

Final evaluation report

More Than Brides Alliance learning project

“Making the Most of What We Know”



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Contents

- Executive summary..... 3
- Project background 4
- Approach of the evaluation 6
- Scope 7
- Limitations 8
- Team..... 9
- Findings..... 10
 - 1a. What is the intended and/or actual application of insights by project participants in ‘Youth-Led Research’? 11
 - 1b. What is the intended and/or actual application of insights by project participants in the ‘Learning Spark Fund’?..... 12
 - 1c. What is the intended and/or actual application of insights by project participants in ‘research collation’? 13
 - 1d. What is the intended and/or actual application of insights by project participants from learning events?..... 14
 - 1e. What is the intended and/or actual application of insights by project participants from knowledge products?..... 16
 - 2a. How is the learning approach ‘Youth-led research’ evaluated by participants? 17
 - 2b. How is the learning approach ‘Learning Spark Fund’ evaluated by participants? 18
 - 2c. How is the learning approach ‘Implementation experience’ evaluated by participants? 19
 - 2d. How is the learning approach ‘Research collation’ evaluated by participants? 19
 - 2e. How are the national and international learning events evaluated by the participants? 20
- Conclusion 22
- Recommendations 22
- Annex I - Results from the post-event surveys of the learning events 27

Executive summary

The More Than Brides Alliance (MTBA) learning project ran for two years and was implemented in nine countries through different learning activities being Youth Led Research, Learning Spark Fund, Research Collation, Implementation Experience, and learning events.

The alliance decided to organize a final evaluation of the project to deepen insights on what participants learned from different learning activities, how they applied these insights in their work, and how they appreciated the different activities themselves. The emphasis during the data collection process was on qualitative data (and to a lesser extent quantitative data), and triangulation of findings was done through document review, interviews, and admission of surveys. There were two main questions to answer during this evaluation, leading to a conclusion and recommendations which were specific per activity.

The main purpose of the project to facilitate linking and learning between participants in the different activities has been achieved according to respondents. All activities were valued including online cross-country exchange despite challenges around working and collaborating online. For most participants, their participation improved both their thinking about the topic and (future) programming on child marriage. Most participants changed ideas they had on the subject of child marriage and adolescent sexuality due to the project activities. The majority of participants had already applied lessons learned in their work or life, and those who didn't deemed it very likely they would in the future. Besides the few general lessons learned that applied to most participants, this report shows the variety of individual experiences.

There was high overall appreciation of participants and high appreciation for each learning activity. The time investment versus the results was found on average very worthwhile for each activity they participated in. The in-depth approach in interviews, the extensive support during the start of the Learning Spark Fund activities, the process and strategies employed during research, and support given to both girls and coordinators in youth-led research were all positive points mentioned by participants.

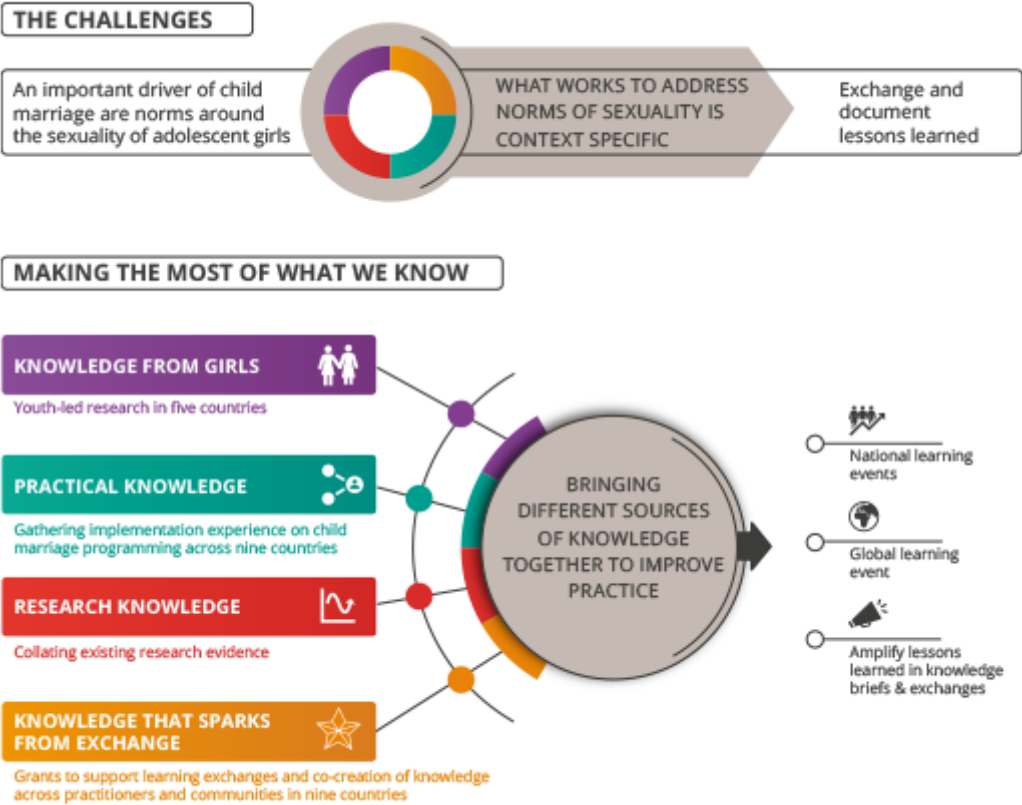
The evaluators would like to thank all participants and the MTBA learning team for their time and dedication.

Project background

The More Than Brides Alliance (MTBA) learning project is a complimentary learning project of the More Than Brides Alliance program which aims to reduce child marriage, and is funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The MTBA learning project ran from 1 August 2019 to 30 September 2021 and used different learning approaches to facilitate learning and exchange around the theme of child marriage and adolescent female sexuality. The MTBA learning project has been implemented in nine countries being India, Pakistan, Malawi, Niger, Mali, Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Nepal and Uganda, by an alliance existing of Save the Children Netherlands, Oxfam Novib, Simavi and Population Council New York.

The project aimed to look beyond the work of the alliance partners (in Mali, Niger, Malawi, India and Pakistan) and expanded its reach by collaborating with partners of other child marriage initiatives such as the Dutch funded child marriage alliances Her Choice and Yes I Do, and aimed linking up with Girls Not Brides and the UNICEF-UNFPA global program to end child marriages

Through an internal evaluation of the MTBA learning project, we wanted to find out if and how the learnings by participants from learning approaches, learning events, knowledge products are -or will be- used to improve child marriage programme practice. We also wanted to know how the different learning approaches themselves were appreciated by participants. The learning approaches referenced in this report are 1) Youth-Led Research, 2) Implementation Experience, 3) Research Collation, and 3) Learning Spark Fund, as well as 4) Learning Events. See also the below infographic.



Youth-Led Research was described by the MTBA learning project as ‘the meaningful and central participation of young people in all phases of the research, from the identification of relevant learning questions and methodology to study design, data collection, analysis, and reflection to feed into programme implementation.’ The objective was both informing programmes content-wise as well as

enabling youth to take the lead on research.¹ The approach was led by Oxfam Novib and takes place in 5 countries.

The *Learning Spark Fund* aimed to connect community members in all participating countries and practitioners in the field of child marriage around a core question and facilitate discussion and learning from one another for improvements in child marriage interventions, based on experience. The Spark Fund made use of different tools for fostering learning exchanges.² It made use of a small grant mechanism, which existed of 3 types of grant calls for which eligible organizations could compete for funds. It made available 11 Community “Skyrocket” grants in 9 countries, 7 “Sparks” grants in 5 countries, and 1 “Fireworks” grant in 1 country³. The approach was led by Simavi.

The MTBA learning project states that *Implementation Experience* was applied in all countries. The approach referred to the reflections and lessons learned by project staff members when working on a project. These were gathered from those working within the MTBA project, as well as outside of MTBA. There were different ways to gather data on existing interventions including internal and external survey's, in-depth interviews, and follow-up interviews with practitioners who were implementing child marriage interventions. The findings fed into the learning events.⁴ The approach was led by Save the Children.

Research evidence was collected by local researchers in all nine countries. This was done both internally from available MTBA evaluations and research, and externally through surveys and collating peer-reviewed and gray literature into a database of articles and reports on child marriage and adolescent SRHR and their intersections. The approach was led by Population Council who were also responsible for the collation. Building on this, the *Research Collation* approach existed of collating research evidence with practitioners' experiences. The project sought to elevate program evidence to the same level as research data for increased complementarity and to help researchers and programs implementers better understand the links between child marriage and female adolescent sexuality. This was a joint effort by Save the Children and Population Council.

