

Joint Efforts between the Indonesian Government and International Organizations in Combating Child Marriage in Indonesia

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Abstract

Child marriage is a serious problem in Indonesia, with tens of millions of marriages occurring under the age of 18 annually. However, in recent years, the number of child marriages has significantly decreased. Between 2020 and 2024, the percentage of child marriages decreased drastically from 10.35% to 6.92%. Nevertheless, in absolute terms, the number of children married in several regions in Indonesia remains very high, especially among girls. The decline in the number of child marriages in Indonesia is inseparable from the various efforts made by the Indonesian government through the revision of the National Marriage Law and the establishment of a National Strategy for Child Marriage Prevention. Furthermore, the active involvement of international organizations cannot be ignored in efforts to address Indonesia's high child marriage rate. This study aims to provide an analytical overview of the involvement and active role of international organizations, including non-governmental entities, in addressing child marriage in Indonesia. This study uses a qualitative approach by applying literature study techniques to analyze a series of efforts made by various international organizations to assist the Indonesian government's program to reduce the number of child marriages in Indonesia. In general, this study found that the Indonesian government's initiatives were followed by various special aid and advocacy programs carried out by international organizations, such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and Save the Children, to increase Indonesian public awareness of the dangers of child marriage and reduce the number of child marriages in Indonesia.

Keywords: *Child marriage, Indonesian government, international organization, UNICEF, Save the Children.*

1. Introduction

Child marriage in Indonesia is a serious social and developmental problem. The number of child marriage cases reached 25.53 million, making Indonesia one of the top ten countries with the highest child marriage rate in the world. This practice tends to occur more in rural areas than in urban areas, but almost all provinces have child marriage rates above 10%. However, the past few years have shown a significant downward trend. Based on national data, from 2020 to 2024, the percentage of child marriages decreased from 10.35% to 6.92%. This condition confirms that child marriage remains an urgent issue in human development in Indonesia.

Although the government has established policies to raise the minimum age of marriage and a national campaign to prevent the practice, child marriage remains a major challenge to human development, gender equality, and the protection of children's rights. Young women, especially in rural areas, are the most vulnerable group due to their low levels of education and limited socioeconomic conditions. The data show that 30.1% of girls in rural areas are married as children, while in urban areas, the figure is 13.1%. The multidimensional impact of child marriage, including reinforcing gender inequality, the risk of domestic violence, and the loss of access to legal protection, illustrates the complexity of this issue. The practice of child marriage also directly impacts education and the economy, as children who marry early tend to drop out of school and end up trapped in structural poverty (Samnuzulsari, Oktariyani, & Safitri, 2025) (Musfianawati, 2022).

To deal with this problem, the government made important changes through the revision of Law No. 16 of 2019, which set the minimum age of marriage to 19 years for men and women. The government also prepared the National Strategy for the Prevention of Child Marriage (Stranas PPA), which emphasizes education, family economic empowerment, changes in social norms, protection services, and strengthening cross-sector coordination (KemenPPPA, 2020). This policy demonstrates the government's commitment to strengthening child protection mechanisms. However, the success of its

implementation still faces challenges, including cultural and economic factors and increasing applications for marriage dispensation at the regional level.

Conversely, the presence of international actors also plays an important role in strengthening the government's efforts. UNICEF contributes through the provision of data, analysis, technical assistance, and national campaigns related to the prevention of child marriage (UNICEF, 2020). Meanwhile, Save the Children runs community-based intervention programs involving families, community leaders, adolescent girls, and the local government. The findings of Save the Children's qualitative research in West Nusa Tenggara show that child marriage still occurs due to cultural influences, economic limitations, and high marriage dispensation (Save the Children, 2023). This confirms that collaboration between governments and international organizations is indispensable for solving the root causes of complex social problems. Based on this urgency and dynamics, this study focuses on the importance of UNICEF and Save the Children in supporting the Indonesian government's efforts to reduce child marriage rates. This study also aims to analyze the contributions of the two organizations and the benefits of their collaboration in strengthening the effectiveness of child marriage prevention policies in Indonesia.

2. Literatur Riview

NO	Author & Year	Research Title	Research Focus	Key Findings	Limitations	Research Gap (Reseach Gap)
1.	(Duarsa & Yazid, 2025)	The Crucial Role of International Institutions in Tackling Child Marriage Issues.	This study analyzes how international institutions shape international norms related to the prevention of child marriage.	It was found that the failure to handle child marriage globally was caused by the absence of a strict international policy on the minimum age limit for marriage, which hampered the process of norm diffusion to the domestic level.	It does not focus on the specific Indonesian context and only discusses global contributions.	There has been no in-depth analysis of the concrete role of international actors in reducing child marriage in Indonesia, including its relationship with national declining trends and the effectiveness of cross-actor collaborations.
2.	(Yoshida, Rachman, & Darmawan, 2023)	Upaya Indonesia Dalam Mengatasi Pernikahan Anak Sebagai Implementasi	This study focuses on Indonesia's efforts to prevent child marriage by referring to the SDGs 5.3 target	Indonesia has implemented various policies, such as revising the Marriage Law, the National Strategy for	This article does not comprehensively discuss the role of international organizations (UNICEF).	There is a gap related to the lack of studies on the role of international actors and collaboration with

