

NO LONGER DAUGHTERS

CHILD MARRIAGE IN INDONESIA



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Introduction

UNICEF defines child marriage as any legal or unofficial union between a child under the age of 18 and an adult or another child.¹ Indonesia ranks eighth globally in child marriage rates, with approximately 25 million women and 7 million men marrying before the legal age of 19.² Child marriage undermines both economic performance and human rights, worsening the quality of life of child brides and grooms – and their children. The impact of child marriage is **intergenerational**.

As child marriage disproportionately affects women, our project focuses on the intertwining **root causes** and **perpetuating factors** that render Indonesian girls vulnerable to marrying early, which we explore in Section 1. Then, Section 2 consolidates our findings through a systems-thinking approach. After evaluating existing solutions in Section 3, this paper identifies gaps and levers of change to recommend potential interventions in Section 4. Finally, we share the insights we gained through our investigation.

Methodology

Through elite interviewing³ and snowball sampling,⁴ we interviewed researchers, NGO workers, and four child marriage survivors from various age groups (under 35, 35-50, above 50) – to learn about the **lived experiences** of being child brides across generations. We then critically dissect the problem of child marriage using various systems thinking tools, including causal loop diagrams, an iceberg model, a stakeholders' map, and a power and interest map.

¹ UNICEF, Child Marriage, <https://www.unicef.org/protection/child-marriage>.

² Eugene Budu et al., "Child Marriage and Sexual Autonomy among Women in Sub-Saharan Africa: Evidence from 31 Demographic and Health Surveys," *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 18, no. 7 (March 2021): 3754, <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18073754>.

³ Unlike intensive interview, elite interview chooses interviewees because of their positions, not randomly.

⁴ Snowball sampling employs referral of one participant to reach out to other possible interviewees to tackle with the difficulties in reaching out to child brides and NGOs working in this field.

I. Challenge Landscape

The challenge of child marriage can be traced to two sets of factors: root causes and perpetuating factors. **Root causes** have fundamental, cascading impacts on several loops and nodes in the whole system, while **perpetuating factors** exacerbate the problems. Fundamentally, child marriage is often employed as a solution to escape poverty and avert cultural taboos. Low educational attainment, coupled with environmental deterioration, creates a poverty trap, thereby forming vicious cycles. Meanwhile, patriarchal norms deprive young women of their right to self-determination. These intertwining challenges are presented in our central system of vulnerability (*Fig. 1*).

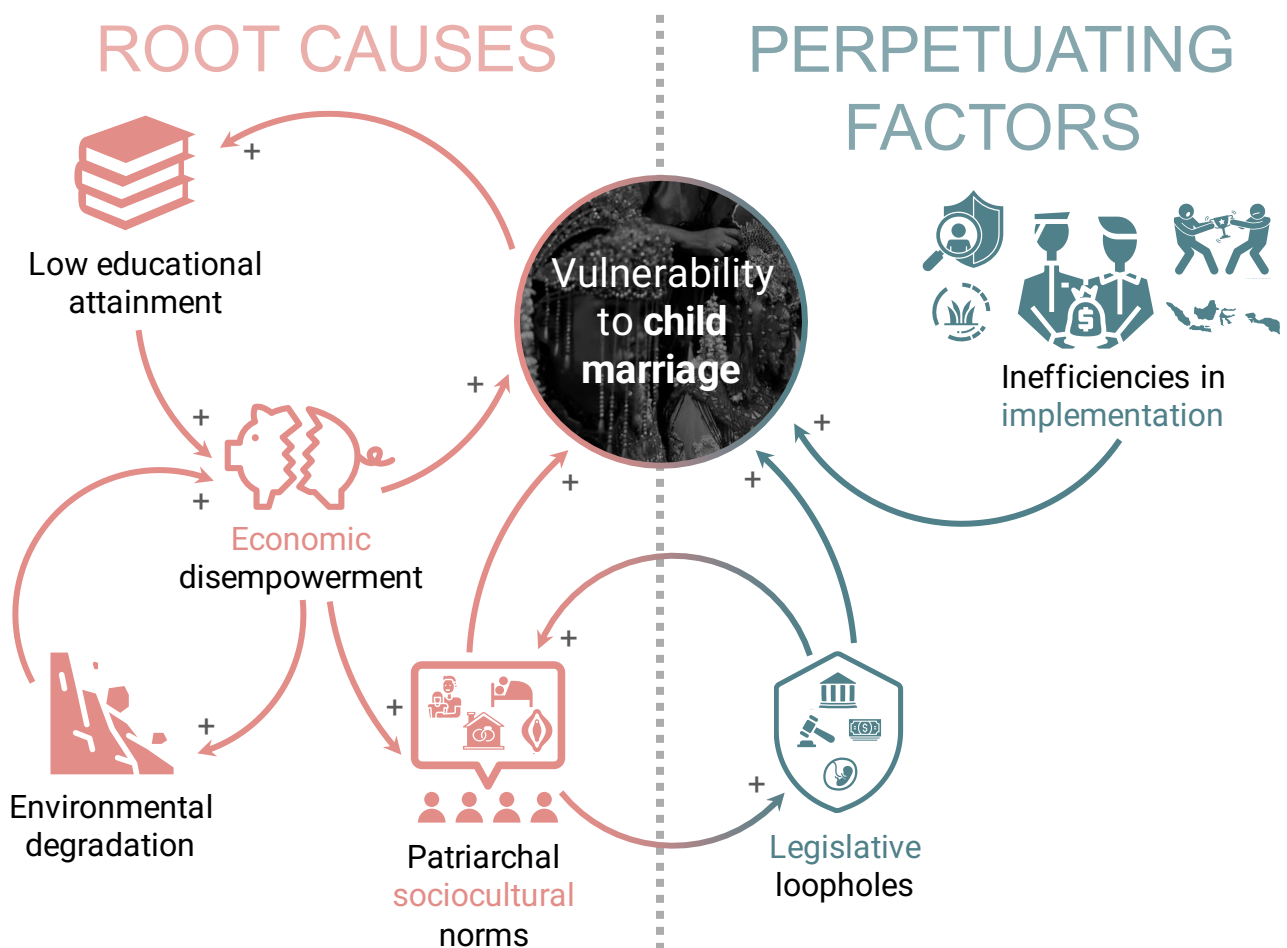


Fig. 1 Our central system of vulnerability. It shows the two root causes of child marriage – economic disempowerment and patriarchal norms – and the two perpetuating factors, legislative loopholes and inefficiencies in implementation. Loops represented include a poverty – education loop, a poverty – environment loop, and a culture – law loop, which are discussed in depth in the succeeding sections.

1.1 ROOT CAUSE #1: ECONOMIC DISEMPOWERMENT

The first root cause is economic disempowerment, mainly in the forms of poverty and economic dependence. Research shows that **poverty** is a major risk factor for child marriage, with girls from poor households being much more vulnerable than their wealthy counterparts.⁵ The child marriage rate is far higher among girls in the lowest expenditure quintile, at 26.76%, while only 11% of those in the top quintile are married before turning 18.⁶ This disparity is particularly evident in the time of **economic shocks and natural disasters**, during which child marriage rate could triple.⁷ Such a correlation is likely because of the lucrative dowry a bride's family may receive, who marry off their daughters to address financial needs. Economic disadvantages not only increase the likelihood of child marriage but also sustain it, trapping child brides to be perpetually economically dependent on their husbands.⁸ After marriage, more than half of child brides are unemployed, and only few have their own bank accounts.⁹ Economic disempowerment both before and after marriage inherently undermines girls' **freedom to choose** whether to marry, and is worsened by **low education attainment** and **environmental degradation** in two positive feedback loops, **poverty-education loop** and **poverty-environment loop**, in *Fig. 2* and *Fig. 3*.



⁵ Lauren Rumble et al., "An Empirical Exploration of Female Child Marriage Determinants in Indonesia," *BMC Public Health* 18, no. 1 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-018-5313-0>.

⁶ Badan Pusat Statistik. 2020. "Prevention of Child Marriage: Acceleration that Cannot Wait." UNICEF. <https://www.unicef.org/indonesia/media/5021/file/Prevention%20of%20Child%20Marriage%20Report.pdf>.

⁷ "National Strategy on the Prevention of Child Marriage," <https://www.unicef.org/indonesia/sites/unicef.org/indonesia/files/2020-06/Prevention-of-Child-Marriage-Report-2020.pdf>. (accessed Feb 25, 2023).

⁸ Interview with a child marriage survivor 1 (anonymous), Feb 26, 2023.

⁹ "Child Marriage in Indonesia," UNICEF Indonesia, February 1, 2020, <https://www.unicef.org/indonesia/reports/child-marriage-in-indonesia>. (accessed Feb 25, 2023).

1.1.1 Poverty – education loop

After marriage, teenage boys and girls often **drop out of school** due to either financial need of their newly-formed family or social pressure in school (or both). As a result, child brides on average receive 6 fewer years of education compared to their peers.¹⁰ With lower educational attainment, they gain **less employable skillsets**, which limit their job opportunities and hinder their economic potential.¹¹ In some cases, child brides and grooms are even expelled from school after pregnancy or marriage.¹² Nationally, lower educational attainment resulting from child marriages caused a loss of 1.7% in GDP in 2014.¹³ Because child grooms and brides tend to live in poverty, their own children will be poorer and less educated and therefore more vulnerable to marrying early,¹⁴ resulting in an **intergenerational cycle of poverty and child marriage** (Fig. 2).