Participants from all learning approaches, together with others involved in the field of child marriage, were brought together during *national and international learning events* to exchange and learn from each other. These took place at the national level between October-December 2020, followed by an international exchange in March 2021 (partly online, partly face to face in-country due to COVID restrictions). Many participants in the national learning events also participated in the international event. A diverse group of participants attended these events, including youth researchers, program implementers, researchers, SPARK fund participants, country learning coordinators, policy makers, and a diverse international audience at the international event. Mali and Niger each combined their international and national events in March 2021.

The MTBA learning project also produced *knowledge products* such as articles and reports and several were published on a dedicated public website (others are work in progress). These were the result of the outcomes and key discussions of the events.

The audience of this final evaluation report are the consortium partners, participants in different approaches, a general audience interested in the topic of child marriage or in facilitation of learning & exchange in international development cooperation, and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs as donor.

¹ Article 'Youth-Led Researchers', published 7 February 2021

<https://morethanbrides.org/mmwwk/2021/02/07/youth-led-researchers/> accessed on 28-6-2021

² <https://morethanbrides.org/mmwwk/2020/12/14/learning-spark-fund/> accessed on 20-7-2021

³ The Community Skyrocket grant was up to €6,000, for national exchanges focusing on communities. The Spark grants' was up to €3,000, for local and national exchanges. The Fireworks grant was up to €11,000, for multi-regional (within country) or multi-country exchanges.' <https://morethanbrides.org/spark/#grantdetails> , accessed 15-9-2021

⁴ MTBA learning project Methods, Tools & Process – Implementation Experience Gathering, version 5, May 15th, 2020

In this report, the terms ‘learning activity’ and ‘learning approach’ are used as synonyms.

Overview of learning approaches applied by the MTBA learning project per country (X=applied)

Country	Youth-led research	Implementation experience	Research collation	Learning Spark Fund	National learning event	International learning event
Bangladesh		X	X	X	X	X
Ethiopia	X	X	X	X	X	X
India	X	X	X	X	X	X
Malawi		X	X	X	X	X
Mali	X	X	X	X		X
Nepal	X	X	X	X	X	X
Niger		X	X	X		X
Pakistan	X	X	X	X	X	X
Uganda		X	X	X	X	X
Total nr of involved participants/ organizations	± 80 (5 countries with each around 15 researchers+ coordinator)	63 (9 countries with each 7 organizations)	5 (in-country researchers, excl. Population Council HQ)	19 organizations	198	224

Approach of the evaluation

Two core learning questions (LQ) were defined for the present evaluation:

- **LQ1: What is the intended and/or actual use of insights (lessons learned) by project participants in improving their work (specifically program practice) or life?**
- **LQ2: How are the different learning approaches evaluated by participants in the different project components?**

The learning questions were formulated in the course of 2021 by the project team. There was no result framework with indicators available for the project. The reason to include intended use of the lessons learned -rather than actual application- is due to the short timeframe to have applied any new skills or knowledge, between participation in activities and this evaluation.

Overview of methods to collect data per learning approach per learning question.

	Youth-led research	Implementation experience	Research collation	Learning Spark Fund	National learning event	International learning event
Document review	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Surveys	NO	YES (LQ2)	NO	YES (LQ1+2)	YES (LQ1+2)	YES (LQ1+2)
KII/FGD	YES (LQ1+2)	YES (LQ2)	YES (LQ1+2)	YES (LQ1+2)	YES (LQ1)	YES (LQ1)

A mixed approach to remotely collect quantitative and qualitative data has been used to answer the learning questions. Data collection methods included an internal document review (such as country event reports and reflection notes by teams), the administration of surveys, semi-structured key informant interviews, and focus group discussions. Qualitative data was analyzed manually in Microsoft Word based on transcripts of interviews. Analysis was done through horizontal reading of transcripts

for similar questions (interviews and FGDs were semi-structured) and with basic coding where useful. Open ended questions from the survey were analyzed with basic thematic coding where required.

Consent forms were obtained from all interviewees. Interview transcripts and survey responses are stored on password protected laptops and Save the Children's SharePoint drive, and will be removed 6 months after publication of the MTBA learning project learning products.

Learning question 1: What is the intended and/or actual use of learnings (lessons learned) by project participants in improving their work or specifically program practice, or life?

This relates to effectiveness as an evaluation criteria⁵, as it asks if the project achieves its objectives. It includes knowledge gained during Spark Fund participation, youth-led research and events, and through knowledge products published on the MTBA learning project website. As not all participants could apply lessons learned to program practice as they did not implement programs on child marriage, the question for those groups was adapted to lessons they apply in their life (for ex. life skills for adolescent researchers). As evaluators, we think this is valuable information for similar future activities.

The main question was broken down in sub-questions per learning activity. To collect data, a document review of reports from national and international learning events took place. Second, an online final survey for a large number of participants (shared with 260 persons) in all countries was executed in July-August 2021, to look into intended and/or actual uptake of learnings. This concerns those who were involved in the Learning Spark Fund and the implementation experience, as well as attendants of the learning events. It also included questions on the use of knowledge products.

Youth researchers and those working on research collation (including local researchers working directly with Population Council) did not participate in the survey, as interviews were a more useful method to collect data on their perspective since they do not directly work on programs where learnings can be implemented.

The third data collection method was a select number of qualitative interviews in participating countries in July and August 2021, to go more in-depth compared to the survey. This concerned participants of all approaches.

Learning question 2: How are the different learning approaches evaluated by participants in the different project components?

This relates to relevance as an evaluation criteria, as it asks if the project is doing the right things. It analyses whether needs were addressed.⁶ This was broken down in sub-questions per learning activity. To evaluate the appreciation of participants of the different learning approaches, mainly 2 ways of data collection were used being the same online final survey and qualitative interviews as mentioned above. To evaluate the usefulness of the learning events, a short survey was sent shortly after each event to evaluate the event itself, or a country event report (written by country learning coordinator) was used instead.

Scope

- Geographical scope: all 9 countries
- Time scope: the full program period of the MTBA learning project from August 2019 - August 2021
- Thematic scope: all learning approaches, national and international learning events, available knowledge products

Per country, a selection of learning approaches has been made to make the evaluation feasible for the evaluating team within the given timeframe and budget. The decision has been made (approved by the project team) to have full inclusion of countries, but not have full inclusion of all applied learning approaches per country.

⁵ <https://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/daccriteriaforevaluatingdevelopmentassistance.htm#coherence-block>

⁶ <https://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/daccriteriaforevaluatingdevelopmentassistance.htm#coherence-block>

The selection of learning approaches per country was based on a number of considerations. Each country would be included by evaluating 1 learning approach applied in that country. Secondly, a regional distribution of selected approaches was made between Asia and Africa, and between East and West Africa where possible. For the Learning SPARK fund, 3 out of 5 countries were selected where more than 1 type of fund was in place to have a larger pool of organizations to choose from for interviews. For research collation, there were local researchers in 2 countries who worked more intensively with Population Council than other researchers who collected data which were both selected. There was no relevance to interview the team or a HQ itself. This was followed by a random selection of approaches per country to fill in the gaps. Also, 2 countries have 2 learning approaches instead of 1 as time allowed to do more interviews. These were split between Africa and Asia.

Overview of learning approaches selected for inclusion in evaluation (X) and actual interviewees (in brackets)
 KII = key informant interview
 FGD = focus group discussion (although limited exchange)

Country	Youth-led research	Implementation experience	Research collation	Learning Spark Fund
Bangladesh			X (female local researcher-KII)	
Ethiopia	X (male YLR coordinator-KII)			
India	X (male YLR coordinator + 2 female youth researchers-FGD)		X (female local researcher-KII)	
Malawi		X (none)		X (male-lead organization-KII)
Mali	X (male YLR coordinator-KII + 2 female youth researchers-FGD)			
Nepal				X (male-lead organization-KII)
Niger				X (male-lead organization-KII)
Pakistan		X (male implementer-KII)		
Uganda		X (female implementer-KII)		
Total nr of interviewees	7	2	2	3

Limitations

- All data collection has been done online. As with any remote interview tool, there is the risk of lower interaction and misunderstandings. However, through transcripts and recording we tried to reduce at least the second risk.
- Findings per approach cannot be generalized to all countries as not all learning approaches applied in each country were evaluated. This applies to both quantitative and qualitative data.
- The final survey response rate was around 17% (45 responses out of 260), providing sufficient data for most countries but very low for Pakistan and Bangladesh despite attempts to increase this. A cause for the overall low response might be the late timing of the survey (a deliberate attempt to capture actual application of learnings at the end of the project). Participants might have changed jobs or were less willing to complete a survey for a project they no longer actively work on.

