

# ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS THEORY OF CHANGE

CREATING SPACE FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS  
TO END VIOLENCE AND CHILD MARRIAGE



Rownak Ara Haque, Shahnaj Parvin, and Shamim Ara Begum, officials of Oxfam Canada's partner Polisree. Photo credit: Abir Abdullah/Oxfam.



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This resource outlines Oxfam Canada’s Theory of Change for its Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (EVAWG) programming. A theory of change shows how we expect outcomes to occur over the short, medium, and longer term as a result of our work. In this document we outline how we understand VAWG; why we focus on ending VAWG; the ultimate aim of our EVAWG programming; our Theory of Change for our work in this area; and highlights and best practices stemming from our EVAWG programs.

## WHAT IS VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS (VAWG)?

Violence against women and girls is defined as “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.”<sup>1</sup>

There are multiple forms of VAWG, whether physical, sexual, psychological or economic. This can include violence in the public sphere, such as sexual harassment, or within the private sphere such as intimate partner violence, which can often lead to femicide. Some forms of violence are technology based, such as internet stalking, or driven by economic factors such as international trafficking of women and girls. Others are rooted in harmful traditional practices, such as Female Genital Mutilation and Child, Early, and Forced Marriage.

VAWG continues to be one of the most widespread, persistent, and devastating abuses of human rights. Global research shows that at least one in three women will experience physical or sexual violence in their lifetime<sup>2</sup> and an average of 35% of women experience violence at the hands of their current or former partners in their lifetime, rising to 70% in some countries.<sup>3</sup> Every day an average of 137 women are killed by a partner or a family member.<sup>4</sup> At least 12 million girls are married before they reach the age of 18. This is 28 girls every minute.<sup>5</sup> A 2018 large-scale global survey of women and men identified ending gender based violence as the top priority for women.<sup>6</sup> Women and girls who face further marginalisation – based on race, caste, ethnicity, ability, class, gender identity or sexual orientation – experience intersecting forms and higher rates of violence. This is a human rights crisis affecting every country in the world.

Violence not only has a negative impact on the physical, mental, sexual, and reproductive health of women and girls; it also acts as a barrier to their economic and decision-making opportunities in the home and society. This not only limits their own social and economic development, but also that of their families, their communities, and their society, which are deprived of the unique perspectives and contributions women and girls can make. It is a human rights crisis affecting every country in the world. It is linked to devastating social consequences such as poverty, lack of education, gender inequality, and child and maternal mortality. VAWG is a violation of human rights that has immediate and long-term consequences.

1 Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (DEVAW), 1993: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/violenceagainstwomen.aspx>

2 World Health Organization, Department of Reproductive Health and Research, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, South African Medical Research Council (2013). *Global and regional estimates of violence against women: prevalence and health effects of intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence*, p.2.

3 UNODC (2018) *Global Study on Homicide: Gender-related killing of women and girls*. Available online here: [https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/GSH2018/GSH18\\_Gender-related\\_killing\\_of\\_women\\_and\\_girls.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/GSH2018/GSH18_Gender-related_killing_of_women_and_girls.pdf)

4 UNODC (2018) *Global Study on Homicide: Gender-related killing of women and girls*. Available online here: [https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/GSH2018/GSH18\\_Gender-related\\_killing\\_of\\_women\\_and\\_girls.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/GSH2018/GSH18_Gender-related_killing_of_women_and_girls.pdf)

5 UNICEF: <https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-protection/child-marriage/>

6 KCL (2019) *Global Attitudes Towards Gender Equality*. Available online at: <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/news/global-study-reveals-what-world-thinks-about-womens-equality>

## WHY DOES OXFAM CANADA FOCUS ON ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS (EVAWG)?

Oxfam Canada believes that every woman and girl should be able to live free from violence, regardless of her age, race, social, or economic status. VAWG is prevalent in every country of the world, regardless of level of development. All women and girls are at risk, although some circumstances – such as living in poverty, disability, race, caste or ethnicity, or conflict settings – increase vulnerability. However, patriarchal gender power relations are a root cause of all women and girls’ vulnerability to and experiences of VAWG. In virtually all aspects of human life, women and girls are explicitly or implicitly considered to be inferior to men and boys.<sup>7</sup> VAWG is an expression and a reinforcement of gender-based discrimination and social norms and beliefs that permeate all aspects of society and dictate what are feminine and masculine roles. The root causes of VAWG are unequal gender power relations that are deeply embedded in the cultural, social, and political institutions of each country, as well as in every aspect of society: home, community, schools, and institutions, among others.<sup>8</sup>