	Implementasi Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Tujuan 5 (5.3), 2022)	Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Tujuan 5 (5.3)	through national policies, government strategies, and factors that cause child marriage.	the Prevention of Child Marriage, education, and the implementation of the Marriage Law. Women's empowerment and identifying causative factors such as culture, economy, education, and social pressures		international non-governmental actors, such as Save the Children.
3.	(Kirana & Nisak, 2022)	The Role of UNICEF in Addressing Child Marriage Issues in Indonesia	UNICEF's role in dealing with child marriage in Indonesia during the 2017-2020 period through the approach of international organizations	UNICEF has seven strategic roles and has played a strategic role in the revision of the Marriage Law, the development of STRANAS PPAs, bold programs, and public improvement related to the language of child marriage.	This study does not compare the role of UNICEF with other international organizations. Therefore, the analysis was not comprehensive.	Further research is needed to measure UNICEF's concrete contribution to the decline in child marriage in Indonesia using the latest data.
4.	(Simamora, 2024)	Implementasi Program BERANI sebagai Upaya Indonesia dan UNICEF Menangani Pernikahan Anak di	Examining the implementation of the BERANI program (UNICEF and Government, UNFPA) in South Sulawesi as a	BERANI was successfully implemented in South Sulawesi, and inter-sectoral collaboration (Government, UNICEF, UNFPA) has reduced child	The research only focused on one region (South Sulawesi); therefore, the results did not necessarily reflect the dynamics of collaboration in other	There is a lack of comparative research on how the BERANI model is applied in different provinces and the influence of

		Sulawesi Selatan	strategy to reduce child marriage.	marriage cases through advocacy, norm socialization, and community-based interventions.	regions in Indonesia.	local collaboration on the decline of child marriage on a national scale.
5.	(Suci & Sulistyaningrum, 2024)	Pengaruh Pendidikan terhadap Pernikahan Anak Perempuan : Evaluasi Dampak Program Bantuan Siswa Miskin di Indonesia	This study analyzes how the Poor Student Assistance (BSM) program affects the duration of girls' education and the implications for the probability of child marriage.	An increase in the length of education significantly lowers the likelihood of girls' marriage by an average of 13 pp. This effect is due to the knowledge effect of longer education.	Because it uses a quasi-experimental essay (Fuzzy Regression Discontinuity), this study is limited to educational variables and does not explore factors such as cultural norms, gender, or other organizational interventions.	There is still a lack of studies linking the effects of education (through social programs) to policy collaboration between the government and international organizations. For example, how UNICEF or Save the Children can leverage educational programs such as BSM to reduce child marriages.

3. Conceptual Framework

3.1 Concept and Definition of Child Marriage

Child marriage refers to the act of marrying someone who has not reached the age of 18, an act that is considered a violation of children's rights and has a wide impact on social, health, and educational aspects of life. In the Indonesian context, this definition is strengthened by Law No. 16 of 2019, which sets the minimum age limit for marriage at 19 years for both men and women. This rule change replaces the previous provision that allowed women to marry at the age of 16, making it an important step for the government to align national legal standards with the principles of child protection. At the international level, UNICEF and the CEDAW committee affirm that any form of marriage under the age of 18 is a violation of the rights of the child, especially since the child does not have the physical, mental, economic, or social maturity to enter married life.

The factors that cause child marriages are complex and interrelated. Poverty is one of the main factors that encourage families to marry girls early as a strategy to ease the economic burden on households. In addition, patriarchal cultural norms that position girls as parties who must maintain family honor are

a driver of early marriage, especially in rural areas. Low levels of education also exacerbate the situation, as girls who drop out of school are more vulnerable to marriage due to limited opportunities to continue their education or to get a job. Gender inequality also plays an important role, with women often in low social bargaining positions, making it easier for them to be pushed into marriage without full consent.

Child marriage has a wide-ranging and ongoing impact. In terms of health, girls who marry and become pregnant at a young age are more prone to various pregnancy complications, such as preeclampsia, anemia, and unsafe childbirth, which can endanger the lives of mothers and babies. Socially, child marriage often causes girls to lose access to education because they have to perform domestic tasks in the family. This impacts the decision to drop out of school and eliminates opportunities for self-development. From an economic perspective, child marriage increases the likelihood of women being trapped in long-term poverty, as a lack of education and skills makes it harder for them to find decent work. In addition, child marriage increases the risk of domestic violence, economic dependence, and social marginalization, all of which worsen the quality of life and reinforce the cycle of poverty from one generation to the next (Mahmuddin, Mansari, & Melayu, 2023).

