CHILDREN OF INDIA FOUNDATION

Terre des Hommes Netherlands | STOP CHILD EXPLOITATION

IMAGE TOOLKIT

Transforming Lives - A Toolkit from the Initiative for Married Adolescent Girls Empowerment (IMAGE) Programme's Journey and Learnings in India

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contributed their insights. Their voices are at the heart of this toolkit, and we hope it will inspire similar initiatives to create a world where every girl can lead a life of dignity, choice, and opportunity.

Team TdH-NL

ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Full Form
ASHA	Accredited Social Health Activist
CBO	Community-Based Organization
CSO	Civil Society Organization
CPC	Child Protection Committee
CRT	Child Rights Trust
CEFM	Child Early and Forced Marriages
EMG	Early Married Girls
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
IEC	Information, Education, and Communication
IMAGE	Initiative for Married Adolescent Girls Empowerment
KII	Key Informant Interview
MCH	Maternal and Child Health
MEAL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NIMHANS	National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences
PMSR	People's Movement for Self Reliance
REACH	Rural Environmental Awareness Community Help (REACH)
SEVAK	Society for Empowerment through Voluntary Action in Karnataka
SHG	Self-Help Groups
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
TdH-NL	Terre des Hommes Netherlands
VTC	Vocational Training Center

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Initiative for Married Adolescent Girls' Empowerment (IMAGE) programme represents a transformative journey that addresses the challenges faced by early married girls (EMGs) in Karnataka. Beginning with a focus on service delivery, the programme gradually transitioned into movement building and advocacy, ultimately empowering thousands of girls to reclaim their lives and drive systemic change. This toolkit is a culmination of that journey, offering practical strategies, lessons, and insights for those seeking to replicate or adapt similar efforts. This toolkit was developed through a co-creation model, with an external consultant facilitating the process and selected EMGs actively participating as co-facilitators from the planning stage onwards.

This toolkit serves as a practical resource for development practitioners, civil society organisations, and policymakers, offering a comprehensive guide to addressing early marriage, gender-based violence, and related challenges. It consolidates the learnings, strategies, and best practices from the IMAGE programme to help stakeholders replicate or adapt the model. Built on the lived experiences and meaningful participation of EMGs and stakeholders, it provides actionable insights, templates, and case studies to support planning, implementation, and advocacy for sustainable change.

From Concept to Action: The Story of IMAGE: The IMAGE programme's conceptualisation emerged from the need to address the complex challenges faced by early married girls (EMGs) in Karnataka. Extensive consultation with EMGs identified critical areas requiring immediate attention: health and nutrition with a focus on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), education, skilling, GBV prevention, and social protection. In-depth groundwork, including baseline studies and stakeholder consultations, informed the programme's design, ensuring it was rooted in the realities of EMGs' lives. The approach combined direct service delivery with trust-building, creating a space where EMGs could feel safe and supported.

As the programme progressed, Phase 2 was envisaged to move beyond immediate service delivery to make systemic and sustainable change. This phase focused on building a grassroots movement led by EMGs themselves, in alignment with TdH-NL's strategic commitment to place children's voices at the centre. The idea of Karnataka Forum Against Child Marriage was conceived as a platform to amplify the voices of EMGs and address challenges like early marriage and GBV through systemic changes. Strategic planning emphasised leadership development, advocacy, and governance structures to ensure long-term impact. The transition from Phase 1 to Phase 2 reflected an organic evolution from addressing individual needs to driving collective action and influencing policies, underscoring the programme's commitment to sustainability and inclusivity.

Building foundations and delivering critical services (Phase 1): The IMAGE programme was implemented in two distinct but interconnected phases. The first phase focused on understanding and addressing the immediate needs of EMGs, laying the foundation for trust and engagement. Through targeted interventions, the programme addressed critical areas such as health and nutrition with a focus on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), education, skilling, GBV prevention, and access to social protection. These efforts were not just about providing services; they were about creating a space where EMGs could feel heard, valued, and supported.

- **Community-Level Entry Points:** The programme's initial strategy revolved around building trust and awareness among EMGs, their families, and communities. Village-level awareness campaigns conducted across districts introduced the programme, using storytelling, community meetings, and peer outreach to engage EMGs and their families. Early engagement activities focused on eliminating stigma, addressing fears, and creating a sense of solidarity among EMGs.
- **Direct Service Delivery:** The programme provided essential services like SRHR, education, vocational training for economic independence, counselling to address GBV, and facilitation of social protection and welfare schemes. EMGs were facilitated to access health services and awareness about birth control, hygiene, and nutrition.

Building a Movement and Scaling Impact (Phase 2): As trust was built and initial successes emerged, the programme naturally transitioned into its second phase. This phase was marked by an expansion of scope and strategy, aiming to amplify the voices of EMGs and build a sustainable movement. The Karnataka Forum Against Child Marriage became the main platform for this effort, mobilising over 17,532 EMGs. The movement's strength lay in its inclusivity—bringing together all EMGs irrespective of their socio-economic situation and working closely with their families, community leaders, government and civil society organisations (CSOs).

In the second phase, the IMAGE programme also focused on leadership development, governance and advocacy as key pillars. A thin but strategic institutional structure with movement leaders at the front was established to ensure smooth operations and accountability. Movement leaders—trained in advocacy, communication, and leadership—became the pillars of the initiative, taking on roles that ranged from preventing child marriages to representing the movement at government consultations. Direct interactions with policymakers provided EMGs opportunities to articulate their challenges, often moving officials to act. Parallel efforts engaged families and communities, sensitising them to challenge harmful norms and practices while creating supportive environments for EMGs' education, health, and leadership. Together, these initiatives created a robust platform for systemic change, empowering EMGs to lead transformative actions in their communities.

Highlights, Achievements and Impacts: The Initiative for Married Adolescent Girls' Empowerment (IMAGE) programme has significantly impacted the lives of over 17,532 early married girls (EMGs) across Karnataka, addressing systemic challenges through a holistic, participatory approach. By preventing 1,134 child marriages, facilitating access to health services for over 3,000 EMGs, and empowering 202 girls to return to education, the programme has transformed lives and communities. Vocational training for 3,816 EMGs enabled economic independence for 70%, while leadership development equipped 1,355 EMGs to advocate for their rights and policies related to child protection, preventing child marriages and gender-based violence, through the Karnataka Forum Against Child Marriage. The IMAGE programme also brought a cultural shift towards gender equality, engaged families and communities, influenced systemic policy changes, and built resilience of EMGs during the COVID-19 crisis, leaving a legacy of empowerment and hope.

Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning: The IMAGE programme adopted a comprehensive MEAL framework to ensure regular tracking of progress and refine strategies. This framework includes baseline, midline, and end-line evaluations, complemented by regular review meetings with partners and stakeholders. Outcome harvesting captured systemic changes, while field-level monitoring ensured activities aligned with objectives. Feedback mechanisms, including consultations with EMGs and movement leaders, informed adaptive actions.

Learning from Phase 1 and Phase 2: Phase 1 of the IMAGE programme underscored the importance of trust as a foundation for meaningful engagement. By addressing immediate needs like SRHR, education, skills development, and social protection support, the programme gained the confidence of EMGs, their families, and communities. The phase revealed the value of creating safe spaces for EMGs to share experiences and build solidarity. It also highlighted the significance of integrating services like SRHR and skills development to tackle the multifaceted challenges faced by EMGs. These lessons shaped the programme's transition to a movement-based approach in Phase 2, emphasising the need for grassroots participation and sustained engagement.

Phase 2 offered critical insights into scaling impact through advocacy and leadership development. The movement-building efforts, including the Karnataka Forum Against Child Marriage, showcased the power of collective action. The importance of inclusivity, partnerships with CSOs, and family sensitisation emerged as key lessons. This phase highlighted the transformative potential of empowering EMGs as movement leaders, enabling them to influence policies and challenge societal norms. The experience also underscored the need for robust governance structures and a strategic plan to ensure sustainability, cementing the IMAGE programme's role as a model for systemic change.

Ways Forward: As the IMAGE programme concludes its second phase, its future plans are rooted in sustainability and long-term impact. The focus will be on integrating the core issues addressed by the programme—early marriage, GBV prevention, SRHR, and leadership development—into the broader programme frameworks of partner organisations. This involves supporting partners in independently raising funds and embedding EMG-focused interventions as cross-cutting themes in their programmes.

The Karnataka Forum Against Child Marriage will remain the movement's backbone, strengthened by a strategic plan that provides clear objectives and pathways. With new funding support from organisations like the Ananya Birla Foundation, elements such as mental health will be integrated while the other focus areas continue to remain. Economic support initiatives and seed grants will be introduced to keep leaders engaged and the movement vibrant. These forward-looking plans are designed to ensure the movement continues to serve as a source of hope and transformation for EMGs. Through this toolkit, the programme also aspires to inspire scale and replication by other CSO partners, extending its impact to more communities in need.

The IMAGE programme has been a transformative journey, turning isolated struggles into a collective force for systemic change. From addressing immediate needs in Phase 1 to building a powerful movement in Phase 2, it has demonstrated the potential of holistic, inclusive, and participatory approaches. The lived experiences of EMGs, their resilience, and their leadership have driven every success, proving that empowered girls can inspire and sustain change in their communities.

Various tools, checklists, formats, and IEC materials have been developed and adopted during the implementation of the IMAGE programme, and a brief description of each resource is included in the relevant sections. The full set of resources can be found in the annexure.

BACKGROUND

Terre des Hommes Netherlands (TdH-NL) is an international child rights organisation dedicated to protecting children from exploitation and abuse while empowering them to realise their rights. Guided by principles of responsibility, playfulness, boldness, and a human-centred approach, TdH NL has been a vital force in advocating for children's rights globally. In India, the organisation has focused on addressing critical issues like child marriage, child labour, and gender-based violence. The Initiative for Married Adolescent Girls' Empowerment (IMAGE) programme is one such pioneering effort by TdH-NL to bring transformative change to the lives of early married girls (EMGs).

The IMAGE programme was launched in 2018 with the goal of empowering early married girls to reclaim their rights, access essential services, and advocate for change. Recognising that early marriage often traps girls in a cycle of poverty, lack of education, and restricted opportunities, the programme aimed to provide holistic support. The initiative started with interventions in five selected districts covering 3,077 EMGs across Karnataka, focusing on areas where child marriage rates were particularly high. Over the years, the programme has reached nearly 17,532 EMGs across 15 districts, enabling them to access education, healthcare, and skilling opportunities, while empowering them to become agents of change and drive their own growth.

Funded by Terre des Hommes Netherlands, the programme is implemented in collaboration with six CSO Partners, with Vidyanikethan as a lead partner and CRT as a technical resource agency. The IMAGE programme has evolved through two distinct phases:

- Phase 1 (2018–2020): Focused on a service delivery model, enabling EMGs to access education, sexual and reproductive health services, nutrition, skilling, and social entitlements.
- Phase 2 (2019–2024): Transitioned beyond service delivery, empowering EMGs to have their own movement advocating for their rights and bringing in systemic change.

The IMAGE programme has shown remarkable success in transforming the lives of EMGs and their communities. Hence, it became clear that documenting its journey, challenges, learnings, and successes was crucial. This toolkit aims to consolidate the programme's learnings, provide practical guidance, and offer a resource for stakeholders interested in replicating or adapting the model.

The toolkit highlights the learnings, best practices, and challenges of the IMAGE programme to guide similar initiatives supporting early married girls (EMGs). It documents the strategies and interventions that helped EMGs access essential services, assert their rights, and build a self-sustaining movement. Designed as a practical resource for stakeholders such as researchers, child rights activists, civil society organisations (CSOs), and grassroots practitioners, the toolkit includes templates, case studies, and step-by-step guidance to support project planning, implementation, and monitoring. It emphasises capacity building to help stakeholders replicate participatory and child-led approaches, ensuring sustainable empowerment for vulnerable groups.

The toolkit explores key areas, including the planning processes and strategies that empowered EMGs, the steps involved in building their movement, and the participatory methods that engaged them meaningfully. It highlights the monitoring and evaluation systems that ensured sustainability and includes real-life case studies and examples from the programme. Additionally, it reflects on lessons learnt about trauma-informed and gender-transformative practices, offering practical recommendations for future projects. These elements collectively provide actionable insights for advocacy and long-term impact.

The toolkit is built on three core principles:

- **Meaningful Participation:** Ensuring EMGs are not just beneficiaries but active participants in planning, implementing, and evaluating the programme.
- **Lived Experiences:** Capturing the real stories and perspectives of EMGs to provide relatable and impactful insights.
- **Learning:** Reflecting on what worked, what didn't, and how future initiatives can benefit from these insights.

A unique feature of the IMAGE programme is its strong emphasis on the meaningful participation of EMGs, aligning with TdH-NL's strategic goal of empowering children to actively engage in and shape initiatives that impact their lives. The toolkit development process reflects this ethos, as it was designed and executed with active involvement from EMGs themselves.

A co-facilitator model was adopted, where movement leaders, who are EMGs, worked alongside the consulting team led by Johnson Thangaraj. This approach ensured that the voices and lived experiences of the EMGs were at the heart of the process.

Movement leaders, selected from the programme's participants, brought invaluable first-hand knowledge of the challenges and successes faced during the initiative. Their selection was based on criteria such as active involvement in the programme, facilitation skills, and rapport with communities. Supported by the consulting team, these leaders were equipped through orientation sessions and mock exercises to co-facilitate discussions, pilot study tools, and contribute meaningfully to the toolkit development.

This toolkit is not just a manual; it is a testament to the resilience, leadership, and aspirations of early married girls. Developed with co-facilitation support from the consulting team and led by movement leaders and EMGs, it reflects a collaborative and empowering journey. Through this toolkit, the IMAGE programme’s model aims to inspire and guide similar initiatives, creating a ripple effect of empowerment for early married girls globally.

APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

The approach and methodology for developing the toolkit are centred on a participatory, inclusive, and trauma-informed framework. This process involved collaboration with early married girls (EMGs), their families, and other key stakeholders who were part of the Initiative for Married Adolescent Girls' Empowerment (IMAGE) programme. By actively engaging these groups, the toolkit reflects real-life experiences and insights gained from the project, ensuring it serves as a practical and user-friendly guide for future initiatives.

Participatory Approach

The toolkit was developed through a participatory approach, involving the people directly impacted by the IMAGE programme at every stage. This ensured that the toolkit was rooted in lived experiences and accurately reflected the perspectives of those it supported. An advisory group comprising movement leaders (early married girls in leadership roles) and key project staff was established. This group provided regular feedback throughout the process. Consultants acted as facilitators, guiding data collection and toolkit development. Movement leaders acted as co-facilitators and actively participated in collecting the data from the field, ensuring that the toolkit's development is inclusive and accurately reflects their lived experiences and leadership growth through the IMAGE programme.

