TRANSFORMING LIVES THROUGH REDUCED CASES OF CHILD MARRIAGES BASELINE MAPPING STUDY

FOR: SOCIAL COOPERATION INITIATIVE (SCI)

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CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The successful completion of the baseline mapping study in Mithi Taulka, District Tharparkar, marks a significant milestone in understanding and addressing child marriages in the region. This comprehensive baseline study examined the socio-economic, cultural, and institutional factors contributing to child marriage, while identifying key stakeholders and assessing the effectiveness of existing prevention mechanisms. Through a mixed-methods approach incorporating household surveys, focus group discussions, and key informant interviews, the study has generated crucial insights that will inform targeted interventions for reducing child marriages in the community.

The study's successful implementation was made possible through the dedicated support and expertise of the Social Cooperation Initiative (SCI) project staff, who played a significant role in data collection, village profiling and context analysis. Their commitment, combined with the active participation of household survey respondents, focus group discussion participants, and key informants from civil society and government departments, ensured the quality and depth of the findings presented in this report.

This baseline study represents a crucial foundation for developing evidence-based interventions to combat child marriage in Mithi Taulka. The insights gathered through this comprehensive assessment will guide the development of targeted strategies to create positive change in the lives of girls in the region. The collaborative engagement of all stakeholders throughout the study process has not only enriched the findings but also established strong partnerships that will be essential for implementing effective solutions in the future.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This baseline mapping study, conducted for the Social Cooperation Initiative (SCI) in Mithi Taluka of Tharparkar District, aims to understand the socio-economic, cultural, and institutional factors contributing to child marriages in the region and to assess the effectiveness of existing prevention mechanisms. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, the study incorporated household surveys, focus group discussions (FGDs), and key informant interviews (KIIs) to generate evidence-based insights that will guide targeted interventions to combat child marriages, improve girls' education, and enhance livelihoods in the community.

CONTEXT AND OVERVIEW

Child marriage remains a pervasive issue in Pakistan, particularly in rural and marginalized areas. The Sindh Child Marriage Restraint Act of 2013 prohibits marriages under the age of 18, yet the practice persists in Tharparkar due to deep-rooted cultural norms, poverty, and inadequate access to education. The goal of the SCI project is to reduce cases of child marriages by improving educational opportunities, increasing awareness about child marriage prevention, and enhancing economic stability.

STUDY AREA AND METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Mithi Taluka, a predominantly rural region with unique ecological and socio-economic characteristics. The study employed a multistage sampling approach across eight union councils in Mithi Taulka, using cluster, systematic random, and purposive sampling methods. A "spin the bottle" technique ensured random household selection, while gender-balanced interviews and targeted focus group discussions provided a comprehensive understanding of child marriage attitudes.

The baseline study covered 56 villages across eight union councils in Mithi. Quantitative data was gathered through household surveys covering 384 households, while qualitative insights were obtained through eight FGDs and six KIIs. Village profiling was also conducted to bridge information gaps. Desk review was carried out for the existing research on child marriage, girls' education, and regional livelihood patterns to build foundational understanding and identify knowledge gaps. A hybrid model was utlilised in which SCI field team was taken on board for the survey data collection, the main reason was that these field teams already did village profiling along with the survey to get the insides.

KEY FINDINGS AND INSIGHTS

Demographics and Social Characteristics
- The study surveyed 384 households, with 52.1% female and 47.9% male respondents.
- Most respondents (61.9%) were between the ages of 31 and 50, and 92.2% were married.
- A majority (64.4%) of respondents were uneducated, highlighting low literacy rates in the region.

Child Marriages and Protection
- 39.3% of respondents identified child marriage as a major risk for girls.
- 56.9% reported girls getting married before age 18, with 13.7% married below age 15
- Child marriage is prevalent in Mithi, with 71% of respondents having attended a child marriage.
- Poverty (69.3%) emerged as the primary driver of child marriage, followed by dowry practices and cultural beliefs.
- Only 42.2% of respondents were aware of laws against child marriage, indicating significant gaps in legal awareness.

- 40.6% still consider child marriage socially acceptable.
- Only 38.6% aware of child protection programs while Only 32.4% aware of mechanisms to report child protection concerns
- Community perception of child marriage is shifting, with 58.4% viewing it as unacceptable.

Education
- Education is recognized as a key factor in delaying child marriages, with 87.2% of respondents acknowledging its importance.
- Girls face significant barriers to education, including financial difficulties (52.8%), long distances to schools, and cultural restrictions.
- 49.8% identified lack of education as the biggest risk for girls
- There is a severe shortage of girls' schools in the area, with only 22 active girls' schools in the 56 villages surveyed.
- 930 girls identified as out-of-school (582 aged 6-10, 347 aged 10-18)- through village profiling.
- 747 girls have never attended school, while 182 dropped out through village profiling
- Only 63.9% consider girls' education important. 24.9% believe girls' education is not important.
- Infrastructure deficiencies in schools, such as the lack of toilets, water, and electricity, significantly impact girls' enrollment and retention.
- Economic constraints, cultural norms, and inadequate school facilities contribute to parents prioritizing boys' education over girls'.
- Concerns about family honor and lack of gender-sensitive infrastructure further restrict girls' access to education.
- Financial burdens beyond school fees, such as uniforms and supplies, hinder girls' education, yet few respondents highlighted financial aid as a need. This suggests concerns over fund misuse and a communication gap between schools and communities on educational costs.

Livelihood and Economic Conditions
- Insufficient income (47.5%) and lack of job opportunities (30.3%) are the main economic challenges faced by households.
- 87.2% recognize economic stability as critical for girls' education
- 69.3% cite poverty as main reason for child marriage
- Many families rely on agriculture (57.5%) and seasonal labor (25.3%) as primary sources of income.
- Borrowing from informal sources (48.2%) and loans (29.5%) are common coping mechanisms.
- Respondents identified skill training and job creation (58.9%) as the most effective forms of livelihood support.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Address Immediate and Long-Term Education Needs
- Establish more girls' schools, particularly middle and secondary schools.
- Recruit local female teachers to address staffing shortages and improve parental trust.
- Provide safe transportation, access to clean water, and adequate sanitation facilities.
- Mobilize local communities to reactivate non-functional schools through collaboration with government and stakeholders.
- Develop Non-Formal Education (NFE) centers and mobile schools to increase educational access.

- Mobile and shelter schools under the Non-Formal Education framework offer a cost-effective solution for areas lacking permanent infrastructure. They provide flexible, community-based learning while addressing cultural sensitivities and accessibility challenges.

Promote Economic Empowerment Initiatives
- Implement skill-based training programs and microfinance initiatives to reduce economic pressures.
- Focus on vocational training for young girls to promote economic independence.
- Establish partnerships with social welfare departments, NGOs, and vocational institutes.

Awareness and Stakeholder Engagement
- Launch comprehensive awareness campaigns to educate communities on the risks of child marriage and the benefits of education.
- Involve local leaders, religious figures, and parents to shift cultural attitudes and reduce stigma around discussing child marriage.
- Organize events and campaigns focused on child safeguarding policies and reporting mechanisms.
- Use a variety of communication channels, including traditional media, social media, and community-based platforms.

Foster Collaboration Among Stakeholders
- Strengthen partnerships between communities, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), and government departments to improve service delivery and law enforcement.
- Establish a unified monitoring and support system to track child marriage cases and provide legal aid to victims.

Support Birth and Marriage Registration
- Raise awareness about the importance of birth and marriage registration as a means of accessing social services and legal protections.
- Integrate registration campaigns into broader community engagement efforts.

LIST OF ACRONYMS

AD	Assistant Director
CSO	Civil Society Organizations
CMRA	Pakistan's Child Marriage Restraint Act
DEO	District Education Office
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
IPC	Integrated Food Security Phase Classification
KII	Key Informants Interview
KM	Kilometre
MHM	Menstrual Hygiene Management
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
NFE	Non-Formal Education
NGO	Non-Government Organization
PRS	Poverty Reduction Strategy
SCI	Social Cooperation Initiative
SEMIS	Sindh Education Management Information System
SMC	School Management Committee
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 OVERVIEW OF THE PROJECT

Child marriage is a critical issue in Pakistan, where nearly 19 million child brides, which is 1 in 6 girls married in childhood[1]. Current statistics show that in Pakistan 4.6 million girls are married before the age of 15 years and 18.9 million are married before 18 years of age[2]. Despite legislative efforts, such as the Sindh Child Marriage Restraint Act of 2013, the practice persists, particularly in rural and marginalized communities. According to the Sindh MICS 2018-19 conducted by Sindh bureau of statistics, planning and development department, among women of age 20-24 years, 8% were married before the age of 15 years and 25% were married before 18 years of age[6]. In Tharparkar in particular, there has been a 0.3% increase in the number of women aged between 20-24 who were married before 15 years old and a 0.1% increase in those married before the age of eighteen. Around 12% of the women who were married before the age of fifteen had no education, compared to only one percent of those who had stayed in education after 16[3].

To address this pressing challenge, Social Cooperation Initiative (SCI) is implementing a 36-month project in Mithi Taulka, Tharparkar District. The project is titled as "Transforming lives through reduced cases of early child marriages." This initiative aims to combat child marriage through a multi-faceted approach, including advocacy, education, livelihood support, and community engagement. One of the critical activities under this project is to conduct a baseline mapping study to assess the current landscape of child marriage and its underlying causes, alongside evaluating girls' access to education and community attitudes toward the practice. The following section outlines the project's goal, outcome, and outputs.

Table # 2: Project outcomes and outputs[4]	
Goal	Reduced cases of early child marriages in Tharparkar, Sindh.
Outcome	Girls 6-18 years at risk of early child marriage in Tharparker, Sindh have improved education opportunities.
Output # 1	Increased enrolment in schools for 900 girls.
Output # 2	Increased awareness on, and attitudinal change about, the importance of education and prevention of child marriages by the communities.
Output # 3	Increased income for 200 family members of the girls enrolled in schools under this project.
Output # 4	Improved protection of girls.

1.2 SCOPE AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This baseline report is centred on a comprehensive mapping and assessment of the factors influencing child marriage and girls' education in Mithi Taulka, Tharparkar District. The key objectives of the baseline mapping study are as follows:

- To understand the knowledge, attitudes, and practices of community members and key stakeholders regarding child marriages in the project area., and to analyse its
- To assess underlying causes of the child marriages and its interconnectedness with the socio-economic and educational dynamics of the project area.

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[1] https://www.unicef.org/pakistan/media/4151/file/Child%20Marriage%20Country%20Profile.pdf
[2] https://www.unicef.org/pakistan/media/4151/file/Child%20Marriage%20Country%20Profile.pdf
[3] https://sbos.sindh.gov.pk/files/SBOS/MICS/MICS%202018-19/Snapshots/F16.MICS-Statistical-Snapshot-Child-marriage_022021.pdf
[4] As stated in the approved project document

- To provides actionable recommendations for targeted interventions, focusing on priority areas such as specific villages, schools, and girls at risk.

This report presents the findings of the baseline survey, which utilized a mixed-methods approach, incorporating household surveys, focus group discussions, and key informant interviews. The survey aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the socio-economic, cultural, and institutional factors contributing to child marriage in Mithi Taulka. It also sought to identify key stakeholders, assess the effectiveness of existing mechanisms, and provide actionable insights to inform project interventions.

The findings outlined in this report are intended to serve as a critical foundation for designing effective strategies to reduce child marriage, improve educational opportunities for girls, and enhance community resilience.

1.3 STUDY AREA

The baseline mapping study was conducted in Mithi Taulka[5] of District Tharparker Sindh Province. Sindh is the second most populated province in Pakistan with a population of 47.9 million of which 47% are women[6].

The district was created in 1990, with its headquarters at Mithi. It is located in the south-east corner of Sindh province, bordered from north to west by Umerkot, Mirpurkhas, and Badin. To the east is India and to the south is the Rann of Kutch and the Arabian Sea. The district covers an area of 19,808 km2 and is unique in terms of ecology and population characteristics. It is mostly desert and sparsely populated; density is low at 83 per km2, compared to 340 for Sindh. Its population, according to the 2017 Census, is 1.7 million – 3.4% of the population of Sindh. There are over 300,000 households, with the average household size at 5.5 persons. The male/female ratio is 54:46. The district is overwhelmingly rural, with 92% of the population residing in rural areas and 8% in urban centres. Administratively, District Tharparker has seven Taulkas: Chachhro, Dahli, Diplo, Islamkot, Kaloi, Mithi and Nagarparkar.

Following tables # 1 and 2 shows population and the figure # 1 shows the geographical overview of the area overview of the area.

Table # 1: Population and Households of Mithi Taulka[7]		
	Population	**Households**
Total	**219,071**	**45,214**
Rural	160,863	32,878
Urban	58,208	12,336

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[5] In Pakistan, districts are administratively divided into sub-units called talukas in Sindh. Same is called as Tehsils in other provinces.

[6] Government of Pakistan, Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, Population & Housing Census, 2017

[7] Government of Pakistan, Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, Population & Housing Census, 2017

Table # 3: Population overview of Project Area[8]		
Taluka	**Population**	**Share (%)**
Chachhro	351,263	
Dahli	308,487	
Nagarparkar	260,170	
Islamkot	244,662	
Mithi	219,071	
Diplo	147,978	
Kaloi	118,030	

Share (%) chart: Chachhro 21.3, Dahl 18.7, Nagarparkar 15.8, Islamkot 14.8, Mithi 13.3, Diplo 8.9, Kaloi 7.2
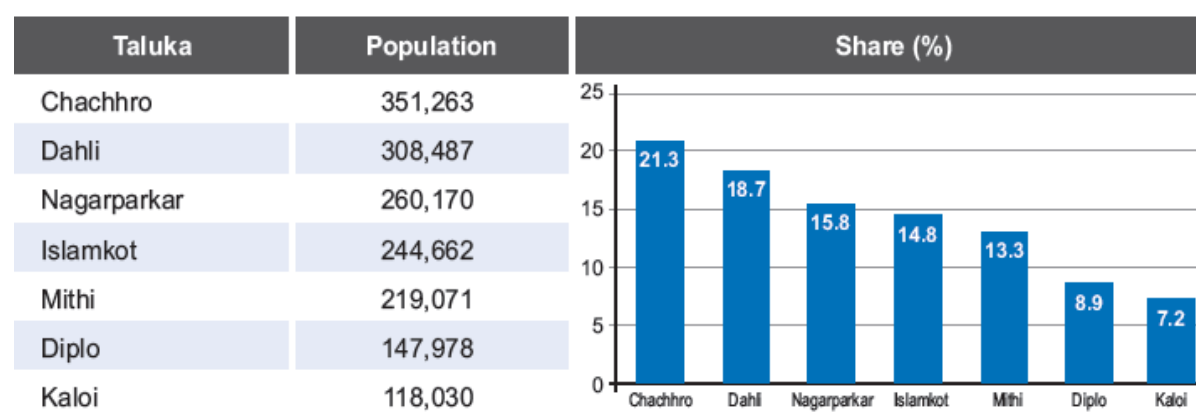
Source: Government of Pakistan, Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, Population & Housing Census, 2017

Figure 1: Map of Sindh Province and Project District
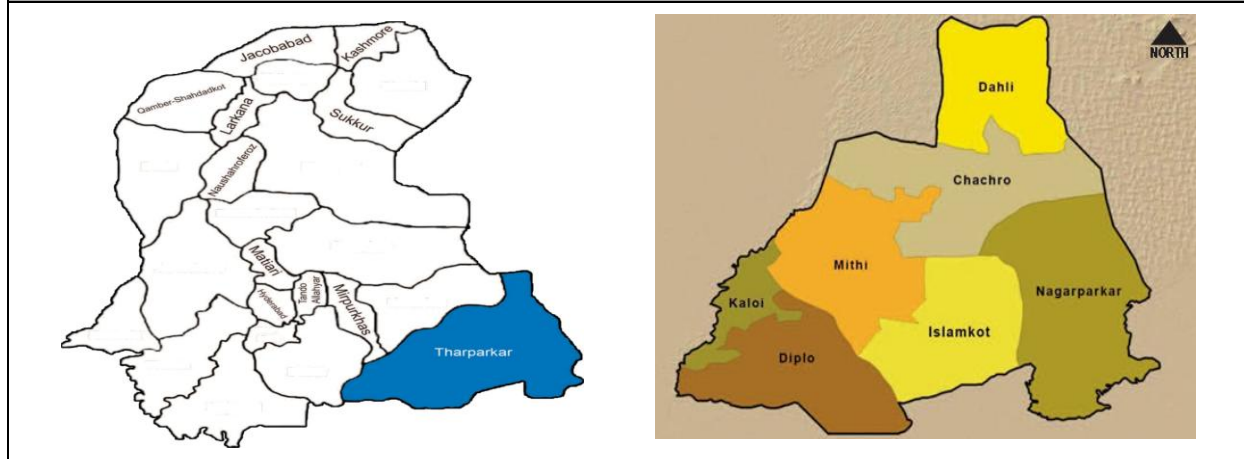
1.4   METHODOLOGY

The baseline mapping survey utilized a mixed-methods approach to examine child marriage and associated factors in Mithi Taulka, Tharparkar District. This integrated framework combined quantitative and qualitative techniques to assess community attitudes, institutional mechanisms, and socio-economic conditions affecting girls' education and protection.

