

Girls' sexuality and child, early, and forced marriages and unions:

A conceptual framework



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Introduction

This conceptual framework is intended to support advocacy and more coherent and effective programming to prevent child marriage and advance adolescent girls' rights and agency. It sets out in visual and narrative forms the rationale for investment in programming that centres of control of adolescent girls' sexuality – which is a core manifestation of gender inequality – as a root cause of child, early and forced marriages and unions (CEFMU). It also provides programming principles to guide the design of gender-transformative approaches that promote adolescent girls' sexual rights and bodily autonomy as a pathway to ending CEFMU.

The framework was developed by the Torchlight Collectiveⁱ on behalf of the CEFMU and Sexuality Working Group and collaborating organisations.ⁱⁱ Following a review of existing research and practice-based knowledge, the Working Group and partners consulted with adolescent girls in Guatemala, India and Niger, with practitioners from organisations working with adolescent girls in Latin America, South Asia and West Africa, and representatives from government and private funding institutions from Canada, Europe and the US that support child marriage programming. (More information about this consultation process is available in Annexes A and B.)

The framework is built on the foundations of human rights, [sexual rights](#), [reproductive justice](#) (see also [here](#)), and [gender justice](#).

What you will find in this resource

In this resource you will find:

1. A **visual depiction and narrative** of the conceptual link between control of girls' sexuality and CEFMU and ways to address this link through programming and advocacy. This includes:
 - The envisioned change for girls' and women's lives that programmes and policies should aspire towards.

4 i Torchlight Collective authors: Marissa Billowitz, Nidal Karim and Katherine Watson. These authors are listed in alphabetical order and represent collective authorship. The ideas and the writing were co-created and authorship as a collective aligns with the feminist values with which this document was developed.

ii CEFMU and Sexuality Working Group and collaborators: Aahung, American Jewish World Service (AJWS), CARE, CREA, EMpower, EngenderHealth, Girls First Fund, *Girls Not Brides: The Global Partnership to End Child Marriage*, Global Fund for Women, GreeneWorks, International Center for Research on Women (ICRW), FosFeminista, International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), MADRE, Nirantar Trust, Plan International, Population Council, Promundo-US, The Summit Foundation, The YP Foundation, UNFPA, UNICEF. The Working Group is responsible for the final edit of the document.

- The root causes of CEFMU: norms and structures that control girls' sexuality and drive CEFMU.
 - Programming principles and gender-transformative approaches to address the control of girls' sexuality as a root cause of CEFMU.
2. A **set of recommendations** for action and future research.
 3. **Annexes of tools and protocols** used in the consultation process. While the conceptual framework is intended to be useful globally, norms related to gender and sexuality vary by context. Practitioners may want to use these tools to hold additional consultations and further adapt some elements of the framework to their local context.

Why is this conceptual framework needed?

Interventions aimed at addressing CEFMU have historically avoided engaging with the topic of sexuality as it is commonly viewed as a taboo issue. Yet we know that societies across the globe fear and aim to control girls' sexuality and that this is one of the fundamental drivers of CEFMU.¹ This is the subject of the Working Group's [Tackling the Taboo: Sexuality and gender-transformative programmes to end CEFMU](#) and other research.

Attempts to advance girls' rights and address CEFMU, therefore, must understand and acknowledge societal control of girls' sexuality. Otherwise, the practice will persist.² This conceptual framework will support such attempts by illustrating the relationship between the control of sexuality and CEFMU and describing approaches to effectively address this link to deliver better results for girls.

For whom is this resource intended?

It is intended for use by:

- **Funders and advocates:** to support them in making the case for greater investment in CEFMU interventions that address control of adolescent girls' sexuality as a driver of CEFMU, and to highlight the unique and critical role civil society organisations "from and for" the communities where CEFMU is happening have in this work.
- **Practitioners:** to support the design of high quality CEFMU programmes that address root causes of CEFMU and have a greater, more sustainable impact.

Sexuality includes sex, gender identities and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy and reproduction. It can manifest in thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviours, practices, roles and relationships.

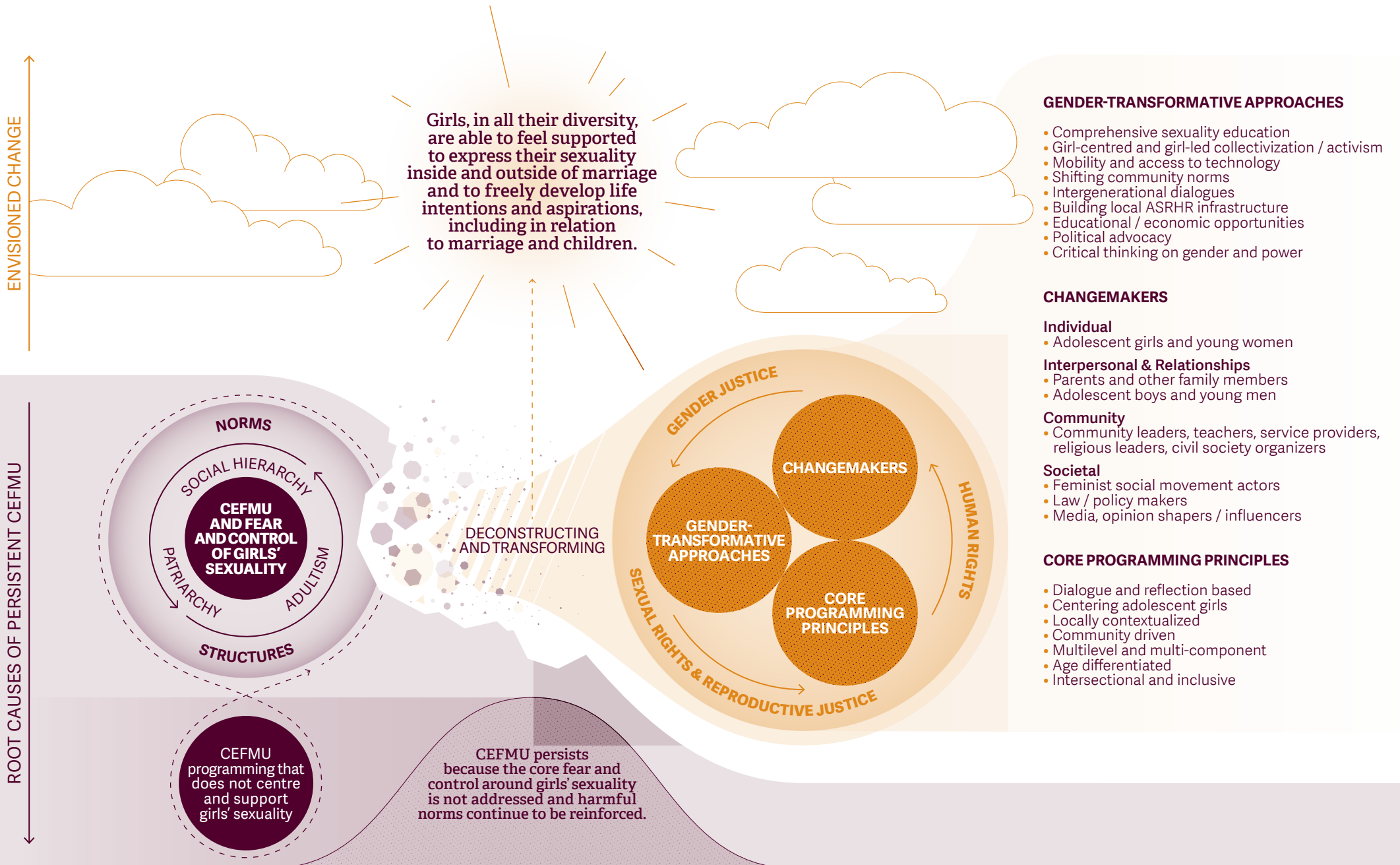
Sexuality is socially constructed and influenced by the interaction of a range of factors including biological, legal and cultural elements.

While the focus of this conceptual framework is CEFMU, the fear and control of adolescent girls' sexuality drives other manifestations of gender inequality, including adolescent pregnancy, female genital mutilation and cutting, gaps in girls' school completion and gender-based violence.

Consequently, this framework has relevance beyond CEFMU for all who are consciously and conscientiously working to transform the discriminatory gendered social norms and unequal relationships of power that impede girls' agency and autonomy. Furthermore, while funding and programming often target these issues separately, by addressing their shared underlying drivers we will make greater and more sustainable progress towards equality, freedom and opportunity for girls and women.