3.2 The Concept of Transnational Advocacy Network (TAN)

The development of the Transnational Advocacy Network (TAN) concept has become an important approach in the study of modern International Relations, especially in examining how non-state actors can influence global dynamics. The concept of TAN is a response introduced by Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink to the limitations of traditional approaches that focus too much on the role of the state as the only actor in global dynamics, on the contrary, this concept says that transnational advocacy is not only carried out by the government but also carried out by non-state actors who have shared values, goals, and discourses (Putri & Anggraheni, 2023). The TAN concept itself functions as a network that unites international actors to build public awareness of certain issues, in this case, child marriage in Indonesia. This concept views that the strength of the TAN concept does not come from military or economic capabilities but from providing information, building moral legitimacy, and creating political pressure through organized campaigns. The TAN concept also plays a role in bridging the interests of vulnerable groups and reducing inequality in access to and understanding of information between parties. It also expands public access to decision-making processes that were previously closed and difficult to reach.

The theoretical view of the TAN concept is relevant in analyzing the phenomenon of child marriage in Indonesia, considering that this phenomenon has a high level of complexity and cannot be handled effectively if only relying on the national government. The complexity of child marriage in Indonesia is closely related to factors such as gender inequality, poverty, limited access to social services, and entrenched cultural norms, which require the involvement of various actors outside the country. In the TAN concept, child marriage is a global issue that requires information exchange, cross-actor advocacy, and coordination between international networks to change policies (Augustarini & Irhami, 2019). International actors such as UNICEF and Save the Children work with the Government of Indonesia based on global norms such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Through campaigns, evidence-based policymaking, and local capacity building, international standards are promoted. In this context, the TAN concept serves as a link between global norms and national policies, so that the issue of child marriage can receive greater attention at the national level in Pakistan. Using TAN lenses, it can be understood that the decline in child marriage rates in Indonesia is not solely a result of domestic policies but also a consequence of cross-sectoral collaboration in a single advocacy network.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Approaches

This research uses a qualitative approach, namely, a descriptive method based on the post-positivist paradigm. This approach can understand phenomena in their natural context, in contrast to experimental studies carried out in situations engineered by researchers. In qualitative research, researchers are the main instruments, while informants are selected purposively and can be developed through *snowball*

techniques. This approach is generally used when research focuses on social phenomena that describe an event (Abdussamad, 2021). The qualitative approach is relevant because child marriage is a complex social phenomenon influenced by social and cultural factors, as well as policy dynamics involving many actors. This cannot be reduced to mere statistical data but requires an investigation of policy processes and interventions by governments, international organizations, and international non-governmental organizations. Thus, a qualitative approach is important to allow the author to obtain in-depth information about the collaboration between the Government of Indonesia, UNICEF, and Save the Children. This is due to the phenomenon of child marriage not only related to numbers, but also to the relationship of factors that cannot be explained through quantitative methods. This study uses *library research* as the main method to collect data from scientific journals, government reports, books, official publications and previous research. Analysis from various sources provides a unified understanding of cross-sectoral collaboration and its impact on reducing child marriage in Indonesia.

4.2 Data Sources

Other data sources used in this study are secondary data, including academic articles, research reports, and publications from international institutions relevant to child marriage issues in Indonesia. This secondary data serves to strengthen the theoretical and analytical foundation, especially regarding the dynamics of collaboration between the Indonesian government, UNICEF, and Save the Children to prevent child marriage in Indonesia. Various official reports from international organizations, such as UNICEF and Save the Children, as well as government policy documents, such as the National Strategy for the Prevention of Child Marriage (STRANAS PPA), have been used to provide a comprehensive picture of policy developments, prevalence trends, and the effectiveness of existing programs. Therefore, secondary data are important as a reference for understanding the research context, comparing empirical findings, and ensuring that the resulting analysis has a scientific basis (Sulung & Muspawi, 2024).

Meanwhile, the UNICEF report is an important source for explaining the technical support, advocacy, and results of programs run with the Indonesian government. The Save the Children document was used to examine community-based interventions, approaches to social norm changes, and the implementation of prevention programs in areas with high child marriage prevalence rates. By utilizing these secondary sources, this study conducts an in-depth analysis of policy dynamics and patterns of cooperation across actors, resulting in a more accurate understanding of the effectiveness of child marriage prevention strategies in Indonesia.

5. Result

5.1 Indonesian Government Efforts

The Government of Indonesia has implemented various important legal measures and policies to address child marriage, one of which is the revision of the Marriage Law Number 16 of 2019. This change not only raised the minimum age for marriage to 19 for both men and women but also eliminated the previous gender differences that allowed women to marry earlier (Mahayogi, Rahayu, Sulandari, & Lesmana, 2025). However, research shows that even though the regulations have been updated, there are still many challenges in their implementation in the field, especially because there is still a marriage dispensation and public disapproval in some areas. In addition to the legal aspect, the government has implemented the National Strategy for the Prevention of Child Marriage (Stranas PPA) 2020-2030, which serves as the main framework for long-term prevention efforts. According to official documents, the Stranas PPA consists of five strategic stages: (1) regional mapping, (2) determination of joint commitments, (3) budget planning, (4) implementation of the program, and (5) monitoring and evaluation. In this strategy, interventions are designed upstream and downstream, focusing on strengthening cross-sectoral cooperation, data utilization, and changing social attitudes through education and campaigns.

