

# Breakthrough ACTION Nepal

## Local Systems Strengthening to Reduce Child, Early, and Forced Marriage Project

Semiannual Progress Report  
October 2020–March 2021

**Submitted to:** United States Agency for International Development/Nepal

**Submitted by:** Johns Hopkins Center for Communication Programs

Cooperative Agreement #AID-OAA-A-17-00017

**Date:** May 6, 2021



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# Contents

<b>Acronyms</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>I. Introduction</b>	<b>5</b>
Management, Start-Up, and Initial Program Activities	6
Recruitment and Hiring of Staff	6
NGO Selection	6
Breakthrough ACTION Nepal Office Established in Province 2	7
Program Coordinators Embedded in Municipality Offices	7
Selection of Palikas (Municipalities)	8
Engagement at the Local Level	9
Engagement at the Provincial level	9
Engagement at the Federal Level	10
<b>II. Performance Monitoring Report (October 2020–March 2021)</b>	<b>11</b>
IR1: Build the capacity of newly elected ward officers, municipal representatives, provincial officials, civil servants, and other community actors to advocate, design, and budget for local activities to reduce CEFM.	11
1.1: Conduct Rapid Mapping of Government and Civil Society and Community Actors in Province 2 Working on SBC for CEFM and CP	11
1.2: Conduct CEFM Data Exercise at the Provincial, Municipality, and Ward Levels	13
1.3: Conduct Capacity Self-Assessment	14
1.4: Conduct Capacity-Strengthening Training for R-CEFM	16
1.5: Implement "Learning by Doing" Co-design Process to Develop and Test Pilot Interventions	17
1.6: Support Ward and Municipality Key Stakeholders to Include R-CEFM Activities During the Government of Nepal Planning Process	17
IR2: Support the implementation of municipal-level and provincial-level activities and initiatives to reduce CEFM.	17
2.1: Support Local Structures for Coordinated R-CEFM Action	17
2.2: Conduct Joint Monitoring	20
2.3: Support Government of Nepal during the Planning Process: Matching Grant Initiative	20
2.4: Develop and Disseminate Local-level R-CEFM Package	20
2.5: Conduct Municipality and Ward R-CEFM Recognition Program	20
2.6: Develop Sustainable Local-level R-CEFM Package for Use in Other Municipalities	20
IR3: Increase Learning Outcomes for Adolescent Girls Through Non-formal Education Interventions	20
3.1: Conduct Start-up and Human Resources Activities	21
<b>III. Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning</b>	<b>22</b>
Quarterly Review and Planning Meeting	22
Breakthrough ACTION Nepal: Semiannual Progress Report (October 2020–March 2021)	1

MEL Plan and Performance Indicator Tracking Table Update	22
Other MEL Activities	22
<b>IV. Management and Administration</b>	<b>23</b>
Project Management Meetings with USAID	23
<b>VI. Lessons Learned</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>VII. Challenges</b>	<b>25</b>

# Acronyms

CCP	Johns Hopkins Center for Communication Programs
CEFM	Child Early Forced Marriage
CP	Child Protection
IR	Intermediate Result
IT	Information Technology
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning
MOSD	Ministry of Social Development
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NPR	Nepalese Rupee
R-CEFM	Reducing Child, Early and Forced Marriage
SBC	Social and Behavior Change
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

# Executive Summary

Breakthrough ACTION received funding from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in 2020 to help reduce child, early, and forced marriage (CEFM) in Nepal. The goal of this project is to strengthen the institutional and technical capacity of the Government of Nepal in Province 2 to design, implement, monitor, evaluate, and coordinate effective SBC activities and strengthen child protection systems to reduce CEFM using community-based, multisector, data-driven approaches. The Reducing Child, Early and Forced Marriage (R-CEFM) project was initially designed with two intermediate results (IRs); however, a third education objective was recently added to the scope of work:

- **IR1:** Build the capacity of newly elected ward officers, municipal representatives, provincial officials, civil servants, and other community actors to advocate, design, and budget for local activities to reduce CEFM.
- **IR2:** Support the implementation of municipal- and provincial-level activities and initiatives to reduce CEFM.
- **IR3:** Increase learning outcomes for adolescent girls through non-formal education interventions.

From October 2020 to March 2021, COVID-19-related restrictions were eased, and the project was able to conduct field activities. The project made significant progress toward achieving its goals, as detailed in this semiannual report. Under IR1 and IR2, the R-CEFM project accomplished the following:

- **Co-located with Save the Children's Office.** In December 2020, Breakthrough ACTION Nepal's R-CEFM staff moved into Save the Children's Eastern Field Office in Bardibas, Mahottari, Province 2.
- **Completed net-mapping exercise at the province, municipality, and ward levels.** At the province level, Breakthrough ACTION conducted participatory virtual workshops with 9 organizations, including government counterparts, international and local non-governmental organizations (INGOs/NGOs), and United Nations agencies. These organizations worked together to identify 21 influencing actors related to CEFM issues at the province level and drew links among them on the map. A activity report was developed, shared with USAID for feedback, and is in the finalization process.

The workshops were guided by the following question: *Who influences local-level social and behavior change (SBC) programming for R-CEFM in Province 2, the municipality, and the ward?* At the province level, key influencers identified for strengthened coordination and collaboration included the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Save the Children, Women's Rehabilitation Center, VSO, SAMAGRA, Mukti Nepal, United Nations Population Fund, and Ministry of Social Development as a central body. At the municipal level, the most influential entities identified were the district administration office; NGOs (e.g., Women's Rehabilitation Center Nepal, Aasaman Nepal); local police, ward offices, and health posts; Save the Children; secondary schools; female community health volunteers; and mothers' groups. At the ward

level, workshop participants identified local NGOs, the Ratauli Youth Club, the ward office, the local health post, and local mediators (e.g., marriage brokers) as major influencers.

- **Conducted CEFM data exercise at the provincial, municipality, and ward levels.** Measuring child marriage is a challenge, especially using existing data sources. During this reporting period, the project oriented key stakeholders, including those representing the province, two municipalities, and their wards, on using available data on health and education from the Health Management Information System (HMIS) and Education Management Information System (EMIS) and Save the Children’s Community-based Education Management Information System. Secondary data sources, possible proxy indicators to measure CEFM, and ways to designate wards as free of child marriage were discussed with stakeholders, including Ministry of Social Development representatives, international and local NGOs, and local officials and ward chairs.

**Completed SBC capacity self-assessment for the province and in four municipalities.** To establish a baseline for SBC capacity, the R-CEFM project worked with Province 2 stakeholders at the provincial and municipal levels (e.g., Pipara Rural, Jaleshwar, Loharpatti, and Matihani) to facilitate an SBC capacity self-assessment exercise with representatives from various government departments related to child protection and CEFM. Participants included municipality executive members (i.e., mayor, deputy mayor, chair, deputy chair, ward chairs, and representatives of women and the Dalit community), chiefs of the women, children and senior citizen section and education section, health coordinator, planning officer, information technology (IT) officer, and the social development committee chairs of the municipality.

- The **objectives** of the capacity self-assessment were as follows:
  1. Review and discuss existing SBC capacity to reduce CEFM and associated protection issues within the CP system of the Social Development Division of the Ministry of Social Development at the province level and the Ministry of Women, Children, and Senior Citizens at the municipality level.
  2. Understand SBC to recognize opportunities for reducing CEFM and gaps within the CP system at the province and municipality levels.
  3. Develop a jointly agreed upon action plan for capacity strengthening at the municipality level.

**The capacity self-assessment intended to evaluate the current status and capacity of the entity, municipality, and provincial government at the start of the project.** The assessment covered four areas: program planning, design, and management; SBC theories and models; coordination, collaboration, and advocacy; and monitoring, evaluation, and knowledge management. Breakthrough ACTION Nepal synthesized results from qualitative discussions with key participants that were held both virtually and in person and from quantitative capacity scores. The results were presented to key stakeholders for consensus building.

The self-assessment took place as COVID-19 cases in Province 2 were rapidly increasing. As such, the project decided to use an abridged version of the assessment tool to conduct key informant interviews with stakeholders via mobile phone and Zoom. Once the COVID situation improved, meetings were held

in person via a two-day workshop. The more comprehensive tool was used later and allowed for stakeholders to validate the findings and rate their organization's and department's skill sets on a scale of 1-4.

