

CAMPAIGNING AND ADVOCACY TO PREVENT AND END CHILD MARRIAGE:

Case studies from The Philippines and Indonesia

Oxfam’s **CREATING SPACES To Take Action on Violence Against Women and Girls**¹ (CS) project (2016–2021) aims to reduce violence against women and girls (VAWG), including the prevalence of child, early and forced marriage (CEFM) in Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Nepal, Pakistan, and the Philippines. The project is implemented by local partner organizations, with support from Oxfam country offices and Oxfam Canada.

Following the socio-ecological model on violence prevention,² the Creating Spaces project applied a multi-pronged, multi-stakeholder approach, at the individual, household, community, and societal/institutional levels, to ignite change and prevent VAWG and CEFM.

Since 2016, Oxfam and partners led and supported several broad-based campaigning and advocacy efforts to both prevent and end VAWG and CEFM. **This document shares lessons learned on effective campaigning and advocacy strategies that have the power to influence policy and legislative changes to prohibit CEFM**, drawing on the historical victories achieved in Indonesia and The Philippines.



Enough Campaign in East Java during the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-based Violence, Indonesia. Photo: Yayasan Kesehatan Perempuan (YKP)

1 The Creating Spaces project was designed in 2016, to primarily address violence against cis gender women and girls. Oxfam Canada acknowledges that gender-based violence also has a disproportionate impact on trans, non-binary, and gender diverse people, and the institution is working to expand its programming to be inclusive to gender non-conforming people.

2 The socio-ecological model on violence prevention is a best practice theory of change utilized by practitioners to consider four levels of intervention that are instrumental in combating gender-based violence – individual, relationship, community, and societal.

POLITICAL WINS IN INDONESIA AND THE PHILIPPINES: After several years of advocacy, Indonesia’s Marriage Act (1974) was amended in September 2019, increasing the age of marriage for women with parental consent from 16 to 19 years old (equal to men).³ Many local jurisdictions are following course and instituting regulations to prevent CEFM. In The Philippines, Senators Lagman and Herrera-Dy sponsored what became known as the “Girls Not Brides” Senate bill 1373 to outlaw CEFM. The bill passed three successful readings (November 2020), and the counterpart Prohibition of Child Marriage bill in the House of Representatives passed its final reading in September 2021. As of October 1, 2021, the bill awaits presidential review and sign off.

1. SUPPORT LOCAL PARTNERS, THEY ARE THE EXPERTS

Campaigning strategies to end VAWG and CEFM work best when they are led by organizations committed to advancing women’s and girls’ rights, children’s rights, and gender equality. The Creating Spaces partners’ sustained actions and presence were central in gaining the support of policymakers, and gradually shifting community attitudes, behaviours, and social norms related to child marriage practices. These organizations hold in-depth contextual and culturally relevant knowledge, have established community relationships, and hands-on experience reaching people at all levels of influence. The organizations’ staff often reside in the local communities themselves and hold a vested interest in improving socio-economic outcomes for local women and girls. Following the lead of its partners, Oxfam provided support through capacity strengthening, alliance building, and amplifying their voices on the national and international stage.

2. CENTRE THE VOICES AND EXPERIENCES OF THOSE MOST AFFECTED

Creating Spaces partners privileged the voices of children, youth, and survivors most affected by CEFM in their campaign efforts. In both Indonesia and the Philippines, first-hand accounts by women survivors on the negative impacts of child marriage turned the tide of public opinion and gained the attention of influencers. For instance, in **INDONESIA**, three child marriage survivors applied for a judicial review of the Marriage Law in 2017; they became the face and voice of national campaigns against CEFM. Their real life experiences attracted media attention and put further pressure on policymakers. Sharing survivor-centred testimonies were also instrumental in countering backlash from religious leaders and other community actors.



Rasminah, one of three child marriage survivors who applied for Judicial Review of Indonesia’s Marriage Law. Photo: Indonesian Women’s Coalition (Koalisi Perempuan Indonesia), 2021

When I was having fun at school, I was forced to get married and take care of my children... how about that... When I see my friends go to school, I often cry, feel envious, crushed, and not feeling well. So, I want to stop child marriage, it’s enough, let me be the last survivor.