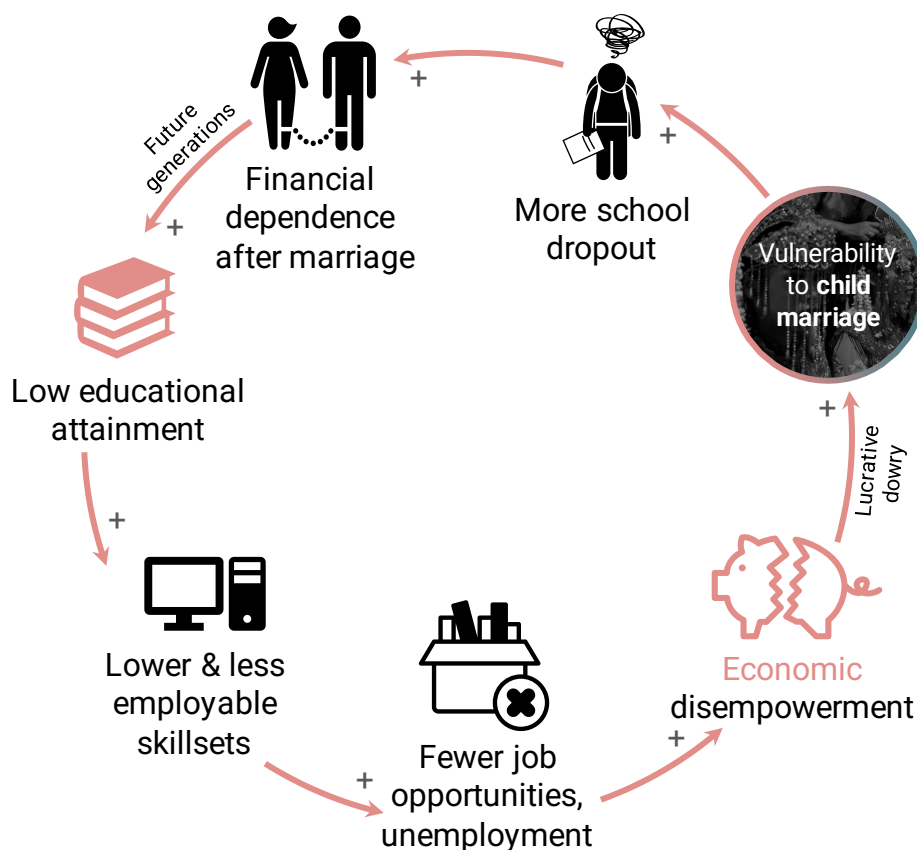


Fig. 2 Poverty – education loop.

¹⁰ Lisa Cameron, Diana Contreras Suarez, and Susan Wieczkiewicz, "Child Marriage: Using the Indonesian Family Life Survey to Examine the Lives of Women and Men Who Married at an Early Age," *Review of Economics of the Household*, June 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11150-022-09616-8>.

¹¹ Irvan M. Hidayana et al., "Yes I Do: Factors Influencing Child Marriage, Teenage Pregnancy and Female Genital Mutilation/Circumcision in Lombok Barat and Sukabumi Districts, Indonesia," Baseline Report December 2016 (Kit Royal Tropical Institute), (accessed February 25, 2023). <https://www.kit.nl/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Baseline-report-Indonesia-Yes-I-Do.pdf>.

¹² Solihin, M. (2023). "Ketika Siswi Sekolah Hamil Dianggap Lumrah". January 2023, <https://kaltimpost.jawapos.com/kolom-pembaca/18/01/2023/ketika-siswi-sekolah-hamil-dianggap-lumrah>

¹³ Grijns, M., & Horii, H. (2018). *Child Marriage in a Village in West Java (Indonesia): Compromises between Legal Obligations and Religious Concerns*. Asian Journal of Law and Society, 5(2), 453–466. Cambridge University Press.

¹⁴ Lisa Cameron, Diana Contreras Suarez, and Susan Wieczkiewicz, "Child Marriage: Using the Indonesian Family Life Survey to Examine the Lives of Women and Men Who Married at an Early Age," *Review of Economics of the Household*, June 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11150-022-09616-8>.

1.1.2 Poverty – environment loop of rural areas

A history of unsustainable economic activities has deteriorated Indonesia's environment. Deforestation from logging and pollution from factories have made conditions increasingly unfavorable for primary industries in rural areas,¹⁵ leading to regional economic disparities with **rural areas experiencing higher poverty rates** than urban areas.¹⁶ Subsequently, rural children are even more incentivized to drop out of school, join factories and earn stable monthly incomes – more reliable than agricultural incomes in the face of increasingly extreme weathers.¹⁷ This further accelerates environmental degradation (Fig. 3). **Rural residency**, therefore, is often considered a risk factor for child marriage.¹⁸ In Papua, a rural and poor state with a 26.34% poverty rate, child marriage is as prevalent as 36%.¹⁹

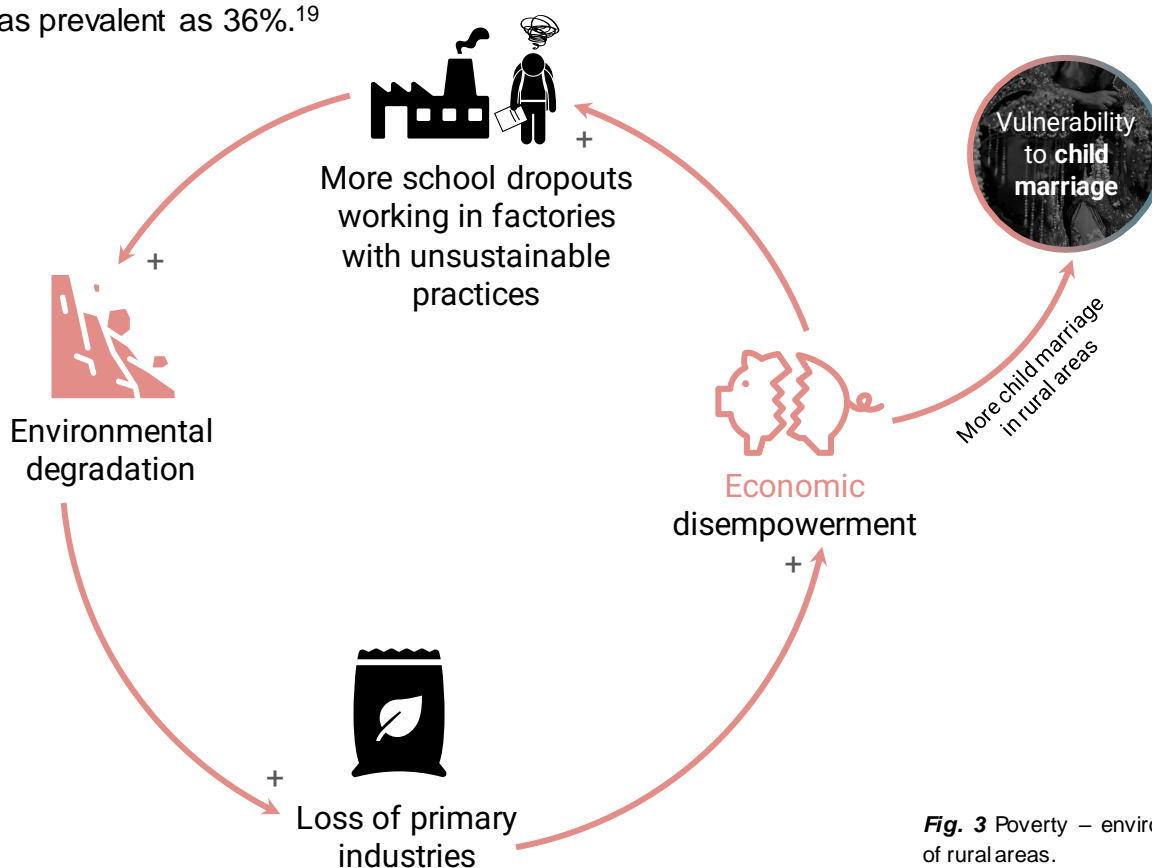


Fig. 3 Poverty – environmental loop of rural areas.

¹⁵ Ayuningtias, T. 2017. "Dampak Industrialisasi Pedesaan terhadap Kesejahteraan Masyarakat." <http://repository.ipb.ac.id/handle/123456789/84470>

¹⁶ Mutiaradina, H & Yacoub, Y. "Analisis Kesejahteraan Petani dan Kemiskinan Perdesaan di Indonesia." Prosiding Seminar Akademik Tahunan Ilmu Ekonomi dan Studi Pembangunan 2020. <https://feb.untan.ac.id/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Yarlina.pdf>

¹⁷ Lauren Rumble et al., "An Empirical Exploration of Female Child Marriage Determinants in Indonesia," *BMC Public Health* 18, no. 1 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-018-5313-0>.

¹⁸ Ibid. See also "National Strategy on the Prevention of Child Marriage," <https://www.unicef.org/indonesia/sites/unicef.org/indonesia/files/2020-06/Prevention-of-Child-Marriage-Report-2020.pdf>. (accessed Feb 25, 2023).

¹⁹ Irwan M. Hidayana et al., "Yes I Do: Factors Influencing Child Marriage, Teenage Pregnancy and Female Genital Mutilation/Circumcision in Lombok Barat and Sukabumi Districts, Indonesia," Baseline Report December 2016 (Kit Royal Tropical Institute), (accessed February 25, 2023). <https://www.kit.nl/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Baseline-report-Indonesia-Yes-I-Do.pdf>.

1.2 ROOT CAUSE #2: PATRIARCHAL SOCIOCULTURAL NORMS

All of our interviewees shared that **deep-seated patriarchal mindsets** play an indispensable role in sustaining the practice of child marriage.²⁰ This manifests on several levels. Firstly, some radical religious leaders in Indonesia purport that the Quran permits child marriage, and Prophet Muhammad himself has a nine-year-old bride, A'isha, which Muslims are to follow as the sunnah, i.e., the way of the Prophet.²¹ Such **theological justifications** continue to be strong arguments that **normalize child marriage** in Indonesia, which has the world's largest Muslim population. For example, 56.1% of surveyed people in the region of Lombok Barat admit the considerable influence religious practices and teachings have on their decision to marry off their children.²² Secondly and more generally, marriage itself is seen as a **culturally necessary foundation** for Indonesian society.²³ Thirdly, the **commodification of women** in Indonesia means that daughters are assets that could be sold off in exchange for dowry. Confined by traditional gender roles, young women, upon reaching adolescence, are immediately exploited as **unpaid caregivers** with a duty to serve men and bear children. In a society where sexual violence against minors is prevalent,²⁴ marriage is seen as a way to **protect a girl's "honor,"** because it is deemed more morally wrong to violate a married woman – now another man's property.²⁵ But even this **emphasis on women's sexual purity** is hugely problematic. **Pre-marital sex** is widely considered **shameful** and, when discovered usually due to pregnancy or sexually-transmitted diseases (STDs), is a compelling reason for a teenage girl to be married off.²⁶

²⁰ Interview with Misayah, one of the founders and current director of Institut KAPAL Perempuan, Apr 28, 2023.