At the local government level, the role of local groups is very important in realizing Stranas PPA. A case study in the Wojo District of South Sulawesi, for example, illustrates how local governments actively implement innovative strategies to reduce child marriage rates. The Wojo government established a special prevention team involving many stakeholders from various sectors, established

social and administrative sanctions, and focused the budget on activities to support preventive measures. This initiative reflects the strong commitment of local parties and the ability of the national strategy to adapt to local conditions (Sangkala & Ismail, 2023). However, these efforts face several obstacles. One of the biggest obstacles is public resistance and the persistence of strong cultural norms. Research in the Indonesian and Malaysian contexts shows that some people reject efforts to prevent child marriage because they feel that it is contrary to certain traditions or social interests (Musawwamah, Taufiq, Haryanto, Supraptiningsih, & Maimun, 2023). This obstacle indicates that national regulations and programs have not been fully accepted or understood by society.

In addition to the changes to the Marriage Law No. 16 of 2019 and the implementation of the Stranas PPA, the Indonesian government continues to strengthen policies to prevent child marriage by evaluating and innovating strategies at the local level. Handayani and Rofii (2023) show that cooperation between ministries and institutions in the implementation of Stranas PPA is quite good, but there are still shortcomings in filling the strategic matrix at the institutional level (Handayani & Rofii, 2023). The launch of the Stranas PPA Practical Guide at the regional level by the central government through the Coordinating Ministry for PMK in 2024 will encourage the implementation of the national strategy. Deputy Lisa explained that this guide was prepared so that local governments and non-governmental organizations can better understand the main causes of early marriage and take settlement steps that are in accordance with local circumstances. The guidance also shows that the government is aware that prevention efforts must be tailored to local conditions and involve various sectors, not just relying on national rules (PMK, 2024).

The role of local governments in preventing child marriage is crucial. An example can be seen in Wajo Regency, South Sulawesi, where the local government has made various innovations, such as establishing a special team for prevention, imposing administrative and social sanctions, and allocating local funds to the program. These efforts are in line with an evaluative strategy that aims to integrate national policies into local actions that are more consistent with local needs. However, social barriers remain a considerable obstacle. Musawwamah, Taufiq, Supraptiningsih, and Hariyanto (2023) show that many people still reject efforts to prevent early marriage. This is due to factors such as customs and understanding of religion, so that some people feel that such interventions are contrary to their traditions or social interests. This condition causes national programs to not be fully accepted or understood by some local communities.

Furthermore, the implementation of the Stranas PPA did not run smoothly in all regions. Experience on the ground shows that the success of the program depends on the commitment and capabilities of local governments. In some places, even though national policies already exist, their implementation at the district or city level is still inadequate due to limited resources or different priorities. This shows that increased technical assistance, funds, and training are needed for the national strategy to be implemented effectively in all regions. In terms of sustainability, the government's efforts to encourage local implementation through practical guidance and periodic evaluations are essential. The central government must continue to strengthen cooperation between ministries and related parties in the regions and provide long-term support to local governments so that prevention programs are not only temporary projects but also part of a stable public service system.

5.2 The Role of UNICEF

UNICEF is an international organization that plays a significant role in supporting the Government of Indonesia's efforts to improve the protection of children and women, especially in reducing the rate of child marriage in Indonesia. Child marriage in Indonesia is a complex issue caused by various factors that vary from region to region, coupled with the factor of globalization with technological advances that play a significant role in being a bridge of communication in factors that cause child marriage (Kusmayanti, Judiasih, Yuanitasari, & Rajamanicham, 2024). Therefore, the multifaceted role of UNICEF is not only in the aspect of the programs implemented but also in the aspect of strengthening Indonesian government policies, advocacy, and providing evidence-based data that informs public decision-making.

One of UNICEF's main contributions is in the form of support for policy advocacy and the development of the National Strategy for the Protection of Women and Children (Stranas PPA), in collaboration with the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection (Kemen PPPA). UNICEF also assists the Government of Indonesia in designing a comprehensive strategy that includes interventions at various levels, from national policies to community-based programs to improve child welfare. This can be seen from UNICEF's role in developing national strategies, socializing policy changes, and monitoring the implementation of policies to reduce child-marriage rates.

Meanwhile, at the community level, UNICEF supports community-based programs such as the Community-Based Integrated Child Protection (PATBM) and the Village Child Protection Group (KPAD) that involve young people and local communities in the prevention of child marriage (UNICEF, Pencegahan Perkawinan Anak Percepatan yang Tidak Bisa Ditunda, 2020). This not only focuses on education and awareness but also encourages the participation of children and adolescents, which strengthens family capacity and creates an environment that supports child protection across the board. This strategy is comprehensive, proven, and sustainable, as it strengthens the capacity of government agencies and local stakeholders to address issues related to girls. Over the past five years, UNICEF has been actively running various national campaigns aimed at raising public awareness of the dangers of child marriage and the importance of gender equality. One of the most widely used campaigns in advocacy is the #ENDChildMarriage campaign, which is disseminated through social media, educational videos, and public discussions to highlight the psychological health risks and socio-economic impact experienced by children when committing child marriage.