Figure 1 Girls' Sexuality and Child, early and forced marriage and unions (CEFMU): How gender-transformative approaches can tackle the root causes of CEFMU



The conceptual framework narrative

The narrative comprises three sections:

1. The **envisioned change** that CEFMU programming and advocacy should work towards.
2. The **root causes** of CEFMU as they relate to girls' sexuality: the discriminatory gendered social norms and structures that must be transformed to end CEFMU.
3. **Deconstructing and transforming** shows how programming and advocacy can address the root causes to move towards the envisioned change.

1. The envisioned change

Girls, in all their diversity, are able to and feel supported to express their sexuality inside and outside of marriage and to freely develop life intentions and aspirations, including in relation to marriage and children.

The narrative starts with the envisioned change in order to ground the framework in the desired feminist reality that girls and young women hope to experience in their lives. The overarching vision is for a world where girls exert agency over their bodies and lives, including whether, to whom, and when to marry and how to express their sexuality.

This envisioned change is the summation of the outcomes programmes should work toward across the levels of the [socio-ecological framework](#): individual, relationship, community and societal levels. These desired changes were developed through research and consultation with the Working Group and validated, nuanced and enhanced through consultation with girls in Guatemala, India and Niger. A selection of quotes from these girls are included in the following sections to highlight their hopes and dreams and make the link with their lived experience in their own voices.

Consultations with girls, practitioners and donors yielded rich insights, the details of which are too in-depth for in this document. To read further, see the full consultation report [here](#).

While the changes described below are aspirational, they should be the ultimate objectives of CEFMU programming. This is because while technical, apolitical and non-transformative approaches may succeed in delaying girls' marriage until age 18, if the underlying causes are not addressed through gender-transformative programming (as described in Deconstructing and transforming, below), girls and women will continue to experience inequality and oppression, in and outside of marriage.

Individual level

Girls feel positively about their sexuality and have the information they need to make decisions and enjoy equitable affective and sexual relationships.

"In my dream world, every girl knows about their body. They can take decisions for themselves and can decide who they want to have sex with."

→ India girls' focus group

Girls decide if, when, and whom to marry or enter into union with.

"Living a life without stereotypes; safely informed, exercising their rights freely, knowing their sexual and reproductive rights, making the decision for themselves to form or not form a family; I can decide who to marry at what age."

→ Guatemala girls' focus group

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer and intersex (LGBTQI) and gender-nonconforming young people feel supported and free to express and enjoy their identity and sexuality.

"There are no set gender definitions and therefore people can get attracted to whoever they want to. In this world, there are no set parameters of beauty, and everybody is considered beautiful and unique in their own way."

→ India girls' focus group

Girls feel free and safe to wear what they want, go where they want, and voice their opinions without being judged and threatened.

"There would also be more confidence and self-esteem as they come to feel more valued about their decisions and opinions."

→ Guatemala girls' focus group

Relationship level

Adolescent girls' parents and guardians understand adolescent sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and how to be supportive of adolescent girls' desires and dreams. They model equitable relationships.

“Girls desire more open conversations with parents about their dating; girls are hoping there will not be discrimination in the attitudes/behaviours of their parents towards them and their brothers.”

→ Niger girls' focus group

Adolescent boys engage in and are supportive of equitable relationships across genders, including understanding the SRHR of girls.

“In the future, boys should be more educated in order to consider girls like their sisters, in order to consider girls as allies.”

→ Niger girls' focus group

Adolescent girls have a community of peers who support each other's desires and dreams.

“Girls understand each other and are supportive of each other. If girls will not be supportive of each other, then who will be?”

→ India girls' focus group

Community level

Schools and health services see the value of and commit to providing safe and accessible SRHR information and services to all girls, especially unmarried adolescent girls.

“Service providers, especially health workers, could be more receptive to girls – especially unmarried adolescent girls – interested in SRHR services... [we] understand why health service providers are asking the marital status of girls before giving the service – they want to avoid problems with parents... But, this reality should change in the future because girls in these situations are facing difficulties.”

→ Niger girls' focus group

“They promote free contraceptive methods, free comprehensive sex education. They support safe and free abortion and care during pregnancy.... Contraceptive methods among other things such as sexuality classes should be normalised.”

→ Guatemala girls' focus group

In schools, neighbourhoods, places of worship, workplaces and other community contexts, girls are viewed, respected and valued as complete human beings with equal rights and potential, including beyond marriage and motherhood.

“For the future, girls are aspiring for an improvement of the broader community's perception about them, instead of perceiving them negatively and as a source of potential problems (there's a Hausa proverb 'we don't want girls who are going to get us in trouble by bringing us a scandal,' referring to unwanted pregnancies).”

→ Niger girls' focus group

“When girls step out for work, the community often passes comments about them, which influences the mindset of their parents. But in the world of my dreams, the community is supportive of girls and gives them freedom.”

→ India girls' focus group

Community institutions see girls as rights-bearers rather than an economic burden or extractive source of income, meaning that their education, voices and interests are fully supported.

"Where the community cares about my rights and supports my dreams. Where they give priority to my dreams no matter how ridiculous they are. Where they give us comprehensive education. Where we are not singled out. Where we are cared for and educated. Where they take care of us and protect our rights, [and] support our studies instead of marriages. Teachers and service providers care about and address the specific and priority needs of girls, adolescents and young women."

→ Guatemala girls' focus group

Community institutions address all forms of gender-based violence in survivor-centred ways, such as by making sure at least half their staff are women, by engaging traditional leaders, and by ensuring judgement- and blame-free support.

"Institutions, especially traditional leaders, are playing a role in responding to GBV [gender-based violence] occurring in their community. For girls, traditional leaders are trusted allies they can report to when confronted with GBV."

→ Niger girls' focus group

Community norms are supportive of and positively view adolescent girls' sexuality, and girls are not shamed for the decisions they make.

"My community is aware that girls have a right over their body and lives, and decisions pertaining to those are taken by girls."

→ India girls' focus group

Societal level

Power structures, institutions and service providers no longer uphold inequitable gender norms.

"Laws are being improved in favour of an improved community. Society shows their support by talking about the issues... It is important that people are treated with equality and equity regardless of their gender and that there is equal justice. Sexuality will be taken as a very normal topic to be discussed among families, and health services give more information and support for sexual relationships. A generous, supportive, and fair society towards all people... where all people contribute independently... and [where] women have the same opportunity as men because women can and are capable of doing things. And even if we are broken, we will fly very high."

→ Guatemala girls' focus group

Laws and institutions support all consensual sexual and affective relationships between adolescents, including outside of marriage.

"Before the law everyone, without exception, is treated equally. The laws establish that all types of love and sexual relationships are valid, and conversion therapies are penalised."

→ Guatemala girls' focus group

Violence in any form against women and girls is viewed as unacceptable and comprehensive; survivor-centred services are available for all survivors.

"In case of any gender-based violence, both the community and police support girls."

→ Guatemala girls' focus group

Adolescent girl-friendly services exist across health, education and other key institutions supporting girls' bodily autonomy and choices.

"Institutions provide quality, comprehensive sexuality education in all the spaces where we develop and also provide the necessary tools [for us] to know our sexuality in a responsible way... As if it were normal... We hope that as girls and adolescents they listen to us... most of the time men are treated better by the laws. They don't give importance to these kinds of issues; we want them to listen to us!"

→ India girls' focus group



2. Root causes of persistent CEFMU

This section explains how discriminatory norms related to gender and sexuality drive CEFMU. It comprises two elements: **1) Norms** and **2) Structures**.

Defining “norms”

Norms can refer to both **social norms** and **gender norms**. Social norms are a shared understanding of how oneself and others should behave. Gender norms are a subset that relate to how people of different genders should behave.^{3,iii} Gender norms are embedded in formal and informal institutions, nested in the mind, and produced and reproduced through social interaction. They play a role in shaping women’s, men’s and gender-nonconforming individuals’ often unequal access to resources and freedoms.⁴ Where both social norms and gender norms are appropriate to use in this framework, they are referred to collectively as “norms”.