Trauma-Informed and Gender-Responsive Approach

Recognising that many girls in the IMAGE programme may have experienced trauma, the toolkit was developed with a strong emphasis on sensitivity and care. Efforts were made to create a safe space where all participants, especially early married girls (EMGs), felt respected.

valued, and supported. The approach focused on empowerment, highlighting the strengths, leadership qualities, and resilience of the girls rather than framing them as victims. Additionally, the toolkit incorporated a gender-responsive perspective, addressing the unique needs of girls and women while providing specific guidance on navigating gender dynamics and power imbalances.

Lived Experiences and Meaningful Child Participation

The methodology prioritised capturing the real-life experiences of EMGs while ensuring their meaningful participation at every stage of toolkit development. EMGs were actively involved in consultations, planning, field research study, and reviews, shaping the toolkit to represent their perspectives. Child-friendly tools like storytelling were employed to ensure their participation was comfortable and engaging.

Qualitative Research Methods

The toolkit relied on qualitative research methods to gain a comprehensive understanding of the IMAGE programme's planning, implementation, impacts, and learnings.

- **Document Review:** A review of programme documents, including proposals, reports, and evaluations, provided a foundation for the toolkit and identified areas for further exploration.
- **Focus Group Discussions (FGDs):** FGDs gathered collective insights from EMGs, movement leaders, and families. EMGs shared their empowerment journeys and movement-building experiences, while families highlighted the programme's impact on family dynamics and community perceptions.
- **Key Informant Interviews (KIIs):** KIIs with community leaders, partner CSOs, government stakeholders, and the project team provided in-depth perspectives on the programme's implementation, advocacy strategies, policy implications, and monitoring mechanisms.
- **Case Studies:** Personal narratives of EMGs were documented to illustrate the programme's impact and serve as practical examples for advocacy and replication.

Sampling Framework and Size

A purposive sampling strategy was used to gather diverse and relevant insights from stakeholders directly involved in or impacted by the IMAGE programme. To ensure depth and quality, data collection was concentrated in three key regions, allowing for focused exploration within the available resources and timeframe. This approach ensured participants contributed valuable perspectives, enhancing the toolkit's relevance and practicality. Data collection focused on four districts—Chikkaballapur, Belagavi, Bagalkot, and Chamarajanagar—selected to reflect diverse geographic and socio-cultural contexts. The sampling population covered for the study is as below.

S-No	Key Population	Method	Chikkaballapur	Belgavai	Bagalkot	Chamrajnagar
1	Early Married Girls including Movement Leaders	FGDs	1	2	2	2
2	Families of EMGs	FGDs	1	1	2	2
3	Community Leaders and Influencers	KIIs	0	2	2	2
4	Civil Society Organizations	KIIs	1	1	1	1
5	Government Stakeholders	KIIs	1	2	2	2
6	Early Married Girls	Case Studies	1	4	4	4
7	Project Team	KII	1			

Orientation Sessions and Pilot Testing

A key component of the methodology was the preparation and training of movement leaders to co-facilitate data collection and provide meaningful inputs for toolkit development.

- **Tool Development:** Study tools were drafted by the consultant team and reviewed by movement leaders (co-facilitators) and the project team. Based on their feedback, the tools were refined and finalised.

- **Orientation Workshop:** A three-day orientation session was conducted for movement leaders, consulting team representatives, and project team members. The workshop included detailed briefings on the toolkit's objectives, methodology, study tools, and design. Mock sessions were conducted to equip co-facilitators with the skills needed for data collection and familiarise them with the tools and processes.
- **Pilot Testing in Bagepalli Taluk:** The finalised tools were piloted in Bagepalli Taluk, providing co-facilitators with hands-on experience. Feedback from the pilot testing was used to further refine the tools and finalise the methodology, ensuring they were practical and effective for field implementation.

IMAGE PROGRAMME JOURNEY

PROCESSES AND IMPLEMENTATION PATHWAYS

Phase 1: Laying the Groundwork – Service Delivery and Early Interventions

Phase 1 of the IMAGE programme focused on laying the groundwork through service delivery and early interventions, addressing the critical needs of early married girls (EMGs) and their communities. This phase established essential support systems, providing access to health, education, skills development, GBV prevention, and social protection while building trust and engagement. The following sections outline key milestones, strategies, and impact measurement approaches, offering practical insights for stakeholders seeking to replicate or adapt similar initiatives.

Sowing the Seeds of Transformation: The Birth of the IMAGE Programme

The Early Vision: Prioritising Prevention

The IMAGE programme was conceived to tackle the pressing issue of child, early, and forced marriages (CEFM) in Karnataka, India. In 2015-16, Terre des Hommes Netherlands (TdH-NL) conducted a thematic review and identified child abuse and SRHR as priority areas, recognising child marriage as a key challenge. Despite legal prohibitions, child marriage remained widespread, with families conducting them in secrecy to avoid repercussions. These marriages severely limited girls' education, opportunities, and health, trapping them in cycles of poverty.

To break this cycle, TdH-NL initiated a two-year programme focused on preventing early marriages through awareness campaigns and community engagement. Partnering with local NGOs and Child Line, the programme aimed to identify and intervene in child marriage cases while changing societal attitudes.

However, resistance from families and communities highlighted the deep cultural roots of child marriage. Despite these challenges, the programme laid the foundation for shifting mindsets and fostering community-driven change.

A Turning Point: Listening to the Voices of Early Married Girls

A defining moment for the IMAGE programme came during its first year when a group of early married girls (EMGs) approached the team with a heartfelt plea: “While you are doing good work for adolescent girls, why don’t you focus on girls like us who are victims of early marriage?”

This question was a wake-up call. Traditional child protection efforts largely focused on preventing child marriages but overlooked the struggles of girls who were already married. EMGs found themselves in a space where they were neither fully recognised as adolescents nor as adults. Many were isolated—excluded from community events, denied opportunities, and forgotten by both society and their own families. The voices of these young women deeply resonated with the IMAGE team. It became clear that prevention alone was not enough—there was an urgent need to support those who had already been married young. This realisation expanded the programme’s vision, leading to a more inclusive approach that addressed not just prevention but also the aspirations and struggles of EMGs.

Consultation and Design: Identifying Critical Support Areas

In early 2017, Terre des Hommes Netherlands (TdH-NL) conducted consultations with early married girls (EMGs) across project regions to understand their challenges, needs, and aspirations. For many, it was the first time they were asked to share their experiences, giving them a sense of empowerment.

During village-level discussions, EMGs from Chikkaballapur voiced their struggles. "We spoke about how we were denied basic health services and education after marriage," one EMG shared. "IMAGE listened to us and created a programme that addressed these issues. For the first time, we felt like our voices shaped something important."

From these discussions, ten key concerns emerged, later refined into five core focus areas for IMAGE Phase 1:

- **Health:** Addressing malnutrition, maternal health issues, and limited access to sexual and reproductive health services.
- **Education:** Supporting EMGs to re-enter education and continue learning.
- **Skilling:** Providing vocational training to build economic independence.
- **Gender-Based Violence (GBV):** Creating mechanisms to prevent and respond to violence.
- **Social Protection:** Helping EMGs access government schemes and welfare benefits.

These priorities shaped the IMAGE programme's first phase, ensuring interventions were rooted in the real needs of EMGs while placing their voices at the heart of the planning process.

Building Partnerships and Consultations

To shape the IMAGE programme, Terre des Hommes Netherlands (TdH-NL) identified districts with high rates of early marriage, prioritising areas where it already had a presence and strong NGO networks. This ensured familiarity with local contexts and effective community engagement. New civil society organisations (CSOs) were brought on board based on their experience in child protection and community engagement. Key partners —PMSR, SEVAK, REACH, MANUSH, Vidyanikethan, and technical resource partner CRT—participated in consultations to finalise the programme's design.

Challenges emerged as early marriage was deeply rooted in cultural traditions, making families and local authorities hesitant to discuss the issue. Despite this resistance, all partners agreed on the urgent need for a strategic, evidence-based approach that combined prevention with strong support for EMGs. These discussions laid the foundation for IMAGE's successful implementation.

Programme Design and the Launch of the IMAGE Programme

Based on research, field experiences, and consultations with EMGs and stakeholders, TdH-NL designed the IMAGE programme as a three-year initiative with a budget of €749,989. The programme aimed to support 3,000 early married girls (EMGs), 2,500 vulnerable children, and 20,000 community members while partnering with 30 NGOs to create a scalable model. Officially launched in Belagavi, Karnataka, on 1 January 2018, the programme ran until 31 December 2020.

Phase 1 focused on service delivery, addressing key needs such as health, education, skills development, GBV prevention, and social protection. The launch meeting brought together TdH-NL, partner NGOs, and technical resource organisations to finalise strategies, governance structures, and monitoring frameworks.

With a strong network of partners and a clear roadmap, IMAGE laid the foundation for transformative change, challenging cultural norms and providing EMGs with critical support. The programme not only delivered immediate relief but also established a replicable model to inspire similar interventions across India.

The project design, outlining the logical sequence from activities to outputs, outputs to outcomes, and outcomes to the goal, is presented in the annexure.

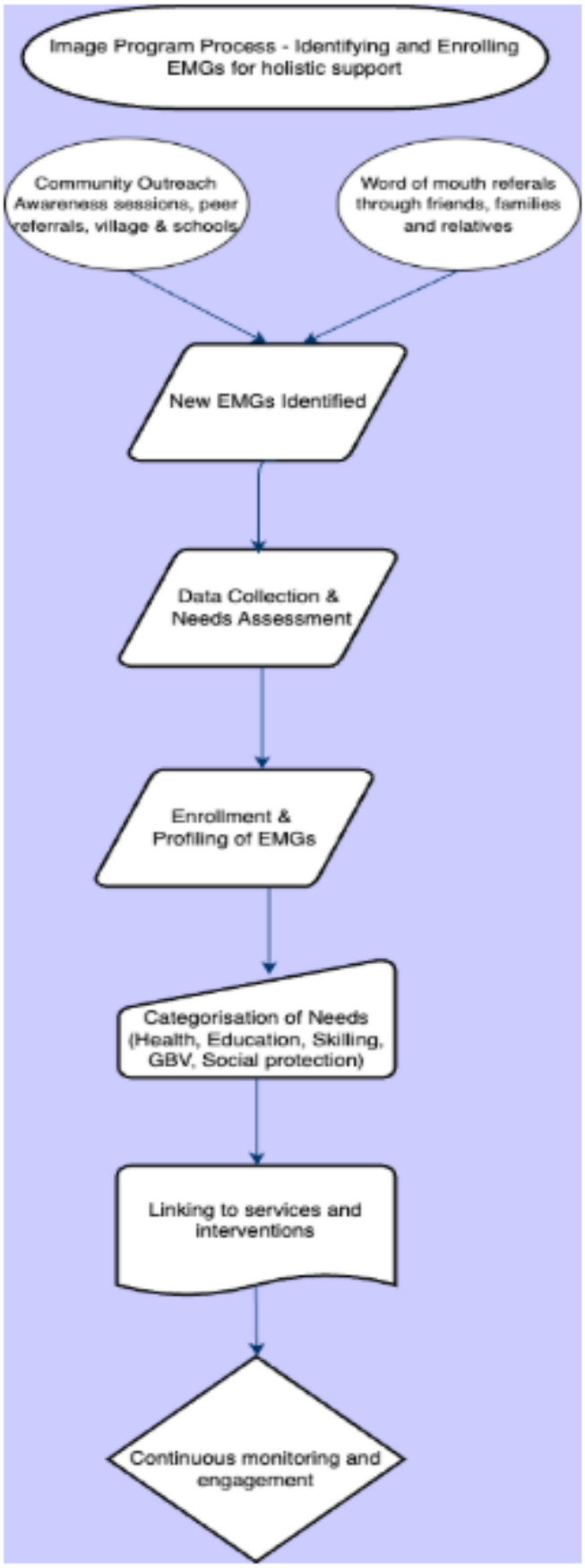
Tool 1 - IMAGE Programme Phase 1 Results Framework
A structured framework detailing key outcomes, outputs, and activities focused on service delivery. The results framework is given in the annexure. The results framework is given in the annexure.

Turning Plans into Action: A Step-by-Step Guide to Implementing IMAGE Programme

The successful implementation of the IMAGE programme required a series of well-coordinated steps that transformed its vision into reality. While some processes were sequential, following a logical progression, others occurred simultaneously to ensure timely execution and resource optimisation. This section outlines the key components of the implementation journey, providing a structured understanding of the steps taken to engage stakeholders, establish partnerships, and deliver impactful services. Though not all activities unfold in strict chronological order, it is presented here in a cohesive sequence to offer clarity and insights into the programme's design and delivery. Each step, from identifying target areas and empowering communities to onboarding partners and rolling out comprehensive services, reflects the collaborative efforts and strategic planning that defined the IMAGE programme's success.

Mapping the Landscape: Identifying and Finalising Target Areas

The IMAGE programme began with a careful and strategic process to identify regions where its interventions could have the most significant impact. The focus was on districts with high incidences of early marriages and a substantial presence of early-married girls (EMGs) who needed targeted support. The selection process involved an in-depth analysis of data to identify districts in Karnataka where early marriage prevalence was alarmingly high. Five districts were prioritised based on these insights, coupled with TdH-NL's existing footprint in the region. The programme aimed to focus on areas where it could make a measurable difference, not only by addressing the immediate needs of EMGs but also by creating a replicable model for future interventions. The chosen districts provided a mix of urban and rural settings, capturing the diverse challenges associated with early marriage.



The mapping process also took into account the operational presence and strengths of partner NGOs in these districts. This alignment of geographic priorities with partner capabilities allowed the programme to build on existing community trust and maximise its reach.

By integrating local knowledge and expertise, the IMAGE programme was able to identify target areas where interventions would be most effective. This meticulous selection of districts laid the groundwork for the IMAGE programme's transformative work.

Partnering for Impact: Onboarding and Strengthening CSO Collaborations

Strong partnerships were at the heart of the IMAGE programme's success. Terre des Hommes Netherlands (TdH-NL) recognised that addressing the complex issue of early marriage required the expertise, trust, and reach of local civil society organisations (CSOs). The partners brought deep connections to the communities, extensive field experience, and a shared commitment to improving the lives of early married girls (EMGs).

The selection of CSO partners was a deliberate and thorough process. TdH-NL used a preliminary profile form to collect information on NGOs operating in the target locations and then subsequently utilised a partner capacity assessment tool to evaluate the strengths, challenges, and readiness of selected partner NGOs for effective programme implementation and collaboration. This ensured that the selected partners were well-equipped to implement the programme effectively. The IMAGE programme began with a combination of existing TdH-NL partners, such as PMSR, MANUSH and Vidyanikethan, and new partners like SEVAK and REACH. Each partner brought unique strengths to the table, enhancing the programme's reach and impact.

Tool 2- Partner NGO Profile Form	**Tool 3- Partner NGOs Assessment Tool**
A form to gather preliminary details of potential partner NGOs, to understand their expertise, reach, impact, and capacities to implement the IMAGE Programme. The form is given in the annexure.	A tool to evaluate the strengths, challenges, and readiness of selected partner NGOs for effective programme implementation and collaboration. The assessment tool is provided in the annexure.