UNICEF is also collaborating with civil society organizations to expand its reach, including engaging adolescents through #KidzTakeOver to encourage their participation in child protection. In addition, UNICEF runs gender equality education programs in schools and communities through the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage. This program emphasizes the empowerment of adolescent girls, understanding children's rights, and prevention of risky practices, while strengthening the Life Skills Education (PHK) program, which is designed as an intervention strategy to support and complement the government's efforts in dealing with the problem of child marriage (Yoshida, Rachman, & Darmawan, 2022), which builds cognitive, interpersonal, reproductive health, and decision-making skills. With an integrated approach to advocacy, education, and empowerment, UNICEF aims to change social norms, improve child protection, and prevent child marriages in Indonesia.

UNICEF's role is not only limited to advocacy and campaigns; it also provides evidence-based data, research, reports, and analysis that governments and institutions can use to design more effective public policies (UNICEF, 2025). UNICEF research covers a wide range of dimensions, from the prevalence of child marriage and the risk factors that drive child marriage practices to the evaluation of existing intervention programs in the field. In this way, UNICEF ensures that every policy and program developed is not only based on norms but also on accurate data so that its interventions have a concrete and measurable impact on children and women in Indonesia. Moreover, it helps develop policies that are more inclusive and responsive to local challenges. UNICEF often works closely with local stakeholders to ensure that the data collected are appropriate for the conditions in Indonesia, with cultural and social differences in different regions. This allows interventions to be tailored to the specific needs of the community so that they can play a significant role in preventing child marriage.

UNICEF's presence as a strategic partner of the government underscores the importance of synergy between international and national actors in solving complex social problems. UNICEF works as a facilitator, aligning global child protection policies with local implementation so that international standards can be applied in practice to fit Indonesia's specific social and cultural contexts. Its continued support enhances the capacity of governments and communities to create safer and more inclusive environments for children while raising public awareness of the urgency of ending practices that harm the rights of children and women. UNICEF plays a core role in the national strategy to protect children and women, blending policy, education, campaigning, and research so that government activities in reducing child marriage and promoting gender equality are synergistic, structured, and sustainable.

UNICEF's role in tackling child marriage in Indonesia has had a significant impact, with a significant reduction in child marriage rates from 2020-2024 to (KEMENPPPA, 2024). In its 2024 *annual report*, UNICEF stated that in East Java, the child marriage rate decreased from 9.46% to 7.7, and in South Sulawesi from 9% and in West Nusa Tenggara from 16.23% to 14.96% (UNICEF, 2024). In addition, UNICEF has succeeded in reducing the rate of child marriage through the BERANI program in Bone district in South Sulawesi, decreasing the number of from 748 cases in 2019 to 84 in 2021 (Allo, 2022). Therefore, this evaluation considers the significant contribution of UNICEF interventions, although the national decline is also influenced by cross-sectoral collaboration. Although the data on the decline in child marriage rates show progress, challenges remain because not all regions show the same decline, and some reports find it difficult to distinguish the direct impact of UNICEF from other interventions.

5.3 The Role of Save The Children

Save the Children plays an important role in preventing child marriage in Indonesia through community-based interventions designed to target the social and structural roots of the problem. In areas with high rates of child marriage, such as West Nusa Tenggara (NTB) and several districts in South Sulawesi, the organization runs programs that combine youth education, capacity building of community and religious leaders, and advocacy of local policies aligned with national efforts (Save the Children, 2023). This community-based approach positions the community, including families, traditional leaders, and religious leaders, as the main actors in prevention, so that the strategy implemented is not only in the form of top-down campaigns but also involves changes in norms from within the community.

The educational approach is an important pillar of the Save the Children program. Using lesson modules on children's rights, youth group discussions, and parent training, the organization seeks to strengthen understanding of the health risks, legal consequences, and social and economic impacts of child marriage. The results of the program evaluation reported by Save the Children show that the educational activities carried out have succeeded in raising awareness among families and adolescents and encouraging decisions that postpone marriage. This is in line with evidence that continuous educational interventions can change the way societies view child marriage. In addition to providing education, Save the Children also focuses on involving religious and traditional leaders in its communication plan. By inviting religious and local leaders to become drivers of change, the program can adapt the message about child marriage prevention to the local culture so that the message is more easily accepted by the community. Research in NTB shows that measures involving community leaders increase the credibility of the campaign and lower the practice of applying for marriage dispensation at the village level when there is a local consensus to reject child marriage. This approach helps link national policies and their implementation at the local level.

Save the Children's Child Protection and Empowerment program also combines policy advocacy efforts at the local government level with direct service. The organization assists district governments in developing local guidelines, strengthening child protection services in health centers and schools, and supporting referral systems for vulnerable cases in the country. The program report shows the best examples of cooperation between Save the Children and local governments, which has succeeded in creating village policies that govern procedures for the prevention and handling of child marriage, including community-based monitoring mechanisms and preventive measures. This integrated approach enhances local services' ability to respond to and prevent child marriage.