Element 1: Norms upholding CEFMU

The root causes of CEFMU: norms and structures that control girls’ sexuality and drive CEFMU

Norms are embedded within, exert influence over, and are shaped by the social systems in different contexts. Yet norms related to social hierarchy and patriarchy are undeniably similar across contexts, nations and regions.⁵

Social hierarchy influences who has decision-making power based on intersectional identity markers such as age, gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, class, caste and other local identifiers of social status. It also determines to what extent individuals and groups must comply with existing norms and the consequences they face for deviating from them. **“Adulthoodism”** is a specific form of social hierarchy experienced by children and young people. It informs the expectations of obedience to adult authority and infringes on young people’s rights to participate in decisions about their lives, including about marriage and life trajectories.⁶

Patriarchy upholds gender norms that privilege what is considered male or masculine. It undermines the rights of women and girls – including to control their bodies and sexuality – and restricts opportunities for women, men and gender minorities to express their authentic selves.⁷

iii While social norms theory tends to focus on internal, cognitive processes (e.g. the way people form individual beliefs based on existing community norms), gender norms theory focuses more on the external, political and institutionalized nature of norms.

This perpetuates hetero-centric norms (also a driver of CEFMU) and discrimination against LGBTQI and gender-nonconforming people and leads to unequal access to resources and power across all social structures and domains, including in the context of marriage, which can be used to sanitise and legalise the commodification of girls' and women's bodies.

From these two overarching norms flow norms specific to the control of girls' sexuality, which drives CEFMU. These are named and clustered below. They emerged from a literature review and were discussed in the consultations with adolescent girls. The lived experience of adolescent girls added nuance and variation to the norms based on their context and experiences.

Purity and family honour

Norms:

- Adolescent girls' sexuality, sexual activity and/or pregnancy outside of marriage reflects negatively on the girl.
- A family's honour is dependent on a girl's purity and virginity.

Where norms dictate that girls must not engage in sexual activity outside of marriage, transgressions may lead to stigmatisation, violence and even murder.

"Girls in our community would have to face violence from their parents/families [if she had sex or got pregnant outside of marriage]. Most likely it will result in honour-killing where the girl will be killed and subsequently their parents will commit suicide out of shame."

→ India girls' focus group

"If I were the one to get pregnant the community would point fingers and say it was my fault, but I feel like my mom and dad would react differently. My mom has told me that if something were to happen, they would support me. They tell me that if I want to commit to a life like this that's fine and they [will] support me... If I were pregnant my parents would first ask me if I wanted to not be pregnant. If I were pregnant my parents would ask me first if I don't want to be with that person, and they would support me in whatever I decided."

→ Guatemala girls' focus group

"Community and families perceive an inter-caste relationship in a very bad light. Parents feel that they have lost their dignity and respect in the eyes of their extended family and community. As a result, parents find a boy overnight and get her married off to him."

→ India girls' focus group

Protection and responsibility

Norms:

- Marriage equates to protection for girls and women.
- Parents are considered responsible when they ensure their daughter is married by the time she is a young adult.
- Girls must obey their parents' decision on timing/choice of marriage partner.

In some contexts, marriage is seen as protecting girls from social stigma, to shield them from being “tarnished” by rumours of impurity. In particular, marriage may be seen as protection for girls whose sexual or romantic relationships outside of marriage are discovered by family members and for those who become pregnant outside of marriage. For both girls and their parents, marriage may also be seen as protection from potential economic vulnerability. In all these circumstances, the control of girls’ choices around sexuality and marriage are justified under the guise of protection and parental responsibility.

“Parents think that they will be relieved of tension if their daughters are married. They feel that it’s their responsibility to get their daughters married and they constantly worry till they find a match for their girls.”

→ India girls’ focus group

“If a girl in my community voices that she doesn’t want to get married, people start passing comments about her and question her character. They start spreading rumours that the girl has a boyfriend and that’s why she doesn’t want to get married. Additionally, women in my community will get together and gossip about her and spread rumours.”

→ India girls’ focus group

Motherhood and adulthood

Norms:

- Marriage and motherhood are inevitable for girls or a confirmation of devotion in the prevalent religion.
- Marriage is the path to adulthood for girls.
- Girls’ primary role is within the home/domestic sphere.

In many places, marriage and motherhood are the only life aspirations available to girls. Identity formation for girls mirrors prevailing gender norms and stereotypes that prioritise their roles as homemakers and mothers over other public roles and identities.⁸

“Often girls are told that their lives and all their dreams must be weaved around marriage. The belief is so strongly imposed that girls from a very young age start believing and dreaming about marriage. This is reinforced in different ways especially through messages like ‘You only have a few years left and after that you will have to live with your husband and in-laws’. Since families pass such statements often, after some time, girls also start believing in it.”

→ India girls’ focus group

“The stereotype that a woman is a housewife persists.”

→ Guatemala girls’ focus group

“Girls are taught that a good woman is one who gets married. And once they get married, society rewards this behaviour. Girls are also told marriage will bring a sense of financial stability in their lives. The husband will earn and fulfil their needs.”

→ India girls’ focus group

Yet girls also have other dreams and aspirations that are discouraged by their families and communities because of the feared consequences of their mobility. In all three countries girls acknowledged that some girls do not want to marry. Conversely, girls also shared that, in some cases, marriage or union can mean more adult freedoms. Once married, in some contexts, women can work for remuneration, but they are still expected to be the primary caregivers for children and tend to their homes.

"I met my cousin-sister yesterday. She wants to become a fashion designer but yesterday she shared that she's thinking of getting married. Her father is very conservative and will never allow her to pursue her dreams. So she's thinking of getting married and hopes to find a partner who will give her the freedom and let her do what she wants to achieve."

→ India girls' focus group



"Girls reported that in their community, it's not good for girls to do another activity outside home like sports, because people don't perceive the benefits for girls. On the contrary, they focus only on the potential negative consequences: the girl can use this opportunity to have relations with boys/men. Girls should stay at home to help their mothers; they don't have enough time to participate in extracurricular activities."

→ Niger girls' focus group

"It's viewed that when girls have a job, the comment [people make] is that she's ready to get married, and that's not okay. Opportunities to practise sports are limited, soccer fields are for boys, and women don't have an equal space, and when they are bigger, opportunities are limited. When a woman decides to have children, she is expected to work as if she didn't have them."

→ Guatemala girls' focus group

Heteronormativity and the desire to marry

Norms:

- All girls are heterosexual.
- All girls want to marry.

The expectation that all girls will marry a man is a manifestation of an unacknowledged social norm that anything outside the heteronormative frame, including gender-nonconforming expressions, are unnatural or abnormal.

"In my community they are very traditional or conservative; they would not react well [to girls who express or are suspected of attraction to other girls], they would mark it as a dishonour to the family... It is sad because there are families that force them to marry not a person they like or love, they marry them for goods or because the family does not have money; they sell the girls and... the parents would react badly if the girl or teenager does not want to marry."

→ Guatemala girls' focus group

Many girls desire to marry men, but others do not – for a variety of reasons beyond sexual orientation. These include prior bad relationships, fear of leaving their parents' homes, fear of experiencing violence, and their educational or other aspirations to create their own futures. Girls are vulnerable to violence, forced marriage and/or social stigma if they refuse to marry.

Sexual harassment and violence

Norms:

- Interactions between adolescent girls and boys are always romantic and/or sexual.
- It is a girl's fault if she is sexually harassed or victimised.

Girls and women, rather than perpetrators, are often blamed and shamed for sexual harassment and or violence, including based on what they wear. This is linked with purity and family honor, which rests on the shoulders of girls in many contexts.

In some places, parents are blamed for anything that happens to a girl; this links to expectations that girls will remain obedient to parents before marriage. Thus, if something happens to her, it is considered the responsibility of her parents.

"Boys are rarely questioned by the family/community. Even when they harass/pass comments on girls, the family blames girls for not dressing up appropriately and the community blames them for having done something provocative. That's also because respect for the family is attached to girls. And it is so fragile that it can break at the possibility of anything that a girl does. Boys on the contrary can do anything and that doesn't hamper the respect and dignity of the family."

→ India girls' focus group

"One time my mother told me not to wear my school skirt because I could be raped, why... if I'm just going out with my school uniform?"

→ Guatemala girls' focus group



Element 2: Structures upholding CEFMU

This section describes how structures and institutions uphold and are upheld by these norms.