The terms “violence against women and girls” (VAWG) and “gender-based violence” (GBV) are often used interchangeably. VAWG and Child and Early Forced Marriage (CEFM) are both expressions of GBV. GBV, however, also includes violence against men, boys, and sexual minorities or those with gender-non-conforming identities. Violence against these other groups is often rooted in the same gender inequalities and harmful gender norms (Violence Against Women and Girls Resource Guide, 2019).

Oxfam Canada focuses on VAWG, including CEFM, since it is the most prevalent form of GBV in the countries where we work.

## WHAT IS THE ULTIMATE AIM OF OXFAM CANADA’S EVAWG PROGRAMMING?

Oxfam Canada’s EVAWG programming is aimed at ending all forms of gender-based violence, in particular the most prevalent expressions of violence: Intimate Partner Violence and, Child and Early Forced Marriage (CEFM). Recognizing that VAWG is rooted in deeply unequal gender relations that continue to lead to discrimination against women and girls, our objective through our programming is to focus on shifting the social norms and practices that perpetuate those inequalities.

A feminist approach to international assistance recognizes that promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls require the transformation of social norms and power relations. This objective is also essential for the achievement of all other development priorities.

Global Affairs Canada, *Feminist International Assistance Policy* (2017)

7 Raab, M. (2012). *Ending Violence Against Women: an Oxfam Guide*: [https://www-cdn.oxfam.org/s3fs-public/file\\_attachments/ending-violence-against-women-oxfam-guide-nov2012\\_2.pdf](https://www-cdn.oxfam.org/s3fs-public/file_attachments/ending-violence-against-women-oxfam-guide-nov2012_2.pdf)

8 UN Women – Virtual Knowledge Centre to End Violence Against Women and Girls: <https://www.endvawnow.org/en/articles/300-causes-protective-and-risk-factors-.html>

Based on Oxfam’s long experience supporting women and girls to realize their rights, Oxfam has identified three key issues that perpetuate such violence:

- 1 Persistent gender-discriminatory attitudes, norms and practices that condone it;
- 2 Lack of access by women and girls who have experienced or are at risk of experiencing violence to quality support services and economic opportunities that can prevent violence from recurring; and
- 3 Limited knowledge and capacity of civil society to influence change.

## WHAT IS OXFAM CANADA’S THEORY OF CHANGE FOR ITS EVAWG PROGRAMMING?

### OVERALL, OUR EVAWG THEORY OF CHANGE IS GROUNDED IN THE FOLLOWING OXFAM PRINCIPLES:

- Changes in social norms are critical to lasting, transformative change
- Programs/projects should target multiple levels, sectors & timeframes
- Intersectional and contextual analyses are central to changes in social norms
- Adopt a gender-transformative approach and leverage Oxfam’s role as a convener, ally in change, capacity building support
- Women and their organizations are vital to creating lasting changes in social norms
- Engaging men and boys are critical to sustaining change in social norms
- Empowering women, girls and gender non-identifying people is central to shifting imbalances in power and critical to targeting gender inequality
- Influential Norm Setters, including traditional and community leaders are powerful allies
- Duty bearers are critical in both modeling positive attitudes and influencing their institutions to create a positive enabling environment
- Essential service provision is key to preventing and responding to VAWG/GBV
- Promote learning and innovation
- Do no harm

No one approach on its own will lead to transformative change for women and girls, particularly around something as culturally embedded as violence against them. Oxfam Canada’s approach to EVAWG is grounded in the socio-ecological model on violence prevention, with interventions occurring across multiple levels (individual, family, community, institutional/political, and societal). When working collectively with diverse stakeholders across these levels, changing gendered social norms that perpetuate VAWG is possible. Evidence has shown that gender inequality is a key driver of violence against women yet it is not always seen or understood as key by individuals and communities who often blame poverty, alcohol, or cultural practices. Change requires an enabling environment where VAWG is increasingly unacceptable and the rights of women and girls are respected. This environment constitutes a mutually reinforcing network in which:

- empowered women and girls demand change,
- engaged and committed men and boys support the change,
- key influencers promote and model the change,
- a legal framework formalizes it,
- service providers offer quality support to women and girls, and
- strong organizations promote women and girls’ social, economic, and political empowerment and mobilize individuals and communities to hold duty-bearers to account.