The following **key issues were identified** at both the province and local levels:

- There were no systems in place to keep records of information/data at the MOSD within the Province and municipalities; this ultimately affects the planning and budgeting of programs;
- Since there was no information or records available, there was absence of activities focused on R-CEFM;
- None of the participants had a clear understanding of SBC and the use and value of SBC to reduce CEFM;
- A lack of data also meant there was no evidence-based (i.e. data or community input) planning. Rather, plans are developed based on personal ideas that include some unfounded assumptions;
- There was no systematic monitoring and evaluation system in place;
- Federalism is a new government system for all in Nepal. As such, government stakeholders indicated they were not aware of child protection and agreed that though it is mandatory, there were no functional child rights committees at the Province and local levels;
- Province and local governments have not yet developed systems for registering development partners/organizations; this has resulted in a lack of coordination among stakeholders interested in working on RCEFM; and
- Ward-level leadership is hesitant to lead CEFM activities or resistant to support this work overall for fear of political backlash and /or impact on their electability.

These findings guided Breakthrough ACTION Nepal to plan and conduct capacity strengthening trainings for Province and municipality stakeholders and support them in developing programmatic activities on reducing CEFM. The R-CEFM project plans to conduct an endline assessment in 2022 to examine changes in SBC capacity over time.

- **Completed project introductory meetings with local-level officials to support local structures for coordinated R-CEFM actions.** Breakthrough ACTION held formal project introductory meetings in person with local level officials in five of its six focal municipalities and 19 wards, with participation from many elected government representatives (e.g., the mayor, deputy mayor, ward chairpersons, municipal executive members, and section heads from respective municipalities including the Ministry of Women, Children, and Senior Citizens). The CEFM situation was highlighted at the national, provincial, and municipality levels. CEFM drivers were discussed, such as urban versus rural factors, poverty, ethnicity, religion, and literacy. These meetings were helpful in sensitizing ward-level stakeholders who are accountable for planning for R-CEFM.
- **Conducted 4-day SBC capacity strengthening for R-CEFM and associated CP issues in two municipalities - Pipra and Jaleshwar.** This training for municipality representatives addressed the gaps identified during the capacity self-assessment. Participants of the training included municipality executive members (the mayor, deputy mayor, chair, deputy chair, all ward chairs,

representative of women and Dalit) section chiefs for the women and children section and education section, the health coordinator, the planning officer, the IT officer, and the social development committee chairs. The objective of the SBC training was to strengthen the capacity of local key stakeholders on data-informed SBC for R-CEFM program planning and steps to design, develop, implement, monitor, and evaluate programs by following the “P” Process™. During a hands-on exercise, participants developed a vision, strategic objectives, and illustrative activities for R-CEFM that their municipalities could use to inform the development of programs and budgets for their annual plans in the coming fiscal year.

Under IR3, the R-CEFM project accomplished the following:

- **Initiated startup activities.** The work plan for IR3 (increasing learning outcomes for adolescent girls through non-formal education interventions) was done in close coordination with USAID. The project conducted scoping visits to key municipalities, reviewed secondary data and flash reports, explored available curricula, met with key education organizations, and prepared and analyzed data and research documents. The final work plan was submitted to USAID during the review period, and the process for hiring IR3-related staff was initiated.

## R-CEFM During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Project progress was delayed due to restrictions for preventing the spread of COVID-19. The GON declared a lockdown in late March 2020 and extended it many times along with prohibitory orders throughout the rest of the year. These COVID-preventive mandates restricted movement to and in the field, thus delaying field project activity implementation. Restrictions eased in October.

The R-CEFM team moved into the Bardibas office in Mahottari of Province 2 in December 2020. Field-level staff there began to implement local activities while following safety guidelines to prevent COVID transmission. However, in March 2021, a resurgence of COVID cases emerged in Nepal that continues to threaten the smooth implementation of project activities. Future activities thus may need to be conducted virtually.

# I. Introduction

Breakthrough ACTION is the United States Agency for International Development’s (USAID’s) flagship global social and behavior change (SBC) program, led by Johns Hopkins Center for Communication Programs (CCP) and implemented by a group of partners, including Save the Children International, ThinkPlace, ideas42, and Camber Collective, with specialized support from Viamo. The project’s vision is to ignite collective action using next-generation and proven behavior change approaches to empower households and communities to become healthier and more prosperous. The work harnesses the power of strategic communication—from mass media campaigns to community outreach—to inspire long-lasting change. The project also takes advantage of innovative approaches, such as market science, behavioral economics, and human-centered design, to drive progress toward improved outcomes in health and other development areas.

The overall project objective for Breakthrough ACTION Nepal’s Reducing Child, Early and Forced Marriage (R-CEFM) project is to strengthen the institutional and technical capacity of the Government of Nepal in Province 2 to design, implement, monitor, evaluate, and coordinate effective SBC activities and child protection (CP) system strengthening for R-CEFM using a community-based, multi-sectoral, and data-driven approach.

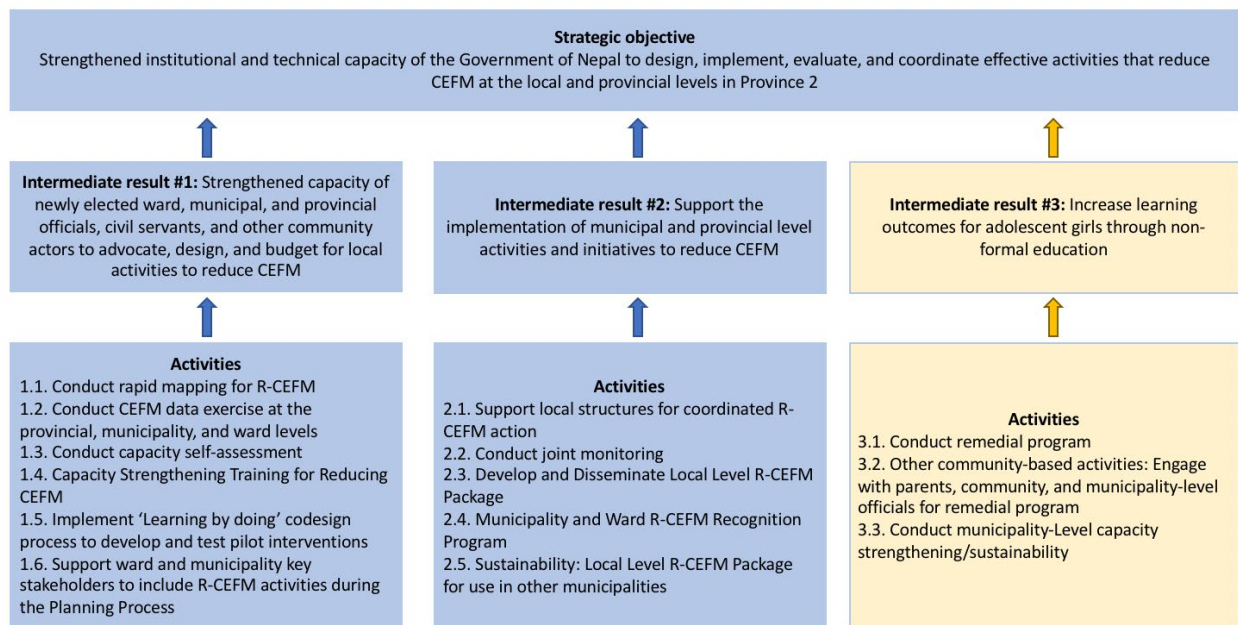
The government in Province 2 is committed and has the political will to address this issue. However, as federalized systems and structures remain in development and as funding priorities lie with municipalities and wards, it is unclear how wards will follow through on their R-CEFM mandate, particularly if infrastructure development is prioritized over social issues. The project’s **theory of change** posits that if the Government of Nepal and its provinces, municipalities, and wards have the structure and capacity to understand and learn about social norms and community-level prevalence rates for CEFM, as well as local R-CEFM efforts, they can meaningfully engage with stakeholders to better plan and budget for R-CEFM activities, which in turn will reduce the CEFM incidence rates in Province 2.

The three IRs for the Nepal R-CEFM project are as follows:

- IR1: Build the capacity of newly elected ward officers, municipal representatives, provincial officials, civil servants, and other community actors to advocate, design, and budget for local activities to reduce CEFM.
- IR2: Support the implementation of municipal and provincial-level activities and initiatives to reduce CEFM.
- IR3: Increase learning outcomes for adolescent girls through non-formal education interventions.

Figure 1 illustrates the results framework for the Nepal R-CEFM project.