Norms do not just exist through beliefs and actions; they are also embedded in institutions at all levels of society. To date, investment in transforming norms within structures and institutions as part of child marriage and adolescent SRHR programming has been minimal, despite evidence of the potential to catalyse large-scale norm change.⁹

Laws

The legal “ecosystem” around child marriage, and sexuality more broadly, comprises a range of laws, including those that regulate sexual and gender identities, (age of) sexual consent, (marital) rape, mandatory reporting of sexual activity by medical and other professionals, medical consent, and child marriage laws. These determine the extent to which young people can make autonomous decisions about their health, sexuality and marriage, as well as the social and legal consequences of transgressing the dominant norms.¹⁰

With the declared aim of protecting girls, minimum age laws prescribe legal ages of consent for sex, marriage and sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services, sometimes corresponding to the age of majority (meaning legal adulthood, which is often age 18). Using age as the sole indicator of adolescents’ capacity to consent fails to recognise their biological and social realities, as well as their evolving capacities. These laws can subject adolescents and their relationships to regulation and, in some places, criminalisation.

Further, these laws are often not fit for purpose in the contexts of girls’ lives. In Latin America, for example, where informal unions amongst adolescents are more common than legal marriages, the law may not prevent the practice and may primarily serve to deny the benefits of marriage to unmarried couples.

In other contexts, including where the ages for sexual and marital consent are the same, adolescents are forced to hide their relationships, preventing girls from accessing SRH services, or causing them to choose to elope. Further, given that prevalence of child marriage is higher in poorer households and amongst marginalised communities, criminalisation of child marriage further disadvantages couples from these communities.¹¹

Laws around CEFMU and sexuality tend to prescribe and reinforce punitive approaches instead of promoting girls’ rights and opportunities. Legal systems, however, have the potential to contribute

to improving girls' health and lives, including through, for example, mandating comprehensive sexuality education and access to healthcare services;^{12,iv} recognition of capacity to consent to sexual activity before marriage; equality of access to education; equal employment rights; and equality of inheritance and property rights for girls and women.

Importantly, the passage of any laws related to child marriage should not replace investments in girls' empowerment, health, education, skills-building, employment and norms-change work required to give young people opportunities and address the underlying social drivers of CEFMU.

Education

Evidence shows that increased schooling for girls is linked with declines in CEFMU, although more research is needed to understand whether education protects girls from marriage, whether delaying marriage leads to more schooling, or both.¹³ Where accessible and safe educational options are available, the visibility of adolescent girls going to school and in classrooms can be a powerful catalyst for sustainable and large-scale norm change in the perceptions of and aspirations for girls.¹⁴

Specifically, comprehensive sexuality education (CSE)^{15,v} has been pinpointed as a crucial opportunity within educational settings for transforming gender norms and allowing girls to make decisions about their lives. Despite this evidence, CSE is not institutionalised within the formal curriculum in many countries.¹⁶ Given the role parents and family members play in perpetuating norms around adolescent sexuality, their involvement in CSE is crucial. They are, in effect, their children's first sexuality educators.

"It depends on the upbringing at home and how the parents teach; if they do not talk to me about sexuality, I will choose who I listen to or take advice from... parents should sit down to talk freely with children and reach that degree of trust with the parents. If it cannot be given at home, it would be good in health centres or schools..."

→ Guatemala girls' focus group

Health

As with education, the norms embedded within the health system affect girls' access to SRH services and their power to say yes and their right to say no. In addition to the laws that restrict adolescents' access to services, the attitudes and behaviours of individual healthcare providers in their interactions with adolescents are influenced by patriarchal and paternalistic adultist norms.

20 iv This framework considers all aspects of "access" to determine how one can actually receive needed health services

v "Comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) is a curriculum-based process of teaching and learning about the cognitive, emotional, physical and social aspects of sexuality. It aims to equip children and young people with knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that will empower them to: realise their health, wellbeing and dignity; develop respectful social and sexual relationships; consider how their choices affect their own wellbeing and that of others; and understand and ensure the protection of their rights throughout their lives."

Seeking information related to SRH, services for the prevention or termination of pregnancy or prevention of sexually transmitted infections can, in some geographies, result in shaming and breaches of confidentiality, particularly for unmarried girls. Further, individual providers or healthcare-providing institutions may impose their own “extra-legal” barriers, such as requiring excessive information before allowing girls to access the requested services.

“If someone approaches the health worker in the community, it will only increase the curiosity of the community members and they will try to find out what the problem is, which will eventually lead the family and girl through a lot of shame. That’s why people from my community go to far-off private hospitals.”

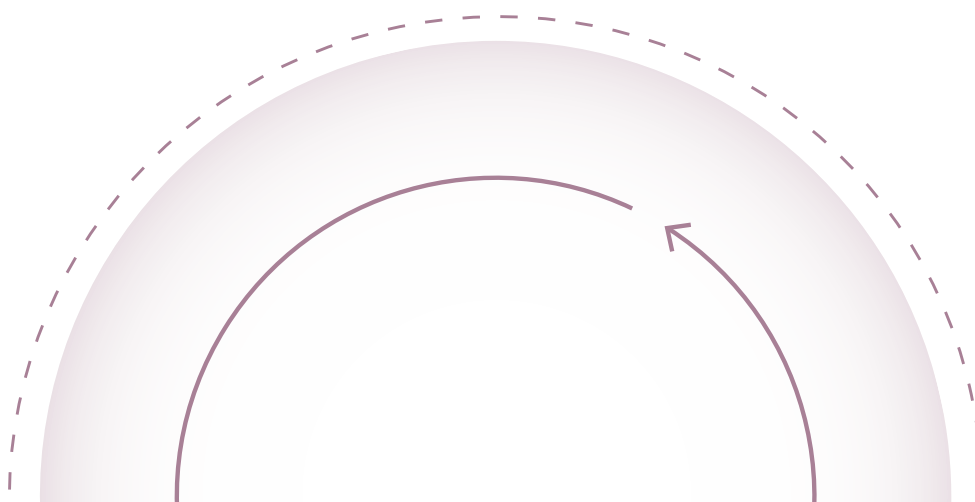
→ India girls’ focus group

Economic opportunities outside of the home

Girls need viable alternatives to marriage, including access to resources. However, gendered social norms confine women and girls to unpaid work within the household, with virtually zero opportunities for financial independence, or to lower-paid employment usually in the unregulated and insecure informal sector. Girls also have less access to skills development, sports and other growth opportunities outside the home that could eventually translate into improved economic opportunities.

This is because of restrictions placed on their physical mobility to protect them from (real and perceived) risks of sexual violence, and parental fear of girls themselves seeking out and engaging in sexual activity. Girls also have less access to digital technology inside the home, which reduces opportunities for remote learning, networking and ecommerce. Again, this is linked to norms related to purity and family honour. Especially in the context of poverty, the fear and control of girls’ sexuality exacerbates them being seen as “financial burdens” and only being valued for their free domestic labour.

The root causes described above must be deconstructed and transformed in context-specific ways through interventions that facilitate social norms, policies and structures that holistically support all girls to exercise their rights and autonomy, particularly with regard to marriage, and to be valued by their families and communities.



3. Deconstructing and transforming: Gender-transformative approaches to addressing sexuality and CEFMU

This section provides a roadmap for how we can deconstruct and transform the harmful norms and structures that control girls' sexuality and drive CEFMU (see Root causes) to move towards a more just and gender-equitable world (see Envisioned change).

This requires **gender-transformative approaches** (GTAs) that support girls' SRHR and challenge norms and institutions that perpetuate CEFMU. To make these gender-transformative approaches effective, it is also important to follow **programme principles** and engage with **change makers** across all levels of the socio-ecological framework.

What are gender-transformative approaches?

GTAs aim to achieve gender equality by encouraging a critical awareness of gender norms and addressing the unequal power relationships and distribution of resources between women and girls and others in the community.¹⁷ With regards to sexuality, GTAs seek to redistribute power and decision-making over all matters of sexuality. This includes girls' sexual and affective relationships, agency for girls and women to enjoy freedom, choice, autonomy, and pleasure in the exercise of their sexuality and reproduction, and how they experience their sense of self and gender identity.

Figure 1 shows the relationships between gender-transformative approaches, principles and changemakers as the roadmap for deconstructing and transforming the root causes of CEFMU. These include:

1. **Core programming principles** (principles that are critical to consider when developing CEFMU programming)
2. **Gender-transformative approaches** (essential programming ingredients), and
3. **Change-makers** (the people who need to be engaged, influenced and/or supported).

