



**GIRLS
GET EQUAL**

TIME TO **ACT!**

Eliminating child, early and forced marriage and reducing adolescent pregnancy in Asia-Pacific

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



LET'S GO **DIGITAL!**

Using digital technology to end child, early and forced marriage and reduce adolescent pregnancy

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The need to address child, early, and forced marriages (CEFM) with innovative, sustainable, and impactful solutions has never been greater. Globally some 650 million girls and women have already been affected by this harmful practice, and today 1 in every 5 girls is married off before the age of 18. This has devastating consequences, often robbing girls of an education, restricting their future work opportunities, and limiting their participation in public life. It also places them at increased risk of domestic violence.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the situation, putting an additional 13 million girls at risk of CEFM. As instances of poverty rise, many girls have been forced to leave school and enter early marriages out of economic necessity. In addition, as girls and women spend more time at home, they are at increased risk of gender-based violence, marginalisation, and social exclusion.

At the same time, the pandemic has increasingly pushed social and economic life online, and individuals, governments, and organisations have become more and more dependent on digital technologies. While this can pose challenges, it also presents an opportunity for organisations working to eliminate CEFM to consider how they might effectively leverage digital technologies in these efforts. However, there remains a serious lack of public information and analysis about how digital technologies can support CEFM elimination efforts.

This report examines the role that digital technologies and online solutions can play in preventing, reducing, and eliminating CEFM in the Asia-Pacific region. Based on an in-depth literature review and key informant interviews, it examines the ways in which Plan International Asia-Pacific Regional Hub (APAC) and other child-rights based development organisations have integrated digital technologies in their programmatic and influencing approaches towards ending CEFM in the region. This includes cases studies of where digital technologies have been integrated within Plan International APAC's programming and influencing work. It also explores some of the digital technologies that have been developed by the private sector and which can be effective in CEFM prevention and elimination, even if they were not explicitly designed for that purpose.

Drawing on these insights, the report develops a series of recommendations about how development actors, governments, and donors working to prevent, reduce and eliminate CEFM can most effectively leverage digital technologies to reach scale and generate impact. The recommendations focus on optimising digital technology development processes; forming the right partnerships; and effectively aligning the digital technologies for scale, sustainability, and replicability. Following are an overarching recommendation and seven key recommendations.

OVER-ARCHING RECOMMENDATION: PLAN FOR SCALE

Many CEFM programmes are most successful at the local level, where their strategies are deeply tied to individual change makers and community values and norms. Replicating these successful programmes at scale has been a challenge for practitioners. One of the key value-adds that digital solutions bring to CEFM elimination efforts is new opportunities to tackle this challenge.

1. REUSE AND IMPROVE EXISTING DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES

Look for ways to adapt and enhance existing digital solutions instead of developing new ones from scratch. This can help an organisation avoid resource-intensive technology development, and increase the chance that the technology will scale and generate the intended impact.

2. OPTIMISE THE USER-CENTRIC DESIGN PROCESS

Digital technologies can offer many benefits to CEFM elimination programming, but an effective process is needed to determine precisely what digital technology could be most effective, and how best to design the technology to suit both the user and the context.

3. ARTICULATE THE PROBLEM BEFORE CHOOSING THE DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY

A well-articulated problem can help guide the selection or development of a digital technology. It can also help in the early articulation of impact, which might also affect how the technology is adapted or designed.

4. EXPAND THE BASE OF PARTNERSHIPS

There are a broad range of technologies that can have a positive impact on CEFM elimination efforts. Identifying these solutions and forming the right partnerships to adapt, develop, and scale these technologies is recommended in order to optimise impact and increase the sustainability of technology-enabled efforts. The private sector in particular should engage more on CEFM prevention and elimination. After all, CEFM is not only a child rights violation, it also decreases the number of future leaders, innovators, and inventors in the workforce of tomorrow.

5. DEFINE AND TRACK THE IMPACT OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY EFFORTS

Clearly defining impact objectives at the beginning of the technology development process can improve the design of the technology, and more effectively align it to generate the intended impact. Regularly tracking these objectives is also important to understand how technologies are affecting key target groups. Digital harms or unintended consequences of usage must also be tracked and addressed.

6. ALLOCATE SEPARATE BUDGETS FOR DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY EFFORTS

Separate budgets can help to ensure that digital technology efforts always have the resources required to effectively develop, scale, and generate impact.

7. DEVELOP A STRATEGY FOR SUSTAINABILITY

A sustainability strategy can increase the chance that the technology will continue to generate impact, even after donor-funded programming ends. Finding the right partners and effectively aligning objectives and incentives is critical to sustainability planning.



The final section of this report provides an overview of how Plan International is contributing to the elimination of child, early, and forced marriage in the Asia-Pacific region more broadly. It describes in detail the programmatic and influencing approaches used in these efforts, and outlines some of the organisation’s work in 10 countries where CEFM elimination efforts are ongoing. This includes details of four “flagship” projects which demonstrate promising practices and show strong potential for scale-up and long-term sustainability.

Identifying opportunities for innovation and scaling up promising practices is essential if we are to realise the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) of ending child marriage by 2030. This is not only an ambitious target, it is also an urgent one: if current levels of CEFM remain what they are today, there will be an estimated 170 million new child brides in the world by the end of this decade. That is 170 million girls and young women deprived of their rights and condemned to a future of poverty, inequality, and discrimination. While there has been progress over the last decade, this has not been enough. Indeed, if we are to eliminate CEFM by 2030, progress needs to be 17 times faster than the progress of the last ten years.

No one set of actors can do this alone – ending CEFM once and for all will require concerted and coordinated effort from a wide range of stakeholders. At Plan International APAC, we are committed to doing all we can to support these efforts, and hope other development actors can learn from our experiences as we learn from theirs. This is why we will continue to publish the “Time to Act!” report on an annual basis, drawing attention to new research on ending child marriage and reducing adolescent pregnancy, and sharing our contributions.

We will also continue to ensure that the people who are most affected by this harmful practice – girls and young women – are front and centre of our efforts. They deserve to live in a world where they can learn, lead, decide, and thrive. They cannot wait. The time to act is now!

THIS REPORT examines the role that digital technologies and online solutions can play in ending child, early and forced marriage (CEFM) in the Asia-Pacific region. Based on an in-depth literature review and key informant interviews, it explores the ways in which **PLAN INTERNATIONAL ASIA-PACIFIC REGIONAL HUB (APAC)** and other child-rights based development organisations have integrated digital technologies in their programmatic and influencing approaches towards eliminating CEFM in the region. It also introduces some of the digital technologies that have been developed by the private sector, which can be effective in CEFM prevention. Drawing on these insights, the report develops a series of recommendations about how digital technologies can be leveraged most effectively to reach scale and generate impact in eradicating CEFM.

The final section of this report provides an overview of how Plan International is contributing to the elimination of CEFM in the Asia-Pacific region more broadly. It describes in detail the **TIME TO ACT!** regional platform and programmatic and influencing approaches driving these efforts, and outlines some of the organisation's work in ten countries where CEFM elimination efforts are underway.



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