The programme implementation was designed to operate at a decentralised level, empowering each partner to take ownership of their specific responsibilities. Partners were assigned clear targets, provided with strategic frameworks, and given action plans and budgets to guide their implementation efforts. Additionally, each partner was granted the freedom to recruit their staff, ensuring they could build a team that was both capable and well-suited to the local context. This approach created a sense of autonomy and responsibility among the partners, enabling them to adapt strategies to the unique needs of their regions while adhering to the overarching goals of the IMAGE programme.

Vidyanikethan, serving as the lead partner, played a crucial role in coordinating efforts across the districts. The organisation also managed the flow of resources, providing sub-grants to other partners and ensuring accountability. CRT, the technical resource partner, added another layer of expertise by offering specialised training, technical guidance, and support for advocacy efforts.

Collaborating with multiple CSOs presented challenges, particularly in aligning their operational strategies with the programme's goals. Some partners were new to working with TdH-NL and required additional capacity-building to meet the programme's expectations. TdH-NL addressed these challenges through regular consultations, training sessions, and ongoing support. These efforts not only strengthened the capacity of the CSOs but also created a sense of ownership and shared purpose among the partners.

The IMAGE programme's focus on fostering collaboration extended beyond formal agreements. Regular meetings, workshops, and learning exchanges created opportunities for partners to share insights, address challenges, and celebrate successes. This collaborative spirit was instrumental in ensuring that the programme remained responsive to the needs of EMGs and their communities.

Building the Foundation: Recruiting and Training Project Staff

The success of the IMAGE programme was rooted in a dedicated and well-trained team of individuals who could connect with communities, deliver services, and implement strategies effectively. Recruiting and training project staff was, therefore, a key step in laying the foundation for the programme's success.

The recruitment process was guided by a balance between leveraging existing expertise and bringing in new talent where necessary. Each partner organisation was given the autonomy to recruit their team members based on specific guidelines provided by TdH-NL. These guidelines emphasised practical skills such as the ability to read and write, prior field experience, and a deep understanding of the local communities. This decentralised approach to recruitment allowed CSOs to select staff who were best suited to the unique needs of their respective regions while ensuring alignment with the programme’s goals.

Tool 4- Staff Recruitment Guidelines for Partner NGOs
A guideline document for the NGO partners outlining transparent, inclusive, and equal-opportunity recruitment processes for hiring staff under IMAGE. Recruitment guidelines are given in the annexure.

Once recruited, staff members underwent comprehensive orientation and training to equip them for their roles. Initial induction sessions were conducted by the partner organisations, focusing on the programme’s objectives, strategies, and implementation plans. These sessions were followed by specialised training facilitated by the technical partner CRT and other experts. For example, training on mental health support was provided by NIMHANS, while workshops on social protection and advocacy were led by experienced professionals.

Regular refresher training and cross-learning sessions were also integral to staff development. These sessions provided opportunities for staff to share their field experiences, learn from each other, and refine their approaches. Capacity-building efforts were further enhanced through field visits by project coordinators from TdH-NL and CRT, who provided hands-on guidance and conducted performance assessments to identify areas for improvement.

The programme's structure was designed to ensure clear roles and responsibilities at both state and district levels, enabling effective coordination and smooth implementation across all regions.

At the state level, a Project Officer provided overall leadership and oversight, supported by a Finance Officer to manage financial operations. At the district level, across the five districts, each implementing CSO partner had a dedicated team comprising:

- 1 District Project Coordinator for overall programme management and monitoring,
- 1 Accountant to handle financial transactions and reporting,
- 1 Counsellor to provide support and guidance to EMGs, and
- 2 Field Facilitators per district (maintaining a 1:300 ratio) to directly engage with EMGs and mobilise communities at the grassroots level.

The training and capacity-building efforts didn't stop at technical skills. Staff were also trained to adopt a participatory and trauma-informed approach, ensuring that their interactions with EMGs and their families were respectful, empathetic, and empowering. This approach was crucial for building trust within communities and having meaningful relationships with programme beneficiaries.

Empowering the Invisible: Identifying and Supporting EMGs

One of the most significant challenges of the IMAGE programme was identifying and supporting early married girls (EMGs), a group often invisible within their communities. These young women, caught between adolescence and adulthood, often remained hidden due to the stigma surrounding early marriage. Reaching out to them required sensitivity, persistence, and innovative strategies.

The identification process was an extensive effort led by Terre des Hommes Netherlands (TdH-NL) and its partner organisations across five districts. Each district aimed to enrol 600 EMGs, resulting in a total of 3,000 participants supported through five implementing partners. However, enrolling 3,000 EMGs was not a straightforward task. It took six to nine months of consistent effort to identify and engage these girls.

Legal concerns surrounding early marriages made families hesitant to acknowledge their daughters' status as EMGs. Communities were initially resistant, and families often viewed early marriage as a private matter rooted in cultural norms.

Field staff, with deep local knowledge, played a vital role in this process. They worked tirelessly to build trust within communities. Services such as health check-ups, counselling, and educational support were used as entry points to connect with families and alleviate their concerns. Despite this, challenges persisted. For instance, during meetings with EMGs at the village or block levels, family members and community members would often surround the meeting spaces, monitoring interactions out of suspicion or fear. Breaking these barriers required time, patience, and consistent engagement.

The programme's first milestone event—a meeting held in Bengaluru for EMGs—highlighted these challenges. For many girls, it was their first time travelling outside their villages. Some families initially refused to allow their daughters to attend, citing safety and cultural concerns. Recognising this, the programme made special accommodations, including allocating a budget for chaperones to accompany underage girls. These additional provisions covered travel, food, and accommodation costs for both the EMGs and their guardians, gradually gaining the trust of families. Over six months to a year, this consistent effort helped break down walls of resistance.

Once trust was established, peer enrolment became a key strategy for expanding the movement. EMGs identified potential members through friends, family, and relatives, sharing their personal stories to build trust and inspire others. They provided guidance on the programme’s benefits, addressed concerns, and supported new members through the enrolment process, creating a ripple effect of participation and solidarity within their communities. This approach, coupled with the efforts of field staff, ensured that the programme reached its target of 3,000 EMGs. Each girl underwent detailed profiling, including enrolment forms, counselling sessions, and individualised needs assessments.

This ensured that services were tailored to their specific requirements, covering areas such as health, education, skilling, social protection, and gender-based violence. By addressing these challenges head-on, the IMAGE programme not only identified EMGs but also empowered them. Over time, these young women transitioned from being invisible victims to visible agents of change within their communities, ready to reclaim their rights and lead transformative efforts for others.

Bringing the Vision to Life: Delivering Comprehensive Services for EMGs

The IMAGE programme was designed to holistically address the diverse challenges faced by early married girls (EMGs) by delivering a comprehensive package of services. Based on the needs identified through demand assessment and consultations with EMGs, families, and communities, the programme focused on five core areas: Health and Nutrition with a focus on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), Education, Skilling, Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Prevention, and Social Protection. Each service was carefully implemented to empower EMGs, promote their well-being, and create sustainable pathways for change.

Tool 5 - EMGs Baseline and Profiling Form
A form to collect demographic details, needs, and challenges of early married girls (EMGs) at the time of enrollment to tailor programme interventions. The baseline and profiling form is given in the annexure.

The following sections outline these services in detail, highlighting the processes involved, key activities undertaken, and the impact they had on the lives of EMGs and their communities from their lived experiences.

Health and Nutrition with a focus on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR):

A Journey of Health and Empowerment The IMAGE programme placed health, nutrition and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) at the core of its mission to empower early married girls (EMGs). SRHR was not just a topic to be addressed but a vital foundation for improving the lives of EMGs, ensuring they had the knowledge, access, and support to make informed choices about their health. This journey, enriched with lived experiences and collaborative efforts, brought a new sense of awareness and confidence among EMGs, their families, and their communities.

Awareness: Illuminating the Path to Informed Choices

For many EMGs, awareness sessions under the IMAGE programme were the first time they encountered discussions on healthy living, nutrition, menstrual hygiene, child spacing, delayed pregnancies, and maternal health. Conducted at the village level in collaboration with ASHA workers, these sessions opened doors to conversations that were often considered taboo. The programme created an approachable and culturally sensitive environment where EMGs could ask questions, share concerns, and learn. Curated IEC materials on various topics were used by the programme to create awareness and sensitise the EMGs, families and communities.

Tool 6- IEC Material- Prohibition of Child Marriage Act Handbook	**Tool 7 - IEC Materials- Handbook for the members of women and child protection committee**	**Tool 8 - IEC Poster on Child Marriage**
A handbook providing simplified legal information on the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, ensuring awareness and legal literacy among communities.	A guide designed to equip committee members with knowledge on child protection laws, their roles, and intervention strategies.	A visual awareness tool highlighting the risks, legal implications, and prevention strategies for child marriage, aimed at engaging communities and stakeholders.
Note: These IEC materials are given in the annexure		

"I was married when I was still studying in the 9th standard, and soon I became pregnant. I didn't even know how to care for myself. I was just a child, carrying a child," Nirmala recalls, her voice soft but steady. "Before IMAGE, I never understood why my health mattered. No one ever told me about child spacing or how to protect myself. The sessions opened my eyes. It was like someone finally showed me the way out of the darkness. I learned to care for myself, and that knowledge gave me strength." Now, Nirmala shares what she learned with other girls. "I tell them, 'Don't stay silent like I did. Learn, speak up, and take care of yourselves. You deserve a better life.'"

Workshops were designed in consultation with EMGs to be interactive and practical, ensuring that the information resonated with the needs and priorities of EMGs. ASHA workers played a pivotal role in bridging the gap between healthcare systems and communities. By distributing nutritive food and hygiene kits and demonstrating their use, they transformed abstract concepts into tangible support.

Reclaiming Health and Dignity: Mamatha's Journey to Empowerment

I was married at just 14 to my maternal uncle. Life after marriage was overwhelming. By 15, I became a mother, and before I could recover, I was pregnant again. My body felt like it was giving up. I had undergone a major intestinal surgery before my marriage, and during my first childbirth, doctors told me I needed a liver transplant. We couldn't afford it, and people in my community called me a burden, saying I was full of diseases.

I didn't know anything about my health or my rights back then. I thought this was just how life was meant to be—constant struggles, no choices, and no voice of my own. My husband's violent behavior only made things harder.

In 2018, everything started to change when I heard about the IMAGE programme. I attended an awareness session reluctantly, but it was like someone turned on a light in my life. They spoke about birth control, maternal care, and our rights as women. For the first time, I realized I could take control of my health and make decisions for myself.

With their help, I accessed schemes I didn't even know existed, like the Thaayi scheme. The knowledge and support I received helped me feel stronger, not just physically but emotionally. I've started making decisions for myself and my children.

Today, I can stand up for myself and even share what I've learned with other women in my community. I'm determined to ensure that no one else has to go through the same struggles I did.

Building Bridges: Linking EMGs to Health Services

Access to primary healthcare was another key pillar of the programme. Many EMGs lacked basic health services before the intervention, often unaware of available resources. Through partnerships with ASHA workers and local healthcare centres, the IMAGE programme ensured EMGs could seek general health, maternal and reproductive health services without fear or hesitation.

"For me, those days used to feel like a punishment," shared Mahima, a 17-year-old from Chamarajanagar. "I would stay hidden, feeling ashamed during my periods because we had no proper resources. I didn't even know what to ask for." She explained how the IMAGE programme's awareness sessions and hygiene kits changed her life. "It might seem small, but receiving that kit made me feel seen and cared for. Now, I know how to manage my health, and I'm not afraid to step out during those days anymore. I feel confident."

EMGs were not only connected to healthcare services but were also guided on how to navigate these systems. Referrals to local hospitals for antenatal care and safe deliveries became routine, addressing the critical health needs of young mothers.

Barma, a Panchayat member from Teerthakunde, shared, 'Through IMAGE's health camps and SRHR awareness sessions, we've seen early married girls learn to prioritise their health. Witnessing a young girl overcome anaemia and confidently advocate for maternal care moved me deeply—it's a transformation that brings hope to our entire community.

Counselling: Healing Hearts and Strengthening Resilience

Recognising the mental health challenges faced by EMGs—stress, isolation, and societal stigma—the programme incorporated counselling and peer support into its SRHR initiatives. Group sessions created safe spaces where EMGs could voice their struggles and find solace in shared experiences. Rekha, 18, from Chamarajanagar, described the counselling sessions as life-changing. "I used to cry myself to sleep, feeling so alone," she said softly. "Hearing other girls share their struggles made me realise I wasn't the only one. It gave me the strength to finally open up to my family."

Counsellors worked alongside ASHA workers to offer personalised guidance, helping EMGs navigate family pressures and cultural barriers. The peer-led support groups, in particular, became a cornerstone of emotional resilience, empowering EMGs to take control of their well-being.

Expanding the Circle: Engaging Families for Lasting Change

The programme recognised that the journey towards better SRHR practices could not succeed without family support. Mothers, fathers, and in-laws were engaged through targeted campaigns that addressed cultural taboos and stigmas. Mothers were encouraged to participate in group discussions where they could openly share their experiences and learn about maternal health, hygiene, and nutrition. Fathers and husbands were engaged through men-focused sessions that emphasised the importance of gender equality and their role in supporting the health and rights of their daughters and wives. In-laws, particularly mothers-in-law and fathers-in-law, were actively involved in group sessions and community events that highlighted how family health and well-being are interconnected and emphasised their significant role in household decisions. These engagements encouraged them to support healthier practices and fostered a more accepting attitude towards empowering EMGs. Community awareness events highlighted the importance of reproductive health and family planning, creating better understanding and acceptance within households.

Radha, 19, from Belagavi, shared how her family's outlook shifted after an awareness session. "At first, my mother-in-law wouldn't let me leave the house, even for health check-ups," she said. "But after attending the programme, she started insisting I visit the health centre. It felt like a new beginning for us."

The involvement of families created a ripple effect, normalising discussions about reproductive health and ensuring that EMGs had a supportive environment to pursue their health goals.

Breaking Barriers: Stories of Change

The IMAGE programme's SRHR interventions were not without challenges. Initially, families and communities resisted participation, wary of addressing issues perceived as taboo. However, the consistent presence of ASHA workers, the use of real-life examples, and community-based awareness campaigns gradually broke these barriers.

Rani, from Bagalkot, shared, "My father-in-law used to say these meetings were a waste of time. But after one session where they explained how health affects the whole family, he started encouraging me to attend. Now, he even reminds me about my health check-ups."

This shift in attitudes showcases how persistent, community-focused initiatives can break taboos and foster lasting change.

2) Education and Skilling: Unlocking Potential and Building Futures

The IMAGE programme understood that education and skilling go hand in hand in empowering early married girls (EMGs), offering them both knowledge and practical tools to transform their lives. For many, early marriage disrupted their education, leaving them with shattered aspirations and limited opportunities. By combining access to formal learning and practical skills training, the programme reignited hope, built confidence, and equipped EMGs to lead independent, dignified lives.

Reclaiming Education: A Second Chance at Learning

Returning to education was an uphill journey for most EMGs. Years of exclusion and family responsibilities left them believing that school was no longer an option. The IMAGE programme worked to change this mindset by creating awareness about the value of education—not just for personal growth but as a means to build stronger, more secure futures.