Funders must recognise that addressing root causes of CEFMU requires a holistic approach covering all elements outlined in this section, which is often not possible through a single implementing organisation (especially those that are small). Hence, funders need to resource multiple complementary organisations, and collaborations among them, within communities. Funders should also support organisations to experiment to adapt these principles and approaches to local contexts.

The case for gender-transformative approaches: What is lost when we do not take gender-transformative approaches to address root causes of CEFMU?

All CEFMU programming inherently involves some approach to gender, whether it reinforces existing norms or seeks to transform them. Programming can be categorised along a [continuum of gender integration approaches](#) to assess its potential impact and adjust accordingly.

The following examples from the consultations and literature show the limitations and unintended consequences of approaches to CEFMU that fall closer to “gender blind” than “gender transformative” on the continuum in that they do not aim to transform gender norms to address root causes of CEFMU, especially with regard to sexuality:

- A CEFMU programme that advocates delaying the age of marriage but does not recognise the evolving capacities of adolescent girls and does not aim to transform discriminatory norms will not change the status quo that denies girls their rights and ability to live to their full potential.^{18,vi} Additionally, advocacy exclusively focused on age of marriage can create scenarios that criminalise adolescent sexuality,¹⁹ reinforcing paternalistic and patriarchal control of their sexuality rather than building girls’ agency.
- A sex education programme that provides purely biological information in sex-separated settings and only promotes abstinence may further stigmatise adolescent girls who choose to be sexually active. It can lead to unintended pregnancies and, as a result, potentially unwanted marriages/unions and to girls dropping out of school.²⁰
- Programmes that provide financial incentives to parents to delay daughters’ marriages may succeed in postponing marriage until age 18, but without any meaningful shifts in empowerment, agency and decision-making in the girls’ lives going forward.²¹
- A programme that does not tackle the root causes of sexual harassment against girls or strengthen their autonomy will not prevent families from seeking to marry them early in order to avoid harassment or involvement in sexual relationships.^{22,vii}
- CEFMU programmes that fail to provide a safe space for adolescents to discuss sexual diversity and broader sexuality topics are failing to address the persistence of discrimination, violence and poor economic outcomes of LGBTQI and gender-nonconforming young people.²³

vi For example, one evaluated child marriage prevention programme “showed a considerable reduction in marriage among girls aged 10-14. However, the marriage of older adolescent girls seemed to accelerate after age 15, suggesting that the earliest marriages were deferred to later adolescence.”

vii In the rapid google survey, 27% participants said the reasons for marrying daughters young was because ‘girls did not have opportunities to study further’, followed closely by the fear of girls getting into intimate relationships of choice (26%) and sexual harassment of girls in public spaces (13%)”

Core programming principles

In designing and implementing gender-transformative approaches for addressing fear and control of adolescent girls' sexuality and CEFMU, it is important to consider the following programming principles.

- A. **Centring the voices, needs and aspirations of adolescent girls:** Programming must create space for girls, especially those who face intersectional discrimination, to meaningfully participate as active agents of change, give them opportunities to exercise agency, and centre and prioritise their voices and aspirations. Enabling girls to lead or participate in programmatic decision-making increases the responsiveness of programmes and builds girls' capacity and leadership.

"Let girls be the protagonists of their own process"

→ Latin America practitioner focus group

- B. **Multi-level and multi-component:** Programming must seek change at different levels with complementary programme components. For example, programmes addressing girls' health and educational needs must build leadership skills for girls, while also working with parents and community leaders to address CEFMU and coordinating with service providers and lawmakers to change institutions and policies.

"Change at all levels is essential for girls to have collective support from within their communities."

→ Niger girls' focus group

- C. **Intersectional and inclusive:** Programming should centre the voices of girls who experience the greatest discrimination and proactively find ways to work with and build the agency and rights of those girls left behind by most interventions. Girls sit at the intersection of many different types of discrimination including age, race, ethnicity, caste, religion, disability and class in addition to gender.

A girl's unique experience of these multiple oppressions impacts on her access to resources, opportunities and decision-making power. An intersectional lens ensures programming and advocacy do not inadvertently reinforce other oppressive norms in the pursuit of gender equity.

For example, a life skills programme in India focused on addressing gender oppression improved girls' bodily integrity but unintentionally reinforced caste norms.²⁴

- D. **Dialogue and reflection based:** Evidence from both CSE²⁵ and gender norms change strategies²⁶ emphasise dialogue and reflection as key to building the critical thinking that makes norms change possible.

This principle extends to the need for funders, practitioners, advocates and front-line community staff and volunteers implementing programmes to engage in our own reflections

on our relationship to our own bodies, social positions, identities, and relationships, our understanding of sexuality, and how these shape our own perspectives, behaviour and analyses.²⁷

“It is necessary to [start] from the body, the recovery of the experience of the body, sexuality as a personal experience and as a relational dimension, [and] how I put the body in relation to my community, my family, friends. The multidimensional, deep recovery of the body is fundamental to decide methodologies, when you start from the body you apply other types of approaches/methodologies.”

→ Latin America practitioner focus group

- E. Community driven:** Programming should be driven by a local desire for structural change. Work should be led by or in partnership with locally based movements for women and girls’ rights and autonomy. Programmes should build on indigenous and emerging sex-positive, gender-equitable norms and practices in the community, challenging the idea that human rights are a “Western concept”.

“Community driven” should not become “adult driven” to the exclusion of the voices of adolescent girls. Challenging the status quo often results in backlash, and community-driven programming mitigates this risk by identifying and supporting allies for girls’ rights within the community and surrounding institutions.

“When programs are managed by people in their community, they are more aware of their difficulties and their specific needs compared to someone from outside their community.”

→ Niger girls’ focus group

- F. Locally contextualised:** Programme implementers should invest in the time and space needed for communities – in all their diversity – to discuss their context-specific norms and structures in order to develop shared understandings of the origins and motivations for particular practices and fears and what and who stand in the way of change. As part of this, it is important to look at the historical roots of many discriminatory norms and institutions given that many originated and/or were compounded by colonialism and the continuation of geo-political inequalities.
- G. Age differentiated:** Designers of programmes and policies need to differentiate adolescence as a life stage with unique potential and strengths,²⁸ and avoid infantilising girls. They should recognise and promote their evolving capacities to exercise autonomy.^{29viii}

It is critical to recognise that adults assessing young people’s capacity are still influenced by prevailing social norms.³⁰ Thus, the concepts of age differentiation and evolving capacities should not be used to limit sexuality education, information, services or support.

viii Evolving capacities are defined “as an enabling principle that addresses the process of maturation and learning through which children progressively acquire competencies, understanding and increasing levels of agency to take responsibility and exercise their rights.”

Gender-transformative approaches

The following are specific approaches (the “how”) that can address the root causes of CEFMU. They should be viewed through the lens of the core programming principles and not as stand-alone “solutions” to CEFMU.

- A. Promoting critical thinking on gender and power:** Safe spaces for dialogue and reflection-based discussions on gender and power should be created, at a minimum among adolescent girls but preferably also with boys, parents, community members and other actors who can effect change. These spaces promote individual and collective understanding on complex issues, including the social, political and economic conditions that oppress adolescent girls.

Discussions should address local gender norms and the ways gender and power manifest in the lives of girls and their interactions in the world. This should include deconstructing masculinities from a gender justice perspective, with accountability to women and girls, and also with tenderness and care to show men and boys that transformation can allow them to be freer and happier.³¹ Dialogues can prepare individuals and groups to take action to transform oppressive conditions.³²

Critical thinking about gender and power must also question norms around heteronormativity and gender binary and confront homophobia and transphobia. After all, these attitudes are rooted in a desire to preserve the socially constructed privileges and power around what is masculine.

“Working with the authorities, although there are laws, this has not been enough; it has led to an increase in informal unions, at the community or indigenous population level, [and] it is a challenge to work with community authorities who validate, approve and authorise unions. We have to do a lot of work with these authorities; [we must] establish a work of sensitisation with the authorities.”