- Interviews with girl researchers were attended by the YLR coordinator/assistant due to child safeguarding principles (we were uncertain of their age) and translation needs, which might have limited their openness.
- The decision was made for the Learning Spark fund to focus on lead organizations only and not interview community participants. Hence, information from ultimate target groups is missing in the report.
- Interviews with an implementer in Malawi did not happen due to lack of responses, and alternative participants in 2 other countries for the same approach did not respond either. Hence, there was 1 interview less than planned.

Team

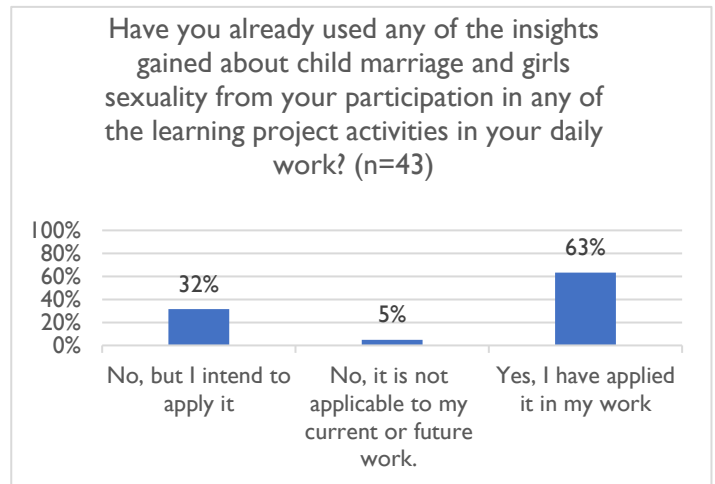
The female evaluation team consisted of Kim Groen, MEAL manager from Save the Children Netherlands who has been involved in the program for MEAL since end 2020 (e.g. collecting data from events through surveys), and Evelyne Nambozo, a consultant who served as a country learning coordinator for Uganda in the MTBA learning project program between March 2020 and March 2021. The Dutch team member conducted the interview from Uganda to ensure objectivity.

Findings

Learning question 1: What is the intended and/or actual use of insights (lessons learned) by project participants in improving their work or specifically program practice?

In majority, respondents (of the final survey) stated they have applied insights or lessons learned to their work, which they gained from their participation in MTBA learning activities. Another third of the participants intended to apply these to their work. This corresponded with the interviews, whereby the majority mentioned they have applied insights, and/or want to apply these in their future work or life. Some participants pointed out lessons from specific activities, others indicated the same insights for various activities.

For some participants, more than a year has passed since the start of any activities. For others, especially those involved in events only, it was between 4 and 9 months. However, even for those with the shortest period between an activity and actual appliance of insights, the majority responded positively although absolute numbers are small.



APPLIED INSIGHT

A number of changes in both mindset and work practices were made in an organisation and its staff in Niger, due to its involvement in learning activities. For example, the mindset of staff changed from somewhat underestimating young (rural) people to actually hiring young staff and giving them project responsibilities. This was due to the experience of working with youth at community level. The organisation also appreciated the element of reflection, and embedded this by installing work meetings for staff to share their knowledge and insights which were not captured by formal reporting.

Participant from Niger

APPLIED INSIGHT

From their participation in the various project learning events, at organizational level they have broadened their scope of stakeholders to involve in discussions on sexuality with girls. Initially, they only focused on parents to speak to the girls but now programming has included grandparents as and religious leaders given that they are key and are already doing a lot in talking to the youths about their sexuality. The organization has also embarked on advocacy at both district and national level for and has developed positive messaging for youths and parents in the initiation camps.

Participant from Malawi

For most of the participants, the learning needs which they had at the start of their participation were (partly) answered. The exchange on effective interventions or strategies in addressing child marriage, the importance of learning with target groups and in general, the existence of the link between sexuality and child marriage were mentioned as learning needs being addressed.

Examples of common appliances of insights by participants in their work or life

- General: (improved) understanding of the existence of the link between adolescent sexuality and early marriage
- Youth led research: apply and share new knowledge on topic with others, continue studies (vs getting married early), negotiating/convincing adults, analyse problems, be more confident in expressing themselves
- Learning Spark Fund: having a meeting with other/more stakeholders like religious leaders, providing safe spaces for girls, introducing more participatory approaches within the community or specifically with girls, adapting content of program activities
- Research collation: use of different, effective methods and process evaluations for future research, share research results with implementers in different ways
- Events: empowering girls through capacity building (such as build self-esteem), engagement of men, focus on education/schooling, and collaborating or having partnerships within civil society, increased youth participation during program design and implementation, advocacy through media, adapting content for workshops or activities

1a. What is the intended and/or actual application of insights by project participants in 'Youth-Led Research'?

According to the young researchers (both youth led research coordinators and young girls), the project contributed to empowering them especially through the (life) skills gained such as confidence to express themselves, communication and negotiation skills. For example, young girls had to convince their parents to release them to participate in the research, and they could now do a problem analysis among others which they are actually using in their day to day activities. These findings were in agreement with the reflections made by Oxfam Novib⁷ about the approach regarding the various skills the participants had acquired as a result of participation.

“Using the example we were given of the problem tree analysis during the coaching, I now try to carefully analyze any problem in my daily life before making a decision about it”. **Youth researcher**

Others participants reported that the project gave them helpful information about the risks and dangers of early marriage. Through this research some youth understood the consequences of child marriage and early pregnancies and decided to not want this for themselves and continue studying. Others reported being able to obtain knowledge on the appropriate age of marriage and are also willing to transfer this information to other young girls. Also some respondents indicated learning clearly the link between sexuality and child marriage, it changed the way they think about these topics.

“I learned more about early sexuality and early marriage. Because culturally, in reality, we see it from a distance.” **Youth led research coordinator**

Whereas the respondents from Mali gained information, the respondents from India and Ethiopia, stated that they gained communication skills during the research process and it is a valuable lesson as stated below by some respondents.

⁷ Article 'youth-led research', published in August 2021, <https://morethanbrides.org/mmwwk/2021/08/11/youth-led-research-results-and-recommendations/> accessed on 6-9-2021

“We learned how to talk to people, how to talk to parents, and how to understand them. And we can apply at home how to talk to parents and how to talk to the people of society. At first, I was afraid to ask anything from anyone. Now, I am not afraid to talk to anyone or if anyone asks anything.” Youth researcher

Beyond gaining personal skills and helpful information, the young girls also noted that the participation enhanced their ability to conduct research in the future especially in a simplified and systematic manner following the approach. It was through the training, workshops and research process they carried out that gave them the opportunities to interact with their community members and carry out research. Findings from the interviews show that the project also enhanced the researchers’ coordinator capacity to do research and this was through the coaching, trainings, one on one sessions with a mentor, and other technical support (both online and physical) they received from the MTBA learning project.

“You can send us anywhere you want to do similar kind of work and we will do it well with the experience we have.” Youth researcher

1b. What is the intended and/or actual application of insights by project participants in the ‘Learning Spark Fund’?

The survey showed that all participants found their engagement in the activities very to extremely useful to improve their thinking. The majority also changed some ideas they had on the subject of child marriage. Examples of these mentioned more often are changed perceptions around the role of parents, the need for parent engagement, better understanding of causes of child marriage, and to involve other stakeholders like cultural, religious leaders or government/law enforcement. Also the importance of youth participation was mentioned.

Around 90% of those who have already applied insights to their work, found these very much or extremely improved their programming on the linkage between child marriage and adolescent sexuality. Some have applied recommendations from activities in their programming like having a meeting with stakeholders, providing safe spaces for girls, but also introducing more participatory approaches and adapting content of activities. What made these participants apply lessons, was insights from exchanges, and evidence gained through project activities related to the Fund or learning events. All those who haven’t yet applied lessons learned, estimated it very likely that this will happen in the future. They mention examples like introducing a more participatory approach with target groups during project stages, organizing exchanges (for staff and target groups), and improved parent engagement.