Through interactive awareness sessions and community engagement, families were encouraged to support EMGs' return to learning. Open School schemes, flexible evening classes, and localized learning centres were leveraged to address practical challenges.

Pushpa, a 19-year-old from Bagalkot, shared her moment of rediscovery: "When I wrote my name for the first time in years, I cried. I didn't think I'd ever get this chance again." Her determination inspired her family to support her journey, and she now dreams of completing her SSLC.

"Through IMAGE, I witnessed how education became a tool for transformation. By re-enrolling early-married girls in schools like Morarji Desai Schools and offering scholarships, the programme gave them a second chance at life. Seeing these girls thrive in classrooms today is a testament to IMAGE's impact", shares Naveen, Cluster Resource Centre Officer (CRCO), Chikkaballapur

Deepa's Story: Reclaiming Education Through Courage

Deepa, a 17-year-old from Chikkaballapur, had her education cut short when she got married at 14. "I always wanted to be a teacher, but after marriage, my books were taken away, and I thought I'd never get them back," she shared.

Through the IMAGE programme, outreach workers engaged with Deepa's family, highlighting the importance of education not just for her but for the family's future. Initially, her husband and in-laws were hesitant, questioning why she needed to study. However, after attending several sessions and seeing the stories of other girls, they began to understand.

"The first time I held a book again, I felt nervous and out of place," Deepa said quietly. "But then I thought, if I don't try now, I'll regret it forever." With her family's reluctant support, Deepa enrolled in evening classes and Open School.

Today, Deepa is working toward completing her high school education and dreams of becoming a teacher. "It's not just about me anymore. I want to show other girls that it's never too late to chase your dreams," she said with determination.

Skilling: Turning Dreams into Livelihoods

While education reignited aspirations, skilling provided EMGs with tangible pathways to financial independence. The IMAGE programme collaborated with Vocational Training Centres (VTCs), skill development agencies, and local artisans to deliver hands-on, practical training. The training programmes were designed based on EMGs' aspirations, job opportunities, and potential for self-employment. EMGs were trained in tailoring, embroidery, computer literacy, and handicrafts, with flexible schedules to accommodate their household responsibilities. Trained EMGs were further connected to job markets and financial institutions, enabling them to secure employment or start their own enterprises.

For Savita from Belagavi, life after marriage felt like being trapped. "I didn't think I'd ever contribute financially to my family. I had no education, no skills—just endless housework," she shared. Through IMAGE, Savita joined a tailoring training programme. "The first time I sat at the sewing machine, I thought I'd never learn. But the trainers were so patient, and with time, I got better," she recalled. Today, Savita stitches clothes for her neighbours and earns a steady income. "For the first time, I feel like I matter. My husband even asks me for advice on finances now," she said proudly.

"We observed that early married girls often lose confidence after dropping out of school. The IMAGE programme's skill training, especially tailoring and computer literacy, gave them a sense of purpose. I remember one girl who said, 'For the first time, I feel like I can do something for myself and my family.'" Lavina Farnandis- Director, Abhyudaya Kendra, Belagavi.

Counselling: Overcoming Barriers and Building Confidence

Returning to education or learning new skills was not easy for many EMGs. Fear of judgment, lack of confidence, and societal stigma often held them back. The IMAGE programme addressed these barriers by integrating counselling and peer support into its initiatives. Safe spaces were created where EMGs could share their challenges and celebrate their progress together. Counsellors worked alongside families to address concerns, fostering an environment of encouragement and trust.

"I used to think my struggles were mine alone," shared Shoba, 19, from Belagavi. "But in the IMAGE sessions, I heard other girls talk about their challenges, and it made me feel less alone. It gave me the courage to share too." Now, she adds with a smile, "I've learned we're stronger when we stand together."

"Deepa R Nayak, Headmistress at Govt High School, Markandeya Nagar, Belagavi, shared, 'Through IMAGE's skill training in tailoring and beautician courses, early married girls have gained financial independence. Seeing them confidently step into roles as tailors and beauticians is inspiring for the entire community.'"

Engaging Families: Changing Perspectives for Lasting Impact

The IMAGE programme understood that the success of education and skilling initiatives depended on family support. Fathers, mothers, husbands and in-laws were engaged through targeted campaigns and discussions that highlighted the benefits of empowering EMGs through education and skilling. Slowly, perceptions began to change, and families became active supporters.

Meena, a 21-year-old from Bagalkot, recounted her family's transformation. *"My husband used to think skill training was a waste of time,"* she shared. *"But after the IMAGE team spoke to him and explained how I could contribute financially, he encouraged me to attend. Now, I've started tailoring from home, and he proudly tells everyone about my work."*

Rani, an 18-year-old from Chamarajanagar, shared her experience with pride. *"My father-in-law was initially against me attending the tailoring classes. He thought it was unnecessary. But after I started earning from small stitching orders, he told the neighbours, 'My daughter-in-law runs her own business now.' It changed everything for me and my family."*

Breaking Barriers: Stories of Change

The journey was not without challenges. Limited access to schools and training centres, family resistance, and EMGs' self-doubt created significant hurdles. However, consistent engagement, personalised support, and real-life success stories gradually broke these barriers.

Radhika, a 19-year-old from Chamarajanagar, shared, *"I used to think my life was just about cooking and cleaning. When I joined the tailoring training, everything changed. Now, I earn by stitching clothes, and my husband even brags about my work to others. My daughter says she wants to learn from me one day, and that makes me feel proud."*

3) GBV Prevention: Breaking the Silence, Restoring Dignity

The IMAGE programme placed Gender-Based Violence (GBV) prevention at the heart of its work, recognising that many early married girls (EMGs) face violence, harassment, and abuse in silence. By combining awareness, counselling, and support systems, the programme created safe spaces where EMGs could speak out, seek help, and rebuild their confidence.

Awareness: Naming the Problem, Creating Safe Conversations

For most EMGs, GBV was an unspoken reality—something they endured but never named. The IMAGE programme began by raising awareness about what constitutes GBV, how it affects physical and mental health, and why speaking out is essential.

Through village-level sessions, interactive discussions, and community awareness campaigns, EMGs learned to identify abuse and seek support. Families were also sensitised to recognise signs of violence and provide safe environments for their daughters and daughters-in-law.

A KII participant from a CSO in Belagavi shared: *"Initially, families did not want to acknowledge violence, but as the sessions continued, we saw mothers and sisters coming forward to discuss their experiences. It was the first step in breaking the silence."*

Sangeetha from Bagalkot shared, *"I thought it was normal to tolerate my husband's anger as it was just part of our culture. I didn't even realise it was violence. After attending IMAGE sessions, I learned I didn't have to accept it. The counsellor guided me, and now I feel stronger and aware of my rights. My family supports me too."*

Counselling: Healing from Within

Addressing GBV required more than just awareness—it demanded emotional support and healing. The IMAGE programme integrated counselling sessions and peer support groups where EMGs could share their struggles without fear of judgment.

Safe spaces allowed girls to voice their pain and find strength in shared experiences. Counsellors worked closely with EMGs, helping them navigate family pressures, societal stigma, and mental health challenges.

A father from Chamarajnagar reflected in an FGD: "I didn't know my daughter was going through so much until she told us after a counselling session. These meetings made me realise we need to listen to her and stand by her. It's our responsibility to protect her dignity and happiness."

Lakshmamma, 20, from Bagalkot, faced years of verbal and physical abuse, thinking it was her fate. “I didn’t know I could say no or that it was not my fault,” she said. Through IMAGE counselling, she gained the courage to speak up. “Hearing others’ stories made me feel less alone. The counsellor helped me talk to my husband, and now things are changing at home. I feel stronger.”

Building Support Systems: Engaging Families and Communities

GBV prevention cannot succeed without the involvement of families and communities. The IMAGE programme worked with mothers, fathers, husbands, and in-laws to challenge harmful norms and build supportive environments for EMGs. Targeted campaigns such as group sessions (both women and men-focused sessions), local events and village discussions highlighted the importance of safety, respect, and gender equality within households. Government stakeholders played a key role in strengthening local support systems for GBV prevention. IMAGE collaborated with child protection units, legal aid authorities, women and child welfare departments, and healthcare providers to ensure survivors had access to essential services. Police and district officials were sensitised to trauma-informed and survivor-centred responses, while ASHA and Anganwadi workers were trained to identify and refer cases.

A father-in-law from Belagavi shared during a village meeting: "I never realised how much my daughter endured until the sessions. The IMAGE programme made me see how our silence allows violence to continue. Now, I stand by her, ensuring our home is a safe place for her and her future."

A government official from Bagalkot shared: "IMAGE's work made GBV a visible issue in our community. Girls now come forward to report violence, and families are more supportive. We've started working with ASHA workers and Panchayat members to ensure timely action and better access to healthcare and legal aid.

Breaking Barriers: Stories of Change

Overcoming the silence around GBV was not easy. The programme faced initial resistance from families and communities, but consistent engagement, real-life examples, and the support of local leaders helped break these barriers.

Padmavathi, 21, from Chamarajnagar, endured years of domestic violence but never spoke up. *“I thought this was just a part of being a woman,”* she said. Through the IMAGE programme, Padmavathi attended a group counselling session that changed her perspective. *“Hearing other girls’ stories gave me the courage to share my own. With their support, I confronted my family and sought help. Now, I’m rebuilding my life with dignity.”*

A mother from Belagavi shared during an FGD: “When my daughter first spoke about the abuse, I didn’t believe her. But the IMAGE sessions helped me understand what she was going through. I now stand with her and make sure she knows she’s not alone. We’re learning together that violence has no place in our home.”

4) Social Protection: Unlocking Opportunities and Building Resilience

The IMAGE programme identified social protection as a vital intervention for empowering early-married girls (EMGs) and their families. For many EMGs, economic insecurity and lack of access to government welfare schemes trapped them in cycles of vulnerability. By addressing these gaps through awareness and facilitation support to apply and avail schemes and services, the programme ensured that EMGs could access essential services and entitlements, paving the way for a more stable and secure future, especially at times of shocks and disasters.

Awareness: Opening Doors to Rights and Entitlements

For EMGs and their families, accessing social protection schemes often felt impossible. Many were unaware of the government programmes available to them, while others faced barriers like missing documents or complex application processes. The IMAGE programme began by educating communities about their entitlements—*ration cards, widow pensions, health insurance,* and *maternity benefits*. Field facilitators organised village-level awareness sessions to introduce EMGs and their families to the concept of social protection. These sessions brought a sense of hope to households that had long felt neglected.

Kamla's Story: Finding Hope

Kamla, 18, from Chamarajanagar, shared how hard life was for her family. "We struggled every day, not knowing there was help for people like us," she said softly.

When the IMAGE team came to her village, they spoke about government schemes like the Thaayi card and ration support. "I didn't believe it was for us," Kamla admitted. "But they helped us step by step—finding the right documents, filling the forms, and guiding us through."

She smiled as she recalled the day her family got their ration card. "It wasn't just food—it felt like someone cared about us. For the first time, we felt seen. Now, my family doesn't go hungry, and I feel like we can face the future."

By working with community-based organisations (CBOs) and trusted local leaders, the programme created an approachable and inclusive environment. EMGs began to see government schemes not as distant opportunities but as achievable rights they deserved.

Facilitation: Bridging Gaps and Overcoming Barriers

One of the key challenges in accessing social protection was the absence of necessary documents, like Aadhar cards or ration cards. The IMAGE programme addressed this by organizing social protection camps where EMGs and their families received support to overcome these bureaucratic hurdles. Field facilitators worked alongside local government departments to streamline applications and expedite processes. A tracking system was used by the programme to map, facilitate and monitor the progress of social protection schemes and entitlements.

Tool 9- Social Protection Schemes facilitation Tracker
A tracking tool to monitor and document the facilitation of EMGs in accessing social protection schemes and entitlements. The tracker is given in the annexure.

Priya, an 18-year-old from Bagalkot, shared her struggles with accessing social protection. "For years, my name was missing from our ration card. Without it, I couldn't apply for health benefits or other schemes," she said quietly. When the IMAGE team visited her village, they explained how they could help. "They didn't just tell me what to do - they sat with me, filled out the forms, and even came with me to the government office. They kept following up until my name was added." She smiled as she held her updated ration card. "It might seem like a small thing, but to me, it meant being seen. Now, I can apply for the benefits I need and support my family better."

In many cases, EMGs also faced stigma or shame when seeking government support. The IMAGE programme helped break these barriers by facilitating open conversations with government officials concerned. By involving local authorities and trusted facilitators, the programme encouraged families to claim their rights without fear.

Maternal Benefits: A Lifeline for Young Mothers

Young mothers often face severe challenges, including limited access to maternity care and financial support. The IMAGE programme placed special emphasis on linking EMGs to Janani Suraksha Yojana and other maternity benefits and childcare support, ensuring that they received the assistance they needed.

Nandini, an 18-year-old from Chamarajanagar, shared her experience: *"When I was pregnant, I didn't even know maternity benefits existed. We couldn't afford regular hospital check-ups, and I was scared about the delivery. The IMAGE team explained the Janani Suraksha Yojana and helped me get registered. They even accompanied me to the hospital for my appointments. Because of their help, I had a safe delivery. It felt like someone finally cared for me and my baby."*

These efforts not only improved maternal health outcomes but also eased the financial burden on families, enabling them to focus on building a more secure future.

Breaking Barriers: Engaging Families and Communities

The IMAGE programme understood that sustainable change required collective action. As with other services, here, too, families were actively engaged to help them understand the importance of social protection. Campaigns and meetings were organised to challenge the stigma associated with welfare schemes and emphasise how access to entitlements could transform their lives.

Shanthi, a mother-in-law from Chamarajanagar, shared her transformation, *"I used to think all these government schemes were just talk. Why waste time on them? But when the IMAGE team came to our village and explained the benefits, I saw how they could help us. My daughter-in-law applied for maternity support, and now we're even getting rations regularly. I make sure she attends every meeting now - it's for the good of our whole family."*

By engaging families, the programme ensured that EMGs received the necessary support to access and utilise welfare schemes.

A Story of Change: Kavitha's Path to Stability

Kavitha, an 18-year-old from Belagavi, faced severe financial difficulties after her early marriage. "We barely had enough food. Some days, I had to skip meals so my husband could eat," she recalled with a heavy heart.

Through the IMAGE programme's social protection camp, Kavitha learned about ration benefits and how to apply. "The team didn't just explain—they stayed with us through every step, filling forms and following up until we got our ration card," she shared. "When the card arrived, I cried. It meant I didn't have to go hungry anymore."

Today, Kavitha is a vocal advocate in her village, encouraging other early married girls to seek support. "If I could get help, so can they," she says with confidence.

Her story underscores the transformative power of social protection initiatives in breaking cycles of poverty and restoring hope to vulnerable families.