→ Guatemala practitioner focus group

- B. Supporting girl-centred and girl-led^{33,ix} collectivism and activism:** Collectivising is the bringing together of members of marginalised groups in ways that enable them to articulate their oppression and strategise for individual and social change.³⁴ Having access to a safe space for girls, especially in places where their freedom of movement is limited, is an important first step and can result in important social networks.³⁵

However, a safe space in and of itself does not lead to transformation of social norms and could even reinforce them. To identify and challenge age, gender-based, and other intersectional inequalities, girls need carefully facilitated spaces that support them to build a critical perspective, recognise and identify sources of oppression and the harmful norms that limit their rights and status in society, and build their collective vision, leadership and action.

ix Girl-led: Girls make the decisions on all issues relating to their group/organisation. They design their own plans/strategies, set their own priorities, and decide how the budget is spent/used, etc. They may or may not have the support of adults. Adult allies might also provide information and assist the girls during their processes. Girl-centred: Work is implemented jointly with and for girls but is led by adults. Adults enable girls to take active roles and agree on priorities and recommendations in a participatory way, ensuring girls’ interests are central and their voices heard. Both girls and adults create messages and recommendations.

Girl-led groups tend to be horizontal in structure (non-hierarchical) with extremely democratic models. While they have goals and objectives that focus on some form of social transformation in their community, for many the opportunity for personal growth is just as important. The collective space provides a system for mutual support and a safe space where they can be themselves, explore their identities and their place in the world, free of traditional patriarchal impositions.³⁶

"It is better for [girls] when girls themselves advocate to change laws and adopt policies to sustainably improve girls' situations."

→ Niger girls' focus group



Image: Christine Han / American Jewish World Service

C. Facilitating public spaces for challenging norms: Public-facing participatory events – such as community radio shows, community theatre, public sports events for girls, and other context-specific spaces³⁷ – provide opportunities for community members to witness ways of organising, communicating and behaving that are informed by gender-equitable norms. Public events that offer opportunities for facilitated dialogue and debate amongst community members significantly transform norms around the rights of girls to hold and express opinions and to have a say in their future.³⁸

D. Intergenerational dialogues are also a powerful norms-shifting strategy when they are facilitated privately between girls and influential adults (parents, community leaders, teachers, grandparents and religious leaders). These dialogues help to bridge gaps in communication, encourage greater understanding around girls' aspirations, and challenge adultism – one of the many norms driving CEFMU. Dialogues including men (as parents or other stakeholders) and boys (as peers) offer additional opportunities to challenge hegemonic masculinity.

“Intergenerational dialogues are relevant in order to improve the communication between elders and adolescents and a mutual understanding about the challenges/difficulties faced by girls most specifically.”

→ Niger girls' focus group

E. Comprehensive sexuality education (CSE): The work by the YP Foundation, INCREASE and TICAH featured in the *Tackling the Taboo* report³⁹ provide clear examples of the essential function of CSE in addressing CEFMU and fear and control of girls' sexuality. CSE in and out of school provides young people with essential skills and tools to support their questioning of harmful gender norms, including reimagining masculinities while building girls' leadership and agency and providing them with scientific knowledge about sex, sexuality and sexual health.

Research illustrates that when CSE includes gender and/or power discussions, it is five times more likely to be effective in improving gender equality and sexual health-related outcomes for girls and other young people.⁴⁰

“CSE programs in [our context] predominantly focus on child sexual abuse and puberty/menstruation with girls, and a gender-transformative lens beyond SRHR needs to be incorporated to integrate some of the other principles.”

→ South Asia practitioner focus group

F. Building local adolescent sexual and reproductive health and rights (ASRHR) service infrastructure: Service provider attitudes and beliefs about adolescent girls' sexuality and ability to make decisions for themselves are a key barrier to achieving good ASRHR outcomes, such as avoiding unintended pregnancies (which can be an impetus for CEFMU).⁴¹

Working with SRH service providers from a gender-transformative perspective to help them understand the evolving capacity of adolescent girls to make decisions about issues that affect them and provide comprehensive services without judgement normalises the sexuality of adolescent girls. This helps ensure providers deliver information and services in a manner that challenges harmful gender norms rather than reinforcing them.

“Building local ASRHR service infrastructure [is] really important to end [child marriage] and for work addressing sexuality... but [it is] one of the most difficult. And why? This requires investment. Not only to put in place but to keep going. And for that to happen requires political advocacy (to unlock the investment) and for ‘ownership’...The challenge is how to maintain community momentum when the program or the institution [that is] supporting withdraws [from the community]. And that’s why... it’s important for this advocacy to be underpinned by governmental commitment, a national action plan or strategy.”

→ West Africa practitioner focus group

- G. Expanding mobility in public spaces and access to technology for girls:** Where girls’ mobility is restricted out of fear of them experiencing violence or exercising their sexuality, participation in activities in public spaces such as sports and civic actions challenges norms of propriety. Combined with other norms-shifting work described in this section, this can expand the acceptability of girls in public spaces. Efforts to expand girls’ space-taking must anticipate and mitigate backlash through outreach and collaboration with key community stakeholders before and during programming.

Opportunities for girls to use, programme and collectivise with technology should also be encouraged as a form of expanded mobility. In enhancing girls’ access to technology, it is important to prevent cyber harassment and other potential harms by equipping girls with information on how to interface with technology safely.⁴²

“Access to technology like mobile phones and the internet is essential for [us] in order to get information, to improve [our] knowledge, and to educate [ourselves] since [we] have access to a lot of information through these modern communication channels.”

→ Niger girls’ focus group discussion

- H. Expanding educational and economic opportunities for girls:** As discussed earlier in the section *Root causes*, the lack of access to safe and gender-equitable educational and workforce opportunities is an important factor in the context of CEFMU. While shifting norms is necessary, it is imperative that structures and institutions offer educational, material and financial resources for girls to have real pathways to live out their aspirations and make financially independent choices. Skills-building, educational and income-generating activities should include space for promoting self-awareness, self-esteem and life planning for girls.

“Experience in working with girls and adolescents in the community... we start first with a life project, not to impose and tell them how to live. We are very careful in the way we work with them, and we propose, as a life project, self-knowledge, that they know the possibilities to dream, to develop themselves.”

→ Guatemala practitioner focus group

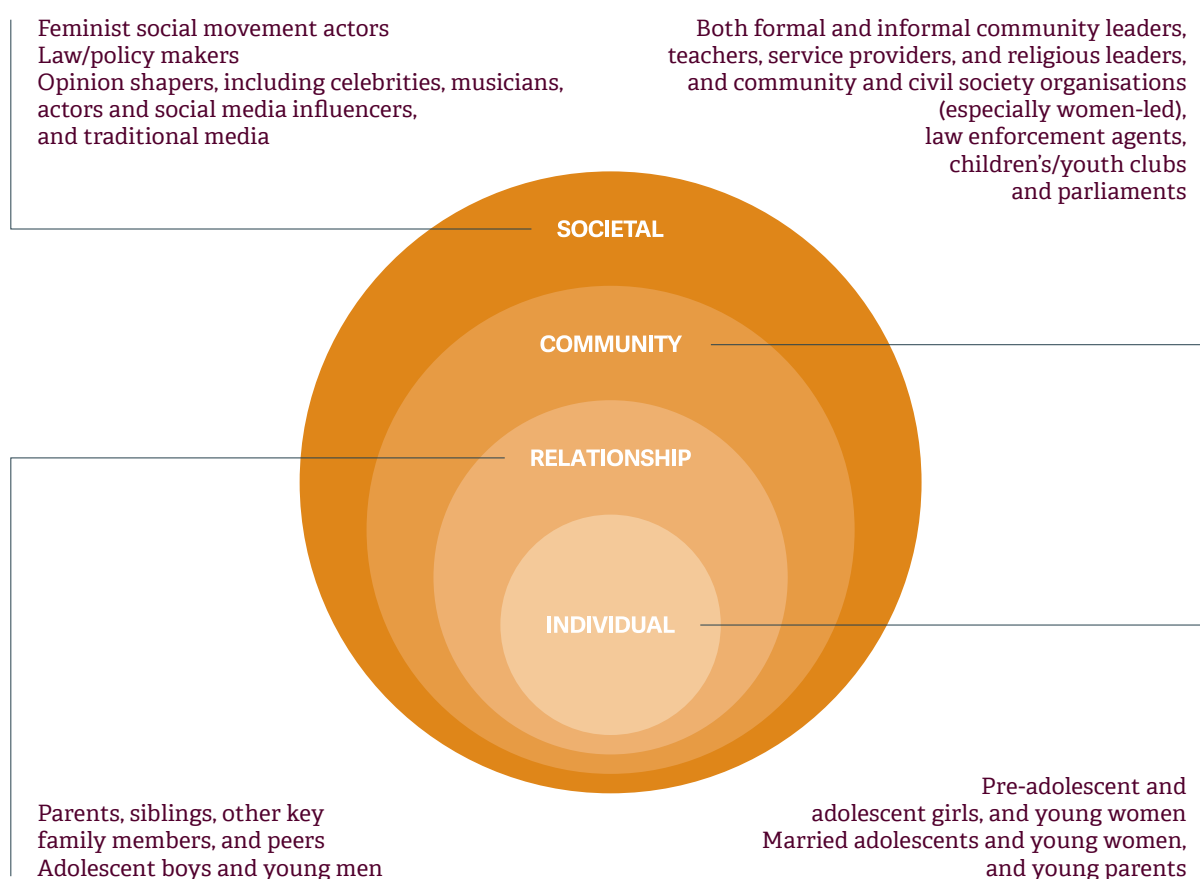
- I. Political advocacy:** CEFMU advocacy should explore the viability and applicability of restorative, transformative approaches that address the intersections of oppression and disadvantage. It should consider political and legal advocacy supportive of ASRHR, and address consent (i.e. decriminalising consensual sexual relations between adolescents) and comprehensive sexuality education, rather than age of marriage in isolation.⁴³

