaches that better achieve goals. CEFM and the underlying drivers of CEFM, such as son preference, economic instability, and strict cultural norms, have been longstanding challenges, but often with the same solutions tried repeatedly without effect. The HCD process guides community members, stakeholders, and practitioners through an

iterative design process enabling them to look at the problem from many different angles to find new or innovative solutions.

If the program has flexibility in potential solutions/outputs and is not committed to a predetermined solution or solution type

HCD works best when the program is open to a multitude of new, empathy-focused approaches and creates opportunities to explore broader structural interventions such as products, policies, and processes, in addition to communication materials and campaigns. To illustrate, examples of the types of potential solutions related to CEFM could be policy/process-related (e.g., cash transfers, incentives or rewards for keeping girls in school, or child marriage-free declarations), activities (e.g., a values clarification exercise for stakeholders such as

parents, teachers, or providers), or products (e.g., non-formal education curriculums that explore the impact of child marriage or an adolescent-friendly comic book that raises CEFM issues).
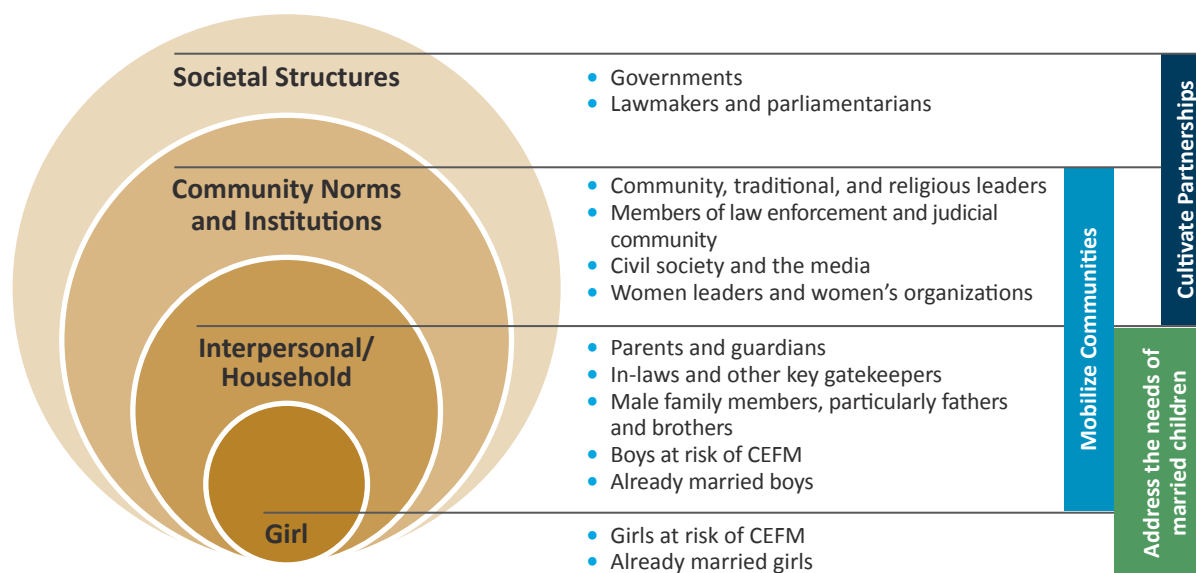
If the program desires a deeper, empathy-driven solution

Empathy is at the core of HCD, as the process aims to render solutions that directly respond to CEFM and the needs and desires of the intended audience as they see them. HCD emphasizes the importance of intentional and frequent direct stakeholder engagement as an opportunity to gain a clear understanding of the problem

at hand, as well as the relational, power, and influence dynamics at play directly from the stakeholders themselves. The Child, Early, and Forced Marriage Resource Guide provides suggestions for who the key stakeholders are in CEFM using an ecological model (Figure 1).

> **Empathy** is the attitude, method, and practice of assuming the point of view of an identified **human** actor to better understand their needs, outcomes, and metrics for success, when designing meaningfully impactful services, products, or experiences. In HCD, **empathy** is Everything.

Stakeholders of CEFM: An Ecological Model

USAID Child, Early, and Forced Marriage Resource Guide

Programs can use the HCD process to impact any of these levels or audiences. Engaging these stakeholders in a meaningful way throughout the process can result in a more empathy-focused understanding of the problem. Taking an empathy-driven approach can help gain a more meaningful

understanding of the context and motivations for CEFM and build on them for lasting change. This could include exploring how and why parents are making decisions about their children, from the perspective that they are doing the best they can for their children within their context.