²¹ Quran 65:4. See also Sahih Muslim 8:3311.

²² Irwan M. Hidayana et al., "Yes I Do: Factors Influencing Child Marriage, Teenage Pregnancy and Female Genital Mutilation/Circumcision in Lombok Barat and Sukabumi Districts, Indonesia," Baseline Report December 2016 (Kit Royal Tropical Institute), (accessed February 25, 2023). <https://www.kit.nl/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Baseline-report-Indonesia-Yes-I-Do.pdf>.

²³ Quran 24:32, 25:74, 40:8, 30:21, 5:5

²⁴ "Global Database on Violence against Women," Indonesia, accessed May 1, 2023, <https://evaw-global-database.unwomen.org/es/countries/asia/indonesia>.

²⁵ Nelly van Doorn-Harder, "Indonesian Muslim Feminists: Islamic Reasoning, Rumah Kitab And The Case of Child Brides," Key Issues in Religion and World Affairs (Institute on Culture, Religion & World Affairs, January 29, 2016), <https://www.bu.edu/cura/files/2016/02/Boston-University-presentation-January-29-2016-van-Doorn-2.pdf>.

²⁶ Interview with a child marriage survivor 1 (anonymous), Feb 26, 2023.

1.2.1 Poverty – information access – mindset loop

Living in under-resourced areas, low-income parents are less likely to have received education on gender equality both in school and through the media.²⁷ Therefore, they might see less value in sending their daughters to school. With dowry in sight, child marriage appears to be a more worthwhile investment. As discussed earlier, this shuts children away from any education at all. Even if they did attend school, **underfunded and understaffed institutions would not have a sex education curriculum** or teach against gender-based discrimination and child marriage.²⁸ Access to other resources such as **the internet** also continue to be **limited for poorer regions**.²⁹ As a result of this limited access to information, when these girls become parents, they may possibly pass on the same set of patriarchal values they were indoctrinated with, perpetuating the commodification of women and the perception of sex as taboo.

1.2.2 Mindset – sexual violence & contraception loop

With limited awareness of women's rights, instances of **sexual violence** have been extremely prevalent in Indonesian society.³⁰ The absence of sex education means teenagers lack the **knowledge about safe sex and dealing with sexual assault**. A child marriage survivor we interviewed emphasized that sex education would have made a difference by enabling her to better navigate the sexual assault she faced.³¹ More pertinently, in a culture that stigmatizes sex, **access to contraceptives and abortion** is limited.³² This results in **increased unwanted pregnancies and transmission of STDs**³³ – both of which are clear evidence of pre-marital sex, whether consensual or not, that forces young girls to marry.³⁴

²⁷ "How to Bridge the Gap in Indonesia's Inequality in Internet Access," World Bank Blogs, accessed May 1, 2023, <https://blogs.worldbank.org/eastasiapacific/how-bridge-gap-indonesias-inequality-internet-access>

²⁸ Sheany, "Indonesia Needs Proper Sex Education, Period," Medium (Medium, March 3, 2020), <https://sheanyas.medium.com/indonesia-needs-proper-sex-education-period-5e65f39f3301>.

²⁹ "How to Bridge the Gap in Indonesia's Inequality in Internet Access," World Bank Blogs, accessed May 1, 2023, <https://blogs.worldbank.org/eastasiapacific/how-bridge-gap-indonesias-inequality-internet-access>

³⁰ "Global Database on Violence against Women," Indonesia, accessed May 1, 2023, <https://evaw-global-database.unwomen.org/es/countries/asia/indonesia>

³¹ Interview with a child marriage survivor 1 (anonymous), Feb 26, 2023.

³² Wulandari RD, Laksono AD, Matahari R. The Barrier to Contraceptive Use among Multiparous Women in Indonesia. *Indian J Community Med.* 2021 Jul-Sep;46(3):479-483, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8575210/>

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Radar Jogja. 2022. "Hamil di Luar Nikah Masih Dominasi Pernikahan Dini." <https://radarjogja.jawapos.com/bantul/2022/04/16/hamil-di-luar-nikah-masih-dominasi-pernikahan-dini/>

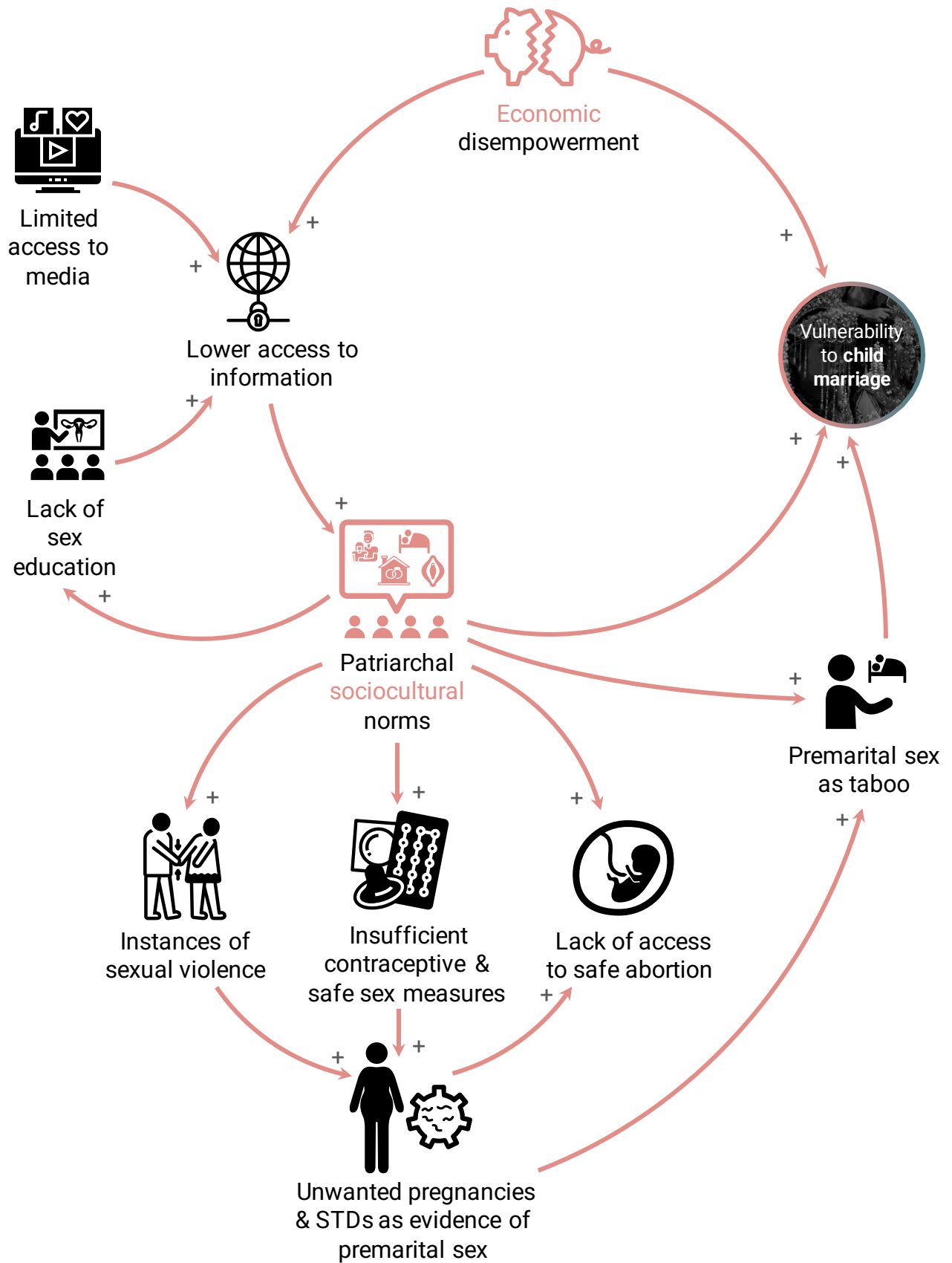
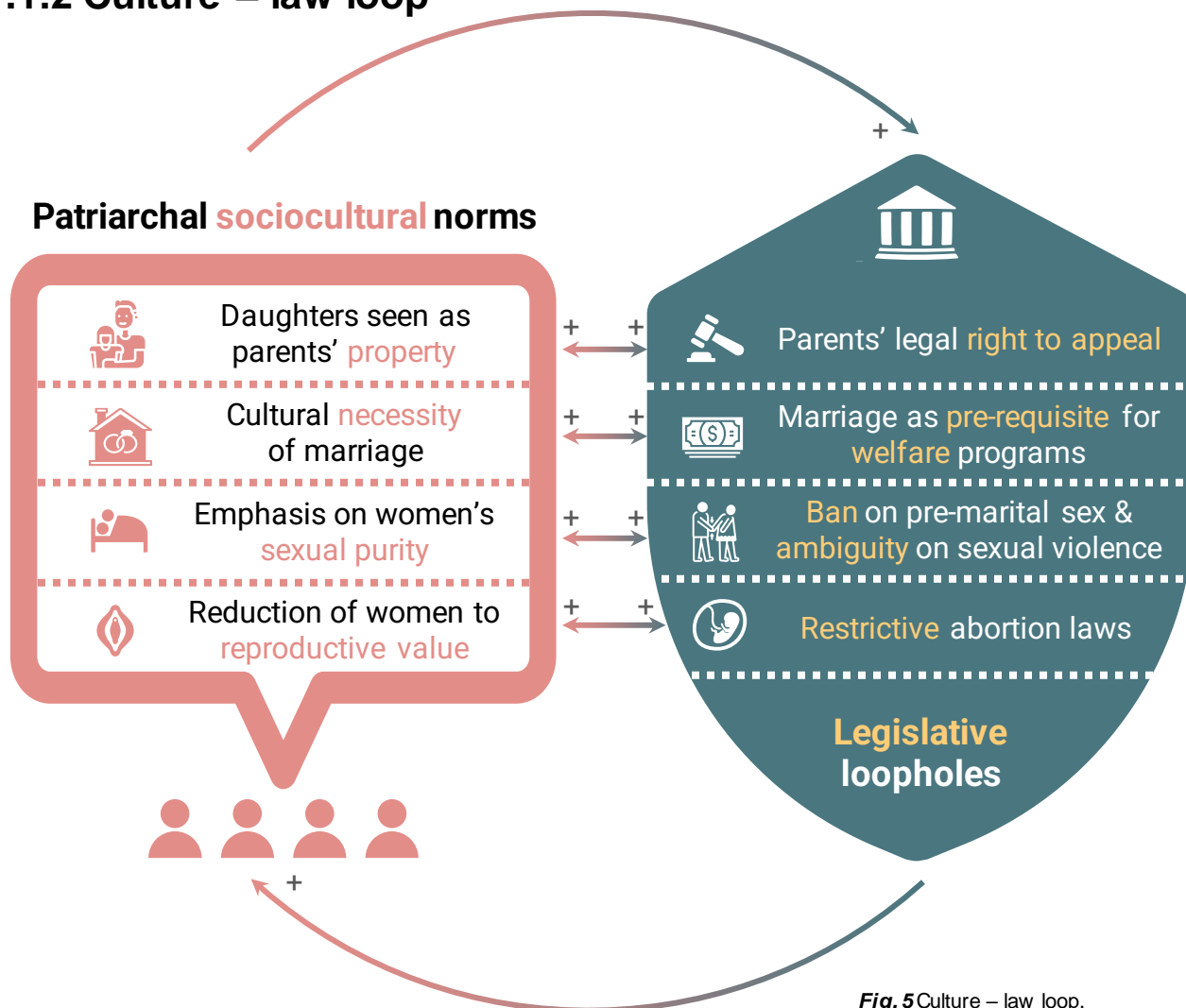