It should integrate accountability: how young women, girls and communities can ensure that laws, policies, plans and programmes address their realities and evolve over time and are not used to police and criminalise adolescent girls. Advocacy efforts should be multi-level, working across local, subnational and national levels.

Changemakers

To effectively challenge power and transform social norms and institutions, CEFMU programming must not only centre around girls but also engage adults, including parents, community leaders, service providers, religious leaders and lawmakers. Figure 2 presents the potential change makers across the socio-ecological framework.

Figure 2 Changemakers across the socio-ecological framework



Understanding context is critical because it illuminates who the allies and opponents are in a rights-based approach to CEFMU. For example, in one context religious leaders might be the hardest to work with, while in a neighbouring context they may be allies. In most communities and institutions, there are usually a few people who already uphold girls' choices and opportunities either privately or publicly; finding these people and starting from there is a good way to create a community-driven intervention.

Engaging change makers is essential to ensure that:

- programming does not instrumentalise girls or create additional burden for them by making them solely responsible for working around the problems created by negative gender norms and gender discriminatory models
- allies are available to mitigate the backlash that often comes from efforts to shift norms, especially by girls themselves
- social norms change occurs from within institutions such as schools and health services (e.g. teachers, health providers and administrators) and positive policies and laws are upheld, while harmful laws and policies are questioned and challenged.

There is no magic formula, no perfect programming that will address the fear and control of girls' sexuality that fuels the practice of CEFMU. Yet progress is possible.

The root causes – discriminatory norms and structures – can be transformed by owning, contextualising and applying these core programming principles and gender-transformative approaches together with personal experience and knowledge and actively involving change makers and allies across all levels of socio-ecological framework. Always putting the rights and voice of girls – in all their diversity – front and centre is paramount.

These principles and approaches are not meant to be a checklist for programme designers.


Rather, we hope they will inspire programmers and funders to invest and stretch in the direction of conscious and conscientious action to transform the norms that control girls' sexuality and perpetuate CEFMU. This collective endeavour requires resources, time and political will, and a strong commitment to girl-centred approaches and partnership.

Conclusion and recommendations

This conceptual framework shines a light on the important role that addressing fear and control of adolescent girls' sexuality plays in effective CEFMU programming. The fear and control of girls' sexuality remain embedded in society in visible and invisible ways. As such, transformative approaches to advance girls' rights and end CEFMU must be grounded in an understanding of how this control manifests and how it contributes to the persistence of CEFMU practices. The Working Group would like to conclude with the following recommendations:

Recommendations for action for funders and practitioners:

- 1. Invest in ongoing capacity building** for themselves (as funding institutions and implementing organizations) and their partners on gender-transformative approaches to avoid “cherry picking” elements, cutting corners or worse, using the terminology but not the actual approach. A strong understanding of the [gender integration continuum](#) will move programming towards addressing girls' sexuality in a way that changes harmful gender social norms and the institutions that uphold them. Furthermore, investment should be made in creating meaningful spaces for practitioners to reflect on sexuality in order to strengthen their work.
- 2. Re-evaluate CEFMU approaches and expand advocacy goals.** Advocacy has centred on legal changes with a strong focus on enacting and enforcing age of marriage laws, including those with no exceptions. Not enough research has been conducted on the unintended effects of such laws, which may include limiting access to SRH services for adolescents or criminalising adolescent sexuality. They do not address the lived reality of most girls, the root causes of CEFMU, informal unions or forced marriages that occur past the legal age of marriage. Other legal advocacy priorities and approaches should be explored, including learning from alternative justice practices used to address other gender justice challenges, and expanding advocacy on laws and institutional policies that resource gender-equitable services and opportunities for girls.
- 3. Partner with and invest in girl-led and feminist movements and organisations** that are poised to take on this work. Though capacity building for those interested and committed to changing their approaches is important, making space for groups that intrinsically “get it” to lead is likely to be a more effective investment than placing organisations that have a steep learning curve in charge. At the same time, fostering partnerships between thought leaders and other organisations can be an effective strategy.

- 
4. **Invest more in addressing structural drivers of norms that perpetuate inequality**, including making legal, education, workforce and health institutions safe, accessible and girl-friendly. Practitioners should ground their theories of change in the gender norms theory, recognising the need for long-term investment in transforming the structures in which norms are embedded.
 5. **Support exploration and experimentation of monitoring and evaluation approaches that centre girls' voices.** More investment is needed to identify and understand measures of success for gender-transformative CEFMU programming and to articulate monitoring and evaluation approaches that centre girls' voices and define success from their perspectives. Theories of change and other evaluation frameworks can also be developed by adolescent girls and young women themselves from formative research using the consultation tools created for this framework's development (in Annex B).

Recommendations for further exploration and research:

1. Despite evidence that illustrates the ineffectiveness of siloed CEFMU programming, funding for it has not stopped. **How can donors and implementers avoid siloed CEFMU programming, including between sectors** (e.g. health, education and social protection) **knowing this approach addresses a “symptom” of the larger problem of inequitable gender norms, not the root causes?**
2. There is evidence across regions of adolescent girls “choosing” early marriage or unions as pathways to status, financial stability, escape from violence in their natal homes, and as the context within which they can express their sexuality in socially acceptable ways. Autonomous decision-making for girls is essential to the world that girls envision. **In the context of limited opportunities, systemic coercion, and harmful expectations about “romantic love,” how do we support adolescents who consensually choose to marry or form a union, and how do we support pregnant adolescents who see marriage as their only choice?**
3. There is growing evidence that punitive approaches that focus on criminalisation of CEFMU and adolescent girls' sexuality create more harm than good for girls, their families and their communities. There is a need to examine, experiment with, and document restorative and transformative justice approaches to advance survivor-centred resolutions. **What kinds of non-punitive approaches can be used in the context of CEFMU?**
4. Feminist movement spaces in many regions have historically been perceived as being led by adult women. While there is increasing emergence of girl-led activism and movements, the connections, intersections and solidarity across the two can be hampered by adultism and hierarchies. **How can CEFMU programming engage with cross-generational feminist movements to create connections and solidarity networks?**
5. The consultation for this framework revealed the importance of contextualisation and documenting diverse understandings and experiences of adolescent girls' sexuality. **Further exploration of contextual social norms that intersect with CEFMU** (e.g. curses in Niger, heteronormativity in Guatemala, and inter-caste relationships in India) **merit further learning, as do girl-led explorations of their own lived experiences in other countries around the world.** This learning can inform research as well as programmatic content, contributing to more effective responses to CEFMU and gender inequality.

Behind this conceptual framework is possibility. The same social norms around girls' sexuality that drive CEFMU stifle girls' agency in other spheres – reproductive health, education, labour and civic participation. They also reinforce standards that pressure men and boys to perform masculinity in dangerous and emotionally limiting ways.

These same norms make life incredibly dangerous for transgender and gender-nonconforming people. By “tackling the taboo” of addressing girls' sexuality through gender-transformative approaches to CEFMU programming and challenging social norms, not only will interventions be more effective, but the change reaped will also be felt in many spheres of social justice.