The study commenced with a comprehensive literature review to establish context regarding child marriage, girls' education, and livelihood patterns in the region. This was followed by stakeholder mapping to identify key actors including government officials, civil society organizations, community leaders, parents, and teachers who were actively involved in addressing child marriage and education challenges.

The data collection phase incorporated both quantitative and qualitative methods. Household surveys were administered in selected villages to gather data on community knowledge, attitudes, and practices

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[8] Government of Pakistan, Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, Population & Housing Census, 2017

regarding child marriage, as well as girls' education metrics including enrolment, attendance, and dropout rates. Staff members conducted in-person surveys by going door to door. The collected data was then entered and digitized using Google Forms to create a systematic digital record. The qualitative component consisted of focus group discussions with adolescent girls, parents, teachers, and community leaders, exploring challenges and opportunities related to child marriage prevention and educational access. Additionally, key informant interviews with government officials and CSO representatives provided insights into institutional frameworks, ongoing initiatives, and implementation gaps.

Throughout the research process, ethical considerations and safeguarding principles were prioritized. The methodology incorporated culturally sensitive and age-appropriate research tools, comprehensive team training on ethical protocols, strict confidentiality measures, and informed consent procedures. Clear protocols were established for managing abuse disclosures, and non-intrusive questioning techniques were employed to prevent respondent distress.

The analytical process involved systematic data processing and validation using Google Sheets, integrating quantitative data on prevalence rates and educational patterns with qualitative insights from discussions and interviews. This comprehensive analysis identified key trends, barriers, and opportunities, which formed the basis for developing evidence-based recommendations. These findings directly informed project interventions aimed at reducing child marriage and promoting girls' education in the target area.

1.5 SAMPLING FRAME

To ensure the reliability and representativeness of the baseline study, a multistage sampling was utilised. The baseline mapping study in Mithi Taulka, District Tharparkar, employed a multistage sampling technique to ensure a comprehensive and representative data collection process. Cluster sampling was first utilized to identify eight union councils within the Taulka area, allowing for diverse geographical representation. Following this, systematic random sampling was implemented using a "spin the bottle" method to select households within each village. This involved determining a starting point by spinning a bottle at a central location, from which every third, fifth, and seventh household was selected, ensuring that approximately eight households were sampled per village. This method allowed for an unbiased selection of participants while alternating between female and male respondents for interviews. In addition to these methods, purposive sampling was employed to select the targeted villages and participants for focus group discussions and key informant interviews based on criteria (population size, location, and demographic characteristics). This approach ensured that a diverse range of stakeholders including community leaders, parents, and teachers were also included in the study. By integrating these sampling techniques, the study effectively captured both quantitative data on household attitudes towards child marriage and qualitative insights from key community figures, starting a robust foundation for developing targeted interventions to address early child marriages in the region.

The household sample size was determined based on the total population in Mithi Taulka, with a focus on achieving a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error[9]. The following outlines the sample size and the data collection methods used:

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[9] https://www.calculator.net/sample-size-calculator.html?type=1&cl=95&ci=5&pp=50&ps=239%2C091&x=Calculate

1.5.1 HOUSEHOLD SURVEY

The household survey serves as the primary method for gathering quantitative data on community attitudes, educational access, and the prevalence of child marriage. A random sample of 384[10] households was selected from 56 villages in 08 union councils of Mithi to ensure a representative distribution across the Taulka (Sub-District).

Table # 5: Household Survey	
Total Population (Mithi)[11]	239,091
Sample Size[12]	384[13]
Confidence level	95%
Margin of Error	5%

1.5.2 FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Focus group discussions were conducted with community members, including men, women, SMC members, and teachers. These discussions provided qualitative insights into the local attitudes toward child marriage, the challenges faced by girls in accessing education, and the community's role in addressing these issues. In each FGD (8-12) participants were selected for one FGD.

Table # 6: Focus Group Discussions	
Total	08
Men	03
Women	03
SMCs	01
Teachers/ Head Teacher	01

1.5.3 KEY INFORMANTS INTERVIEW

Key informant interviews were conducted with district officials, civil society representatives, religious leaders, media members, and lawyers. These interviews provided an in-depth understanding of institutional frameworks, legal perspectives, and the involvement of various stakeholders in addressing child marriage and promoting girls' education.

Table # 7: Key Informants Interviews	
Total	06
District Officials	02
Civil Society	01
Religious Leaders	01
Media	01
Lawyers	01

1.5.4 VILLAGE PROFILING

A comprehensive village profiling of 56 villages across 8 union councils in Mithi Taulka was successfully

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[10] Scientifically required sample was 384 but we collected data form additional household just to keep quality control in margin and reduce the margin of error.

[11] Census 2,954 km² Area 80.94/km² Population Density [2023] 1.4% Annual Population Change [2017 → 2023]

[12] https://www.calculator.net/sample-size-calculator.html?type=1&cl=95&ci=5&pp=50&ps=239%2C091&x=Calculate

[13] This means 384 or more measurements/surveys are needed to have a confidence level of 95% that the real value is within ±5% of the measured/surveyed value.

conducted by the project team. This baseline mapping study draws valuable insights from the key data points gathered during the village profiling process. The profiling was completed following an in-depth immersion process within the area, utilizing mixed data sources, including firsthand information from community engagements and observations, as well as government records such as the census and Sindh Education Management Information System (SEMIS)[14] data. This rich dataset serves as a critical resource, bridging information gaps left by household surveys, focus group discussions, and key informant interviews.

By employing this comprehensive sampling and data collection approach, the study aimed to ensure a balanced perspective, incorporating both quantitative data and qualitative insights from key stakeholders in the area.

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[14] https://www.sindheducation.gov.pk/pages.jsp?page=SEMIS-TrackingprogressintheEducationLandscape

2 CONTEXT ANALYSIS OF CHILD MARRIAGES

2.1 STATE OF CHILD MARRIAGES

UNICEF defines child marriage as a formal marriage or an informal union that takes place before the age of 18 and is considered a violation of a child's human rights. More than 700 million women worldwide were married before age 18, most commonly in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, and by 2030 it is estimated that 950 million women will be married under age 18 (UNICEF). The SDGs, Target 5.3, calls to eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation by 2030 (SDSN 2017).

Pakistan was the first state to propose a target to end child marriage at the 10th Open Working Group[15] Session in 2014 (IISD 2014) – being a country where this practice prevails since decades. Yes, Pakistan is home to nearly 19 million child brides, which is 1 in 6 girls married in childhood[16]. Current statistics show that in Pakistan 4.6 million girls are married before the age of 15 years and 18.9 million are married before 18 years of age[17].

Pakistan's Child Marriage Restraint Act (CMRA) 1929[18] sets the legal age for marriage to 16 for women and 18 for men. However, the Sindh Provincial Assembly passed the landmark Child Marriage Restraint Bill[19] in April 2014, which was Pakistan's first law prohibiting child marriage. The Sindh Hindu Marriage Act of 2016[20] was the first law in Pakistan to regulate Hindu marriages.

In Sindh marriage under 18 is prohibited by law[21]. However, the multiple indicator cluster survey (MICS)[22] conducted and published recently by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Sindh government shows that despite the presence of a dedicated law, the reported prevalence of girl child marriage in Sindh rose by 1.3 percent for girls married under age 15 and by 2.2 percent for girls married before the age of 18 years, between 2014 and 2018–19. In 2019, the NGO Sahil reported that Sindh has the highest bulk (82 percent) of reported child marriage cases across Pakistan, followed by the highest cases of child abduction[23].

In Tharparkar in particular, there has been a 0.3% increase in the number of women aged between 20-24 who were married before 15 years old and a 0.1% increase in those married before the age of 18[24]. Around 12% of the women who were married before the age of 15 had no education, compared to only one percent of those who had stayed in education after 16[25]. There is agreement that most cases of girl child marriage are simply not reported to authorities across Sindh due to widespread social and cultural acceptance. Experts suggest that though the number of registered cases may be higher in Sindh and rising with each passing year, this may be a sign of the law being invoked and not necessarily increased

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[15] The Open Working Group is an inter-governmental process, were instrumental in the development of the SDGs.
[16] https://www.unicef.org/pakistan/media/4151/file/Child%20Marriage%20Country%20Profile.pdf
[17] https://www.unicef.org/pakistan/media/4151/file/Child%20Marriage%20Country%20Profile.pdf
[18] https://pakistancode.gov.pk/english/UY2FqaJw1-apaUY2Fqa-ap%2Bb-sg-jjjjjjjjjjjjj
[19] https://wdd.sindh.gov.pk/files/wdd/THE%20SINDH%20CHILD%20MARRIAGES%20RESTRAINT%20ACT%2C%202013.pdf
[20] https://prosecution.sindh.gov.pk/storage/rulesRegulations/l7bfXBBMJdYCUgu0nmVDDmeiX5nhNQl20oieJ3MT.pdf
[21] https://wdd.sindh.gov.pk/files/wdd/THE%20SINDH%20CHILD%20MARRIAGES%20RESTRAINT%20ACT%2C%202013.pdf
[22] https://www.unicef.org/pakistan/documents/sindh-multiple-indicator-cluster-survey-2018-19
[23] https://sahil.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Cruel-Numbers-2019-final.pdf
[24] https://sbos.sindh.gov.pk/files/SBOS/MICS/MICS%202018-19/Snapshots/F16.MICS-Statistical-Snapshot-Child-marriage_022021.pdf
[25] https://sbos.sindh.gov.pk/files/SBOS/MICS/MICS%202018-19/Snapshots/F16.MICS-Statistical-Snapshot-Child-marriage_022021.pdf

incidence[26].

Studies have shown that in Pakistan, child marriage disproportionately affects young women living in rural areas[27], having low income or belonging to the poorest quintile of the wealth index, living in poorly educated households, or having no education (Nasrullah et al. 2014a, Nasrullah et al. 2017). Besides this, culture, religion, and history have a strong hold in sustaining child marriage practices, given the large variation of the practice evident across different regions, tribal and ethnic groups in Pakistan (UNFPA 2007, UNFPA 2012, GNB 2017).

The drivers behind girl child marriage are deeply complex, divergent, and interlinked.[28] The most crucial factor encouraging the practice of child marriages, and preventing progress towards its elimination, is poverty. In terms of the relationship of child marriage with wealth, available district data suggests that women between the ages of 20 and 24 years who are married before age 15 and age 18 years mostly belong to the poorest and poorer wealth quintiles[29]. and the incidence of both decreases with rising levels of household wealth[30]. In terms of its relationship with education, about 12.1 percent of women aged 20-24 who reported being married before 15 years had no education, whereas only one percent of those who had attained higher education (aged 16+) were married before reaching the age of 15[31]. Stigma surrounding female sexuality and reproductive rights[32] and perceptions of women and girls as property rather than rights bearers, barriers to education, and norms pertaining to economic and physical security[33] are also among major derivers of child marriages.

2.2 STATE OF EDUCATION

Sindh faces significant challenges in providing educational opportunities to its young population, especially in rural areas. While the province's literacy rate has improved over time, it remains below Pakistan's national average (55% in Sindh compared to 58% nationwide)[34]. For women, the disparity is even more pronounced, with an overall literacy rate of 44%, dropping to just 19% in rural areas[35]. This gap highlights the persistent inequities in access to education.

Low enrolment and inadequate school survival rates further compound the problem, leaving Sindh with over six million out-of-school children (OOSCs) aged 5 to 16 years, as reported in the Pakistan Education Statistics 2016-17. Alarmingly, 54% of these children are unlikely ever to enter primary school, and many of those who do are overage, increasing their likelihood of dropping out. The gross intake ratio (GIR) for Grade 1 was just 39% in 2016-17, and the net enrolment rate (NER) stood at a mere 61%, underscoring systemic issues in the education sector[36].

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[26] 64785006_ending_impunity_for_child_marriage_pakistan_2018_print-edit-web.pdf (reproductiverights.org)

[27] https://www.unicef.org/pakistan/media/4151/file/Child%20Marriage%20Country%20Profile.pdf

[28] https://pakistan.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/unfpa_child_marriage_pea_report_sindh.pdf

[29] Any of five equal groups into which a population can be divided according to the distribution of values of a particular variable.

[30] Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) Sindh – 2018-19

[31] Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) Sindh – 2018-19

[32] World Health Organization et al., Preventing gender-biased sex selection: An interagency statement, 5 (2011), *available at* http://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/publications/gender_rights/9789241501460/en/.

[33] UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia, Early Marriage in South Asia: a Discuss ion Paper, *available at* www.unicef.org/rosa/earlymarriage(lastversion).doc

[34] https://www.globalpartnership.org/node/document/download?file=document/file/2019-04-Pakistan-Sindh-education-sector-analysis.pdf

[35] https://www.globalpartnership.org/node/document/download?file=document/file/2019-04-Pakistan-Sindh-education-sector-analysis.pdf

[36] https://rsu-sindh.gov.pk/contents/profiles/Profiling%202019%2013-01-2020.pdf

The situation is exacerbated by poor infrastructure and insufficient resources. Many schools lack basic facilities, such as boundary walls, toilets, drinking water, and electricity. Nearly half operate with only one teacher, and a considerable number have no permanent shelter. Girls face additional barriers, including cultural norms, poverty, and safety concerns, which contribute to their disproportionately low enrolment. Only 38% of students in government schools are girls.