Fig. 4 Poverty – information access – mindset – sexual violence & contraception loop, a combined map of 1.2.1 and 1.2.2.

1.3 PERPETUATING FACTOR #1: LEGISLATIVE LOOPHOLES

In 2019, the Indonesian parliament unanimously agreed to raise the legal minimum age at which women can marry to 19 – equal to that of men.³⁵ While this should be hailed as progress, loopholes still exist in the legal system that **nullifies the efficacy of anti-child marriage legislation**, which, as we will argue, can all be traced back to **cultural and structural issues** that need to be addressed.

1.1.2 Culture – law loop



³⁵ Undang Undang, No.16, 2019.

Sociocultural norms creep into legislation in various ways, as shown in *Fig. 5*. Firstly, up to 70% of marriages are officiated through **religious** ceremonies and remain **unregistered** with the state, a testament to the dominance of religious influence in Indonesian society.³⁶ Secondly, despite the 2019 change in the legal minimum age, **parents are entitled with the right to appeal** to a religious court or a district court for an exemption for their children to marry earlier,³⁷ with no minimum age limit. As a result, some 95% of marriage dispensation cases for underage children to marry are granted by the judges.³⁸ Thirdly, the courts, deeply rooted in patriarchal values, often seem to **lack understanding and sensitivity** when dealing with child marriage cases. One child marriage survivor we interviewed was asked if she knew “the responsibilities of a wife” in court.³⁹ The court in this specific case failed to provide a supportive environment for the child bride, further alienating the already-traumatized victim. Moreover, a cultural emphasis on marriage means that it is often a **prerequisite for welfare programs**, such as housing relief.⁴⁰ The cultural marginalization of women’s rights also pervades into other aspects of Indonesian laws – evident in the slew of conservative bills passed recently, including an upcoming **ban on pre-marital sex** and **vague articles regarding rape**.⁴¹ Arbitrary and ambiguous amendments regarding sex and sexual violence make it harder to convict rape perpetrators and more convenient to penalize women for their sexual impurity – which is also made clear by **laws restricting abortion**.⁴² Legislative gestures like these in turn serve to reinforce existing cultural biases, further entrenching patriarchal norms in society.



³⁶ Maria Platt, “Marriage, Gender and Islam in Indonesia,” December 2017, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315178943>.

³⁷ Cate Sumner, “Courting Change for Indonesia’s Invisible Brides,” Low y Institute, February 21, 2022, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/courting-change-indonesia-s-invisible-brides#:~:text=required%20by%20law,-.The%20overwhelming%20proportion%20of%20marriage%20dispensation%20cases%20for%20children%20to,face%20difficulties%20paying%20court%20fees>.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Interview with a child marriage survivor 2 (anonymous), Feb 26, 2023.

⁴⁰ Badan Pusat Statistik. 2020. “Prevention of Child Marriage: Acceleration that Cannot Wait.”

UNICEF. <https://www.unicef.org/indonesia/media/5021/file/Prevention%20of%20Child%20Marriage%20Report.pdf>

⁴¹ Masrur Jamaluddin, Heather Chen, and Angus Watson, “Indonesia Bans Sex Outside Marriage as Parliament Passes Sweeping New Criminal Code,” CNN (Cable News Network), December 6, 2022), <https://www.cnn.com/2022/12/05/asia/indonesia-new-code-passed-sex-cohabitation-intl-hnk/index.html>. Also, Undang-Undang Tindak Pidana Kekerasan Seksual, Article 4 and 5, April 2022, <https://www.dpr.go.id/doksileg/proses2/RJ2-20170201-043128-3029.pdf> See also Undang Undang, No.16, 2019.

⁴² “Abortion Policy Landscape - Indonesia - World Health Organization,” accessed March 28, 2023, <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/338768/factsheet-indonesia-eng.pdf>.

1.4 PERPETUATING FACTOR #2: INEFFICIENCIES IN IMPLEMENTATION

We now focus on the underlying inefficiencies within the Indonesian government that hinder its ability to effectively implement policies against child marriage. One researcher reported that **rivalry exists between various governmental departments** competing to solve the issue, which has led to **unnecessarily complicated bureaucratic processes**.⁴³ These departments are also often entangled with **corruption**.⁴⁴ Moreover, there appears to be **little collaboration and trust between the government and grassroots organizations** – who are constantly short of funding, manpower, and resources.⁴⁵ Made of archipelagos, Indonesia’s geography lacks connectivity and often renders large-scale policies infeasible due to its **decentralized governance**.⁴⁶ But ultimately, according to researchers, the government lacks incentives to attempt large-scale policies because they seem to consider child marriage as an intermediate means to solve other problems, like health concerns, not a problem in itself.⁴⁷

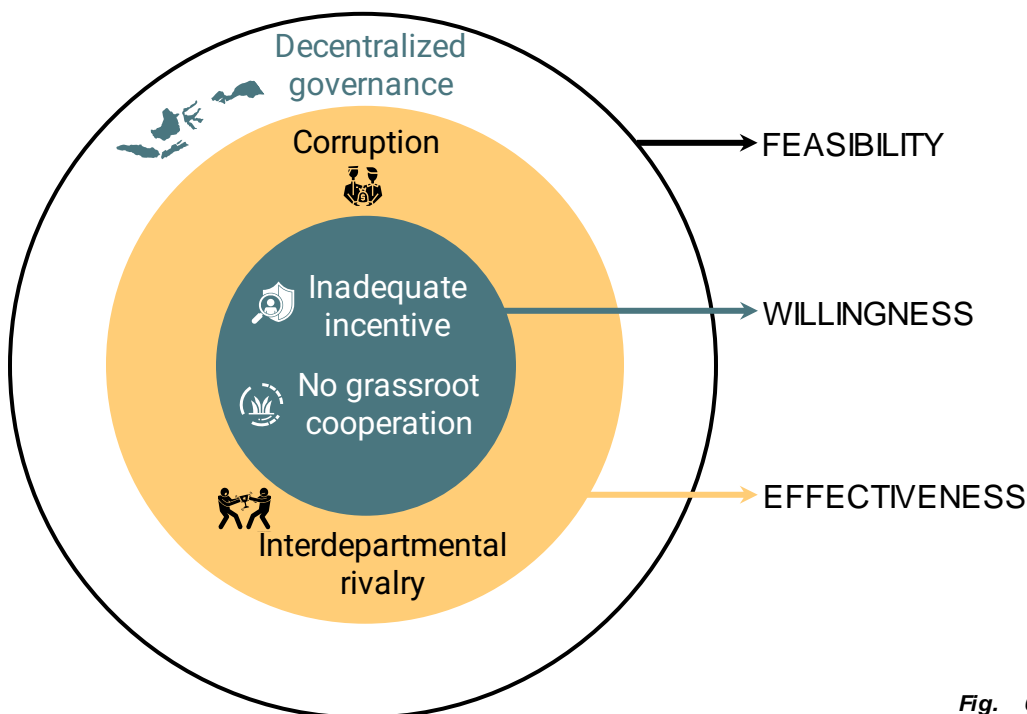


Fig. 6 Layers of governmental inefficiencies.

⁴³ Interview with Dr. Diana Contreras Suarez, Feb 24, 2023.

⁴⁴ “Indonesia Policy Briefs” (OCED, March 2015), <https://www.oecd.org/indonesia/publicationsdocuments/policybriefs/2/>.

⁴⁵ “Report on Community Based Child Protection Mechanisms Supported by Plan in Indonesia” (Plan International), accessed March 1, 2023, <https://plan-international.org/uploads/sites/57/2022/06/ICPREC-Brief-CBCPM-report-Indonesia-FINAL.pdf>.

⁴⁶ Anwar Nasution, “GOVERNMENT DECENTRALIZATION PROGRAM IN INDONESIA” (Asian Development Bank Institute, n.d.).

⁴⁷ Interview with Dr. Diana Contreras Suarez, Feb 24, 2023.

II. System Thinking Approach

2.1 Systems Map

We have consolidated our challenge landscape into a comprehensive Systems Map, including the causal relationships we have highlighted and the interactions between the various risk factors behind Indonesian girls' vulnerability. The map reveals positive feedback loops that amplify impact of each risk factor and perpetuate the persistence of child marriage. It may be accessed [here](#).