Figure 1. Results Framework for the Nepal R-CEFM Project



## Management, Start-Up, and Initial Program Activities

### Recruitment and Hiring of Staff

Several new staff members were hired during this reporting period by both CCP and Save the Children:

- Punam Khadka – senior coordinator, child protection for Save the Children
- Rakesh Yadav – monitoring, evaluation, and learning specialist for CCP
- Kajal Jha – program coordinator (Mahottari) for CCP
- Hajra Sabnam – program coordinator (Rautahat) for Save the Children

CCP also has begun the hiring process for another program coordinator for Rautahat. For IR3, the hiring process for Mr. Shree Krishna Wenju, the senior technical coordinator for education based in Bardibas was completed in March 2021. This position provides technical and managerial leadership for the education component. Also for IR3, the hiring process for two project coordinators based in the respective districts is ongoing and will be completed by April 2021.

With regard to gender equality and social inclusion in staffing, 60 percent (3/5) of the selected candidates are women, and two thirds represent the Madheshi ethnic group, including one Muslim, one Janajati, and one Hill Bramin/Chhetri candidate.

### NGO Selection

It is mandatory for international NGOs working in Nepal to work through local implementing partners. For this project, two NGOs for both districts will be selected to implement community-level activities. The NGO selection process for implementation of IR2 and IR3 was initiated in January 2021. Two different

partnership modalities were adopted. In one implementation district (Mahottari), the project team would partner with an existing NGO partner based on results from the partnership capacity assessment. An Expression of Interest as issued for Rautahat district which is a new working area for Save the Children International.

**Partnership Assessment Tool (See Annex 1) to Select a Partner NGO for Mahottari District.** In February 2021, the Partnership Assessment Tool was used to assess Save the Children International’s existing partner, Ratauli Yuwa Club, based in Mahottari and previously selected as a partner in 2018. The assessment was conducted based on the scope of work under R-CEFM and its compliance with child safeguarding, anti-fraud, and bribery requirements. The assessment team consisted of the R-CEFM core team and the senior award and finance coordinator at Save the Children International. The assessment was conducted in the presence of senior board members and staff of Ratauli Yuwa Club using eight internal and external standard criteria. The assessment showed that the club has expertise in community mobilization and in handling multiple funders, including USAID.

**Partner NGO Selection in Rautahat District.** The project conducted an open selection process for an NGO partner selection in Rautahat by releasing an Expression of Interest, which was published in the Nagrik national newspaper and the Hi-Way local newspaper. An 11-member review committee was formed to assess proposals and ultimately select the partner. The committee consisted of representatives from Save the Children International departments in charge of finance, supply chains, education, CP, child rights governance; technical leads; country office program operations; two local government representatives; and one social welfare council representative.

## Breakthrough ACTION Nepal Office Established in Province 2

**Co-located with Save the Children in Bardibas.** In December 2020, Breakthrough ACTION Nepal’s R-CEFM staff moved into Save the Children’s Eastern Field Office in Bardibas, Mahottari, in Province 2. One staff member moved to the country office in Kathmandu in March 2021.

## Program Coordinators Embedded in Municipality Offices

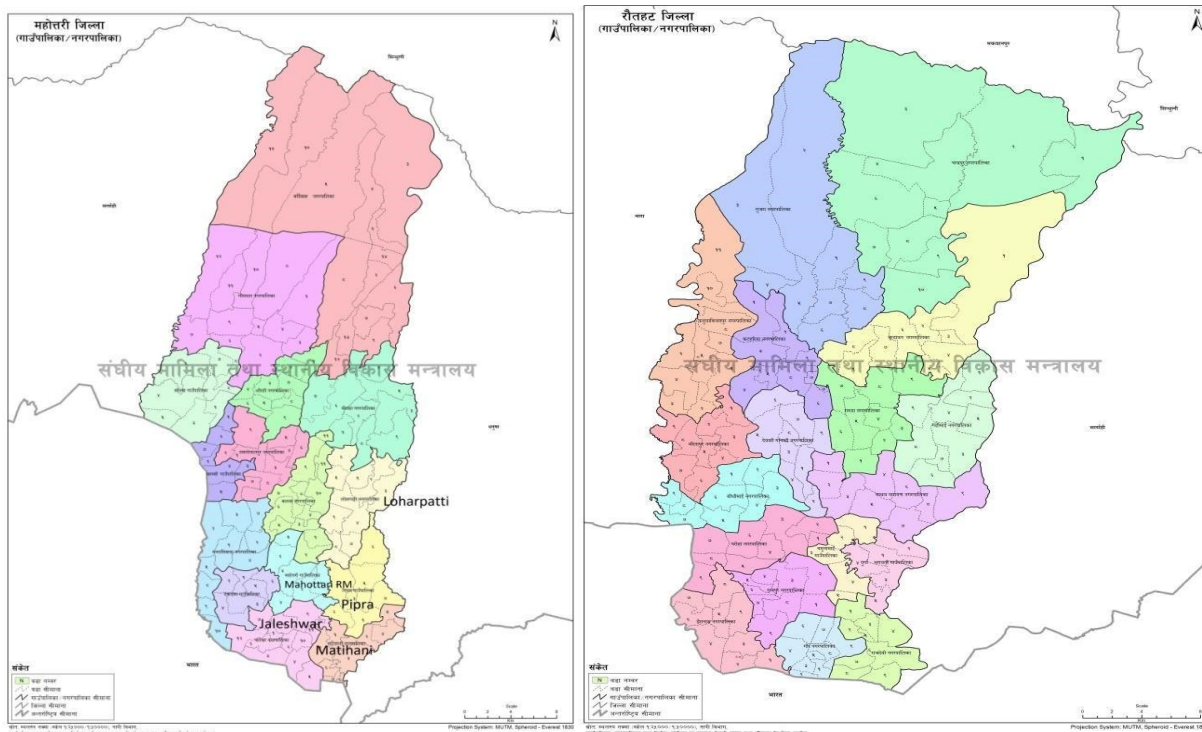
All municipalities of Mahottari district (Pipara Rural, Jaleshwar, Matihani, and Loharpatti) have agreed to work jointly with Breakthrough ACTION to address CEFM and to provide workspace and desks to Breakthrough ACTION staff (i.e., project coordinators) in their municipality buildings. Project coordinators began working in the municipality offices during the reporting period. This arrangement has facilitated day-to-day coordination and program implementation with local governments.

Program coordinators in the social development section have access to collaborative space at the local level. Municipalities have provided office space with tables, chairs, and printers in the municipality building, often in the same room where officers from the Ministry of Women, Children, and Senior Citizens are stationed. For the spaces in the municipalities, the program coordinators coordinated with municipalities stakeholders and made request before moving project’s office in each municipality. However, in some places where the municipality rents buildings for its operations, space is congested.

## Selection of Palikas (Municipalities)

Four new palikas in addition to the two in Mahottari were selected based on selection criteria (below). Mahottari and Rautahat are two districts of Province 2 located west of the provincial headquarters, Janakpurdham of Dhanusha district, and separated by Sarlahi district in the middle. These two districts had already been selected and included in the Nepal R-CEFM work plan. All eight districts of Province 2 share similar indicators with other provinces. However, Mahottari and Rautahat districts rank low on key development indicators (e.g., health, education, women’s empowerment, and economy), both within the province and at the national level. Figure 2 depicts district maps showing municipalities and rural municipalities in Mahottari and Rautahat.

Figure 2. District Maps of Municipalities and Rural Municipalities in Mahottari and Rautahat



Mahottari and Rautahat rank lowest on the Human Development Index and the Human Poverty Index. In addition, Rautahat district has the largest Muslim population. Muslim communities can be challenging to work with on issues like CEFM due to some cultural factors. Along with these challenges, these districts offer opportunities to replicate and learn from project achievements in other districts with similar socio-economic profiles. In the case of Mahottari, for example, the project has already started working in two municipalities, Jaleshwar and Pipara. Save the Children also is working in Mahottari, and the project can use its network there.