Four informal village-level groups were introduced to create a supportive space for early married girls (EMGs) and promote collective action. These groups aimed to empower EMGs while involving families and communities to drive long-term change. EMG Groups provided a safe platform for early married girls to connect, share experiences, and build solidarity. Vulnerable Girls' Groups targeted school-going girls aged 12–18, raising awareness about the risks of child marriage and encouraging education. Family Groups engaged mothers and mothers-in-law through discussions and sensitisation sessions to create a supportive environment for EMGs within households. Spouse Groups involve husbands in conversations about gender equality, family well-being, and shared responsibilities that includes household and childcare, encouraging them to support their wives' education and growth. These groups laid the foundation for stronger community involvement and helped shift mindsets toward empowering EMGs.

Lessons from the Ground: Insights from Phase One of IMAGE

The first phase of the IMAGE programme offered critical insights at various stages—design, implementation, monitoring, and partnerships—that contributed to its success. These learnings serve as a guide for organisations planning similar interventions to empower early married girls (EMGs) or other such vulnerable communities.

1. Listening to EMGs Shapes Program Design: The IMAGE programme began with a focus on prevention but evolved to include support for EMGs after recognising both their unique challenges and strengths. Incorporating their voices during the design phase ensured that the programme addressed their lived realities and needs effectively. This underscores the importance of creating safe and inclusive spaces and opportunities for the meaningful participation of EMGs throughout the project cycle i.e. working with EMGs rather than working for EMGs.

2. Ground-Level Needs Assessment Strengthens Programme Design: Consultations with EMGs, families, and stakeholders during the design stage were instrumental in identifying key areas—SRHR, education, skilling, social protection, and GBV prevention. This focused approach enabled the programme to deliver targeted and impactful interventions.

3. Family Support is Critical for EMG Participation: Engaging family members—parents, spouses, and in-laws—helped create a supportive environment for EMGs. Awareness sessions and dialogues changed perceptions and encouraged families to actively support EMGs' access to education, health, and social services.

4. Peer Support Builds Confidence and Encouragement: The programme demonstrated that peer support groups play a crucial role in building emotional resilience among EMGs. Safe spaces for sharing experiences in these groups provided encouragement and collective confidence.

5. Holistic and Integrated Services Yield Better Outcomes: The programme's integrated approach—combining SRHR, education, skilling, GBV prevention, and social protection—addressed multiple needs of EMGs simultaneously. This ensured greater impact and sustainability of outcomes.

6. Collaboration with Grassroots Service Providers is Essential: The involvement of frontline workers like ASHA workers and local service providers and engaging them as change makers helped deliver health and support services effectively. Building partnerships with trusted community actors enhanced outreach and acceptance of the programme.

7. Social Protection through Convergence Improves Livelihood Security: Linking EMGs and their families to government welfare schemes addressed poverty-related challenges. Facilitating access to ration cards, health insurance, and maternity benefits demonstrated how convergence with existing systems can strengthen programme outcomes.

8. Evidence Gathering and Reflection Enhance Program Quality: The programme's emphasis on monitoring and evidence gathering through baseline, midline, and end-line studies helped track progress and impact. Regular reflections and reviews allowed for adaptive planning and course corrections.

9. Action Research Strengthens Learning and Innovation: The programme adopted an action-research model where interventions were implemented, reviewed, and refined based on field learning. This approach ensured continuous improvement and relevance to the needs of EMGs.

10. Strong Partnerships Drive Success: Collaborating with local CSOs and technical resource agencies brought expertise, field experience, and community trust to the programme. Strategic partnerships ensured effective implementation and strengthened outreach.

11. Use of technology tools like CommCare and Google Forms for needs assessments and field studies enhanced the project's ability to deliver services effectively and efficiently. It also empowered EMGs by strengthening their confidence in using tech solutions.

12. Sustained Family and Community Engagement Overcomes Barriers: Consistent and culturally sensitive engagement with families and communities helped overcome resistance to issues like SRHR and GBV. Involving boys and men proved essential in addressing deeply rooted social and cultural norms. Through patience, persistence and gender-transformative approaches, the programme gradually broke barriers, fostered acceptance, and created a supportive environment for lasting change.

PHASE 2 - MOVEMENT BUILDING

Phase 1: Service Delivery (2018-2020) ==> Phase 2: Movement Building & Systemic Change (2019-2024)

Phase 2: Sustaining Change – Movement Building and Advocacy

This section explores the evolution of IMAGE NEXT, tracing its journey from the conception of the movement to its implementation. It highlights the processes involved in conceptualising, designing, and rolling out the movement, as well as the strategies used to monitor its progress and measure its success. The section also highlights the lessons learnt during this phase and outlines future plans to sustain the movement to ensure the rights and development of EMGs.

Planting the Roots: Ideating a Movement for Sustainable Change

Initially, **t**he IMAGE programme focused only on service delivery for early married girls (EMGs), aiming to improve health, education, skilling, social protection, and GBV prevention. However, during the 2018 outcome harvesting exercise, EMGs and stakeholders highlighted the need for systemic change. While families were gradually shifting attitudes, government action remained limited. EMGs emphasised the need for stronger policies, preventive measures, and responsive services, leading to discussions on advocacy and movement-building.

At the same time, momentum around community-led movements was growing in the social sector, reinforcing the idea of expanding IMAGE beyond direct services.

In 2019, a funding opportunity from Comic Relief aligned perfectly with this vision. Through collaborative consultations with EMGs, NGOs, and stakeholders, IMAGE NEXT was designed, integrating advocacy and movement-building into its core. To meet the funder's requirement for a women-led organisation, Vidyanikethan, a key Phase 1 partner, applied as the lead. Comic Relief awarded a five-year, £500,000 grant, with TdH-NL contributing 15% co-funding. This marked the transition into IMAGE NEXT, a phase focused on amplifying EMGs' voices, engaging systems, and ensuring long-term sustainable change.

The following table highlights the significant changes between phase 1 and phase 2 in terms of their scope, approaches, and principles.

	IMAGE Phase 1	**IMAGE Phase 2**
Scope	**Service Delivery:** Prevention of early marriages, Direct service delivery to EMGs focusing on health, education, gender based violence, skilling and social protection **Coverage:** 3000 EMGs **Geography:** 5 districts of Karnataka **Duration:** 3 years	**Empowerment:** Movement Building, Advocacy and bringing Systemic Changes **Coverage:** 15,000 EMGs **Geography:** 15 districts of Karnataka **Duration:** 5 years
Principles and Approaches	**Top-down:** providing direct services to EMGs based on their needs **Needs based:** Addressing immediate challenges, gaps and priorities	**Bottom-up:** Enabling EMGs to lead their own movement and advocate for their rights **Rights based:** focusing on long term empowerment and systemic transformation

Starting Strong: Designing the IMAGE Movement

The IMAGE Movement was created as a community-led initiative to prevent early marriage and support early-married girls (EMGs). Learning from similar movements, it was kept informal and flexible, ensuring community ownership rather than formalising it as an organisation.

Through extensive consultations with EMGs, families, and experts, the movement's priorities, governance, and leadership structure were shaped to be by, for, and of EMGs. The focus remained on prevention, support, and advocacy while avoiding financial activities that could distract from capacity building and empowerment.

EMGs were actively engaged in defining the goals and governance of the movement. *"We participated in meetings where we helped decide how the movement should function,"* said an EMG from Chamaraj Nagar. *"They didn't just tell us what to do; they asked for our ideas, and now we feel like it's truly our movement."*

To create a strong collective voice, the movement expanded from five districts to 15, increasing participation from 3,077 EMGs in Phase 1 to 17,532. Community champions were identified to mobilise and support EMGs, while movement leaders at block, district, and state levels were trained as advocates and facilitators.

The governance structure was kept simple and transparent, allowing grassroots ownership and flexibility for organic growth. This approach ensured the movement evolved naturally, driven by the experiences and aspirations of EMGs themselves.

The project design, outlining the logical sequence from activities to outputs, outputs to outcomes, and outcomes to the goal, is presented in the annexure.

Tool 10 - IMAGE Program Phase 2 Results Framework
A structured framework detailing key outcomes, outputs, and activities focused on movement building and strengthening. The results framework is given in the annexure.

From Roots to Growth: Building and Nurturing the IMAGE Movement

Broadening Horizons: Strategic Selection of Locations and Partners for Movement Building

To strengthen the movement, Phase 1 districts were retained, while new high-prevalence districts were added, expanding to 15 districts across five regions. A hub-and-spoke model was used, where Phase 1 districts acted as central hubs, supporting nearby districts to maximise resources and impact. The goal was to reach 1,000 EMGs per district, totalling 15,000 EMGs.

Existing partner NGOs—Vidyanikethan, PMSR, SEVAK, and REACH were retained for continuity and trust-building, with Vidyanikethan leading the programme, supported by CRT for technical guidance. MANUSH, one of the partner NGOs in the first phase, was replaced with ARPANAM Trust in the second phase due to some internal issues. Unlike Phase 1, which had decentralised service delivery, Phase 2 adopted centralised management under Vidyanikethan. This shift was due to changes in Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA), restricting sub-grants. A dedicated secretariat team was set up within Vidyanikethan to oversee direct programme implementation, funded by Comic Relief and TdH-NL.

Guiding the Way: Recruiting Regional Movement Coordinators

In Phase 2, IMAGE shifted from service delivery to movement building, leadership development, and advocacy. To support this, a lean but effective staffing model was introduced. Five Regional Movement Coordinators were appointed to mobilise EMGs, support movement leaders, and coordinate activities across regions. A state-level secretariat was set up within Vidyanikethan to provide centralised leadership and support.

The team included a Project Officer, Project Coordinator, Communication Officer, and Finance cum MIS Officer, ensuring efficient management, outreach, and oversight. This new structure streamlined operations strengthened regional coordination and laid the groundwork for sustaining the IMAGE Movement.

The Regional Movement Coordinators were tasked with the critical responsibility of mobilising EMGs, supporting movement leaders, and coordinating activities within their designated regions. They acted as vital links between the grassroots movement and the state-level secretariat, ensuring the movement's goals were implemented cohesively across all regions.

Strengthening the Movement: Activities for Advocacy and Leadership

The second phase of the IMAGE programme focused on building a sustainable movement led by early married girls (EMGs) to address systemic challenges. Shifting from service delivery to movement building, this phase emphasized community mobilisation, movement building, leadership development and advocacy efforts. Key activities included the promotion of village-level groups, identification and enrolment of members in the movement, capacity building of EMGs as leaders, engaging families and communities to challenge social norms, collaborating with CSOs, and influencing government systems through evidence-based advocacy.

The following sections outline the core strategies and activities implemented to strengthen the movement, develop leadership, and amplify the voices of EMGs for lasting change.

1) Uniting Voices: Mobilising EMGs for Collective Action

The IMAGE movement brought together early married girls (EMGs), vulnerable girls, and their families to create a strong grassroots force for change. Awareness sessions at the village level, supported by Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), introduced the movement's purpose through storytelling, discussions, and posters. These sessions helped build trust and encouraged EMGs to join. Many girls learned about the movement through word-of-mouth from peers and community influencers.

"When the IMAGE team visited our village, they spoke about how the movement could support girls like me. At first, I didn't believe them. I thought no one cared about what happens to girls after marriage," said Lakshmi, an EMG from Chamarajnagar. *"But when I attended a meeting, I heard stories that felt so much like my own. It was the first time that I felt that there were many girls like me. That's when I decided I wanted to be part of this and help other girls too."*

The growing network of EMGs began encouraging others to come forward, breaking barriers of isolation and hesitation. Group leaders and community champions worked tirelessly to ensure that no girl was left behind, reaching out to families to address their concerns and support the enrolment of EMGs into the movement.

To create a supportive space and encourage collective action, the IMAGE programme formed and strengthened four informal village-level groups. While the promotion of these groups was initiated in the first phase, they grew stronger and expanded in this phase, empowering EMGs and involving families and communities for lasting change.

1. **EMG Groups:** The heart of the movement, these groups provided a safe platform for early married girls to come together, share experiences, and build solidarity.

"In our group, I learned that my story wasn't unique—many girls were living the same struggles. Hearing others talk about how they overcame their problems inspired me to stand up for myself," said Anitha, an EMG from Belagavi. "Now, we support each other like sisters. Together, we are stronger."

2. **Vulnerable Girls' Groups:** Targeted school-going girls aged 12–18, raising awareness about the risks of child marriage and promoting the importance of education. These groups planted seeds of prevention by empowering younger girls with knowledge.

3. **Family Groups:** Engaged mothers and mothers-in-law through multiple events such as group discussions, one-on-one sensitisation, and focused village-level meetings to address intergenerational challenges and create enabling environments within families.

"I thought my daughter-in-law's only responsibility was to look after the house, but after attending a meeting, I realised she deserves more," shared Sumitra, a mother-in-law from Chamarajnagar. *"I've started supporting her to continue her education and attend skill training sessions. It's her right to have a better future."*

4. **Spouse Groups:** Spouse groups were formed at the village level to engage husbands to have discussions about gender equality, health, and the importance of supporting and empowering their wives. These sessions, facilitated by trained movement leaders and community champions, provided a platform for men to openly discuss traditional gender roles, family well-being, and shared responsibilities. Through interactive discussions, real-life examples, and expert guidance, husbands were encouraged to challenge harmful norms, adopt healthier family dynamics, and become active allies in their wives' empowerment.

"When I first attended a meeting, I felt awkward. I thought, 'Why should I listen to this?' But then, they spoke about how men could share responsibilities and support their wives' growth," said Ravi, a husband from Belagavi. "I realized I had been holding her back. Now, I encourage her to go for training and make her own decisions."

These groups became more than just forums for meetings; they turned into safe havens where EMGs and their families could share their struggles, fears, and dreams without judgment. For many girls, it was the first time they found others who understood their challenges.

Community champions were identified from within the groups of EMGs. These champions, who worked voluntarily and paid only for their travel, were selected based on their interest, dedication, and commitment to supporting their peers and the movement's objectives. Their primary roles included:

- Facilitating access to services for EMGs, such as counselling, training, and awareness programmes.
- Supporting the mobilisation of EMGs into the movement.
- Acting as liaisons between EMGs and movement to ensure effective communication and coordination.

A Champion's Journey: Priyadarshi's Story

Priyadarshi, a 24-year-old from Chamarajnagar, was married young and faced the many challenges of early marriage, including limited education and isolation. However, her involvement with the IMAGE programme transformed her life and inspired her to help others.

"When I first attended an awareness session, I was nervous. But as I learned about child rights and how early marriage impacts girls, I wanted to help others like me," Priyadarshi shared.
She began speaking to mothers in her village, drawing from her own experiences to explain the importance of education and health. "Some laughed and said I was wasting my time, but I didn't stop. I wanted every girl in my village to have a chance I didn't get," she said passionately.

Priyadarshi's dedication led her to prevent two child marriages and enroll three young girls back into school. Her ability to connect with families and address their concerns made her a trusted voice in the community. "I feel proud knowing I can make a difference. Seeing those girls in school gives me hope for the future," she said with a smile.

Priyadarshi's journey highlights how local champions like her can play a pivotal role in transforming attitudes and creating lasting change in their communities.