From the interviews it was found that a few similar types of learnings were gained during participation in the activities. Both the value of participatory engagement with the community/youth, and personal growth of involved staff (coordinators) were mentioned explicitly. One participated called it ‘learning and unlearning’. The perceptions held by staff on how to present a project to a community and implement it were changed, as the Fund ‘forced’ organizations (in a positive way) to build in reflections in their proposals and think about a more participatory approach. This was different from their regular way of working so they had to ‘put all information we had in the back of our head’ and not put information in the mouth of the community participants. This was also mentioned in the survey as some respondents said it promoted creative thinking and to really listen to the community.

“We always say we have to make room for young people but often it’s like a discourse but without us really feeling it, without us really seeing the importance, without us being very convinced. And there [after the project], we are convinced.” Lead organization

A diverse set of lessons learned were either applied or to be applied still. An example of an already applied insight was to go beyond parent engagement and look at the role of grandparents, which was a new insight for one of the organizations gained from girls themselves. Grandparents could be a source of information on SRHR and even on child marriage. Another insight was to change the often negative perception in the organization on the role of religious leaders and focus on their positive role and actions ‘to enhance programming on sexuality’. A possible application of new knowledge was to look into the role of initiation counsellors and how they could provide information to young people on child

marriage which meets their needs. Another example was doing advocacy at local and national level on the role of parents who should take responsibility for their children also when these are becoming teenagers. The Spark Fund offered a platform to air these and other messages.

“If it wasn't for the Spark fund, we wouldn't have been able to bring together stakeholders at national level.”
Lead organization

Other examples of insights that were applied already by one participant were the recruitment of more young staff and giving them responsibility within the organization. More informal sharing of knowledge (besides formal reports) and giving staff working locally with youth a larger role in discussing projects was another insight. Also, the realization that staff underestimated the capacities of young people to speak up and express themselves (especially girls and youth in rural areas) was an important gain. A lesson learned for another participant was to stop always having separate group activities according to gender, age or function in the community, but bring these more together in the future. The assumption made by staff that having mixed groups would per definition hamper some participants to speak up, was proven wrong.

Another participant stated that girls gained much more confidence throughout the project which culminated in speaking at the event while before they were 'hiding themselves at home'. The insight, which was intended to become part of the organization's strategy, was to further strengthen girl empowerment as well as introduce this to their parents by sharing the same information through education. They already applied new knowledge gained from the event to offer a platform for girls and parents, together with other actors and government through campaigns. Also, the process itself of the Fund with leading participants going from broad orientations to narrowing down issues was found very useful and could be replicated in other projects.

1c. What is the intended and/or actual application of insights by project participants in 'research collation'?

The respondents highlighted and appreciated key strengths of the approach such as generating more evidence and bringing the linkage between sexuality and child marriage to the forefront which was otherwise missing in the existing research narrative. It also enabled researchers and implementers to be in the same space where implementers shared more context specific knowledge. These findings were in agreement with the reflection paper⁸ on collating research with evidence compiled by Population Council. The local researchers interviewed were able to clearly articulate how lessons learnt through MMWVK have informed or will inform their future research. For example, one researcher remarked that hearing about the effectiveness of life skills interventions via girls' groups from practitioners sparked interest in adopting a similar strategy for future programs given that these girls' groups provide an opportunity for the girls to connect. Secondly, she further appreciated the need to conduct process evaluations during implementation of upcoming projects on child marriage to ascertain effectiveness.

“In our new project, we are trying to understand and we are comparing it with the MTBA activities, and from the MTBA activities, we have suggested to the implementers that the Girls' Group activities are actually effective and need to be included.” **Local Researcher**

It was reported in India and Bangladesh that the approach involved hybrid interactive workshops which brought together researchers and implementers who were able to complement each other's knowledge as often times research knowledge may miss out on rich knowledge from implementers such as effectiveness of programs as researchers' focus may be on particular indicators. It was also noted that the approach led to the generation of new evidence regarding child marriage such as drivers of child marriage, hot spots of child marriage and workable interventions to inform future

⁸ Reflection note by the MTBA learning project team, 'Collating research evidence with implementation experiences', 2021 (not published)

programming. It was also noted that the approach helped bridge the gap where there is an absence of research but many programs addressing child marriage and Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights.

“The approach brought researchers and implementers to the same space that is also really effective. in that implementers bring a lot of knowledge that is more context specific especially effective interventions which research results alone may not provide given that not everything can be measured by numbers as a result, I wrote a blog to explain further the linkage between sexuality and child marriage and shared with implementers on child marriage within the country” **Local Researcher**

Additionally, the respondents also agreed that the approach was an eye opener to workable and context tailored strategies for addressing child marriage especially where there is scattered information about programs. It was noted that the approach is helpful in resource constrained settings, helping to communicate about efficiency and effectiveness of programs. The approach also enabled increased sharing of digital content which is vital in situations where physical meetings are not possible.

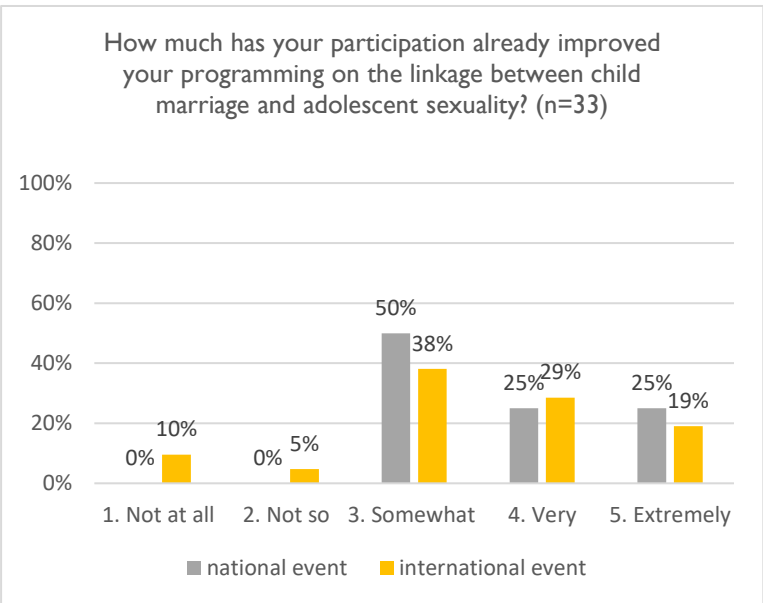
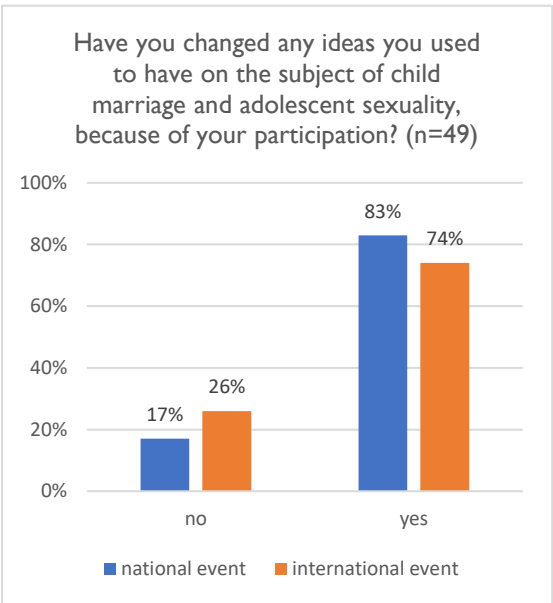
“There are so many programs, but we do not have like in one place you not find all these programs especially the workable strategies. Everything is like here and there, the proper documentation is not there... collate those things first, and this type of learning event is a nice way to do this actually”. **Local Researcher**

1d. What is the intended and/or actual application of insights by project participants from learning events?

Country learning events

Participants in the national learning events (who participated in the final survey) found their participation very useful to improve their *thinking* about the link between child marriage and adolescent sexuality (no data for Malawi and Bangladesh). Around 80% of them said they had changed ideas they used to have on the subject of child marriage and adolescent sexuality, because of their participation. Overall, the (increased) awareness of linkages between topics related to child marriage and sexuality seemed a more common effect of the event. The actual changes in ideas varied much per person. These ranged from better understanding of the link between child marriage and adolescent sexuality, of linkages between all kinds of topics, to using advocacy strategies or introducing working with parents in the approach or in proposals.

“We expanded our learning session on men and pregnancy with knowledge from the national event” **Participant, Uganda**



Zooming in on those who had already applied lessons learned to their work, all responded it somewhat to very much improved their programming on the linkage between child marriage and adolescent sexuality. All those who intended to apply insights in the future deemed it likely they will use these to improve their programming, and most found this very likely.