**The municipality selection criteria** (based on the R-CEFM project approved work plan) are as follows:

- Located in the southern-most part of the district
- Demonstrated political will by mayors and deputy mayors of both municipalities to take action against CEFM
- Existing social development staff interested in working with the project in the localities

- Demonstrated need based on evidence from the Education Management Information Service data, Flash reports, USAID Adolescent Girls’ Empowerment assessment, Equity Index, Human Development Index, among others
- Large proportion of marginalized populations (for the process and interventions to be tested among those populations)
- Experience and overlap with partner organizations and NGOs
- Safe and secure, with no violence of any kind in the communities

Additional criteria are also considered:

- Total population and high population density
- Percentage of pregnancies occurring among women and girls <20 years old, used as a proxy for CEFM at the local level

Based on these criteria, four municipalities were selected. In Rautahat, we selected Durga Bhagwati Rural municipality and Rajpur municipality. In Mahottari, we selected Loharpatti municipality and Matihani municipality. (See [Annex 2](#) in details)

### Engagement at the Local Level

All municipalities of Mahottari district (Pipara Rural, Jaleshwar, Matihani, and Loharpatti) have agreed to work jointly with the team in the municipality building. To influence local-level planning within the government, the following activities have been implemented:

- Project kick-off meetings
- Net mapping
- Capacity self-assessment
- SBC capacity strengthening exercise
- Data exercise and indicator harmonization

### Engagement at the Provincial level

The project team regularly engaged and provided support to the Province 2 Protection Cluster, which is activated and functional for the COVID-19 emergency response. The cluster, led by the social development division of Province 2’s Ministry of Social Development (MoSD), is tasked with inter-agency coordination to provide response services to protect women, children, senior citizens, and people with disabilities during emergencies. The project supported the cluster to develop a preparedness and response plan. This engagement helped to introduce and create a conducive environment for understanding the significance of CEFM issues in Province 2. Progress was made at the province level during the review period, including completion of the following activities:



*Mr. Thulobabu Dahal, Under-secretary-MoSD, Province 2 giving his closing remarks during Provincial Protection Cluster Meeting.*

- Conducted project kick off meeting, net-map, and capacity self-assessment
- Provided updates on R-CEFM data and situation at a protection cluster meeting
- Decided at the protection cluster meeting with MOSD that a CEFM thematic group would be led by the R-CEFM project representative and include other like-minded organizations
- Held discussions with stakeholders to make child-marriage-free indicators and lobby for R-CEFM guidelines for province 2
- Continued activities related to the formation and reformation of a child rights committee at the ward and palika levels, under the “Child Rights Act 2077” that was recently passed by the province assembly

### Engagement at the Federal Level

A meeting was held in January 2021 with the joint secretary of the Ministry of Women, Children, and Senior Citizens for a record of discussion, as required by the Ministry of Finance, for additional objectives related to informal education for girls to prevent CEFM. At the meeting, it was learned that there is a budget allocation for children and women, even for R-CEFM activities, at the ministry and division levels. However, as local-level engagement in planning and implementation for R-CEFM are more effective approaches, the ministry will plan for additional non-conditional budget allocation at the local level in the next fiscal year. This allocation would allow municipalities to plan and budget for context-specific activities for R-CEFM. The joint secretary will discuss this with the secretaries of the Ministry of Women, Children, and Senior Citizens and the Ministry of Finance to determine the types of approval to be given.

## II. Performance Monitoring Report (October 2020–March 2021)

IR1: Build the capacity of newly elected ward officers, municipal representatives, provincial officials, civil servants, and other community actors to advocate, design, and budget for local activities to reduce CEFM.

### 1.1: Conduct Rapid Mapping of Government and Civil Society and Community Actors in Province 2 Working on SBC for CEFM and CP

#### Conduct mapping exercise at the province, municipality, and ward levels

- Conducted six participatory net-mapping exercises with stakeholders from the provincial level and two focal municipalities (Pipara Rural and Jaleshwar), as well as a select ward in each focal municipality (Ward 4 in Pipara Rural and Ward 5 in Jaleshwar). Due to COVID restrictions, the province-level net-mapping was conducted virtually. After restrictions eased, the rest of the exercises were held face-to-face following COVID protocols.
- The main question that guided the net-mapping exercise was as follows: who influences local-level SBC programming for R-CEFM in Province 2, including the municipalities and wards?
- The three specific objectives of the net-mapping exercise were as follows:
  1. Map the CEFM landscape within the CP system, including actors (e.g., government, NGOs), key influencers, and networks in the federal system.
  2. Analyze governmental and non-governmental links and networks to understand how the CEFM landscape within the CP system works.
  3. Inform the design of capacity strengthening interventions at the province and local levels.

#### *Analysis and Findings at the Province Level*

The key findings of the net-mapping exercise were as follows:

- Participants listed 39 organizations that are directly or indirectly concerned with reducing CEFM in Province 2. Of those, 21 organizations were prioritized and included in the mapping exercise. These organizations included government counterparts, international and local NGOs, and United Nations agencies.
- The five organizations that were considered to have the most influence on activities to reduce CEFM in Province 2 were UNICEF, Save the Children, the MOSD, Women’s Rehabilitation Center, and United Nations Population Fund. In comparison, organizations with the least influence—according to participants—included the Province Police, Office of the Chief Attorney, Province Health Directorate, Informal Sector Service Centre, National Human Rights Commission, Province Planning Commission, and Child Rights Committee. Among those, five were considered

slightly less aligned with the goal of CEFM in Province 2: The Office of the Chief Attorney, Province Health Directorate, National Human Rights Commission, Province Planning Commission, and Child Rights Committee.

- The Social Development Division of the MOSD received technical support from multiple organizations, including UNICEF, United Nations Population Fund, Save the Children, Women’s Rehabilitation Center, Community Family Welfare Association, Informal Sector Service Centre, and the Province Planning Commission. For NGOs like the Community Family Welfare Association, Women’s Rehabilitation Center, and Informal Sector Service Centre, these relationships were bidirectional: technical support was provided between MOSD and these organizations in both directions. Other governmental actors (e.g., Province Police, Child Rights Committee, and Province Health Directorate) were not recipients of technical support from other key stakeholders in this network (according to participants).
- The MOSD and Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) and INGOs, coordinated most with other actors in the network. However, there were key actors, such as the Province Health Directorate, People in Need, Province Planning Commission, and World Vision, that participants in this workshop did not link with other actors. The net-map activity also showed a considerable lack of coordination and collaboration between the two major R-CEFM initiatives: Beti Padhao-Beti Bachao Campaign; and Beti Suraksha Program of the Province 2 government. The difference in the number of linkages across actors points to key actors (e.g., MOSD, VSO) with whom to work and identifies opportunities for Nepal R-CEFM to strengthen connections within this network to foster coordination and collaboration of its efforts.
- A comparison of actors’ connections and influence suggests there are opportunities to strengthen coordination and collaboration with UNICEF, Save the Children, Women’s Rehabilitation Center, VSO, SAMAGRA, Mukti Nepal, and United Nations Population Fund.
- The preliminary key findings were shared with the Province 2 MOSD team during the province-level meeting on December 24, 2020.

#### *Analysis and Findings at the Municipality Level*

According to participants in the municipalities of Jaleshwar and Pipara Rural, actors who played a role in activities to reduce CEFM included the Government of Nepal, NGOs, and community-based organizations.

In **Jaleshwar**, actors with high influence over these activities included the Women and Children Service Center, District Administration Office, Women’s Rehabilitation Center Nepal, Aasman Nepal, and the local police office.

In **Pipara Rural municipality**, participants identified fewer actors that played important roles in implementing R-CEFM activities but mentioned the local police office, ward offices, and Save the Children as those with the highest influence.

In **Loharpatti municipality**, among the 17 organizational and one individual actor included in the net-map, participants identified the local health post, area police office, and secondary schools as the most influential for R-CEFM. Although the Ratauli Yuwa Youth Club, Ward 6 office, and Female Community Health Volunteer program were rated as strong influencers for issues, they received fewer linkages on the map.

In **Matihani municipality**, out of 17 organizations, participants identified Matihani municipality, the secondary school, local police office, Female Community Health Volunteer program, and Mothers Group as the most influential actors for R-CEFM.

Analysis and Findings at the Ward Level

In **Jaleshwar Ward 5**, participants identified the following actors as influential in R-CEFM: Government of Nepal, NGOs, and community-based organizations. The actors with high influence over R-CEFM activities were the Ratauli Yuwa Youth Club, specific individuals in a health organization, the ward 5 offices, and the local health post.