2) Movement Building: Strengthening the Foundation for Collective Action

The IMAGE programme's second phase prioritised movement building as a powerful strategy to unite early married girls (EMGs) and vulnerable girls into a collective force for change. Through grassroots mobilisation, leadership development, and strong partnerships, the movement created a sustainable platform for girls to raise their voices, assert their rights, and challenge societal norms.

The first step in movement building was enrolling EMGs and vulnerable girls across existing and new districts. The EMGs along with project staff conducted door-to-door visits, word-of-mouth referrals through family, friends and relatives networks, conducting meetings at schools and communities to identify EMGs. Awareness sessions, storytelling, and peer-led campaigns helped introduce the IMAGE Movement to local communities. Partner NGOs played a critical role in reaching out to families, engaging girls, and building trust. The enrollment process emphasized inclusivity—there was no age limit or any other social and economic exclusions for joining the movement. Girls completed simple application forms to become members and unique identity numbers were assigned to track participation. Following an inclusive approach, the movement leaders chosen from among EMGs were issued identity cards to symbolize their leadership roles.

Tool 11 - Movement Membership Enrollment Form
A form to register EMGs and vulnerable girls into the Karnataka Forum Against Child Marriage, ensuring structured movement participation. The enrolment form is given in the annexure.

The success of this grassroots approach is evident in the movement's rapid growth. From 3,077 members from across five districts in Phase 1, the movement expanded to over 17,532 EMGs and vulnerable girls spanning over 15 districts in the state of Karnataka. This growth was driven by existing members who encouraged their peers to join, demonstrating the power of peer influence and solidarity.

Pavithra, an 18-year-old from Chamarajanagar, was initially unsure about joining the IMAGE Movement. “I didn’t know if it would make any difference,” she shared. “I thought, what could a group of girls like me do?” Encouraged by a peer who had already joined, Pavithra attended her first meeting. “Listening to others talk about their lives made me realize that I was not the only one,” she said. “They spoke about challenges I had faced too, and how being part of the group gave them strength.” Over time, Pavithra not only became an active member but also started encouraging others in her village to join. “Now, I have a group of sisters who understand me, support me, and give me courage. Together, we are stronger,” she said proudly.

The IMAGE programme created village-level groups and conducted regular group meetings where EMGs could share their challenges and learn from one another. Village-level groups became the heart of the movement, providing emotional support and practical solutions to the everyday struggles of EMGs.

At the core of the IMAGE Movement were movement leaders—dedicated EMGs who emerged as change-makers. Selected based on their interest, commitment, and willingness to lead, these leaders provided strategic direction and represented the movement at district, regional, and state levels.

Movement leaders took on critical responsibilities, including:

- Preventing Child Marriages and Addressing GBV: The movement leaders, supported by village-level groups and community networks, played a key role in identifying and preventing child marriages and gender-based violence. They worked closely with families, local leaders, and support systems to intervene in cases where government agencies faced challenges in taking action.
- Advocacy and Representation: Participating in consultations, developing strategic plans, and engaging with stakeholders to address systemic challenges.
- Coordinating Movement Activities: Enrolling new members, facilitating group meetings, and ensuring the delivery of services for EMGs related to health, nutrition, SRHR, education, skilling and access to social protection schemes.

A Leader's Courage: Mangala's Story

Mangala, a 19-year-old from Chikkaballapur, was chosen as a movement leader because of her courage and determination. During the COVID-19 lockdown, Mangala learned of a planned child marriage in her village. With the support of her local EMG group, she approached the family and explained the legal and health risks involved.

"At first, they shouted at me, asking why I was interfering. But I didn't give up. I shared stories of other girls who had suffered and brought the ASHA worker to talk to them. In the end, they decided to stop the marriage."

Mangala's persistence not only prevented the marriage but also inspired trust in her leadership. Families in her village began seeking her advice, and more girls joined the movement, realising the strength of collective action.

Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) were integral to the IMAGE programme's success. Mapping CSOs and conducting brainstorming workshops created a shared understanding of the movement's goals. CSO partners supported mobilisation efforts, conducted awareness campaigns, and acted as facilitators between EMGs and local authorities. Workshops and refresher meetings with CSOs ensured alignment with movement priorities. Their presence strengthened local ownership of the movement and enabled targeted outreach in remote areas.

"The IMAGE programme allowed us to connect deeply with communities, especially in remote areas where girls faced significant challenges. Through this collaboration, we've seen girls who were once silenced now raising their voices and taking charge of their lives. It's been empowering for both them and us." – Shaila, Counsellor, REACH, Bagalkot.

The COVID-19 pandemic posed unexpected challenges, disrupting planned activities. However, movement leaders and community champions pivoted quickly to provide relief to EMGs and their families. Leaders conducted risk assessments, facilitated access to rations and healthcare, and prevented a surge in child marriages during the lockdown.

Rashmi, a movement leader from Chikkaballapur, spoke about a similar intervention: *"A family in my village tried to arrange a wedding for their 15-year-old daughter during the lockdown, thinking no one would notice. I gathered our EMG group and went to speak with them. We shared stories of girls whose lives were affected by early marriage and involved in the panchayat. After a long discussion, they decided to cancel the marriage. Now, the girl is continuing her studies."*

The pandemic highlighted the critical role of movement leaders in protecting vulnerable girls and reinforced their credibility within communities. Their proactive efforts earned trust and respect, strengthening the movement's visibility and impact.

The IMAGE Next programme ensured the movement's sustainability by evolving its governance structure. A state-level secretariat was set up at Vidyanikethan to coordinate movement activities and provide strategic guidance. Regional Movement Coordinators facilitated communication between village groups and leadership teams, ensuring smooth operations.

Annual visioning exercises, consultations, and review meetings enabled movement members to revisit priorities, assess progress, and adapt to emerging challenges. These processes kept the movement dynamic, participatory, and aligned with the aspirations of its members.

Nandhini, a movement leader from Bagalkot, shared her thoughts about the annual visioning exercises: *"Every time we meet, it feels like we are building something together. We share what worked, what didn't, and how we can grow stronger. Last year, we planned to focus more on helping girls return to school, and now, seeing those changes in our villages, it feels like our voices truly matter."*

The IMAGE Movement transformed isolated struggles into a collective force for change. By mobilizing over 17,532 EMGs and vulnerable girls, building grassroots leadership, and fostering partnerships with CSOs, the movement became a powerful platform for advocacy and empowerment.

Now known as the Karnataka Forum Against Child Marriage, the movement has grown into a state-wide initiative with a strategic plan that outlines clear objectives and pathways to achieve them.

These efforts not only amplified the voices of EMGs but also laid the foundation for sustainable change—where girls are not just participants but leaders of their transformation.

3) Leadership Development and Capacity Building: Empowering Leaders for Change

The IMAGE programme recognised that sustainable change requires strong, capable leaders who can inspire and guide others. To achieve this, the programme focused on identifying, mentoring, and empowering early married girls (EMGs) and young women as change agents. These leaders —selected at block, district, and state levels—played a critical role in spearheading the movement, driving advocacy efforts, and building solidarity among their peers. By strengthening their skills in leadership, communication, and advocacy, the IMAGE programme transformed EMGs into confident leaders who could not only voice their concerns but also represent others, ensuring that their collective voices reached the highest levels of decision-making. This leadership training also helped many EMGs become members and leaders of various empowered groups and sub-committees such as Gram Panchayat Sub-committees, Pasu Sakhis, Krishi Sakhis, Para legal volunteers, MGNREGA, Child Protection Committees etc.

The journey began with identifying potential leaders from among EMGs who demonstrated interest, commitment, and passion for driving change. Regional coordinators and community champions conducted discussions and meetings with EMGs to identify girls who showed leadership qualities.

The mentoring process was gradual and supportive. Girls who initially hesitated to step forward were encouraged through one-on-one conversations, group sessions, and exposure to inspiring role models. By creating a nurturing environment, the programme gave these girls the confidence to take on leadership roles.

A Leader's Journey: Priyanka's Story

Priyanka, a 20-year-old from Belagavi, was initially shy and hesitant to engage in group discussions. Married at 16, she felt her opinions carried no weight. When the IMAGE programme conducted a leadership workshop in her village, Priyanka was encouraged to attend.

"At first, I sat in the back and stayed quiet. But the trainers kept asking us to share our thoughts and experiences," Priyanka recalls. "They told us that our stories could inspire change."

With mentoring and consistent support, Priyanka began to find her voice. She started participating in group discussions and was soon leading them, helping other girls articulate their challenges. "Now, I speak to community leaders about issues like child marriage and access to health services," Priyanka shares proudly. "I've even helped prevent two early marriages in my village."

Priyanka's transformation from a hesitant participant to a confident leader showcases the success of the IMAGE programme's leadership development initiatives in empowering EMGs to drive change within their communities.

Capacity-building training was a cornerstone of the programme's leadership development strategy. A series of workshops and sessions were conducted to equip identified movement leaders with practical skills in:

- Movement Functioning: Understanding the vision, mission, and structure of the IMAGE movement.
- Leadership Development: Building self-confidence, decision-making abilities, and teamwork skills.
- Communication: Learning how to articulate concerns, engage with stakeholders, and represent the movement effectively.
- Advocacy and Lobbying: Understanding the basics of advocacy, identifying issues, and engaging with government officials and policymakers to drive change.

Vani, a 21-year-old leader from Chikkaballapur, attended leadership and advocacy workshops through the IMAGE programme. During her sessions, she learned about maternal health schemes and realised many families in her village were unaware of these benefits. "I saw how women struggled to afford care during pregnancy," Vani shared. Motivated by her training, she partnered with local ASHA workers to conduct awareness meetings, simplifying the process for applying to health schemes. "At first, I wasn't sure people would listen, but the training helped me believe in myself," she said. Vani's efforts helped 18 families access maternal health cards and benefits. "Now, people come to me for advice. It feels good to see the difference I've made," she adds proudly.

The systematic capacity-building efforts of the IMAGE programme, with the use of a participatory self-assessment tool (provided in the annexure), empowered EMGs to take ownership of the movement, advocate for their rights, and inspire others to join. Movement leaders emerged as role models, proving that with the right support, early married girls could break barriers and lead meaningful change.

Tool 12 - Participatory Self Assessment Tool for Movement
A tool to help movement leaders to self assess the capacities and performance of Movement on various aspects, understand strengths, gaps and develop action plans to improve. The self assessment tool is given in the annexure.

The leadership development initiatives were not without challenges. Many girls faced resistance from families and communities, who questioned their ability to lead. However, consistent mentoring, peer support, and exposure to role models helped girls overcome these barriers.

A father from Chamarajanagar shared, *"At first, I didn't understand why my daughter went to these meetings. But seeing her speak confidently about child marriage and education changed my mind. Now, I'm proud to say she's helping our whole community."*

These shifts in family attitudes further strengthened the movement, as leaders gained the support and recognition they needed to thrive. Through a structured approach to leadership development, the IMAGE programme empowered EMGs to become confident and capable leaders.

By building their skills, providing mentoring, and creating learning opportunities, the programme ensured that these young women could lead the movement, advocate for change, and inspire others.

The leadership journey of these EMGs—from silent survivors to vocal champions—demonstrates the transformative power of investing in girls' potential. Today, these leaders are not just shaping their futures but are paving the way for a generation of girls to dream bigger and aim higher.

4) Norms and Behaviour Changes at Family, Society and Cultural Levels

The IMAGE programme recognised that real change in the lives of early married girls (EMGs) required a shift in family, societal, and cultural norms. Addressing harmful practices like child marriage and gender-based violence meant engaging families, men and boys, and influential community leaders to challenge deep-seated traditions and behaviours. By using culturally sensitive approaches, mass awareness campaigns, and targeted sessions, the programme successfully created a supportive ecosystem that empowered girls and influenced positive change.

Families are the first and most critical support system for early married girls. Recognising this, the IMAGE programme conducted awareness sessions at the village level to educate families about gender equality, health, nutrition, and the importance of delaying early marriages. Mothers, fathers, and mothers-in-law were specifically engaged, as they often played key roles in decision-making within households. During these sessions, topics such as sexual and reproductive health, the importance of girls' education, and maternal care were introduced in simple, relatable ways. Community champions and movement leaders used storytelling, role-play, and real-life examples to encourage open conversations within families.

During a session in Belagavi, a mother-in-law shared, *"We always believed marrying girls early was our duty. But when I attended the IMAGE session, I learned about the health risks and struggles these girls face. It made me realise how much my daughter-in-law was silently suffering. Now, I encourage her to rest, eat well, and even think about studying again."*

Changing norms required engaging men and boys to promote gender equality and shared responsibility. The IMAGE programme conducted sessions specifically targeting husbands, brothers, and young men to sensitise them on issues such as child marriage, gender-based violence, and the importance of supporting EMGs. These interactive sessions were held at village meetings, youth clubs, and informal gatherings. Discussions focused on breaking harmful stereotypes and encouraging men to take active roles in supporting their wives and sisters.

Mahesh, a 23-year-old husband from Bagalkot, shared how his perspective changed after attending a session on gender equality. *"At first, I thought these meetings were not useful but intended to create a power struggle within the family. But when I heard how early marriage and unequal workloads affected women's health, I realised I needed to change. Now, I help my wife with household work and encourage her to attend her tailoring classes. Supporting her has made our relationship stronger."* This shift in mindset among men like Mahesh demonstrates how targeted efforts can create long-term behavioural change and support EMGs in leading healthier, more fulfilling lives.

The IMAGE programme launched mass awareness campaigns using print and digital media to reach wider audiences. Posters, short films, radio messages, and social media campaigns were designed to address issues like early marriage, gender-based violence, and the importance of education. These campaigns created a buzz in communities and helped normalise conversations around traditionally taboo topics. Local events, rallies, and street plays were organised to engage entire villages in discussions about harmful practices and their consequences. By showcasing real stories of EMGs and their resilience, the campaigns struck an emotional chord with audiences.

In Belagavi, IMAGE teams conducted a rally followed by a street play highlighting the dangers of early marriage. An elder remarked afterwards, "We didn't realise how much harm early marriage causes until we saw it through the play. My neighbour was planning their daughter's wedding, and this made me convince them to stop. Now, she is back in school."

Such moments of realisation sparked through creative campaigns, underscored the importance of using innovative approaches to challenge cultural norms. Local representatives, elected leaders, religious heads, and other influential members of society were identified and sensitised to become advocates for change. Workshops and meetings were held to discuss the legal implications of child marriage, gender-based violence, and the role of leadership in promoting positive behaviours. By engaging trusted leaders, the programme ensured that its messages reached every corner of the community.

A religious leader from Belagavai shared: *"People listen to us. It is our responsibility to guide them toward what is right. Now, I speak at gatherings about why girls should study and grow, not be married too soon."*

The IMAGE programme collaborated with existing community-based organisations like Self-Help Groups (SHGs), youth groups, and women's collectives to strengthen its efforts. These organisations acted as interfaces, helping to spread awareness, identify cases of early marriage, and support EMGs in accessing services. Through regular interactions and joint campaigns, SHGs became platforms for change, encouraging women to challenge societal norms and support their daughters' rights.