In addition to direct intervention in the form of community programs, one of Save the Children's biggest contributions to preventing early marriage is its role in advocating for local and central governments. This advocacy function aims to ensure that children's voices, research results in the field, and good examples from various community programs are included in official policies. Save the Children plays an important role as a policy mediator that connects local communities with decision-makers through various means, such as open discussions, joint dialogue, and the development of evidence-based policy recommendations. In practice, Save the Children's advocacy does not stop at making recommendations but also encourages better local regulations. In some areas, the organization is involved in making Village Regulations related to the prevention of early marriage. They also supervise the process of

drafting regulations by involving religious leaders, women leaders, village institutions, health centers, and schools. This approach is supported by the results of assessments in the community, which show that areas with regulations on the prevention of early marriage tend to experience a decrease in marriage dispensation applications (Wahid, 2023).

In addition to regulatory advocacy, Save the Children strengthens the capacity of local government agencies to adopt a holistic approach to child protection. In addition to helping formulate rules, Save the Children also strengthens the ability of local governments to implement a comprehensive child protection approach. One of the important things that is done is to provide training to the child protection office and the village on how to refer cases, report incidents, and change the way of communication to change behavior. By improving this capability, policy advocacy efforts not only influence government decisions but also encourage organizational structural changes so that local governments can continue these programs even after the organization's assistance has ended. (Yasir et al., 2025).

Save the Children advocacy is also carried out through various national campaigns aimed at changing social norms, including digital campaigns that focus on adolescents and older adults. Based on various studies, campaigns carried out continuously can shift the impression that early marriage is commonplace by building new narratives that emphasize the health dangers, economic risks, and importance of education for girls. At the national level, Save the Children also advocates for several ministries, such as the Ministry of PPPA, Bappenas, and the Ministry of Home Affairs, to ensure that the prevention of child marriage remains a priority in human development. Save the Children's advocacy function acts as a bridge between experience on the ground and policymaking. By combining research, public campaigns, inter-stakeholder dialogue, and institutional strengthening, Save the Children ensures that change occurs not only in individuals but also in broader policies. This role complements community-level efforts and strengthens the effectiveness of national efforts to reduce child marriage rates.

5.4 Forms of Collaboration and Synergy

Efforts to address child marriage in Indonesia have emerged from a combination of government policies and intensive support from international organizations and international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) such as UNICEF and Save the Children. This collaboration goes beyond technical support by establishing a unified framework that links national policies, local interventions, and global standards. This integrated approach is in line with the concept of TAN, where a network of cross-border actors works through the provision of information, moral campaigns, and strengthened accountability to drive policy change. This synergy, related to efforts to reduce the child marriage rate from 10.35% in 2020 to 6.92% in 2024, significantly strengthens the effectiveness of government policy.

The first form of collaboration emerged through a formal partnership between the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection (Kemen PPPA), UNICEF, and Save the Children. This partnership was institutionalized through a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) and the preparation of a joint work program that specifically targets improving the implementation of the National Strategy for the Prevention of Child Marriage (Stranas PPA) (Darmawati, 2024). Through this formal mechanism, the Government of Indonesia has access to technical support, evidence-based research, and program-planning assistance from UNICEF and Save the Children. This formal framework allows for a clearer division of roles, harmonization of achievement indicators, and better cross-sector coordination. Cross-agency MoUs in the child protection sector improve the regularity of prevention programs and accountability among actors.

In addition to formal partnerships, a second form of synergy emerges through collaboration in advocacy, public campaigns and public education. UNICEF and Save the Children adopted evidence-based advocacy as a strategy to encourage broader public understanding through the provision of data and situational research on the health, psychological, and economic risks of child marriage. Campaigns such as "Stop Child Marriage", UNICEF's U-Report, and youth mobilization programs have become important channels to increase educational outreach in schools, communities, and online platforms. This collaboration is an important factor in changing social perceptions of child marriage, especially in areas

with a high prevalence (Children, Pelaminan Bukan Solusi Terbaik: Perkawinan Anak, Pernikahan Dini dan Kawin Paksa, 2023).

Other synergies are realized by strengthening the capacity of local institutions at the level of local governments, schools, and civil society. UNICEF provides curriculum-based training on child protection, case management guidelines, and the development of regional action plans to prevent child marriage (DP3A 2025). Meanwhile, Save the Children has established community-based child protection mechanisms, psychosocial support, and safe spaces for adolescent girls (KemenppPa, 2025). Interventions that combine local official training and community empowerment have been shown to improve early detection, case reporting, and local responses to situations that could potentially lead to child marriage.