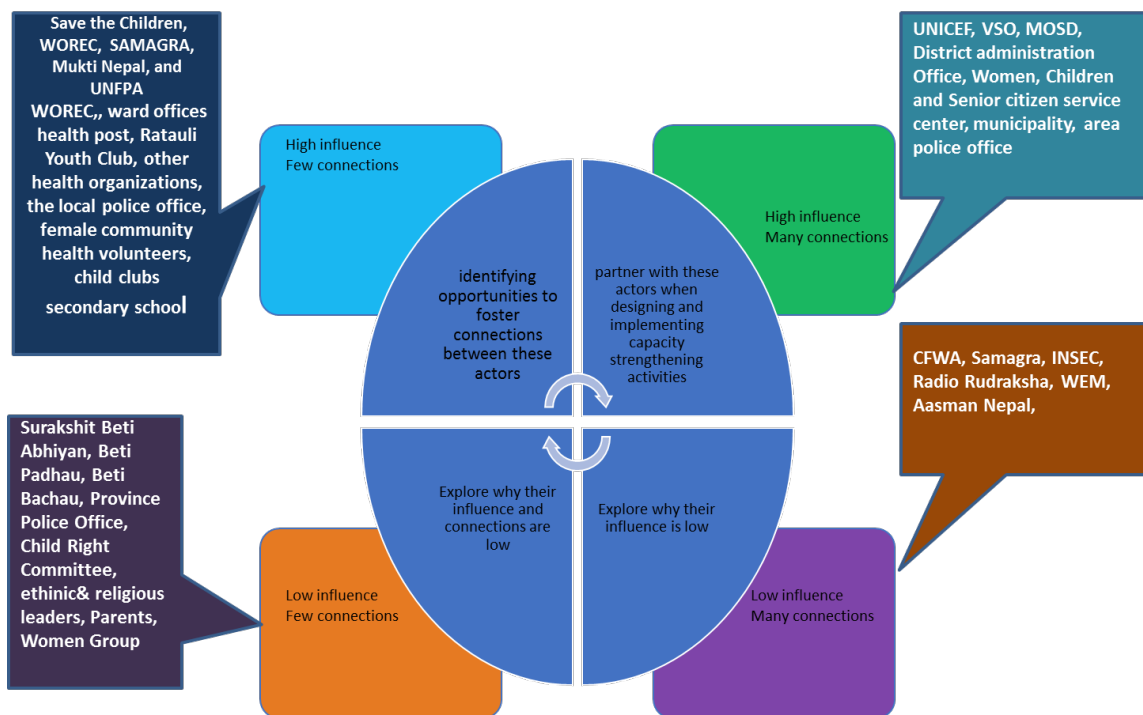
In comparison, participants in **Pipara Rural Ward 4** identified fewer actors that played important roles in R-CEFM. The local police office, ward 4 office, local mediators (e.g., pundits, religious leaders), local secondary school, and Chandra Bati Mahara were cited as the actors with the highest influence.

#### *Plan for utilization of findings*

Our intervention will be guided based on the cross-cutting themes and locally relevant insights gathered during these mapping exercises. To do this, the team will examine actors' influence and connections across settings. This segmentation process can be useful in identifying with whom, and how, to coordinate and collaborate in a given network. Based on where an individual or organization falls on the matrix, the project can develop focused, locally relevant strategies for capacity strengthening activities. For those actors with high influence and many connections, programs should prioritize maintaining these relationships and be sure to partner with these actors when designing and implementing capacity strengthening activities. These partners may be the same, or may vary, across municipalities. For those actors with high influence but few connections, programs should prioritize identifying opportunities to foster connections between these actors and others within the network to strengthen the system. For those actors with low influence, but still noted as playing a role in the network of stakeholders influencing SBC/CP activities to reduce CEFM, further exploration is needed to understand the barriers that exist that limit their influence, and whether they can or should have greater influence in the network.

“It is good to see on the map that there are so many actors that could work collaboratively to reduce child marriage.” – Rachana Jha, Assistant to development inspector, Pipara Rural municipality

The Capacity self-assessment indicates there is no coordination within municipalities, within sections/teams and with external partners. The net mapping exercise was meant to inform a joint understanding of the local situation of CEFM and the opportunities to inform the issues. This information supports the project team to identify what data, resources, networks, and activities are present as well as additional data, resources, networks, and activities needed to improve evidence-based decision-making for R-CEFM. Influential and non-influential actors, their relationships with one another, and their alignment with the goal of reducing CEFM were summarized across levels of government and compared to identify actionable strategies for future capacity strengthening activities.



A final version of the mapping exercise report will be included in the next quarterly report. Building on the preliminary findings and feedback, above, the data gathered will contribute to a matrix of influence and connections that will segment audiences (government sections or organizations) and outline targeted strategies for capacity strengthening activities.

## 1.2: Conduct CEFM Data Exercise at the Provincial, Municipality, and Ward Levels

Three data exercise events were held at the provincial and municipal levels. Participants included MOSD representatives and development partners like World Vision International, United Nations Population Fund, local NGOs, and the Community Family Welfare Association at the provincial level. At the municipal level, ward chairs and NGO officials participated.

These exercises helped develop the practice of updating data both from primary and secondary sources to support evidence-based planning for R-CEFM. Participants were sensitized on using available data on health and education through systems such as the GON’s HMIS, EMIS, and Save the Children’s Community-based Education Management Information System (CEMIS). CEMIS is a database developed by SCI and contains more details than EMIS, such as the number of out of school children, and is updated more frequently for project planning in their working area. Data regarding CEMIS is collected only in program area of Save the Children. It is also shared with local level government and concerned stakeholders as needed.

The government does not have a direct role in the development of the CEMIS system. It is implemented by Save the Children only. However, there is coordination and collaboration with the local government during the data collection process.

Participants also discussed potential proxy indicators related to child marriage that can be found using available data, as well as potential indicators for child-marriage-free declarations at the ward and palika levels, as shown in Table 1.

*Table 1. List of proposed outcome and proxy-level indicators*

Indicator #	Description
1	Percentage of pregnancies occurring among women and girls <20 years old
2	Percentage of complaints regarding child marriage at the police office
3	Enrollment rate for children in grade 8 and grade 12
4	Drop-out rate for children in grade 8 and grade 12
5	Percentage of people aged 20–24 years who were married or in a union before age 20
6	Percentage of parents who say that they will not marry their sons to a girl younger than 20
7	Percentage of parents who believe that early marriage puts girls at risk for health complications

These data include information on both girls and boys where available. Disaggregation by sex will facilitate, at the local level, comparisons of enrollment, drop-outs, and marriage patterns to inform decision-making. While calculations for the child marriage-free indicator may focus on data about girls specifically, it remains important to be able to monitor trends in these CEFM-related indicators for both boys and girls over time.

During the data exercise at the municipal level, there was commitment from the participants to record and keep local-level information. However, it was mentioned that constant follow-up and support are required to ensure systematic data management, such as using data during review meetings and planning meetings. The list of proposed indicators was shared with USAID and feedback received. Further discussion with partners is planned for next quarter, at which time we hope to finalize the list of indicators.

### 1.3: Conduct Capacity Self-Assessment

To establish a baseline for SBC capacity, the R-CEFM project worked with Province 2 stakeholders at the provincial and municipal levels (e.g., Pipara Rural, Jaleshwar, Loharpatti, and Matihani) to facilitate an SBC capacity self-assessment exercise with representatives from various government department related to

child protection or CEFM issues. The exercise was conducted as COVID-19 cases in Nepal, particularly in Province 2, were rapidly increasing. As such, the project decided initially to use an abridged version of the assessment tool to conduct key informant interviews with stakeholders via mobile phone and Zoom. The more comprehensive tool was used at a later date and allowed stakeholders to validate the findings and rate their organization's or department's skillsets on a scale of 1–4.

When the COVID situation eased, 2-day in-person workshops were held, one in Matihani municipality and one in Loharpatti municipality. The objectives of the capacity self-assessment were 1) to review and discuss existing SBC capacity for R-CEFM and associated protection issues within the CP system of the Social Development Division of the MOSD at the province level and the Ministry of Women, Children, and Senior Citizens at the municipality level; 2) to understand SBC for R-CEFM opportunities and identify gaps within the CP system at the province and municipality levels; and 3) to develop a jointly agreed-upon action plan for capacity strengthening at the municipality level, including forming a local child rights committee and ward child rights committee and their capacity building.

The project completed 'SBC capacity self-assessment' activities with Province 2 stakeholders, and with four municipalities of Mahottari district. This assessment provides baseline values to improve specific areas of weakness. A total of 18 questions were used to assess four areas: program planning, design, and management; SBC theories and model; coordination, collaboration, and advocacy; and monitoring, evaluation, and knowledge management. Results were presented to the municipality, and quantitative capacity scores across the four domains were agreed upon by participants for the province and for Jaleshwar and Pipara Rural municipalities.

On the first day of the face-to-face workshops in Matihani and Loharpatti municipalities, the participants reviewed the 18 questions. On the second day, the groups shared scores, and evidence was presented to participants for consensus building.

Participants from the province level were from different departments of the MOSD in the CP system who have roles and responsibilities in R-CEFM. Of the 14 interviewees, six were from different divisions of the MOSD, including the social development division; two were from the parliamentary committee on Women Children and Social Justice, which is responsible for R-CEFM advocacy efforts; and six were from national and international NGOs who were interviewed to gather their insights on the capacity of the provincial government.