In a village in Belagavi, an entire community rallied to stop an early marriage after attending an IMAGE awareness session. The neighbours collectively approached the family and explained the harm it would cause. The family eventually agreed to delay the wedding, and the girl was enrolled back in school. *"I thought nobody would care, but the whole village stood up for me. Now, I have hope that my future will be different,"* shared the young girl with tears of relief.

The IMAGE programme's focus on shifting norms at family, societal, and cultural levels led to significant behavioural changes. From families recognizing the importance of delaying marriages to men sharing responsibilities, the programme demonstrated how awareness and collective action can transform deeply ingrained practices.

Lavina Farnandis, Director of Abhyudaya Kendra, shared, 'Through IMAGE's movement-building efforts, we've seen families and communities begin to embrace early married girls as leaders. Watching EMGs confidently stop early marriages and lead awareness drives shows the incredible power of collective action and support.

Helpful Hints to Engaging Boys and Men

- **Start with Awareness and Sensitisation:** Conduct interactive sessions that challenge harmful gender norms and stereotypes. Use relatable examples and real-life stories to illustrate the impact of gender inequality on families and communities.
- **Focus on Shared Benefits:** Highlight how gender equality benefits everyone, including men and boys. For example, emphasise how shared responsibilities can lead to healthier relationships and happier families and showcase success stories of men who have embraced gender equality
- **Engage Through Peer Networks:** Leverage existing men and youth groups, identify champions to spread awareness.
- **Address Practical Concerns:** Provide practical guidance on how men can support their wives, daughters, and sisters in accessing education, health services, and economic opportunities.
- **Use Culturally Sensitive Approaches:** Tailor messaging to align with local cultural contexts while challenging harmful practices.
- **Provide Role Models and Mentors:** Highlight stories of men who have become allies in the fight against child marriage and GBV.
- **Create Spaces for Reflection and Growth:** Organise men-focused group discussions where they can reflect on their roles and responsibilities.
- **Be Patient and Persistent:** Changing deeply ingrained norms takes time. Consistently engage men through repeated interactions and follow-ups.

5) Advocacy and Evidence: Building Bridges with Government and Stakeholders

The IMAGE programme combined evidence-based advocacy and direct engagement with government stakeholders to drive systemic change. By connecting early married girls (EMGs) with policymakers and using research-based evidence, the programme ensured that the voices and challenges of EMGs were heard, recognised, and acted upon.

To empower EMGs and create platforms for advocacy, the IMAGE programme organised district- and state-level consultations. These events allowed EMGs to share their lived experiences directly with government officials, civil society organisations (CSOs), and community leaders. For many EMGs, these platforms marked their first opportunity to interact with decision-makers and articulate their struggles.

Through mentorship from movement leaders and regional movement coordinators, the girls gained the confidence to speak about issues like child marriage, gender-based violence (GBV), and the need for education and healthcare services.

Sujatha's Story: A Voice for Education

Sujatha, a 19-year-old EMG from Chikaballapur, bravely spoke at a district-level consultation about her interrupted education. "I told the officials how hard it is for girls like me to return to school after marriage," Sujatha recalls. "They listened to us and promised to help." Following the meeting, local authorities facilitated connections to Open School programmes, helping girls like Sujatha resume their education.

These interactions not only fostered trust between EMGs and government officials but also led to tangible outcomes such as improved access to education, health services, and social protection schemes.

The IMAGE programme emphasized the importance of evidence to support its advocacy efforts. Studies were conducted with the active involvement of movement leaders to understand the challenges faced by EMGs, including maternal health issues, GBV, and barriers to accessing social protection. The findings provided credible data that complemented the stories shared by EMGs during workshops and consultations.

Tool 13 - Guidelines on engaging EMGs on participatory research
A guideline document outlining steps and protocols to be followed to select and engage EMGs in participatory research studies to ensure their perspectives inform programme decisions. The guidelines are given in the annexure.

Key evidence was presented at district- and state-level meetings, where policymakers and officials discussed solutions to address the issues. For example, the following studies were undertaken:

- Maternal Health Study: A study revealed poor health outcomes for adolescent mothers. The findings were shared at a state consultation, prompting authorities to commit to strengthening outreach services and antenatal care in rural areas.
- Understanding the impacts of COVID-19 on early married girls (EMGs) and vulnerable girls in Karnataka, India
- Understanding adverse maternal and neonatal outcomes of adolescent pregnancy among Early Married Girls in the state of Karnataka

These studies served as powerful tools to amplify EMG voices and push for policy-level changes. By combining data with lived experiences, the IMAGE programme ensured that the advocacy was not only factual but also deeply human and relatable.

Strategic communication played a vital role in amplifying the programme's advocacy efforts. The IMAGE programme carried out mass awareness campaigns using print and digital media to reach more people. Posters, short video clips, WhatsApp messages, and social media content were created to highlight issues like early marriage, gender-based violence, and the importance of education. These efforts sparked conversations in communities and helped break the silence around sensitive topics.

Regina, a movement leader from Chamarajanagar, shared her experience at a consultation: *"I told officials how many girls suffer in silence because they don't know where to seek help. The meeting gave me a chance to ask for better support in our villages."* Her story, paired with data on GBV, highlighted the urgency of accessible services, prompting local leaders to pledge action.

Social media platforms were also leveraged to share inspiring stories, programme successes, and challenges, ensuring visibility for the movement and building broader support for its goals.

Empowered Voices, United Actions: Lessons in Movement Building

Mobilising EMGs at Scale- Build Trust for Participation: Through focused enrolment drives, peer-led outreach, and village-level campaigns, the IMAGE Movement successfully mobilised over 17,532 EMGs. Trust was the cornerstone of this effort, strengthened by the creation of safe spaces where girls could voice their concerns and direct welfare support during the COVID-19 crisis.

Developing Leadership- Invest in Local Leaders: Training movement leaders focused on building knowledge about critical issues, developing leadership mindsets, and equipping them with practical skills to address challenges.

Engaging Families- Transforming Support Systems: Targeted efforts to sensitise families—especially fathers, spouses, and mothers-in-law—changed existing harmful norms and practices related to early marriages, GBV, and EMGs accessing essential services such as health, education, and leadership roles. Families were encouraged to become supporters ensuring EMGs' growth and empowerment.

Evidence-Based Advocacy- Combine Data with Lived Experiences: Research studies shed light on the systemic struggles faced by EMGs, such as barriers to accessing health and education. Integrating real-life stories added emotional depth, making the advocacy efforts more impactful. This powerful blend of data and lived experiences emerged as a key learning, successfully influencing government policies.

Humanising Governance- Connecting EMGs with Policymakers: Workshops and consultations created a platform where EMGs courageously stood before government officials, sharing their struggles and aspirations. These heartfelt appeals often moved the officials, breaking through the bureaucracy and sparking genuine responses.

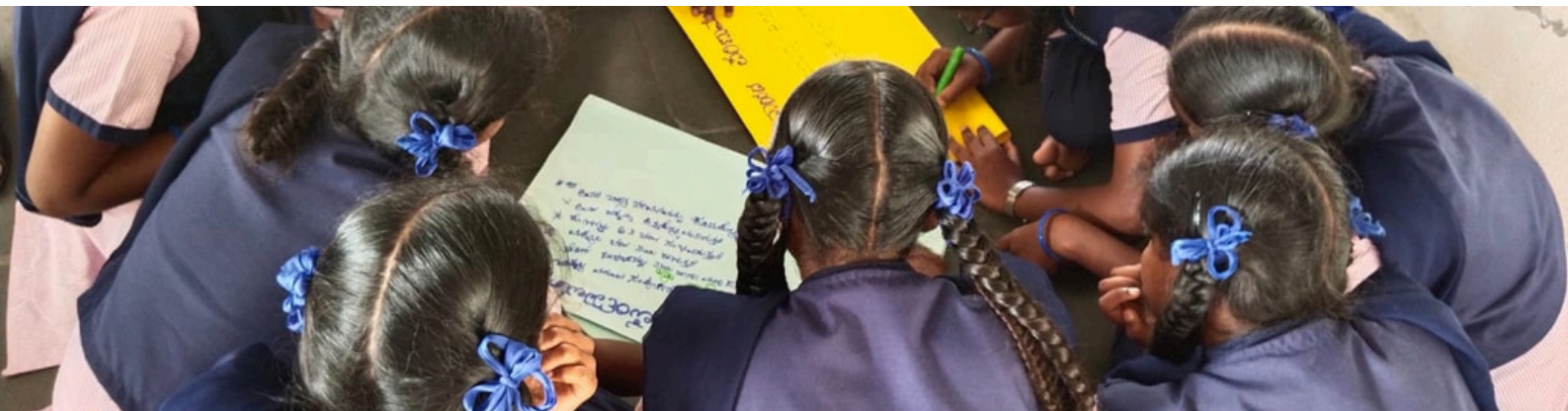
Adapting to Crises- Leadership Resilience in Action: Amid COVID-19, movement leaders pivoted to relief efforts and child marriage prevention, showcasing unwavering dedication, earning community trust, and demonstrating the strength of grassroots leadership under adversity

Collaborating with CSOs- Build Strong Alliances: Partnerships with CSOs went beyond traditional programmatic collaboration, building trust and relationships rooted in shared goals. This long-term engagement extended beyond grants and helped tackle systemic challenges like GBV effectively.

Centring EMGs' Voices: Make Girls the Leaders: The IMAGE programme placed EMGs at the forefront, enabling them to take charge of the movement and drive transformative actions for themselves and their communities, proving the power of girl-led leadership in creating lasting change.

Ensuring Inclusion- Reaching Every EMG: The IMAGE Movement embraced diversity, ensuring that EMGs from marginalized backgrounds, including those facing caste, disability, or economic barriers, had equal access to support and leadership. By addressing diverse needs, the movement ensured inclusivity, enabling every EMGs of different backgrounds to participate and benefit.

EMGs as Agents of Change: Early Married Girls (EMGs), though often perceived as victims, possess significant strength and are capable of driving transformative change. By recognising their unique strengths, rather than solely focusing on their challenges, we can empower them to build their agency and resilience and become powerful agents of change within their communities.



IMAGE'S IMPACT STORY

BREAKING BARRIERS, BUILDING FUTURES

The Initiative for Married Adolescent Girls' Empowerment (IMAGE) programme has left an indelible mark on the lives of early married girls (EMGs) and their communities across Karnataka. Spanning two transformative phases, the programme's impact is a testament to the power of holistic, participatory, and systemic approaches to addressing the multifaceted challenges faced by EMGs. By combining direct interventions with advocacy and movement building, IMAGE has shifted narratives, influenced policies, and empowered thousands of girls to reclaim their lives and lead change.

Protecting Futures: Preventing Child Marriages

One of IMAGE's most significant achievements is its success in preventing child marriages. Through a combination of awareness campaigns, community mobilisation, and legal interventions, the programme prevented 1134 child marriages across the state. Movement leaders, trained to recognise and respond to early marriage cases, worked closely with families, community champions, and authorities to intervene in potentially harmful situations. These efforts not only protected vulnerable girls but also created a ripple effect, changing societal perceptions of child marriage.

At first, we were hesitant to let our girls join IMAGE activities. We worried about what others might think and feared the impact on our traditions. But over time, as we saw them grow more confident and brave—stopping child marriages and continuing their education—we realized the value of the programme. Now, we support them fully, and even the community respects their efforts. IMAGE has not just changed their lives but has brought a positive change to our families too. - Shared by families during FGDs in Chikkaballapur.

Restoring Health and Well-being

Health emerged as a cornerstone of IMAGE's interventions, addressing the pressing needs of EMGs through comprehensive health services and awareness campaigns. Over 2,475 EMGs accessed treatment for various health complications through 1,733 health camps organised under the programme.

These camps provided critical support, from maternal and child health (MCH) services to nutrition counselling and SRHR education. Additionally, 2,155 girls received sanitary pads, and 650 were vaccinated for HPV, marking a significant step toward promoting menstrual hygiene and cervical cancer prevention. Beyond treatment, IMAGE emphasised awareness. Workshops on family planning, delayed pregnancies, and SRHR equipped EMGs with the knowledge to make informed decisions about their health. The programme also facilitated linkages to local healthcare providers, ensuring continuity of care.

Returning to Education and Skills Development

Education and skills development were integral to IMAGE's efforts to empower EMGs economically and socially. The programme successfully supported 273 EMGs to return to formal or non-formal education. Tuition support and partnerships with open schooling systems enabled girls to pursue their studies, with many completing 10th and 12th-grade exams. Vocational training further expanded opportunities for economic independence. Over 1668 EMGs were trained in tailoring, computer skills, beautician courses, and other trades. Approximately 70% of these girls achieved economic independence, securing livelihoods that transformed not only their own lives but also their families' prospects.

Strengthening Social Protection

A key outcome of IMAGE's interventions was the improved access to social protection schemes and entitlements. The programme facilitated the acquisition of critical civic IDs and linkages to welfare programmes, benefiting over 2,543 EMGs. From accessing maternity benefits under the Thaayi card scheme to securing pensions and subsidies, these linkages provided a safety net for vulnerable girls and their families.

Building Leadership and Advocacy

Leadership development lies at the heart of IMAGE's movement-building efforts. Over 1,355 EMGs were trained as movement leaders, equipping them with skills in advocacy, communication, and governance. These leaders became the driving force behind the Karnataka Forum Against Child Marriage, representing their peers in government consultations and advocacy platforms. Their work ranged from facilitating awareness campaigns to spearheading legal interventions, demonstrating the transformative potential of grassroots leadership.

For many of us, the IMAGE programme feels like a second home—a place where we find comfort, guidance, and support. It has given us lessons that neither our families nor schools ever taught. Through this programme, we gained knowledge, skills, and confidence that changed our lives completely. It became a turning point, helping us face challenges and giving us the hope and opportunities to shape our future. - Shared by EMGs during FGDs in Bagalkot.

Transforming Communities

IMAGE's impact extended beyond individual beneficiaries to their families and communities. By engaging families—especially fathers, mothers-in-law, and spouses—the programme challenged harmful norms and fostered supportive environments for EMGs. Community champions, including local leaders and influencers, were identified and trained to sustain these efforts. These champions played a pivotal role in shifting attitudes toward child marriage, GBV, and the rights of adolescent girls. Mass awareness campaigns, street theatre, and digital media outreach amplified the programme's message, reaching thousands across Karnataka. Families began to support EMGs in accessing education, healthcare, and leadership opportunities, signalling a cultural shift toward gender equality.

Policy Influence and Systemic Change

IMAGE's advocacy efforts bridged the gap between EMGs and policymakers, leading to tangible systemic changes. Workshops and consultations brought government officials face-to-face with EMGs, enabling girls to share their challenges and demand actionable responses. The programme's evidence-based approach, supported by research studies and field data, strengthened its credibility and influence. For instance, findings from the programme's SRHR studies highlighted the urgent need for improved maternal health services for adolescent mothers. These insights were presented at state-level consultations, prompting authorities to enhance outreach programmes for young mothers. Similarly, the programme's engagement with education departments facilitated the enrollment of out-of-school girls in open schooling systems.