The most strategic form of collaboration is the integration of Indonesia's national programs with the global agenda, especially through the UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage (UNICEF, 2024). This global program offers a comprehensive framework that links national policies with international experiences and global standards. Integration into this global program not only improves the methodological foundation of the Indonesian Government's intervention but also encourages opportunities for knowledge exchange, global resource mobilization, and more systematic program evaluation, so that Indonesia has access to comparative data and technical funding that can improve the quality of national programs. Meanwhile, Save the Children complements this pillar of global cooperation with a grassroots approach that focuses on empowering families, adolescents, and community-based protection systems. Save the Children has included the issue of child marriage in the agenda of child rights governance and gender equality, so that cooperation with the government not only focuses on the implementation of the program but also encourages the improvement of more sustainable policies (Children, 2023).

Overall, the collaboration between the Government of Indonesia, UNICEF, and Save the Children is a significant example of effective multilateral coordination and reflects the core function of transnational advocacy networks. National policies are combined with local implementation and integrated into the international agenda. This cooperation has proven effective in terms of government capacity building, public awareness raising, enhancement of child protection mechanisms, and deeper social transformation in the region. Synergy and complementarity among these actors have been key factors in decreasing the prevalence of child marriage in Indonesia in recent years. Through this integrated approach, enforcement efforts are no longer *ad hoc* but have developed into sustainable interventions and can reach a wider level of society than before.

5.5 Impact of Collaboration

Collaboration between the Indonesian government and international organizations, especially UNICEF and Save the Children, has yielded tangible results in reducing child marriage rates and strengthening child protection at both the national and local levels. According to a UNICEF report, the child marriage rate in Indonesia has decreased significantly in recent years. The percentage of women aged 20-24 years who were married before the age of 18 will drop from 8.06 percent in 2022 to 5.90 percent in 2024. This decline shows that joint efforts between various parties are beginning to show measurable results. The decline in the number is not only due to legal policies but also due to community-based and educational programs supported by the government and international partners.

The decline in child marriage rates is not only due to legal policies but also because of community-supported and educational programs, which are jointly developed by governments and international organizations. In 2024, the government will release practical guidance on implementing the National Strategy for Child Marriage Prevention (Stranas PPA) in the regions, which will provide stronger support for local commitments and make implementation mechanisms more effective at the provincial and district levels. The Deputy of the Coordinating Ministry for PMK said that this guide helps encourage good cooperation between local governments, non-governmental organizations, and local communities in reducing the practice of child marriage. In addition, the shift in social norms is one of the social impacts of this collaboration. Through community awareness campaigns and cooperation

between various parties, this community better understands the negative impact of child marriage in terms of health, education, and the economy. The fact that marriage dispensation applications continue to decline supports this. According to policy analysis, although there are still requests for dispensation, the application of stricter laws and the active role of local authorities have reduced public trust in the practice of child marriage (Dahriah et al., 2020).

Furthermore, this cooperation has strengthened policies to protect children at the national and regional levels. The Stranas PPA Guidelines provide a framework for local governments to include child marriage prevention in local development plans and public service systems. Thus, the actions taken are not only campaign programs that take place occasionally but also part of an ongoing system. This commitment can be seen from the goal of reducing the rate of child marriage: the government stated that the figure of 6.92% exceeds the target of the 2024 RPJMN, which shows that this policy and cooperation is starting to have a real impact. Notably, this collaboration increases openness and responsibility through joint supervision. By involving UNICEF and community organizations, local governments can independently examine child marriage data and assess the success of existing programs on the ground. This provides an opportunity to gain input and change strategies based on data, which is critical to ensure that interventions remain in place.

5.5 Obstacles and Challenges

Efforts to combat child marriage have been highly successful in Indonesia. According to the figures, the percentage of cases decreased from 10.35% in 2020 to 6.92% in 2024 (Kemenppppa, 2024). This is the result of effective coordination between the central and local governments in collaboration with international organizations and international non-governmental organizations such as UNICEF and Save the Children, which work together on various child marriage prevention programs in Indonesia. However, many programs still face various obstacles in their implementation evenly and optimally across the country. These barriers can be summarized in several key aspects that require a more comprehensive approach to develop better prevention programs in the future.

One of the main issues in preventing child marriage in Indonesia is the inequality of implementation between regions, especially in rural and remote areas. Although Law Number 16 of 2019 on Marriage and the National Strategy for the Prevention of Child Marriage have been passed, access to education, information, and support services for children remains limited in remote areas. Its prevention is further complicated by the application for marriage dispensation, namely, the application for marriage under the age of 19 by the child's parents. Therefore, children in the region still face a very high risk of early marriage, even though the national rate has declined. The uneven distribution of experts and advocacy activities further exacerbates these gaps, making the implementation of effective interventions in some areas impossible. This implies the need for an inclusive approach to cover the entire region.