— Rasminah, Indramayu, West Java, Indonesia

In the **PHILIPPINES**, the CS project organized a dialogue between 13 young girls, youth advocates, and legislators to present issues associated with CEFM. This led Senators Lagman and Herrera-Dy to sponsor the Girls Not Brides bill.

It is vital that survivors and youth at risk share their stories of their own free will, they provide informed consent to any participation in advocacy and programming, and that all possible measures are taken to protect them from harm.⁴

3. BUILD ALLIANCES

With a multitude of risks and harms⁵ associated with CEFM, a wide range of civil society organizations and actors see value in supporting an end to child

³ The official age of marriage without parental consent is 21 years of age for both sexes.

⁴ Learn more about Oxfam Canada’s Feminist Principles [here](#).

⁵ Child brides experience sexual and reproductive health risks, lower educational attainment, poverty, and increased risk of intimate partner and family violence, and other forms of exploitation and abuse. Learn [more](#).

marriage practices. In Indonesia, Creating Spaces national partner, the Indonesian Women’s Coalition (KPI), joined Coalition 18+, a multi-stakeholder⁶ alliance dedicated to increasing the legal age of marriage for women. By acting as one unified voice and combining resources, Coalition 18+ increased the visibility, reach, influence and impact of campaigning efforts on CEFM, and gained the attention of community members and leaders from the local to national levels.

In the **PHILIPPINES**, when youth formed alliances with other youth and supporters, the results were powerful. The student-based organization, United Youth of the Philippines-Women, grew into the provincial Maguindanao Alliance of Youth Advocates Against CEFM, and engaged in face-to-face lobbying with local and provincial legislators to pass regulations related to CEFM. At the national level, Creating Spaces partner, Philippine Legislators’ Committee on Population and Development (PLCPD), launched the youth-led and multi-sectoral #GirlDefenders alliance to elevate and maintain CEFM on the political agenda, garnering the public support of legislators from the Executive and Congress. For over two years, #GirlDefenders persistently campaigned for passage of the Girls Not Brides bill, even in the height of the COVID-19 pandemic by moving much of its advocacy online.

It takes considerable time, effort, and commitment to build alliances. Most importantly, it takes investment in strategic relationship building to gain trust, agreement on common objectives, and consensus on strategy, tactics, and roles.

4. CULTIVATE WOMEN’S TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP

Women and girls played an instrumental role in demanding structural and legislative changes from the local to national level to promote women’s and girls’ rights and end gender-based violence. To build their leadership potential to influence these changes, the project partners established local women’s and youth groups to foster learning on their legal and human rights, gendered social norms and positive alternatives, and the negative consequences associated with VAWG and CEFM. This issue-based learning, coupled with skills training on running campaigns, engaging with decision makers, and effective advocacy strategies strengthened women’s and girls’ confidence and capacities to lead and support campaigning activities.

5. USE EVIDENCE FOR CHANGE

Sharing data and evidence on the high rates and wide-ranging devastating impacts of child marriage has had a positive influence in building the credibility of advocacy efforts at all levels. Creating Spaces partners shared evidence during key moments along the campaign, such as rallies, community events, when speaking to media, in advocacy materials, and during formal meetings with community leaders and policymakers. In the **PHILIPPINES**, the project team conducted [feminist research](#) on the social norms and other structural factors driving CEFM, putting a human face on child marriage that was relatable and localized. Using this research alongside data collected through [feminist evaluations](#), the team developed knowledge products that had a concrete influence on policy discourse related to CEFM.⁷ For instance, Oxfam’s [Position Paper](#) was instrumental in developing the Girls Not Brides Senate bill.



Public hearing on child, early, and forced marriage, January 2020, Philippines. Oxfam and partners invited to attend as resource persons by the Senate Committee on Women, Children, Family Relations and Gender Equality. Photo: Rina Fulo Oxfam

6. LEVERAGE KEY OPPORTUNITIES AND CHANNELS

Campaigns can gain more influence when they capitalize on high-profile events. In the **PHILIPPINES**, the #GirlDefenders alliance used strategic opportunities, such as the International Day of the Girl Child and International Women’s Day to draw media and public attention to the Girls Not Brides bill. This, in turn, put further pressure on legislators to outlaw child marriage. In **INDONESIA**, project partner KPI, alongside Coalition18+, seized the political opportunity of simultaneous presidential, national, provincial, and district elections to ramp up advocacy efforts. Local partners also collaborated with Oxfam’s global [ENOUGH](#) campaign to strengthen efforts to shift social norms that perpetuate gender inequality.