The Sindh School Education Sector Plan and Roadmap (2019–24)[37] acknowledges these challenges, particularly the factors limiting girls' education, such as long distances to schools, a shortage of female teachers, childcare responsibilities, and inadequate sanitation facilities. It also highlights economic constraints, low perceived returns of education, and child labour as reasons for high dropout rates and low transition to higher levels of education. However, critical issues like child marriage—known to significantly impact girls' education—remain unaddressed in the Roadmap and the Sindh Non-Formal Education Policy (2017).

Decades of neglect and pro-private sector policies have further weakened the public education system. Enrolment has shifted from government to private schools, and the number of government schools has declined. While donor-funded initiatives and public-private partnerships have introduced some improvements, these efforts remain fragmented and fail to address systemic problems at scale[38]. Budget inefficiencies also persist; for instance, only 53% of allocated funds for girls' stipends were spent over seven years[39], reflecting broader issues of mismanagement and underutilization of resources. The issue of unspent budgets in Sindh appears to cut across sectors[40].

While the 18th Amendment opened up the possibility of unilateral interventions in the education sector that have been pitched at a certain level of attention within the government, continued support from the government still remains off the table as special projects do not translate into recurrent budgets, and small "model" projects are not replicated to scale[41]. There is also a notable decline in the effectiveness of education expenditure despite manifold increase over the years[42].

The situation in Tharparkar, one of Sindh's poorest districts, is particularly dire. The district has nearly 3,500 schools, but 44% are one-room structures, and 10% lack shelters entirely. Over 90% are primary schools, accounting for 77% of enrolment, while secondary and higher secondary schools represent just 1%, contributing to low transition rates. Facilities are severely lacking: 84% of schools lack electricity, 79% have no toilets, 55% lack drinking water, and 47% are without boundary walls. Gender disparities are stark, with only one-third of school-age girls enrolled compared to two-thirds of boys. The imbalance extends to teachers, where the male-to-female ratio is 89:11[43].

According to the Sindh Education Management Information System (SEMIS)[44] data of Mithi Taulka in paints a grim picture of the state of education. Out of 590 schools, 27 are closed, primarily due to a lack of enrolment and the unavailability of teachers. Alarmingly, 66 schools operate without any buildings, while 386 school structures are either in dire need of repair or deemed unsafe. Classrooms are severely limited,

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[37] School Education Sector Plan and Road Map for Sindh (2019-2024). School Education and Literacy Department Government of Sindh,

[38] https://www.globalpartnership.org/sites/default/files/document/file/2020-19-Pakistan-Sindh-ESP.pdf

[39] Ibid p.44

[40] Lapse of over 60pc education, health budget a question mark over Sindh govt's competence, says governor - Newspaper - DAWN.COM

[41] https://pakistan.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/unfpa_child_marriage_pea_report_sindh.pdf

[42] World Bank Group (2017) Sindh Public Expenditure Review (p.11). World Bank, Washington, DC. DOI: 10.1596/29264

[43] https://urbandirectorate.gos.pk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/PRS%20Tharparkar%20Report.pdf

[44] https://www.sindheducation.gov.pk/pages.jsp?page=semis-trackingprogressintheeducationlandscape

with 423 schools having only one or two classrooms. Basic facilities are glaringly absent—215 schools lack access to water, 441 have no electricity, and 460 are without complete boundary walls. Hygiene and sanitation are equally neglected, with 17 schools lacking toilets and 548 schools missing handwashing facilities. Menstrual hygiene management (MHM) is almost non-existent across the schools. This challenging environment is further compounded by significant gender disparities, as only 15,549 girls are enrolled compared to 30,943 boys, highlighting the urgent need for systemic reforms to ensure safe, equitable, and conducive learning conditions.

2.3   STATE OF LIVELIHOOD

Sindh is one of the provinces in Pakistan with the highest prevalence of food insecurity, malnutrition, and poverty. In 2020, the population faced multiple shocks including high food prices, locust outbreaks and heavy monsoon rains/flooding, all exacerbated by the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Around 3.1 million people (26 percent of the rural population analysed) are estimated to be facing high levels of acute food insecurity (IPC Phase 3 or above) in the current period of March to June 2021, corresponding to the end of the lean season and the beginning of the harvest season. These include around 2.26 million people (19 percent of the rural population) in IPC Phase 3 (Crisis) and 0.8 million people (7 percent of the rural population) in IPC Phase 4 (Emergency) across the nine districts analysed. At least 5 percent of the population analysed in all the districts is in Phase 4, and between 15 to 30 percent in IPC Phase 3 or 4. The analysis of the projection period (July-September 2021) corresponding to the post-harvest season indicates that the number of people in IPC Phase 3 or above is expected to reduce to 2.6 million (22 percent of the rural population). Urgent action is required to protect livelihoods and reduce food consumption gaps of people in Crisis and save lives and livelihoods of people in Emergency[45].

Tharparkar is unique in the province in terms of ecology and economy. It is a fertile desert; meaning that it is entirely arid, but grass sprouts whenever it rains. However, droughts are frequent, sometimes lasting 2-3 years. Grass commands a special place as fodder, given that the district has an essentially pastoral economy. The failure of rains for two consecutive years depletes fodder stocks and the population, along with their cattle, migrate to Barrage areas to the west in search of grazing land. As such, seasonal migration has been part of Thari life since time immemorial. It is also a subsistence economy and poverty, and deprivation is endemic. The district ranks among the lowest in Sindh on the Human Development Index, particularly in terms of housing quality, education, and health[46].

Unique pastoral economy of Tharparkar characteristic is underlined by its livestock composition and share in Sindh, comprising largely of cattle, goats, sheep, donkeys and camels. It accounts for half the numbers of camels in the province, one-third of sheep, one-fourth of donkeys, one-fifth of goats and horses, and one-tenth of cattle. Buffaloes are the dominant livestock in Sindh but share from Tharparkar is a mere one percent[47].

Tharparkar has emerged essentially as a 'remittance economy', while the local economy has continued to function as before, and the population has continued to base their permanent residences in isolated villages. Livestock continues to be the defining asset that almost every household possesses. Informal home-based handicraft industry scattered across villages and carpet weaving in Islamkot are other contributors to the district's traditional economy. Remittances have reinforced family incomes and, in most

[45] https://www.ipcinfo.org/fileadmin/user_upload/ipcinfo/docs/IPC_Pakistan_Sindh_Acute_Food_Insecurity_2021MarSept_Report.pdf

[46] https://urbandirectorate.gos.pk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/PRS%20Tharparkar%20Report.pdf

[47] https://urbandirectorate.gos.pk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/PRS%20Tharparkar%20Report.pdf

cases, emerged as the largest share of total household income[48]. Recent development in the Thar Coal Project has opened some jobs for the local population, but the benefits of these development are yet to be realized[49].

[48] https://urbandirectorate.gos.pk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/PRS%20Tharparkar%20Report.pdf

[49] https://www.boell.de/sites/default/files/2019-12/Thar_Coal_Project.pdf

3 RESULTS AND INSIGHTS

This section provides an overview of the key findings from the baseline study on child marriages. It begins by an overview of the context based on the literature review and lead to outlining critical insights into the prevalence, drivers, and consequences of child marriages, drawing from both quantitative and qualitative data collected during the study.

3.1 DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE HOUSEHOLD SURVEY RESPONDENTS

Before presenting the results, it is important to understand the characteristics of the household survey respondents. This section provides an overview of their demographics.

3.1.1 GENDER AND AGE

The study data was collected from a total of 384 households in Mithi Taulka of District Tharparkar. Among these household respondents there was a slightly higher representation of females (52.1%) compared to males (47.9%). The age distribution of the surveyed population reflects that most respondents fall within the 31–50 age group, accounting for 61.9% of the sample. The 18–30 age group comprises 23.7% of respondents, representing young adults who may also contribute to shaping social norms or be directly impacted by them. Respondents above 50 years make up 12.1%, Meanwhile, those below 18 years' account for only 2.3%.

Chart # 1: GENDER	Chart # 2: AGE
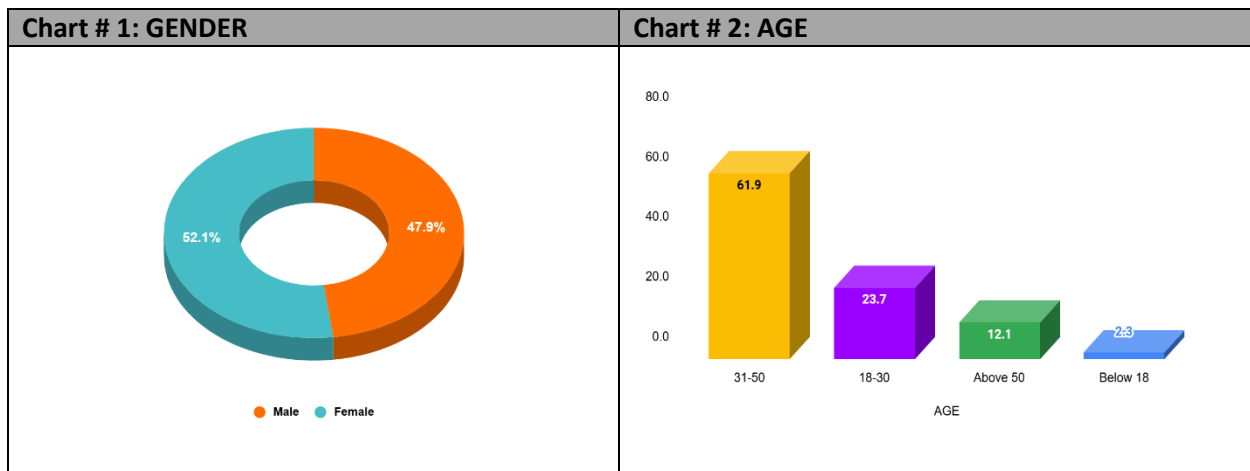
3.1.2 MARITAL STATUS AND RELATIONSHIP TO HOUSEHOLD

Out of total respondents in this baseline study, an overwhelming majority, 92.2%, are married, while only 7.8% are unmarried. This high proportion of married respondents indicates that most participants are likely experienced in household decision-making and social practices, including those related to marriage. It also suggests that the perspectives captured in this study are predominantly shaped by individuals who may have firsthand experience with marital customs and traditions. Most of the respondents 53.65%, are household heads themselves, while 44.98% are spouses of household heads. Only a small fraction, 1.37%, are other family members.

Chart # 3: MARITAL STATUS	Chart # 4: RELATIONSHIP TO HOUSEHOLD
7.8% 92.2% ● Married ● Unmarried	45.0% 53.7% ● Head ● Spouse ● Family Member
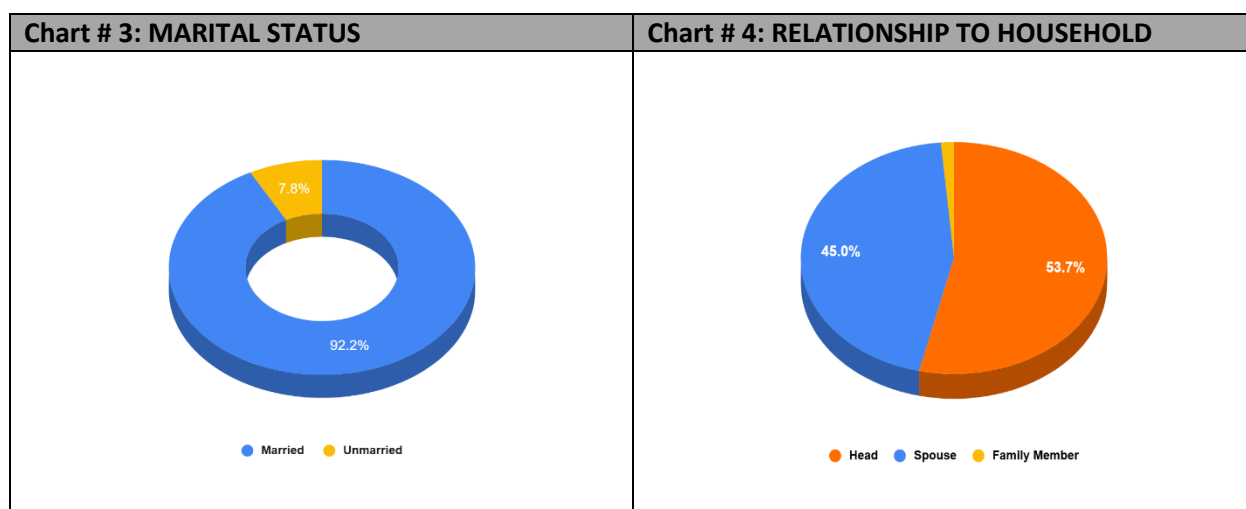
### 3.1.3   EDUCATION STATUS OF RESPONDENTS

On the education status, a majority, 64.4%, respondents are uneducated. Only 12.1% have attained primary education, while 11.6% and 11.2% have reached secondary and higher education levels, respectively. Notably, just 0.7% hold a bachelor's degree.

Chart # 5: EDUCATION STATUS OF RESPONDENTS

11.2%

11.6%

12.1%

64.4%

● Uneducated   ● Primary   ● Secondary   ● Higher Education   ● Bachelor's Degree
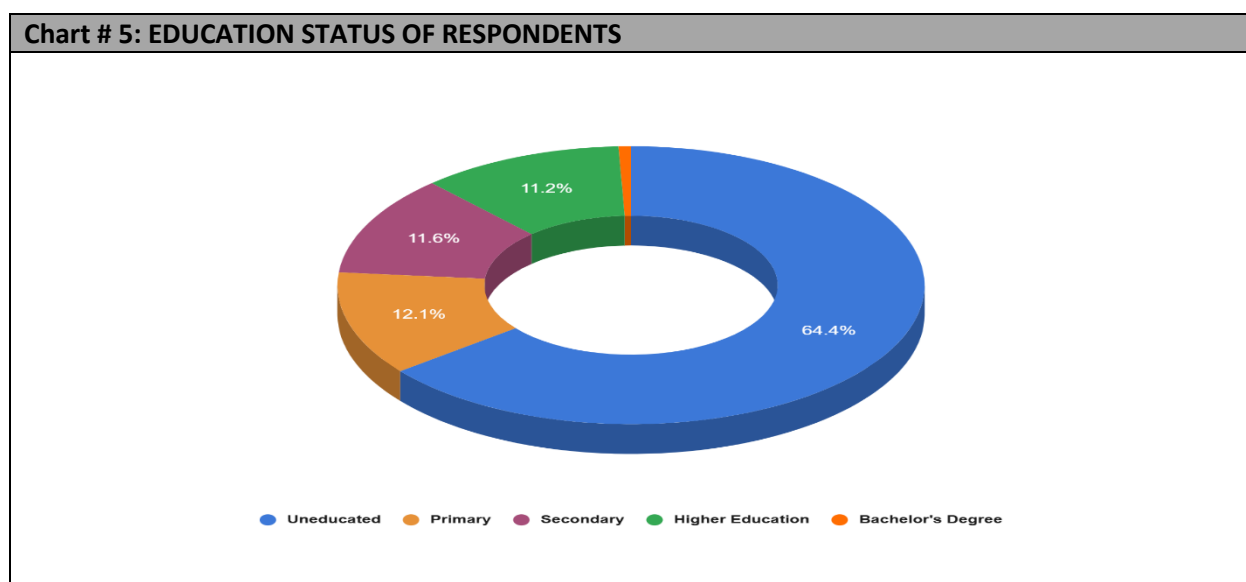
3.1.4   HOUSEHOLD SIZE AND SOURCE OF LIVELIHOOD

The baseline data on the primary sources of income for respondents in Mithi Taulka shows a predominantly agrarian economy, with 57.5% of households relying on agriculture as their main source of livelihood. Wage labour constitutes the second most common source, accounting for 25.3%, highlighting the significant dependence on daily or seasonal work. A smaller proportion of respondents are employed in the formal sector, with 4.1% working as government employees and 5.0% in private employment. Small business activities contribute to 7.8% of household incomes, while only 0.2% are operators, reflecting minimal engagement in specialized or technical roles. On average, households consist of 6 or more members, where children make up a sizeable portion of the household composition, with an average of 4

children per household, highlighting the prevalence of larger family sizes. Baseline data also identified 52 children with disabilities within 438 surveyed households.