Participants from the municipality level included executive members (the mayor, deputy mayor, chair, deputy chair, all ward chairs, representatives of women and Dalit), section chiefs for the women and children section and education section, the health coordinator, the planning officer, the IT officer, and the social development coordinator of the municipality.

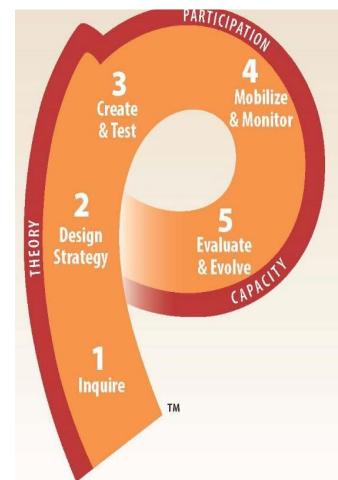
**A summary of key findings** from both the province and municipality levels are as follows:

- There are no systems in place to keep records of information/data on CEFM at the MOSD within the Province and municipalities. While EMIS and HMIS exist and indicators related to CEFM are available (e.g. enrollment, drop-outs, or age when seeking antenatal care), they are not

extracted by the MOSD as a proxy for CEFM; this ultimately affects the planning and budgeting of programs;

- Since there was no information or records available, there was absence of activities focused on R-CEFM;
- None of the participants had a clear understanding of SBC and the use and value of SBC to reduce CEFM;
- A lack of data also meant there was no evidence-based (i.e. data or community input) planning. Rather, plans are developed based on personal ideas that include some unfounded assumptions;
- There is no systematic monitoring and evaluation system in place;
- Federalism is a new government system for all in Nepal. As such, government stakeholders indicated they were not aware of child protection and agreed that though it is mandatory, there were no functional child rights committees at the Province and local levels;
- Province and local governments have not yet developed systems for registering development partners/organizations; this has resulted in a lack of coordination among stakeholders interested in working on RCEFM; and
- Ward-level leadership is hesitant to lead CEFM activities or resistant to support this work overall for fear of political backlash and /or impact on their electability.

Figure 3. The "P" process



These key findings from the province-level qualitative assessment were shared and scored with the Province 2 MOSD team after the operational management meeting organized on December 24, 2020. Separate events were organized in both municipalities to share municipality-level qualitative assessment findings and scoring.

A separate report will be prepared on the capacity self-assessment of the province and municipalities. Based on the findings, the project will focus on specific areas of weakness for improvement.

#### 1.4: Conduct Capacity-Strengthening Training for R-CEFM

Based on the findings from the capacity self-assessment, the project designed capacity strengthening activities for the municipality. Low SBC for understanding and prioritizing R-CEFM was identified as a key issue at both the province and municipality levels. Focus was found to be on infrastructure development without input from the grassroots level during the planning process. The objective of the capacity strengthening training thus is to strengthen local key stakeholder capacity for data-informed activity development for R-CEFM and for designing and implementing high-quality SBC programs. During this training, the participants developed their vision for R-CEFM and built systematic, evidence-based programs following the "P" process, as shown in Figure 3.

The capacity strengthening exercises for Pipara Rural municipality and Jaleshwar municipality in Mahottari district were completed. The main objectives of these exercises were as follows:

- Review and discuss existing SBC capacity for R-CEFM and associated protection issues within the CP system of the social development division of the MOSD.
- Understand SBC as it relates to R-CEFM opportunities and gaps within the CP system at the province and municipality levels.
- Develop a jointly agreed-upon action plan for capacity strengthening at the municipality level.

The participants of these assessments were municipality executive members (the mayor, deputy mayor, chair, deputy chair, all ward chairs, representatives of women and Dalit), section chiefs for the women and children section and the education section, the health coordinator, the planning officer, the IT officer, and the social development coordinator of the municipality. Altogether, 17 participants from Pipara Rural municipality and 30 participants from Jaleswor municipality actively participated.

### Methodologies for Capacity Strengthening Exercise

Based on the capacity self-assessment findings, the content of the training was designed to introduce participants to SBC concepts. Discussion topics included why people change their behavior and how, SBC approaches and models, child protection and its role in R-CEFM, and existing laws and mandates for R-CEFM in the municipality. The current CEFM situations in Province 2 and in the respective municipalities were shared. Participants learned about and applied the P Process™ – a tool for planning strategic, evidence-based programs – to the main exercise. Each stage of the P Process was facilitated using participatory methods, and both municipalities documented their visions, strategic objectives, illustrative activities, monitoring and evaluation plans with indicators, checklists, and activity budgets and timelines for R-CEFM. Pipara Rural municipality developed an R-CEFM action plan for NPR 10 million (Approx. \$86,000), and Jaleswar municipality developed an R-CEFM action plan for NPR 5 million (Approx. \$23,000). They also committed to allocating enough money for R-CEFM issues in their annual plan for the coming fiscal year. This funding was allocated based on workplans developed during the annual planning budgeting session. Draft work plans were developed as an exercise during the training. When the planning process for the fiscal year 2078/79 started, Pipara and Jaleswor municipalities were guided by the evidence-based exercises in their cluster level meetings for R-CEFM and then used the draft plans to advocate for R-CEFM activities at the municipality level. Without these exercises and the draft plans, they most likely would not have proposed R-CEFM activities.

Based on final work plans developed by each municipality, programs will regularly mentor the women and children section for inclusion and implementation of activities. All supporting documents developed during the exercise/training will be included in the "Local SBC Systems Strengthening to Reduce Child, Early, and Forced Marriage – Palika package" as reference materials.

### 1.5: Implement "Learning by Doing" Co-design Process to Develop and Test Pilot Interventions

During the project period, the R-CEFM team worked together with government counterparts to plan the implementation of a proposed HCD activity to co-design and strengthen the government's capacity for reducing CEFM. In particular, the capacity strengthening workshop participants contributed to determining the audiences for the activity and potential objectives and questions.

The team developed draft lines of inquiry (see [Annex 4](#)).

### 1.6: Support Ward and Municipality Key Stakeholders to Include R-CEFM Activities During the Government of Nepal Planning Process

The process of supporting wards and municipalities to include R-CEFM activities starts with a formal 7-step planning process in mid-April. Preliminary discussions were started among concerned officials of the palikas/municipalities during various meetings and trainings, and R-CEFM was specifically discussed during the capacity strengthening exercise described in section 1.4. Due to regular advocacy by the R-CEFM project, Pipara rural municipality allocated some resources (NPR. 700,000; Approx. \$6,000) from their surplus budget during their winter budget session to conduct CEFM activities in each of 7 wards.

## IR2: Support the implementation of municipal-level and provincial-level activities and initiatives to reduce CEFM.

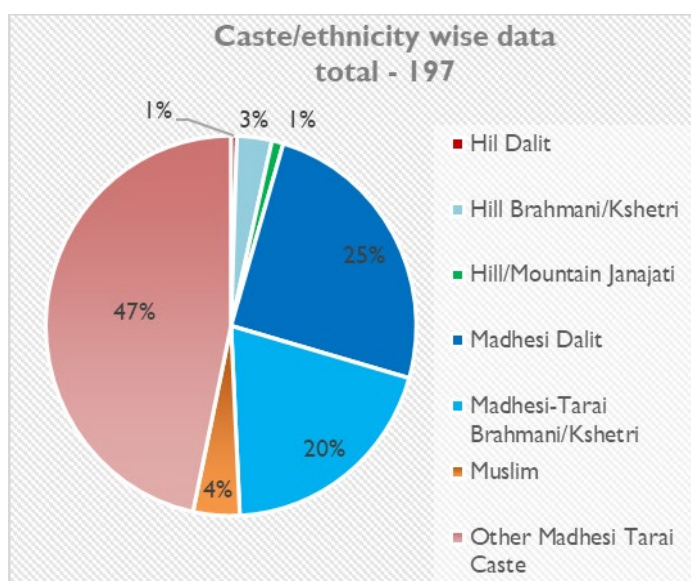
### 2.1: Support Local Structures for Coordinated R-CEFM Action

Project introductory meetings with three municipalities (Pipara Rural, Loharpatti, and Matihani) were held with elected government representatives including the mayor, deputy mayor, ward chairpersons, municipal executive members, section heads from respective municipalities (e.g., Ministry of Women, Children, and Senior Citizens). The meetings introduced the concept of the R-CEFM project, highlighted the CEFM situation at the national, provincial, and municipality levels, and explained CEFM drivers like urban versus rural factors, poverty, and literacy. Figure 4 shows a breakdown of the 197 participants (135 men and 62 women, including 1 person with a disability).