Resilience During Crises

The COVID-19 pandemic posed unprecedented challenges, yet IMAGE demonstrated remarkable resilience. Movement leaders pivoted to relief work, distributing essential supplies and providing psychosocial support to affected families. Despite the crisis, leaders remained committed to the programme's mission, preventing child marriages and maintaining community trust.

A Lasting Legacy

The achievements of IMAGE are a reflection of its holistic and participatory approach. From preventing child marriages and improving health outcomes to empowering girls through education and leadership, the programme has created a lasting legacy of change. By transforming the lives of over 17,532 EMGs and fostering a statewide movement, IMAGE has proven that systemic challenges can be overcome through collective action, resilience, and a steadfast commitment to human rights.

TRACKING IMPACT:
THE MEAL FRAMEWORK OF IMAGE PROGRAM

The Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, and Learning (MEAL) framework of the IMAGE programme was designed to ensure effective tracking of progress, evidence-based decision-making, and continuous improvement throughout both phases of the programme. It provided a structured system for monitoring activities, evaluating outcomes, conducting research, gathering feedback, and facilitating learning. This approach not only ensured programme accountability but also enabled adaptability, making it a valuable reference for organisations working in similar contexts.

Monitoring Systems

The IMAGE programme established a robust monitoring system with detailed results frameworks for both phases, featuring objective and measurable indicators to track progress at all levels—activities, outputs, outcomes, and impacts. This framework was used as a guide not only for implementation but also to track progress and steer the programme.

In the initial stages, monitoring focused on tracking activities to ensure timely and effective implementation. Regular monthly meetings were held with partners to review planned activities and discuss progress. Over time, the programme transitioned to an outcome-oriented approach using outcome harvesting. The programme adopted participatory approaches and ensured EMGs became an integral part of the programme planning and management, including participation in all MEAL activities. This allowed the team to capture systemic changes and impacts while continuing to monitor planned activities.

Tool 14 - IMAGE NEXT Outcome Harvesting Tool
A structured evaluation approach to track behavioral, social, and systemic changes among EMGs, communities, government officials, and CSOs, using the 4 W's framework to document progress and impact. The outcome harvesting tool is given in the annexure.

Review and planning mechanisms were integral to the monitoring process. Semi-annual reviews and planning meetings brought together implementing partners, movement leaders, and key stakeholders to assess achievements, discuss challenges, and set priorities for the next phase. These centralised reviews, often held in Bengaluru, were supplemented by internal monthly meetings to maintain consistency and progress at the local level.

"We discussed how many girls were able to access education and health services," one EMG explained. "Our feedback helped the team make improvements. It felt good to see our suggestions lead to real changes." FGDs with EMGs in Bagalkot.

Evaluation was a key pillar of the MEAL framework, ensuring accountability and learning at every stage of the programme.

Both phases of the IMAGE programme included baseline, midline, and end-line evaluations. The baseline studies were conducted internally to help the team understand the initial context and make necessary programmatic adjustments. Midline and end-line evaluations were carried out by external consultants, selected through a competitive process, to ensure objectivity and incorporate external expertise. During these evaluations, EMGs were actively involved in all stages of evaluation expertise including planning, field research, and analysis. These evaluations provided valuable insights into the programme's relevance, effectiveness, and impact, shaping its direction and strategy.

During the end-line evaluation of IMAGE Phase 1, the evaluation team genuinely listened to how our lives had changed, said one participant. We spoke about how we stopped child marriages and gained valuable skills. It made us proud to know that our stories and insights would shape future programmes and help others like us. Shared by EMGs in Belagavi during the FGD.

Tool 15 - Future is Female- A Story Book
A collection of real-life stories showcasing the resilience and transformation of EMGs, illustrating the impact of the IMAGE Program. The story book is given in the annexure.

Research for Evidence Building

Evidence generation was a critical component of the IMAGE programme, designed to inform advocacy efforts and improve programme interventions. Led by CRT (Child Rights Trust) with active participation from EMGs and movement leaders, research studies explored critical issues such as:

- The challenges faced by EMGs, including gaps in access to health, education, and social protection.
- The impact of COVID-19 on EMGs and their families.
- Maternal and neonatal health outcomes among adolescent mothers in Karnataka.

These studies were not only shared during district and state-level consultations to inform policy but also helped strengthen the programme's credibility and influence.

Learning and Adaptation

Learning played a central role in guiding programme implementation and improving strategies. Regular learning workshops and review meetings provided platforms for reflection and cross-learning among partners, movement leaders, and stakeholders. These meetings emphasised feedback from EMGs, partners, and community stakeholders, enabling the team to assess the effectiveness of interventions, identify areas for improvement, and make informed decisions.

The IMAGE programme adopted an action-research approach, where activities were implemented, reviewed, and refined based on learning and feedback. This iterative process ensured the programme remained relevant and impactful in addressing the evolving needs of EMGs and their communities.

Documentation and Reporting

Documentation was critical for tracking progress, sharing learnings, and maintaining transparency with donors and stakeholders. Reports were prepared after review and reflection meetings, capturing progress against planned activities, results, and outcomes. These reports also documented challenges, lessons learnt, and plans for the future, ensuring a comprehensive record of the programme's journey. Regular reporting to donors, including TdH-NL and Comic Relief, demonstrated the programme's impact and highlighted the importance of continued support.

Movement Leaders' Role in MEAL

Movement leaders were actively engaged in the MEAL framework, ensuring that grassroots voices and perspectives were integral to the programme's processes. Leaders participated in planning and review meetings, contributed to outcome harvesting, and acted as co-facilitators in research studies. They also played a key role in monitoring activities within their regions, ensuring accountability and alignment with the programme's goals.

The MEAL framework of the IMAGE programme served as a cornerstone for its success. Its comprehensive structure combines systematic monitoring, rigorous evaluation, robust research, continuous learning, and grassroots involvement to ensure accountability and adaptability. By integrating these components, the IMAGE programme not only achieved its objectives but also created a replicable model for organisations seeking to implement impactful and sustainable programmes. This approach stands as a valuable reference for those looking to design, monitor, and evaluate similar initiatives effectively.

BEYOND TODAY

CHARTING THE FUTURE PATH FOR IMAGE

As the funding support for Phase 2 of the IMAGE programme concludes, the focus is now on ensuring the sustainability of the movement and its continued impact on early-married girls (EMGs) and vulnerable girls. Terre des Hommes Netherlands (TdH-NL) India team, along with partner organisations, has committed to maintaining momentum and supporting the movement through strategic initiatives, even with limited funding. The following plans outline the roadmap for the future:

1.Support and Strengthening Partner Organisations

The strategic and institutional partnership between TdH-NL and the implementing partner organisations remains a cornerstone of support for the movement. While specific project funding may have concluded, the collaborative engagement continues through other activities and shared objectives. Partners are being equipped and supported to raise their own funds, ensuring they remain focused on addressing the issues of early marriage and gender-based violence (GBV).

2. Regular Review and Planning Meetings

To ensure continued alignment and progress, structured review and reflection mechanisms are in place: Quarterly Regional Meetings: Partners and movement leaders meet at the regional level to discuss challenges, successes, and next steps. Biannual State-Level Meetings: A larger gathering is organised twice a year to review the overall progress, reflect on the movement's impact, and strategise future plans. These meetings provide a platform for shared learning and collective problem-solving.

3. Securing New Funding and Expanding the Programme

A significant step forward is the anticipated support from Ananya Birla Foundation, which will provide critical funding to sustain the programme. This new support includes:

- Integration of Mental Health as a Core Component: Building on the existing programme elements, mental health will be a key focus area, addressing an urgent and often overlooked need among EMGs and movement leaders.
- Honoraria for Community Champions and Movement Leaders: For the first time, a few community champions and movement leaders will receive financial assistance for their contributions.

1. **Exploring Financial Sustainability**

As the movement matures, financial sustainability is becoming a central focus. Previously, there were concerns that introducing economic activities might shift the movement's focus from advocacy to financial objectives. However, with a stable institutional structure now in place, it is the right time to explore sustainable funding models, such as:

- Seed Grants for the Movement: Providing an initial grant to establish a financial base for the movement.
- Economic Support for Movement Leaders: Designing livelihood programmes for movement leaders to ensure their active participation and long-term engagement without compromising their time and well-being. Exploring possible revenue streams for the movement through a collection of member subscriptions, financial services facilitation, and facilitation of social protection schemes and services.

2. Scaling the Movement's Impact

Looking ahead, the movement aims to deepen its impact by:

- Expanding to new regions to reach more EMGs and vulnerable girls.
- Strengthening advocacy efforts to influence systemic change at the state and national levels.
- Increasing community ownership by involving more local stakeholders and champions.

CONCLUSION

The IMAGE programme represents a journey of transformation and empowerment, addressing the multifaceted challenges faced by early married girls (EMGs). This toolkit captures the essence of that journey, presenting a comprehensive resource that shares the strategies, lessons, and experiences gained from the programme's two phases. It serves as a guide and inspiration for those seeking to create meaningful and lasting change in similar contexts, showcasing how collective efforts can lead to systemic changes.

A Holistic Approach to Empowerment

At its core, the IMAGE programme adopted a holistic approach, integrating critical service areas such as SRHR, education, skills development, GBV prevention, and social protection—directly addressing the needs expressed by EMGs. These pillars equipped EMGs with the tools to reclaim their lives and break free from cycles of poverty, violence, and marginalisation. By addressing both immediate and systemic challenges, the programme enabled sustainable change that positively impacted not only individual girls but also their families and communities.

Leadership from Within

The programme's strength lies in its grassroots leadership. Movement leaders, community champions, and EMGs themselves took on active roles as change agents. With training in advocacy, leadership, and communication, they gained the knowledge, attitudes, and skills to tackle deep-rooted issues such as child marriage and GBV. Their stories of courage and resilience became the foundation of the movement, proving that when girls are empowered, they drive transformative actions.

Institutionalising the Movement

The creation of the Karnataka Forum Against Child Marriage marked a significant milestone. This state-level movement, guided by a robust governance structure, ensured continuity and scalability.

A centralised secretariat, regional coordinators, and local actions by movement leaders created a seamless system for implementing strategies and achieving objectives. The institutionalisation of the movement guaranteed that the fight against child marriage would continue beyond the programme's duration.

Collaboration as a Catalyst

Partnerships with CSOs and government departments were instrumental in amplifying the programme's reach and impact. These collaborations were not transactional; they were built on trust and aimed at long-term engagement. By pooling resources, aligning goals, and fostering mutual support, the programme addressed systemic challenges like GBV and child marriage at a scale that would not have been possible in isolation.

Advocacy That Centres Girls' Voices

Advocacy was a cornerstone of the programme's success. Through workshops, consultations, and direct engagement, EMGs presented their lived experiences to policymakers and stakeholders. This approach humanised the data, combining statistics with compelling stories that moved decision-makers to act. The programme's advocacy efforts not only influenced policies but also shifted societal perceptions about early marriage and the potential of young girls to lead change.

Learning and Adaptation for Resilience

The programme's adaptability was a key factor in its success. The MEAL framework ensured that every step was informed by evidence and feedback. Regular reviews and research studies highlighted gaps and opportunities, enabling the programme to evolve. The COVID-19 pandemic tested this adaptability, with movement leaders concentrating on relief work and child marriage prevention. Their efforts during the crisis reinforced trust within communities and demonstrated the resilience of the movement.

Sustaining the Momentum

As the IMAGE programme transitions to its next phase, sustainability remains a priority. The institutional structures, strategic plans, and collaborative networks established during the programme lay the groundwork for long-term impact. The upcoming partnership with Ananya Birla adds a new dimension, with mental health becoming a focus alongside core elements of the programme. Honorariums for champions and movement leaders will provide economic stability, ensuring their continued commitment and participation.

Financial sustainability is another area of focus. Discussions are ongoing to provide the movement with seed grants and economic support activities, ensuring that leaders remain active without shifting the movement's core objectives. By integrating early marriage as a cross-cutting issue across partner programmes, the IMAGE movement is poised to influence a broader range of initiatives.

A Legacy of Empowerment

The IMAGE Toolkit captures not just the strategies and activities but also the spirit of the programme. It stands as a testament to the power of collective action, grassroots leadership, and evidence-based advocacy. It offers a model for addressing complex social issues, proving that when those affected are at the forefront, change is both meaningful and sustainable.

The journey of the IMAGE programme has been one of hope, resilience, and transformation. It has shown that systemic change is possible when communities, organisations, and individuals come together with a shared vision. As the movement continues, it calls on all stakeholders to support and sustain this work, ensuring that EMGs not only reclaim their futures but also lead the way for others.

ANNEXURE

S-No	Resource	Description	Link
1	Partner NGO Profile Form	A form to gather details of the partner NGOs, helping understand their expertise, reach, impact, and capacities to implement the IMAGE Program.	
2	Partner NGOs Assessment Tool	A tool to evaluate the strengths, challenges, and readiness of partner NGOs for effective programme implementation and collaboration.	
3	Staff Recruitment Guidelines for Partner NGOs	A guideline document outlining transparent, inclusive, and equal-opportunity recruitment processes for hiring staff under IMAGE.	
4	EMGs Baseline and Profiling Form	A form to collect demographic details, needs, and challenges of early married girls (EMGs) at the time of enrollment to tailor programme interventions.	
5	Social Protection Schemes facilitation Tracker	A tracking tool to monitor and document the facilitation of EMGs in accessing social protection schemes and entitlements.	
6	Movement Membership Enrollment Form	A form to register EMGs and vulnerable girls into the Karnataka Forum Against Child Marriage, ensuring structured movement participation.	
7	Guidelines on engaging EMGs on participatory research	A guideline document outlining steps and protocols to be followed to select and engage EMGs in participatory research studies to ensure their perspectives and inform programme decisions.	
8	Participatory Self Assessment Tool for Movement	A tool to help movement leaders to self assess the capacities and performance of Movement on various aspects, understand gaps and develop action plans to improve.	
9	IMAGE Program Phase 1 Results Framework	A structured framework detailing key outcomes, outputs, and activities focused on service delivery.	

S-No	Resource	Description	Link
10	IMAGE Program Phase 2 Results Framework	A framework mapping objectives, activities, and expected impacts of movement building and advocacy under the IMAGE Program.	
11	IEC Material- Prohibition of Child Marriage Act Handbook	A handbook providing simplified legal information on the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, ensuring awareness and legal literacy among communities.	
12	IEC Materials- Handbook for the members of women and child protection committee	A guide designed to equip committee members with knowledge on child protection laws, their roles, and intervention strategies.	
13	IEC Poster on Child Marriage	A visual awareness tool highlighting the risks, legal implications, and prevention strategies for child marriage, aimed at engaging communities and stakeholders.	
14	Future is Female- A Story Book	A collection of real-life stories showcasing the resilience and transformation of EMGs, illustrating the impact of the IMAGE Program.	
15	IMAGE NEXT Outcome Harvesting Tool	A tracking tool to monitor and document the facilitation of EMGs in accessing social protection schemes and entitlements.	

Towards a healthy, safe & secured childhood
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