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NIWANO PEACE FOUNDATION

## **Project Completion Report**

**“Campaign to protect young girls of Nepal from child  
marriage: Intervention in *Tamang* and *Balami* Villages of  
*Pharping*, Nepal”**

**Implemented by Rukmini Foundation**

**Supported by Niwano Peace Foundation, Japan**

## **Introduction**

This is the Project Completion Report of “Campaign to protect young girls of Nepal from child marriage: Intervention in *Tamang* and *Balami* Villages of *Pharping*, Nepal” The project was carried out by Rukmini Foundation with generous support from Niwano Peace Foundation (NPF), Japan. The project period was from November 15, 2016 to November 14, 2017 and total the total fund received from NPF was \$6100.

## **Backgrounds of the project**

Despite various interventions from international and national/local agencies, child marriage is still a common practice in Nepal. Recent figure shows that close to 40 percent of Nepalese girls marry before the age of 18 (UNICEF, 2016). The legal age for girls to marry in Nepal is 18; parents who violate this law are supposed to face legal repercussions. However, this law is hardly enforced, leading to most girls in rural areas marrying at a very young age. The girls from Tamang and Balami communities, and the most economically deprived Tibeto-Mongoloid communities of Nepal, are most affected by child marriage.

Economy plays a major role in making a child bride. For example, uneducated and younger brides require a lower dowry price, leading many parents to marry their daughters off at a younger age. Similarly, in households with limited resources, a girl is considered a burden and a bad investment since she will become a member of another family after marriage. As such, sending them to school is considered a low priority. For those enrolled in school, as soon as their academic performance declines, they are pulled out. These girls are left with two choices: stay home and do household chores or marry. Unfortunately, a majority of the girls in rural areas only have the option to marry. Major factors like the recent earthquakes in Nepal and subsequent collapse of the rural economy have led to a rise in child marriage.

Aside from economic reasons, religious and cultural beliefs are also behind the practice of child marriage. The common belief in Nepal is that boys should marry a girl who is

“pure”, (never engaged in any sexual activities). The younger the age, the higher the chance of a girl being “pure”. This belief is a major driving force for child marriage.

Needless to say, the practice of marrying off underage girls is not only a gross violation of human rights, but it also has devastating consequences at multiple levels for the girl, family, and society as a whole. Child marriage is directly related to poor reproductive health, which often results in severe complications and even death during pregnancy and childbirth. In fact, the Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR) and Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) of Nepal are among the highest in the world (UNICEF, 2016). Since younger mothers tend to have limited knowledge on health and welfare issues and other members of the family do not often intervene, these mothers and offspring experience health problems throughout their lifetime. In addition, young mothers have little control over the household resources and have little say in the decision-making process. More often than not, children of these young mothers will not be able to attend school. This is especially true if the child is a girl. This creates a vicious cycle of child marriage.

Despite being so close to Kathmandu, our project area Pharping, lags behind in socio-economic development. Although there is no official data, we have observed the number of child marriages in the project area, particularly within the Tamang and Balami communities. This project was a part of Rukmini Foundation’s ongoing campaign of protecting young girls of Pharping from child marriage by keeping them in school.

Thus, the ultimate purpose of the project was to end child marriage by keeping the girls of Tamang and Balami communities in school. In the past, the foundation has targeted the girls who were residing in the central part of Pharping. However, we realized that the girls from Tamang and Balami communities, which are located in more remote parts of the region, are even more vulnerable to child marriage. As such, these two communities were the primary beneficiaries of this project.

## **Descriptions of the project**

### 1. Conducted a survey of the potential victims

During the project period, we conducted surveys in remoter regions where the Tamang and Balami communities are located. This survey will supplement our original survey so that we can identify the most vulnerable girls and meet their needs better for the future interventions.

### 2. Established a Resource Room

This Resource Room is located in the Community Learning Center of Pharping. This is where all community members gather to discuss the issue of child marriage and other social issues. Various trainings, including training for new mentors, was conducted in this center. The necessary furniture and equipment were procured through the grant. However, Rukmini Foundation will be responsible to maintain the resource center including paying rent.