CS partners consistently used both mainstream and social media channels to reach and engage civil society, increase public support, and hold

⁶ Coalition 18+ consisted of CSOs and WROs, legal professionals, academics, interfaith religious leaders, female and youth activists, and journalists.

⁷ Learn more about Oxfam Canada’s Feminist Knowledge Strategy [here](#).



Philippines, October 9, 2020. More than 200 lawmakers and campaigners from the ‘Girl Defenders’ alliance joined an online solidarity rally to call for the passage of anti-CEFM bills within the House of Representatives and Senate.

governments to account to uphold women’s and girls’ rights. Advocates actively used social media to spread awareness and mobilize support, using Facebook, Zoom, Twitter, Instagram, and Youtube. In the final project year in the Philippines (2020-2021), campaigning activities reached an estimated 46,599 people, facilitating healthy debate on VAWG and CEFM.

7. STRENGTHEN LOCAL ACCOUNTABILITY MECHANISMS

In both the Philippines and Indonesia, it took several years of ongoing, targeted efforts to build a critical mass of supporters, and to make considerable progress towards outlawing CEFM. However, even with the passing of national legislation, child marriage practices are likely to continue without proper enforcement mechanisms in place at all levels of government. The **INDONESIA** team, along with the support of local champions, are building relationships with village and district-level authorities, and advocating for local regulations, monitoring systems, public education, and other protocols to prevent VAWG and CEFM. To date, the project contributed to 59 concrete actions taken by local governments within project districts. The team is also monitoring the impacts of concerning loopholes in the amended Marriage Law that still allow parents to request marriage dispensations for their children from religious and district courts.⁸

⁸ According to some [reports](#), there was a sharp increase in underage marriages during the COVID-19 pandemic due to a rise in teenage pregnancies.

8. SHIFT SOCIAL NORMS FOR LONG LASTING CHANGE

While many religious leaders and influencers have become champions of change, others have pushed back on efforts to end child marriage. This backlash reinforces how legislative changes, alone, cannot change deeply engrained cultural practices and traditions. Through its programmatic model, Creating Spaces used a multi-pronged and multi-stakeholder approach to shift the attitudes, behaviours, and **social norms** that perpetuate gender inequality and discrimination. The project partners consistently educated and engaged with various community leaders to shift their mind set and gain their support.

When these leaders champion women’s and girls’ rights, community members are more likely to reevaluate their own beliefs and behaviours. Simultaneously, the project facilitated peer-to-peer learning and other approaches to educate women, men, and youth residents on the harmful impacts of social norms and practices on women and girls. Public awareness campaigns through rallies, community events, and forum theatre were equally important opportunities to challenge the status quo and present alternate realities where women and girls are empowered, respected, and free from harm.

Educated communities, together with laws and policies that protect women and girls, have the power to end CEFM and VAWG. The project has documented countless examples of how community members successfully stopped imminent child marriages and protected survivors from further violence. With continued education and advocacy, these promising outcomes have the potential to ripple out and shift social norms on a broader level for long lasting change.

To access other Creating Spaces Learning Briefs, publications and resources, please visit <https://www.oxfam.ca/publication/creating-spaces-impact/>

This learning series is commissioned by Oxfam Canada’s **CREATING SPACES TO TAKE ACTION ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS PROJECT** with financial support from the **GOVERNMENT OF CANADA** through **GLOBAL AFFAIRS CANADA**. Several individuals were involved in the development and design of this document: Kimia Ghomeshi, Megan Lowthers, and Farwah Qasim (Oxfam Canada); Ana Maria Caspe (Oxfam Philippines); Dini Anitasari (Oxfam Indonesia); Under the Rainbow consultants (Sarita Ranchod, Vanashree Chetty and Sonja Boezak); and Jenny Walker.



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