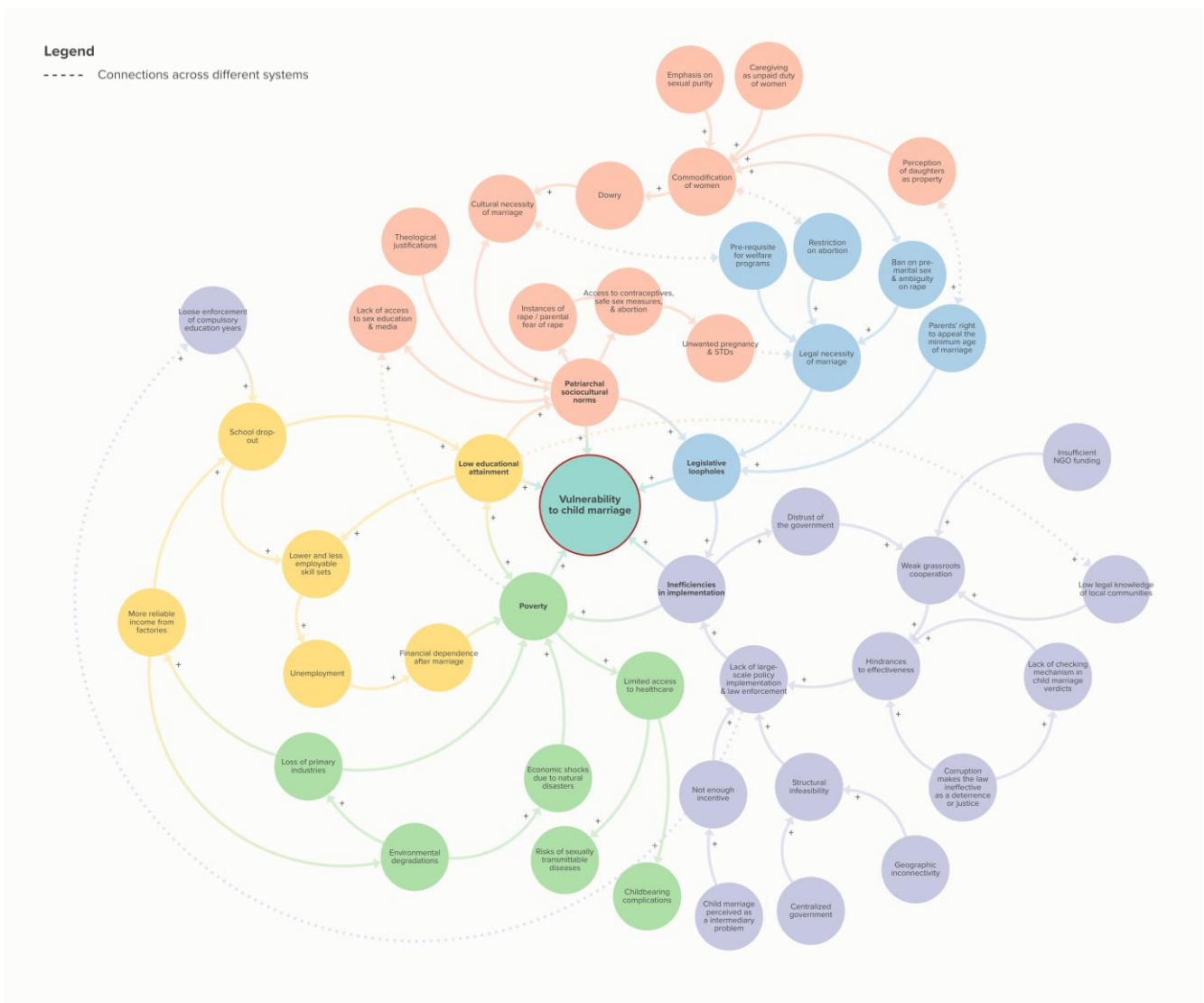
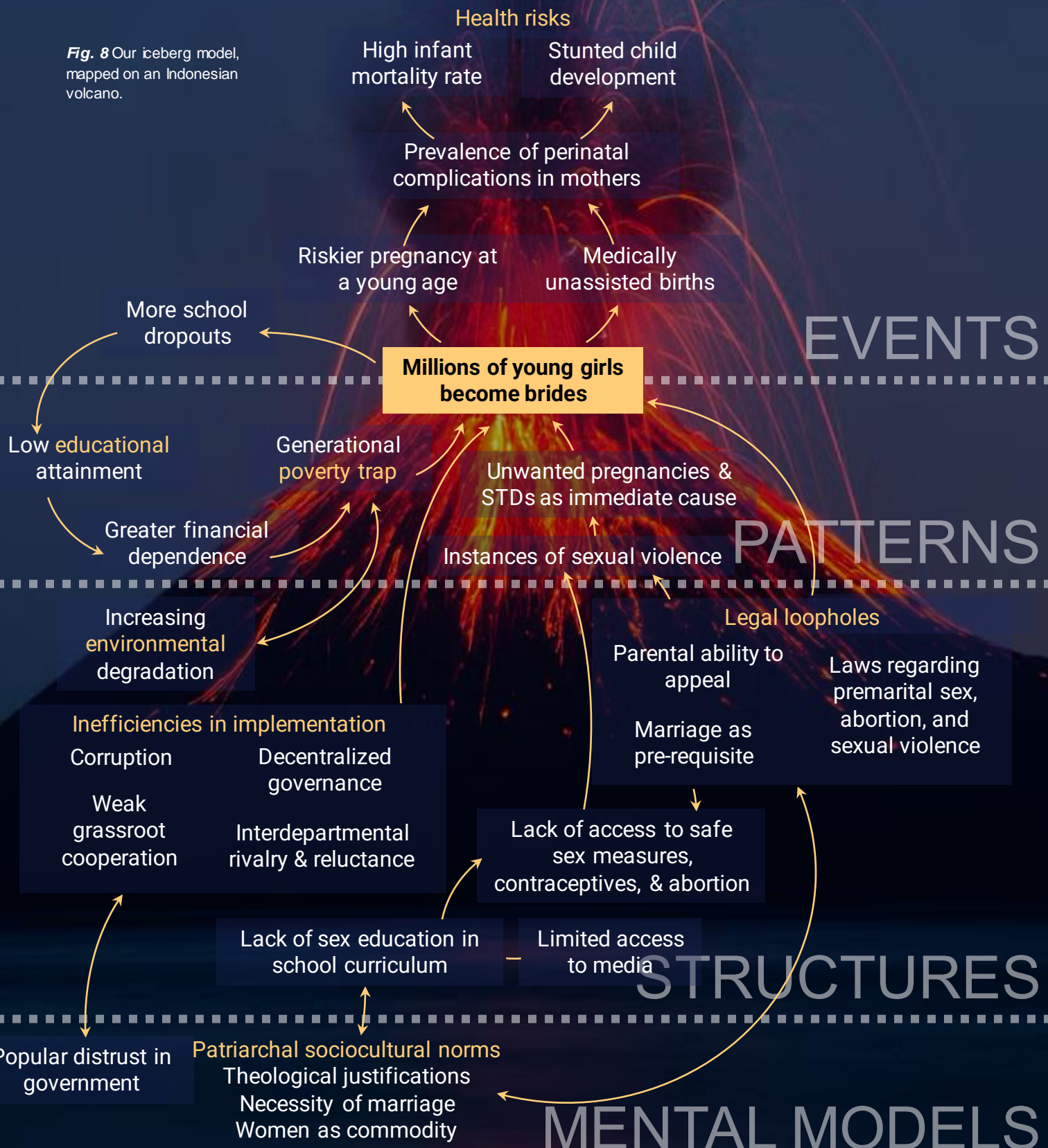


Fig. 7 Our systems map, highlighting the intertwining factors influencing Indonesian girls' vulnerability to child marriage.

2.2 Iceberg Model

The iceberg model emphasizes that child marriages have multiple layers of causes and risk factors, including events, patterns, structures, and mental models. Mental models, although intangible, are deep-seated and the most difficult to solve. This understanding is crucial for policy making and system mapping.

Fig. 8 Our iceberg model, mapped on an Indonesian volcano.



2.3 Stakeholders' Map

This map identifies stakeholders in the system who either exacerbate or ameliorate the problem of child marriage. Those in an inner circle are closer to the survivors. There also exist different power dynamics among the actors. The map may be accessed [here](#).