If the program wants a user-driven intervention rapidly vetted before implementation

HCD embraces an audience-driven, iterative approach to problem-solving as a means to generate successful approaches/ideas. The populations served by this approach are a part of the design, creation, and testing of interventions from the start. For CEFM programs, this could mean young girls, parents, young men, religious leaders, health providers, or others are relevant to the situation. HCD employs frequent user testing of low-fidelity prototypes (quick and easy drafts of a concept or product with which the user can engage to provide feedback) before deeming a solution ready for implementation. Unlike pretesting nearly finished solutions, this iterative approach of frequent testing with the target audience early in the design process facilitates early failure, which then informs rapid and low-stakes iterations of solutions (revisions that are quickly reviewed and updated with user input) before finalization and

implementation. This approach can help CEFM programs gain quick feedback from the intended audiences and other influencers to ensure the solutions/interventions will be widely embraced, especially to protect against unintended consequences, such as a backlash if solutions/interventions are misaligned with values and cause resistance.

If the program needs multilevel or multisectoral buy-in and participation

HCD encourages co-creation—working hand in hand with the intended audience and key stakeholders from the beginning to ensure that everything is validated by them, which increases the likelihood of acceptance and adoption. For example, if a program wants to strengthen government across multiple sectors to improve CEFM policies and programs for youth, families, or communities, an HCD process can involve the relevant staff and bring them closer to listen and discuss solutions with the communities and individuals. This ensures all voices are heard and decisions are made with everyone at the table.

Examples of Human-Centered Design in CEFM Programs

UNICEF's Delaying Child Marriage[13]

Implementing Organization: UNICEF
Overview: In Indonesia, one out of every nine girls is married before the age of 18. To address this and help Indonesia reach the Sustainable Development Goals, along with other child rights and protection issues, UNICEF is building a national child protection system.
Locations: West Sulawesi, Indonesia

Project Description

Many girls in Indonesia lack the information and life skills necessary to navigate the complex worlds they live in, making them vulnerable to teenage pregnancy and child

marriage. In 2016, around one in nine, or 11%, of girls were married before age 18. Ultimately, many of these marriages and subsequent departures from school are happening due to teenage pregnancy or families wishing to protect their female children from the stigma of a potential pregnancy out of wedlock.

The HCD process facilitated by UNICEF Indonesia inspired innovation through a user-centered process to design solutions. Adolescents were led through a process of identifying and solving challenges in consultation with teachers, health workers, and parents to understand the greater context. The young people sought to develop innovative and gender-responsive adolescent-friendly information and communication materials to address child marriage, healthy relationships, and reproductive health. Culturally relevant solutions were prototyped in the form of a comic book, a popular Indonesian card game (*kartu bayang*), playing cards, and a poster (based on playing cards). After testing a number of options, they selected the innovative and gender-responsive, adolescent-friendly comic.

Key Outcomes and Learnings

- In April 2018, the My Life, My Choice was adapted for U-Report, UNICEF's social media-based polling platform, and shared on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, reaching 110,000 users. Amongst other digital content posted in April through U-report, the comic book was the most successful in engaging users (821 reactions on Facebook; 2,126 likes on Instagram; and more than 6,000 impressions on Twitter).
- The HCD approach can be effective when working with adolescents in reproductive health.

Source: Bakker, F., Handayani, N. H., Minnick, E., & Syafitri, R. HCD to prevent child marriage in Indonesia. *The Journal of Development Communication*, 29(1), 4–15.

REDUCING CHILD, EARLY FORCED MARRIAGE (R-CEFM) PROJECT, NEPAL[14]

Implementing Organizations: Johns Hopkins Center for Communication Programs; Save the Children

Overview: Breakthrough ACTION's Reducing Child, Early, and Forced Marriage (R-CEFM) Project (2020–2022), funded by USAID, aims to strengthen the capacity of the Government of Nepal in Province #2 to design, implement, monitor, evaluate, and coordinate effective social and behavior change (SBC) and child protection (CP) system activities to reduce CEFM.

Locations: Nepal - Province #2

Project Description

In Nepal's Province #2, child marriage is highly prevalent, with 12% of girls married before age 15, 65% married before age 18, and 82% married before the legal age of 20. (Nepal 2016 DHS). Despite a government commitment to reducing child marriage, child marriage is a social norm and powerful local government entities within a newly federalized structure are not able to plan or take action.

To strengthen the Government of Nepal's SBC activities and CP systems, the R-CEFM Project is conducting an HCD process in six municipalities in conjunction with local stakeholders—including government, community and religious leaders, teachers, parents, girls, and boys—to identify local needs and develop and refine potential activities to address CEFM.

