Empowerment of girls: We invest in young people, particularly girls, to empower them to make informed decisions on their SRH and maintain a healthy wellbeing. By increasing SRH knowledge, changing attitudes, and building skills, we enable girls to make safe and informed decisions. Young people are encouraged to take leadership in their communities on SRHR issues and child marriage prevention through various means, including developing youth clubs which provide safe spaces for young people to gather, learn and respond to issues in their communities.

Access to formal education: Increasing access to education is crucial to delaying child marriage. The UACM programme works with parents, school management and Parent-Teacher Associations to ensure that girls’ education is prioritised. We also train teachers in gender-sensitive didactics so they are able to respond to the specific needs of girls and boys in the classroom. Making schools more girl-friendly helps increase student retention. We also work to reintegrate girls who dropped out of school due to early marriages.

Involving local communities: In order to improve the ability of girls and women to exercise their SRH-rights and choose when, whom and if they marry, it is important to change community attitudes which normalise the practice of child marriage and devalue the voice of girls. Therefore UACM seeks to build an enabling environment where girls rights are respected. We encourage traditional and religious leaders to be active role models and take action to prevent child marriages in their communities. To reach the wider community, we also conduct community-based awareness raising activities and radio and social media campaigns.

Unite Against Child Marriage Programme

In the next 10 years, approximately 14 million child marriages will occur each year in developing countries. Child marriage is a violation of human rights and has serious implications on girls’ health and development.

The Unite Against Child Marriage (UACM) programme is implemented by the SRHR Alliance (Simavi, Amref, Choice, dance4life, Rutgers) in partnership with Edukans. UACM seeks to address harmful cultural practices that normalise child marriage and ensure that girls have access to the knowledge and the SRH services they need to exercise autonomy over their lives and make informed health decisions. UACM is implemented in India and Malawi through 18 local partners and uses five strategies to empower girls and fight the practice of child marriage:

1. **Empowerment of girls:** We invest in young people, particularly girls, to empower them to make informed decisions on their SRH and maintain a healthy wellbeing. By increasing SRH knowledge, changing attitudes, and building skills, we enable girls to make safe and informed decisions. Young people are encouraged to take leadership in their communities on SRHR issues and child marriage prevention through various means, including developing youth clubs which provide safe spaces for young people to gather, learn and respond to issues in their communities.

2. **Access to formal education:** Increasing access to education is crucial to delaying child marriage. The UACM programme works with parents, school management and Parent-Teacher Associations to ensure that girls’ education is prioritised. We also train teachers in gender-sensitive didactics so they are able to respond to the specific needs of girls and boys in the classroom. Making schools more girl-friendly helps increase student retention. We also work to reintegrate girls who dropped out of school due to early marriages.

3. **Involving local communities:** In order to improve the ability of girls and women to exercise their SRH-rights and choose when, whom and if they marry, it is important to change community attitudes which normalise the practice of child marriage and devalue the voice of girls. Therefore UACM seeks to build an enabling environment where girls rights are respected. We encourage traditional and religious leaders to be active role models and take action to prevent child marriages in their communities. To reach the wider community, we also conduct community-based awareness raising activities and radio and social media campaigns.

Number of people trained on early marriage, and SRHR (community members, educators, trainers, teachers, secret mothers): 247,819

Number of schools that have been reached on child marriage: 599

Number of people reached by awareness raising activities on child marriage: 13,274,045 (direct and indirect)
**Development and improvement of legislation and policies:** The UACM programme works to build a policy and legal environment to protect the rights of young people and prevent child marriage. We work with local policymakers to ensure local bylaws and national legislation enforce the minimum age of marriage.

**Improved access to SRHR services:** Young people face multiple structural barriers in accessing SRHR services. We strive to improve the quality and use of SRHR-services by young people by increasing access to Youth-Friendly Services. We train health staff in youth-friendly service delivery and sensitise them to the needs of young people. Our partner organisations also provide direct services through helplines and by strengthening referral services for issues such as gender-based violence, safe and legal abortion, and HIV testing and counselling.

**Conclusion**
These strategies ensure a multi-sector approach to ending child marriage that recognises the importance of empowering girls, mobilising communities and building an enabling environment for legislative change. Together, these strategies provide girls and their communities with the tools and knowledge to stop early and forced marriages and give girls a better start in life.

Hawa’s mother is the head of their household and struggles to earn enough to support the family. Hawa decided to marry a boy who offered financial assistance for her education. She soon realised that he was unable to support her, and sought advice from her 15 year old aunt Amina who is a member of a youth club. These clubs provide comprehensive sexuality education, raise awareness on the dangers of child marriage, and support young girls to stay in school. With Amina’s guidance, Hawa abandoned the marriage and returned to school.

“My aunt shares information with me why girls should not drop out of school. I am now determined to continue with my education. I would advise all to stay in school because education is very important. It prepares you for a better future and to get a job. I can marry an educated man which means both of us working, then our family will be financially better off.”

**Case Study from Education Expertise Development Foundation, Malawi**

Hawa is 13 years old and from a rural village in the Mangochi District of Malawi.

“I can marry an educated man which means both of us working, then our family will be financially better off.”