Chart # 6: SOURCE OF LIVELIHOOD
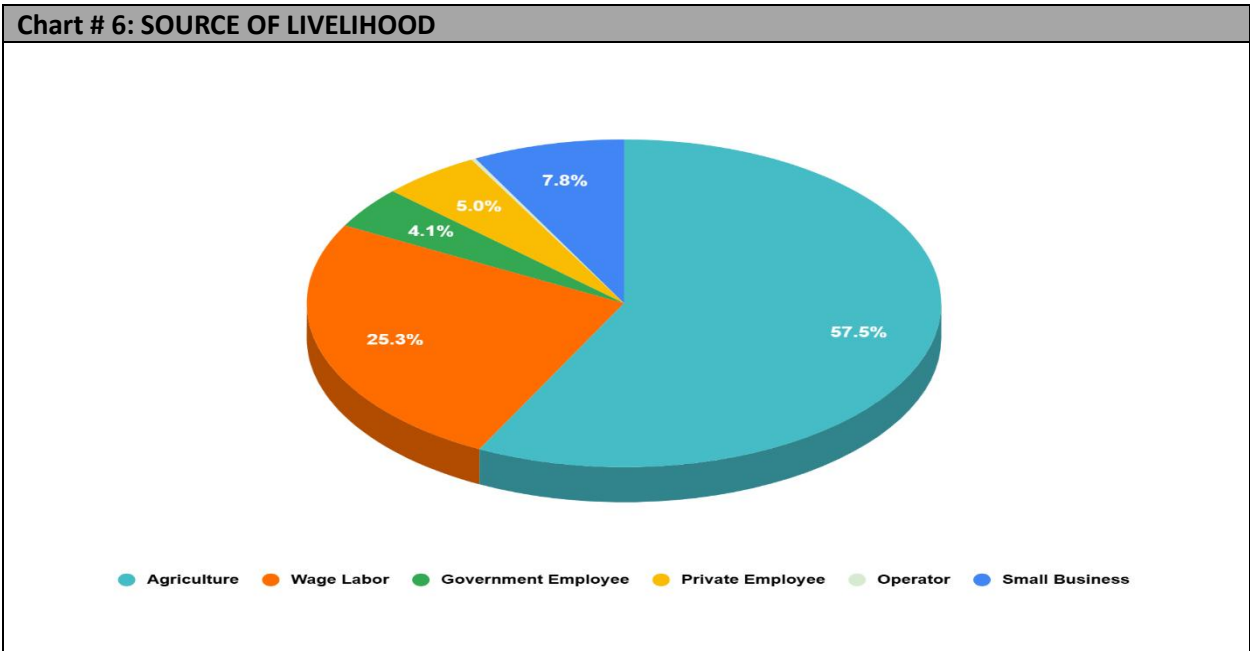
3.1.5 RELIGION AND LANGUAGE

The baseline data of the respondents on religious composition shows most of the population identifying as Hindu, accounting for 61.0% of respondents. Muslims represent 38.6%, while Christians make up a small minority at 0.5%. Such diversity necessitates culturally sensitive and inclusive approaches in addressing social issues like child marriage. Tailoring interventions to respect and incorporate religious beliefs and practices will be essential for fostering community engagement and ensuring the effectiveness of awareness and prevention efforts. In term of language, Sindhi is the predominant language, spoken by 58.0% of the population. Dhatki, a regional language, is also widely spoken, accounting for 41.6% of respondents, while Urdu, the national language, is spoken by only 0.5%.

Chart # 7: RELIGION

Chart # 8: LANGUAGE
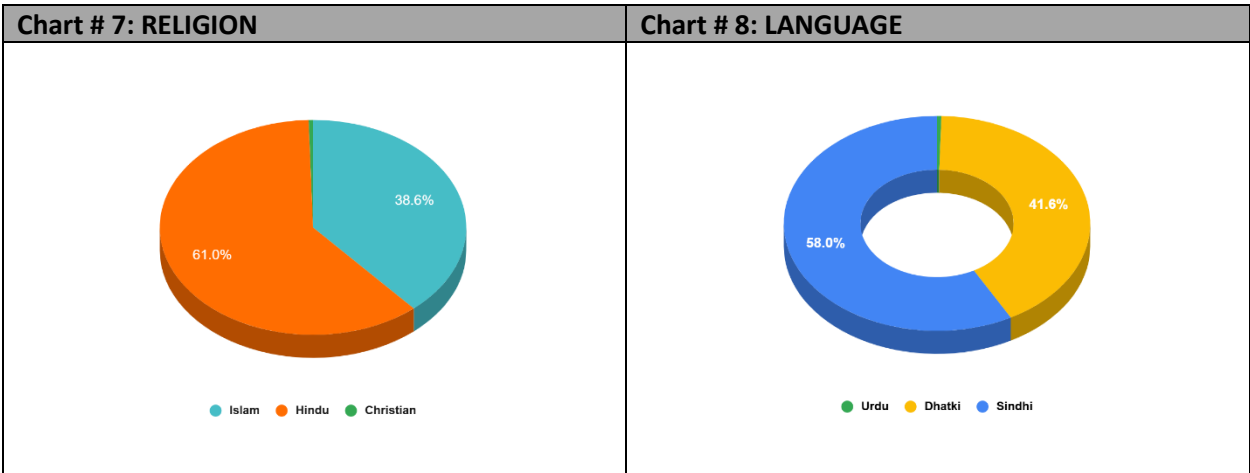
3.2   FINDINGS ON CHILD MARRIAGES AND PROTECTION

The study findings shows that the child marriage practice is common in the area. This section provides an in-depth analysis of the knowledge, attitudes, and practices of communities and highlights the perspectives of community gatekeepers and stakeholders on child marriage.

3.2.1   TYPES OF RISKS FACED BY GIRLS IN THE AREA

The baseline data highlights three type of major risks faced by girls in the community, with nearly half of the respondents (49.8%) identifying a lack of education opportunities as the most significant challenge. Child marriage is the second most cited risk, affecting 39.3% of girls, reflecting its prevalence and impact on their lives. Additionally, 10.6% of respondents recognize violence and abuse as a critical risk, underscoring the vulnerability of girls to unsafe environments.

Chart # 9: TYPES OF RISKS GILS FACING IN THE AREA
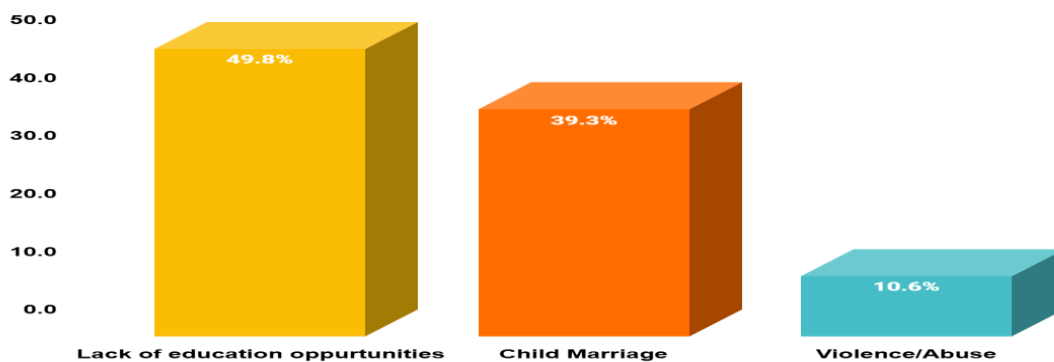
3.2.2   PARTICIPATION IN CHILD MARRIAGE

The baseline data indicates that 71.0% of respondents have attended a child marriage at some point of time in their lives, highlighting the prevalence of this practice within the community. In contrast, 29.0% reported not having attended any such event.

Chart # 10: PARTICIPATION IN CHILD MARRIAGE
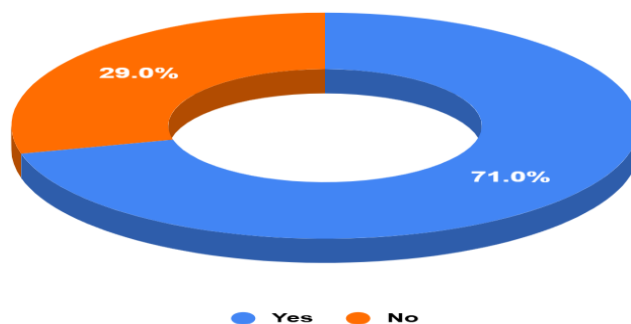
3.2.3   AWARENESS ABOUT MARRIAGE AGE

One the question of what age do girls typically get married in the community, the data highlights some critical trends. While 43.2% of respondents indicate that girls are married above the age of 18, an equal proportion report marriages occurring between the ages of 15-18, and 13.7% state that girls are married below the age of 15.

Chart # 11: OPINION ABOUT AGE OF MARRIAGE

13.7%

43.2%

43.2%

● Below 15   ● 15-18   ● Above 18
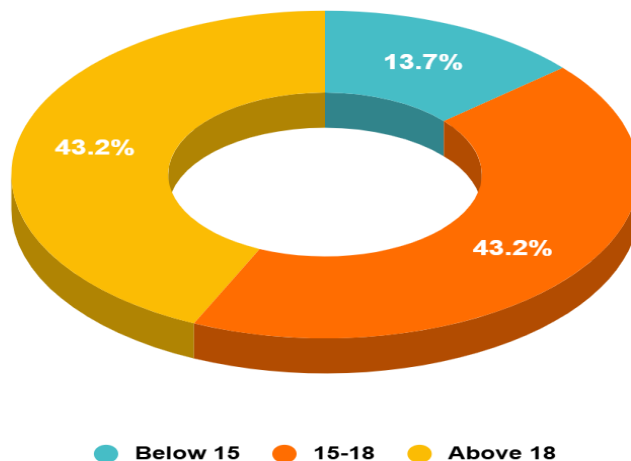
3.2.4   AWARENESS ABOUT EXISTENCE OF CHILD MARRIAGES LAW

The baseline data shows that only 42.2% of respondents are aware of laws or policies against child marriage, while a majority, 57.8%, are unaware about existence of any policies, laws, or legal frameworks.

Chart # 12: AWARENESS ABOUT EXISTENCE OF CHILD MARRIAGE LAW
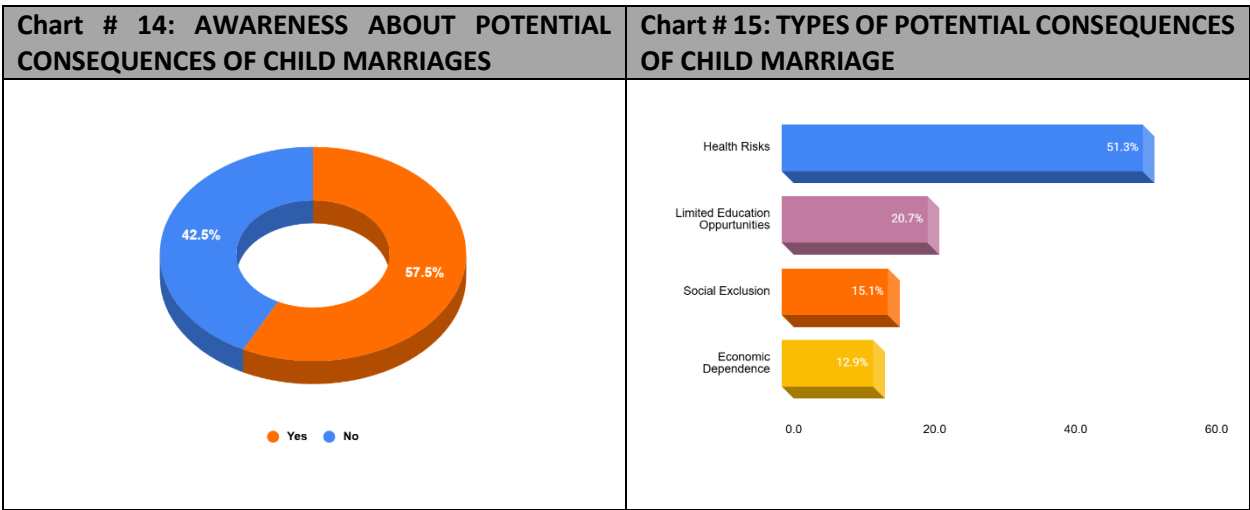

42.2%

57.8%

● Yes   ● No
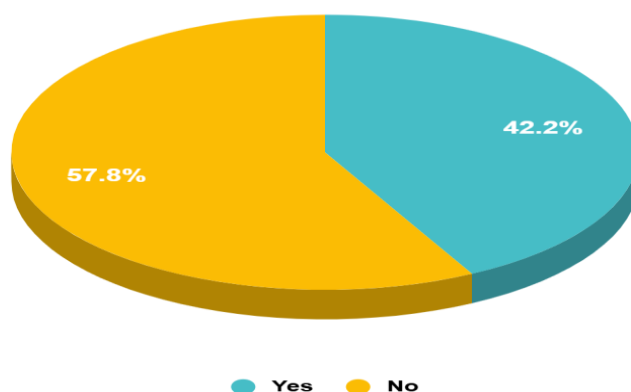
3.2.5 SOCIAL ACCEPTANCE OF CHILD MARRIAGES

The baseline data shows that 40.6% of respondents perceive child marriage as acceptable within their community, while a majority, 58.4%, believe it is not acceptable. A small proportion (0.9%) are unsure or unaware of the community's stance.