International learning event

Similar to the national events, the international event also scored on average a very good when it came to its usefulness to improve the thinking about the link between child marriage and adolescent sexuality for individual participants. While a quarter of the participants did not change any ideas they had on the topics of the event, the vast majority did. This is a bit lower compared to the national events. The need for engagement and approaches adapted to various groups within the community (especially male/boy engagement and parent engagement) were mentioned most as examples of insights that have been applied. Using a multi stakeholder approach was also mentioned. Other examples of insights were the benefits of learning in its own, such as the use of learning forums or other forms of exchange, different advocacy models, the need for inclusivity and participatory approaches, and the need for capacity building of staff on the themes. For those who had not changed ideas, reasons varied a lot for ex. for knowledge sharing contexts between countries differ a lot, still testing ideas from the event, or they were confirmed in their ideas.

“Early adolescent sexuality is not only a girl's issue. Boys also need to be involved, but also parents through awareness raising.” Participant, Mali

Focusing on those who had already applied lessons learned to their work, a majority stated it has somewhat to very much improved their programming on the linkage between child marriage and adolescent sexuality. For a few participants it hasn't so or not at all improved their programming. All those who intended to apply insights in the future deemed it likely they will use these to improve their programming, and most found this very likely.

During the international event, particular sessions were dedicated to lessons learned (such as the Wall of Wisdom) and their application. It had a number of action points or reflections on uptake of lessons learned per country, and some were specified according to the type of participant like researcher, program implementer etc. About half of the participants had applied these actions in full or partly in their work, the other half not (yet). Those who didn't not, often had only attended the international and/or national learning event without participation in other learning activities, or perhaps were not based in a participating country.

The action points or reflections taken up by participants vary per country and hence uptake varied a lot per person. Some points mentioned more often across countries were empowering girls through capacity building (such as build self-esteem), engagement of men, focus on education/schooling, and collaborating or having partnerships within civil society. Other examples of insights which have been applied were increased youth participation during program design and implementation, advocacy through media, and adapting content for workshops or activities. This came about due to the presentation of various approaches in countries, and advanced knowledge on the topic through either exchanges with participants or evidence from the approach itself. Many of these came from implementers who also participated in one or both learning events.

“(1) We have been built the capacity of our community change agents in delivering information on adolescent sexuality. (2) We have redesigned our activities and integrated household dialogues on adolescent sexuality and how parents can be in position to guide their children.” Participant, Uganda

Through the interviews with implementers, again a variety of lessons learned were shared such as for Pakistan that the terminology or jargon around child marriage and sexuality is often too international and not contextualized in projects in their start-up phase The capacity of NGO staff to communicate

messages to communities, youth etc. was found crucial and required more capacity building. The entry point for projects on child marriage was to be discussed too, whether a right based approach or a protection point was more suitable. The interviewee from Pakistan was confirmed in its belief that protection should be the start message, followed by trust building and only then empowerment on rights.

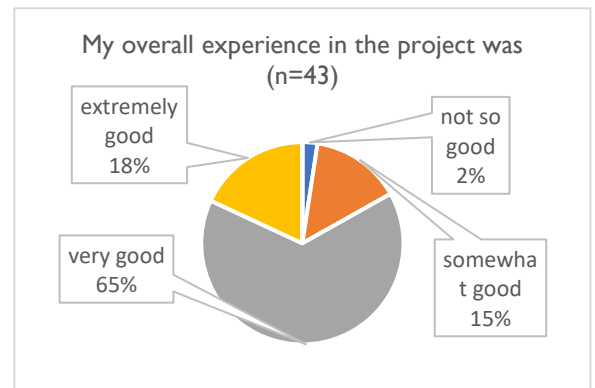
An interviewee from Uganda also mentioned the events confirmed some of the approaches its organization already undertakes. They already applied a lesson learned from the events on engaging more, different actors by joining a national network to collaborate more on a national level ('go beyond' the district level) to advance their advocacy on sexuality education. Another applied insight was to use an approach presented at the event within the own organization, namely to engage community champions and link them closer with local leaders to make it more sustainable. A lesson to be applied in the future was to involve national religious leaders in projects, who influence religious actors at local level where actual implementation takes place.

1e. What is the intended and/or actual application of insights by project participants from knowledge products?

Around half of the survey respondents had at least once visited the website of the MTBA learning project. Most of those visitors (65%) also used knowledge products, mainly articles and (learning) reports. Those who visited the website but did not make use of resources mention reasons like lack of time, potential use in the future, or not applicable for their work. Participation in a particular learning activity(ies) or being based in a certain country did not define the use or no use of the website or products as the picture was varied.

Learning question 2: How are the different learning approaches evaluated by participants in the different project components?

Over 80% of the respondents of the final survey evaluated their overall experience in the project as very or extremely good. It was clear that participants valued the exchange of experiences and knowledge on different levels, such as between countries, between national and international, between organizations engaged in the field of child marriage, or between implementation and research. The participatory approach used in the events was seen as innovative by several participants. Others mentioned they had learned a lot about the link between adolescent sexuality and child marriage.



2a. How is the learning approach 'Youth-led research' evaluated by participants?

Overall, the findings indicated that the coaching and mentorship both physical and online accorded to the researchers coordinators at the start of the process was effective and helpful which enabled them to execute their tasks as coordinators for the process.

“So I think coaching was very, very good, especially that was accorded to me. Because I engaged in a lot of one to one sessions with my mentor, and also engaged in a lot of experience sharing among research coordinators from other countries as well” Youth led research coordinator.

According to most respondents the project was relevant, effective and efficient because it was community based. There were many participants in these meetings who came from all strata of society: religious people, the young people from the community, and the researchers.

It involved the young girls to do research in an area which impacted them and it involved them going back to their communities to do research to understand the linkage between sexuality and child marriage. The respondents reacted to this approach as below:

“And one of the benefits of the approach is that, when young people are leading the research from their community, they really collect more articulate information from the communities.” Youth led research coordinator

According to some respondents the project was innovative because of the idea that persons among the beneficiaries were from the communities, as they were at the center of doing research. The findings were very interesting and very shocking in some way. For instance in one participating country, it was often stated that girl education is free but the research findings reflected that girl education was not actually free as stated.

Findings also show that if the project process was well planned with effective strategy, better results could be achieved. For example, the youths were well trained and mentored to conduct research effectively yet it was their first time.

The respondents were generally in agreement that the process was well structured, innovative and empowering and were thus satisfied with the process. There were however some individual suggestions on adjustments that could be made such as translating the materials into local languages for easy comprehension by the locals, involving parents of the girls as well as some adolescent boys as researchers, increasing the number of girls involved as researchers, and improving the logistic support for coordinators in terms of budget. Also merging workshops was mentioned to solve the mobility challenge which was equally highlighted in the Oxfam Novib reflection on the approach.

if parents of the girls can be involved as researchers in this type work so they can realize the actual feelings of the girls, understand the actual situation i.e. why some parents are supporting child marriage and why other parents are not supporting, so that there will be a generational exchange of ideas to fill the generational gap. Youth researcher

...involve some boys in this research done by the girls. Even when girls are priority, but have some boys so these boys can understand better. **Youth researcher**

Additionally, some youth researchers suggested incorporating other topics such as addressing violence in the community especially sexual violence like rape and domestic violence which starts with child marriage, as well as some topics on external drivers of child marriage such as environment and climate change.

2b. How is the learning approach 'Learning Spark Fund' evaluated by participants?

What was appreciated in the approach and should be maintained was especially the orientation and support given during the proposal phase with much exchange and feedback. The orientation itself was found participatory. Expertise shared was found helpful such as on how to engage community members or youth, and how to not just inform them but for them to provide their knowledge. Also, the diversity of the group of participants was very important. Others indicated the process and activities were good and no changes are necessary. The participatory approach was new for some participants and mostly assessed as positive, innovative or good. A few others said they already used such an approach.

The time investment of participating in the activity versus the results were found very and extremely worthwhile, which had the highest score from all 4 approaches. This might be somewhat surprising as administrative activities were found time intensive by some participants. Overall, the coaching and support provided by Simavi was found very helpful and supported the proposal quality. They appreciated the different guides/booklets with clear steps, and the help to refine learning questions/agenda, as well as flexibility in planning. The importance of being flexible and adaptive management was also stressed by Simavi in its own reflections⁹. While many participants experienced this new approach as inclusive and participatory of which parts can be replicated in other activities, this was less explicitly mentioned by the MTBA learning project team itself as a strength¹⁰.