Initially, most elected representatives did not want to take a stand against CEFM in order to protect their political benefits and interests. This resistance to R-CEFM was openly accepted by elected representatives during various meetings where R-CEFM was on the agenda. However, regular advocacy of R-CEFM in different meetings helped to increase the understanding of some officials regarding the gravity of CEFM and generate commitment to adapt and implement policies, strategies, and plans for R-CEFM.

The project team conducted ward-level project kick-off meetings in all 19 wards in Jaleshwar municipality and Pipara Rural municipality. The objective of the meetings

was to introduce the R-CEFM project to ward-level government representatives (both elected representatives and bureaucrats) and other stakeholders, such as teachers, health post in charges, and police. In the meeting, the project team shared the current CEFM trends at the national, provincial, and municipality levels. In addition, participants were introduced to rapid assessment findings on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on CEFM trends in the respective municipality. The team also oriented participants to the local-level planning process and incorporation of CEFM issues into the planning process to increase commitment.



“This is a very good initiative to reduce child marriage, which is one of the major problems in our Terai community. We have allocated NPR 300,000 (approx. \$2,580) budget for the children. Hopefully, this project will support us [technically] to expand more support to reduce it.”Mr. Lokendra Lal, ward chairperson, Ward no. 4, Jaleshwar”

In February 2021, a wider consultation was organized with provincial government and other non-government actors to establish basic indicators to declare wards CEFM-free. Two wards in Jaleshwar and two in Pipara Rural conducted initiatives for the process of CEFM declaration. The project team agreed to provide technical support of child protection indicators to ensure the child-marriage-free status before declaration of a Child-Friendly Local Governance. For Jaleshwar municipality, Ward 8 (Ramaul) and Ward 12 (Tharui) have agreed on CEFM-free ward declarations. In Pipara Rural municipality, the process is being finalized at the ward level and will be completed soon after decisions are made by municipal executives. This cross-cutting agenda is being discussed in all CEFM-related coordination and program discussions at the ward and municipality levels. However, indicators are still being finalized.

The federal ministry requested that each municipality collect and share information about vulnerable communities. The project team provided technical support to the women, children, and senior citizen sections of Jaleshwar municipality and Pipara Rural municipality in collecting integrated data on women, children, senior citizens, and people with disabilities. Technical support was provided to the municipalities by developing types of variables, questionnaires, database support to IT, analyzing data and keeping records of that information etc.

It was conducted with the objective to strengthen the government’s ability to assess data and use it to support vulnerable members of the community on an as-needed basis. These data provide evidence for local-level planning and support processes that allow municipality and external stakeholders to support vulnerable communities. This includes girls at risk of early marriage.

The project provided technical support to Jaleshwar municipality to finalize the gender-based violence fund management and operation procedure 2077 (2020/2021), which operated under the women, children, and senior citizens section of the municipality. The project recommended a few provisions on CEFM responses through this fund, which were agreed upon and adapted by the Palika. A total of NPR 100,000 (approx. \$860) has been collected through February 2021, from Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizens at the federal level. This fund will be used by survivors of gender-based violence, as per procedures, and it will also support the response to CEFM-related issues.

The project team has been regularly engaging and providing support to the protection cluster that was activated and functional for the COVID-19 emergency response. The cluster, led by the social development division of the Province 2 MOSD, facilitates inter-agency coordination to provide response services to protect women, children, senior citizens, and people with disabilities during emergencies. The project supported the cluster to develop a preparedness and response plan. This engagement helped to introduce and create a conducive environment for understanding the significance of CEFM issues in Province 2. The project team also supported development of the format and orientation on

mapping of agency and CP services available in Province 2 to establish a referral pathway for coordinated protection services.

The R-CEFM project has been influential in advocating for budget allocation from local governments for CEFM and other associated CP issues. During the SBC Capacity Strengthening Exercise, the chairperson of Pipara Rural Municipality made a commitment to allocate NPR 10,000,000 (approx. \$8,600) in next year's fiscal plan to conduct activities to address CEFM. In addition to this, Loharpatti municipality has developed a plan to sensitize community members and school children on child rights, CP, and SBC. As of March 24, 2021, the project team is providing technical support, such as orientation and facilitation, to the women and children section of Loharpatti municipality to execute child rights, CP, and SBC-related programs (e.g., capacity building training in communities and schools).

The project team conducted a meeting with the MOSD counterparts on January 28, 2021, and decided to form an informal project coordination team at the province level. The team will be led by the chief of social development division of the MOSD and include members from the same division, other divisions of the MOSD, representatives from the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Law, invited R-CEFM project staff, and representatives from USAID. The team will meet every two months to review and discuss project updates, any issues, and support received from the MOSD as necessary.

## 2.2: Conduct Joint Monitoring

During this period, no joint monitoring events took place.

## 2.3: Support Government of Nepal during the Planning Process: Matching Grant Initiative

A change of modality occurred with the matching grant initiative. Previously, while planning this project's activities, there was a planned provision to provide financial support to civil society organizations directly, that would then support the community structure financially. Now, the modality has been changed to a sub-award agreement with a local NGO that would in turn collaborate with the community structure (i.e., a local child rights committee and ward child rights committee) for the matching grant initiative because partnering directly with Community based Organization (CBOs) or civil society organizations like youth clubs, community based loose forum as previously planned does not comply with the guidelines of the Social Welfare Council (of GON) – a local guiding body – that states International organizations like Save the Children cannot directly implement at the community level. Instead, they work with locally registered NGOs for that purpose. Consequently, the local NGO will not transfer funds directly to the community structure but will reimburse program costs based on actual expenses. For example, the WCRC will develop action plans proposing different initiatives (i.e. street drama, campaign, etc.) that could influence the reduction of CEFM in their respective wards/communities. WCRCs will advocate for budget allotments to support such activities on a yearly basis following the annual planning process. However, during the initial phase of implementation, WCRCs may require financial support to carry out some of the activities. PNGOs would help to provide this support by reimbursing relevant expenses.

During the ward-level project kick off meetings, one agenda item was to orient attendees on the local-level planning process and incorporation of CEFM issues during planning. In Jaleshwar municipality, the project team supported efforts to develop a budget for children’s welfare and issues. This support helped to unpack strategies and key R-CEFM activities.

#### 2.4: Develop and Disseminate Local-level R-CEFM Package

Initial planning to develop a local-level R-CEFM package (Palika package), which will be an adaptation of the SBC Palika Package for Health developed under an earlier Breakthrough ACTION project, has begun. Results from a recent capacity self-assessment has helped to inform the design of this package by providing some direction about the state of the structure, use of evidence while designing programs, the program design process, understanding of SBC, community involvement, and meaningful GESI integration while planning, implementing, and monitoring of programs.

Further, the Project team interacted with the Women, Children, and Senior Citizens section chief and found they were not empowered to take lead on R-CEFM issues, despite being mandated by the GON to do so. As a result, they were not participating in the planning process.

Based on the above-referenced findings, the Project will implement two approaches, Human Centered Design (HCD) and Community Action Cycle (CAC), to address the following strategies: i) strengthening the system for RCEFM at municipal level and ii) strengthening the ward and community level child protection structures. Based on these experiences, the project will adapt the SBC Palika Package for Health to the R-CEFM context for municipalities.

#### 2.5: Conduct Municipality and Ward R-CEFM Recognition Program

This activity has not been started, as it is a Year Three activity.

#### 2.6: Develop Sustainable Local-level R-CEFM Package for Use in Other Municipalities

This activity has not started.

### IR3: Increase Learning Outcomes for Adolescent Girls Through Non-formal Education Interventions

In response to the COVID-19 crisis, USAID added an education objective to the Breakthrough ACTION scope of work. This education component aims at increasing learning outcomes for adolescent girls through remedial education activities and in close coordination with the Government of Nepal education system. The remedial program will prioritize children in sixth through eighth grades who are the most marginalized and underperforming and aim to help them stay in school, which will help delay child marriage.

During this reporting period, the R-CEFM team conducted scoping and then adapted the R-CEFM work plan to incorporate the IR3 education component. The work plan concept document, MEL indicators, timeline, and budget breakdown were recently re-submitted to USAID on March 25, 2021, with revisions addressing USAID comments and questions from the first draft. The work plan concept document and its

supporting documents were prepared based on numerous discussions with USAID and with the Ministry of Women, Children, and Senior Citizens. The basis of the work plan concept also built on scoping discussions with various stakeholders working in the field of remedial education, as well as input derived from webinars focusing on the evolving COVID-19 pandemic, its effects on school closures, ongoing mitigation responses, and emergency education cluster mitigation plans. Mapping templates were designed and information was collected from Province 2 partners to assess the ongoing extent of interventions to coordinate and avoid duplication of efforts. Information was collected on the materials and instructions available to conduct bridging and remedial education activities.