Chart # 13: SOCIAL ACCEPTANCE OF CHILD MARRIAGES IN THE AREA

40.6%
58.4%

● Yes   ● No   ● Don't know
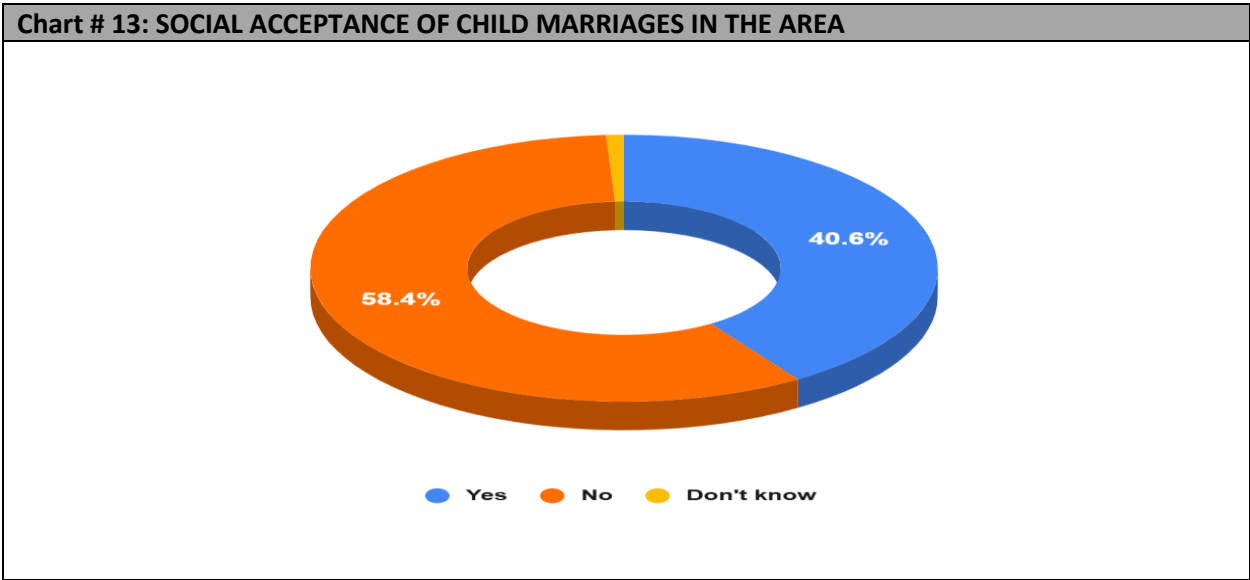
3.2.6 AWARENESS ABOUT POTENTIAL CONSEQUENCES OF CHILD MARRIAGES

The baseline data shows that 57.5% of respondents are aware of the potential consequences of child marriage, while 42.5% remain unaware, highlighting a significant gap in understanding the risks associated with this practice. Among those aware, health risks are the most identified consequence, cited by 51.3%, reflecting concerns about the physical and reproductive health of young brides. Limited education opportunities are recognized by 20.7%, indicating an understanding of how child marriage curtails educational attainment. Social exclusion is mentioned by 15.1%, and 12.9% acknowledge economic dependence therefore, underscoring the broader social and economic impacts of early marriage.

Chart # 14: AWARENESS ABOUT POTENTIAL CONSEQUENCES OF CHILD MARRIAGES	Chart # 15: TYPES OF POTENTIAL CONSEQUENCES OF CHILD MARRIAGE

42.5%   57.5%

● Yes ● No

Health Risks — 51.3%
Limited Education Oppurtunities — 20.7%
Social Exclusion — 15.1%
Economic Dependence — 12.9%
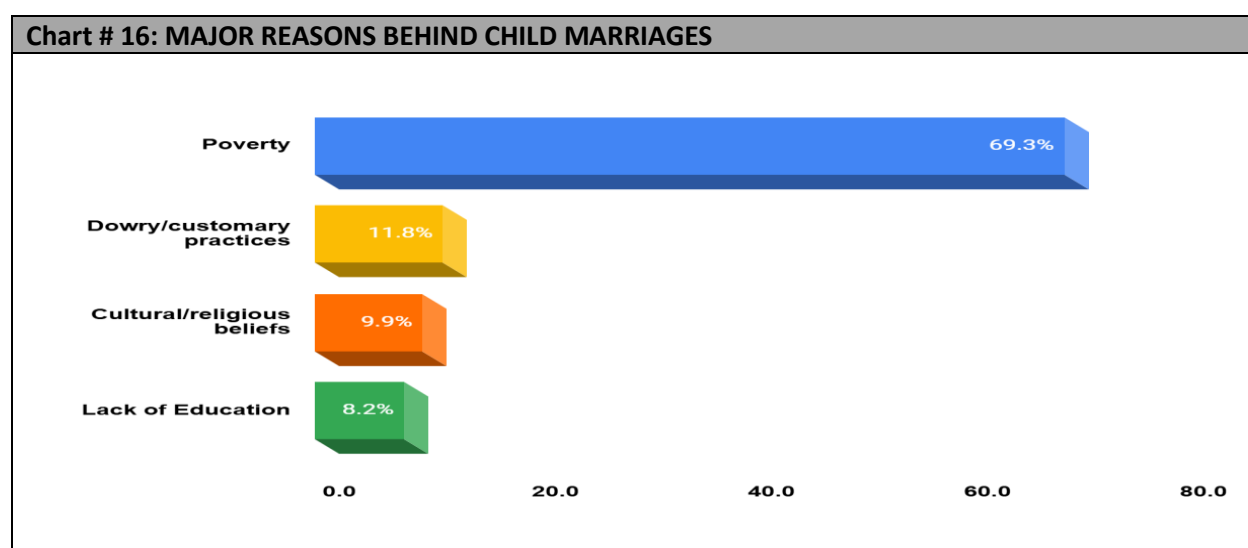
0.0   20.0   40.0   60.0

Early marriage often leads to girls dropping out of school due to domestic responsibilities and societal expectations (FGD Male, Female and SMCs). Early marriages often result in health risks for young mothers, complications during childbirth, and poor health outcomes for children (KII with DO Primary Education, Lawyer, and Religious Leader).

Girls are forced to drop out of school upon marriage, limiting their potential for economic independence and personal development (KII with CSO Manager, DO Primary Education and Media). Early marriages perpetuate cycles of poverty as uneducated girls have fewer opportunities for employment (KII with Lawere and Media). Young girls married early experience limitations in personal development, education, and career aspirations (FGD Male, Female and SMCs).

3.2.7 MAJOR REASONS BEHIND CHILD MARRIAGES

The baseline data shows that poverty is the leading reason for child marriage in the community, cited by 69.3% of respondents, highlighting the significant impact of economic hardship on this practice. Dowry and customary practices are identified as contributing factors by 11.8%, reflecting the influence of traditional norms. Cultural and religious beliefs account for 9.9% of responses, indicating the role of societal expectations in perpetuating child marriage. Additionally, 8.2% attribute the practice to a lack of education, underscoring the interplay between educational access and early marriage.

Chart # 16: MAJOR REASONS BEHIND CHILD MARRIAGES

Reason	Percentage
Poverty	69.3%
Dowry/customary practices	11.8%
Cultural/religious beliefs	9.9%
Lack of Education	8.2%

Across FGDs and KI interviews, poverty emerges as a dominant factor pushing families toward early child marriage, as they see it as a means to reduce financial burdens (KII with CSO Manager, DO Primary Education and AD Social Welfare). The journalist we interviewed stated that *"Child marriage practice in area is because of poverty level of the families and this is also major reason that parents do not send their children to school as they want extra hands to help them in household chores, " Khatto explained. "In many cases, parents marry off their daughters as a way to secure their future, especially when economic resources are scarce."* Traditional practices and social norms continue to support early marriage despite the known consequences (KII with Lawyers, Media, and Social Welfare).

> *Poverty is a major barrier to girls' education in our community. Girls are often forced to work to support their families, leaning them almost no time for studies.*
>
> *(Community Member)*

Resistance to change due to entrenched cultural practices and economic constraints remains a significant barrier (KII with DO Primary Education and AD Social Welfare) . Similarly, poor access to education, particularly for girls, perpetuates early marriages as families prioritize immediate economic needs or cultural expectations over long-term benefits. (KII with DO Primary Education and AD Social Welfare). Weak enforcement of child marriage laws and limited community awareness of legal consequences hinder progress to address the issue (KII with Lawere and Media).

> *Many families believe that education girls are a waste of resources, as they will eventually get married and leave the family.*
>
> **(Local Tuition Teacher)**

Inadequate infrastructure, lack of qualified teachers, and poor school facilities exacerbate the problem, particularly in rural areas (FGD Male, Female and SMCs). Families are also facing challenges in affording school fees, uniforms, and transportation, particularly in impoverished regions (FGD Male, Female and SMCs).

3.2.8   PERCEPTION ABOUT ROLE OF EDUCATION IN DELAYING CHILD MARRIAGES

The baseline data shows the strong recognition of education as a key factor in delaying child marriage, with 87.2% of respondents considering it particularly important and 10.7% viewing it as somewhat important. This reflects a widespread understanding of the role education plays in empowering girls and reducing early marriage practices. However, when asked about continuing education after marriage, 64.2% of the respondents expressed support, while 31.7% opposed it, and 4.1% were unsure.

Chart # 17: IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION IN DELAYING CHILD MARRIAGES	**Chart # 18: SHOULD GIRL CONTINUE EDUCATION EVEN AFTER MARRIAGE**
10.7% / 87.2% — Very Important, Somewhat Important, Not Important	31.7% / 64.2% — Yes, No, Not Sure
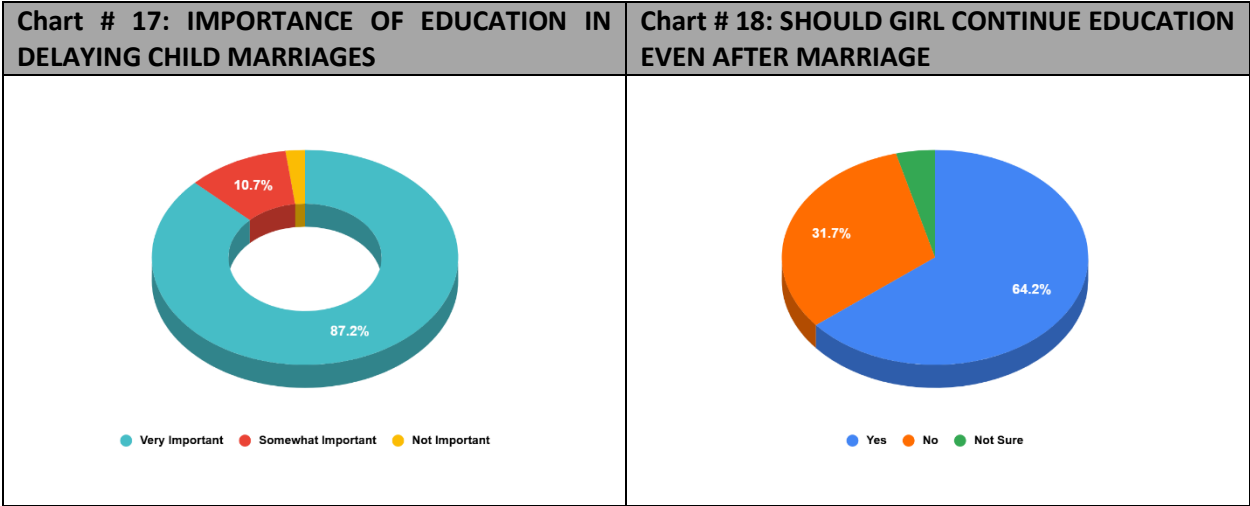
3.2.9   PERCEPTION ABOUT ECONOMIC SITUATION AND CHILD MARRIAGES CONNECTIONS

The baseline data indicate the strong recognition of economic stability as a critical factor for girls' education, with 87.2% of respondents considering it important and 11.4% somewhat important. This highlights a widespread understanding and reality that financial security plays a pivotal role in ensuring access to education for girls. However, perspectives on whether improving livelihoods could reduce child marriage are divided. While 45.7% believe it could, a slightly larger proportion (49.5%) do not see a direct connection, and 4.8% remain unsure.

Chart # 19: ECONOMIC SITUATION AND MARRIAGES CONNECTIONS

Yes   No   Not Sure
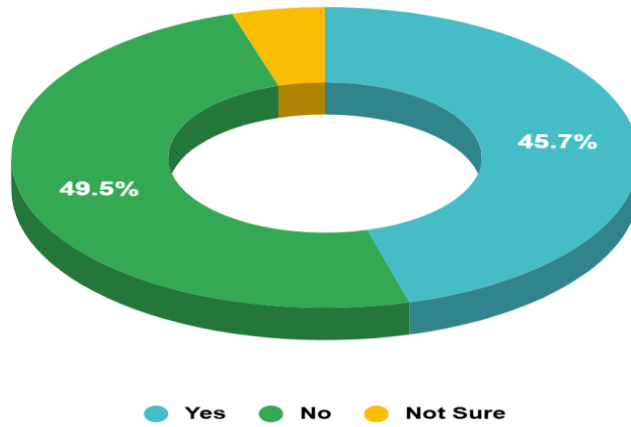
### 3.2.10 RESPONSIBILITY FOR PREVENTION OF CHID MARRIAGES

The baseline data highlights that families are considered primarily responsible for preventing child marriages, with 52.3% of respondents identifying them as key actors. Community leaders (22.6%) and religious leaders (20.3%) are also seen as significant influencers in addressing this issue. Interestingly, only 3.0% of respondents view the government as responsible, indicating limited trust in or awareness of governmental roles in enforcing child marriage prevention laws. A small minority (1.8%) believe no one is responsible, reflecting a possible sense of resignation or lack of accountability within the community. These findings underline the critical need for collaborative efforts involving families, local leaders, and religious figures, alongside stronger governmental enforcement, and advocacy, to effectively address and prevent child marriages.

Chart # 20: RESPONSIBILITY FOR PREVENTION OF CHILD MARRIAGES

Families   Community Leaders   Religious leaders   Government   No One
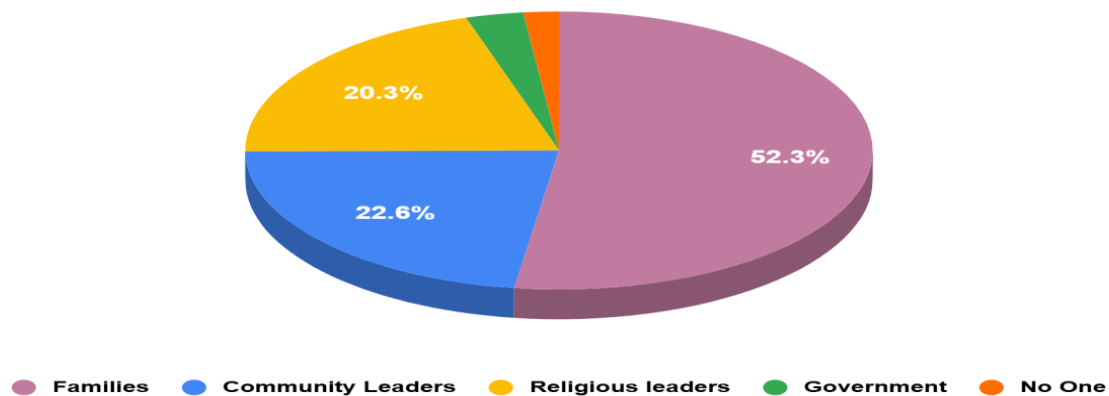
3.2.11 EXISTING EFFORTS TO TACKLE THE ISSUE OF CHILD MARRIAGES

The baseline data shows limited efforts and support within the community to address child marriage. Only 39.0% of respondents reported that discussions to prevent child marriage take place in their community, while 61.0% indicated no such discussions occur. Additionally, only 34.7% of respondents believe their community supports actions against child marriage, with 58.4% opposing such efforts and 6.8% being unsure.