An improvement could be to allow more flexible budgets or higher budgets, based on the actual activities in the proposal (instead of working with fixed envelopes). Another suggestion was extending the time duration to allow more time for community engagement. Physical cross-country exchange or experience visits were not possible due to Covid, but it was something some participants would like to see next time. A challenge for some organizations was the use of virtual technology for their rural participants.

"The process had enough exchange to allow to better specify the elaboration of the documents. This is a process important to maintain. What I want to improve: to see possibility anyway how to improve the funds".
Lead organization

Another challenge was the group size which needed to be limited to facilitate learning. For a next time it should allow for more young people to be engaged although this was mainly a recommendation for the participating organization itself. But perhaps this also resonated with Simavi's own findings that it could be hard to distinguish between opinions of different community participants, and include 'new' stakeholders.¹¹ As the group size needed to be limited, the selection of participants was crucial.

There were different opinions on the use of the online forum SLACK. Despite the assistance, several participants who were not familiar with the technology or with connection issues found it hard to actually use it for interaction and needed more orientation or also use email. Others found it easy to access and/or an interesting tool.

⁹ 'Reflection note: Learning exchanges By The Spark Learning Fund Team', May 2021

¹⁰ 'The Learning Exchange Facility', <https://morethanbrides.org/mmwwk/2020/12/14/learning-spark-fund>, accessed on 31-8-2021

¹¹ 'The Learning Exchange Facility', <https://morethanbrides.org/mmwwk/2020/12/14/learning-spark-fund>, accessed on 31-8-2021

Related to documentation, some found that the obtainment of documents with multiple rounds could be changed (how is unknown) as well as providing more timely feedback (although others appreciated the feedback process). There was also a recommendation to improve the clarity on the project proposal part for all partners (specific to Ethiopia). Simavi recognized in its reflection note that providing clarity on what the fund offers and what is expected from participants was a key starting point.

2c. How is the learning approach 'Implementation experience' evaluated by participants?

Two things stood out when those who participated in the implementation experience activities reflected on the interview(s) in which they shared insights and interventions about child marriage and girls' sexuality. These were that the interviews were well done, and that it provided an opportunity for the interviewee to share experiences (with a broader audience outside the interview). Interviewees also appreciated the clear process and the detailed or in-depth approach of capturing information by the interviewer. Appreciated was also that the interviewer came from the same country which helped to understand the context (vs someone from outside the country). The order of activities were found logical with first interviews, then national event, then the international event. The time investment of participating in the activity versus the results were mainly found very or extremely worthwhile, the rest found it somewhat worthwhile.

Suggested improvements ranged from doing individual interviews, to doing interviews with more implementers, to sharing a more specific approach for follow up. The survey or questionnaire should perhaps also include the topic of terminology and how people communicate about issues related to child marriage and sexuality, as this was found missing by a participant. The MTBA learning project Save the Children team, in a reflection note¹², outed its preference for face to face interviews. Interestingly, none of the participants (in the survey and interviews by evaluators) noted this as a challenge to an open question on what could be improved.

The approach of linking implementation experiences gathered through surveys and interviews with existing academic research during the events was appreciated. Some described it as a good approach for sharing and learning, complementary, inspirational, or essential. One participant from Pakistan said however that combining research and implementation experiences required time. It could be counterproductive if both sides could present their standpoint but without sufficient time to discuss arguments in-depth. This the participant found a risk during the event. The MTBA learning project team itself had a similar reflection related to combining the two sides, stating that a better connection between the two groups could be made in future initiatives to enhance mutual understanding.

While the above mentioned approach itself was generally appreciated and the presentations were found relevant, a few comments were made on the research. These lacked up-to-date data from the situation on the ground which changed recently due to COVID (it was acknowledged this was no one's fault), as well as the need to engage more national research(ers) and allow them/give time to prepare academic research specific for a learning event. This was resonated in the reflection note by the MTBA learning project team, stating that in-country applied research could be done more in the future to bridge the gap with implementers.

That this research helps in building evidence was clear to participants who are implementing programs. One participant commented that for national advocacy it would be better to focus more on national research and not only repeat international messages.

2d. How is the learning approach 'Research collation' evaluated by participants?

When asked to evaluate the Research Collation approach, the respondents appreciated the process involved as well as the strategies employed such as focusing on girls' groups although made suggestions towards improving the approach based on their experiences.

¹² Reflection note by the MTBA learning project team, 'Collating research evidence with implementation experiences', 2021 (not published)

In India, it was reported that the approach may not be appropriate for many implementing partners with diverse programs and strategies especially regarding data usage after monitoring.

*Although the approach adopted a monitoring dashboard/ tool, the process was not smooth and data was not properly used as it was not uniformly adopted by all the various numbers of partners involved. It thus works best with a single implementing partner involved. **Local Researcher***

While in Bangladesh, it was suggested to increase on the numbers of stakeholders especially funders and government who are key players in the child marriage response.

*The approach however limited on the participation of key stakeholders. In future, we should invite more development partners, the donors, the government officials, because ultimately the funding will be given by the donors, the implementation, whatever the NGOs are doing will be up scaled to the government partners. **Local Researcher***

2e. How are the national and international learning events evaluated by the participants?

Country learning events

Every country (except Mali and Niger) organized a national learning event between October and December 2020. The events were reflected upon by participants either through a post-event online survey, or as part of the event itself. Satisfaction levels were found high for the content of the event, as well as the information provided, the level of engagement, and addressing learning needs. More than 80% of the post-event survey participants gave scores of either very good or extremely good. The final survey showed that the time investment for participants was well worth it seeing the results (although nearly 20% said it was somewhat worthwhile). Some recommendations were to make the events even more inclusive in terms of organizations or partners incl. participants from different government levels. The annex presents more results of the surveys.

*“The content of the event -Link between child marriage and adolescent female sexuality- was very exciting for me. During our session a research paper was presented on this issue that was informative.” **Participant, Bangladesh***

*“The organizers had diverse presentations that had practical and local solutions to child marriages. We have many times had to deal with the issue of tokenism but with this workshop, I now know how to get results without letting participants depend on tokens that we give them in order to do something that benefits them.” **Participant, Uganda***

Participants also indicated their learning needs for the national event in terms of topics (which varied a lot) and what worked well (mainly group work, a hybrid event, sharing best practices and stories). The learning needs and recommendations from these learning events fed into the setup of the program for the international event.

International learning event

Organized as a 3-day hybrid event in March 2021, the international learning event gathered participants from all 9 countries to learn and exchange amongst each other, to discuss how to apply lessons learned to program strategies and ‘to prepare to act’. It took place both offline and online, due to COVID 19 restrictions.

Alike for the national learning events, there was a high appreciation for the event, the organizers/facilitation, and the different program elements. The second day was found the most satisfactory which focused on translating lessons learned into application for program strategies. More than 90% of the respondents found the cross-country exchange an added value of the event. This was also confirmed by the final survey, send out a few months after the event, where the exchange of experiences was mentioned as one of the things that was most appreciated.

The time investment of participating versus the results showed a more varied picture compared to the national event, divided more evenly between somewhat, very and extremely worthwhile.

“I ended up seeing the similarities and differences between countries. It gave us insight into how we can understand how other country strategies may be different from ours, and the need for contextualization.”

Participant, Malawi

“This gave me the opportunity to find out our similarities and even find out that things mentioned by other nationalities are or may happen in my community as well so that was very constructive in understanding the link between child marriage & sexuality. And experiences are always good to hear and take as we can refer to them in our actions.” **Participant, Niger**

Suggestions for improvement by participants were to further increase interaction between country participants, the need for more time (for group work) due to the full program, and have (more) girl representatives attending. An improvement also mentioned more often was to involve the community members more or give them more time to voice themselves (unknown if this relates to the national or international event or both). One participant from India stated it would be helpful to have a sharing workshop within the alliance partner (at international level) to develop new strategies.

A few practical feedback points were the preference for physical events and more, similar events, translation to overcome language barriers (one interpreter vs multiple interpreters), and technical/connection issues. The technical complexity and time restraints were confirmed by a reflection note on the event by one of the organizers which also provided suggestions for improvements. Despite issues related to working and collaborating online, overall there was enthusiasm about the approach by the participants although the balance between off- and online could be improved somewhat. The annex presents more results of the survey.