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We are not able to name the individual girls who participated in the consultations, we are able to name the individuals and institutions who participated in the practitioner and donor consultations:

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- Rise Up – Levantemos, Guatemala: Verónica Buch, Juany García
- The Summit Foundation: Jacqueline Carter
- GreeneWorks: Margaret Greene

Annexure

ANNEX A: The framework development process

An initial draft of the conceptual framework was developed by the Torchlight Collective consulting team based on the literature, the team's knowledge and experiences as practitioners and researchers (in CEFMU, adolescent girls' rights, gender-transformative programming and ASRHRs) and inputs from the Working Group members.

Following the initial draft development, consultations were carried out with funders and practitioners from organisations working with adolescent girls, and with adolescent girls. The consultation process was a collaborative effort across the Torchlight Collective consulting team and several Working Group members and their partner organisations. The consultation process consisted of three main components, which are outlined in the table below:

CONSULTATION GROUP	NUMBER OF GROUPS AND GEOGRAPHY	CONSULTATION PROCESS
Adolescent girls	3 - Guatemala 3 - Niger 1 - India*	Participatory exercises including use of country-specific vignettes to validate components I, III and IV of the conceptual framework conducted in person in India and Niger and virtually in Guatemala
Practitioners	1 - West Africa 1 - Latin America 1 - South Asia**	Virtual focus group discussions to validate component IV and the articulation of sexuality in the conceptual framework
Funders	1 - mix of US, Canadian and European funders	Virtual focus group discussion to gather general input on the organisation and usability of the conceptual framework

* In India due to the Covid-19 crisis the Torchlight Collective team in consultation with the Working Group decided it was not safe or reasonable to have the Working Group partner organisations carry out the remaining two focus groups. This was decided in order to be responsive to the partner organisations and communities who had moved into extreme crisis shortly after the first focus group.

** In South Asia, it was not possible to conduct the practitioner focus group as planned amidst the emergent crisis of Covid-19, and so the input that was received was sought individually from several practitioners in Pakistan and one practitioner in India. As such, the inputs are not fully representative of the region and do not represent data generated from a group discussion.

The consultation process was grounded in feminist principles and sought to be inclusive, intersectional and driven by the voices of those in the contexts where the consultations were being carried out. As such, for the participatory exercises with the adolescent girls across three countries, the Torchlight Collective worked with collaborators in each country to develop context-specific vignettes and to gather input on the full participatory tool that was developed. Each consultation started with a pilot group of adolescent girls in each country, and based on that experience and feedback from implementers the consultation tools were adjusted for the remaining consultations with adolescent girls.

The consultation process was carried out between February and June of 2021, during which the reality of the Covid-19 pandemic continued to shift the context in the countries and regions where consultations were planned. The Torchlight Collective and the Working Group adjusted the original consultation plans based on inputs from partners in each country and region and based decisions on the feminist principles upon which this work was initiated.

Based on the findings from the consultations, the Torchlight Collective collaborated with the Working Group to decide on changes to the preliminary framework draft. The framework presented here is the revised version.

ANNEX B: Tools and guides for the consultation process

The tools and guides used in the consultation with adolescent girls in Guatemala, India and Niger can be accessed [here](#), and adapted for use in additional consultations and research with girls.

The summary findings of the consultations are [here](#).

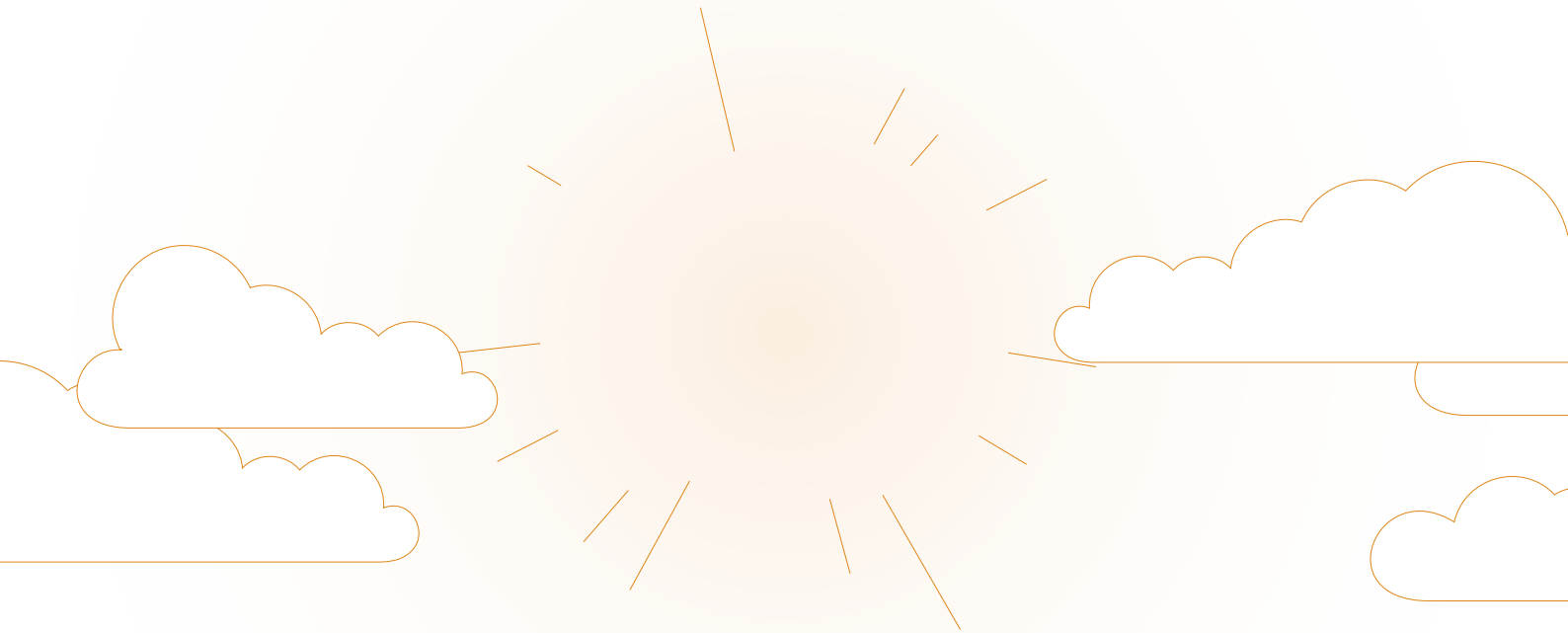
ANNEX C: Human rights agreements relevant to CEFMU

HUMAN RIGHTS AGREEMENT	PROVISIONS RELEVANT TO CEFMU
Universal Declaration of Human Rights	Article 16: "a) Men and women of full age... have the right to marry and find a family. They are entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution. b) Marriage shall be entered into only with free and full consent of intending parties..."
Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women	Article 16 (1) prescribes a) the same right to enter into marriage and b) the same right to freely choose a spouse and to enter into marriage only with their free and full consent. Article 16 (2) states: "The betrothal and the marriage of a child shall have no legal effect, and all necessary action, including legislation, shall be taken to specify a minimum age for marriage."
Convention on the Rights of the Child	Article 3: In all actions concerning children the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration. Article 5: States that parties shall respect the responsibilities, rights and duties of parents or, where applicable, the members of the extended family or community as provided for by local custom, legal guardians or other persons legally responsible for the child, to provide, in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child, appropriate direction and guidance in the exercise by the child of the rights recognised in the present Convention. Article 6: Maximum support for survival and development. Article 12: The right to express his or her views freely in all matters affecting the child in accordance with age and maturity. Article 19: The right to protection from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parents, guardian or any other person. Article 24: The right to health and to access to health services; and to be protected from harmful traditional practices. Articles 28 and 29: The right to education on the basis of equal opportunity. Article 34: The right to protection from all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse. Article 35: The right to protection from abduction, sale or trafficking. Article 36: The right to protection from all forms of exploitation prejudicial to any aspect of the child's welfare.
Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage, and Registration of Marriages	Article stipulates that the state parties take legislative action to specify a minimum age for marriage and stipulates that no marriage shall be legally entered into by any person under this age, except where a competent authority has granted a dispensation as to the age, for serious reasons, in the interest of the intending spouses.
Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery (1956)	Article 1(c)(i) equates any marriage that is forced upon a girl or woman by her family or guardians as similar to slavery and requires the state party to eliminate it.

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