Chart # 21: DISCUSSIONS TO PREVENT CHILD MARRIAGE	Chart # 22: TYPES OF POTENTIAL CONSEQUENCES OF CHILD MARRIAGE
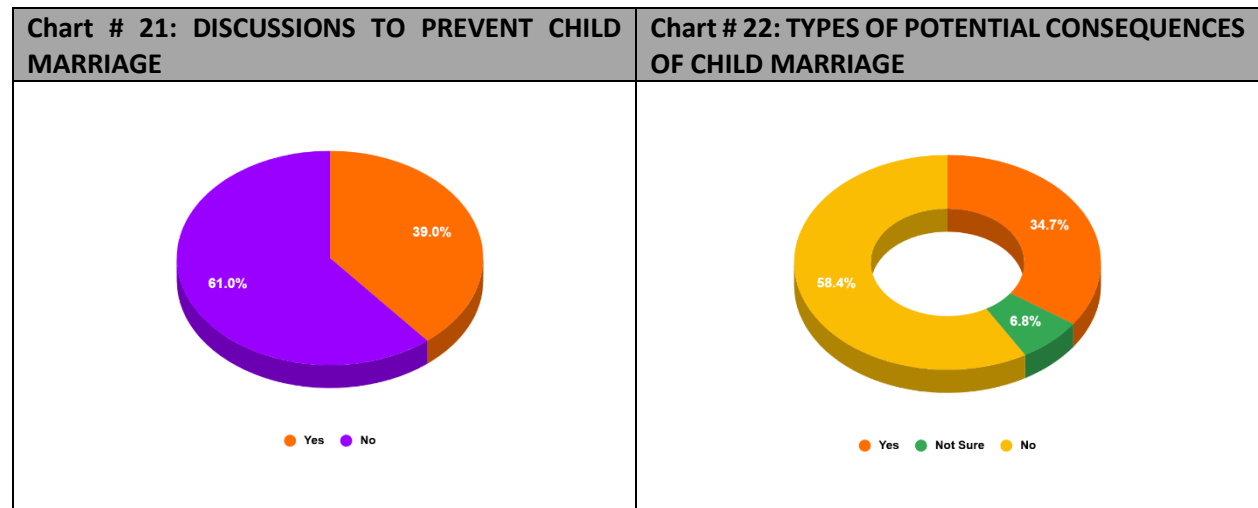
### 3.2.12 AWARENESS ABOUT CHILD PROTECTION AND SUPPORT MECHANISMS

The baseline data highlights significant gaps in awareness and infrastructure for child protection in the community. Only 38.6% of respondents are aware of child protection programs in their area, while a majority, 61.4%, remain unaware. Similarly, just 32.4% report the existence of mechanisms to report child protection concerns, with 67.6% indicating no such mechanisms are in place.

Chart # 23: AWARENESS ABOUT CHILD PROTECTION	Chart # 24: AWARENESS ABOUT CHILD PROTECTION SUPPORT MECHANISMS
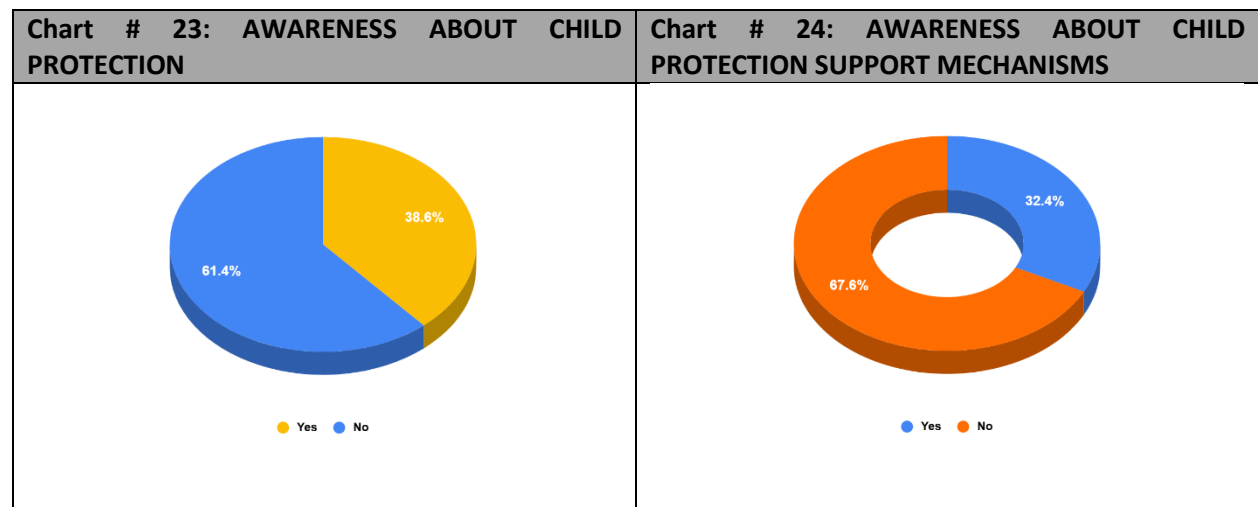
3.3 FINDINGS ON EDUCATION

3.4 STATUS OF BOYS SCHOOLS[50]

Out of the 56 villages profiled, there is existence of 48 active boys' schools, 47 of these provide co-education (though girls enrolment is quite low), demonstrating a significant reliance on shared learning spaces due to the situation girls school in the area. Majority of these schools (32) are primary schools, followed by middle (10) and high schools (6), indicating limited opportunities for higher education. Infrastructure remains a major concern, with only 9 schools equipped with a drinking water facility and 18 having electricity, which significantly impacts the learning environment and overall functionality of the schools. Additionally, 31 schools have boundary walls, and 34 schools have latrine facilities.

Chart # 25: STATUS OF BOYS SCHOOLS
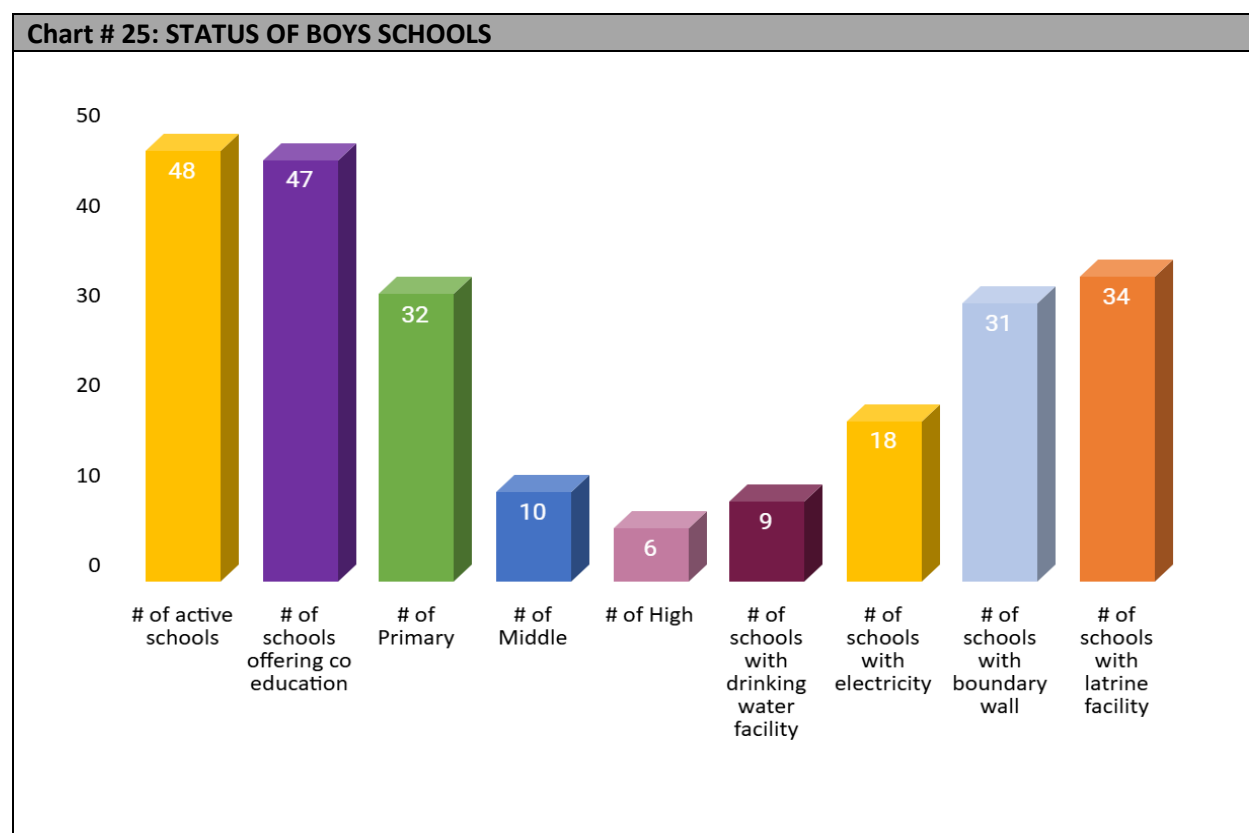
3.5 STATUS OF GIRLS SCHOOLS[51]

The village profiling process reveals critical challenges in the status of girls' schools within the surveyed villages. Out of 56 profiled villages, there are only 22 active schools exclusively for girls and all are limited to the primary level. There are no middle or high schools for girls, severely restricting their opportunities for continued education beyond the primary stage. Infrastructure inadequacies are stark, with only 4 schools having drinking water facilities and with no electricity. Alarmingly, none of the schools have functional bathroom facilities, raising significant concerns about health hazards, safety and security. These findings underscore the need for interventions that help to bridge the gaps in girls' access to primary,

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[50] Based on village profiling data

[51] Based on village profiling data

middle, and high levels and ensuring basic amenities to create a safe, supportive, and equitable educational environment. This is also important because we have already noticed low enrolment of the girls in the boys' schools reflecting reluctance of parents to send their girls to either boys' schools or the schools which are located far from their locations.

Chart # 26: STATUS OF GIRLS SCHOOLS
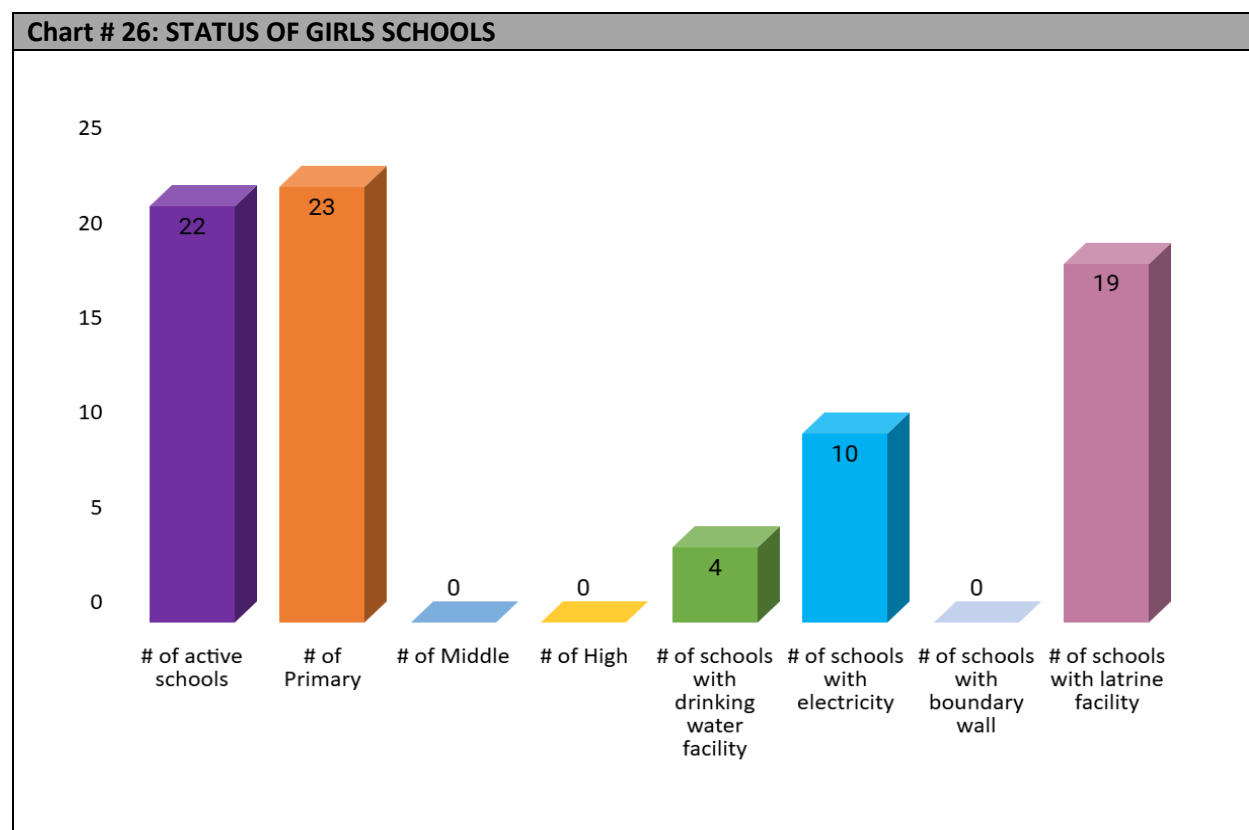
3.6 IDENTIFICATION OF OUT OF SCHOOL GIRLS SCHOOLS[52]

The baseline mapping study highlights a critical issue with 930 girls identified as out of school in the 56 profiled villages. Of these, 582 are between the ages of 6-10, and 347 are aged 10-18, indicating that a considerable number of girls miss foundational and secondary education opportunities. Alarmingly, 747 of these girls have never been to school, while 182 dropped out, reflecting systemic barriers to both enrolment and retention. These figures point to deep-rooted challenges such as poverty, cultural norms, lack of infrastructure, and limited access to education facilities. Addressing these barriers is crucial to reducing the number of out-of-school girls and ensuring they have the opportunity to access and benefit from education, empowering them and fostering long-term socio-economic development in their communities.

Village profiling process also recorded that there are only 6 non-formal education schools in the area which are not sufficient to cater the needs. Out of 56 villages profiled, only 5 villages have local community organization which reflects need for organization and mobilization efforts in these communities to help collective action to address community issues.


[52] Based on village profiling data

3.6.1 PERCEPTION ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF GIRLS EDUCATION

The baseline data on the realization of the importance of girls' education highlights that a majority of respondents (63.9%) consider it important, while 11.2% view it as somewhat important, and a significant 24.9% believe it is not important. This indicates a substantial gap in awareness among nearly a quarter of the population, underscoring the need for targeted efforts to emphasize the value of educating girls. Regarding the perceived benefits of education, 55.5% of respondents associate it with better job opportunities, reflecting an understanding of its economic advantages. Additionally, 24.5% recognize that education can delay marriage, while 20.1% see it as a means to improve social standing.