This theory of change takes a multi-pronged approach based on three pillars: engaging key community actors and networks to understand, support and promote positive gender norms; supporting women and girls who have experienced violence; and building knowledge and capacity of institutions and alliances to influence change. Global research has shown

that alliances and movements across a number of stakeholders working together for a common goal will foster a stronger collective power for change.

Building on Oxfam’s experience of working to shift power relations, the theory of change takes a non-linear view of change, recognizing that work to increase women and girls’ participation is likely to provoke backlash, which must be anticipated and managed. It also builds on Oxfam’s understanding that Southern-based CSOs, particularly WROs, are key agents in determining the direction of change in their societies. Therefore, supporting them in their critical work to promote the rights of women and girls and to reduce VAWG is key to long-term sustainability, and therefore a central component of this program.

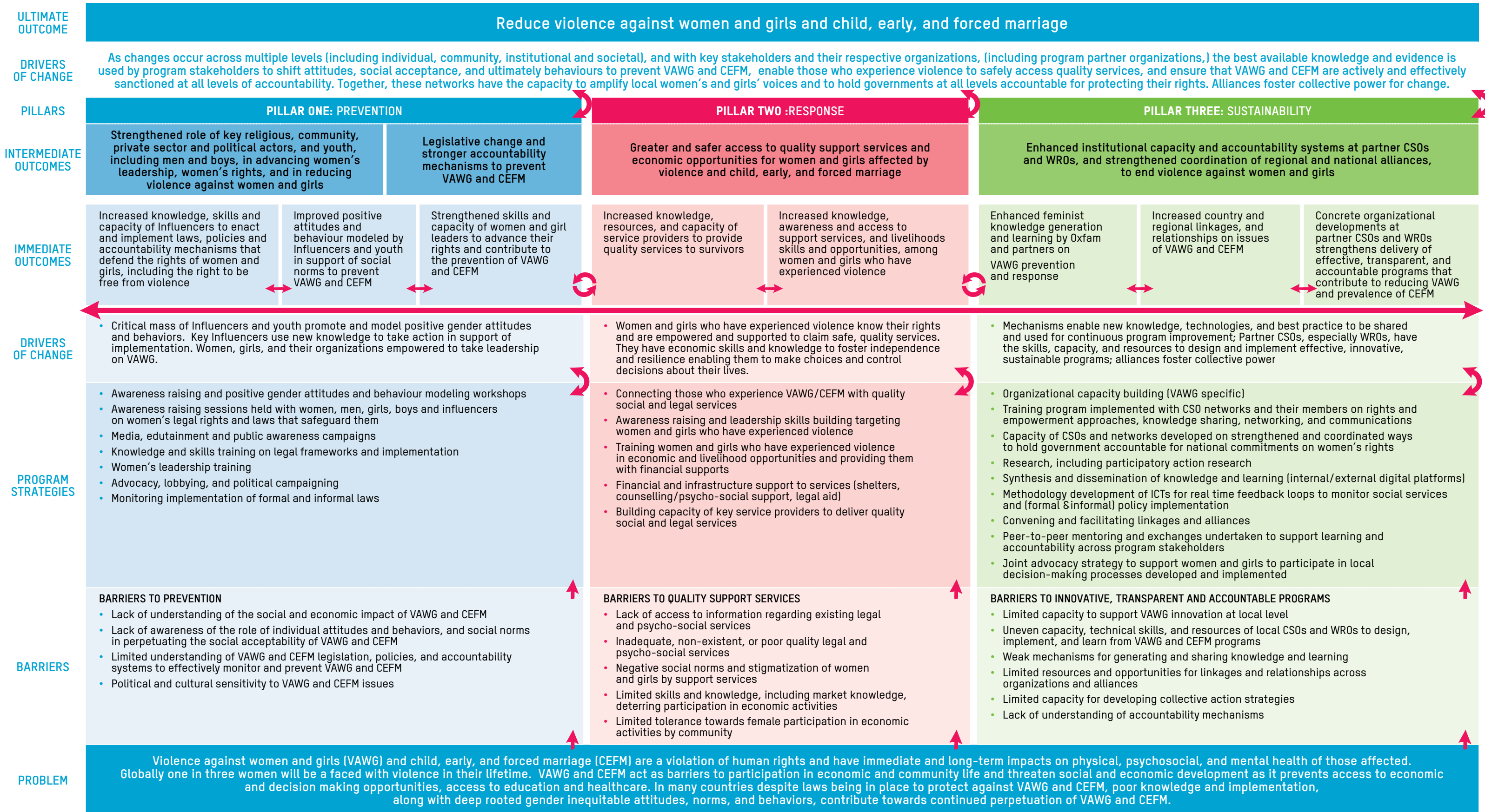
Most importantly, community actors, especially women leaders, teachers, and youth, work in increasingly complex contexts and are the harbingers of change.



