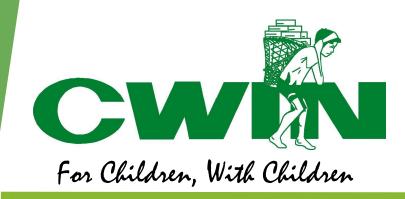# Adaptive Programming in times of COVID-19 Child Marriage Programmes Nepal

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For Children, With Children

Reasons for Child Marriage post Covid-19

▶ **Increasing vulnerabilities:** among urban poor and marginalised communities in the rural and urban poor areas due to loss of jobs, lockdown and increased poverty levels

▶ **Child marriage to escape poverty:** families want to escape poverty by marrying off their daughters so that they have one less person to feed. Parents might also think that this is the right time as they do not have to invite anyone and no one will raise fingers at them

▶ **Lack of social support:** as the local authorities and police are busy handling corona cases and that the child clubs are also not active due to the current situation, parents might think they can escape legal hurdles and get away with social pressure

▶ **Increasing online engagements:** as the adolescents have no schools and are idle these days, they are stressed and are depressed as well. They might get indulged in love relationships as a way out through different means/social media which might increase risk child marriage

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Recent Critical Cases

I want to cite two very disturbing recent cases from Nepal, one from Rukum and another from Rupandehi districts.

▶ Some four boys from the Dalit community in their early twenties were brutally killed by villagers alleging that the boys had gone to the village to take away 'kidnap' the 17-year-old girl for marriage

▶ In another case, where the girl was forced to marry the rapist and she committed suicide or was believed to be murdered by her new in-laws.

▶ Child Helpline Nepal 1098 run by CWIN has responded to at least 6 cases of child marriage during the lockdown and have rescued some

CWIN Initiatives for Programme Adaptations During the Lockdown

▶ **Information dissemination:** We are broadcasting information related to COVID-19 through different FM stations in districts. Utitilising television/radio –FM stations, public service announcements and social media platforms.

▶ **Online** Focus Group Discussions usiling online tool called SLIDO

▶ Online **counselling** sessions by expert Child Psychiatrists and Clinical Psychologists

▶ Field work/case filing and rescue of critical cases through the Chil Helpline 1098

▶ **Awareness** on the Internet online harms and child marraige

▶ Distribution of **emergency relief** packages for family strengthening

▶ **Peer Support:** Peer support through mobile phones. Adolescent facilitators are doing door to door campaigns disseminating leaflets regarding COVID-19 & child marriage in districts where possible.

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Post Covid-19 Strategies

▶ **Structural Issues:**
  ▶ Growing social/economic disparity
  ▶ Patriarchal mindset/gender discrimination
  ▶ Intersectional issues within child marriage
  ▶ Conflict around young people's agency, sexuality and caste and class based discriminations

▶ **Family Strengthening:**
  ▶ Design alternative ways of engaging and educating families for their proactive roles
  ▶ System of family formation and implications of family transitions /address family poverty, unemployment and protection issues

▶ **Child Protection and Social Security:**
  ▶ Strengthen child protection mechanism like the Child Helpline 1098 and guarantee social security of young people

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Post Covid-19 Strategies

- **Education :**
  - Ensure retention of young people in high schools, especially girls
  - Ensure 'quality' education, give 'sustainable' skills and ensure 'income' and jobs
- **Sexual and reproductive health rights**
  - Comprehensive sex education Introduce and start sex education which gives proper knowledge to young people with clear messages.
  - Give an environment to young people where they can discuss SRH (sexual and reproductive health) issues
- **Mental health concerns and Psycho-social support**
  - Address unprecedented child mental health concerns post COVID-19
  - Make counselling services available and accessible/Use online platform
- **Masculinity**
  - Creating spaces for men and boys to share and redefine norms and masculinity.
  - Promote positive role of male members of family to counter child marraige

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Empower the children and young people!

▶ Strengthen agency of young people while addressing child marriage

▶ Strengthen and mobilise adolescent groups/child clubs for awareness and peer support

▶ Facilitate meaningful representation of voices of young people in decision making at the local, provincial and federal levels

▶ Careful planning of community based interventions keeping the safety of young people and physical distance in mind. Utilise online platforms wherever possible to keep the outreach increasing. Likewise, information related to COVID-19 needs to be incorporated in awareness campaigns.

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