Chart # 27: REALIZATION OF GIRLS EDUCATION	Chart # 28: BENEFITS OF GIRLS EDUCATION
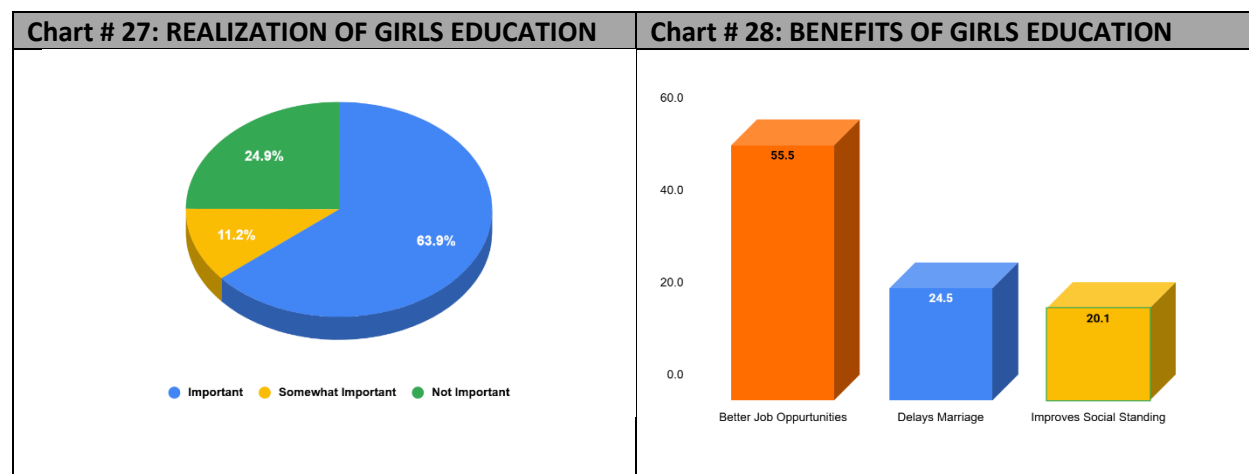
3.6.2 BARRIERS TO GIRLS' EDUCATION

The baseline data on challenges faced by girls in attending school in Mithi Taulka highlights financial difficulties as the most significant barrier, affecting 52.8% of respondents. Distance to school (14.3%) and cultural or religious barriers (14.2%) also emerge as key challenges, reflecting the impact of geographic and societal factors on school attendance. Inadequate quality of education, cited by 9.4%, points to the need for improved educational infrastructure and teacher training. Concerns about safeguarding and protection (5.4%) and lack of safety (3.3%) further underscore the importance of creating a secure and supportive environment for girls.

Chart # 29: BARRIERS TO GIRLS' EDUCATION
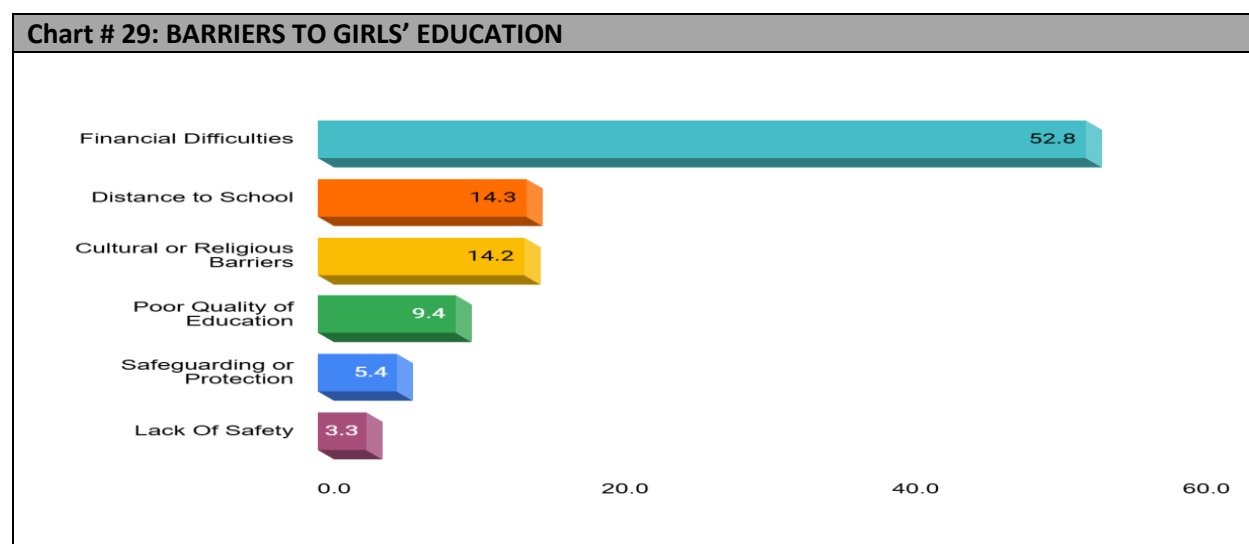
A major concern raised was the scarcity of female teachers, which discourages parents from sending girls to co-educational schools due to cultural norms and safety concerns. Additionally, many schools in the area lack basic facilities, such as water, toilets, and classrooms, creating an uncomfortable learning environment. This contributes to high dropout rates, with many girls leaving school by class three due to inadequate infrastructure and cultural constraints. Additionally, parents exhibit strong reluctance to continue their daughters' schooling once they reach puberty. This resistance stems from several interconnected cultural and social factors:

> *"There is no female teacher in our village and parents do not feel safe to send their girls to the boys school."*
>
> *(FGD Participants)*

1. There is a deeply held belief that family honour becomes particularly vulnerable during a girl's puberty years.
2. Parents perceive that allowing girls to leave the house during this period, even for education, puts their family honour at risk.
3. The primary concern appears to be security-related risks that parents believe their daughters face when traveling to and from school.

As a result of these concerns, many parents choose to keep their daughters at home after they reach puberty, prioritizing what they perceive as family honour and security over educational opportunities. This cultural practice creates a significant barrier to girls' continued education beyond the onset of puberty.

The issue of school location was also highlighted (FGD with male and female), as schools are often situated far from villages and lack transportation facilities, making commuting unsafe and challenging, particularly for girls. Community leaders and members expressed strong interest in participating in educational initiatives, provided that adequate facilities and resources are ensured. They stressed that setting up schools closer to villages, equipping them with basic facilities, ensuring the availability of female teachers, and providing safe transportation options are critical to improving access to education for girls. These measures can help address the barriers to education and encourage regular attendance.

> *"We are willing to send our girls to school, but the school is too far and it almost impossible for girls to walk so much distance to attend school."*
>
> *(FGD Participants)*

3.6.3 PERCEPTION ABOUT LINK BETWEEN ECONOMICS AND EDUCATION

The baseline data indicate the strong recognition of economic stability as a critical factor for girls' education, with 87.2% of respondents considering it particularly important and 11.4% somewhat important.

Chart # 30: LINK OF ECONOMIC STABILITY WITH EDUCATION

Very important   Somewhat important   Not important
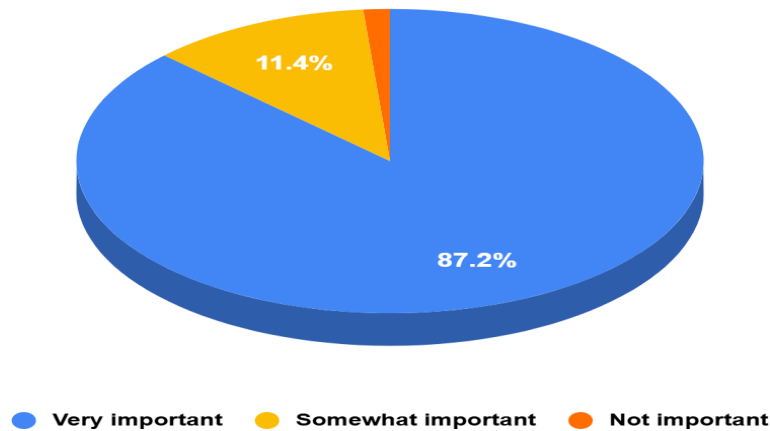
The discussions with stakeholders, including community members, educators, and government officials, highlight key themes and trends regarding education. Participants emphasized that economic hardship limits families' ability to afford education-related expenses, such as school supplies and transportation, often prioritizing household, or economic activities over education, particularly for girls.

3.6.4   EFFORTS BY FAMILY TO SUPPORT GIRL EDUCATION

The baseline data on efforts to support girls' education shows that 47.0% of respondents have taken steps to promote girls' education, while a majority, 53.0%, have not. This indicates a significant gap in active community engagement toward improving educational opportunities for girls. In families, particularly those with multiple children, girls are often viewed as an economic burden, leading parents to prioritize boys' education when resources are limited. This bias is further complicated by cultural norms that closely link family honor to girls' puberty age. The concept of honor creates additional restrictions on girls' mobility and activities, particularly during adolescence. Adding to these challenges, parents express reluctance to send their daughters to school due to concerns about the "certain school situation," which suggests inadequate privacy or gender segregation facilities that don't align with cultural requirements. These intertwined economic, cultural, and infrastructural barriers create significant obstacles to advancing girls' education in the region.
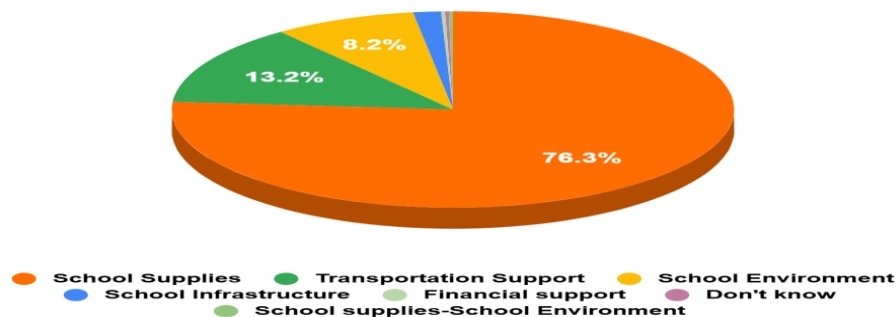
Chart # 31: EFFORTS BY FAMILY TO SUPPORT GIRL EDUCATION

53.0%   47.0%

● Yes   ● No
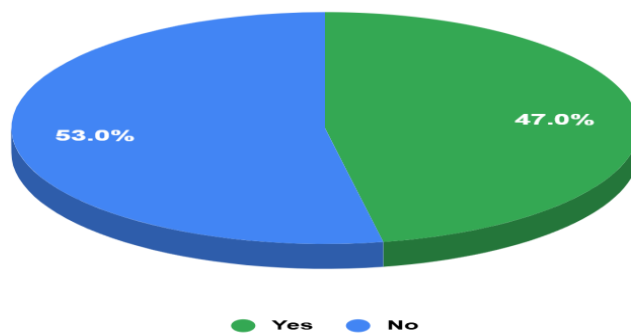
3.6.5 SUPPORT NEEDS TO BENEFIT GIRL EDUCATION

The baseline data on the type of support identified to benefit girls' education highlights that the majority of respondents (76.3%) prioritize school supplies as the most critical form of assistance. Transportation support is considered important by 13.2%, reflecting challenges related to accessibility. Improvements to the school environment (8.2%) and infrastructure (1.6%) are identified by fewer respondents, suggesting these issues are less visible or pressing in comparison. Financial considerations in education extend far beyond just school fees, encompassing essential expenses like uniforms, stationery, and clothing. While primary school students can wear colored clothes, uniforms become mandatory after primary level, creating an ongoing financial burden for parents. Surprisingly, only 0.2% of respondents mentioned financial support as a key factor, despite financial difficulties being a major barrier to education. This low response rate might suggest concerns that direct financial aid could be diverted from its intended educational purpose. The minimal number of respondents who either expressed uncertainty or identified multiple forms of support points to a communication gap between schools and communities, highlighting the need for more comprehensive dialogue about the various challenges affecting girls' education and the full scope of financial commitments required from families.

Chart # 32: SUPPORT NEEDS TO BENEFIT GIRL EDUCATION

13.2%   8.2%   76.3%

● School Supplies   ● Transportation Support   ● School Environment
● School Infrastructure   ● Financial support   ● Don't know
● School supplies-School Environment

3.6.6   AWARENESS ABOUT PROGRAMS TO SUPPORT EDUCATION

The baseline data shows that 45.4% of respondents are aware of some kind of initiatives or programs that are working to support education in their area, while a majority, 54.6%, report no such programs or are unaware of their existence.

Chart # 33: AWARENESS ABOUT PROGRAM TO SUPPORT EDUCATION

54.6%

45.4%

● Yes   ● No
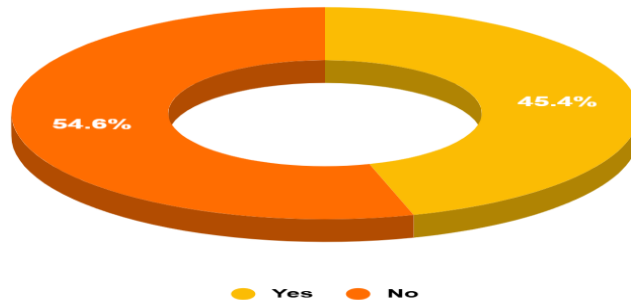
Focus group discussions with male and female participants, as well as SMC members, reveal that key figures within communities are willing to support education through collective initiatives, such as hiring teachers. However, these efforts are often hindered by limited resources. There is a shared understanding that poverty forces families to prioritize marriage over education, but education and empowerment programs for women are seen as critical tools to break cycles of poverty and promote socio-economic growth.

Within the community, there is also an acknowledgment of the valuable role played by NGOs. These organizations have effectively initiated door-to-door awareness campaigns, established schools in underserved areas, and advocated for girls' education, contributing to meaningful progress in addressing educational challenges.

3.7   FINDINGS ON LIVELIHOOD

3.7.1   MAJOR ECONOMIC CHALLENGES

The baseline data on main economic challenges highlights that nearly half of the respondents (47.5%) identify insufficient income as their primary economic concern, reflecting widespread financial insecurity. A sizeable portion (30.3%) cite a lack of job opportunities, indicating limited avenues for stable employment and income generation. Additionally, 13.3% report the high cost of living as a key challenge, suggesting that rising expenses further strain already limited financial resources. Lastly, 8.4% identify lack of access to financial resources as a barrier, pointing to the need for improved credit and savings mechanisms. The baseline data also shows that 40.9% of respondents are aware of any programs supporting livelihoods in their area, while the majority, 59.1%, report no such programs or are unaware of their existence.