The remedial activities for targeted students will focus on four core subjects: math, science, English and Nepali. The activities will encourage and support the most-at-risk students to continue their studies and help those who have recently dropped out due to the pandemic to also continue with their studies. Life skills will be integrated into the remedial coursework. Community and parental engagement and psychosocial support activities have been integrated into the work plan to create a supportive, enabling environment that will help children continue their education and facilitate needed psychosocial support for children who have endured stress due to the pandemic. The MEL indicators have been aligned with the USAID education MEL indicators.

### 3.1: Conduct Start-up and Human Resources Activities

The project is currently finalizing staff selection for IR3. A scoping visit for a geographic location to implement the IR3 component was completed in February 2021. Five municipalities in Rautahat and four in Mahottari were assessed. All nine municipalities are located in the areas south of the highway with high prevalence of CEFM. Assessment scoring was based on criteria such as enrollment rate, Girls' Access to Education program status, and percentages of Dalit, Muslim, and other minority populations. The assessment report is in the process of finalization.

# III. Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning

## Quarterly Review and Planning Meeting

Two face-to-face review and planning meetings were held in this reporting period (First quarterly meeting in Dec 2020; and a semiannual meeting). Besides them one meeting for financial and programmatic reviews and budgeting was held in Bardibas in Feb 2021. Programmatic and MEL progress, achievements, issues, and challenges were thoroughly discussed with all Nepal R-CEFM project staff. Also, the team discussed and updated the baseline and target values for the performance indicator tracking table. See the report attached in the [Annex 5](#).

## MEL Plan and Performance Indicator Tracking Table Update

Revision of the timeline for the MEL plan, including development of MEL activities and performance indicator tracking table for IR3 (e.g., updates on targets and baseline values), was completed and submitted to USAID. Thirteen indicators are reported during this 6-month period. See [Annex 6](#) for more information.

- Updated performance indicator tracking table
- Updated performance indicator reference sheet
- Updated MEL plan (life of project)
- Updated performance indicator tracking table, performance indicator reference sheet, and indicator performance tracking table progress files

## Other MEL Activities

Formative activities, including the net-map exercise, data exercise, and capacity assessments described in Sections 1.1, 1.2, and 1.3 were successfully conducted at the province, municipality, and ward levels. Data from these activities were used as baseline values for key performance indicators in the revised performance indicator tracking table that was shared in February 2021. As part of human-centered design lines of inquiry, a sample size determination, methodology, and institutional review board approval process has been initiated. See the [Annex 4](#) for the Lines of Inquiry document.

## IV. Management and Administration

Most of the management and administration efforts focused on supporting project activities to conduct in the field. Though expenses in the first quarter were very minimal, it was higher in the second quarter of this project year. The detailed expenses are worked out in the Financial report (Q2 FY21 Quarterly Financial Report Breakthrough ACTION-Nepal) of this reporting period.

Breakthrough ACTION Nepal will work with local community based organizations (CBOs) and NGOs as partners to implement some elements of the project at the community level. The partner selection process began in the second quarter of the reporting period. Save the Children International is using the Partner Assessment Tool (PAT) to assess candidates in Mahottari district and published an Expression of Interest for potential partners in Rautahat district.

### Project Management Meetings with USAID

The project team held weekly project update meetings with the R-CEFM team and USAID Nepal. The meetings have been instrumental to get input, guidance, and suggestions from USAID to implement the program effectively and efficiently. Bi-monthly updates were provided to USAID on the project's progress prior to the onset of the weekly USAID and R-CEFM project meetings.

Staff completed USAID compliance certification courses, such as HIV-AIDS Legal and Policy Requirements, Protecting Life in Global Health Assistance and Statutory Abortion Restrictions, and US Abortion and Family Planning Requirements. All R-CEFM staff on the Nepal team also completed the mandatory Save the Children International compliance certifications.

## VI. Lessons Learned

- Face-to-face activities, especially during the second quarter, was found very useful for meeting project objectives compared to virtual models followed during first quarter of the project year.
- Placing project staff in the municipality is helpful to increase understanding of the issues, opportunities, and gaps in addressing CEFM. It is also important to increase coordination and collaboration with government representatives and bureaucrats to generate impact by working together to address the identified gaps.
- When restrictions related to working in the field were eased and program coordinators were allowed to relocate to municipalities, the project team observed the local situation was not what was expected. For example, municipality offices were not well managed and there were no designated staff for different thematic areas such as women, children, and senior citizens.
- Participants from the municipality give their full time when events are organized far from their regular locality. If the events are organized locally, participants like elected representatives and key bureaucrats, such as chief executive officers, they tend to come and go as beneficiaries of different services or they do not give full time to any events.
- Under federalization, local government is free to develop and implement its own policies, strategies and plans even though they are mandated to follow some federal guidelines. Still, many municipalities are found to be non-compliant with federal guidelines. For example, the Local Government Act 2074 outlines separate roles and responsibilities for palikas and wards but not specific departments or sections. Therefore, one municipality might identify someone from the social welfare section to be responsible for CEFM issues while another might identify someone from the health section. This will need to be considered when designing programs and materials meant to strengthen the system.

## VII. Challenges

- Top-down planning and decision processes instead of bottom up are in practice in both palikas (Pipara Rural and Jaleswor). Village-level issues, such as those from grassroots efforts, are often not included in the annual planning and budgeting. For example, the designated officer is often confused about how to allocate the lumpsum budget for women's and children's issues and which activities to plan because there is no consultation with people at the grassroots level.
- The focus of elected representatives like Mayor and Ward Chairs; and bureaucrats like the Chief Administrative Officer is on tangible (visible) interventions rather than process (law governing) interventions. Construction of roads, water taps or tube-wells, and community buildings, welcome gates, temples are priorities for them.
- Some elected representatives do not want to take a stand against CEFM to protect their political benefits/interests. This resistance to R-CEFM is openly accepted by elected representatives during various meetings where R-CEFM is advocated.
- There is no budget allocation for children's issues. A mandatory 10 percent budget allocation specific to women and children issues was previously required by Village Development Committees (VDCs) before federalism, but there are no such provisions now.
- CEFM is socially and culturally accepted at all levels, including many social and political leaders who defend the practice. Though this was common knowledge at the onset of the project, the norm is more pervasive than originally anticipated and has a persistent impact on the project's day to day activities.
- The age at first marriage differs between Nepal and its neighboring country, India. In Nepal, 20 years is the legal minimum age for marriage, whereas in India it is 18 for women and 21 for men. Cross-border marriages are frequent.
- Matihani municipality has no dedicated human resources for the women and children section, which is led by the health section by verbal agreement only.
- NGOs do not coordinate on general efforts or efforts specific to R-CEFM.
- The project was delayed, until February 2021, in selecting the final four focal Palikas. There were additional delays in collecting and verifying data on the CEFM-related proxy indicators for these new Palikas. Across all palikas, availability of data remains a challenge with direct measures of CEFM (e.g. marriages before 20 years, type of marriage) as well as other relevant socio-demographic factors not used to collect information.
- Stakeholders indicate that data from the Nepal Demographic Health Survey 2016 are outdated. In the five years since the survey, major political structures such as a new federal system have been established.
- COVID-19 is a persistent threat. Government-imposed restrictions on gatherings of more than 25 persons, lockdowns, and school closures are anticipated.

# Annex

**Annex 1: Standard Partnership Assessment Tool (PAT)**

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1S6f3GOPzBo28Lb8bx50CEaatl4WkBzt3/view?usp=sharing>

**Annex 2: Additional Municipality/Rural Municipality Selection Criteria**

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/16o62c6TwwlrfFfp65sdH9rqTk12bbtpc/view?usp=sharing>

**Annex 3: Rapid mapping for R-CEFM: Key findings**

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1UuomlXRg9O2LsN0jfd2pYdcoctKI5vh-/view?usp=sharing>

**Annex 4: Lines of inquiry Documents**

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Jhbtm\\_kX8COTpmFQu8zbdT4hn8DPXTLD/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Jhbtm_kX8COTpmFQu8zbdT4hn8DPXTLD/view?usp=sharing)

**Annex 5: Quarterly Progress Report (October to December 2020)**

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1qKRzG7QaT8g2v4ADvMy6ly5dj7dsd9e8/view?usp=sharing>

**Annex 6 : Performance Indicator Tracking Table**

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1al6L4VrAy9Q0HfPvMn0APDm-64cyn97P/view?usp=sharing>

END