Related to follow up of the event, issues raised by participants were the need for more commitment, and resource mobilization to implement plans. However, it is not clear from these answers whether these themes should be addressed by the event organizers, or whether these are actions for participants themselves to take up. There were a few other critical notes, on learning in the international event being hampered by the facilitator in India not being comfortable with sexual rights, and failure to ensure active participation of different stakeholders in Pakistan.

From the final survey (which took place 4-5 months after the international event), we found that over half of the participants had continued to connect to other participants from either the national or international learning event, and so half of them did not. Those who did, mention for ex. they discussed implementation collaboration, community perspectives, linkages between topics, or remain in touch with other organizations, joined an alliance, or connect with media and research institutes. Those who did not connect, did not specify why.

The next examples and suggestions for improvement were from a participant from Pakistan. The connection between both events could have been made better by having a more similar group, to prevent repeating some discussions for new participants. The event should also gather both more actual implementers as well as researchers, to have a group with more perspectives. The timing of the international event, being after the implementation of the project, might be better mid-way the program to allow more implementers to exchange on their experiences. Some staff left after implementation and so were not attending both events. Another point was made on improving the preparations for the international event. A cross-country exchange took place which demanded a discussion in advance within country during the event, which led to a relevant but incomplete presentation as time was limited for the discussion. A suggestion was to have a single/multiple day orientation session with participants to explain the objectives of the events and manage expectations.

Conclusion

Learning question 1: What is the intended and/or actual use of insights (lessons learned) by project participants in improving their work (specifically program practice), or life?

For most participants, their participation improved both their thinking about the topic and (future) programming. Most participants changed ideas on the subject of child marriage and adolescent sexuality. More common insights (besides many unique insights) were a better understanding of the link between child marriage and adolescent sexuality and causes of child marriage, using advocacy strategies, the importance of engaging (grand) parents and boys/men, using a multi-stakeholder approach incl. religious leaders, and the importance of community and youth participation.

The majority of participants had already applied lessons learned in their work or life, and those who didn't deemed it very likely they would in the future. The period to have applied lessons ranged from a year to a few months. They also found their learning needs which they had before activities started were (partly) answered, such as learning about effective interventions or strategies in addressing child marriage, the importance of learning with target groups and in general, applying participative approaches, and the existence of the link between sexuality and child marriage. For some participants, simply getting information on child marriage and adolescent sexuality made a difference as they didn't have this knowledge beforehand.

Besides these common insights, there were mainly unique examples given by participants on insights that were or would be applied. The lessons learned through participation, and their (future) implementation, varied a lot per learning activity, and within these per participant. This made it hard to make general statements on lessons learned that applied to most participants. Apparently, the learning activities offered many and diverse opportunities to gain new knowledge, or confirm or validate certain beliefs of participants. Some participants could point out lessons from specific activities, others indicated the same insights for various activities. The reflections of participants made it clear that lessons learned were not always picked up during a particular activity, but were sometimes a result of a combination of these.

Learning question 2: How are the different learning approaches evaluated by participants in the different project components?

There was high overall appreciation of participants and high appreciation for each approach. The time investment versus the results was found on average very worthwhile for each learning activity they participated in. Suggestions for improvements were specific per approach.

The in-depth approach in interviews, the extensive support during the start of the Learning Spark Fund activities, the process and strategies employed during research, and support given to both girls and coordinators in youth led research were all positive points mentioned by participants. Also for the events there were many positive remarks, from appreciation of the cross-country exchange and hybrid character during COVID, to appreciation of the content and level of engagement of participants. The approach of linking implementation experiences gathered through surveys and interviews with existing academic research during the events was appreciated as well.

Recommendations

Recommendations per approach

The following recommendations focus on the specific learning activities and are based on input by participants and MTBA learning project team.

Youth Led Research

- Translate materials into local languages to simplify the training.
- Merge some workshops to address the mobility challenges that may arise
- Look into integrating (some) boys into the group of girls who remain the main target group (to be checked in advance with girls)

- Involve some parents of the young girls as researchers so that they can better understand and learn from the research process about the link between child marriage and sexuality

Implementation experiences

- Maintain the approach of having an interviewer coming from the same context as the interviewee
- During surveys/interviews, also ask about issues and solutions around communication/terminology around the chosen topics as these can differ per country
- Look into more opportunities to bridge the gap between implementers and researchers.

Research collation

- Involve more stakeholders in the workshops especially the donors who fund recommendations and also government officials who scale up recommendations
- Maintain hybrid workshops of bringing implementers and researchers together as they share complimentary knowledge during such events.
- Invest more in digital content which is vital in situations where physical meetings are not possible

Learning Spark Fund

- Look into the opportunity for budgets based on activity plans
- Organize physical cross-country exchanges when situation allows
- Maintain simple administrative requirements
- Allow for/be more explicit on representation of different types of participants by coordinating organizations
- Maintain the high level of support, especially in the proposal phase.

National and international events

- Retain as much as possible the same group of participants for consecutive events per country to ensure the participant's comprehension of the content incl. previous discussions.
- Bring more national researchers in the events, involve them where possible in preparing and presenting data
- Ensure the actual implementers are present, for ex. by organizing events during the implementation stage
- Use the latest available research data
- Ensure more time (in advance or during event) to prepare a 'country standpoint' in-country before cross-country exchange
- Maintain the wall of wisdom
- Ensure online tools/platforms are used which allow for low connectivity and easy access

Knowledge products

- No recommendations

Recommendations for future programmes focused on learning

The above learning questions focused on the specific activities applied in the MTBA learning project. However, the evaluators also tried to extract more general findings (at the request of the team after submitting the draft report) which can be relevant for other, future learning programmes or projects that have learning components. A note of caution is needed as the quantity of data collection was limited and comparisons with other learning programmes were limited due to the scope of the evaluation. Nevertheless, an analysis has been made which points out general characteristics that might be relevant for learning programmes within the field of international development. Both strengths and weaknesses focus on best and weaker practices and approaches within the program. Opportunities focus on what could be introduced as new practices and threats focus on what factors can have a negative impact that are out of control of a program.

Strengths – things to maintain or upscale	Weaknesses – things to change
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hybrid approach of online and offline exchange and learning offered opportunity to continue learning despite COVID. • Combination of sharing country research data and practitioners experiences. • Capacity strengthening on and gaining experience with actual appliance of participative approaches which can be applied in other type of projects by participants. • Hand-holding or high level of support (both physical and online) by project team throughout project activities to ensure continuous engagement and interest of target groups and their understanding of e.g. methods, activities. • Data collection being local, in-country; present and discuss data comparisons across countries • Using a multi-stakeholder approach and the importance of community and youth participation. • Sequencing of learning activities, building on each other • Individual appliance of new insights in work or life due to participation, with few commonalities • Use rigorous qualitative methods for research • Documentation of learning, make implicit knowledge explicit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The learning or project period was short to ensure concrete community and behavioral change so improve on the duration of implementation. • The project emphasized the empowerment of girls to the comparative neglect of masculinity/boys. • No application of a holistic approach to include adolescent girls with disabilities to have equal opportunities to access learning programmes. • Terminology around a theme can differ per country and needs even more contextualization. • Changing composition of participants between various activities can hamper continuous and in-depth learning • Cross-country exchange (online) was organized after the project ended for many participants, leading to fewer participants with experience compared to doing it earlier or more often (perhaps on a smaller scale and both physical/online). • Research collation and working intensively with local researchers was limited to certain countries, which can be extended.
Opportunities – things to improve	Threats – things to be careful of
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invest more in digital content which is vital in situations where physical meetings are not possible • Balance pro-active and reactive tools or channels to collect data from project participants to carry out comprehensive research that can lead to concrete conclusions. • Involve youth researchers / girls in the design, implementation and monitoring of interventions • Create online opportunities for youth researchers to share their experiences and concerns, communicate with their peers and access sources of support. • Further research on community mobilization to confront the link between sexuality and child marriage and teenage pregnancy especially given the projected rise in child marriages and teenage pregnancies due to Covid-19. • Allow for in-depth exchange and inclusiveness in activities organized by project and target groups themselves (which can be hard to do with small groups). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use less than most recent research data (due to external factors like COVID) can defy the objective for implementers and researchers to exchange more and improve practices • No use of digital solutions anymore (being time and cost efficient)when the situation fully allows physical exchange again • Funding for learning (projects) is often not a priority for donors. • Time investment into learning within organisations and individuals is often limited. Deliberate efforts and time are needed to build it into the culture of an organisation/team and mindset of individual staff. • Turnover of participants/participating organisations hampers the impact of the learning process.