### 3. Mentoring at the school

Our trained mentors, called Didi (elder sister) and professionals visited local schools (Panchakanya High School and Setidevi High School), talked to teachers, and potential victims about the risk of child marriage. Our mentors are making regular contacts with the schools to ensure that girls are in fact attending school. The mentors had frank discussion with the girls on various topics including household problems and reproductive health issues. If our mentors feel that a girl might be a potential victim of child marriage, they consult teachers and the community for further action.

### 4. Mentoring at the village level

Mentors, community leaders, and Rukmini Foundation Nepal team members visited all households of the Tamang and Balami villages. The door-to-door visits were very successful in protecting girls from becoming child brides as well as other potential abuses.

### 5. Developing mentors

For sustainability of the project, we trained 12 local girls to be mentors. Our master trainers trained these girls so that they can do the mentoring activity to stop child marriage in the future. Eight of these girls are actively doing mentoring activities.

### 6. Advocating at the local, national, and international level

Rukmini Foundation formed partnerships with like-minded organizations such as, the Community Learning Center, Social Welfare Council, and Lit World, at local, national and international levels respectively. We lobbied our case through these networks to further spread our campaign during various national and international days, such as, International Women’s day and International Day of the Girl child.

#### 7. Evaluation of the project

To understand our strengths and areas to be improved, and to further strengthen our campaign’s effectiveness and sustainability, we implement a third party evaluation of the project (The final version of the evaluation will be published soon).

#### Chronology of the project activities

Date	Activities	Remarks
2016 November 15:	Discussion with community member about NPF project	Local Leaders, NGOs, and Municipality staff were present
December 5:	Data collection, analysis and mentoring strategies	A volunteer taught our staff how to gather and analyze data
December 19:	Establishment of the Resource Center	The resource center is in Pharping
December 20-27	Detailed survey and data analysis	Tamang and Balami village Ward no 9 and 10 were surveyed
2017 January 2 – February 28:	First phase of mentoring program in the schools	In Panchakanya High School (Tamang Village)

March 1 – March 31:	First phase of mentoring program in the villages Celebrating the International March Women’s Day at the Resource Room	In Tamang village
April 3 – May 31:	Second phase of mentoring program in the schools	In Setidevi High School Balami village
June 5 – June 30:	Second phase of mentoring program in the villages	In Balami village
August 7 – August 21:	First batch of Training of Trainers (TOT) to be a mentor	6 girls were trained
September 4 – September 18:	Second batch of Training of Trainers (TOT) to be a mentor	Another 6 girls were trained
October 2 – October 31:	Project and the campaign evaluation	
October 11:	Raise the issue of child marriage internationally on the “Day of the Girl Child”	This was carried out with Lit World
November 1- 14:	Preparation of narrative and financial report of the NPF project	



our team visiting school



Community meeting at the resource center





## **Achievements**

- Decreased rate of child marriage as more girls are staying in school. Specifically, 100 girls were protected from child marriage;
- Around 400 community people were sensitized on the issue of child marriage and girls' empowerment;
- One resource center was established in the project area;
- 8 mentors were added to the team of mentors through Training of the Trainers (TOT) in two project villages;
- We observed increased participation of girls in programs and activities that celebrate the achievements of women, and build skills such as leadership, teamwork, and self-confidence;
- The awareness on child marriage was raised at the local, national, and international level through advocacy campaign;
- An evaluation report was prepared to inform future strategies to eliminate child marriage; and
- The new issue of acute malnutrition was observed. This was not part of the project, which was needed to address quickly. A task force team was created to raise awareness of "Mid-day meal" program in schools of the region.

## **Limitations and future issues**

- Although we did observe decrease in child marriage over the past year but it was extremely difficult to quantify. Despite our effort one case of elopement was reported.
- Although 12 girls receive training to be mentor only 8 of them are active. We believe that they need further training to become "trainer". And it is very difficult to find female candidates to be a mentor.
- The child marriage is extremely complicated issue with cultural and economic implications. Continuous intervention is needed to tackle this issue.

- Because of rainy season, harvesting season, and agricultural season, we could not implement the activities as originally planned.
- We observed that the malnutrition in these villages were rampant. We have to tackle this issue as well.

## **Lessons learnt**

We have found that the most effective prevention for child marriage is to ensure girls stay in school until they graduate high school. However, in the areas where we are working, many students do not attend school due to the distance they have to travel and without any food. So, food becomes an incentive to come to school, and school is the reason they will not get married early.