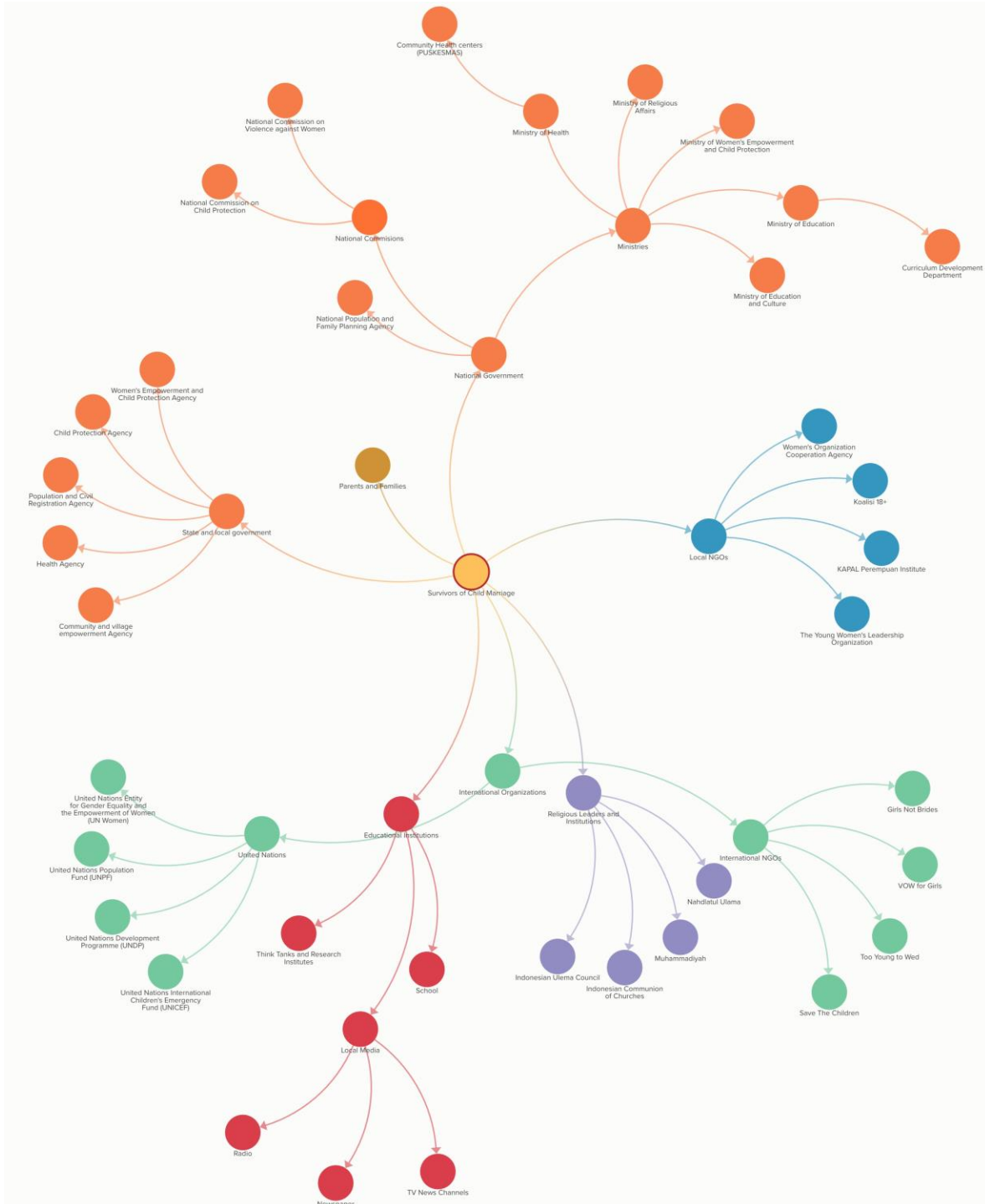


Fig. 9A stakeholders' map.

III. Solutions Landscape

3.1 Power & Interest Map

This map represents power and interest of each actor on child marriage. However, it is noteworthy that there are non-actor factors, namely poverty and low educational attainment, that reinforce the actor on negative interest side and constrain power of those on positive side.

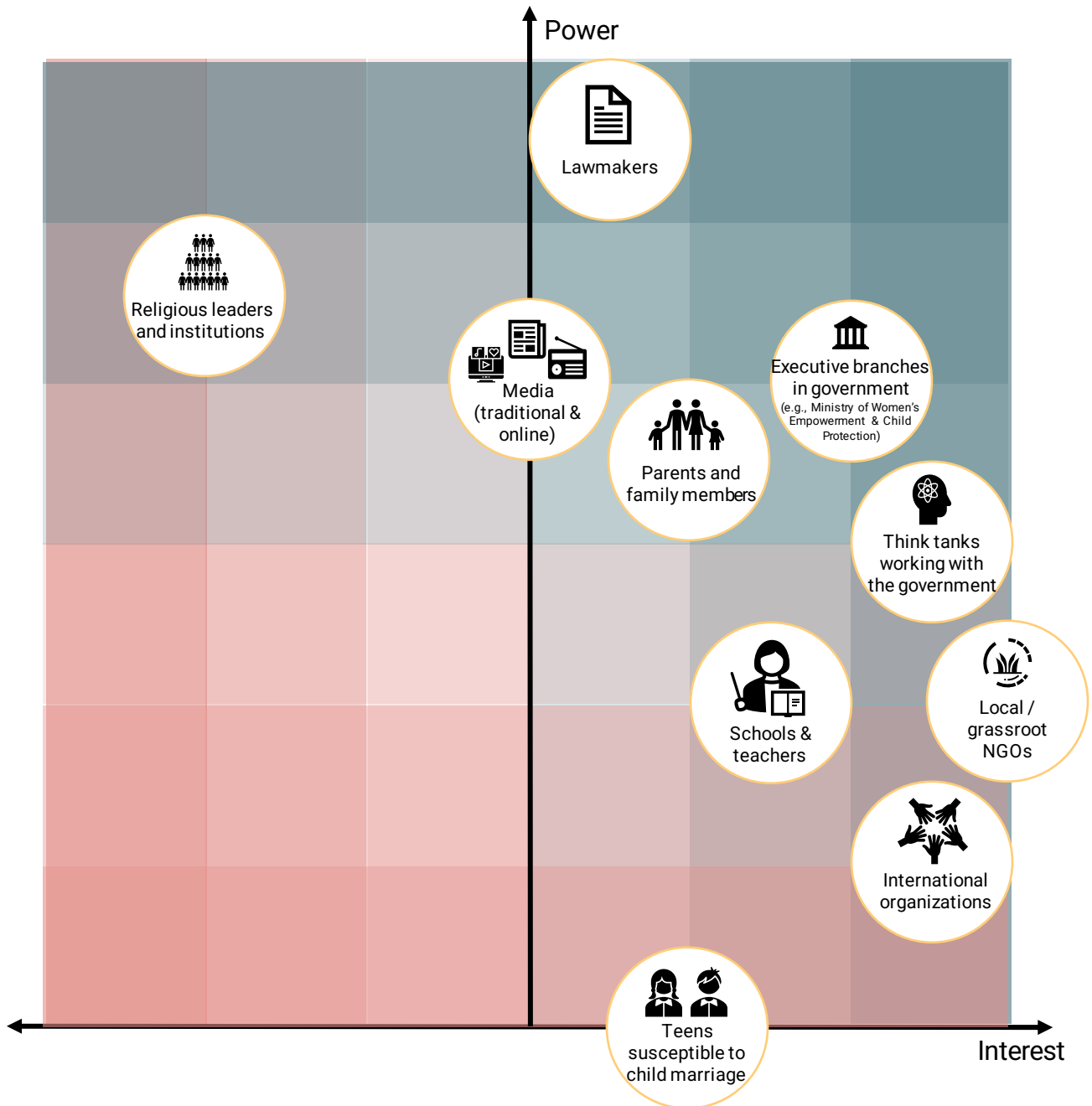


Fig. 10 Power & interest map, showing each stakeholder's willingness and ability in reducing child marriage.

3.2 Understanding existing solutions

National Government	Grassroot NGOs	Global Organizations
<p>Law No. 16 of 2019 on Marriage, which set the minimum age for marriage at 19 for women and men.</p>	<p>Coalition to End Child Marriage (Koalisi 18+), an NGO that aims to raise the minimum age for marriage in Indonesia and enhance legal measures to put an end to marriages that occur prematurely and involuntarily. They garner support through petitions and the creation of Amicus Curiae (Friends of the Court) as a vehicle for society's participation in the judicial process.</p>	<p>United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), which has implemented various programs in Indonesia to prevent child marriage, including supporting the development of national policies, providing technical assistance to local governments, and raising awareness about the issue.</p>
<p>The Indonesian government, under the ministry of women empowerment and child protection as well as the ministry of national development planning launched the National Strategy to Prevent Child Marriage in 2020, which aims to stop child marriage by 2030. The strategy includes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Optimizing children's Capacity; 2) Creating an Environment that Supports the Prevention of Child Marriage 3) Service Accessibility and Expansion 4) Regulatory and Institutional Strengthening; and 5) Strengthening Stakeholder Coordination. 	<p>KAPAL Perempuan Institute enhances the ability of women and stakeholders in local communities to collect and analyze data using appropriate methods and tools, which has resulted in consistent generation, synthesis, and dissemination of data at the lowest level (villages).</p>	<p>Girls Not Brides campaign, which aims to end child marriage globally by advocating for policy change, raising awareness, and promoting community-based solutions.</p>
<p>The "Stop Child Marriage" Movement, spearheaded by the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection, is a collaborative effort to coordinate policy and cultural changes, legal protection, and enforcement to prevent child marriage.</p>	<p>Collaboration between the East Java Women's Organization Cooperation Agency (BKOW) and UNICEF, which works to facilitate access to education, health and life skills services.</p>	<p>The Global Partnership for Education (GPE) has supported education programs in Indonesia that aim to prevent child marriage by increasing girls' access to education and improving the quality of education.</p>

Fig. 11 Solutions Landscape. This section aims to provide an overview of the interventions that have been implemented in Indonesia to address child marriage in order to identify the gaps and challenges that need to be addressed.

Governmental: legal framework and national policies

In 2019, the legislative body amended the marriage law, raising the minimum age for marriage for women from 16 to 19. However, the current law enables parents to seek dispensation for their children to marry before the new minimum age.⁴⁸ This provision has been exploited by parents and community leaders to justify and perpetuate child marriage.⁴⁹

The National Strategy to Prevent Child Marriage in 2020 was a positive development outlining specific actions that could be taken to combat the issue.⁵⁰ However, aforementioned challenges make implementation and enforcement ineffective across different government agencies and levels, leading to incomplete or inconsistent actions.⁵¹ Additionally, there lacks top-down monitoring and auditing as a solution in Indonesia.⁵² Although the strategy calls for the child marriage task force to report their progress to the national secretariat at least once a year, it is unclear whether this report has been made or if it is publicly available.⁵³

Local: Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Grassroot Movements

NGOs like KAPAL Perempuan Institute, The Young Women's Leadership Organization, Women's Organization Cooperation Agency, and grassroot movements like Koalisi 18+ have been actively engaging with communities to raise awareness of the harm of child marriage, advocate for legislation changes, and providing support for vulnerable girls and families. Examples of their effort include community education campaigns, life skills training programs for girls, and legal aid and counseling services on child marriage issues.⁵⁴ However, NGOs often lack the resources and political power to effect systemic change, causing many to focus only on specific regions or communities, leaving other areas without support.

⁴⁸ Eduardo Liotta, "Teen Couple Runs Away From Home, Then Uses a Legal Loophole to Get Married", *Vice News*, March 2019, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/qvymdb/teen-couple-runs-away-from-home-then-uses-a-legal-loophole-to-get-married> (accessed March 1, 2023).