Looking at other evaluations and papers¹³ related to learning in international development projects, there are similarities and differences with the result of this evaluation.

Learning should be a deliberate effort, to ensure that tacit knowledge is made explicit. Missing out on documenting knowledge or lessons learned keeps knowledge implicit and within an individual's mind, while sharing insights is important for joint learning leading to improving projects and practices. Limited collective learning between researchers, project implementers, policy makers and other parties is a cause of research results not reaching those who need it which are also the same groups. As learning was central within the MTBA learning project and documentation and sharing data, information, and experiences were made a key feature, this was a departure point for the programme.

The preferred modes of sharing knowledge such as online exchange, physical meetings, website, newsletters etc. might differ per country and within this project the same modes were applied to different countries. In general, participants valued the different approaches which offered different ways of learning as well. Also, in practice, a mode such as physical meetings was not allowed and participants were content to have at least online exchange. Whether (more) differentiation per country is needed regarding the activities of transferring and sharing knowledge, could be something to look into in the future. Also, formal and informal learning can both be important to achieve the same goal.

Within the MTBA learning project, learning happened through project activities which mainly took place at national or community level. There were few possibilities for physical international exchange, although these were foreseen but had to be cancelled due to COVID-19. Cross-country sharing and learning is something that is valued in other projects well. This requires strong coordination, time investment, and financial resources. Participative learning events, exchange workshops or other forms to facilitate exchange allow different countries or different groups of participants to learn from each other. This should be more than sharing updates on each other's work, as an in-depth exchange is something some programs struggle with. The MTBA learning project intended to facilitate this and design activities incl. events in such a way to stimulate this. Offering these possibilities more often throughout a program with a longer duration might help to increase the depth of discussions and exchange, especially with low turn-over of organisations or persons.

The need for translating knowledge into practice, or in MTBA terms 'bridging the gap between researcher and implementers', is something that is found a challenge in some projects, and which has been addressed by this project. Although there is recognition it needs further improvement, much experience has been gained on what works and what not. By facilitating participants (maybe indirectly) to critically review or challenge their own and project's assumptions and practices, a higher level of learning can be reached then for ex. adjusting activities within the same project. This would be interesting to look at in more depth in a future program as examples have been found within this project of changing assumptions and practices. Moving beyond this level, triple loop learning is about learning about learning, for ex. whether learning and how learning continues to happen after project activities have ended, needs further investigation. This evaluation gives some examples only.

Another finding of different projects is to ensure exchange through a 'neutral' platform where different stakeholders with (possibly) divergent opinions can meet. Whether the MTBA learning approach or views were seen as neutral by participants is not known, neither if this was problematic for them (not in scope of this evaluation). What is clear from the current project, is the high variety of insights gained by participants besides several common lessons learned. Striving for consensus or striving for diversity is an important departure point and this could be something to assess for a future learning program.

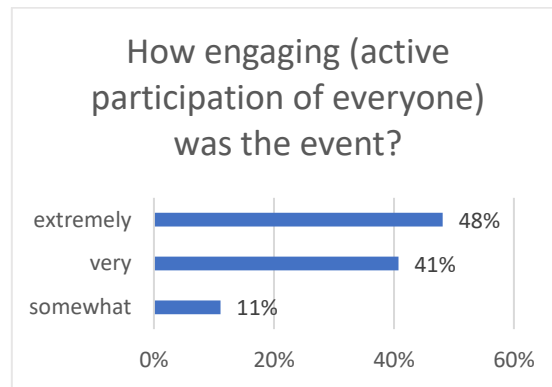
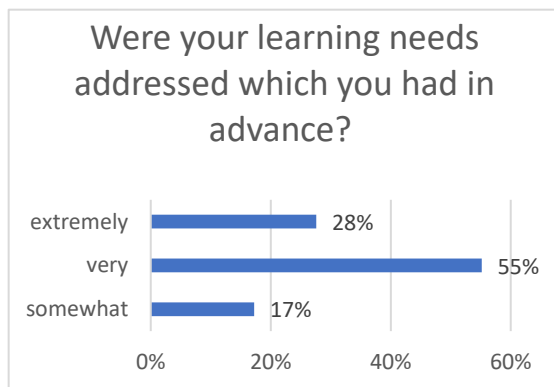
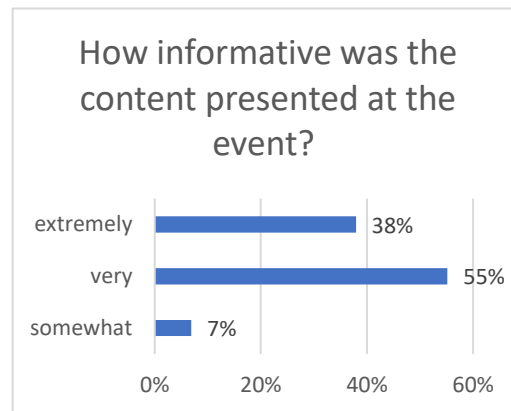
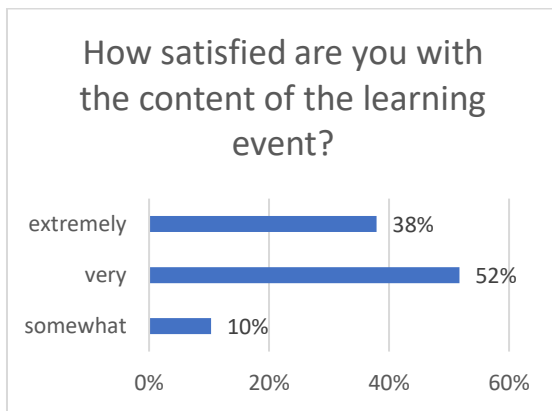
¹³ Kaleido research, 'Evaluation of Share-Net international, the knowledge platform on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR)', 2017; Results in Health, 'PITCH End Term Evaluation Report, 2020; Partos, 'Towards improved use of monitoring data. Lessons from Partos member organisations', 2016; Mark Lundy, Maria Veronica Gottret and Jacqueline Ashby, 'Learning alliances: An approach for building multistakeholder innovation systems', 2005; Nkum Associates Accra, 'IRC/triple-s project. Research on learning alliance approach. Final report', 2014

To connect organisations (but also individuals like researchers) who otherwise work more individually or in isolation is an added value of a learning program which at the least facilitates exchange and joint learning. Gaining access to information can be one of the reasons to join a network or platform. The network function of this project has not been extensively evaluated, although it is known many participants continued to connect to each other's and some organisations joined existing networks in country to team up with others working on the same issues. It is also known that many participants gained new knowledge on the link between the topics so they got access to new or updated information. What is valued in many programs, is the international network function which was lower than aimed for, due to COVID, in this project.

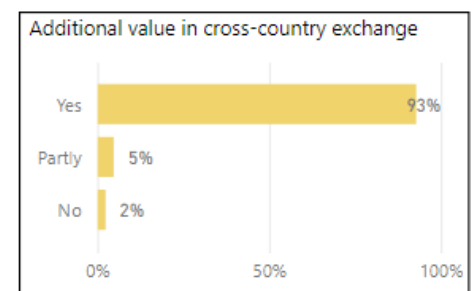
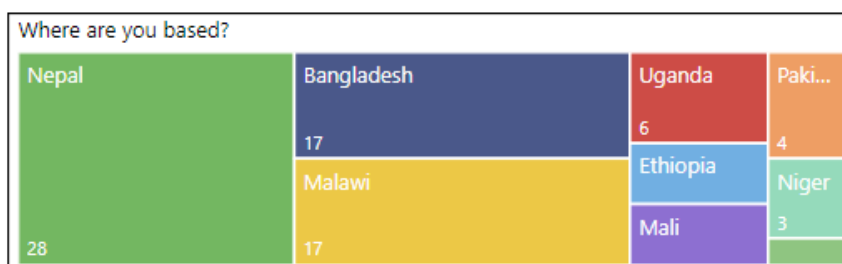
To find out whether new insights have been actually applied, this evaluation relied on honest answers of respondents. No factual check was done if their appliance of insights was indeed carried out. However, to find out whether people actually use knowledge that is shared was already quite difficult according to another evaluation. The evaluation of the MTBA learning project shows it is possible on a small scale, although also recognizing limitations.

Annex I - Results from the post-event surveys of the learning events

National learning event



International learning event



Legend

Scores are: 1. Not at all 2. Not so 3. Somewhat 4. Very 5. Extremely