Though the HCD process is currently underway, findings identified from the formative work indicate that in Nepal:

- Drivers of child marriage include gender and social disparities, migration, poverty, and sociocultural norms.
- Household and community members participate in marriage decisions for girls, and girls rarely influence the conversation without stigmatization.
- Sociocultural norms of importance that play a role include protecting girls' sexuality, parental obligation, religious beliefs, son preference, and dowry.

All factors are exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which is anticipated to contribute to increasing child marriage rates. Updates and results will be available soon at breakthroughactionandresearch.org/where-we-work/nepal.

Key Outcomes and Learnings

- The HCD approach can strengthen the capacity of the local government to interact with end users and develop CEFM programs.

Source: Breakthrough ACTION Project. (2021).

Conclusion

As seen from these examples, the HCD process is a promising approach to help programmers develop interventions to address the issues related to child marriage. The approach can help bring fresh and creative solutions to long-held challenges by incorporating the end user as a valuable ally and active participant in the design process.

Useful Resources

- Child, Early, and Forced Marriage Resource Guide
- Ideo Design Kit
- Leveraging Human-Centered Design for Family Planning: Lessons and Considerations

Appendix I:

Checklist for Human-Centered Design Program Design

At each stage of HCD, have you…	✕ No	? Some-what	✓ Fully	If not fully, what do you need to do to ensure it happens?
Empathize Stage				
1. Taken the time to look at users? Have you incorporated the voice of the young girls and boys most affected by child marriage? 2. Provided opportunities for programmers and stake-holders to identify their own biases and discussed how to put them aside?				
3. Taken into consideration the many influences on child marriage outside of health or education? For example, economic, religious, migration, or societal influences?				
4. Ensured that the HCD facilitators are well trained to work with users to adapt to participants' needs, such as helping young people express themselves?				
5. Reviewed existing quantitative and qualitative in-formation or stakeholder analysis to understand the larger picture? Reviewed what has worked or not worked in other programs?				
Define Stage				
1. Synthesized information to prioritize based on the key question?				
2. Examined different points of view of users or stakeholders?				
3. Considered using the rose, bud, thorn methodology?				
Ideate Stage				
1. Does the program include users and stakeholders in brainstorming? Is creativity encouraged?				
2. Does the program approach brainstorming from different angles and see what it generates, encouraging new ideas?				
Prototype Stage				
1. Tested many ideas quickly to get feedback?				
2. Developed a flexible rough and ready (not fixed) approach so they can adapt?				
Test				
1. Selected ideas that have been tested with key audiences for feedback?				

References

1 UNICEF. (n.d.). *Child marriage*.

2 UNICEF. (2014). *Ending child marriage: Progress and prospects*.

3 Glinski, A. M., Sexton, M., & Meyers, L. (2015). *The child, early, and forced marriage resource guide*. Banyan Global.

4 Girls Not Brides. (2020). *Ending child, early and forced marriage is crucial to gender equality*.

5 Girls Not Brides. (2018). *Economic impact of child marriage: An information sheet*.

6 Wodon, Q., Male, C., Nayihouba, A., Onagoruwa, A., Savadogo, A., Yedan, A., Edmeades, J., Kes, A., John, N., Murithi, L., Steinhaus, M., & Petroni, S. (2017). *Economic impacts of child marriage: Global synthesis report*. The World Bank and International Center for Research on Women.

7 Vogel, J. P., Pileggi-Castro, C., Chandra-Mouli, V., Pileggi, V. N., Souza, J. P., Chou, D., & Say, L. (2015). Millennium development goal 5 and adolescents: Looking back, moving forward. *Archives of Disease in Childhood, 100*(Suppl 1), S43–S47.

8 World Health Organization. (2017). *Global accelerated action for the health of adolescents (AA-HA!) guidance to support country implementation*.

9 UNICEF. (2019). *The state of the world's children 2019*.

10 Jackson, E., McDougal, L., & Raj, A. (2017). *Community experiences with project RISHTA: A youth empowerment program to delay marriage in Jharkhand, India*. Center on Gender Equity and Health (GEH), University of California, San Diego School of Medicine.

11 Otoo-Oyortey, N., Kwateng-Kluvitse, A., & Howard-Merrill, L. (2016). *Now girls know their rights: Lessons from an intervention on child marriage and female genital mutilation in Mara Region, Tanzania*. Foundation for Women's Health, Research and Development.

12 Kalamar, A. M., Lee-Rife, S., & Hindin, M. J. (2016). Interventions to prevent child marriage among young people in low-and middle-income countries: A systematic review of the published and gray literature. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 59(3), S16–S21.

13 Bakker, F., Handayani, N. H., Minnick, E., & Syafitri, R. HCD to prevent child marriage in Indonesia. *The Journal of Development Communication*, 29(1), 4–15.

14 *Breakthrough ACTION Project*. (2021).