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ "Strategi Nasional Pencegahan Perkawinan Anak", National Development Planning Agency, January 2020, <https://www.unicef.org/indonesia/media/2856/file/National-Strategy-Child-Marriage-2020.pdf>

⁵¹ Hoko Horii, "Child marriage, not all alike", *Inside Indonesia*, November 2018, <https://www.insideindonesia.org/child-marriage-not-all-alike> (accessed March 1, 2023).

⁵² Benjamin A. Olken, "Monitoring Corruption: Evidence from a Field Experiment in Indonesia," *Journal of Political Economy* 115, no.2 (2007): 200-249.

⁵³ Hoko Horii, "Child marriage, not all alike", *Inside Indonesia*, November 2018, <https://www.insideindonesia.org/child-marriage-not-all-alike> (accessed March 1, 2023).

⁵⁴ Misiyah, "Simply changing the law will not end child marriage, it is critical to ensure that the law is being effectively implemented", *Equal Measures 2030*, September 2020, <https://www.equalmeasures2030.org/story/simply-changing-the-law-will-not-end-child-marriage-it-is-critical-to-ensure-that-the-law-is-being-effectively-implemented-misiyah-director-of-institut-kapal-perempuan/> (accessed March 1, 2023).

Global: international organizations

Global organizations have provided technical assistance, funding, and policy guidance to the Indonesian government, helping promote reforms and initiatives aimed at ending child marriage. For example, UNICEF and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) have worked with the government to develop national action plans and strengthen legal frameworks to prevent child marriage.⁵⁵ These organizations have produced progress reports that analyze child marriage data in Indonesia and offer policy recommendations, such as improving access to health services and promoting sexual and reproductive health education.⁵⁶

However, there is insufficient coordination and collaboration between global organizations, as well as between global organizations and local partners. Global organizations may have limited understanding of Indonesia's specific sociocultural context that enables child marriage and may benefit from working more closely with local partners to design and implement interventions. With initiatives tailored to the specific needs of communities, global organizations can use their resources more efficiently.

⁵⁵ UNICEF Indonesia, "UNICEF welcomes recent amendment of Indonesia's Marriage Act", September 2019, <https://www.unicef.org/indonesia/press-releases/unicef-welcomes-recent-amendment-indonesias-marriage-act> (accessed March 1, 2023).

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

IV. Gaps & Levers of Change

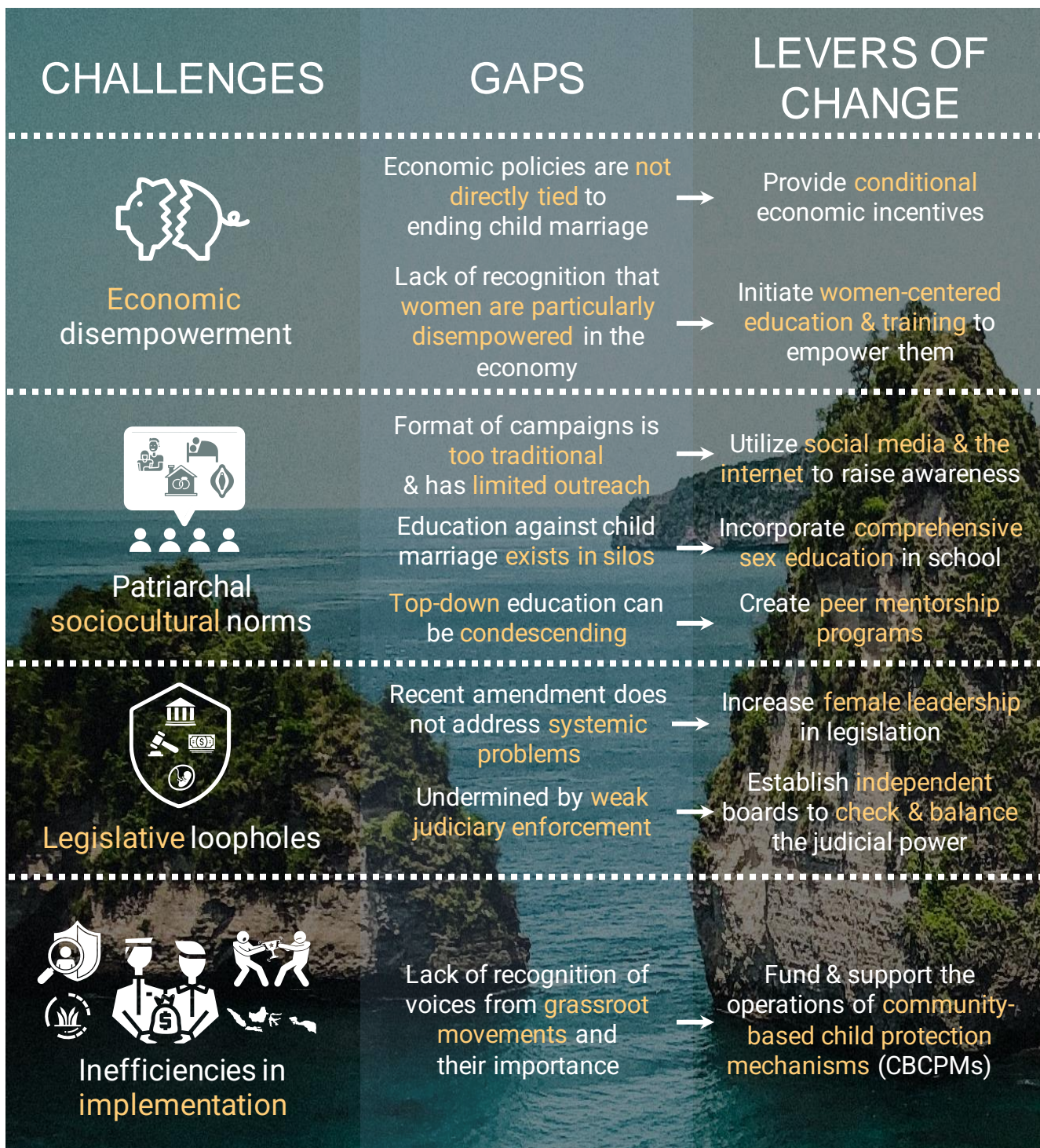


Fig. 12 Gaps and levers of change in a chart, which traces back to the four factors in our challenge landscape.

As we have discussed, child marriage is fundamentally a solution to escape poverty or avert cultural taboos. Therefore, our proposed recommendations focus on finding **alternative solutions** to these problems facing Indonesian families.

4.1 Economic Policies

Conditional economic incentives

Since poverty is a significant driver of child marriage, providing economic incentives whose expected benefits outweigh those of child marriage may deter parents from commodifying their daughters as economic assets by marrying them off, especially in times of natural disasters.⁵⁷ We discovered that when poverty alleviation efforts are not directly tied to ending child marriage, they prove to be ineffective and have even generated a reverse effect in some countries.⁵⁸ We therefore propose economic incentives that come carefully with certain conditions. For example, cash transfer should be conditional with the agreement that the children will continue staying in school. Such conditional cash transfer programs have proven to be effective in some countries, such as Malawi and the Philippines, and they should be implemented simultaneously with other intervention schemes to cover other drivers of child marriage.⁵⁹

A study shows that 25.6% of the parents in Bone District, South Sulawesi consider marriage a viable solution to poverty, and girls over 18 who are not married burdens to the family.⁶⁰ Thus, we expect such economic incentives to have the immediate effect of reducing child marriages for poor families, but they are rather short-term solutions, and long-term problems in the mental model must be tackled as well. To truly uplift them out of poverty, a systematic approach that emphasizes skills training needs to be taken.

⁵⁷ "National Strategy on the Prevention of Child Marriage," <https://www.unicef.org/indonesia/sites/unicef.org/indonesia/files/2020-06/Prevention-of-Child-Marriage-Report-2020.pdf>. (accessed Feb 25, 2023).

⁵⁸ Nicholas Mathers, "How Cash Transfers Can Contribute to Ending Child Marriage" (Girls Not Brides, December 2021), https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/documents/1655/How_cash_transfers_can_contribute_to_ending_child_marriage.pdf.

⁵⁹ Sarah Baird, Craig McIntosh, and Berk Ozler, "Cash or Condition? Evidence from a Cash Transfer Experiment," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 126 (November 2011): 1709-1753.

⁶⁰ Heribertus Rinto Wibowo, "One household, two worlds: Differences of perception towards child marriage among adolescent children and adults," *The Lancet Regional Health – Western Pacific* 8 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lanwpc.2021.100103>

Women-centered education & training programs

In our opinion, a more holistic, future-oriented economic strategy would acknowledge the intersectional struggle that women face more disproportionately than men in the economy. The most impactful way to end child marriage is to empower girls through education.⁶¹ Compulsory schooling years should be enforced more strictly, with attention to female students, to deter parents and school communities from forcing child brides to drop out after marriage. Everyone should be allowed to complete 12 years of school and pursue tertiary education without fear of being pariahs at school.⁶² Vocational training should be more directed to women to improve their skillsets and reduce structural unemployment. This would in turn grant women financial independence even if they got into early marriage, as productive members of the workforce who earn a stable income.

Education and skills training would target the root cause of poverty for many Indonesian women alike, breaking the intergenerational cycle of child marriage. However, the effectiveness of such policies depend on the receptiveness of their intended beneficiary. We expect reluctance from families to send their girls to these trainings, as they remain heavily influenced by the patriarchal notion that women belong to the domestic sphere and do not need education. This also correlates with the trend in other countries that due to the patriarchal socio-cultural structure, circa 25% of both men and women in one survey believe it is morally wrong for women to pursue higher education instead of domestic shores.⁶³ They may also value the short-term incentive of having their children work at home over the purported benefit of higher wages in the longer term through education, which seems far-reaching and unpredictable. Hence, women-centered education and skills training would not work unless they are combined with policies that address the imperfect information on educating girls.

⁶¹ Arwyn Finnie, "Cash Incentives May Not Matter Most When It Comes to Ending Child Marriage," Girls Not Brides, November 27, 2017, <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/articles/cash-incentives-may-not-matter-comes-ending-child-marriage/>.

⁶² "Prevention of Child Marriage: Acceleration That Cannot Wait" (UNICEF and Badan Pusat Statistik, 2020), <https://www.unicef.org/indonesia/media/5021/file/Prevention%20of%20Child%20Marriage%20Report.pdf>.