Sonali Naik, 23, has gained custody of her two young boys and applied for child support through support services provided by Oxfam Canada’s partner.

Photo credit: Atul Loke / Oxfam

# OXFAM CANADA'S EVAWG THEORY OF CHANGE



# HOW DOES OXFAM CANADA IMPLEMENT ITS EVAWG THEORY OF CHANGE?

As depicted in the theory of change diagram our EVAWG Theory of Change takes an integrated and multi-faceted approach, acting on multiple levels (individual, community, institutional and societal) with diverse actors. We strive to achieve our ultimate outcome through program strategies undertaken with the following actors and influencers, known as **DRIVERS OF CHANGE** based on the following set of assumptions:

PILLAR 1	PROGRAM STRATEGIES	ASSUMPTIONS
Engaging key community actors to support and promote positive gender norms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Awareness raising and positive gender attitudes and behaviours modeling workshops with <b>influencers, youth/adolescents, and women and girls</b> who are community leaders</li> <li>Media, edutainment and public awareness campaigns</li> <li>Knowledge and skills training on legal frameworks and implementation for <b>influencers, youth/adolescents and women and girls who are community leaders</b></li> <li>Women’s leadership training</li> <li>Advocacy, lobbying and campaigning with <b>duty bearers</b></li> <li>Monitoring implementation of formal and informal laws</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Training will increase the capacity of influencers to change or implement laws;</li> <li>Exposing influencers and youth to alternative gender norms and opportunities to reflect on and discuss these norms with peers will support attitude and behaviour change;</li> <li>Women and girls will become more active in demanding their rights if there are concomitant changes in the attitudes and behaviours of people around them;</li> <li>Advocating for changes in laws and rules can reinforce changes we are seeking in attitudes and behaviours;</li> <li>Strengthening of (formal and informal) accountability mechanisms at different levels makes clear the expected behaviour to which people will be held to account, and helps to sustain and reinforce positive behaviour change, including at individual (personal) responsibility and collective (political) responsibility.</li> </ul>

## PILLAR 1 IN ACTION

In Indonesia, Oxfam’s partners successfully lobbied the national government to raise the minimum age of marriage for women from 16 to 19, conducted campaigns through social and mainstream media, including connections with over 50 “champion” journalists, and held cultural events aimed at challenging the social acceptance of child marriage.



Chinky Shukla is a participant in the Creating Spaces project in Nainital, Uttarakhand State, India.

Photo credit: Anja Kessler/Oxfam

PILLAR 2	PROGRAM STRATEGIES	ASSUMPTIONS
Supporting women and girls who have experienced violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Connecting those <b>women and girls</b> who experience VAWG/ CEFM with quality social and legal services</li> <li>Awareness raising and leadership skills building targeting <b>women and girls</b> who have experienced or are at risk of experiencing violence</li> <li>Training <b>women and girls</b> who have experienced or are at risk of experiencing violence in economic and livelihood opportunities and facilitating job connections.</li> <li>Financial and capacity building support to service providers (shelters, counselling/psycho-social support, legal aid) to adequately respond to VAWG using a survivor-centred approach</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The quality of services can be improved through skills training and awareness raising to shift attitudes and behaviours of key service providers;</li> <li>Women’s awareness about available services will enable them to better access these services, particularly if concomitant community efforts shift attitudes about social acceptability of violence and reduce stigmatization of those who experience violence;</li> <li>Building life skills, especially economic and livelihood skills, builds women and girls’ independence and resilience, enabling them to make choices and control decisions about their lives.</li> </ul>

## PILLAR 2 IN ACTION

Oxfam Canada’s partners in Nepal use a social and financial skills package to empower adolescent girls and women through weekly sessions conducted by social mobilizers and facilitators over a period of months. This life skills training is an effective way of creating a cohesive and supportive platform in which girls and women create a positive peer pressure to stay in school and community, help each other advocate with parents against child marriage, build networks, and become change agents in their community.