Another challenge that is quite complicated in preventing child marriage is the strong cultural and religious norms. In many communities, this practice is considered socially natural, even as part of religious traditions and teachings. A report from Save the Children revealed that in some areas, such as Lombok, patriarchal norms and religious interpretations actually strengthened the habits of child and forced marriage. Applications for child marriage dispensation were recorded in 492 cases, and there was an additional 1 or 2 children within 12 months. This figure does not include child marriages that are not recorded and are well organized by the village head. This gap allows child marriage to continue despite national regulations. As a result, advocacy and education campaigns carried out by UNICEF and Save the Children are often rejected by local communities; therefore, interventions need to be tailored to local cultural sensitivities, involving community and religious leaders to encourage more lasting change in attitudes. This is important for effectively overcoming these obstacles. This shows that the regulatory gap at the national and regional levels is an obstacle to the prevention of child marriage in Indonesia.

Another major challenge in preventing child marriage is limited resources and program sustainability issues. Most of these initiatives rely heavily on foreign aid for funding, training programs, and advocacy campaigns. However, support for these efforts stalled after the intervention was completed, at which

point local capacity was generally too weak to continue the previous programs. This implies a lack of budget, professional staff, and adequate monitoring systems. The consequences can be seen in the increase in child marriage rates during the COVID-19 pandemic, which is due to a decline in economic activity globally, an increased social burden, and access to social services and education is increasingly difficult, thus increasing the threat of child marriage again (Bachtiar, Nirwana, & Darmadali, 2021). Therefore, much more needs to be done to build local capacity for the long-term sustainability of these programs.

Furthermore, the effectiveness of child marriage prevention programs is influenced by the level of community participation and the child. However, many *top-down* approaches result in low involvement of children, parents and local communities. However, if children are involved as active agents of change, accompanied by community participation in raising awareness, this will increase the understanding of the community as a whole. This can create new social norms that oppose child marriage; however, there are further challenges related to gender and violence. The practice of child marriage is often closely linked to gender inequality, where girls are the main actors of violent discrimination and human rights violations. Without gender considerations, prevention efforts will only reduce the incidence without improving the quality of life of children. Integrating gender aspects is essential for achieving better outcomes. These obstacles are also related to the rise of transnational advocacy networks (TAN), where the effectiveness of TAN is largely determined by local capacity and alignment between global and national actors.

5 Conclusion

5.1 Conclusion

Indonesia has made significant progress in preventing child marriage in recent years. The decline in the number of child marriages across the country shows that cooperation between the Indonesian government and international institutions has yielded tangible results. Integrated national policies, advocacy support, and community-based activities collectively enhance child protection efforts. The government has a role to play in improving regulations and providing policy guidance through the Stranas PPA 2020–2030, while UNICEF and Save the Children provide support through education, campaigns to change social norms, and strengthening local-level services. This cooperation not only resulted in a decrease in the number of child marriages but also drove greater social change.

People in various regions are becoming aware of the health, economic, and psychological risks of early marriage. Support from religious leaders, traditional leaders, and local community groups accelerated the acceptance of prevention programs, so that social norms that used to consider child marriage as common began to change. This change shows that interventions that directly involve the community have a strong influence on social transformation; however, there are still some challenges that must be considered. Cultural rejection, the practice of marriage dispensation, and reliance on funding and technical support from international institutions can affect the program's long-term sustainability. To maintain the achievements that have been achieved, it is important for the government to continue to incorporate prevention programs into regional policies, strengthen coordination between sectors, and ensure that changes in social norms are truly embedded in society.

5.2 Limitation

This study has several limitations. First, the study relies entirely on secondary data, such as government reports, official publications from the actors involved, and previous research. This dependence prevents researchers from delving further into the dynamics of collaboration through primary data, such as interviews with the government, UNICEF, and Save the Children. Second, without primary data, this study cannot capture the direct perspectives of actors who benefit from cross-actor collaboration. Therefore, this study only used descriptive analysis and cannot comprehensively describe the empirical conditions in the field. Third, this study did not conduct a cross-regional comparative analysis; thus, the findings did not represent variations in regional policy implementation. Nevertheless, this study provides an overview of cross-actor collaboration in preventing child marriage in Indonesia.

5.3 Suggestion

Future research should expand the focus of the analysis using a comparative approach between regions in Indonesia. This is because the dynamics of child marriage are greatly influenced by sociocultural contexts, religious norms, and local customary practices. By comparing regions such as NTB, South Sulawesi, West Java, NTT, and South Kalimantan, researchers can identify distinctive patterns that distinguish the effectiveness of government interventions and international organizations in each region. Comparative analysis can also reveal the structural factors that have made some regions succeed in reducing child marriage rates while others are still struggling to face the same challenges. In addition, researchers can further deepen the study of the effectiveness of policy advocacy conducted by UNICEF and Save the Children. Future research can focus on how the advocacy process affects local policymaking, institutional transformation, and program sustainability after the international organization's intervention ends.

Research on cross-sectoral collaboration mechanisms at the village and district levels is also important, especially in examining how the role of religious leaders, indigenous leaders, and community institutions can strengthen or hinder the spread of new norms related to child marriage prevention. Future research should explore the long-term changes in social norms that occur after community education interventions are implemented. This is useful for assessing whether the changes achieved are permanent or temporary. By broadening the focus of the research, future studies can provide a more comprehensive picture of the social dynamics of child marriage prevention in Indonesia.

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