⁶³ Jennifer McCleary-Sills et al., "Child Marriage: A Critical Barrier to Girl's Schooling and Gender Equality in Education," *The Review of Faith and International Affairs* 13 (2015), <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/epdf/10.1080/15570274.2015.1075755?needAccess=true&role=button>

4.2 Sociocultural Policies

Social media campaigns

To combat deep-seated patriarchal mindsets, existing awareness campaigns have relied heavily on traditional media such as signboards, which can often be didactic and have limited appeal to both the younger generations and their parents. Since media exposure has proven to have protective effect against child marriage,⁶⁴ we propose that governmental and grassroots NGOs harness social media tools to promote gender equality and women's empowerment. There has been implementations of social media campaigns and applications in several countries, namely Timor-Leste and Bangladesh.⁶⁵ They have reached out to over 1,000 people in Timor-Leste, and many more in other countries, publicizing the potential harms of child marriage, and creating safe spaces online to encourage them to seek help when needed.⁶⁶ Also, as a necessary complement to women-centered education programs, media campaigns should highlight how education can help alleviate poverty, thus increasing perceived returns of education relative to marrying daughters off for immediate economic benefits like dowry.⁶⁷ This has potential to end the intergenerational education-poverty loop.

Indeed, internet access and costly infrastructure pose a challenge to such efforts, but digital campaigns would still be a much more resource-efficient way of raising awareness due to their immediacy and wide outreach. Notably, online campaigns and support systems around child marriage would leverage on and further strengthen the government's ongoing effort of digitization. In 2022, BAKTI, an agency under the Ministry of Communications and Informatics (KOMINFO), promised to bring 4G connectivity to all Indonesian villages in the next two years, along with initiatives to promote digital literacy.⁶⁸ But the key to the success of our proposal is the inclusion of young voices from the community in the decision-making process, who may offer ideas on making online content more relatable and effective in reaching its audience. With this in place, we have confidence that digital access will be a powerful tool to reduce child marriage.

⁶⁴ Lauren Rumble et al., "An Empirical Exploration of Female Child Marriage Determinants in Indonesia," *BMC Public Health* 18, no. 1 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-018-5313-0>.

⁶⁵ Let's go digital! - Using digital technology to end child, early and forced marriage and reduce adolescent pregnancy, 2021, https://plan-international.org/uploads/2021/12/time_to_act_-_lets_go_digital_plan_international_apac_2021_cefm_flagship_report.pdf.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Robert Jensen, "The (Perceived) Returns to Education and the Demand for Schooling," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* (May 2010), https://cega.berkeley.edu/assets/cega_research_projects/58/The_Perceived_Returns_to_Education_and_the_Demand_for_Schooling.pdf

⁶⁸ Ming En Lieu, "How Indonesia Is Improving Economic Inclusion for Rural Communities," GovInsider, May 9, 2022, <https://govinsider.asia/intl-en/article/how-indonesia-is-improving-economic-inclusion-for-rural-communities-bakti-danny-januarismawan/>.

Comprehensive sex education and school curriculum reforms

Teachings against child marriage often exist in silos and are not in conversation with other areas of gender and sexuality. Thus, schools should have a comprehensive sex education on consent, safe sex, and gender stereotypes and discrimination to counter deep-rooted patriarchal norms and offer alternative ways to prevent or manage the impacts unwanted pregnancy, which often makes the parents marry their daughters off early.⁶⁹ Students should be informed of how to respond to sexual abuses. Teachers, too, should set examples to not blame victims of sexual abuse for becoming child brides.

The two suggestions we have outlined so far, while addressing the sociocultural root cause, both require the governmental support. However, multiple factors hinder the effectiveness of governmental intervention. Moreover, our power and interest analysis shows that religious leaders, who hold more conservative views on marriage, often wield de facto power in rural communities.⁷⁰ As such, we foresee difficulties in the actualization of digital campaigns and sex education curriculums and a time lag until any positive effect could take place due to the deep-seated nature of the problems in the mental model. The reliance on the establishment also means curriculum changes are inherently top-down measures. To bridge the gaps left behind, we also recommend informal initiatives like a peer-to-peer mentorship program.

Peer mentorship program

Peer mentoring program connects child brides with one another in a more equal fashion. The presence of mentors assures mentees they are not alone, reducing their sense of alienation. With first-hand experience, mentors can better connect with girls emotionally and offer more relatable advice than existing campaigns. It is proven in the case of child welfare and substance programs that the first-hand experience from peer mentors is valuable to the children, their families, and social service workers.⁷¹ Those who have successfully got out of child marriage can serve as role models, and as support when mentees experience mental health struggle or domestic violence in their marriage. During our research, we had the fortune of interviewing former child brides who pursued higher education with great resilience. We have no doubt they would be able to inspire a new generation of Indonesian women. Apart from helping the child brides, peer mentors can also work with NGOs to prevent child marriage by helping those at risk.

⁶⁹ Heribertus Rinto Wibowo, "One household, two worlds: Differences of perception towards child marriage among adolescent children and adults," *The Lancet Regional Health – Western Pacific* 8 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lanwpc.2021.100103>

⁷⁰ Nelly van Doorn-Harder, "Indonesian Muslim Feminists: Islamic Reasoning, Rumah Kitab And The Case of Child Brides," Key Issues in Religion and World Affairs (Institute on Culture, Religion & World Affairs, January 29, 2016), <https://www.bu.edu/cura/files/2016/02/Boston-University-presentation-January-29-2016-van-Doorn-2.pdf>.

⁷¹ Jeanelle S. Sears et al., "Like a marriage: Partnering with peer mentors in child welfare," *Children and Youth Services Review* 74 (2017): 80-86.

4.3 Legislative Reforms

To enable effective enactment of policies targeting the root causes of child marriage (i.e., poverty and patriarchal norms), we also propose structural reforms on the legislative and policy levels.

Female-oriented policies and leadership in politics

Simply raising the minimum age neglects the myriad of conservative bills against women's rights. Increasing female participation in parliament will better ensure that the entire legal framework puts the interest of women at heart and that we will have more female-oriented policies proposed in other sections, so that necessary reforms to policies patriarchal laws may be proposed and passed. This includes outlawing the mechanism to appeal for an exemption of minimum age. Marriage consent and decisions of minors should not be influenced by the parents. Premarital sex should be decriminalized to reduce instances where forced child marriage is used as a solution to sexual abuse and rape. Laws regarding sexual violence should also go back to being specific and targeted to effectively curb crimes. A robust, comprehensive legal framework will provide a strong foundation for the protection of women's and children's rights in general.

Of course, the presence of female leadership in politics heavily intersects with women's sociocultural status and would not be possible without aforementioned campaigns and curriculum reforms. Our recommendations are therefore systematic, interacting with each other in an organic manner, and should be considered holistically.

Independent boards to check and balance the judicial power

Even with the new minimum age, weak law enforcement has been a significant gap in the current system that contributes to the prevalence of child marriage in Indonesia, due to reasons outlined in Section 1.4. This leads to limited deterrence and accountability for those who facilitate child marriage. As such, an independent entity should be set up to check court decisions based on consent and necessity and ensure the court's integrity.⁷²

The establishment of independent review boards will not only help alleviate the issue of child marriage alone; we believe it will trigger positive changes across the judicial system, as Indonesians who have greater faith and trust in their judiciary will be more willing to cooperate with laws and governmental policies.

4.4 Reforms in Policy Implementation

Support for community-based child protection mechanisms (CBCPMs)

With mostly top-down policies, the government does not adequately recognize the importance of community-based child protection groups made of local volunteers. CBCPM networks could aid the government in better identifying problems on the ground, providing immediate assistance, and making referrals to relevant authorities.⁷³ Thus, the government should support them with staff, funding, and legal resources, constantly building confidence and partnership with both local and international organizations.

Ultimately, the government could only do so much — solutions to community problems lie in the community. Entrusting grassroots actors with power and responsibility will encourage a greater sense of ownership to help those who are vulnerable within their community. After all, support for one family may only mean as much for the local organizations, but to the family, it means the whole world.

⁷² Early and Forced Marriage in Republic of Indonesia (Indonesian Legal Aid Association for Women (APIK), 2014), <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Women/WRGS/ForcedMarriage/NGO/IndonesianLegalAidAssociationForWomen.docx>.

⁷³ "A Common Responsibility: The Role of Community-Based Child Protection Groups in Protecting Children from Sexual Abuse and Exploitation," Save the Children's Resource Centre (International Save the Children Alliance, 2008), <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/document/common-responsibility-role-community-based-child-protection-groups-protecting-children/>.

Key Insights & Lessons Learned

We initially expected the raise of minimum marriage age to 19 would decrease child marriage rates in Indonesia, but it was not the case. Mere legislative change is not enough to end child marriage. Throughout our research, we discovered the interconnectedness between economic disparity and socio-cultural norms, the influence of religion over politics, and the social repercussions of environmental degradation. We also realized the butterfly effect of seemingly unrelated events – like how the criminalization of pre-marital sex could force sexual abuse survivors into child marriage, and how Indonesia’s vast geography may have undermined the effectiveness of its governance. At the end of the project, we have learned to appreciate Indonesia with an intersectional understanding of gender and race, religion and ethics, and geography and economic power.

Due to time constraints, there are topics we could not explore in this research. For example, there have been soap operas romanticizing child marriage – one of which, named *Pernikahan Dini* (literally translated as *Early-age Marriage*), was so popular that it won Panasonic Awards for “Favorite Drama Series Program” twice.⁷⁴ We wish to have investigated the effect of glorifying child marriage on the younger generations. Furthermore, it would be beneficial to research into positive deviance among people who could avoid or get out of child marriage.

We do not see ourselves as saviors coming to rescue Indonesian women. Instead, through our multi-layered approach that targets their vulnerability to child marriage, our most vital focus is on the grassroot level. We hope this could empower Indonesian women economically and culturally, so that they could regain their agency and freedom of self-determination – not as a bride or daughter, but as themselves.

⁷⁴“Pernikahan Dini,” Wikipedia (Wikimedia Foundation, April 10, 2023), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pernikahan_Dini.