Chart # 34: MAJOR ECONOMIC CHALLENGES	Chart # 35: EXISTING PROGRAM TO SUPPORT LIVELIHOOD
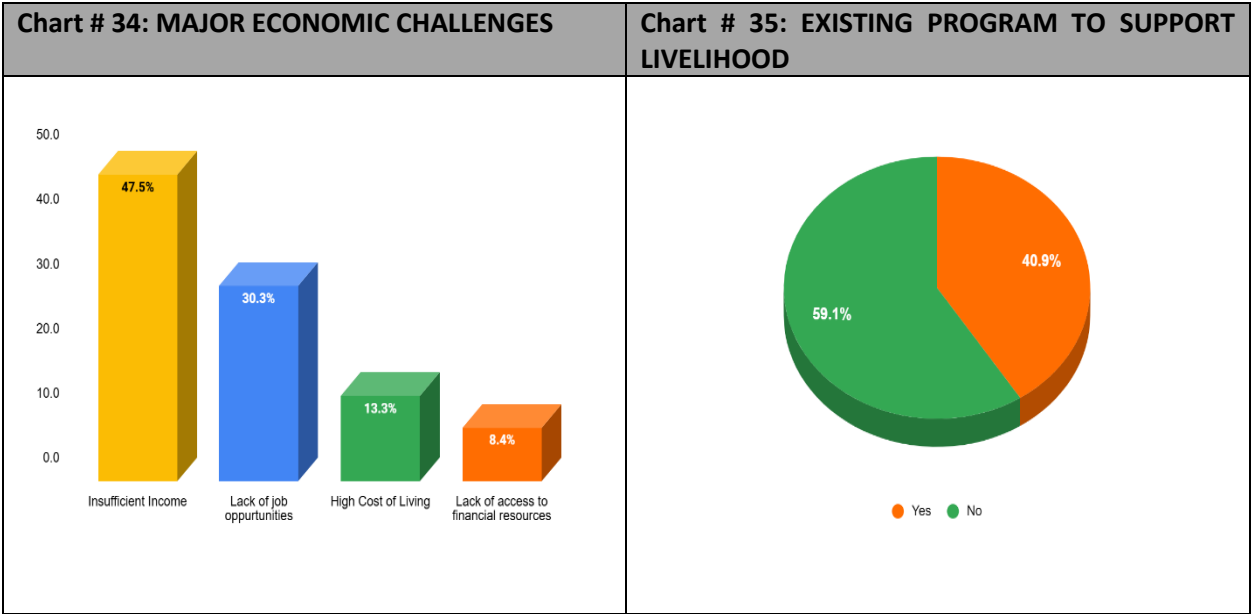
3.7.2   STRATEGIES TO MITIGATE ECONOMIC IMPACTS AND ACCESS TO PROGRAMS

The baseline data highlights the strategies households employ to manage economic difficulties, with borrowing being the most common approach (48.2%) using informal mechanisms, followed by taking loans (29.5%) from formal institutions. Seasonal work is another strategy used by 15.1% of respondents, reflecting the reliance on temporary or irregular income sources. A smaller proportion (6.3%) manage financial challenges by reducing expenses, indicating limited flexibility in household budgets. Additionally, only 32.2% of respondents have participated in livelihood improvement programs, while a majority (67.8%) have not engaged in such initiatives.

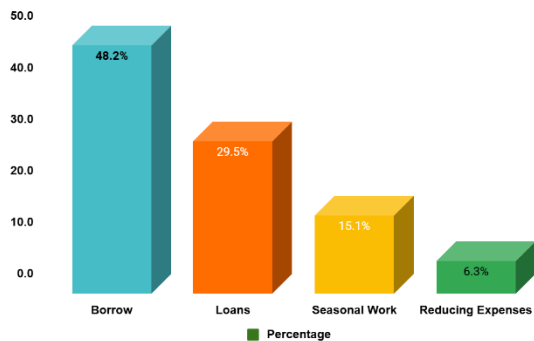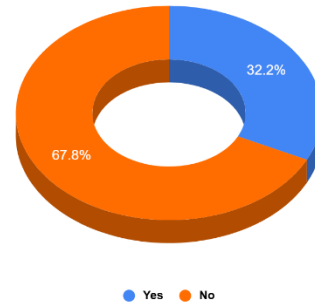| Chart # 36: STRATEGIES TO MITIGATE ECONOMIC IMPACTS	Chart # 37: ACCESS TO LIVELIHOOD PROGRAMS

Chart # 36: STRATEGIES TO MITIGATE ECONOMIC IMPACTS — bar chart: Borrow 48.2%, Loans 29.5%, Seasonal Work 15.1%, Reducing Expenses 6.3% (Percentage)

Chart # 37: ACCESS TO LIVELIHOOD PROGRAMS — donut chart: Yes 32.2%, No 67.8%

3.7.3   TYPE OF POTENTIAL SUPPORT THAT CAN BENEFIT LIVELIHOOD

The baseline data indicates that skill training and job creation programs are viewed as the most effective forms of livelihood support, with 58.9% of respondents identifying these as key to benefiting their community. Financial assistance, such as loans or subsidies, is also seen as important by 35.8% of respondents, reflecting the need for direct financial resources to alleviate economic challenges. A smaller proportion (5.3%) value a combination of financial assistance and job creation initiatives.

Chart # 38: POTENTIAL SUPPORT AREAS TO IMPROVE LIVELIHOODS

Chart # 38: POTENTIAL SUPPORT AREAS TO IMPROVE LIVELIHOODS — bar chart: Skill Training and Job Creation Programs 58.9%, Financial assistance (e.g., loans, subsidies) 35.8%, Financial assistance/job creation 5.3%
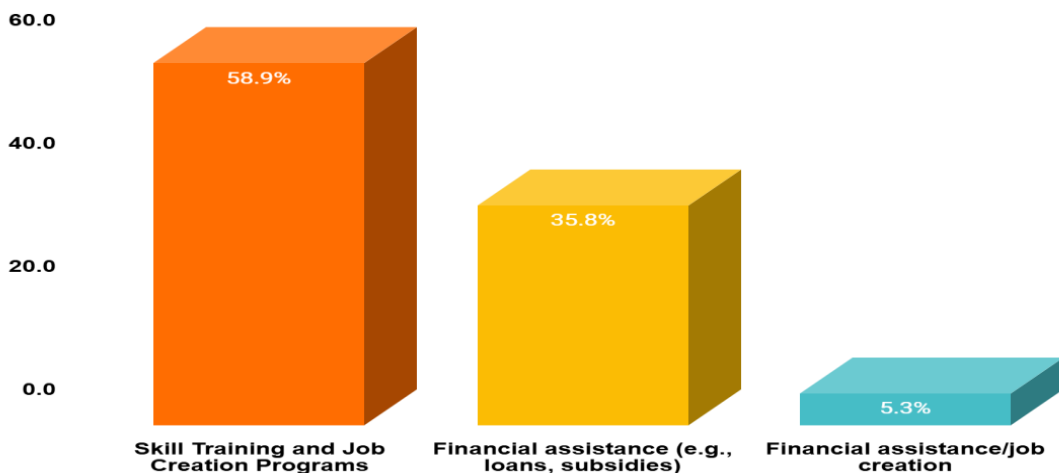
4 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 ADDRESS IMMEDIATE AND LONG-TERM EDUCATION NEEDS

The study's data clearly highlights the scarcity of functional schools for girls, particularly middle and secondary schools. This severe lack of educational opportunities beyond the primary level significantly restricts girls' ability to continue their education. Even the schools categorised as functional face critical challenges, such as insufficient teaching staff, poor infrastructure, inadequate water and sanitation facilities, or being located too far away for young girls to access regularly.

While boys' schools in the area offer co-educational programmes, the study found low enrolment rates for girls due to parental reluctance to send their daughters to such institutions. As a result, the region experiences a high rate of out-of-school girls, exacerbating the educational gap. Despite these challenges, the baseline data reveals a strong awareness among parents and the community about the importance of girls' education. There is widespread recognition that improving access to and retention in education could play a pivotal role in delaying child marriage.

To address these challenges effectively, an integrated set of effort is needed, combining immediate interventions with longer-term strategies.

In the short term, the primary focus must be on ensuring immediate and safe access to education for girls and bringing schools closer to where they live. A starting point could be implementing organised and targeted mobilisation efforts with parents to encourage them to send their daughters to existing girls' or boys' schools.

Another key approach to improving access to education is the recruitment of teachers from within the community or nearby villages. This measure would help ensure that non-functional schools, currently hindered by a lack of teaching staff, can become operational. Additionally, schools with teacher shortages could meet the demands of newly enrolled girls,

> *Focus on building schools, providing scholarships, and improving the quality of education.*
>
> **(KII with DO primary and AD Social Welfare)**

addressing one of the critical gaps in education provision. These teachers could begin classes in existing government buildings, making use of local resources to start bridging the gap.

Additionally, creating a safe and welcoming environment for students is essential. Immediate actions, such as ensuring access to clean water and adequate sanitation facilities, can have a transformative impact on school attendance and retention. Introducing transportation services would help girls overcome the challenge of distance, while scholarships and financial incentives could alleviate the economic burden on families. These efforts should be further strengthened by understanding the unique needs of individual families and providing tailored support to address the barriers highlighted in the study. Such initiatives would not only encourage parents to send their daughters to school but also lay the foundation for sustained educational opportunities for young girls.

In the areas where government buildings are unavailable, establishment of the Non-Formal Education (NFE) Centres offers a viable solution. These centres would be strategically located within the communities, ensuring that they are easily accessible. Girls could be enrolled in nearby government schools to maintain their formal status, while attending classes at the NFE Centres. This arrangement

would enable them to appear for formal government exams, blending flexibility with the benefits of the formal education system. The Non-Formal Education (NEF) school system represents an innovative and flexible approach to ensuring universal education access for girls by utilizing existing community structures like Madrassas and life skill institutes. This system's core strength lies in its adaptable hours and culturally sensitive framework, allowing girls to balance domestic responsibilities with their education while respecting local customs and traditions. By integrating formal education into established community institutions, NEF schools create a bridge between traditional and modern learning methods, making education more accessible and relevant. The system employs local teachers, involves community leaders, and offers practical life skills alongside academic education, ensuring that learning remains contextually appropriate and valuable. Through this comprehensive approach, NEF schools effectively address various barriers to girls' education, from cultural constraints to practical challenges, ultimately working towards the goal that no girl child remains out of school. The success of this system stems from its recognition that education must adapt to learners' circumstances rather than forcing students to conform to rigid educational structures, resulting in improved enrolment, retention rates, and educational outcomes.

However, addressing the issue of education access on a sustainable basis requires more than temporary solutions. **In the long term**, mobilising local communities to tackle the problem of non-functional schools is crucial. Through an ongoing process of organisation, mobilisation, and capacity building, community members—working in collaboration with the education department and local representatives—can conduct targeted root-cause analyses of each school's dysfunction. This collaborative effort can then focus on addressing the underlying issues and making efforts to draw attention of elected representatives, community influentials and government officials in reactivating these schools to ensure they become fully functional and meet the needs of the community.

> *"Education enables both boys and girls to contribute to their families' well-being, support their communities, and fulfil their roles in a meaningful way. It is a path to empowerment, and our religious teachings encourage both genders to seek knowledge."*
>
> **(KII with DO primary and AD Social Welfare)**

Lastly, if resources permit, mobile or shelter schools could offer an effective solution to the issue of unavailable teachers and schools. These mobile or shelter schools would provide convenient and safer access to education, particularly for girls, by bringing learning directly to their doorstep at times that suit their schedules. The mobile and shelter schools, integrated with Non-Formal Education (NEF) framework, provide a cost-effective solution to educational access challenges, particularly in this area. These portable educational units operate efficiently where permanent school infrastructure is absent, offering flexible curriculum adaptation and multi-grade teaching methods through community-based teachers. Despite ongoing costs for transportation and materials, the system remains economical due to lower infrastructure expenses and shared resources, while effectively addressing cultural sensitivities by bringing education to girls' doorsteps and accommodating local schedules and norms.

Together, these measures—short-term and long-term—would not only address the challenges faced by schools in the study area but also empower communities to prioritize and sustain girls' education.

4.2   PROMOTE ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT INITIATIVES

Most families in the study area primarily depend on agriculture or daily and seasonal wages for their livelihoods, with men predominantly engaged in agricultural work and women in casual labour or domestic tasks. Baseline data on economic challenges reveal that nearly half of the respondents cite insufficient income as their primary concern, underscoring the pervasive financial insecurity in these

communities. Additionally, the data indicates that many families are burdened by debt as a means to cope with their economic difficulties. These findings emphasize the need for economic interventions to alleviate economic pressures and improve household stability.

Communities and stakeholders recognize skill-based training programs, particularly those accompanied by startup or financial assistance, as a valuable initiative, especially for women but also for the broader community. To maximize their impact, these skill development initiatives should be grounded in thorough needs assessments to ensure alignment with the specific requirements and suitability of the target population.

> *Implement program like microfinance and vocational training to reduce the economic pressure on communities.*
>
> **(KII with CSO and AD Social Welfare)**

Targeting young girls in these programs can yield long-term benefits by empowering them to be recognized as valuable contributors within their communities and households. Such initiatives can also enable girls to pursue education, gain employment, and achieve economic independence. Establishing partnerships with existing stakeholders, including social welfare departments, vocational training institutes, local NGOs, and businesses, can enhance access to mentorship opportunities and amplify the impact of these programs.

4.3 AWARENESS AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Insights from the baseline study, combined with recommendations from NGO representatives, community members, and teachers familiar with the local context, emphasize the need for comprehensive awareness initiatives. While the baseline data reveals that most community members are aware of the legal age for child marriage, the practice is still widely accepted, reflecting deeply ingrained social norms. Addressing and shifting these norms requires long-term, consistent efforts rooted in the realities of the local context.

> *Educate communities on the negative consequences of child marriage and the benefits of education.*
>
> **(KII with CSO, Lawer and Media)**

For awareness efforts and initiatives to be effective and impactful, they must be guided by thorough audience analysis and actively involve local community members, leaders, religious figures, and other influential stakeholders. The active engagement of these key actors is crucial for building trust with gatekeepers and garnering the support necessary to ensure the project's success.

Additionally, organizing events and campaigns focused on child safeguarding measures is crucial. Both quantitative and qualitative studies revealed a significant lack of awareness about safeguarding policies, helplines, and appropriate actions to take in case of incidents. Only a small portion of community members were familiar with these policies and mechanisms, highlighting the need for targeted awareness efforts.

> *Work with religious leaders, parents, and community leaders to change cultural attitudes and practices.*
>
> **(KII with Religious Leader and AD Social Welfare)**

The study also found widespread reluctance to discuss child marriage, with many believing that family matters should remain private—a significant barrier to addressing the issue. Awareness initiatives must focus on reducing the stigma associated with discussing and reporting child marriage, while promoting accessible and confidential channels for children at risk to seek help.

To effectively convey these messages, awareness initiatives should leverage a variety of communication strategies tailored to the audience. These could include alternative media such as community theatre and

local cable networks, traditional media like radio and television, as well as modern technological platforms, including social media, to expand reach and engagement.

4.4 FOSTER COLLABORATIONS AMONG GOVERNMENT, CIVIL SOCIETY AND COMMUNITIES

Focus group discussions and key informant interview data highlight the importance of fostering stronger collaboration and engagement between communities, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), and relevant government departments at the taluka and district levels. Strengthening this interface can create numerous opportunities to implement proactive and supportive measures. These efforts would ensure the effective enforcement of laws, enhance social service delivery (including education, healthcare, birth and marriage registration, social protection, and access to economic empowerment programmes), and ultimately contribute to the prevention of child marriages.

Beyond preventing child marriages, these collaborations can ensure that victims have access to essential support services, including medical care, protection services, psychological support, reproductive health services, and rehabilitation.

Furthermore, there is significant potential to establish and strengthen a unified monitoring and support system to enhance access to justice and services related to child marriages. Such a system would enable the systematic implementation and enforcement of laws prohibiting child marriages, ensuring all cases are properly monitored and recorded. Additionally, it would provide legal aid to victims, safeguarding their rights and supporting their recovery and reintegration into society.

4.5 SUPPORT BIRTH AND MARRIAGE REGISTRATION

Although birth and marriage registration were among the least mentioned needs during the household survey, interviews with key informants, civil society representatives, and government officials emphasised the importance of improving the documentation of births and marriages. Efforts to raise awareness about the significance of these registrations should include tailored messaging that highlights the tangible benefits communities can access as a result, such as eligibility for social services or legal protections. Integrating these messages into broader community engagement efforts could help drive meaningful improvements in registration rates.