

## **Keeping girls in secondary school with bicycles**

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### **Organisation**

Janaki Women Awareness Society (JWAS)

### **Country**

Dhanusha district, Nepal

### **Length of project**

May 2016 – April 2018

### **Supported by**

Donations received via Global Giving and the *Girls Not Brides* website

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### **Project summary**

Janaki Women Awareness Society (JWAS) is working to address child marriage in southern Nepal by providing girls in secondary school with bicycles so they can continue their education. For many girls, staying in school is difficult, because of the pressure of getting married but also because many schools are located far away. By receiving a bicycle, girls who used to walk 5 – 12km to school every day, now have a faster and safer way of traveling to school. This means they are more likely to attend on a regular basis and have more time and energy for their school work.

Keeping girls in school is one of the most effective ways to prevent child marriage while simultaneously providing them with the knowledge, skills and confidence to create a more promising future for themselves.

### **What are the anticipated outcomes as identified in the *Girls Not Brides* Theory of Change?**

- Girls are increasingly aware of their rights.
- Girls have the opportunity to develop solidarity with one another through peer groups and collective action.
- Alternative economic and social roles for girls and women exist and are valued.
- Increased access of married and unmarried girls to health, education, economic, and legal support.

In addition, this project is working with families and communities working towards the following outcomes:

- Families, communities and young people are increasingly aware of the harmful impact of child marriage and alternatives available.

- Families, communities and young people value alternative options to child marriage.
- Families and communities prefer not to marry girls as children.

## **What are the key activities of the project?**

### **Identifying the most vulnerable girls**

JWAS start by obtaining school data from the district education office to understand how many girls are enrolled and attending secondary schools in the area and which girls are the most vulnerable when it comes to school drop-out and child marriage.

The project team then visit schools across the district to talk to teachers, school management committees and community members. They discuss the challenges that girls face, such as how many girls have to travel long distances to school, and use the visits as an opportunity to talk about the harmful consequences of child marriage.

Girls are selected and invited to be part of the project based on their socio-economic background and the distance they live from school. For each of the girls, a house visit takes place to verify how far she lives from school, her socio-economic status and to hold a meeting with her parents. This is an opportunity to stress the importance of continuing a girl's education into secondary school and to explain the harmful consequences of child marriage.

### **Providing girls with bicycles**

After the household visits, the girls and their families are formally invited to take part in the project and the schools are informed. A final meeting is organized with the parents of each girl to take their written commitment for continuing their daughter's education and not marrying her before the age of 20. Her school must also express a commitment to address child marriage.

Each girl is then given a bicycle during a special ceremony to mark the occasion. Local authorities, school teachers, guardians, students, politicians and the media are invited to be part of the event and show their support for girls' education.

Immediately after the distribution ceremony, the team visit the household of each recipient to reinforce their commitment to continuing their daughter's education and not marrying her before she turns 20. The team continues this follow up and support to schools and girls throughout the year.

The project aims to provide 500 girls in some of the poorest communities in southern Nepal with bicycles by May 2018 so they can easily attend secondary school.

## **Has the project been evaluated?**

Although a formal evaluation hasn't been performed yet, the team are frequently visiting the girls, their parents and schools to track their progress. The findings of a recent post distribution visit at Baidhyanath Devnarayn Public Lions Higher Secondary School, Dhanusha are below.

According to the girls who received bicycles:

- They have never missed a day of school since receiving a bicycle.
- They have never been late for school since receiving a bicycle.
- They now have time to participate in extracurricular activities held in school because they can get to and from school quickly and safely.
- The girls say, "friends, neighbours in the village, teachers at school and even parents at home treat us differently as compared to before".
- They say they feel 'capable, stronger and confident'.

According to teachers at the schools:

- The attendance rate of girls with bicycles has increased
- One recipient came top in her class since being able to attend school more frequently using her bicycle.
- Parents of girls who received bicycles are more involved in their daughters' education and visit the schools to keep track of their progress.
- Girls who received a bicycle are more involved in extracurricular activities.
- Girls who received a bicycle are more confident to speak in public and appear to be less shy to speak out in class.
- Girls who received bicycles are not married but two of their peers who did not receive a bicycle have been married despite school efforts to stop them.

According to parents of the girls:

- The project team found that almost all parents whom they met during follow up visits continue to be committed to their daughters' education.
- While many still face the social pressure to marry their daughter, parents feel happy that their daughter has a bicycle and can continue her schooling.

To hear the story of two girls, Khusbuda and Ragini, who received bicycles, please click [here](#).

## **What are the challenges in implementing the project and how are you working to overcome them?**

There are thousands of vulnerable girls at risk of child marriage and who meet the criteria for receiving a bicycle. However due to limited funding for this project, only 25 girls per school can currently be supported.

To overcome this challenge, the team is planning to develop a long-term project in two strategic areas: empowering girls and mobilising families and communities (including religious leaders). Initial consultations with education stakeholders, schools and communities are taking place. The team are also consulting other NGO partners to think about developing a joint project which will include the bicycle component along with distributing other educational materials such as school uniforms, books, schools bags and sports materials.

The target for the current project is to distribute bicycles to 500 girls. As of the end of June 2017, the team had distributed 140 bicycles and raised around \$20,000 for the project. To meet the overall target, a further \$30,000 is needed by May 2018. By using social media, Global Giving and the support of *Girls Not Brides*, JWAS are communicating widely to a variety of national and international donors who may help to continue to support their work.

## **What factors are important to the success of the project?**

### **Support and direction from the government of Nepal**

The National Strategy to End Child Marriage was endorsed by the government of Nepal in March 2016. This has provided a roadmap for any project addressing child marriage by providing strategic

direction and the backing of the government. JWAS initiated this project with strong commitment to support girls' education, a key part of the national strategy.

### **The *Girls Not Brides* Theory of Change**

Being a member of *Girls Not Brides* and *Girls Not Brides* Nepal has provided the team with a greater understanding of the different areas that need to be worked on if we are to end child marriage. The *Girls Not Brides* Theory of Change was a useful document and one which guided JWAS to design this project and work towards the objectives set out in the 'empowering girls' strategy area of the Theory of Change.

### **Support from local education institutions and the media**

Support received from the local media, educational institutions, and international partners has contributed to the success of this project. The media have been key in helping to disseminate news about the project so more people understand the issue of child marriage and the work of JWAS. Education-related stakeholders and schools have helped to identify the most vulnerable girls and remained in touch for continued information and support. National and international friends have helped by sharing information about the project with donors throughout the world.

### **What pieces of advice would you give other civil society organisations considering implementing a similar project?**

- Where possible design the project in line with the government's strategy to end child marriage. In Nepal there are six pillars to the National Strategy to End Child Marriage. Where possible, work towards objectives which touch interrelated areas of the strategy. For example, by working to ensure girls stay in school, it is equally important to make sure your work also reaches out to families and communities to get their buy in and support for their daughter's education as well as working with education providers to ensure schools are safe and providing quality education.
- The longer term your project can be, the better. It's also really important to cover as many communities as possible because when it comes to the harmful social norms which perpetuate the practice of child marriage, the more communities you reach, the more likely you are to see social change.
- Keep sharing best practice and success stories. When one project team shares this information, it's so helpful for other organisations working to end child marriage to hear what's working and why.

For more information about JWAS' project visit their [Global Giving page](#).