PILLAR 3	PROGRAM STRATEGIES	ASSUMPTIONS
<p><b>Building knowledge and capacity of institutions and alliances to influence change</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Organizational capacity building, specific to elimination of violence against women and girls, for <b>partner CSOS, especially women’s rights organizations</b></li> <li>Research, including participatory action research, with <b>partners and their project participants</b></li> <li>Synthesis and dissemination of knowledge and learning (internal/external digital platforms)</li> <li>Methodology development of ICTs for real time feedback loops to monitor social services and (formal and informal) policy implementation</li> <li>Convening and facilitating linkages and alliances to build or support <b>national and regional networks and alliances</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Projects, advocacy and influencing can become more effective in reducing VAWG and prevalence if greater emphasis is placed on generating and using new research, best practice and learning;</li> <li>Improving capacity of project partners to design, implement and learn from VAWG initiatives contributes to more effective work to reduce VAWG and CEFM and is key to long term project sustainability;</li> <li>By modelling accountability and transparency, project partners take responsibility for and contribute to global accountability on VAWG/CFEM;</li> <li>Collective power of alliances and networks, particularly of women’s rights organizations, is critical for influencing lasting and long-term sustainable change.</li> </ul>

### PILLAR 3 IN ACTION

Oxfam Canada has supported gender transformative research on the impact of Community Discussion Centres in Nepal on changing social norms, attitudes, and behaviours of the women involved on VAWG and CEFM. The women in the CDCs kept diary entries of how their involvement in these peer-to-peer empowering spaces allowed them to make changes when it came to their daughters’ lives. The research showed the important of formalizing the CDCs so that they can be taken up as an official national mechanism to fight CEFM in the country.



Faridul, Lovely and Rubina, all of whom work to end violence against women and child marriage through-belonging to the Creating Spaces Community Group.

Photo credit: Abir Abdullah/Oxfam

Rubina was married when she was just 12 years old and was forced to quit school. Her grandfather arranged her marriage before she was born. Rubina’s mother, Lovely, was also married when she was just a child as were three generations of women before her. Faridul was just a child when his sister was married, he looked on as her childhood was stolen from her. Rubina, Lovely and Faridul have joined the Creating Spaces Community Group. They work together to end child marriage and violence against women and girls. Rubina now has a voice within her home and community. She advocates to end child marriage and is determined that her 3-year old daughter Jhim gets an education.

We will measure our success in achieving our ultimate aim to reduce VAWG and CEFM by assessing whether an enabling environment has been created where these abuses are increasingly unacceptable and the rights of women and girls to live free from violence are respected. This environment constitutes a mutually reinforcing cycle in which:

- empowered women and girls demand change,
- engaged and committed men and boys support the change,
- key influencers promote and model positive change,
- a legal framework formalizes it,
- service providers offer quality support to women and girls, and
- strong organizations promote women and girls’ social, economic, and political empowerment and mobilize individuals and communities to hold duty-bearers to account.

Oxfam Canada is currently in its fifth year of implementing the Creating Spaces To Take Action on Violence Against Women and Girls project (2016-2021). The project’s final evaluation will collect evidence-based data from the project districts to test certain elements of the Theory of Change and associated assumptions outlined in this document. An updated Theory of Change reflecting our program learnings will be shared subsequently.

#EndChildMarriage

#EndVAWG



19-year-old Amaliah Sultanbatao conducts classroom discussions on gender-based violence and child early and forced marriage among her school mates in Bubong, Lanao del Sur (BARMM), Philippines, as part of their commitments in the student government council.

Photo Credit: Vina Salazar / Oxfam



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For **more information** on our EVAWG programming, visit:

<https://www.oxfam.ca/what-we-do/issues-we-work-on/ending-violence-against-women-and-girls/>



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